

# **“Teacher, do you think I have a bright future?” - Anxiety and uncertainty in a Rwandan Catholic Secondary Boarding and Day School**



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*Dedicated to the children and youth of Rwanda*

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# ABSTRACT

This thesis offers an ethnographic account of the lives of a handful of Rwandan twelve to fifteen-year-olds over their first two years as students at a Catholic-led, public secondary boarding school on the outskirts of Kigali. The wider context is Rwanda as both a post-conflict state, in which schooling is thought of as a tool for shaping collective memories and constructing a shared civic identity in the name of 'reconciliation'; and as a developmental state, in which schooling intends to make young people useful human capital for accomplishing national development goals. The focus of the thesis is on how the young Rwandans in the study (re)interpret and appropriate the discourses they encounter in the school and beyond as they perform their identities and imagine their futures. Told in the students' own words, with particular attention to the creative production of alternative (non-elite) discourses at grass-roots, the thesis tells a story of anxiety and uncertainty as students struggle to navigate the many ambiguities in their lives and to truly believe the government's promise of a bright future.







## Chapter One

# “Learning from our history to build a bright future” – aspirations and anxieties in present-day Rwanda

### *On the Road to College Saint-Jacques de Zébédée*

This thesis presents an ethnographic account of the aspirations, anxieties and uncertainty experienced by Rwandan students in their first years at a Catholic secondary boarding school, eighteen to twenty years after the genocide.

My account begins in the first week of May 2012, my third day in Rwanda, as I stood on the pavement in downtown Kigali beneath the recently completed high-rise, Kigali City Tower. A rising sun pierced through the mist which had hung in the air since the morning. Traders brushed past carrying heavy merchandise. Three young men under a large yellow MTN Mobile umbrella were competing to sell mobile phone cards to passers-by, in between chatting to a young-woman with a baby wrapped to her back. A group of high school students huddled at the bus stop where a man with no legs sat on the curb holding out his dry cupped hand. Smartly dressed professionals weaved up and down the busy pavements and sleepy looking soldiers stood watch. Yet, I was struck by how quiet everything was. When the traffic stopped, I could hear the chirping of crickets in the trees. Rwanda was in the annual period of remembering. Churches and public buildings were draped with shiny purple and white ribbons, the official colours of mourning. I was meeting Joseph Uwajesu, a senior civil servant. His wife, who I had been put in touch with by a mutual friend, had invited me to stay with their family for a few weeks while I searched for a house to rent and a school to host my research, before my wife and children would join me. He was driving me to an introductory appointment with Father Alexis Karenzi, Director of *College Saint-Jacques de Zébédée* - a public secondary school established by the Catholic Church in the final years of the colonial era.



A few minutes later we were bouncing up and down the hills of Kiyovu, a smart, forested, residential neighbourhood, in his black Toyota Prada. As we joined the main boulevard I noticed an imposing billboard towering above us, a deep purple rectangle with large white writing that read: "*Learning from our history to build a bright future.*" Joseph explained that it was the official slogan for that year's memorial season, marking eighteen years since the genocide. Soon I would realise there were many of these, displayed at prominent points around Kigali. The rest of the year the same boards are used as advertising space, usually for new types of bank account or alcoholic beverage. As we sat in traffic through the lower part of Nyamirambo, which is reputedly the oldest and liveliest part of town, I pondered what this phrase might have meant to the crowds of people spilling into the road from the doorways of worn-down but colourfully painted boutiques and mosques. I found myself deconstructing the rhetoric, which in the space of a phrase seemed to touch on several core themes in academic scholarship on Rwanda that are relevant to this study.



For example, the use of the first-person plural – “learning from *our* history” – evokes a shared “Rwandan” experience of ethnic conflict and genocide. Yet, as the field of peace and conflict studies often shows, the past is a contested space which, depending on how it is constructed, can give legitimacy, or even reality, to people’s different senses of belonging and group-identities, not to mention historic grievances and claims to certain rights.<sup>1</sup> Some analyses of life under Rwanda’s RPF-led government suggest the government is using its power over state institutions such as memorial sites<sup>2</sup>, the national school curriculum<sup>3</sup>, re-education camps<sup>4</sup>, anti-divisionism laws<sup>5</sup> and gacaca courts<sup>6</sup>, to enforce a ‘hegemonic’ narrative about Rwandan history, ethnicities and national identity, which, rather than unify the nation, serve to cloak the emergence of new forms of inequality and suppress the expression of legitimate grievances, which are left to fester at grassroots. This has led to calls for a more open dialogue that permits a plurality of experiences, a “*Habermasian, shared, open space*”<sup>7</sup> for positive interaction between diverse identities. This issue has particular relevance in a classroom setting, where, as Apple<sup>8</sup> reminds us, the

<sup>1</sup> For examples see the following: On the Balkans Conflict, see Crawford B. (1998), Gati (1992), Roudometof (2002), Wilmer (1997) and Woodward (1995). On Ukrainian Nationalism, see Wanner (1998). On Kosovo, see Finney, P. (2002). On Cambodia, see Takei (1998). On Northern Ireland, see Barton & McCully (2003) and McGarry & O’Leary (1995). In general, see Gillis (1994) and Tint (2010).

<sup>2</sup> Memorial sites

<sup>3</sup> Buckely-Zistel (2009), Freedman et al (2008)

<sup>4</sup> Thompson (2013)

<sup>5</sup> Lemarchand (2007)

<sup>6</sup> Haile (2008), Longman (2006), Thompson (2013),

<sup>7</sup> Hodgkin (2006:203)

<sup>8</sup> Apple (1993:22)

school curriculum is the means by which governments “*define some groups’ knowledge as the most legitimate, as official knowledge, while other groups’ knowledge hardly sees the light of day*”. Nonetheless, one of the themes to emerge strongly from this research will be students’ ability to resist or strategically appropriate official discourses in order to create alternative systems of knowledge at grassroots in the service of their interests.

Next, the second-half of the phrase – “to build a bright future” – asserts Rwanda’s growing self-confidence that it is a country in the process of a positive transformation; and like Rwanda’s history, this “bright future” is collectivised as something in which all Rwandan’s have a stake, and by implication, for which all should work and sacrifice to stay on course to achieve. Academic assessments of Rwanda’s reconstruction and development since the genocide in 1994 have both praised Rwanda as a “development miracle”<sup>9</sup> for its against-the-odds economic growth, and substantial improvements in health and education, as well as raised concerns about growing inequality, the authoritarian nature of the state, and the adverse incorporation of citizens into an increasingly regulated formal economy. This reflects a concern in peace and conflict studies about the tendency for peace-processes to fail to deliver on people’s expectations, as the ‘direct violence’ of war is often replaced with the ‘structural violence’ of social inequality, as well as increased levels of everyday and domestic violence.<sup>10</sup> Hence, Galtung distinguished between *negative peace*, being the mere absence of violence, and *positive peace*, which requires cooperation and the ‘integration of human society’.<sup>11</sup>

Rwanda’s schools are significant in the construction of both types of peace, as they shape individual and collective identities, order students by academic ability, make and break dreams, and, I will argue, reproduce social inequalities and divisions. A substantial body of literature from the sociology of education looks critically at schools as sites of social and cultural reproduction<sup>12</sup>, which I hope this work will contribute to as it interrogates and distils the spaces in which identities, roles and relationships are performed, challenged and sustained.

Finally, the poster’s use of a subject-less continuous present – “*learning*” – makes it feel like a political slogan, or the sort of ‘mission statement’ used by foreign NGOs and development agencies to proclaim their values and purpose. Maybe Kigali’s sizeable community of foreign consultants, ‘volunteer-tourists’<sup>13</sup>, missionaries, and NGO, development agency, and diplomatic staff, were in fact its target audience, and the sign was intended as a message from the Rwandan people, announcing to the world Rwanda’s transformation; no longer to be pitied as the place of genocide but respected as the location of a development miracle in the making. After all, it was written in English, so it would have been incomprehensible to a majority of Rwandans. This links to another common theme in academic writing on Rwanda – its ambiguous relationship with foreign donors, as it combines anti-colonial and anti-imperial

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<sup>9</sup> Crisafulli & Redmond (2012) argue Rwanda’s unexpected economic success was not merely a ‘miracle’ but the outcome of deliberate and effective leadership under Kagame.

<sup>10</sup> Galtung (1967 & 1969); McGinty (2006); Paris (1997)

<sup>11</sup> Galtung (1964:2); Gleditsch et al (2014),

<sup>12</sup> For a review of theories on Social Reproduction in the classroom see Collins (2009)

<sup>13</sup> Simpson, K (2004)

rhetoric with an outward oriented development strategy that courts the world's support.<sup>14</sup> It is also a reminder that Kigali is increasingly seeing itself as an international city, better connected than ever to the rest of the world, even while many of its citizens continue to live in poverty and have barely travelled beyond its borders.

These were some of the issues on my mind when I first conceived of writing an ethnography about the lives of students at a Rwandan secondary school four-years earlier, and as I made my way to College Saint-Jacques, not knowing what to expect. Having first encountered Rwanda through the stories of Rwandan asylum seekers in southern France where I was volunteering in 2005 and then written an under-graduate dissertation in 2008 on the philosophical underpinnings of the international community's 'indifference' during the genocide, I was broadly familiar with all the major books on its origins, causes and execution<sup>15</sup>, the role of the international community<sup>16</sup>, and eye witness<sup>17</sup>, insider<sup>18</sup> and journalist<sup>19</sup> accounts of the violence. Such texts are plentiful and discouraging, and they left me to wonder about the prospects for Rwanda's future – Would it, indeed, be bright? Who would own it? Who would lose out? Could deeply entrenched social divisions be erased by state diktat? Assuming not, how are the fault-lines between social identities being (re)shaped? And what are the roles of the state, school, community and home in that process?

It is not my objective to definitively settle all of the scholarly debates referenced here. Rather, the intended contribution of this work is to provide a 'thick description'<sup>20</sup> of the experience of a handful of students at a formative stage in their lives, depicting how they fashion their identities, navigate social relationships and imagine their futures over their first two years at a Catholic Secondary Boarding School. Nonetheless, in doing so I hope this ethnography provides useful material for anyone studying topics such as peace-building and reconciliation; curriculum and social reproduction in schools; African youths' experiences of globalisation and 'development'; or political and social life in Rwanda under the RPF-led government. Furthermore, I suggest that the findings of this research resonate beyond the classroom, since schools can be thought of as microcosms of society; meaning how Rwandan secondary students construct their identities and social relations within the school is both reflective and constitutive of identities and social relations in Rwanda generally<sup>21</sup>.

Another intended contribution of this work is methodological, as it departs from what I would argue is a "typical" study of Rwanda in at least three ways. Firstly, it offers a relatively rare, ethnographic, 'view-from-below' of schooling, education policy and the state, which asks how *students* construct their identities in the context of the school, rather than merely what the school is doing to students; and it takes account of the organic production of discourse and the school's autonomous social-life beyond the

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<sup>14</sup> Pottier (2002) and Reyntjens (2004) have both noted the RPF's flair for strategic information management, co-opting the international community as a sounding board for its narratives.

<sup>15</sup> Mamdani (2001), Prunier (1995), Uvin (1998), Des Forges (1999)

<sup>16</sup> Melvern (2000, 2004 & 2007)

<sup>17</sup> Dallaire (2003), Mukagana (2001), Uzabakiliho (2001)

<sup>18</sup> Barnett (2003), Kahn (2001)

<sup>19</sup> Gourevitch (1998), Jennings (2000), Keane (1996)

<sup>20</sup> Geertz (1973)

<sup>21</sup> Poluha (2004) makes a similar case as she looks at how schools reproduce patron-client relations in Ethiopia.



state. So, while power structures, rituals, routines, symbols and discourse are recognised as the context in which students learn and grow, the main analytical focus is the students themselves. Echoing a recent turn to more ‘biographical’ writing on development in Africa<sup>22</sup>, some chapters focus in depth on specific students.

Secondly, in contrast to much grass-roots research, such as McClean-Hilker<sup>23</sup> on youth ethnicities, or Ingelaere<sup>24</sup> on peasants’ political consciousness, which, though ethnographic, study their subjects predominantly through the lens of ethnic politics, this research looks at ‘identity’ holistically, taking in its scope students’ socio-economic status, religious beliefs and practises, notions of masculinity and femininity, and even individual physical and intellectual endowments such as being tall, good at science, or anything else that contributes meaning to how they see themselves in relation to others. I have also tried to allow the students to dictate the relative weight to place on these different aspects of their identities rather than fit them into a pre-conceived template of my own design.

This level of complexity and nuance is only possible because, thirdly, the study is grounded in the lives of just a few students within a single secondary school. While this limits the breadth and representativeness of the findings, it offers a depth that has been considered lacking. As Longman<sup>25</sup> concluded in his essay on future research priorities for Rwandan scholarship, “*What is needed most today is detailed analysis of specific topics and sectors of society and communities rather than global analyses*”. In his own work on the contests for power within and between Christian churches prior to the genocide, Longman<sup>26</sup> treats churches as “inherently political” institutions, with the power to confer status and distribute financial reward, independent of their role in influencing or implementing national policies. His work also benefits from extensive archival research which enables him to historicise the institutional evolution of churches in Rwanda. This provides a foundation for looking at schools in a similar way, as political and cultural institutions with unique historical trajectories that are at times resistant to or untouched by the state.

I will expound on these points when I discuss my methodology in the next chapter. Firstly, however, it will be helpful to elaborate on some of the debates just identified in order to set the historical, political, social and economic context for this research and the individuals’ lives it draws upon. I will do this in two sections, the first looking at debates about the role of history and peace-education in reconciliation, and the second at debates about how ordinary people are being affected by government policies intended to bring about ‘modernisation’ and ‘development’. Following this, I will conclude with a section suggesting how a ‘students-eye view’ of Rwanda, such as this work aims to provide, can potentially uncover subaltern perspectives that are often obscured by much of the literature. I will also outline the structure of the rest of the thesis and summarise the content of the remaining chapters.

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<sup>22</sup> For example: Niehaus (2013), Werbner (2011) & Yarrow (2011)

<sup>23</sup> McClean-Hilker (2009)

<sup>24</sup> Ingelaere (2010)

<sup>25</sup> Longman (2006:42)

<sup>26</sup> Longman (2001, 2009)

### ***“Learning from our history...” – contested memories and identities***

The words “learning from our history” on the genocide memorial advertising board evoke a shared, ‘Rwandan’ experience of the past that all can agree upon and learn from. Yet, the past is a contested space. Its different versions each gives legitimacy to different claims to justice and rights.

In official accounts, Rwanda’s genocide, referred to as the “Tutsi-genocide”<sup>27</sup> to ensure victimhood is properly assigned, began with the revolution in 1959 when the Tutsi monarchy were deposed and massacres forced thousands of Tutsi into exile in neighbouring countries, Uganda, Tanzania, Burundi and Zaire, continued through the first and second republics in the form of repression of rights and occasional massacres, and finally ended when the Rwanda Patriotic Front liberated the country in July 1994. This timeframe enables Tutsi who returned to Rwanda from exile after the genocide to claim victim status alongside Tutsi who survived the acute genocidal violence of April to July 1994.<sup>28</sup> With the UN having cowardly abandoned Rwanda during the genocide, the RPF is credited with single-handedly and heroically putting an end to the killing, establishing a transitional government of national unity followed by democratic elections, and since then, achieving big strides in national development, against the odds.

However, missing from the RPF historical narrative is any analysis of the reasons for revolution in 1959, beyond merely attributing “ethnic divisions” to Rwanda’s Belgian colonizers; or any acknowledgement of the war, started when the RPF invaded Rwanda from the Congo in 1990 – a war that, according to Human Rights Watch<sup>29</sup>, involved RPF attacks on civilian targets, including a hospital and camp for displaced persons; the looting and destruction of civilian property and other serious human rights violations. This is thought to have greatly contributed to the climate of fear that Hutu-power was able to exploit in the run-up to its campaign of mass genocidal violence in April 1994.<sup>30</sup> Nor is there any mention of the tens of thousands of Hutu civilians killed by the RPF after it took control in 1994, significantly more, according to Des Forges<sup>31</sup>, than could be accounted for by unintentional killings of civilians caught up in the violence; or the experience of Hutus accused of participating in the genocide, sometimes falsely, and incarcerated for many years without trial in overcrowded, unsanitary, mixed gender and often open-air, prisons.<sup>32</sup> This has led several prominent Rwandan-observers to conclude that the RPF-led government’s version of history is one which constructs all Tutsi as victims, while denying the grievances of thousands of innocent Hutus.<sup>33</sup>

While the RPF historical narrative defines guilt and victimhood along the lines of Hutu or Tutsi ethnicity, paradoxically, it also seeks to do away with ethnic categories in favour of a single national “Rwandan” identity. Supporting this, the official historical narrative claims that Hutu, Tutsi and Twa had little meaning

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<sup>27</sup> Originally the government referred to the “Rwanda genocide” but 2003 Constitution was amended to refer to “Tutsi Genocide” (Waldorf 2011) and since around 2008 government officials have insisted on calling it the “genocide against the Tutsi” (Waldorf 2009).

<sup>28</sup> Burnett (2009), King (2010), Pottier (2002)

<sup>29</sup> Human Rights Watch (1993)

<sup>30</sup> African Union (2000, Chapter 7)

<sup>31</sup> Des Forges (1999:734)

<sup>32</sup> Tertsakian (2008) describes conditions in which there was not enough space to lie down and people’s feet literally rotted away in the mud and excrement beneath them.

<sup>33</sup> Des Forges (1999), Eltringham (2004), Pottier (2002).

in pre-colonial times and were merely used to distinguish between pastoral and agricultural workers. Their status as “ethnic groups” is said to have been the invention of Belgian colonisers, who measured facial features and separated Rwandans into distinct ethnic classes as a strategy to divide-and-rule. The pre-colonial era is described as a time when Rwandans lived together in peace without any divisions or conflict<sup>34</sup> Such an image of a harmonious past is given as a vision of what Rwanda could again become. As Daniel<sup>35</sup> observes, *“the healing comforts”* of nation-states suffering a loss of self-esteem, *“are expressed in the language of recovery and restoration, through an orientation toward the past.”*<sup>36</sup> Though I wondered, thinking back to the many diverse people I had seen that morning, whether this was a past all people could recognise.

Given that the advertisement appeared as part of the commemorations to mark the anniversary of the genocide only eighteen years earlier, it is noteworthy that the words “our history” are used rather than *“learning from our past”* or *“our experience”*. The past is something people experience through ‘memories’, which are lived and re-lived, continuously evolving as they connect the past to the present through processes of remembering, forgetting and reinventing<sup>37</sup>. Whereas ‘history’ is a representation of the past out of evidence and is segmented from the present like a closed chapter. Memory is based on individual or group experiences, while history is universal. As Nora<sup>38</sup> writes: *“memory is blind to all but the group it binds - which is to say, as Maurice Halbwachs has said, that there are as many memories as there are groups... History on the other hand belongs to everyone and no one, whence its claim to universal authority.”* In other words, the concept of ‘history’ used on this advertising board implies a set of universally accepted truths. In his analysis of Rwandans’ narratives of the past, Etherington<sup>39</sup> found the paradigm of history to be well planted. He wrote: *“... my respondents relied on the illusion that the past is a static, distinct, concurrent world that one can visit and consult. Like the narrator in L. P. Hartley’s<sup>40</sup> The Go Between, they acted as if “the past is a foreign country: they do things differently there.”*

Yet, most of the people I had seen around me that morning would not experience the memorial season each April as ‘history’, but as ‘memory’. They would have lived through the events of 1994 either as *rescapés*, Tutsi who witnessed but survived the genocide by escaping to other countries or hiding in swamps, forests, neighbours’ homes or sometimes under the bodies of the dead; *genocidaires*, those who had played some role in the killing but having confessed and passed through *ingando* (re-education camps) have been released from prison back to their communities; *innocent Hutu*, who often nonetheless remain under suspicion and are sometimes required to express their collective shame<sup>41</sup>, many of whom had fled to the Congo refugee camps in 1994 as the advancing RPF took control of the country; *genocide orphans*,

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<sup>34</sup> For more thorough expositions of the RPF’s official historical narrative see King (2010), Lemarchand (2007) and Rutayisire et al (2004).

<sup>35</sup> Daniel (1997)

<sup>36</sup> Cited by Etherington (2012).

<sup>37</sup> Nora (1989)

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, cited by Etherington

<sup>39</sup> Etherington (2012)

<sup>40</sup> Hartley (1953)

<sup>41</sup> Among other occasions, in an address at the Youth Connekt Dialogue on 30 June 2013, Kagame told all Hutu to seek forgiveness saying: *“even if you did not kill, ask forgiveness for those who killed in your name and acknowledge that it should never happen again”*

child survivors who were raised by others or formed their own 'families'; and *returnees*, Tutsi who grew up 'in exile' in neighbouring countries and 'returned' to Rwanda after the genocide, but were nonetheless effected by it. Anyone who did not fit into one of these categories, such as those who were born after the genocide (which is the group my students would fall into), have surely been influenced by the stories of parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts and older siblings who did.

Simultaneous to the hustle and bustle of everyday life, symbols of the genocide seem to appear everywhere in Rwanda, especially during memorial season. On the memorial week itself, beginning on 7<sup>th</sup> April each year, no events may be held that are not genocide memorials, and *Rwanda TV* shows nothing but genocide-related documentaries and official commemorations from the Amahoro Stadium. From April to June calendars fill with commemoration events marking the anniversaries of massacres at particular locations, in which survivors recount their tales of fear, horror and loss. Dotted across Rwanda's towns and countryside are small memorials - sometimes nothing more than a pile of stones where flowers are laid but often containing more formal tombstones surrounded by low metal railings. Then there are the larger official, memorial sites such as the chapel at Nyamata with its pews still strewn with the blood-stained belongings of those who were massacred there and its roof and doors unrepaired from the spray of bullets. Or the underground tombs at several official sites where visitors are invited to walk, see up close, and even smell thousands of piled up skulls and femurs. Such sights often generate a speechlessness or "traumatic silence"<sup>42</sup> – and here is where the rhetoric of 'history' seems contradictory. While the concept of history appeals to *reason*, official memorial sites preserve raw *emotions* which seem to defy explanation, thereby making it difficult to contemplate one. Making the genocide not just unpardonable but un-explainable facilitates the sort of binary thinking (Tutsi victim, Hutu perpetrator) noted above, that legitimizes the RPF government as the only imaginable alternative to a genocidal regime. Yet, these memorial sites would not be experienced in the same way by everybody. For the Hutu, for whom, of course, there are no official sites for remembering their dead, memorials to the victims of "the Tutsi genocide" may be symbols of shame, defiance, or oppression.

In addition to these official "lieux de mémoire", are also thousands of what Meierhenrich<sup>43</sup> refers to as *loci* - places - such as a house, bridge, corner, tree, bend in the road or any other space which "*become imbued with memory*" in a way which is "*incidental - not integral to their existence... result(ing) from a spontaneous encoding of place.*" He argues that ordinary Rwandans often prefer *loci* over mass graves and cemeteries as sites of remembering. Although the practice is no longer permitted, traditional Rwandan culture prescribed that bodies of the deceased should be buried within the vicinity of the home to facilitate communication with their spirits.<sup>44</sup> Despite the vulnerability of *loci* to the forces of time and change, compared with the official 'lieux de memoire' which are often quite literally set in stone, the presence of objects and places of remembering which are beyond the control of the state, allows more personal - and diverse - memories to survive. Yet, despite the plurality of painful memories and perceived grievances on all sides, it is the project of the RPF government to re-construct Rwanda's disparate groups

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<sup>42</sup> Guyer (2009)

<sup>43</sup> Meierhenrich (2011:287)

<sup>44</sup> Meierhenrich (2011:287) citing Verdal (2001)

- survivors, genocidaires, returnees etc - as "Rwandan citizens" on the path to a mutually-dependent "bright-future" through appeal to a shared history and culture.

With these understandings in my mind, I was led to question what the outlook is for a society like Rwanda's, which has so recently experienced devastating violence right at its roots. When individual and family experiences of the recent past are so diverse, I asked myself whether it is possible to forge trust-based relationships between neighbours and communities? And, if the RPF-government were to be successful at erasing people's sense of ethnic identity, whether new group identities such as class might gain increased importance? Rwanda's classrooms seemed to me an appropriate place to pose these questions, not least because they are prime arenas in which the concept of 'learning from our history' and the conflict between official historical narratives and private memories is manifest.

It is widely agreed that in the years leading up to the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, Rwandan schools helped to stoke ethnic divisions through a culture of violence and corruption, including an often abused quota system for allocating school places on the basis of ethnicity; and a national curriculum designed to inculcate youth with the official "Hutu" narrative that constructed the Hutu as Rwanda's indigenous population and the Tutsi as foreign invaders.<sup>45</sup> In response, immediately on taking power, the RPF banned history teaching in schools and soon after set up the National Curriculum Development Centre, charged with writing a new curriculum. Its former leader, Rutayisire<sup>46</sup>, explains:

*"Education has clearly been used to divide the Rwandan society. However, the authors are convinced that through restoring memory and reconstructing history as objectively as possible, Rwandans can gradually be helped to draw together as one nation"*

This view is echoed by Obura<sup>47</sup> of UNESCO who asserts:

*"Historians are calling the colonial and post-independence versions of Rwandan history and culture a set of myths... (p.99) ...just as the myths were constructed, they can be deconstructed but this time in a scientific manner" (p.102).*

Muhimpundu<sup>48</sup>, who is a consultant to MINEDUC likewise argues that:

*"Rwandans have lacked an education which helps them to progressively rid themselves of their divisive mythical beliefs... an education which would have developed a spirit of tolerance and a will to work together rather than mutual exclusion, an education in Rwandan citizenship"*

However, while the grey literature of policy documents and donor reports, such as those just cited, tend to present an image of the RPF-led government transforming schools from weapons of division and violence to tools for reconciliation and peace, a growing academic literature argues that the new curriculum is no more objective than before and merely replaces one official narrative with another

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<sup>45</sup> Erny (1994), Gasanobo (2004), Rutayisire (2004), Rutembesa (2002)

<sup>46</sup> Rutayisire (2004:336)

<sup>47</sup> Obura (2003:99-102)

<sup>48</sup> Muhimpundu (2002:90)

according to the interests of the new ruling elite. Buckley-Zistel<sup>49</sup> identifies three rhetorical strategies in the new curriculum that help to legitimise the RPF-led government and its program to “de-ethnicise” Rwandan society. These are the construction of a *common ideal* based on the image of a harmonious pre-colonial past; an *outside enemy*, binding Tutsi and Hutu as collective victims of colonialism; and an *internal enemy*, legitimising the RPF insurgency against Habyarimana and justifying the denial of civil liberties on security grounds. Other instrumental effects of the government’s history narrative presented in the new curriculum, are thought to include: masking the Tutsi dominance of public institutions<sup>50</sup>; insulating the government from criticism<sup>51</sup>; labelling some groups as collectively “victims” and others collectively “guilty”<sup>52</sup>; generating resentment between Hutu and Tutsi<sup>53</sup>; and structuring a civic identity in the image of (mainly Tutsi returnee) government elites.<sup>54</sup> Altogether this is said to “*create new dynamics of social exclusion*”<sup>55</sup>, which I will show in this thesis include but go beyond ethnicity.

Another concern, however, is not that students will universally subscribe to narratives taught through the school curriculum, but that private memories and alternative understandings will find no room for expression – a situation that Buckley-Zistel<sup>56</sup> warns, “*fabricate(s) unity without reconciliation*”. In their study of curriculum materials and teaching training programs, Freedman et al<sup>57</sup> suggest that a lack of dialogue in schools, “*make(s) it hard for everyday citizens to process what happened during the genocide and talk about lingering fears*”. Nonetheless, in her interviews with Rwandan teenagers McLean-Hilker<sup>58</sup> found that creating an environment in which people are afraid to talk openly about their experiences of ethnic identity does not make the issue go away. She writes that, “*...ethnicity was omnipresent in Kigali. Although rarely spoken about in public, it was always just below the surface in social life and was regularly discussed in the private sphere.*” This highlights the need to better understand students’ life-worlds and the way classroom knowledge is (re)interpreted, utilised and sometimes cast aside by students in their performance of self, which this work aims to do.

### **“...to build a bright future” – from a ‘post-conflict’ to a ‘developmental’ state**

It had been eighteen years since the genocide as I pulled up for my first time through the old metal gates of College Saint-Jacques; meaning only the oldest few students at the school would have lived through it personally, and they would have been babies or toddlers. As I planned to work with first year students, whose ages typically range from eleven to fourteen, they would all have been born between four and seven years after the RPF military victory had put an end to the genocide and war, and around naught to three years after Rwanda’s internal security had been stabilised and it had begun the process of reconstruction. Nonetheless, in their childhood, Kigali would have looked quite different from today. In

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<sup>49</sup> Buckley-Zistel (2009)

<sup>50</sup> Brauman et al (2001:151); Reyntjens (2004:87)

<sup>51</sup> Buckley-Zistel (2006:110-112); Reyntjens (2004:179-180, 199); Pottier 2002)

<sup>52</sup> Longman (2006); Eltringham (2004).

<sup>53</sup> Buckley-Zistel (2009:47)

<sup>54</sup> Freedman et al (2008:684).

<sup>55</sup> Hodgkin (2006:119)

<sup>56</sup> Buckley-Zistel (2006:102)

<sup>57</sup> Freedman et al (2008:685)

<sup>58</sup> McLean-Hilker (2009:84)

their short life-times they would have witnessed a remarkable transformation. Muddy tracks they walked along as children have become tarmacked roads; those roads have become busier, with increasingly smarter cars, and lined with more impressive buildings; the downtown skyline now boasts a few high-rise, shiny-glassed commercial buildings; shops carry ever more foreign goods; nearly everyone now owns a mobile phone, even domestic servants; and even during the course of my fieldwork, Kigali got its first proper cinema, Visa cards became accepted at most ATMs, and an impressive new conference centre was being built in time to host the 2016 World Economic Forum. In the previous five years, economic growth had averaged eight percent per year in real terms, income poverty had fallen from fifty-seven to forty-five percent, and substantial progress had been made on maternal and child mortality rates.<sup>59</sup> Rwanda was also listed as the world's second-top improver in the World Bank's *Doing Business* survey in 2010<sup>60</sup>.

Correspondingly, recent academic studies look less to Rwanda as an example of a post-conflict state, and increasingly study it in terms of its development, for which it stands out among Sub-Saharan African countries and is widely regarded as impressive. Notwithstanding it being one of the most heavily aided countries in Sub-Saharan Africa,<sup>61</sup> Rwanda's progress in terms of economic and income growth, and its improvements in education and life-expectancy, are generally attributed to its strong and determined leadership, particularly in the person of Paul Kagame<sup>62</sup>. Different accounts of Rwanda's growth and development trajectory have variously defined Rwanda as a case of 'high-modernism'<sup>63</sup>, 'development-patrimonialism'<sup>64</sup>, 'developmental authoritarianism'<sup>65</sup>; and as a 'developmental'<sup>66</sup> and a 'post-developmental' state.<sup>67</sup> These perspectives commonly depict strong, state-led economic development, based on strategic investment in particular industries, infrastructure projects and public services, while the nuances between them reflect differences in emphasis. For example, 'authoritarian' highlights the state's willingness to use brute force to drive through its program and silence any opposition; 'patrimonialism', emphasises the low levels of corruption and sincere development-focus of government elites; and 'post-developmental', is used to account for how this is taking place within the context of a neo-liberal marketization of the economy.

Hence, the phrase – "to build a bright future" – in the genocide memorial advert, places Rwanda and its people on a journey, from the devastation of its tragic past, to somewhere better than it is today. It calls on people to consider its progress since the genocide and work together towards a common vision. Like its history, the future is collectivised as something in which all Rwandans have a stake. Indeed, one of the few policies of the Habyarimana regime that the RPF has embraced and promoted is the Umugunda system of compulsory public works on the first Saturday of every month.<sup>68</sup> Umugunda, which translates

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<sup>59</sup> Booth & Golooba-Mutebi (2012:385).

<sup>60</sup> World Bank (2011)

<sup>61</sup> Hayman (2007)

<sup>62</sup> Booth & Golooba-Mutubi (2012:387) praise Kagame's "austere sense of public duty".

<sup>63</sup> Several contributors to Straus & Waldorf (2011) employ this term used by James C. Scott to describe the excesses of dirigisme in viligization projects in Tanzania in 1970s

<sup>64</sup> Booth & Golooba-Mutebi (2012)

<sup>65</sup> Matfess (2015)

<sup>66</sup> Unsworth & Uvin & (2002).

<sup>67</sup> Honeyman (2016)

<sup>68</sup> Though this was a pre-colonial and colonial practise, it was brought back and re-institutionalised under Habyarimana 1973-94 (Schaefer 2001, Verwimp 2003)

to “we work together”, not only gets necessary jobs done in the community, such as protecting hillsides against erosion or dredging flood drains, it also symbolises each citizen’s commitment to “do their bit” for the benefit of everyone. Similarly, the establishment of the Agaciro Development Fund in 2012, which encouraged Rwandans at home or abroad to raise funds for national development, is possibly one of the only examples in the world of citizens volunteering to pay more tax. Everyone is encouraged to give what they can, no matter how great and small, and those who do are praised for their patriotism.

However, without denying Rwanda’s security and stability, unexpectedly good macro-economic performance, encouraging human development statistics and low levels of corruption, a large number of academic studies take a critical stance. Some have challenged the amount of credit given to the RPF-led government for Rwanda’s “development miracle” by pointing out the role played by foreign aid<sup>69</sup> and plundered mineral wealth from the Congo<sup>70</sup>. Others draw our attention to the government’s tightening authoritarian grip over civil society and troubling human rights record<sup>71</sup>. Meanwhile, a growing body of literature questions who is benefiting from ‘development’ and ‘modernity’, and who is being left behind, or adversely incorporated into modernisation projects without consultation or regard for their best interests.

An example of this would be the government policy of *imidugudisation* (villagization) of the Rwandan countryside. The policy, which aims to re-shape the rural landscape away from one of houses dotted equal distances apart over every hill, each on its own parcel of land, to gathering houses together in villages and running along roads, is in theory very sensible. Its purpose is to facilitate better transport links and access to electricity and water supplies. However, in practice it is resented by many rural peasants who see long delays in receiving the promised services and often would prefer to build homes closer to the plot they farm.<sup>72</sup> Newbury<sup>73</sup> suggests its biggest problem, however, is that as in other parts of Africa where voluntary villagization has been attempted, such as Ethiopia, Mozambique and Tanzania, it has ended up being coercive. In some cases, those most affected by the policy, who were given little or no say in the policy to begin with, have been threatened, fined, or had their existing shelters destroyed by local officials, while those whose land was seized to make way for *imidugudisation* have not been compensated.<sup>74</sup> Further still, this is taking place in a context where land rights are disputed due to different waves of refugees leaving and returning and by a government that is perceived by many peasants to lack legitimacy.<sup>75</sup>

In the name of ‘development’, the government is not only stipulating where houses must be built, it has also introduced regulations about what materials they must be built from. Here, a policy designed to improve the quality of Rwanda’s housing has made it too expensive for the majority of rural labourers to ever afford the materials to build their own home. Sommers<sup>76</sup> has shown that this not only has

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<sup>69</sup> Hayman (2011)

<sup>70</sup>Reyntjens (2011)

<sup>71</sup> Hayman (2006:138-145)

<sup>72</sup> Sommers (2012)

<sup>73</sup> Newbury (2011:233-5)

<sup>74</sup> Newbury (2011)

<sup>75</sup> Ingeleare (2014)

<sup>76</sup> Sommers (2012)



implications for people's material well-being but also has a profound impact on social relations, as the requirement in Rwandan culture for a young man to have built his house before he can marry or be considered an adult is forcing young men and women to delay marriage to an increasingly later age. Many young men in Sommer's study spent all their spare earnings trying to build a home, one tile at a time, even while knowing that it was unlikely they would ever manage to complete it.

Another regulation designed from above, ostensibly to aid national development, but which is resented by poor small-holding farmers, are laws dictating what crops to grow and when. In theory, such laws make Rwanda's agricultural production as a whole far more efficient as they encourage regional specialisation of crops that grow better in particular climates and soils, as well as the commercialisation of production. However, mono-cropping leaves individual farmers far more vulnerable to food insecurity and the push towards bigger, commercial farms, concentrates the gains from agricultural production in the hands of a few entrepreneurs.<sup>77</sup> Also, the financial penalties for non-compliance can be harsh. Reyntjens<sup>78</sup> records an occasion in the Eastern province when officials up-rooted people's crops because they failed to plant in rows as they had been instructed.

The effects of government 'development' policies and discourse are thought to not only be experienced as increased vulnerability, but also social stigma and humiliation. Ansom<sup>79</sup> contrasts the attitudes portrayed about the rural poor in Habyarimana's and Kagame's speeches. She suggests that whereas Habyariman glorified peasants, presenting himself as one of them, Kagame's government is filled with people who grew up in cities while in exile, now base themselves in Kigali, and appear to not know their own hills. She also notes how Kagame's speeches often appear patronising towards the poor, blaming their predicament on their own mentality or work ethic. For example, in his inaugural speech he stated: "We would like to urgently appeal to the Rwandese people to work. As the Bible says, 'he who does not work, shall not eat'."<sup>80</sup> Thus, at the same time as people are told where to live, how to build, what to grow, and, in the case of students, what and where to study, they are also told to be self-reliant and work their own way out of poverty.

Honeyman<sup>81</sup> describes how the discourse of self-reliance appears in the new entrepreneurship curriculum, which aims to turn young people into "orderly entrepreneurs" – a phrase she coins to express how aspects of entrepreneurship such as properly registering, correct payment of taxes, respect for the environment and government regulations are emphasised while entrepreneurial attributes such as creativity and individualism are overlooked. Later in this thesis I show that for all the focus on history and politics education in the academic literature, entrepreneurship is given far more importance in the national curriculum and examinations, and it is of much greater concern to students who know that once they leave school they will be responsible for making it in the world on their own, to sink or swim according to their work ethic and 'mentality'.

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<sup>77</sup> Huggins (2009, 2011)

<sup>78</sup> Reyntjens (2007)

<sup>79</sup> Ansom (2011:242)

<sup>80</sup> Ansoms (2011:243)

<sup>81</sup> Honeyman (2016)

This is all taking place in the context of rising inequality, as an expanding middle class is doing well out of 'development' but others are failing to reap the gains of economic growth. In the ten years leading up to the genocide, Rwanda went from being a low-inequality country with a Gini of 0.289 to a high one<sup>82</sup> – a trend that has continued since, peaking around 2005 when the Gini rating was 0.522<sup>83</sup>. Although the government's National Institute of Statistics (NISR) makes a point that poverty is falling and income inequality is now in decline, the decrease in the Gini-coefficient over the past five years is minimal to modest; Rwanda remains the most unequal country in East-Africa; and, when the data is disaggregated to district level, we see that urban inequality is continuing to rise.<sup>84</sup>

The matter of rising inequality is a common theme in academic literature on peace-building after civil conflict, which is concerned with why peace processes fail, and, in particular, how a tendency for states emerging from civil war to import western-style liberal democracy and market-based economies has often exacerbated structural inequalities and increased social tensions<sup>85</sup>. Reflecting on his work in El Salvador as he moved with FMLN<sup>86</sup> peasant guerillas while they were pursued through the forests by government forces, Bourgois revisits his field-notes to make sense of how the peasants he had once praised for their solidarity had since become marred in domestic and everyday violence.<sup>87</sup> He draws upon Bourdieu's<sup>88</sup> *'law of the conservation of violence'* to explain how at the end of war violence rarely dies, it merely changes shape. This often begins with an increase in inequalities of wealth and opportunity, as some groups or individuals do well out of peace settlements and the return to economic growth, while others are left behind – a situation sometimes referred to as "structural violence"<sup>89</sup> because it entails some people exercising power over others in a way that curtails their well-being and even life-span. Bourdieu<sup>90</sup> explains how the humiliation and resentment this generates leads to an increase in everyday and domestic violence as the *"structural violence exerted by financial markets... is matched sooner or later in the form of suicides, crime and delinquency, drug addiction, alcoholism and a whole host of minor and major everyday acts of violence."* Evidence for the tendency of peace-settlements to lay the foundations for new forms of violence can be seen around the world, particularly in places like South Africa<sup>91</sup>, El Salvador<sup>92</sup>, Guatemala<sup>93</sup>, Cambodia<sup>94</sup>, and the Democratic Republic of Congo<sup>95</sup>, to name a few, where post-conflict governments have adopted a neo-liberal approach to economic reconstruction and development.

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<sup>82</sup> Ansoms (2005:502)

<sup>83</sup> NISR (2014)

<sup>84</sup> McKay (2014), NISR (2012)

<sup>85</sup> Paris (2004); McGinty (2006)

<sup>86</sup> Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front

<sup>87</sup> Bourgois (2001)

<sup>88</sup> Bourdieu (1998)

<sup>89</sup> Kohler & Alcock (1976:343) defined structural violence as *"Whenever persons are harmed, maimed, or killed by poverty and unjust social, political, and economic institutions, systems or structures"*.

<sup>90</sup> Bourdieu (1998:40)

<sup>91</sup> Du Toit (2001);

<sup>92</sup> Moodie (2010), Bourgois (2001, 2002)

<sup>93</sup> Brett (2016)

<sup>94</sup> Springer (2009, 2011)

<sup>95</sup> Autesserre (2006), Hamber (2010)

In Rwanda, while there are still occasional, low-level, cross-border skirmishes by FLDR terrorists (former genocidaires) camped in the Eastern Congo and occasional grenade attacks in Kigali markets or memorial sites, the RPF has been successful in achieving a monopoly on military power and maintaining internal security. However, in the light of the literature just presented, it is worth considering the nature of Rwanda's 'peace' and the extent to which unequal access to wealth, power, and human and civil rights, is fomenting tension, resentment and anxiety at grass-roots – even in Rwanda's classrooms. That will be a core aim of this thesis, which builds a picture of Rwandan adolescence as a time of great expectations, but also great anxiety and uncertainty about the future, punctuated by episodes of physical and symbolic violence.

### ***Seeing like a Rwandan teenager***

So far in this opening chapter, I have described the political, social and economic contexts in which the young students at the heart of my study are growing up, and introduced some of the academic debates around them, including questions about knowledge construction under the RPF and the link between historical narratives, collective memories and identities; grassroots experiences of 'modernity' and globalisation; and discussion from the field of Peace and Conflict Studies about the way violence often changes shape after civil conflict, from organised collective warfare to its 'structural', 'everyday' and domestic forms. In writing this thesis, it is not my intention to definitively resolve any one of these debates, but to contribute a rich source of ethnographic data for those engaged them. Moreover, by bringing to light the complexity of young Rwandan's social relations and identities, I hope to unsettle some of what I perceive are shared assumptions in much of the literature on Rwanda under the RPF, which, I contend, sometimes unwittingly occludes meaningful grassroots perspectives.

To explain what I mean by this, it will help for a moment to borrow an idea from the "anthropology of development" approach to development research, which rather than view policy as a set of solutions to concrete problems, looks at it as 'discourse', produced by development institutions to rationalise particular practices or to mask the power relations and real intentions behind them; and instead of studying its effects, analyses the apparatus of policy-making itself<sup>96</sup>. From this perspective policy discourse is thought to not merely describe social reality but be constitutive of it. Prominent critics of development have argued that "development", which exists as a palpable social reality, was first of all constructed conceptually through the discourses of development institutions<sup>97</sup>. Furthermore, they have shown how academia, even when critical of "development", has often colluded with its practitioners in constructing "the third world" as an object lacking "development" – where "development" means "external intervention" – in order to justify the activities of the West, historic and contemporary, in Africa, Latin America and Asia. In this same manner, I submit that although the academic literature on Rwandan schooling tends to contest the positive claims made by educational planners and donor agencies about education's role in fostering reconciliation, shared citizenship and opportunities for all, both sides of this debate are, nonetheless, tangled in a similar ontology which unconsciously reinforces elements of the official narrative by overshadowing alternative perspectives. This research aims to bring those

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<sup>96</sup> Mosse (2004:641)

<sup>97</sup> Escobar (1995); Ferguson (1994); Shore & Wright (1997)

perspectives back into the frame in two ways: firstly, it seeks understand the multiplicity of influences that make up students' life-worlds, and secondly, it employs a holistic concept of identity that goes beyond ethnicity and takes in its scope any discourse or phenomenon by which students position themselves in relation to others.

### ***Understanding students' life-worlds***

With their dominant focus on education policy, especially history and political science curriculums, academic, government and donor discourses on Rwandan schooling are collectively constructing the school curriculum as the most significant means by which the state exerts power and influence over Rwandan youth and the primary influence on their identities and values. Without denying the importance of classroom knowledge in students' lives, I suggest that its dominance in the literature is rhetorically expanding the influence of the state over young Rwandans in a manner that overshadows other sites of identity construction and renders students' life-worlds and the institutional practices of the school almost invisible.

Another way of expressing this would be to say that, although not explicit, most writing on Rwanda since 1994 discusses ethnic relations from an "instrumentalist" perspective, which posits that boundaries between social categories are produced and given salience through the short-run strategic actions by elites. By contrast, this work is written from a social constructivist perspective, which attributes the process of identity construction to cultural and discursive systems that, *"have their own logic or agency... (and) exist and move independently of the actions of any particular individual"*<sup>98</sup> Consequently, although this is a school-based ethnography, my interest has been drawn to the informal spaces beyond the gaze of school leaders, the relationships students develop in their clubs, church groups and dormitories, and the knowledge young people bring into the school from the outside, acquired in the home and through other social networks. Classroom learning and the control the school exerts over students' time, movement and speech are considered as part of one complex whole. In the next chapter, outlining my research methodology, I discuss the sources of data used to build a more detailed picture of students' life-worlds.

This said, encouragingly in recent years there has been an increased focus on understanding what Rwanda looks like from a grassroots perspective for this work to build on. Straus and Waldorf's<sup>99</sup> collection of essays on state-building under the RPF included several contributions from authors who had recently returned from ethnographic fieldwork documenting the perspectives of ordinary Rwandans, like Hutu prisoners, Tutsi survivors, rural peasants, children and youth, many of which have been cited this work. Meanwhile, Sommers<sup>100</sup> has written specifically through the eyes of Rwandan young men struggling to earn enough to build a house and meet the social expectations of marriage and family life; Pells<sup>101</sup> has written about children's experience of vulnerability and perceived lack of rights; McLean-Hilker<sup>102</sup> has

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<sup>98</sup> Fearon & Laitin (2000:851-3)

<sup>99</sup> Straus and Waldorf (2011)

<sup>100</sup> Sommers (2012)

<sup>101</sup> Pells (2011, 2012)

<sup>102</sup> McLean-Hilker (2014)

looked at intersection of ethnicity and gender among Rwandan adolescents and young adults; and while I was engaged in my fieldwork two other doctoral research students were engaged in school-based ethnographic work.<sup>103</sup>

### ***A more holistic view of social identity***

A large proportion of academic, journalistic and policy literature on Rwanda focuses on ethnicity, while much less is said about other aspects of Rwandan social life. For instance, schooling is analysed for its role in disseminating official narratives on the origins and meaning of ‘Hutu’ and ‘Tutsi’ and its efforts to construct a ‘shared Rwandan citizenship’, but there is comparatively little attention given to the role of schooling in the reproduction of social class or notions of masculinity and femininity. This not only has the effect of discursively magnifying ethnicity as a feature of people’s lives, it also conceals the way ethnicity intersects with gender, class, religion and other defining aspects of their social identities. Of course, I am not suggesting that ethnicity is not a significant feature of how young Rwandans see themselves and relate to one another, but it does not exist in a vacuum. Over the course of this thesis I will suggest that ethnicity is given meaning as it relates to people’s vulnerabilities and sense of injustice.

Perhaps the nearly exclusive focus on ethnicity in so much of the literature is a consequence of the genocide being such a totemic and disruptive event that everything gets analysed through its lens. Yet, scholars whose engagement with Rwanda pre-dates the genocide frequently lament that much of the post-genocide literature does little to increase understanding, is devoid of context and can be misleading.<sup>104</sup> Pottier<sup>105</sup> argues that some ‘newcomers’ to Rwanda have too easily adopted RPF narratives on the past and wrongfully dismissed decades of careful post-colonial research. Meanwhile, Longman<sup>106</sup> suggests that:

*“Too many recent authors begin their analysis of Rwanda with the genocide and read backwards into Rwandan history as though all of Rwanda’s past was an inevitable march towards the disaster of 1994”*

I would add that there is a similar tendency in writing on the post-conflict transition to treat the genocide as year zero while overlooking many continuities that pre-date it. For example, while young Rwandans’ experience of social and economic inequalities within a high-handed developmental state, such as that described in the previous section, might be a feature of life under the RPF, it is also remarkably similar to the situation in the years leading up to the genocide. Ethnographic data from the time suggests that ethnicity was but one of two distinct forms of prejudice and inequality in Rwanda. Uvin<sup>107</sup> explains:

*“One was the official ‘Hutu’ ideology, designating all Tutsi as evil, dangerous, cunning and intent on power... The other is the prejudice of what is locally called the ‘evolués –*

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<sup>103</sup> Tim Williams (2016) and Kirsten Pontalti (forthcoming in 2017)

<sup>104</sup> Longman (2004:29), De Lame (2005:3)

<sup>105</sup> Pottier (2002:121-122)

<sup>106</sup> Longman (2004:30)

<sup>107</sup> Uvin (1999:52)

*the urban, educated, modern, 'developed' people – versus their backward, rural, illiterate, 'underdeveloped' brothers".*

Uvin's<sup>108</sup> description of structural violence in Rwanda immediately prior to the genocide, which is based on extensive original analysis of primary data from the decades leading up to it, describes not only inequalities of wealth, but state enforced social exclusion, not only of the Tutsi but also rural Hutu peasants who were barred from taking advantage of much of the development aid pouring into Rwanda and were not permitted to move to the towns for work due to a government policy of travel restrictions.<sup>109</sup>

Various studies during the first and second republics likewise describe how, for the majority of Hutu, the hopes of revolution and independence were never realised. In 1966, four years after independence, Lemarchand<sup>110</sup> likened Rwanda, to the Thermidorian period of revolutionary France, in which there had been "*a partial restoration of the very order of things which the first revolution sought to destroy*", since although Hutu chiefs had replaced Tutsi leaders, original social structures remained intact. Reyntjens<sup>111</sup> illustrates this point with the example of the resistance of Hutu landowners in the north and north-west, a region historically controlled by Hutu chiefs, to the abolition of a feudal institution from which they benefited known as *umukonde*, and how this was in contradiction to the ideology of the 1959 revolution. He notes how debates over the rights of Hutu landowners to keep the *umukonde* continued until 1973 when the military took power and installed a regime dominated by Northern Hutu.

The extent of class inequalities between Hutu and Hutu or Tutsi and Tutsi brought about by clientship and lineage systems are a common theme of ethnographic work between independence and the genocide. De Lame's<sup>112</sup> ethnography of clientship relations on a Rwandan hill in the late 1980s employs Baudrillard's analysis of "*consumption as a means of identity-building*"<sup>113</sup> to demonstrate the social as well as monetary value of ownership and exchange of drinks, cows, women and land. Based on two decades of archival research and three periods of participant observation, she demonstrates that patron-client relationships experienced little change through each of Rwanda's political transitions, but also shows how, as Rwanda became increasingly incorporated into the global economy, the monetarisation of exchange introduced a paradigm of accumulation which exacerbated social inequalities.

Meschy<sup>114</sup>, who also conducted her ethnography on a single Rwanda hill, describes how lineage systems produced inequality and rivalry between families of the same lineage as land became more scarce and fragmented and parents frequently privileged certain sons to the exclusion of others. Jefromovas<sup>115</sup> makes similar observations in her twenty-year study of Rwanda's brick and tile industries, which she uses as a window to understanding class and gender relations. She shows how those able to earn enough from agricultural land in the rainy season were able to get ahead by entering brick and tile production, while

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<sup>108</sup> Uvin (1998, 1999)

<sup>109</sup> Uvin (1999:116).

<sup>110</sup> Lemarchand (1966:318)

<sup>111</sup> Reyntjens (1987:93)

<sup>112</sup> De Lame (2005) NB. This appeared in French before the genocide.

<sup>113</sup> (ibid:20)

<sup>114</sup> Meschy (1974)

<sup>115</sup> Jefromovas (2002:81)

others had to rely on casual labour, which she suggests economically stratified even siblings into producer and labourer classes. These studies and others tell a story of pre-genocide Rwanda in which class mattered as much as ethnicity, where there were rich and poor Tutsi as well as rich and poor Hutu.

Gender is another social category explored in some of the pre-genocide ethnographies, which, like class, appeared to structure power relations and individuals' choices and behaviour no less than ethnicity. De Lame, for example, describes a society in which women were commodified as markers of distinction – the “*ultimate exchange*” – where fertility was the “*supreme symbolic value*”<sup>116</sup>; but paradoxically notes how marriage, marking the passage to adulthood, was also the only means by which a girl could ever gain status<sup>117</sup>. Jefremovas<sup>118</sup> explains how inheritance would usually be received shortly before a young man intended to marry and was pre-requisite to obtaining a bride, hence, unequal patterns of inheritance also meant unequal access to women. Two of Rwanda's foremost historian/ethnographers, David and Catherine Newbury<sup>119</sup>, explain how by custom and law a young man needed to provide a home before he could marry, and describe how Rwanda's economic crash in the period before the 1994 genocide left a generation of young men with no jobs, land or schooling. This situation, according to the African Union<sup>120</sup> created: “*an entire cohort of young men into their thirties with no family responsibilities, and often no work and little hope*” adding that, “*such rootless young men are made-to-order recruits for possible violence*”. Of course, as Newbury<sup>121</sup> points out, “*such gender effects cut both ways, for women, too, remained single long beyond the habitual age of marriage*”.

Finally, the history of the genocide demonstrates that religion can also be a weak or strong aspect of individual identity and has an effect on how people view ethnicity. It is often pointed out that before the genocide, as now, Rwanda's Christian churches were ethnically mixed. Yet, given the rivalry between Catholic and Protestant churches in the race to gain converts<sup>122</sup>, this fact should also cause us to enquire about the meaning and significance Rwandans place in adhering to a particular faith, or, how the different values emphasised by each faith influence their identities and actions. It has been observed, for example, that while many Christian churches were sites of massacres, committed by and against people who previously worshipped together, Rwanda's Muslim community appeared resistant to the genocide with Hutu Muslims protecting their Tutsi neighbours. The same is also said of members of the Pentecostal church and the *Abarokore* (saved) movement<sup>123</sup>. Could this be because their collective religious identity was stronger than their identities as Hutus and Tutsis? Equally might the large number of killings in churches be attributable in part to rivalries and resource conflicts that existed between members of the same congregation?

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<sup>116</sup> (ibid:xvii)

<sup>117</sup> (ibid:203)

<sup>118</sup> (ibid:82)

<sup>119</sup> David and Catherine Newbury (1998:91, 1999:302)

<sup>120</sup> African Union (2000:30)

<sup>121</sup> Newbury (1998:91)

<sup>122</sup> Linden (1977), Longman (2009)

<sup>123</sup> Longman (2004:35)

## ***Argument and Overview***

With these understandings in mind, this study is based on the premises, firstly, that ethnicity means different things to different people and is more fundamental to some people's identities than others; and secondly, that ethnicity is given meaning as it intersects with social identities such as religion, gender, wealth, and being rural or urban, as well as the social realities that feed people's political consciousness and sense of justice. It cannot be understood properly in isolation from these things.

Thus, my aim in writing this thesis, is to produce a 'thick description' of growing up at College Saint-Jacques that enables those who read it to join me in "seeing like a Rwandan teenager", including the full range of complexity, ambiguity and uncertainty my students encountered each day as they constructed their identities and navigated their social worlds. I hope those who read it will feel I have left enough detail and nuance for them to evaluate and interpret my descriptions in their own ways. Nonetheless, I tentatively construct three arguments in relation to some of the debates identified already in this chapter, each of which is woven through the subsequent chapters as a recurring theme. These could be summarised as follows:

- ❖ Firstly, ***the experience of growing up at Saint-Jacques can be summarised as one of great expectations coupled with great anxiety and uncertainty, authoritarian discipline and injustice.***
- ❖ Secondly, ***College Saint-Jacques is a microcosm of Rwanda***, which is produced by and which helps to reproduce Rwandan society and the state. It is '*produced by*' because the social, cultural and political norms and power structures which define Rwanda are the same which permeate the school. It 'reproduces' Rwandan society in a figurative sense as the place where social identities are learned and reinforced and a literal sense as it raises the next generation of educated workers.
- ❖ Thirdly, while the discursive and symbolic power of the state, not to mention brute force, may set the 'conditions of possibility', ***social identities are constructed and maintained at grassroots through the appropriation of official narratives and cultural creation.***

This thesis is made up of three parts. This chapter and the next set the national context in which Saint-Jacques students are growing up and introduce the key concepts and methodology for the student. Chapters three and four describe the institutional context – what the school does to students. Then chapters five to seven each look at a different aspect of identity and ethnicity and what students do within that context – the grass-roots discourses through which they perform the gendered, spiritual, African, modern, traditional, and ethnic aspects of their identities.

This chapter has discussed the broad socio-economic context of Rwanda in the second decade of the twenty-first century and introduced some of the contemporary academic debates. It has depicted a post-conflict state in which the government is actively trying to re-construct collective memories and redefine citizenship, as well as a developmental state, in which individual freedoms are sacrificed in the name of modernity and young Rwandans are expected to become, as Honeyman suggests, 'orderly entrepreneurs'.



Finally, it has argued for a more anthropological, de-centred approach to understanding young Rwandans' experience of schooling. This methodological approach is elaborated in the next chapter, which explains the various sources of data I have drawn from to write this thesis.

Ostensibly, chapter two details and defends my research methodology, including issues of sampling, data collection and ethics, but it does more than this. Through a look at the problematic nature of my position as a participant observer – how my presence aroused suspicion and interfered with the power dynamics between students and discipline staff - it also contributes to the overall argument about Saint-Jacques as a microcosm of Rwanda, which reflects and reproduces in students the fear and distrust endemic in Rwandan society.

Chapter Three aims to locate College Saint-Jacques in its social, geographic and historical context showing how Saint-Jacques sits in the imagination of students and their parents as a place 'betwixt and between'<sup>124</sup>; not only between different life-phases, as the place where children grow into adults, but also as the gateway to a brighter-future. The chapter also considers a prominent discourse about 'fairness', showing how the concept has been important at Saint-Jacques since its earliest days but has shifted meaning over time from the idea of "equity" in the post-independence era to "meritocracy" under the RPF. It argues that whereas the *equity* paradigm in the years before the genocide generated a heightened sense of horizontal inequalities while ignoring the vertical inequalities that were present *within* Hutu and Tutsi ethnic groups, the *equality* or *meritocracy* paradigm in the current era conceals both forms of inequality. Chapter Three also contributes to the image of Saint-Jacques as a microcosm of the Rwandan state, showing how knowledge is constructed in the classroom through curriculum, pedagogy and constant evaluation and ranking of students, through which the state aims to construct the ideal citizen; and how this affects the way many students see themselves and plan for their futures. At the same time, however – and supporting the recurring theme about the importance of grassroots and student agency – it describes how, perceiving deficits in their own education, students engage in much learning outside of the classroom as they exchange ideas and develop their talents.

Chapter Four discusses Saint-Jacques' tough disciplinary regime, describing how tight control over students' time and movement is capriciously enforced through harsh physical punishments and public humiliation, which leaves many students feeling isolated, powerless and insecure. It also shows how this reproduces the sort of patron-client relationships that are an enduring feature of Rwandan society as students find ways to survive the experience by seeking protectors.

Chapter Five then looks at the centrality of gender to students' identities, as it describes boys' struggles to live up to popular notions of masculinity and how these are constructed in ways that can cause both boys and girls increased anxiety, social exclusion and shame. It also shows how different discourses of masculinity stem from different traditions, such as cultural customs learned in the home, colonial and Catholic influence on the school, modern youth culture, and the government and donors' 'gender equality' agenda, all of which provide boys with material to draw upon as they strive to present themselves as men. Yet, as not all boys are equally endowed to do this, the chapter also observes some

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<sup>124</sup> Turner (1967)

of the face-saving strategies employed by boys who find themselves unable to measure up to social expectations of manhood and instead become 'docile bodies'

Chapter six describes how students articulate their anxieties through alternative 'grassroots' knowledge systems, not found in the formal spaces of the school, which draw on ideas of the secret and the hidden. A conspiracy theory found in Hip Hop culture, about the Illuminati is revealed to articulate students' vulnerabilities to the hidden forces of state and global power, and the threats to their identities as 'African' and Christians. Then, a discourse about witchcraft and Christianity is shown to express students' material insecurities about resource-based conflict at a more local and intimate level, even between neighbours and extended family. Witchcraft, against which Christian faith is the only protection, seems to offer an explanation for unexpected misfortune and the unfair distribution of rewards. Similarly, the materiality of Hip Hop culture and the Illuminati represents both a temptation to acquire wealth through doing wrong and a face-saving justification for failure. Finally, both the Illuminati and witchcraft discourses display young Rwandan's ambivalence towards modernity, as witchcraft is condemned for being 'uncivilised', while the Illuminati is seen as a threat to Rwandan cultural traditions.

The final chapter looks at the ethnic aspect of students' identities and argues that despite the classroom discourse of a united "Rwandan citizenship", under the surface (and occasionally above it) many students retain a strong sense of ethnic identity, victimhood and mutual distrust. However, the caveats given above stand: that ethnicity does not mean the same thing to everybody and that it receives its meaning as it connects with students' perceptions of unfairness and anxieties about their futures. Finally, like masculinity, the Illuminati, or witchcraft, ethnicity is revealed as both an explanatory discourse for students' perceived injustices, embarrassments and social exclusion, as well as a cultural resource for making friends, forging alliances and opening opportunities.

### ***"Excellent! You will start tomorrow"***

After a short wait at reception office we were ushered into the Principal's Office where we I met Father Karenzi. He was a wise looking, spectacled, older gentleman, with a flat head of grey hair; short and slim but with a small pot-belly that interrupted the flow of his long white Priestly robes. I briefly explained the purpose of my research and handed him a copy of my CV to establish my credentials, which he took out of my hand and perused, making occasional sounds of approval while I sat in silence looking around his office.

"I think it is a good idea!" he said enthusiastically, then he took a mobile phone from his table and made a short phone call to his Deans of Discipline and Studies (the equivalent of deputy heads in Rwandan schools), inviting them to join us. While we waited he asked questions about my family and when they would arrive in Rwanda, and the political situation in the UK.

After a few minutes the two other men arrived. They both seemed less friendly than Karenzi and showed little enthusiasm as I explained again the purpose of my research, taking extra care to not make it sound too controversial. None of them seemed especially worried about my research and were more interested in what my role at the school would be. I asked if I could mainly be used as a classroom assistant, or teach

the political science course, which I reasoned would offer lots of opportunities for political discussion with students, but none of them seemed particularly enthused by the idea, not because of any concern about it being a controversial topic, but because they seemed to see it as of minor importance. Karenzi then showed them my CV and pointed out my degree in economics, asking me if I could teach entrepreneurship to their Senior Three O-Level students. I responded that I was happy to teach Entrepreneurship but that I wanted to work with a Senior One Class, which seemed to disappoint them. The Dean of Studies suggested I teach English to Senior One, Political Science to Senior Two and Entrepreneurship to Senior Three. Without properly considering the time commitment this would entail I accepted. Karenzi immediately clapped his hands together saying, *“Excellent, you will start tomorrow”*. In retrospect I regretted taking on so much work, but at that moment it did not matter. I was in.

## Chapter Two

### "We all told lies. I told her I've had sex with nine girls" - Methodological and Ethical issues

"Teacher there is another Muzungu doing research", a group of students called out to me as we passed on the balcony corridor on our way to lunch. My first instinct was to regard the idea of another *muzungu* (non-African) at Saint Jacque as a threat to the relationships I had been working hard to develop. Then again, I was excited by the idea of being able to exchange notes and confer with another researcher.

I was not the first *muzungu* to conduct research at Saint-Jacques but I was the only one in the memory of its longest serving staff to ever really become part of everyday life at the school by spending an extended period of time there as a teacher. A few months before I arrived a Swiss Masters Degree student had spent four weeks at the school interviewing students and staff and observing social science lessons. A few months before him a US-based researcher had made several visits over a period of months. A young Korean man used to come in each week to teach sports to the first-year classes but did not build any meaningful relations with the students, who complained that he would only allow them to play his preferred sport of basketball rather than football and that they found him unreliable. On one occasion, there was great excitement when a mini-bus of English cricket-players arrived with half-a-day to coach students in the "new sport from England", which teachers explained was part of Rwanda's initiation into the Commonwealth. I also remember meeting some representatives of an American Catholic group who brought with them a shipment of glossy new textbooks. Finally, Saint Jacque students participated in an annual science competition organised by KOICA, the Korean International Development Agency. So, while it was not unusual for Saint Jacque students to witness '*muzungu*' visitors on their campus, such encounters were usually brief and built around a specific activity.

However, to have a young *muzungu* become a class teacher and 'hang out' with students informally during breaks, after-school sports and through extra-curriculum activities, over the course of nearly two years, was unprecedented; and if carefully managed, presented an opportunity to gain students' confidence in a way few researchers are able. Even still, this often required careful navigation of a complex and hard-to-predict social environment, in which it was easy to inadvertently offend or arouse suspicion. Hence, I felt anxious about sharing the school with another *muzungu* researcher.

Over the weekend I found out more about the new *muzungu* while visiting one of the boys. As we chatted, he seemed distracted and looking down at his body, which was unclothed from the waist up, began flexing his chest and triceps and asked, "*Sam do you think my arms are getting stronger?*" He had the sort of fat-less torso that revealed every crease of muscle and bone but he clearly wanted to grow bigger, so in encouragement I told him, "*you're certainly at the age where your muscles will start to develop.*" This seemed to encourage further questions about puberty as he asked about pubic hair growth, "*Sam, did*

*you know that some African men can grow a friggin' afro down there?" Then he changed the subject again, "Sam, there was a muzungu doing research about those things. She asked us many personal things".*

"What sort of things?" I enquired.

*"Things like that, what we were just talking about. Like how often we trim our hairs down there... how often we masturbate... Sam why does she need to know stuff like that? Anyway, we all just told lies and made stuff up", he said laughing, "I told her I've had sex with nine girls!"*

"That's not very kind. That will mess up her research", I said.

"We don't care", he shot back, "Muzuuuunguuuu (emphasis added) asking us stuff like that. She doesn't even know us. What's it for? How will she benefit from it?"

"Hmm... I am a bit surprised ", I conceded before asking, "Did she explain the purpose of her research? Where is she from?"

"Erm, India. No, Asia... I don't know. We didn't see her".

It turned out that this would be the extent of her engagement with Saint Jacques. Other students later verified that the Dean of Studies had ordered them to complete a questionnaire which asked about puberty and sexual practices and that some of them had laughed about it together and agreed to sabotage the research by exaggerating or outright lying. Though sexual activity between high school students is not unusual in Rwanda, it contravenes the conservative Christian values that many espouse, and is not something young people discuss openly for fear of being judged negatively and stigmatised. Conversely, in a different setting, sexual activity is something young men might brag and joke about as a marker of masculinity. Over the course of my fieldwork I came to witness students performing their identities quite differently, depending on company and context. Such complexity can never be captured in a survey or a short field visit.

My purpose in sharing this experience is not to invalidate all research that uses non-ethnographic methods of data collection, and is certainly not to ridicule the researcher for not understanding something about the research context which from her perspective would have been an 'unknown unknown'; rather it is to highlight one of the barriers to doing good research at a grass-roots level in Rwanda, the resentment and lack of trust many feel towards western researchers intruding on their lives. Indeed, when I challenged students about their decision to sabotage somebody's survey, they gave two justifications. Firstly, that as a stranger the researcher had no right to ask such personal questions, and secondly, that as a 'muzungu' she would benefit from the research without giving anything to them in return. In this chapter I explain how issues such as these were taken into account by my research design and how they affected the scope and quality of data I was able to acquire.

