The Burden of Privilege:
Navigating Transnational Space and Migration Dilemmas among Rwandan Scholarship Students in the U.S.

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
BY

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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Dr. Frances K. Vavrus, Advisor

August 2014

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am exceedingly grateful for the support and encouragement from family, friends, and colleagues that have carried me through to the end of this doctoral journey. First and foremost, I thank my parents for their grounding presence in my life, their never-ending willingness to listen and offer their wisdom in moments of joy and discouragement, and their unwavering confidence in my ability to complete this project. I also thank my brothers and my nephew—Kyle, Jared, and Aidan—for their good company in Minneapolis and for allowing their home to be a point of stability (and storage) as I have moved around the U.S. and East Africa over the past several years.

Many old friends have accompanied me on this journey and new friendships have developed along the way. I cannot adequately express my appreciation for this network of supportive friends, nor can I name all those around the world whom I am grateful to count among them. Some deserve special mention. Thanks to Melissa, an old friend and kindred spirit, for being such an exceptional support from a distance. Thanks to Marta for bridging my grad school and non-grad school worlds and for being such a great traveling companion. I am grateful that David introduced us on my first day back in Wulling Hall after returning from two years in Rwanda. Thanks to Rebecca and Kigali for hosting me during my research and showing me their favorite places. Thanks to the marvelous Millers for their hospitality and help transitioning from working abroad back to life and graduate studies in Minnesota. Thanks to Matthew for his academic and life counseling and for urging me on toward this finish line. Thanks to Beth for her jovial spirit and the

many hours of writing and conversing together. Thanks to Anne for getting as enthusiastic about scholarship program research as I do and sharing countless articles. Thanks to my entire CIDE cohort for all the invaluable feedback provided at various stages of this work. Thanks to my kickball and broomball team, the Bloody Noses, for providing lots of comic relief and a little exercise and to the Jackets, my beloved practicing band, which also helped keep me sane. Thanks to Joetta and other friends at Faith Mennonite Church for being a sustaining community, and for the other churches that have served as important sources of connection and support during my travels. Thanks to Laura and Kyle for welcoming me to Arizona and making sure that I got away from writing and out into the mountains every once in a while. Thanks to Tim for connecting at CIES and for offering much needed encouragement during the final writing push. Thanks to Marissa for giving the gift of editing. Thanks to the many other friends in across the U.S., Rwanda, and beyond who welcome me as I come and go. It's amazing to reflect on this web of relationships: true abundance.

The supportive relationships I have developed with my professors at the University of Minnesota while pursuing first a MA and then a PhD in the College of Education and Human Development are also numerous and exceptional. I have learned so much both in and out of the classroom throughout my graduate school experience. In particular, I have appreciated the opportunity to collaborate closely with Dr. David Chapman and Dr. Joan DeJaeghere on work that, like my own, seeks to inform the design of education development programs. I have also benefited greatly from taking classes

with Dr. Peter Demerath and Dr. Andy Furco that have enhanced my understanding and practice of community-engaged scholarship.

Just prior to completing my MA at the University of Minnesota in 2008, I went to hear Dr. Frances Vavrus, a candidate for a position in my department, present on her research. As I looked into her work further, I was captivated by her capacity for critical analysis and her commitment to working consistently in a particular place over the long-term. This resonated with my own desire not just to bounce from project to project but instead to build long-term relationships, in-depth understanding, and meaningful exchange. It was in large part due to the closing lines of *Desire and Decline,* a book based on her dissertation research, that I determined I would like to return to the University of Minnesota for a doctorate. Reflecting on the challenges of working toward social change, she writes:

> A lifetime of learning about and working on [problems that are vast, complex, and intractable] just might begin to make a difference. Perhaps that is the most useful course: to forget the search for a panacea and to settle in for the long haul. (2003, p. 150)

This dissertation has been a long haul, and I could not have asked for better mentorship throughout the process. I am grateful for an adviser who has so gracefully balanced affirmation and critique, structure and flexibility, reflection and action. Thank you, Fran, for helping me chart my own scholarly course. I look forward to a lifetime of continued learning about and work on the challenges that you have helped me and so many others understand more deeply.

In an unexpected turn of events, I wrote much of this dissertation while directing an undergraduate scholarship program for students from Sub-Saharan African countries at Arizona State University. Accepting a full time position prior to completing my dissertation made me—and I imagine my committee members—somewhat nervous. I am grateful to Jacqueline and The MasterCard Foundation Scholars Program team at ASU—Kevin, Jenn, and Seabrook—for making it possible for me to adjust to my new position while maintaining progress toward the end of my doctorate. Thank you for your gracious accommodation during the final phase. I am amazed that this project was completed during my first nine months in a new role and could have not done it without you.

Finally, I thank the Rwandan government officials and U.S. program administrators who granted me permission to carry out this research as well as the higher education faculty and staff, community members, and Rwandan Presidential Scholars who made this study possible by participating in the research. Thank you for your hospitality, your willingness to accommodate a researcher's gaze, your generous gifts of time, and your commitment to working toward a bright future for Rwandans.

The MasterCard Foundation Scholars I now work with at Arizona State University have also played an important role in inspiring me throughout this writing process and affirming that the relevance of this work goes beyond the Rwanda Presidential Scholars Program. I conclude these acknowledgements with a mantra that these students recount often to each other: *If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.* To all those who have helped reach this point and made the journey a pleasant one: You are appreciated beyond words. Thank you.

DEDICATION

To Aidan, a constant source of joy and perspective.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation is an ethnography of the transnational education space inhabited by higher education scholarship recipients from Rwanda pursuing undergraduate degrees in the United States. It examines how this space is produced through the representational practices of actors in the U.S. and Rwanda and, in turn, constitutes the relationships, dilemmas, transformations, and representations that occur within these spaces. Employing a transnational lens, the study describes a space of opportunity as well as tension between contrasting narratives of change, national and familial priorities, and the "magical" expectations of various actors that contrast with students' lived experiences of undergraduate education in the U.S. Most centrally, it argues that navigating the diverse expectations associated with a U.S. education is a significant yet under-addressed challenge faced by scholarship students from low-income and post-conflict contexts. Understanding this burden—the burden of privilege—is its primary focus.

The study demonstrates that spatial analysis offers a promising approach for illuminating the experiences of internationally mobile students and for informing the design and implementation of international higher education scholarship programs. It concludes that scholarship students would benefit from program designs that create space for open dialogue about the migration dilemmas that accompany international mobility, particularly those related to the weighty expectations of family and nation for those privileged to have received scholarships to study in the U.S. This is particularly crucial for programs involving youth from low-income and post-conflict contexts—a group for whom the burden of such a privilege is particularly pronounced.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

HEI	Higher Education Institution
IFC	International Friendship Connection
NUR	National University of Rwanda
NURC	National Unity and Reconciliation Commission
REB	Rwanda Education Board
RPSP	Rwanda Presidential Scholars Program
RPF	Rwanda Patriotic Front
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathemat

PREFACE: A POEM AND A TRIBUTE

Knowledge and magic and making things happen

In Rwanda, many people think a U.S. visa transforms who you are.
A U.S. education is the best in the world.
Suddenly, you are a big person, an important person, someone that others will listen to, respect and admire. Many eyes are watching you.
Everyone thinks I am so smart now.

I am still the same person.

The U.S. is viewed as a land of opportunity,
where money grows on trees and everyone is wealthy.
You can't turn down this opportunity no matter what, and if you come here, you can't fail. But there was no gold when I got off the plane,

And failure is possible.

This scholarship offered a path out of a difficult life.
It's not easy to be a student in Rwanda.
This was a way to fulfill my dreams and secure my future.
I expected to become rich, and then I would help others. Many people are expecting my support.

I don't have much to take back yet.

We are expected to transform our country.
Sometimes, our parents say not to worry about that. There will always be someone to help. A chance only comes once – don't pass it up.
We have a big responsibility – an inspiring and scary responsibility.
You can't go back and struggle.

I am just trying to do my best.

I will stay hopeful.

This poem[1] weaves together words and ideas from the 34 students interviewed as part of this study to convey the themes that are central to this dissertation. During the final weeks of my fieldwork, I wrote this poem as part of my data analysis process and shared it at meetings with research participants on each of the two campuses where this study was carried out. I begin this dissertation with an account of these events because they provide an insightful window into what I discovered and how students responded to my developing interpretations of their experiences. Moreover, they introduce the transnational education space inhabited by these students not only as one of struggle and disenchantment—themes that run throughout the chapters to follow—but as a space of hope and determined perseverance. Thus, I begin toward the end of my research journey.

Elephants in the Room

As I drove to Liberal to share some preliminary findings with my research participants, I was nervous. I knew many of the students had entrusted me with perspectives that they would not share publicly because of concerns that they might be judged and even reported on by others. I anticipated that my identification of their migration dilemmas, obstacles to returning home, response strategies, and in particular,

[1] Writing this poem was an exercise in 'poetic transcription' (Glesne, 1997). Poetic transcription is an approach to enlivening interview data by representing it in the form of a poem. This approach is often able to capture the rhythm and vitality of speech more closely than the direct text. As Richardson (2003) argues, "When people talk, … whether as conversants, storytellers, informants, or interviewees, their speech is closer to poetry than it is to sociological prose. Writing up interviews as poems, honouring the speaker's pauses, repetitions, alliterations, narrative strategies, rhythms, and so on, may actually better represent the speaker than the practice of quoting in prose snippets" (p. 516). To construct this 'poetic narrative' (Wild and Scheyvens, 2012), I used my own words as well as the words of participants to convey central themes. While the poem goes beyond direct quotes from participant interviews, it is aligned with the post-positivist recognition that as a researcher, I am not a detached presenter of these participants' stories but an active collaborator in the process of mutual exchange and co-creation of knowledge (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003).

the finding that students were very private and hesitant to trust one another, was not the positive representation of their experiences that some had hoped I would convey.

I arrived at the classroom that I had reserved for my presentation a few minutes early. As I set up my PowerPoint, students began to arrive. Eight students were present by the time I started my talk. They were an interesting mix – some who had not participated in my study were present, along with some who had been particularly cautious in their interviews as well as others who had come across as open and unrestrained. First, I passed out a handout with space for the students to note the following for each section of my presentation: (1) What surprises you? (2) What resonates with you? (3) What's missing? At the end they were asked to note any suggestions, concerns, questions or comments. Next I began by explaining the challenge I faced in representing such a variety of experiences and perspectives that were shared with me. I shared my concern that one of the most prominent themes that emerged from my conversations with the students was an "elephant in the room," something that everyone is aware of but no one wants to draw attention to by mentioning it out loud: for a variety of reasons, students are wary of returning to Rwanda upon graduation. "I hope that you find it beneficial to hear some of the perspectives of your peers that may not be easy to talk about in person, and I welcome your feedback on the things I share."

My presentation was organized into several sections. First, I spoke of the meanings different groups associated with a U.S. education, tying this in to the academic pressure students experience and the widespread fear of failure so many spoke of in their interviews. I also summarized common themes regarding social supports and challenges,

highlighting the variety of ways students spoke of their relationships with other Rwandan students. I shared that while many expressed appreciation for the support they receive from their Rwandan peers and several commented that differences that matter in Rwandan society are less salient in the U.S., others experienced isolation and spoke of distrust among the students. I explained some of the dilemmas that the interviews had helped me understand in greater depth and presented a table outlining some of the considerations that students described as pushing and pulling them to stay in the U.S. or return to Rwanda. I also described some of the common ways in which students are strategizing for the future, in many cases by developing entrepreneurship skills and pursuing doctoral degrees. I shared my interpretation of how these strategies are closely linked with the fear of failure so many students expressed.

Finally, I presented the above poem, which I wrote by compiling themes and words from the student interviews to summarize the linkages I had discovered between diverse expectations, lived experiences, and the students' struggles to navigate the challenges they face while remaining hopeful. At the end of the presentation, students expressed their appreciation for the poem. It was the most well received part of the presentation and several asked for copies when I had finished. One wrote on the handout, "I loved that poem. It summarized almost all the ideas I could think of." Although one student later pointed out that I shouldn't imply that all Rwandans believe that a U.S. visa transforms your life, s/he agreed that it expressed well how magical expectations do not align with students' experiences. "That first part, I disagree with it. There are different

categories of people in Rwanda. Not everyone is coming from a background where they think a U.S. visa transforms who you are," s/he explained. "But the other parts are true."

Overall, the students resonated with what I shared. "There is definitely no room for failure," another noted. Students seemed most surprised by the variety of perspectives I had found regarding the social dynamics amongst Rwandan students. In response to a quote presented in which a student expressed his perspective that the students live together but don't really have close relationships and help each other out, one student replied, "I don't really agree with that. I don't know what they're talking about. That's not my experience so it's not true." Some expressed agreement, while another student jumped in to say that it's not a question of being right or wrong, true or false, but of being a particular experience someone has had that may be different from your experience. I expressed my agreement.

One student pointed out that I had focused more on what the government and families want, but said little about what the students want for themselves. I realized that this was an accurate assessment and likely a result of students' own hopes being largely constrained by the desires and expectations of others, as well as a greater level of comfort speaking about these pressures than their own dreams and what they hope to achieve personally. There were also several factors included on a table of push and pull factors I shared that a few students had not expected. "I was surprised that tension with the international community influenced the way some students shape their future. Social jealousy and tension also surprised me," one commented. Others expressed that this did not surprise them at all. One explained, "If I go back to my village, I'm really careful

about talking about how I went to America. But in the city, you can be proud of that. It doesn't matter, no one will be jealous. You will have respect and you can do things." Another added that jealousy is only among family members and neighbors, but that once you become successful, jealousy doesn't impact you.

Although only eight students attended this meeting and just a few provided substantial feedback, I had the opportunity to meet with others individually to discuss my findings. Some of these meetings were with students who had attended the presentation while others were with those who had been unable to attend. One of these conversations occurred in the Liberal lunchroom. A group of students who had been present again expressed their concern that the quote from a student that represented the scholars as living in the U.S. like they live in Rwanda, implying disunity, was concerning as it could give those who knew little about Rwanda the wrong impression. "You know, there was one thing you said that was really funny. That quote about Rwandans not helping each other," s/he said. S/he didn't mean funny in the sense Americans usually mean it. S/he meant that s/he did not approve of such a statement. S/he also wanted to assure me that s/he thought the presentation was really good and appreciated knowing what other Rwandans had shared. These comments implied that there had been some discussion around the concern that if I included an extreme statement like that one quote, it would represent them negatively.

Several expressed appreciation for how the presentation made them feel less alone in their concerns about life beyond graduation. "Some of those quotes, they sounded like me," one student shared in a coffee shop conversation following the

meeting. "I didn't realize that other people were having those same kinds of thoughts. That was good to know," s/he explained.

Several days later, I organized a similar event on the Metro campus. This time I didn't have to host it in a classroom as two of the students had offered to host the occasion in their apartment. This time fifteen students turned up to hear what I was finding. I was less nervous – something I generally noticed to be the case when I was at Metro compared to Liberal. The students seemed more uninhibited and less concerned about my presence. I provided snacks and the students sat around the room in attentive silence as I shared themes and quotes from my interviews. As at Liberal, I closed with the poem.

One student present—a recent graduate who was working at a nearby hospital while trying to get into medical school—commented on how important it is for students and their families to understand the limitations international students face in the system here, and what courses of study are not viable possibilities. S/he was still coming to terms with the loss of her/his own medical school dream. Another student asked if I thought Rwanda's ambitious vision for the future is realistic, given my experiences in the country. "I used to think so," s/he explained, "but I see things differently now." Another student expressed the view that the government's emphasis on how much they expect of the scholars is unnecessary and unhelpful. "They don't need to keep telling us about our responsibility. We have Rwanda in our hearts. We just need time to get ready to contribute."

One of the students responded with a question: "So what would you advise us to do?" I struggled to find an answer on the spot for this challenging question. Though I was at a loss to offer a helpful recommendation, later I texted this student a response: "I should have said I think you should follow your passions and keep Rwanda in your heart, and that you will eventually find the place where those two meet." Several minutes later s/he replied, "I agree. Your response kind of inspired my thoughts. I think that it's great that you shared with us all."

The evening concluded with several students expressing their appreciation for the opportunity to speak broadly about their experiences and their hope that the findings would make a difference. I was encouraged that after months of building trust, some of the students were grateful for the opportunity to have their perspectives voiced in ways that had the potential to make a difference for Rwanda and the future of the program:

> *We've had visitors from Rwanda – a delegation that came last year. We met with them and spoke formally – what's your GPA? What are you accomplishing? But we didn't get to have personal conversations about what our academic and social experience is really like. You are the first one who has come to have those conversations. You will be our voice, and we thank you for that.*

While students at both Liberal and Metro affirmed many of my interpretations and plans for representing their experiences, I found the two "member check" meetings strikingly different. Whereas some students at Liberal expressed concern with some of the dilemmas described and my perceptions of their social relationships in particular, students at Metro did not challenge the themes presented. Instead of expressing concern

with how they would be represented by the research, they wanted advice regarding how they might respond to the dilemmas facing them as scholarship recipients that they, like me, now more thoroughly understood. They wanted assurance that I would share these challenges with government officials who might be able to do something about their predicament of wanting to contribute to change in their country but finding few viable pathways to return to make a difference. They were confident that my preliminary findings posed greater opportunity than risk.

I remained concerned, however, that my representation of the data might be negatively interpreted. Throughout the process of writing up these findings, this concern echoed persistently in my mind: What if officials in Rwanda view this work as evidence that many of the Rwanda Presidential Scholars are unappreciative youth, ready and willing to selfishly voice their complaints to a willing ear? This concern is not unfounded. I did return to Rwanda to discuss preliminary findings with Rwandan officials involved with the scholarship program shortly after the completion of my fieldwork and was struck by some of the responses I encountered. As I sat in the office of one official who had studied outside Rwanda recounting the dilemmas faced by Rwanda Presidential Scholars, I was disappointed and somewhat surprised by the response. In the words of one listener, "These are just youth. They're selfish, and they don't yet understand how Rwanda works." I persisted to clarify the significance of some of these dilemmas and the opportunity for those supporting the scholarship program—including these officials—to respond in creative ways and support students as they work through challenging questions. By the end of the conversation, the official was brainstorming

ways in which incorporating something as simple as sharing personal stories of current leaders who struggled with similar challenges into programming for Presidential Scholars might be beneficial.

While the students who participated in this study undoubtedly had varied intentions and motivations, the conclusion that the youth I interviewed spoke from primarily selfish motivations and a desire to acquire what they need to pursue their individual objectives is far afield from the sentiments expressed in the above vignette and throughout my interviews. In contrast, many students chose to voice their experiences out of concern and a desire to see changes that would benefit Rwanda and the future of the program. In one research participant's words at the close of an interview:

> *My final comment is to thank you, you know, to do this kind of research. I know you did talk to a lot of people here, and I know your research is going to be used by many people. I think that's a good thing you have done. I think that once they do see your report and what we do think, there is a chance that there is something that is going to change. But if you didn't take your time and come here, that was not gonna happen. […] Another thing is we don't really get, you know, that many people who do come here and want to talk to us and stuff like that. But you coming, I'm sure that there is something that is going to be changed. And I do thank you for that.*

My opening comment is to say thank you to the Rwanda Presidential Scholars who welcomed me into their space and helped me understand its contours as well as their experiences maneuvering within and reshaping it. It is my sincere hope that this study

contributes in some small way to a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of youth from low-income, post-conflict contexts who are granted the opportunity to study abroad with the expectation that they will return to contribute to change in their context of origin. I also hope that by my coming and their speaking, something will be changed. And I do thank them for that.

CHAPTER 1

AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF TRANSIATIONAL EDUCATION SPACE

> Having [a goal] is generally deemed a good thing, the benefit of something to strive toward. This can also blind you, however: you see only your goal, and nothing else, while this something else – wider, deeper—may be considerably more interesting and important. (Ryszard Kapuscinski, 2001, p. 24)
>
> Research is captivating because it yields surprises. (Sommers, 2012, p. xix)

Introduction

I did not set out to examine the struggles that lie beneath the shining surface of an international higher education scholarship program for bright Rwandan college students. Rather, my intent at the outset of this study was to examine if and how Rwandan students' identities and imagined futures, aspects of particular significance for individuals and nations with a history of identity-based conflict, are transformed by the learning opportunities that international scholarships provide. As I entered into dialogue with these scholarship students, however, I discovered that my research provided a space where they were able to voice dilemmas and concerns that they were uncomfortable discussing in public settings. Somewhat unintentionally, I began listening to narratives that revealed how coming from a context rife with economic, political, and social instability impacts the ways in which students understand themselves, experience learning abroad, and imagine their futures.

I began to realize that the very thing I sought to explore—the transformative potential of learning opportunities outside Rwanda's borders—was constrained in

significant ways by the economic and social dynamics of post-conflict Rwanda. While students did speak of being profoundly changed by their experiences as undergraduate students in the U.S., I was struck by the ways in which their academic and social experiences abroad were shaped, and in many ways inhibited, by the socio-political dynamics and expectations of various groups in Rwanda that accompanied them to the U.S. Gradually, the context of post-genocide Rwanda began to shift from the background to the foreground of my study, and this dissertation turned into an exploration of transnational education space because the past and present situation in Rwanda was ever on the minds of these students as they lived and learned in the U.S. In other words, the privilege of receiving a prestigious scholarship to study abroad was also experienced as a burden for many of these students because of the expectations placed upon them to return home and address an array of challenges equipped as agents of economic and social change. The psychological interplay of Rwanda and the U.S. in the lives of these students led me to opt for the term 'transnational' rather than 'international' in the title of this dissertation because the former suggests that national histories and identities cannot always be neatly contained when students are studying abroad. A space exists, formed *beyond* the boundaries of the home country and the host country, that the term 'international' fails to capture. The 'transnational' is a concept that allows me to explore how national and global education and development goals produce spaces in which students from low-income, post-conflict countries find themselves studying at colleges and universities in the U.S. as recipients of prestigious scholarships.

The Rwanda Presidential Scholars Program

In 2007, a U.S. liberal arts college joined together with the Government of Rwanda to provide the nation's top-performing students with a comprehensive scholarship to study abroad in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). Funded primarily by the Rwandan government and supported by select U.S. higher education institutions (HEIs),[2] the Rwanda Presidential Scholars Program (RPSP) grew to include over twenty host institutions across the U.S., including a consortium of eighteen HEIs, that provide over 200 of Rwanda's "Best and Brightest"[3] with an undergraduate education. By providing degrees in STEM fields to a select group of students, the RPSP was designed to advance Rwanda's economic development by equipping the nation's youth to strengthen higher education, launch research and development initiatives, and become entrepreneurs and innovators. In addition to supporting Rwanda's economic development plan, the host institutions sought to promote global engagement and intercultural learning through the scholarship program. At times, these goals converged in the experiences of RPSP students; in other instances, as illustrated in Chapter Four, the pursuit of STEM subjects and intercultural learning on U.S. campuses created tensions for students that were difficult for the students to resolve.

I learned of the RPSP while living in Rwanda's capital city, Kigali, where I spent two years as a facilitator of an international learning opportunity for undergraduate students from U.S. higher education institutions. I designed and implemented education

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[2] The support from host institutions entailed both financial support in the form of waiving or reducing tuition for these scholarship students and student service support that included supporting the scholarship students' academic and social transition.

[3] Policy makers in Rwanda as well as program administrators and community members in the U.S. involved in supporting the program frequently used this term to describe the scholarship recipients.

programs for undergrad students from the U.S. studying abroad in East Africa. This work as an international educator with an interest in education policies and socioeconomic development in Sub-Saharan African contexts led me to explore tertiary education opportunities available to students from Rwanda. When I learned that the Rwandan government was funding a scholarship opportunity for the country's top performing graduates to pursue undergraduate degrees in the U.S., I was intrigued by the potential of this initiative to equip Rwandan students to contribute to economic and social change in post-genocide Rwanda. Inspired by literature examining national and civic identity shifts that occur through international education (Dolby, 2004; Rizvi, 2005), I designed a study to explore the development of cosmopolitan sensibilities among scholarship program participants. I contacted the administrator of the consortium of U.S. host institutions and was granted permission to examine the experiences of Presidential Scholars for my dissertation research. After months of preparation, I packed my car and drove off to re-enter the world of undergraduate student life.

Over a nine-month period of fieldwork, I immersed myself in the RPSP and in the spaces its students inhabit. Moving between two participating institutions, I interacted with Presidential Scholars in cafeterias, classrooms, and a variety of other locations around the two campuses and the surrounding communities. My research endeavor also brought me into the students' transnational space where I, like them, worked with an uneasy awareness that others may be watching and reporting on my research to the Rwandan government. While I began the study with an interest in communicating my findings with government officials in Rwanda in hopes that the study might contribute to

improvements in policy and program design, I grew increasingly uncomfortable with this commitment as I began to realize the extent to which students struggled with the prospect of returning home upon graduation—a central component of the program's design. Moreover, I did not anticipate the degree to which I would encounter suspicions from students that they, and my work researching a government-funded program, were likely under surveillance from the Rwandan government.

Such suspicions are the result of the Rwandan government's reputation for responding harshly to perspectives and research findings that run counter to official government narratives. Some scholars who have recently worked in post-genocide Rwanda explain that qualitative research has not thrived there because of its potential to reveal unwelcome findings that may upset authorities and unleash negative consequences (Reyntjens, 2011; Sommers, 2012; Straus & Waldorf, 2011). Others counter that such claims are exaggerated and overstate the obstacles to carrying out empirical research in post-conflict environments (Clark, 2013).[4]

Similarly, I found that the students invited to participate in my research varied considerably in the extent to which they perceived that sharing concerns about Rwanda or the scholarship program may put them at risk, and the degree to which they practiced selective reporting.[5] Most were initially cautious yet eventually willing to participate and speak openly about the positive and negative aspects of their experiences. Some were

[4] Philip Clark (2013) argues that while working in post-conflict societies is inevitably challenging for researchers and that some research presenting highly critical views of the Rwandan Patriotic Front has upset authorities in Rwanda, few foreign researchers have officially been deemed *personae non gratae* and prevented from carrying out fieldwork in the country.

[5] King (2009) describes selective reporting as one of several data collection challenges in post-conflict contexts. It refers to the practice of respondents molding and withholding information. Other Rwanda scholars, including James Scott (1990) and Jan Vansina (1996), also describe this phenomenon.

particularly concerned with reproducing acceptable narratives in our interviews. Among those who declined to participate in the study were the students who were most critical and concerned with the potential consequences of being deemed unappreciative or unpatriotic. While in some ways a limitation, these choices on the part of research participants and non-participants also offered important insights into the context of post-conflict Rwanda, as elaborated in the methodology chapter of this dissertation.

As I discussed this research project with other scholars who have carried out research in Rwanda throughout this project, I grew increasingly concerned with the safety of my research participants and maintaining a collaborative, productive relationship with government officials in Rwanda. Self-monitoring became part of my life during fieldwork and affected my writing. The themes I was finding heightened the concern that my representations may have negative implications for the students in my study given the high profile nature of the RPSP coupled with the Rwandan government's concern with international image. While this was not a comfortable space to occupy, it was an opportunity that afforded significant insight into the lived experiences of the students. These RPSP students are lauded as a means to promote economic and social change in Rwanda. For students at the heart of a national development strategy, being asked to speak openly about their experiences and perspectives, some of which raised serious concerns and questions about the program, was not a comfortable invitation. I did not anticipate the extent to which this would be the case.

Through an examination of the transnational space produced by this particular scholarship program, I intend to draw attention to challenges—such as this perceived

sense of surveillance—that students from post-conflict contexts struggle to navigate. Bringing together perspectives from studies of transnational migration and international student mobility, I inform the redesign of international higher education policies and programs for students from politically volatile countries. In doing so, I hope to improve the experiences of students who participate in these programs.

Rationales

Three rationales exist for a study focusing on space in relation to an international scholarship program for students from Rwanda. First, the concept of space contributes to theorizing mobility and places international student mobility within other the migration studies literature. As discussed below, the scholarship on migration has previously focused primarily on studies of the so-called brain drain. Second, spatial analysis informs higher education policies by illuminating the migration decisions made by students from post-conflict countries. These students are often overlooked by higher education policymakers yet attract attention from international development organizations as part of a development assistance strategy. Third, it draws attention to the unintended consequences of the 'magical expectations' that well-intentioned development scholarship initiatives place on students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds as a 'diaspora of hope' (Appadurai, 1991). As the hope of their families, nations, and other supporters of international scholarship programs, scholarship students face a myriad of expectations as they pursue higher education abroad and these can unintentionally create significant stress for them, as described throughout this

dissertation. These rationales outline the study's intended threefold contribution to education theory, policy, and program design.

Theorizing mobility

This study contributes to theorizing about mobility by examining the experiences of a group that has received limited attention within migration studies. With over three million students studying internationally at the tertiary level (OECD, 2010), international students constitute a significant mobile population. Despite their prevalence, international students are largely absent from migration research examining the complex cultural dynamics of movement between countries (Waters & Brooks, 2012). International students are largely neglected within migration scholarship yet have an important role in rethinking how migration is conceptualized and theorized (Findlay et al., 2006; Findlay, 2011; King, 2002; Li et al., 1996).

Within the broad category of internationally mobile students, scholarship students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds constitute a small yet significant minority. Most international students come from privileged families, due to the high cost of international travel and residence abroad. In contrast, development-oriented scholarships for students from low-income countries are merit based, based on educational accomplishments. For this group, scholarships provide not only access to a high quality education but also a ticket abroad that has significant implications for one's social status and network of familial relationships. By employing a transnational lens to illuminate the migration dilemmas of this minority group within the internationally mobile student population, this study makes an important empirical contribution.

International scholarships for change

Higher education programs, including international scholarship initiatives, are supported by national governments and development assistance organizations for a variety of reasons. These range from concern with access and equity at the tertiary level to the development of human capital to meet civil service and private workforce needs. While these concerns often overlap, some proponents emphasize the role of higher education as a vehicle for social justice (Dassin, 2009), while others focus primarily on its centrality to economic growth and development in the global knowledge economy (Altbach, 2007; OECD, 2004; Perna, 2014).

However, all of these objectives rely significantly on students returning to their contexts of origin upon graduation. Concern with 'brain drain,' the migration of skilled people from developing to industrialized countries, has figured prominently in debates around international scholarship programs as a higher education development strategy. More recently, some analysts have argued that these concerns are mitigated by globalization, which allows skilled professionals to work abroad while maintaining contact and creating impact in their countries of origin (Teferra, 2005). While this paradigm shift from 'brain drain' to 'brain circulation' has recast debates surrounding the gains and losses associated with skilled migration, the emigration of skilled professionals remains a significant concern, particularly in the world's poorest countries (Dassin, 2006; Dassin 2009; Kapur & McHale, 2005; Odhiambo, 2013; Oosterbeek & Webbink, 2011).

A central question faced by proponents of international scholarship programs—a historically significant yet widely contested form of educational aid—is whether students

will return with the skills and attitudes they have assimilated during their studies or whether they will remain abroad where they can garner higher wages (Wild & Scheyvens, 2012). Migration is a particularly critical socioeconomic issue for low-income, post-conflict countries, where sending students abroad for a higher education offers exposure to skills and ideas that are not accessible within national borders. Rwanda is among many nations with underfunded and underperforming domestic universities that face the challenge of maintaining linkages and gleaning benefits from students that go abroad for their tertiary studies.

While the vast majority of research examining highly skilled migration evaluates questions of 'brain drain' and 'brain circulation' from an economic perspective, this dissertation takes up a distinct yet related set of concerns. In the chapters that follow, I explore the complexity of the migration dilemmas faced by international students from Rwanda who have not yet graduated from bachelor's degree programs in the U.S. and are in the process of deciding whether to return to Rwanda or remain in the U.S. to gain further education and professional experience. I situate my research within an emerging body of international student mobility research that articulates the drivers of mobility as simultaneously economic, cultural, and political (Collier, 2013; Rizvi, 2005; Sing, Rizvi, and Shrestha, 2007). I examine diverse understandings of a U.S. education and how these understandings produce a space in which students from Rwanda come to reimagine their identities, social affiliations, and national obligations. In doing so, this study brings an alterative perspective to the debates surrounding international scholarships as a form of economic development assistance.

A 'diaspora of hope'

Finally, this dissertation draws attention to the implications of framing internationally mobile students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds as a 'diaspora of hope' (Appadurai, 1994). I ask what the 'magical expectations' associated with a U.S. education mean for the youth who accept scholarships accompanied by a heightened responsibility for their families, communities, and nations. By employing spatial analysis to examine how students from Rwanda navigate what Rizvi (2005) refers to as 'the dilemmas of globalization'—the opportunities provided by global labor markets and their perceptions of national, community, and family loyalties—this study illuminates the poignancy of these dilemmas for recipients of scholarships designed as a solution to a host of complex development challenges.

In sum, this dissertation contributes to education theory, policy, and practice through an examination of how a group of academically-talented youth, initially educated in Rwanda during the tumultuous decade following the 1994 genocide, live and represent their experiences as recipients of a prestigious government scholarship to study in the U.S.. I argue that neither mainstream literature on international student mobility nor conventional economic analyses of migration adequately recognize the ways that history, culture, economics, and politics affect how these students experience their education abroad. This study demonstrates that circumstances in Rwanda shape students' emerging professional identities in ways that have significant implications for their post-graduation choices and present scholarship students with challenging dilemmas as privileged but

burdened youth. Furthermore, the study suggests that the majority of support services provided to international students, while not without merit, are based on static and nation-bound understandings of culture and identity that are limited in their ability to alleviate the struggles of scholarship students from low-income, post conflict contexts. By focusing on the development of intercultural competencies and giving little attention to the multiple localities and social networks that students participate in while abroad, many international student services fail to address the challenges transnationally mobile students face as they navigate a competing array of social, economic, and political influences and responsibilities.

Research Questions

The RPSP provides a rich case for examining the experiences of youth beneficiaries of government-funded education development assistance. Accompanied by a myriad of 'magical expectations,' such programs are designed to solve a host of complex challenges in low income, postcolonial, and post-conflict societies. This dissertation examines the policies, representations, and practices of actors in the U.S. and Rwanda that produce a transnational educational space in which Rwandan students navigate the expectations of their families and the Rwandan state, as well as those of the U.S. administrators, faculty, and community members involved in the scholarship program. Drawing on Lefebvre's (1991) three-fold notion of space as *conceived* through ideological, symbolic, and representational practices; [6] *perceived* through the patterned

[6] Representational practices is a term used to refer to how people, places, and spaces—particularly those viewed as different and 'other'—are signified through cultural practices and representations (Hall, 1997).

routines of material and social practice; and *lived* through everyday experiences, this dissertation is framed by the following research questions:

1. How do the representational practices of U.S. and Rwandan actors involved in supporting the Rwanda Presidential Scholars form the transnational space in which the students negotiate their education and plan for their future?
    a. How do Rwandan and U.S. actors represent the scholarship program and the value of a U.S. higher education?
    b. How do Rwandan scholarship students perceive the value of a U.S. education and the expectations that their government, communities, and families have for them upon graduation?
2. How do students experience and negotiate this transnational space?
    a. How are Rwanda and Rwandans represented on and around U.S. campuses?
    b. How do Rwandan scholarship students represent themselves, their experiences, and their imagined futures?

Overview of the Dissertation

In the following chapter, I outline the spatial theories of education that inform the theoretical underpinnings of this study and situate the research within an emerging body of literature that analyzes the intersection of transnational migration studies and international student mobility. Chapter 2 argues that transnational spatial analysis offers a promising approach to illuminate the experiences of internationally mobile students and

inform the design and implementation of international higher education scholarship programs.

Chapter 3 sets the scene for the chapters that follow by describing the research design, context, and approach. Building on the discussion of spatial theories of education, I argue that multi-sited ethnography is a well-suited methodology for a spatial analysis of a scholarship program such as the RPSP. I then briefly introduce the multiple 'fields,' both geographical and social, included in the study and describe the challenges posed by researching the experiences of students from a post-conflict country. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the dilemmas I encountered in my research and writing process.