I begin, picking up from the last chapter, by reiterating the case for an emic and holistic approach to understanding young Rwandans' experiences of schooling under the RPF-led government. Then I will look more specifically at the various sorts of data I gathered and how they have been used to draw the conclusions set out later in the thesis. This is followed by a section discussing some of the ethical challenges I encountered and delicate judgements I had to make in this regard. I will also say more about the challenge of developing mutual trust between myself and my research participants through a discussion on my own positionality and the eventual impossibility of staying neutral in such a structured and conflictual social environment.

### ***“A view from below” – Fieldwork Methodology***

As I discussed in the opening chapter, Rwanda's school curriculum is considered an important tool for shaping collective memory and constructing a shared civic identity, making it a focal point for policy intervention and debate. Yet, our understanding about the impact of schooling on young people's identities is limited, because most analyses have looked only at the inputs and outputs of schooling – funding arrangements<sup>125</sup>, enrolment demographics<sup>126</sup>, policies<sup>127</sup>, curriculum materials, textbooks, teacher training and classroom pedagogy<sup>128</sup> – without seeking to understand how this is experienced by the students themselves. The purpose of my research is to give voice to the students' perspectives, which are often missing in studies about them. Hence, rather than ask what schooling is doing to students, I am asking what students are doing with their experience of schooling; how they are drawing on the symbolic and discursive material they encounter at school and beyond, as they perform their identities and position themselves in relation to others. This mode of enquiry allows for the possibility of unintended effects<sup>129</sup> of school curriculum and policy, and that students' backgrounds and their interactions with family and peers outside of school are as meaningful to them as what they learn in class, if not more so. It also implies a student's-eye view that is cognisant of students' ability to critically engage with the discourses and practices they encounter at school and elsewhere, and to re-appropriate them into alternative forms of knowledge in ways which best serve their interests.

My conceptualisation of identity as a performance, a choice that students make to present themselves in particular ways, is not to suggest they are not constrained by context. Without getting bogged down with theorizing about the relationship between agency and structure, it suffices to say that there is a context to students' lives which provides a range of discursive and symbolic material and sets the parameters of acceptable performance, or what Foucault<sup>130</sup> has called the “conditions of possibility”. Following Ortner<sup>131</sup>, I find it helpful to think of Saint-Jacques students as the players of “*serious games*” in which hierarchical structures and dominant discourses set the rules and give each player a different hand, but

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<sup>125</sup> On Resource/Capacity Issues: Hayman (2005); MINEDUC (2001), World Bank (2004).

<sup>126</sup> Akresh & de Walque (2008) compare household survey data to educational inputs

<sup>127</sup> On Language Policy: Samuelson & Freedman (2010). On financial & access policies: McLean-Hilker (2010)

<sup>128</sup> On Curriculum: Buckley-Zistel (2009), Hodgkin (2006), Obura (2003), Rutayisre et al (2004), Weldon (2009, 2016).

<sup>129</sup> Ferguson (1995:18) argued that: “*Seeing a development project as the simple projection of the “interest” of a subject... ignores the non- and counter-intentionality of structural production, and in this way is profoundly non-anthropological*”.

<sup>130</sup> Foucault (1980)

<sup>131</sup> Ortner (1996), cited in Levinson (2001:4)

which students are able to “*play with skill, intention, wit, knowledge, intelligence*”<sup>132</sup>. Furthermore, as Ortner explains:

*“The idea that the game is serious is meant to add into the equation the idea that power and inequality pervade the games of life in multiple ways, and that, while there may be playfulness and pleasure in the process, the stakes of these games are often very high”*

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Throughout this thesis I make the case that the over-riding experience of students at College Saint-Jacques is one of anxiety and uncertainty, as the stakes of success or failure are indeed high and the conditions of their lives can be unpredictable and limiting.

Therefore, my objective as a researcher is two-fold; firstly, to understand and produce a ‘thick description’<sup>134</sup> of the context of students’ lives, identifying the discourses, symbols, and cultural practices that structure social relationships; and secondly, to accurately represent students’ voices as individual beings exercising their agency to fashion their identities and navigate their social worlds. When I speak about the ‘context of students’ lives, I refer not only to the formal aspects of school-life that fall under the control of government policy and the directorship of two Catholic Priests, but also the informal spaces of school, as well as life beyond, including the home, church, community, and influence of popular culture.

Handling this much complexity has not been easy. It could never have been gleaned through surveys, rapid appraisals or even lengthier structured interviews. It has required full immersion in the field over an extended period of time as a participant-observer, and a narrow focus on just one school, one cohort of students, and a handful of them within it. This approach to studying student identities has been used successfully by Levinson<sup>135</sup> in Mexico, as well as Davison<sup>136</sup>, who followed twelve ethnic-minority sophomore students in urban California over a two-year period, treating each as an individual case study, in which the full 360-degree context of their lives in and outside of school informed her analysis. To receive this level of access, both to the school and to the lives of individual students was not easy; it required a willingness to “go with the flow” and make the most of opportunities that arose, as well as to accept less than ideal sampling methods.

When I arrived in Rwanda at the beginning of May 2012 I did not yet have an arrangement with any school. I had been put in contact with a private parent-run school through the Rwandan High Commission in London, but they wanted me to take on the role of head-teacher, which would have interfered too much with the dynamics I would be trying to research, so I politely declined. I also felt it would be beneficial to base my research at one of the more established public schools with longer run traditions, closer links to the establishment and potentially a more diverse student body. Being introduced at College-Saint-Jacques, which was an ideal host for my research, came about through good fortune, as it so-happened

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<sup>132</sup> Ortner (1996:12-16)

<sup>133</sup> (ibid)

<sup>134</sup> Geertz (1973)

<sup>135</sup> Levinson (2001)

<sup>136</sup> Davison (1996)

that Joseph, the friend of a friend who was kindly hosting me, was on good terms with Father Karenzi, the Principal.

My original intention had been to become a classroom assistant rather than a full teacher, because it would have made me less conspicuous and enabled me to spend time observing other teachers' classroom dynamics. Also, I felt that as a teacher I risked wielding too much influence on the very dynamic I would be trying to research, and worried about being seen by the students as an 'authority figure' who is difficult to talk to. However, the position "classroom assistant" did not exist in the minds of Saint-Jacques' leadership, and I sensed that Karenzi's enthusiasm to take me into the school was for the prestige of having a *muzungu* teacher at Saint-Jacques rather than to support my research. So, as I described at the end of the previous chapter, I accepted becoming a class-teacher of English to Senior One classes, Political Science to Senior Two, and Entrepreneurship to Senior Three. With three classes in each year group this meant that I was teaching well over 300 students – a significant time commitment, most of which was unnecessary for gathering data for my research, but very helpful in gaining the support of the Principal and teaching staff for my continued presence. Being a volunteer teacher also made many students feel better disposed towards me, because, unlike the researcher with the sexual practices survey, it could be said that I was 'giving something back'.

My reason for focusing on Senior One students, was that the transition from primary to secondary school is a formative part of growing up, and I reasoned that seeing students in their first few weeks at boarding school would enable useful comparisons a year or so later. Unfortunately, I arrived too late to observe the Senior One's in their very first weeks at Saint-Jacques as I started teaching them one week into their second term. However, due to the time it takes to mark Primary School Leaving Exams and assign children to their secondary schools, Senior One students had only been at Saint-Jacques a few weeks by this point. They arrived half way through the first term, around the end of February, broke for the three-week Genocide Memorial holiday in April and began their second term in the final week of April, a week before I arrived.

While I learned as much as I could about every aspect of Saint-Jacques, I was able to follow this particular cohort of students more closely and over a longer period of time. I was their class teacher from the second week of their second term in Senior One to the end of their first term in Senior Two. I returned to the University of East Anglia in April 2013 to spend a few months organising and analysing my data to ascertain where any gaps were, and I returned in September 2013 to teach the same students again for the third term of their Senior Two year. I visited them a final time in December 2014, shortly after they had finished their O-Level exams at the end of three years of study and hosted a graduation 'pool party' at a hotel to thank them and wish them farewell. During the gaps in between these visits and in the three years since, many students have kept in touch with me via Facebook, WhatsApp and Skype.

In order to understand the texture of students' lives outside of school, it was necessary to select a smaller number of students who I would get to know well, along with their parents and siblings, visiting them in their homes during the holidays and joining them in their normal activities. It would have been ideal if these students could be selected randomly, or better still using some kind of quota according to criteria



like religion, gender, ethnic-background and social class, but this was not possible. Firstly, it was not possible in school to quickly discern students' ethnic-backgrounds or even their socio-economic status. When I finally did meet with one young man in his home I remember being shocked to discover that he was not from a middle-income family as I had expected, but lived with a single mother in a small, rented, two-room, mud-built house with an iron-sheet roof. Even more significantly, the depth of understanding I was seeking was potentially quite intrusive on students' private lives and their informed consent, along with the consent of their families, could not be taken for granted.

Consequently, my method for choosing a sample of around ten students could be described as "opportunistic". At the end of our first term together I gave all the students a consent form and information sheet with my contact details on and asked for anybody who was willing to see me in the holidays to let me know<sup>137</sup>. I visited as many as responded positively but over time developed stronger relationships with some than others. To some extent this depended on the attitude of students' parents. Some discouraged their sons or daughters from getting involved in my research, others gave permission, while some actively encouraged us to become friends, even inviting my whole family to eat in their homes, which we always reciprocated. There was a gendered dimension to this as it was usually boys who had the freedom to meet up<sup>138</sup>. Taking opportunities as they came also meant that not all of the key sample group were in my Senior One cohort. Three came from my Senior Two social science class and a couple were A-level students in Senior Six who happened to live in the same neighbourhood and became very helpful in orienting me and giving me some of the recent history of the school.

Another unplanned element to my fieldwork which ended up proving valuable was that when my wife had to return to the UK earlier than planned, one of the families I had become close to invited me to move in with them for three months rather than stay in a family-sized home on my own. This family were aware of my research interests and gave their permission for me to incorporate anything I learned into my analysis. The parents, who were not much younger than my own, treated me like the oldest sibling and often included me in discussions about private family matters. They got to know me as well as I knew them. For my part, I fulfilled all the obligations that could be expected of an older brother. We remain close to this day and communicate weekly. Some of my richest insights came through these relationships.

In summary, although my data cannot be said to be representative of all Rwandan first-year secondary school students, the relatively long-duration of my fieldwork and a willingness to take opportunities as they arose to build trusting relationships enabled me to build a body of data that is both broad and deep. In the next section I describe in more concrete terms what sorts of data I have acquired through these fieldwork opportunities.

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<sup>137</sup> Until this point I was not able to formally begin my research as I still obtaining ethical approval and a research permit according to the laws of Rwanda.

<sup>138</sup> Rubagiza, Were & Sutherland (2011) also note in their evaluation of introducing ICT into Rwandan schools how boys have greater freedom to mix socially while girls remain at home.

## ***Data collection towards a “thick description” of context***

A common criticism of ethnographic methods is that because the process of data collection also entails a measure of analysis, as researchers continuously work through their data and follow their noses to make decisions about which lines of enquiry to drop or pursue, the findings can be heavily influenced by the interests and biases of the researcher. Also, as the volume of potential data from participant observation can feel almost infinite the question arises as to what actually constitutes data. Is it merely whatever the researcher finds interesting enough to record? To avoid Kourtizin’s<sup>139</sup> charge that in the fieldwork process, ethnographers “*create the very evidence they later rely on as proof*”, I chose to go to Saint-Jacque with a clear and pre-determined set of sub-questions and types of data I intended to gather that would contribute to a thick description of the context, as set out below:

### ***The classroom context***

To structure my observations about how knowledge is transmitted in Saint-Jacque’s classrooms I drew on Bernstein’s<sup>140</sup> concept of a message system, comprising curriculum, pedagogy and evaluation.

*Curriculum* entails the selection of ‘official knowledge’<sup>141</sup> students should learn, as found in official syllabuses, work schemes and textbooks. I acquired copies of the two MINEDUC-approved Political Science for Secondary School textbooks<sup>142</sup> as well as several schemes of work which I quote from in this thesis. However, whereas some studies have used such curriculum material as the main source of data for understanding what Rwandan students are being taught<sup>143</sup>, I felt that a systematic review of textbooks would not be helpful, partly due to the unmanageable amount of data they contain, but more so because, as it did not take long to see, the intentions of curriculum planners do not translate neatly into practice. Instead, I recorded how textbook passages are used in class and during personal study time. I noticed that class notes copied from the board, rather than books, made up the more important part of students learning and revision for exams so I also kept photocopies of students’ notes.

*Pedagogy* is concerned with the mode through which educational knowledge is transmitted from teacher to learner, with attention to how knowledge is classified and framed.<sup>144</sup> *Classification* entails the structuring of knowledge into bounded subjects. When classification is strong, knowledge is organised into distinct and separate subjects with rigid boundaries between them and learning is content based. When classification is weaker, several academic subjects can be explored through a single topic and more is asked of the learners than mere recitation of knowledge, as it requires the development of skills. As the next two chapters show, educational knowledge at Saint-Jacques is classified ‘strongly’, which can be

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<sup>139</sup> Kourtizin (2002:133)

<sup>140</sup> Bernstein’s (1971)

<sup>141</sup> Apple (1993)

<sup>142</sup> Published by the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC 2008a & 2008b) and referred to here as PESS (Political Education for Secondary Schools) 1 & 2

<sup>143</sup> For example, Gasanobo (2004) produced an entire thesis just looking at the content of textbooks in pre-genocide Rwanda.

<sup>144</sup> Bernstein (1971)

observed from students' time-tables, which are broken into segmented lesson periods, with a different subject, different teacher and different set of materials required for each subject.

*Framing* refers to how the transmission of knowledge is sequenced and the classroom dynamics – whether the chunks of the syllabus are delivered in a pre-determined order within a set amount of time, or the teacher has the flexibility to adapt the pace according to students' interest, progress or needs. The framing of knowledge at Saint-Jacques could be seen through the rigidity of teachers' work schemes, which set out everything that must be covered each week. Pedagogy also covers the dynamics of communication in the classroom, such as whether teachers use a "chalk and talk" method, standing at the front of the class and interacting with students like they are members of an audience, or group based learning activities where the teacher facilitates discussion and discovery.

Classroom observation played a part in my understanding of pedagogy. Although, due to my own busy teaching schedule and the discomfort many teachers felt at being observed, I spent much less time than I would have liked observing other teachers' classes. Much of my understanding about pedagogic practices at Saint-Jacques came from eavesdropping in the corridor outside classroom doors; the things students told me as they compared mine and others' teaching styles; and what I was able to discern from students' reactions to my own teaching. As Poluha<sup>145</sup> discovered teaching as a participant observer at a school in Ethiopia, young people's reactions to particular teaching methods can indicate their established expectations of teacher-student interaction in the classroom. In the few classes I was able to observe in full I used a classroom observation method suggested by King<sup>146</sup>, including mapping who talks to whom and how often; the movement of the teacher around the classroom; and the strategic purpose of teachers' utterances, such as to give information, instruct, reprimand, or open up discussion.

These sorts of insights are important because, according to Bernstein's theories, stronger classification and framing socializes learners into drawing sharper distinctions between educational knowledge and everyday knowledge. Throughout this thesis are examples of how students seem to compartmentalize classroom knowledge, seeing it as something which is useful in achieving success in an education setting, without it necessarily being carried with them outside of the classroom or exam hall. This is interesting in light of the ambiguities and inconsistencies I record in their presentations of self.

This moves us on to how *assessment* methods shape classroom learning and the forms of knowledge and intelligence which are privileged over others. In my field notes I recorded issues such as: the form of evaluation, whether based on teachers' classroom observations, homework, course work, or end of term exams; the frequency of formal assessments; the question of what is actually assessed, whether students are tested on their ability to accurately recite knowledge, or to display acquired skills such as problem solving, critical thinking or creativity; the way that evaluation outcomes are communicated; and the significance students and teachers assign to the assessment process and results. I kept copies of exam papers, exam timetables, and school reports, and I wrote about these issues in my field notes. Such data contributes to my description in the next chapter of how, viewing their school experience as a passage-

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<sup>145</sup> Poluha (2004:113)

<sup>146</sup> King (1996)

way to the fulfilment of future aspirations, Saint-Jacques students tend to block-off or compartmentalise classroom knowledge to the domain of passing exams and climbing ranks, distinct from knowledge acquired and employed in other contexts of their lives.

### ***The institutional context outside of the classroom***

There is, of course, more to school life than what goes on in the classroom. While the classroom is the primary space for learning the government-mandated curriculum, students are also schooled through the institutional life of Saint-Jacques, which is highly structured. It is here where Saint-Jacques students learn to negotiate their positions in a stratified community, in which there are rules stipulating expected behaviour and sanctions for non-compliance. I found the following helpful in mapping this formal institutional context:

Firstly, I paid attention to the *organisation of time*. The students followed a detailed schedule from rising in the early morning to going to bed at night. Though I was never able to witness the very early morning period between rising from bed and arriving in church at 7am and have had to rely on student testimony to fill in those gaps, on several occasions I stayed at the school from 7am until late at night in order to record how each segment of the day was organised. I also stayed late on Fridays when the schedule was a little different and visited on a few weekend days. In addition to the weekly timetable, I recorded the annual calendar, the rhythm of term beginnings, exams, reports, and holidays three times a year, and annual events such as the induction of new students, school genocide commemoration, the school birthday at which Catholic students' public confirmations took place and student graduation parties.

Secondly, I found it helpful to map out the *physical space* in the school and the boundaries set on students' movements. Even the positioning and style of different buildings and open spaces are imbued with symbolism and in a practical sense can structure individuals in relationships of power. For example, the Senior One students occupy the bottom corridor classrooms closest to the office of the Principal and Dean of Discipline, whereas Senior Two occupy the floor above, so promotion from one year to next is literally seen as moving upwards. Thirdly, related to physical space are also the *rules and practices* relating to personal property, privacy, and the material conditions of living arrangements. The highest quality buildings closest to the school entrance housed the Fathers, but were mainly out of bounds to students, whereas the boys' boarding, with two floors of bedrooms looking onto each other around a square courtyard felt exposed and, as I write in Chapter Four, had similar qualities to Foucault's<sup>147</sup> panopticon.

Fourthly, I noted the *institutional voice* of the school; how it defines its mission and values. Data on this can be found in sources like the school website, motto, and mission statement. Whole school rituals such as assemblies, singing the school anthem and graduations, can also be observed as modes through which school authorities seek to shape and reinforce their culture and values.<sup>148</sup> I aimed to participate in as much of school-life as possible, attending the different early morning churches, school assemblies and special

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<sup>147</sup> Foucault (1975)

<sup>148</sup> Nias (1999)

conferences, staff meetings, student clubs, and sports activities; and recording detailed descriptions in my field-diary.

Fifthly, I paid attention to how the school constructs the ‘ideal student’ – what conformity and non-conformity look like – through attention to *discipline practises*, including school-rules, official systems of rewards and punishments, and teachers’ affirmations or criticisms. Though some rules are written and posted on the notice boards, my observation of actual practice, as well as student testimony, helped me to see the uneven and capricious nature in which rules are enforced, also discussed in Chapter Four. I was present at two end of term deliberation meetings, when decisions are taken about which students to promote to the next year up, who must repeat and who would be excluded, and I took detailed notes. Following Simpson<sup>149</sup>, I also asked questions and gave consideration to teachers’ and students’ discourses around who had the right qualities to be chosen as head boy, head girl or for other leadership positions.

Finally, I found it helpful to understand *Saint-Jacques’ history* in order to understand the roots of some of its traditions and discourses, as well as where the school sits in the minds of its students, teachers, parents and others. I spent some time gathering archival data on this which I share in the next chapter.

### ***Unstructured and informal spaces within College Saint-Jacques***

Beyond the scope of school authorities, I expected to see a different order of knowledge and was interested in uncovering how this circulates through organic student discourses and culture. By ‘informal spaces’ I refer to places and situations that are not controlled or overseen by school authorities, where students have an increased amount of freedom and room for spontaneity and creativity, or where authority is delegated to student leaders, such as in the boarding and dining room, or the various student-run clubs and societies. Some examples of unstructured free time include break and lunch times, when apart from the need to arrive at the dining hall on time and having set seating arrangements, students were free to chat among themselves; after school sports, which was never well enforced; and some longer periods on Saturdays and Sundays. Student-led spaces included school clubs every Friday evening and sometimes at break, lunchtimes or weekends; the different church groups that met each morning, apart from the Catholics who were overseen by the Priests; Saturday morning sports or work activities; and much of the time in the boarding.

Some of these moments offered my best opportunity to spend time getting to know students, as the rest of the time both they and I were tied up with the compulsory elements of the school day. However, the job of obtaining data on everyday student interaction in these spaces was not easy, precisely because they were less structured and students’ whereabouts were less predictable. What’s more, these were spaces where as a teacher I would not normally be expected to be, which created a few challenges. Firstly, it was not always easy to access these spaces because I sensed that some of the staff monitors in charge of discipline and running the boarding did not want me there. Consequently, I never stayed for a full day on any weekend, meaning some parts of Saturday, which is the least structured on the timetable, remain a

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<sup>149</sup> Simpson (2003)

mystery to me. Likewise, at lunch times I decided to eat with the teachers rather than students because that is where everybody expected me to be, so I only had a limited view of the sorts of conversations that take place over dinner. Secondly, when I did 'hang-out' with students in their clubs or playing sports after school my presence changed the social dynamic as students spent time talking to me rather than behaving as they would if I were not there. For example, I never witnessed bullying but was often told about it, which suggests that my presence inhibited students' behaviour. Notwithstanding these draw backs, I was able to gain quite a detailed image of students' interactions in these informal spaces owing to the amount students would tell me while spending time together, or in diaries we would write back and forth in, which I will say more about shortly.

### ***Beyond the school gates***

In contrast to school where the use of time and space is tightly controlled, students' home lives can be more fluid and diverse. This makes sources of data more difficult to define because they are so incalculable. To maintain a sense of structure to my data I decided to focus on different roles students occupy in terms of their relationships to other people.

To begin with I aimed to gain a sense of students' family lives by spending time with them in their homes. At first my visits felt formal and I had to arrange the visit around some kind of interview to justify being there. However, over time home visits became more natural and were based on friendship and activities unrelated to my research. For example, instead of appointments to discuss my work, parents would invite me to share meals with the family and we would get to know each other like friends. Such visits also decreased in formality as time moved on, from a formal meal with traditional customs observed, to a more open invitation to call by anytime as close friends and family might, and permission to pitch in with odd jobs, signifying my acceptance into the family circle. Though I often had a list of questions in my head and would sometimes steer the conversation towards something I was trying to understand, generally we just talked.

Home visits also gave insights into how family life was organized. At meal-times I noted customs such as who served; who ate first; whether a blessing was offered on the food; how often families ate together or apart; whether food was prepared by a domestic servant or members of the family; how it was distributed; and how family members interacted. In the case of students with televisions I watched how siblings agreed between themselves which channel to watch. I observed the gendered division of domestic labour between male and female siblings. I also saw that some parents were more present in their children's lives than others and noted how some young people altered their behaviour in front of parents. Finally, seeing into students' homes gave a better insight about their relative financial positions as some clearly enjoyed more assets and greater comforts than others. Every home I visited had a different dynamic.

In addition to everyday domestic life, I was able to observe family traditions around important events. I was invited to marriages and funerals, birthday celebrations, baptisms, Christmas and New Year. I also saw how families reacted differently to genocide memorial events – how some parents actively

encouraged participation and attendance, while most families experienced it passively through the television coverage. On a few occasions, I also joined families in their places of worship and paid attention to the role played by my student, noting how he or she performed religiosity through dress, song, movement, and speech; the extent and enthusiasm of their participation; the texture of their worship, whether reverent or joyous; and their use of and knowledge of scripture. I was also able to discern how others in the congregation greeted and interacted with the student. Some appeared to be popular within their congregations while others were more on the fringe.

Finally, I endeavoured to understand each of my sample group students' personal networks of friends, extended family members and neighbours, noting who they spent the most time with and what sorts of activities were involved. Some seemed well connected in their neighbourhood and regularly visited people or received visitors whereas others stayed at home; some had large networks and others smaller ones.

In all these interactions I rarely interviewed parents, siblings or friends of students in any formal way, as I found that when doing so answers become more scripted. Instead, I found that 'blending in' and having ordinary conversations put people at ease and often yielded unexpected insights about things I would not have thought to ask. I will say more on this 'interview' style later. I sometimes used these conversations to get feedback on what I thought I was learning. Rather than ask questions about them, I would share general impressions of Rwandan life which students would confirm or reject, often giving examples about others in their social circles to justify their points. In this way, they became, with me, participant observers of their own social-worlds.

### ***Students' own voices***

Having discussed the types of data that helped me to define the context in which my students were growing up and the discourses and symbols they draw upon as they present and position themselves in relation to others, I will conclude by discussing the sorts of data I gathered to uncover their own voices.

As mentioned previously, my ideal was to select a sample of around ten students to study in depth, treating their lives and progress at Saint-Jacques as individual case studies. However, gaining students' and parents' consent for this level of intrusion was not easy and required taking opportunities as and when they arose. Consequently, there was never really a start-date on which I felt I had my defined my group-of-ten. Rather, it was self-selecting and emerged ad-hoc, as, having conducted preliminary interviews with about thirty students, in process of time I developed stronger relationships and greater insight into some more than others.

In the end my sample looked like a pyramid of ninety-six students, increasing in depth of relationship while decreasing in number of students from bottom to top:

- ❖ At the top is one student whose family I lived with, who over the past few years I have come to know almost as well as my own siblings.

- ❖ Below him there are three more boys whose homes I spent a lot of time in, and whose families also visited us in our family home. Two of these have travelled with me on mini-holidays to other parts of Rwanda and the other has an older sibling who is staying with us in England while at university.
- ❖ At the third-level down, completing the group of ten, are two boys and two girls from my Senior One cohort, a Senior Two boy and Senior Six girl, who have all visited my home either alone or with their families and have all hosted me in theirs, in most cases several times. However, with the exception of the Senior Six girl, despite numerous visits and conversations, we never reached the same level of trust and openness as with the four boys I knew best. Social conventions of politeness were ever-present, which although indicated respect, seemed to put a distance between us – a sort of barrier, which is easy to recognise but difficult to describe.
- ❖ On the fourth level down are twelve more students, including six Senior One boys, five Senior One girls and one Senior Two boy. These all participated in interviews, talked to me often in breaks and kept journals for me. Some of them also visited my home or I theirs, but I never got to know their families in a meaningful way.
- ❖ Finally, seventy-four more students gave me their informed consent to use their classwork and other observations recorded from our daily interactions during school time and completed two in-depth surveys. Their contributions were valuable, and most students supplied me with some insight or another during the course of my time at Saint-Jacques.

The sorts of data collecting from students were as follows:

Beginning with the seventy-four students at the base of the pyramid as well as all the others, there were daily opportunities to see and record in my field diary how they performance their identities in different settings. I focused on different moments each day and, to avoid being seen constantly scribbling notes, wrote all I remembered at my earliest free period. Observations included students' self-expression during religious worship at 7am each day; skits and role plays students wrote and acted out whenever they put on conferences; expressions of grief, anger, respect or 'trauma' during genocide memorial commemorations; the goings on in student-ran clubs and societies; or behaviour during sporting activity. I also created opportunities for students to express themselves in a classroom setting. In my first week at Saint-Jacques, to help my Senior One English classes develop their speaking and listening skills, but also for me to get to know the students better, I asked everyone to prepare a three-minute speech titled "Who Am I?", to give at the front of the class followed by a few questions from other students. On other occasions I set up debates about controversial issues, such as gender roles. I had hoped these activities would enable me to observe students' diverse opinions, however, in a classroom setting, speeches, debates and presentations were often strikingly similar; they felt scripted and pre-rehearsed. While I was disappointed that these activities gave me little data on students' individuality, they were valuable in eliciting dominant discourses and modes of expression. The same is true of students' essays, which I kept copies of.



All ninety-six students completed two surveys. To be clear, I do not consider their responses to these to constitute an expression or performance of identity. The first survey was used to provide me with an overview of Senior One's demographics in terms of gender, age, religion, family size and composition, and parents' occupation, and contained a longer section aimed at measuring students' economic status. It also asked a series of questions about discipline practices at Saint-Jacques because what some students reported to me did not tally with my own observations, so I chose to ask some basic questions to a larger sample in order to compare. Similarly, the second survey measuring students' attitudes on issues such as gender equality, religion, meritocracy and wealth inequality, and learning and study habits, were designed not to produce new insights so much as to triangulate some of what I thought I was understanding, by asking a wider pool of students.

The main difference between the larger group of seventy-six students and the twenty-two I will go on to discuss is that I did not study them as individuals, only as contributors to my general understanding of the styles and textures of student performance.

Towards the end of my first term, I gave the twenty-six students (those in the top four levels of the pyramid and four others) a smart, ring bound diary, which we would pass back and forth between us like pen friends. They would use it to record details about their lives, friendships, troubles and worries at school or at home, and to ask me about my life. Whenever they wanted, they passed the diary to me so that I could respond to their questions, offer some comments and ask further probing questions about some of the things they had shared. Often, I would share with them something that was puzzling me about Saint-Jacques or Rwandan culture and ask the students to help me to understand it better. In this sense, they were acting as fellow participant observers, drawing conclusions about their social world and sharing them with me. Some students also used the diaries to share jokes, riddles or song lyrics. They would also share gossip, from reporting the bad behaviour of other students to intrigue about which boys and girls 'liked' each other. In return, my students knew they could ask me anything they wanted about my life, which made for a more equal exchange. It was also common for students to ask my opinions of them and for advice for their futures. Several asked me to comment on whether I thought they had a "bright future", as if seeking reassurance and encouragement.

The idea of giving students' diaries came from a conversation with a fellow doctoral researcher, Tim Williams<sup>150</sup>, who was finding them helpful in his fieldwork in a rural Rwanda Group Scolaire<sup>151</sup>. In addition to being a good way to allow students to express themselves without the discomfiting environment of a formal interview and in a medium that provided instant photocopyable data, the diaries offered two unanticipated advantages. Firstly, they enabled one-to-one dialogue with students during term time, which was not always easy due to the rigours of the school day and difficulty finding a private space to talk. Secondly, I found they made it possible for female students to communicate with me much more openly than by face-to-face conversation. It seemed to put them at ease, many enjoyed the experience of keeping a diary, and it avoided the difficulty I would have had as a young male being seen talking alone

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<sup>150</sup> Williams (2015)

<sup>151</sup> A three-year secondary school for students not expected to go on to A-Levels.

with a girl. On the downside, though some students kept the diaries for nearly eighteen months, others became bored or lost them after only a few weeks. I also failed to anticipate the diaries' commodity value and found myself under pressure to give out more diaries to students who were not interested in using them as I intended.

The richest insights for this work came from the ten students whose lives offered individual case studies of growing up at College Saint-Jacques. Nearly all of the vignettes and dialogue transcripts throughout the thesis come from this group. Though I became closer to some than others, I collected the same-types of data from all of them. This included non-anonymised copies of their survey responses; copies of class work and school reports; copies of the journals we kept together; observations recorded in my field diary from the classroom, the playground, their homes, communities, and churches; and much time in each other's homes.

In our first few home visits there was an expectation I should interview them since I was, after all, there as a "researcher". I wanted to gain a sense of how students narrate their own lives and what they see as important without structuring the interview around my own assumptions, so I decided to conduct life history interviews. I drew a timeline from birth to however old they were, and a scale above it from one to ten, and asked students to draw a line that rises and falls according to how happy they were at that point in their life and talk me through it, explaining why they had drawn the ups and downs where they had. Low points were often associated with deaths and poisoning, which I describe in Chapter Six. High points were usually around individual successes or moments of greater prosperity. These conversations provided some interesting topics for us to revisit in future conversations. Details from students' family histories also made it possible to discern their ethnic backgrounds without having to ask directly.<sup>152</sup>

The rest of my data did not come from 'interviews' so much as ordinary conversations in the course of spending time together. On a few occasions, when I did try to interview a student who I had already established a relationship with, I noticed an instant closing of body language and a reversion to what felt like more scripted answers. If I did have specific questions I would frame it casually in the course of ordinary conversation and in terms of needing the students' advice, such as, "*Hey, there is something I'm trying to understand about...*", or "*some students say this, but some say that, what's your view?*" Like Thompson<sup>153</sup>, whose research aimed to evaluate how those she defined as vulnerable and marginal experienced the RPF-led governments' post-genocide reconciliation policies I spent most of my time building human relationships based around leisure activities or sharing domestic work and "*let trust and emotional engagement be the foundation of the research process.*" With one student, I went jogging in the mornings. Another's mother asked me to teach him to swim, so we visited a local pool every few days. The mothers in the families I became closest to often referred to me as the oldest son in the family. Not being naïve to what this might have meant in terms of obligations and expectations this was not a discourse I encouraged, but I tried to honour their requests to be a teacher and older friend to their children.

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<sup>152</sup> Ingelaere recommends using family history to discern ethnicity (2010)

<sup>153</sup> Thompson (2010)

Finally, social media has proved a very useful tool for better understanding students. It is another arena in which students perform identity and, being on-line, this is typically away from the gaze of their parents or school authorities. Several hundred Rwandan students, mainly at Saint-Jacques, have sent me friend requests on Facebook, which I accept. I have participated in numerous group conversations and I see students' posts fill up my timeline. It is interesting to observe what they choose to share with their peers and what they aim to communicate about who they are. This is also a space where popular culture and grass-roots discourses circulate, as I discuss in Chapter Six about the Illuminati. Social media is also a handy way to stay in touch with those who have helped with my research. When I have needed clarity about something I have always had people to ask. In many ways, the writing of this thesis is a collective effort between them and me, as I frequently share my insights and take account of students' responses.

### ***Ethical challenges of school-based research in a post-conflict, authoritarian state.***

As the research methods for this study involve an unusually high level of intrusion into a small number of young people's lives over an extended period of time, there are particular challenges to ensuring the work is ethical and that participants are not only protected from harm but find their inclusion in the study to be worthwhile and, hopefully, empowering. This is especially so given the young age of participants, the social and political sensitivity of the issues addressed in the research, and the authoritarian nature of both the Rwandan state and College Saint-Jacques. In this section I evaluate the ethical challenges posed by my research and the steps I took to protect and compensate participants and ensure my own safety. I begin by discussing some of the challenges of doing social research in Rwanda generally, in light of recent debates about the feasibility of conducting ethical research there without self-censorship, given the government's reputation for using judicial and extra-judicial methods to silence its critics. Next, I look at the research context at Saint-Jacques, where fears and suspicions abound, participants are unevenly situated and power can be exercised with impunity. Finally, I outline the steps I have taken to safeguard participants and myself against harm, respect their personal integrity, and give something back.

### ***Conducting ethical research in Rwanda***

Towards the end of my fieldwork, from late 2013 to January 2014, a heated conversation took place through the pages of the *Times Higher Education*, about the extent to which it is possible to conduct good research in Rwanda without either self-censorship or compromising safety and ethics. It began with an opinion piece by Phil Clark<sup>154</sup> of SOAS, which accused foreign researchers in Rwanda of deliberately exaggerating the extent of government surveillance and risk to participants because it adds prestige to their work, and of warning away young researchers in order to protect their academic turf. He insisted that "*It is possible to publish controversial findings and continue discussions with officials, provided one adopts a fair and considered tone*" and argued that those who had met closed doors had been "*bombastic or hectoring during their research, belligerently 'speaking truth to power'.*"

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<sup>154</sup> Phil Clark (2013)

Several prominent scholars, all of whom have worked on Rwanda for decades, responded with a joint letter<sup>155</sup> defending the integrity of colleagues against what they considered to be “ad hominin attacks” and accused Clark of being “*poorly placed to comment on the dangers faced by scholars*” who work on particular themes or with more remote and impoverished people. In the same edition, Jessee<sup>156</sup> also responded to Clark with an article in which she agreed with him that it is rare for foreign researchers in Rwanda to be made *personae non grata* or physically harmed because of their work, but argued that the state nonetheless uses various bureaucratic devices to “*bring pressure to bear in ways that are hard to prove and yet create an atmosphere in which it can become difficult, even impossible, to conduct safe and ethical fieldwork*.”

Ample reports confirm that the RPF-led government has, on occasion, taken strong action against Rwandan citizens perceived to threaten its reputation abroad.<sup>157</sup> Yet, just as the number of foreign researchers who are banned from visiting Rwanda is low compared to the many who continue to work there despite publishing critical research findings, the majority of Rwandans who participate in critical research manage to do so without negative repercussions. The problem for researchers, however, is that people’s awareness of actual or rumoured cases of intimidation and persecution of research participants by local or state authorities creates an environment of fear, which can affect the research relationship and lead respondents to self-censor. In my first weeks in Rwanda, during a conversation with a former ministry of education employee over a drink in a hotel reception, she stopped me mid-sentence, lowered her voice and asked if we could sit somewhere else, then as we moved outside to the pool area she whispered that a man near to where we had been sitting was a government spy. “*There are spies everywhere*”, she warned. On another occasion, I was interviewing one of my students and his mother in a cafe when he told me off for talking too loudly and said sharply, “*Actually, Sam, we can’t talk here, it isn’t safe*”, forcing us to abandon the subject I had been interested in. Whether in these instances the threats were real or merely perceived none of us could know, but their mere possibility had practical, epistemological and ethical implications for my work.

Nonetheless, I was able to gain access to a Rwandan secondary school and acquire all the data set out in the previous section, with little to no surveillance and with official permission from the Ministries of Education, Immigration and Health (where the National Ethics Committee sits). I doubt that a Rwandan researcher would be so well accommodated at a school in the UK. For this reason, it seems unfortunate that Clark’s article questioned the motives of the unnamed researchers, rather than seeking to understand why there is such a diversity of experiences among the Rwanda research community, because in the subsequent debate some of his valid and more thoughtful points became lost, particularly the idea that younger researchers should not be deterred from doing ethnographic work in Rwanda.

A few months into my fieldwork, I met up with another PhD student who had been discouraged from a fieldwork idea on the advice of more experienced researchers. She was looking at history education and as we talked it occurred to me that some of her perspectives, which were based entirely on curriculum

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<sup>155</sup> De Lame et al (2013)

<sup>156</sup> Jessee (2013)

<sup>157</sup> Amnesty International (2004), Front Line (2005), HRW (2016), Longman (2011)

documents and interviewing officials and trainee teachers, would be enhanced by seeing, as I was, how the history curriculum is actually implemented in the classroom. When I asked why this was not a part of her research design, she explained that she had originally wanted to collect data in schools but had been advised by her supervisors that she was unlikely to gain government approval, so she never sought it. I make this point not to invalidate people's legitimate concerns, but to show that despite what is sometimes assumed, it is possible to negotiate access to government-controlled field sites and carry out research on sensitive topics and researchers should not be put off trying.

On the other hand, not all researchers have been so fortunate. Jessee<sup>158</sup> reports that on returning to Rwanda after previous critical research, she was stopped at passport control, told the visa she had acquired from the High Commission in Canada was invalid, given only three weeks to negotiate ethical approval – a task she describes as “impossible” – and warned against contact with the civilian population in the meantime. Thompson<sup>159</sup> reports having her research permit revoked by the executive assistant to the minister for local of government, who also confiscated her passport and required her to attend an *ingando* re-education camp. Begley<sup>160</sup> was forced to leave her field site early when she discovered some of her participants had been interrogated by local officials. She also reports being told of street kids being paid to follow her and report on her movements and being aware of up to five men doing the same. She recorded in her field journal the following words, which capture the sense of paranoia and fear that can overcome a researcher in such a context:

*“I’m completely terrified that people are going to be thrown in jail for genocide ideology or even killed for what they have told me. There’s no one I can talk to. There’s no one to tell me what I should do, because the government is watching my emails and after this incident I have no doubt that they are. I have to leave.”*

Given that not many years before, close to where she was working, government soldiers reportedly<sup>161</sup> attacked buildings occupied by the foreign staff of three NGOs, killing three Spanish nationals, and arrested and shot dead the only witness; that five UN Human Rights observers were murdered in the South West; and that there are several other examples of foreign witnesses to human rights abuses being murdered<sup>162</sup>; it was not an over-reaction for Begley to fear that “knowing too much” could land her in hot water.

It is probably best to conclude that the experience of doing research in Rwanda is variable and, to some extent, unpredictable, rather than clearly one thing or another. I suspect researchers' differing perspectives have a lot to do with where and with whom they conduct their fieldwork. Begley was working in the Kivu area and regularly crossing the Rwanda-Congo border at a time when the terrorist threat from former-genocidaires organizing in the Congo felt severe and Rwanda was preparing to invade. Thompson

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<sup>158</sup> Jessee (2013)

<sup>159</sup> Thompson (2011)

<sup>160</sup> Begley (2009)

<sup>161</sup> HRW (1998)

<sup>162</sup> For a fuller list see Guichaoua (2015:378)

was working with rural peasants in the south west, another area close to insurgents and considered disproportionately Hutu. Both were having conversations with the local population, unmediated by formal institutions and government oversight. By contrast, my research was at a public school in Kigali with sons and daughters of Rwanda's growing urban middle-class, a high number of whom held positions in the RPF<sup>163</sup>.

Speaking to Senior Six high school leavers about their experiences of mandatory *ingando* camps that all students must pass through on their way to university, I discovered the camps offered a very different experience in Kigali to remote rural areas. Those who attended from Saint-Jacques generally had a positive experience and reported making friends and enjoying a dance on the final night, whereas young people I spoke to in Gisenyi, who attended *ingando*, described it as being like a military boot camp with harsh punishments.<sup>164</sup> So it is fair to say that researchers' and participants' freedom and safety across Rwanda is not uniform, and in a way, I felt protected by the number of friendships I made with people who aligned themselves politically with the RPF.

Begley was also not unreasonable to assume her email communication was not private. A recent report by Privacy International<sup>165</sup> noted that communications service providers are required to ensure their systems are capable of enabling communications interception, and that personal data from WhatsApp and Skype have been used in court to convict Rwandan nationals for treason, including journalists who have been critical of the government. I was advised by several friends working in Rwanda for the World Bank and international charities to assume my emails were not private – a rule I always followed. I never felt that this prevented me from writing critical observations, however, so long as they were balanced and did not have an anti-government agenda, and provided I took care to never name individual sources.

Another reason researchers have varied experiences, and a caveat not made by those cited above, is that the threats and obstacles researchers in Rwanda come across are more likely due to individual actors than planned at the highest levels of the state. Jesse's experience of being told her visa was invalid on arriving at the airport and given an impossible timeline to gain ethical approval sounds to me more like bureaucratic rigidity than a top-down operation to frustrate her work. I was also misadvised at one point by immigration officials, which led to me being fined, but I put this down to human error. Twice I was given 48 hours to leave the country by an immigration official due to delays acquiring a research permit, but I talked my way into an extra few days on each occasion. The decision seemed to be at the discretion of individual officials and depended on their willingness to exercise judgement rather strictly adhere to rules. Similarly, it seems that Thompson's *ingando* experience came about because an individual minister chose to respond to her work that way. I have noted through discussion with fellow researchers that those whose work asks difficult questions of officials can find themselves under greater surveillance and pressure, possibly due the personal insecurities felt by those in positions of authority, particularly as they

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<sup>163</sup> See Chapter Three

<sup>164</sup> I shared this observation with a young man who attended *ingando* in suburban Kigali who disagreed, telling me his own experience was brutal, including a two-hour game of cat in mouse in which the inmates were chased by soldiers with sticks and had to keep running or be beaten whenever caught.

<sup>165</sup> Privacy International (2015)

frequently fall out of favour.<sup>166</sup> Finally, reading Begley recount the experience of a local RPF official telephoning one of her respondents to ask what she was doing in his home, I am reminded that a few weeks into living with my Rwandan family, the father mentioned casually in conversation that he had registered my presence in their home with local officials, as if this were no big deal. I understood it to be a normal bureaucratic requirement like the requirement to register sim cards, show passports and complete a travel form when staying at hotels, or put rubber ink stamps on every document, even my teaching timetable – a reflection of the controlled nature of Rwandan life but nothing more sinister.

Perhaps our different interpretations of similar situations stemmed from a human tendency to absorb the moods of those around us. In the passages Begley shares from her field diary, her sense of threat seems to come mainly from the things she is told by her translator, Joseph, and his reaction to events. An experienced human rights observer investigating disappearances in the Kivu area, once told me that in a context where the local population live in fear and rumours continually circulate, it becomes difficult to establish facts. Nonetheless, what matters is not the counter-factual question of what would have happened had Begley stayed, but how the context of fear and suspicion among the local population inhibited her ability to do research safely and ethically. She acknowledges this, writing: *“When I entered the domain of the lived experiences of my participants, fear and suspicion became very much a part of my everyday life. It played a predominant role in constructing and shaping the research and writing process”*.

By contrast, I worked with a largely professional, urban population, some of whom would struggle to believe the experiences of their fellow Rwandans living outside of the capital, who often put me at ease. Dr Iyakaremye, who was my supervisor at the Kigali Institute of Education, with whom I affiliated, encouraged me to feel free to be critical in my research. It seemed to me that while the government may not appreciate researchers asking politically sensitive questions, the decision to curtail it has to be balanced against the need to also present itself as modern, democratic and open. What’s more, as an unheard of, unpublished PhD student, I doubted that I was considered of sufficient importance to scrutinize too closely.

I write these things to give a sense of the judgements I made regarding my own safety and that of my respondents. Nonetheless, I did take measures to ensure my work complied with Rwandan law and that participants were protected, which I will outline shortly. Firstly, however, I look briefly at some of the ethical challenges presented by the context of College Saint-Jacques.

### ***Conducting ethical research in the context of Saint-Jacques***

On the last day of the school year, early in the morning before church, I passed a group of my students, but when I stopped to greet them, a young man who would normally shake my hand and stop to talk looked straight through me as if I were not there and continued on his way. As our paths crossed several times that day, it became obvious he was avoiding me. I wondered what I had done to upset him, since only the night before we had been joking together in the evening outside the dining room as he left from

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<sup>166</sup> Himbara (2013)

supper. We had been due to walk home together after school, but he was not at our meeting point just beyond the gates.

When I arrived home, I was surprised to find him in my living room waiting for me. *“David, what’s wrong?”* I asked, with barely concealed frustration.

*“We can’t talk at school anymore. Something bad happened. Sam you can’t trust the monitors. They think you are a spy and I think they could hurt you”*, he said.

He went on to explain that the previous night, about thirty minutes after everyone had gone to bed, one of the monitors (staff paid to oversee student discipline) made him get up and go outside in only his nightwear to a small stone circle bench between the boarding and refectory, where the other two monitors were waiting for him. They told him that the security guard had informed them that, “the *Muzungu* teacher” had helped him escape school earlier that evening along with a female classmate, who they said had already confessed. They mocked him and told him that he was going to be beaten and then expelled from the school. It was dark and cold and he felt afraid. As he pleaded his innocence, one of them laughed and said to him: “Maybe we will not punish if you tell us everything the *Muzungu* teacher said to you”. They were particularly interested in the conversation we had earlier in the evening, which took place immediately after an end-of-year staff deliberation meeting to decide the fate of students with poor marks, or deemed to have poor discipline, in which I had spoken out against their decision to exclude a student. Through about ten minutes of interrogation David chose to answer all their questions honestly, which was wise because they had already been through the same process with the female student. Fortunately, both their stories matched so they were allowed back to bed without harm, but the experience frightened David to the point that he asked if we could avoid each other at school from then on and only ever meet outside.

This incident shocked me. To know that a thirteen or fourteen-year-old girl and boy could be taken from their beds in the night, held in a cold dark space, threatened and interrogated by three adults, simply for talking with me, alerted me to how the monitors feared my presence at the school and to the vulnerability of my students. It also shows how, as a participant-observer, I had become a part of the social dynamic I was studying, making it impossible to remain neutral. I could gain the trust of (some) students, or staff, but not both. In Chapter Four I describe the dynamics of power at Saint-Jacques in more detail, but here it suffices to say that at various times, the school authorities saw me as too sympathetic to teachers; many teachers felt I was too close to students; A-level students questioned why I gave more attention to the Senior One and Two classes; and it became difficult not to appear to favour some student groups over others. For example, as I describe in Chapter Seven, I unknowingly gave more attention to Tutsi than Hutu students during my first term, which, by the time I realized, made it more difficult to form relationships with the latter.

On several occasions students made reference to the fact they knew the monitors did not like me. Some reported overhearing conversations in which monitors or teachers referred to me as a spy, either from the UK government or their own. Some reported teachers warning the students to be careful what they



tell me. A young science teacher told them, *“That Muzungu is very clever. He leaves alone the older students but he shows you attention because he knows you are younger and easier to manipulate”*. A few students worried that I was personally in danger and warned me to beware of being poisoned. It seemed some discipline and teaching staff, including the deputy principals, only tolerated my presence because they knew I was there with the blessing of the Minister of Education and carried a rubber-stamped research permit bearing the Ministry’s crest. Ironically, one of the reasons MINEDUC supported my application was that, thanks to Karenzi, it was understood that I was wanted by the school. Thus, while I never felt concerned for my physical safety, it did make me feel uncomfortable to know I was so disliked and to notice that I was regularly being watched.

One of the dilemmas I faced participant-observing as a teacher, in a position of authority, was how to conform to the expectations of the role and ‘fit-in’ with other teachers, without creating a distance between myself and students, or acting unethically. Teachers are not to befriend students, and, as I explain in the next two chapters, they are expected to administer tough discipline. When a student was caught stealing money from my bag, one of the monitors gave me the choice to either beat him myself, or allow them to call his father and inform the Principal. The boy, who was forced to kneel on the concrete floor, looked at me through his tears and begged me to beat him, but I could not. On another occasion, when Father Bertrand, who became Principal after Karenzi, noticed that I was overly casual inspecting students’ fingernails on the way into my class, he decided to come and do the job himself. Making all students put their hands on the desk in front of them, he walked around the room with a wooden stick, beating the hands of students whose nails were not cut short enough. One boy who flinched and pulled back his hand, was struck across his cheek instead. From Bertrand’s glance toward me as he left the room, I sensed this was a rebuke for me as much as my students.

My objection to corporal punishment was noted by students, teachers and school leaders alike, and it left me between a rock and hard place. If I had treated students as some staff did I would have been a distant and unapproachable authority figure to them, and, worse, I would have broken the Convention on the Rights of Children<sup>167</sup> and my own personal ethical code. However, my leniency on matters of discipline, was not only thought of as “bad teaching”, but interpreted by many teachers and leaders as a way of manipulating students into trusting me. Some students interpreted it likewise, or as a weakness for them to exploit.

However, over time, many came to see me as their friend and protector. Like Pells<sup>168</sup> experienced in her research with Rwandan children, it was common for students to express frustration that adults refuse to listen to them, or that they have nobody to share their troubles with, so some seemed to use me as a counsellor to off-load to or seek advice from. I also developed a reputation for fighting students’ causes when I perceived injustice. I defended those threatened with expulsion; helped a boy to become a day student against the wishes of the Dean of Discipline; and was caught helping a poorer boy pay his library fine. When students were sick, had worries at home, or needed supplies bringing in, I sometimes secretly

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<sup>167</sup> For a summary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child see [https://www.unicef.org/crc/files/Rights\\_overview.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/crc/files/Rights_overview.pdf)

<sup>168</sup> Pells (2010)

lent them my phone. I was regularly asked for advice or practical help by those running club activities, churches, or starting new initiatives, and older students often came to me for references and help with scholarship applications. Unfortunately, however, as the affection and good will some students felt for me increased, the distrust of staff, and even some other students, seemed to deepen.

### ***Ethical safeguards***

Having identified some of the ethical challenges of conducting school-based research in Rwanda, I will end this chapter by setting out some steps I have taken ensure my research meets reasonable ethical standards.

Out of respect for my host country and to protect my informants and myself from charges of illegal activity I chose to always obey Rwandan laws and gain official approval for my work. Before traveling to Rwanda I contacted the High Commission in London to discuss my research. They advised me to travel to Rwanda as a tourist and apply for a visa once there. After arriving, within legal time frames I visited the immigration office to apply for a research visa and began the process of obtaining a research permit from the Ministry of Education. This required affiliating with a Rwandan Higher Education Institution, and I found the Kigali Institute of Education very supportive in this regard; writing a full research proposal including literature review, methodology, time-frames and ethics section; and gaining ethical approval from the Rwanda National Ethics Committee, comprised of a panel of national experts. While the process was not easy, I followed it through and generally found Rwandan officials helpful. Until I received the permit I avoided conducting formal interviews, using my time instead to learn Kinyarwanda and build relationships while volunteering at the school.

For research to be ethical, participation should be fully voluntary. This requires firstly, that participants properly understand the purpose of the research, what their involvement will entail and how their data will be used; secondly, that consent be clearly demonstrated and non-binding, which is to say that those who choose at one time to participate reserve the right to withdraw later or to ask that their data be removed; and thirdly, that no undue pressure is placed on any individual to give their consent. To satisfy the first of these requirements, I made sure to clearly set out the rationale behind my research, the data I would collect and the level of access I required, in a Memorandum of Understanding between myself and the school; I explained to each class I taught that I was at the school as a researcher and would be keeping a diary of my observations; and I gave all of my Senior One students, as well as any students from other years who came to participate, an information sheet in Kinyarwanda, explaining my research and making clear their rights to ask me to not use their data and to withdraw from the study at any time.

Guaranteeing full consent, however, was more difficult, because whether teachers or students liked it or not, the school leadership had appointed me as a class teacher and I could not un-see the observations I made each day. It would have been unreasonable to insist on unanimous support for my presence. Instead, I took care to ensure that I have never used students' class-work or described them in this work unless they demonstrated consent by completing and signing an informed consent form. Given the long duration of the study, obtaining informed consent was not a box to tick at the beginning but a continual

process. I regularly discussed my research questions, methods and findings with students and repeatedly reminded them of their right to withdraw. During the writing process I have gone back to students whose stories appear in the thesis to double-check their consent. On more than one occasion participants have asked me to not mention certain details and one student withdrew completely for a time, which I honoured.

It is also important that people do not give their consent under coercion, which can happen unintentionally in situations where there is an imbalance of power, such as between teacher and student. At least twice while I was teaching at Saint-Jacques students were ordered to complete surveys without being given a choice. In contrast I took a few minutes to emphasize to my students that while it would be helpful to me they were under no obligation to answer all or any of the questions. While ninety-six students completed the informed-consent form, comfortably, there were also some who chose not to.

In the case of students I spent time with outside of school I also sought informed consent from a parent or legal guardian. Also, when at each other's homes, I always ensured there were others close by, otherwise we would meet outside in a public place.

Despite being in a context where corporal punishment was expected, I chose not to use it. Even when I knew my refusal to beat a child could result in them receiving harsher treatment, such as in the example above, I felt it was more important that I personally do no harm and then do all I could to protect students from physical or psychological abuse.

To protect participants I have chosen to change students' names and some details about their lives. This is also true for other characters in the thesis. This was not an easy decision as some students were proud of their participation and asked me to name them in my writing, however, I decided that most were too young and the future too unpredictable to allow them to make that decision. I have also changed the name of the school.

Finally, and returning to where this chapter started, the question of who benefits from my research was an important one for my students. I was often asked by people what I would get out of my time in Rwanda and why I had chosen to research them. Since they would be giving their time and divulging personal information, it was only fair of them to ask what they would gain from participating. I generally responded that I was hoping to receive a doctorate from my work, but that I also hoped they would benefit from my teaching at the school and that my research would help Rwandan students' voices be heard and bring about improvements for young people in future. If that was optimistic, though I did not pay students for their time, I tried at least to ensure our time together was always mutually beneficial. If we met in restaurants for interviews, I bought them lunch. Those who came to our home were fed and enjoyed playing the Nintendo Wii. Others enjoyed playing sports, swimming, borrowing my camera for photoshoots, or traveling to other parts of the country. In the case of a few students in financial hardship I helped with the cost of tuition fees or micro-financed parents' business activities. Some of these commitments are ongoing. We never talked about such arrangements being payment or compensation.

We used another word – friendship. As friends, we were equals. They knew my life as well as I knew theirs and they became partners in writing this thesis.

### ***Concluding Thoughts***

This chapter has set out my research methodology, including the sorts of data which contribute to the ‘thick description’ offered in later chapters and the methods used to collect them. Furthermore, it has described the challenges of attempting to distil the effect of schooling on how youths construct their identities, as well as the ethical and political difficulties of conducting social research in Rwanda. Two other key points about methodology are important to take from this chapter:

Firstly, that young Rwandans who open their personal lives to researchers rightly ask what each party stands to gain or lose from the transaction. Researchers have no right or reason to expect openness and honesty from participants, especially without giving in return. Perhaps, the ultimate transaction is friendship built on mutual trust and obligations. Even then, “truth” is a problematic construct since people’s opinions, beliefs and practises change and evolve, and they vary from context to context. Only through multi-contextual observations (for example, seeing students in their classrooms, playgrounds, homes, churches and on-line communities) over an extended period of time, is it possible to begin making sense of the inconsistencies, nuances and ambiguities in their lives, not to mention the changes that occur gradually or due to unanticipated events. Thus, the object of this study is not to uncover one single “truth” – what student’s *really* think and feel – rather it is to describe the discourses and symbols they draw upon in different contexts as they navigate their social worlds.

Secondly, social research is inherently political. Whether activism or a dispassionate observation, it entails speaking truths to power; and the presence of a participant observer from the outside unavoidably disrupts the usual order of things. This reality meant it was not possible to keep everybody at Saint-Jacques happy, which required me make practical and ethical choices about which relationships mattered most. In doing so, I had to walk a delicate line between using my position to amplify students’ voices and ensuring they benefited from my work, on the hand, and protecting them from harm and guaranteeing my continued access to the school, on the other. The fact these tensions were so acute at Saint-Jacques tells us something of the competitiveness, paranoia and insecurity the envelops the school from top to bottom – a context I describe further in the next two chapters.

## Chapter Three

### "This is a school of excellence" – Locating College Saint-Jacques de Zébédée in Rwandan society

I rarely met with Father Karenzi following our introductory interview. Though I watched him address the whole school around the flag pole each morning and walk about afterwards inspecting students, it was a full three weeks before our next conversation. When we crossed paths at the end of morning assembly, while eight hundred students and staff dispersed in different directions on their way to classes, he asked me, *"Well Sam, you have been at our school for a few weeks now, so tell me, what do you think? How do we compare to schools in your country?"* I searched for something to say that could be interesting and constructive without being unflattering.

*"So far, I have been impressed with the students. They work hard and seem well behaved. I like the way the students organise themselves in their churches and clubs and teach one another. I think these are times when valuable learning occurs, perhaps even more than in the class",* I told him.

*"Yes, that is what I always tell the teachers. You must give the students freedom! That is why I like to let them organise their own groups and we stay out of their way."* He replied enthusiastically before asking, *"And what about the Senior One's? I suppose many come speaking poor English?"*

*"Actually, it is surprising how well some of them speak!"* I replied. *"Younger students who have learned English in primary school often speak it better than the older ones<sup>169</sup>. But the challenge I find is that depending on their family backgrounds and what primary schools they attended, some students find our English lessons much too easy and need something more challenging, while others struggle to understand a single word I say."* Karenzi nodded understandingly, giving me confidence to continue, *"That is something we would do differently in England. Rather than having three mixed-ability classes, we would probably teach them in different groups for each subject according to their performance in tests."<sup>170</sup>*

Karenzi threw his hands in the air in exasperation. *"Voila! Voila! That is what I keep telling everyone but the parents refuse. I tried to implement that system but parents complained to the district (authorities) and the ministry (of education) that it created unfair divisions, so we had to keep things as they are. How am I supposed to run a school like that, eh? Tell me! And we have teachers who do not know English. You know Sam, they say we are a school of excellence. But really, what does that mean to be a 'school of excellence'? In Rwanda, some think 'school of excellence' is to have only one child per bed, eat meat once*

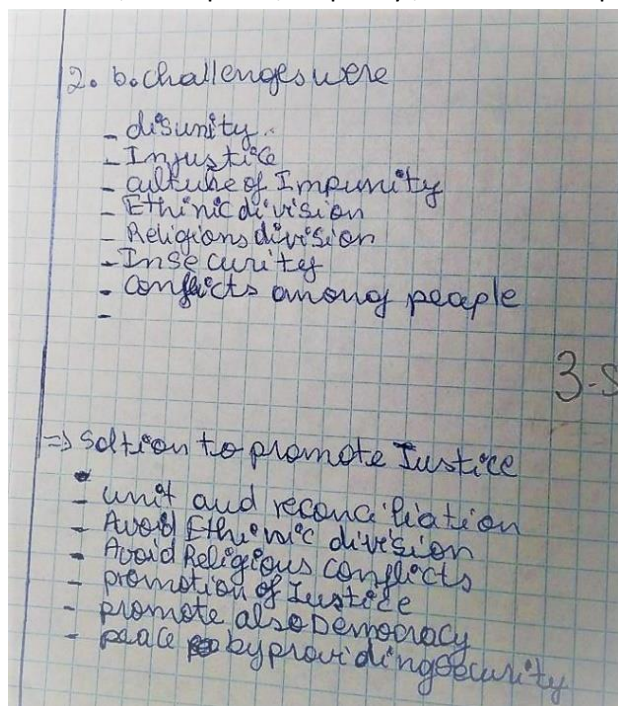
<sup>169</sup> Rwanda switched from French to English in 2009, so older students had completed most of their education in French.

<sup>170</sup> I acknowledge this was a controversial suggestion, as critics of streaming suggest it disadvantages lower ability students by 'constructing failure' (Boaler et al 2000) and exacerbates educational inequalities (Gamoran 2000). There is also evidence that in mixed ability groups teachers gear pedagogy and curriculum towards the weaker end and fail to stretch higher ability students towards their potential (Gamoran & Weinstein 1998). Whether right or wrong, this is what, in the spur of the moment, I told Karenzi based on the challenge I found teaching such a diverse group.

*per week and bread in the mornings. But that is not 'school of excellence'! No. 'School of excellence' means good teaching. So really, what can I do?"*

Two things Karenzi said stood out to me, echoing words I had heard students use several times in the preceding three weeks, which, like political ‘buzzwords’, seemed imbued with a force that went beyond their face value. The first of these was his assertion that Saint-Jacques was a “*school of excellence*”, which, given the number of times I heard that phrase, I presumed was an official designation for certain schools rather than a case of everyone using the same adjective. Yet, like Karenzi, I was left to ponder what being a “school of excellence” meant to different people. Secondly, I was intrigued by parents’ use of the language of ‘fairness’ and ‘unity’, or rather accusations of ‘unfairness’ and ‘division’, to argue against streaming students by ability, and the force these ideas seemed to carry. Both Karenzi and Bertrand who later replaced him had managed to increase school fees, required parents to pay for building upgrades and dismissed students, without any resistance, such that at times, as I describe in the next chapter, it seemed the Father Principal was all-powerful. So, the fact that Karenzi’s attempt to introduce streaming by ability was defeated by parents’ public complaints about “unfairness” and “division” shows the potency of these ideas in Rwandan political discourse.

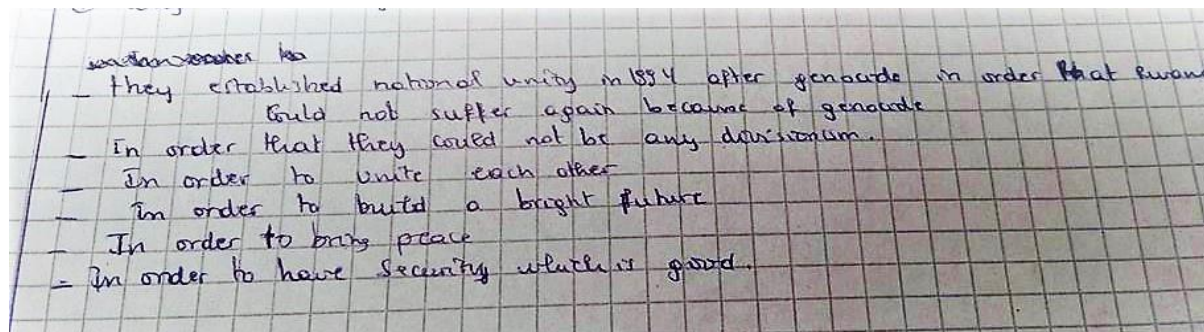
Indeed, the values of ‘fairness’ and ‘unity’, which are often expressed as “*having no divisions among us*”, were highly espoused by students and school-leaders alike, who used them to condemn or justify particular regulations or behaviours, often in the language of ‘genocide ideology’, juxtaposing the social divisions during their dark collective history against the unity of their ‘bright futures’<sup>171</sup>. For example, my Senior Two students’ politics essays, discussing Rwanda’s transition under the RPF, were usually constructed as two lists of binary opposites which describe the period before the genocide as a time of ‘division’, ‘corruption’, ‘impunity’, ‘bad leadership’ and similar; and the present day as the opposites of these things.



However, being sceptical that there could really be no tensions or prejudices between students of different social-groups, in my first weeks and months at Saint-Jacques I often asked what they thought were the main dividing lines in the student body; whether they were based on gender, wealth, religion, or anything else. I deliberately de-emphasised ethnic identities, by saying something like: “*I know Rwandans have moved beyond the conflicts of the past, but every society has some kind of divisions. In my country people judge you by your parents’ jobs and how much money you have, in some places teenagers choose friends from their own race, or in some countries people are divided by religion. What do you think is the main characteristic*

<sup>171</sup> See Chapter One

at Saint-Jacques that unites or divides people?" Or, "how do people at Saint-Jacques choose their friends? Do girls mainly stay with girls? Is it by which church you are in? Or maybe who comes from rich or poor homes?" No matter how I asked the question, students detected where it was leading, and the answer nearly always came back the same: "No teacher we are equal!" or "Now there are no divisions among us" – spoken with conviction. Thus, ethnicity was not the only form of division my students rejected. Any kind of 'division' was looked upon negatively, or its existence denied.



At Saint-Jacques, having 'no divisions' is thought to be synonymous with 'fairness', as it derives from everybody being treated the same, given the same rewards for success, the same punishments for bad behaviour, and the same lost opportunities for failure, without consideration for social group characteristics. This also relates to the concept of "meritocracy" – a word which, although not often used by students, is how the RPF-led government and donor-partners describes its approach to education<sup>172</sup>. Saint-Jacques students convey the same concept through assertions such as "you reap what you sow", or "anybody can succeed if they work hard enough", and the common denunciation of low achievers as "lazy".

Exemplary of this meritocracy discourse and the contrasting of pre- and post-genocide systems, an article in the government owned *New Times*<sup>173</sup> titled 'Meritocracy should be the Rwandan way of life', opined:

*"...back then (under the previous regime) academic merit was at the bottom of the pecking order... Today, however, Rwanda has changed and is gradually progressing to become a nation built on meritocracy – where we allocate rewards on the basis of an individual's merit or his/her abilities regardless of social class, religion, or who their father or mother is."*

This chapter explores and interrogates these discourses around 'meritocracy' (or, in students' parlance, "fairness") and the concept of Saint-Jacques as a 'school of excellence', as a foundation for understanding students' hopes, aspirations, tensions and anxieties described in later chapters. In addition, as this thesis provides as a case-study on schooling and growing up in Rwanda eighteen years after the genocide, this

<sup>172</sup> Ndahiro, Rwagatare & Nkusi (2015:75,94,105-6); United Nations (2007:44); World Bank (2004:3,8)

<sup>173</sup> *New Times* (2015)

chapter answers the question “*of what is Saint-Jacques a case?*”<sup>174</sup>, as it locates the school within Rwanda’s school system and society more generally, identifying the sorts of students who attend it, and their backgrounds, aspirations and expectations from attending.