Chapter 4 examines how actors in the U.S. and Rwanda produce a particular kind of transnational education space through their representational practices: a space characterized by tension and fear. Narrative vignettes illustrate the representational practices of U.S. program administrators and RPSP community supporters. Scholarship student perceptions of national, societal, and familial expectations are analyzed. In this chapter, I argue that the economic, social and political context in which the participants in this study are embedded produced a transnational education space characterized by three sets of tensions: (1) between entrepreneurial economic subject and social change agent narratives; (2) between national development objectives and familial livelihood strategies; and (3) between 'magical expectations' and lived experiences in the U.S. and of the U.S. higher education system.

In Chapter 5, I discuss the representations of Rwanda and Rwandan students, including the students' own self-representations, present in the two U.S. campus communities in this study. I argue that while in the U.S., these students encounter representations of Rwanda that stimulate new understandings of themselves and their nation. Drawing on observations and student interviews, I discuss three dominant views of Rwanda and Rwandan students that students described in interviews and that I observed during fieldwork. Rwandan students and/or Rwandan youth in general were represented as (1) exceptionally intelligent; (2) culturally distinct; and (3) living in struggle. The chapter highlights the ways in which students accommodate and resist these representations. Additionally, it considers how their responses to these representations are informed by the three sets of tensions described in Chapter 4.

Chapter 6 examines the Rwandan scholarship students' experiences of living in these campus communities. I analyze the everyday practices that brought students together, united by their shared Rwandan identity, as well as those practices that isolated them from one another. Drawing on student narratives, I describe how the spatial imaginaries of 'home' and 'abroad' that students formed prior to traveling to the U.S. are dislodged during their life in the U.S. as students undergo a variety of profound transformations. I argue that their nascent cosmopolitan identities and emergent plans for life after graduation are informed by their societal obligations in Rwanda, the messages encountered at U.S. higher education institutions, and the uncertainties of Rwanda's political economy coupled with their newfound access to transnational opportunities for migration and work. Finally, this chapter strengthens the argument set forth in the

preceding chapters: the students' self-representations are best understood through the lenses of the tensions present in the transnational space of the scholarship program.

Together, Chapters 4, 5, and 6 provide a window into the experiences of 'development' scholarship recipients from the low-income, post-conflict context of Rwanda. These experiences demonstrate that transnational spatial analysis offers a promising means of understanding the challenges faced by internationally mobile students and highlight the transformative potential and limitations of international scholarship programs. Perhaps most importantly, the findings illuminate how the privilege of international mobility is accompanied by challenging cultural adjustment, personal transformations, and dilemmas that merit further attention and creative response.

In the final chapter, I review the findings of this study and discuss its contributions to educational theory, policy, and practice. Recommendations for higher education policy makers in general and for the Rwanda Presidential Scholars Program in particular are provided. I argue that combining spatial analysis with a transnational perspective enriches understandings of international student experiences. This expanding area of research and policy debates has much to gain from further ethnographic analyses of the role that representational practices, post-conflict contexts, and cultural logics play in shaping student struggles and learning processes. Several potential avenues for future research are discussed. The chapter concludes with a reflection on how spatial analysis problematizes simplistic assumptions and solutions to complex social challenges and also opens a "sphere of possibility," (Massey, 2005, p. 9) within which transnational actors

might engage in ongoing collaboration to work toward change in and through international higher education.

CHAPTER 2

RE-CONCEPTUALIZING INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION SPACES: A TRANSNATIONAL FRAMEWORK

> Space is no longer given a neutral or passive geometry; it is continuously produced through social-spatial relations … space is conceived as a product of cultural, social, political and economic interactions, imaginings, desires and relations. (Singh et al. 2007, p. 197)

> Transnational networks are not limited to the much-discussed circuitry of flows, measurable movements of capital, people, information and commodities. They also reflect and shape lines of meaning, the experiences of lives lived; they invoke memories, hopes and special relationships across a distended social field. (Ley, 2010, p. 26)

Introduction

As students increasingly move across national borders in pursuit of tertiary education, transnational spatial analysis offers a promising approach to enrich understandings of the contexts in which migration and learning occur. In this chapter, I examine shifting conceptualizations of space in education research and highlight how constructivist notions of space can contribute to scholarship on international student mobility. Transnational space is introduced as a central concept with the potential to illuminate the multi-local lives of internationally mobile scholarship students. I also argue that this concept opens the possibility of interrogating assumed relationships between U.S. scholarship opportunities and the contributions that students are expected to make to

their countries of origin. The chapter concludes with a summary of the concepts and insights drawn from research on the changing spaces of education and provides a framework for subsequent chapters.

Theoretical Underpinnings: Spatial Theories of Education

Central to this analysis is a theoretical understanding of space as relational, productive, and dynamic. This study is informed by constructivist notions of space drawn from geography and demonstrated to have rich potential for educational policy studies (Gulson & Symes, 2007; Larsen & Beech, 2014; Thomson, 2007; Singh et al., 2007). Recent education policy studies have drawn attention to the relevance of the 'spatial turn' within the social sciences for educational theory. As education policies and programs increasingly incorporate a broad range of actors and sites, spatial analysis has become especially important (Brooks, Fuller, & Waters, 2012; Gulson & Symes, 2007).

Proponents of spatial analysis assert that spatial theories have significant potential to unsettle, destabilize, and shift assumptions in education policy studies. In an overview of how these broad epistemological trends have made their way into education research, Gulson and Symes argue that spatial analysis is about "providing explanatory frameworks that both disrupt and posit new possibilities for education policy studies (2007, p. 3). This possibility rests on the assertion that space is social and fluid in nature, rather than given and fixed. To the extent that space is formed by social actors, it can also be transformed, a recognition that incites imaginative possibility.

It is important to note the distinction between space and place. While space is often used to refer to physical places, in this dissertation, I use the term in a 'spatial'

sense to refer to cultural, social, political, and economic interactions and relations. Soja (2000) distinguishes between space and spatiality, suggesting that space is both constructed at the level of the social imaginary while also articulated in physical landscape. Similarly, Rizvi (2010) stresses that space is not merely a social construction. Spaces are complex phenomenon with both physical form and social meaning constituted through social relations and cultural practices. I use the term place to refer to the fixed, physical dimension of space.

While educational researchers have employed the concept of 'space' in a variety of ways, researchers have shifted away from objective and static understandings of space and toward a recognition of space as constructed and imbued with meaning through social processes (Brooks, Fuller, & Waters, 2012; Singh et al. 2007). Much of this work is inspired by the scholarship of Henri Lefebvre, who draws attention to the role of representational practices in constituting space. In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre (1991) argues that space is both constituted through social relations and is constitutive of them. He articulates a multi-dimensional understanding of space as *perceived*, *conceived*, and *lived*. These three interrelated processes are representations of space, spaces of representation, and lived space.

Representations of space refer to the ideological and symbolic practices through which space is conceptualized. These include how international learning opportunities are framed for participants. For example, study abroad is often represented to U.S. students as an opportunity to pursue self-discovery and cross-cultural understanding (Dolby, 2004; Feinberg, 2002), while for students from low-income countries, such opportunities are

often situated within a more utilitarian and less individualistic discourse (Singh et al. 2007). This recognition in international education scholarship that the ways in which education mobility opportunities are framed have significant implications for how they are experienced by students contributed informed the decision to employ a framework that attends to representations of space.

Spatial practice refers to patterned routines of material and social behaviors and interactions through which space is conceived and perceived. One example that is particularly relevant to this study is the common practice among Africans working in urban centers or high-income countries to provide support to their extended family members in rural communities or low-income countries. This practice contributes to the widespread perception that traveling abroad provides access to financial opportunities and that mobile individuals who are able to tap into such opportunities will make significant economic contributions to their extended family members that remain behind (Collier, 2013).

Finally, lived space refers how space is experienced and transformed in the every day life. In Lefebvre's work, lived space is also referred to as 'spaces of representation' and 'representational spaces.' Within lived space, contradictions between perceived and conceived space, such as the perception that opportunities are more abundant in high-income countries and the conception of scholarship students as a national investment, are at the same time passively experienced and actively changed as inhabitants imaginatively seek to appropriate the spaces they occupy. As Thompson (2007) argues in relation to schooling at the primary level, "It is important to consider not only the material and the

symbolic but also the realm of experience. Contradictions in and between perceived and conceived space are experienced passively but they are *actually* changed in lived space" [emphasis in the original] (p. 113).

While Lefebvre's work attends to space as a social experience and presents possibilities for analyzing the tensions inherent in educational practice, it gives limited attention to the scale at which processes of spatial production occur. Increasingly, education spaces shape and are shaped by social processes that transcend national borders and involve complex interactions between actors operating at different geographical scales. For example, while government scholarship policy objectives are developed at the national scale, localized understandings and perspectives regarding these objectives vary considerably across scholarship recipients and host institutions. Other scholars drawing on Lefebvre's ideas have noted the limited attention he gives to the cultural and technological innovations that have made national borders increasingly porous. As Singh et al. (2007) point out,

> Remaining exclusively with Lefebvre's (1991) ideas on spatial production (and 'Western' conceptual tools more generally) has drawbacks given the importance of trans-national mobility of different peoples to critical conceptualizations of space. (p. 209)

Building on these critiques, I argue that the cross-border relationships within which scholarship programs are embedded suggest the need for analytical constructs that address the variety of actors and contexts involved in the production of education space. Despite its limitations, Lefebvre's trialectic of space as *conceived* through ideological,

symbolic, and representational practices, *perceived* through the patterned routines of material and social practice, and *lived* through everyday experiences provides a useful framework for organizing and analyzing the data presented in this dissertation. I address the gap in Lefebvre's work by drawing on transnationalism scholarship to address geopolitical and cultural influences that circulate globally. In the following section, I introduce the concept of transnationalism. Together with spatial analysis, transnationalism frames my analysis of international scholarship student experiences.

Transnationalism as a Conceptual Tool

As spatial analysis has increasingly drawn the attention of educational researchers, transnationalism has emerged as a conceptual tool for understanding the mobility of specific populations. In broad terms, transnationalism refers to the "multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across the borders of nation-states" (Vertovec, 1999, p. 447). While transnationalism is a novel term, complex cross-border relationships are not a new phenomenon (Portes, 2003). Basch et al. provide a commonly cited definition of transnationalism as "the process by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement" (1994, p. 7). In contrast to views of migration as a discrete move from one context to another, transnationalism emphasizes the dynamic and border-spanning nature of migrant relationships:

> We call these processes transnationalism to emphasize that many immigrants today build social fields that cross geographic, cultural and political borders. Immigrants who develop and maintain multiple relationships—familial,

> economic, social, organizational, religious, and political—that span borders we call 'transmigrants.' An essential element of transnationalism is the multiplicity of involvements that transmigrants sustain in both home and host societies. (Basch et al. 1994, p. 7).

The concept of a 'transnational social field' emerged out of a growing interest in transnational processes and a recognition that mobile populations create and inhabit space distinct from physical nation states. 'Transnational social field' encompasses transnational social processes such as the formation of mobile populations' identities that occur in this space. (Schiller & Fouron, 1999). It extends constructivist notions of space to attend to the diverse and border-spanning contexts and relationships that simultaneously contribute to these processes. Transnational social fields encompass a wide network of actors. These networks extend across national borders and incorporate participants in the "day-to-day activities of social reproduction in these various locations" (Fouron & Schiller, 2001, p. 544).

Although internationally mobile students constitute a significant mobile population affecting multi-local processes of social reproduction, studies of transnationalism give little attention to this group. Instead, these studies focus primarily on migrants at either end of the global socioeconomic spectrum: low-skilled groups migrating out of necessity (Basch et al., 1994; Glick et al., 1999), and the lives of elite and highly skilled migrants (Ley, 2010; Ong, 1999). Migrants in the middle of this spectrum, including groups such as expatriate workers and students for whom mobility is more temporary, have received little attention (Collins, 2009). In sum, mobile students

have been "largely and conspicuously absent" from empirical research on transnationalism (Waters & Brooks, 2012, p. 22).

Scholars have used a variety of terms to refer to transnational social fields.[7] As this study focuses on education space, I employ the term *transnational education space* in reference to the social fields in which international education occurs and internationally mobile students negotiate and construct their identities. Although the use of transnationalism within education studies is limited (DeJaeghere & Vu, 2011), education scholars have begun to employ this term to describe "an educational environment in which educational agencies sustain relations and activities that link together several national territories" (Pitkanen & Takala, 2012, p. 2). As described in the following sections, transnationalism in international mobility research has drawn attention to the significance of social class, the multi-faceted nature of student identities, and the complex relationship between contexts of origin and education locales abroad in my own research.

Transnationalism and International Student Research

> Just as empirical studies of transnationalism have largely ignored the potential significance of international students, so, too, has an emergent sub-field of research on international students generally neglected to comment upon their transnationalism. (Waters & Brooks, 2012, p. 23)

Within the student mobility literature, one prominent strand of research focuses on the cultural adjustment and learning experiences of international students. In this scholarship, cultural difference is put forward as a primary influence on student learning

[7] Similar terms include *transnational social spaces* (Pries, 1999), *transnational villages* (Levitt, 2001), *contact zones* (Clifford, 1997; Pratt, 1992), *translocality* (Appadurai, 1996), and *third spaces* (Bhabha, 1994). See Gargano (2009) for a discussion of these related concepts.

processes and an explanation for many of the challenges faced by international students. This research assumes cultural differences are at the heart of academic and social adjustment challenges, and in doing so largely overlooks differences that exist between students from particular countries and regions. Furthermore, nationality is often presented as the most salient of identities, oversimplifying students' multiple and changing sense of self (Gargano, 2009). As Rizvi (2005) points out,

> Part of the problem with much of this research on international student experiences lies in the fact that it is located within a narrow social psychological framework that focuses largely on learning processes within formal settings, which effectively sidelines broader political and historical issues . . . Also missing in this research is any notion of how student cultures are dynamic and how their identities are subject to change as a result of their transnational experiences. (p. 2)

Another strand of student mobility literature is dominated by national-level analysis of the cross-border movement of university students. Policy maker interest in international student contributions to national economies has given rise to a focus on country-level statistics and comparisons regarding the numbers of incoming and outbound students as well as the problematic phenomenon of 'methodological nationalism,' the tendency to equate societies with nation-states. Among these national-level analyses are studies concerned with 'brain drain' and 'brain circulation.' This literature focuses primarily on the economic drivers of migration, giving little attention to the cultural politics of identity, mobility, and globalization (Rizvi, 2005). By employing the nation-state as the primary unit of analysis, this literature largely overlooks the

linkages that international education develops between and across nation-states (Waters & Brooks, 2012). As Gargano (2009) argues, what is needed is "a lens that does not examine national trends or statistics, but that illuminates student voices and the impact of cultural flows and processes on student-inhabited transnational spaces, identity negotiations, and networks of associations" (p. 332).

A transnational perspective acknowledges that cultural identities are dynamic and multifaceted (Schiller & Levitt, 2006). In contrast to the limited ability of the strands of research focusing on cultural adjustment, learning processes, and national-level analyses of cross-border movements of students to explore culture and identity, transnationalism allows for the complexity of the relationship between students' country of origin and their educational locales abroad. Bringing together perspectives on transnationalism and international student research offers the potential to enrich understandings of international student mobility in a variety of ways outlined in the following section.

The Possibilities of Transnational Education Space

Scholars working at the intersection of transnationalism and international student mobility scholarship have begun to tap into the analytical potential of transnational education space. In this section, I highlight four contributions from this emerging body of theoretical and empirical work that I draw on to enrich understandings of Rwandan scholarship students' experiences in the U.S. First, employing a transnational lens to the study of international student experiences foregrounds social class, drawing attention to the geographical variation in how mobility is accessed and experienced. The lens enables scholars to analyze the extent to which the everyday lives of mobile students are

circumscribed by economic, social, and political realities. Second, transnational spatial analysis challenges nation-centered understandings of student identities by revealing the multiplicity of student identities. These identities are continually transformed as students negotiate contexts of origin and lived experiences abroad. Third, it illuminates the importance of factoring in students' ongoing relationships with their context of origin for understanding how students construct and reconstruct their sense of self. Finally, this analytical framework shows that transnational space is a product of both objective and subjective forces, including complex and changing conditions of economic and political organization as well as the agency of individuals and groups of people who produce and inhabit education space.

Spatial differentiation and changing spatialities

In contrast to notions of globalization that convey increasing cultural homogeneity and ease of movement, scholars of transnational migration argue that considerable variation exists in how different groups experience and appropriate migration (Ley, 2010; Collins, 2009). Ley (2010) critiques notions of 'undifferentiated sameness' (p. 4) in global space, arguing that differentiation occurs on both local and global levels and is to a large extent accounted for by socio-economic class differences and political contexts. Pointing out the problematic nature of this differentiation for certain migrant groups, he suggests that, "distinctive political regimes, varying economic regulation, and diverse cultural traditions among national jurisdictions create challenging spatial differentiation" (p. 5). In other words, mobility is experienced in different ways and social constructs and structural barriers present greater challenges for some groups

than for others. By drawing attention to spatial inequalities, this notion of 'challenging spatial differentiation' helps illuminate not only the differences across migrant groups, but within a broad grouping such as internationally mobile students that includes students from different regions and socioeconomic backgrounds.

'Spatial differentiation' is perhaps best illuminated by an example. In a study of Chinese students studying in Australia, Sing et al. (2007) found that their socioeconomically privileged research participants had considerable exposure to global media culture and had arrived in Australia with strategic cosmopolitan imaginaries already developed. They contrast the privileged research participants' experiences with those of migrants and refugees, whose lives abroad are characterized by more significant cultural disjuncture due to the drastic differences between life at home and abroad and their imaginaries prior to arrival. Drawing on Appadurai's (1996) term, they argue, "the materiality of their class privilege defines the 'scape' within which the students' transcultural contacts in Australia were embedded" (p. 211). As I will elaborate in the chapters to follow, this acknowledgement of the relationship between class privilege and spatial imaginaries is an important contribution that helps illuminate the struggles faced by scholarship students from Rwanda and in particular, those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds within this group.

In addition to the varied ways in which space is experienced by mobile individuals and groups, the changing relationship with space that mobility entails is important to understanding the experiences of scholarship recipients from Rwanda. Spatial understandings change as new relationships and perspectives are acquired through

experiences of mobility. These changes involve not only the development of intercultural competency but also the ability to navigate class differences and change in one's own socioeconomic status, real or perceived. This is particularly the case for groups such as scholarship students from low-income families for whom mobility opens up opportunity horizons that would not otherwise have been imaginable. Collins (2009) offers the concept of 'changing spatialities' (p. 5) to refer to the ways in which mobile populations reconfigure their relationship to place and space. Combined with the insight that mobility is not equally available to everyone, this concept of changing spatiality suggests that for groups with limited access to mobility, the disjuncture wrought by international travel is particularly drastic. As elaborated in Chapter 7, I argue 'changing spatiality' is experienced by scholarship recipients from low-income, post-conflict contexts with limited familiarity with Western culture. International travel is a significant class marker; thus, in contrast to international students who already enjoyed considerable class privileges at home, students from more disadvantaged backgrounds undergo changes that involve not only adjusting to an environment that is more dramatically unfamiliar but also with a significant shift in social status upon accessing international mobility. They experience a more drastic transition as they encounter Western culture than their peers who previously had greater contact with global cultural flows. Furthermore, how they are perceived by others in their society of origin and the associated social expectations undergoes significant change as a result of their international mobility.

Multiple and dynamic identities

Transnational spatial analysis challenges the nation-centric notion of identity that predominates in research on international student mobility. While this was noted in the above discussion of the limitations of current scholarship, it merits additional attention because the gap highlights a key contribution of transnational spatial analysis. As Gargano (2009) notes,

> International student mobility literature lacks comprehensive and coherent theories for analyzing the intersections of identities, is highly focused on nationality, and is uninformed by issues of class, ethnicity, religion, language, culture, sexual orientation, gender, academic, and other student-defined salient identities. (p. 340)

Transnationalism challenges these homogenizing notions and attends to the variety of identities that influence how migrants make sense of their international sojourns. While broadening notions of identity, transnationalism acknowledges that national associations remain significant among transnational migrants. Moreover, transnational spatial analysis draws attention to the historical and dynamic nature of identities. As Rizvi (2005) argues,

> [International student] identities are clearly shaped not only by their personal histories, cultural traditions and professional aspirations but are also continually reshaped by new cultural experiences, but in ways that are neither uniform nor predictable. … Their imagination is always a product of a range of factors. (p. 4)

In contrast to of the bulk of the international education scholarship which employs more narrow and static notions of culture, scholars of transnationalism acknowledge that

history and politics contribute to constituting 'the cultural.' In the case of a nation like Rwanda emerging from identity-based conflict, acknowledging the historicity of identities as well as contemporary efforts to cultivate a unified national identity is particularly important.

Social embeddedness

The extent to which students remain embedded in relationships and contexts abroad throughout their studies and the ways in which distant changes shape their daily lives is another aspect of international student experiences that is illuminated by a transnational perspective. Gargano (2009) refers to this as the "simultaneity of locality" (p. 339). Waters and Brooks (2012) point out that in Western locations, mobile students are often portrayed as adventure and excitement seekers with few significant ties or social responsibilities. While international student research has generally neglected the importance of familial relationships, these relationships are central to transnational migration research. The limited scholarship at the intersection of international student mobility and transnational migration research shows that for mobile students, international travel is often pursued as a part of a family strategy for accumulating capital and achieving social mobility (Collier, 2013; Ong, 1999; Rizvi, 2005; Sing et al. 2007). Family members play a significant role in enabling mobility and in constructing the expectations placed upon students as they travel abroad. Recognition of these familial strategies and obligations challenges images of carefree and unencumbered international students and draws attention to the social relationships in which these students are embedded (Waters & Brooks, 2012).

In addition to remaining embedded in relationships with family and friends while abroad, internationally mobile students maintain relationships with contexts that are continuously changing. More specifically, geopolitical conflict and perceptions of students' home country on the international stage affects how they conceive of their identity and imagine the future in significant ways. Gargano (2009) suggests that transformations or events in students' contexts of origin impact how they reconstruct their sense of self while abroad. In the context of my study, these insights draw attention to the ways in which changes in Rwanda and Rwanda's relationship with the international community might illuminate student narratives. The significant changes that occurred during the period of my research and that were reflected in student narratives are described in Chapter 3.

Space as a product of objective and subjective forces

A final insight drawn from research examining international student experiences from a transnational perspective involves the relationship *between* changing economic and political conditions and the political agency of individuals and groups of people. While studies of transnational processes have attended to both changing social formations and changing modes of cultural production/consciousness, few have examined their interrelationship. In an analysis of transnationalism scholarship, Vertovec (1999) points out that the term has been employed to analyze a wide range of phenomena. He describes six distinct 'takes' on transnationalism:

1. Transnationalism as a 'social morphology,' referring to the cross border social formations that result from the intensification of border-spanning ties, interaction, exchange, and mobility, particularly within diaspora communities;
2. Transnationalism as a 'type of consciousness' marked by multiple identities and community loyalties;
3. Transnationalism as a 'mode of cultural production' involving cultural blending and fluidity;
4. Transnationalism as an 'avenue of capital', referring to the increasing dominance of transnational corporations in the global economy;
5. Transnationalism as a 'site of political engagement' through which new civic opportunities are available and national politics are transformed;
6. Transnationalism as a '(re)construction of place or locality' through which relationships to geographical places are transformed as actors are positioned in more than one locality.

These six concepts convey the breadth of transnationalism research. In this dissertation, I draw on Rizvi's (2010) critique of existing transnational analyses to examine the interaction between changing contexts and changing modes of identity and consciousness. In a study of international doctoral students, Rizvi (2010) points out that analyses of distinct manifestations of transnationalism fail to bring these various 'takes' together in important ways. He argues:

> While Vertovec recognizes that these 'takes' are not mutually exclusive, he does not explore how, for example, global capital flows shape new modes of cultural

> production; how these modes define the social morphologies across systems of relationships and networks; how these systems transform the social configurations of communities, and how these configurations affect not only the cultural consciousness of people but also the calculations they make about how to position themselves within the transnational space. (p. 7)

In contrast to Vertovec's analysis, which does little to address the interplay between changing social formations, processes of cultural reproduction, patterns of capital formation, and forms of identity and consciousness, Rizvi's research on the experiences of international doctoral students examines the relationship *between* objective and subjective forces in producing transnational space. He employs spatial analysis to illuminate the challenges international doctoral students confront as they negotiate their educational experiences and strategically position themselves as they plan for the future. He posits that spatial analysis is useful because it helps account for the ways in which international students make sense of their mobility in relation to processes of globalization:

> [Spatial analysis] underscores the importance of human agency, while at the same time pointing to the connections between macro-economic and geopolitical transformations and patterns of social action and calculations (p. 9).

In addition to drawing attention to students' agency, Rizvi attends to the role of other actors, including both nation states and educators. He notes that although many scholars point to the declining role of nationalism, nation states continue to play a significant role in creating particular kinds of transnational subjects and proactively seek

to incorporate their diasporas into national development objectives. This attention to state involvement the construction of transnational aspirations and identities is particularly important for examining the case of a government-sponsored international scholarship program designed around the objective of gleaning national benefit from an investment in international undergraduate education.

A final consideration drawn from scholarship at the intersection of international education and transnationalism is the role of human agency—particularly among educators—to cultivate critical cosmopolitan sensibilities among mobile students. In a study of American students studying abroad in Australia, Dolby (2004) found that as these students studied abroad, their national identity shifted from a passive to an active identity as they realized the extent to which "American" is defined and authored by diverse actors both within and beyond the borders of the U.S. As the students grew increasingly aware of their global interconnectivity, they began to reimagine and proactively represent less exclusionary and more inclusive notions of "America"—notions that transcend the national. She describes this shift as a "nascent form of cosmopolitanism" (p. 172)[8] and suggests that international education programs offer the possibility of renewing commitments to democracy and the public good. In a study of international students from China and India at Australian universities, Rizvi similarly (2005) found that students developed cosmopolitan outlooks but notes that they were in many cases less concerned with global inter-connectivity than with strategic interests in global economic possibilities, drawing a distinction between the range of cosmopolitan

[8] Although Dolby (2004) does not explicitly define her use of the term *cosmopolitan,* it is implied that this refers to a post-national sense of American identity that understands its global connectedness.

sensibilities to which international education can contribute. His concern is that some of these forms of cosmopolitanism are "more concerned with strategic positioning within the global labor market than with building a moral sense of global solidarity" (p. 1). He concludes that education institutions must more intentionally cultivate critically and morally informed graduates, rather than assuming that critical cosmopolitanism, defined as cosmopolitanism that examines the ethical implications of global shifts and changes, is a natural outcome of international education experiences.

These studies point out that transnational identities are shaped by global changes as well as the agency of students, policy makers, and educators. While few empirical studies have employed transnational spatial analysis to study international student mobility, the discussion above suggests that such an approach has considerable potential to illuminate the experiences and choices of internationally mobile students. The emphasis these international education scholars place on the agency of diverse actors in shaping education space leads me to conclude that a transnational analysis of mobile students should attend to the role of various program supporters and in doing so, has the potential of offering a distinct contribution to migration scholarship.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have described the conceptual framework of transnational education space employed in this study, situating it within changing conceptions of education space and understandings of transnational migration. I have also identified four ways in which the concept of transnational education space might enrich understandings of the experiences of mobile students from Rwanda: (1) by attending to spatial

differentiation and changing spatialities; (2) by challenging nation-centered notions of identity; (3) by acknowledging social embeddedness; and (4) by examining the relationship between objective and subjective forces and the role of agency in transnational processes. I now turn to an overview of the research methods employed in this study to examine the transnational education spaces of the Rwanda Presidential Scholars Program and a discussion of how my research design and experiences were influenced by the space of post-conflict Rwanda.

CHAPTER 3

SETTING THE SCENE: RESEARCH APPROACH, CONTEXT, AND CHALLENGES

> Anthropology…is the most fascinating, bizarre, disturbing, and necessary form of witnessing left to us at the end of the twentieth century. As a mode of knowing that depends on the particular relationship formed by a particular anthropologist with a particular set of people in a particular time and place, anthropology has always been vexed about questions of vulnerability. (Behar, 1996, p. 5)

Introduction

In *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology That Breaks Your Heart,* Ruth Behar (1996) reflects on the strange business of entering people's worlds with the intention of writing about their lives. She describes the vulnerability that witnessing sometimes entails. Throughout the months of my fieldwork, as I listened to students describe their histories, speak of their fears, and share their struggles to find hope in the midst of the challenges, Behar's words offered encouragement during times when the act of witnessing left me deeply discouraged by the circumstances of these youth. Her words opened up possibilities to bridge "passion and intellect, analysis and subjectivity, ethnography and autobiography, art and life" inherent in research. (Behar, 1996, p. 174).

Following Behar's lead, I incorporate elements of subjectivity and autobiography in this chapter as I describe the ethnographic methods and multi-sited research design that I employed to examine the Rwanda Presidential Scholars Program. First, I provide an overview of my research approach as it aligns with the conceptual framework discussed

in the previous chapter. After describing how the research design was adapted during the study's initial phases in response to my early experiences pursuing research clearance in Rwanda and the insights that emerged as I began data collection, I then introduce the multiple fields of this research, briefly describing the broad context of post-conflict Rwanda and the geographical sites where this research was conducted. I follow with a description of the data collection methods and analysis procedures employed in the study. The chapter concludes with an account of how I attended to questions of interpretation, validity, and ethical responsibility as I designed and carried out the study produced this dissertation.

Multi-sited Ethnography

The research questions underpinning this thesis ask how space is conceived, perceived, and lived by diverse actors in transnational contexts and relationships. Multi-sited ethnography is a research methodology that is informed by the theoretical rethinking of place and space discussed in the previous chapter. It offers an approach to fieldwork that is attentive to transnational contexts, meanings, and relationships by examining contemporary social change in multiple geographic and social fields (Marcus, 2011). I employ multi-sited ethnography in this study to explore the implications of historical, social, political, and economic processes within and transcendent of the nation-state that account for the lived experiences and imagined futures of internationally mobile students.

Multiple Sites: Geographical Locations and Social Fields

Initially, this study was envisioned as a multi-sited ethnography that would include sites in Rwanda and the U.S. However, pursuing research clearance in Rwanda

provided important insights regarding the politics of the transnational space I set out to explore, not only for my research participants but for also for me. In the end, I narrowed my data collection sites to two U.S. campuses while continuing to attend to the students' ongoing relationship with Rwanda throughout their studies. While this choice limited my ability to examine students' experiences in Rwanda first hand, I was still able to observe how Rwanda's history and current dynamics were ever-present on students' minds as they navigated life in the U.S.

Below, I describe the context of post-conflict Rwanda and explain how I adjusted the research design and site selection during the early phases of the study. I then introduce the geographical sites where fieldwork was carried out as well as the broader network of transnational relationships in which the fieldwork was situated.

Rwanda: A Field of Contested Representations

> Rwanda is a country full of paradoxes, difficult for outsiders to comprehend and to apprehend. (Reyntjens, 2010, p. 1)

> Is [Rwanda] an engine of transformative growth and visionary reform? The answer would have to be "yes," and to a significant degree. At the same time, does its regime crack down on dissent and maintain a very high degree of social order? Again, to a significant degree, and in most respects the current government has been unrepentant about its record on human rights, democracy, and social control. Contemporary literature on Rwanda is mostly unhelpful in gathering a balanced picture of contemporary life there because much of it is so sharply drawn between the upbeat and the downbeat. (Sommers, 2012, p. 15)

Knowledge of Rwanda's history of identity-based conflict and the divergent assessments of its post-genocide trajectory within the international community is essential in order to understand how the transnational space of the RPSP was conceived, perceived, and experienced by the scholars and myself. Two aspects of the Rwandan context are particularly relevant to this study. The first is Rwanda's development vision as it relates to the government's motivation for supporting higher education scholarships abroad. The second is the significance of the ways in which Rwanda and Rwandans have been and are represented for Rwandan politics and society. This context is important for understanding the ethical concerns related to this research that I discuss in the final section of this chapter.

Rwanda's development vision

For a small country in which the majority of the population derives its income primarily from subsistence agriculture, Rwanda has an ambitious development agenda. By the year 2020, the government is striving for Rwanda to join the ranks of middle-income countries. This plan, articulated in Rwanda Vision 2020 and other national policy documents, rests on the pillars of political stability and economic development. These pillars are built through the reconstruction of social capital lost during the genocide, transforming the agricultural sector into a service sector, and developing the human resources necessary to support a vibrant public sector, private sector, and civil society (Republic of Rwanda, 2000).

While short-term goals aim at promoting economic stability and reducing aid dependency by the pursuit of regional economic opportunities, medium-term goals

emphasize integration into the global knowledge-based economy. Higher education is identified as a key area of investment if Rwanda is to develop the information technology and leadership skills needed to compete in the global knowledge economy. In this way, the country seeks to compensate for its limited natural resources by capitalizing on its 'human capital' and its strategic location between East and Central Africa. This strategy depends on developing a strong service sector and the information technology capabilities necessary to serve as a regional hub.

The move to middle-income status requires significant investment in the education sector. Accordingly, the government is currently committed to providing universal access to nine-year basic education and improving education quality through teacher training initiatives. Although Vision 2020 emphasizes the government's concern with the lack of Rwandan nationals with the professional training and specializations necessary to maintain technological systems, the government considers the development of a skilled labor force to be a necessary precursor to enhancing the secondary and tertiary education sectors (Republic of Rwanda, 2000). This decision necessitates that Rwanda send students abroad to develop the skills required for an increasingly technologically advanced economy.

Alongside the emphasis on human capital for economic development is the theme of reconciliation. Equity and the restoration of social cohesion are presented as foundational to national prosperity. Restoring social capital through good governance and an effective and stable state is emphasized as "a minimal condition to stimulate a harmonious development of other pillars" (Republic of Rwanda, 2000, p. 12). Rwanda's

Vision 2020 thus acknowledges the interrelationship between economic growth and social trust.

The Rwandan National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC) is the government body tasked with establishing unity and social cohesion (NURC, 2010). In light of the role ethnicity played in the 1994 genocide, Rwanda's approach involves efforts to dissolve notions of Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa, the country's three 'ethnic groups.' As in other post-conflict contexts, this effort has taken the form of re-writing history (Kearney, 2011; Paulson, 2011; Freedman, Weinstein, Murphy, & Longman, 2008). The NURC has received both praise and criticism for its approach to bringing about reconciliation and in particular, the civic education camps discussed below.

A distinct feature of Rwanda's approach is the central focus of these efforts on university-bound youth. Prior to beginning tertiary studies, secondary school graduates are required to attend Ingando Peace and Solidarity Camps. Ingando is a term derived from a Rwandese verb that refers to ceasing normal activities to reflect on and solve national challenges. Different variations of Ingando are designed for a different groups in Rwandan society, including genocide survivors, prisoners, and youth (NURC, 2010).

Retreats for university-bound students have the express goals of strengthening citizenship and reinforcing the identity of 'being Rwandan' (Kearney, 2010). Themes addressed include Rwanda's history, national and regional political and socioeconomic issues, and the obligations and duties of leadership. The camps employ military training, group bonding activities, and rote teaching methods to develop a unified national identity grounded in a view of Rwandan history that attributes the development of ethnic

groupings to colonial powers and portrays pre-colonial Rwanda as a peaceful and unified society (Kearney, 2010). The pedagogical approaches employed in the camps leave little space for students to question and debate other historical perspectives. Instead, the teaching reinforces the notion that there is 'a' Rwandan identity that these promising university-bound students should embody.

Representations of Rwanda and Rwandans

Rwanda's presentation of its own history and current state are received with doubt and enthusiasm. Human rights advocates challenge Rwanda's official version, citing discrepancies in history and current politics. Meanwhile, private investors laud the rapid development of infrastructure, health, and education that has occurred in the last 10 years. Among Rwandans, however, the ability to challenge the government's official version of events remains constrained.

Genocide memorials across Rwanda tell the story of the significant and tragic ways in which representations of Rwanda have shaped the course of Rwandan politics and society. These memorials provide accounts of how missionaries and explorers arriving in central Africa in the late 19th century produced theories about Rwandan society in an effort to explain the sophisticated civilization they encountered. In general, these theories posit that early intrigue with the organization of Rwandan society contributed to reifying differences between those who held different positions within the social structure, laying the groundwork for the ethnic divisions that followed. As McLean Hilker (2009) describes,

> These ideas and constructs contributed to reshaping existing forms of social and political organization in Rwanda. As political competition intensified towards the end of the colonial period and in the decades after independence, Rwandan political elites appropriated and modified these theories to mobilize support for their claims and, in some cases, to legitimate violence. (viii)

Contemporary representations of Rwanda in media and scholarship continue to shape Rwanda's politics and society in significant ways. The literature on post-genocide Rwanda reveals drastically divergent perspectives regarding the nation's post-genocide trajectory. Scholars interested in advancing human rights work in Rwanda have raised concerns regarding the current ways allegations of 'genocide ideology' and 'divisionism'[9] are used to stifle freedom of speech and repress dissent (Human Rights Watch, 2008; Reyntjens, 2011; Waldorf, 2011). These scholars conclude that Rwanda has transitioned from one authoritarian regime to another and argue that this trend does not bode well for the country's long-term stability. These concerns are reflected in Longman's (2011) critique:

> The [Rwandan Patriotic Front][10] regime tolerates very little public criticism, strictly limiting freedoms of speech, press, and association. … Defenders of the

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[9] The Rwandan constitution contains laws that criminalize both 'genocide ideology' and 'divisionism', both of which have been critiqued for their vague and ambiguous nature. 'Genocide ideology' is defined as "any behavior manifested by acts aimed at dehumanizing a person or a group of persons with the same characteristics," (Republic of Rwanda, 2003, Article 3) while 'divisionism' (also referred to as 'sectarism') is defined as "any oral or written expression or any act of division that could generate conflicts among the population or cause disputes" (Republic of Rwanda, 2003, Article 3).

[10] The Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) is the political party that took power in Rwanda following the 1994 genocide and has been the ruling party since. The party was created in 1987 by the Tutsi diaspora that fled from Rwanda to Uganda following waves of ethnic violence in the 1950s. The party is led by President Paul Kagame,

> RPF regime simultaneously deny these criticisms and claim that restrictions on freedoms are necessary for national unity, given the history of genocide, and that benign authoritarian rule is necessary for economic development, their top priority. (p. 27)

In contrast to these critical perspectives, many international donors are impressed by the results that this authoritarian approach has yielded. The results that have received widespread praise are summarized in the following quote from a World Bank publication:

> Rwanda has made impressive development strides, recovering remarkably well following the 1994 genocide. The economy grew at an average rate of almost 10 percent a year between 1995 and 2005. The Government has introduced market reforms and privatized many state-owned enterprises. Economic and political governance has improved dramatically. The Government has introduced measures to promote reconciliation and peace. Poverty and mortality rates are down significantly, and immunization and literacy rates have risen substantially. These results are impressive." (Watkins & Verma, 2008, as cited in Sommers, 2012)

The authoritarian approach to governance described above goes hand in hand with the level of social control that has allowed Rwanda's current government to achieve the results that have impressed many international donors. As Sommers (2012) points out, "The recipe that the Rwandan government is following, in short, is both yielding impressive results and raising serious questions. These two slices of Rwanda, as illustrated in the divergent assessments of Rwanda's situation, turn out to be halves of the same pie" (p. 22).

These divergent assessments have significant implications for the monetary development assistance that international donors provide to Rwanda. The *New York Times* journalist Stephen Kinzer (2008) writes that the strides Rwanda has made toward becoming a safe and orderly country has attracted the interest and investment of individuals and governments:

> [Rwanda has] recovered from civil war and genocide more fully than anyone imagined possible and is united, stable, and at peace. Its leaders are boundlessly ambitious. Rwandans are bubbling over with a sense of unlimited possibility. Outsiders, drawn by the chance to help transform a resurgent nation, are streaming in. (p. 2)

In contrast, human rights advocates have pushed for aid cuts to Rwanda in light of the RPF's authoritarian approach to governance as well as allegations regarding the RPF's involvement in the neighboring Democratic Republic of Congo. This juxtaposition is emblematic of the diverse ways Rwanda is viewed and the economic and societal implications of these contested representations. Perspectives regarding the extent to which reconciliation efforts have been successful are similarly divergent.

One of the approaches to reconciliation that has received considerable critique is Ingando. Although these camps receive substantial support from development organizations, including the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the UK Department for International Development (DfID), scholars of post-conflict reconciliation have raised concerns. One of the primary concerns raised by critics of Ingando is that by disseminating a particular version of history that clearly delineates

perpetrators and victims, these camps reconstruct notions of ethnicity in ways that prohibit meaningful reconciliation. James Kearney, head of Peace and Security at the United Nations Association UK, carried out ethnographic research on Ingando. His work illuminates the contradiction inherent in the aims of developing "bright, free-thinking individuals, crucial bulwarks in any resistance to ethnic forces that might seek to tear the country apart once more" (Kearney, 2011, section Ingando) and the pedagogical approach that dictates a particular version of history, effectively stifling critical analysis of Rwanda's past. Kearney describes this approach as "propounding one inalterable historical account which reinforces the idea that the people of Rwanda are ethnically identical, and secondly, by bonding the young students together through tough military training" (2011, section Ingando).

RPSP students participate in a two-week Ingando program designed specifically for students studying outside Rwanda's borders. Following their second year of studies in the U.S., students participating in the Rwanda Presidential Scholars Initiative are expected to return to Rwanda for a summer internship. During this time, the students are required to participate in the Ingando program. As described in Chapter 5, students expressed a variety of ways in which participating in Ingando allowed them to learn from government officials and other Rwandan students studying abroad. They also raised questions about their experience. While my initial plan was to carry out observations of Ingando activities, I changed these plans during the process of seeking research clearance, as described in the following section.

In sum, much of the scholarship on post-conflict Rwanda challenges Rwanda's self-sculpted image that has gained the nation considerable support within the international donor community. The challenges posed by the work of academics and human rights activists who present images of Rwanda that do not align with government-sanctioned narratives have contributed to suspicion of outside researchers. Such wariness toward researchers, along with widespread hesitancy to share information that might be perceived as unpatriotic, made it difficult to examine how the Rwandan youth in this study made sense of their experiences living out one of Rwanda's national development strategies and responded to images of Rwanda and Rwandans that circulate outside the country's borders. It is to a discussion of these research challenges that I now turn.

Research challenges in Rwanda

My intentions of carrying out observations and interviews in Rwanda and the U.S. were disrupted by two realizations. First, I discovered that the activities organized for RPSP students prior to their departure for the U.S. and upon their return for an internship varied considerably from year to year and were not always planned sufficiently in advance to make it possible for a researcher residing outside Rwanda to make arrangements to participate. Second, and most important, the process of seeking research clearance in Rwanda proved to be more ambiguous, constraining, and time-consuming than anticipated. Proceeding through this process, I grew concerned that it was designed to ensure that my dissertation would be adequately screened prior to reaching a broad audience. As I undertook the official process laid out by the Ministry of Education, which

seemed to be extended upon each step I completed, I grew increasingly uncomfortable with the level of oversight that the various required approvals and agreements entailed.

One example of this oversight was the requirement that I identify someone in Rwanda who would agree to be 'affiliated' with my study. Acquiring a local affiliate proved challenging because the Rwanda Education Board officials I approached with this request were unsure what being "affiliated" with a research study meant and the responsibility that it would entail. After several phone conversations between one potential 'affiliate' and the authorities responsible for the research clearance process, it was clarified that this would involve reading my dissertation prior to its submission to ensure that the content was acceptable. Eventually, this leader identified someone willing to fulfill this task and I was provided with a signed letter of affiliation. In the end, I determined that the potential advantages of carrying out data collection in Rwanda—learning more about the perspectives of government policy-makers and observing their efforts to shape the experiences of Rwandan youth—did not outweigh the concerns associated with completing the research clearance process—namely, the requirement to submit the dissertation to official scrutiny before proceeding. I decided that while Rwanda would remain an integral part of my analysis, I would carry out my fieldwork at sites in the U.S.

Geographic Sites

Selecting the U.S. field sites from among the many colleges and universities involved with hosting Presidential Scholars involved a process of exploring both logistical and ethical implications of each combination of options. Approximately twenty

U.S. institutions are currently involved with the RPSP. These institutions span a wide spectrum in terms of size, type, student body, and courses of study offered, among other variations. Ethical concerns were at the forefront of my considerations.

I initially set out to include three campuses in order to examine how different campus environments shape student experiences. During my preliminary months of fieldwork, I narrowed my focus to the two sites included in this dissertation for several reasons. First, I decided to focus on emergent themes that largely transcended the institutional differences that were part of my initial research interest in working on three campuses. By narrowing to two sites, I was able to focus on these site-spanning themes while still considering a few site-specific comparisons through extensive fieldwork. Second, choosing two sites with a large number of Rwandan students allowed me to provide research participants with an assurance of anonymity that increased their willingness to participate in the study. The two campuses where I chose to carry out observations are referred to in this study as Liberal, a small private college, and Metro, a large public university. Given my concern with maintaining anonymity, desire to focus on themes that largely transcend the institutional differences, and the integration of site descriptions into the narratives presented throughout the following chapter, I provide here only a brief introduction to these two institutional contexts.

Liberal

Liberal is a small, private college that exists largely in isolation from the town in which it is situated. Both Rwandan and domestic students often referred to their college experiences as happening within the “Liberal” bubble. True to its name, Liberal has a

reputation for being politically and socially progressive in contrast to a surrounding community known for its social and political conservatism. University employees, students and community members described Liberal as an environment where students work hard and party harder. During the months I was based at Liberal, I lived on the edge of campus and walked to my office in the student center each morning. On weekends, I would frequently find my yard strewn with beer cans and plastic cups, remnants from the festivities that marked the end of a week of classes.

Program design was another distinct curricular feature. The institution's liberal arts curriculum requires students to complete a wide variety of core classes regardless of their majors. Majors and course offerings were primarily theoretically oriented, created to prepare students for masters and doctorate level study than to enter the workforce upon graduation. This feature emerged as a key contributor to variation in student experiences because of the widespread interest among RPSP students in pursuing fields of study that provide a more concrete skill set and well-defined career trajectory. All RPSP participants are required to major in STEM programs.

Metro

Metro is a medium-size public university with a largely commuter population. Whereas Liberal students are active participants in campus events, Metro has a sizeable non-traditional student body that is less involved in extracurricular activities. Many students have already started careers and are furthering their studies with the intent of advancing their professional skills and qualifications. During my time at Metro, I stayed several miles from campus and got to know the students by joining them each day in the

campus cafeteria, the primary space where students from Rwanda gathered on a regular basis. Given the greater national and racial diversity among the Metro student body, it was initially more challenging to pick out the Rwandan students from among the throngs of undergraduate and graduate students, but it did not take long to identify their gathering places.

As at Liberal, Metro students are required to take a wide array of coursework outside of their selected major. However, the courses of study available to students included engineering, a field that Rwandan students perceived to be highly valued and relevant in the Rwandan context. The majority of Presidential Scholars at Metro chose to pursue this major. One student even explained that while it was not his initial program of choice, after being placed at Metro, the institution where aspiring engineers hoped to be assigned, he decided to take advantage of the enviable opportunity to pursue this major that he believed would likely open career opportunities.

A final distinct feature of the Metro campus is the array of church-affiliated student unions that surround the premises. Walking each day from the parking lot to the student center, I passed several denominationally distinct gathering places. It was in the Baptist Student Union where I participated in conversation clubs organized to bring together community members and international students to practice English and build relationships. While such activities are also offered to Liberal students, the places where they occur are further from campus and I observed fewer Liberal students participate in these gatherings.

It is to the connections between these church communities, higher education institutions, and the nation of Rwanda that I now turn.

Transnational ties

Multiple relationships link the U.S. higher education sites and surrounding communities with the nation of Rwanda. One of the prominent ties I discovered had its origins within a particular denomination of Christian churches. This tie was formed based primarily on theological orientation, with the educational component secondary. In an effort to resist theologically liberalizing trends within North America, this group of churches chose to align themselves with more conservative leadership from the global south, and in particular, from the nation of Rwanda. As the Rwandan leadership interacted with churches in the U.S., interest in the small African country began to grow. Individuals became involved in various development efforts taking place in Rwanda, including work with churches, education programs, and microfinance institutions. Over time, these relationships created a web of connections based on theological alignment and development initiatives.

As this network grew to include leaders of U.S. philanthropic and higher education institutions, some leaders saw the potential to bring together Rwanda's economic development objectives with the interest of U.S. institutions in providing students with a global education. The idea was well received by both the Government of Rwanda and a variety of U.S. colleges and universities. Thus, the Rwanda Presidential Scholars Program was developed.

As the program developed, a wide range of higher education institutions became involved with the scholarship program. As one of the institutional leaders explained,

> We were able to put together a very broad coalition of diverse schools. The range and diversity of schools that have come together for this scholarship program, and the commitment across the country … that's the other thing that's interesting. These schools of very different backgrounds have come together to do this.

In addition to encompassing large, small, public, and private institutions, the group of supporting institutions includes both secular and religiously affiliated universities. While religion was not a central feature of campus life at either of the campuses included in this study, a program administrator at Liberal associated the college's interest in supporting the scholarship program with both a desire to expose students to other cultures as well as a commitment to promoting democracy rooted in the institution's religious heritage:

> It wasn't just about what Liberal ought to be doing for Liberal students, in terms of giving them exposure. It's about how we are a part of a global network of higher education, and we have a tradition as a [Christian denomination] institution of social responsibility and social justice. I think as Americans, we have a responsibility to provide a kind of educational experience that is essential to a democratic, free society, and the notions of what is liberalism, what does it mean to have sensibilities that have to do with rights and justice?

Expanding the presence of international students and promoting mutual cross-cultural learning were also priorities motivating host institutions. As an administrator at Metro explained:

> Part of our initiative is global awareness. We have always been dedicated to having international students on our campus; presently they are in excess of 700 international students from about 85 countries, and we saw this as an opportunity to expand the number of international students matriculating with us. … Most [Metro students] tend not to have the opportunity to interact with those from another culture – particularly Africans. And having the students here, even though they were here for an education, they proved to be awesome good-will ambassadors for their country, and our students learned a great deal from the Rwandan students, and visa versa, the Rwandan students learned a great deal from our students. So I think we are achieving what we want to achieve by having the dual type of exposure.

S/he also noted the significant role that the surrounding churches play in supporting the students from Rwanda:

> I would be remiss if I did not share that there were a number of local churches that were involved in helping to provide support for the students, both in clothing, cookware, whatever the students needed there were groups and or individuals available who stepped up and provided it for the students.

The significant involvement of community members, and local churches in particular, in supporting Presidential Scholars was a striking feature of the scholarship program at both Liberal and Metro. As program staff and community members shared about the history of the program, I learned that this involvement grew from an early realization that these students needed summer language training in order to succeed in

their studies. The cost of this training, however, was beyond what the Rwandan government could accommodate, so a local organization agreed to contact churches around these campuses, some of which had already begun to develop connections with Rwanda, to see if they would be willing to serve as host families. This arrangement allowed the program to continue.

These churches brought their own agendas to their support of the RPSP students. The desire of some families to offer hospitality and learn about the lives of students from a part of the world was coupled with an interest in supporting the growth of local businesses in Rwanda. One community member attributed this interest to a growing movement among Christian business people, which s/he referred to as 'Kingdom Enterprise.' S/he explained:

> The premise is that the businessperson—the person who is gifted with the ability to build a business that creates jobs and creates industry, creates prosperity, creates wealth—has been given a very unique divine gift to transform life in a holistic way. My calling in mission to build that business is as authentic to the Kingdom of God as a pastor's mission to go plant a church.

S/he went on to explain how this vision of 'business as mission,' in combination with Rwanda's interest in developing a vibrant private sector, led to the recognition of a shared interest in supporting Rwandan students to pursue degrees in the U.S. For Rwanda, it was a strategy to promote foreign investment. For these community supporters in the U.S., it was another form of doing God's work.

The needs and overlapping interests of the Rwandan government, U.S. higher education institutions, and local churches described above help explain the presence of religiously affiliated community members, and in some cases, the explicit sermonizing, that I observed at events both on and off Liberal and Metro campuses. While the perspectives of these community supporters are further elaborated in Chapter 4 in relation to how they represented the value of a U.S. education to scholarship recipients, they are noted here because of the important backdrop they provide for understanding the transnational ties that link Rwanda with higher education institutions and communities in the U.S.

Ethical Considerations

An overarching concern throughout the phases of research design, data collection, and analysis was ensuring that no risks were posed to the research participants. In light of the above discussion of the context of post-conflict Rwanda, this section describes my motivations for choosing to carry out this research despite the escalated concerns posed by the Rwandan government's particular sensitivity toward critical representations of its programs. I also explain how I adjusted the focus of the study as I discovered the ways in which the dynamics in post-conflict Rwanda were impacting my research process and the lives of Rwanda Presidential Scholars.

Having lived in Rwanda for several years, I began this study well aware of the caution with which many Rwandans speak of their experiences and the extended time it takes to build relationships of openness and trust. In addition to my experience living and working in Rwanda, my reflections on the challenges and dilemmas of carrying out

research in post-conflict contexts were informed by the work of other scholars that have done fieldwork in the wake of the genocide. Despite some variation in researcher experiences and perspectives, widespread consensus exists in the international scholarly community that Rwandans live in an environment of extreme social control and that the government exercises a variety of strategies to silence its internal and external critics (Reyntjens, 2011). This makes safeguarding the identity of research participants paramount, particularly when researching topics that are potentially politically sensitive.

In a reflection on her experience carrying fieldwork in Rwanda, Elizabeth King (2009) describes several methodological and procedural challenges she encountered. Notably, King talks extensively about the phenomenon of selective reporting, which includes the telling of lies, the tendency of groups to tell similar and politically sanctioned public narratives, and the emergence of counter-narratives in private spaces. In addition to noting the challenges posed by this phenomenon, she describes how selective reporting also serves as important data. She argues,

> Such material, especially if it is collected with caution and self-awareness on the part of the researcher, contains a wealth of information about the hidden transcripts informing social behavior, as well as the self-censoring that people feel they need to impose upon themselves. Hearing and recognizing patterns in respondents' comments can allow researchers to discern what informs the patterns. Group narratives can be understood as important both for what they include and for what they exclude, informing researchers about participants'

> social and political worlds, their understandings of societal cleavages and conflicts, their fears, feelings of threat, and grievances. (King, 2009, p. 135)

I initiated this study with an awareness of the challenges I was likely to face in carrying out my research with a group of students participating in a program funded by the Government of Rwanda. I proceeded with the hope that in addition to contributing to scholarship as outlined in Chapters 1 and 2 the findings would offer useful insight for government officials involved in the design and implementation of scholarship programs. One of the dilemmas I faced in carrying out this study, however, was balancing my interest in sharing the findings with government officials with my awareness that students would likely be concerned if they perceived me as being affiliated with the Rwandan government. Given the high profile of the scholarship program as a presidential initiative and my interest in sharing research findings with program leadership, I informed students of the likelihood that my research would be read by government officials. While I emphasized that I was carrying out this research as an independent researcher, this acknowledgement undoubtedly influenced what students were willing to share.

I quickly discovered that the ways in which students censored their opinions in light of this information illuminating. At first, students were wary of voicing perspectives that they believed might be negatively perceived by government officials. However, as they began to realize that other students shared similar concerns, they started to view the study as an opportunity to voice their opinions in an anonymous and constructive manner. As I shared preliminary insights, students grew more comfortable sharing both the positive and negative aspects of their experiences as scholarship students.

I was also aware that students might feel obligated to participate in the study even if they preferred not to participate. I strove to balance encouragement to busy students with an expressed ability to decline participation. On numerous occasions, students who neglected to respond to a first or second email invitation found time to respond after a third reminder and happily made time to participate. Thus, I made it my practice to offer students three requests to participate, and after three ignored replies assume that they preferred not to be included.

After a student responded to my invitation but prior to carrying out an interview, I went through an extensive informed consent conversation with each participant and provided a chance for the students to ask me any questions about the study before deciding to participate. In some cases, students carried out extensive interviews of me and several took time after our initial conversation before agreeing to participate.

A variety of strategies were employed to safeguard the research participants and the data collected. These included carrying out research on multiple campuses to increase anonymity, avoiding questions of ethnicity and government policy (aside from discussions of the scholarship program itself), and providing limited site descriptions and demographic information about the study participants in this dissertation. Research participants included males and females, first, second, third, and fourth year students, and a few recent graduates. They also included a variety of program administrators, faculty members, university staff, and community members. In an effort not to compromise the anonymity of research participants, I do not provide a breakdown of these characteristics of the interviewees. Throughout the dissertation, s/he is used in reference to keep

references to faculty, staff and students gender-neutral. Furthermore, although some comparisons are made across the two institutions included in the study, in most cases I have chosen not to identify which school interviewees attended. The data collection methods employed in response to these ethical considerations are outlined below.

Fieldwork Methods

The data presented and analyzed in this dissertation derive from fieldwork conducted over a nine-month period on and around the Liberal and Metro campuses. During this time, I spent one semester living on the outskirts of Liberal's residential campus and another staying several miles away from the predominantly commuter campus of Metro. I employed three primary data collection procedures.

Interviews

First, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 34 scholarship students and a variety administrators, staff, and faculty at each institution.[11] All of the Rwandan scholarship students studying at Liberal and Metro during the time this research was conducted were invited to participate in the study. As noted above, students were offered the opportunity to schedule a pre-interview meeting with me, during which they could ask questions about my research study prior to deciding to participate. Many took advantage of this opportunity. The students were particularly interested in understanding if and how I planned to share the research with government officials in Rwanda.

[11] In addition to student interviews, 36 faculty interviews were carried out; however, student interview data and participant observation serve as the primary sources for this dissertation. While the faculty interviews helped to frame my analysis, only a few that specifically illuminate the themes addressed in this dissertation are included here.

Each interview was carried out in English and lasted between approximately one to two hours. The majority of the interviewees agreed to have their interviews digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim, while several were more comfortable speaking without a recorder. In these cases, I typed notes during and after the interview. The interviews followed a basic protocol, with some variation across interviewees and throughout the study as additional questions and probes were added to explore emergent themes. Questions addressed students' initial expectations of the U.S. and experiences adjusting to studying in the country; significant aspects of their educational experience as scholarship students; relationships with groups in the U.S. and Rwanda; the expectations they perceive as scholarship recipients; and the influences on students' hopes, plans, and considerations related to migration decisions. While I did not prompt students to elaborate on their future plans out of concern that this would make them uncomfortable, I did ask them about what they and their Rwandan peers take into consideration as they imagine and plan for their post-graduation trajectories. The student interview protocol is included as Appendix A.

Participant observation

In addition to the semi-structured interviews, I carried out participant observation in a variety of on and off-campus settings, including the following: classrooms, extra-curricular lectures, campus events celebrating cultural diversity, and activities for international students organized by groups in the communities surrounding the Liberal and Metro campuses. These observations also included meetings that I organized to share preliminary findings at the end of the data collection period, as described in the preface to

this dissertation. Through these events, I observed how the students engaged with each other and with members of the campus and surrounding community. In particular, I attended to how the opportunity to study in the U.S., the nation of Rwanda, and Rwandan students were represented by various actors and the ways in which research participants responded to these representations. When possible, I brought my laptop and took extensive notes throughout my observations. When this was not possible or too obtrusive, I made every effort to write up field notes as soon as I returned from the event. In some cases, the words spoken by research participants were captured word for word. In other instances, I paraphrased or recalled from memory several hours after the fact. Thus, the quotations included in the vignettes should be viewed as approximations of what was said rather than the exact words of research participants.

Lived experience

A final data collection strategy involved sharing experiences with the students participating in this research project. Anthropologist Michael Jackson, whose work is situated within a tradition of radical empiricism, describes the value of a research approach that prioritizes lived experience:

> Ethnographic knowledge that is constructed out of verbal statements or likens experience to a text which can be "read," deciphered, or translated is severely restricted. … Knowledge belongs to the world of our social existence, not just to the world of academe. We must come to it through participation as well as observation and not dismiss lived experience—the actual relationships that mediate our understanding of, and sustain us in, another culture, the oppression of

> illness or solitude, the frustrations of a foreign language, the tedium of unpalatable food—as "interference" or "noise" to be filtered out in the process of creating an objective report of our profession. (1989, p. 9)

Throughout the nine months of fieldwork, I formed relationships with students from Rwanda through a variety of informal interactions. Casual conversations and hanging out that occurred over encounters in the campus cafeterias, dinners, hikes, and other excursions around campus provided multiple insights into the daily lives and experiences of the students. This strategy also allowed me to interact with students who chose not to participate in the interviews and understand their reasons for declining to participate in the more formal aspects of the study. My efforts to slowly build relationships with students from Rwanda, many of whom were initially suspicious of my intent in carrying out this study, paid off with insight into their daily lives and struggles.

These insights confirmed several articulated hypothesis and introduced lines of research I did not expect before embarking on this study. I did not anticipate the sense of isolation that characterized the experience of many scholarship students during their time abroad. Neither did I anticipate the extent to which this research would offer an opportunity for them to express concerns and reflections that they were uncomfortable sharing with their peers from Rwanda, for fear that their views might be reported to the government or others back home. My familiarity with the Rwandan context and assurance of confidentiality created a safe space in which students reflected on their anxieties and hopes in insightful ways. For these reasons, I have chosen a narrative approach to convey the interactions and relationships that are a central contribution of

this study yet difficult to present in the text of a dissertation, as Jackson notes in the quote above.

Data Analysis Methods

Data analysis began with writing copious field notes and analytic memos throughout the research process. Through writing these memos, I began to identify preliminary themes and relationships in the data. At the end of the nine-month fieldwork, two meetings were organized to share this preliminary analysis with research participants. Although the analysis was not complete at this phase of the project, several thematic relationships were beginning to develop. While refined through further analysis, these preliminary themes shared with research participants remain central to the findings presented in the chapters of this dissertation.

Member checking serves as a technique to obtain feedback on the viability of interpretations from the perspective of the informants themselves (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I was interested in understanding how the scholarship students would respond to my emergent interpretations of their experiences for three reasons. First and foremost, I wanted to understand if my findings might be perceived as particularly risky information to include in a report that could be accessed by the Rwandan government. Additionally their responses to the perspectives of their peers as well as my interpretations served as important sources of data, illuminating what students deemed to be acceptable and unacceptable narratives (King, 2009). Finally, dialogue was central to my research process, and as students began to understand what I was finding and trust that even the critical perspectives might be used for beneficial purposes, our conversations became

further enriched. These meetings with research participants provided an opportunity to receive feedback from the students on my analysis, which was incorporated into subsequent analyses. The findings presented at these meetings and student responses were described in the preface. Subsequent analysis built on these preliminary findings and they remain central to the arguments woven throughout Chapters 4, 5, and 6.

After fieldwork was complete, I transcribed the student interviews. This was followed by reading and rereading the hundreds of pages of textual data to generate a set of inductively derived codes. These codes were then used to categorize the data. Initially, I used NVivo qualitative data analysis software to organize and code the interview data and field notes. The initial coding involved organizational codes established prior to the interviews (closely related to the themes organizing my interview protocol) and substantive codes that reflected the concepts and beliefs expressed in the interviews (Maxwell, 2005).

Once the data was coded, I began a process of data reduction. Codes associated with transformation, isolation, and struggle—prominent themes in the student narratives—were selected as the focus of my analytical attention. After narrowing the analysis in this way, I began to look for relationships among the emergent themes to identify a coherent argument. I identified codes that described and explained the salience of these themes. In many cases, these relationships were directly identified in the interview data. For instance, some interviewees articulated that they feared returning home because of the shame associated with failure while others spoke of both themes without directly drawing a relationship between the two. As relationships were identified

in the data, I looked for evidence that supported or challenged these relationships. In addition to interpretive insights gleaned from the research participants, this process was guided by the study's transnational conceptual framework, which drew attention to actors and contexts that both include and transcend the nation-state.

As I proceeded with my data analysis and began to employ theoretical categories to the data, I changed to an alternative organization system that involved printing the interview transcripts (using one color paper for Liberal student interviews and another for Metro student interviews) and cutting the interviews into segments that were then placed in folders labeled according to the broad coding categories. While time consuming, this process allowed me to easily reorder these folders and the data within them as the central arguments of this dissertation emerged throughout the analysis. These folders provided structure as I began to write up the findings and settled on the decision to use Lefebvre's threefold of conceived, perceived, and lived space as a framework organizing and interpreting the data.

In addition to the choice to hone in on particular themes and analyze them from both an inductive and theoretical perspective, the choices made regarding negative cases and infrequently mentioned themes also merit some explanation. It is important to note that the themes of transformation, isolation, and struggle were not equally present in all student narratives. Narratives that are less characterized by themes are not ignored; rather, these discrepant cases are also considered throughout the analysis and contribute in significant ways to the conclusions that are drawn. Furthermore, some of the themes addressed in sections of this dissertation were present only in a few student interviews.

While the frequency of particular themes is not quantified in my analysis, it is described throughout the text to give the reader a sense of a theme's prevalence. Themes that relate to the central questions examined in the dissertation but that are only present in a limited number of student narratives are included in the analysis because they add breath to the range of influences considered. Moreover, they are analyzed in relation to the self-censoring that other scholars have drawn attention to in post-genocide Rwanda (King, 2009). Other themes that were present in the data but not directly related to the research questions are not addressed in this dissertation. Finally, in selecting the quotations included in the text to illustrate themes with abundant support in the student narratives, preference was given to quotations that summarize these central themes and their relationships.

From the various themes and relationships identified, three form the central arguments of this dissertation: (1) the representational practices of diverse actors and student perceptions of post-graduation expectations produce a space of tension and fear of failure; (2) multiple articulations of 'Rwanda' and 'Rwandans' encountered in the U.S. produce a space of responsibility, questions, and discouragement; (3) Rwandan scholarship students experience this transnational education space as a space of transformation, isolation, and struggle as they begin to develop new understandings of themselves and new visions and strategies for the future.

Before elaborating on these central arguments in Chapters 4, 5, and 6, I briefly address the strategies I employed to ensure the credibility of my data collection and

analysis, study limitations, and my decision to present these findings using a narrative approach.

Credibility

Several strategies were used to ensure the trustworthiness of the data collection and interpretation. First, I chose to spend an extended period of time (9 months) in the research settings. This "prolonged engagement" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 303) provided an opportunity to build trust and interact with research participants in a variety of settings. It also allowed for the collection of rich, detailed, and varied data (Becker, 1970). In addition to the central themes, variations and negative or discrepant cases are presented throughout the analysis. By collecting data from a diverse range of individuals using a variety of methods, I was also able to practice triangulation. While Fielding and Fielding (1986) point out that triangulation does not automatically increase validity, I practiced triangulation to address what I considered to be one of the primary credibility threats: the selective reporting discussed previously in this chapter. By observing and interacting with numerous research participants in a variety of settings, I was able to understand and analyze the different ways in which the scholarship students chose to engage with my study. Finally, member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) allowed me to validate my findings by soliciting feedback about my data and conclusions from research participants themselves.

Limitations

Despite these measures, the study has several potential limitations. First, while the nine-month period of fieldwork allowed for prolonged engagement, this time was divided

between two campuses. Spending an even longer period of time in each context would likely have allowed for deepened relationships and further insight. Following the first round of interviews through which I identified a number of pertinent themes, a second round of formal interviews with all the research participants or a grounded survey incorporating a larger sample would have enhanced the study. However, due to time constraints this was not feasible.

Second, my positionality as a researcher also presented certain limitations. While my prior experience living and working in Rwanda had the advantage of facilitating trust building with many of the research participants, my familiarity with Rwanda made the students particularly interested in discovering my views and perspectives regarding their country and government. All were curious, and some particularly suspicious, of my relationship with the Rwandan government. Throughout the research, I emphasized that I designed this research independently based on my interest in understanding how students from Rwanda experience their international education as scholarship recipients and with the goal that the findings might inform the efforts of decision makers in Rwanda and beyond to improve higher education policies and scholarship programs.

Related to my positionality as well as the ethical concerns discussed above was the limited extent to which I was comfortable probing certain topics that were identified as significant throughout the study. I was hesitant to ask students directly about topics that might lead to critique of political and social dynamics in Rwanda. Undoubtedly, students were strategic in both protecting and furthering their personal interests as they participated, or chose not to participate, in the study. As previously noted, I acknowledge

the likelihood that students withheld certain information about their perspectives and plans out of concern for their own well-being. I view this withholding as both a data limitation and an important data point (King, 2009). While this illuminated the kind of political space in which Rwandan scholarship students operate and strategize for the future, it constrained my ability to explore the relationship between students' family background and their plans for the future. As described in Chapter 6, while student interviewees did not elaborate on their personal histories in most cases, their narratives pointed to the importance of family socioeconomic status in particular in shaping post-graduation plans.

The study was also limited by the decision not to pursue data collection in Rwanda. As a result of this choice, the perspectives of policy makers included in the study are limited. Additionally, I depend on student accounts of their experiences in Rwanda—internships and participation in Ingando between their sophomore and junior years of study—rather than direct observation of how Rwandan actors represented the purposes of the program and the value of a U.S. education as they relate to the nation's development objectives. In contrast to the representational practices of U.S. actors that were observed directly, I focus on student perceptions of the values and expectations of actors in Rwanda.

Finally, the extent to which the findings of this study are applicable to other groups of internationally mobile students may be considered a limitation. Students from the context of post-conflict Rwanda, participating in a government-funded scholarship program, face challenges that are in many ways distinct to this particular group and are

not necessarily generalizable even to other post-conflict contexts or scholarship programs. Despite the distinct characteristics of this particular sample, I posit that the study exhibits theoretical generalizability by demonstrating that internationally mobile students experience and interpret international learning opportunities in transnational education spaces that are socially produced by actors in their contexts of origin and educational locales abroad. While transnational education spaces are undoubtedly varied, this reframing of mobile student experiences and focus on the cultural logics of one particular student population has rich potential to illuminate the experiences and strategies of internationally mobile students from other contexts and different kinds of education programs.

In sum, time constraints, my positionality and ethical concerns as a researcher, and the hesitancy of Rwandan students to speak extensively about their family backgrounds and future plans all placed certain limitations on this study. At the same time, my positionality and what students chose to share regarding particular topics helped illuminate the transnational education space these students inhabit in significant ways. I argue that while these findings are not necessarily transferable to other internationally mobile populations, the notion of transnational education space examined through this ethnography of the Rwandan Presidential Scholars Program is theoretically generalizable to other mobile student groups.

The "Burden of Authorship"

I conclude this chapter with a discussion of the challenges I faced in determining how best to write about the lives and experiences shared with me during fieldwork before presenting these findings in the chapters that follow.

> An anthropologist's conversations and interactions in the field can never again be exactly reproduced. They are unique, irrecoverable, gone before they happen, always in the past, even when written up in the present tense. The ethnography serves as the only proof of the anthropologist's voyage, and the success of the enterprise hinges on how gracefully the anthropologist shoulders what Geertz calls the "burden of authorship." (Behar, 1996, p. 7)

Throughout my writing process I spent a considerable amount of time agonizing over how to convey these two core experiences: the burden and the privilege of being a scholarship student from Rwanda. In addition to distilling massive amount of data, it was difficult to determine how to present prominent themes while also acknowledging the variety of personalities, experiences, and perspectives among research participants. Moreover, I was concerned with representing various groups in a manner that both honored their good intentions and rigorously analyzed their understandings and representations of the scholarship program and students. I also struggled to capture what it felt like to enter into the transnational space of these students as I listened to their stories and concerns. Could my conversations and interactions be reproduced in a way that captured the struggle, appreciation, hope, and determination expressed by these Rwandan youth? Could I convey my experiences in a "rigorous yet not disinterested"

way, as Behar (1996, p. 175) suggests that vulnerable observers must do? I was daunted by the task of honoring and critically analyzing the conceptions, perceptions, and experiences of students and program stakeholders who welcomed me into their worlds and informed my understandings.