The first half of the chapter gives a history of Saint-Jacques from its birth in 1957 to the present, which demonstrates that Saint-Jacques has always been tied up with national political change, including shifting conceptions of fairness, moving from the ideas of *equity* and *social justice* prior to the genocide, to *equality* and *meritocracy* today. It also charts Saint-Jacques’ rise to prominence as one of Rwanda’s top public schools, its genocidal legacy and re-emergence as a “school of excellence”; which continues to educate the children of Rwanda’s expanding, yet vulnerable, middle-class. This is followed by a section defining the demographic composition of Saint-Jacques, noting the contentiousness around defining it as a middle-class school in a context where acknowledging social-class or socio-economic inequalities is thought to challenge the idea of meritocracy. The final section discusses teaching and learning in the classroom and how ‘official knowledge’ and the ‘ideal student’ are constructed by government and school authorities as they set the curriculum, determine pedagogic practices and require students to compete with one another through rigorous and regular testing and ranking. It also argues, nonetheless, that while students’ learning options are certainly constrained by government-determined criteria for success, students tend to compartmentalise classroom knowledge as a currency for passing exams, while retaining the ability to create, share and learn alternative knowledge, skills and values in less formal settings – as is shown in later chapters.

## ***A Short History of College Saint-Jacques: from equity to meritocracy***

### ***Early Political Foundations***

In this section I describe how, since its establishment in September 1957, Saint-Jacques has been caught up in Rwanda’s ethnic politics and been a site of struggle, where contests over ‘fairness’ and ‘equality’ have played out. Although, as I will show, people’s understanding of these concepts has shifted in different epochs, from affirmative actions to redress historic ethnic injustices to denying the presence of ethnicity and treating everybody the same.

In addition, I explain how, due to the historical turn of events, Saint-Jacques unexpectedly rose to prominence during the first (1962-1973) and second (1973-1994) republics, becoming one of Rwanda’s most prestigious secondary schools, but these days struggles to hold its place against a generation of elite international schools, despite its designation as a ‘school of excellence’. Today it primarily draws its students from the children of Rwanda’s growing urban middle-class. Though, as I discuss later in the chapter, to describe Saint-Jacques as ‘middle-class’ is not uncontroversial in a political context that prizes the idea that in the modern Rwanda there are no divisions and that every child born has an equal chance of success.

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<sup>174</sup> Lund (2014). ‘Of What is This a Case?: Analytical Movements in Qualitative Social Science Research’ *Human organization* 73(3):224-34



Founded during the turbulent final years of the colonial era – a time when senior Catholic clergy were divided on whether to continue their policy of upholding the ruling Tutsi monarchy or give their support to growing calls for democracy<sup>175</sup> – Saint-Jacques's origins were inherently political. Its founder, André Perraudin, is considered one of the influential Catholic leaders of the time responsible for the church's switch of allegiance away from the Tutsi royal court and towards the rising Hutu elite, who would eventually overthrow the monarchy in 1959 and gain independence from Belgium in 1962<sup>176</sup>. Though few students today know much about him, his personal, political and religious persuasions seem significant in shaping the school's early trajectory.

Perraudin grew up in a poor family of eleven in rural Switzerland. He was educated by the White Fathers in an Alsatian boarding school from the age of twelve, embarked on his Africa mission to Burundi as a 33-year-old Priest in 1947 and rose quickly thereafter. Having become fluent in Kirundi<sup>177</sup>, in June 1950 he was sent to Rwanda to teach at the Major Seminary of Nyakibanda where he was made Rector by 1952. When he was promoted to Bishop by Pope Pius XII, Perraudin chose Rwanda's first African Bishop, Aloys Bigirumwami, to ordain him on 25 March 1956. He remarks in his memoirs that despite public chatter about the unprecedented ordination of a white Bishop by a black Bishop, "*personally I found the choice, quite simply, normal. In my mind, nonetheless, there was an anti-colonial testimony to be given.*"<sup>178</sup> Eighteen months after founding Saint-Jacques and a few months before his appointment as Archbishop of Kabgayi (a position he would hold for the next thirty years).



Aloys Bigirumwami, Rwanda's first native Bishop

Perraudin again demonstrated a belief in racial equality in a controversial pastoral letter, dated 11 February 1959, in which he expressed concern that, "*In our Rwanda, differences and social inequalities are to a large extent related to differences of race, in the sense that wealth on the one hand and political and even judicial power on the other hand, are to a considerable extent in the hands of people of the same race.*"<sup>179</sup> Until this point, the church had had a policy of reinforcing the socio-political structure which the White Fathers had found in place on arrival in Rwanda<sup>180</sup> - a centralised Royal Court and small Tutsi-dominated elite. That was soon to change, however. Perraudin's journals describe his realisation that, "*of the 59 Rwandans who became Priests while living in the Major Seminary under my jurisdiction, between*

<sup>175</sup> Longman (2009:46-7)

<sup>176</sup> Overdulse (1997:43-44)

<sup>177</sup> The language spoken in Burundi is very similar to Kinyarwanda.

<sup>178</sup> Perraudin (2003:21-22)

<sup>179</sup> Catholic Church. Conference Episcopale du Rwanda, Bishops. (1999)

<sup>180</sup> Erny (2004:32)

1951 and 1956, 45 were Tutsi and only 14 Hutu."<sup>181</sup> In 1958 he commissioned a survey on the Hutu-Tutsi balance of forty-seven secondary schools under his jurisdiction and reports that, of the twenty-nine which responded, their school populations totalled 1116 Hutu students (39.2%) and 1740 Tutsi students (60.8%)<sup>182</sup>. This led to a commitment from Rwanda's Catholic leadership to work towards greater equilibrium between Hutu and Tutsi students. Thus, 'fairness' and 'equality' were thought about within a framework of ethnic and regional diversity and meant taking positive action to even-up the learning opportunities of under-represented groups.



It was this commitment to open access to schooling to a greater number of students, particularly those in rural areas, that caused Perraudin to re-locate Saint-Jacques in 1958 from its original site at Rwamagana in the East, to the Saint-Famille parish in what is now downtown Kigali. At that time, Kigali was a relatively young settlement and the most prestigious secondary schools were located further south around the largest colonial and administrative centre, Butare; Nyanza, home to the Royal Court; Kabgayi, the largest Catholic hub; and in the east around Zaza, where the White Father's had built their first school in early 1900s. Meanwhile the north and west of country, where the Hutu are most dominant, had few if any educational institutions of merit. Such regional inequality would be addressed in the coming decades through greater emphasis on boarding schooling, which would make the location of schools less relevant<sup>183</sup>, but for the time being the decision to re-locate Saint-Jacques to Kigali in 1958 was part of a

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<sup>181</sup> Perraudin, A. (2003:19)

<sup>182</sup> Perraudin (2003:161-2)

<sup>183</sup> Hoben (1989)

strategy to increase the spread of quality Catholic secondary schools in order to enable a more diverse student population. It was not until four years later in 1962, when Rwanda's first post-independence government somewhat unexpectedly chose Kigali over Butare to be the nation's new capital, owing to its central location and good transport links. The same year College Saint-Jacques moved once more to its final location in the Kigali suburb of Nyamirambo and its present day two-storey classroom blocks and dormitory buildings<sup>184</sup> were completed by 1964<sup>185</sup>. Thus, by chance, Saint-Jacques became the most important Catholic secondary school in post-independence Rwanda's growing capital city.

In addition to increasingly vocal and often violent conflict over political and economic inequality between Tutsi and Hutu in the late colonial period, Saint-Jacques was also born at a time of heightened concern about poverty and 'under-development', which led to criticisms that Rwanda's school system needed to do more to equip students with productive skills. Rwanda's Belgian colonial administrators since 1916, like the Germans before them, had shown little interest in developing educational institutions for the majority of Rwandans because they saw Rwanda as merely a hinter-land to more profitable colonies, which could be managed through a system of indirect rule. Responsibility for financing and running educational institutions had largely been left to churches, principally the Catholic Church under the White Fathers, who considered themselves first and foremost missionaries with a duty to convert Africans to Christianity. The White Father's founder, Cardinal Lavigerie, discouraged missionaries from taking up the causes of the marginalised and directed them to focus on gaining favour with rulers. This was partly based on the idea that conversion of the entire population would be more likely achieved with the support of the ruling class and to prevent Protestants achieving greater influence with rulers than the Catholic Church; but possibly also because, at a time when the temporal power of the Catholic Church in Europe was being challenged following the reunification of Italy, Lavigerie saw in the monarchies of East Africa an opportunity to re-establish theocratic governance.<sup>186</sup> These founding principles were taken forward by the White Father's first leader in Rwanda, Mjr Hirth, who taught the missionaries to "*render unto Ceasar and Musinga all that can be returned to Ceasar and Musinga*"<sup>187</sup>, along with Mjr Classe, who served as Hirth's vicar general and later replaced him as Vicar Apostolique<sup>188</sup>

For the majority of rural peasants, therefore, Catholic schooling offered only a basic education, sufficient to pass catechism and become faithful Catholics without transforming their traditional subsistence lifestyles. Mission journals show that although some attention was given to teaching health, hygiene and basic agricultural skills, success tended to be measured in numbers of students baptised and confirmed rather than any academic standard<sup>189</sup>. The few exceptions in the colonial era were the superior schools, set-up for the training of an indigenous clergy, who, according to Lavigerie's directions, were selected from the "natural leaders"<sup>190</sup> of the population, which is to say the (mainly) Tutsi elite; and a secular school

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<sup>184</sup> See map on page 89

<sup>185</sup> Based on information found in school archives

<sup>186</sup> Chrétien (1973:140); Linden (1999: 48-51)

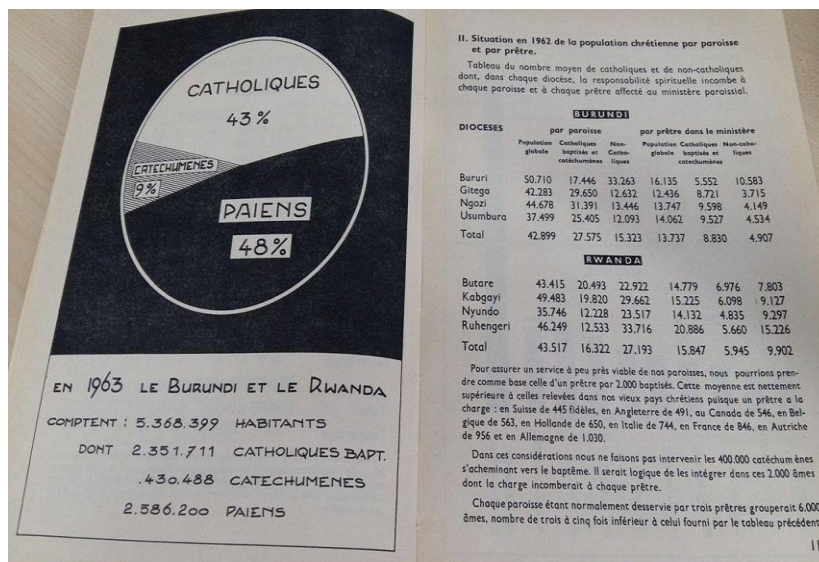
<sup>187</sup> Letter to Rwaza Mission 1911, cited by Rutayisire (1987:52)

<sup>188</sup> Rutayisire (1987:44)

<sup>189</sup> This can be seen in mission journals and log books found in the White Father's archives in Rome. For example, the White Fathers' 1964-1968 quinquennial development plan (pages 10-11, pictured on the next page), which seems to consider the number of converts as its primary success factor.

<sup>190</sup> Lemarchand (1970:60-65)

at Nyanza, established in the early colonial period to gain favour of the Royal Court, which originally opposed the teaching of Catholicism to young nobles because the court's legitimacy derived from the traditional religion. As training for the priesthood, the superior schools, or seminaries, tended to focus on classical languages like Greek and Latin, theology, humanities and social sciences, which were all taught to high standards.



Ironically, many of the Hutu intelligentsia who would go on to lead the revolution and occupy senior posts in the government of the first republic developed their political consciousness in such schools.

Following the end of the Second World War, when Rwanda came under the trusteeship of the United Nations, this two-tier and minimalist school system was criticised for being inadequate, leading to several reports and recommendations that would increase the surveillance of the state over school standards and improve the link between learning and work opportunities.<sup>191</sup> This coincided with a growing concern within the Catholic Church worldwide for the plight of the poor and oppressed, changing attitudes to race and a commitment to human rights, expressed through Liberation Theology. The Second Vatican council (1962-5) marked this shift in direction as it emphasised prioritising the poor as the defining characteristic of catholic educational and social activity. By this time, the church in Rwanda had become increasingly divided between more senior mission leaders who, associating with the colonial authorities and being considered part of the elite, were more inclined to continue giving unconditional support to the ruling class, and newer missionaries in the field, many of whom came from humble backgrounds themselves and had been involved in social democratic movements in Europe, who, working more closely with the local population, sympathised better with their cause<sup>192</sup>. Increasingly missionaries aligned themselves with the newly educated Hutu counter-elite<sup>193</sup> such as Kayibanda, who would go on to become Rwanda's first elected President. Kayibanda was made editor of the Catholic Newspaper, Kinyamateka, in 1954, using the position to criticise injustices in Rwandan society through the framework of Catholic Social Teaching. He later became personal secretary to Mjr Perraudin following the latter's appointment as Bishop of Kabgayi in 1956. In the end, revolution and independence occurred with the church's blessing and senior figures like Perraudin increasingly saw schooling as a pathway to social and economic emancipation rather than merely a means of increasing the number of devotees.

<sup>191</sup> Erny (1981:146)

<sup>192</sup> Linden and Linden (1977:66-7)

<sup>193</sup> Lemarchand (1970:133) as cited by Longman (2011:69)

As education became more and more tied to national economic development throughout the 1960s and was given greater importance by international organisations such as UNICEF and the World Bank<sup>194</sup>, it increasingly became a function of government and was not left to the private sphere. Following independence, the 1962 Constitution and further education laws in 1964 and 1966 introduced obligatory six years basic primary schooling, which in theory should have been free, followed by three years of core then three years of specialised secondary schooling in either professional, technical or humanities streams.<sup>195</sup> However, as the structure of the Rwandan economy changed little in this period, over the next three decades the majority of Rwanda's secondary schools would remain focused on preparing students for agricultural careers, while more elite ones prepared students for public administration, which, given the lack of any industrial base, at the time of the 1994 genocide remained the only reliable source of well-paid employment<sup>196</sup>. Meanwhile, specialist training for the Priesthood became the preserve of a few independent 'petit-seminaires'. By contrast, College Saint-Jacques made a decision in the early 1960s to add science subjects, including biochemistry, mathematics and physics to its curriculum, which had previously been built around subjects like Greek, Latin and Literature. It is thought that Saint-Jacques was the first school to introduce such subjects to Rwanda, a fact which according to Karenzi was instrumental in raising the school's reputation as the number one choice for the children of many of Rwanda's ruling and middle classes during the first and second republics, as it represented Rwandan modernity and provided a pathway to the jobs of the future<sup>197</sup>. To this day, Saint-Jacques specialises in science and information technology, which are thought to offer the best prospects for future well-paid jobs, though it now has far more competition.

Also during this period, the influence of the state at Saint-Jacques expanded through successive waves of reforms to include curriculum, assessment, scholastic time-tables, inspecting standards and student selection procedures. In Saint-Jacques' earliest years the colonial government's involvement was literally limited to the payment of teachers' salaries and it appears to have been unreliable even in this regard, as the mission journal of Zaza records how in February 1959 staff at several schools (including in Rwamagana where Saint-Jacques was located at the time) went on strike over not being paid<sup>198</sup>. The author opined that *"the fault is the government's who send money very late"*, and asked, *"Where are the Rwandans getting these new ideas? European newspapers, radio, bad example of whites in Africa?"*<sup>199</sup> This is interesting to note, because it says something about the relative political climate and strength of organised labour movements then compared to now, that Saint-Jacques teachers experienced a two-month delay in receiving their salaries during my second term, but unlike fifty years earlier, none of them felt confident to take any form of strike action and only one belonged to a union. Following independence, the 1962 Constitution and subsequent reforms over the next four years went beyond simply providing funding, however, to establishing official government oversight and the beginnings of a national curriculum and standardised assessment. Saint-Jacques retained autonomy over selecting its students,

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<sup>194</sup> Unterhalter (2015)

<sup>195</sup> Hoben (1989:13-14)

<sup>196</sup> Uvin (1998:21)

<sup>197</sup> Hoben (1989:116-121) is critical of education planners at the time for failing to foresee that the agricultural sector could not absorb the number of graduates. Thus, there was a massive under-supply of science and technology based education.

<sup>198</sup> Journal de Zaza VII (from archives of White Fathers)

<sup>199</sup> Journal de Zaza VII (from archives of White Fathers)

which it did on the basis of primary school leaving exam results, maintaining its status by ensuring it only took the most able students. However, like all institutions in Rwanda under Kayibanda's post-revolution government, it was forced to adopt a quota-system, ensuring "ethnic equality" according to each ethnic group's representation in the Rwandan population.

### ***The Equity Discourse***

The Kayibanda and Habyarimana governments of the first and second republics legitimised their autocratic rule through a twin discourse of *development* and *social revolution*, painting themselves as a 'government of the majority ethnic group, for the majority' ethnic group<sup>200</sup>. Thus, fairness was not thought about in terms of 'equality', treating everybody the same, but 'equity', redressing the imbalances of decades or more of Tutsi dominance. Like other schools and all public institutions Saint-Jacques was required to admit students according to "the National Policy", under which 90% of places had to be reserved for Hutu, 9% for Tutsi and 1% for Twa, reflecting each group's representation in the population. However, although a small Hutu elite monopolised political power and thousands of formally powerful Tutsi families were killed or forced into exile during this period, the greater financial, educational and social capital accrued by many Tutsi families during the colonial era continued to give them an advantage<sup>201</sup> and the hopes of revolution were never realised for the majority of Hutu. Lemarchand<sup>202</sup> likened this to the Thermidorian period of revolutionary France in which, there had been "*a partial restoration of the very order of things which the first revolution sought to destroy*", since Hutu chiefs replaced Tutsi chiefs while fundamental social structures remained intact. The military coup in which Habyarimana seized power in 1973, ushering in the second republic, was intended to redress this.

Subsequently, the education reforms in 1979 further tightened government control over the school system, including over the allocation of places. All primary school leavers sat national exams and government officials allocated them to secondary schools based on a quota system that took account of their ethnicity, region of origin, gender and exam results, in that order. This was justified by the Habyarimana government in the language of "affirmative action" to redress the deeply ingrained inequalities caused by the favouring of Tutsis in colonial times and the failure of the Kayibanda administration to tackle them<sup>203</sup>. This approach to 'fairness' was largely supported by the international community<sup>204</sup>. For example, Hoben's 1986 USAID report presented the fierce competition to access schools like Saint-Jacques as an unintended consequence of the government's "commitment to equality"<sup>205</sup>.

By defining 'fairness' as 'equity' along horizontal 'ethnic' lines, however, the school system gave little or no consideration to the vertical economic inequalities and disadvantages. Hoben observed an urban bias in students attending the best public secondary schools like Saint-Jacques due to their proximity to students' homes and the fact better-off parents knew how to circumvent regional quotas by registering

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<sup>200</sup> Prunier (1995); Reyntjens (1994)

<sup>201</sup> Prunier (1995:60)

<sup>202</sup> Lemarchand (1966:318)

<sup>203</sup> MINEPRISEC (1986a; 1986b)

<sup>204</sup> Uvin (1998:27)

<sup>205</sup> Hoben (1989:124)

their children in the prefectures of origin<sup>206</sup>. Although the promotion of boarding schools was intended to overcome the challenge of proximity and enable more rural children to attend, the cost of boarding schools and insistence that there be low teacher to student ratios meant the costs of secondary education were high by African standards<sup>207</sup>. Erny<sup>208</sup> adds that the system was open to corruption and was “*not safe from manipulation behind the scenes for the benefit of those who had long arms. For colleges were not immune from persuasion*”. This is not to suggest that wealthy Tutsi were by this time able to easily circumvent the system; they were not, and there is evidence that by 1994 Tutsi students were even marginally fewer than their 9% quota. Rather it demonstrates the diminished value of Primary Leaving exam results in a context where “*entry to secondary and tertiary education is the result of money and influence rather than knowledge and perseverance*”<sup>209</sup>

According to Karenzi, who was appointed director for the first time in 1983, the quota system negatively affected the school's academic standards. Nonetheless, I am told by many students and some parents that Saint-Jacques was attended by many of the sons and daughters of prominent government ministers and military generals throughout the first and second republics right up to the 1994 genocide. Ntahobali, son of Pauline Nyiramasuhuko (Minister for the Family and Women’s Affairs in the Habyarimana government) and Maurice Ntahobali (former President of the Rwandan National Assembly, Minister for Higher Education and Rector of the National University of Butare), who was sentenced to life in prison in 2011 by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda for his leadership role in the genocide, had been a Saint-Jacques student in the late 1980s.<sup>210</sup> Major General Rwarakabije, who led the FDLR (Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda) rebel army in the Eastern Congo in the years after the genocide had studied at Saint-Jacques in the 1970s<sup>211</sup>. As did Tharcisse Muvunyi, the highest ranking military officer over security operations in the Butare and Gikongoro prefectures during the genocide, who graduated from Saint-Jacques in 1973<sup>212</sup>. Marcel Gatsinzi, graduating from Saint-Jacques in 1968<sup>213</sup> became Chief of Staff of Rwandan Armed Forces for the first ten days of the genocide but was fired for refusing orders and proposing talks with the RPF to discuss a transition to democracy.<sup>214</sup> He went on to serve as Minister of Defence from 2002 to 2010. Perhaps Saint-Jacques’ most prominent Tutsi graduate is Tito Rutaremara, who is considered one of the ideological founders of the RPF<sup>215</sup>. Rutaremara was the RPF civilian leader between 1987 and 1993 and went on to become RPF secretary general and Rwanda Chief Ombudsman<sup>216</sup>

### ***The Dark Night of Genocide***

The story is told among students that in 1991, Father Karenzi, a Tutsi, publicly denounced and punished a group of Saint-Jacques students who had formed a Hutu-power cell within the school. This was led by

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<sup>206</sup> Hoben (1989:106)

<sup>207</sup> Hoben (1989:52)

<sup>208</sup> Erny (2004:135)

<sup>209</sup> Uvin (1998:126)

<sup>210</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (2011).

<sup>211</sup> Source protected for anonymity

<sup>212</sup> African Rights (1999:8)

<sup>213</sup> Source protected for anonymity

<sup>214</sup> Melvern (2000:131)

<sup>215</sup> Purdekova (2015:179)

<sup>216</sup> Princeton University, Innovations for Successful Societies, Oral History Program. Interview 26 May 2010.

Olivier, whose father, Colonel Bagasora, was in charge of the military during the genocide and is widely regarded its arch-organiser.<sup>217</sup> The group is said to have also included Josée, the daughter of Colonel Rwagafilita, who, along with colonels Bagasora and Serubuga formed a leading trinity during the genocide as senior members of the 'Clan de Madame' (or the 'azkazu'), a powerful secret network connected to Agathe Habyarimana, the President's wife<sup>218</sup>. A few years earlier Serubuga is known to have arranged the murder of Mayuya, who Prunier<sup>219</sup> suggests was Habyarimana's "own man" and likely replacement. Mayuya's son, Sylvere Mayuya was also a College Saint-Jacques student during this period, though there is no evidence he belonged to Olivier's and Josee's Hutu-power cell and I mention him here only to reiterate a point that Saint-Jacques schooled the children of many of the most senior figures in the country at the time. Karenzi's attempts to fight Hutu-power ideology at Saint-Jacques culminated in a witch-hunt against him. When he heard his name listed on the radio as an enemy to Rwanda he fled to Belgium in 1991, three years before genocidal violence would engulf his school.

Early on 7<sup>th</sup> May 1994, within hours of the outbreak of genocide, several hundred Tutsi and pro-democracy Hutu from the surrounding neighbourhood arrived at the church next to Saint-Jacques and were given refuge by two White Father priests. Several times that day small numbers of *interahamwe* attempted to attack those inside the church but were resisted. Over that night, the infamous RTLM [Radiotélévision des Mille Collines] radio broadcast reports of RPA soldiers hiding in the church and calling for people to reinforce that attack.<sup>220</sup> Around 10am on 8<sup>th</sup> May a truckload of security forces arrived, dragging people out of the church and killing several dozen<sup>221</sup>. In the commotion others fled next door to College Saint-Jacques, where they hid initially in the Catholic chapel. In desperation, some survivors of the first massacre contacted the military authorities begging them to send protection, but when soldiers arrived they joined in the killings<sup>222</sup>. For the next three months Saint-Jacques became the scene of a series of massacres in the chapel, boarding, nursing science block (today known as the "ancient block") and other parts of the grounds; but it was also a scene of rescue and liberation, since the school was situated between the RPF and Ex-Far front lines, and on several occasions, even as early as 13<sup>th</sup> April, RPA [Rwandan Patriotic Army] soldiers managed to rescue people sheltering there<sup>223</sup> yet a massacre of seventy people was reported by Medecins Sans Frontiers as late as 10<sup>th</sup> June<sup>224</sup>.

Stories of loss and survival are recounted annually in memorial services at the school. Some of the buildings, including an empty shell of a two-storey teaching block drenched in shattered glass and rocks and a crumbling bell tower speckled with bullet holes, have been left undisturbed as a reminder of what happened there. Saint-Jacques's status as a massacre site seems to be a source of pride for some students, perhaps representing to them its standing in history as one of Rwanda's long standing educational institutions.

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<sup>217</sup> Prunier (1995)

<sup>218</sup> Twagilimana, (2007:20); Off (2000:48-9)

<sup>219</sup> Prunier (1995:87)

<sup>220</sup> International Centre Against Censorship (1996:131-132)

<sup>221</sup> Des Forges (1999:210)

<sup>222</sup> Bartrop (2014:234)

<sup>223</sup> <https://christopher-black.com/final-trial-argument-for-the-defence-of-general-ndindiliyimana-before-the-ict/>

<sup>224</sup> MSF (2014)



## ***Re-beginning***

On the night of the 3<sup>rd</sup> July as the last Ex-Far soldiers fled Kigali, the RPA took full control, declaring the city liberated by 10am the next morning. Two weeks later, the remainder of the country had been liberated and on 18<sup>th</sup> July a new Government of National Unity was established, which made re-opening schools a high priority. At this time, Saint-Jacques was being used as a camp for around 12,000 internally displaced people, the Ministry of Education was just an empty shell of a building with scattered and burnt documents, many teachers were either dead or displaced and parents felt reluctant sending their children back to places where some of the worst massacres had occurred. Nonetheless, following a public appeal by the government, by September, just two months after the genocide, primary schools in the area re-opened. At Saint-Jacques space was made to re-commence senior six classes on 20<sup>th</sup> October 1994<sup>225</sup> and students were able to sit their final exams early in 1995, only nine months late. Many of these new secondary graduates were immediately called upon to teach in the primary schools and given one-off incentive payments from UNESCO<sup>226</sup>. Over the course of 1995 the remaining year groups recommenced at Saint-Jacques and new students flowed in from surrounding countries when Rwandan families living in exile ‘returned’ to their homeland. As children of different ages, speaking different languages, showed up at Saint-Jacques with no documentary evidence of their prior school status, so far as possible, nobody wanting to study was turned away until more formal testing and admissions systems could be put in place around 1996<sup>227</sup>.

Even in the emergency phase, while parts of the country were not yet secure and teaching materials consisted mainly of boxes known as TEPs (Teachers Emergency Package) provided by UNESCO and UNICEF<sup>228</sup>, Rwanda’s new RPF-led government set about reforming the education system. As I explained in Chapter One<sup>229</sup>, the national curriculum that developed in Rwanda through the First and Second Republics, as well as the “National Policy”, by which educational opportunities were distributed according to ethnic and regional quotas, is widely held responsible for inculcating Rwandan youths with genocide ideology. Consequently, in addition to collaborating with UNESCO/UNICEF on restoring educational infrastructure<sup>230</sup>, the RPF-led government immediately set about reforming schools, banning the teaching of politics or history until a new government-approved curriculum could be written, and developing a new system for allocating secondary school and university places.

Under the new system, administered by a new National Examinations Council, which was set up in 1995 to “ensure fair standards”<sup>231</sup>, every child finishing their sixth year of Primary School sits the same national exams at the same time on the same day. Their papers are anonymised and marked externally. Students are asked to list their top three choices for secondary school and each school agrees with the government a minimum standard they will accept. Generally, students who achieve the required marks for their first-choice school are offered a place there, but if they fall below the required standard, or that school has

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<sup>225</sup> Obura (2003:58)

<sup>226</sup> UNICEF (1995:28)

<sup>227</sup> Eye witness interview with the father of one of my students

<sup>228</sup> Sinclair (2001:57-66)

<sup>229</sup> Page 9

<sup>230</sup> MINEPRISEC/MINESUPRES (1994:7)

<sup>231</sup> King (2014:121)

already been filled with higher ranking students, government officials will look at their second and third options. Once these are exhausted students are sent wherever the government can offer them a place, potentially a much inferior rural boarding school in a distant province. As the quality of secondary school that one attends is thought to strongly influence performance in the Senior Six national exams and, therefore, the outcome of a similar process used to allocate university places, competition among Kigali's growing middle-class for places in the best public schools is fierce.

### ***The Meritocracy Discourse***

Seen through the lens of genocide and the historical narrative of the RPF, which treats ethnicity as a mere colonial invention, the quota system that was praised by donors in the 1980s in the language of “equity”, or “positive discrimination”, was now labelled “favouritism”<sup>232</sup> and a “legal framework for discrimination”<sup>233</sup>. In the post-genocide era, fairness is conceptualised in terms of equality – everybody being treated the same irrespective of gender, religion, region of origin or ethnicity – and ‘meritocracy’, which holds that everybody has the same opportunities and is rewarded according to their effort and capabilities. Hence, the Head of Rwanda’s National Curriculum Development Centre wrote that “*Since (the genocide), tremendous progress has been made in qualitative improvements of the education system; candidates are now selected purely on the basis of merit.*”<sup>234</sup>

Thanks to its good reputation, Saint-Jacques was able to set a high bar for entry and after some difficult years, has re-emerged among the high performing public schools nationally, even being considered better than many of the more expensive private schools. However, with the increasing internationalisation of Kigali a new generation of elite and expensive private schools which tend to sit international (either baccalaureate or Cambridge) rather than state examinations has replaced schools like Saint-Jacques as the first choice for government ministers and Rwanda's growing wealthy business class, who prefer their sons and daughters to be educated alongside the children of ambassadors, UN, World Bank and NGO officials and other ex-pats. Consequently, Saint-Jacques is no longer the gold standard it once was. Nonetheless, if not an 'elite school' it at the very least remains a 'middle class' school, capable of attracting the children of lawyers, doctors, civil servants, bankers and medium sized business owners. Although, I should note, the concept of class is not one recognised by government and school officials, or teachers and students – a point I elaborate in the next section.

Since its post-genocide political and economic re-orientation away from francophone Africa and towards the Commonwealth and East African Community, Rwanda has incorporated elements of the old British system into its own: the first three-year secondary cycle now leading to O-levels, and the second three years to A-levels. Rather than offer students a choice between all A-level subjects, however, they are packaged together into different streams, with different secondary schools offering some packages and not others. For example, students at Saint-Jacques have a choice between the MCB (Maths, Chemistry and Biology), MPC (Maths, Physics and Computing), PCB (Physics, Chemistry and Biology), and MPG (Maths, Physics and Geography) A-level streams, but if an O-level student wanted to go on to study

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<sup>232</sup> Obura (2003:93)

<sup>233</sup> Rutayisire (2004:333)

<sup>234</sup> Rutayisire (2004:342)

economics, or a social science or humanity subject she would have to leave Saint-Jacques after Senior Three and study elsewhere. It seems that most of the schools thought of as "excellent" specialise in science-based subjects, so to study anything different often means studying at an 'inferior' school to Saint-Jacques.

Among other 'schools of excellence' we find Byimana Science School, which lauds its science credentials even in its name; Lycee de Kigali whose website's welcome message declares: "*Lycee de Kigali (LDK) has re-defined the goal of the institution by orienting academic vision toward ICT and other science disciplines*" (though it still offers history and geography); and schools like Notre Dame de Citeaux, Groupe Scolaire Officielle de Butare and Collège Saint-André, which all offer similar A-level streams to Saint-Jacques. In interviews, students often expressed the view that their choice to study science subjects at A-level was more guided by the need to go to a "good school" and to be "intelligent" than by what they actually enjoyed or felt they were good at. Equally, it was often a hard-headed decision based on an expectation that a knowledge of science and technology will be required for the well-paid jobs of the future as Rwanda's development plan, Vision 2020, begins to be realised.

In addition to its position in the rapidly expanding capital city and specialisation in science subjects, Saint-Jacques derives its strong reputation from its status as both a Catholic school and a public school. Under the colonial administration Rwanda developed a tripartite school system which has more or less remained to this day, consisting of "*écoles publiques*", schools owned entirely by the government, most of which were nonetheless managed by missions until quite recently; "*écoles libres subsidiées*", which were privately run schools in receipt of some state funding, usually established by missions or groups of parents; and "*école privé*" which were entirely private.<sup>235</sup> It appears that Saint-Jacques began life as a publicly funded free school, though the role of the state in all but financial arrangements has increased gradually overtime and today, although Saint-Jacques continues to be owned and managed under the diocese of Kigali, it falls under the direction of the Nyarugenge district government and is listed alongside Rwanda's top public schools in national league tables.

Saint-Jacques' funding arrangements have remained largely the same over the past six decades. Teachers' salaries are paid by the state, while the cost of buildings, learning materials, management and any other needs are borne by parents through the payment of school fees (currently 79% of the budget) and by the Catholic church. In the past, the church provided funding centrally, however in recent years the Vatican has required the church in Rwanda to be self-financing, which Saint-Jacques achieves through renting out its buildings and sports facilities, an on-site garage and the sale of firewood. This funding arrangement allows the older Catholic schools to add extra value to what can be supplied by the state. For example, Saint-Jacques is better staffed than most state schools, employing three monitors (who supervise students and maintain discipline outside of class time), a librarian, secretary and others who are employed directly by the church supplementary to what is statutorily provided for by the government. Self-finance has also provided superior facilities such as its science laboratories and IT lab. Donations which come through the church from other countries have also provided a mini-bus (from Belgium) and books for the library (from USA), which many staff and students regard as outstanding compared to libraries in other schools. Saint-

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<sup>235</sup> Erny (2004)

Jacques also has some autonomy to set its own school fees plus a separate amount to pay a bonus to teachers on top of their basic state salary, which in theory enables the school to attract better teachers. This makes Saint-Jacques among the most expensive state schools and more expensive than many private schools, though considerably cheaper than some of the newest international standard private schools.

### ***Great expectations of a Saint-Jacques education***

Saint-Jacques is no longer attended by the children of Rwanda's elite. However, it remains a prestigious school – a school of excellence – whose students hold high expectations, combined with the fear of not achieving them.

This section interrogates the ideas of 'meritocracy' and 'excellence' a little further. It begins with a vignette about my experience gaining research approval from the Rwanda National Ethics Committee, which reveals the political sensitivity of appearing to challenge the view that Rwanda's new education system is fully 'meritocratic'. This is followed by an analysis of the demographic composition of Saint-Jacques students, which shows that, without denying its diversity, Saint-Jacques' student body can be generalised as being from urban, educated, middle-income families. Finally, it defines this group as those who are educated enough and connected enough to see far horizons, while insecure enough, due to lacking any safety nets, to be vulnerable to shocks; and shows, in their own words, how students and parents pin their hopes on a Saint-Jacques education as a route to social and economic advancement, even seeing its more austere aspects as the 'rites of passage' to a 'bright future'.

### ***Do say "School of Excellence". Don't say "middle-class".***

The final requirement to obtain a government research permit, after affiliating to a Rwandan institution and submitting an application to the Minister of Education, is to gain official approval from the Rwanda National Ethics Committee. This demands a research proposal and ethics form of similar rigour to anything required by the most exacting of western universities, which is submitted one week before an hour-long hearing in which the applicant gives a power-point presentation to the committee members, who then take turns to ask questions and offer their judgements. After the applicant leaves, the committee decides either to reject, approve, or request revisions to the proposed research. Conscious of potential sensitivities about discussing "identity" and working in a school setting, I prepared meticulously, re-writing my proposal from the beginning. Without misrepresenting my research, I increased my emphasis on the holistic nature of identity; I made sure to insert subtle praise for the government wherever I could, such as on Rwanda's progress towards Millennium Development Goals on universal primary education and gender equality; and I ensured that my phraseology was in line with the Rwandan government requirements, for example referring to the "genocide against the Tutsi" rather than the "Rwandan genocide". However, I still referenced 'ethnicity' as a potentially salient aspect of students' identities because I felt not doing so would be disingenuous. I worried that despite my best efforts my research might be rejected by the committee. It turned out I was wrong. Besides some disagreement over my sampling methods, which I think reflected a usual misunderstanding between a committee comprised mainly of doctors who are more used to the ethics of clinical trials than anthropology (the RNEC is situated

in the Ministry of Health), the committee's biggest concern seemed to be how I had introduced Saint-Jacques as a 'middle-class' school.

"*Why have you described Saint-Jacques as middle class?*" the committee chair asked, adding "*is it not a public school?*"

"*Well, it might be a public school, but it is one of the best public schools in Rwanda*", I replied. "*And there is definitely a middle-class bias in its population. So, in a discussion about sampling, I think it is important to acknowledge that the learning experience at Saint-Jacques is not representative of what the vast majority of Rwandan youth will experience.*"

The chair shot back, "*Cannot anyone apply to study at Saint-Jacques? Do they only allow middle-class students to apply? Entrance to Saint-Jacques is based on academic performance in the Primary Leaving Exams and nothing else. It doesn't matter if you are a rich child or the poorest child from the countryside, if you work hard and have the marks you can attend.*"

"*Well that might be true in theory*", I replied, "*but the reality is that Saint-Jacques is more expensive than many public schools and most of its students did well in primary school because they already come from homes with educated parents and because they had the benefit of attending more expensive primary schools.*"

Raising his voice slightly the chair rebuked me, "*No, no, no. In Rwanda what matters is to work hard. Children from poor homes whose parents do not know French or English often do better than others because they work hard. And many poor children find sponsors. Are you really trying to tell me there are no poor children at Saint-Jacques?*" he insisted.

"*Well, of course there are some poor children, I accept that. Actually, one of my brightest students, who is top in his year, lives in a very poor home...*" I was going to go on to say that he was, nonetheless, an exception, but I was interrupted, "*Well there you see. You cannot call it a middle-class school*".

I persevered, "*You should see some of the cars that drop off day students in the morning. I could not afford one of those vehicles. Many of the children are from much richer homes than mine.*" However, sensing that our conversation was turning to argument, I let these be my last words on the matter. It was made clear to me that removing the line describing Saint-Jacques as 'middle-class' from my proposal would be necessary to obtain ethical approval. I obliged, describing it instead as a "school of excellence".

I think, perhaps, the controversy in calling Saint-Jacques a "middle-class school" lay in the potential implication that a public school would discriminate on the basis of wealth or any other social factor. Unlike in the past, there is no ethnic, economic, gender or any other type of quota used in the student admissions process, not even religious though it is a Catholic school. The ethics committee chair was correct to say that in principle the very poorest child could receive a place at Saint-Jacques if she worked hard enough (and had a sponsor). While I cannot think of a Saint-Jacques student who would qualify as among the most chronically poor in Rwanda, which would mean a child from a rural area, cut off from water or electricity supplies, whose family own little land and who labour for less than 800RwF (approximately 1\$) per day

just to survive, I can think of some students who were from very poor homes and seemed to achieve academically against the odds. For example, Jackson was the highest performing student in Senior Three. His Father works fourteen hours per night, seven days per week, as a security guard for an embassy, for which he earns just 30,000RwF (£26) a month. His mother is a subsistence farmer and home-maker. Neither parent speaks English or French. They live as a family of five in a small mud-built house nestled half way up the steep-sided valley leading out of Kigali at Gatsata. Jackson is disabled, but manages to hobble up and down the muddy slopes to carry home jerry-cans of water from the pump in the valley. They have no computer, no television and no electricity. Jackson's school fees are paid by a charity and his father covers his boarding fees from taking on extra work as a painter. Similarly, Jonathan was one of my brightest Senior One English students. Throughout my first term I had assumed he was relatively well off because he speaks so confidently. When I visited him in the holidays I learned that he and his mother live together in a rented two-room shack attached to other similarly small dwellings, tucked down a hill beneath the side of a paved road in what is otherwise a wealthy neighbourhood. Neither room is larger than about four by six foot and barely furnished. They rarely have electricity and share a latrine, washing area and water supply with neighbours. They struggle to afford basic food. His school fees are paid by a protestant charity. I can think of a handful of other Saint-Jacques students with similar backgrounds and I have no doubt there are more I do not know about.

However, the fact that such cases exist does not mean the social composition of Saint-Jacques is representative of the general population of Rwanda. If my ninety-five senior two English students accurately represented a cross-section of Rwandan youth, eighty-two would come from the countryside<sup>236</sup>, twenty-four would not have access to safe drinking water<sup>237</sup>, fifteen would be unable to read and write even in Kinyarwanda<sup>238</sup>, twenty-five would grow up never attending school (which evidently all of them do)<sup>239</sup> and only thirteen of them would be expected to graduate high school.<sup>240</sup>

To draw a more accurate image of the student populace I developed a survey with the help of some of my students. Having learned from previous error that children are unlikely to know their household income and that asking the occupation of students' parents was likely to yield lots of the non-interpretable responses such as "businessman", which could mean anything from the chief executive of a large corporation to someone who sells fruit from a basket, I discussed with some students what sort of assets or activities would define somebody as rich or poor and used this knowledge to develop a survey and scoring system. I gave the survey to all of my Senior Ones along with an informed consent form and a clear reminder that it was not compulsory. Seventy-three out of ninety-five senior two students and three senior three students returned their surveys, representing 24% of the O-Level population. Though I promised to keep individual responses anonymous I asked the students, if they were willing, to include their names. This enabled me to verify their responses against what I already knew from visiting students during the holidays. So far as I could observe the responses were honest. This survey data, along with data

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<sup>236</sup> NISA (2012a:14)

<sup>237</sup> NISA (2012c:23-24)

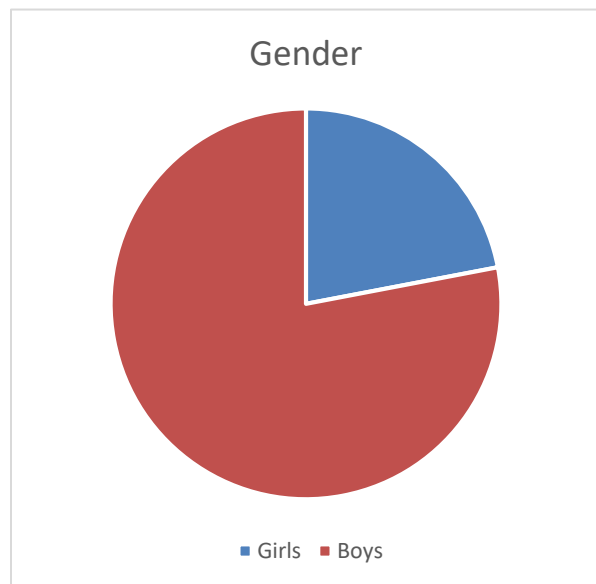
<sup>238</sup> NISA (2012d:40)

<sup>239</sup> NISA (2012a:24)

<sup>240</sup> NISR (2012e)

already available to me, such as registers, is presented below to give an idea of the demographic composition of Saint-Jacques students.

### ***The demographic composition of Saint-Jacques students***

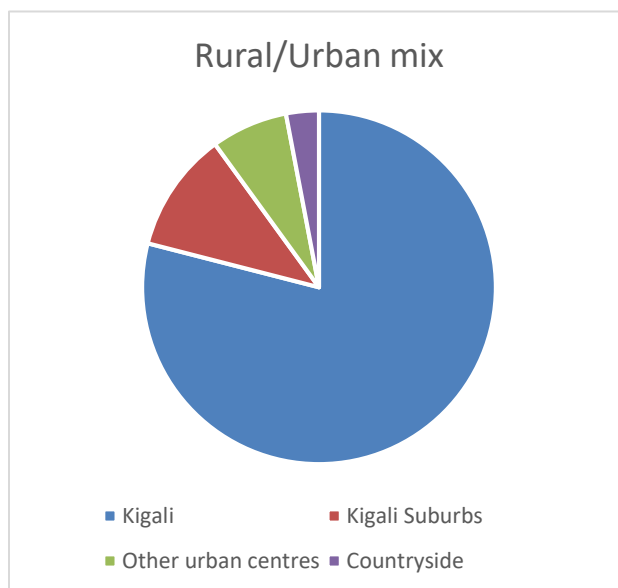


#### **GENDER**

Only twenty-one out of ninety-five senior two students (22%) are female, whereas nationally the ratio between male and female students is almost equal.<sup>241</sup> This is partly because there are two large all-girls schools in Kigali, the long-established Catholic public-school, Notre Dame de Citeaux, and the more modern private FAWE Girls School, while there are no all-boys schools. It could also be because there are fewer available boarding places for girls. Though, I also detected a sense among many students and parents that Saint-Jacques, known for its austere discipline, is thought of as a good place to prepare boys for manhood – a point I elaborate later.

#### **RURAL/URBAN MIX**

The student population at Saint-Jacques is overwhelmingly urban. Seventy-nine percent of those surveyed live in Kigali and a further eleven percent live in the Kigali suburbs. Seven percent come from other urban centres outside of Kigali and just three percent live in the countryside. While it may be tempting to attribute this urban-bias to its location, it is worth remembering that boarding remains very popular in Rwanda (nearly two-thirds of Saint-Jacques O-Level students live in the boarding), which makes it possible for students to study at any location in Rwanda.

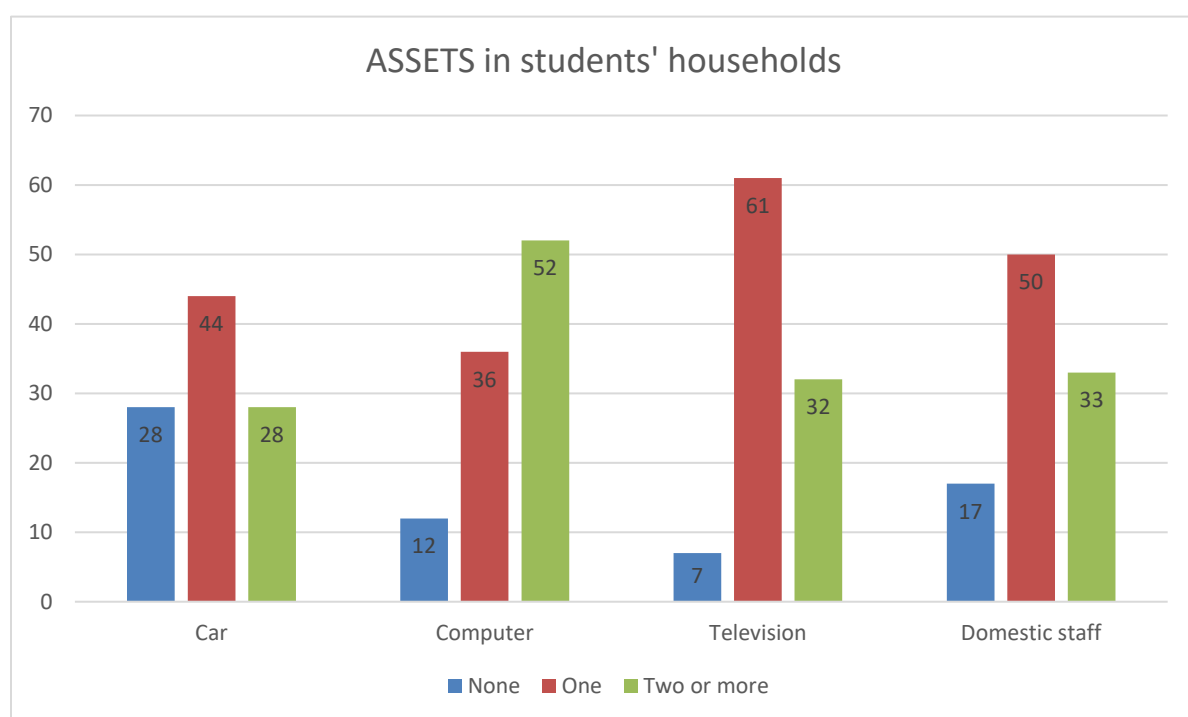


#### **ASSETS**

Likewise, questions in the survey about assets confirmed that the average Saint-Jacques student is significantly wealthier than the average Rwandan.

<sup>241</sup> NISR (2012d:37)

- Only 28% of students have no vehicle in the family. An equal number of students come from two-car families.
- Only 12% of students do not have a laptop or PC at home, while over half have two or more.
- Only 7% of students have no television, 61% have an older box-style TV and 32% have flat screens.
- Only 17% of students have no staff at home, while a third of students have two or more staff.
- Only 14% of students wash from buckets, having no shower at home. 39% have cold showers fitted and 47% have hot water.
- Only 20% of students use latrines at home, while 80% have western-style sit-down toilets.
- Despite a propensity for large families, 55% of students have sufficient bedrooms in the house to give every child his or her own room and 21% have enough for guest bedrooms. Only 7% of students at Saint-Jacques share a room with two or more siblings and/or a parent. Nationally over half of children share a bedroom with two or more others.<sup>242</sup>



On the question of travel, the survey results were polarised. 14% of students have travelled beyond the East African Community and the Congo and 43% of students have been outside Rwanda, but 45% of students have never even holidayed outside of Kigali. It is common to find students who had never seen the volcanoes, Lake Kivu, or any of the large animals at Akagera Game reserve. I came to realise that the cultural concept of a 'holiday' is thought of as very modern or Western. Even families with large houses, smart phones and 4x4 cars often consider money spent on leisure and travel to be frivolous compared to how it could be invested in something longer lasting and income yielding, like education opportunities for the children in the family, or business activity. Many parents I spoke to were prepared to sacrifice a large proportion of their household budget to buy a superior education for their child. So, it is perhaps leisure and tourism activity more than anything which separates Rwanda's aspiring middle-classes from its

<sup>242</sup> NISR (2012d:xxi)



wealthier globe-travelling elite. This is not about what can be afforded, but what can be risked, as I go on to explain.

### ***Betwixt and Between***

Saint-Jacques is not a destination, but a passage way. It is a space betwixt and between students' child and adult selves, between their backgrounds and their futures. Those from poorer homes see it as a great opportunity to transcend their family backgrounds and do better than the generation before. Meanwhile, students from better-off homes, who as children have borrowed status and comfort from their parents, understand it as passage way to independence, when they will have to acquire their own status and wealth. Thus, it is a liminal place, where futures are made but not yet written, a rite of passage on which parents and students pin their hopes.

Aspects of life at Saint-Jacques are physically, mentally and emotionally hard, as the next chapter describes, yet it seemed it was its 'hardness' that made it a popular choice for many parents, particularly those who put their children in the boarding. Students sometimes complained about the discomfort and simplicity of boarding life, the harshness of their daily routine or missing the love of their families, but usually coupled this with some woeful acknowledgement that it was "*for the best*" as they were learning "*to be disciplined*", or to "*use my time well*". I was frequently told by both boarding and day students that day students experienced "*too many distractions*", particularly after-school television or too much sleep at the weekends, which, it was claimed, negatively affected their scholastic performance. This is a strong explanation for why two-thirds of students were boarding yet ninety percent live a daily-commutable distance from the school; though another reason given was that for students travelling from other parts of Kigali the cost of boarding fees could be less than the total daily bus fares for the term, and that the 7am early start risked day students being late. For example, Elsa wrote in her journal about becoming a boarding student,

*"I chose to be a boarding student because at home we moved from Nyamirambo to Kicukiro. My opinion is that I like how boarding students live (more) than day students. Before, when I was still a day student, I didn't study at home, I studied only at school."*

Nonetheless, like students, the main reason parents gave for putting their children into College Saint-Jacques and particularly into its boarding was that they wanted their sons or daughters to learn discipline. Typical phrases from parents include: "*It will make him into a man*"; "*She must learn to wash her own clothes*"; "*It will teach her to live with others*"; "*I want my son to learn to work hard*"; "*It makes children more responsible*"; and "*they must learn to use time wisely*". These 'hidden curriculum' aspects of studying at Saint-Jacques seem as important to parents as getting good marks, though the two are clearly connected in their minds. Likewise, a common criticism of 'inferior' secondary schools was that "*their students are undisciplined*."

Parents and students usually attribute Saint-Jacques' strong reputation for instilling discipline into its students to its historic prestige and Catholic tradition. Sometimes, when I would question the reasons behind certain discipline practices, such as beating students across the back with large sticks, or forcing students to kneel for long periods on hard ground until their knees would ache, teachers would claim

these were learned from the Belgian colonisers. Strict rules, such as enforced silence between 6pm and 6am, long study hours, and an intolerance of lateness were often described as part of a "Catholic education". According to my survey of seventy-eight students, the proportion who are Catholic (36%) is actually lower than in the general population (57%)<sup>243</sup>. One protestant father told me that while he considers Protestantism to be a more compassionate form of Christianity, he chose to send his son "*Chez les Catholiques*" to learn hard work and discipline. This association between 'discipline' and Catholic education is discussed in a Rwandan newspaper article titled "*The secret behind academic excellence in faith-based schools*"<sup>244</sup> which lists nine high-achieving schools (all Catholic). The article quotes the head teacher of Byimana Science School which, we are told, topped the league tables for science in 2012, attribute his school's success to discipline:

*"Every mistake, whether minor or major has its correspondent punishment. We never tolerate unruly students and this helps as many other schools have regulations but never implement them."*

One of its students, echoing the concern about time-management expressed by many Saint-Jacques students is reported to have said:

*"Every minute here has its purpose, we don't have time to waste. If we are not in class, we are busy doing other activities and each activity has influence on our general studies."*

In another new article celebrating the success of College Notre Dame de Citeaux, the journalist observes:

*"There are school rules and regulations written at the administration block's notice board and you either comply or quit. There is no bargaining and discipline is now part and parcel of the school culture"*<sup>245</sup>.

Such attitudes to discipline are discussed in more detail in the next chapter, but I make these points here to show what being a school of excellence means to many parents, as they view a Catholic boarding education as a rite of passage to good future.

### ***Knowledge Construction In and Out the Classroom***

In the opening vignette, Father Karenzi asserted that being a school of excellence is not about giving the students better diets or more comfortable living conditions but about "good teaching". In this section I consider what teaching at Saint-Jacques looks like – how educational knowledge is transmitted between teacher and student, how scholastic success is defined, and what forms of knowledge or capabilities are valued by those who design and implement the school curriculum, as well as what is excluded. It describes two different worlds of learning – the formal learning that is the express objective of schooling and the ad-hoc, informal learning that occurs incidental to it. To begin with, drawing on Bernstein, I consider how 'official' knowledge is constructed in the classroom, through curriculum, pedagogy and evaluation. Then,

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<sup>243</sup> Rwandan 2012 census

<sup>244</sup> New Times (2013b).

<sup>245</sup> New Times (2008)

I move on to consider two spaces of learning outside of the formal school curriculum – the deliberative learning that occurs in recreation time as Saint-Jacques students teach one another and develop their own talents and interests; and the innate learning that results from living in the world, participating in human relationships and consuming different media. In this manner, I justify the statement I made to Father Karenzi that, in my opinion, some of the best learning at Saint-Jacques occurred outside the classroom, and I introduce a theme that recurs throughout the remainder of the thesis about the prevalence of grass-roots knowledge and significance of the life-world.

### ***Curriculum & Pedagogy***

Those who write and assemble national curriculums exercise the power not only to define what counts as ‘official knowledge’ but to construct the ideal citizen by determining which knowledge and skills are valued and which are not. Early in the process of rebuilding the education system after the genocide, in 1996 the government of Rwanda established the National Curriculum Development Centre charged with this purpose<sup>246</sup>. Much has been written about how, in a post-genocide context, the RPF-led government is using its control over the national curriculum to “reconstruct”<sup>247</sup> historical memory and promote a sense of universal “Rwandan” identity.<sup>248</sup> Fewer have considered the relationship between curriculum and desired forms of human capital for development.<sup>249</sup> From the perspective of a participant observer who has used government curriculum materials in the classroom over nearly two years, I tentatively suggest that the amount of attention collectively paid by the research community to the content of history and politics curriculum materials is disproportionate to the thoroughness of their use, or the value placed upon them by the majority of teachers and students. The content of textbooks and curriculum materials may be usefully analysed to understand government discourse, but to understand how this is conveyed also requires an appreciation of how knowledge is selected, prioritised, classified, framed and evaluated<sup>250</sup>.

According to Bernstein’s thinking *On the Classification and Framing of Educational Knowledge*<sup>251</sup> the classification of educational knowledge at Saint-Jacques is “strong”, as learning is organised around distinct subjects with rigid boundaries between them, which are themselves divided and sub-divided into distinct chunks of knowledge to be learned and retained by the student. Students follow timetables which are segmented into “lessons”, while different teachers move from class to class, delivering pieces of knowledge as subject specialists. The framing of knowledge – how it is sequenced and delivered in the classroom – is equally rigid. Teachers are required to produce and submit for inspection their “schemes of work” detailing exactly which pieces of knowledge will be delivered each week in order to cover all the required material by the end of the term. Thus, the pace of learning is determined by term dates and the need to ensure every piece of knowledge has been transmitted before the end of term exams. One term, when two all-school events both fell at the same time I usually taught political science to a Senior Two

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<sup>246</sup> King (2014)

<sup>247</sup> Rutayisire (2004:336)

<sup>248</sup> Buckley-Zistel (2006, 2009); Freeman et al (2008); Hodgkin (2006); Muhimpundu (2002), etc

<sup>249</sup> Honeyman (2016)

<sup>250</sup> See also Chapter Two, pages 30-32

<sup>251</sup> Bernstein (1971)

class, I found myself under pressure to squeeze the final three-weeks-worth of material into one lesson. As a consequence, there is little opportunity to deviate from the schedule to explore student's questions or interests. This often seemed to stifle potentially fruitful learning opportunities.

As the example (left), taken from a Senior Three Entrepreneurship class, shows, the learning items on work schemes often include instructions to define a concept, or state why it is important. "Why study accounting?", "Definition of Accounting", "Importance of Accounting", "Notion of the Balance Sheet",

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION  
KIGALI CITY  
NGAKWERANGE DISTRICT  
SCHEME OF WORK (2022)  
SUBJECT: ENTREPRENEURSHIP  
LEVEL  
COURSE

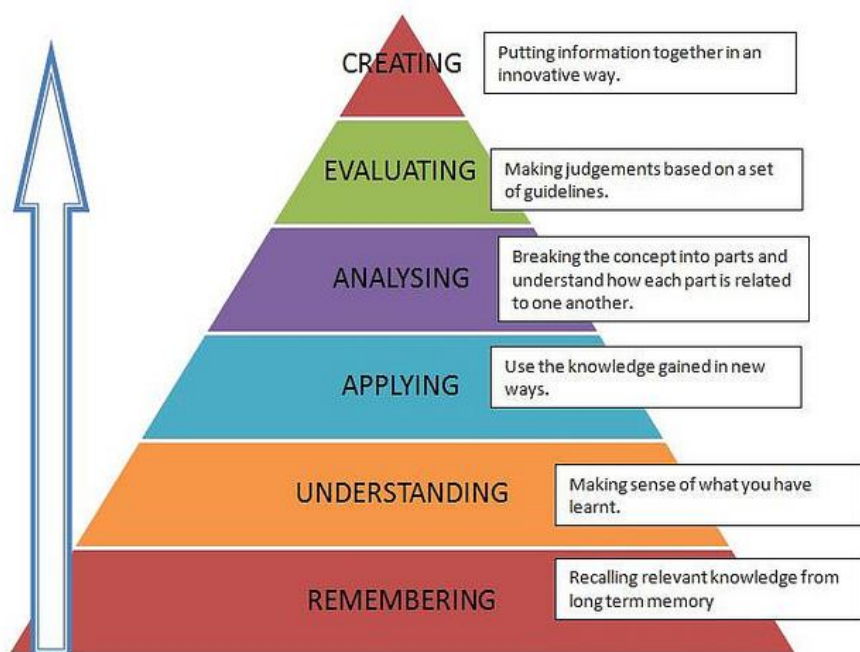
Revision

I<sup>st</sup> TERM

WEEKS	CONTENT
1 <sup>st</sup> week 07/01-14/01	Module 2: Introduction to Accounting Unit 1: Why Study Accounting? 1.1. Definition of Accounting 1.2. Importance of Accounting
2 <sup>nd</sup> week 14/01-21/01	1.3. Enterprise operations (flow)
3 <sup>rd</sup> week 21/01-28/01	Unit 2: Balance Sheet 2.1. Notion on the balance sheet 2.2. Asset Account
4 <sup>th</sup> week 30/01-06/02	2.3. Liability Account 2.4. Final balance sheet + 1 <sup>st</sup> Evaluation (Quiz)
5 <sup>th</sup> week 06/02-13/02	Unit 3: Prime Entry Books 3.1. Journal 3.2. Ledger
6 <sup>th</sup> week 13/02-20/02	3.3. Trial Balance 3.4. Cashbook
7 <sup>th</sup> week 20/02-27/02	Unit 4: Stock management 4.1. Meaning of stock (Definition)
8 <sup>th</sup> week 27/02-06/03	4.2. Necessary documents for stock management

"Meaning of Stock (Definition)" and so on. In the classroom this sort of knowledge would usually be conveyed by the teacher writing definitions on the board for students to copy into their notes. Some teachers might first pose the learning item as a question – "Why is it important to pay tax?" or "What is the meaning of Entrepreneurship?" – and allow students to offer suggestions. This would continue until somebody gave the answer the teacher was looking for. Science and maths also required learning definitions and copying text from the blackboard into notebooks, but in addition teachers would write formulas or sums on the board and much of the lesson would be spent practising them in near silence. Some teachers, particularly those more recently trained, tried to vary their teaching methods, including the use of problem solving or group work. However, having limited teaching materials, finding difficulty surveying different groups to ensure they are focused and working, and feeling pressure to cover material on schedule, made it easy to slip back into a 'chalk and talk' style of teaching, or more often, chalk and copy.

<sup>252</sup>Thus, learning at Saint-Jacques is knowledge-based, rather than skills based. The emphasis is on memorising definitions, lists, facts, and pre-prepared arguments. On the hierarchy of cognitive processes developed by educational psychologist, Benjamin Bloom<sup>253</sup>, this model of learning barely requires students to go beyond the most basic level – *remembering* facts and concepts. Apart from doing calculations in maths and science subjects, demonstrating *understanding* and *application* of facts often



amounts to recitation of definitions and arguments, while analysing, evaluating and creating are, if not discouraged, not a part of learning and assessment.

For example, in the political science essays pictured at the beginning of the chapter, the ‘before and after’ lists students recited, contrasting life under the pre- and post-genocide governments, were always similar to each other and were seldom if ever elaborated with examples. Likewise, marking

entrepreneurship exams, I noticed the definitions and explanations students gave were nearly identical, not because of copying one another, but because all had copied, memorised and recited text from the black board. This ‘knowledge-based’ approach to learning was particularly noticeable in the English curriculum for Senior One, for which the work scheme I was given focussed intensively on grammar, including correctly naming and using thirteen tenses, adverbial phrases, conjunctions etc – all taught through oral explanations and practice questions. To help my class expand their understanding of the purpose of language learning I asked them to come forward and write words on the board to complete the statement, “*Being good at English means...*” Their responses included ‘*correct spelling*’, ‘*good grammar*’, ‘*pronouncing words properly*’, ‘*using capital letters*’ and ‘*never making mistakes*’. I then led a class discussion on the uses of language, such as to *persuade*, *explain*, and *describe*, which led to an enjoyable tangent on how advertisers use language. Students all agreed they wanted to learn creative-writing and analyse texts more. However, knowing that their exam would not measure these skills, I felt compelled to use most of our time getting “exam ready”.

<sup>252</sup> Graphic courtesy of: <https://expertbeacon.com/sites/default/files/Blooms%20Taxonomy.jpg>

<sup>253</sup> Bloom et al (1956)

### ***Evaluation, Ranking and Fairness***

As my Senior One classes moved into the second year we were given a new English curriculum to pilot, that had been recently developed with the support of educators from VSO<sup>254</sup>. It was, in my opinion, a big improvement, as it introduced English language learning through topics students were interested in such as “the music industry”. For each topic, students were encouraged to learn associated vocabulary, and there was more oral work and opportunities for group activity. However, the exams changed little. When I complained to a fellow English teacher in the staff room that the exams were still geared towards accuracy, he explained that if we gave marks for students’ creative work we could be open to accusations of unfairness because it is subjective.

Students take the fairness of exams very seriously as they are the means by which students are ranked, allowed to continue to the next year, forced to repeat a year, or even excluded. At the end of Primary School, O-Levels and A-Levels exam marks also determine the allocation of school places. Every term at Saint-Jacques ends with a week of exams, which teachers must mark quickly as the grades for each subject are collated and students are sent home with a report listing their marks for each subject and their overall position within their class. This is generally taken very seriously by students and their parents as it directly compares their performance against those they will be competing with for school places and scholarships. For transparency and fairness, teachers re-issue marked papers to students to go over and check for themselves that their marks have been correctly tallied. The measures to ensure “fairness” in national exams are even more stringent. The staff who work on printing the papers are detained for several weeks in *incommunicado* to prevent them from leaking details of their contents; and exam results are always published so that everybody can see the link between a students’ mark and any future scholarship.

As the learning process is geared towards examination success, the way students are evaluated, more than anything else, establishes what knowledge and skills count most. The papers from some subjects (Science, Maths, English, Geography and Entrepreneurship) are set by the district education authority and each term the results at different schools can also be compared. Other subjects (History, Political Science, and Religion) use exams set only by the class teacher, with no cross-school comparisons made. Thus, we see that although political science, for example, is on the school curriculum, it is not a criteria against which schools are scored and compared. The government’s priority is to turn students into valuable human capital for its Vision 2020<sup>255</sup> development plan, which requires a knowledge of science, technology, languages and business. These dominate students timetables at Saint-Jacques, while history, religion and political science are each given just one class period per week. To some students’ disappointment, arts subjects like music, drama, and fine-art are not taught at all.

### ***The School of Life***

According to Bernstein, stronger classification and framing, as can be found at Saint-Jacques, leads learners to draw sharper distinctions between educational knowledge and everyday knowledge. This conforms to my observations, as my students seemed to compartmentalise classroom knowledge as

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<sup>254</sup> Voluntary Service Overseas

<sup>255</sup> MINECOFIN (2000)

something which is useful for their advancement, by successfully memorising and correctly repeating its contents; however, outside of the regime of classroom learning and testing, a different set of skills and knowledge mattered more.

### *Informal learning within the school:*

Towards the end of my first term at Saint-Jacques I was invited by some senior students to attend a conference they had organised in the main hall. They were part of a student-led charitable youth network called “Seven United”, which was founded at Saint-Jacques a few years earlier and now had branches at other schools. What I saw amazed me. With no supervision or support from teachers whatsoever, students from all year groups put on a show called “A Call to Charity”, which included music, movement and dance, drama, and the spoken word, all carefully stage-managed with lighting and sound. All that were involved, from the group’s founders to the newest Senior Ones, deployed talents in leadership, project management, and performance arts; all learned through play and experience. The students of AERG (Association of Child Genocide Survivors) likewise organise the annual genocide commemorations each year, arranging the marque, sound system and chairs, engaging with VIPs, inviting speakers to give their testimonies, and using performing arts. Younger students learn from the older ones and gradually take increased responsibility as they pass through the years. Another group of students organise a school-wide general knowledge tournament known as ‘Saviour Plus’ which takes place once a week in the lunch break culminating in a grand final towards the end of term. Others take responsibility for the Facing History Club, who meet on Friday evenings to watch and discuss films on modern historical events. Still others run church choirs, or hold leadership positions in their respective church groups.