Related to these concerns, questions of approach were a key consideration. How could I bring the stories of my research participants to life without compromising their anonymity? Furthermore, how could I weave the lives of individual students and the story of my nine months moving between Liberal and Metro campuses into a presentation of central themes? While biographical approaches present rich pictures of individual lives in ways that illuminate wider issues and social processes, they often make it more challenging to sustain a coherent argument (McLean Hilker, 2009). Given my concern with maintaining the anonymity of research participants, I opted to structure my analysis around theoretically-informed themes. I also chose to avoid the use of pseudonyms based on a concern that even if quotations were associated with particular students in an anonymous manner, such an approach might prompt readers familiar with the research participants to identify particular individuals. While the choice to focus on collective themes limits, to an extent, the richness of the individual stories, I also acknowledge the significant variation that was present.[12]

[12] It is also worth noting an additional reason why I chose not to note the precise frequency with which particular themes were raised. This is because of the variety of data collection methods employed and the variation in each student interview. While not all themes were addressed in every interview, in many cases these themes were discussed in other contexts, some of which were recorded in my field notes and others that were not. Thus I chose instead to use terms such as "few," "many," and "most" to indicate more generally the prominence of certain themes and perspectives.

In an effort to integrate my lived experience carrying out this research with the data generated through observations and student interviews and address the other challenges outlined above, I present my research findings using a narrative approach.[13] Narratives have the advantage of staying close to the lived experience of fieldwork and avoiding the kind of systematic restructuring that often occurs in the process of academic writing (Jackson, 1989). Robert Coles (1971) describes the aim of narratives as follows:

> … to approach certain lives, not to pin them down, not to confine them with labels, not to limit them with heavily intellectualized speculations but again to approach, to describe, to transmit as directly and sensibly as possible what has been seen, heard, grasped, felt by an observer who is also being constantly observed. … The aim, once again then, is to approach, then describe what there is that seems to matter. (p. 41)

Despite the ways in which narratives allow researchers to 'keep faith' with those who share their world and their experiences, Peterson (1998) points out that a narrative approach also has limitations that should be acknowledged. First, no approach to data collection or writing can entirely escape the bias of subjectivity and offer an objective account of what actually happened. In addition to the researcher's interpretation of a particular experience, research participants also engage in interpretation as they present their experiences and perspectives. To address these limitations, I have sought to be reflexive about my acts of interpretation throughout the research and writing process.

[13] I use the term "narrative approach" to refer to the telling of stories—both the story of the researcher's fieldwork experience and the stories relayed by research participants in their own words—as the primary means of data presentation.

This narrative approach allows me to richly convey the representations of space, spaces of representation, and lived experiences that constitute the transnational education space of the RPSP and the role of various actors shaping this space. Throughout the following three chapters, I intersperse extended narrative vignettes and student quotes with an analysis of how transnational space is conceived, perceived, and experienced by scholarship students from Rwanda. I begin in Chapter 4 with an account of my experience 'entering the field' and the representations of transnational education space that I encountered.

CHAPTER 4

REPRESENTATIONS OF SPACE: THE MULTIPLE MEANINGS OF A U.S. EDUCATION

> The Rwandan government has an idea of why you're doing this – so you'll go back to Rwanda – remember that? This wonderful idea that you will get your BA, go back, and magically hire people with businesses you start. It's like magic. Like the gold you got handed when you got off the plane in America. (Administrator)

> The program will create a generation to help run companies and drive growth in the future. The amount spent on sending each student abroad is a huge investment, and it demonstrates just how much Rwanda values the importance of providing its best and brightest with a multi-cultural education. President Paul Kagame is creating a pipeline of talent. (Community Member)

Introduction

From the beginning of my quest for research clearance in Rwanda to the conversations I had with research participants during the final weeks of my fieldwork, the ways in which the value of a U.S. undergraduate education was understood and represented by diverse actors emerged as central to understanding the educational experiences and migration dilemmas of scholarship recipients from Rwanda. In this chapter, I examine how actors in the U.S. and Rwanda produce the transnational space inhabited by Rwanda Presidential Scholars through their representational practices. First, I describe how actors on and around the two U.S. campuses participating in the Rwanda Presidential Scholars program represent the scholarship opportunity and the value of a

U.S. education. I then consider the role of actors in Rwanda in constituting conceptions and perceptions of this transnational education space by examining how scholarship students described the expectations of their government, communities, and families in Rwanda. The chapter concludes that the representational practices of actors in the U.S. and Rwanda constitute a space characterized to a large extent by tensions between diverse expectations and lived experiences as well as by fear of failure.

The chapter begins by introducing a variety of the U.S. actors involved in supporting the Rwanda Presidential Scholars through a series of narrative vignettes that convey my initial interactions with the students, program staff, and community members at the two higher education institutions selected as sites for the study. In addition to introducing the U.S. actors involved in supporting Rwanda Presidential Scholars, these vignettes convey the caution with which I observed students representing themselves in relation to one another and to my research project, as well as their growing sense of disjuncture between the expectations set for them by different actors and their lived experiences as U.S. undergraduate students. The vignettes also reveal the stress these students experience as they navigate contrasting understandings of an international scholarship opportunity. These themes are further elaborated in the subsequent chapters.

The vignettes are interspersed with analysis of how the expectations of the Rwandan government, society, and students' families contribute to creating a transnational space that is neither solely Rwandan nor American. Throughout, I discuss each of the three sets of tensions: (1) between narratives that represent students primarily as entrepreneurial economic subjects and those that represent them as agents of civically-

engaged agents of social change; (2) between family, community, and government expectations of scholarship students upon graduation; and (3) between "magical expectations" and students' lived experiences as U.S. undergraduate students. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the tension and fear of failure produced through these representational practices and navigated by scholarship students from Rwanda.

First Encounters

My first interactions with the scholarship students from Rwanda and the other actors on and around the campuses where I carried out my fieldwork occurred at a leadership conference the weekend after I arrived at one of the host campuses. Rwandan scholarship recipients from across the participating U.S. higher education institutions were present, and the agenda included an introduction of my research study as well as a variety of presentations by program staff, members of the surrounding community, and student participants. It was during this first weekend of my fieldwork that students began to engage with my project. They listened carefully to my plans and probed to determine how they might be represented through my research. The leadership retreat was also where I began to observe the varied ways in which program staff and community supporters in the community where I chose to carry out my research spoke to scholarship recipients about the value of their U.S. higher education. The following series of vignettes describes my observations of the leadership conference. In addition to foreshadowing several themes addressed in subsequent chapters, the vignettes portray a transnational education space constituted by diverse views of the value of a U.S. education.

Entering the field

I arrived at Liberal College—where I would spend the first four months of my research—on a hot summer morning, the day before scholarship recipients from schools across the U.S. host campuses were scheduled to begin a two-day leadership conference. The international programs office had arranged for me to stay in a small apartment for visiting scholars on the edge of campus. They also provided me with an office and a title: International Programs Graduate Research Assistant.

Across the street from my apartment, the well-groomed campus was largely deserted aside from the residential life staff preparing for freshmen orientation and the conference participants from Rwanda that I would soon be inviting to participate in my research. Flowing fountains and lush gardens interspersed with dignified brick buildings gave the campus a park-like appearance and venerable atmosphere. On the first day of the leadership conference, I made my way across the largely deserted grounds to the student center to join the Presidential Scholars for lunch.

The cafeteria was where I made my first introductions. After navigating my way through a sea of options – the sandwich and salad bars, the hot dishes, the international cuisine, the stir-fry section, the blend-your-own concoction station, and an array of soups, desserts, condiments and beverages – I was directed to a small dining room where the scholars were seated at round tables. Some were reuniting with friends from distant schools while others were making new acquaintances. I joined a table in a back corner where two seniors from Liberal were sitting quietly and introduced myself. "My name is Aryn, and I'm here doing my dissertation research with Presidential Scholars," I

explained. The students were very curious about my project. "Why did you choose this program?" one of the students asked. As I shared my history living and working in Rwanda, they continued to pose questions. "Where did you live? What did you like? Where did you travel?" They listened intently as I described my experiences and perceptions of Rwanda. These preliminary conversations assured me that my familiarity with the Rwandan context would be invaluable in establishing relationships and building trust with these students.

After lunch, we walked to a large auditorium where students were trickling in. I picked up an agenda for the biannual conference funded by a large, private U.S.-based NGO and saw my name listed as the second item on the page. About half of the anticipated 100 students were present by the time of the welcoming address. The opening remarks by an administrator emphasized the importance of building networks among Presidential Scholars to support social adjustment, the quest for academic success, and the transition back to Rwanda upon graduation. As I set up my PowerPoint presentation, s/he highlighted the civic benefits of the program, noting how students are gaining leadership and critical thinking skills that will prepare them to contribute to their communities. "With that," s/he concluded, "I would like to introduce Aryn Baxter, a doctoral student at the University of Minnesota who will be studying this scholarship program for her dissertation research."

Filled with suspense regarding how the students would respond to my study, I introduced myself and described how I came to be interested in Rwanda and the Presidential Scholars Program. I explained my desire to listen to their experiences and

explore the influences that have shaped how they imagine and plan for their lives beyond graduation. I flipped through my slides as I spoke, glancing up occasionally at the amphitheater of students in an unsuccessful effort to gauge their level of interest. After explaining the consent process and what to do should someone prefer not to participate in the study, I asked if there were any questions.

"What sources will you use to determine if information is true of false?" one student asked. I explained that I would be asking for individual student perspectives, which vary from person to person, and that while I cannot always determine if someone is speaking honestly about their experience, I will listen to many different perspectives in order to identify similar and contrasting views and experiences. Another student raised his hand. "How will you decide what information is important? I mean, what if I tell you a joke?" "Hopefully my sense of humor is good enough to know the difference," I quipped, adding that I would not be recording everything I am told, but focusing on information that is relevant to my topics of interest and research questions. The final question reminded me that some of these students were quite familiar with the research process: "How will you control for response bias? Don't you think people will just tell you all the positive things you want to hear?" "That's definitely a challenge," I replied, "and one of the reasons that I will be spending several months gathering data from many people in a variety of different ways."

These initial interactions revealed that the students I was inviting to participate in my research were keenly aware that both their expressions and my interpretations of their experiences as scholarship recipients constituted potentially consequential acts of

representation. While some students agreed to participate immediately, others were more cautious, taking time to ask additional questions and gauge my trustworthiness and the potential implications prior to agreeing to join the study. I invited each student to come to my office individually and ask any questions prior to deciding whether or not to be included in the research—an offer that led to several research participants coming to interview me quite extensively before agreeing to participate. If and how I planned to share my findings with government officials were the questions of greatest concern.

For the remainder of the leadership conference, I sat toward the back of the auditorium and observed the series of presentations. The first session offered insight into how students' imaginaries of America constructed while living in Rwanda were dislodged as they began to realize that international students face many obstacles in pursuing a medical career path and that finding employment opportunities is a struggle even with a U.S. bachelor's degree. Subsequent sessions introduced some of the key actors involved in conveying the purposes of the scholarship program and how they represented the scholarship program.

Reconsider your medical school dreams

My presentation was followed by a session about medical education in the U.S. A doctor of non-U.S. descent began by describing the limited prospects of getting into a U.S. medical school and advising the students to have realistic expectations about challenges that loom particularly large for international students—namely the high cost and competition for limited spaces. S/he also encouraged them to explore the kind of collaborations that the Government of Rwanda may have with medical schools in other

countries, suggesting that leaving the U.S. for medical school and returning later for residency may be a viable strategy.

When the speaker had concluded, an administrator asked students to raise their hands if they were thinking about medical school. Nearly a quarter of the fifty students present at the session indicated their medical school ambitions. "We don't want to discourage you," the s/he assured the students. "We just want you to be well-informed."

The next speaker was a U.S.-educated professor from an African country who presented the students with an overview of more accessible opportunities within the health care profession. S/he began by emphasizing the significant responsibility the students have in building the future of their country as scholarship recipients, describing a U.S. education as valuable both on the individual and community level:

> *We are talking about building the future of Rwanda, and you are that future. Your chance to come to the U.S. was a big blessing for you as an individual and for the community back home. … The secret to success is hard work, sweat, and sleepless nights [laughter]. There are no short cuts to success. If you try to find one, chances are you will end up in the court system. People may take short cuts in your country, and you may hear stories about that here in the U.S., but sooner or later the system will catch up with you.*
>
> *I want to talk to you about the future of Rwanda. I came here from another country and struggled to get through the back door into the U.S. system. You came for education – you are likely to be a future leader. There are many examples, Egypt, Italy… there are leaders who were trained in these U.S.*

institutions. What you're up to is something beyond yourself. So what are the options if you don't go to med school? What about the rest of you who didn't raise your hand?

S/he then proceeded to elaborate on possibilities within the field of public health, informing the student's of Liberal's arrangement with a nearby university to combine a four-year bachelor's degree with one year of graduate study for a Master's degree in public health. S/he explained,

Public health is a very good option for you – it helps you figure out how to make interventions work at the population level. If your passion is treating patients, you may prefer to pursue medical school, but for those interested in health interventions, this is a good option.

Following this presentation, one of the students raised his hand with a question. "Do you think it is worthwhile for students to get bachelor's degrees here when their friends in Rwanda are already getting jobs as doctors and lawyers without getting a four-year degree first?" s/he asked, expressing doubt that the opportunity to study in the U.S. through the scholarship is actually as valuable as expected. The presenter responded by emphasizing the quality of an undergraduate degree from the U.S.

During the short break that followed, a first-year student approached me to make an introduction. "I was interested in medical school," s/he explained, "but now I'm confused. Does public health have to do with politics? I'm interested in health, but not politics." "It doesn't have to," I assured the student, and provided an example of the

work a friend of mine with a degree in public health does in East Africa. "It's worth looking into."

In addition to exemplifying one of the ways in which students' experiences in the U.S. dislodged their imagined understandings and expectations of America, the public health presentation also foreshadowed another prominent theme: the way in which scholarship opportunities burden students with the future of their nation and create pressure to succeed that both motivates hard work and puts students under considerable stress. The first day of the conference ended with a talk given by an administrator. It was followed the next day by a series of presentations by members of the surrounding community that were instrumental in initiating and supporting the scholarship program. The following two vignettes reveal a diversity of perspectives regarding the potential of a U.S. education to transform Rwanda's future.

Work together to transform Rwanda through a quiet, educated change

In the final session of the day, an administrator encouraged the students to reflect on how they might best prepare themselves for their return to Rwanda and emphasized the importance of developing a support network with other scholars. The administrator's rapport with the students was comfortable, and s/he interspersed jokes throughout the talk.

> *It's important to network with the people in this room, not just muzungus [foreigners]. When you go back to Rwanda and talk about missing McDonalds, these people will understand you. You will want to start businesses with people you share things in common with. Your key to success is not just studying in the*

library. That is only part of what your future success depends on. It also depends on other people. Some scholars don't think they have time for that.

You guys need to talk to each other. There are so many opportunities, and if you think you are alone in doing this, you probably aren't. Don't just ask where other scholars went to high school, but also what you are studying and planning. Don't squander your time together. Well, squander a little bit, have fun, but make sure you use it.

After encouraging the students to be intentional in their interactions with other scholars, s/he suggested that the students reflect throughout the weekend on what they hope to do with their education. With some sarcasm, s/he also reminded them that the Government of Rwanda hopes they will return and transform Rwanda by creating jobs. She described the government's expectations as magical:

How is this experience relevant to what you want to do in the future? You have to get through each test, each paper, so it's easy to lose sight of that question: Why are you doing this? The Rwandan government has an idea of why you're doing this – so you'll go back to Rwanda – remember that? [audience laughter] This wonderful idea that you will get your BA, go back, and magically hire people with businesses you start. It's like magic. Like the gold you got handed when you got off the plane in America. [audience laughter] We did give you a phone card, didn't we? To call home and say, 'I'm in America, I'm broke.' You need to be thinking at each stage about how this is preparing you to go back to Rwanda.

The administrator's concluding remarks acknowledged the challenges students are likely to face upon returning to Rwanda and the limited preparation provided by a bachelor's degree. Despite being familiar with the pressure these students face, s/he added,

> *We know it's unrealistic to say you finished your BA, now go be successful. There aren't even a lot of jobs in Rwanda, and the government isn't going to just hand them to you. We want to prepare you, but there's only so much we can do. There's a lot you can do. Make sure you are taking classes that can help you if you do a business when you get back. Think about how you will get the skills you need to make money when you get to Rwanda.*
>
> *Be more deliberate with each other, making connections and talking about what you'll do when you graduate. I see you're protecting yourselves as individuals from the group and I know that is partly cultural. I'm asking you to do something that you might not feel comfortable doing. We don't want to ever send another student home because they have become isolated and depressed.*
>
> *Being a Presidential Scholar is stressful – the government is telling you that you are the hope and future of Rwanda. I don't know about you, but it would stress me out. How about hearing that because of you, 15 students are not being funded at KIST [Kigali Institute of Science and Technology, a higher education institution in Rwanda]? Is that stressful? I don't know how you breathe with that. [laughter, then silence]*

Now I'll add to that pressure. We know the program will end if you don't go back when you complete your degree – we need to maintain that trust. If you decide to stay here, marry a muzungu, and have babies, just send money home, if that's what happens [laughter] then all the students waiting for this opportunity, they can go somewhere else, and this program will be over. And that's ok – if it's not going to work, it's not going to happen. When you go back, you can't be waiting to be handed a job. You need to be able to create your own position, work for an international company. You need to start preparing for that, to go back with security.

In closing, s/he posed a question to the listeners: "Why not just send money home? I've heard a lot of you say it's just as good."

"Because there's no other person with the knowledge you have gotten here. Money is not as good as you going there," one student replied.

"But what if you go back and just consume?" another responded, releasing a wave of laughter and chatter throughout the auditorium.

"A valid point," the speaker replied. "What if you go back and all you can do is sit in your mom's house and drink banana beer?" s/he elaborated. "Don't just go back – go back prepared."

How many of you growing up knew people who were abroad? They may be sending money, but are they changing systems, creating opportunities? Just think of the transformation that is possible. Not an overthrow of a government, but a quiet, educated change by participating in Rwandan culture in a way that thinks

outside the box and can find solutions to problems that haven't been addressed. There are ways Rwanda can develop in ways that are better for Rwanda. I'm not saying that Rwanda needs to be like the U.S., but a better Rwanda. I wouldn't say one culture is better than another, but you can help Rwanda develop in appropriate ways.

You can't get anywhere in life by yourself. Being an entrepreneur is risky. Bill Gates found hundreds of ways to make a computer not work before he figured out how to make it work. Thankfully he was able to live with his mother while he was taking those risks.

We want to be there as much as we can to get the knowledge to help you be successful. We hope you will feel confident and prepared for your return to Rwanda – not the last option if you can't find anything to do here, nobody will marry you, you got kicked out of grad school after your fifth PhD. There are opportunities that others are grabbing – don't you think it should be Rwandans? The presentations over the next couple of days will provide you with some ideas about how to prepare for life after graduation.

With these closing words, the students were left to socialize for the remainder of the evening and I returned to my small apartment to process the day's events.

Like the professor of public health, the administrator spoke of the students as Rwanda's future. Although s/he also emphasized the importance of returning to contribute to their nation, s/he represented the government's expectations as "magical" and unrealistic. In contrast to the expectation that graduates would return to bolster

Rwanda's economy by creating jobs, she expressed hope they would transform systems and create a "a quiet, educated change" by returning home as critical thinkers exposed to life outside Rwanda's borders.

While expressing considerable skepticism about the government's expectations and highlighting the value of returning to Rwanda as change-makers and problem solvers, the administrator also echoed certain messages promoted by Rwandan government officials as she encouraged students to equip themselves with entrepreneurial skills. Additionally, s/he emphasized the importance of networking and building relationships with other scholars to help ensure their success abroad and upon return to Rwanda. The administrator's reference to students protecting themselves from the group and the phenomenon of students studying with isolation and depression also introduced another recurrent theme: scholarship students were very cautious in their interactions with other students from Rwanda and were to a large extent alone in their struggles.[14]

This view that the Rwandan students are being equipped as leaders and agents of social change was also conveyed in the interviews with faculty and program administrators at the host institutions. These leaders recognized, however, that the principle objective of the Rwandan government in sending students abroad for degrees in STEM fields was economic development. One administrator explained,

> Clearly, [the Rwandan government's] goal is to replace the professional class that was lost in the genocide, and principally in the STEM disciplines. For them, it's basically economic development. I will say that there's been a little bit of tension. … It's a tension that other places also feel in working in developing countries—

[14] This finding is further discussed in Chapter 6.

> the narrow focus on STEM disciplines to the exclusion of a fuller liberal arts experience. It's been a little bit of a challenge for us to explain to them why we're helping them not just train technicians but leaders. … The government, for understandable reasons, is looking at how to get a trained expert class to develop them technologically to import technologies that will be useful in the global economy. They're not really looking ahead to how these people are going to be leaders.

The broader benefits of a liberal arts education were noted in a number of the faculty and program administrator interviews. One faculty member familiar with Rwanda's history and current political context expressed the hope that a U.S. education would encourage students to ask new questions:

> At least they will have to wonder a little bit about the level of control that is being exercised [in Rwanda], and they may conclude that it is absolutely still necessary, but at least they have to wonder. […] How much do you wonder at 18, especially in an authoritarian context where you're not allowed to question your educators? Part of that is just the maturation process, but I think there's no way that being in a context where you're actually supposed to say to your instructor, "This seems different than what you told us yesterday," doesn't change the way you think about authority and the way you interact with it.

Another administrator similarly elaborated on additional benefits of a liberal arts education, emphasizing its role in cultivating innovation:

> The problem solving skills, the analytical and critical skills, the capacity to write well, to improvise, all those things are things that I think are going to make these kids have a greater influence on the future of the country because of their leadership potential. …We're not training people. We're teaching people to learn how to learn so that they can innovate. … Maybe that's a help for a place like East Africa.

This administrator also noted the challenge that contributing change in Rwanda would likely entail:

> I think that the question will be: will these kids in going back be free to take Rwanda as they get older into a new direction in leadership, or will they find themselves pressured in a patronage kind of structure?

In contrast to the perspectives of U.S. faculty and program administrators who expressed concern with the Rwandan government's narrow focus on economic development and emphasized the role of a U.S. education in cultivating leadership and critical thinking capacities, members of the surrounding community with linkages to Rwanda tended to emphasize the students' role in contributing to Rwanda's economic growth. The following vignettes present the perspectives of several of these community members on the value of a U.S. education. They also illuminate the transnational relationships and interests that link actors from educational locales abroad with actors in Rwanda introduced in Chapter 3.

Develop Rwanda's private sector as multi-cultural Rwandans

The next morning's lineup included three speakers from the surrounding community. One was affiliated with a locally based organization that works with Rwandan businesses to identify placements for returning scholars. This community member's presentation focused on how the scholarship program aligns with the Government of Rwanda's development vision. "Let's talk about why you're here. It's because Rwanda has a vision of being successful, from a prosperity or GDP standpoint," s/he began. Throughout the presentation s/he continued to describe how s/he, like the government of Rwanda, envisions that sending Rwandan students to study in the U.S. will contribute to the nation's economic growth.

> *Who knows who the Asian Tigers are? These are the countries that shifted to democracy and the free market in the 1960s – South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore. President Kagame taught me this, because he knows these countries came from places worse than Africa and managed to achieve prosperity. When Rwanda lays out a vision, Vision 2020, they aren't just making stuff up. They know exactly how these Asian tigers got there—the road map from poor country to emerging economy. Here's the pattern: First, you need peace and security. Next, the foundation of a healthy society needs to be put in place – physical and food security, health care, education, infrastructure, the rule of law. This needs to be followed by a shift from government initiatives to private sector-driven growth, which involves inviting foreign businesses in. Identifying the best*

and brightest students and sending them to study abroad so they can eventually run businesses is an important step.

Following this articulation of Rwanda's development vision, s/he reminded the students of how the Presidential Scholars Program came into being, emphasizing its role within the country's national development strategy.

The program will create a generation to help run companies and drive growth in the future. The amount spent on sending each student abroad is a huge investment, and it demonstrates just how much Rwanda values the importance of providing its best and brightest with a multi-cultural education. The government is spending a higher percentage of its budget on education than any other country in Africa.[15] *President Paul Kagame is creating a pipeline of talent.*

In the next four years, you will become a multi-cultural Rwandan, an incredibly valuable skill. You have to be outstanding academically – that's what drives the engine that drives this – and you have a responsibility to build a network of friends that will be with you for a lifetime – students, faculty, churches, businesses. Leaders in Rwanda with connections are a powerful asset. When people see what God is doing in Rwanda, people get inspired. No one has a bigger network of friends than Paul Kagame. You can't underestimate the value of a network of friends that will stand by you for life.

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[15] A comparison of primary and higher education spending in Rwanda and other African countries circa 2008 found that while Rwanda's share of spending on primary education was comparable to other African countries and approximately equal to the Education for All benchmark, their spending on higher education was considerably higher (26.5% of public recurrent education expenditure compared to 19.2 % in other African countries). (World Bank, 2011, p. 8)

Every one of you has the possibility to be a bridge to your country. You are capable at a moment's notice to tell people about Rwanda, why you are proud, what you hope to do, to invite visitors. That's the most powerful thing this group may do. Support, encourage, invest.

Next, s/he provided his view of Rwanda's history in three chapters: the period from 1990 – 1999 when the most significant change agent was the solider, the following period of transition, referred to as "redemption and reconciliation," during which the primary change agent was the civil servant, and finally the current period of prosperity and growth driven by the private sector – not the government, but by entrepreneurs who create prosperity and jobs. S/he elaborated on the importance of entrepreneurship:

The most important need in Rwanda is jobs. People around the world want good jobs, but governments can't create jobs. Small and medium size businesses owned and operated by private entrepreneurs create jobs. Entrepreneurial business people will be the ones who make a difference in Rwanda. What does this mean for you? You need to figure out your God-given passions and talents, what you're supposed to be, what you were made to do, and where the opportunities are, and where you can make the biggest difference. You need to begin your college experience with the end in mind: What role will you play in Rwanda's growth? What business can you start as a young college grad? Look at the market demand and learn skills – English, accounting. RwandaLink will help you return to good jobs in Rwanda. This is the big challenge over the coming years.

Students responded with a variety of questions: If accounting is one of the most in-demand skills, why are so many students in the program studying engineering? What skills are most transferrable within different businesses? How can we get capital? What if your business fails? What about issues regarding intellectual property in Rwanda, and the challenge of competing with the government when you try to start your business? Responses emphasized that successful entrepreneurs don't quit, finding capital is never easy but it is possible, and while there will be difficulties as Rwanda transitions to a private-sector driven economy, students must push through these challenges.

One particular question addressing current events involving Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the international community generated a defensive response and filled the room with palpable tension. A student raised a concern about allegations regarding Rwanda's involvement in the Congo may impact foreign investment, and inquired what the speaker thinks of these current events and their implications. "I try to stay out of politics, and I always stand by my friends in Rwanda," the speaker replied, steering away from the topic. "I have no reason not to believe their denial of allegations."[16]

The next speaker was a pastor at one of several mega-churches in a neighboring county. S/he told the story of becoming an entrepreneur after observing a family-run business and then later becoming a pastor. S/he explained how the entrepreneurial background served as a motivation to develop a ministry in Rwanda that involves training students in vocational skills, Christian discipleship, and entrepreneurship.

[16] While I do not elaborate on this point here, this exchange points to the role of domestic politics in Rwanda in shaping how students represent themselves on U.S. campuses. This is discussed at greater length in Chapters 5 and 6.

Students were invited to work with this project to arrange internships in Rwanda following their sophomore year: "You would learn entrepreneurship and teach English. Then, after graduation, we would introduce you to the services we offer and see if you can take advantage of those resources."

Another entrepreneur from a nearby church followed with a personal testimony of becoming an entrepreneur as an electrical engineer. "What I happened to study was a God thing, a providential thing," s/he explained. Equipped with a combination of engineering, marketing, and accounting skills, s/he launched a firm that does engineering consulting work. "What you need," s/he advised the students, "is the capability and skills, trustworthiness, and follow-through." S/he went on to explain how capital would be a challenge, and that verbal and written communication skills are invaluable for acquiring capital and clients. Following these remarks, students posed some questions inquiring about the speaker's thoughts on water management and electrical power access in Rwanda. They seemed enthusiastic to discuss these critical issues with an engineer who had visited their country. The conference wrapped up with a variety of student-led presentations covering topics that ranged from entrepreneurship initiatives to studying abroad and applying to graduate school.

Three central themes were present in my observations of the community members that presented at the leadership conference. The first was the emphasis placed on multiculturalism and entrepreneurship as two skill-sets students had the opportunity to develop during their studies that would equip them to develop Rwanda's private sector. The second was the prevalence of references to God. As noted in the previous chapter, I

found that religious faith was a significant factor motivating many of the community members I met to interact with international students. Moreover, it served as significant point of connection between religiously-oriented students and members of the surrounding community. Finally, the hesitancy with which community members and students spoke of global events involving Rwanda offered insight into the political significance of how actors positioned themselves in relation to the geopolitical events that were unfolding at the time of this research. The instance of a student asking a question about Rwanda's involvement in the Congo suggested both the significance of international as well as domestic politics as students plan for the future, as well as a the extent to which domestic politics in Rwanda inhibited students' ability to discuss certain topics even far outside the country's borders.

Several weeks later, I had the opportunity to interview the speaker from the community who had emphasized the important role Presidential Scholars would play in Rwanda's economic growth. In the interview, s/he elaborated on her/his perception of why Rwanda values sending students abroad for a higher education and the overlap between the nation's development vision and her/his own sense of personal calling to do God's work by building businesses:

> What the Rwandans talk about, is its economic development. It's how do we get the GDP growth up to 10% or more and how do we encourage entrepreneurship and how do we, how do we get foreign investors and domestic investors to invest money and start businesses and hire people and provide services and make products and export those? How do we get that? How do we create an

> environment where the business community is vibrant? And it's a combination of foreign investors coming in. … The reason is if, if you have a third world economy and you have third world businesses, they don't operate at the same level of efficiency or productivity or profitability or quality or integrity as businesses that operate in a first world environment, in the United States, or Western Europe, or Australia. So, if you want to begin to compete in that first world environment, you have to bring foreign investors into the country to build businesses.

S/he went on to explain how an international higher education plays in to this economic growth strategy:

> A foreigner who builds a business in a country immediately begins employing local people. And local people now have to manage, have to work at a level that's higher, more efficient, more productive than they ever have, because the foreigner comes in knowing what he wants and knowing what can be done. The domestic person who has never been outside of this country has no idea what's possible. So, that's one of the values of foreign investors. … Those foreign-owned businesses and the environment ultimately have to be led by nationals. … If I can find a national from Rwanda who has been educated in America, that's exactly that kind of talent that I would use, then, to begin training my indigenous management team. … You've got to get this talent pool built up, where western businesses and more sophisticated businesses and leaders who are multi-cultural, who are confident in terms of dealing with anybody can function. And so, that's

> where the inter-relatedness of the study abroad potential with the foreign investment and the build-up of your private sector go together. They overlap.

In addition to this overlap between study abroad and Rwanda's objective of developing the private sector by producing multi-cultural Rwandan business people, s/he described the alignment of her/his faith-based mission to connect churches and business leaders with emerging economies and:

> So, you have a government, whether or not it's faith-motivated or not, that's the strategy. And then you come along with another movement of faith-motivated American business guys who say, God's calling me to build businesses, and this country's sitting here saying, begging me to come in and build businesses. So, you know, it's a perfect overlap. What I'm called—divinely called—to do to impact the world is exactly what this country is saying they want us to do.

In sum, this community member emphasized that the Rwandan government and many of the churches and business people in the communities surrounding Liberal and Metro value a U.S. higher education because of its potential to cultivate the multicultural skills necessary to facilitate foreign investment in Rwanda. They also value that supporting scholars from Rwanda not only engages suburban Americans with the work of the church in other parts of the world and the vision of building a "Kingdom Enterprise," as described in Chapter 3, but is a core ingredient in Rwanda's recipe for achieving prosperity through private sector-driven economic growth.

These quotes and the preceding vignettes describe two distinct representations of the value of a U.S. education for the nation of Rwanda. The first narrative, emphasized

by community members who are both supporters of the scholarship program and admirers of the Government of Rwanda's approach to national development, represents the scholarship opportunity as a space for increasing global economic competitiveness and accelerating privatization in Rwanda. As the interviewee above explained, many business people in local churches have become involved with Rwanda because they believe that they have been called by God to transform the lives of the poor through the use of their business skill. Furthermore, they recognize that their sense of calling aligns with the Rwandan government's focus on creating prosperity through private sector growth.

The representational practices of U.S. faculty and program administrators contrast starkly with those of the community members and churches surrounding the two campuses. These differences highlight the tension produced within the scholarship program space inhabited by Rwanda Presidential Scholars as various actors seek to equip these students as entrepreneurial economic subjects, on one hand, and as agents of social change on the other. Furthermore, the tension between ways in which the educational environment inhabited by scholarship students is conceived by diverse actors and the extent to which students perceive that their U.S. education will equip them to fulfill these expectations to contribute to Rwanda's future constitute significant dilemmas for scholarship recipients to negotiate as they imagine their futures as internationally mobile students.

Perceived Expectations

In addition to the economic growth and social change narratives revealed in the preceding vignettes, student interviewees spoke of a variety of groups in Rwanda that also had contrasting expectations regarding the benefits of a scholarship to study in the U.S. In this section, I describe how students perceive the expectations of government officials, community members, and family members in Rwanda. I first introduce the expression *avuye states,* translated as *coming from the (United) States*, as a term that conveys how Presidential Scholars perceive that others will view them upon returning to Rwanda. I present a vignette showing how I discovered this term and explored its meaning and significance for Presidential Scholars. This is followed by a description of how students perceive the governmental, societal and familial expectations they bear as scholarship recipients.

"Avuye States" [Coming from the States]

It was around December 2010, during my second year living in Kigali, that I first recall hearing my Rwandan friends refer to the Rwandans studying abroad who would soon return on holiday to take over restaurants, bars and clubs around the capital city as "the come froms." At the time, I simply thought that it was a creative way to refer to international students returning during their vacations—another East African appropriation of the English language.

Several months into my research, I began to notice that the students I was interviewing often used this expression to describe how studying in the U.S. transforms their social status in Rwanda. The connection occurred to me during an interview with a

first year student at Metro as he described his concern that as someone "coming from the U.S.," he would be viewed and treated differently upon returning to Rwanda. As I probed, he elaborated on the meaning of the expression.

> *Student: People who know me, they just expect me to be this high status person who came from the U.S. so they will consider me [pause] they will put me in higher status, which at my level I don't think I deserve and that will make me somehow uncomfortable. That will make me feel less comfortable with the environment but still I'll enjoy it.*
>
> *AB: The expression that you are coming from the states when you come back from studying abroad, do they say that in English or Kinyarwanda?*
>
> *Student: They say it in Kinyarwanda.*
>
> *AB: Can you write it down for me?*
>
> *Student: It's gonna be a sentence. [Writes yagezeye, avuye states] It means, when they say yagezeyo, it means you have been…you're rich. It's an expression to explain someone who is rich. So they say yagezeyo and you say really? How's that? He graduated from America. They add that.*
>
> *AB: Ok, so it means you're rich.*
>
> *Student: "Coming from" is the expression, but they say it in different ways. … Avuye states. Comes from the States. When they say this expression, everyone, if they were talking about something they look up and say ah, avuye states. You know. When they say avuye states, it gives you some kind of, the community*

around you, they say hey, avuye states. Avuye states, man. Everyone will look at you and say oh really? How is America? They try to ask you the questions, everyone will come around you, and that's kind of gonna give you…if you are looking for a service, it will be quick, because they say avuye states.

AB: So the direct translation is you've come from the states, but the actual meaning is different.

Student: The actual meaning is different. You are wealthy, you are rich, you are an important person. You have some values in society that do not belong to everyone. That's the direct translation, but it means a lot.

As I continued to ask interviewees about the meaning of this expression, others confirmed that the expression captures the high value many Rwandans place on going to another country. One student explained,

America has become a very powerful place, a powerful nation. So coming from abroad is one thing, and you understand [Rwandans] give it value. Then it adds up, coming from America, so it's like value squared. People give you more trust and they can know if they give you something to handle you're gonna handle it very well. They trust your abilities.

Although the some students did not mind the respect and trust they earned by coming from the states, many expressed discomfort with this change in social status and a desire to remain a social status on the same level of their friends in Rwanda who did not have the good fortune to study abroad. Many also expressed that they found the responsibilities that accompanied *coming from the U.S.* to be problematic. They

explained how this status deepened their sense of responsibility to their families and Rwandan society at large. Interviewees described the expectations of the Rwandan government as distinct and sometimes in tension with those of their families and communities in Rwanda. While interviewees had different perceptions of whose expectations were the most challenging, there was widespread agreement that these expectations made them wary of returning to Rwanda until they felt sufficiently equipped to meet these expectations.

Central to the varied meanings associated with returning from the U.S. to Rwanda were the different ways in which Rwandan government officials, community members, and family members understood and valued a U.S. education. The following sections describe how scholarship students perceived their national, societal, and familial obligations and what these perceptions reveal about the value each of these groups of actors place on a U.S. education.

National Expectations

> Being a Rwanda Presidential Scholar doesn't make you feel very comfortable. You feel like you have to do something, like people are watching you. You don't want people to think that you failed, that you used the government money for nothing. … So we feel like we have to do much better, do more school to succeed, do success in every subject.

> It's really important and it means a lot if your country is paying for you and providing what they can to provide school for you. … You're on a government mission. You're an ambassador.

> The hardest [expectations] are from the government. … You have that feeling that you have to be the highest. If you get put in charge of an office, you have to do the best, more than a local graduate in Rwanda. That's the hardest challenge. It puts hard pressure.

Students perceived that government officials in Rwanda valued a U.S. education for two primary reasons: (1) its contributions to the national economic development strategy; and (2) its potential to improving Rwanda's international reputation and network of relationships. Related to the former was the assumption that a U.S. higher education was far superior to what could be obtained in Rwanda in fields identified as key to economic growth. While the economic contributions were paramount, student accounts of government messages also emphasized the importance of serving as ambassadors for their country and correcting misrepresentations of Rwanda that might be encountered abroad.

Students spoke extensively about their sense of feeling indebted to Rwandan society because of the national resources invested in their education. They described their sense of responsibility both positively—as an inspiration to work hard and succeed—and negatively—as an ever-present and stressful burden. The challenge that many students identified was that while they viewed the expectation that they would contribute to their nation as reasonable, throughout their time abroad they grew increasingly concerned that it was not particularly realistic. As students gained an awareness of the skills provided by an undergraduate degree and the structural and cultural barriers to a successful return to Rwanda, they began to develop new understandings of how they might best contribute to

their nation while holding on, and in some cases deepening, their initial sense of commitment.

Ingando was described as the primary means through which the government conveyed their expectations to the scholars. Students expressed that by explaining the Rwandan government's accomplishments and vision for the future, the event was intended to instill a sense of national pride that would counter the temptation international students face to remain abroad. As one student explained,

> [Ingando] is about teaching the students about Rwandan culture, patriotism, because they know if you go abroad, your mind will change. You'll meet some people over there who will say hey, there's no reason of going back to Africa. So they try to bring us, to teach us the stuff about the country, people working hard to develop the nation, all those things to make you still in your country in the head.

Additionally, students recounted that at Ingando, they were taught a particular narrative about Rwanda and instructed regarding how to represent their nation while abroad. The following quotes demonstrate that in addition to acquiring skills needed in Rwanda, scholarship recipients are expected to develop international networks and represent Rwanda positively while abroad:

> They came to teach us how, not to teach, but telling us how the country is now, about the history of the country, because some of us don't even know the history of the country—at least not how they tell it—entrepreneurship, stuff like that. So it was pretty helpful because you kind of catch up on the country and know all that stuff.

> We get to meet and talk about our history, history of our nation, the culture of our nation, we talk about what people ask and what our responses are, we talk about if you meet people who don't have any knowledge about Rwanda, what are you going to say? What's the basic stuff you're going to tell them? If you meet an investor who wants to invest in Rwanda, what would he want to know? I mean, you have to know the basic stuff, the statistics. At least to say to start a business in Rwanda it will take you a week to go and write the papers.
>
> Also, if you meet a person who is against Rwanda, who is misleading people, how you would approach them, how you would approach the public to tell them the truth, not hide anything. Talk about the bad side and talk about the good side. So that's what we did. And also, you know, learn some history of the country, learn the way the country is going, the plans, where we came from, stuff like that. It was so much helpful.

While many students spoke positively of the government's efforts to explain the nation's policies and strategies to the nation's youth through Ingando, others critiqued the approach used at Ingando to communicate the government's expectations. One student likened Ingando to being in a cave, which I interpreted as a reference to the limited opportunity for expressing multiple perspectives and engaging critically with Rwanda's challenges and policies:

> Ingando, you go there, you are in a cave. Only one person is just projecting shadows in front of your eyes. He is showing you the way Rwanda is. The way

> Rwanda is, as if he or she is the only one who has eyes. … You just say, "Here I am, sir."

One administrator expressed a similarly negative perspective regarding the Ingando requirement:

> I don't really know how I feel about this, they have to go back after their sophomore year, to go through kind of a political camp, is the way I see it, and it sort of reminds me of a quasi-Stalinistic re-indoctrination to make sure they don't forget to whom they're beholden and get too westernized.

In addition to the critique that Ingando kept students the dark and indoctrinated them with subjective messages about Rwanda, other students explained how the Ingando experience confirmed their sense that government officials are out of touch with the lives and dilemmas of internationally mobile students:

> The people who were teaching us were the people in Rwanda, the people who live there. And most of them didn't get to come here and go back. So they don't know really what's going on. It's more what they expect us, but they didn't have our experiences. … Somehow it wasn't realistic. Most of them, they expect us to come back, which sometimes you can't just come back. They're like after you study there, come back and help your communities. But there are also other ways to help instead of just coming back home.

These student narratives suggest that the value the government of Rwanda places on a U.S. education in relation to economic growth and international diplomacy are neither

well aligned with some students' academic experiences in the U.S. nor their experiences and understandings of Rwanda.

Community Expectations

> There's a misconception that people in Rwanda have. Even now it kind of creates problems for us here interacting with people in Rwanda. They think kind of like we've made it, we have got there to the top and we are just enjoying life, there's nothing else. They will be like ok, now, can you send me an Apple laptop? We'll be like well, that's like $1,000 USD. That's very expensive. They'll be like yeah, but we know you guys are rich. We'll be like who told you that? They'll be like no, just don't be like Americans and be selfish. They kind of think Americans are selfish and greedy because you know Americans, they put on a financial perspective. So they say oh, you have just become Americanized and now you are thinking everything about money. I think well, I'd love to help you, but given the financial means that I have now, I don't think I can buy you a laptop that costs that much. They're disappointed. They'll be disappointed in you. They don't understand that here, things are expensive. They can never understand you buy a book for $150. They can't. They think the money they give you, you're just using it, being extravagant and stuff, but it's not true. The perspective changes when you get here.
>
> If I don't have an opportunity to go to grad school … I guess the expectations people in Rwanda have for me, the skills that they expect me to have, I wouldn't have them. My sophomore year, I went back to Rwanda and people said oh,

> you're a physics major. So you guys must be building machines that generate electricity, stuff like that. You must be good. You can right now build a machine that can generate energy with high efficiency. Because they think you know, it's America. They do everything. And then you think, apart from just simple stuff, I can't do anything. … If I go back to Rwanda, what would I do? … You talk to friends who went to the same high school together, and they are like hey man, once you finish, just come back and give us jobs. It's like, what can I do? Nothing! So people expect you to have skills and knowledge that literally, you don't really get at the college level. That kind of shocked me. … They think the U.S. means knowledge and magic and making things happen, pretty much.

While student perceptions of national expectations indicate that the Rwandan government values a U.S. education for its contributions to economic development and international relations, they suggest that community members in Rwanda value a U.S. education for slightly different reasons. Student narratives suggest that community members in Rwanda view a U.S. education as a ticket that provides access to wealth, resources, and opportunities, some of which may be shared with those who remain behind. Like the government, many community members also value the skills provided by a U.S. education and expect that students will return equipped to solve complex challenges such as limited access to electricity and widespread unemployment. Both government officials and community members value the investment in educating students abroad based on the assumption that this opportunity will have not only individual benefits but also societal impact. For community members, these benefits are linked with

remittances as well as solutions to broader challenges such as access to electricity and unemployment.

Another commonality between these two groups of actors is the concern expressed with the likelihood that upon arriving in the U.S., students would develop selfish attitudes that might deter them from making these intended contributions. The temptation to remain abroad was viewed as something encountered "over there" in America, where selfishness and greed are perceived to prevail. While the skills that could be acquired in the U.S. were highly valued, certain attitudes and perspectives were to be avoided and guarded against. These negative perceptions of the U.S. on the part of individuals in Rwanda were indicated throughout the student narratives and several interviewees commented that they were surprised to discover upon arriving in the U.S. that Americans were far more friendly and generous than they anticipated.[17]

As with the government's expectations, interviewees spoke of the expectations of their peers and neighbors in Rwanda as being misaligned with their lived experiences. Many spoke of the widespread belief in Rwanda that traveling to America is a guarantee of wealth and success. They also conveyed exaggerated understandings of what four years in the U.S. would prepare students to accomplish upon their return. Although many students described holding similar views prior to arriving in the U.S., they spoke of a

[17] One student reflected, "I thought that, I don't know how I can word this, but yeah, I thought Americans, you guys are Americans, I thought they were selfish and opportunistic, like they will do everything to get to the top. They will do everything possible to get to the top. But when I got here I found Americans are not like that. They are really good, Americans. I can give you like an example. My host family, they are really wonderful. I can say that in the past 4 years, that's the most beautiful thing that God has given me is them."

growing disconnect between how America and a U.S. education are understood in Rwanda versus their transformed understandings of both as particularly problematic.

Family Expectations

> The family thinks that when you come and go back, you'll get a better job, you'll be able to support them. Our families back home, they expect our help.
>
> Some people when they get here, they are immediately in a different situation than they used to be back in Rwanda. They are like more responsible. … You just become like the eldest person of the family, because even your father is right now depending on you. They'll ask you some medical bills or some school fees. So you're immediately all grown up, and that can put too much pressure on you. … You were used to having everything taken care of by your family, but right now, immediately, you are the one who takes care of all the problems for your family. It's a sudden change.
>
> I don't know if it's for other students here, but our families, our parents, they want us to stay here, not going back. They say how can you go back home and live here when you have opportunities? They say don't miss that opportunity to stay here – try everything to stay here. You'll have a better life here. You're like ok. If I stay here, I feel like I have the responsibility to help my country. They're like yeah. People who help the country will be always here. Look for yourself first, and then you'll help after.
>
> Your family saying ok, you should stay away, it's kind of like, you know, they can be like you will be a failure if you come back again. And you'll be like why

> do they think like that? So it's a pressure, and you'll be like ok. If I do go back, they will be really disappointed in me, or something like that. So you get that conflict. Yeah. Because most of the family members, they will be expecting you to stay here because they will get more money. … Rwandans, they really take pride in having friends and relatives abroad. … So that's a conflict really. And also there will be you – what do you want to do? Do you want to stay, or do you want to go?

Whereas government officials and communities valued a U.S. education because of what it would equip students to accomplish upon their return, the family members of students studying in the U.S. placed little emphasis on students returning to address social challenges. Instead, they valued a U.S. education for the access it provides to professional opportunities that are not widely available in Rwanda. For some, this was linked to expectations of remittances, while others simply expressed satisfaction that for their children, the future was now secure. Students' families did not value returning to Rwanda because it was perceived to pose a threat to the security offered by opportunities in the U.S.[18] This security was both economic and political.

While a few students spoke of their families simply being excited upon learning that their child had received a scholarship to study in the U.S. that would ensure a good life and secure future, most articulated an expectation that the scholarship opportunity would have direct implications for the entire family's livelihood. For some, this resulted

[18] This relates directly to Collier's (2013) argument: "In many cases migration is more a family decision than that of the migrant alone: the migrant is not escaping from the family but rather is part of a larger strategy of enlarging opportunities. From the perspective of other family members, migrants are investments that often pay off handsomely through a prolonged stream of remittances and enhanced access for further migration." (Paul Collier, p. 196)

in a drastic transition from depending on one's family to being expected to provide for one's family. Although many students spoke of their ability to contribute to their families in Rwanda as an aspect of their experience abroad in which they took great pride, some described it as overwhelming.

In addition to family expectations creating an overwhelming sense of responsibility, students spoke of the advice of their family members as being in tension with the government's emphasis on returning and contributing to Rwanda's development. In contrast to governmental and societal responsibilities, which generally involved the expectation that students would return to Rwanda upon graduation, familial expectations often included the expectation that students would remain abroad after completing their studies.

The final reason why students perceived familial expectations as stressful was their belief that receiving the Presidential Scholarship meant that their child was exceptionally intelligent and incapable of failure—a representation of scholarship students that is elaborated in Chapter 6. One student described family expectations as the most stressful expectation of all. He explained, "They always think ok, he's there, he's so smart, he's gonna achieve this, he's going to do great things. … So if I fail, they'll be like no, we didn't expect that. How can it happen? … They think it's a land of opportunities, how can you miss that?"

Failure is not an option

Being a Presidential Scholar in two words: it means *work hard*.

> No one wants to go back directly after graduating. … It's not because we don't want to contribute. It's because the requirement of contributing, we are required more and we are not ready to fulfill those expectations yet.

As indicated in the previous three sections, government officials, community members, and families all value a U.S. education for slightly different reasons. Regardless of whether students return to Rwanda or remain abroad, the access to skills, resources, and opportunities provided by a scholarship to study in the U.S. is expected to equip them to accomplish great things. Success was an assumed outcome of a U.S. education and as a result, scholarship students feared returning to Rwanda unable to achieve or demonstrate such success. In a discussion of the costs of returning home after migrating abroad, economist Paul Collier (2013) echoes the concerns expressed by the students:

> Not only are there the practical costs of traveling back home and searching for a job, there are psychological costs of publicly admitting to failure in a context where many other migrants are perceived as having succeeded. (p. 154)

In addition to the expectation of success, Rwandan students are expected to work hard. Journalist Stephen Kinzer (2008) quotes President Kagame as saying:

> We have to work on the minds of our people. We have to take them to a level where people respect work and work hard, which has not been the case in the past. You have to push and push. I hear whispers of criticism, complaints that people are being pushed too hard. I have no sympathy with that. People have to be pushed hard, until it hurts. (p. 6)

This combination of success as assumed and hard work as valued leaves students in a tricky situation upon realizing the limitations of a U.S. education. Rather than complain or point out the inaccuracy of certain assumptions and expectations, they are expected better work hard. Failure is not an option.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined how actors in the U.S. and Rwanda actively produce the educational space inhabited by Rwanda Presidential Scholars through their representational practices, drawing attention to a variety of tensions and fear of failure created by the diverse expectations of these actors. In the first section, I identified two contrasting storylines—economic narratives that suggest the value of a U.S. education is primarily its ability to cultivate entrepreneurial economic subjects, and social change narratives that emphasize the role of a U.S. education in developing critical thinking and leadership capacities—that underlie how program staff and some community members understand the value of a U.S. education. In Chapter 6, I return to this theme to argue that many of the students interviewed grew increasingly skeptical of both narratives as they approached graduation.

Next, I examined the tension between the students' perceived expectations of government officials, community members, and families in Rwanda and their lived experiences as undergraduate students in the U.S. I showed how student narratives describe a growing awareness of the disjuncture between these expectations and the limited opportunities available to them in the U.S. and Rwanda as well as an increasing awareness of the structural and cultural barriers that would make it challenging for them

to access these opportunities. I conclude that the social status tied to "coming from the states" contributes significantly to students' wariness of going back to Rwanda upon graduation. This suggests that all three groups of actors exaggerate the value of a U.S. education in ways that produce shame and fear of returning to Rwanda to struggle.

The final tension identified in the chapter is the conflicting expectations of students' families and policy makers in Rwanda. Students expressed that while government officials emphasize the importance of returning to Rwanda with skills needed for the nation's economic growth and development, their families often encourage them to remain abroad where more opportunities are available. These conflicting expectations create a double bind for students in which they are unable to satisfy both their parents and their government.

In sum, this chapter has explored how the scholarship opportunity and the value of a U.S. education are represented by actors in the U.S. and Rwanda and perceived by scholarship recipients. It has demonstrated how the representational practices of actors in the U.S. and Rwanda involved with the Presidential Scholars Program, as well as the broader social, economic and political context in which they are embedded, create a scholarship program space characterized by a variety of tensions and dilemmas. In the chapters that follow, I shift from focusing on how the scholarship program space itself is constituted through the understandings, expectations, and values of these actors to examining how Rwanda and Rwandan students are represented and represent themselves on and around U.S. campuses. These chapters show that space is not only constituted through the social relations and interactions discussed in this chapter but also produced

through social relationships. I now turn to an exploration of the ways in which Rwanda and Rwandan students were represented on and around two U.S. campuses.

CHAPTER 5

SPACES OF REPRESENTATION:

REPRESENTATIONS OF RWANDA AND RWANDANS IN THE U.S.

> Study abroad provides not only the possibility of encountering the world, but of encountering oneself—particularly one's national identity—in a context that may stimulate new questions and new formulations of that self. (Dolby, 2004, p. 150)

Introduction

Throughout my fieldwork, I observed a variety of ways in which Rwanda and students from Rwanda were represented in the classrooms, extracurricular contexts, and community settings where I carried out my research. I also observed and spoke with students about their responses to these various representations. In this chapter, I use narrative vignettes and data from my interviews with students and faculty to explore how scholarship students experience and respond to their encounters with images of Rwanda and Rwandans that circulate outside their nation's borders. The representations of Rwanda and Rwandans presented in this chapter are organized around three themes: (1) the reputation of Rwandan scholarship students as exceptionally intelligent; (2) the cultural stereotypes with which Rwanda is associated and the traditions for which it is celebrated; and (3) the current state of Rwandan youth.

The vignettes and interview data reveal how students not only accommodate and resist these images but also how they begin to ask new questions and develop new formulations of themselves and their nation in response to these encounters. Representations that challenge state-directed images of life in Rwanda, in particular,

prompted both discouragement and a sense of responsibility among these Rwandan youth. They also revealed a tendency toward risk aversion amongst the scholarship students that limited their engagement in discussions about contemporary Rwanda. I argue that these representations contribute to the production of transnational education space by adding to students' fear of failure, shaping their spatial understandings, and fueling efforts to promote more hopeful representations of Rwanda and Rwandans.

"Best and brightest"

> From the beginning, the Rwandan government made it very clear that 'these are our "best and brightest" in the sciences, and that's how we're gonna contribute to Vision 2020. We're gonna leapfrog some of these development challenges by becoming sort of this technology innovator and powerhouse for Sub-Saharan Africa.' So we knew from the beginning of the interview process that these were really talented students, top to bottom, really smart. (Administrator)

> Without a doubt, every faculty member that had the opportunity to teach the Rwandan students said that they were a joy to have in the classes, and they wish they had more students of that caliber. And I wish we had more American students who were as well motivated to succeed. (Administrator)

> It's really burdensome, you know. You feel like I can't disappoint these guys. I have to be great. … It can be motivating sometimes, it may help you not get distracted, but it may also stress you out, depress you. If you fail once, you feel like oh, it's over. My career is dead, or it's going to die. (Student)

The racial diversity—or lack thereof—on Metro and Liberal campuses influenced the preconceptions that Rwandan students encountered. At Metro, where there were significantly more African American students, some Rwandan students described initially encountering faculty members with the expectation that they would not be strong students. However, they explained that it did not take long before they began to gain a reputation for their exceptional academic performance. Students at Liberal, a campus with significantly less racial and international diversity, spoke of having been preceded by a reputation for academic excellence. Many expressed feeling pressure to rise to the high bar set by their predecessors from Rwanda. While these two groups of Rwandan students described slightly varied encounters with negative and positive academic stereotypes, both spoke extensively of the challenge of being viewed as Rwanda's "best and brightest."

Not only did this representation set high academic expectations among faculty and community members in the U.S.; it also raised expectations among family, friends, and government officials in Rwanda. Several students expressed concern that these expectations were based on a misperception that Presidential Scholars are exceptionally intelligent:

> There is a big sense of responsibility. First, the way we are perceived by other fellow Rwandans, or high school friends, or other people in college in Rwanda gives us responsibility. They think we are smarter than really we are. They really expect more from us. When we think about it, it's like hey, I'm graduating next

> year. I don't know what I'm gonna do now. You say ok, I don't need to disappoint them.

Fear of disappointing others by failing to succeed academically and professionally was a common theme in student interviews. The following quote from a student captures the widespread concern with how the responsibility associated with being perceived as brilliant back home makes the prospect of failure all the more acute:

> Sometimes [our responsibility] is stressful, because they selected the students who are really brilliant and the best in the country, so people back home expect you to be a genius. Even here, professors believe Rwandan students are really smart, so in class they think it's really easy for you. But when you get there, it's not really easy for everybody. When you get there, you feel like you are failing. Not even failing for the class, but failing for your country and yourself. So it's really stressful sometimes. But on the other hand, it kind of pushes you to go forward. You're like I need to do this. I've got this chance. I need to take advantage of every opportunity that I can get so you're kind of getting the most from the scholarship and the program. It's bittersweet.

This reputation for academic brilliance was closely tied to the expectation that students would return to Rwanda successful. Another student elaborated on how returning to "struggle" or to "become useless" would be socially catastrophic:

> Just coming back, I think they expect something that you have that they don't. … Let's say you have nothing and you begin the same life, struggling, you see how bad that is? So, combining it with people – the government or other people that

> have those expectations from us – it becomes too much. But it's good. It gives us a target, or pushes us to do something. … The scary thing is that you won't achieve it. As I told you, you go there and you become useless. That's the scary thing.

Becoming useless upon return to Rwanda was widely viewed as the ultimate failure. These narratives explain how being represented as Rwanda's "best and brightest" contributes to the perception that small failures are hugely consequential.

Cultural Beings

> Arguing that nationality is the most salient of identities because it is national borders that are being crossed oversimplifies the experiences of educational sojourners and ignores the ways in which international students recreate or contest cultural or alien ideologies. (Gargano, 2009, p. 340)

Another common way in which Rwandan students were represented was as bearers of Rwandan culture. As international students in general and Rwandan students in particular, the scholarship students were viewed as bringing distinct cultural traditions and perspectives to U.S. campuses and were regularly called upon to perform their culture—especially Rwandan dance. Limited notions of culture were frequently employed to explain differences between Rwandan students and other students, support adjustment to life in the U.S., and bring diverse perspectives and experiences to the classroom. The following vignettes offer glimpses of the kind of representations that occurred in co-curricular and off-campus settings. They reveal a widespread view of

culture as something to be performed and celebrated through food, clothing and dance, as well as the predominant emphasis on nationality as central to students' identity.

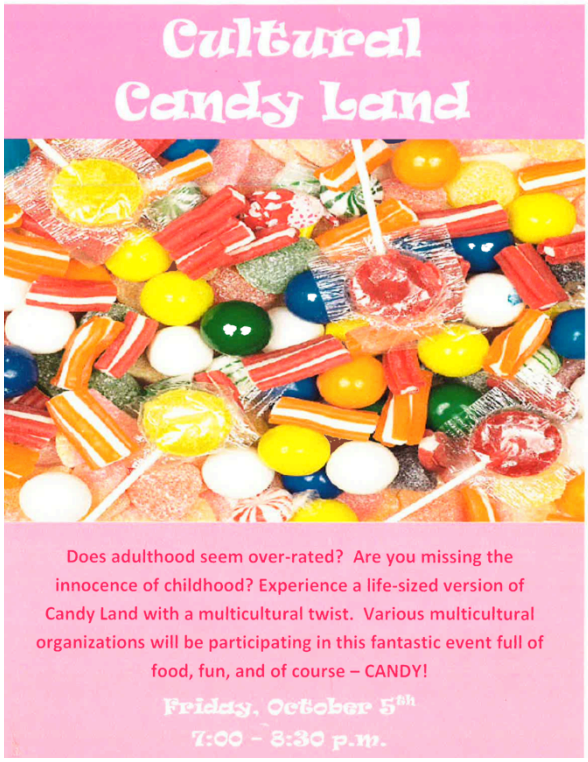

Figure 1: Cultural Candyland Flyer

Cultural Candyland

Several events were organized during my time at Liberal and Metro campuses to celebrate the diversity on campus. Although international diversity is limited, it has grown in the past several years along with the services designed to serve multicultural and international students. The first event I attended was Cultural Candyland, a fair advertising the different services and student organizations available on campus. The Multicultural Student Affairs staff had spent weeks crafting giant versions of popular candies and I had watched the copy room down the hall from my office gradually fill with larger than life Reese's Pieces, Runts and York Peppermint Patties, among other sweets.

By the night of the event, the room looked like a life-sized version of the children's board game, and students attending the event were sent from table to table to listen to a short spiel about student groups including Amnesty International, the African American Student Association, International club, and a smattering of groups for students from particular regions and nations such as India, Mexico and Asia. The flashy and fun celebration of diversity along with the free candy scattered around the tables drew a sizeable crowd and many international students were present, including those from Rwanda, were present at the event. They circulated around the room to learn what each organization—and each culture represented by the various student groups—had to offer.

Later in the semester, I attended several International Week events, which included a variety of internationally themed festivities. There was a flag hanging ceremony, an international fashion show, an international talent show, and an international food bazaar. "Come enjoy some culture, fashion and food," read the invitational email. I was informed that Rwandan dance performances had won the talent show at this event several years in a row. However, the leader of the dance troop had graduated and no one had stepped up to replace her. At the talent show, several students from Rwanda, dressed in contemporary Rwandan fashion. They walked up and down the runway twice, as a sparse audience cheered them on.

The following day, I passed by the international food bazaar. International students had prepared a variety of foods from around the world. Although the event was well attended, I found the students from Rwanda that were present seated at a table together. The students discussed how they are viewed around campus. They shared that

after several years of having a Rwandan presence on campus, students are much more familiar with Rwanda and less prone to hold negative stereotypes. One explained,

> *I was lucky to find out there were other Rwandans before me who were here at Liberal, so most students knew about Rwandans. ... You just talk to [some students] and they don't know anything about Rwanda or Africa. ... Sometimes we lie to them just making a joke, telling them you can have a gorilla in your back yard, which is not true. And they accept it. "We will come to your house and see it." And I say, "Yeah, sure, you can come there." Sometimes I think really? Can you think this is true?*

The students also expressed surprise and frustration with the limited views of Rwanda and Africa that they continue to encounter. "I was not surprised by being asked if I was a Hutu or a Tutsi, but I was surprised when I was asked if I really lived in a jungle," one stated. Another added,

> *Most people, the first thing they are going to say is hey, I have seen that movie Hotel Rwanda. Then they start asking if you were there when everybody killed the other. ... The understanding they have of Rwanda is violence, poverty, hatred. ... They'll be like hey, you're from Rwanda? How did you survive? Do you guys have this and this? They expect us to be very poor, very violent, involved in wars all the time. Some people really know what's going on, but most people who have just seen the movie will ask you strange questions. ... And of course they just associate you with Africa. Africans, we tend to be singular for some reason. You're from Africa? Man. You're supposed to be like this.*

While students expressed some pride in their academic reputation and the intrigue with certain aspects of Rwandan culture, many indicated surprise that so many Americans had such limited familiarity with their country and actually believed that coming from Rwanda meant that one had grown up in a village surrounded by exotic wildlife. For some students, this was an opportunity to develop elaborate stories and perpetuate these misconceptions, while others took this as an opportunity to challenge stereotypical images of Africa. Many were discouraged by the discovery that most Americans who did know something about Rwanda knew only about the 1994 genocide and continued to associate the country with its violent past. In contrast, they were encouraged by encounters with community members—usually those involved with local churches doing work in Rwanda—who viewed Rwanda as a country that has made great strides toward reconciliation and spoke optimistically about its social and economic progress.

These observations of international events and conversations with students about how they are viewed on campus also reveal that although unfamiliar foods and dances are celebrated, other aspects of cultural difference receive considerably less attention. Observations off campus revealed a similarly limited notion of cultural difference. Most of the events I attended in the surrounding community were organized by the International Friendship Connection (IFC),[19] an organization that connects church members with any interested international students at surrounding colleges and universities by facilitating conversation clubs, organizing excursions and holiday celebrations, and recruiting American host families. Interviews with several of these

[19] This is a pseudonym for the actual organization.

community members and observations of events that brought Rwandan students together with individuals from local churches show how students are represented not only as an opportunity to celebrate diversity but also as an international mission field—an opportunity to show faith-based compassion and promote certain theological messages.

The IFC grew out of a desire to offer hospitality to international students. One of the leaders of this organization explained in an interview that upon hearing a statistic that 90% of international students never enter an American home during their sojourn in the U.S., a group of people from local churches got together and started matching international students with American families. "It all stems because we are followers of Jesus." S/he went on to explain:

> The scripture tells us that a man came up to Jesus and asked what is the greatest commandment, and he said 'Love God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.' But he added, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' … When someone comes in your country, you treat them like you would treat your own people. You love them the same. When we heard that statistic that students were coming from other countries and not receiving that type of love, we wanted to show that same kind of kindness.

A community member involved with another organization that collaborated with IFC to connect Rwandan students in particular with individuals from local churches spoke of Rwandan scholarship students as a way to get suburban Americans more deeply engaged with church ministries in Rwanda. This community leader explained that Rwandan students were instrumental in helping church members begin to see Rwandans

as more than just as "poor kids in a village" and begin to develop commitments to supporting the work that their churches and local organizations are doing in Rwanda. S/he explained that as these community members came to see Rwandans as students who shared ambitions similar to their own children, their views began to shift:

> We have had a lot of families and churches in [the area] get involved with Rwanda over the last 10 years. You know, people have gone on trips. We've done drives for school supplies and stuff. … So, Rwanda was something that a lot of people were doing. But the biggest challenge we always had was how do we actually get people here to stay emotionally engaged in a mission that's happening on the other part of the world. … The Rwandan scholar fixed, changed all that, because all of a sudden, instead of, you know, we were bringing the mission to them. … These students come in and they start banging out A's in all these hard classes, and you realize that these kids are a lot smarter than the kids, than my kids are. You know, I mean most Rwandans, you know, I've got really great kids, but academically they don't compare to these kids. And so, you know, so all of a sudden you look at them in a completely different light when you realize that they are more capable than most of the people you know. And that's not the way we normally look at charity and mission and stuff like that.

In these community member interviews, Rwandan students were represented both as an opportunity to offer hospitality as well as an opportunity to cultivate empathy and engage American Christians in global work by bringing it close to home. Their presence helped

shift Rwanda from "something people were doing" to a place with youth abounding with talent and potential.

During my fieldwork, I attended several of the conversation clubs held at local churches or religiously affiliated student unions on the outskirts of campuses to observe these spaces in which students interacted with members of the local community. Each time, there were several students from Rwanda present, usually from at least two different colleges. Upon entering, I would receive a nametag sticker and a Sharpe marker to write my name. The evenings began with a pot-luck dinner prepared by members of a different church each week. Everyone ate at round tables, which were divided into conversation groups following the meal. Each group was given a handout with several discussion prompts and English idioms. They dispersed after dinner to spend around an hour discussing various topics about their lives and demystifying idioms such as 'putting all your eggs in one basket' and 'throwing in the towel.' Toward the end of the semester, I attended celebrations organized by IFC on two different campuses. The following vignette provides an account of these events and shows how students both accommodated and resisted the ways in which they were expected to represent and perform particular aspects of their national culture.

"I'm Saudi, but I don't do Saudi dance."

The last conversation club of the semester was held in the Baptist Student Union on the edge of Metro campus. Upon arrival, I was warmly welcomed by the event organizer. After greeting me, s/he introduced me to some Iraqi women who were sitting

on the far side of the room. We chatted for a few minutes until it was time for a talent show to begin.

The show opened with a variety of acts introduced by the organizer. There was a young Chinese pianist who impressed the crowd by playing a long and challenging piece from memory, a local performing a collection of American children's songs, an Indian doctoral student who sang some poetry, and a worship song performed by two African American students. This was followed by a request for the Rwandan students to dance. "Are the Rwandans going to dance?" the event organizer scanned the crowd for the Rwandan students. "We love it when the Rwandans dance. Don't y'all love it when the Rwandans dance?" s/he asked the crowd, which responded with an enthusiastic cheer. "After four years, we know you're not shy," s/he added. "We love it when the Saudis dance too."

There was some shuffling and the Rwandan students moved to the front, whispering amongst themselves. They decided they needed to organize some music first, and requested that a few other acts go first. Someone stepped forward to teach the crowd how to line dance to "The Waddle." By the time the line dance finished, the Presidential Scholars were ready, although not particularly prepared or enthusiastic. Someone hooked their cell phone up to the speakers to play a popular Rwandan song and the group began to sway gracefully to the music, surrounded by appreciative onlookers seated in metal folding chairs. They were still waving their arms in the air like cow horns when the D.J. decided to cut the music and end the performance. The crowd applauded

and another request was made for the hesitant Saudis to follow with a traditional dance from another part of the word. The "Saudi's" still weren't ready.

After a nervous performance of the Haitian national anthem, one Saudi student got up and performed a traditional style Saudi dance by himself. Once again, the crowd was visibly pleased. Then another student from Saudi Arabia stepped forward. "I'm Abduni," said the young man in fitted jeans and a white t-shirt. "I am Saudi, but I don't do Saudi dance so you'll have to excuse me. I'm going to break dance for you." With that, he put on some music and started break dancing, impressing some and astonishing others with this display of global youth culture. This was followed by several performances by locals, including a French horn rendition of Amazing Grace, a guy who announced that he was "channeling his inner Louis Armstrong" and proceeded to perform "Oh When the Saints Go Marching In," and a trio of older men singing "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" a cappella. Finally, there was a short message elaborating on the theme of the hymn, and a closing song to end the evening of celebrating music and dance from around the world and introducing the story of Christianity.

In addition to providing a vivid illustration of how international students responded to community members' expectations that they represent their cultures in particular ways, this vignette reveals that some community members view international students as an opportunity to offer hospitality and while doing so, share the Christian faith. A community leader involved in partnering with the IFC explained how she views the opportunity as a ministry to both show God's love and present particular messages about God to international students:

> We do some Bible studies for internationals if they are interested in learning more about Jesus. We do lots of things. Some of the things that we really try to focus on are things like helping students grow and in that growth, helping them understand who God is and grow into a relationship with him. Once they get to know him, learn how to grow and develop that relationship with the Lord. Also, help them get connected to a local church. We also encourage them, equip them, to learn how to serve the world through missions, through service projects, through just being selfless and looking for other needs and how they might meet those needs in various ways. We put a lot of effort into helping people understand God's heart for the world and how much he loves all the different people in the world.

While different songs and dances from around the world were welcomed and celebrated at the community events, the sharing of an evangelistic message indicated that the religious diversity present was a matter of concern rather than something to celebrate. The above vignette also shows that while community members expected students to present traditional aspects of their culture, they were surprised when instead students demonstrated their affinity for aspects of global youth culture with which some of these church members were less comfortable.

Another context where I observed how scholarship students were represented and represented themselves on campus was in the classroom. While my observations varied depending on my weekly interview schedule, I typically observed three classes per week. These classes included a combination of courses designed specifically to support international students in their adjustment to a new academic and social environment and a

variety of social science courses in which students from Rwanda were enrolled. Although the majority of courses Presidential Scholars take are science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) courses, I did not include STEM courses in my observations because they are very content-focused and involve little discussion. Based on discussions with a variety of faculty and program administrators, I determined that the social science courses would provide greater insight into my questions of interest. I also interviewed a variety of faculty members that have taught students from Rwanda in STEM and social science courses. Some of these interviews are incorporated in the following vignettes.