Despite the absence of formal tuition, many students are talented in video-editing, D.J-ing, photography, drawing, guitar-playing, fixing computers, making and modelling clothes and much more. These are learned from trial and error, older friends or siblings, and self-tuition with guidance on YouTube channels. Some students also had a wide general knowledge from reading literature, non-fiction books and news sites on topics that interested them. One of my students, interested in politics, is even a regular consumer of the Guardian on-line and catches up on Prime Ministers Questions on YouTube.

### *A Lifeworld Beyond the School*

As discussed in Chapter One, students inhabit a life-world within and beyond the school. Versions of recent history taught in the classroom are filtered through private memories and family histories. No two backgrounds are the same. Students come from different neighbourhoods, belong to different faith communities, and face different struggles. Some students are the children of former RPA soldiers, while a few quietly hide the stigma that their fathers spent time in prison on charges of genocide. Thus, although the knowledge encountered in the classroom is the same for everybody, and all must learn to how to recite it in an exam, it is interpreted through the filter of different life experiences.

There is not space here to analyse all aspects of government discourse, but to give an example, a key part of the RPF historical narrative is the denial or minimisation of ethnic differences in pre-colonial Rwanda and insistence that ethnic divisions were introduced by colonialism. The idea a harmonious pre-colonial Rwanda appears throughout the official political science textbook, which lists the first objective of the

module on Rwandan political history as being to enable students to “*prove that the pre-colonial Rwanda was a well organised and structured state*” and “*demonstrate that Rwanda was already a Nation and a State before the colonial administration*”<sup>256</sup>. Likewise, a section listing conclusions of the module states that “*All the Europeans who interacted with ancient Rwanda were so impressed by its administrative organisation that they feared to give it the status of colony*”; “*The result of Belgium’s “divide and rule policy” severely destroyed the unity and cohesion of Rwandans... It is important to note that divisionism had never been witnessed in Rwanda before the colonial era*”; and “*All the policies initiated by the current Government are aimed at restoring and consolidating the lost unity and cohesion of Rwandans as well as national sovereignty...*”<sup>257</sup> However, these ideas are interpreted and appropriated by students in relation to their own experiences of the west and white people.

One of my youngest students, Beni Mugisha, who showed little awareness of politics and wanted to be a professional footballer for Arsenal or Barcelona when he grows up, recounted with great concern a story in the news at the time that Laurent Blanc, the manager of the French National Football team, had secretly plotted to cap the number of black and Arab players in France’s junior football teams in order to advance more white players to the national side. This demonstrated for Beni a conspiracy to stop young Rwandan boys like him from having the opportunity to play at the highest level, in order to perpetuate white dominance of his favourite sport.

Moreover, as one of Rwanda’s most prestigious public schools, which is easy to find on Google and Facebook and has international links through the Catholic Church, Saint-Jacques received more than its share of foreign visitors. Poorer students also often had a western sponsor through a church or NGO and many of the better off students had extended family members who lived in Europe or the USA. In short, it was not unusual for Saint-Jacques students to have personal experience of white people. Even in these interactions they often reported feeling looked down upon or finding the white person unreliable. A few foreign researchers in recent years had shown up at Saint-Jacques, used the students for data, from which they personally benefited, but then left without giving anything back. Visiting charities or groups within the church would often over-promise and under-deliver. Relatives in western countries seemed to disappoint in their level of remittances – a sign they had “*turned Muzungu*”. When I kept a commitment to a student such as visiting them in the holidays or giving some financial assistance, they often expressed surprise, especially the first time I went back to Saint-Jacques for the final term of 2013 after four months away, when several students told me “*we didn’t think you’d really come back.*”

Western charity is seldom received uncritically by Saint-Jacques students and is more often considered a form of patronage that entails a hierarchical relationship between the giver and themselves. It is understood for example that the many, mainly American brand, designer clothes that find their way to Rwanda are western people’s ‘cast-offs’, their often good-quality only reinforcing the sense of wastefulness and arrogance on the part of those who considered themselves too good to still wear them. Students who received sponsorship through western-based churches and NGOs often complained about the number of rules imposed, such as the funding covering fees but not boarding, and the insecurity they

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<sup>256</sup> NCDC (2008a:31)

<sup>257</sup> Ibid:40



felt about the risk of being dropped by a sponsor. Many were suspicious or resentful that the administering organisation ‘taxed’ some of the money given by the sponsor. When I asked Jonathan if he had a relationship with his sponsor he told me they had exchanged a few letters. “*What kinds of things do you write?*” I asked him. He smiled as if to laugh as he responded, “*I just put what they tell me to. They don’t really want us to know each other but I have to say things that make him keep giving*”.

Meanwhile, white people visiting or living in Kigali often confirmed my students’ stereotypes of them as condescending and selfish by breaking cultural norms such as talking too loudly in public; eating while walking down the street; being unwilling to eat from the same plate or drink from the same cup as another – symbols of trust and brotherhood in Rwandan culture; spending large amounts of money to buy imported western food rather than eating local produce; and insisting on carrying around and using their own crash helmet when riding motos, instead of using the one provided by the driver. It was also noticed and discussed negatively by those around if a white person was observed walking past a beggar without giving any change. In these personal interactions white people frequently confirmed and reinforced the distance that they felt existed between them.

Thus, in understanding the relationship between school curriculum and student knowledge, it is necessary to understand a much fuller context. Through this thesis I make the argument that while schooling is an important part of the context of students’ lives, curriculum content has much less influence in shaping students identities as their experience of competition and struggle to get ahead.

### ***Concluding Thoughts***

This chapter has introduced and interrogated a prominent discourse about ‘unity’, ‘fairness’ and ‘meritocracy’, which is used by students, teachers, school leaders and parents and which recurs throughout this thesis, as a foundation for understanding students’ hopes, aspirations, tensions and anxieties described in later chapters. Tracing its history from the late colonial era to the present, I have showed how Saint-Jacques sits in people’s imaginations as one of Rwanda’s most prestigious public schools yet one in relative decline; and I have demonstrated how ‘fairness’ has been a dominant idea at Saint-Jacques since its earliest days, but has shifted meaning over time, from a focus on *equity* in the first and second republics to *equality* in the post-genocide era. I have suggested that whereas the *equity* paradigm generated a heightened sense of horizontal inequalities, while ignoring the vertical inequalities that were present *within* Hutu and Tutsi ethnic groups, the *equality* or *meritocracy* paradigm in the current era conceals both forms of inequality. For example, I demonstrated how, while the demographic make-up of College Saint-Jacques is clearly predominantly middle-class, I was prohibited from saying so.

A second prominent discourse explored in this chapter was the idea of Saint-Jacques as a ‘School of Excellence’. I have tried to establish what this means to teachers, parents and students – how they imagine Saint-Jacques as a ‘rite of passage’ or gateway to a brighter future. I noted here how the harshness of life at Saint-Jacques formed part of its appeal, as it was believed necessary for turning boys into men. I also looked at what an ‘excellent education’ is imagined to be; how those who decide the curriculum, pedagogy and systems of assessment, who define what constitutes official knowledge and what types of skills and attributes will be rewarded, have the power to construct the ideal student and citizen. I noted,

for example, how science, technology and business are privileged over humanities and arts; and how classroom learning focuses on the memorisation of information, while critical thinking and creativity do not feature. In this respect, little has changed at Saint-Jacques since its early days.

Thirdly, however, and following another recurring theme in this work, I showed how informal learning occurs outside the classroom, where students pursue their interests and show considerable initiative and creativity. They also demonstrate an awareness of Saint-Jacques' limitations in fulfilling all their aspirations, as they compartmentalise classroom knowledge as useful for passing exams, but not enough. In the chapters that follow are many examples of grassroots creativity that appropriates or counters official knowledge for specific aims.

Finally, the chapter has hinted at a tension between the idea of 'unity' and the competitive struggle that is inherent in meritocratic advancement. This tension will reappear in each chapter.

## Chapter Four

### "Do the right thing, in the right place, at the right time" – hierarchy, discipline and resistance

The third term of 2012 started later than usual as Rwanda's teachers had been re-deployed to conduct the national census, so apart from about a dozen students I had spent time with throughout the holidays, I had not seen the majority for nearly two months. I arrived early and walked about the school grounds greeting everyone. A chilly fog still lingered, which perhaps added to my sense that the school seemed abnormally glum. Students walked slowly with their heads down and seemed to talk to one another in whispers. This was not what I had expected. I imagined they would be loud, excitedly catching up with friends after a long period apart. I began to ask each person who stopped to greet me "*why is everybody so quiet this morning?*" Some just shrugged. A few suggested people were sad because they had only just said goodbye to their families. "*It takes a few days to get used to*", one explained. Many, particularly older students, said people were anxious about having a new Principal.

There seemed to be a consensus that Father Karenzi was irreplaceable. He had left at the end of the previous term to become a parish priest in France after a long association with Saint-Jacques. Most students could recount his role denouncing ethnic divisions at the school before the genocide, and credit him with driving up standards following his return as Principal around 2005. They say that before his return, the diet consisted only of rice and kaunga (maize flour mixed into a stiff paste), but Karenzi had the vision to begin farming the school land so the students could eat meat twice each week and more vegetables. Nonetheless, I always struggled to understand people's enthusiasm about Karenzi's tenure. I found his leadership style uncompromising and severe. On several occasions I had witnessed him make a public example of students in morning assembly, forcing them to kneel on the ground and confess their faults before smacking them across the face with his hand, causing a sharp echo to bounce off the surrounding buildings. I had also observed him publicly ridicule teachers in a way that undermined them. However, many students saw this as a quality to love about him, as it showed that he treated everyone equally, like a father adjudicating between quarrelling siblings. Likewise, as noted in the previous chapter, strict discipline was associated with paternal concern. When I asked why people feared Karenzi's departure, many responded that whoever replaced him was unlikely to maintain the same level of discipline and order. Hence, although students often complained about the harshness of life at Saint Jacques, they also believed it to be good for them – a necessary part of growing into successful adults.

I had already met the new Director, Father Bertrand, during the holidays. He was much younger than Karenzi and considered tall and charismatic - "*a bit of a politician*" as one teacher described him to me. From our brief encounter I intuitively sensed he would be less likely to punish physically, more sympathetic, and perhaps willing to grant the students more personal freedom than Karenzi had. I tried to reassure students but seemed unable to change the consensus that things were about to change for the worse. However, over time it became clearer that neither the students nor I were right in our early

assessments of Father Bertrand. Discipline and order did not break down as many students feared. Nor was he more sympathetic.

In retrospect, I wonder why my first impressions were so wrong. Maybe it is because he seemed quieter and less dominating in conversation, or because I knew that he shared my opinion that the students would perform better if they were permitted to sleep more than six hours per night (Karenzi had insisted on the "virtues of early rising" and had the students wake by 4:30am for additional morning study). This human tendency to read idiosyncratic practices such as quietness through one's own cultural lens is a potential hazard for ethnographers<sup>258</sup>. As I became more culturally attuned I learned that Bertrand's more reserved style of speech, which I had mistaken for humility and willingness to listen, is considered by many students to indicate "seriousness" - a quality they associate with austere leadership.



**School assembly in the main hall**

Father Bertrand was barely seen during the first three days back, until he called an all school meeting in the Salle Polyvalent to introduce himself. About five minutes into his speech, he stopped and stared towards the back of the room, identifying a small boy he had caught talking. The room fell silent. He quietly called the boy forward. Eight hundred heads turned and followed the boy as he shuffled anxiously down the central aisle to the middle of the hall. Bertrand stared down at him from the stage and, without

any tone of anger, ordered the boy to leave the room and tell the monitors (adults who are employed to maintain discipline) to call his parents to collect him, as he was to be immediately and indefinitely excluded. This punishment, for what everyone agreed was a minor fault, seemed severe, even by Karenzi's standards. The school was no longer in any doubt that Bertrand would not tolerate indiscipline. As Father Bertrand resumed his speech, switching from Kinyarwanda to English, he declared that all he required was that everyone, whether students, teachers, discipline or ground staff, "*do the right thing, in the right place, at the right time!*"

This injunction, which was not always easy due to the number of rules and the uncompromisingly strict and sometimes arbitrary manner in which they were enforced, became an oft repeated motto that students would quote, either in seriousness or playfully as they would tease each other for odd misdemeanours. It also accurately describes the priests', and many students' and parents' expectations

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<sup>258</sup> Wolcott (1999:89)

of a Catholic Boarding education, that it should provide a regimented world in which everyone knows his or her place, how to act and what to say at the appointed moments. After all, strong discipline and hard work conformed to students' understanding of a "school of excellence" and was considered necessary for them to grow into successful men and women who contribute to and share in Rwanda's bright future.

This chapter considers the tangible, non-academic, aspects of life at Saint-Jacques; the way students' time and space are organised and controlled through a regime of discipline and punishment. It continues two main threads from previous chapters about the non- and counter-intentional effects of policy, and the contradiction between a discourse of individualism and community. It examines structures and practices which divide people and reproduce the sorts of anxieties, tensions, competitive struggles, and perceptions of injustice, that seem to permeate Rwandan life. In summary, I argue that while Saint-Jacques appears to have all the hall-marks of a "total-institution"<sup>259</sup> – meaning it is characterised by isolation from the outside world, a loss of individual identity, and the use of surveillance and punishment by a small group to control the schedules and movements of a larger group – its discipline regime is more often quietly resisted by students than internalised<sup>260</sup>, and it appears to teach them a different set of skills and values to those intended. Essentially, rather than producing a community of students who value 'unity', 'fairness', order and obedience to authority, the capricious and uneven manner in which discipline is administered at Saint-Jacque educates students in the world of power, patronage, and in the importance of staying on top.

I will begin by discussing discipline, punishment and resistance on a conceptual level in preparation for a section describing an ordinary day in the life of a Saint-Jacques student. Through detailed description, I hope to give the reader a sense of Saint-Jacques' tightly controlled environment in which students have little privacy, personal freedom, or opportunities for deviance, while also showing some of the ways student do manage to resist authority and break rules without being caught. This is followed by a discussion on the use of surveillance and punishment as a deterrent and means to subjugate non-conformists, in which I show how students question the legitimacy of certain actions and distinguish between punishment motivated by love and verses 'power'. Finally, I look at hierarchy, power and patronage, showing how students survive school through finding patrons and clients or play-acting as docile bodies.

### ***Paradigms of Discipline, Punishment and Resistance***

Like '*doing the right thing, in the right place, at the right time*', another phrase, often repeated by the Fathers, was simply, "*Be disciplined*". The word 'disciplined' was sometimes enunciated slowly in a tone that made it sound magical. It is worth taking a moment to consider how the priests, teachers, and students at Saint-Jacques understand 'discipline', as its meaning is contested.

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<sup>259</sup> Goffman (1961)

<sup>260</sup> In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault (1975) argues that institutions exercise a form of 'disciplinary power' that leads inmates (or boarding students) to self-police, internalising routine practises until conformity becomes habitual.

Two reviews of the education studies literature on discipline through the 1990s<sup>261</sup> and 2000s<sup>262</sup> found that the majority of texts take the form of empirical studies into the most effective attitudes, skills and techniques teachers can develop to control the behaviour of their students, in order to attain the best conditions for classroom learning. Clark argues that such texts use the words 'discipline' and 'control' interchangeably when they are actually describing only the latter. He explains how the 'control' paradigm assumes children are naturally unruly and need to be tamed; that their poor choices must be overridden by adults who know better what is good for them; that order is a prerequisite for learning; and that children internalise self-control as the routines and procedures of the institution, enforced through punishment and reward, instil in them the 'good habits' desired by those in authority.<sup>263</sup> By contrast, a paradigm of 'discipline' would treat children as self-reflective agents capable of setting the direction of their lives, the role of the educator being to consult on rather than to direct their activities. It would consider self-discipline to derive from submission to internal values and would focus on drivers of intrinsic motivation.<sup>264</sup> MacAllister refers to this 'agency-based' approach as "*Educational Discipline*", as it guides ethical development, encourages altruism and supports children to pursue their own goals and interests.<sup>265</sup>

Part of the difference between these two concepts of discipline, therefore, lies in whether it is intended merely to control behaviour for the maintenance of order, or affect change in the disciplined person. While behaviour-control has long been the dominant approach to school discipline, even early in the development of Education Studies as a field of social science, academics and teaching professionals were emphasising discipline's transcendent value in developing students' characters. In an early edition of *The School Review* in 1896, a Californian High School Principal<sup>266</sup> wrote:

*"Order must be maintained to facilitate study and recitation, to save time and prevent waste of energy... But the securing of this important result fades into insignificance when compared with the higher and truer object of school discipline. The pupil's moral training is its object... ..It is the habit of good conduct that makes good citizens."*

This view of discipline as a form of character training for producing good citizenship, dominated the colonial approach to education, though, naturally, the "ideal student" it aimed to produce varied according to the priorities of ruling elites. This has been identified as an explanatory factor in why schools become sites of social re-production.<sup>267</sup> In colonial-era literature such as *Tom Brown's School Days*<sup>268</sup> and *Tales of St Austin's*<sup>269</sup> we find the strong, witty, even-tempered and heroic young men, ideal for national leadership or colonial administration, honed through systems of prefects, house-loyalty and hours of competitive sports on public school playing fields. Baden Powell's *Scouting for Boys* was written as a

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<sup>261</sup> Clark (1998)

<sup>262</sup> MacAllister (2014)

<sup>263</sup> Clark (1998:290-1).

<sup>264</sup> Clark (1998:294-6)

<sup>265</sup> MacAllister (2014:448)

<sup>266</sup> Biedenbach (1896)

<sup>267</sup> Hempel-Jorgensen (2009)

<sup>268</sup> Hughes (1857)

<sup>269</sup> Wodehouse (1903)

handbook to infuse young working-class and middle-class boys, who were to be the "*bricks in the wall of the British Empire*<sup>270</sup>, with values of patriotism, self-reliance, service, and Christian faith. In the European colonies, schools were part of the colonisers 'civilizing mission' and were ran mainly by churches. For example, in Rwanda, as discussed in Chapter Three<sup>271</sup>, except for a secular school at Nyanza for educating the national elite, the earliest White Father mission schools focussed on converting people to the Catholic faith and subduing the population to peacefully obey their leaders. Some basic skills were taught to improve livelihoods without enabling students to challenge the social order.<sup>272</sup>

Over the past century, the Rwandan state has become increasingly involved in the day to day running of schools, as students are seen as valuable human capital, whose development is central to the National Development goals of the ruling class<sup>273</sup>. Consequently, the RPF conceptualises the 'ideal student', as one who is hard working, self-reliant, entrepreneurial, obedient to authority, patriotic and committed to building a unified Rwanda. The previous chapter touched on how these values are promoted through the school curriculum, but here I consider how they also feature in discipline models that emphasise order and obedience, as well as 'equality', according to how we saw it defined in the previous chapter. Alongside, the goals of the state, the priests at Saint-Jacques also have their own objectives from discipline – nurturing a community of good Catholics who are humble, prayerful, obedient and without vice.<sup>274</sup>

It is important, however, to distinguish between the stated objectives of discipline and the methodological and conceptual approach used to achieve it. I submit that while there has long been a discursive commitment to discipline for moral character development, as opposed to merely maintaining order, discipline practices at Saint-Jacques better resemble the 'control' paradigm than an agency-centred approach. Noting a modern turn from 'corrective punishment' towards the idea of 'positive discipline', which uses reward and affirmation as 'positive reinforcement'<sup>275</sup> for desired conduct, MacAllister<sup>276</sup> argues that despite their obvious differences, both approaches are, nonetheless, underpinned by a 'behaviourist' perspective on human learning, which seeks to control people's conduct by manipulating their extrinsic environment. As an enclosed space, which limits students' freedoms and dictates their daily movements – a 'total institution' – such technologies of control at Saint-Jacques are all-pervading. Our interest in this chapter is not only in how students experience such an environment, but how they exercise their agency in the face of it.

In his sociology of the prison, *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault<sup>277</sup> argues that 'total' institutions – or what he refers to as "*complete and austere*" institutions, in which groups of individuals are subjected to constant surveillance, strict and repetitive routines and tough discipline – make people into "docile bodies", who internalise the ethics and rules of the institution and modify their behaviour, eventually

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<sup>270</sup> Baden-Powell (1908)

<sup>271</sup> Pages 55-56

<sup>272</sup> Lemarchand (1970:60-65)

<sup>273</sup> Chapters 5 & 6 both discuss the 'human capital' approach to education.

<sup>274</sup> This has long been an aim of Catholic education. See Okoledah (2005)

<sup>275</sup> Woods (2008)

<sup>276</sup> MacAllister (2014)

<sup>277</sup> Foucault (1975)

negating the need for external force. Describing the way prison life imbues the convict with new ways of seeing and acting, he writes:

*"Work, alternating between meals accompanies the convict to evening prayer; then a new sleep gives him an agreeable rest that is not disturbed by the phantoms of an unregulated imagination... thus the weeks, the months and the years follow one another; thus the prisoner who, on entering the establishment... was single-minded only in his irregularity... gradually becomes by dint of a habit that is at first purely external, but is soon transformed into second nature, so familiar with work and the pleasures that derive from it, that provided wise instruction has opened his soul to repentance he may be exposed with more confidence to temptations, when he finally recovers his liberty."<sup>278</sup>*

This image of prison as a process of redemption, transforming the convict from his "natural" state of laziness, sin and vice into a good citizen, mirrors the Catholic concern with repentance and change, and the colonial ideal of boarding school as a civilizing mission. Each, in essence, are about changing people's natures. According to the Catholic doctrine of original sin, man was created with an internal harmony that submitted the body to the soul; or lower impulses, emotions and appetites, to higher reason and to the will of God; but, as a result of original sin, he became carnal and lost this harmonious submission. Hence, whether in monasteries or secondary schools, a Catholic education entails subduing natural instincts and appetites<sup>279</sup> through deprivation of alternative influences and the daily repetition of prescribed practices.

We find this approach to education in the autobiography of Valentine-Yves Mudimbe<sup>280</sup>, who grew up in a White Father's Seminary in Belgian-Congo and took up residence in a Benedictine Monastery in Southern Rwanda in the late colonial era, about the same time that Saint-Jacque was founded. Mudimbe reflects on his experience at these institutions through the lens of Foucault and describes his "*domestication*" as a young student under the 'panoptic gaze' of the priests. The 'Panoptican', as Foucault explains, is an architectural style in which prison cells face into an inner courtyard with a watchtower in the middle. From this position prisoners are isolated from one another, making alliance building difficult, but all are visible to the watchman in the tower. The tower is designed in such a way that it is difficult for the prisoners to know when they are being watched. Feeling permanently observed, prisoners must be exactly obedient at all times or risk punishment. This leads prisoners to self-surveillance, and through daily repetition of desired conduct, turn it into a habit, woven into their character. Mudimbe writes about how the unequal gaze of the priests affected him:

*"When I leave school at 4pm I can, without fear, imagine Don Charlier - who comes and goes in the school corridor - transformed into an invisible spirit which follows my paths until the moment when, the next morning, I would present myself at the sacrament to serve the first mass"<sup>281</sup>*

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<sup>278</sup> Ibid p.239-40

<sup>279</sup> Redden (1948:157)

<sup>280</sup> Mudimbe (1994)

<sup>281</sup> Ibid p.15-16. Own translation from French



Like Mudimbe<sup>282</sup>, I often heard students liken boarding at Saint-Jacques to living in a prison in terms of the monotony of routine, lack of privacy and restrictions on personal space. However, although he does not acknowledge so in his own analysis, Mudimbe also recounts some tales of subtle resistance, which complicate his narrative of total 'domestication'. For example, as Simpson<sup>283</sup> points out in his commentary, Mudimbe tells how struggling to think of any sins at the time of confessional, he used to choose an old deaf father to confess to, and instead of inventing sins would recite 'Ave Marias'. He later wondered whether the old father was not colluding in his pretence.<sup>284</sup> On another occasion, feeling hungry, he sneaked back into the chapel after night prayers, opened the tabernacle and ate the whole ciborium of sacred hosts, which he justifies saying: "*I was hungry... it was in total contradiction to received teaching on the power of the Eucharist. I didn't care. I just ignored it. To me God seemed a friend and a father, and I could always explain myself to him*"<sup>285</sup>. These stories demonstrate a self-awareness and sense of humour not entirely consistent with Mudimbe's self-description as being "*well domesticated... a well-dressed animal*"<sup>286</sup>

Simpson<sup>287</sup> suggests in his ethnography of "St Anthony's", a Catholic Missionary Boarding School in 1990s Zambia, that he finds Foucault "*good to think with but also good think against*", as he highlights individual subjectivity and "the students' order of things" against the demands of the institution; portraying the tensions between the Marian Catholic tradition of humility and simplicity, and more individualistic Protestant culture. The boys in Simpson's study valued the "civilising process" of their mission education - calling their school "Half-London" - while contesting Catholic religious doctrine and constructing their masculine selves in ways antithetical to the Marian Fathers' mission to make them love the Virgin Mary. I found a similar contradiction at Saint-Jacques between the Fathers' insistence on simplicity and material equality between students, and the national discourse of entrepreneurialism and culture of materialism. This will become more apparent later in the chapter as I show how students circumvent the various rules and routines at Saint-Jacques that are designed to level them; and re-organise themselves into a social hierarchy.

Though Simpson's work is set in a different national political context, I have found it methodologically and conceptually useful to my effort at looking holistically at contested identities within the boarding school. However, I am not sure that I agree with Simpson that his focus on students' subjective selves and the unstructured or rather student-structured spaces within the school requires "*thinking against*" Foucault. To focus on structure, as Foucault does in his earlier work, is not to deny the presence of agency, nor does analysing subjectivity disclaim the oppressive hand of authority; rather, both interplay to produce unanticipated social realities. As Willis<sup>288</sup> discovered in his ethnography of a non-selective, 'working-class' boys school in urban mid-England, although the power dynamics ensured that working-class boys got working-class jobs, this social-reproduction came about more through the boys' own oppositional

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<sup>282</sup> Ibid p.48

<sup>283</sup> Simpson (2003:3-4)

<sup>284</sup> Ibid p.23

<sup>285</sup> Ibid p.71

<sup>286</sup> Ibid p.16

<sup>287</sup> Ibid p.4

<sup>288</sup> Willis (1977)

counter-culture than curriculum or teacher practice. Foucault acknowledged this interplay of structure and agency when he wrote that: "*Where there is power there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance, is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power.*"<sup>289</sup> By this line of thought, resistance is an act of power which is at once rebellious and subordinate, much how I will describe the resistance of Saint-Jacques students as not seeking to overthrow the school authorities but finding ways to alleviate the worst of their experiences. Nonetheless, while Foucault always coupled power with resistance, his analytical focus was understanding the techniques of the former<sup>290</sup>. Hence, to better appreciate the nature of student resistance at Saint-Jacques I find Scott's<sup>291</sup> concept of "*everyday resistance*" helpful.

*Everyday resistance* entails actions calculated to mitigate the worst aspects of being dominated when open rebellion is too risky. The actions are 'small scale', 'relatively safe', promise material gains, and require little or no formal co-ordination<sup>292</sup>. In the section below, I describe an ordinary day at Saint-Jacques, including students' daily routines and physical surroundings. It is taken mainly from a fieldnotes entry about a single day I spent following the same few students from getting up in the morning to going to bed at night, though some information from other field notes and interviews is brought in for additional context or explanation. The image of Saint-Jacques that emerges is of an institution as *complete and austere* as Mudimbe recalls in his autobiography, yet, as I go on to show, much like Mudimbe acknowledged in his prose if not in his analysis, students are conscious of their own oppression and took many opportunities to engage in acts of everyday resistance.

### ***An Ordinary Day***

The Saint-Jacques campus sleeps, a pocket of darkness lit only by the half moon and quiet speckles of light from across the surrounding hills. The chirp of grasshoppers pierces the hypnotising whirring of the distant Mosque calling Muslims to prayer. It is 4:30am. A bell rings in the boys' boarding and silhouettes of young male bodies emerge onto the balcony that over-looks the inner court-yard, stretching and shivering in the morning air. The clang of chains against the heavy iron gates seems to hurry some of them as the animateur, Valentin, removes the padlock to enter. Some boys gasp as they see the leather belt in his hand, which he carries from room to room, pulling back the covers of boys struggling to wake and quickly whipping them once or twice across their bare torso or thighs. This does not last long as students across the court yard and around the upper balcony shove and prod roommates who spring into action. "*He only ever beats the small boys*", one student told me in an interview - a view that was shared by several others. Some students suggested that he dare not use the belt on stronger boys for fear they might retaliate - implying that many students believe this to be an illegitimate method of waking late risers.

The 4:30am wake-up time had been introduced by Father Karenzi who had read an article in an American magazine about the health benefits of early rising for teenagers. This led him to believe that 5:00am was not early enough and that by rising at 4:30am students would develop greater self-discipline and gain

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<sup>289</sup> Foucault (1978:95-6)

<sup>290</sup> Deveaux, M (1994:234)

<sup>291</sup> Scott (1985 & 1989)

<sup>292</sup> Scott (1985:36)



**External corridor looking in to boys' boarding**

from an extra thirty minutes of personal study in the mornings, when their minds are the sharpest. In the weeks following his decision, Karenzi regularly preached the virtues of early rising during morning assemblies and posted the magazine article on his notice board. Many students seemed to buy into the idea that an earlier start was good for them. When I caught students yawning or putting their heads down during my classes, however, they usually admitted that they found six hours sleep insufficient. This was sometimes confessed to as though it were a personal weakness. A week after Father Bertrand took charge, he decided

students needed to sleep longer and introduced a new time table which had them rising at 5:00am instead. In my final interview with Bertrand a few days before I left Saint-Jacques, he reflected that this was one of the major changes he had made to improve students' lives.

Apart from a small row of showers tucked in an enclosed corner, there are no washing facilities in the boarding. Boys huddle around taps to fill up their buckets which they carry into the court-yard and set down on the cement ground wherever they can find a space. Having nowhere to hang their clothes or towel and the ground being wet, they remove all their clothing in the dorm rooms, pick up their soaps and walk back to their buckets naked. I hear a boy complain that the bucket he had just put down had been taken by another student. Some boys only wash their arms, face and feet, reasoning they had a fuller wash the previous afternoon after sports. Apparently, this is preferred because the water is warmer in the afternoon having been heated by the sun through the day. Others work in twos, using a small amount of water to lather the soap all over their bodies then helping each other to rinse off properly before returning to their rooms to dry and dress. The journey between bucket and room is easier for boys with ground floor bedrooms leading directly out on the court yard, but others have to navigate the balcony and stairs. There is an internal staircase on one corner of the courtyard, but on the opposite corner the staircase is external, requiring the boys leave the boarding, quickly use the stairs, and re-enter again at the bottom. At the top of the external staircase is a balcony overlooking the courtyard on one side and the school grounds on the other, which leads to a wing of classrooms that have been



**Boys' Boarding, inner courtyard**

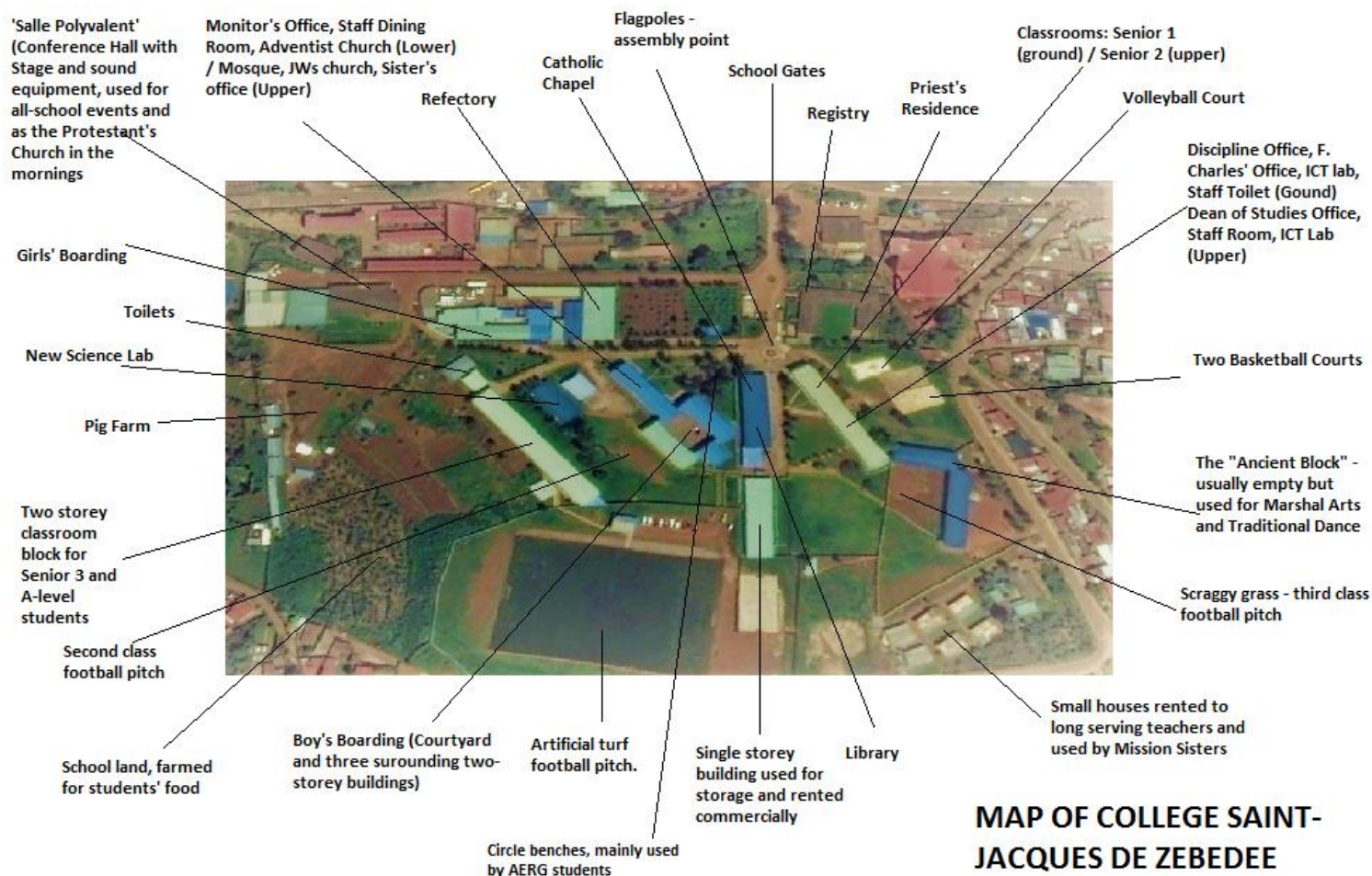
given to various student groups. The first has been given to the Muslim's for a Mosque, the second is used by the Jehovah's Witness students, the third by the Friday night Facing History club and further along is the office of the missionary Sister assigned to the school. A few boys complained to me that female Muslim students can see the boys washing on their way to pray or that the missionary sister regularly walks across the balcony and stares down on them. Others, claimed not to be bothered by this. "*We all have the same thing*", one boy observed. "*Why should I care? She is our mother*", shrugged another. I am told that one time, when she entered the boarding to talk to a student while some boys were washing, while most quickly covered themselves, in an apparent act of defiance, a naked, well-endowed, Senior Five boy deliberately stood a few inches from her.

The girls boarding is much smaller than the boys – a converted former dining hall partitioned into a few rooms with five bunk-beds in each. A woven reed fence shields the building from view and marks a private garden around the perimeter where girls hang their clothes to dry. Unlike the boys, whose toilets are smelly, dirty latrines, without doors on the cubicles, the girls' boarding has private sit-down toilets. Also, because there are fewer of them, I understand girls have less trouble getting a shower. Their wash space is also communal, though not at all exposed like the boys'. There seems to be a different attitude in general to female modesty. Boys, for example, regularly play sports shirtless and on one occasion a group of boys found being late were ordered out of the boarding and forced to stand by the flag pole in whatever state of attire they were found in, including some in only underwear. Girls, on the other hand, are required to always cover their bodies and their privacy is strictly guarded. Girls also rise at 4:30am, but although the animatrice punishes lateness I am not aware of any treatment comparable to being whipped out of bed like some of the boys are.

By 4:55am every student is dressed in the correct uniform and assembled in the chapel for morning prayers. The uniform requirement is beige trousers for boys and long beige skirts for girls, with a short sleeved white shirt bearing the school crest on the pocket and a school jumper for cold weather. Every item of uniform is stamped with a number in black ink to identify the owner in the case of theft, except for the jumpers which have a number sewn in the back below the neck. This is often cut out or unstitched, however, indicating that at some point the jumper had been stolen. Following prayers, which last only a few minutes, everyone walks in silence to their A-level students' block at the far end of the school, where they sit evenly spaced at graffiti covered wooden desks for ninety minutes of personal study. Most are leaning, elbows on the table and chin in hands, flicking through notes they took the previous day. A few hide copies of the bible, the Watch Tower, or a library book or comic on their knees below the desk, while pretending to study their class notes. Some lean their forehead against a flat hand that shields their closed eyes from view.

At 6:30 another bell rings and students shuffle to the refectory, a large room with a low corrugated metal roof and row after row of wooden tables and benches, where breakfast consists of a bread roll and a warm milky drink they called "tea". It is considered a privilege to eat bread in the mornings. Apparently, most schools only serve tea or a sloppy maize-based porridge. After eating, each student washes his or her cup and plate in large barrels of water in the room next door and makes his or her way to their respective churches - Catholics in the main chapel, Protestants in the Salle Polyvalent and Seventh Day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses and Muslims in the classrooms of the wing that runs perpendicular from

the boys' boarding. Up until this point, everything has been done in complete silence - at least it should have been. Since 6:00pm the previous evening students have not been allowed to speak. Although they do, carefully and in whispers, if they are caught they are punished. One boy, caught whispering to a friend before bed was ordered to stand in the middle of the courtyard, wearing only his bedclothes. He remained stood in the cold until nearly midnight, when Boris sent him to bed.



**MAP OF COLLEGE SAINT-JACQUES DE ZEBEDEE**

It is 6:58am, the speaking ban is lifted and the school is beginning to feel more alive. Father Charles, the Deputy Principal responsible for discipline, stands straight in his long black robes near the flag-poles, which stand at a cross roads in the school grounds. Straight in front of him he can look up the steep stony driveway to the school gates, where two security guards in green uniforms check people in and out. Across to his left he can see along the path that leads to refectory on the right and the boys boarding on the left, including the classrooms where three of the churches meet. Behind him is an open space between the Catholic Chapel and Library on one side and a two-storey classroom block on the other that also houses the staff room and some offices. Thus, from this vantage-point he can see all the main walkways in use at this time of day and it is difficult for anybody crossing the school to avoid being seen. He checks his watch then walks forward to where a small group of day students are jogging down the driveway trying not to be late, their backpacks bouncing behind them, and opens his arms as if to not let them past. I cannot

hear what he says, but I see the students take their pink discipline records out of their pockets and hand them to him. These pink pocket-sized booklets in which staff record students' infractions, must be carried by them at all times, along with pale green identity cards that bear their photograph, name, date of birth and religion. After taking their cards, Charles orders them to kneel on the sharp stony ground and leaves them there to enter the church.

At 7:05 two more day-students walk down the main drive late. Without being told to, they kneel down next to the others. All of them remain kneeling for the duration of church, occasionally putting their hands on the ground in front of them to take the weight from their knees. I ask them why they are late. "*Teacher, the buses came late*", one of them whispered back. Goffman<sup>293</sup> notes that requiring subjects to adopt submissive or humiliating postures is common in total institutions, whether it be a patient made to eat with only a spoon in a mental asylum or a military cadet standing to attention whenever a senior officer enters the room. According to *The Holy Rule of Saint Benedict*<sup>294</sup>, errant monks were required to "*lie prostrate at the door of the oratory in silence; and thus, with his face to the ground and his body prone, let him cast himself at the feet of all as they leave the monastery*". At Saint-Jacques, as I have observed in other Rwandan schools, rule-breakers are required to kneel on the ground for an indeterminate period, until permitted to stand. Nobody may talk them. The act of kneeling physically and symbolically diminishes them. It also causes pain.

At 7:45am a long procession of Protestant students walks briskly from where they meet on the far side of the school beyond the Refectory and form scattered groups around the flag poles. They are soon joined by Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses and Adventists. "*Yesterday, the Protestants were shouted at by Father Charles for being late out of church, but today the Catholics are late*", I observe to one of my students, Elyse, as she joins with her Adventist group. Then, curious to see what her reaction would be, I add, "*Do you think Father Charles will tell off the Catholics today?*" She looks surprised by the audacity of my question and shaking her head while raising her shoulders to her ears says simply, "*It is their school.*" Suddenly the electric organ in the Catholic chapel just behind us bangs out some harsh chords and the choir sings as the Catholic students are herded quickly out, filling the gaps in the circles around the flag to form a tight donut of bodies. Father Charles cuts his way through them to the centre. Morning assembly begins by Charles calling the group who are still kneeling a few metres away to come forward. "Be punctual", I hear him say several times in English, amidst telling them off in Kinyarwanda. He



**For morning assembly, students form a circle around these flag poles and the Priests stand on the raised area in the middle**

<sup>293</sup> 1961:22

<sup>294</sup> Chapter 4

raises his hand high above his head and swings it dramatically, as if wielding a golf club, smacking the nearest student to him, a girl in the older years, between the shoulder blades. This seems to indicate his fury with the whole group as the others are spared on this occasion and sent to take places in the crowd.

While this is going on two of the monitors walk around the outside of the circle inspecting students from behind. Occasionally they reach through the crowd and tug a student's clothing, who then hands over his discipline card. All boys. I try to guess what they all have in common. The search is stopped abruptly as Father Charles finishes his speech - something about the need to be smart and punctual - and orders the school into singing the Rwandan National Anthem. As the singing begins, everyone within hearing distance who is making their way towards the flag area, including some teachers coming from the staff room and senior Catholic students who have been de-robing and tidying the church, freeze wherever they are and join in the singing. I observe the Jehovah's Witnesses students standing in the outer rings, bowing their heads respectfully but not singing because their faith does not recognise the legitimacy of any state. In one of my first ever assemblies Father Karenzi had angrily chastised certain students for not participating and threatened to report their non-singing to the police, so I had asked Jehovah's Witness students in the past if they were not afraid of being punished for not singing. Some said they were afraid but others assured me they have special dispensation because it is a matter of faith. Similarly, when it is not too disruptive, the Muslims have permission to pray at their 'Mosque' and Adventists hold their Sabbath services at sundown on Friday evenings while other students are in various "clubs" - Scouts, Entrepreneurship, Traditional Dance etc. Following the National Anthem, the School Anthem is sung. A senior boy sings the first lines as a solo then leads the rest of the school in a call and response sequence. The tune is catchy and students and teachers are often singing it under their breath through the day. When the song ends, Charles says in English, "Nice day", which is the cue for everyone to scatter to their classrooms. Some run quickly to wet their mouths at the nearby taps or use the toilet and everyone is engaged in conversations – a few moments of relief from the silence and order of the rest of the morning.

Within a few minutes the noise quiets down and several lines of students stand smartly in place facing their class teachers. It is now 8:07 but nobody - neither teachers, students, nor Father Charles - seems concerned about class starting over seven minutes late. It seems punctuality is more important at some times of day than at others. Students hold out their hands stiff and straight in front of them, palms down, as one by one they walk past their class teachers who inspects their finger nails and uniform before they enter the classroom. Kneeling outside the discipline office, further down the teaching block, are the boys who had been identified during the assembly. After my final student runs past me into the classroom I walk over to enquire why some of my students have been put there and whether I may have them back in class to begin lessons. "*These students are wearing incorrect uniform*", the monitor, Boris, explains, before indicating to the boys they could go to class. "*What is wrong with your uniform?*" I ask one of them on our way back, genuinely unable to see how it differed from others. It is common for shirts and trousers to be marked with ink stains and worn from repeated washing, but this was not the objection. "*Teacher, it is because we are wearing amacupe*" (the Kinyarwanda word for "bottle"), one of them explains. The fashion of wearing tighter trousers that become skinnier around the calf and ankle is popular in Rwanda and I discover that some boys cut their trouser legs up the seam and re-stitch them, so they tighten

towards the ankle like an upside-down bottle neck. They were all given two weeks to replace their trousers with straight-legged ones that are evenly wide all the way down.



**Students from a different Rwandan school with the same uniform as Saint-Jacques.**

When it comes to un-ironed trouser-legs, fraying pockets, thread-bare knees, ink blotches, or orange-speckled food stains and mouldy collars on shirts, the school authorities are fairly tolerant, but they punish displays of individuality or 'fashion'. If boys fail to keep their hair short enough they can be forced to have it cut at school, always even shorter than they would like. Girls must also keep their hair short, barely a centre-metre longer than the boys' and they are forbidden to wear make-up. Some girls also complained that

their skirts, which end half way between the knee and ankle, and their baggy shirts, seem designed to be as unshapely as possible. I never heard any student express pride in their uniform. Some girls even told me they wanted to leave Saint-Jacques and attend a private school, purely so they could have braided hair. It seemed, therefore, that the dress standards were less about keeping students smart as, firstly, keeping them uniform; and secondly, avoiding the potential for sexual attraction between students. Girls' bodies were particularly dangerous in this regard, as I discuss in chapter five.<sup>295</sup>

"Gooood moooorning tea-cher" the class chant in unison as we enter the room, standing straight at their desks. "Mwaramutse, mwicare" (Good morning, sit down) I respond to laughter and light applause for my efforts in Kinyarwanda. It is 8:15 and we begin our class fifteen minutes late. The rest of the day until 4:30pm is taken up by eight lessons of 50 minutes. Students remain in the same classroom and it is the teachers who move between rooms. There are three classes back to back, usually comprising a single and a double period, followed by a twenty-minute break at 10:30, which most teachers use to get themselves a cup of tea in the teachers' dining room, but I tend to spend interacting with students or doing last minute marking and lesson preparation. Then there are two more class periods, followed by ninety minutes for lunch from 12:30pm to 2pm.

At 12:35 I walk toward the teachers' dining room, which is on the ground floor of the wing of rooms leading off the boys boarding. It used to be a chemistry lab until a new one was recently built, and it still smells like one. On my way, I notice about twenty students kneeling outside the dining room. Some are grimacing with discomfort. "*What are you all doing?*" I ask. An older student looks up and says quietly,



*"Teacher we are late to eat because the teacher of sports did not finish on time and we had to change clothes".*

*"Why don't you tell the monitors that it is not your fault?"* I ask.

*"No teacher, they cannot listen",* responds the girl next to him looking up at me quickly then back at the ground, as if nervous she will be caught talking to me.

Not wishing to get them into more trouble I excuse myself and go back towards the staff dining room. I hear two sharp hand claps and look back to see the kneeling students have been granted permission to join the others and eat. In the dining room, students are not allowed to choose where to sit, they are assigned tables by the monitors, who mix up years and classes, decreasing the chance of friends sitting together. A chart outside is used to check that everybody is in their appointed place. Students and teachers eat the same, rice with a mix of beans and green leaves today, though the students never believe me, always imagining that their teachers are eating something better. The monitors also eat the same, but they tend to take their food in another classroom nearby. This equality in diet seems important to the Fathers. The head monitor complained in an interview that he had asked for permission to bring in some ingredients from home to augment what was on offer, but the Principal had refused, insisting he either take his free lunch with everyone else or go away and purchase a full meal somewhere else. By contrast, the two Fathers eat very differently. They take their food in their own residence, prepared by their own cook, and have an allowance of 600,000RwF per month, which is more than enough to buy quality ingredients, including meat every day and alcoholic drinks. Some of the teachers resent what they describe as the priest's "bourgeois" lifestyle, which is paid for out of money raised from the school facilities.

After eating, students wash their plates and forks and some are assigned to peel potatoes for the evening meal. For the rest of lunch time they are free. Many choose to spend time in whichever student-led clubs they belong to. The nicest part of the school grounds – a shaded area of grass with ring-shaped stone benches that allow about ten people to sit facing each other in a circle – is taken over by the student 'families' within AERG (the organisation for child genocide survivors). In a senior block classroom around 150 students have crowded in to watch a round of "Savoir-Plus", a school general knowledge quiz in which teams of four compete in a knock-out competition. Those who cannot fit in the classroom watch through the windows and doorway.

In the afternoon, there are three more fifty-minute class periods, then at 4:30 the bell rings the end of the school day. Day students walk up the stony drive way and congregate just outside the gates by the kiosk that sells school supplies and chewing gum, and in little pockets at various 'taxi' (bus) stops downhill from the school. The boarders are supposed to participate in what is described on the timetable as "obligatory sports". Behind the younger students' classroom block is a large tarmac space with two full size basketball courts and a volleyball court. There is also a set of three metal chin-up bars of different heights. Next to this, at right-angles to the teaching block is a building that students called "the ancient block" - the shell of an old two-storey building that was badly damaged in the genocide and left a rubble of bricks and broken glass. An upstairs class-room in this block is used by a senior student who teaches

others martial arts and a lower classroom is used for traditional dance by the Saint-Jacques troop, as well as a semi-professional group who rent the space for a small fee. There are three areas for playing football and where one plays seems to indicate one's place in the student hierarchy. The best pitches are at the Mumena Stadium, a full sized astro-turf pitch set down a hill behind the school. It is owned by Saint-Jacques and rented out to professional teams - a source of income for the priests - but when it is not rented out the official school team play there as well as older



**Basketball Courts and Pull-Up Bars**

students and any younger ones who demonstrate enough talent to be included. The second-best pitch is on grass in between the back of the library and senior classroom block. The pitch is not lined and only twenty metres long but two undersized goal posts mark each end. Here up to fifteen-a-side play, but when it gets too busy the boys arrange themselves into more teams and play a tournament, or they send smaller and weaker players to the third area. This is the thicker grass by the ancient block. Here the younger students, senior ones and twos play with as many as twenty-a-side. The school owns few decent footballs. On Fridays when I take my Senior One class for sports in the final period, we often play here with the best ball, but it is collected at 4:30 by a Senior-Three boy who throws them a thread-bare flat ball instead. My students resent it, but none of them resist.

Many students do not participate in sports at all, preferring to spectate or use the time to rest or socialise. Most notably, the girls rarely play sports. A few put on their sports clothing and join in the volleyball or go for a light jog, but they are not made welcome in the more aggressive football or basketball matches and there no other facilities available to them. Occasionally one of the Fathers complains about non-participation in sport, particularly by girls, during assembly, but I suspect they know that the facilities available are insufficient for the number of students, as "obligatory sports" was never policed.

At 5:30 the bell sounds, signalling that everyone has thirty minutes to wash and be seated in the senior block classrooms for personal study. The two students I have been interviewing today, instead of joining in the football, ask me to accompany them to the boys boarding so they are not obviously seen by the monitors to be already in their uniforms. I pause at the gates when I see tens of naked boys covered in soap and suggest I should wait outside, but none of them seem to mind my presence and others join in calling me inside. I only stay a few minutes however, as I do not want to be seen by the monitors to be disrupting students from getting ready.

The boarding feels crowded, uncomfortable and exposed. Like Foucault's description of the Panopticon prison, from the middle of the square inner-courtyard I can see into the windows and doorways of two floors of bedrooms, which each have five tightly packed bunkbeds, except for a large room at the back of

the boarding which holds nearly twenty. The floors are concrete, walls are red-brick and the gates, doors, window bars, balcony railings and beds are all metal. The mattresses are worn thin in the middle and while students bring their own sheets from home, nobody has a pillow. I am told it is not worth bringing a pillow because those who do get mocked for being 'soft', or soon find them stolen. There are no chairs, desks or other furniture, not even lockers to protect students' belongings. It is against school rules to bring anything from home except approved uniform and supplies, of which everyone should have the same, so the school authorities do not consider it necessary to enable students to secure their property. Clothes are stored in suitcases on or under beds and, it appears, on every available window or rail, which are strewn with clothes hung out to dry.



**Typical boys' bedroom (left), larger boys' bedroom (right). Photo taken during holidays. The only difference in term time would be mattresses on the beds**

Like dining hall seating, students' rooms and beds are assigned to them by monitors, with a mixture of ages in each room. Monitors also decide which class to put students in within their year group and deliberately mix things up each new academic year. One teacher explained that keeping students continually moving between different sets of people is a tactic to prevent them forming close friendships. Like the panopticon, it acts as a form of enforced separation.<sup>296</sup> However, though punishable if caught, some students sometimes mutually agree to swap rooms so they can be with friends. Older or stronger students also force younger ones to swap with them, meaning where one sleeps to some extent reflects the pecking order of the boarding. The most sought-after beds are nearest the outer windows away from the door, because they offer fresh air from the window and they are the last beds to be reached when the monitors enter to conduct a search or wake up call, giving students in those beds more time to react. The second-best beds are nearest door, because they also provide more fresh air. The least desirable beds in the entire boarding are those in the centre of the large room at the back, without any wall nearby. These are usually saved for those who arrive after the start of term. Students also prefer bottom bunks, because they can tuck sheets under the mattress above creating a curtain around the bed. They refer to these as 'ghettos' and value the privacy that comes from being able to hide themselves, while those without

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<sup>296</sup> Semple (1993:90)

ghettos spend their entire lives under the gaze of others, even when they wash or take care of bodily needs.

Ghettos seem to also provide a way of marking out personal space. As with the adaptation of school uniform, students value the opportunity to differentiate themselves from others. Simpson<sup>297</sup> reflects how, at the Zambian Mission school he calls St Anthony's, prefects were allowed to personalise their space with curtains, photographs, posters and slogans; other senior students had partitioned areas which they decorated, while 'Commoners' could merely place pictures on the inside of their locker doors. Similar customs have been observed in British public schools<sup>298</sup>, as well as American College Dorms, where Nathan<sup>299</sup> suggests students decorate their bedroom doors with words and images as a way of projecting an image of how they want others to see them. Few such opportunities for individual expression exist at Saint-Jacques, however, where the boarding is intended to be a levelling experience in which all students, no matter what their position in the school, are to share the same quality of life, have the same physical appearance and possess the same belongings. It is against the rules to post anything to the walls or decorate personal space, but ghettos carve out a privileged area. Perhaps, the only authorised form of individual expression is the choice of paper one uses to cover exercise books, which, often depicted students' interests.

Monitors conduct regular spot searches of dorm rooms, including students' personal property, and confiscate any contraband. By decree of the Minister of Education, possession of a mobile phone can result in immediate exclusion from the school. I am aware of a few students who hide MP3 players to listen to music in bed at night, but have not yet been caught. More commonly, students hide supplies of chewing gum, sachets of powder that flavour drinking water and similar treats, often brought in by day students, either as a favour for their friends, or to be sold for profit. A senior one boy whose best friend often smuggled him treats explained, "*Twelve weeks is a long time without tasting anything sweet*". One of my Senior One girls was recently excluded from the boarding and forced to attend the rest of the term as a day scholar, not for anything she did, but because on a visit day, which happened once a month on a Sunday afternoon, her parents brought in biscuits for her older brother. The following day in morning assembly, Father Charles reminded everyone that no gifts are allowed to be brought in on visits. He argued that it was not fair for some students to have treats and not others, so if anybody brought any they would have to be shared with all eight hundred students. Father Charles' concern about inequality between students echoes the *Holy Rule of Saint Benedict*<sup>300</sup>, which states:

*If anyone be discovered to have what he has not received from the Abbot, let him be most severely punished. And in order that this vice of private ownership may be completely rooted out, let all things that are necessary be provided by the Abbot.*

By 6pm the final few students are running to the senior block for evening study as the three monitors, Valentin, Boris and Louise, form a check point across the pathway, ready to punish late arrivals. A few jog

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<sup>297</sup> Simpson (2003:103-4)

<sup>298</sup> Wakeford (1969:78)

<sup>299</sup> Nathan (2005)

<sup>300</sup> Chapter 55, cited by Goffman (1961)

past them, but the moment Valentin's watch shows it is 6pm they hold their arms out to block those still approaching and force them to kneel. I see this happening behind me while I make my way back up hill towards the boarding and, as I turn the corner, bump into some of the Senior One students I had been with earlier, who are running to be on time. "Stop!" I whisper, "*you are already too late and they are punishing everyone*". Two of the group decide to dart for cover behind some bushes to wait it out. The others accept their fate and carry on down the hill.

The sky is getting dark again and a mandatory silence falls once more over the students who resume their morning study positions, heads down, flicking through class notes, waiting for the bell to sound for supper at 7:30pm. I walk up and down the path outside the building, observing their activity through the windows. As the lights are on in the classrooms but outside is now dark, it is much easier for me to see the students than for them to see me. I whisper to a boy sat at an open window, "how come everyone is so quiet?"

"*Teacher, the monitors are watching*", he replied, before staring back at the book on his desk. By this point, Louise and Valentin are nowhere to be seen, but Boris lingers, not too far away.

At 7:30pm the students walk in silence to the refectory for supper, a mixture of sweet potato and beans that creates a pleasant smell. At this point the silence breaks and quiet conversation at each table is permitted, but at 8pm obligatory silence re-commences for another ninety-minutes of study. At 9:30 everyone walks in silence to the Catholic chapel, where all denominations participate in nightly prayers and then return to the boarding. Everyone has a few minutes to brush their teeth and use the bathroom one more time before the gates are locked and the lights go out.

### ***Good Punishment and Bad Punishment***

This chapter opened describing students' reactions to the change in school Principal, when Father Karenzi left after many years in charge, leading some to worry that his much younger replacement, Father Bertrand, would struggle to maintain discipline, which would precipitate a further decline in the position of College Saint-Jacques relative to other schools. Before long, most students came to regard Father Bertrand as an even more uncompromising disciplinarian than Karenzi had been, but they disliked him for it, because, as one boy expressed it: "*Father Karenzi punished us like a Father, but Bertrand has a black heart*". Of course, I generalise, as there are some students, usually those who at some point or other have been on the receiving end of Father Karenzi's temper, who dislike both men equally. Nonetheless, the overall consensus seemed to be that when Karenzi administered discipline he did so for the purpose of teaching students and had their welfare at heart, whereas Bertrand was thought to be motivated by the thrill of having power rather than love for the student. Like Poluha<sup>301</sup> found with children in Ethiopia, Saint-Jacques students believe that "*a teacher should act as a parent or older sibling towards a student*".

While walking through town one evening with Kevin, one of my Senior One students, we bumped into a man who seemed happy to see him and stopped to talk for a minute. Continuing on our way, Kevin explained it was his Primary Five teacher who he had learned under for two years in a row after being made to repeat the year. "*He beat me so much*", Kevin recalled, "*but he really helped me become a good*

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<sup>301</sup> Poluha (2004:70)

*student. I changed a lot that year. And now he is happy to see that I made it into Saint-Jacques. So I really owe him.*" Kevin bore no bad will towards the teacher for beating him, because it was accompanied with genuine concern for his personal development and success.

While at dinner with Mugisha's family, his father thanked me for showing an interest in Mugisha's education and told me, *"Mr Sam, I give you permission to beat my son. As his teacher you can guide him to grow up straight and be a good man. If you see him not working hard or misbehaving he needs to be beaten, because, as the Bible says, who the Lord loves, he disciplines."* Mugisha's oldest sister, Annie, later explained to me that her father's instruction to beat his son was intended as a compliment, because it signified his confidence in me.

When I asked students to explain the difference between good and bad punishment, in addition to discussing the motives of the person administering the punishment, a common response was that good punishments are *'fair'* but bad ones are *'unfair'*. Through our discussion I understood fairness to mean two things: firstly, *consistency*, in the sense that everybody knows in advance what the punishment is for a particular infringement and that it is always applied the same to everyone, no matter who they are; and secondly, *proportionality*, meaning the punishment should fit the severity of the fault. At Saint-Jacques the administration of punishment for breaking rules is neither consistent nor proportionate, rather it is irregular, unpredictable, and seemed to depend on the caprices of the monitor or priest. The most common punishment for minor faults such as lateness or talking during 'obligatory silence' is to kneel down until the knees become sore and potentially receive a slap to the face with a monitor's open hand; but sometimes punishments were more creative. The following is a list of incidents that I either witnessed myself or that were reported to me by at least three different witnesses:

- ❖ Senior Two students discovered talking during evening study were made to remove their shoes and walk up and down over sharp stones with bare feet.
- ❖ Students forced to eat bad rice.
- ❖ Students found talking in the dormitory were made to remove their tops and lean against the cold metal railing so that it supported their weight across their bare-chests. Students reported slight bruising from the pressure, feeling cold and embarrassment.
- ❖ Two of my Senior One students among a group caught messing about in the classroom were forced by the Dean of Discipline, Junior, to face each other and smack the other one across the cheek. When the stronger of the two slapped his friend only gently, Junior ordered him to do it again, harder, or he would beat them both. The second-time round, he smacked his friend with sufficient force to make his friend cry in front of his classmates.
- ❖ Several boys who were late getting changed from sports in the evening were forced out of the building in only their underwear and made to change outside in full view of the school.
- ❖ Boys running late to leave the dormitory in the morning were given a count-down to get out. A young man in Senior Six made it to the gate but it was closed in his face and he was forced to kneel in the courtyard during morning studies. While on his knees he was

slapped several times in the face and kicked. The incident caused him to cry, causing further embarrassment.

- ❖ Two boys who were caught sleeping in the boarding instead of attending evening study were made to put their shins on the balcony railing and hands on the floor in a near-vertical push-up position for thirty minutes. If they fell, they were beaten.
- ❖ Senior One girls and boys whose nails were deemed too long were made by Father Bertrand to pull up shoots of grass and weeds from the pathways using their bare fingers.

Punishments such as those just listed are given according to the imaginations and whims of the monitors or priests, with no clear link to particular infringements. On a different day, the same behaviour could be met with no punishment, or more likely a completely different type of punishment. Also, punishments do not take account of students' motives and effort. I observed five main reasons why Saint-Jacques students break rules. These are, firstly, *factors outside of their control*, such as being late to school due to transport problems, or not having the correct uniform due to theft; secondly, *human imperfection*, such as accidentally oversleeping, taking too long washing, or not resisting the urge to talk during obligatory silence; thirdly, *deliberate acts of resistance* to improve their quality of life, such as smuggling food or electronic devices into the boarding, pretending to study while sleeping, or hiding during sports; fourthly, *cheating* on tests; and finally, *acts that hurt others*, such as physical and verbal bullying, or stealing. Yet, as no such typography exists at Saint-Jacques, beating another student could carry a less severe punishment than having long finger nails. One exception to this, a sixth type of fault which is treated more seriously than any of those just listed, is refusal to bow to authority, known as "*insubordination*". This almost certainly results in permanent exclusion in the case of students, and dismissal for staff, as I describe in the next section.

Another distinction students make between good and bad punishment is about their long-term outcome. Good punishments save young people from the consequences of their mistakes by helping them to correct bad behaviour, but if a punishment is worse than the natural consequence of a fault, it cannot be said to be corrective. Hence, corporal punishment is considered less severe by Saint-Jacques students than exclusion from the school, because although it causes some pain and embarrassment it does not damage a students' life-prospects. I learned this lesson the hard way when I signed in Arnaud's discipline record. Being unwilling to use corporal punishment and more liberal in the freedom I gave students, some of them treated my classes as light-relief from the pressures of the day, which made it difficult to keep control at times. It was especially challenging with some of the students who were more familiar with me outside of school, so eventually I felt I had no choice but to use what I thought was the only non-violent sanction available to me – writing in Kevin and Arnaud's discipline notebooks. While Kevin accepted the punishment with understanding, Arnaud appeared upset and surprised that I would do such a thing and withdrew from me for a time. One of his friends, Axel, explained that because he already had two bad marks on his record that term, my signature guaranteed him receiving a mark of 'poor' for conduct on his end of term report, which, put students at risk of exclusion. "*Teacher, it would have been better if you made him kneel down or beat him,*" he added. Signing his record was deemed an act of violence.

In one of the more physically violent incidents during my time at Saint-Jacques a Senior Three boy, Yannick, who was a leader in the boarding, severely beat a small Senior One boy across the back with a cable, as a punishment for wetting the bed. The beating left the boy with blood on his shirt and lash marks all over his back, and he was so afraid to re-enter the boarding he spent the night sleeping in the grass outside. As a punishment for Yannick's abuse of power, the monitor, Valentin, forced him to lie face down in the boarding and publicly flogged him to the point that other boys found it distressing to watch and began to beg for mercy on his behalf. A few months later, when I had an opportunity to ask Yannick about the incident, he told me that by beating him Valentin had 'shown him mercy', because it prevented him from being excluded. *"But they tell me the beating left you bleeding from the mouth and very badly hurt"*, I said in confusion. He replied, *"Yes teacher, I had demons that needed to be beaten out of me, but it is better that I am still in school."*

Exclusion from a good public school like Saint-Jacques is the ultimate punishment, because it makes it very difficult to find a place in a similar school, which either means paying a lot more for one of the top private schools, or in most cases, paying a little more for an inferior private school. Meanwhile, even temporary exclusions cause the student to miss out on learning and risk getting a lower grade. Thus, when he temporarily excluded a boy for talking during an all-school assembly, Father Bertrand opted for one of the most severe punishments in his arsenal and unleashed it without any emotion. It was this quietness that students found most intimidating. *"You never know what he is thinking"*, said one student. Another told me, *"At least when Karenzi became angry you knew it was because he has passion, but Bertrand has no feeling"*. There was a clear sense among students that Father Bertrand did not care about their well-being and could not be relied upon to deal justly with them.

As discussed earlier in the chapter, *complete and austere institutions* are thought to use surveillance, segregation, repetition of daily routines and harsh punishment to inscribe<sup>302</sup> desired behaviours onto the bodies of those interned in them, such that those behaviours become habits, eventually negating the need for external force. However, this effect is not being produced at Saint-Jacques. In my description of an ordinary day, I have shown some of the many ways that students engage in everyday acts of resistance to make school life more pleasant; and in this section I have suggested that students are able to distinguish between punishment that is consistent, proportionate, and designed to correct and improve them, which they welcome as a necessary part of growing up, and punishment that is whimsical, harsh, and seems to serve no other purpose than making the person administering it feel powerful, which they resent. Rather than teach young people good habits, it seems the most useful lessons students learn from their experience of discipline at Saint-Jacques are in the dynamics of hierarchy, power and patronage; and, in this sense, it prepares them well for adult life in Rwanda.

### ***Hierarchy, Power and Patronage***

In the final section of this chapter, I suggest that power-relations at Saint-Jacques resemble those in Rwandan society more broadly, including the concentration of power at the top, severe penalties for challenging authority and a network of patron-client type relations from the top to the bottom.

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<sup>302</sup> Butler (1989)



Furthermore, I submit that such a dynamic is deep rooted in Rwandan cultural and political organisation. I begin by outlining the different roles within the Saint-Jacques hierarchy from bottom to top, showing some of the tensions between teachers, students and monitors; then discuss the authoritarian nature of the priests. Finally, I look at how power is organised through a series of superior-inferior relationships, resembling the sorts of patron-client relations that are an enduring feature of Rwandan life.

### ***Who's who at Saint-Jacques?***

Notwithstanding the subordinate position of the students, there is a group at Saint-Jacques who appear to be considered inferior even to them. These people, who are ever present but nearly invisible, work as security guards, cooks, cleaners, and ground labourers. Some have small homemade houses on the farmed area of the school land. They can almost always be seen engaged in some kind of manual work, but they play no part in formal school life. They are not invited to events such as the school anniversary celebration or annual genocide memorial and the students believe it is forbidden to speak to them. One time, Father Karenzi caught me chatting with one of the security guards and asked in an angry tone how we were able to communicate with each other. *"He speaks French"*, I replied, and Karenzi looked surprised. One of the younger cleaners once knocked on the door of my classroom while I was teaching, apologised and asked, in English, if he could empty the bin. Some students whistled, cheered and clapped, because they did not expect him to know any English. Later that week I saw him in the library so I complimented him on his English ability. He told me his story, how he had been through school up to Senior Three but could not afford to study A-levels, all the while looking over my shoulder anxiously, for fear of being caught. *"I'm not allowed to talk to you"*, he whispered.