I found that one of the courses specifically designed for international students sought to have students reflect on cultural difference in order to understand and navigate life in the U.S. Despite the utility of classes that aimed at highlighting 'cultural difference' as a salient issue, I began to realize that much of what Presidential Scholars struggle with throughout their time abroad was related to the broader economic, political, and social constraints within which they operate. This is illustrated in the following vignette from a class in which exploring cultural difference was a major focus.

Culture in the classroom

The first class session of the semester focused on discussing the topic of culture shock and understanding the differences students encounter.

Professor: Are there any barriers that make it challenging for you to interact with American students?

Student from Rwanda: Yes, drinking. It's not that bad, it's the way they do it. It's not about religion or culture. It's about self-control.

Professor: That's an example of ethnocentrism, the very human belief that your culture is better than other cultures. Let's think about why. The first time many Americans can experience some things like drinking alcohol is in college. [Name of college] intentionally creates a safe place for students to try these new things.

Student from Rwanda: In my country, we drink and we talk. They drink and they jump around.

Professor: Yes, they dance. When you are in these situations, think about how maybe it is culture.

Throughout the semester, students were assigned academic or news articles to read about U.S. culture prior to the beginning of the following course. Students also completed a variety of written assignments to assist them in developing their writing skills – a major challenge for the students from Rwanda whose secondary education in the sciences had placed little emphasis on writing. Topics addressed included emic and etic perspectives on cultural observation, communication, social relationships, academic relationships, pop culture, religion and culture, holidays (Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas), U.S. political culture, American worldview, food and culture, and gift giving. Throughout my observations, I noticed that generalization usually happened at the level of the nation, and comparisons were made primarily between "American culture," "Vietnamese culture," "Chinese culture," "Rwandan culture," etc. Generalizations regarding cultural differences were almost always made on the basis of national affiliation and rarely associated with other dimensions of identity, with the exception of occasional references to gendered differences.

Another class session was on the topic of relationships. The discussion began with students brainstorming a list of concerns and misunderstandings they have encountered regarding the meaning of friendship and dating in the U.S. In the conversation that ensued, students from Rwanda discussed their perspectives on how much was appropriate to communicate with others. They emphasized the importance of guarding personal information.

Student from Zimbabwe: In my relationships back home, if you don't tell your friends everything, it can lead to conflict.

[The students from Rwanda quickly jumped in to counter this point.]

First student from Rwanda: There are certain affairs that are personal and even wouldn't be shared with close friends.

Second student from Rwanda: Telling everything to your friends can create dependence. You should tell the truth, but reserve some for yourself. Don't be open like an open space.

First student from Rwanda: Like if your dad stole a goat, you wouldn't tell your friend. You have to keep some secrets, because if someone gets the weak point out of you, they can easily turn and do something bad.

In light of how Rwanda's tragic history has cultivated widespread distrust, this conversation is a pertinent illustration of the limitations of a cultural difference framework without an equally strong emphasis on the historical context for explaining differences, such as the level of trust in relationships. Overall, the vignette illustrates a practice of representing and supporting international students primarily as students who

struggle academically and socially due to their cultural background. While classroom discussions presented opportunities for talking about culture in relation to historical and political context, engagement with the political histories of students' home countries was limited.

In my observations of social science courses and conversations with faculty, I found a widespread interest in drawing on students' perspectives as international students to enhance the learning experience for all students. I also discovered, however, that there were limits to the extent to which students from Rwanda were comfortable sharing their experiences and perspectives in the classroom. The following two classroom vignettes provide examples of classroom interactions in which students from Rwanda were and were not comfortable representing their background and sharing their experiences with other students.

Introduction to Psychology

Early on in the semester, I met a professor of psychology. This professor was interested in my research, and invited me to visit two sessions of the introductory class, both of which had a student from Rwanda. I was informed of the days when the professor planned to draw on international student perspectives in the class discussion. One of these days was focused on the topic of cognitive development in childhood. The classes were looking at Vygotsky's theories, which emphasize sociocultural influences on the skills and knowledge developed during childhood, and the professor had invited the students from Rwanda to share their thoughts and experiences in class. I accepted the offer to attend both sessions.

Both classes began with a lecture on the various stages of child development. This was followed by an overview of the different researchers who have had a significant influence on the field of child development and shaped current thinking. After being introduced to Vygotsky's scaffolding theory, which emphasizes that culture dictates what people need to learn and the skills they need to develop, students were asked about the skills that are most valued in U.S. culture. A variety of responses were offered, including being athletic, working hard, developing social skills, and being independent. "I would like to take advantage of the diversity in our class and have [our student from Rwanda] talk a little bit about what's valued in Rwanda; what's similar and what differs."

The student in the first class stood up and described how Rwandan parents praise children when they first walk, how they are encouraged to use their right hand even if they are left handed and given tea without sugar when they wet the bed in order to train them out of this. S/he explained that kids don't eat with grown-ups unless you've done something really good that merits getting invited to eat with them. When the professor asked what kinds of behaviors were reinforced in schools, s/he responded that sports were important and students learned that they needed to be strong to defend themselves. S/he also noted that science is heavily encouraged because there are many opportunities in Rwanda if you study science, including the chance to go to the U.S. "That's neat," the professor affirmed. "Thank you very much for sharing, and thanks to everyone else for talking about your experiences. You can see how much cultural context shapes learning."

The second class had two international students: one from Rwanda and another from China. The student from Rwanda was invited to speak first. "In Rwanda, the thing

which is very important is parents wish their kids can accomplish studying," s/he explained. "When you have education you will be rich. They always tell you to go to school so you become someone important, get a good job, and have authority in society." S/he added that children are also taught to do physical activities because if they fail to continue in their schooling, they will have to do farming. "We develop muscles because we don't have cars. We're walking. I became lazy when I came here. I can't walk to Wal-Mart." Like the previous student, s/he also explained that students in Rwanda are encouraged to study science. "What you study depends on how society treats people and who gets hired. When you want to have an auspicious future, you take sciences. If you study other things, sometimes we believe you won't get jobs in Rwanda. We want our country to industrialize and develop, and sciences contribute to that. After her/his presentation, the Chinese student shared some observations about childhood in China. The students from U.S. were then asked to comment on how their experiences were similar or different.

After class, the professor expressed satisfaction with how the discussion went, noting that it would be nice to have more international students in the upper level classes because of the valuable contributions they make. The professor found that the discussion even engaged some of the students who usually sit off to the side and sometimes fall asleep during the lectures.

In contrast to this classroom environment where students comfortably shared about certain aspects of their childhood experiences, students taking a history course focused on the Great Lakes Region of Africa, of which Rwanda is a part, were much

more hesitant to share their perspectives in class. My observations of this class indicated that while a number of students from Rwanda were interested in exploring topics related to the history and politics of their home region, they kept their thoughts as they did so largely to themselves.

History of the Great Lakes Region

I attended a history class focused on the Great Lakes region of Africa on several occasions. Focusing on the history of the ongoing conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo, it involved frequent references to current events. My observations coincided with a period during which Rwanda was in the news more frequently, being critiqued for its involvement in the Congo. The class was reading a book by Jason Stearns, titled "Dancing in the Glory of Monsters: The Collapse of the Congo and the Great War of Africa." On my first visit, I sat in a circle with the students as they discussed questions about one of the chapters. Two students from Rwanda were present and said little during the class discussion.

After class, I asked one of the two Rwandan students in the class what s/he thought of the book. "I hate that book. And I hate discussing politics with American students." Several days later in another conversation, s/he expressed that his animosity now encompasses the entire discipline of history: "I hate history," s/he explained, "because Stearns accuses Rwanda of fueling Congo's problems." S/he went on to describe how other authors have done a better job of showing how colonialism and neocolonialism are the source of the country's complex conflict.

This interaction, in addition to discussions with this particular student in other contexts, suggested that the individual's hostility toward critical discussions of Rwanda was a guise for the processing of new ideas and perspectives. Like many of the students, s/he seemed to be caught between a desire to be a loyal Rwandan citizen, and to develop her/his own perspectives on contentious issues. Throughout my fieldwork, I noticed that some of the students that reacted most strongly to the representations of Rwanda they encounter in the U.S. were also among those most interested in asking questions and carrying on these discussions with me. I interpreted her/his response of denial and anger when encountering new perspectives as an indication that s/he is still processing these ideas, sifting them through her/his worldview, and beginning a process of deconstructing and reconstructing some of her/his prior understandings.

Other student interactions suggested that fear of spies and monitoring by the Rwandan government were one of the primary reasons that students were constrained in how they chose to represent their own perspectives and respond to representations of Rwanda. In a conversation with one student shortly after the death of a well-known Rwandan government official, I asked if the students from Rwanda talk more about their country when it makes the news. "No," s/he replied. "There are always spies, so we avoid talking about politics in Rwanda." As scholarship students and faculty alike made occasional references to a widespread paranoia among the students that they were being watched, I lamented that my research was contributing to their sense of being under surveillance.

I asked several faculty members if they identified any ways in which coming from a post-conflict context limited the ways in which students from Rwanda engaged in class activities. Several of the responses represented students as reserved and reluctant to fully participate in certain discussions that might reveal too much about their opinions or background. "It's hard to tell what's the limiting factor," one professor replied. "It's hard to tell whether the limiting factor is language, whether it is no willingness to challenge authority figures, or whether it's related to conflict. I think those are separate." This professor went on to share observations of a forum that happened on campus where students were hesitant to share their perspectives.

> I remember having a forum after Kagame's second election. I don't remember exactly the question that was posed, but this discussion certainly turned in the direction of would he ever actually step down. It took a while, I mean, we sat in silence for a while with a really substantial Rwandan contingent saying nothing. The tension there was palatable. You know the views were just dying to emerge, and they were super reluctant. It was a Kenyan student who started the conversation, and once he did, you sort of gradually got an expression of really tentative views and then it started to get more engaged after that. But it's a slow process, and I thought it was interesting that the first person to actually voice a view was a Kenyan.

Another professor in the social sciences shared that having students from Rwanda has changed the way the professor teaches. "Oh my gosh, I have made some terrible errors I feel like. Unintentional errors, but definitely. … I'll give you some of my bad

examples, which you can use." This professor provided two examples illustrating how certain topics covered in anthropology courses were particularly personal for students from Rwanda.

> So, the first time I really thought about it was the first intro class. I have an extra credit assignment. It's bonus. It's completely voluntary, that students can do a kinship chart. So, we're practicing how to write kinship charts, and I say, you know, do what you know, and then interview a family member and fill in what they know. And you use two different colors. And for exchange students or study-abroad students, I always say, you don't have to talk to your family member, just turn it in, right? For full credit. Well, this student came to me outside of class with a poster board and walked into my office, so he didn't turn it in in class. He came and said I want to give this to you. And at first, I was full of explanations, like this is wonderful. Oh my gosh, you've done such a good job. Look at these huge extended families. And then, they're all dead, right? So, that's one thing that's indicated on the chart, is just dead, dead, dead, dead, dead. Across this kinship chart. And it dawns on me like, this is why he's in my office and not turning it in in class. He's telling me about his family and he's opening up this opportunity for me to talk about that with him. And that was horrible. I mean it was so, and knowing Rwandan students now, they don't really turn down opportunities to do extra credit. They're looking for that A, so in a way, I say it's optional, but how optional is it? … So, that was terrible and dealing with that,

> and trying to think, I can't avoid it. I don't want to avoid it. But I also want them to, to be able to function in my class, right?

This professor's second example of how coming from a post-conflict context shaped how students engaged in classes involved showing a film involving an ax fight.

> It walks you through making a film. And no one is killed, no one is seriously injured, but it's a violent scene. And it's a real scene. Well, the [Rwandan] student who was in that class bolted out of class during that. And then [s/he] came back and we talked, talked about it. And [s/he] said, I'm really sorry – [s/he's] apologizing to me – and [s/he] said, but, I watch horror movies all the time. I love horror movies, but I can't look at machetes. Okay, that's fine. I don't want you to look at machetes. I wish I had warned you. I wish I had thought to think, you know, to say something about this. It's not, and [s/he] wasn't asking me to not show it. [S/he] wasn't, you know, upset with me. [S/he] was apologizing to me, and so there are these huge issues that rise up in my class. Now, they end up loving the class. They're not upset with me for putting them in that position, and I think in some ways there's a relief in having someone talk to you about it. That same person would come sit in my office and talk for hours, uninterrupted. You know, [s/he] would just tell me about her family. Maybe I was the space that she needed to do that, right? … It's really hard.

Other examples of how Rwandan students engaged in the classroom from these faculty interviews also indicated that as students determined that a particular classroom was a safe space, they spoke of their experiences in ways that deepened their own

learning experiences and those of their classmates. This is illustrated by several examples offered by another professor in the social sciences.

> I teach a freshman level class and for one of those sessions we were working on identity. With a typical American student population, how does your sense of identity change? Now that you're in college, do you define yourself differently? That was kind of the typical way that we expected that conversation to go. Mine was a little bit different because I had the Rwandan students in there. There was this absolutely glorious moment when we were trying to think about how you define your roles, the identities you take on, and one of the Rwandan students said "My identity, although I am Rwandan and was born in Rwanda, is actually Congolese. That's where I was during the genocide, so Rwandans don't consider me Rwandan because I haven't suffered." It was a really beautiful moment of thinking about how we constitute identity that I think made everybody in that room kind of take a step back. It worked perfectly, because certainly when you think about other groups, whether it's race or gender or whatever it is, there's a component to that. What is it that solidifies you as a group? Some kind of suffering is very kind of part of that. That was the moment when I thought holy cow, this program isn't about them, right? Like I believe they're getting a good education out of it and I'm glad about that, but I shifted from thinking about it as public service to the world to this is a serious educational contribution to this institution that I wasn't quite as conscious of before that moment.

Another example of Rwandan student participation in social science classrooms involved students offering a different perspective on the topic of democracy:

> I was teaching [a class on leadership]. If you want to understand this concept better from the position of social science, how would you go about approaching it. For sure there's a normative assumption in the U.S. that democracy is good. One of the Rwandan students said, "I don't know why you think that. Democracy in my country would be a disaster. We have an authoritarian leader and it's a good thing." I think that also was a moment that just sort of left the room thinking, what? It was kind of a fun opportunity to challenge a really dominant assumption that they brought to that, that in terms of leadership, what we need to think about is how people cannot dominate too much, but still guide and [s/he] just absolutely said, "Maybe, but not always."

This professor provided several additional examples of moments that occurred in the classroom when s/he was unsure how to respond and engage with what students shared. On one occasion, in the same leadership class referenced in the previous example, a student talked about having a female relative that had been part of the RPF, Rwanda's current ruling political party that began as a rebel movement among members of the diaspora living in Uganda. "That was a really interesting moment in terms of both gender and understanding what the needs of an insurgency or revolutionary movement are," the professor explained. "I was caught between wanting to ask a thousand questions and not knowing how much to pursue," s/he added.

While representing childhood in Rwanda to a classroom of mostly American citizens appeared to be a comfortable way for students to bring aspects of their histories and identities into the classroom, the vignettes and faculty reflections on occurrences in their social science classrooms indicate the caution with which some students shared personal stories and perspectives. They also reveal a desire among some students to seek out spaces for reflection and the opportunities such spaces create for American and Rwandan students alike to look at the world from a slightly different angle.

Concerning Representations of Rwandan Youth

While Rwandan students frequently reported encountering a lack of awareness and both positive and negative stereotypes from Americans they met in the community groups or from fellow students, they also encountered representations of Rwanda and Rwandans from academics familiar with some of the scholarship about post-genocide Rwanda. For faculty at both Liberal and Metro, the presence of Rwandan students in their classrooms often sparked an interest in learning more about a nation that they primarily associated with the genocide that made mainstream news in the mid-1990s. Some were amazed with the country's recovery and progress toward reconciliation, while others questioned the nation's trajectory and the government's human rights track record.

One faculty member I met during my first weeks on campus took an especially critical stance toward Rwanda's President, Paul Kagame. S/he described the scholarship program as largely supported by "a bunch of Evangelicals who have drunk the Kagame Kool-Aid." This professor also expressed frustration that Rwandan students "get huffy" when asked about their ethnicity and tell people that they are Rwandan, which s/he found

to be a disappointing denial of identity that thwarted the professor's interest in knowing the ethnic backgrounds of the scholarship recipients.

Students also had an opportunity to attend a public talk given by a researcher who has studied Rwanda and visited campus during my fieldwork. This researcher articulated challenges facing Rwandans today, particularly Rwandan youth, as one finds in much of the academic scholarship on the country. The research findings presented were based on a study that was carried out with Rwandan government input and approval, and the researcher emphasized that in addition to being consulted during all stages of the research design, government officials had confirmed all of the study's major findings. Nevertheless, the research findings presented challenged pre-set conceptions of the realities facing ordinary youth in Rwanda and were difficult for some of the Rwandan students to hear. They discussed the concerns raised by the researcher in a number of settings in the days after the event. For example, the day after the public lecture, I ran into two students who were discussing some of the main points from the talk.

> "I'm getting out."
>
> "I'm going back to face the challenge. I don't really agree with his sampling. I'm from a humble family and that's not the reality I know. But we have to face things."
>
> "Umva. Umva. [Listen. Listen.] We can't do anything. …"

The students proceeded to argue about whether or not anything could be done about the economic and political challenges presented. Eventually, one left, and the other continued walking with me.

> "Most of the guys here, they don't want to go back."
>
> "What do you think is the main reason for that?"
>
> "Because they're scared. You can make all the money in the world in Kigali, but if you live in fear, it's nothing."

Earlier, this student had asked the visiting researcher if s/he was concerned that the challenges facing Rwandan youth might lead to conflict, suggesting that this was a reference to living in fear of what might happen in Rwanda in the future.

A little while later, I ran into another student who had heard the researcher speak on campus. We were scheduling an interview for the following day, and the student paused before changing the subject to the talk. "You just have to tell me honestly what you think about this stuff." I replied that it makes me concerned, and that I have observed both progress and fear in Rwanda. "I can't believe [the researcher's work], but it brings up a lot to think about," s/he admitted. After questioning me with interest on what I have read and think about education policies in Rwanda, s/he resorted back to dismissing anything a non-Rwandan might have to say about her/his country. "You people just don't see things right." "Maybe not, but it's good to keep having these conversations," I replied as we parted ways.

Students' responses to academics' representations of Rwanda and Rwandan youth illustrated the students' commitment to defending their government's policies as well as a limited awareness of criticisms of the country by those outside its borders. At the same time, however, it was evident that students were thinking deeply about the points raised by the researcher. For instance, several days later in a conversation with a student who

had attended the talk, qualitative research came up. The student explained that s/he doesn't really like qualitative research, particularly when it's about Rwanda. "I read it, and I don't like it because it's not really Rwanda," s/he explained. "But then I start thinking maybe it is." Others expressed similar questions about how one does research to get 'real' Rwandans' views. One student who had chosen not to attend the researcher's lecture recounted a conversation that s/he had when another student who had attended:

> I was writing a report in the library when they said, "Hey, this researcher was talking about Rwanda. [S/he] generated some ideas from people that present Rwanda not the way it really is. [S/he] went to the countryside and asked them questions." That's what they were telling me. Then I asked them, "So, was the countryside in Uganda or Tanzania?" "It was Rwanda." *[Laughs]* "So why are you saying he presented Rwanda the way it's not, not the way it is? They are Rwandans. They are people. Kigali's not Rwanda."

Several students who had been present at the event shared that while they were critical of some data that were presented, they found other aspects insightful and accurate. For example, one interviewee explained,

> When I went to that talk, I thought it was very interesting because [the researcher] saw some things I actually didn't see. [The researcher's] points, I agreed with them. ... But I actually never thought of it that way. … But again, [the researcher] said that Rwandans are not interested in education—that's not exactly what [the researcher] said, I'm just paraphrasing here—and they will go out of school so they can build a house. I was like ok. I don't agree with that. It depends on who

> you are talking with. People want to study, and a lot of people are getting there. … Rwanda has changed a lot. … There are different ways of viewing Rwanda, and it depends on who you interact with, it depends on if you've been there, and what you want to think. What you want to believe actually counts. I love my country. I want to believe we're doing great, and I see everything that proves that we're doing great. You're from here, you get everything from the news, they're not always positive about it, so you definitely have your view and if you're thinking something, you'll definitely see something that actually proves it.

For these students, representations of Rwandans by academics were sometimes difficult to accept as they did not align with the more optimistic messages that many wanted to believe. Some exhibited a sense of loyalty and obligation to defend their government and protect their nation from what they see as misrepresentation. As college students, they also sought to maintain their hope that life in Rwanda is improving. Without this belief, it would be difficult for them to go on working toward a brighter future for their country.

Moreover, it was difficult for the students to engage in conversations about Rwandan realities in public due to fear of being under surveillance. The choice on the part of some students to avoid the researcher's presentation altogether reflects a strategy of avoiding risk by avoiding controversial conversations. These observations confirm Sommers' (2012) finding that precaution or risk aversion is a prominent tendency among Rwandan youth yet challenge his proposition that "elite Rwandan youth might very well have the ability to express their agency more openly and forcefully [than economically

impoverished youth]," (p. 201). In contrast, this research suggests that even far outside of Rwanda's borders, Presidential Scholars—a relatively privileged group of Rwandan youth by virtue of their mobility—are similarly wary of discussing topics and expressing perspectives that may be perceived as negative portrayals of life in Rwanda in the presence of their Rwandan peers. In one-on-one conversations, students exhibited less self-censorship and more frequently expressed concerns with inequality as well as their frustration with the ways in which their government and their peers downplay suffering in Rwanda.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined how Rwanda and Rwandans are represented on and around U.S. campuses and how scholarship students from Rwanda respond to these representations. The chapter illustrates how being from Rwanda—a country associated with both a violent past and intriguing cultural traditions, and viewed by some as pursuing a highly promising vision and by others as being on a deeply concerning trajectory—affects their experiences in the U.S. in distinct and formative ways. I argue that these representations contribute to the production of a transnational rather than an international space in which scholarship students study and live. It is a transnational space because student responses to the representations of Rwanda and Rwandans they encounter while studying the U.S. are shaped in significant ways by their prior experiences in Rwanda, government expectations that they will represent their nation in particular ways as ambassadors, and questions surrounding their country's future stability

and likely trajectory as it relates to their own career plans and desires to make a meaningful contribution to the lives of other Rwandans.

First, I described the academic reputation of the scholarship students as Rwanda's "best and brightest" and showed how this representation produces pressure and adds to the fear of failure introduced in the previous chapter. Second, I discussed representations of Rwandan students as bearers of Rwandan culture. This included a description of how cultural diversity was celebrated in and outside of the classroom and how culture was viewed as the primary explanation for differences and adjustment challenges. I concluded that these representations and uses of culture reveal oversimplified and nation-centric notions of culture that are largely devoid of historical and political context. In addition to my observations, I drew on faculty interviews to show how students were represented as inhibited by historical and socio-political context and provide examples of how coming from a post-conflict context impacts the ways in which Rwandan students engage with course materials and add to the diversity of perspectives in U.S. classrooms. These faculty reflections demonstrated a more nuanced understanding of culture and its role in shaping teaching and learning experiences.

Third, I examined how students responded to critical representations of Rwanda by academics. In particular, I noted how an academic's public discussions of his/her research about Rwanda prompted students to challenge certain representations to do while also spurring many to reflect on the research findings and the challenges facing Rwanda in relation to their own future trajectories. This section in particular indicated both a desire and a sense of responsibility among scholarship students to represent

Rwanda in a positive light while also acknowledging the challenges the country continues to face.

In the following chapter, I further examine students' self-representations. Building on this analysis of how students responded to representations of Rwanda and Rwandans in public and private spaces, I examine how the scholarship students interacted with each other and with my research project. I explore the ways in which students begin to ask new questions, develop new formulations of themselves, and (re)imagine the future in response to their experiences of America and transformed spatial understandings.

CHAPTER 6

LIVED SPACE:

THE EVERYDAY LIVES AND REIMAGINED FUTURES OF RWANDAN SCHOLARSHIP STUDENTS

> Space is a lived, felt, and experienced phenomenon that is negotiated through both larger historical relations and the contingencies of everyday life. Space is thus imbued with ideological and political content; it involves dealing with broader structures, including various contrasting representations of space and spatial practices, and working towards social imaginaries of various kinds. (Rizvi, 2010, p. 8)

Introduction

In the preceding chapters, I have argued that the representational practices of actors in the U.S. and Rwanda involved with the Rwanda Presidential Scholars Program produce a transnational education space characterized by tension, responsibility, and fear of failure. In this chapter, I examine how Rwandan scholarship students experience and negotiate this transnational education space in their daily lives, on and off campus. The chapter is organized around three common themes present in the students' narratives: transformation, isolation, and struggle. The argument developed throughout these sections is twofold. First, I contend that students' spatial imaginaries are transformed by their experiences in the U.S. and Rwanda in ways that pose challenging dilemmas. Second, I assert that students' ability to strategically negotiate these dilemmas and (re)imagine their futures is constrained in significant ways by coming from a low-income

nation shaped by a history of identity-based conflict.

Transformation

Rwandan scholarship students' spatial understandings and imagined future trajectories are transformed in significant ways as they move back and forth between Rwanda and education locales in the U.S.[20] In this section, I describe the strikingly similar imaginaries of 'America' that students had formed prior to travelling abroad and examine how students' spatial understandings are dislodged through their experiences in the U.S. and upon returning to Rwanda half way through their studies for a summer internship. I refer to students' views of America and Rwanda as 'spatial' because their understandings of these geographical places are imbued with significant social meaning. They are social imaginaries, constructed through social relations and cultural practices (Rizvi, 2010). I also analyze the ways in which students negotiate their sense of space and reimagine their future trajectories as they discover unanticipated constraints and possibilities through their lived experiences abroad.

Imagining America

For many students, exposure to media images and conversations with other Rwandans prior to travelling abroad shaped imaginaries of America as paradise. Exposure to these images produced visions of the U.S. as a place drastically different from Rwanda. In contrast to perceptions of Rwanda as characterized by underdevelopment, struggle, and uncertainty, America was imagined an idealized place

[20] Student perceptions of their social responsibilities and obligations also undergo significant transformation but are not discussed here because they were elaborated in Chapter 4.

of development, abundant opportunity, and certain success. “Of course, everyone wants to go to the U.S.,” one student explained. “You think if you go to the U.S., you are on your way to heaven. It’s like another level of heaven.” Many of the descriptions offered by the students indicated similar understandings of America as paradise, a place where soil was covered with carpet or concrete. “You hardly step on the land,” one student explained, “so I thought it was like paradise, everywhere is like skyscrapers.” As described in the following quotes, paradise was envisioned as a place where cities, technology and education were highly developed and wealth was abundant:

> All I knew about the U.S. was what I could read in books and see in movies. So if you watch movies, you see America as a spectacular place. You see all those skyscrapers, all these highways, and you think this is the best country you can dream of.

> I used to watch American movies to hear what the U.S. was like; a very good country with high development, technology, stuff like that, so I was excited to come and see how it was this powerful country in the world. I was expecting to come and see these huge houses, huge buildings, to see and compare the education because I knew in Rwanda when you go to study abroad outside Rwanda, outside the continent of Africa, we believe that you will get much better education than you could get otherwise. So I was expecting to come and see differences in development, technology and education and stuff like that. I was expecting to come and be rich, because that’s what we Rwandans think—that all Americans are rich.

These words show that media-informed images of America led students to believe that studying in the U.S. would instantly transform their lives. Student narratives also indicated that the scholarship was viewed as an opportunity to escape the challenging conditions of studying in Rwanda, where many students struggle to pay their school fees while maintaining their livelihood. Students' expectations reflect a view of an education abroad as a "lottery ticket to a better life" (Collier, 2013, p. 197). "Life was hard for me in Rwanda," one student explained, "so I didn't think I was going to have things that I needed … enough money to be able to study in good conditions." Another contrasted her/his understanding of life as a student in Rwanda with life as a student in the U.S.:

> When I got this scholarship I was very happy. The first reason why I was happy was that I found I was not going to go to NUR [the National University of Rwanda]. I knew life there would not be easy for me, if I were there. I was happy to see I wouldn't be hungry anymore [going to the U.S.], and I'm not going to suffer…Of course, studying in the U.S. is everything that everyone in Rwanda wants to do.

In sum, students' spatial imaginaries of the U.S. were in stark contrast with their experiences of Rwanda. Whereas in Rwanda, students experienced and anticipated struggle, particularly as university students, in the U.S., students expected to lack nothing. The following sections describe how these understandings were dislodged as they confronted the similarities, differences, constraints, and possibilities of life in the U.S.

Encountering America

Once in the U.S., students began to reorient themselves to contexts that were different in many ways from what they imagined. Given the idealized images of America described above, students envisioned a direct relationship between obtaining a U.S. education and a secure future. Getting a good job and becoming rich were common expectations. Upon arrival in the U.S., however, students were shocked to realize that the differences were not as drastic as they had anticipated, nor were the opportunities as abundant. Several described their appreciation for the similarities they discovered and the ways this helped them adjust to their new surroundings:

> I believed all was just cities. I was surprised to see you can find some small places and small cities you can even find in Rwanda. … It was good because sometimes you like a place that is quiet and very similar to your own.

Some expressed relief that societal differences were not as drastic as anticipated:

> Before I came I always imagined America to be tall buildings, like you see in New York, in the movies. … I was like ok; I see this environment is really green. It kind of reminds me of Rwanda. So I felt like ok, you know, when you come from a town or country that is poor and then you get to a country that is really rich, you get kind of taken back. You're like ok, I'm not really civilized that much. I'm going to be left behind with this civilization and all. But when I got here, I didn't feel that way. I felt like ok, I belong here. I can adapt to this life. It's not that I'll be left behind. It kind of gave me hope that I'll adapt easy here.

Another similarity that students were surprised and disappointed to discover was that even in America, suffering is present. "It's still earth after all, you know," one student explained. "It's not as poor as African countries, but there's still many problems." This realization was often associated with exposure to forms of poverty that students never imagined to be present in the U.S., as described in the following quotes:

> I told you I thought the U.S. was like heaven. … When we arrived, things changed. I saw people walking, I saw beggars, people in the road begging. I saw people suffering. I saw homelessness. And I thought everywhere is the same. There is always trouble; there are always struggles. Life is different, but it doesn't matter where you are, you will still have people who struggle for their lives.
>
> One of the things that was really surprising was you know, to see a homeless muzungu [white person]. That was really surprising. You know, I thought that everyone in America was rich. But when I came here, that is not true. It was really surprising to see a homeless muzungu.

Beyond the presence of economic inequality, some also described observing social problems in America that they had not anticipated:

> [Rwandans] think they have a lot of problems there and there are no problems here, in America and Europe. [laughs] But on one side, sometimes I even think Americans have even more problems than we do. … I really think that Americans have a social problem, in their social life. I think they are too lonely to be happy in life. Or too busy, kind of. Because in Rwanda, I think in Rwanda life is easy. Maybe financially, Rwandans we are not, we don't have a lot of money, but life is

> easier this way. … Americans, every aspect of their lives involves money so they have to work hard and they have to be busy. … But for Rwandans, we really interact easily. And when you look at the homes … they have a house, really huge out there in the woods, and their kids have grown up, they have got married, and the people, they live there just two people, and you can't even hear birds here as you hear in Rwanda singing. There are not many birds here singing. So you think how does someone live a lonely life like this when everything else seems perfect in their life, but they're too lonely? It may not be a problem for Americans, but from my perspective, I see it as a social problem.

As noted in Chapter 4, another realization that altered students' spatial imaginaries was that the U.S. education system did not offer unlimited opportunities, nor would it guarantee employment in the U.S. or Rwanda upon graduation. Students gradually discovered the limitations of a four-year undergraduate degree and the challenges associated with pursuing further education, particularly in fields such as medicine. All grew increasingly aware of the competitive job markets in both Rwanda and the U.S. throughout their time abroad.

Expressing a growing sense of doubt that s/he would obtain a job in Rwanda upon graduation, one student explained, "When you come here to the U.S. you think you have high education, you get a better education than those in Rwanda. That's what we believe, but it might not be true, I don't know. I was expecting to get a job without trouble once I go back to Rwanda." The realization that even a U.S. education is no guarantee of success grew increasingly acute as students approached graduation. Another explained:

> Back in Rwanda, when we heard we were gonna be coming to the U.S. to study, some of us thought we're gonna come back and be ministers or President and everything. So, right now, I think there's way more to it than I knew, you know. Just coming to the U.S. doesn't answer everything. There are still some difficulties to face and challenges and everything. Success is not guaranteed. Because right now I am applying to grad school. I've been applying to different various schools, but I didn't get offered yet. Also I've applied to different companies for jobs. I'm like still in the process, you know. And right now, I'm kind of doubting. What's gonna happen to me? I'm still worrying about the future. I thought before I came, as soon as I got to the U.S., all my questions would be answered. But that's not the case. You still have to work, you still have to fret, you know.

These narratives reveal the extent to which spatial imaginaries of America formed in Rwanda are misaligned with students' lived experiences in the U.S. For many students, transitioning to life abroad was not only a process of cultural adjustment but also a journey of disenchantment as they began to realize unforeseen barriers to their success. Returning to Rwanda partway through their studies was a significant milestone—and often a major turning point—on this journey.

Re-encountering Rwanda

> [Returning to Rwanda] was very influential. … Now you're back in Africa. And immediately, everything you see, it will shock you. Everything you used to see and take as normal, now you will see them in new ways.

Between their second and third years of study in the U.S., Presidential Scholars were provided with an opportunity to return home for a summer internship. In theory, students were to be placed in internships arranged by Rwanda Education Board staff in Rwanda. In practice, students were largely on their own in planning their internship experience, and even those who had arrangements made on their behalf often returned to find that these plans were not as developed as they anticipated. While a few spoke of positive placement experiences, the vast majority did not. The inadequate planning, ineffective matches, limited supervision and instruction, and insignificant tasks that characterized the internships described in the following quotes all contributed to a process of students reimagining their future in relation to Rwanda.

> I went back and my internship was taken by another person, another Rwandan student. So I quietly didn't do much.
>
> [The internship was] not a great match. … Internships in Rwanda are free, usually. You don't get paid. At least for us, they didn't really expect much. I mean, I didn't do much. But on the other side, I think I learned some because I would tour [around the country]. But it was more of me learning than doing anything. I learned some stuff in my field. I saw how they built the buildings; I learned some technical stuff.
>
> It was not helpful, but it could be. … I got to do some work, but I felt like I did nothing. They would be there one day, then the next day they would be too busy, they're not showing you anything. … They'd be like oh, tomorrow we'll teach you this. Then tomorrow they say oh, I'm too busy, I will show it to you the next

day. So why do we bother to do those internships if we don't really get something?

In contrast, a minority of students spoke positively of their internship. These experiences were characterized by work environments where students felt productive, received instruction, and interacted with individuals that inspired students with their openness to new technologies and innovative ways of thinking.

> I went back to Rwanda and worked in an industry. … Those were a very happy three months. I got to know a lot of people, see how people interact with their bosses, how people interact with the people who work for them. I got to see how people actually work. When you're in school, you actually don't think about working. You're just like ah, that will happen some day. … It has to be productive. When you're not productive, it wouldn't mean anything, so that was really helpful.

> I worked in a [biomedical center] … Most of the time I was working in that lab, trying to discover what maybe I will find in the future after Liberal. Because I have an interest in medicine but there are other options. … I met specialists, they could teach me everything. I did practical work. Of course I enjoyed it.

> I enjoyed my experience. I was working with the big company that produces and sells electricity over there in Rwanda. … They have this kind of system of being efficient in power distribution. They use some digital meters in measuring electricity, which was something good. Imagine having this company in a small country and they're using high tech measuring devices. … I was saying if I come

> back, I can be more contributing because what you guys are doing is good. I can bring some better ideas or even as good ideas. So I loved where the company is going and I would be very proud to be even part of that company. … The people I worked with—I loved those guys there. It was a good experience.

Regardless of whether their placement was well designed or not, returning to Rwanda caused many students to realize the extent to which their understandings of the U.S. and Rwanda had changed during two years in the U.S. For many, this return marked a significant turning point in how students imagined their futures. Many spoke of frustration with community members, employers, and colleagues who had unrealistic expectations of what students would be able to accomplish after two years of studying in the U.S. On several occasions, research participants—both students and program administrators—referred to these expectations as 'magical' because of the transformative power they attributed to skills acquired through a high quality U.S. education. While students themselves had not long ago subscribed to the same illusion that the U.S. would transform their lives, they had grown disenchanted by the time they returned for their internship. Furthermore, students described feeling misunderstood by the government officials who designed their internship placements, and observing aspects of life in Rwanda that would make it challenging for them to accomplish their personal and career goals in Rwanda upon graduation. In response, many began to reposition themselves and their futures in relation to Rwanda.

In Rwanda, students were surprised by encounters with family and friends who held the same magical expectations of the U.S. that they themselves held prior to

travelling abroad. As they realized the extent to which these expectations were unrealistic, many determined that they needed to pursue further education and professional experience prior to returning to Rwanda.

Others were discouraged by the discovery that the Rwandan officials responsible for arranging internship opportunities and assisting the students to reintegrate into the Rwandan workforce had limited understandings of the U.S. education system. One student described a negative experience of being placed in a hospital where no one understood that U.S. undergraduate students intending to study medicine were not already medical students:

> They don't even have any idea what we are studying. When we got there the first time, they thought we were medical students already. They were like oh, so you know how to do blood transfusions? You're like no, I have never worked in a hospital before. But you are medical students, right? No. You're studying biochemistry? Then what are you doing in a hospital? ... After our sophomore year, I have had math, biology, cell biology, and organic chemistry. Why do you want me to use this in a hospital? … So people there, they don't understand what we're studying. So they don't really know how to help us. The program would be like no, you guys need to come back and go to work. Work where? Pretty much nobody understands. They're like ok, how is the system again?

The misalignment between what students were expected to know and what they had actually learned in their two years of studies left students feeling misunderstood and raised significant questions regarding their ability to find a professional niche in Rwanda

upon graduation. In addition to 'magical' expectations and misunderstandings of the U.S. education system, students also encountered social dynamics that created challenges and brought into question whether returning to work in Rwanda was the best way to contribute to their nation upon graduation. The kind of leadership practices and attitudes encountered among colleagues during the internship are particularly well illustrated in the following student's account:

> Looking at my experience when I went to Rwanda, I really think that when we finish our studies and go back there, we'll face a problem because people won't give us an opportunity to apply what we've learned. It doesn't really have to be sciences, but also how to approach life, if you are working, how you work with another coworker or how you take care of people you are serving. Because we went there and they gave us internships, but really, they don't give you enough room to apply what you learned. They just want to control you. You do this, but don't do something else. You'll be like but I want to do this, this is better. Or you will give someone a suggestion. I think this will be done better if, let's say people agreed on a policy of not littering or making sure that when we leave a room, shut down the lights. But they will be like no. Electrogaz is there. They will leave all the lights on—10 offices and the lights are on, no one is there. They are taking lunch outside. So when you do that, they think why do you do it? Why do you stress on that? You'll be like it will be better, it will save a lot of power if this whole building, people will try to do this. No, not interested. They do not understand you. I think it will be hard. They just think you're kind of being

> prideful, boasting because you studied in America, but what you are even saying is basic. It's common sense, but they'll be like don't try to be smart. If we have to change something when we get back, I'm sure we will just meet opposite ideas.

These observations illuminate that pride and resistance to change are also important cultural barriers and structural constraints that many students grew increasingly aware of throughout their internship experience. Additionally, observations of Rwandan leaders who had studied abroad prompted reflection regarding how difficult it would be to maintain commitments developed abroad upon returning to an environment where other social norms prevail:

> You see [the behavior of others who have studied outside Rwanda and returned] and you don't want to go back there and be like that – just be bossy to people and try to be respected instead of making sure your employees are respected and they are happy with what they do. You just kind of oppress them and put them under there. That's what happens. … So it's discouraging. You'll be like when I go there, that means I will be like that. I don't want to do that. Maybe I can stay here in the U.S. and still be a good advocate of my country.

Observations such as this led some students to question whether returning to work in Rwanda upon graduation would be the most effective way to contribute to change. The following statement illustrates the significant changes in how students understand themselves and imagine their futures in relation to Rwanda as they move back and forth across national borders:

> When you board the airplane coming back, that's when you realize things have changed. Your ideas, the thoughts you have, you'll kind of be upset. You'll be like I will never come back here again. I will just come to visit. I will never come back to this place again because you are kind of like disappointed in what people do, and how they view you. You just think maybe, I think I can work in U.S., just come to visit family here, but not live here. I even started thinking the best way to help Rwanda is being in Rwanda? Or you can help Rwanda staying outside? … So when you're on the airplane, you have those conflicting ideas in you. But the first semester when you get here, you really realize someone has changed. I have seen that in some people who went before me and I even saw that in myself. I'm like ok. So that's why.

This and similar reflections on the internship experience reveal students' dynamic spatial imaginaries and the challenging migration dilemmas they present as students approach graduation. In the following section, I show how as students process these realizations and the implications for their future plans, they do so largely on their own. Uncertain how their peers might respond, many students described choosing to keep their future plans to themselves and navigate these transitions in isolation. I then turn to a discussion of the challenging migration dilemmas posed by these new spatial understandings and the strategies students employ to navigate and resolve these contradictions through their everyday practices.

Isolation

Isolation was a subtle yet prominent theme that emerged from my observations and student interviews. While not all students spoke of experiencing isolation and some expressed concern when I shared some of the ways in which interviewees had described relationships with their Rwandan peers, several shared extensively about their personal experiences of isolation others expressed concern with having observed their peers struggling alone. At the same time, as noted in the analysis that follows, most students also spoke of their Rwandan peers as providing a supportive and encouraging network. In this section, I examine how relationships with other Rwandan students and social experiences with non-Rwandan peers on U.S. campuses contribute to the experience of isolation that was widespread among Rwandan scholarship students.

Rwandan relationships: Flying alone

> We are all Presidential Scholars, but we have very, very different backgrounds. … One of us will have some difficulties and it will be widespread to get help. But I know I'm here alone. I'm here alone.

Every day, Rwandan students at Liberal and Metro could be found seated together in the lunchroom and at events around campus. On multiple occasions, I observed international program staff cautioning the students that their tendency to stick together and speak Kinyarwanda would likely intimidate American students and limit their social experience on U.S. campuses. While students expressed appreciation for the support that they received from their Rwandan peers during their initial period of adjustment and the way in which gathering together allowed them to "feel Rwanda," over time, the extent to

which isolation was a central feature of many students' lived experience became apparent.

The first indication of isolation among the scholarship students that I encountered was at the leadership symposium described in Chapter 4, when an administrator encouraged students to be deliberate about making connections with other Rwandan students and collaboratively develop their future plans. The students' responsibility in ensuring that their peers do not become isolated and depressed was emphasized. The administrator also explained that networking with each other and sharing their plans was an important strategy for preparing for life beyond graduation. "I see you're protecting yourselves as individuals from the group, and I know that is partly cultural," s/he explained. "I'm asking you to do something that you might not feel comfortable doing."

Students elaborated on their relationships with their Rwandan peers and presented a variety of explanations for this "partly cultural" tendency to avoid speaking of their struggles and their future plans with other students from Rwanda. Many described strong support during the initial period of adjustment followed by a largely independent existence. In the words of one student:

> When you have problems, especially when you're a freshman, you really need someone to help you with scheduling, to ask about how to study, about professors, [peers from Rwanda] support you. You don't know anything about the American academic system, so having Rwandans, it's really helpful because you're comfortable with talking to them. You know that they know where you are and

> they have been there, they know the things that you are struggling with, so they help you during the freshman year. But after, everyone flies on his own.

One reason for this tendency for Rwandan scholarship students to "fly on their own" is Rwanda's history and political context. Several students explained that growing up, they were taught to guard their personal information due to the nation's history and ongoing concern with ethnic division. In the words of one student,

> [Rwandans] don't really talk to people, asking where they are from. We can talk to people from out of the country really easily, but that's not something that we actually ask each other. I was kind of surprised that here you meet people, they tell you about their family, where they are from, which is really not … we talk to each other in Rwanda, but you don't ask people, especially because of that divisionism that existed before the genocide, you don't ask people where you are from. People just are not comfortable telling you, you know, my family was from this place.

Another explanation was the level of surveillance that students perceive they are under as recipients of a prestigious government scholarship. Students emphasized that in Rwanda, people are always watching you and that receiving the Presidential Scholarship increased their sense that people "have eyes on them."[21] "The shame people make you feel, that's very common in our country," one student explained. Another added, "[In Rwanda], it's not just your parents watching, but also the community around you. It's

[21] "Having eyes on someone" was a common expression referenced by students. "I don't know if you understanding this statement—having eyes on someone," one student explained. "In other words, they have hopes in you. If you fail, they fail. If you win, they win. I think that's how I can describe it."

very natural for us to watch somebody, and say why are you doing that? You should do this. This is the right thing."

Students perceived that this practice of watching and judging each others' actions remained common among Rwandan scholarship students in the U.S. They expressed concern that they might be judged negatively by fellow Rwandans if they were to speak openly about their wariness of returning to Rwanda upon graduation. One student described how fear of judgment prevented her from being honest with her peers:

> Sometimes you get even judged by other Rwandans here. They'll be like, 'Why would you stay here?' You know, we can be really hypercritical sometimes. You pretend that you want to go back because you love the country and all that, but you know that you're lying to other people too. You want to show a good side of yourself. [Going back] is not like something we like to talk about because we know people will be judging. They'll be talking about the program and saying this one is trying to do this, which is different from what you guys expect.

As indicated in the quote above, students widely perceived that despite having the option of remaining abroad, pursuing careers in Rwanda upon graduation was the preferred, and therefore the more "patriotic," option. As Rwandans—and in particular, as recipients of a Presidential scholarship—students were wary of representing themselves and their future plans in ways that might put their national loyalty in question.

The combination of feeling under surveillance by their peers and perceiving that intentions to remain outside Rwanda presented the risk of being considered unpatriotic led students to regard their post-graduation plans as 'personal information' and avoid

discussing the topic with other students from Rwanda. “I talk about my plans with my American friends, my Kenyan friends, but not with my Rwandan friends,” one student explained. “Why is that?” I asked. “They’re personal,” s/he replied. As multiple references were made to the students’ perception that they were under surveillance throughout my research, I came to determine that what this student deemed ‘personal’ was any information that could be potentially problematic if reported to authorities in Rwanda. “Rwandans are paranoid,” another student explained. “Some people think that someone might be collecting information to give to the Rwandan government.”

A final reason why students choose to keep their future plans and concerns private is the perception that neither their American nor their Rwandan peers have an accurate understanding of the variety of ways people live in Rwanda and the challenges faced by much of the population. This was particularly apparent in the wake of the visit of the researcher who presented critical findings about Rwanda, described in the previous chapter, which sparked public and private discussions of issues in Rwanda among scholarship students. In a discussion with one student not long after this event, the student explained that things going on in Rwanda make her/him anxious as s/he approaches graduation. “Do you feel like you have any spaces here where you can talk about these things?” I asked. S/he responded,

> I can’t talk about them. I mean, Americans, they have no idea. I feel like they wouldn’t even understand what I’m saying. They have no idea what’s happening there. These Rwandan kids here, they’re idiots. See how [the researcher] said it’s bad in Kigali more than in any other city I’ve visited? All these kids disagreed.

> They had no idea. … They're just being ignorant. I cannot talk to them about those things. They will just piss me off. So I just carry them in my mind and try to sleep.

These words, like others spoken in the privacy of interviews, indicate that some students feel like outsiders in relationships with both their Rwandan and their American peers. They also help explain why many students embraced my research design. By allowing them to voice their challenges in a private setting and have them shared more broadly in a confidential manner, the methodology provided a safe and longed-for opportunity to discuss certain anxiety-inducing topics and discover the perspectives of their peers. As described in the preface, many students were anxious to hear what their peers were willing to share in private and encouraged to discover that they are not alone in their struggles.

In contrast to these expressions of isolation and mistrust, several students noted that studying in the U.S. with Rwandan students from diverse backgrounds was a unifying experience. One student explained that competition with other groups contributed to bringing Rwandan students together:

> In Rwanda, it's kind of hard to feel it, that we are one population, but when we get here, we tend to be close to each other, to help each other. … Our purpose is to improve ourselves and improve our country. … We're now competing with Americans, with Chinese, so we try to stick together.

More commonly, however, student narratives and observations revealed the extent to which sociocultural dynamics in Rwanda accompanied students to U.S. campuses. As one student explained:

> We live just like Rwandans. You live with someone because living with him doesn't give you anything, like helpful and stuff, and he doesn't take anything away from you. Because we live, we live together. … In America, we don't hang out a lot.

Although I did observe Rwandan students together on many occasions, student narratives indicated that many felt isolated from their Rwandan peers. This isolation is compounded by the challenges Rwandan students face as they seek to build relationships with American peers and succeed academically, as discussed in the following sections.

Non-Rwandan relationships: Cultural continuity and disjuncture

The extent to which scholarship students struggled to build relationships with non-Rwandan students on U.S. campuses varied considerably. While some experienced extreme cultural disjuncture that made it difficult to build meaningful relationships with students on U.S. campuses, others found that their interactions in the U.S. were to a large extent contiguous with their prior cultural practices and that their prior exposure to the U.S. through television and movies equipped them for the transition. These varied experiences indicate the importance of social class and prior access to global media culture in how students experience education abroad. They also show the significance of transnational communities, such as churches, in facilitating social integration. As Singh et al. (2007) note in relation to the experiences of Chinese students in Australia, "The

materiality of their class privilege defines the 'scape', to use Arjun Appadurai's (1996) term, within which the students' transcultural contacts in Australia were embedded" (p. 211). They argue that in contrast to migrants and refugees that cross national borders with limited economic resources, relatively privileged internationally mobile students experience less cultural disjuncture as they cross international borders.

Students emphasized the importance of identifying points of connection with peers and community members as they sought to build relationships. "It's not hard [to make American friends] when you have something that links you to other people," one student explained, expressing a common perspective as students spoke about building relationships abroad. As many students came from backgrounds where they regularly attended and actively participated in church activities, the involvement of churches in welcoming and connecting with international students was greatly appreciated. These students described the ease of connecting through transnational church communities and host families who also practiced Christian faith. In one student's words:

> My group at church, I go to a church that is the same kind as in Rwanda. It's [a particular denomination]. When I came here, I didn't know how to find a church in the U.S. It's the church I was born into and my host family helped me to know them so we got connected, and when I got here I immediately joined them. That's my really important group. I'm really assimilating into that. It helps me spiritually.

> In every society, you have to adjust to try to fit in. …I've been going to churches everywhere, I interact with people. I have friends. I can be part of any group as long as it's a good group.

Another student explained that while it was difficult to find those who shared a similar faith commitment on the campus where s/he studied, seeking out such connections was an important strategy for developing relationships:

> Coming from Rwanda, I'm a religious person and I like to be talking about God and Jesus and all of that. And when I got here, Liberal is not religious. So it was a bit difficult for me. …Even the people I interact with, we don't share the same Christian views, and it has been difficult trying to stay where I was back home, but having a Bible study group has really helped me.

In addition to finding common ground with people of faith, sports, musical interests, and pop-culture familiarity were also important points of connection. "I play soccer…I feel like it has helped me learn more about American culture than anything I have done here," one student explained. Another described how music helped her/him develop relationships:

> Music is pretty much the first thing I like on earth. Every time there is a concert, I'm going to be there. Yeah. And of course, all those people I always see there, sometimes we meet and just talk. We make friendships, and sometimes we just meet and play music. … So that's a community I've started belonging to.

While familiarity with sports and music facilitated relationship building, unfamiliarity with American hobbies and games inhibited connecting with others:

> My first few weeks were really awful. For example on the orientation trips, we had different kinds of games that everybody of course has played like a million times since their childhood. But for me, it's actually my first time playing them. It's kind of hard to learn a game and also to have fun, so that's the biggest challenge I had my first few weeks. Learning how to interact with people and also enjoy it.
>
> I'm getting used to the American hobbies, like to go camping. … And all the games they have around here. There are many things you can do outside class, many more than we do back home. … And like sports, almost everybody here watches basketball games, so I kind of started liking it a little. … You have to know the basic rules of the game and all that. I didn't know anything about it before I came.

Familiarity with pop-culture was a frequently mentioned point of connection. For those who came who came to the U.S. already familiar with American television shows and pop-culture, adjustment came more easily:

> I love movies. I don't watch a lot of them, but I watch some TV shows. My classmates will say hey, have you seen Arrested Development? Have you seen this show? I'm like, I want to learn those shows, pop culture and stuff. So I learn from my friends and it helps me with my every day life. … If you have a common interest with a friend here, you get along very well. … Two of my friends, they are big fans of Dr. Who, the movie. I told one of them a quote from the movie and he said "You watched that show?" I said yes. He was like oh my goodness, you

> have to be my friend. So you know, it's good to have some other interests outside school.

Students themselves noted that not all of their Rwandan peers came to the U.S. with the same level of familiarity with life outside Rwanda's borders. One explained how both media exposure and ties with family members who had studied abroad eased her/his transition and made the adjustment less challenging than that of her/his peers:

> I watch a lot of movies, and I watched a lot of movies in Rwanda. Some of them were actually about American life. … Most of the time during my freshman year, I actually understood, and they were like how do you understand that? Even Americans were like how do you understand? I had already seen it somewhere. I had a few friends who went to different countries, some of my relatives studied abroad, some studied here, some studied in Europe, so I got to get some of that, but other students didn't have that chance. Some students didn't have that chance, and it took quite a while to actually get used to [the way other students live].

While students who were more easily able to identify points of connection such as faith, hobbies, and interest in pop-culture developed relationships with ease, others struggled to make connections, as indicated in the following quotes:

> It was hard to have friends, because you know, when you're a freshman, pretty much you hang out together and you know the same movies, you've read the same books. Or you know, there's that connection somewhere that people see in each other. But for me, it was totally new, knowing nothing about their experience, and freshmen are not really the best people to cultivate friendships

with, because they're like I studied here and here, and then they ask where I studied, home in my country, and they'd be like oh, that's really cool. Interesting. But what's good about that?

I was having a hard time to get along with people here. So I went to the cafeteria and I had no choice but to sit only with Rwandans. … I know it wasn't anybody's fault, but the things they talked about, their behavior, my behavior, they were just incompatible. … I noticed these guys keep asking you questions, they're like interviewing you. And I think the main reason is they don't have anything else to talk about like when they talk to each other. … I would just rather not talk about it, just be a normal person. At least if they ask me what kind of game that I would like to teach them how to play, that would be ok. But they don't ask about that.

American students are like teenagers. It's more liberal than it should be … their choices and what they do. … It was not easy to make connections. What they like may not be what I was interested in. Our life oriented goals, everyone is hoping for a bright future, but how we want to get there is different. How much do they care about their studies? I found some people saying if this is tough, I do this one. For me, I don't have the options. I just have to do this and be successful. I understand because they are not under constraints. It also shapes the way we see life.

Moral values also made it challenging to adjust. Some students expressed concern that building relationships with American students would necessitate changing their values and indicated that this was how they were advised to integrate socially:

> The way people now say you have to make friends; you have to make connections. Here, to make friends, you definitely have to participate in some things even if you don't like them. So it's like, the most challenging thing is I was really forced not to be myself and I just couldn't let that happen. … I think in college here, especially at Liberal, since I don't know what happens at other schools, you're forced to be somebody else.

In a conversation with a group of international students, including several from Rwanda and a few from other African countries, I asked what they found to be the most challenging social aspects of their first semester as international students. The dialogue that ensued drew attention to students' frustration that domestic students defined them as 'international' and therefore distinct and unfamiliar with American culture. Several emphasized their familiarity with various aspects of American culture and those from African countries in particular expressed disgust with the assumptions that they would have no such familiarity:

> With most the people I met, with international students, they feel like the only conversation they can have with them is, so what do you do in your country, this and that? They won't talk about things in America because they assume you don't know – music, sports…I don't know. You may know, but the conversation just doesn't go that way.

> I actually feel the same way. They do ask you about your country, want to know a lot…they discreetly want to ask if you live with animals [laughter] but they don't ask that directly. They just say what's different? They do show a sort of curiosity

– they want to know what you're like. However, what I found difficult socially is building actual friendships of substance. Sometimes I feel like a guinea pig. It's like, I want to come to you…there are a lot of really geeky people here, very smart people, who want to know about stuff. [laughter] So they come to you so they can absorb as much information as possible.

AB: How would you advise them to build relationships with students from other countries?

Forget that I'm an international student. I'm a Liberal student.

Yeah, exactly.

First, they will ask me about my country. That's ok. But after that, it's just hey, you want to go out? Hang out here?

To get by, I first started to tell people I'm from New Jersey and we would talk. Then I'd tell them where I'm from. Seriously, they couldn't tell. The moment you say I'm from here, I don't know how to explain, it becomes how they define you.

You are foreign, you have a label, foreigner, on your head.

Yeah. They have to try and look at it from a different perspective. You're a Liberal student. That should say something. You probably had access to the internet, access to American culture somehow. It shouldn't be that hard to relate.

I have friends that ask me if I've been to Chick Filet, and I say no, then they're like we have to take you. That's definitely better than saying, oh, do you have Chick Filet in your country?

> I think what [s/he] means is that they assume knowledge of us. They might say you're from [an African country], and if I say I never watch TV, that's fine, they can tell me about it. But if they say oh, do you have a TV? That's a different question. So it's the way people ask questions – if they assume knowledge of people, you can't talk. They think most of us grew up in the boondocks, and that's ok to think that, because it's what media portrays. It's not their fault, but they try to assume knowledge.

Two things stand out from these student narratives. First, Rwandan students—and international students in general—vary considerably in the extent to which they are able to find points of connection to build relationships with domestic students. While social class and lifestyle at home explained this variation in some cases, it also had to do with faith commitments, moral values, and preferred activities that created a transnational sense community for students. Second, this challenge of social integration was compounded by the way in which domestic students viewed and engaged with international students, assuming and interrogating difference rather than acknowledging and focusing on common ground.

In summary, although the social experiences of scholarship students varied, the theme of isolation was widespread. Social dynamics amongst Rwandan students and the challenges of building relationships with non-Rwandan peers both contributed to the phenomenon of students 'flying on their own.' As a result, students have limited peer support as they make sense of their changing sense of space described in the previous section and struggle with the dilemmas addressed in the following section.

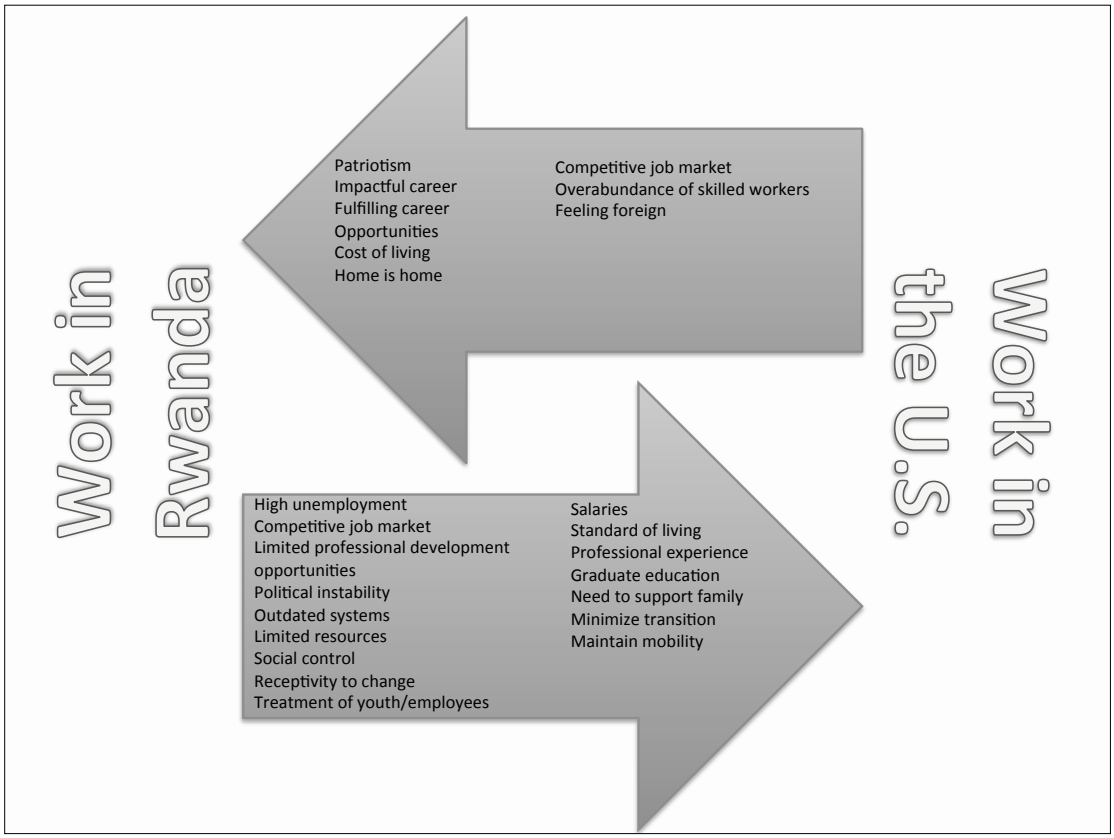

Figure 2. Migration Considerations

Struggle

Students spoke extensively about the struggle to adjust their post-graduation plans in response to their transformed understanding of the U.S. academic system as well as the opportunities available to them in the U.S. and Rwanda. For many, though not all, spatial dilemmas figured prominently in their post-graduation planning. The places where students felt obligated, and in some cases personally desired, to return were not always spaces in which the perceived the economic, social, and political would facilitate their personal and professional goals. On one hand, their narratives reveal that students understand, and in many cases have internalized, that being physically located in Rwanda

is the most patriotic choice and impactful way by which to provide return on the national investment in their education. On the other, as students develop new spatial imaginaries, they begin to question if being physically located in Rwanda would provide a social, economic and political space conducive to their success. The social, economic, and political considerations that students described in relation to their decision to stay abroad or return to Rwanda after graduation are discussed in this section and summarized in Figure 2 below.

Social motivations and constraints

Expressing patriotism was one of the advantages that students associated with returning to live and work in Rwanda. Those that equated the choice to return with patriotism emphasized that their education was a national investment that would reap benefits upon their return to utilize and transfer their skills within Rwanda's borders, as illustrated in the following quotes:

> This money [spent on the Presidential Scholars Program] can do some other stuff—that's kind of how I think about it. They could use it for something else, but they used it for education. If we don't do what we're supposed to do, it's kind of a loss for [the Student Financing Agency of Rwanda] and the government. Sometimes we're tempted to stay here because of the earnings, the salaries. We are tempted to say that but I believe going to Rwanda should be much better if you're patriotic. Patriotic – do you say that? If you're patriotic, you should go to Rwanda. That's where you can give effective support.

Others resisted the notion that remaining abroad indicated an absence of national loyalty. These students noted the possibility of supporting one's country from abroad as part of the diaspora:

> Something I do believe is that people from Rwanda, they love their country. They would love to go back and serve their country, because as I told you, we all are the hope of our country. … Some people would like to work outside of their country, but they will still be in the Rwanda diaspora, which is also a Rwandan community abroad. Because everybody cannot be inside the country, you know.

U.S. administrators also noted the ambiguous tension between the importance of returning to Rwanda and the potential contributions of the diaspora and transnational leadership for Rwanda's economic growth. One administrator explained:

> There's a kind of delicate issue of not wanting to encourage students to think of themselves as transnationals, knowing that they have at least a short-term commitment specifically to Rwanda. And I think that Rwanda itself is positioning itself in Africa as a transnational force. And I think that their, one of their national goals is to become a leader in Central Africa. And that's going to require leadership that behaves and thinks of itself as transnational. But again, we're in kind of an awkward situation relative to addressing that need for the students specifically.

Another administrator noted that despite the formal requirement for students to return and work in Rwanda for four years, Rwanda's president emphasizes the potential value of transnational networks for the country:

> The rhetoric is that Kagame will say, "Look, I don't care whether they don't come back, because I was a member of the diaspora and I know that in order to keep a country strong, and if a country experiences oppression and authoritarianism, it takes a diasporan movement to counterbalance the internal forces. So he will say publicly that he just believes he wants them to come back and help Rwanda, but he's accepting of them not coming back but being part of the diaspora as long as they help Rwanda. He says that what happened in the genocide was that nobody knew who they were – Rwandans. Tutsis and Hutus – nobody knew what that meant. He hopes that by having this consortium and this program, internationally now, it's not just focused in the U.S., that he could, if there was something bad happening to Rwanda, they could marshal the international community of opinion either through social networks or other ways to lobby U.S. congress and others to intervene.

Regardless of the debates surrounding the relationship between physical presence in Rwanda and national loyalty, students associated a variety of advantages with helping from home. These included maintaining a more accurate understanding of community challenges, sharing knowledge and inspiring others, and influencing how assistance is used. These perceived advantages are illustrated in the following quotes:

> I know that it is our responsibility to go back to Rwanda and help develop it, while sometimes I feel I have to stay in America. But I have a responsibility to go back to Rwanda and serve it. I can serve it well abroad but it will be different. In Rwanda, I have to be near people I am serving and know their problem. … You

have to be near people you are serving and understand them face-to-face. Serving your country while abroad is very different. So I will choose to serve it while in Rwanda. I have to understand and to see problems of the community I am serving and be near them. This is why I should serve Rwanda while living in it. … It is my responsibility to go back. I signed a contract. I have to do what I signed. Even if I didn't sign it, I feel it is my responsibility. I like Rwanda.

When you're working abroad, physically you will not be there. What you will do to help Rwanda, you will just give money to build a school, you will give money to your family, you will pay school fees for members of the family. Maybe other people. All those things are done by you when you are outside. But when you are there, maybe you could do those things, but also you can help others. If you studied sciences, you can help Rwandan students to learn more about sciences. You are using the intelligence you have to help others in other countries. It's like you will help Rwanda just using one thing, because you will just help them using the money that you have. But when you work in Rwanda, you will use that money even though it cannot be much, but you're also using intelligence, so it will be different.

If I'm not in a place personally working on a place and experiencing what is happening there, I cannot really know exactly what's happening there or how things are moving over there. If I consider the choice of staying here and sending money to Rwanda … I would send money, yes, but how would the people there

> use that money? Would it be the same way that I myself would use that money and develop the country, or would it be a different way?
>
> When you go back, [Rwandans] can really have a picture of you, not just the sketch in their minds. How you speak, how the experience abroad changed you. They may kind of envy you. They may be willing to walk in your path, and in the end you may end up impacting lives of people. Also, you're more involved in the development of your country. Motivating others, initiating programs that may be more difficult for others to do.

In addition to the advantages of working in Rwanda described above, students also noted that studying in the U.S. has increased their interest in choosing a career path that provides societal as well as personal benefit. This shift was attributed to observations of American culture and a growing awareness of their privileged position. The following description of one student's shifting priorities shows how entering a transnational education space in which the social benefits of higher education received significant emphasis contributed to expanded social awareness and commitments:

> Before I came here, I was 19. I was thinking about studying, and then getting work. Then as you get here, you notice there are a lot of things that you have that other people don't have, like my friends in Rwanda. There are a lot of opportunities that I have that my friends don't have. So by this time, you think of like maybe if I get time, I try to help a friend. Like four years before I came, it was just about studying. … When you live here, you see how much people

> volunteer here, and then you think like in Rwanda, there are people who have a lot of money but really don't give anything.

Many students expressed the realization that while they had little distinctive to offer in the U.S. job market, Rwanda in particular and Africa in general offered an opportunity to do socially relevant work. "This country is already developed compared to Rwanda," one student explained. "If I stay here, it would be just like a drop in the ocean. There wouldn't be any influence, not much things to do, because everything is already done. But by going there, very many things can be done. I believe that." Some identified Africa in general as a context where they could do meaningful and impactful work:

> I plan on working everywhere in the world where I can really impact the community, where my work can have an importance to the community. So here, you don't need me. You have enough. I have to go somewhere, not necessarily in Rwanda, but ideally, it should be in Rwanda. I love it. It's my country. … I don't plan to work anywhere else except Africa. … My work should be where it's needed.

> I would like to do non-profit work. … I don't really limit myself to Rwanda. I think making a difference either in Rwanda or anywhere in Africa, yeah, would be a really good thing.

> I can serve in different places, but it would be better to begin with those who really need that kind of care, who need help. Of course I will begin with my country then I could expand and go somewhere else. You know Africa, entire

> Africa has many problems. It has its own unique problems but of course I will start with my country.

This expansion of possible locales where students could imagine their futures reflects an increasingly transnational imaginary. For others, Rwanda in particular was viewed as a place where students saw needs and desired to make a difference:

> I just feel like what if I go back to help others, to develop my nation? Then I have something to be remembered about; then I have something good to do in my life. I have been useful, spending my life doing something good for others. I don't think the U.S. needs my help—they already have enough help. So I just want to go back and contribute my fair share, give back to the nation.
>
> Living in the U.S., you can have a decent life *[laughs]*. Decent. You can have a decent life you can call it, if you have a job of course, but I'm not useful. They have a bunch of doctors, people with PhDs. You can go teach somewhere and have money, but other than that, there's nothing else we're doing for them. They have a lot of people, so they don't really need you. Well, they need you because you're teaching students, but Rwandans, they need you more than they do. So that's why I want to go back.
>
> This sense of contribution is one thing that would make me come back. Back in Rwanda, there was this guy who was an engineer. He did an MA in engineering in India and then he came back to build villages of modern houses for the community. The community could easily get in those houses and paying a fee for rental. So it was a very good thing he did for the community. I would say if I got

> the chance to get skilled enough, I could go back and create that kind of thing. That could help the community a lot. But also, as I said, it requires skills and experience and everything. So I would say I will work here and when I feel confident enough, and have capital and everything, that's when I have to go back to Rwanda and make something that really is meaningful there. Yeah.

In addition to illuminating where students envision their futures, these quotes show that standard of living and salary—factors emphasized in economic analyses of student mobility—are not the only things that students take into consideration when planning for career and migration decisions. Students expressed the importance of fulfilling national objectives and pursuing an impactful career that benefits society. Doing socially relevant work was a priority that grew increasingly important during their time abroad. "I don't know if it's in your culture to be helpful, but it made me someone who is really helpful to other people. Life here really shaped me." Another explained:

> One thing I learned in the U.S. is that people want to help their communities. … They have the heart of helping. … I also want to help. … That's the most I've learned here actually. When I go back home, I don't want to sit like the mayors. I want to do something for people, get to the communities, get to the individuals, not just sit and watch from the top but get to the people. People here, they are serving, and I think there's a difference between serving and being a leader, being the mayor. The big guy who sits and watches. So when I want to go home, I want to serve people, to be the leader, but not a ruler, you know?

In addition, living in Rwanda was also valued for more personal reasons, including cultural familiarity and proximity to family. Many described this advantage with a simple phrase: "home is home." After spending several years as foreigners in the U.S., students grew nostalgic for the place where they came from. The following motivations for returning to Rwanda express the difficulty of fitting into an unfamiliar U.S. context:

> I'm not a person who will make changes, big changes. What I will do may not even be recognized. But as long as I feel that I'm doing it, working in the community where I grew up, being close to the family, yeah. … There is a community that you feel is really home. You see? You're not feeling like a visitor or a foreigner.
>
> It was really hard to fit in here. You know, no matter how people are nice, you feel like it's not your home. I even feel like I can study here, get a degree that I want, but I don't want to live here my whole life. No.
>
> There's where you want to be. We all want to be close to our families. We have families here and they matter a lot, but we lived in Rwanda mostly for 17 years and up, and that's like part of our life, most of our life. You always want to go back to where you're from; you want to go back home. So, you're like I'm gonna be here, I'm gonna do this and do this and do this, but I'm going back at some point. It doesn't matter how much time you spend here working and getting all that income and helping people from there, but you actually want to physically go back. And the amount of time you want to spend here is different depending on

each person. … You do what you can here, you do everything that you have to do, and then you go back.