Even the students have a superior status to the manual staff, by virtue of their family-backgrounds or what they are destined to become after their education. This was brought home to me one day when one of my students vomited in class and an older lady was summoned to clean up the mess. As she bent down, mopping the ground around where the students were sitting, none of them spoke to her, not even to say thank you, nor did she make eye contact or speak to any of them.

Teachers occupy an ambiguous position vis-à-vis students. Although they exercise authority in their classrooms, award students' their marks and are looked up to as the source of educational knowledge, there is an awareness on the part of both teachers and students that the teacher is in a 'lower' profession than those to which most students aspire. One teacher complained to me that his students did not show him respect because *"they expect that when they leave here, after a few years they will be higher than me"*. No student ever cited teaching as a desirable career choice, tending to regard it as a sign of failure, and younger teachers were nearly always looking for a way into something more 'respectable'. Also, having grown up under a Francophone system, teachers usually spoke inferior English to their students, adding to students' sense of superiority. Students gave teachers derogatory nicknames and often discussed them behind their backs in insulting terms. The same dynamic existed between students and monitors, except that that they were more fearful of the monitors whose mission it seemed was to keep them humble.

Teachers and monitors also have a conflictual relationship at times. While neither is in charge of the other, when their jurisdictions overlapped it was normally the monitors whose decisions carried more weight, because they are closer to the priests. Teachers sometimes resented the monitors, who they perceived as having more authority while being less qualified. Monitors, meanwhile, aspired to have degrees like the teachers, and to be able to go home after school rather than having to live-in with the students.

Students, teachers and monitors, however, are all subject to discipline and potentially public ridicule by the priests; thereby reminding everybody where power lies. This was particularly so during Father Karenzi's time. Students appreciate the way Karenzi would sometimes criticise or correct teachers during morning assembly and, while explaining to me why they preferred Karenzi over Bertrand, recounted stories of times he intervened on the side of students, overruling punishments or granting privileges that had already been refused by teachers or monitors. They saw this as a sign of love, that he was '*Father over the whole school*'. Meanwhile, the teachers and monitors found it humiliatingly undermining, particularly as they had often only been enforcing rules which Karenzi himself had set. On a different day, if they had failed to enforce the rules of the school they could be punished. I recall during assembly one morning, Father Bertrand summoned the security guard from the gate and chastised him in front of the students for letting a few enter the school after 7am without reporting their lateness. He was publicly threatened with losing his job if it ever happened again and sent back up the path. Thus, the priests were above the law, but everyone else was subject to it.

### ***Power play***

I commented in the introductory chapter that in addition to being studied as a post-conflict state, Rwanda is noted for its 'development' being driven by a government that has been described as both 'authoritarian' and 'patrimonial'.<sup>303</sup> This is thought to follow a long tradition of authoritarian leadership in Rwanda, stretching back through the second Republic (1973-1994)<sup>304</sup>, first Republic (1959-1973)<sup>305</sup>, colonial era (circa 1885-1962)<sup>306</sup>, and even pre-colonial times, when Rwanda is thought have been unusual among African states for its complex institutions and centralised authority.<sup>307</sup> There is disagreement about whether feudal-like institutions in place at that time, such as *buhake*, mitigated the effects of inequalities due to the reciprocal benefits they provided between patron and client<sup>308</sup>, or whether inequalities were only maintained through naked power<sup>309</sup>, but there is a consensus that Rwanda was characterised by a top-down hierarchy of inferior-superior relationships. A similar power structure continues to permeate Rwandan society today. Studies on peasant political consciousness have demonstrated ordinary

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<sup>303</sup> Pages 10-11

<sup>304</sup> Several scholars have written about Habyarimana's authoritarianism: Lugan (1997); Prunier (1995); Reyntjens (1994) and Uvin (1998)

<sup>305</sup> Mwakikagile (2012:240) wrote that Rwanda's first elected President, "*led a regime that was so autocratic that even the Hutu elite who were its primary beneficiaries bitterly resented Kayibanda's authoritarian ways*".

<sup>306</sup> Charting the growth of the Rwandan state from pre-colonial times to the present, Kamatali (2014) identifies colonialism as integral to nurturing authoritarian rule.

<sup>307</sup> Lemarchand (1966) & Longman (2009:42). Reyntjens (1987) wrote about how Belgian colonisers strengthened bureaucratic rule.

<sup>308</sup> Gravel (1965); Kagame (1972), Marquet (1961)

<sup>309</sup> Codere (1962, 1973). See Jeffromas (1997) for an analysis of this view.

Rwandans' sense of inferiority and powerlessness.<sup>310</sup> Likewise, in a recent study on Rwandan youth, Sommers<sup>311</sup> describes how youths talk categorise people as either being "high" or "low", in a way that is not only conceptual but spatial as the villages, where those who are wealthier live, sit on the tops of hills while the poorest live in the swampy valleys below. Likewise, Saint-Jacques students referred to people as being "high" or "low" to indicate their place in the social order, not just between groups but within them, since some students were respected more than others.

In some respects, the organisation of power and patronage at Saint-Jacques is not dissimilar to what has existed in Rwanda since the pre-colonial era. For example, the diffuse power structure in pre-colonial Rwanda, which involved both clan and lineage, meant that people could be a client to more than one patron, meaning, as Marquet points out: *"it is possible to have the support of one chief (or his complicity even) when resisting another"*. Similarly, students at Saint-Jacques could seek protection from a teacher or monitor against the other, or, more often, appeal directly to Father Karenzi, who, as described above, would often oblige them. Secondly, much how some Saint-Jacques students described their relation to Karenzi, Marquet defined such relations as *'paternal'*, writing:

*Parents sovereignly judge what they are going to give their children. Undoubtedly, their social groups force them to secure for their children the protection they need to live... Parents decide without further ado what is best for the child and think that better than he, they know what is 'best for him'*

Although, thirdly, he notes, *"a paternal relation does not exclude profit"*<sup>312</sup>, just as at Saint-Jacques, both the Fathers and monitors justified their treatment of students in terms of knowing what is best for them, while also deriving profit from their positions, as I will explain.

As monitors exercised total control over students' lives it was important to stay in their favour. If a student became ill and needed medical care, it was the monitors who decided whether to allow them access to it. When Kevin broke his ankle playing basketball he was refused permission to call home and continued to walk on it until the holidays two weeks later when his mother took him to hospital. One young man complained of a serious illness for two weeks but was left in the boarding without access to doctors until his condition became serious. He died a few days later in hospital. Sometimes students wanted to call home to ask parents to visit them or bring additional supplies, but this relied on a monitor granting them use of a phone. The school did not supply toilet paper and students frequently ran out, forcing them to wash with their hands and water each time they used the toilet, but students in the monitors' favour were sometimes given paper to use. It was also clear that some students could get away with minor rule-breaking in a way that others could not. Part of this difference in treatment, I am told, was due to the payment of bribes by parents to ensure their sons or daughters were well looked after. They were not called bribes. Kevin's father, Felix, used to buy Valentin drinks, others gave him 'donations' towards his university fees, but the implications were clear.

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<sup>310</sup> Ingeleare (2014) Thompson (2013)

<sup>311</sup> Sommers (2012:32)

<sup>312</sup> Ibid

The priests have a more sophisticated means of extracting profit from the school. In addition to their salaries from the state for acting as Principal and Vice-Principal, they run the school estate and use the profits as they see fit. The estate generates profits from renting out the astro-turf football pitch, the large Salle Polyvent (multi-purpose hall), a large storage room by the library, and a garage where taxi-cars are repaired. Some teachers complained that not enough of this profit was ploughed back in to the school and too much went to enrich the life-style of the priests. Meanwhile, students' parents were regularly being asked to pay extra fees for repairs and construction projects. Father Bertrand seemed particularly astute at business, finding new ways to profit from the school estate including having trees cut down to sell the wood and deliberately overloading the boys' boarding beyond its capacity, and then excluding people from the boarding for minor faults, without reimbursing their fees.

The teachers fought back, however, when he put a stop to the privilege Karenzi had granted them of using the school hall and borrowing the school mini-bus for their family weddings and funerals. I was not used to seeing teachers stand up for themselves, they went two months without pay once and suffered patiently, but on this occasion, they got together and signed a joint letter reminding Father Bertrand that the mini-bus did not belong only to the priests, as it had been given by a Bishop in Belgium as a gift to the whole school. In response, Father Bertrand agreed that it could be used, but only at a commercial rate of 100,000RwF (approximately £100) per day. He also announced plans to increase the rent the teachers paid on the small houses at the back of the school, which he argued had fallen behind market rates. Soon after, the teacher who organised the letter found one his own children excluded from the school for poor marks. This sort of power play, punishing anyone for challenging authority, was effective in securing compliance.

Nothing was punished more severely at Saint-Jacques than challenging authority – a crime known as “insubordination”. For example, a popular Senior Six student who seemed to have a power-struggle with monitor Valentin – perhaps because they are of a similar age – was excluded from the boarding for refusing to kneel for a monitor. He was on his way to evening prayers when Valentin accused him of being late and, despite allowing some students who were literally two paces in front of him to pass, told him to kneel on the ground. The student responded that he had a leg injury and was not able to kneel down but would take a different punishment, however, this was viewed as insubordination and cost him his place in the boarding. Even teachers received zero tolerance for breaking the rules imposed on them. A notice in the staff room requesting teachers carry out certain duties ended with the warning that non-compliance would “*be considered insubordination!!! (sic)*” and instructions on how to invigilate exams came with a list of fines for any mistakes teachers made, suggesting a stick rather than carrot approach to staff management as well as student discipline.

Another example of zero tolerance for insubordination came shortly before I arrived in 2012, when the head boy was excluded. Students get to elect their head boys and girls from a list presented to them by the school leadership. However, on this occasion many complained that the most popular choice for head boy in O-Levels was not given as an option, so Father Karenzi relented and allowed them to have their way. From there on, however, the boy's life was made difficult and when monitor Louise ordered him to kneel as a punishment for something he was innocent of, he refused, with predictable consequences. It is possible his fate may not have been so bad had he not been the Head Boy, but those in positions of

leadership, who other students were expected to follow, came under particular scrutiny by the monitors and priests. Being responsible for the conduct of others they could also be punished for failing in their stewardship. Hence, although some sought leadership positions others actively avoided them. One leader explained, *“(the monitors and priests) make you responsible for the behaviour of others but if you punish too much people will say “he is being a high person” and not want to hang with you, so me, I prefer to keep my friends and not make myself higher than everyone”*.

Unlike in some schools where student-leaders are given special privileges such as better living quarters<sup>313</sup> or a smarter uniform to distinguish them from the rest, there are no obvious benefits given to those at Saint-Jacques who are made responsible for their classes, dorms, the refectory, or other areas, except for status and power. It is not necessary to be officially appointed a leader to be accorded status by other students, however. In the informal economy of power, young men who are physically stronger are given respect and assume patronage over younger students regardless of formal positions. This includes maintaining law and order in the boarding to the benefit of everybody. The students follow an unwritten code not to report rule-breaking to the monitors, but sometimes find it necessary to administer their own justice. For example, the student who stole from me, discussed in Chapter Two<sup>314</sup> was beaten by a few boys in the boarding as a lesson not to steal. Stronger and older students also collect younger ‘clients’ who they protect from excessive bullying.

There is a ritual of mocking Senior One students in their first weeks and months, as well as some students in higher years if they are physically smaller or shy, and forcing them under threat of a beating to wash other students’ clothing and fetch their water. Such work is also sometimes done as ‘favours’ for student leaders in the expectation of protection and help. Senior Two boys are the most likely to bully others. I recall my Senior Ones sharing with me some of their unpleasant experiences of bullying in the boarding, but at the start of their Senior Two year, seemed to regard it as “their turn” to administer punishment, and excitedly anticipated the arrival of the new Senior Ones who they pledged to initiate into the school as they had been. Like Adorno et al<sup>315</sup> described in the *The Authoritarian Personality*, it is common to see the leaders, whether officially assigned or not, bowing down to those above them while kicking down on those below. A few students seem aware of this phenomenon, as it has been explained to me that potentially the reason why Valentin is the most fearsome monitor is because not long before starting in the post he was himself a student at Saint-Jacques and a veteran of the boarding. His school history was known by some of those he went on to oversee as a monitor and passed down in boarding folklore. Students’ nickname him “Birdman” behind his back, in memory of the time Father Karenzi publicly ridiculed his bad singing in church, saying, *“you sound like a bird”*.

Thus, while doing the right thing, in the right place, at the right time was important for surviving school, the strongest lesson students seemed to take from their discipline at Saint-Jacques, was how to navigate a world of power and patronage and the importance of getting on top.

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<sup>313</sup> Simpson (2003)

<sup>314</sup> Page 45

<sup>315</sup> Adorno et al (1950)

## ***Concluding Thoughts***

In this chapter I have described boarding-life at Saints-Jacques – how students’ time, speech and movements are tightly controlled through a regime of surveillance and discipline, intended to keep them in order and make them internalise the attitudes and behaviours desired by school leaders. I likened the school, particularly the boarding, to Foucault’s description of the panopticon prison, in which students have limited opportunities for individual expression, are frequently separated and mixed around to prevent them forming close ties, feel permanently watched, and live in fear of harsh punishment. Such punishments are often, capricious, inconsistent and administered without allowing students the opportunity to justify themselves, which can leave them feeling powerless and insecure.

In this manner, I depicted Saint-Jacques as a microcosm of the Rwandan state, which, like Saint-Jacques, employs authoritarian practises to inscribe itself on the identities of its citizens, subjecting them to a high degree of surveillance, curbing freedoms of association and expression, and dictating even the smallest of everyday activities, such as: what crops to plant; what type of tiles to put on one’s roof; the requirement to register a guest staying over-night; the ban on plastic bags; the ban on wearing flip-flops down-town; or the requirement to keep one’s car clean at all times. Also, like at Saint-Jacques, punishments meted out by the Rwandan authorities can sometimes appear unpredictable, uneven and possibly even unavoidable. As Tertsakian<sup>316</sup> argues, “*all Rwandans are afraid of being arrested one day*”.

Secondly – and again, like in Rwanda generally – I have shown how, despite its character as a “total institution”, Saint-Jacques students do not fully internalise the discourses and discipline practises of the school but retain a space for criticism and resistance. Students distinguish between good punishment, that is corrective, being proportionate to the offense and administered consistently and equally to everyone, and brazen abuses of power designed to keep them subordinate. In the case of the latter, the lesson they learn is not to “behave better” but to avoid being caught out and, even more importantly, to ensure they end up on top in life. Students may play along with the discipline regime and certainly dare not attempt open rebellion, but they quietly and subtly resist it.

It is also worth flagging up here, how students’ perceptions of injustice at Saint-Jacques, which contradict the discourse of unity and fairness in the new Rwanda, are sometimes filtered through the lens of ethnicity – a point I will pick up on in Chapter Seven, where we see students accusing their leaders of harbouring “genocide ideology”.

Another way Saint-Jacques has been shown in this chapter to reflect Rwandan society is in the hierarchical relations that exist between cleaning and grounds staff, teachers, monitors, students and school leaders. The ‘lowest’ in the school – those deemed to be ‘uneducated’, who worked long hours in manual jobs, spoke little English and often wore more traditional clothing – were not treated as part of the school community. Nobody took the trouble to get to know them, much how I observed many families treated their house-boys and girls, who were ever present, yet almost invisible. Tensions were also shown between teachers who, despite their authority in the classroom context, felt looked down upon by their

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<sup>316</sup> Tertsakian (2001)

middle-class students who knew they would soon surpass them. I have suggested that superior-inferior relationships and tensions permeate the whole school.

Thus, I have argued that the “hidden curriculum” at Saint-Jacques trains the students in hierarchy and how to negotiate the sorts of patron-client relationships that have long been an enduring feature of Rwandan society dating back to pre-colonial times.

## Chapter Five

### “I became a dog a today” – The struggle for manhood

Dusk was turning to night as a steady flow of mourners filed through the metal gates down the steep path into the front yard. My thirteen-year old student Kevin and I sat close together on a low wooden bench away from the scattered clusters of plastic garden chairs where guests were conversing and passing out drinks. He was attempting to point out how various people were connected, though I was struggling to keep up. We were joined by Kevin's cousin, Yves, whose younger brother, Manzi, had died in hospital just a few hours earlier following what Kevin had described as a 'suicide by accident'.

"*When are you going to bury him?*" I asked, privately wondering whether the family could afford to give their son a dignified burial.

"*We already did that*", Kevin replied, "*that's why I invited you this afternoon*".

I paused, both surprised at the speed with which the family had organised the burial and the gathering I was now a part of and slightly embarrassed that I had not arrived sooner after Kevin had telephoned.

"*You're both very brave*", I suggested, in a clumsy attempt to make conversation - talking about school or more everyday things did not feel appropriate so soon after the death of a fourteen-year old boy – but also to prompt a response that might help me make sense of the atmosphere around me. Although I had noticed that Yves's mother, who had chosen to stay away from the guests preparing food at the back of the house with a small group of close female relatives, looked numb and emotionless and had the eyes of someone who had spent many hours crying, his father spoke loudly and occasionally broke into laughter with the group of men he sat drinking with, which included his brother-in-law, Kevin's father. Both fathers had called me over a couple of times to "*leave the boys and have a beer with the men*", so I sat with them for a few minutes both times to avoid giving offence.

Kevin seemed to ponder my suggestion that he was brave as he stared at the ground rolling the neck of his Fanta bottle between his hands. Then he muttered, "*I became a dog today*". Yves looked away as if he were not part of our conversation and I asked Kevin what he meant. He responded by telling me about a Rwandan proverb, "*amarira y'umugabo atemba ajya mu nda*", which means that a man's tears fall into his stomach. I understood from this that Kevin was expressing disappointment in himself that earlier in the day he had allowed myself and others to see him cry, which broke the ideals of manhood to which he aspired and made him feel ashamed.

In the five years that have passed since that evening I have watched Kevin grow taller than me and experience some of the physical, mental and social changes that occur with adolescence. We know each other well. Our families have holidayed together. For the final three months of my first visit (after my wife and children returned to England) and on three shorter subsequent visits, I stayed as a guest in Kevin's



family home. In between these visits we communicate regularly through social media and Skype. During the course of our friendship, Manzi's death was not the only occasion that I have seen Kevin cry, but it seemed the one he was most disappointed about – perhaps because formal rituals like funerals and weddings are occasions when social scripts are particularly salient. Nor was it the only occasion that Kevin demonstrated both determination and frustration in his efforts to live up to his ideals about what it is to be a man. In common with other boys at Saint-Jacques, Kevin consciously strives to project his masculinity in a way that would meet the approval of his peers, school authorities and family, particularly his Father, all of whose judgments he seems to worry about.

This chapter is about Saint-Jacques boys' struggles to measure up to popular notions of masculinity. Since masculinity, like femininity and gender, is an abstract and unsettled concept within social sciences, it will first be helpful to briefly clarify how I am using it here. Masculinity encompasses any qualities, social roles, tastes, dispositions or behaviours that particular groups associate with being male, to which men and boys are under pressure to conform in order to be acceptable within that group<sup>317</sup>. Hence, failure to attain dominant ideals of masculinity can bring about ridicule, social exclusion and a loss of self-esteem. I will show that boys' efforts to behave in acceptably 'masculine' ways can also be a source of frustration, anxiety and embarrassment for themselves and their female peers.

Certain 'masculine' ideals, such as wealth, power, aggression, competition and heterosexuality, which Connell<sup>318</sup> identifies as the 'dominant masculinity' within Western culture, seem equally prominent in studies of Sub-Saharan African masculinities<sup>319</sup>. Some scholars of gender propose that manhood follows a universal blueprint comprising a few general themes that can be observed and measured. For example, David & Brannon<sup>320</sup> identified four major themes associated with masculinity, which they called 'No Sissy Stuff' ("the stigma of all stereotyped feminine characteristics", as well as homophobia and hetero-sexism); 'the Big Wheel' ("success, status, and the need to be looked up to"); 'The Sturdy Oak' ("toughness, confidence and self-reliance"); and 'Give 'em hell' ("the aura of aggression, violence and daring"). These were worked into the *Brannon Masculinity Scale*<sup>321</sup>, against which a person's conformity to 'masculine norms' could be scored. Thompson and Pleck<sup>322</sup> soon after developed their Male Role Norms Scale, which posited three dimensions of masculinity – status, toughness and anti-femininity.

Notwithstanding the strong presence of each of these themes in Saint-Jacques students' concepts of masculinity, however, I find this 'global approach'<sup>323</sup> to masculinity unhelpfully essentialist in two respects. Firstly, while there are clearly similarities between different cultures' popular concepts of masculinity, there are also notable differences. For example, modern Anglo-American culture has contested the traditional requirement for men to hide their emotions and constructed a masculine ideal that is both physically strong and dominant while also sensitive<sup>324</sup>, but I never encountered this in Rwanda. Certainly,

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<sup>317</sup> Pollack (1998:xxiii)

<sup>318</sup> Connell (1995, 2001)

<sup>319</sup> Dolan (2003), Morrell (1998 & 2005), Niehaus (2000), Simpson (2003), Weiss (2009)

<sup>320</sup> David & Brannon (1976)

<sup>321</sup> Brannon & Juni (1984)

<sup>322</sup> Thompson and Pleck (1986)

<sup>323</sup> Franklin (1988)

<sup>324</sup> Carol (2003:413-4); Doss & Hopkins (1998)

Kevin considered displays of emotion, even crying at his cousin's funeral, to always be feminine, or worse, something that reduced him to the status of a dog. Secondly, in addition to variations between cultures there are also variations within a culture as well as individuality. As Barker<sup>325</sup> reminds us:

*For every young man who recreates traditional and sometimes violent versions of manhood, there is another young man who lives in fear of violence. For every young man who hits his female partner, there is a brother or son who cringes at the violence he witnesses men using against his sister or mother. For every young man who refuses to use a condom, there is another who discusses sexual health issues with his partner"*

He further observed that some boys perform traditional manhood in some ways, such as acquiring physical strength or seeing themselves as primarily responsible for earning and providing, while resisting it in others, like refusing to participate in bullying smaller boys or sexually dominating women.<sup>326</sup> Such 'resistance', however, might instead be a case of eschewing one prominent version of masculinity in order to meet the requirements of another. For example, clergy and officers in the military – two of the most highly esteemed professions in Rwandan life – might share certain 'masculine' ideals in common, such as self-discipline and a stern style of leadership, but in other ways aspire to very different visions of the ideal male.

For these reasons, rather than treat masculinity as something innate and universal to be objectively defined and measured, this chapter views masculinity as fluid, context dependent and socially constructed, which comes into being through people's iterative performances of socially sanctioned scripts<sup>327</sup>. I will talk, therefore, of 'masculinities' rather than 'masculinity' because there are multiple, different, but interrelated ways of experiencing and performing manhood<sup>328</sup>; and I will talk of gender as something people *do* rather than what they *are*.

A good example of this approach within a Sub-Saharan African educational institution is Humphreys'<sup>329</sup> study of how boys and girls "do" gender in Botswana classrooms. Humphreys describes three different performances of masculinity, which she calls 'good classroom students', 'rebels', and 'docile bodies'; observing how each is discursively constructed within the context of the school. Context is important, because while these masculinities are constructed by students' performances of them, the boundaries which set the 'conditions of possibility'<sup>330</sup> depend on the discursive material available, as well as ritual and mundane practices and social structures both within and outside of the school. Humphreys identifies the schools' colonial legacies and Catholic traditions as particularly impactful in setting these boundaries within and against which masculinities are constructed.

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<sup>325</sup> Barker (2005:6)

<sup>326</sup> Barker (2005:145)

<sup>327</sup> Butler (1990)

<sup>328</sup> Amaya (2007), Bambert (2005), Silverstein & Rashbaum (1994)

<sup>329</sup> Humphreys' (2008, 2013)

<sup>330</sup> Foucault (1980)

By contrast, in his ethnography of a Zambian mission school, Simpson shows how students themselves contribute to the discursive context in which masculinities are constructed. He describes how a distinctively 'Catholic' masculinity that the Marian Fathers who run the school aim to promote is contested by students, who draw on alternative religious discourses and cultural traditions to construct their masculinity differently. For example, the Marian Brother's project to make Mary "*known and loved*"<sup>331</sup>, which required cherishing motherhood and dedicating "*their bodies, lives and wills to the imitation of Mary as a feminine ideal*"<sup>332</sup>, met resistance from students in a context where "*the general and most widely shared attitude towards girls and women... was extremely negative*"<sup>333</sup>. Likewise, the three Marian values of humility, simplicity and modesty, as well as Catholic doctrines, were challenged by the teachings and practices of 'Born Again' and Seventh Day Adventist students, who were able to selectively appropriate some aspects of mission-schooling while retaining a space for themselves to fashion their own masculine identities as "*jacked-up intellectuals*", "*modern Christian-gentlemen*", or "*an elite in the making*".<sup>334</sup>

This understanding, that elite discourses, particularly those conveyed through the school curriculum, are contested as well as adopted by students as they construct their identities, is a recurring theme in this work. In this chapter, it can be seen as I consider how students' strongly held notions of masculinity and femininity are able to coexist with a national discourse about gender equality.

In the next section I look at how this 'gender equality' discourse in the school curriculum obfuscates the social construction of masculinities and their effect on Rwandan social life. In particular, I will show how, although the RPF has achieved nearly unanimous public support for its 'gender equality' program, including among Saint-Jacques students who proudly express their commitment to it, 'equality' is defined in sufficiently narrow terms (as parity of access to learning and jobs) that 'traditional' gender roles in settings like the home remain unchallenged. This popular 'buy-in', I argue, is largely due to how the government and donors discursively link 'gender equality' to national development and modernity in a manner that makes any opposition to it appear unpatriotic or 'backwards'. Also, by viewing the problem of achieving gender equality in terms of overcoming female deficits, the national gender equality discourse helps to obscure the effects of patriarchy and the socially constructed nature of popular masculinities. On a practical level, this can often mean girls trying to compete with boys to get good grades, while carrying greater domestic burdens at home. Meanwhile, boys face greater competition for school places, scholarships and jobs, while the social requirement for them to own a home in order to marry and be considered a 'real man' remains a source of anxiety.

Finally, I note how in addition to promoting "gender equality" the school curriculum briefly includes a concept it calls "gender complementarity", or as students express it, being '*equal but different*'; but it is vague about what this means in a practical sense. I suggest its inclusion in the curriculum serves to pacify any whose religious or traditional values are offended by the promotion of "gender equality", by

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<sup>331</sup> Simpson (2004:18)

<sup>332</sup> Ibid:21

<sup>333</sup> Ibid:25

<sup>334</sup> Ibid:189-90

reassuring them that the concept is strictly limited to the sphere of economics and political rights – leaving space open for compelling and deep-rooted constructions of masculinity to dominate young men’s identities and interactions.

In the second half of the chapter I will describe these different masculinities performed by Saint-Jacques students and attempt to identify some of the different discursive traditions from which they are drawn, including routines and traditions in the home, whose roots can sometimes be traced back to pre-colonial cultural practices; colonialism and the Catholic church; and modern hip-hop youth culture. The main cross-cutting themes, where different masculinities converge and diverge, include the projection of wealth and status, physical and emotional self-control, expectations around social roles and family-life, and gendered attitudes to sexuality and the body. Each of these will also be shown to act as a constraining or enabling factor in boys’ performance of masculinity, since boys are not all equally endowed. Finally, like Humphreys, I will show how boys who find themselves unable to play masculine roles such as ‘the good Catholic student’, or the ‘rebel’ (known at Saint-Jacques as ‘toughs’), often perform as ‘docile bodies’ or find other ways to protect their self-esteem.

My decision to look at gender through the lens of masculinities is mostly an effort to highlight issues affecting girls and boys that are often obscured by more commonly girl-centred approaches to gender; but is also partly due to limitations in the quantity and quality of my data. Though I set out to study boys and girls in equal depth and to include girls in the small group of students I would follow most closely, I was never successful in building trusting relationships with my female students to the extent I was with some of the boys. The parents of some of the boys I worked most closely with actively encouraged us to spend time together. By contrast, parents of girls tended to control and limit our interaction. Students tell me that daughters’ friendships with fellow students, especially older males, are usually tightly supervised while sons are given more freedom – a point I will return to later. My richest insights for this chapter come mainly from one family – Kevin, his father, mother, older sister, twin-sister, and baby brother – because over the months I stayed in their home they became less inhibited by my presence and I was able to observe day-to-day life and spend considerable one-on-one time with each family member. I have been present for important family occasions and mile-stones in the children’s lives, witnessed conflicts, successes and disappointments, as well as mundane routines. It is with their permission that I use those experiences in this chapter.

### ***“Equal but different” – the National Gender Equality Discourse***

In Chapter Three I described my students’ rhetorical commitment to “equality”, or what they call having “no divisions among us” – a situation they juxtapose with Rwanda before the genocide – and how this was both displayed and tested in a class exercise we did during my first weeks as the Senior One English teacher, in which I asked each student to present a short speech and take questions from the class on the subject “Who am I?” If it was not covered in their speeches I made a point of asking what each student wanted to do when they grew up. Their answers surprised me. Coming, as I do, from a society in which young people’s choices about school subjects and future careers are heavily gendered, I expected to find

the same; but with the exception of becoming a soldier, which was only popular among certain boys, gender seemed unimportant, with girls just as likely as boys to say they aspire to become doctors, computer programmers, electricians, scientists, engineers, bankers, lawyers or business people. This appears to be replicated nationally as Ministry of Education statistics show no significant variation between the numbers of male and female students opting for science, humanities, or economics streams at upper secondary level.<sup>335</sup> Though, I should note, this is not the case in vocational training schools where masonry, carpentry, and metal work classes are mainly filled with young men while young women mostly learn needlework. This highlights how the construction of gender roles can vary according to economic status.

The 'social attitudes' survey of nearly one hundred Senior One students also revealed the relative unimportance of gender in influencing most Saint-Jacques students' decisions about education and future occupation. Seventy-nine per cent of boys and eighty-one per cent of girls indicated that they disagree with the statement that *"it is more important for a boy to get a good education than it is for a girl"*, of which the majority in both cases 'strongly' disagreed. There was nearly as much opposition to the statement that *"domestic jobs like cooking and cleaning should be done by women"*. When, in class, I tried to probe, *"but don't you think there are some jobs men just do naturally better than women?"* my students became all the more adamant, several saying with a sense of conviction, *"No teacher. We are equal"*.

The students' insistence that boys and girls are "equal" seemed at odds with my own observations of gendered social expectations, but it makes sense when one understands the discursive environment in which they declare their support for "gender equality"; what they mean by "being equal"; how "gender equality" is conceptualized in the school curriculum; which traditions and practices it affects; and, importantly, what aspects of gendered identities and roles it leaves alone. I will address these questions with reference to official documents and curriculum materials, particularly the government-produced *'Political Education for Secondary Schools'* textbooks One and Two<sup>336</sup> (PESS 1 and PESS 2) I was given in my first week at Saint-Jacques to use with my Senior Two political science class. Such textbooks cannot be taken as a guide to exactly what students think, or even everything they are taught, but they do tell us what the government *intends* students to learn, especially as the National Curriculum Development Centre, which produces the mandatory official texts, is closely scrutinized by senior political leaders. The examples I will cite from them are not exhaustive but merely indicative of the discourse found in a large quantity of such material. Together, they indicate that Saint-Jacques students' emphatic public commitment to what they call "gender equality" might be attributed to how it has been defined and promoted by the RPF government and international donors, firstly, as something integral to Rwanda's program of national economic development; secondly, as a human right that had been denied under the pre-genocide regime; and thirdly, as a marker of modernity; such that to oppose the RPF government's efforts to achieve gender parity in school enrolment and attainment is to present oneself as anti-development, unpatriotic, and 'backwards'.

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<sup>335</sup> MINEDUC (2014)

<sup>336</sup> NCDC (2008a, 2008b)

## **National Development**

“Gender equality” is primarily talked about in the school curriculum and government policy documents in relation to national development, with a focus on enabling women and girls to participate in taxable productive activity in order to harness their human capital for the benefit of the national economy.

This is also considered to be the principal purpose of education in general, since growth in higher skilled human capital, whether male or female, is particularly important in an economy like Rwanda’s, which lacks natural resources and has a large amount of surplus agricultural labour. Rwanda’s PRSP and Vision 2020 development plans envisage Rwanda becoming the technology, communications and financial hub of East Africa, modelled on Singapore<sup>337</sup>. The importance of educated citizens for Rwanda’s development is taught in schools. For example, module five of PESS 1 teaches that the first objective of education is: *“preparing the learner to become a complete, instructed and ready person who is useful to the society”*<sup>338</sup>. A sub-section then explains the *“role of education in national development”* as enabling people to *“acquire modern techniques and methods... to achieve high production and a rational management of resources”, and “participate in the management of their country”*. In a 2013 statistical report, Rwanda’s Ministry of Education describes its overall mission as to *“transform the Rwandan citizens into skilled human capital for the socio-economic development of the country by ensuring equitable access to quality education...”*<sup>339</sup>. Thus, *“quality education”*, is to make Rwandan youths more productive, while *“ensuring equitable access”*, whether on the basis of ethnicity, class or gender, is about making sure that no productive potential is lost.<sup>340</sup>

In a unit titled ‘Gender and Development’ in PESS 2, students are taught about the centrality of ‘gender equality’ to ensuring more citizens are economically active. It opens with the following statement: *“Any durable development for any organized society depends on real and active participation of all its members. Within this context it is necessary to take account the (sic) gender equality.”*<sup>341</sup> Similarly, a government Girl’s Education Policy document states that, *“the empowerment of women through education and training, which is to the advantage of the Nation, is the roadmap to development.”*<sup>342</sup> It is noteworthy that gender equality in education is not described in terms of any benefit to or emancipation of the girl or women as an individual, but in terms of what she can bring to the collective through her greater “participation” in the national economy.

Likewise, gender inequality is not discussed in relation to the dominant discourses or cultural shibboleths governing social expectations of masculinity or femininity, but as the outcome of a series of deficits – tangible handicaps or barriers of some kind that hold girls back. In a political science unit titled “Unity and

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<sup>337</sup> Ulrich, L & Thomas, R.S. (2014).

<sup>338</sup> NDCD (2008a:107)

<sup>339</sup> MINEDUC (2014:1)

<sup>340</sup> Tikly (2004) has gone as far as to describe this approach as a “new imperialist” project to make populations economically useful to capitalism. See also Tikly (2011)

<sup>341</sup> NDCD (2008b:55)

<sup>342</sup> MINEDUC (2008:8)

Reconciliation”, which discusses “*the promotion of gender equality*” as one of the government’s “*strategies for preventing genocide*”, PECS 1 states:

*“In order to achieve (gender equality) it is necessary to reconsider the current status of the Rwandan women, who seems to be kept in dependence that handicaps her from contributing valuable participation in all domains of national life. The participation of the women in the development of the country and in the process of decision-making from her current status of just a mother, is necessary to consolidate unity and reconciliation of Rwandans...”*<sup>343</sup>

Yet the policy focus, in this regard, is on ensuring parity between male and female students in enrolment rates and exam results from primary school through to university, where boys set the standard of normal expectations towards which girls are thought to need lifting. Consequently, boys are typically absent from discussions about gender policy, because ‘inequality’ is not thought about in terms of patriarchy or constructed notions of masculinity, but as a residual deficit in girls that needs plugging.

Government policies to increase female representation in schools have therefore focussed on increasing inputs to provide targeted support, and the removal of ‘barriers’. Inputs include the provision of subsidies and scholarships for areas where female completion rates are low; scholarships to attract girls into male-dominated subject areas; and building girl-only boarding schools. Policies to make schooling more female-friendly include identifying and fast-tracking talented female teachers into management roles and ensuring separate sanitation facilities are available for girls<sup>344</sup>. At Saint-Jacques all leadership roles were still occupied by men, though separate female sanitation facilities had been built. Also, the original dining room had been transformed into a girl’s boarding, though it had much less capacity and was less suitable than the boy’s boarding. Another policy, which is presented as a form of ‘affirmative action’, but which boys sometimes complained about, was that grade boundaries for advancing on to the next stage of learning, and to obtain subsidised university tuition, were set lower for girls than for boys. These measures are all geared toward achieving a key goal of Vision 2020 that in the near future half of university students will be female.<sup>345</sup>

This way of conceptualising “gender equality” in education in terms of bridging deficits to achieve parity between girls and boys, is by no means unique to the Rwandan government or Vision 2020. It also reflects some of the global and cross-national influences on Rwandan education policy, such as UNESCO’s “Education For All” targets, which required gender parity by 2005 and gender equality by 2015; the Millennium Development Goals Two (universal primary education) and Three (gender equality); and more recently Sustainable Development Goal Four (Quality Education) and Five (Gender Equality). Rwanda’s largest bi-lateral donor, the UK’s Department for International Development, is particularly committed to the Rwandan education sector and made attainment of the MDGs the cornerstone of its aid policy.<sup>346</sup> Accordingly, Rwanda’s progress towards these targets has been considerably above the Sub-Saharan

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<sup>343</sup> NDCD (2008a:160)

<sup>344</sup> MINEDUC (2008)

<sup>345</sup> MINECOFIN (2000:25)

<sup>346</sup> See DfID (2000) and Schweisfurth (2006)

Africa average, for which the RPF-led government has been widely praised. Commitment to ‘gender equality’ in education is, therefore, an important source of government legitimacy and credit with the international community.

Rwanda achieved gender parity for access to primary education in 2001, with girls having a slightly higher completion rate (finishing all six years) but boys having a marginally higher transition rate (moving on to high school)<sup>347</sup>. A similar pattern can be seen for the lower and upper secondary schooling. However, boys still perform markedly better than girls on O-Level and A-levels exams following three years of lower and upper secondary schooling respectively, which MINEDUC acknowledges as an on-going challenge. This suggests that beyond parity of access are issues of quality which are yet to be fully addressed. Nonetheless, as Aikman and Rao<sup>348</sup> have suggested, rather than go about this by identifying linear relationships between various gender “gaps” and attainment, it is more fruitful to consider, “*how gender equalities in education are enmeshed in issues of power and identity and how educational processes are influenced by social, cultural and historical contexts*”.

Such issues of power and identity are unlikely to be addressed by the ‘gender equality’ envisaged by the state, which begins and ends with the incorporation of more women into economically productive, not to mention taxable, activity. Equally, however, it is this ‘development’ objective that makes the Rwandan government’s gender equality program so uncontroversial and widely accepted, since anyone not committed to the education of girls and promotion of women’s rights is thought to oppose the modernisation of the Rwandan economy. Indeed, the ‘Gender and Development’ unit in PESS 2 explains how such “*a person’s or a society’s mentality can slow down National Development*”<sup>349</sup>

### ***Human rights and post-genocide reconciliation***

As well as being necessary for economic development, ‘gender equality’ is presented in Rwandan classrooms in the language of human rights, bestowed on Rwandan citizens by a benevolent RPF leadership in contrast to the division, impunity, and oppression of previous regimes. As with other themes I have looked at in this work, government discourse is both future orientated, about being modern or “civilised”, while also looking back to a long-lost past to be recovered post-genocide. For example, in a politics module about “Unity and Reconciliation”, a section listing “Strategies for Preventing Genocide”, states that:

*“The Government of National Unity does not cease to reaffirm the significance it dedicates to education. The Government is convinced that education should aim at recreating in the youth values that were lost during the recent history of the country”*<sup>350</sup>

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<sup>347</sup> MINEDUC (2014, 2015)

<sup>348</sup> Aikman and Rao (2012:212)

<sup>349</sup> NCDC (2008a:56)

<sup>350</sup> NCDC (2008a:158)



These “lost values” include not only harmonious relations between Hutu and Tutsi but equal rights of all kinds. As with ethnicity, colonialism is said to have reified and exacerbated gender divisions. For example, a module on ‘Discrimination’ in PESS 1 describes the impact of colonial schooling on gender inequality in this way:

*“Even when schools for girls were founded, they were exclusively taught domestic activities aimed at preparing young girls to become wives for Astrida secondary school leavers, who were educated to serve in the colonial administration. Thus, the school did not improve the women situation very much. Instead of reducing gender disparities tat (sic) already existed, colonizers introduced new ones and encouraged the ones that already existed”<sup>351</sup>*

Looking at the post-independence period, although the textbook acknowledges efforts to make schooling more gender equal, it suggests these efforts were unsuccessful due to parents’ *“reluctance to send their daughters to school”*, adding: *“Most parents were still shut up in the old-fashioned mentality that views the girl’s education as useless. If they had to make a choice, they only sent boys rather than girls.”<sup>352</sup>* This use of the words *“old-fashioned mentality”* to describe cultural opposition to gender parity in schooling echoes Kagame’s pejorative description of peasants’ ‘mentalities’ discussed in the opening chapter.<sup>353</sup> As I discuss in greater detail in the next chapter, about students’ attitudes to witch-craft, ‘traditional’ views were associated with being ‘backwards’ and “uncivilised” – everything Saint-Jacques students tried hard not to appear to be. By contrast, I found that “gender equality” was so strongly identified with Kagame and the ruling RPF’s efforts to reshape Rwanda as a liberal-democratic state, that publicly announcing one’s commitment to giving girls equal rights to school places or work opportunities, was to present oneself as patriotic, pro-development and modern.

Students’ essays contrasting pre-genocide Rwanda with its transition under the RPF, frequently cite the introduction of gender equality on their list of positive reforms. They are proud to be able to claim a parliament which is nearly two-thirds female, well aware that western countries have made much more limited progress on achieving gender balance in political representation. Students also demonstrated an awareness and appreciation for how, under Kagame, “gender equality” has been enshrined in law. In what could be defined as a “rights-based” approach<sup>354</sup> the 2003 Constitution commits the people of Rwanda to *“ensuring equal rights between Rwandans and between women and men without prejudice to principles of gender equality and complementarity in national development.”<sup>355</sup>*

On this, hangs many more tangible reforms giving women legal rights that were previously denied, such as freedom from domestic violence; rights over children born outside of marriage; the rights of widowed women and orphaned daughters to inherit; and abortion rights. In addition, government funded programs target help for the victims of sexual violence; women-only micro-finance schemes and cooperatives have

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<sup>351</sup> NCDC (2008a:135-6)

<sup>352</sup> *ibid*

<sup>353</sup> Page 13

<sup>354</sup> McGowen (2012)

<sup>355</sup> The 2003 Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda, Preamble, Paragraph 10.

been developed to help women improve their financial positions; and quotas exist to guarantee female participation in political life. These measures, some of which grew directly out of aftermath of the genocide, are framed in the language of human rights, and in such a way that to openly disagree with girls having equal educational opportunities to boys is to display the sort of mind-set that is held responsible for the poverty and conflict in the past.

However, a narrow focus on granting equal gender rights is no guarantee to achieving equality of opportunities or outcomes, because it risks “*neglecting wider economic and social contexts which hinder and impede girls’ ability to realise their rights*”<sup>356</sup>. This context includes the way constructed notions of masculinity and femininity influence the norms that govern social and familial relations. For example, Gervais et al<sup>357</sup> report that despite legal changes allowing women to inherit, many orphaned girls and widows either lack the resources to defend their land or property rights in the courts, or they choose to forego their rights for fear of souring relationships with male relatives and communities they may rely on, who are often resistant to changing customs. The same could be said of girls’ abilities to access their rights to education, as much depends on the attitudes of parents and the economic choices families must make about where best to place their resources. This is not to suggest that no women have been empowered by new gender-equality rights, but that the picture is uneven, because a women’s ability to claim her rights and access justice depends greatly on her level of education and social and economic capital.

A similar point could be made about girls’ access to quality schooling. Observing the families of Saint-Jacques students I found that the rhetorical commitment of parents and students of both genders to girls and boys having an equal right to a quality education was not always completely matched in practice. Parents placed such high value on the education of all their children that differences in their attitudes towards their sons verses their daughters were subtle and not easy to observe. Parents who could, would set aside large proportions of their income to buy both their sons and daughters the best education they could afford. Nonetheless, the strategic choices made by larger families, who struggle to afford sending all their children to good schools, or require older siblings to watch young ones, are revealing. Older sons are more likely than older daughters to be boarding students, which, it is worth bearing in mind, is widely believed to offer a better education.

For example, although Stella’s parents were very strict in their requirement that she bring home good grades each term, she was made a day scholar at Saint-Jacques partly to be walking distance from home in order to help run the house and watch over the youngest two of her four brothers. Meanwhile, her two high-school age brothers were sent away to expensive and even more prestigious Petite Seminaires.

Kevin had an older and twin sister at a prestigious Catholic girls’ school, and a younger brother at a private Parents’ Primary School. As Kevin’s father, Felix, began to struggle financially due to ill health, he became unable to afford to pay for all of the children’s school fees. His first priority was to pay for primary-aged children, probably because private schools are less forgiving about non-payment and also because, like many parents, he saw a higher quality primary education as essential to helping them be competitive in the National Primary Leavers Exams in order to gain a place in one of the top public secondary schools.

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<sup>356</sup> Aikman and Rao (2012:214)

<sup>357</sup> Gervais et al (2009)

After that, however, Kevin's education seemed the highest priority with his tuition and boarding fees being paid while his older sisters went into debt to their school. This affected both of them when they came to progress to their next level of education (A-levels and university) as the school refused to release their leaving reports until the debts were paid and were it not for the help of a benefactor they would not have been.

Also, unlike his sisters who were day-scholars, when Kevin joined Saint-Jacques as a Senior One student, Felix insisted on him entering the boarding because he believed it would help him achieve better grades, despite this being against his mother's wishes and against the teachings of their church leaders. This is not to say that Felix was disinterested in the education of his daughters – More than once, when his oldest daughter came home with lower than expected grades, in his anxiety that she work harder, he forced her to lie on the ground while he beat her with a stick, which, she explained, was because he feared she would fail to get a university scholarship, struggle to marry well, and end up being a burden – but ultimately, when it came to tough financial opportunity costs, Felix prioritised the education of his son over his daughters.

### ***The idea of Complementarity***

Such discrepancies between students' insistence that boys and girls are equal in their rights to education and jobs, and some of the choices made by parents that in practice favour boys, does not imply to me that my students' positive espousal of "gender equality" in the classroom is insincere, or that in class they are merely reciting from a public script. Rather, it represents a clash between students' ideals and social reality, as they find themselves caught between two dissonant discourses – the "gender equality" promoted by the state and international donors as 'development', 'modernity' and 'human rights', verses popular or traditional gender norms. I suggest that one of the reason students are so able to accommodate the state's "gender equality" discourse with their experience of differential gender roles in the home lies in the narrowness of its scope and its inclusion of an idea it calls "gender complementarity".

The term 'gender complementarity' appears coupled with 'gender equality' in the 2003 constitution (quoted above) as a 'principle in national development'. The unit on Gender and Development in PESS 2 explains the fit between these concepts, where it says:

*"Promoting a woman is done by recognising her rights. Gender promotion means the relevant distribution of responsibilities between men and women such that they may complement each other in National Development Activities"*

*And*

*"Both sexes are naturally complementary. For example: neither of the two can have child on his/her own. It is only through their union that they may have children. Complementing their potentialities increases their chances of success and yields good results."<sup>358</sup>*

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<sup>358</sup> NCDC (2008b:57)

It is unclear whether this is meant to acknowledge the contribution that domestic work makes towards national development, or simply to suggest that men and women, though equal in worth and rights, are innately different, and possess diverse qualities that make each gender better suited to certain types of non-domestic productive activity than the other.

It is difficult to see how the idea of ‘complementarity’ affects gender rights in any practical sense, or how this assertion of gender differences fits with other parts of the curriculum materials which teach that gender is socially constructed. The Political Science curriculum lists as an objective not only that teachers “*demonstrate the necessity of gender complementarity*” but also that they “*demonstrate the notion of gender*”, including the difference between *sex*, as biologically determined, innate and unchangeable, and *gender* as “*socially defined characteristics*” which “*change(...) within time, place, social class, age, religion...*”<sup>359</sup> ‘Gender complementarity’ and the ‘social construction of gender’ are not presented as alternative perspectives but as facts, as if there are no potential contradictions between them. However, neither idea is particularly well explained in the curriculum materials and it seems likely that their inclusion reflects the contentious nature of gender equality and competing interests of different groups influencing their production. I observed that passages in the text books defining gender as socially constructed were neither used in class nor understood by students, but probably reflect the discourse of western academics and donors who advise MINEDUC. Meanwhile, the discourse of ‘complementarity’ was much more common and seemed to echo the teachings of many religious leaders who used it to explain how men and women are equal before God yet have different ‘natural’ roles.

Whenever I heard students make comments I considered sexist, which was often, I used to challenge them by repeating their own words back at them, such as, “but I thought boys and girls were equal?” To this, one boy replied, in a manner that was typical of many, “*Yes teacher, we are equal. Equal, but different*”. Though only a minor part of the government’s approach to gender equality, which appears only discursive and not embodied in any policies or programs, ‘equal but different’ seemed to define how most students and their families did gender. In the second half of this chapter, I describe what these differences mean, paying particular attention to boys and the various masculine ideals they must acquire to successfully perform manhood in their homes, at school, and within their peer groups.

### ***Performing Masculinity in the home, school and peer group***

As I set out in the opening section of this chapter, there is no single concept of masculinity to which boys at Saint-Jacques are expected to conform, rather there are a number of masculinities, sometimes nuanced in their differences, sometimes contradictory, all constructed though a myriad of social, cultural and historical forces, both material and discursive. These ‘masculinities’ are complex, fluid and not easy to define. Nonetheless, for the purposes of this analysis I will identify three varieties of masculinity in the lives of boys at Saint-Jacques, each with its own set of challenges, opportunities and risks. The first is the masculinity boys learn in the home, particularly from their fathers and other older male relatives, as they strive to develop the attitudes, qualities and habits associated with the transition from boyhood to manhood, and eventually to achieve independence and become capable of fulfilling the social

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<sup>359</sup> NCDC (2008b:55-56)

expectations of marriage and fatherhood. I will call this masculinity, *'the man of the house'*. The second is the version of manhood espoused in the teachings of the Catholic church, which, I will show, can be found everywhere at Saint-Jacques, embedded in traditions, rituals, organisational structures and mundane practices. I will refer to it as being a *'good Christian gentleman'*. The Kinyarwanda terms for such a man would be *umugabo wifite* (a man of means), *umugabo wiyubashye* (a man with self-respect), or a man who has *uburere* (culture/education). Thirdly, I look at a form of anti-establishment masculinity that takes inspiration from youth hip-hop culture, which Saint-Jacques students refer to as being a "tough". Finally, I will discuss the case of some boys who struggled to attain any of these, derogatively referred to by other students as "losers", who, in the socially competitive context of Saint-Jacques, became 'docile bodies'.

### *The man of the house*

In the opening vignette I described Kevin's disappointment with himself for crying following the death of his cousin, Manzi. I came to understand that his regret was not because he thought a man should never cry at all, but that, in that context, he believed the men in the family had a duty to control their emotions, in order, as he put it, to *"stay strong for the women"*. This emotional self-control or 'toughness' that Kevin associated with being a man, is about more than merely the aesthetics of masculine performance, therefore, as it relates to a man's ability to fulfil his expected role within the household. In our conversations and other experiences like this, Kevin seemed determined to prove himself capable of performing the attitudes and attributes he associated with being a 'real man', not only in preparation for a time, far in the future, when he would have his own household, but in nervous anticipation of a time, much sooner, when he might become the 'man of the house' to his mother, sisters and baby brother.

Felix, Kevin's father, was in bad health and his life seemed in decline. Kevin often spoke fondly about his primary school years, when they lived in the big house next door, with tiled floors, a real toilet and a bathroom. Back then, his father was a civil servant, owned a couple of kiosk shops, and comfortably sent his children to good private schools. It was a time, Kevin recalled, when *"we used to eat meat all the time, and my Dad had many friends who were high-up in the RPF"*. In more recent years, he had been made redundant from his job, sold one kiosk to repay debts, and had to employ someone else to run the other, leaving little profit, because he was too ill to work full-time. Kevin's mother became the main earner, and Felix found it necessary to rent out their home, moving his family into a smaller and less comfortable mud-brick house he parcelled off from their garden. Worse than all this for Kevin were the nights he would listen to his father in pain, retching and coughing up blood. The family's increasing financial insecurity and Felix's deteriorating health seemed to leave Kevin wanting to grow up quickly, 'become a man', and join his father in fulfilling his obligations as the head of the household. We often talked about how he felt a need to work hard and become capable of making money. He also told me with pride about the night Felix stayed up with him, talking into the early hours, advising him about his future and giving him a charge to look after his mother and sisters one day, when he would no longer be there.

The anxiety of losing the protection of a parent early in life was not unusual. A few of my students had already lost their fathers to diseases or 'poisoning'<sup>360</sup>, others saw them endure chronic health conditions,

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<sup>360</sup> See Chapter Seven

and many parents were beyond their middle ages. For Kevin, like other boys at Saint-Jacques, this brought home that ‘becoming a man’ meant more than displaying socially prescribed ‘masculine’ traits, important as that was to their self-esteem; it meant fulfilling functions that are fundamental to sustaining life. Though men and women were widely agreed to be equal in their rights to educational and work opportunities, they were not deemed equal in their responsibilities to the family. There remained a strong social expectation that women be the nurturers and home-makers while men protect and provide.

In his research on the lives of ordinary Rwandan youth, Sommers<sup>361</sup> describes how difficult it is for young men to accomplish this. He explains that in order to attain the socially recognised status of manhood, a male youth must first build or purchase a home, which is considered a prerequisite for a legal marriage, and then children; however, owing to low wages and the effect of strict government building regulations increasing the costs, most young men find themselves stuck on a treadmill, forever working towards a goal they doubt they will ever achieve. Drawing inspiration from Utas<sup>362</sup> who coined the term “*Youthmen*”<sup>363</sup> to describe young men in West Africa who are too old to be youths but have not yet achieved the cultural requisites of manhood; as well as Singerman’s<sup>364</sup> description of youth in Egypt and the Middle-East, who must save for a socially acceptable marriage well beyond their adolescence, as being in a state of “*waithood*”, Sommers argued that many Rwandan youth are in a situation of “*Endless Liminality*”. The individual and social consequences of a generation in their twenties and thirties unable to gain social recognition as men and women, or to live respectable family lives, are severe, and include “*illegitimate children, prostitution, the spread of HIV/AIDS, crime, a high urban growth rate and an increase in school drop-out rates*”<sup>365</sup>.

Unlike the youth in Sommers’ research, who, representative of the majority of youth in Rwanda, were mainly rural poor, destitute or single migrants to the city, the boys at Saint-Jacques had better than average prospects. Most were urban and middle-class, and even those from poor backgrounds who were there on scholarships had higher expectations by virtue of being Saint-Jacques students.<sup>366</sup> Even still, many boys at Saint-Jacques showed anxiety and doubts about fulfilling their hopes of becoming ‘men’ in the sense of being able to provide materially for their future wives and children. Few expected to be married before the age of thirty – more than their whole lives again away. Most anticipated five more years of high school, assuming they did not have to repeat a year; followed by a struggle to get a university scholarship and adequate funds to pay any excess tuition fees, which could take a couple of years; and then, following university study, preferably overseas, badly paid or unpaid internships until they would get their first break in a professional job. Only then could they begin saving for a house, but this would be made difficult by the pressure many young men feel to buy the right skinny jeans, shoes, smart phones, sun glasses and other fashion symbols that are seen as essential to appear successful and attractive to girls. Thus, although Saint-Jacques boys had better prospects than the average Rwandan youth, they also had greater expectations placed on them. For them to become ‘real men’, and in some cases keep up with

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<sup>361</sup> Sommers (2012)

<sup>362</sup> Utas (2003)

<sup>363</sup> See also Momoh (1999)

<sup>364</sup> Singerman (2007)

<sup>365</sup> *Ibid*:xvii

<sup>366</sup> Chapter 3 explains how Saint-Jacques is considered a “School of Excellence”

their fathers, it was not enough to build a simple house, they had to prove they could provide a woman with comforts and status.

Gendered expectations before marriage continued into domestic life. In reality, with few exceptions, my students came from homes where both parents worked for an income, usually in jobs of similar status to each other, but this fact seemed to have little bearing on expected roles within the home. After long days at work mothers were still responsible for buying and preparing food, clothes washing, keeping the house clean, and the nurture of children. Fathers were still ultimately responsible for the financial security of the family and making the decisions about housing, school fees, and vehicles. Part of this role seemed to include building and maintaining friendship networks based on reciprocal obligations, which could be called upon in times of need. This necessitated the father to spend large amounts of time away from the home visiting friends in their houses or bars, and to spend a portion of the household income keeping a stock of alcohol to serve visiting guests, even when money was tight. In addition, men were responsible for home or vehicle repairs and upgrades and physical security, though it was rare to see the man doing the labour himself as he would usually pay someone else while acting as overseer. Women could also employ 'houseboys or girls to assist with domestic tasks, or bring someone in to do the laundry, but normally performed at least some of the labour themselves.

The gendered responsibilities of fathers and mothers patterns the expectations they have of their sons and daughters and shapes every-day practices in the home. One of the best opportunities to witness the dynamics of family life was at meal times, when conventions and routine practices which may have been self-evident to the families, revealed insights into gender roles as well as the 'pecking order' in the home. Over the course of my fieldwork many students' parents invited me to family dinners. No matter which family I visited, the experience was always similar. The following account from my field diary of the first time I ate with Kevin's family is representative of experiences in other students' homes. It took place a few weeks before the funeral I described earlier.

*"Kevin phoned yesterday on behalf of his mother to invite me to join them for dinner today. I took a motorbike-taxi to a well-known hotel on the tarmacked road, where I found Kevin already waiting to escort me the rest of the way. As I followed him down steep slopes, through the maze of back allies and open storm drains that ran between the houses, he teased me, "we're going to give you proper Rwandan food. I don't think you'll be able to eat it".*

*We entered the front yard and Kevin's mother, Marie-Noel, came out of the small kitchen adjacent to the house, to greet me. "Muraho Sam" (a formal Kinyarwanda greeting), she said, offering me her forearm to shake as her hands were dirty from cooking. She invited me to sit in the lounge and ordered Kevin to go and buy me a drink. I was left with Kevin's twin sister who was watching TV. After a few minutes, Christelle, his older sister arrived and we chatted for a few minutes until Marie-Noel called her name from the kitchen and she promptly left, presumably to help. Kevin reappeared with a Fanta citron and a straw and told me to drink.*

*A few minutes later Felix, arrived in the doorway. I stood straight up and he greeted me in French “Ca va Sam? Soyez le bienvenu dans notre petit maison”<sup>367</sup> as he held me by the elbows and bowed his forehead into mine three times. He ushered for us to sit again and he asked me about my time so far in Rwanda while the girls and Marie-Noel walked in and out placing steel serving dishes on the table. Then Christelle, came into the salon carrying a basin and a jug of hot water. She passed me the soap and said “Sam, we are ready to eat”. She poured a small amount of warm water onto my hands while I lathered the soap, then rinsed them for me. After this she went to Felix, and then Kevin, doing the same. Once all our hands were clean and the whole family was assembled around the coffee table, Felix got everybody’s attention, thanked me for coming and offered a blessing on the food.*

*After the blessing he invited me to serve myself and he did the same, followed by Kevin. The several steel dishes contained rice, beans, a red sauce with chunks of meat in, cabbage, and large ball of steamy dough made from cassava flour called ubugali, which was placed in the centre. I only took small portions, partly out of uncertainty but also because I wanted to ensure everyone had enough to eat. So, I was surprised by the amount Felix and Kevin loaded onto their plates. Only after the men were served the girls and Marie-Noel dished their food. Everyone ate with their fingers, leaning forward, and breaking off bits of ubugali, which they used to pick up rest of their food. The family joked together in Kinyarwanda and commented on how little food I was taking. There was no cutlery, and they laughed as I tilted my head right back trying to drop rice into my mouth. Marie-Noel offered me a fork, which made me realise they did own cutlery, so I wondered if this was part of some test, or a joke to make me think they eat with their fingers. Seeing the teenagers laughing made me determined to assimilate so I politely declined the fork and continued eating with my fingers.”*

Months later, when I lived with the family and we ate together every evening, I was able to see which aspects of this experience reflected their normal routine, and which were because I was a guest and a *Muzungu*. I discovered that eating rice with their fingers was unusual, but not unheard of, though fingers were always used for eating ubugali; red meat was a luxury, only eaten once or twice a week, while a more common source of protein were tiny dried fishes eaten whole; there was usually less variety; and when there were no visitors, we were usually left to wash our own hands at the outside tap. However, much of what happened was very routine. Felix and Kevin never helped in the preparation of food, which was always left to the females. The convention that males serve themselves first was always observed. They always seemed to take large portions and the best bits of meat without much thought for what represented an equal share. I felt embarrassed about this so used to insist on waiting until the end to take my food. On one occasion when they had potato chips, which were everybody’s favourite, the bowl was emptied before the last of us were served, leaving only rice. Later Kevin, who had noticed, asked me why I did not take some chips with him. I told him I felt bad that his sisters would get none, but he explained

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<sup>367</sup> Translation: “How are you, Sam? Feel welcome in our little home”.



to me, “*Sam, don’t you know, the women eat the best food in the kitchen while they are preparing it? That’s why we take first in the house.*”

We often joked about such cultural misunderstandings and differences. Everyone found it amusing when I sat outside on a Saturday morning hand-washing my clothes and insisted I was doing it wrong as “*Muzungu* only know how to use machines”. Kevin and his father used to tease me for doing what they called “women’s work” like washing up, but the girls would tease back that they prefer *Muzungu* men who know better than Rwandan men how to treat a woman. Marie-Noel would also point out the teachings of their church, that men should play a role in the home. These conversations often turned to “gender equality” and how culture was changing. I recorded one occasion when Kevin’s family teased him over dinner that while in bygone times, as the oldest son, he would have inherited his father’s land, in the modern Rwanda this would now go to his oldest sister, Christelle. The inference in their teasing was that his status had been diminished. The family concluded that Christelle would share everything equally between the siblings. When I later asked Kevin how he felt about everything being split between four siblings one day he emphasised to me that he was happy with the modern way of inheriting because it was important to him that his sisters were looked after. By being positive about equal inheritance rights, Kevin played the role of a man who puts his family first, thereby compensating for any sense of lost male privilege with the performance of a masculine ideal as a ‘provider’. This is not to suggest anything disingenuous on Kevin’s part. His love for his sisters was real, as was his sense that it fell to him as the oldest son to ensure his siblings’ well-being.

Assuming the responsibilities of a ‘man of the house’ required boys to develop a set of attitudes and dispositions deemed necessary to perform the role well. Before moving on to describe Catholic versions of manhood, I will describe three qualities in particular, which I will call *resourcefulness*, *emotional hardness* and *authority*, and show how boys’ relationships with their fathers seemed instrumental in developing them.

I described in the opening vignette how at the funeral Kevin’s father and uncle called me to “*leave the boys*”, who were drinking ‘Fanta’ (the generic term in Rwanda for a soft drink), to “*have a beer with the men*”. As some recent ethnographic studies<sup>368</sup> have shown, the practice of beer brewing and drinking in various African societies is important in the making of self and demarking boundaries of age, class, gender, and even ethnicity. Likewise, De Lame<sup>369</sup> has explained how in earlier times in Rwanda, only women made the Sorghum beer drank at the festivals marking fertility, such as births and naming ceremonies, while men produced the banana-beer exchanged for cash; marking a boundary between domestic and economic spheres.

Kevin and Yves, were determined to start drinking beer as a marker of maturity. A few months after the funeral, when our families spent a few nights away in Akagera together, Kevin and Yves started rejecting Fanta and instead chose to drink Apple Malt, a non-alcoholic cider-like drink. When that was not available and we had a crate of different Fantas, Kevin took the only tonic water, declaring, “*Sweet drinks are for kids*”. A few months on from this Kevin and Yves started secretly drinking Primus beer and small bottles

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<sup>368</sup> van Wolputte, S. & Fumanti, M. (Eds.) (2010)

<sup>369</sup> De Lame (2004:316)

of coffee flavoured whiskey, bought with small change they collected. When he had a sore throat, Kevin referred to this as his “medicine” as it burned its way down, and he seemed to relish in my disapproval. As they got older, both boys’ fathers permitted them to join in drinking a little alcohol with them occasionally, marking their slow transition to manhood. Both of Kevin’s sisters disapproved of alcohol and his mother only drank occasionally when there were guests. Some churches in Rwanda insist on abstaining from alcohol, but theirs permits drinking in moderation. That said, Felix and his brother regularly drank beyond what the church Elders considered acceptable and their sons were determined to copy.

Felix easily spent more money in a year drinking in bars with other men than the annual cost of one of his daughter’s school fees, which he was struggling to pay and falling into debt with. However, this was not simply a case of financial mismanagement or putting personal leisure before family needs; rather, it reveals the value placed on beer drinking as both a status symbol and a social and monetary exchange, considered essential for maintaining a network of friendships and mutual support. What a man drinks and how often he buys drinks for others can be marker of distinction<sup>370</sup>, hinting at his wealth, status and the size of his social network. In bygone times, drinking Primus, Rwanda’s first manufactured bottled beer, represented modernity compared with the traditional practice of friends and neighbours sharing a home-brewed beer through straws, all from the same calabash<sup>371</sup>. However, with the growth of urban-living and increasingly cash-based economy, Primus is now drunk widely, and Kevin once dismissed it as “*the beer of houseboys*”. It is the least expensive beer and it markets itself to a younger crowd, running the annual *Guma Guma Superstar* reality singing contest, featuring mainly Rwandan R&B and Hip-Hop artists. Primus’ more expensive rival, Mutzig, has a more sophisticated style and uses the strap line “*the taste of success*”. Felix’ drink of choice was Heineken, more expensive still and, though manufactured in Rwanda by Bralirwa like the others, was considered European and conferred on him the image of a gentleman.

As in many western cultures, social drinking comes with the expectation of buying rounds of drinks for others. Failure to participate in this form of gift exchange leads to social exclusion, not only from drinking, but also from business opportunities, co-operative arrangements and other networks of reciprocal support. As De Lame<sup>372</sup> observed, “*The man who is always broke finds no one to hand him the straw, and is only condescendingly offered an occasional sip from the bottle*”. Kevin understood this when he told me, in reference to his father’s regular absence, “*He goes to bars a lot to get good deals, to find jobs or to call in favours. When you have a problem, you have to first make friends and negotiate at the bar.*” A man’s ability to do this affects the security of his family, particularly in an economy where few men work in professions for large corporations and the majority rely on negotiating mutually beneficial business arrangements or calling in favours.

Kevin always seemed proud of his father’s resourcefulness and ability to solve problems and fix deals, whether finding a buyer for his business, obtaining the finance to construct small dwellings on his enclosure for rental income (not to mention getting local authorities to turn a blind eye to building regulations), or even talking his way out of a traffic fine. “*My Dad has many friends. Even some in high places from the days he was in the RPF*”, Kevin boasted; and although on another occasion he also

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<sup>370</sup> Bourdieu (1984)

<sup>371</sup> De Lame (2004:323)

<sup>372</sup> De Lame (2004:327)

expressed worry that his father's social network appeared to be shrinking as the family's financial position deteriorated, Kevin always expressed confidence in his father's ability to provide, along with an impatience to grow up and shoulder more of the burden himself. With this ever present in his mind, although, like most young men, Kevin does not expect to achieve full recognition as a man until he is at least thirty, the pressures of manhood loom large in his life.

To equip himself, Kevin strives to become 'strong', like his father. While becoming muscular, or even fat, is preferred over being skinny, and the ability to endure physical pain brings respect, 'strength' is conceptualised as a state of mind more than body. It is demonstrated through emotional self-control and the exercise of authority over others. As the idea of letting one's tears fall on the inside<sup>373</sup> suggests, it is acceptable for men to feel pain and sorrow, but they have a duty to control themselves and not allow it to show, so that those around them may take strength from their courage. This 'hardness' also creates an emotional distance between a father and his children. Men demonstrate love for their children by working hard to provide for their needs and by disciplining them, but they rarely display warmth, sympathy or affection. When Kevin became sick shortly after another Saint-Jacques student died of Typhoid Fever, Felix showed concern by insisting he go to the hospital, but offered no tenderness or effort to relieve his symptoms. Kevin, for his part, knew not to complain too much about his physical suffering. When his twin-sister, Carla, spent the day crying on her bed after learning she would have to repeat the year at school due to low marks, neither parent offered any physical affection or words of comfort and they spoke harshly to her.

Emotional distance was matched by physical distance. Felix was frequently absent and unlike other family members nobody expected him to let any of them know where he was or when he would return. Sometimes he would be gone all night without warning, or longer, since, like many fathers, he not only spent many evenings in bars with friends, he also travelled far from home. The world of a man was larger than that of his family. Felix spent many weeks in neighbouring Uganda searching for business opportunities, though it seemed none ever materialised. Mugisha's and Paci's fathers did similar, both traveling to Dubai on a regular basis in search of car parts and hard ware for resale. By contrast, most of the mothers I knew, if they were not at their employment, were at home doing domestic work. Physical separation also came about through boarding school. At Saint-Jacques visit days were only one Sunday per month, and it was not uncommon for students to find only their mothers or siblings show up. If a Fathers' travels coincided with school holidays it was possible for young people to grow up, as Mudime<sup>374</sup> describes, remembering only "*montages*" of their fathers. In a conversation exploring the possibility of sending Kevin overseas to study, Felix once explained: "*You see Sam, what matters is that we provide for our children's futures. I could send Kevin away and not see him for three years, but that would not matter if it meant I was doing my duty as a father*".

In their life history interviews, Saint-Jacques boys' most vivid memories of their fathers often involved incidents of punishment or praise. Kevin recalls the time he received the worst beating of his life when, as a year five primary school student, his father caught him stealing his money. "*He put me face down on*

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<sup>373</sup> Simpson (2009:19) wrote of Zambian young men's stories of childhood that "*it was his father – usually described as a silent, emotionally distant figure – who set the measure for his son of what it meant to be a "real man"*

<sup>374</sup> Mudimbe (1994:30)

*the ground with his foot on my back so I couldn't move and he took a tree branch and beat me so hard",* he recalled. When I asked how many times his father struck him, he responded, *"I don't know. So many times. Until he got tired. It pained for three days."* Physically painful as the experience was, Kevin regards it as a learning moment in his life and credits his father with teaching him an important lesson. Felix stopped beating Kevin around the time he started at Saint-Jacques, though Kevin's respect for his father is such that the mere thought of disappointing him is enough to make him modify his behaviour. I observed similar in the homes of my other students.

Meanwhile, good conduct was rewarded with praise. For certain special occasions in the year Kevin's family had 'family parties', in which his parents and siblings got together with uncles, aunts and cousins for a meal and drinks. I was invited to one, which caused conflict between Kevin and one of his older female cousins who insisted only family should be there. They have a family tradition at such events that after everyone has eaten the fathers give speeches. They have usually had a few beers by this point and seem warmer than usual. Their speeches are typically long and involve a mixture of stand-up comedy and fortune telling as the father's single out different children for praise and humorous ridicule, reminiscing about the past and making positive predictions about each child's future. A father's words of praise in these moments is treated as precious and held on to by the children as a source of affirmation and self-esteem. Equally, a Father's words of chastisement seem to hurt long after they are spoken. For example, Christelle holds on to a memory of Felix once telling her she was no longer his 'first-born', as if this was an irrevocable decree rather than merely harsh words spoken in a moment of anger. This is, perhaps, because Christelle is used to her father's word on a matter being final.

Just as Saint-Jacques students would never seek to justify themselves or talk back to adults at school<sup>375</sup>, neither Kevin nor his siblings ever dared to question their parents' decisions. Despite his absence in their day to day lives, which were directed by their mother, Felix seemed to have the final word on important decisions such as where and what the children would study, and where the family would live. It was Felix's choice to send Kevin to boarding school, though Marie-Noel objected on the grounds that it prevented her from ensuring he was following their faith. Though Kevin sometimes found his fathers' rules, particularly unexpected changes to his schedule, unfair and frustrating, he indulged<sup>376</sup> his father with respect and tried to walk in his footsteps.

### *Good Christian Gentlemen*

In this section I look at how masculinity and, to a lesser extent, femininity are constructed in Catholic teachings and within *"the 'taken for granted', mundane and routine practices"*<sup>377</sup> of the institution. In Rwanda, such 'everyday' aspects of schooling, especially at long-established institutions like Saint-Jacques, have their origins in the colonial educational methodologies of the Catholic mission school. I found visiting other schools in Kigali, that even newer state or parent run schools seem patterned after the styles and concepts of schooling that were imported by the White Father missionaries early in the 20<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>375</sup> See Chapter Four

<sup>376</sup> Poluha (2004:91) similarly noticed in her study of children in Ethiopia that, *"The indulgence towards fathers, whether unemployed, addicted to school or not caring for the children, was great."*

<sup>377</sup> Dunne (2008:55)

century. As I discussed in Chapters Three and Four, the foremost objective of these early schools was to convert the population and fashion young Rwandan men and women into faithful Catholics. This, inevitably, entailed a reconstruction of masculinity and femininity, based on the European and Christian concepts of family and gender roles. Three performances inherent in colonial and Catholic masculinity, which are embedded in routines and structures at Saint-Jacques, can be called *'obedience and self-discipline'*, *'masculine leadership'* and *'heterosexual monogamy'*. The first of these is the essence of always doing and saying the right things, in the right places and the right moments, as discussed Chapter Four, so I will not return to it here, but the others warrant further attention.

### ***Masculine Leadership***

In contradiction to the state-driven discourse of female equality in the economic sphere, the organisational structure and various practices at Saint-Jacques seems to reinforce a concept of masculine leadership and feminine domesticity. To begin with, though the ratio of male to female teaching staff is approximately even, all of the leadership positions, with the exception of department head for humanities, are occupied by men. Meanwhile, backroom secretarial, finance and library functions are provided by women. Of particular note is the contrast between the roles of the priests and the missionary sisters assigned to the school. The priests are appointed by the Bishop of Kigali for indefinite but potentially long periods of time to lead the school and manage the administration of financial matters, admissions and student and staff discipline. By contrast, the mission sisters are sent for shorter durations out of a convent in the Congo. They are quiet, background figures, who play no role in school management, apart from overseeing the kitchen, and mainly provide pastoral support to girls and a service mending students' clothing. The economic worlds of the mission sisters and priests are also very different. The sisters nearly always dress in their religious habit – a pale blue tunic and white scapular – whereas the priests only wear their robes when officiating in the church and most of the time could be found in designer suits or casual wear. The priest's residence is at the front of the school near the church and registry. A large satellite dish stands on their perfectly manicured lawn, a well-kept 4x4 vehicle sits under their carport, and their private kitchen brims with the smell of home cooked meals prepared by their own cook. The sisters, meanwhile, live in one of the small houses built for teachers, set downhill behind the school, and they eat more simply.

There is a similar gender division in leadership roles handed to students. For example, though O-Level and A-Level sections each elect Head Girls and Head Boys, the Head Boys always seem to dominate the speaking when they appear together in an official capacity and nearly everyone regards them as senior. One student explained, *"the Head Girl is responsible only for the girls, but the Head Boy is over all students."* Also, while there are female student leadership positions within the girls boarding, the student captains in charge of keeping order in the refectory and looking after sports facilities are all male. I asked Mugisha why this is the case. He explained, *"because boys are more able. How in the world would a girl tell you to keep quiet in the morning?"* I probed, *"Why are boys more able?"* to which he replied, *"Come on Sam! You know boys are good at intimidating people. And strong as well."*<sup>378</sup>

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<sup>378</sup> Mirembe (1998) found similar in an elite Ugandan school

Boys' bodies dominate the physical space of the school, whether in the Dining Hall where the all-male student-captains walk up and down the aisles keeping order, on the sports-pitches where boys compete in high-energy contact sports after school, crowding out any potential female players, or at the front of classrooms during clubs and churches, which boys tend to lead. Not all boys were thought capable of leadership roles, however. When I asked students who they thought would make a good Head Boy, physical stature seemed the most important quality. A short boy, even if charismatic, intelligent and well-liked, lacks the physical presence to command obedience from others. In this respect, a boy's ability to perform dominant masculinity can be outside of his control, since those who, by consequence of genetics, are physically smaller, find themselves excluded from holding positions of authority. These boys are expected to be orderly, obedient and submissive.

There does appear to be one area over which girls are in charge – maintaining a tidy classroom. Sometimes my Senior One students would amuse themselves in break times by competing to throw screwed up balls of paper into the bin at the back of the classroom. After one such occasion, as my class was starting, Father Bertrand walked in and began shouting at Grace and Claudia who sat together near the door. He thumped Claudia several times, hard, between the shoulder-blades, and she and Grace slid out from their desk and began hurriedly picking up the balls of paper and pushing them into the bin. *"What did he say to you"*, I whispered, once I was sure Bertrand was a few metres down the corridor. *"Teacher, he told us 'is that how you will clean your house?' and he told us we are lazy, bad girls who no man will marry."* Following the incident I asked students if it was only the girls' responsibility to clean the classroom. Possibly interpreting my question as a test, they insisted it was not and affirmed the ideal of gender equality. Yet, while I have no doubt Bertrand would have punished boys for the mess had there been no girls in the room, the manner in which he singled out Grace and Claudia, supports the view that the distribution of responsibilities at Saint-Jacques is gendered, according to ideals of dominant masculinity and domestic femininity.

### ***Heterosexual monogamy***

In addition to re-enforcing strength and authority as a masculine ideal, Catholic discourse and practice at Saint-Jacques also genders students' bodies and sexualities. Christian doctrines requiring heterosexuality, celibacy outside of marriage, and monogamy within marriage are so embedded in Rwandan life that it is easy to imagine their cultural roots extend far before the colonial era. However, historians believe pre-colonial Rwandans practised sexual relations quite differently to today. Maquet's<sup>379</sup> study of the period immediately preceding the arrival of Western influence<sup>380</sup> found that Rwandans distinguished between the reproductive/economic functions of sexual intercourse, belonging to marriage, and its inherent value in giving pleasure and releasing tensions<sup>381</sup>, which could be obtained outside marriage. Thus, before marriage, Tutsi boys were often given Hutu wives and daughters of their father's clients as temporary concubines; and although girls were strictly forbidden from pre-marital sexual relations, due to the value placed on a girl's virginity, after marriage their sexual needs could be satisfied by 'privileged partners' if

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<sup>379</sup> Maquet (1961)

<sup>380</sup> Ibid:1

<sup>381</sup> Ibid:77

their husbands were not available. Approximately thirty-percent of marriages were polygamous with the number of wives a man took generally depending on economic considerations, balancing whether each additional wife increased a man's productivity (by watching over an additional homestead or farming more land), or was considered an extra expense.<sup>382</sup>

Maquet also found that "*homosexuality was widespread among Tutsi and Hutu young men*"<sup>383</sup> but only as a means of experimentation and satisfying sexual needs, since he also notes that homosexuality "*was almost always ascribed to the lack of heterosexual contacts.*"<sup>384</sup> Vansina<sup>385</sup>, concurs, writing that at the royal court, "*many of the favourites would be lovers of the King... for homosexuality was admitted at court and quite common in military circles*". Like Maquet, Vansina appears to regard such relations as purely a matter of gratifying physical desires. However, Watkins<sup>386</sup> history of the court suggests some homosexual relationships also involved deep emotional commitment, trust and friendship, such as that between King Yuhi IV Gahindiro and his childhood friend Rugaju, who he elevated with him to become his closest advisor.

Thus, when the White Father missionaries first encountered Rwanda, as in other parts of Africa, they found a people whose sexual practices and family structures were far from the European Christian ideal, and made changing them a central part of their 'civilising mission'. Linden<sup>387</sup> observes that it was "*in the area of marriage (...) they had shown themselves determined to impose quite new patterns of behaviour.*" As Stoler<sup>388</sup> writes in her exploration of Foucault's thinking on colonialism and sexuality, "*the discursive management of sexual practices of colonizer and colonized was central to the colonial order of things*". The missionaries' primary tool for promoting their views on 'sexual morality' were the mission schools. White Fathers' journals<sup>389</sup> show that at schools attended by ordinary Rwandans, success was measured not in scholastic performance but in numbers of "*covert*" (converted) who had passed through Catechism, Baptism and Confirmation. Becoming a Catholic required the converted to denounce polygamy, ancestor-worship and other 'sinful' customs and adopt the moral and cultural values of the missionaries<sup>390</sup>. The pace of change was slow at first as new converts were mainly disempowered Hutu, while the King and other elites maintained traditional practices. When Rwanda passed from German to Belgian hands following the First World War, the White Father's took a more direct approach to re-ordering family life, persuading the new Belgian Administrators to introduced a 'Polygamy Tax' of six to fifteen francs per wife for all men in Polygamous marriages<sup>391</sup>. They also successfully exercised their political influence to replace chiefs who refused to convert to Catholicism with their own followers, and were instrumental in the royal coup which saw the King Musinga Yuhi V replaced by his Roman Catholic son Mutara III<sup>392</sup>.

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<sup>382</sup> Ibid:72

<sup>383</sup> Ibid:77

<sup>384</sup> Ibid:78

<sup>385</sup> Vansina (2004:108)

<sup>386</sup> Watkins (2014)

<sup>387</sup> Linden 1977

<sup>388</sup> Stoler (1995:4)

<sup>389</sup> Viewed at the archives of the Society of the Missionaries of Africa in Rome.

<sup>390</sup> Pawliková-Vilhanová (2007:257)

<sup>391</sup> Koff (1997)

<sup>392</sup> Des Forges (1969 & 1972)

This effort to transform Rwandan moral values and marriage contracts appears to have been a success, since today every Saint-Jacques student I discussed it with intended to enter a monogamous marriage. Some have a polygamous grandparent, but the practice is very much regarded as something from the past. Homosexual relations, by contrast, are regarded as something new and foreign<sup>393</sup>. My students often insisted that “*there are no gay Africans*” as it was “*against their culture*”, or, if they admitted that homosexuality existed in Rwanda they attributed it to corrosive Western influences. Love<sup>394</sup> found in her interviews with Rwandans who identify as LGBTI that the absence of a recognised history of homosexual relations puts them in “*the uneasy position of continually having their existence denied*” while at the same time experiencing wide-spread discrimination. I have seen several of my students circulating homophobic memes on their social media feeds, including one celebrating a claim that Zimbabwe’s Robert Mugabe had imprisoned two gay men, promising to release them when one of them gets the other pregnant. No student could ever admit to homosexual curiosity or desire without experiencing persecution. Some boys have told me they have seen ‘other boys’ engage in group masturbation in the boarding, and there were hints that homosexual experimentation between close male friends went even further; but, although considered a ‘sinful’ act, this was said to be fraternal rather than non-heterosexual.<sup>395</sup> By contrast, a boy who appeared effeminate in his looks, voice and body language was vulnerable to being labelled ‘gay’ and persecuted; not only by his peers but by the monitors, who students say mainly beat the boys thought to be weaker, possibly to “make them tough”. I knew a few such young men at Saint-Jacques, who I will discuss in the section on docile bodies.

Finally, having discussed a revolution in attitudes to polygamy and homosexuality, one area where Catholic moral teachings seem to have had a more limited effect on behaviour, but which dominates much of the discourse about male and female sexuality at Saint-Jacques, is the requirement for celibacy outside of marriage. Teenage sexual relations are not only considered sinful, but problematised for spreading HIV/AIDS and causing unwanted pregnancies that bring embarrassment to families and limit a girl’s opportunities for educational advancement. Responsibility for teenage sexual activity is usually attributed to girls, whose bodies are constructed as dangerous – the objects of sexual desire, from which male students needs shielding. This is achieved through enforced modesty standards and physical separation.

At Saint-Jacques there is a clear difference in attitude to male and female modesty. As discussed in Chapter Four<sup>396</sup>, while the school uniform for boys, if worn smartly, intends to give them the appearance of ‘gentlemen’, there is no requirement to hide their bodies when not wearing it. When I took my Senior One class for sports immediately after our English lesson, girls left to change in their boarding but the boys changed by their desks in the classroom, and some were so keen to maximise their time on the sports field they stripped down to their boxers even while the last girls were still in the room. Not all boys did this. Some felt embarrassed and ushered the girls to hurry up and leave or wore their sports clothes under their uniforms, but there was no taboo in a boy being semi-naked in the presence of girls. Likewise, once on the sports pitch boys frequently removed their shirts for comfort or to identify teams. Displays of male

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<sup>393</sup> Epprecht (1998) found Zimbabweans also consider male-male sexual relations to be a white import.

<sup>394</sup> Love (2014)

<sup>395</sup> Kiama (1999) found similar in Kenya.

<sup>396</sup> Page 88



athleticism was something the priests encouraged. By contrast, the girls' uniform, which is baggy and shapeless, seems designed to de-emphasise female sexuality, as does the prohibition on wearing make-up and requirement to maintain short hair. Their sports clothing is also strictly policed so that midribs, shoulders and thighs are fully covered.

Cultural expectations of female modesty stem from the colonial era when traditional dress was altered by missionaries. As Leach<sup>397</sup> writes about girl's schooling in Sierra Leone,

*"In the overseas missionary context, dress took on great symbolic significance as a visible means of marking out the convert from the heathen and was one of the many cultural changes imposed by the missionaries on their congregations."*

At Saint-Jacques, as is common across Rwanda, boys participating in traditional dance are often shirtless from the waist up, apart from a thin decorative sash, just as they would have been a century ago. However, the female traditional dress known as the *musanana* that drapes over one shoulder has clearly been adapted to include a modern spaghetti-strap top worn underneath, ensuring the chest area is fully covered. In 2016 Miss Colombe Akiwacu, representing Rwanda at a supranational beauty pageant, created a national controversy<sup>398</sup> by modelling a bikini, as required by competition rules, which led commentators on social media and in letters to newspaper editors to complain that she had violated Rwandan culture by being "almost naked" on stage.<sup>399</sup> As with those who see homosexuality as something foreign, the popular view that bikinis are "un-Rwandan" shows just how thorough Rwanda's religious and cultural transformation has been, since, as another commentator pointed out in her defense, "if we took Miss Colombe Akiwacu back in time, we would find she is actually overdressed for the 'real Rwanda'". The national museum and mission archives confirm this, as they contain early colonial-era photographs of teenage girls dressed in attire that today would be considered indecent.



<sup>397</sup> Leach (2008:48)

<sup>398</sup> New Times (2<sup>nd</sup> Dec 2016)

<sup>399</sup> New Times (8 Dec 2016)

Physical contact between male and female students is also prohibited at Saint-Jacques. They may be friends and talk to one another in breaks, but holding hands, linking arms or similar displays of closeness will be punished, if caught. At the end of her Senior Two year, Claudia, who had never been in much trouble, received a mark of “poor” for discipline on her school report. When she enquired why, she was informed by Father Bertrand that it was because she *‘wears make-up and spends too much time flirting with boys’*. By contrast, the boys she was accused of spending too much time with were not disciplined for being with her.

It seems that female agency is usually held responsible for pre-marital sexual activity, even when the female is subordinate, such as in the case of transactional sex between school girls and “sugar daddies”. Young Rwandans identify this as a danger for girls<sup>400</sup>, but students and teachers usually discuss tackling it in terms of needing to “educate girls” to make different choices, rather than changing the behaviour of men. In a debate I organised with my Senior Two English students on the topic, “Who is to blame for teenage pregnancies?” the majority found it easy to argue that girls are more responsible than boys. Those advancing this argument in each of the three classes talked about prostitution and sugar-daddies in terms of girls’ greed for cash and commodities. None of the opposing debate teams had the conceptual repertoire to challenge this by highlighting girls’ vulnerability to economic exploitation. When accounting for sex in teenage relationships many students, including girls, spoke critically of girls who wear make-up or revealing clothing to “tempt” the boy. The other team countered by arguing that some pregnancies are the result of rape as boys are stronger and force themselves on girls, but this was rejected by the other side on the basis that rape is less common than consensual, which included transactional, sex. One boy drew a pie chart to illustrate the point.

It seems to me this discourse of female sexuality as something ‘threatening and contagious’, which stems from patriarchal colonial views of African women<sup>401</sup>, also implies a rather fatalist view of masculine sexuality, in which male sexual desire is inevitable and difficult to control. Yet, controlling it is, according to Christian theology, fundamental to overcoming the effects of original sin<sup>402</sup> and being recognised as a ‘respectable Christian gentleman’. All of the boys I came to know best confided in me their anxiety that they will eventually ‘give in to temptation’. One of my Senior One boys, later in Senior Five, shared with me his first sexual experience with a girl, which stopped short of intercourse, saying, *“We got so close then I thought, man, what I am doing? So I stopped it. I want to wait till I’m married, but I don’t think I’ll make it.”* A high number of boys I knew well – including some who performed their Christian identities with some piety earlier in their school careers – did not ‘make it’ to the end of Senior Six before sexual debut. This is in line with research suggesting a third of 15-19 year-old young men in Rwanda are sexually active.<sup>403</sup> Though, while their inevitable succumbing to sexual desire was admitted to privately to myself and their friends – after-all, everybody else was doing it – their public performance usually remained that of a good Christian Gentleman, almost as though everyone were in on the same open-secret.

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<sup>400</sup> Williams T. et al (2012)

<sup>401</sup> Arnfred (2004:67)

<sup>402</sup> Page 84

<sup>403</sup> Babalola (2004), Ministry of Health (2010)

The Catholic values of *'obedience and self-discipline'*, *'masculine leadership'* and *'heterosexual monogamy'* were also strongly associated with academic achievement. Indeed, historically priests in Rwanda were the best educated, particularly in western languages as well as Greek and Latin. The bourgeois life-style of the priests at Saint-Andre was also not lost on the students. Plus, while nobody could avoid random and capricious punishment, performing as a good Catholic seemed the safest way to navigate through school. Thus, being a "Christian Gentleman" fed into boys' aspirations to become good providers.

### *Toughs: Rebellious Masculinity and Counter-Culture*

In the preceding sections I described some of the qualities associated with being the *man of a household* (resourcefulness, protectiveness, emotional hardness, independence, and decisiveness) and a *good Christian gentleman* (obedience, self-discipline, dominance, heterosexuality and monogamous marriage); and earlier in this chapter as well as in Chapter Three, I defined an ideal man in the eyes of the state as one who is patriotic, hardworking, entrepreneurial, tax-paying and 'modern', which includes supporting 'gender equality'. Each of these masculinities overlaps in places, particularly in their emphasis on fulfilling social obligations according to the dominant norms of church, state, and society. Conformity to such masculinities brings position and respect but since not all young men are positioned equally, this is harder for some than others. Thus, some young men choose to subvert these masculinities, drawing on some of their requirements while rejecting others, to assert their manhood in a way that is considered counter-cultural or 'rebellious'. For example, they perform the heterosexuality required by Christian masculinity, but to an exaggerated degree that simultaneously rejects the church's emphasis on monogamy and pre-marital abstinence. Likewise, they retain the importance of physical presence and power but use them to rebel against the established order rather than to gain position within it. At Saint-Jacques, young men who do masculinity this way are known as "*toughs*".

This distinction I am making between 'conformity' and 'rebellion' is often referred to as a distinction between "hegemonic" and "subordinate" masculinities.<sup>404</sup> The idea that a masculinity is 'hegemonic' does not imply that it is 'normal' in a statistical sense; typically only a minority of men manage to enact it, rather, as Connell and Messerschmidt explain, it is 'normative' in the sense of being, "*the currently most honoured way of being a man, (that) require(s) all other men position themselves in relation to it.*"<sup>405</sup> Subordinate masculinity has often been talked about in terms of effeminate and gay sub-cultures that reject heterosexuality<sup>406</sup>, but it can also entail the rejection of a masculinity based on economic power and status, in favour of one based on bodily power as expressed through hardness, violence and 'sexual capital'.<sup>407</sup> Such masculine performances, whether by young men in Africa<sup>408</sup>, minorities in America<sup>409</sup>, or

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<sup>404</sup> Connell (1995), Mooney, K. (1998)

<sup>405</sup> Connell & Messerschmidt (2005:832)

<sup>406</sup> Blachford (1981); Carrigan, Connell & Lee (1987)

<sup>407</sup> Groes-Green (2009)

<sup>408</sup> Aboim (2009), Dover (2005), Gibbs, Sikweyiya & Jewkes (2014); Mooney (1998), Weiss (2004, 2009)

<sup>409</sup> Adams (2007); Bourgois (1995); Messner (1997); Paschal (2013)

working class 'lads'<sup>410</sup> in England are thought to provide the economically and socially marginalised with a way of recovering self-esteem and demanding respect.

The toughs at Saint-Jacques do not engage in violence, drug taking or sexually aggressive behaviour to the extent of young men in many of the studies just cited. Rather, as explained in the previous chapter, their aim is not to bring down the established order, but to find a sense of personal autonomy within it by pushing at the boundaries through everyday acts of resistance. 'Toughs' appear on many of the pages in this thesis. The boys who lied about their sexual prowess to mess up a researcher's study in Chapter Two were considered "toughs". In the previous chapter, the toughs were those who bullied younger boys and dominated the boarding despite having no formal authority. Toughs will also appear in the next chapter where I discuss Hip-Hop culture in greater detail. Here, I will briefly describe some of the ways they establish their manliness while rebelling against 'hegemonic masculinities' at Saint-Jacques.

Toughs differentiate themselves from conformists through their style of dress, speech and movement. The previous chapter described how Saint-Jacques students find ways to express 'individuality', despite living under a discipline regime that aims to establish uniformity by controlling their timetables, physical appearance and personal belongings. Those wanting to present themselves as good students take care to clean their uniforms well and wear them as smartly as possible: shoes polished, clean white shirts tucked in and creases ironed into the sleeves. Toughs also do all they can to look sharp, since scruffiness would indicate poverty or a lack of self-respect and they consider themselves the 'high' people in the school'. However, they modify the uniform by turning their trousers into amachupe (skinny leg)<sup>411</sup> and wearing them low down below the hips, creating a sagginess around their bottoms in the style of many Hip-Hop artists. This is referred to as wearing "pockets down" and it is strictly against school rules. If caught, they are beaten, but they do it anyway. Boys also exercise choice over their belts and shoes. Conformist boys wear smart conservative belts and plain black shoes, whereas the "toughs" push the boundaries of what school leaders will accept. For example, Kevin chose to buy black Nike Air basketball trainers rather than leather shoes, which he felt gave him extra kudos with others. One boy wore a belt strap that was green, yellow and red with "Bob Marley" written on it. Another wore a belt buckle shaped as a gun. Similarly, while the standard haircut is short and the same length all over, *toughs* sometimes cut their hair very short on the sides giving more shape and style.

*Toughs* also move and position their bodies differently to students performing 'hegemonic masculinities'. While the latter tend to walk with straight backs, some *toughs* walk with a slight bend in the knees and sway the shoulders more, creating a small bounce in each step. When they talk, they use more exaggerated hand gestures, occasionally shaking their wrist and clicking their fingers while rolling one shoulder back and forth. These bigger movements not only enlarge their stature compared to the more reserved posture of other students, they also mimic the styles of Hip-Hop, which, as I show in the next chapter, is experienced by some as a way of reclaiming authentic black culture and rejecting the Europeanism that Christianity, and Catholicism in particular, represents.

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<sup>410</sup> Willis (1977)

<sup>411</sup> Page 91

*Toughs* dominate the space in the classroom. They are more likely to arrive late, get up and move around and swop places. Although students are supposed to respect a seating plan, when some teachers, myself included, allow students to choose where they sit, the *toughs* normally take places towards the back of the classroom and often huddle close together, three or more with their arms around each other, squeezed onto a bench intended for two. *Toughs* are also more likely to talk out of turn, throw paper towards the bin instead of placing it inside, and graffiti on chalk boards during breaks; though this does much depends on the teacher and severity of punishment they could expect. Small punishments such as being made to kneel, being slapped, or beaten one or two times with a stick does not deter them, and taking physical punishment 'like a man' can be a way to prove their toughness.<sup>412</sup> However, they are far more cautious if they believe an action would risk getting them expelled.

As well as speaking out of turn, *toughs* also use silence as a form of resistance. When I asked questions in class, those performing as good Catholic students would arch their backs pushing their index finger high into the air to be chosen. Many of the *toughs*, meanwhile, hid at that back of the room refusing to engage with the lesson. Sometimes when I called upon one of them to answer, he would respond in Kinyarwanda to chuckles of those around him, or in a style of youth-speak I found difficult to follow. Often this was done by boys who were weaker at English as a way of inverting the power relationship between them and me. Humphreys<sup>413</sup> observed that in a context where students are schooled in a language that is not their mother-tongue, weaker ability in the language of instruction can feel particularly disempowering as it denies access to verbal space. Hence, those who find English more difficult often perform as *toughs* as a way of regaining presence.

The system of constant testing and ranking of students is brutal to those who finish near the bottom as it continually reinforces the idea that they are inadequate. To overcome this, boys who are less academically talented seek to be defined not for their brains but their bodies, being physically stronger than other boys or sexually dominant over girls. In relation to boys, the ability to not flinch at physical punishment, success on the sports field, and signs of physical maturity such as facial hair, muscle growth and penis size are important to them. Shorter boys are often gently mocked. In one of my classes they would call a short boy's name and tell him "*you are few*". When washing in the boarding, some boys with bigger penises walk around with them proudly on display, while boys who are late-developers or have smaller penises are sometimes teased. A few boys with gynaecomastia, a condition enlarging the male breast during puberty, are particularly ridiculed.

*Toughs* display their heterosexuality to one another by sharing pornography and talking about girls in sexualised ways. For example, eighteen months on from the funeral discussed at the start of this chapter, I noticed that, in a bid to fit in, Kevin had started using the expression "*eating chicks*" as a metaphor for sex with girls, which he admitted to me was something he had learned from older boys in the school. One time, Jonathan, a devout Protestant in Senior Two took it upon himself to preach to a group in his class who were sharing pornography but was threatened and told "*take your Priesthood somewhere else*". Though they were careful enough to never do anything in my presence, it has been reported to me by

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<sup>412</sup> Pattman & Chege (2003) discuss the acceptance of pain as a mark of bravery

<sup>413</sup> Humphreys (2013)

both male and female students that sexual harassment of girls is common. It usually occurs in the ancient block, which was out of sight, and can range from embarrassing them by commenting on their bodies in a sexualised way, to unwanted touching of their breasts and bottoms. This is usually over clothing though I am aware of at least one incident when a girl in my class was surrounded by boys who put hands inside her shirt and up her skirt. A few boys admitted to me that even in class they would put their hand in a girl's shirt pocket as if to remove her ID card, but rub or squeeze her breast in the process<sup>414</sup>. I learned through diary entries and girls coming to me as a trusted adult that many find the experience of being spoken about or touched in this way very upsetting, but in the moment, they are either passive, or 'laugh it off', which boys claimed to interpret as acquiescence. It is more likely, that girls do not believe their complaints would be taken seriously, or that they risk punishment themselves for being alone with boys. My own observations and evidence from elsewhere in southern Africa support the view that it is common for men to hold girls responsible for being sexually touched by male classmates.<sup>415</sup> For all the punishments I saw administered at Saint-Jacques, I never knew of a single case of boys being punished for the sexual teasing or touching of girls.<sup>416</sup>

Before moving on, I should note that it is not all or only young men with lower educational attainment who perform as *toughs*, nor are the different masculinities outlined in this chapter distinct categories that male students stay within, rather they each present an array of discursive and symbolic material that young men can draw upon as they perform their masculinities, sometimes contradictorily between different acts and before different audiences. Intelligent young men who perform as good Christian students in front of their teachers, sometimes adopt the styles of *toughs* in student-only settings, or crack jokes in class to avoid being stigmatised by their peers for being too clever.<sup>417</sup> Meanwhile, those who most often act as *toughs*, can behave with great piety while in church, or even make themselves into docile bodies when necessary.

Also, a young man's performative options are constrained by how he is naturally situated, but not determined by it. Kevin is a bright young man with good language capability, positioning him well to be a 'good Christian gentleman', but when he had an early growth spurt between Senior One and Two and came to the attention of some older students, he was drawn to spending more time with the *toughs* who bestowed upon him added status. When I asked students in interviews who their first friends were in Senior One, it was notable how many mentioned Kevin as somebody who had been kind to them in their early days in the boarding, but followed up by expressing disappointment in him. "*Now he is a tough and too high for me*", Fabian told me. Ironically, while Kevin believed he was becoming more popular, fewer students actually considered him their friend. After a time, lower than expected grades and worries in his family life led Kevin to abandon his group of *toughs* and become more concerned once again with his grades. Thus, although being tall and handsome enabled him to enact the role of *tough*, and being intelligent positioned him as a successful student, Kevin also exercised his agency.

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<sup>414</sup> Research by Leach & Machakanja (2000); Human Rights Watch (2001)

<sup>415</sup> See Dunne, Humphreys & Leach (2003:6) & Tabane & Mudau (2014)

<sup>416</sup> Leach (2003) suggests girls do not report abuse because they expect it to be ignored

<sup>417</sup> Humphreys (2013:770-1)

Some boys, however, find their ‘conditions of possibility’ more restrained, perhaps because they are small, from very poor backgrounds, or have weak English language ability. Most often, these boys perform as docile bodies.

### *Docile Bodies*

When asking teachers and staff who they thought should be made the next Head Boy I sometimes asked “what about Prince? Or Beni? Or Cedrick?” – the names of well-behaved, quieter students. These suggestions were always rejected with the explanation that the Head Boy must be tall enough to command respect. This was not merely a students’ code, even teachers agreed that it was better to have a slightly less well-behaved Head Boy who was strong, than a model-student who was quiet or small, as they would be responsible for leading other students to comply. If a Head Boy or Class Captain failed in this duty, he could be punished for the behaviour of those under him. Thus, it was not a position everybody sought after. A previous Head Boy for O-Levels told me he did not actually want to be Head Boy, because it required him to put himself above others and discipline his friends, or face punishment himself for not doing so. Many boys at Saint-Jacques preferred to avoid notoriety and keep their heads down, surviving school by being invisible, or “docile”. Smaller boys, especially those who were less articulate, often had no other option. Nonetheless, I observed three different strategies such boys used to survive school, protecting themselves against the violence and humiliation that could befall them.

The first of these, used best by a young man called Elias, was to develop stronger bonds with female students. Elias spoke softly and in a high-pitched tone. His body was late passing through puberty, and in his appearance and mannerisms he displayed characteristics generally associated with femininity. Though behind his back boys joked that Elias was “gay”, he was never severely bullied, as he used his emotional and tender qualities to relate to and form close friendships with some of the girls. Such girls never thought about Elias romantically, rather he was one of them. His friendships with the girls gave Elias a sense of belonging and support, and other boys knew that if they were unkind towards Elias they would lose the respect of the girls they wanted to impress.

Secondly, four boys, Benji, Alain, Jean-Luc, and Prince, who were smaller and appeared physically and emotionally more child-like, formed a tight friendship group, drawing self-esteem and strength from each other. They found joy in their shared interests in football, comics, and games, while avoiding ‘adult’ themes such as politics and sex. Theirs was a strategy of non-engagement. They did not seek to join the students thought of as “high” or “popular”, rather, they quietly condemned the “toughs” for being less “Christian” and stayed out of their way. They also seemed unbothered by their lower ranks on school tests, content to defer worrying about academic performance until later in their school life. Benji also entertained the dream of becoming a professional footballer – he deferred facing the realities of possibility. They were well-behaved, conformed to school rules and mostly succeeded at staying out of trouble. On the rare occasion they were caught in a fault, which was unavoidable at times, they endured whatever punishment was meted to them without any resistance or display of bravado, possibly fighting back tears. Benji and Jean-Luc also appeared to feel protected by the friendship with me. Benji was possibly the first student to talk with me one-on-one after my second or third time of teaching, when he sought me out to offer advice about how I could use the threat of writing in students’ discipline books if I

needed to control the class. None of these boys were considered leaders by their peers, but they sat at the front of the classroom and were helpful and cooperative to me as their teacher.

Finally, Placide, who was probably the smallest boy in the school, somehow managed to play on this fact, positioning himself as the baby of the school. Rather than challenging older or taller boys, he sought their protection, and rather than bullying him, some of the senior students demonstrated their manliness by taking him into their fold, like shepherds to a lamb. He was in every sense a docile body. However, it is important to note that if, like Kevin and others, Placide were to inhabit a taller, stronger body, this option would not have been available to him, and like them, he would have been forced to compete to stake his claim as a man. Thus, amongst an array of masculinities, boys' options are constrained by factors beyond their control and most face a painful struggle to meet the social expectations placed upon them and be accepted as men.

### ***Concluding Thoughts***

This chapter has looked at the centrality of gender to how young Rwandans perform their social roles, or "identities". It has described boys' struggles to live up to popular notions of masculinity and how these are constructed in a way that can cause both boys and girls to experience anxiety, social exclusion and shame. Continuing a thread from other chapters, boys' sense of social obligations, status anxiety and economic uncertainty were shown to be important in how they perform their masculine selves.

The chapter has also been interesting for what it shows about the limits to state-driven social engineering; that while the state is, with some success, promoting its vision of "gender equality", based on incorporating girls and women into the national economy and garnering their contribution to national development, it permits a space for women to be "equal but different", where deep-rooted social attitudes and cultural practises around the construction of masculinities and femininities persist. These stem from different discursive traditions and customs learned from the home and family life, colonial and Catholic influences on the school, modern youth culture, and elsewhere, all of which provide boys with material to draw upon as they strive to present themselves as men.

Finally, however, we noted how not all boys are equally endowed to perform ideal types of masculinity. Those who struggle academically, particularly with English, or become frustrated with the strictures of school and church life, may assert their masculine status as "toughs". While boys who are smaller, less physically mature, from poorer homes, or perhaps more emotionally tender, would struggle to perform "tough" masculinity, so instead employ face-saving strategies and become as 'docile bodies'. Equally, a more muscular boy may find docility difficult due to how others position him. Thus, we see how young men's agency is constrained by a complex mesh of factors beyond their control.

Kevin lost his father to a blood disease in his fourth year at school. He did not cry at the funeral to 'be strong' for his mother and siblings but admitted to me later that he wondered if he had missed out being able to process his emotions. As his family fell on difficult times he quickly matured into a devoted son and brother and continues striving to perform masculine roles in a way that would make his father proud.



## Chapter Six

### Witches' poisonings and the Hip Hop Illuminati – subaltern narratives on material and spiritual insecurity

As I relaxed on our hotel-room balcony looking over Lake Kivu, my six-year-old son brought me my mobile phone to answer. "Hello?"

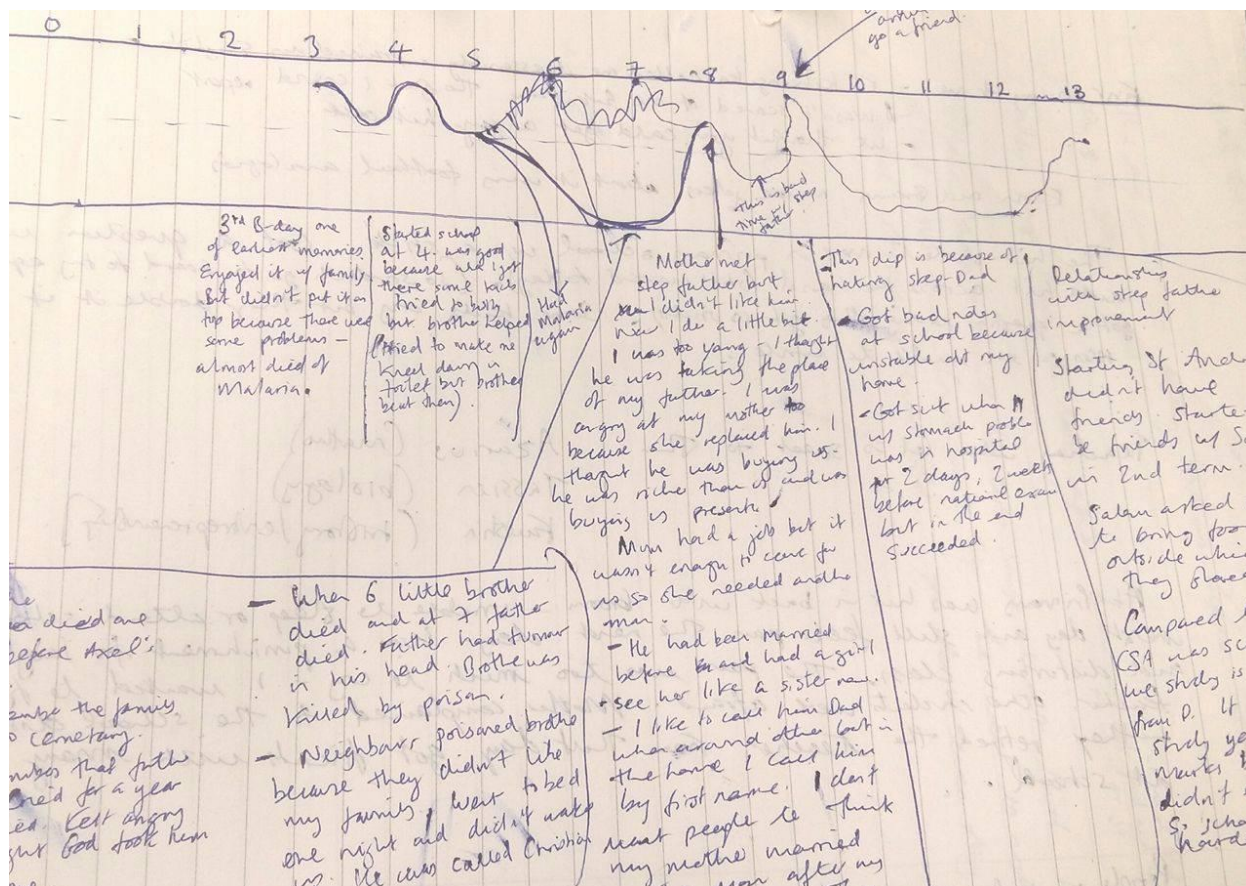
*"Hello, teacher? It's me, Simeon. The tall one who plays basketball",* came the reply. *"Teacher, I saw on Facebook that you are in Gisenyi. So, I want to ask you, teacher, if you will visit my uncle in hospital? He is very sick teacher. Tomorrow I am coming there. We will go together."*

My wife and I had decided to go to Lake Kivu for a few days of undisturbed family-time before the new school term began, but Simeon seemed determined, so I agreed to meet him by a small concrete pier on the beach the next day so he could show me the way.

The hospital was one large muggy room crammed with rows of beds, barely a foot apart. Simeon's uncle had tuberculosis and I could see he was very dehydrated. I suggested to his family, who were crowded tightly around the bed, that the nurse looked too busy to properly care for him on her own, so it was vital they took shifts, ensuring he got enough fluids and using a wet flannel to keep his temperature down. Simeon did not seem interested in my advice and explained they had actually brought me there to pray for his uncle, because he had been poisoned with demons. A visiting pastor had confirmed this, after locating and removing a small cursed bag hanging from the rafters of the dying uncle's home. Some of the students at Saint-Jacques considered me a 'pastor' because I taught Bible lessons in the Protestant church one morning a week, so I understood that Simeon expected my prayer to carry some authority. I agreed to offer a prayer, but suggested that *"our faith also needs works."*

Two days later, shortly after we arrived back at our family home in Nyamirambo, Simeon called to inform me that his uncle had died.

It was not unusual for my students to witness somebody they loved die or suffer from the effects of dark magic and demons, usually administered secretly through poisons and cursed objects. In life history interviews I conducted during my first school holidays in July 2012, I gave each student a graph listing every year from their birth to the present and asked them to draw a continuous line showing the high and low points, in order to enable them to narrate their lives on their own terms and talk me through some of their most memorable experiences. The lowest points often involved the death or severe illness of a nuclear family member or grand-parent and after several interviews I noticed that unless the sick or deceased person was elderly, the cause of death or sickness was nearly always given as deliberate "poisoning" by somebody who knew them, and the motive as "jealousy". I also came to understand that poison was not produced according to knowledge of chemistry but was based on dark magic.



Example from a life history interview with a 13-year-old Senior One boy

Dark magic, or witchcraft, is explored in this chapter as one of two discourses used by Saint-Jacques students as they express fears and anxieties related to their material and spiritual wellbeing. The other is a variation on the Illuminati conspiracy theory that has circulated in Europe since the eighteenth century, which, in this incarnation, involves global corporate and political power controlling young Africans through the influence of African-American Hip Hop. Such discourses are sometimes referred to as “counter-knowledge”, to reflect how they make empirical claims that “purport to be knowledge but are demonstrably untrue... either because there are facts that contradict them, or because there is no evidence to support them.”<sup>418</sup> However, following a recurring theme in this thesis, I find it more anthropologically useful to analyse witchcraft and the Illuminati in terms of what they reveal about subaltern perspectives and how they are used in the performance of identity. Thus, drawing on Foucault, this chapter treats Saint-Jacques students’ narratives about witchcraft and the Illuminati as ‘subjugated knowledge’, the presence of which reveals a field of knowledge construction beyond the official ‘message systems’<sup>419</sup> of the classroom, described in Chapter Three, and despite the constraints that give Saint-Jacques its character as a ‘total’, or ‘complete and austere’ institution, set out in Chapter Four.

<sup>418</sup> Thompson (2008)

<sup>419</sup> Bernstein (1971)

By ‘subjugated knowledge’, Foucault means *“knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naïve knowledges located low down in the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity”*<sup>420</sup>. This may indeed mean that such knowledges contain elements which can be empirically disproven according to the dominant epistemological order, but they may be considered ‘true’ in the sense that they articulate students’ actual experience of the world and *“truth is imminent to the domain of ‘lived reality’”*<sup>421</sup>. What’s more, such narratives also constitute students’ lived-realities, since, as Escobar writes, *“it is through language and discourse that social reality comes into being.”*<sup>422</sup> Thus, the production and circulation of narratives about witchcraft and the Illuminati, not only describes students’ realities but shapes them, whence the maxim that *“there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power-relations.”*<sup>423</sup> Therefore, the construction – or, to use Foucault’s terminology, the “re-emergence” – of ‘subjugated’, ‘local’, ‘popular’ or ‘disqualified’ knowledge<sup>424</sup>, constitutes an exercise of discursive power in opposition to the dominant ‘regime of truth’<sup>425</sup>. Or, as Foucault writes, *“it is through the re-emergence of these low-ranking knowledges... that criticism performs its work.”*<sup>426</sup> Indeed, it has often been observed in climates of opaque, authoritarian and capricious governance, that counter-narratives emerge at grass-roots which, rather than engage with the ontologies of official knowledges, are built of different discursive material entirely, as people find a subversive lexicon that makes sense of their subordination and protects self-esteem, while avoiding directly challenging those in power.

This chapter begins with two vignettes that indicate how witchcraft and the Illuminati are commonly narrated by Saint-Jacques students. This is followed by a section setting out some epistemological premises on which such narratives can be considered windows onto the societies where they are found, as they reveal the anxieties of those who hold to them and the social context – the structures, discourses and events – that enables them to make sense and be useful to those who employ them. The final two sections analyse and interpret the Illuminati and Witchcraft narratives as they relate to people’s material and spiritual security. In the first I show that they express students’ sense of material vulnerability to the forces of globalisation and modernity in the case of the Illuminati, and intra-family or neighbourhood conflict in the case of witchcraft. In the second I look at how the Illuminati and witchcraft relate to their Christian identities, as they both represent a temptation to sin in order to accumulate greater wealth and social standing in the short run, but in a manner that is socially taboo, and thought spiritually dangerous and self-destructive in the end.

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<sup>420</sup> Foucault (1980b:82)

<sup>421</sup> Alcoff (1996)

<sup>422</sup> Escobar (1997:4)

<sup>423</sup> Foucault (1977:27)

<sup>424</sup> Foucault (1980b:82)

<sup>425</sup> Foucault (1977:92)

<sup>426</sup> Foucault (1980b:82)

### *Hip Hop Superstars and the Illuminati Conspiracy*

It was just before 7am on a fresh December morning, when I arrived outside the high white gates guarding Paci's new family home - a half-built mansion where marble tiles and pillars met unfinished plaster. We had arranged to go running then chat over breakfast.

"*Mwaramutse Paci, are you ready to keep up with me?*" I teased, trying to sound more energetic than I felt, as he unlocked the side gate and shook my hand in the sort of grip, twist, fist-bump motion that teenagers use. "*Err, can we go later?*" he asked hesitantly, "*there is something I want to show you first.*"

We went in the house and he ushered me to sit on the new leather sofa, drawing my attention to the large flat screen TV opposite, that was playing Nicki Minaj's 'Pound the Alarm' – a music video in which barely dressed women shake their bottoms and breasts in a Latino-style carnival, which seemed at odds with the Christian piety I was used to seeing Paci perform at school. He turned up the volume slightly, then disappeared, returning a minute later with a bottle of Fanta Citron which he opened and set down in front of me with a glass and a straw. "*Are you not drinking too?*" I asked, adding "*let's share it*" before he had chance to respond.

"*No, no teacher, you drink*", he insisted, "*I drank tea before you came*". As I took the first sip he began, "*Teacher, I want you tell me about the Illuminati.*"

"*You mean, the Divinci Code? Dan Brown?*", I replied.

"*No teacher, you are thinking of Chris Brown*" (an American singer), he said with a chuckle. "*So what do you know about it?*"

"*I'm not sure what you want me to tell you*", I said apologetically.

Paci disappeared again then came back with an old lap top, which he started up and opened a video file he had downloaded from YouTube. "*Let's watch this. It is in Kinyarwanda but I can help you*", he said. The video was a thirty-minute documentary compiled to warn viewers about the Illuminati - a powerful network of anti-Christ, who manipulate global events and pull the levers of international power in ways that harm the interests of ordinary Africans, and who Paci informed me were gaining strength in Rwanda. It focused on black music superstars, either from the world of Hip Hop and R&B or icons such as Prince and Michael Jackson, exposing how they are entangled in a secret web of money, power, and corruption, and how their career success depends on staying on the right side of the Illuminati leadership and willingness to pay the entrance fee – the blood sacrifice of somebody close to them. Paci added further information not included in the documentary, about how Jay-Z had killed the real Beyoncé as his blood sacrifice and replaced her with a body double. This can be proven by comparing little details in the music videos of each Beyoncé, he explained.

When the movie finished, Paci took me straight into the next one - again lifted mainly from an amateur American production with Kinyarwanda voice-over and some Rwanda-specific scenes. This one helped viewers to identify the growing influence of the Illuminati around the world through images such as the

"all seeing eye" on US banknotes and numerous ways that 666, the number of the beast, is covertly imprinting itself on our lives, including in bar codes, US driving licenses and Rwandan identity cards. Paci became particularly animated over a section which showed that the VISA card, which had just arrived in Rwanda and was being advertised everywhere, is a code for the numbers 666, because VI is six in roman numerals, S is the Greek sigma and A has the value of 6 in Babylonian.

Paci seemed surprised at my ignorance on the topic as he had been hoping I could teach him more about it. I was surprised that it so concerned him. "*Where did you learn about all of this?*" I asked him.

"*At school*", he replied.

"*You mean they teach you this in class, or at church?*" I probed.

"*It is what we discuss in the boarding*", he explained, "*and we share information, like these films on YouTube. And I want to know if you will you help me research it?*"

"*Do you believe all this stuff about the Illuminati?*", I asked, sceptically.

Paci looked at me as though he was trying to guess my own opinion and gave the sort of ambiguous response I had become used to from many students, "*Some say it's true, some says it's not.*"

Until this experience, nine months into my fieldwork, I was not conscious of having ever heard anyone discuss the Illuminati, yet in the weeks that followed I noticed it increasingly often. Paci was correct: some students believed the Illuminati presented a real threat, others dismissed it as rumour, but nearly everyone had heard about it from fellow students and seen information on the internet. The Illuminati does not feature in the school curriculum, nor is it talked about by politicians or in mainstream Rwandan media. A few of the younger teachers had heard the stories but laughed them off as "childish". The rest of the teaching staff and every parent I asked seemed to know as little about it as I had done until Paci shared it with me. It is a *subjugated-knowledge*, a narrative that appears to circulate among youth who tell each other the stories and share home-made documentaries via the internet.

### *Witches, demons and poisonous curses*

Like Simeon, who I discussed in the opening vignette, Paci had also experienced the harmful effects of witchcraft. In his life-history interview he told me that the biggest sorrow in his life is the health of his mother. I am unsure what her clinical diagnosis might be, but Paci explained that she had demons put into her by another woman on her wedding day, out of jealousy of her marriage to his father. The demons cause her to have seizures, which on one occasion led her to burn herself with an iron. She lives with permanent scars from various self-inflicted injuries. The family keeps her out of public view and keeps her illness a secret, though when I asked Paci whether they were ashamed of the illness he insisted, "*I could never be ashamed of my mother. I love her and I pray every day that she will be healed.*"

The detail about the wedding stood out to me because it was the second time that week I had been told about poisoning connected to a wedding ceremony. Another student, Ntwali, had recently been to the wedding of a cousin. They are all Tutsi, but his cousin was marrying into a Hutu family. He told me, "*My*

*dad told us not to eat any of the food at the wedding party in case it was poisoned by the girl's family."* I raised my eyebrows in surprise and said, *"Surely people wouldn't want to poison their own extended family."*

*"Sam, many people still have those ideas of the genocide,"* he responded.

I probed, *"Yes I accept that, but if this couple love each other I can't imagine their family members wanting to hurt them that way."*

*"Sam you don't know Rwandan families",* he insisted, *"in the genocide, in mixed families, people killed their own brothers-in-law or sisters-in-law. Even husbands killed their wives. Sam, when we were children we were even poisoned by someone in my Dad's family in the country-side who was Tutsi like us."*

*"Wow, why was that?"* I asked.

*"Because of jealousies. Our family has lands in the east, but it's my father who inherited. People in the countryside are like that. Poisoning is very common in the countryside. That's where you still find witches."*

Based on my students' testimonies, the highest cause of premature death in Rwanda would appear not to be Malaria, acute respiratory infections, or AIDS, as reported by Rwanda's National Institute of Statistics<sup>427</sup>, but poisoning by a witch, which is so common that nearly every Saint Jacques student has lost someone to it or experienced a close shave themselves. Yet, much like the Illuminati, despite its importance to everyday life, witchcraft is not a part of the school curriculum; it is unmentioned in textbooks, class room discussion, assemblies, and even morning church meetings; nor is it a part of national political dialogue. Rather, it derives from a completely different system of knowledge, one which is popular and pervasive but is found exclusively at grass-roots and somewhat in the shadows.

### ***Epistemological premises on the use of subjugated knowledges for understanding students' identity construction***

This section sets out four epistemological premises, which have guided my analysis of Saint-Jacques students' discourses around witchcraft and the Illuminati, as they form the basis on which these discourses can be seen to both give expression to students' subjective experiences and serve as cultural resources for performing their identities.

To begin with, although in developing country settings occult beliefs are sometimes labelled 'traditional or 'indigenous knowledge'<sup>428</sup>, subjugated knowledges concerning the use of physical materials that are endowed with invisible properties to produce particular effects – known here as "witchcraft" – can be found in every society throughout history. The last person convicted of witchcraft in Britain was sent to jail as recently as 1944<sup>429</sup>; while money spent on clairvoyants in the UK is reported to be increasing since

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<sup>427</sup> NISR 2014

<sup>428</sup> For example: Kalichman & Simbayi (2004)

<sup>429</sup> Moore and Sanders (2001:1)

the onset of recession in 2008<sup>430</sup>; and homeopathy is available on the UK's publicly funded National Health Service, despite the governments' own chief medical officer telling a parliamentary committee that the principles it is based on are "scientifically implausible"<sup>431</sup>. Of course, the specifics of witchcraft beliefs and practices vary widely from one culture and society to another, but the basic concept of occult knowledge, meaning "knowledge of the hidden" as opposed to knowledge that is empirically measurable, is widespread across higher and lower income countries.

Likewise, conspiracy theories have long been a part of what Hofstadter calls the 'the paranoid style'<sup>432</sup> of American politics. They exist not just on the fringes but across the political spectrum and within the establishment.<sup>433</sup> Indeed, one can find talented students on many Western University campuses, usually with anti-establishment and anti-globalisation views, who believe that the CIA planned the 9/11 World Trade Centre attacks, or that Princess Diana was assassinated by British Intelligence Officers, acting on orders from Queen Elizabeth II. The Illuminati itself has re-appeared in various guises for over three centuries. Porter<sup>434</sup> traces the conspiracy from embellished stories about a group by that name that was founded in Bavaria to promote free thinking during the enlightenment, to rumours about Jacobinism in the French revolution, Free-Masonry in eighteenth century America, the death of the Romanovs in Russia, and modern Christian fundamentalism. She argues that the Illuminati narratives in these different ages, "*reflect the concerns of the prevailing ideology of the day.*"<sup>435</sup> I will show in the next section that Saint-Jacques students' Illuminati narratives echoes the Rwandan government's anti-western political discourse, but also appears to subtly critique its embrace of globalisation.

Secondly, having defined subjugated knowledge as typically less orthodox or less scientific, this does not mean that those who subscribe to it are less rational. On the contrary, as Fassin<sup>436</sup> observed studying conspiracies about the origin and spread of AIDS in South Africa, "*far from lacking coherence and rationality as one tends to think, (conspiracy theories) are actually coherent and rational in excess.*" Saint-Jacques students who talk about the Illuminati are rational both in style and substance, and often meticulous about unearthing 'hidden' or 'suppressed' information in order to build up a case of 'evidence', some of which is difficult to counter. Foucault's interest in archaeology stemmed from the idea that subjugated knowledge also entails the re-emergence of "*historical contents that have been buried and disguised*"<sup>437</sup>, much like the recovery of private memories in contrast to official histories discussed in the opening chapter.<sup>438</sup>

The first Illuminati film Paci showed me was styled like a crime documentary. One section shows an image of the American R&B singer, Aaliyah, wearing a sparkling bikini, while the narrator explains that her death in 2001 "*was planned by someone who loved her and needed her for his own blood sacrifice.*" Damon Dash,

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<sup>430</sup> Research with 300 psychics reported a 40% increase in clients. See: Little (2009).

<sup>431</sup> House of Commons (2010)

<sup>432</sup> Hofstadter (1964)

<sup>433</sup> Walker (2013:10)

<sup>434</sup> Porter (2005)

<sup>435</sup> *Ibid*:244

<sup>436</sup> Fassin (2011:42)

<sup>437</sup> Foucault (1980b:81)

<sup>438</sup> Page 7-9

former manager of Jay-Z is then accused of the act and 'evidence' is presented, including images of the plane crash and a black man of similar build to Dash lifting body bags onto stretchers; a time-line of dates of Dash's relationships with women construed to imply that Aaliyah knew she would be sacrificed; and a claim that Dash sold his fashion label Roca Wear to Jay-Z for \$30 million, which Jay-Z later sold for \$204 million, implying some favour or debt between the two. The film goes on to make similar connections between fame, wealth, blood sacrifice and Illuminati membership with other African-American artists including Michael Jackson, Tupac, Jay-Z, and Beyoncé. The films also employ laws of science and mathematics to add weight to their arguments. For example, their claim that the VISA card contains the numbers 666 – the mark of the devil – is not implausible, given that 'VI' is six in Roman numerals, the Greek Sigma ('S') is represented by the numerical symbol for six and the Babylonian mathematics system counts in sets of six, rather than decimals, giving 'A' the value of six.<sup>439</sup>

Paci was, likewise, able to present me with copious evidence of where images from the Illuminati appear all over the place, from American money and public buildings, to hand gestures used by hip hop artists. All over the internet there are images of powerful people, from politicians like Barack Obama and Hilary Clinton, to actors and music stars making a hand gesture in which the index finger and thumb form an 'o', that many would recognise as meaning "ok", but which Paci and other students have pointed out is actually a triple six, as the "o" makes the circular part of a six, with the little, ring and middle fingers forming the tails. Justin Timberlake appears to confirm his own Illuminati connection with an album cover on which he forms this "o" around his eye, combining the triple six with another Illuminati symbol, the "all seeing eye."



Clinton makes the sign of the devil, 666, thought to indicate membership of the Illuminati

This was later copied by Harry Potter actor Emma Watson on the front of Marie Claire magazine, as well as by numerous other celebrities.

In contrast to this 'rational style' of the Illuminati narrative, with its emphasis on 'evidence' from the metaphysical world, witchcraft operates in the realm of the spiritual and consciously rejects the positivist approach to understanding reality. Yet, it is the ethereal and mystic nature of witchcraft that makes it so compelling, as it seems to fill a cognitive gap, functioning as a means for explaining the inexplicable. Indeed, whenever students claimed witchcraft as the cause of an event I used to ask them what evidence they had that witchcraft was involved. Nearly always, rather than supply me with evidence, the student would cite the lack of evidence in support of alternative explanations. For example, when I asked Gloria how she knew that a bad stomach pain she had once had was caused by a witch she responded, "*because the doctors could not find what was causing it.*" When I asked Mugisha why he believes that witches kill people he replied, "*When you are enemies, it is easy to kill with witchcraft because it leaves no proof... My*

<sup>439</sup> <http://www.storyofmathematics.com/sumerian.html>



*mother's father was poisoned by a witch. He went to hospital and they found nothing. He even went to India and they found nothing, so he came back to Rwanda and died."*

Writing about witchcraft in the Cameroon, Nyamnjoh<sup>440</sup> explains that while western epistemologies view a dichotomous relationship between the real and the unreal, in the Cameroonian epistemological order, *"the opposite or complement of presence is not necessarily absence, but invisibility."* Hence the occult is a 'knowledge of the hidden', the evidence for which, if such is necessary, lies not in the occult power itself, but in the visibility of its effects. Furthermore, because people believe in witchcraft, there are people who practise it, meaning it is not only experienced through its effects, such as inexplicable deaths or misfortune, but also its inputs – the spells, potions, and cursed objects, such as the sack found hanging in Simeon's uncle's home. From this perspective, say Moore and Sanders<sup>441</sup>, *"witchcraft is not so much a 'belief' about the world but a patent feature of it."*

Thirdly, conspiracy and occult knowledges make it possible to see the world through the eyes of the subaltern because they correspond with people's 'lived realities', as well as their social perceptions and historical memories. In the case of conspiracy theories, knowledge about where a plot originates, from where it derives its power or support, against who it is targeted, and for what purpose, may tell us something about how those who express such ideas experience power and authority, how they position themselves in the social hierarchy and where they identify the opportunities and threats in their lives.

For example, Fassin<sup>442</sup> argues that black South Africans who believe the AIDS epidemic is part of a plot by western governments to systematically exterminate black people, have every reason not to trust white people or their technologies. In the early twentieth century during a plague outbreak in Cape Town, black people were forcibly removed and "quarantined" in settlements that would later become the model for segregated townships, even though there was a higher incidence of infection among the white population. Then during the apartheid struggle, a government doctor had actually conducted experiments to weaponize cholera and anthrax against ANC leaders. Also, some Conservative and National Party representatives publicly stated that AIDS would succeed where they had failed. The perception that white people's technology is incomprehensible, coupled with a belief borne of experience not to trust white people, made anything possible. So far from being incredible that AIDS should be a western conspiracy against Africans, from the point of view of many black South Africans, including many high-ranking ANC officials, such a conspiracy merely fits a pattern of behaviour they had come to expect and is, therefore, entirely rational.

With this in mind, one can ask what experiences students like Paci encounter in their lives to make their theories about the Illuminati plausible; where do they place themselves within the narrative; and what does this tell us about their social identities and anxieties? Such an approach would lead one to consider questions such as how the narrative's portrayal of Anglo-American 'white-power' speaks to Paci's own experience, perceptions, and historical memories of western cultural imperialism; and what his worry

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<sup>440</sup> Nyamnjoh (2001:29)

<sup>441</sup> Moore and Sanders (2001:4)

<sup>442</sup> Fassin (2011)

about the growing influence of the Illuminati in Rwanda tells us about his experience of globalisation, modernity, and citizen-state relations.

As with conspiracy theories, witchcraft beliefs and practices have been shown to vary from one society to another according to different social dynamics. At the time that Evans-Pritchard<sup>443</sup> was writing about the Azande, witchcraft was institutionalised within the prevailing order, so that the oracles used to divine the presence of witchcraft were administered through official channels. By contrast, witchcraft beliefs in post-colonial Africa are more commonly thought of as deviant and operate outside of formal institutions. In his study of witchcraft in the Cameroon, Gecheire<sup>444</sup> is able to show how the nature of belief in and the use of witchcraft differs from one region to the next, according to each society's historic trajectory and social structure. He found that in segmentary forest societies like the Maka, which have closer kinship ties, witchcraft, like power, is conceptualised as an ambivalent force. Whereas, in the Bamileke and Bamenda grassfield societies, which were more hierarchical even before colonialism, there is a stronger demarcation between 'good' and 'bad' uses of witchcraft and specific institutional arrangements for dealing with it. This dynamic nature of witchcraft leads Geschiere to conclude that far from being a static, pre-modern, phenomenon, witchcraft is closely linked to modern power relations and is used to both "*oppose(...) new inequalities and relations of domination*"<sup>445</sup> and to help people in their struggle to accumulate wealth and power. This distinction between the traditional and modern is important because it moves us beyond merely interpreting what subjugated knowledges *mean* to social actors, to understanding how they are *used* by them, and the social processes and structures which make possible or constrain their public performance.<sup>446</sup>

Fourthly, then, like other narratives studied in this thesis, witchcraft and the Illuminati are discursive resources that Saint-Jacques students are able to use strategically in the presentation of self. For instance, in the following analysis, the Illuminati is shown to not only express a critique of globalisation and western cultural imperialism but to valorise students' African identities. Meanwhile, witchcraft is used to re-attribute blame for misfortune and as a face-saving explanation for why some people acquire more wealth than others. Thus, it challenges the meritocracy discourse described in Chapter Three, as it highlights the capricious nature of the market, questions the legitimacy of others' wealth, and makes poverty a virtue. Both witchcraft and the Illuminati are used by students in the performance of religious identity as justifications for succumbing to temptation and as evils against which to present oneself as a 'good Christian'.

### ***Accounting for social or economic failure – The global and local threats to material well-being***

This section analyses the way Saint-Jacques students' narratives about the Illuminati and witchcraft locate threats to their physical security and material well-being from global, national and local forces that exercise illegitimate power behind a veil of secrecy. Looking firstly at the Illuminati, it explains how,

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<sup>443</sup> Evans-Pritchard (1937)

<sup>444</sup> Geschiere (1997)

<sup>445</sup> Ibid:5

<sup>446</sup> Green (1997)

echoing the anti-imperialist message in the school curriculum, which galvanises nationalist sentiment by constructing the West as an external threat<sup>447</sup>, the Illuminati represents Western cultural, economic and political power and acts as a metaphor for white, particularly corporate American, control of black culture. It therefore relates to students' wider anti-imperial sentiments; their stereotypes of white people as power-hungry; their sense of victimhood at western interference in African political affairs; and their experience of economic globalisation, which enables forces beyond Rwanda to exert an increasingly stronger influence over their lives. Following this, I consider how, for some students, their Illuminati narratives also pose threats closer to home, as they describe people betraying their closest human relations in exchange for the wealth, power and prestige that only the Illuminati can bestow. This is particularly seen in how some students question whether or not Rwanda's President, Paul Kagame, is himself a member or friend of the Illuminati, since, despite his frequent anti-western discourse, his economic "development" and modernisation policies increase people's vulnerabilities to market-forces and their fear of being socio-economically left behind.

This leads to how Saint-Jacques students' narratives about witchcraft highlight their sense of injustice and insecurity concerning the uneven and unpredictable distribution of good fortune or hardship. I argue that, as witchcraft is said to be motivated by jealousy or greed, in a context of growing inequality it calls into question the legitimacy of other people's economic and social advancement and provides an explanation for otherwise inexplicable misfortune. Finally, I discuss the nature and locality of the threat posed by witchcraft, noting that whereas the Illuminati is a large network of people who occupy senior positions in global and national political, economic and cultural institutions, witches are found mainly in the Rwandan countryside, are usually poor and tend to act alone; while the Illuminati is sophisticated and 'modern', witches are considered 'uncivilised'; while the Illuminati is remote, witchcraft is intimate, local, even familial; and while the Illuminati are pulling the levers of global and state power from above to keep young Rwandans subordinate, witches pull people down from below, poisoning and cursing them to thwart their ambitions. Together, therefore, witchcraft and the Illuminati indicate a context in which Saint-Jacques students are surrounded by threats to their well-being from the most far-removed global music icons, business tycoons and heads of state, to close neighbours and family.

***"In Rwanda, you can never trust a Muzungu"***

When I saw one of my Senior One boys, a small eleven-year-old with skinny arms, struggling to carry his wash bucket from the tap by the refectory towards the boarding, I carried it for him to the boarding gates, using the opportunity to chat along the way. I did not regard this action as condescending, charitable, or in any way remarkable; it just seemed normal. However, I learned later that the act had been noticed and caused much talk among the students, who debated my motives. Olivier in Senior Six asked if we could talk, and once we were alone he said, *"Teacher, they say you helped one of the Senior One boys carry water. Why did you do that?"*

*"He looked like he was struggling with it", I shrugged, "Why do you ask?"*

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<sup>447</sup> Page 76

*“But it is not normal to see that. People wonder how can a man like you do that for a kid”, he said.*

Curious to understand what the incident meant to Olivier I asked, *“well, why do you think I did it?”*

He hesitated, then said, *“Me, I don’t know. I think maybe because you are so kind teacher, but most people say it was a trick, that you are very clever, or even dangerous.”*

I laughed, *“What’s dangerous about carrying a bucket?”*, to which he replied, *“they don’t know, but they say you are smart. And in Rwanda you can never trust a Muzungu.”*

This view that white people are cunning, selfish and not to be trusted seemed deeply set. It appears in the anti-colonial sentiment found in the school curriculum and students’ personal experiences of white people, discussed in Chapter Three.<sup>448</sup> Similarly, at the heart of the Illuminati narrative, and indeed other aspects of hip-hop culture, is the idea that a powerful, secretive and malevolent global elite is using its superior strength – knowledge, technology, wealth, political networks – to control the world.

Whenever any student taught me about the Illuminati I always asked them where its headquarters were located, and without exception, they responded, “America”, often adding “of course”, as though this fact ought to be obvious. The following transcript of an interview with Richard Sibomana in Senior Two epitomises that perspective as he explained to me who joins the Illuminati:

*SR: Is the Illuminati strong in Rwanda?*

*RS: Not in Rwanda because Illuminati members the most strong, are like in music or politics, like the President of the USA or people who are talented in different domains.*

*SR: Does being in The Illuminati make you powerful, or does becoming powerful tempt people to join it?*

*RS: After someone becomes powerful they join The Illuminati because it helps you stay on top, but it does not create your power. But it is possible to avoid them (The Illuminati) though it is difficult because they are powerful.*

*SR: Who is in it?*

*RS: Many singers like err, Jay Z, Beyoncé, Lil Wayne, Drake, President Bush and Obama.*

*SR: But Bush and Obama are not on the same side?*

*RS: Not everyone in The Illuminati knows each other.*

*SR: How do you know Obama is in?*

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<sup>448</sup> Page 76

RS: *How he greets people. He makes some signs like... [Richard made the signs of 666 and devils horns with his hands].*

SR: *So you have seen him do that?*

RS: *I understand it from a documentary by a journalist saying when he greets American people he makes like that. There are many people who share with me about the Illuminati and I watched it on a disk from a friend in my quartier. And also, the last year in 2013 in S3 is a boy called Hakizimana. He was doing a conversation with five of us and teaching us about the Jacksons and how when Jackson was a young eight-year-old his father made a promise with the head of Sony to make him powerful. The owner of Sony is the head of The Illuminati. So, Jackson's father made a blood sacrifice of his son Junior so Michael will develop his talent and earn.*

SR: *The head of Sony is Japanese, no?*

RS: *I think he is American.*

SR: *Who did Michael Jackson's father make a blood sacrifice to?*

RS: *I don't know. But the Illuminati is close to Satan and wants the blood of humans to give to Satan. And he gives them power. Like you see the example of singers who become popular in a short period of time.*

*But Jackson wanted to change from Illuminati to being Muslim and when they saw that he was going to change they used a doctor to kill him. And there is a concert in which Michael Jackson gave away secrets of the Illuminati. And Tupac was also killed by them.*

Richard believes that famous singers like Michael Jackson and even American Presidents rise and fall according to the machinations of senior Illuminati leaders, as the secretive group is pulling the strings of global power – and doing so on behalf of Satan.

The positioning of black artists as prominent Illuminati members in the narrative is interesting given it is essentially a tale of African victimhood to manipulation and exploitation by western powers, yet most of its leading figures are African American music artists. Contrary to how they sometimes portray themselves in their lyrics as marginalised and down-trodden, these black cultural icons occupy an ambiguous space in the minds of many African youth, because having escaped their backgrounds they have become famous and wealthy members of the global cultural elite, making them at once symbols of aspiration but also, potentially, betrayal, since money is always treated as inherently evil in the Illuminati discourse. Hence, in the first film Paci showed me, after showing clips of various Rwandan music artists, one of the opening vignettes froze on an image of a \$100 US bank note, zoomed in on George Washington, followed by one of a large bag stuffed with \$100 bills, as the narrator condemned the love of money.

Paci helped me to better understand the role of hip-hop artists in the Illuminati's project to dominate the world when he explained:

*"The Illuminati leaders use African stars to control us. If you want to be rich and famous you have to join the Illuminati because they can make you successful and they can destroy you too. If a star that is high becomes low it is because the Illuminati was not happy with them. They even kill people like Tu-Pac. You see how Eminem is not popular now? That is because he refused to support the Illuminati. He repented. But that is why they use black singers. Like for example, do you know the singer Lil Wayne? Well me, I love him so much, so if I see him doing things I might want to do like him. So, that is how they trick us to sin and do things that lead to a bad life."*

Paci's and Richard's discussions about the role of black singers in the Illuminati contain the understanding that hip-hop artists are not a homogenous group - there are 'good' artists who refuse to support the Illuminati and 'bad' artists who agree to do its bidding in exchange for wealth and fame. The former do not survive long however, because those who oppose the Illuminati have their careers, or lives, ended prematurely.

The artist Saint-Jacques students associated most strongly with the Illuminati was Jay-Z, while Tupac seemed most frequently identified as the Illuminati's enemy. I suspect there is more to this than Jay-Z's overt use of Illuminati symbols in his work. Part of the appeal of hip-hop for many Saint-Jacques students, particularly in its indigenous form, is its coded messages about black emancipation. Despite the fact hip-hop is an imported cultural form, whose spread across Rwanda and other African states is attributable to the rapid expansion of global markets, paradoxically, it has been appropriated by many African hip-hop artists to define and strengthen African identities in the face of cultural globalisation, and to express their anger about global injustice. As Ntarangwi<sup>449</sup> has observed, *"one of hip-hop's enduring identities across the continent... is its ability to provide a resource for articulating feelings of economic and social marginality."* However, Jay-Z and other Illuminati hip-hop artists whose lyrics focus more on women, wealth and status, seem to have betrayed its roots as a form of black-resistance. As one student put it, *"Jay-Z has become too comfortable"*, meaning that he has transcended his origins and taken a place in the world of white corporate greed, symbolised by the money Paci's video claimed he had made from Rocawear.

By contrast, Tupac's lyrics are imbued with anti-western politics and seem to articulate young Africans' social discontent. Ntarangwi<sup>450</sup> notes how Tupac's violation of social etiquette saw him become a symbol of the Sierra Leone Revolutionary United Front whose rebels wore him on their shirts in the late 1990s. My own students were familiar with the pro-black messages in his music and praised his courage to "tell the truth" about the USA and Illuminati leaders. Though, ultimately such courage led to the Illuminati ending Tupac's life and the careers of artists like Lauryn Hill, or Eminem, who Paci said had "repented".

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<sup>449</sup> Ntarangwi (2010:1321)

<sup>450</sup> Ntarangwi (2010:1319)

Artists must therefore choose between staying loyal to their roots, or the wealth and success offered by Illuminati. They cannot have both.

Gosa<sup>451</sup> suggests that within hip-hop culture, the Illuminati “*provides a stand-in for white corporate control of black cultural production.*” The Illuminati’s purpose in wanting to control black music, as Paci explained, is to use the influence of black artists to manipulate the thoughts and behaviour of African youth who follow their example. By tempting Paci to copy the behaviours of Lil Wayne - which I gained from our interview could include drugs, glorifying violence, gangster-style dress and particularly pre-marital sexual activity - the Illuminati is seeking to destroy an essential part of his identity as a good Christian and the security that brings him. I will discuss Saint-Jacques students’ anxieties about avoiding sin and guarding their religious identities shortly, while the point to take from this section is that the Illuminati’s perceived aim is to control African young men in ways that are self-destructive and that this is thought of as part of a broader mission to keep Africans in subjection to western power.

***“Have you not seen how Kagame is friends with Clinton, Bush and Tony Blair?”***

An integral part of Saint-Jacques students’ narratives about the Illuminati is the idea of betrayal, as people sacrifice their own friends and family – even lovers in the case of Jay Z and Beyonce, or Damon Dash and Aaliyah – for the opportunities of wealth, fame and power. It is not merely a commentary on the west and white people, therefore, as it describes black people joining the global elite. Hence, although Saint-Jacques students’ explanations for the Illuminati echo the anti-western discourse of their President, Paul Kagame, and the sorts of nationalist and anti-colonial messages contained in the official school curriculum, as laid out in Chapter Three, some students theorize that Kagame, like Jay Z and others, may have sold out to the Illuminati himself.

I found students divided on this point. Some see Kagame as being on their side, standing up for Rwanda’s interests, while others believe he has become a member of the global elite. Whenever Kagame gives a speech overseas or receives foreign heads of state, former world leaders, and world-famous stars like Angelina Jolie<sup>452</sup>, it is well publicised by Kagame’s communications team, to project an image of him walking tall on the world stage and bringing prestige to the country. This also supports the wider RPF narrative crediting Kagame for Rwanda’s “miraculous”<sup>453</sup> post-conflict transformation. However, while many students express pride at seeing their smartly suited President stepping out of private jets and limousines and walking shoulder to shoulder with global stars and political giants, some also wonder whether this has made him detached from the concerns of ordinary Rwandans. “*Have you not seen how Kagame is friends with Clinton, Bush and Tony Blair?*” one student asked me, “*You see how these days Kagame is one of them?*”.

Students’ views on whether or not Kagame belongs to the Illuminati were usually expressed in terms of confusion, suspicions or doubts, rather than certainty. The question at stake is whether their national leaders are on the side of the Rwandan people against the global elite, or are themselves members of that

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<sup>451</sup> Gosa (2011:194)

<sup>452</sup> New Times (2013)

<sup>453</sup> Page 4, 11

elite; whether their government is a force for liberation or another source of their marginalisation. The question arises because, simultaneous to Kagame's frequent anti-colonial, anti-western discourse, the RPF-led government promotes a development model based on neo-liberal reforms leading to deeper integration into the global economy and the adoption of what are considered "western values", such as gender equality and a secular state. Indeed, a few students have suggested to me that Kagame's leadership on legalising abortion<sup>454</sup> in 2012 and parliament's ruling in 2009 that sexual orientation is a private matter while refusing to include anti-LGBT legislation in the penal code<sup>455</sup>, could indicate that, if not a member of the Illuminati, Kagame is certainly being controlled by them.

Some of the more superficial "evidence" of Kagame's Illuminati membership, offered by a few, includes the use of cow horns on official ministry emblems, which could be interpreted as "devils' horns", and the construction of a large glass pyramid near the entrance to Kigali's international airport, which some say resembles the Illuminati symbol known as the "all seeing eye". However, people also point to the arrival and growth in Rwanda of known Illuminati technologies such as the visa card and bar codes; the rapid circulation of smart phones and mandatory registration of sim cards, which makes it possible for authorities to track people; and most recently an automated payment system for public transport, which some theorise allows the Illuminati within the government to trace their journeys. This expansion of telecommunication technologies brings Rwanda closer to the rest of the world, while at the same time placing everyday communications and financial transactions in the hands of powerful, remote and opaque companies and governments, which the Illuminati are thought to have infiltrated. What's more, the proliferation of smart phones and similar devices is transforming the way people communicate, bringing people closer together, but at the same time introducing new, expensive, requirements for participation in social life, potentially creating new forms of exclusion.

The same dichotomy runs through Rwanda's economic development model, which on one level is bringing Rwandans and the world closer together, introducing new commodities and opening up opportunities to accumulate individual wealth, but which, for many, constitutes a form of oppressive 'social re-engineering'<sup>456</sup> that takes away freedoms and exacerbates inequalities. In the opening chapter I discuss how Rwanda's Vision 2020 economic development plan, taking inspiration from the East Asian "Tiger" economies, prioritises high-skilled human capital development, as it bids to turn Rwanda into the financial, telecommunications and IT systems hub of East Africa<sup>457</sup>; but also note the criticism that most Rwandans experience this "development" negatively as it regulates people's livelihoods and forcibly incorporates them into national and global supply chains in ways that worsen living conditions and make them more vulnerable to the whims of the market. Drawing on Scott's<sup>458</sup> concept of "high modernism", Hasselskog<sup>459</sup> describes Rwanda's economic model as 'social-engineering' in the sense that it relies on top-down planning, decisions are taken by experts rather than democratic politics, participation is secured by coercion rather than choice, and control is centralised. This approach has led to some of the policies listed

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<sup>454</sup> Kane (2015)

<sup>455</sup> <http://www.lgbtnet.dk/countries/africa/rwanda>

<sup>456</sup> Ansoms (2009:299; 2011:240); Ingeleare (2009:299; 2011:240)

<sup>457</sup> Minecofin (2000:25)

<sup>458</sup> Scott (1998)

<sup>459</sup> Hasselskog (2015)



in Chapter One<sup>460</sup> such as compulsory public works, villagization, and regulations dictating what materials to use for house building, what crops to plant, and when to plant them, with penalties for non-compliance. Likewise, in the name of modernisation a large area near Kigali centre, known locally as Kiyovu Cy'abakene<sup>461</sup>, has been demolished to make way for new Sky-Scrapers and commercial redevelopment, but those forced off their land complain they have not been compensated.

Honeyman<sup>462</sup> defines this situation as 'post-developmental' to capture the way this coercive centrally-planned development takes place within a context of neo-liberal marketisation of the economy, which focuses on individual responsibility to become 'self-reliant' and provide oneself with work – a situation she describes as "regulated self-reliance."<sup>463</sup> This entails a clamp down on informal, untaxed economic activity, limited social protections, and flexible labour markets, of which the Chief Executive of the Rwandan Development Board, Francis Gatere, boasted, "*the mobility of labour in Rwanda is the most flexible of anywhere in Africa.*"<sup>464</sup> Thus, Saint-Jacques students narratives about the Illuminati, in which the careers of Hip-Hop artists are made or broken, not according to their talents and effort, but their connections and willingness to betray their roots to get ahead, appears to serve as a metaphor for people's experience of 'neo-liberal', 'post-developmental' economic development.

### ***"Even family can poison you": Witchcraft and the intimacy of structural and everyday violence***

Like conspiracy theories, the discourse and practices around witchcraft are shaped by, and shape, the society where they are found. Both the extent of witchcraft accusations, and the way witchcraft is conceptualised – whether as a neutral force or something more evil – has been shown to correspond with the structure and distribution of political power. Geschiere<sup>465</sup> suggests that while witchcraft in the Cameroon in the 1960s was considered a response to the opaqueness and unpredictability of one-party authoritarian governance – a means of uncovering the hidden – the incidence of witchcraft actually increased with the democratisation process, as multi-party politics led to increased competition and insecurity. Killings by witches are likewise widely thought to have increased in South Africa in the mid-nineties as the lifting of apartheid and ushering in of democracy brought about increased competition and the accompanying disappointment that the ANC's "rainbow nation" did not deliver all the material gains many had expected.<sup>466</sup>

In the introductory chapter of this thesis I made reference to Borgois<sup>467</sup> observation that often in states emerging from civil conflict, violence does not die but merely shifts form, as the end of formal hostilities and transition to democracy brings an increase in everyday, domestic and structural violence<sup>468</sup>. With this

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<sup>460</sup> Page 11-13

<sup>461</sup> Meaning 'Kiyovu for poor people' to distinguish it from the wealthier half of Kiyovu where the President and Prime Minister have their official residences.

<sup>462</sup> Honeyman 2016

<sup>463</sup> 2016:5

<sup>464</sup> Theafricareport.com (2015)

<sup>465</sup> *ibid*:7

<sup>466</sup> Ashford (1998)

<sup>467</sup> Borgois (2001)

<sup>468</sup> Page 13-14

in mind, it is understandable that as violence, crime and interpersonal rivalries increase, the number of witchcraft killings (or accusations) would also increase. Witchcraft can therefore be seen as a gauge for levels of social unrest and inter-personal violence within a society, since, as Niehaus explains, "*It is not that the world is peaceful and that witches are violent; rather, people and witches are equally violent.*"<sup>469</sup> My students were unable to say whether witchcraft usage is declining or increasing, but although many agreed that it is practised less publicly than in the past, probably because of its stronger association with "backwardness" and "sin", if I were to measure its occurrence not by counting its practitioners but the number of its victims, I would have to conclude that it is extensive. Nearly everyone I spoke to felt that at some point they had been the victim of witchcraft which would render it by far the biggest cause of premature death.

It was rare, however, for students to actually identify the witch, or the person who commissioned the witch, responsible for their misfortune, and if they did they were apathetic about trying to obtain justice. This led me to wonder how it was that students were able to confidently attribute certain deaths, sicknesses and other unfortunate events to witchcraft but not others. When I asked this question, as I have shown already, the standard response was either to point to the presence of a motive – jealousy, greed, vanity – or to cite the lack of any alternative explanation. According to an epidemiological study of 6874 witchcraft killings in South Africa since 1992, the odds of bewitchment being the reported cause of death significantly increased in children and women of reproductive age, and when deaths were sudden.<sup>470</sup> In other words, witchcraft coincides with deaths that are unexpected and tragic; it occurs in the 'zones of the extraordinary'<sup>471</sup> and provides a rationale for making sense of unfortunate events in a landscape of uncertainty.

Witchcraft's invisible hand, dishing out good fortune to some and bad luck to others in a way that seems beyond anyone's control, is felt particularly strongly where neighbours and kin become divided by increasing social and political inequality, as Niehaus<sup>472</sup> has shown in his ethnography of "a life" in the New South Africa. Niehaus studies the life of his friend, Jimmy Mohale, who after serving in the ANC anti-apartheid struggle became frustrated at his inability to progress, as he yearned for success but was repeatedly overlooked for promotions and experienced many accidents and losses. As he eventually was dying of AIDS, Jimmy interpreted his misfortune as the effect of his own Father's witchcraft. That Jimmy accused his father of cursing him, rather than any stranger, tells us something about the way that the humiliation brought about by structural and cultural violence breaks down trust even at the most local of levels, including the family, just as my students Ntwali and Paci described earlier in this chapter; or as Benji put it, "even family can poison you".

However, although rapidly growing wealth inequalities and rising crime – structural and everyday violence – set the scene for Jimmy Mohale's life of bad luck, Niehaus cautions against reading everything as a consequence of social structure and encourages us to also consider how unexpected 'events' that interrupt the usual order of things can affect perceptions and expectations. This is not to suggest that

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<sup>469</sup> Niehaus (2013a:48)

<sup>470</sup> Fottrell et al (2012)

<sup>471</sup> Niehaus (2013b)

<sup>472</sup> Niehaus (2013a)

social structures are unimportant in setting the context in which extraordinary events are analysed and interpreted, however; since, as Niehaus explains, following Sahlins<sup>473</sup>, “*people set new events in storylines already established.*”<sup>474</sup> Nonetheless, some events are of such a magnitude as to disrupt the course of those story lines. The 1994 genocide, which still looms large in the historical memories of most students at Saint-Jacques, might be such an event. Saint-Jacques students frequently make reference to anecdotes or generally accepted ‘facts’ about the genocide in support of their view of the world. For example, when I expressed surprise or disbelief at the thought that anyone could be killed or cursed by their own family member or close neighbour, Ntwali reminded me that this is exactly what happened during the genocide, when spouses are said to have turned on each other or people turned in their own brothers or sisters-in-law to be killed, usually in order to be spared themselves. Thus, many students ask, if it happened in the genocide then why not now?

Equally, the fact that so much intra-family violence occurred during the genocide may also stem from the nature of family and social relations that preceded it. In her history of relations between factions of the Royal Court during the early colonial era, Des Forges shows how the system in which polygamous Kings ruled with their mother created ambiguity and conflict over which of the King’s wives and sons would succeed. For example, when Rutarwindwa succeeded Rwabugiri, he was given Kanjogera as an adoptive mother because his own mother had been killed (by court execution) while he was still young, but Kanjogera had her own son, Musinga, who was also eligible to rule. When a conflict with the German colonial army humiliated the court, Kanjogera took the opportunity to undermine and isolate Rutarwindwa, who, seeing his loss of authority, killed himself. Kanjogera then succeeded in placing her own son Musinga beside her as King. Such manipulations and violent purges over succession and inheritance was a prominent feature of court-life. Rwabugiri had not only executed the mother of his successor Rutarwindwa, but also his own mother and biological father. The head of another powerful lineage had murdered his own sister, who was also the wife of the King of the day and, according to Des Forges, “*whole lineages were sometimes wiped out in political pogroms.*”<sup>475 476</sup>

Violence over inheritance found at the Royal Court reflects a pattern of intra-family conflict in wider Rwandan society. One of Rwanda’s earliest ethnographers, Marquet<sup>477</sup>, observed that even in the colonial era, the principle unit in social life was the nuclear family based on polygamous marriages. Inheritance was patrilineal and tended to bequeath all to one favoured son. This has long created potent rivalries between the sons of different wives and has long been considered a strong motivating factor for witchcraft use. Observing social life on a Rwandan hill in the 1980s, De Lame also describes how lineage rights and distribution on a local level can be a tense source of intra-community conflict. She found that in a context where, due to the scarcity of land, “*a person’s landholding on the hill can only be increased to the detriment of someone else*”<sup>478</sup>, and because social relations are traditionally maintained through a redistributive gift exchange, “*accumulation and capitalisation (whether through inheritance or the*

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<sup>473</sup> Sahlins (1985:153)

<sup>474</sup> Niehaus (2013b:652)

<sup>475</sup> Des Forges (2011:10)

<sup>476</sup> De Lame (2004)

<sup>477</sup> Marquet (1961)

<sup>478</sup> Ibid:279

acquisition of cash) *are products and tokens of evil and witchcraft.*<sup>479</sup> Hence the association between witchcraft and intra-family violence found in many Saint-Jacques students' witchcraft narratives, which, as in the case of Ntwali and Paci, often occur at weddings or births and relate to jealousies and rivalries over inheritance.

Indeed, the majority of Saint-Jacques students' witchcraft narratives take this form, in which they or somebody close to them are the victims and witchcraft functions as an explanation for unexpected tragedy or misfortune as somebody known to them, acting out of jealousy, seeks to pull them down. Some students' witchcraft narratives also call into question the legitimacy of others' unexpected success. For example, Mugisha's older sister told me of her uncle's village, where one man always seemed further ahead in planting and harvesting his field than anybody else, while others in the village lost sons to inexplicable illness. It is said that he used witchcraft to kill them and commands their dead bodies to rise up in the night and work in his fields. Eventually, in order to protect others in the village from further harm, the villagers severely beat the man, destroyed his crops and drove him from his land. Thus, appearing to do better than others not only makes a person vulnerable to others' jealousy-inspired curses and poisoning, but also to accusations of using witchcraft themselves. This relates to my observation in Chapter Three, that while there were wide inequalities of wealth between different Saint-Jacques students, most tried hard to disguise their poverty, or their wealth, and position themselves, "in the middle", where they could avoid notoriety or judgement.

### ***"Don't take me as more African"***

As the preceding analysis has demonstrated, although stylistically the Illuminati and witchcraft look quite different – one is worldly, involving guns, bling, body-bags and hip hop, while the other is ethereal and concerned with magic potions and ancient spells – together they indicate a context in which students are surrounded by threats to their material well-being, from the most far-removed global pop icons, business tycoons and heads of state, to close neighbours and family. However, one noteworthy difference between witchcraft and Illuminati discourses is how they position the victim in relation to modernity. Whereas the Illuminati is located in new technologies, fashions, and popular culture imported from America, witchcraft is described as "traditional", or even "backwards" and "uncivilised". In an interview with Mugisha in which he shared stories of his own family's victimhood to witchcraft, at one point he gave an embarrassed smile and said, *"Don't take me as more African"*, thus demonstrating an awareness that, as a white Englishman, I may disbelieve his experiences or look upon him patronisingly.

Perhaps, it also displayed an ambivalence about his African identity that I often observed in my students – insecure or even ashamed, but at the same time defensive and defiant. Thus, while students' narratives about the Illuminati display a distrust of the west and a concern to preserve traditional "African" and "Christian" values against the corrosion of western culture, they reject witchcraft, not only as "sinful", as I discuss in the next section, but as something "traditional" and anti-modern. This seems to indicate a degree of acceptance of colonial discourse with its notion of linear progress towards western-style "development". Indeed, I found it common for Saint-Jacques students to compare Africans unfavourably

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<sup>479</sup> Ibid:278

to ‘Muzungus’ (white people) and express a wish to become more like their idealised view of western people one moment, and then a moment later assert their Rwandan or African patriotism and impute all of Rwanda’s problems to colonialism and ongoing western interference. Thus, the Illuminati provides a discursive resource for performing patriotism and African pride, while the rejection of witchcraft enables students to present themselves as ‘modern’ and ‘civilised’. Both narratives also relate to Saint-Jacques students’ religious identities and spiritual insecurities as they struggle and choose between the respect to be derived from accumulating wealth or ‘popularity’ verses the benefits, material and spiritual, of being a ‘good Christian’.

### ***“No man can serve two masters” – Spiritual Insecurity***

So far, this chapter has shown that Saint-Jacques students’ narratives about witchcraft and the Illuminati both exonerate people for their own inexplicable misfortunes or material failures and challenge the source of other people’s wealth and status as illegitimate, or even immoral. In this final section, I explore how witchcraft and the Illuminati seem to also present students with the temptation to transgress the tenets of their faith, but in a way that would ultimately be self-harming and socially destructive. African American Hip-Hop artists escape poor urban slums, against the odds, and become multi-millionaire global super-stars by selling their souls to the devil, even making blood sacrifices to the Illuminati leadership, but often their lives end in tragedy. Thus, for many Saint-Jacques students, maintaining strong Christian faith and avoiding committing sin is essential, not only for good self-esteem, but to attain the rewards God has promised to those who remain faithful to Him. Yet, Christianity has a challenger which offers students more immediate and tangible satisfaction in the form of opportunities to accumulate wealth, either through witchcraft or similar illicit means, or simply respect from peers by adopting the styles of US Hip-Hop artists or other markers of money or hardness. Here lay Paci’s dilemma discussed early on, about whether to dress, talk and walk like a ‘good Christian’ or to copy the styles and behaviours of his favourite hip-hop star, Lil Wayne.

Judging by Saint-Jacques students’ Facebook profiles – which offer a good perspective on how students present themselves to one another when they are less restrained by the gaze of school leaders or parents – most students aim to tread a line between both identities, projecting an image of themselves as ‘good Christians’ by sharing Bible-related memes, but also as sexually attractive and savvy participants of popular youth culture, posting posed and often photo-shopped images of themselves wearing designer clothes and shoes, baseball caps, headphones or sun glasses, stood next to flashy looking vehicles, or holding smart phones. Many boys post photos of themselves wearing vests or open shirts that display their biceps and abdominal muscles, known colloquially as “packs”, while girls show off their cleavages or wear tight-fitting trousers or skirts while posing with their bottoms pushed outwards.

It seemed there was a social dividend to be found in both types of identity – as good Christians and as ‘cool’, or in their terms, ‘high’ people; and many students were adept at performing both in varying degrees and different contexts. In using the language of ‘performance’, it would be wrong, however, to view one or the other performance as disingenuous, or an act of duplicity, rather both performances display different, conflictive aspects of the same self. Amongst expressions of piety, and negative evaluations of others’ adherence to expected standards of “Christian living” – which in the case of some

Pentecostal churches included strict rules requiring girls to keep their hair short and always wear long skirts (not trousers) – students often expressed self-doubt about their own abilities to “avoid temptation”. Kevin, whose struggles to measure up or choose between competing masculinities was described in the previous chapter, told me about his first sexual experience, aged seventeen, “*We got so close but I realised what I was doing and stopped it. I want to wait until I am married, but I don’t think I will make it.*” This experience of being caught between conflicting desires often featured in student preachers’ sermons, which emphasised the Biblical requirement to “*Choose ye this day who ye will serve*”<sup>480</sup>, or the warning that “*No man can serve two masters... ye cannot serve God and mammon.*”<sup>481</sup>

In the analysis that follows I demonstrate, firstly, that witchcraft and Christianity are closely intertwined – they belong to the same knowledge system – and that, as witchcraft is strongly associated with inequalities and injustice, which are everywhere, the ‘spiritual insecurity’<sup>482</sup> it engenders is ubiquitous in the lives of Saint-Jacques students, who consider that this “*this world, belongs to Satan.*” Secondly, based largely on my time spent in Saint-Jacques students’ early morning churches, I consider some of the Christian discourses which encourage students to shun the Illuminati and witchcraft as they place their hope in Christian living, not merely as a performance to earn social respect in the short-term, but in the expectation of obtaining liberation and justice from God in the long run.

### ***“This world belongs to Satan”***

The day after his uncle died, Simeon persuaded me to travel back to Gisenyi with him for a day of prayer and mourning in the chapel. Before heading into the ADAPER church we called at his uncle’s family home – a small and crumbling building in the church grounds, where he had lived with his wife and about nine children, ranging from young adult to toddler. The teenage boys’ bedrooms were in a separate building that looked like a converted stable, just large enough to hold their bunk-beds, with doors opening straight onto the yard. I noticed there was no glass in the windows and a swarm of mosquitoes and flies swirled above their beds. In the main house, Simeon showed me the beam on the ceiling where the cursed bag had been hung to entice demons to enter his uncle’s body, though my attention was more drawn to the number of spiders-webs, wasps’ eggs and small holes there were in the roof. Simeon’s uncle was a pastor and the house had been a benefit of his position in the church, though with his death the church leaders informed the family of their intention to demolish it and build a new house that would be rented out to increase the church’s income, leaving them homeless.

It was strange to attend the funeral of a man I had only met once, yet I found myself invited to a private gathering of Simeon’s father and uncles to discuss how they would all support their deceased younger brother’s widow and children. They were discussing how to fund building a new home for the widow and several children, or whether the children would be divided between their families. The sum of money required was burdensome for all involved and my accelerated incorporation into the family inner circle felt like an obligation to contribute. The last time we’d been together they asked for my prayers, but now

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<sup>480</sup> KJV Old Testament (Joshua 24:15)

<sup>481</sup> KJV New Testament (Matthew 6:24)

<sup>482</sup> Ashford (1998, 2005) describes fear of witchcraft as ‘spiritual insecurity’ to describe how it is a fear of the spiritual realm, though I take it a step further to also denote students’ insecurities about their own spirituality.

a more tangible help was needed. Given the awfulness of the situation I wondered whether none of them were questioning why God had not reversed the witch's curse, but if their faith was in anyway shaken it did not show. Before going back to Kigali, I found a way to ask Simeon why our prayers could not save his uncle. "*I don't know,*" he responded, then added, "*This world belongs to Satan, and sometimes God allows Satan to do his work.*"

In contrast to some cultures where occult beliefs and religion belong to two separate systems of knowledge, Simeon links witchcraft to Christianity as two opposing forces within the same world. If I ever appeared sceptical about the presence of demons, evil spirits or dark magic, my students often relied on biblical passages as proof of their existence. However, anthropologists studying 'witchcraft' in various other African settings, whether *Djambe* in The Cameroon<sup>483</sup>, *Al Baraka* in North Africa<sup>484</sup>, or *Mangu* among the Azande people of The Sudan<sup>485</sup>, have shown that occult beliefs and practices are often conceptualised by members of those societies as an ambivalent force that can be used for both bad and good. Geschiere complains about anthropologists who "*still tend to reduce discourses on witchcraft to an unequivocal opposition between good and evil, even when the local terminology hardly lends itself to this.*"<sup>486</sup> Yet, in present-day Rwanda I found it is the local people themselves who talk about witchcraft in such dualistic terms. Although there is some evidence this has not always been the case.

In Kinyarwanda two words are used to describe witchcraft, *Ubupfumu* and *Inbaraga*. *Ubupfumu* combines the words 'ubupfu' meaning 'trickery' or 'folly', and 'mu' meaning 'within', to literally denote "the trickery within". *Inbaraga* literally means 'strength'. Both *ubupfumu* and *inbaraga* are thought to be special powers that reside within a person which can be used to further his or her own ends, however *inbaraga* is thought to be a more neutral term, indicating a force that can be used for good or bad. As one student explained, "*ubupfumu is literally bad, but people call (witchcraft) inbaraga to make it good... people who use ubupfumu, they don't call it that way because it is more satanic.*" Common examples of *inbaraga* are the charms used to protect houses from evil or spells cast to make people successful in getting a new job or to be healed from a sickness. Also, when people move into new houses they sometimes call witches to cast out snakes. Though I never came across anyone who had personally witnessed this, a few students talked of knowing others who had actually seen the snakes leaving a property after such a cleansing spell. However, even though using such witchcraft brought obvious benefits and did not cause anybody any harm, every student I spoke to regarded both forms of witchcraft – *ubupfumu* and *inbaraga* – to be satanic. For this reason, I never encountered anybody who admitted to using witchcraft themselves and it was always talked about as something that others do.

I asked Jonathan why he believed that practising witchcraft is sinful even when it is used for good purposes. He responded, "*Because it is the devil's power you are using and not God's power. And most people use it for selfish reasons.*"

"*But if God is stronger than demons*", I asked, "*why do people not just use God's power to help them?*"

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<sup>483</sup> Geschiere (1997:12-13)

<sup>484</sup> Rasmussen (2001:136)

<sup>485</sup> Evans-Pritchard (1937)

<sup>486</sup> Ibid

He replied, “*God being more powerful than the devil doesn’t mean God can’t allow the devils work... Do you know the story of the Israelites? Moses and Aaron made snakes out of their sticks and the witches of pharaoh did the same. That’s proof to show you that the devil has power too.*”

Thus, it seemed that if, as its etymology suggests, *inbaraga* was once ambivalent, today it is tied up in Christian binaries of good and evil. According to everyone I spoke to, any wealth or status derived from witchcraft, either by using it to benefit oneself or selling one’s own witchcraft services to others – which I heard likened to the magician Simon in the New Testament<sup>487</sup> who wanted to buy Peter’s priesthood to make financial gain– is illegitimate and tainted.

This same shift in popular conceptions of witchcraft can be observed in other African settings. Looking at the dynamic nature of witchcraft among the Tsonga and Northern Sotho-speaking inhabitants of northern South Africa, Niehaus et al<sup>488</sup> found that the dualistic thinking, around which witchcraft was linked to the powers of God and the Devil, stemmed from the spread of Zionist churches in the 1960s. These intentionally aimed to structure popular perceptions of witchcraft in a way that saw the Holy Spirit as people’s only source of strength and comfort in the face of affliction. By slight contrast, in her work with members of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Ghana, Meyer<sup>489</sup> suggests that it is the lay members themselves who have synthesised ‘traditional’ and Christian beliefs in this way. As the witchcraft described by Saint-Jacques students is the same as appears in the bible, Christian living offers the best protection against it. Therefore, when Paci described the Illuminati’s use of Hip-Hop artists to tempt him to have sex and do drugs, he is describing a plot to make him weaker and place him within the power of the devil.

### ***“The last shall be first and the first shall be last”***

For many at Saint-Jacques, maintaining strong Christian faith and avoiding committing sin, is essential not only for good self-esteem, but to attain the rewards God has promised to those who endure their trials patiently and remain faithful to Him. Christian discourse contains the hope of a day when all injustices will be put right. When I complained one day that I wished I had darker skin, as some boys commented on my red “tan-lines” while we changed for sports, an A-level student who I knew from the Seventh-Day-Adventist choir told me that I am fortunate to be white. “*Teacher, I think our skin is this dark colour because we are cursed*”, he explained. I asked him why he thought Africans were cursed and he told me that it is a biblical teaching, citing the Tower of Babel as the time when race came into being. Another student told me dark skin related to the curse God put upon Cain after he slew Abel, meaning that Africans, as the apparent descendants of Cain, do not belong to God’s covenant people the House of Israel.

On the other hand, many students quoted from the Sermon on the Mount that “*the last shall be first and the first last*”<sup>490</sup>, or from Isaiah that “*every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low*”<sup>491</sup>, as evidence that in the last days of the world powerful European nations who have turned

<sup>487</sup> KJV New Testament (Acts 8:9-19)

<sup>488</sup> Niehaus et al (2001)

<sup>489</sup> Meyer (1992)

<sup>490</sup> KJV New Testament (Matthew 20:16)

<sup>491</sup> KJV Old Testament (Isaiah 40:4)



their backs on God will be destroyed and God-fearing poorer African nations made strong. This hope of a reversal in the structure of world power was also expressed once in my Senior Three Entrepreneurship class when, as students learned about the laws of supply and demand in relation to prices, some enjoyed hypothesising about the day the world runs out of oil and food and becomes dependent on Africa for aid. Apocalyptic versions of Christianity – the belief that ‘the end is nigh’ - therefore presented the hope of impending black emancipation if Africans remain firm in their Christian faith.

However, as some of the student-pastors often teach, *“straight is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it”*<sup>492</sup>; and many find Christian living, with its emphasis on honesty, self-denial and chastity, is not easy. Students expressed a sense of moral panic about living in a world of innumerable temptations to sin, and concern at the number of their peers who were being seduced by them. In an English class assignment that invited students to write a letter to a friend offering life-advice, few wrote about things their friends *should do*, while most listed a series of things for their friends to *“avoid”*, such as drugs, alcoholism, pornography, prostitution and ‘sugar-daddies’ – older men who lavish gifts on school girls in exchange for sexual favours. Perhaps this reflects how students interpreted the assignment in the context of national campaigns to enforce the legal drinking age of eighteen and warn youths about the risks of drug taking, HIV and unwanted pregnancies. However, this conception of the world, as a maze of moral hazards to be avoided, could also be seen in the sermons of student preachers each morning in the protestant church, which seldom focussed on the positive behaviours and attributes Christians should develop, like service, charity and sacrifice, but more often lamented the sinfulness of the world, exhorting their listeners to fast and pray for the strength to resist temptation and to purify themselves.

Students often presented themselves as ‘Christian soldiers’ battling to stay on the *“straight and narrow path”* in a world of filth and sin. This view can be found in many students’ conversion narratives. When I returned to Saint-Jacques in late 2013 after a few months away, Mugisha told me enthusiastically, *“I’ve become a preacher now.”*

I asked him why he was chosen and what the qualities of a good preacher were, so he explained, *“You have to have a good story.”* He went on,

*“For me, I’ve been delivered like the apostle Paul. You know that pastor Simeon in Senior Six? He told us that if we have looked at pornography it leaves the images in our minds and hearts, so he invited anyone who is afflicted to come back at lunch time for him to pray over us. And because I had seen something I went. We sat in a circle and prayed for our hearts and minds to be purified and after I was cleansed I preached about how I was delivered from that evil inside me. And people saw how I preached well, so they made me a preacher.”*

*“What is about your preaching that other students like so much?”* I asked.

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<sup>492</sup> KJV New Testament (Matthew 7:14)

Mugisha thought for a moment and said, *“I like to preach the things people find hard to hear, about the end of the world and the destruction coming to those who disobey God. I scare people. But I tell the truth even if it is hard to hear.”*

Mugisha’s assertion that his preaching is appreciated because he *“tells hard truths”*, echoes the hip-hop discourses of “keeping it real” and “hardness” that Weiss<sup>493</sup> observes among youths in the barbershops of Arusha, Tanzania. Weiss explains that the attraction of such narratives lies in their authenticity, as they appeal to the tangible realities of youths’ lives.

At Saint-Jacques there was a drift of students from the Catholic Church to the Protestants - something that troubled the priests who tried hard to impose a rule that everyone must attend the church listed on their student ID cards. On one occasion Father Karenzi called forward Catholic students caught attending the Protestant meetings in assembly and labelled them “prostitutes”. This became an established term of insult to students who left the Catholic Church to attend other denominations and if caught they were punished. It would be reductionist of me to suggest that all students who chose to convert away from Catholicism were motivated by doctrine. Some students told me they preferred the Protestant or Adventist style of singing, the less formal and ritualistic structure of their meetings, or simply the freedom to sit with their friends in the morning or to conduct their worship away from the gaze of the priests. However, a significant number also talked about Protestantism being more “real” because it required a more active form of worship and stronger devotion compared to Catholicism which they considered passive and overly reliant on the priests’ direction. This was particularly true for Seventh-Day Adventists and Jehovah’s Witnesses who emphasised adherence to what the bible *“really teaches”* and often narrated their faith as a set of doctrinal differences between their churches’ teachings and the “mistaken” creeds of other religions.

For their part, many Catholic students were ambivalent about their faith, which they presented as a matter of family tradition rather than personal conviction. However, more committed Catholics, like Protestants, also appealed to the idea of authenticity, pointing out that as the original European church, which has retained a traditional style of worship, Catholicism represents the “official” church that Christ established over two thousand years ago. Strictness about the use of time and space and harsh punishments, as well as confession, communion and incense to cleanse from sin also drew on the hard contrasts between sin and righteousness and their sense, much quoted, that *“strait is the gate”*<sup>494</sup>

Seventh-Day Adventist and Jehovah’s Witness teachings often focused on the “signs of the times”, particularly those found in the book of Revelations which indicate that we are in the last days of the world, a time of wars, famines, and great destruction before a final day of judgement. By contrast, protestant preachers appealed more to emotion than the biblical text but the messages were similarly about the urgent need to repent and live as “true” Christians. Student preachers in the protestant congregation at Saint Jacques depicted the world through a series of moral binaries between which students had to choose – the power of God versus the power of Satan, angels versus demons, the “world” versus the Kingdom of Heaven, and guidance and comfort of the Holy Ghost versus the ‘lustful temptations of the flesh’.

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<sup>493</sup> Weiss (2002, 2009)

<sup>494</sup> KJV New Testament (Matthew 7:14)

Popularly quoted scriptural passages included a warning against complacency in spiritual matters, “... *because you are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, I am about to spit you out of my mouth*”<sup>495</sup> as well the warning that “*no man can serve two Masters*”<sup>496</sup>, discussed already.

This call to choose sides made it impossible to reap the benefits of witchcraft, even in its positive ‘Ingabara’ form, without rejecting Christianity. Likewise, the scriptural injunction to be separated from “the world”<sup>497</sup> required shunning the fashions and styles that symbolised money, power and sexual desire. Yet, at the same time, many students found such symbols irresistible, which led them to sin and become vulnerable to the judgements of God and others. Further still, it left them without any confidence that God would be their protector to cast out demons and stave off curses.

Writing about the final years of the authoritarian Banda dictatorship in Malawi, van Dijk<sup>498</sup> describes how alongside the Ayufi (youth-league of the ruling party) whose public demonstrations put fear into rural townships, a generation of young charismatic preachers emerged publicly calling on people to repent. In emotionally charged public displays they cast out demons and evil spirits and denounced witchcraft and occult forces, which they held responsible for the lack of progress in Malawi as well as a host of social problems like heavy drinking, smoking, violence and sexual promiscuity<sup>499</sup>. Against these “evils”, Pentecostal Christianity with its concept of being “born-again”, or as Mugisha described it “delivered”, required a clean break from the past, including the rejection of cultural traditions and rituals that were considered demonic<sup>500</sup>.

On the other hand, sometimes, when expressing uncertainty about events in the future, my students talked as though these two forces, the powers of God and Satan, act on their lives in a manor beyond their control. It was common to hear Christians of all denominations express the sentiment that something they were hoping for would happen “if God be willing”, as though they were merely passive recipients of God’s will. Equally, bad mistakes could be attributed to demonic forces which had control over them. In one of the most violent episodes of discipline during my time at Saint Jacques, described in Chapter Four<sup>501</sup>, a young man was publicly flogged as a punishment for whipping a younger student with a cable for wetting the bed. He was a quiet and serious young man, a leader in the protestant church, with a reputation for strictness with younger boys in the dorm. When I asked whether he thought the punishment he received was justified he told me, “*I had demons inside me that made me do that thing, and the monitor, he beat the demons out of me.*” Thus, discourses of witchcraft and Christianity also offer justifications for mistakes and opportunities for change and renewal. This fatalist view of sin and righteousness may also reflect a broader sense of powerlessness that permeates the lives of people whose futures seem uncertain and reliant on the whims of opaque forms of power, be they global, state or local.

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<sup>495</sup> KJV New Testament (Revelations 3:19)

<sup>496</sup> KJV New Testament (Matthew 6:24)

<sup>497</sup> KJV New Testament (John 15:19)

<sup>498</sup> van Dijk (2001)

<sup>499</sup> *ibid*:100

<sup>500</sup> *ibid*:109

<sup>501</sup> Page 98-99

### ***Concluding thoughts***

Two common grass-roots narratives – witchcraft and the Illuminati – have been used in this chapter as windows onto Saint-Jacques students' life-worlds, with attention not only to how individuals interpret them, but how they use them in the performance of identity and the negotiation of social relations. It is in essaying to interpret subjective experiences such as I have here that the ethnographer's positionality becomes most problematic. Thus, I am aware that the interpretations I have given here may be incomplete, and that others, including my students, may offer alternative perspectives. Nonetheless, while highlighting different individuals' narratives and the explanations they offer, I have identified several commonly occurring themes and the chapter has covered a lot of territory. Thus, it may be helpful before moving on to pull together some of the main observations.

Fundamentally, the chapter has considered witchcraft and the Illuminati as products of the often hidden and capricious powers that affect people's lives. Firstly, drawing on Foucault, the chapter defined such narratives as forms of *subjugated knowledge*, whose (re)emergence implies an act of subversion as they offer the subaltern a low-risk and subtle means to criticise the state. Connectedly, they articulate students' experiences of structural and everyday violence caused by globalisation, the liberalisation of the economy, state-driven social re-engineering and micro-level intra-family or intra-community conflict resulting from land scarcity; and they offer a socially-acceptable explanation for material loss. Thirdly, the rejection of witchcraft enables people to present themselves as 'modern', while the rejection of the Illuminati restores pride in their collective African identities. Fourthly, witchcraft and the Illuminati both represent different temptations to sin in order to win respect or material gain; thus, Christianity offers a face-saving explanation for poverty that restores self-esteem and a hope for a time of restitution for injustices they endure. Fifthly, the fatalism with which many talk about the dangers of witchcraft and sin, reflects a sense of powerlessness and relieves them of moral agency for their choices.

Finally, in relation to understanding the influence of schooling in shaping how young Rwandan's construct their identities, witchcraft and Illuminati narratives at Saint-Jacques demonstrate the pervasiveness of grass-roots counter-discourses that develop and circulate independently of what is taught in the classroom or other mechanisms of state knowledge construction.

## Chapter Seven

### **“It’s those f\*\*\*ing Hutus. They did this to me”: Life Through the Lens of a Genocide**

Near the end of my third term at Saint-Jacques, I happened upon an agitated crowd of students in the archway that cuts through the main block to the basketball courts behind. They were huddled around the bulletin board jostling to read it. Some appeared to ride on the shoulders of those in front to get a better look. Others, I noticed, lingered a few paces back with expressions of worry. On the wall was posted the names of students who owed a debt to the school, either for boarding or tuition fees from previous terms, and how much was owed. The students explained to me that Father Bertrand had warned people in assembly that if they did not settle their debts with the school over the weekend they would be unable to sit their end of year exams. Students seemed not only concerned or relieved by the presence or absence of their own names from the list but intrigued about which of their class-mates owed the greatest debts – a rare insight into other students’ personal affairs. News of certain unexpected names on the list quickly spread to the refectory where lunch had started. As I stood scanning the lists for the names of students I felt concerned about, I was interrupted by teacher Eli, who I had not noticed was stood behind me also reading the lists. *“They’re wicked aren’t they?”* He said, nodding towards the Dean of Discipline’s office. *“Why do they have to embarrass the students like this? You see, they even have the nerve to list (my son) on there, when it is the school that has paid me late.”*

After school I took a moto to Fidel’s house, where I had been invited to dinner. As I let myself into the yard and approached the house I heard Fidel and his mother, Louise, arguing and saw him walk hurriedly away and slam the door of his room, which opened onto the outdoors kitchen area where Louise was mixing cassava flour. She looked up and laughed, possibly embarrassed about what I had witnessed, and said simply, *“Ah Sam, your friend Fidel is sad”*. I asked what was wrong, but she told me to go and ask him myself. Instead, I went into the lounge and asked his sisters, who explained that their father had been expecting someone to lend him money to pay Fidel’s fees, but he had been let down. I realised Fidel’s name must have been on the list of debtors at school and discerned that he was feeling a mixture of anxiety about being barred from entering his exams and embarrassment about other students learning of his economic situation. Fidel had successfully presented himself as a “high person” and most students assumed him to be richer than he was.

I went in to see him. He lay flat on the bed with his back to me and his face buried in a pillow. *“Hey”* I said, but was met with silence. *“Hey!”* I tried again, *“Why didn’t you tell me about the school fees?”* He shrugged and muttered *“I’m fine”*, still into his pillow, so I tugged it away to encourage him to talk to me properly and noticed he had been crying. Still looking away, but now louder and angrier he said: *“Sam, it’s those fucking Hutus. It’s those fucking Hutus. They did this to me. If my Dad didn’t grow up as a refugee, he would have got an education and we’d be rich now. Everything is the fault of those fucking Hutus.”*

To hear a Rwandan student make such a brazen reference to his or another's ethnic background in this manner is not normal, even with a family friend. It is generally agreed that openly identifying oneself as Hutu or Tutsi is taboo in post-genocide Rwanda, in which everyone is meant to define themselves as simply "Rwandan". Indeed, some students claimed to not even know whether their parents were considered Hutu or Tutsi at the time of the genocide, while others would lower their voices to a whisper or talk to me in code about someone being "T" or "H". Even Fidel, who had developed a trusting friendship with me, would not normally talk quite so bluntly, so his angry comment surprised me. What's more, a few weeks earlier Fidel had offered a different explanation for why his family had begun to struggle financially, when he told me that his father, whose arms bore the scars of bullets he took fighting for the RPF in 1994, would have become a Colonel or General by then, but had given it all up and sacrificed friendships when he joined a church that required him to be a pacifist.

How, then, should Fidel's outburst be interpreted? Are we to understand that he, and probably other students, carry a seething resentment of the 'other' ethnic group, which is only suppressed to keep within socially and legally expected norms? Was this deviance from the public script a case of Fidel's mask slipping in anger to reveal his 'true' beliefs? Or, like students' narratives about Christianity, witchcraft and the Illuminati in the previous chapter, was this a case of Fidel drawing selectively from one of a number of available discourses students use to explain their misfortune or save-face in times of embarrassment and insecurity? To what extent did Fidel feel a victim? And, how does this affect his relationships?

This chapter investigates the place of ethnicity in Fidel's and other students' lives, and how ethnic identities and ethnic othering are affected by their experience of schooling at College Saint-Jacques. I will argue that ethnicity is a ubiquitous, at times salient, and occasionally explosive, but never exclusive, aspect of Saint-Jacques students' social identities. It is complex. It varies from student to student, who each have different parental heritage, family cultures and historical memories; and its meaning and value depend on other social phenomena, such as religion, gender and wealth inequality. In particular, this chapter argues that Saint-Jacques students' discourses and practises around ethnicity seem closely linked to the politics of distribution and students' anxieties about their current and future social status. In this regard, we will observe ethnicity being used as a source of solidarity and social capital, as well as narratives of victimhood that save face in moments of diminished social standing. Conversely, we can also observe students who shun ethnic 'othering' and division as a mark of their religious values, modernity, or good citizenship – heeding the call to build a new Rwanda – or who simply find more value in other forms of group identity.

Continuing an ongoing theme in this study, which problematizes the relationship between elite discourses and grass-roots knowledge, the remainder of the chapter is structured around three contrasting sites of knowledge construction: firstly, the messages encoded in the formal curriculum; secondly, the sub-culture found in the informal, student-led, spaces of the school; and finally, students' private family lives and individual ethnic heritage. In the first section, I describe how state-driven ethnicity and citizenship discourses are presented in the political education curriculum as well as official school rituals and ceremonies, and how this is experienced and interpreted by students. Echoing observations in early chapters, I show students' aptitude for living with ambiguity, as many passionately recite public scripts in a classroom setting while proffering seemingly contradictory views in private. On the other hand, I also

find the classroom to be an arena of linguistic gymnastics, where students rehearse performances of patriotism and attempt to catch one another out for using politically incorrect wording. In the second section, I argue that in the student-led spaces of the school, ethnicity comes alive. I describe how a prominent student-led society within the school, AERG (Associations Des Enfants Rescapés du Genocide)<sup>502</sup>, which defines and tightly controls its membership predominantly along ethnic lines, has become simultaneously a source of social capital and prestige for some students and resentment and social exclusion for others. In the final section I look at the diverse ways ethnicity and politics are discussed in the privacy of the home and how this often contradicts what students hear at school, in some cases fomenting a sense of historic or present victimhood and suspicion.

Before moving into these three sections, however, I should first add a caveat about my data. Although the analysis of students' ethnic relations offers a nuanced view of the diversity and complexity of their experiences, the voices of students with Hutu heritage are less well represented. When I started my research at Saint-Jacques, in the interest of ethics and to avoid giving offence, I never asked students about their ethnic heritage. Instead, I developed this insight gradually over time, based on details of students' lives they chose to share with me. In addition, with time I became more attuned to discerning such details, while remaining cautiously aware that even Rwandans frequently guess one another's ethnicity incorrectly. Consequently, it took me many months to realise that nearly all of the students I had developed more trusting relationships with were either from Tutsi or mixed backgrounds. This did not go unnoticed by the students, of course, one of whom eventually asked me, "*Teacher, why do you prefer Tutsi students?*"

I can think of three possible explanations for how this situation came to be. Firstly, the key students I worked most closely with were mainly self-selecting, which causes me to wonder whether, in a context of suspicion, where parents raise their children to be careful what they say outside of the home, students from Tutsi backgrounds were perhaps more confident sharing personal details about their lives with me. Secondly, it seems to me that Saint-Jacques has a disproportionately high number of students from Tutsi backgrounds compared with the general population of Rwanda; and although the data to establish this is unavailable, it is not an unreasonable assumption given that it draws nearly four out of five of its students from Kigali, which has a much higher percentage of people of Tutsi heritage due to the numbers who returned following the genocide. A third possibility is that some students are in fact from Hutu parentage, but misled me into believing they are of Tutsi or mixed parentage. Certainly, as I describe in the third section, students often contest others' claims about their background.

By the time I tried to correct for this bias in my sample and reach out to students who I understood to be from Hutu backgrounds, I found it difficult to achieve the same level of openness, and mutual trust. Although most considered me a kind teacher who cared about them, they would avoid sharing too many personal details about their lives. This demonstrates the challenge for a participant observer to be considered 'neutral', in a context where students were generally suspicious and distrustful of one another. Those I interviewed would often try to use the opportunity to elicit details of my conversations with their classmates, while repeatedly stressing the importance of me not sharing any details about their own lives

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<sup>502</sup> The Association of Child Genocide Survivors

with others, even details that to me seemed fairly innocuous. In this respect, students of Hutu heritage are conspicuous by their under-representation from my data and what this demonstrates about their relative discomfort discussing their backgrounds, compared to my students of Tutsi heritage.

***“We do not have Hutus or Tutsis here. We are all Rwandans”: ethnicity and citizenship discourses in the school curriculum***

The story is often told at genocide commemorations of Chantal Mujawamahoro, a Senior Six boarding student at the Nyange Secondary School in the Western province, who became a national hero for her bravery and commitment to ‘national unity’. On 18<sup>th</sup> March 1997, three years after the genocide, a band of armed Interhamwe terrorists entered Rwanda from the Eastern Congo under cover of night, strangled the school guard, and stormed the classrooms where Senior Five and Six students were studying late. Their intention was to kill all the Tutsi, so they ordered everyone to separate themselves by ethnic group, but the students refused. Witnesses report that Chantal, a twenty-one-year-old of Hutu heritage, courageously stood up, facing the killers, and said: *“We do not have Hutus or Tutsis here. We are all Rwandans”*. One of the gunmen shot her in the head and she dropped dead instantly, one of six girls who were killed that night. Her body now lies in a special tomb on the school grounds and she is honoured at the National Heroes Monument in Kigali. Her display of unity, preferring to die with her classmate as Rwandans than identify some as Tutsi, is held up as an example of patriotism for others to follow and a symbol of hope for a future without ethnic divisions.

The promotion of a collective “Rwandan” national identity in place of ethnic identities is fundamental to the government’s program of post-genocide reconciliation and its vision of a modern state, underpinned by a patriotic national citizenship. This section describes the various ways that a collective ‘Rwandan’ identity is promoted through schooling. However, I will go on to argue that the construction of a national civic identity is complicated, if not undermined, by the way the genocide is memorialised in a manner which keeps it raw and reproduces ethnic categories under new names. In particular, I argue that the status of “survivor” has become a proxy for “Tutsi” and affords some students certain privileges while excluding others. Finally, after describing how these twin discourses of ‘Rwandan citizenship’ and genocide commemoration are disseminated in the school and some of the tensions between them, I consider how they are interpreted and operationalised by students in a classroom setting. Here, I show the importance of using politically-correct language and how the classroom is a space where students engage in word games to practise their patriotism or trip one-another up for using an out-of-favour term. Navigating this delicate and testing linguistic environment is, I suggest, one more source of anxiety for Saint-Jacques students.

***“Now there are no divisions among us” – constructing shared citizenship***

The opening chapter to this work introduced a prominent theme when I arrived at Saint-Jacques in 2012 of *“learning from our history to build a bright future”*. I noted how Rwanda’s educational planners consider that in the years leading up to the genocide against the Tutsi in 1994, schools were instrumental in fostering genocidal ideology in the hearts and minds of Rwandan youth by teaching divisive ‘myths’ about



Rwandan history, and how this creates an imperative for schooling today to “deconstruct myths”, “restore memory” and “reconstruct history”.<sup>503</sup>

The ‘history’, taught in schools and state propaganda before the genocide, essentially reproduced the discredited racial theory of early colonialist John Hanning Speke, which assumed the Tutsi to be a distinct and superior race who had conquered Rwanda from the North and were better-suited to governing<sup>504</sup>, turning it into a Hutu victim-narrative. Prunier<sup>505</sup> explains how, rather than reject Speke’s theory, the Kayibanda and Habyarimana governments, “*merely inverted its sign*” so that, “*the Tutsi were still foreign invaders... but now this meant they could not really be considered citizens.*” This narrative, which conjured “Hutu” memory of the Tutsi as their historic oppressors, produced the logic and fear that Mamdani<sup>506</sup> suggests “*mobilised the foot soldiers of the genocide.*” Reversing this, the RPF historical narrative minimises the significance of ethnicity in pre-colonial times, emphasising how Rwanda existed as an organised nation state even before colonisers arrived, in which people spoke the same language and participated in the same cultural traditions. The emergence of ethnic divisions according to this narrative is attributed entirely to Rwanda’s colonisers who “divided” the Rwandan people.

The idea of Rwanda having a harmonious pre-colonial past is threaded throughout the Political Education for Secondary Schools (PESS) textbooks One<sup>507</sup> and Two<sup>508</sup>, like a three-part play, in which peace and order is destroyed by colonisers in the second act, culminating in genocide, but restored again in the third under the guidance of the RPF government. In module two of PESS 1 on Rwanda’s political history, students are taught about complex administrative structures in the pre-colonial state that ensured checks and balances on power, followed by colonialism which, “*led the country into an institutionalised ethnic and regional impunity<sup>509</sup>*”, until the new government, “*endeavoured to restore the Rwandan culture of mutual acceptance (sic), mutual supports, sociability and patriotic values...<sup>510</sup>*” In module three on the economy, students are told how, “*Rwanda has to urgently address the structural defects before 1994 and the consequences of Genocide<sup>511</sup>*”, and how such defects had lasted thirty years and were a product of “*colonial and post-colonial economic indifferences<sup>512</sup>*”. In module four on human rights, in addition to learning about the development of International Humanitarian Law, students are taught about such institutions that existed in pre-colonial Rwanda, for example, that, “*the non-combatants males were not killed, while girls and women, without exception, were always protected and respected.<sup>513</sup>*” The same pattern is repeated for curriculum materials on gender, protecting the environment, discrimination and education.

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<sup>503</sup> Page 9

<sup>504</sup> Braeckman (1994:21-4)

<sup>505</sup> Prunier (1995:80)

<sup>506</sup> Mamdani (2001:233)

<sup>507</sup> NCDC (2008a)

<sup>508</sup> NCDC (2008b)

<sup>509</sup> NCDC (2008a:34)

<sup>510</sup> NCDC (2008a:38)

<sup>511</sup> NCDC (2008a:57)

<sup>512</sup> NCDC (2008a:58).

<sup>513</sup> NCDC (2008a:88)

Judging from my students essays and comments in class, they were adept at reciting this three-part story and, as I described in Chapter Three, when asked in a classroom setting would insist that in contrast to the ethnic hatred before the genocide, “*now, there are no divisions among us.*” However, as I go on to show later in the chapter, this statement was more the affirmation of an ideal, or the answer students believed I was looking for, than a true reflection of their lived-experience. Firstly, however, I will discuss the government’s approach to citizenship education a little further, showing how it articulates an aim to not merely teach a ‘more accurate’ version of Rwandan history, but to shape children’s social values, attitudes and skills, and mould them into good Rwandan citizens.

The introductory paragraph to the political science syllabus booklet for Senior One through to Senior Six classes, emphasises that the primary objective of the politics curriculum is to help students develop values such as ‘harmony’, ‘cohesion’, ‘reconciliation’ and ‘integration’. It states:

*“At Ordinary Level, political education will have the major role to play in the development of essential and human values suitable to create harmony and cohesion...*

*...Political education will hence, add more emphasis on the promotion of competent skills in justice, peace, tolerance, unity and reconciliation...*

*...The lesson in political education shall aim at integrating the student in the society through the development of patriotic and human values.”*

Thus, values like “justice” and “peace” are considered not merely concepts to be understood by students, but skills to learn. PESS 1 links ‘learning history’ to the development of shared values:

*“Due to atrocities that plunged the whole country into mourning from 1959 up to 1994 and claimed thousands of victims, the government of Rwanda opted for national reconciliation as a priority... ...therefore the government focusses on educating youth on reconciliation and on national unity... ...It is through the policy of unity and reconciliation as well as sharing values that a national reconstruction will be attained.”<sup>514</sup>*

And

*“The education system must enable Rwandan Youth to learn their history in order to understand the current situation and get some orientation on national values.... The education system must instill (sic) all common values beyond individual or group differences into children.”<sup>515</sup>*

As the final sentence above suggests, schooling aims to build a common Rwandan citizenship based on “common values” which transcend the interests of individuals or groups. I observed in Chapter Three that students rehearse a discourse of meritocracy that positions all Rwandans as equal, denying the presence of social class, ethnicity or other group-based characteristics that might be considered disadvantageous.

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<sup>514</sup> NCDC (2008a:23)

<sup>515</sup> NCDC (2008a:24)

This meritocracy discourse attributes lack of progress to “laziness” or a “bad mentality” and values those who work hard, not just for their own sake, but to contribute to national development. Similarly, I noted in Chapter Five how the government’s vision of ‘gender equality’ is about incorporating women into the national economy so that their potential contribution to national development is not wasted.

The idea of everyone working together for the collective good is mainstreamed throughout the national curriculum. In Geography students learn about stewardship over the environment, including praise for the government’s bold decision to ban plastic bags (though, judging by many of my students’ propensity to drop litter, I am not sure the message is being well-received). Religious Studies teachers are encouraged to promote the themes of reconciliation and forgiveness. Meanwhile, the Entrepreneurship curriculum encourages paying tax and adopting socially responsible business models. Honeyman<sup>516</sup> has written on how the government seeks to mould students into “*orderly entrepreneurs*”; hard-working, willing to take personal risks, but obedient to state regulations and motivated by contributing to national economic development.

Here, I have been describing the *content* of the school curriculum, however, the extent to which information, or “knowledge” is being internalised as “skills” or “values”, is debateable. In Chapter Three I argued that classroom learning at Saint-Jacques is ‘knowledge-based’ rather than ‘skill-based’; focussed on memorising definitions, lists, facts, methods or pre-prepared arguments for and against particular positions, rather than requiring students to weigh-up, evaluate and analyse information, or create new arguments or ways of presenting it. The consequence, I suggested, was that students tended to view information in black and white terms, as either wrong or right, with little room for nuance; their role being to learn the correct answers to score well on tests, rather than to develop critical thinking skills or new ways of seeing and expressing themselves. In a sense, such knowledge is detached from students’ social reality; comprised of discourses or theories *committed to memory* for the purpose of recitation in the appropriate places, but not *experienced*.

By contrast, in Chapter Four I described how the concepts of ‘equality’ and ‘responsibility’ or ‘duty’ towards the ‘community’ are expressed and experienced in more tangible ways, noting how time and space is organised at Saint-Jacques so that everybody moves together, eats the same, dresses the same, and possesses the same personal property. Students were expected to keep together in mandatory early morning runs on Saturdays; work together in Umuganda, the public works in which all Rwandans are meant to participate one Saturday per month; and fulfil their turns on the rota to wash dishes and peel potatoes. However, as I also described, the sense of school unity or ‘shared citizenship’ this was meant to inspire is undermined by students’ subtle acts of resistance; the informal hierarchy in the boarding, which requires younger and smaller boys to wash shirts and perform chores for older and stronger ones; and the evident injustices which taught that ‘some people were more equal than others’ – a point I return to later.

Other activities intended to foster a sense of citizenship and belonging to a school community, included the observance of National Days, which often reference a moment in Rwandan history; an annual

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<sup>516</sup> Honeyman 2016

celebration of the Saint-Jacques' birthday; graduation ceremonies; traditional dance troops and music groups, who played at school events to celebrate Rwandan traditions and culture; evening prayers; and morning assemblies, when the Fathers would address the whole school around the flag pole. The Fathers used these moments to make important announcements, celebrate students' successes, publicly chastise those who had transgressed against the community by breaking one of its rules, and offer criticism, advice or inspiration. Assemblies always ended by the whole school singing the National Anthem followed by the School Anthem. As I described in Chapter Four<sup>517</sup> the observance of this ritual was taken very seriously. Participation was mandatory and anybody walking across the school grounds when the singing began was expected to stop on the spot, stand straight and join in.

Anyone who failed to observe this morning ritual risked being shamed as a bad citizen who did not respect Rwanda. I am not certain that expressions of outrage against those deemed to insult Rwanda were entirely sincere, however. Watching closely, I observed that sometimes it was not only Jehovah's Witness students who did not participate in the singing, as others, if they were hidden from the eye-line of the priests, sometimes did not bother either, perhaps regarding it as a tired routine rather than meaningful ritual. This would not prevent the same individual pouring scorn on another for failing to show patriotism, the performance of which, as with other discourses explored in this thesis, can be an important source of cultural capital as Saint-Jacques students outmanoeuvre each other in their "serious games"<sup>518</sup>.

I will return to this point shortly, but first consider how, at the same time as promoting shared citizenship and banning ethnic identity, the way the genocide is memorialised at Saint-Jacques subtly positions students by their relation to it.

### *"I'm a survivor – a Tutsi survivor" – new categories of distinction*

In 2014, a group of students for the Saint-Jacques chapter of AERG had the privilege to perform a theatrical skit at the National Amahoro Stadium in the presence of President Paul Kagame for an event commemorating the twentieth anniversary of the genocide. One of my students had to perform a short monologue of a survivor looking back and contemplating his journey since then. I do not remember the exact words, except for one line which stuck out above the rest. After a quiet, contemplative passage mourning lost loved ones, he rose sharply in volume, declaring proudly, "*I'm a survivor. A Tutsi survivor!*", the word "Tutsi" emphasised above the rest. This jarred with me, as I was not used to hearing students declare their ethnic identities to anyone and had become accustomed to such language being taboo. The authors of much of the literature I had been reading in the years before embarking on my own fieldwork had suggested that asking people directly about their ethnic identity could be considered offensive, or worse, a mark of genocide ideology, in a context where ethnicity had been effectively outlawed, and describe the strategies they might use to discern this without needing to ask<sup>519</sup>. In early interviews with my students, before developing trust between us, some of them claimed to not know their parents' ethnicities at the time of the genocide. When I once raised the topic of ethnicity in class, some of the students play-acted that they did not even know the meaning of the word, goading me into defining it,

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<sup>517</sup> Page 91

<sup>518</sup> Page 26

<sup>519</sup> Ingelaere (2009)

and when I did they continued their act, *“Teacher, we don’t know what you mean. There are no Hutus or Tutsis. Only Rwandans”*. Yet, this student was prepared to loudly declare himself a Tutsi, in front of the President!

Concerned he might be making a mistake, I checked with him on this point and came to understand that while it is forbidden to identify people by their ethnic group in the present, when memorialising the genocide it was fine for him to identify as a survivor, and that in this context the word “Tutsi” served as an adjective, clarifying that he was a survivor of the genocide against the Tutsi, as opposed to anything else. Indeed, while the genocide that occurred in 1994 has, in the past, been referred to by a number of names, in recent years the RPF-led government has insisted on calling it *“the genocide against the Tutsi”*, leaving no doubt about who its victims were. Thus, a statement like, *“most government ministers are Tutsi”*, would be considered ‘genocide ideology’ because it distinguishes people by ethnicity with the purpose of creating a sense of unfairness and resentment between different Rwandans; but the statement, *“I am a Tutsi survivor”*, in the context of genocide memorial, is merely a reference to the past which helps to counter denialism. As Begley<sup>520</sup> concluded from her research,

*“For those who use Hutu/Tutsi identities outside the context of the genocide, they are considered genocidaire sympathisers, negationists and spreading divisionism. However, within the context of the genocide, the role of “ethnicity” is being reinforced and reaffirming ethnic divisions.”*

Similarly, Eltringham<sup>521</sup> has argued that while identifying people as Hutu or Tutsi is proscribed under anti-divisionism laws<sup>522</sup>, these categories re-emerge under the proxies *“survivors”* and *“genocidaires”*. Furthermore, although official versions of history recognise the positive role of many Hutu during the genocide who risked or lost<sup>523</sup> their lives protecting Tutsi neighbours, friends and family, there is a common tendency to assume these so-called *“moderate Hutu”* were the minority, while imagining that the majority supported the genocide in some way, even if they did not participate in it. This belief came through strongly in interviews with students from Tutsi families, as I show in the final section of this chapter. What’s more, as Eltringham<sup>524</sup> points out,

*“the phrase ‘Hutu-Moderates’ is only used retrospectively and does not appear in descriptions of contemporary Rwanda. It is solely an epitaph and may imply that the only ‘moderate’ (or ‘anti-genocide’) Hutu are dead... ...the depiction of this group as an ‘extinct category’ contributes to a portrayal of contemporary Rwanda according a crude, binary framework, composed only of ‘victim-survivor-Tutsi’ and ‘perpetrator-genocidaire-Hutu’.”*

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<sup>520</sup> Begley (2016)

<sup>521</sup> Eltringham (2004:71-78)

<sup>522</sup> See Lemarchand (2007)

<sup>523</sup> Jefromovas 1995,

<sup>524</sup> Ibid:75-6

Other scholars have likewise commented on the globalisation of genocide-guilt to *all* Hutu in Rwandan public discourse.<sup>525</sup> This was underscored in July 2013 when, at a Youth Connect meeting, in which Paul Kagame conducted a question and answer session with young Rwandans, he responded warmly to the suggestion that “*those in whose name the genocide was committed*” should apologise on behalf of perpetrators.<sup>526</sup> Reportedly, at the end of the conference ten youths publicly apologised for the role their relatives had played in the genocide and Kagame praised them for doing so. When Saint-Jacques students who attended the conference reported to me that this had happened, at first I did not believe them, or assumed something had been lost in translation, as it seemed to me to contradict the idea of shared Rwandan citizenship (not to mention the principle of individual accountability before the law<sup>527</sup>). However, as with my friend who performed for the President, I came to understand that young Rwandans can identify their ethnic backgrounds so long as they do it in orientation to the genocide.

Consequently, at Saint-Jacques there were two types of student: those considered ‘survivors’ and those who were not. Being a ‘survivor’ brought privileges to which other students were excluded. This was most obvious during the school’s annual genocide commemoration, which is organised by the student members of AERG. It is the biggest event in the school year. A mini stage is erected, four large marquees are hired to shelter students and invited guests from the sun. Speeches are given by invited dignitaries, testimonies are borne by survivors from the Saint-Jacques massacres and a well-known singer performs – all introduced by student compares from AERG. The students re-enact narratives of Rwandan history, or artistically interpret themes such as love, unity and forgiveness through poetry, music, dance and drama. Visitors under the VIP tent are waited on by smartly dressed AERG students. Other students act as ushers all along the route, from the gates to the temporary theatre erected on the grass by the library. The level of professionalism from the students is impressive and months in the making. It is their day.

Students who are not members of AERG form a passive audience. They sit for many hours. In the year I attended the sunshine was intense and not everybody was fully protected by the marquees. They seemed to enjoy, or relax through most of it, but some started to tire by the end. Parts of the presentation are distressing to some, as harrowing details are recited of killings that occurred metres away from where the children were sitting. About every thirty minutes, it seemed, a female student would collapse to the ground, wailing and convulsing. The first time this happened I rushed over to see if medical assistance was needed but was told not to worry as four young men, more used to this condition than me, swiftly formed a human stretcher and whisked her away like a casualty on a battle field. I was told not to worry, that it was “just trauma”, caused by hearing the testimony. It was my first time to see someone perform this physical response to emotional trauma, but the students saw it as normal. Though, in private, one of them later questioned whether girls who did this were not deliberately making a public display of their grief and connection to genocide-victimhood, underscoring the view that being a ‘survivor’ carried some kind of symbolic capital.

Until recently, there were also more material benefits to being a Tutsi genocide survivor. To help those who lost one or both parents in the genocide afford the cost of school fees and materials, the government

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<sup>525</sup> Prunier (1995), Stockton (1996)

<sup>526</sup> Daily Nation (2013); The East African (2013)

<sup>527</sup> See Etringham (2004:73)

established a fund, known as FARG (The Genocide Survivors Assistance Fund). By the time I arrived at Saint-Jacques most students had been born after the genocide, though one of my Senior Three students was in receipt of it. The fund is controversial, however, as it only supported children who lost parents in the genocide – meaning ‘the genocide *against the Tutsi*’ – while there was no similar support available for the sons and daughters of Hutu killed either by the *Interahamwe*, government forces or the RPF<sup>528</sup>. This again highlights the demarcation between survivors and everyone else.

### *Performing Patriotism*

One of the ways some students performed their identities as ‘survivors’ was through overt displays of patriotism and support for Kagame and RPF, and stern condemnation of ‘the West’. Of course, any student was free to do this, but in my observation, it was most often those in AERG who did. Appearing to view themselves as the youth wing of the RPF, they policed the use of language and reinforced the public script. This could sometimes be seen in my Senior Two political science class, as students would pick each other up on linguistic transgressions and passionately rehearse their love of Rwanda and Africa.

For example, in a module analysing the causes of conflict, I gave my students a homework assignment to choose a modern conflict, write and present an essay discussing the motivations of each side, and say how they would resolve it if they were negotiating a peace settlement. The majority of students chose the Rwanda genocide of 1994 (which I regret not ruling out). The second most popular choice was the ongoing conflict in the North Kivu area of Eastern Congo where, at that time, M23 rebels, which the UN had accused Rwanda of secretly arming, were advancing on Goma. A number of students also chose to present on the civil war in Libya. My student’s perspectives on these conflicts were different to my own, highlighting the extent to which western and local Rwandan knowledge diverge.

General Gaddafi had been killed a few weeks earlier and a young man, one of my brighter students, presented a strongly worded essay condemning America for killing Gaddafi. According to him, Gaddafi was an African hero with a vision for a unified Africa; the USA feared that together Africans would become strong and not need America’s help; they also feared Gaddafi not “giving” Americans his oil, so they “*turned the Libyan people against each other and sent US special forces to kill Gaddafi*”. He was not the only person to hold Gaddafi in high regard. Several students were able to cite examples of how “*Gaddafi loved Rwanda*”. For example, not far from Saint-Jacques is a Muslim school with beautifully manicured grounds that locals call “Gaddafi” because he apparently paid for the school to be built and subsidised the learning of all its students. On another occasion, as I argued with a Senior One student, also in AERG, that the West had intervened in Libya because Gaddafi was killing his own people, he waved his finger in my face answering, “*No, you guys killed Gaddafi because he has oil. You only make war where there is oil. But in Rwanda you leave people to die.*” Two years later after the massacre of journalists working for Charlie Hebdo in Paris by an Islamic militant, the same student said, “*Good! Now the French know what it is like to have your people massacred. And we won’t help them like they didn’t help us.*”

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<sup>528</sup> MacLean-Hilker (2010)

The students who presented on the North Kivu conflict used the opportunity to make a passionate defence of Kagame, against accusations in a United Nations special report that Rwanda was supplying weapons and soldiers to the Tutsi-dominated M23 rebels, who were terrorising villages as they aimed to gain control of the mineral rich region. Around this time several countries were threatening to withhold aid as a consequence of the report and students used this as evidence of the West interfering in Rwanda's security affairs and trying to control them through aid. Several students accused the UN of having an anti-Rwanda agenda, which they historicised by pointing out how UN peace-keepers had abandoned Rwanda during the genocide, but then gave humanitarian support to the two million Hutu refugees, including many genocidaires who had fled to Goma in 1994 as the RPF advanced and eventually 'liberated' the country. In the present conflict they argued that the UN forces' battle against the M23 rebels, which included the use of helicopter gunships, was not matched by an equal concern with fighting the FDLR - a rebel army comprised mainly of former genocidaires who were also terrorising parts of eastern Congo and committing occasional terrorist acts in Rwanda. There were many logical contradictions in students' arguments which seemed to sway between denying that Rwanda was backing M23 and arguing why it would be morally justifiable if it was, in terms of Rwanda's right to defend itself against the FDLR. Privately, however, many admitted to me that despite what they said in class, they did believe Rwanda was supporting M23. What students' denials and justifications revealed, in addition to their sense of Rwandan victimhood to the self-interest and double-standards of western powers, was their loyalty to Kagame and self-identification as patriotic Rwandan citizens.

Later in the class, one of the groups began to present what seemed to me like another recitation of the official government narrative on Rwanda's history and genocide that I had heard innumerable times before. It sparked controversy, however, when one of the boys presenting made reference to "the war" in Rwanda in 1994. Another boy raised his hand to argue back, *"there was not a war in Rwanda in 1994. It was a genocide"*.

*"You say there was no war, but there were two groups of people fighting"*, the first student responded.

*"There was a genocide, and there were those who liberated Rwanda from the genocide, but you can't call that war"*, his opponent fired back.

Another student raised his hand and trying to resolve the matter explained, *"There was a war when the RPA invaded Rwanda in 1990, but then there was genocide against the Tutsi."*

*"How can you say the RPA started a war when the genocide against the Tutsi started in 1959?"* the debate continued, as I sat back and listened, pleased to hear my students engaged in debate. Later in the discussion, the student who had (correctly) said there was a civil war in Rwanda from 1990, made reference to "the genocide", without adding the suffix "against the Tutsi". Despite the fact his opponent had done the same thing moments earlier, he picked up on this to suggest that by referring to it in this way and failing to give the proper name to the genocide the young man was minimising the genocide. I stepped back in at this point, concerned not to have such allegations flying across my classroom.

I became the focus of accusations of genocide minimisation myself once, in a conversation on Facebook. I had expressed the view that "up to 800,000 Tutsi were killed in the genocide" – two-hundred thousand



below the Rwandan government's figure of one million. When a former Saint-Jacques AERG student corrected me, rather than let it go, I made the mistake of giving an explanation for my figure, based on the known number of Tutsi in Rwanda at the time of the genocide, minus the 300,000 known survivors. Like a Rwandan version of Godwin's Law<sup>529</sup>, it did not take long before several others joined the conversation, accusing me of disrespecting the dead Tutsi whose lives I had not acknowledged with my lower estimate, followed by a suggestion that my comment bore the seeds of genocide denial. To receive such an accusation in the UK can be quite upsetting, but in Rwanda it can be dangerous. Yet, I found conversations like this between students could also be little more than verbal sparring, rehearsing lines from a public script and proving oneself as a 'good Rwandan'.

A final point to make before moving on is that the lines students used in the examples given in this section – about Gadaffi, M23 and aspects of Rwanda's recent history – are not learned through the school curriculum. These are another example of how students draw upon discourses around them and engage in original creation in their public performances of self and in a manner that they believe will augment their status.

In the next section I look at how the categories of survivor operates in the informal social life at College Saint-Jacques; particularly how belonging or not to the AERG can affect students' relationships and mould their identities.

### ***“When your friend joins AERG you can lose him forever” – ethnicity in student-led social clubs***

Sometimes on Friday evenings I joined with students in the Facing History club, which had started some years earlier under the guidance of an NGO, *Facing History and Ourselves*, which helped reintroduce history teaching in Rwandan schools. The NGO has since left and these days the club is ran independently by Saint-Jacques students. On Friday evenings, the students, sometimes more than sixty, huddle together around a small television in an upstairs classroom to watch movies depicting events from history, followed by discussions or debates. This week we were discussing 'Invictus', a film about Nelson Mandela's first years in office following the end of apartheid and how he used the Rugby World Cup as a symbol of unity. As I stood in the doorway with other students who had arrived too late to squeeze in, I noticed out of the corner of my eye that Mugisha was stood alone on the balcony corridor a few paces away, and sensed he was waiting to talk to me.

*“Hey, is everything ok?”* I asked him. He shrugged, then looking round and lowering his voice said, *“we can't talk here”*. He ushered us a little further down the balcony and we rested against the railing, facing out towards the evening sky, where our voices would be lost.

*“It's about Olivier”,* he said, *“Did you know he's joined AERG? And you know, he was my best friend, but that means we won't talk anymore.”*

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<sup>529</sup> A law which states that the longer an internet debate goes on the closer the probability that somebody will draw a comparison to Hitler.

I looked at him, puzzled, *“Why does that mean you can’t talk?”*

He sighed, *“Sam, do you not know how those guys are? Everything they do, they do it together. When you join them, they control you. You must be with them at every break and lunch. And you change. When your friend joins AERG you can lose him forever.”*

*“Well, at least you can still hang out together at Facing History”*, I said, knowing that Olivier was a keen participant.

Mugisha stared down from the balcony towards the stone circles where AERG students usually sat at break and lunch times and said, *“He isn’t here. Even now, he’s with them.”*

Joining AERG was not straightforward. It required writing a letter to the leaders of the AERG group in that school, who would decide whether or not to accept the applicant. Olivier was a Senior One student, but tall, articulate and sensible for his age. He was one of the first in his cohort to join. In the subsequent weeks I discovered through interviews and student journals that Mugisha’s sentiments about AERG were shared by many – even students from Tutsi backgrounds – who would complain that AERG students isolated themselves from the rest of the school and that when a friend joined, he or she would be kept so busy by the demands of the group they would no longer have time for their friends outside of it, even if they wanted to. Several students claimed that those who joined AERG experienced some kind of personality change. In the students’ own words, when a friend joins AERG:

*“They begin to make themselves higher than everybody else.”*

*“They become very political.”*

*“They stop caring for their friends.”*

*“They can’t share their secrets.”*

*“They stop trusting you.”*

It was also felt that when a person joined AERG they became bound by group-loyalty, making it impossible to refuse its demands on their time and impossible to ever leave, even if they wanted to. Almost as some described the Illuminati in the previous chapter, the students talked as though AERG had a mysterious hold over its members.

In private, some students went so far as to tell me that AERG – an organisation founded to support the victims of genocide – was now keeping alive ethnic divisions, as it split the school between “survivors” and others. I raised this point with Jonah, one of the student-leaders of AERG at Saint-Jacques, after we visited the Kigali Genocide Memorial together. Jonah explained some of the history of AERG, how the organisation, which is now nationwide, started its life at Saint-Jacques<sup>530</sup> shortly after the genocide, as a mutual support group for children who had lost loved ones. As some members of the group were the only survivors in their families, they organised themselves into a “family” of their own, known as the

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<sup>530</sup> This is according to Saint-Jacques students. I have not been able to verify whether it is correct.

“Dukundane” family, who provided each other with a network of practical and emotional support. Jonah explained that AERG continues to support “child genocide survivors” at Saint-Jacques in this way today.

I told Jonah how impressed I was with the way AERG students had organised the Genocide Commemorations and how they love and support each other. Then I asked, *“Can anybody at Saint-Jacques become a member of AERG?”*

“No”, he answered, in a tone that sounded surprised I had even asked, *“of course, you have to be a survivor.”*

The use of the word “survivor” puzzled me, since by 2012, eighteen years on from the genocide, only the oldest few students would have actually been alive at the time, so I asked what he meant by this.

*“It means that your parents are survivors”*, he conceded.

*“But I know that the parents of some of your members were not in Rwanda at the time of the genocide. They were living in Tanzania, Burundi or Uganda and returned when it was over”*, I probed.

“Ah...” he sighed, appearing slightly offended by my question, *“but if they had been here then they would have been a target. So they are still survivors”*, he explained, adding, *“And the genocide started in 1959, so all Tutsi, wherever they were in 1994 are survivors.”*

I asked how they knew whether a new student is the child of a survivor or not. He laughed at my question and boasted, *“Sam, we have the whole school mapped out. We know the backgrounds of everybody, even the teachers.”*

Two weeks later outside the Facing History club, where students were watching ‘Amazing Grace’, a film about the abolition of the slave trade in Britain, Mugisha and I chatted again. I conceded, *“It seems to me that the requirement for joining AERG is not about being a survivor but being the son or daughter of a Tutsi.”*

*“Not even that”*, he explained, *“My mother is a Tutsi. She is even a survivor of the genocide who experienced many bad things. But if I wrote to (AERG) to join they could not allow it, because my Father is Hutu.”* I was aware that Mugisha had a brother who was a member of AERG in a different school, which I pointed out. He responded that each school is different, but that the leaders of AERG at Saint-Jacques would not regard him as someone who could join. He was not wrong. I discovered a year or more later from some of my original Senior One students who had joined AERG by that point, that Mugisha was considered to be Hutu.

I asked Mugisha, *“If they allowed you to join AERG so you could be with Olivier, would you?”* hoping I might be able to appeal to them on his behalf.

*“Sam! I could never ever join that group”*, he insisted.

Mugisha stayed true to his word. However, I found it common for younger students to state firmly that they were not interested in joining AERG, for all the reasons given above but especially for the sake of

keeping their friendships outside of it, only to find that by the end of Senior Two, one by one, most had changed their minds and become members.

AERG membership was alluring and offered social benefits to students that were difficult to acquire anywhere else. As mentioned previously, AERG was modelled around the idea of giving child genocide survivors surrogate families. Even today, the AERG group is sub-divided into family units, with male and female senior students playing as mother and father to younger ones who heed their council and refer to one another as brothers and sisters. These family units and the wider group do for each other what ordinary families do – ‘parents’ give advice, council, discipline and protection, while everybody offers each other a loyal support network that can be counted on in times of trouble. AERG students are known to stand up for each other, even taking collective action at times to challenge the school leadership over perceived injustices. What’s more, their bond to each other is expected to last beyond their time at school. Like a masonic order or college fraternity, there is an expectation that members of the AERG family will back each other and promote each other throughout their lives. In a context where school authorities deliberately atomise students<sup>531</sup> and where they find it difficult to form trusting friendships, the group loyalty achieved by AERG is remarkable, and something to envy.

Saint-Jacques students often considered AERG members to be the “high” people in the school, that they had an aura of superiority – an image which some AERG leaders worked hard to cultivate. There was no official event to celebrate graduation at Saint-Jacques, but major church groups (the Catholics, Protestants and Adventists) held their own, organised by student-leaders. These were planned to a high standard. The Cine Mumena school hall and stage were always decorated wall to wall with shiny colourful fabrics, light refreshments were often served, entertainment was provided and students wore their smartest clothes. Some even hired outfits for the events. These graduation ceremonies were self-funded through donations from the students in the weeks leading up to them. The ‘biggest’ graduation, in terms of grandeur of the decorations, quality of catering, and smartness of dress, and the last event of the year, was always AERG’s. They would invite the entire school to come and watch, as graduating AERG students in full university style gowns received certificates. Shortly before the 2012 graduation, Jonah came to my house to borrow a suit jacket for the event and told me about the lengths he and others were taking, including substantial personal financial sacrifice, to maintain AERG’s reputation for putting on the best graduation celebrations. *“It is important that other students know that we are the smartest and the ones with authority in the school”*, he explained casually.

Also affirming this image of prestige was the way AERG was the custodian of the school’s biggest event of the year, the Genocide Commemoration; the connections and access AERG students had to VIPs and political leaders; the way they dominated the most sought after recreational spaces in the school; and, in Karenzi’s time, how they seemed to be given privileges to which others were excluded. For example, some AERG students recalled that Father Karenzi would hold a dinner, just with them. AERG students often believed themselves to carry a powerful collective voice. Jonah boasted to me that a few years earlier they had brought about the dismissal and prosecution of a teacher who they deemed to be teaching “genocide ideology”. Some students – in and out of AERG – expressed a view that AERG membership

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<sup>531</sup> See likening of the school to Foucault’s Panopticon. Pages 95-96

brought immunity from severe discipline such as exclusion, because of the force of their collective voice. However, when Father Bertrand arrived at Saint-Jacques he soon disabused them of this idea, and they came to regard themselves as persecuted, as I will show in the final section.

Another way AERG leaders sought to maintain an image of superiority was by doing everything they could to ensure their members always ranked highly in school reports and results tables. They operated an internal discipline system to keep members behaviour in check, and older students acted as mentors to younger ones. They were also careful in selecting which students to take in. Being deemed a “survivor” was not the only qualification for joining AERG at Saint-Jacques. They also considered a student’s character and reputation. While some students were only admitted after writing a letter of application and possibly waiting some time, others were head-hunted by senior members responsible for recruiting those who might add value to the organisation. I suspect that Mugisha’s friend, Olivier, joined in this way, as he was the sort of student whose behaviour was unimpeachable and who regularly placed high in exam results tables and won competitions.

All this considered, it seemed to me that students who aligned themselves with AERG were not so much motivated by the historic memory of the genocide and were not, like its original members, recovering from it; nor did the majority of students harbour any ill will towards those from Hutu backgrounds per se; rather, their decision to join AERG was rational and future-oriented, as membership was perceived to increase their sense of status, security and belonging during the passage through school and offer valuable social capital that might benefit them later in life. This underscores a key argument of this thesis, that ethnicity finds meaning as it relates to socio-economic competition, opportunity and exclusion.

AERG was not the only student-ran membership-based organisation at Saint-Jacques. Enterprising students with leadership qualities sometimes set-up new groups. The majority of these never grew beyond a few of their peers and eventually petered out, but some have grown into small societies with chapters on different school campuses. Two such groups exist at Saint-Jacques – the Peace and Love Proclaimers (PLP) and Seven United for the Needy (SUN). PLP was founded by young men who saw the need for an inclusive student-movement to promote forgiveness and friendship. Seven United started its life at Saint-Jacques and is focussed on bringing young people together in acts of charity and community service. At least four of the founding members of Seven United, who I know personally, are from Tutsi backgrounds. One is a genocide survivor who grew up an orphan. The membership of both groups is of mixed-ethnicity. Yet, sometimes at Saint-Jacques, particularly in the case of PLP, students would tell me they believed it was a group mainly for “those who could not join AERG”. One or two were bold enough to say it was “for Hutus” and some in AERG regarded it as a “rival group”. I do not accept their interpretation as accurate and it is not how the students in those groups saw themselves, but the fact it is sometimes said demonstrates the ethnic-lens through which these groups are viewed and how in this aspect of student-life at Saint-Jacques, the discourse of “now there are no divisions among us” is threatened.

### ***“We don’t hate them, we just can’t trust them” – learning ethnicity in the family***

My first significant discussion about ethnicity with Fidel took place a few weeks before his “f\*\*king Hutus” outburst, described at the beginning of this chapter. Though my senior one students seemed slow at first to form friendships, towards the end of their first year I started to notice more relaxed and playful behaviour between students during break times, including what looked like flirting between male and female students. One break time, I entered my classroom early to find Fidel and a thirteen-year old girl called Elsie chasing each other around the room, even jumping over desks, as they fought over a rubber band. A few days earlier another student had gossiped to me in his journal that: *“Bright loves Chantal in S2 and I think nowadays Fidel is getting interested in Elsie”*. Elsie had already told me in her journal that she thought Fidel was *“intelligent”* and *“so attractive”*. So, when later that week Fidel and I were talking and the topic turned to girls, I asked whether he wanted Elsie to be his girlfriend. He quickly scoffed at the idea, so I challenged him, *“well you certainly seem to be showing her a lot of interest.”* His tone became more serious, *“yeah, yeah, she is attractive, but she can never be my girlfriend. Don’t you see?”*

*“See what?”* I asked.

Lowering his voice again he said, *“Sam, she is Hutu. One thing my Dad has always told me is we will never marry a Hutu, even more than marrying someone in my church I must marry a girl who is pure Tutsi, like me”<sup>532</sup>*.

*“But that’s divisionism. It’s racist. You’re all Rwandans now”*, I challenged, deliberately using the language of the RPF, who I knew he respected.

Adjusting his tone once more to be sure I knew he was not play-acting and winding me up, as he often liked to do, Fidel explained that although you could be friends with individual Hutu girls and boys, somebody in their family, whether a parent, uncle, aunt, or cousin, was likely to have participated in the genocide against the Tutsi. Such people, he said, *“continue to carry the genocide in their hearts.”* He gave examples of young Tutsi marrying Hutus who end up being hated or even poisoned by someone in their new extended families. He also pointed out that during the genocide many Tutsi were betrayed by Hutu family members. *“Some even killed their wives.”* he stressed, before concluding, *“so you see Sam, it’s not that we hate them, we just can’t trust them.”*

There are documented cases of Tutsi women being killed by their Hutu husbands or brothers-in-law, and of Tutsi children being refused refuge, handed over, or even killed, by their Hutu uncles and aunts, during the genocide. So, it was not far-fetched for Fidel to assume that marriage is no protection from ethnic violence, or that some of his peers might be growing up in the homes of former genocidaires. On the other hand, as Fidel acknowledged in our conversations, many Hutu had also refused to participate in the genocide and some (a large number actually) had protected Tutsi family, friends and neighbours. However, as it was not possible to know who played what role, he thought it prudent to limit his

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<sup>532</sup> McLean-Hilker (2012:237) found almost identical language used in her research, quoting a 17 year old boy who said: *“I want a girl who is purely Tutsi”* and a 19 year old girl who said: *“If you like a boy you first to have enquire about him to check... you know, that he not Hutu.”*

relationships with children from Hutu backgrounds to one of mutual cordiality. They could co-operate in class, play together, even flirt with each other, but never share secrets or expect to rely on one another in times of need.

Suspicion, and a lack of trust between students, seemed common at Saint-Jacques, particularly in the Senior One and Senior Two year-groups. Like McClean-Hilker<sup>533</sup>, I found that that students' mutual distrust manifested itself in them being very private about their own backgrounds, while seeking to 'unmask others'. She discusses this in terms of ethnic heritage, though I discovered it was equally true for socio-economic status, as well as aspects of students' backgrounds considered socially embarrassing, such as having been born to a single mother, having divorced parents, having an older relative in prison, mental illness in the family, or being orphaned due to AIDs. Hence the excitement about the names of debtors appearing on the school bulletin board, described at the start of this chapter, which offered a rare insight into others' lives.

The development of trust-based friendships was not helped by the rules described in Chapter Four<sup>534</sup>, mandating which church to attend, where to sit in class and the dining hall, which dorm room and bed to use, and long periods of enforced silence, all of which limited the amount of time students could spend with the same individual. Opportunities for students to build friendships in the holidays were also very limited, again, particularly in the younger years, due to lack of money for transport, parental prohibition, embarrassment about allowing class mates to see their homes, and having 'nowhere to go'. Students usually spent holidays at home, often watching TV or helping with domestic chores. If they played with other children, it was with others in their neighbourhood rather than from school. Friendships that did exist were often between students who had been to the same primary school, or those appointed to sit next to each other in the first term. Others had simply met on the first day and decided to stick together. Even "friends" often knew little about each other's lives outside of school and were still wary about sharing too many personal details with the other.

There were, of course, many exceptions, ambiguities and nuances in the way different Saint-Jacques students constructed their ethnic identities. While most friendships withered when one of the two joined AERG, there were students who maintained their friendships across that barrier. Mugisha and Olivier also stayed friends, though they saw much less of each other. Likewise, while some members of AERG were overtly political, others were not; while some harboured anti-Hutu stereotypes and tarred anyone of Hutu heritage with collective guilt, others were more open-minded and reconciliatory; while some reacted defensively to the slightest perception of criticism of the RPF-led government, others were more nuanced; and while some children from Hutu backgrounds were resentful towards AERG, others were more sympathetic.

It is also important to recognise that the attitudes of Saint-Jacques students are not static. An advantage of knowing these young people over several years is that I have been able to watch their beliefs and identities evolve. For example, some who insisted they were opposed to AERG for all the reasons given above, became loyal AERG members. Similarly, Fidel, who at one time blamed "the Hutus" for his

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<sup>533</sup> McClean-Hilker (2009)

<sup>534</sup> Pages 95-96

problems and presented himself as a firm disciple of Paul Kagame, came to quietly blame the government for some of his disadvantages and express feelings of disappointment and betrayal. He told me, *“I used to think Kagame was making Rwanda a home where all Tutsi could be safe and prosper, but now I know it only benefits his friends.”* Of course, this is not something Fidel would express to his companions in AERG, but even some of them have sensed that his enthusiasm for the RPF has cooled.

This diverse and dynamic nature of ethnic identities is difficult to trace and explain. It is also a very different picture to the “unity” presented in the classroom. While it is futile to try to quantify the relative weights of various influences that sway students one way or another in their performance of ethnic identity, it is important to appreciate their unique home lives and family heritage. Fidel’s view, that *“it’s not that we hate (the Hutu), we just can’t trust them”*, runs contrary to the public discourse of ‘forgiveness and reconciliation’ and ‘shared citizenship’ that are taught in school and through the media. It was not a view that could be expressed publicly, for fear of being accused of being a ‘bad citizen’, ‘unpatriotic’ and ‘divisive’. It was a view he learned in the home.

In the remainder of this section I explore some short-biographies of students at Saint-Jacques, showing how their diverse life experiences seemed to influence their perceptions and relationships with regards to ethnicity. Though every young person is unique, I have put them into some crude categories to help draw out common themes. I begin by discussing some young men who, viewing their lives through the prism of Tutsi victimhood formed a strong group-based solidarity with other ‘survivors’ and, like Fidel, found it difficult to trust Hutu. Then I will consider the position of “Hutsi” children – those from mixed parentage, who struggle to define themselves. Finally, I consider the different responses of children from Hutu backgrounds to their experience of social stigma at Saint-Jacques.

### *Tutsi Victimhood*

Literature on Rwanda’s post-1994 transition has suggested that the prohibition on acknowledging ethnic identity is a device to mask the Tutsi dominance of senior positions in the government, military, judiciary and civil service.<sup>535</sup> Ingelaere<sup>536</sup> has also written on how Hutu peasants’ verses Tutsi peasants’ sense of political representation and power has switched from pre- to post-genocide eras. Without disagreeing with these findings, it is important to also recognise that people do not experience life as aggregate groups, but as individuals. Whatever the data may show about the relative positions of people from Hutu backgrounds verses those with Tutsi backgrounds, many “Tutsi” children at Saint-Jacques come from homes that struggle financially, feel anxious about their futures and are affected by a sense of historic or even present-day discrimination and victimhood. I will describe three such boys here whose life stories could easily represent those of many others and how their perception of victimhood was reinforced by the capricious nature of discipline at Saint-Jacques, described in chapter four.

***Fidel:*** Fidel’s father had been an RPF officer from around 1992 to a few years after the genocide. Both of his parents had grown up in exile outside of Rwanda, and, as refugee children, been denied equal rights with the local populations, including the opportunity to get an education. They would have grown up in

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<sup>535</sup> Reyntjens (2002:187-190)

<sup>536</sup> Ingelaere (2009)



the 1970s learning about the violent revolution which had forced their families into exile and the on-going persecution of the Tutsi in their homeland. They would have felt a natural right to be able to return to their families' lands and live safely, and an understandable distrust that this could happen while Habyarimana's government remained in power. They had lost members of their extended families in the genocide and seen the carnage of its aftermath when they settled in Kigali late in 1994. For the next few years they would have experienced the hardship of re-building their lives in a post-conflict state that they did not know particularly well; the insecurity felt in the first few years before Rwanda was stabilised, living around those who had committed mass murder and not knowing how to tell a saint from a killer; intra-family conflicts over land rights; rumours and anecdotes of ongoing attacks on Tutsi survivors and returnees like them. This was the context Fidel was born into in 1999. Over the early years of his life, his father did well out of the recovering economy and, making good use of his connections in the RPF, was able to acquire land and build a good family home in Kigali. As Rwanda's development miracle took off, however, this family's position worsened. They had to leave their large family home and move into a smaller one and saw their assets steadily decline. Fidel's Father's social circle decreased as, while some former comrades prospered, he became increasingly vulnerable.

Like many students at Saint-Jacques Fidel talked a lot about the future. He had big dreams, but also big doubts. In his first months at Saint-Jacques he spent his time with a group of "toughs"<sup>537</sup> that included boys from both Hutu and Tutsi backgrounds. However, at the end of Senior One, concerned about his diminishing grades and being held-back or tarnished by this group, he joined AERG. His mother and sisters note that it was after joining AERG that he became increasingly political, but he insists that his father's values and stories about growing up in exile and the scenes of genocide he encountered during the RPF 'liberation' of Rwanda had the most profound influence on him.

***Jonathan:*** Jonathan is the son of a single mother who became pregnant with him as a teenager following a date rape. Stigmatised and forced to leave the family home, she raised him in very poor and challenging conditions, including a period in which, out of desperation she was tricked into joining the army. Jonathan's only relationship with his father is through court-cases as his mother had tried in vain to force his father to pay some maintenance costs for him. Both parents are Tutsi, however, both Jonathan and his mother feel let down by Kagame's Rwanda. Jonathan blames his father, rather than "Hutus" for the difficult life he has had and spent his Senior One year insisting to me privately that he would never join AERG. By Senior Three, however, he was a full and active member and, when in public, would loudly recite the official public script on all issues of Rwandan history and politics, while conceding to me in private that he did not believe half of what he was saying. More than anything, he seemed in need of friendship, and AERG provided him with that.

Jonathan is able to attend Saint-Jacques thanks to a foreign sponsor but lacks the privileges of many of his classmates and AERG members. His social position enables him to think critically about the meritocracy and equality discourse, and unlike many in AERG, he regards himself as a victim of the modern Rwandan state more than historic persecution of the Tutsi before the genocide. He is also one of the most critical

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<sup>537</sup> See pages 135-139

of western powers and most distrusting of white people; which, although he sometimes expresses in terms of the UN's betrayal during the genocide, seems more about ongoing global inequality.

**Anody:** Anody is the youngest child of a widowed mother. Both his parents are Tutsi. They live in a reasonable house but are cash-poor and survive on the remittances sent by a relative overseas. He told me that his mother struggles because *“she is too old for physical work and she never studied because of the discrimination that existed before the genocide.”* She had lived in Rwanda in the years leading up to the genocide but managed to leave the country before it broke out, returning again afterwards. Anody had an older brother who was murdered – hacked to death outside the family home by a group of thieves. The thieves were Hutu and Anody believes his brother was targeted at least in part because he was Tutsi.

His mother not being strong in either French or English, Anody was not given opportunity to develop language skills in the home and struggled academically. At Saint-Jacques he gravitated to the group known as “toughs”, who performed a form of oppositional masculinity based on hip-hop culture and resistance to authority, but he was more of a follower than a leader among that group. He was generally liked by other students as he was not aggressive and limited his deviance to ‘joking around’, talking in class, foot dragging when work was set etc. Towards the start of Senior Two, Anody co-founded a secret group with a few other boys called “Young Killers”. All of them were Tutsi and, though they started out as a rap group, some of them would joke together that their purpose was to avenge the deaths of their family members killed in the genocide. This was never a serious suggestion, however, just young men letting off steam. In reality, the group only lasted a few months and merely hung out together getting up to light mischief.

Towards the end of Senior Two, Anody committed a childish act that would cost him forever. One break time, while nobody was looking except the few he was trying to impress, he took a pen and wrote nicknames next to the real names of each person in his class on an A4 class list that was pinned to the door. He was caught by the Dean of Discipline who forced him to write a confession note. I found him in a state of anxiety, his jaw locked in the way teenage boys do when they try not to cry, as he explained to me that he feared being excluded for his crime. I helped him to draft a confession, using phrases such as *“I know it was a stupid teenage error but that is no excuse”* and *“I am frightened of being excluded. My father is dead and I have no other way to pay for school.”* My hope that this would evoke some compassion was misplaced, however, and, after leaving him for a week to stew on what his punishment might be, and despite impassioned pleas on his behalf by myself and other teachers who knew Anody's background, Father Bertrand permanently excluded him from College Saint-Jacques.

Several teachers agreed that an injustice had been done, that the punishment did not fit the crime and was inconsistent with normal practice, and, like several other students who were dealt with cruelly by Father Bertrand, Anody read his situation through the lens of ethnicity. He told me, *“they (meaning Hutus) stopped my mother going to school and now they're attacking me.”* Bertrand was known to be the son of a prominent Hutu and students in AERG believed he was persecuting them. This became increasingly difficult to refute and by the end of Senior Three several of my students had been excluded for what anyone would agree were minor offenses, including Kevin, Fidel and Jonathan. I encouraged the students to speak out if they believed there was an injustice, but they told me that they feared doing so. *“Sam, the Catholic priests are powerful, no one can touch them,”* Fidel explained. I mention this here to demonstrate

that, without disputing the literature which describes RPF dominance, popular perception of the power of the Catholic church should not be underestimated. Countering the usual narrative on modern Rwanda, these young men from Tutsi backgrounds felt powerless in the face of what they perceived as ethnic-discrimination.

### *Being “Hutsi”*

Though throughout this thesis I have talked about students being of ‘Hutu heritage’ or ‘Tutsi heritage’, in truth many have both, since the extent of inter-ethnic marriage or inter-ethnic sexual relations outside of marriage is high and historically always has been. In a genetic sense it is likely that a majority of Rwandans will find both groups in their family tree. However, the phenomenon of being of mixed heritage is often not recognised due the custom that children assume the ethnicity of their father. Hence, pre-genocide census data recorded people as either Hutu, Tutsi or Twa, with no category for ‘mixed’. As Mamdani explains,

*“rather than being biological offspring of Tutsi centuries ago, today’s Tutsi need to be understood as children of mixed marriages who have been constructed as Tutsi through the lens of patriarchal ideology.”<sup>538</sup>*

David Newbury<sup>539</sup> estimates that greater than a quarter of Rwandans today have both Hutu and Tutsi grandparents and in some places as many as half; while, McLean-Hilker’s<sup>540</sup> research suggest Rwandans estimate just under a third of the population are of mixed parentage. Most Rwandans I asked estimated the figure slightly lower but still substantial.

Young people who are of mixed-parentage occupy a particularly ambiguous space. Through extended families on both sides they have insights into the historic and contemporary grievances of both Hutus and Tutsis; they have the potential to ‘play on’ both sides of their ethnic mix in different contexts and different company; but, equally, may find themselves defined and positioned by others in ways not of their choosing. McLean-Hilker<sup>541</sup> identifies three factors which Rwandan’s use to define others’ ethnicity. The first is by the ethnic group of the Father; the second is by physical appearance; and the third is by past and present experiences. For example, having a relative who fought for the RPF or ‘returned’ to Rwanda after 1994 indicates being Tutsi, while having a relative who was accused at Gacaca, or joined the mass exodus to Goma in 1994 indicates being Hutu. I will briefly illustrate these points through short biographies of three students.

***Mugisha:*** Mugisha is the son of a Hutu father and a Tutsi mother. His father was politically active opposing the Habyarimana government in the years leading up the genocide. When it broke out, both of his parents narrowly escaped being killed, as his father helped to rescue several Tutsi, including Mugisha’s mother. She suffered some horrific ordeals, including witnessing the brutal murder of loved ones, before finally being saved. They were both hiding in Saint-Jacques the day it was liberated. They witnessed the battle

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<sup>538</sup> Mamdani (2001:54)

<sup>539</sup> Newbury (1998)

<sup>540</sup> McLean-Hilker (2012)

<sup>541</sup> Ibid

for Kigali and would have also witnessed atrocities committed by all sides to the conflict. They fell in love and married not long after the genocide and had their first child, Mugisha's brother, just two years after, about the time that internal security was established. Mugisha's father is a businessman who believes it is wise to stay out of politics. He is privately critical of the government's authoritarianism, but has put his activism days behind him, preferring to focus on building a good life for his family. Mugisha's mother is still affected by the trauma of what happened in 1994 but finds comfort in strict adherence to her Pentecostal faith.

When Mugisha attends the annual Genocide Commemoration at Saint-Jacques he does so as the son of two parents – one Tutsi, one Hutu – who took shelter and survived there. The stories recounted would remind him of stories his mother and father have told, or more likely fill in blanks from what gets left unsaid. Mugisha attends the event as a spectator, however; while the group of students charged with organising the commemoration, many of whose parents were not in Rwanda in 1994, consider him to be a Hutu. None of the other students at Saint-Jacques knows Mugisha's background. Unlike some who make an effort to be viewed a particular way, Mugisha refuses to disclose his ethnicity at school, but acknowledges to me that under the patriarchal system he would be considered Hutu. AERG students consider him to be Hutu, based partly on his physical appearance, but also because he does not perform a Tutsi identity, such as through overt displays of support for the RPF. Conversely, Mugisha's older brother who looks physically more typically-Tutsi is an active member of AERG at another school. This demonstrates how physical appearance can affect the way one is positioned by others.

Mugisha is interested in politics, he reads about it a lot on the internet and in private he is critical of the RPF-led government, particularly on the issues of democracy and human rights, and expressed a desire to run for office one day. This worries his father, who warns him that nobody who goes into politics comes out of it well and tells Mugisha to focus his energies on learning sciences. Both parents encourage their children to foreground their Christian rather than ethno-political identities.

***Stella:*** Stella's mother is Tutsi. Her father is Hutu and works in a senior position in an important financial institution. However, like so many Hutu men he spent some time in prison after the genocide due to allegations from which he was eventually acquitted. This period, during her early childhood, caused her family some hardship, but these days are they comfortably middle-class. Both parents are strict, even by Rwandan standards, and put their children under a lot pressure to work hard and bring home good grades. Stella explained, *"although my mother is Tutsi, because my father is Hutu we are all Hutu. And Dad believes that we will have to work twice as hard as others to have the same opportunities because we are at a disadvantage."* Stella was not so much defining herself as Hutu as explaining the patriarchal logic. She also demonstrated a lack of confidence in 'meritocracy'.

At Saint-Jacques Stella holds a student-leadership position and is one of the most popular girls, partly because she is kind to everyone no matter which groups they associate with. She is friends with many of the AERG leaders and they collaborate together on school-wide projects and events, but she has never sought to join them because she believes *"they could never accept"* her. Despite feeling excluded and holding legitimate grievances against the state, she does not perform as a *victim*, however, and presents herself as patriotic and positive about Rwanda's future.

Younger students in the school, who are not aware of Stella's family background, find it difficult to discern her ethnic identity. Physically she has stereotypical features of both Hutu and Tutsi. One young man said of her: *"I believe she is Tutsi because she is attractive, but maybe a grandparent is Hutu."* While another said, *"She is Hutu, but she looks somehow beautiful. Maybe her mother or grandmother is Tutsi, but she is Hutu"*. Both these young men equated attractiveness with the stereotypically Tutsi physical traits. However, the first seemed to assign ethnicity on the basis of physical appearance, the second on the father's ethnic group. A third young man told me, *"she looks Hutu, but it is difficult to tell."* In the absence of knowledge about a fellow students' background and parentage, a person's physical features can strongly affect how others' position them.

***Paci:*** I make an assumption that Paci is of mixed parentage. I do not know his parents. His mother has a long-term illness and is usually kept out of the way<sup>542</sup> and his Father is regularly overseas doing trade. Paci identifies himself to me as Tutsi and talks about the members of his family killed in the genocide, including one who was tortured as a spy. However, other students, particularly those in AERG, believe he is Hutu. When I shared that information with him he rolled his eyes as if he was tired of hearing it, and said defiantly, *"let them think what they want. I know who I am and I know my family's background"*. Paci had previously shared with me an image of his great uncle, who was a prominent figure in Rwanda's colonial history, and a Tutsi. I also observed that while Paci has stereotypical traits associated with both groups, some of his older siblings appear more stereotypically Tutsi, whereas his father's physical appearance is more stereotypically Hutu. One of the AERG students claimed his and Paci's fathers knew each other and insisted that Paci's Father was Hutu.

I think it is likely that Paci's mother is Tutsi and his father is either of Hutu or mixed heritage. In reality, the majority of Rwandans have both Hutu and Tutsi ancestors; and 'the truth' about Paci's ethnic heritage cannot be known by me and may not be known by him either. Nonetheless, this dissonance between how Paci self-identifies and how others at Saint-Jacques label him reveals some interesting points about ethnic politics. Those who label Paci a Hutu do so based on a) his ambiguous physical appearance, b) the belief his father is Hutu, and c) the fact that Paci does not perform "Tutsi" identity – by which I mean that he is not enthusiastically pro-RPF, or even especially interested in politics; he seems genuinely comfortable in having friends from both ethnic groups; and his family works in business, with no obvious links to political or military institutions. On the other hand, while Paci emphasises his rejection of ethnic divisions and insists that he has no interest in being part of a group like AERG, the effort he made to prove his Tutsi heritage to me shows that it mattered to him. Perhaps he sought to avoid the stigma of collective guilt, or maybe it was important to him that his mother's family's experience of genocide and his heritage as a 'survivor' not be denied.

### *Hutus and collective guilt*

In the situation described above, Paci, who is probably of mixed ethnic heritage, described himself as Tutsi, while other students at Saint-Jacques, particularly those in AERG, defined him as Hutu. In other words, they put him in the 'out-group', as somebody who was not one of them. Refuting his claim to be

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<sup>542</sup> Page 145

Tutsi, one student told me, *“there are many who will tell you they are Tutsi, maybe because they are ashamed of what their parents did during the genocide”*. On one level this statement is problematic, but on another it is perceptive. It is problematic because, possibly unintentionally, it implies that *all* Hutu, or at least all whose children try to mask their Hutu backgrounds, supported or participated in the genocide, when we know that is far from true. However, it is perceptive in how it identifies the sense of collective shame that many Hutu children experience. I observed that children raised by Hutu parents seemed to have developed mechanisms for avoiding or overcoming social stigma and/or prejudice. I note three here:

***Reciting the public script:*** Some children from Hutu backgrounds seemed to surmount any potential association with the genocide by proving their worth as good citizens who rejected ‘genocide ideology’. The ten youths at the Youth Connect meeting cited earlier are good examples of this as their statements expressing collective guilt and apologising for the crimes of older relatives (however distant) were praised by Paul Kagame. A young man of Hutu-parentage at Saint-Jacques was praised for a poem he recited at the commemoration, expressing his sorrow and desire to make reparations for the crimes of his relatives. Such young people bury their Hutu identities and re-emerge as model Rwandan citizens.

To some extent, Stella sought to overcome the label “Hutu” in this way also, as she performed a conformist identity and embraced the vision of Rwanda’s ‘bright future’ – at least in public, though in private to me she was more openly critical.

***Re-appropriating the script:*** While a child could proudly declare, *“I’m a survivor - a Tutsi survivor”*, it was extremely rare for anyone to declare themselves ‘Hutu’. This is because the government-sponsored narrative that *“there are no Hutus and Tutsis, we are all Rwandan”*, though criticised as a device to mask Tutsi power, is often appropriated by ‘Hutu’ students to their advantage, as they refuse to acknowledge any identity other than “Rwandan” and use the concept of shared citizenship to criticise AERG students or others for being divisive.

For ethical reasons, I avoided asking students their ethnic backgrounds, but in the case of students of Tutsi parents it was normally easy to discern, or the information was offered freely. Children from Hutu families, however, would normally feign ignorance of their background. Or, it also seemed parents were less likely to discuss ethnicity in the home. The following interview with Celeste, a thirteen-year old Senior One student, could suggest either of those:

*Q: What characteristic of yours most influences how others treat you?*

*A: At this school, because of being seen as wealthy, people steal more. They took my books. Took my purse. But my aunty tells me I am bullied because I am Hutu.*

*Q: Last week you told me you did not know if you are Hutu or Tutsi.*

*A: Grace told me how to know. She asked me if my father ever told me. I said no. She promised to tell me. And David told me characteristics like Hutus have large noses here (pointing across the bridge of her nose).*

*Q: Do you want to know your ethnic background?*

*A: No, because I know it is dangerous. And those people in this school who talk about it bring divisions.*

*Q: What do you mean?*

*A: Like AERG. I hate it with all my soul. When people enter that family it changes them. But me I'm in PLP.*

*Q: When did you join?*

*A: I told Grace (another female student from Hutu background) I wanted to join a family. She said 'Please not AERG'. I said, "Seven". She said. "No there is someone I don't like in there". So she suggested PLP.*

*Q: How is PLP different to AERG?*

*A: AERG brings divisions and thinks about only themselves, but PLP wants to help everybody and change the world.*

We see in this transcript how Celeste claimed her family did not discuss ethnicity. Up until this interview she had said she did not know her background. However, during this interview she demonstrated not only an awareness of her Hutu heritage, but a rejection of it in favour of 'unity'. Celeste also describes how she and Grace found "a family" in the Peace and Love Proclaimers group. The emergence of such groups at Saint-Jacques did not intend to rival AERG; and they did not define membership according to any ethnic categories; but they did seem to offer a home to those who did not qualify for AERG membership.

Finally, it is noteworthy that Celeste said her aunt had told her she might be bullied because she is Hutu. On other occasions Celeste talked about how her father was nearly falsely imprisoned after the genocide and other injustices she perceived.

### ***Concluding Thoughts***

This chapter has considered some of the diverse and complex ways Saint-Jacques students construct their own and others' ethnic identities. Building on the description threaded throughout this thesis of Saint-Jacques students' experiences of anxiety, uncertainty and insecurity, I have shown how ethnicity finds meaning as it relates to socio-economic competition; how it offers a resource for accessing social capital and maintaining group-based solidarity for some, while becoming the cause of social exclusion for others; and how it forms the basis of students' victim-narratives, which offer face-saving explanations for their misfortune, as in the case of Fidel who, hurt and embarrassed by his family's recent loss of income, attributed it to his parents' experience of growing up as Tutsi refugees decades earlier; or Anody, who interpreted his exclusion from school through the lens of his mother being denied an education under Habyarimana.

Continuing our study of the tensions and contradictions between the public script and grassroots narratives, the chapter has explored some of the conflicting discursive and symbolic material produced in

three sites of knowledge construction – the classroom, students’ social clubs, and the home – and how it enables or constrains students’ performances of self in their quest for security, respect and status.

Beginning with the discourse of ‘unity’ found in the school curriculum, it argued that students’ public statements that *“there are no divisions among us”* constituted a performance of patriotism, an expression of aspiration, or in the case of students from Hutu backgrounds, an attempt to redefine themselves, rather than a sincere belief about how the world *is*. It showed how the notion that *“there are no longer Hutus and Tutsis”* is undermined by the way these terms have been replaced with the proxies ‘perpetrator’ and ‘survivor’, which are socially assigned to young people despite them not being alive at the time of the genocide. It also showed how the notion of being a ‘survivor’ brought social benefits, while those who were not designated ‘survivors’ were expected to experience collective guilt and encouraged to apologise on behalf of their Hutu parents and relatives.

Next, we saw how the division between students defined as ‘survivors’ and everybody else comes alive in a physical sense in the student-led spaces of the school, where membership of the prominent student society, AERG, is defined along ethnic lines. Looking at students’ descriptions of AERG we saw how those on the inside consider it provides them with friendship and guidance during their passage through school, learning opportunities, prestige and a network of connections to draw upon later in their careers; while from the outside it is seen as elitist, secretive, powerful and controlling. Thus, AERG is a source of social capital for some and social exclusion for others.

In the final section I offered some biographical details of differently situated students. The purpose here was to demonstrate the nuances and complexities of students’ ethnic backgrounds and highlight the gap between what is taught in school and what is learned in the home. Speaking to a literature which sometimes aggregates the Tutsi as Rwanda’s new elite, in the case of Fidel and Anody it demonstrates how many youths from Tutsi homes nonetheless struggle and experience a sense of victimhood and vulnerability for which they continue to collectively blame Hutu. On the other hand, Jonathan’s case shows how disadvantaged Tutsi youth can also feel resentment towards the RPF-government, which they perceive is not sharing the benefits of development with them.

This section also considered the case of “Hutsi” children – those with mixed parentage – who struggle to define themselves. It noted the case of Mugisha, who sits through Saint-Jacques’ genocide commemoration each year being considered ‘Hutu’ by its AERG organisers, while privately knowing his own Tutsi mother was among those who had survived the genocide and sheltered there. Noting the criteria others use to assign Hutu or Tutsi identities to mixed-heritage students, the chapter also noted how ethnicity intersects with gender as it is defined according to patriarchal heritage. It also noted how Stella’s ethnic group was discussed in terms of her physical appearance, as Tutsi girls are socially constructed to be ‘more beautiful’.

A final point to take from this chapter is that the ways in which young Rwandans define their own and others’ ethnic identities and the importance they attach to ethnicity varies from student to student; and, furthermore, the same student’s beliefs and practises often evolve overtime as they are exposed to new opportunities or dilemmas, and new ways of seeing the world and relating to others.



## Conclusion

### Six Years Later

Six years have passed since the scene I described at the beginning of the opening chapter. I am stood again in downtown Kigali, waiting to meet some former students for lunch. They are young adults now and eagerly awaiting the publication of their A-level results. The three-storey Union Trade Centre, which was Kigali's only shopping mall six years ago, is now overlooked by a grand hotel that boasts a rooftop swimming pool; and is dwarfed by glass-fronted high-rise office blocks which have filled the gaps in between buildings I recognise. The roads are less chaotic than I remember. The beat-up multi-coloured Matatu mini-buses that used to zip around blasting out their hip-hop beats have been banned from the city, replaced by the larger, smarter, more uniform vehicles of the Kigali Bus Company. Passengers carry an electronic pre-payment card that they tap on a reader as they board. A major road which used to be covered with roaring motorbike taxis jostling for clients is now pedestrian only. I also notice an absence of beggars or anybody trying to sell mobile phone cards, which are now mostly purchased at official service centres cropping up at convenient locations around the city. Rwanda has developed in other ways too. Families who used to boil their water now have drinkable water delivered in large clear plastic jerrycans; many have switched from charcoal to gas for their cooking fuel; and nearly everyone in middle-class families owns a smartphone. Beneath the façade of 'development' however, at grassroots much has stayed the same. If anything, the pace of 'modernisation' seems to be accentuating socio-economic struggle and increasing the distance between people.

My students are waiting for their A-level results; waiting to discover where 'meritocracy' will place them next in life. Those who are expecting good marks and have financial backing are scrambling around for opportunities to study overseas, while others have seen their childhood ambitions tempered by a dose of reality. Fidel used to dream of becoming a doctor. Now he wonders if he will afford university or try to make a living from self-employment in a small business. Mugisha, who was in Senior Two when I arrived, has spent the last year unemployed. After his A-levels the state offered him teacher training college, which fell short of his hopes for life, but his family can only afford to send one child at a time to university. He hopes to one day study in China after his brother has graduated. Benji, one of the boys I described as 'docile' in chapter five, had a growth spurt. He is now tall, muscular and handsome. He did well in school and with his good grades and father's connections is expecting to have a 'bright future'.

At Saint-Jacques, as the days, weeks, and years turn and cohorts of students come and go, they observe the same regulations, keep to the same routines and honour the same traditions. In his latest update on life at the school, teacher Eli told me:

*They're still giving out their famous punishments. It's unacceptable. They even tear students' skinny trousers and make the parents buy new uniforms. Father Bertrand has been transferred somewhere else, which is fortunate as he stole from the school. Unfortunately, they brought back the Fireman (the student's nickname for Father*

Charles) *with his brutal methods. And Bosco? They made him Dean of Discipline. It's really serious. All the teachers agree that they can't send anyone to him for discipline. Frankly, he considers himself the school principal because of the weaknesses of Father Charles.*

A new intake of first years has just arrived at Saint-Jacques. They were in their first weeks of primary school at the time this thesis began. Seeing them reminds me how small and young some of my students were when I became their Senior One English teacher and how much has happened in their lives since then. I wonder how the new students are settling in to dorm life, what their expectations are from a Saint-Jacques education, and how they are imagining their futures. My mind is taken back to the questions I posed myself on my first ever day there in relation to different bodies of literature, such as on the role of schooling in the (re)production of social identities; the nature of Rwanda's post-conflict reconciliation, social reengineering and state-building under the RPF; and African youths' responses to globalisation and modernity. This thesis has presented an attempt to address those topics ethnographically and with as much honesty as possible.

The thesis has been structured around different aspects of students' identities: expectations and aspirations (Chapter Three); conformity and resistance and negotiating patron-client type relations (Chapter Four); the performance of masculinities (Chapter Five); political, religious and socio-economic subjectivities (Chapter Six); and relationships with ethnicity (Chapter Seven). However, some cross-cutting themes relating to the literatures just discussed recur throughout the thesis, which relate common anthropological topics – such as agency versus structure, continuity versus change, or the role of discourse and symbols in the production of social group boundaries – to the issue of schooling and youthhood in contemporary Rwanda. In conclusion, I will briefly show how such ideas have re-emerged in different chapters in relation to three tentative arguments I set out in the opening chapter. Firstly, that the overriding experience of growing up at Saint-Jacques can be summarised as one of great expectations coupled with great anxiety and uncertainty. Secondly, that College Saint-Jacques can be viewed as a microcosm of Rwanda. Finally, that while the discursive and symbolic power of the state, not to mention brute force at times, may set the 'conditions of possibility', social identities are constructed and maintained at grassroots through the appropriation of official narratives and cultural creation.

### *Anxiety and uncertainty*

It is impossible to talk about Rwanda without talking about ethnicity. As I argued in the opening chapter, there is a tendency in much of the literature on Rwanda to treat the genocide as year zero and read all social phenomena as growing out of it, or as Longman<sup>543</sup> observes, when considering the colonial and post-independence era, to "*read backwards into Rwandan history as though all of Rwanda's past was an inevitable march towards the disaster of 1994*". However, in this work I have attempted to show that while ethnicity can be a salient feature of young Rwandans identities it does not exist in vacuum. Rather, I have argued that if one aspect of Saint-Jacques students' experience of growing up in the new Rwanda stands out above others, it is not their orientation to the past, but to the future; their sense of growing up in a

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<sup>543</sup> Longman (2004:30)

rapidly changing world in which new technologies and commodities are bringing the world closer, coupled with a fear that they will be left behind, among the ‘uncivilised’ and socially excluded. I argue that the overriding experience of being a young Rwandan today is one of anxiety and uncertainty in relation to their current and future social standing.

One of the tensions observed in the thesis was between a discourse of ‘collective’ or ‘shared’ citizenship and responsibility to the state, on the one hand, and a discourse of individualism and self-reliance on the other. We saw the first of these in the discipline practices described in chapter four, which aimed to ensure that students were stripped of their individualism and had all things in common, and in parts of chapters three and seven where I described how the RPF-led government constructs the ‘ideal’ citizen as one who is obedient and fulfils her obligations to the state. However, chapter three highlighted the way all students are pitted against each other through a regime of constant testing and ranking. Moreover, it introduced a dominant discourse in contemporary Rwanda about ‘meritocracy’. Echoing a political discourse which gained prominence in the late 1990s in the west – which has often been dubbed the ‘*meritocracy myth*’<sup>544</sup> – it posits that everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed and that people fare according to their natural capabilities and work-ethic. This is thought to be socially desirable as it ‘rewards talent’ and, as I showed in chapter three, is clothed in the language of ‘fairness’. I have argued, however, that the idea of meritocracy cloaks embedded vertical and horizontal inequalities, and that by equating exam results or financial success with people’s work ethic and ‘mentality’, as Rwanda’s President, Paul Kagame<sup>545</sup> often does, those left behind are blamed for their plight, leading to a loss of self-worth. As Young<sup>546</sup>, who coined the term ‘meritocracy’ writes, such people “*can easily become demoralized by being looked down on so woundingly by people who have done well for themselves... No underclass has ever been left as morally naked as that.*”

Saint-Jacques students’ competitive struggles to acquire self-esteem and good social standing are explored in several chapters. For example, chapter four argued that harsh discipline practices and the hierarchy that developed between young men in the boarding, schooled them in superior-inferior relationships and the importance of staying on top. Chapter five showed the anxieties young men experience about their ability to perform the social expectations of dominant masculinity, including their role as a ‘provider’. Chapter six is particularly important for understanding the anxiety and uncertainty, as it depicted some young people’s sense of being surrounded by threats to their material well-being, from extended family and neighbours as much as from global capital and neo-imperialism. That chapter also explored some of the narratives students employ to make sense of misfortune and to save-face when things go badly. Finally, chapter seven argued that ethnic identities must be understood in relation to the opportunities they bring for accessing group-based solidarities or explaining misfortune.

### *College Saint-Jacques as a microcosm of Rwanda*

A second recurring theme in this thesis is the idea that Saint-Jacques can be viewed as a microcosm of Rwanda. This is so in the metaphorical sense that much of what I have described as the social life at Saint-

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<sup>544</sup> Goldthorpe (2003)

<sup>545</sup> Page 13

<sup>546</sup> Young (2001: paragraph 12-13), cited in Alvarado (2010)

Jacques is applicable to Rwanda in general; but I also mean it in the literal sense that the Rwandan state and Rwanda's dominant social and cultural norms permeate school-life from the classroom to the playground, and that in turning out graduates to join the ranks of Rwanda's swelling middle-class, it, and schools like it, are producing the next generation of Rwandans. On the metaphorical level, I have described how Saint-Jacques is characterised by distrust and paranoia (chapter two); violence, authoritarian leadership and patron-client type relations (chapter 4); and competition over social status, much how many studies define Rwanda. Taking the idea of a microcosm more literally, several chapters have outlined ways the school introduces discourses of the state as it seeks to produce ideal citizens. For example, chapter three noted the emphasis placed on learning sciences and entrepreneurship and the idea that the purpose of schooling is to make young people useful to national development. It also observed that classroom learning prioritises memorisation of "correct answers" but discourages (or at least does not encourage) students to think critically or creatively. Chapters Five, Six and Seven respectively, showed the presence and uptake of official narratives on gender equality, anti-colonialism and collective citizenship – the idea that there are no longer Hutus and Tutsi, only Rwandans. Notwithstanding the way some of these ideas were also resisted or re-appropriated, their uptake was shown to be significant.

### *The significance of grass-roots narratives – agency v structure*

A dominant theme in literature from the sociology of education is the role of schooling in cultural and social reproduction. Similarly, in the Rwandan studies literature much attention has been given to understanding the role of the state in producing ethnicities and citizenship, both in terms of the ideologies that led to the genocide against the Tutsi in 1994 and attempts at social re-engineering since. This thesis has provided rich empirical data for those interested in these topics. While mapping out the tightly structured context of Saint-Jacques students' lives, I have argued that even within a fairly overbearing authoritarian culture like Saint-Jacques' (and Rwanda in general), students find spaces to recover 'subjugated knowledges' or to re-appropriate official discourses in ways that serve their interests. Thus, the thesis illustrates some of the limits to the reach of state. This was particularly evident in the discourses about the Illuminati and witchcraft described in chapter six, which I argued constitute a form of discursive power that enabled students to critique their social worlds and challenge official narratives outside the parameters of elite discourse. For example, I noted coded critiques of Paul Kagame in students' discussions about whether or not he is a member of the Illuminati.

Similarly, Chapter Five noted how the state actively promotes "gender equality" as the incorporation of women into the national economy through granting equal rights and affirmative actions; but, by conceding that men and women are "equal but different", it leaves traditional constructions of femininity and masculinity alone. Similarly, I have argued that when students recite official discourses they are very often aware that they are reading from the public script, and are doing so for a strategic purpose, rather than sincerely believing what they say. This was shown in the word-games students would play in political science class in the previous chapter, which they used to publicly perform their patriotism while catching others out, while often admitting to different views in private. Likewise, in chapter three I argued that classroom knowledge is compartmentalised by students as something which is good for the purpose of

passing exams, but once outside the classroom they actively learn in other ways to make up the deficits they perceive in their own knowledge and skills.

Finally, I have highlighted in several places in this work some of the ways in which students skilfully resisted top-down power and asserted their individuality and autonomy. For example, the boys in chapter two who decided to sabotage a researcher's survey on sexual practises did so because they perceived that she was seeking to gain from them without giving back.

On the hand, while observing some of the ways students exercise discursive power, I also described the ways power is enacted on them, showing how symbolic capital available to some is unavailable to others, and how, while students seek to position themselves, they are also positioned by others. This was especially evident in the chapters on gender and ethnicity. On gender, I defined "toughs" as young men who were left to perform an oppositional form of masculinity, based on bravado, physical strength and sexual presence, because life had landed them in a place where they found dominant masculinity unachievable. Being a "tough" carried a danger, however, as Anody, experienced with his expulsion from the school, detailed in the previous chapter. Similarly, I also described in the previous chapter how the ethnic identities students seek to unmask and/or assign to one another can be a source of social exclusion and victimhood.

My students were not born equal, nor did they grow equally – physically, mentally and emotionally – or find equal opportunities presented to them; but neither were they born without agency. Thus, this has been a story of resourceful young Rwandans, skilfully discerning, adapting and striving to make the most of what life has given them; hoping for bright futures, while fearing being left behind – another tale of how African youths are confronting headlong the impacts of globalisation, urbanisation and "development".

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