In summary, the ways in which students spoke of the advantages of returning to Rwanda indicate that place is closely related to students' sense of obligation and desire to do meaningful work. For many, their experiences studying in transnational space increased their desire to contribute to society, not only in exchange for the scholarship they had received but also because of the commitments to contributing to the community that they encountered on and around U.S. college campuses. They also cultivated nostalgia for their country that is reminiscent of how Lefebvre (1991) describes home: "a special, still sacred, quasi-religious and in fact almost absolute space" where rationality and dreams exist in "almost ontological dignity" (p. 121). At the same time, their experiences produced new expectations, a sense of being outsiders in their places of origin, and an increasingly 'cosmopolitan' sense of belonging as indicated by references to working anywhere in Africa or the world. Despite the widespread desire to return to Rwanda and do socially meaningful work, they were not sure the space would facilitate the kind of impact they desired. The social challenges students anticipated raised serious concerns.

Students were often cautious in discussing the ways in which social and political concerns made them wary of returning to Rwanda, however, the occasional references made to such considerations indicated their significance for how scholarship students imagine and plan for the future. When asked if social relationships factored into her/his thinking about where s/he'd like to live after graduation, one student indicated that this

was ‘personal’ information. “I don’t know. There might be some personal things, but I don’t know about that,” s/he explained uncomfortably. “You might say I just really don’t want to go live with those people again.”

Others described jealousy of those who had studied abroad as a significant concern and obstacle to achieving desired impact in Rwanda. One student told the story of a family member who studied abroad and encountered a negative response upon returning to Rwanda to try and make a contribution:

> The challenge was that people would see [her/him] as someone who is trying to show off that [s/he] knows stuff. They try to make [her/him] feel bad about [herself/himself]. [S/he] just had the intention to help, to contribute, but people in Rwanda are kind of jealous so it’s not working the way [s/he] expected it to be. So now [s/he’s] not coming back anymore because the people there – I don’t know what they expected [her/him to] be like – but they’re not that welcoming.

This student expressed concern that although s/he also hopes to return to Rwanda to make a contribution after securing a good livelihood abroad, s/he is wary of receiving a similar response. “I don’t know how they’ll be welcoming or what they’ll be expecting of me,” s/he explained. Comments like these suggest a concern with returning to Rwanda only to find that those you hope to support are jealous and unwelcoming. They also indicate the significant ways in which stories of Rwandans who have gone abroad and returned shape how students think about their own future trajectories.

Economic considerations

For a few students, particularly those interested in engineering and entrepreneurship, Rwanda was viewed as a place where program graduates would find more abundant opportunities than in the U.S. "Our country has many projects of construction so I know I will get a job back home. There are a bunch of opportunities in the construction industry," one engineering major explained. Another interested in running his own business emphasized the competitive environment in the U.S. "Creating something in Rwanda that maybe has not been there, it would be actually way easier," s/he concluded. Most, however, acknowledged that income was a significant factor in their post-graduation decisions and that economic opportunities in Rwanda were limited.

As students described the importance of income in their migration decisions, they noted that this was not considered in isolation from student's career interests. They also emphasized that income was viewed as an important way to contribute to improving the lives of others and making a difference in Rwanda. In the words of one student, "You want to do a job that you like, but you also want the job to bring you something. … The question of income actually matters because if you have income, the more income you have, the more you can be helpful." Interviewees also noted the ways in which influences on career decisions varied based on one's family circumstances:

> Some students are from poor families, so when they're looking at their careers, they're not actually looking at the stuff they like to do, but they're looking at how much they're going to earn. And then if you find work in the U.S., you feel like it's going to give you more money than you can make in Rwanda. … You don't

> want to go back and be the guy like your uncle is. Even some families are going to encourage you, say hey, stay in the U.S., make more money and send us money, you know. So besides the job, what you want to do and what you love to do, it's mostly the background, what your family has.

Although it cannot be confirmed given the limited demographic data collected for this study, the above quote suggests that economic considerations are a particularly salient concern for students coming from the most economically disadvantaged families.

Professional considerations

In addition to income differences between the U.S. and Rwanda, students came to realize that studying in the U.S had impeded their development of skills and interests that align with opportunities in Rwanda. As their opportunities to take up different fields of study expanded, so did the locations in which they considered pursuing employment:

> As I told you, some of [Presidential Scholars] are doing aerospace, telecommunications, and when they go back, it's a small country, a tiny, small country, and none of those companies are back home. So they say ok, we don't even have something to do here, so why are we here? Rwanda not having this kind of big opportunities may even cause people to stay abroad. America, Europe, somewhere else where they have these kinds of jobs.

Differences in technology and infrastructural systems also posed a challenge to desires to return home and make a difference. One student explained that because of the limited technology available in Rwanda, it would take significant investment to implement the kinds of systems they were learning about in their studies:

> Rwanda is developing, so the technology is nowhere like compared to where it is in the U.S. So if you want to do something new back home, it's going to take you a lot of investment, a lot of outside help, because there are no resources in Rwanda to do what we want to do, what we studied here. That's why we're worried about what we want to do when we get home because there's nowhere to start. You have to start something new, so you need a huge immediate help. A big investment. You need capital to do that stuff. Because education is still low, we have such a big challenge. I can't start to do like the systems I see in the U.S. …. I cannot go and establish that system in Rwanda. So it's going to be challenging if we go back.

Beyond limited employment opportunities, Rwanda's lack of opportunities for ongoing learning and professional development were also emphasized. While students expressed their expectation that after achieving a certain amount of knowledge they would be ready to return to Rwanda, they also indicated a growing desire to be life-long learners and were aware that returning to work in Rwanda would limit such opportunities for continued growth and learning:

> After college, or even MA, I don't know. I just feel like you keep growing, and at a certain place you may be like yeah, this may be enough for me to go back and do something. Yeah. You know, when you go back, I think, like when I was doing my internship, I wouldn't be learning anything. Like the knowledge that I will have, I'll just be putting there and just doing whatever little I'll have to do, and it

> wouldn't be helpful to have come and studied here and just go back after a BA or MA.
>
> When you get here, you get really advanced. You get to use big machines. I'm thinking about chemistry people, biology people—you get to do really amazing research. When you think about going back, you don't see that happening. And that's kind of throwing you back where you were a few years ago, and that's a really huge concern people have—going back and not growing in your career. … When I was doing my internship back home, I didn't like the working culture there. I don't see myself, like after my BA, going to work there and really achieving my goals, my personal goals there. You kind of, you want to do more. I guess America has taught me to want to do more, to be better, to have some goals, career goals that Rwanda won't be able to help me fulfill on a certain level at some point, so that's a big concern. Having experienced what we have experienced career-wise, and then experiencing having to go back, it kind of throws you, I think.

The above quotes indicate that while students understand they have been provided with access to transnational mobility with the expectation that they will return and contribute to their nation, their education abroad contributes to making them outsiders professionally, with knowledge that does not easily translate into the Rwandan context. Furthermore, their experiences in this space have expanded their personal goals and their awareness of how opportunities to fulfill these goals would be constrained by returning to Rwanda.

Political uncertainty

Political uncertainty was another theme that arose in interviews but one that students were hesitant to discuss. I did not ask specifically about politics in the student interviews; however, on several occasions, students made reference to current events involving Rwanda affecting their plans for the future. At the time of my research, Rwanda was experiencing cuts in international development assistance in response to allegations regarding the government's involvement in the Democratic Republic of Congo. One student explained how her/his perspective on the gravity of Rwanda's 'crisis' changed over time:

> This crisis affected my dreams. Some people were telling me how bad things were, but I used to ignore all that and say oh, you guys are lying. You don't even know what's going on. But now I can see it by myself, things are really bad. I used to argue with my [relative in Rwanda]. S/he's the one I live with when I'm in Rwanda. S/he told me how bad things are in Rwanda and I just can't agree. But now I can agree a little.

References to this 'crisis' emphasized its impact on future strategies, encouraging students to stay abroad longer than initially anticipated:

> Sometimes there are some things that happen, some crisis like the recent one, and they make me change my mind … So for instance, now, I was thinking of not going to grad school, just find a job for one year or two then go home. Go home and just be a normal person, and do business. Now I changed my mind. I'm

> looking into going to grad school even more than before. There's no stability in our country.

These references indicate that changes in contexts of origin are dynamic and that perceptions of political stability and instability inform how students imagine and plan for the future.

Strategies

> If I graduate in May, I'm not going to be with enough information to go back and do what I want to do in Rwanda. I need another step.

As students described their efforts to resolve the tensions between how transnational education space is conceived, perceived, and experienced as they reimagine their future trajectories, certain patterns were are apparent. Students unanimously expressed a desire to stay beyond their four-year degree to gain further education and experience.[22] References to not yet having enough training, knowledge, and new ideas to bring home were commonplace. Students also emphasized the importance of going home on their own terms, when they were ready to make a difference and ensure that they could maintain their ability to move across national borders at will. Three options that students considered as strategies for maintaining their mobility and equipping themselves with the skills, experiences, and resources needed to successfully return to Rwanda were

[22] While the Rwandan government initially set a policy that students had to return immediately after the completion of a four-year degree, it did not take long before they decided to allow students to apply for graduate programs and for Optional Professional Training. One administrator explained how this was a relief for both the students and the U.S. administrators: "That has reduced a lot of conflict that we had with the first group that was told they could not stay for graduate school. They were like we're here, we're prepared, we now speak English and we understand the academic environment, we can do really well in grad school, and we're being told that it might change but that right now we don't have permission? How are they going to prevent us from going to grad school?"

pursuing graduate studies, gaining professional experience,[23] and developing entrepreneurship skills. Following a discussion of student concerns regarding returning to Rwanda with a bachelor's degree, each of these strategies is discussed below.

Limits of a bachelor's degree

Regardless of their field of study, all of the students I interviewed expressed that they would be better equipped to make an impact in Rwanda if they had the opportunity to remain outside Rwanda's borders beyond their four years of undergraduate study. Many pointed out that a bachelor's degree would not enable them to achieve the program's goals as efficiently as they would be able to with further education. "The BA does not allow you to achieve all the goals…or I may achieve all the goals but it may take me more time if I have only a BA than if I would have a PhD," one student explained.

For some, particularly those at Metro who were able to pursue an engineering degree at the undergraduate level, the prospect of returning to Rwanda without additional study or work experience was not ideal but was less concerning than for those who had pursued degrees in the natural sciences in hopes of going on to study engineering or medicine beyond the undergraduate level. An engineering major explained that while s/he would be comfortable returning after graduation, s/he would prefer to first acquire a master's degree:

> I can't say that it's like I've failed, but I'm not fully 100% as I wanted. Let's say I'm going back right now. … I can go and still do my work the way I want it to be and I can feel very comfortable with it. But if I get to stay here a little longer, I

[23] Students traveling abroad with a J-1 visa have the option of remaining abroad for two years of work experience referred to as Optional Professional Training.

> believe I can do much better than what I can right now. … I can feel comfortable with going, but if I get to a MA degree, I can feel much better.

Students pursuing undergraduate science degrees noted the disadvantage they faced in comparison to their peers studying more applied subjects:

> For the engineers, it could be fine if they go back, because some of my friends don't really need PhDs to have a job or something. They just need an MA or BA. But for me, with my biology, it's nothing. I'll be competing with other BA's in Rwanda and we are like at the same level, so I'm not bringing something new. … So I want to stay here, work like for a year to make sure which program I want. … Then I want to do really a PhD. I don't know really in which field. And then after a PhD, work in a research lab or something like that. And then after that, I'll be sure that I have something to bring home.

They also noted the limited career options available to those with bachelor's degrees in Rwanda, pointing out the low compensation and social prestige associated with careers such as teaching at the secondary level:

> The only job for physics majors would pretty much be teaching. And as an undergrad, you wouldn't be teaching anywhere—you'd just be teaching high school, which I don't think would be, in terms of financial, getting a lot of money for myself and other people who would have expended a whole lot of money. To go teach high school, it wouldn't really match. … I don't think it would be what people expect me to have.

In addition, students explained how returning to Rwanda after graduation would limit their freedom of movement while acquiring further education would expand their options. For many, working in a particular place became less significant as the opportunity to maintain transnational mobility grew increasingly important. Even those who maintained a commitment to working in Rwanda wanted the freedom to choose to return on their own terms and timeline:

> For most of the Rwanda Presidential Scholars, most of us, I don't think anybody wants just to go straight home after getting their BA. They feel like it would be great if they can go home with a PhD or MA. Kind of like going home on your terms. If you have a PhD or MA, you can get a job here and if you go home, you're deciding you don't need a job here in the U.S. or anywhere. I'm gonna go home. I feel like that's the main thing. Personally, I think it doesn't matter to me where I work. As I said, I just don't want to have a BA in biology and be sent back on the next plane.

Returning to Rwanda was widely viewed as a choice that would close off other options. The following quotes, along with the student narrative above, indicate a growing sense of cosmopolitanism and an increasingly transnational future imaginary:

> People after being here realize they don't have to necessarily be in the U.S. but not necessarily be in Rwanda. After being here, you realize you could be somewhere else. You don't want to necessarily stay here; you also don't want necessarily to go back.

> I plan to be someone who can work anywhere. It goes with my passion to learn new languages. I work on things until I know enough to go to that country and not have too much trouble living there. When I finish studies, I may spend a year to travel, go back to Rwanda, I might start a family and not have so much freedom later. So when I start working in Rwanda, I will be someone who can go back and forth.

> Working abroad, it can open for you other opportunities. If you work here in the U.S., you can go work in Europe. If you are working here at this time, it doesn't mean that you are working here forever. So when you are not still working here, you can go back, you can go work somewhere else in the world because you were working here in the U.S. But when you are in Rwanda, I don't think you can get that chance. When you work in Rwanda, you are just enclosed in Rwanda, and you can't go anywhere else. When you're working abroad you are exposed to all opportunities, they are open for you. So I think working abroad has more advantages than Rwanda.

As noted above, students sought graduate degrees, professional experience, and entrepreneurship skills in order to equip themselves with knowledge, socially valued credentials, and to facilitate their ability to work anywhere and move back and forth across national borders. In some cases, these strategies were well-aligned with students' personal interests and career plans while in others they were pursued out of necessity in the absence of alternative options. This was particularly the case for students interested in becoming doctors. Many chose to accept the scholarship to study in the U.S. instead of a

full scholarship to pursue a medical degree in Rwanda despite having been informed while in Rwanda that medical school was an unlikely path for international students in the U.S. Several explained that the chance to go abroad may only come once, so when your opportunity comes, you should take it. While some found that the options available in the U.S. opened new possibilities, many struggled with coming to terms with the limitations of the U.S. academic system and its implications for their career aspirations.

Pursuing PhDs

> I'm thinking about going to grad school … to take advantage of this opportunity. … Just keep studying until I'm satisfied, until I get a PhD.

As students described their plans for life beyond graduation, the number of references to doctoral degrees was striking. Over time, I began to realize that in many, though not all, cases, students were considering PhDs not because they would compensate for the limited practical skills acquired at the undergraduate level or because such a degree was well-aligned with their desired career trajectory but because they provided funding, the promise of social prestige, and a means of postponing their return to Rwanda. I also discovered that students themselves were concerned with the phenomena that so many of their peers were considering doctoral degrees, recognizing that in many cases this strategy was pursued as a last resort and that the extent to which it would facilitate personal or program goals was questionable. Students attributed this to the limited understanding of the U.S. education system that students had prior to traveling to the U.S., and that Rwandan government officials continue to have:

> When you're in Africa, you don't know much about the system here as far as the international student. There are some opportunities that you're not able to get because you're an international student. So that also hurt some people's dreams, but you know, you do what you have to do, you know. … I guess it also comes down to the government people who send us here, they don't really know about the system and how it works. Sometimes they blame on you: How can you be like so good and not have scholarship opportunities? Like I said, we all have a kind of naïve view about you know, what happens in the U.S. … [For students studying certain subjects], it's imperative to get a PhD program to get to. Because for them, if you go back to Rwanda with a BA in physics, you don't really…you're just like anybody else, you know. Unless you're super creative, you know. When I look at some of the schools that don't have graduate programs and look at students who graduated there, I don't know, … when you look at their lives now, it's sad. We know what they could have done, what they're able to do, it's pretty sad. They're just caught up in a system – they were the first to get here and they didn't know anything, you know. It's sad.

Community members and administrators also noted the phenomenon that many were choosing to pursue graduate school. As one community member explained:

> Now they're running into barriers about how they can come back and make a difference. And it comes down to a job. And the reality of, can you find a job and how do you go about finding a job. And I think that's the reason that they kind of, they naturally, they're all academics, you know, high performers. So,

> they, the easiest thing is to apply to go to graduate school, because they know they can be successful at that. And if they can pull that off, they just defer the ultimate decision as how do I get back. … They're all going to graduate school.

Student narratives described fear of returning unprepared as a core motivation for pursuing further study:

> I want to go home. … Most of us are scared, kind of scared, you know, this expectation. They've paid this money for me so if I go back, what am I going to do? Am I going to go back and then ask the same government that gave me a scholarship for a job? Am I going to say hey, give me a job, I'm back from studying. We just feel like we need to go back and start our own businesses, our own something. … We are kind of scared a little bit. Some actually decide to stay because of that feeling – you can't go back and ask [the government] for a job after everything they've done for you. … That's why we need another step, another experience like an MA or PhD.

In addition to the centrality of job market considerations in Rwanda noted by these interviewees, students described this choice in relation to what the limited fields of study available to them at the undergraduate level and the difficultly of securing funding for master's degrees. "I'm going to go to grad school and study things that I wanted to study," one student said, pointing out that her/his desired course of study had not been available her/his undergraduate institution. Others emphasized the need for more practical training. "I don't feel ready to go outside to work," another noted. "I need to go through higher education to feel more trained."

For students with limited interest in teaching and research, master's degrees and some career experience were the preferred options. "My best choice would be going for a master's degree first," one engineering student explained. "If get this MA degree, this increases my ability, more ability to be fully functioning person if I can say this. … Once I have a master's degree, I will dedicate my life now in fieldwork." Similarly, another engineering student explained that a PhD would not be her/his preference. "I'm a little scared of doing like a PhD. But I think for an MA which is oriented toward, you know, an MA of engineering, I'd be interested to do that." While MA degrees were in high demand among scholarship students, the limited funding available for this option was prohibitive:

> I'd have MA over PhD. … I think MA is good, but in terms of financial support, it's very hard to be covered. … Every school you apply to, they offer you a PhD and it can come with financial support, but MA does not. So if they had a chance to cover MAs, it would be good.

In response to the limited funding available for master's degrees, some students who otherwise would not have considered doctoral studies chose to do so. Similarly, some of the students who had come to the U.S. with medical school dreams described considering doctoral degrees as they gradually came to terms that getting in and financing medical school was unlikely. Many described how they accepted the scholarship despite being forewarned that they would not be able to pursue medical degrees:

> I wanted to go to medical school. Back home, the way the system works, it's after high school, you either go to college for different majors or you go straight to

> medical school as part of the National University. Coming here, … everybody said you're not gonna be able to do it, it's hard, getting in is hard, then money and stuff, and I just, I didn't have answers back then. But I decided if I could get the scholarship to come here, I'm gonna give it a try and try to get to med school. … That's where I'm at. I'm trying to figure out how to go to med school.

By junior or senior year, several of these medical school hopefuls had decided to consider PhDs as an alternative to medical school:

> Still now, I'm dreaming about going to medical school, but I know it's really, really hard. ... So I started thinking about taking a PhD in molecular biology when I graduate. It's my back-up now. So I started studying for the GRE and MCAT, so I can do both the exams. If I go to medical school, it will be fine. … If I don't get it, graduate school, I'm sure I will get in.

Several interviewees expressed their disappointment that such a large percentage of Rwandan students—98% in one student's estimate—ended up pursuing PhDs because of the realization that they were unable to pursue their preferred options. One provided an insightful explanation for this common phenomenon:

> It's sad. A lot of Rwandans really, they pursue PhDs not because it's something they want to do. It's hard to get a scholarship for MA programs from the government because they have to support a lot of kids to go through college first, right, so you find yourself only presented with funds for PhD programs and ok, you say ok, when you look at industries, their chance to hire you as internationals is real small, you know, so if June goes by, July goes by, you don't have any

> opportunity from industry, chances are you're scared, you don't want to go back home, you're 22 years old, you know, and do something, they end up in PhDs. I mean, they still do well because we are different, we are very adaptive and we can really live under unfavorable conditions and manage to survive …I don't like it, you know. We should talk about it and say hey, I don't feel like I need to do something just because the system is not presenting me what I wanted. I can wait, you know.

While some pursued this option out of desperation, others thought through this choice and determined that it was a good option for them rather than just a last resort or way to fulfill someone else's expectations. One student explained how initially, others influenced her/his decision to consider a PhD, but in the end it was her/his own choice:

> I think [getting a PhD] started as not being my idea, but I also have been thinking a lot about it. I told you my uncle influenced me a lot and he wants me to get a PhD. So I had to ask myself, do I want to get a PhD because I want to fulfill his dreams? … But I really think a PhD, I will be fine with it. … I really think I want to do that and do research. But it really started as his idea, not mine.

Few acknowledged that this choice was unlikely to lead to careers in Rwanda, however, some did note that the longer one studied in the U.S., the more they would want to remain in a context where they would receive adequate compensation for their work. One explained:

> Getting a PhD, you want some payback. Studying is really hard, spending time on research, you need some money back. That's motivation for working outside.

> …Because I'm committed that's why I will go there and that's why I have to work here before I leave. I have to work to get money to enjoy my degree, to get some salary, get some basics in life. … When I'll be back in Rwanda, I'll have some basics. I need to start a family. … All of those things are motivating me to be able to work internationally and then work locally. So that's also what I mean by making networks, having communication and interactions, take that advantage so I can also have a job that can connect America and Rwanda and the rest of the world.

When I shared that students were considering PhD programs because of the academic and financial constraints encountered in adjusting to the U.S. higher education system with students at the member-check meeting described in the preface of this study, they nodded in agreement. One student noted on a feedback form, "About the PhD program, I think that fear really pushes people to do it just because it has funding. I am sure many do that program because of the funding." They also agreed that entrepreneurship was regularly promoted as an option for returning to Rwanda in the face of limited job prospects. Some students appreciated this recommendation and sought to develop entrepreneurship skills in an effort to prepare for a successful return to Rwanda while others were more skeptical and less interested, as discussed in the following section.

Entrepreneurship as the answer?

While graduate school was a strategy developed primarily by the students themselves, entrepreneurship was a solution emphasized by a wide variety of actors. The

importance of developing entrepreneurship skills was widely touted by the Rwandan government, U.S. administrators, and community members as a strategy for scholarship students in response the limited employment opportunities awaiting graduates in Rwanda. Students were encouraged to become job creators rather than job seekers. Some embraced this recommendation while others expressed concern with what they perceived to be another unrealistic and 'magical' expectation.

Students that were comfortable being represented as job creators viewed entrepreneurship as a strategy for resolving the dilemma caused by wanting to work in Rwanda yet finding the income insufficient. "I believe if you go [to Rwanda] and work your job really efficiently, maybe you can raise your income from something low to a higher level. And doing this, I believe, would be creating your own business, not just working for a company," one student explained. Proponents of entrepreneurship were actively involved in student-run initiatives such as Emerging Leaders and Entrepreneurs (ELE) Rwanda, an organization started by Presidential Scholars to equip Rwandan youth to create innovative solutions and business ventures.

Among those who expressed an interest in pursuing entrepreneurial activities, self-employment was generally viewed as a long-term strategy. Students spoke of plans to first acquire sufficient knowledge, then to work in order to gain experience, capital, and networks, and finally, years down the road, to launch businesses that would benefit them personally and create employment opportunities for others:

> I'm thinking about being self-employed. Like, for example, creating a business. But that is a very long-term goal because first, when I get done with school, I'm

> thinking about working with a company and then going to graduate school. Then depending on how much resources I'll have in the future, I'll think of creating something that will help the society. In helping society, I'm thinking about providing jobs to people. … And maybe I'll be able to reduce the unemployment rate by small, small change. But also that small change is a big contribution.
>
> I want to start a company, and when I do start it and it becomes profitable, I will use that profit to do what I want to do, to help some people I want to help. That's how I want to do it. It's just I haven't started my company, and I'm still in school. … Right now, I can't do anything. If I do it here, it doesn't mean that I'm not going back home. If I do it in Africa, I'm hoping to do it anywhere other than Rwanda, but I would like to be in East Africa. [The main thing is] where it would be easy for me to do it.
>
> After I get the money to start out with and I get skills and connections too, I can just go back. And maybe I can go back and work in Rwanda 5 years, and then after leave the job and start my own business. … Hopefully by the time I'm 50, I'll have something.

Others resisted being represented as the nation's future job creators and questioned the notion that graduates would be sufficiently equipped to fulfill this expectation. One student poignantly expressed her/his frustration with the way in which entrepreneurship was presented as a universal solution. In her/his view, it was absurd to expect recent graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds to create jobs when those with considerably more privilege were unable to accomplish such a feat:

> When you go to Rwanda, these leaders, they tell us to come and create jobs. How are you gonna do that? How are we gonna do that? If I graduate from here, the only thing I'll have is my own clothes and shoes. How am I gonna create a job with that? … You cannot expect someone right after they graduated to create jobs. They don't even have enough knowledge to do that. They don't know anything other than their work, studies. One good thing they could do is to help these folks, they could create jobs for them first, and then if they employ them, they will probably learn from them how to create more jobs from them. … They shouldn't just say, "Hey, create jobs. Come create jobs." You know, they're the same folks who have PhDs, they are only working for the government. So if they are telling me to create jobs, they should be exemplars to me. They should say hey, we have these jobs; you should do the same. But there are no jobs. They haven't created any. So who am I going to learn from? And the entire world is in a crisis. Even Americans fail to create jobs. So how are you going to expect a Rwandan kid – who is living [her/his] dream of having enough food – to create a job? To create jobs for some other people?

Younger students took solace in the knowledge that they would at least be able to observe if and how earlier cohorts would navigate the challenges associated with becoming job creators: "They're saying you graduate from graduate school and you go home and because you can't find a job, you create your own, yeah, that's our language. But how do you do that if you don't have anything to start on? We'll see what the others

will do, so we have an advantage." Wary of this entrepreneurial discourse, students waited in anticipation to see if and how their peers would forge a path back to Rwanda.

In summary, scholarship students described themselves as 'stuck,' not in a hopeless sense but in the sense of having a desire to make a meaningful contribution yet feeling unable to do so:

> I feel like I need to [serve the community] after getting somewhere. Right now, I'm stuck like the others. Right now, I haven't reached the position or the place where I can be able to do that for the community. Yes, I can do some small things, but I will do that. I'm being prepared. I can see how people in the U.S. serve in whatever they do. I've seen people volunteering; I've seen a lot of things. I feel that I can do the same.

In an effort to succeed professionally, live transnationally, and contribute socially and economically, students sought opportunities to gain work experience, further their education, and develop entrepreneurship skills. As students accepted that certain courses of study such as medicine were no longer options for them in the U.S. system and that funding for MA programs was limited, even those who were not interested in careers as researchers or professors were pushed to consider and in some cases pursue doctoral studies. The full funding offered by many doctoral programs provided an opportunity to remain abroad and pursue a title that is highly regarded in Rwandan society. This common motivation for pursuing doctoral degrees reflects the limited understandings of the U.S. education system that students had prior to accepting the scholarship and that is held among some government officials in Rwanda. It also shows the ways in which

scholarship students' experiences brought about new understandings of the opportunities and limitations a U.S. undergraduate degree offers, particularly for international students.

Similarly, many students felt pushed to acquire entrepreneurship skills so that they could develop their own enterprises and create jobs in the face of limited employment opportunities in Rwanda. While some pursued this strategy on their own volition, others expressed frustration with the frequent references to entrepreneurship as the solution to their post-graduation concerns. Entrepreneurship was viewed by most as either an unrealistic approach or a long-term strategy for securing one's livelihood and creating impact in Rwanda.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented three prominent themes that emerged as Rwandan scholarship students described their lived experiences in the U.S.: transformation, isolation, and struggle. I have also highlighted the widespread concern with returning to Rwanda upon graduation and outlined common strategies that scholarship students pursue as they seek to resolve challenging migration dilemmas and plan for the future. In the first section, I argued that students' understandings of the U.S. and Rwanda are transformed in profound ways as they move between these locations and develop new relationships and increasingly transnational spatial imaginaries. I described how students imagined America prior to traveling abroad, their encounters with America, and their experiences returning to Rwanda for internships.

In the second section, I showed how many scholarship students experienced isolation in relationships with both their Rwandan and non-Rwandan peers. Among their

Rwandan peers, this isolation was explained by Rwanda's history and contemporary political dynamics as well the perception on the part of some students that neither American nor Rwandan students adequately understood their perspectives. In relationships with non-Rwandan peers, some students experienced continuity while others experienced significant disjuncture. I argue that students' class background, faith commitments, and personal interests all contribute to the extent to which students struggle in adjusting socially to life on and around U.S. campuses.

Third, I described the spatial dilemmas students struggle with as they grow increasingly aware that social, economic, and political dynamics in Rwanda may not be conducive to achieving their personal and professional goals. I describe a variety of social, economic, political, and professional considerations that emerged as key considerations from student narratives.

Finally, I highlighted three strategies that students are pursuing in order to maintain their transnational mobility and equip themselves for the future: professional experience, further education, and entrepreneurship skills. I showed how many students are pursuing PhDs not because of their alignment with professional and national objectives but as a last resort in light of academic and financial constraints encountered in the U.S. I also described how some students embrace entrepreneurship as a long-term livelihood strategy while others critique the emphasis on entrepreneurship as a solution to youth unemployment.

Throughout these sections, I have argued that students' spatial imaginaries are transformed by their experiences in the U.S. and Rwanda in ways that pose challenging

dilemmas, and that students' ability to strategically negotiate these dilemmas and (re)imagine their futures is constrained in significant ways by the isolation shaped by Rwanda's history of identity-based conflict and compounded by academic and financial constraints. In the concluding chapter, I summarize the findings from this study and discuss their implications for theory, policy, practice, and future research.

CHAPTER 7

SHAPING TRANSNATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION SPACES: IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY, POLICY, PRACTICE, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Introduction

One day in the Metro cafeteria, I proposed to several students that I was thinking of titling my dissertation *Avuye States*. "What?" they asked, failing to interpret my attempt to employ a Kinyarwanda phrase. "You know, *coming from the States*," I clarified. They laughed. "The more I think about it, that's what everyone seems to be struggling with—all the things that coming from the States [U.S.] means to many different people." There was a pause, followed by their laughter turning to nods of agreement as they reflected on the connection I was making between this familiar term and the expectations and dilemmas discussed over our many hours of conversation over the past months. "Ok, that makes sense," they acquiesced. "It's not the only thing I learned," I clarified, "but it does explain a lot."

This final chapter begins with a summary of this dissertation study and a review of its key findings. Central to all of these findings is the above insight that the multiple meanings of *coming from the States* is at the heart of how the opportunity to study in the U.S. is conceived, perceived, and experienced by scholarship students from Rwanda. I then discuss the implications of these findings for theory, policy, practice, and future research. The chapter concludes with a reflection on the "sphere of possibility" (Massey, 2005) opened by spatial analysis.

Summary of Study

This multi-sited ethnography of the Rwanda Presidential Scholars Program has employed Lefebvre's (1991) three-fold concept of spatial production to describe how actors, relationships, and circumstances in Rwanda shape the experiences, emerging professional identities and imagined futures of scholarship students in profound ways. Through the lens of transnational spatial analysis, I have examined how the dilemmas of globalization are reflected in students' educational experiences, social relationships, and post-graduation strategies. The data presented was collected over a nine-month period of fieldwork at Liberal and Metro—two higher education institutions involved with the Rwanda Presidential Scholars Program—during which I interviewed 34 students and observed a variety of classes and extra-curricular activities on and around these campuses. The narrative accounts drawn from these interviews and observations provide rich insights into how this particular transnational education space is produced by diverse actors and negotiated by mobile students from Rwanda.

Summary of Major Findings

The study found that the Rwanda Presidential Scholars Program is a transnational education space where multiple meanings of a U.S. education and social obligations intersect and new representations of self and nation are encountered. In this space, students' identities and imagined future trajectories are transformed in significant and unanticipated ways as they strategically negotiate the challenges and possibilities posed by their experiences as mobile students. The ways in which this transnational education space is conceived, perceived, and experienced produces a heavy burden for scholarship

students: the burden of privilege. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 illuminated this burden through an analysis of three inter-related processes of spatial production: representations of space, spaces of representation, and lived space. The major findings from each of these chapters presented in Table 1 below are summarized in the following sections.

Table 1. Summary of Major Findings

Inter-related Processes of Spatial Production	**Major Findings**
Representations of Space	The contrasting meanings of a U.S. education, 'magical' and conflicting expectations of actors in the U.S. and Rwanda, and the disjuncture between social imaginaries and lived experiences abroad produce a transnational education space characterized by tension and fear of failure.
Spaces of Representation	Students encounter multiple articulations of 'Rwanda' and 'Rwandans' in the U.S. in this space. These encounters produce a space of responsibility, questions, and discouragement.
Lived Space	Students experience this transnational education space as a space of isolation, struggle, and transformation. In this space, they begin to develop new understandings of themselves and reimagine the futures as they strategically negotiate the challenges and possibilities presented by their changing conceptions, perceptions, and experiences of transnational education space.

Representations of space: Tension and fear of failure

Chapter 4 examined how the purposes of the scholarship program and the value of a U.S. higher education are represented by actors in the U.S. and Rwanda and how Rwandan scholarship students' perceive their obligations to their government, communities, and families. Three tensions were identified as contributing to the

production of fear of failure among Rwandan scholarship students. The first tension was between the contrasting narratives of change represented by various program supporters. Among Rwandan government officials and their U.S. community supporters, policy objectives of promoting private sector growth and developing entrepreneurial economic subjects were represented as the primary purposes of the scholarship program. Among these actors, a U.S. education was valued for equipping students with the multi-cultural skills that would enable them to run companies, create jobs, and drive economic growth. Students were viewed as an investment in Rwanda's private sector development strategy. In contrast, program administrators and faculty more commonly emphasized students' potential to contribute to quiet, educated change in Rwanda as critical thinkers and creative, culturally aware problem-solvers. Students were represented as agents of social change, and a U.S. education was valued for its contributions to the development of transformative leadership capacities. These narratives of private sector-driven growth and civil society-led social transformation represented scholarship students in contrasting ways.

The second tension was the conflict between students' obligations to their nation and their families. Student descriptions of Ingando—the political education camps that students are required to attend upon returning home for summer internships—reveal government efforts to inculcate patriotism and commitments to supporting Rwanda's development vision. In contrast to government expectations that students return to Rwanda upon graduation, students' family members in Rwanda in many cases preferred that they stay abroad where they were better positioned to access opportunities and send

remittances. Students perceived that they would be viewed as a failure in the eyes of the government if they pursued a career working abroad, while in the eyes of their family members, they would be viewed as a failure if they chose to return to work in Rwanda. The tension between students' national and familial obligations created a double-bind.

The final tension described in Chapter 4 is the disjuncture between students' imaginaries of America and their lived experiences of undergraduate education in the U.S. Student narratives revealed strikingly similar, media-informed spatial imaginaries of the U.S. and of a U.S. education that students had already formed prior to travelling to the States. These imaginaries, as well as their understandings of self and nation, were dislodged throughout their experiences in the U.S. and, in particular, upon their return to Rwanda part-way through their scholarship experience. Students struggled to realign their expectations and strategies in light of the unanticipated challenges and possibilities encountered abroad while the 'magical' expectations of government officials, family, and community members in Rwanda remained largely constant. Thus, students became increasingly concerned with the prospect of being perceived as failures as they grew disenchanted with the promise of a U.S. education.

The chapter argues that the widespread fear of failure expressed by students is in large part the product of the contrasts, conflict, and disjuncture that characterize ways in which this particular transnational education space was conceived, perceived, and experienced.

Spaces of representation: Responsibility, discouragement, and risk aversion

Chapter 5 examined how 'Rwanda' and 'Rwandans' are represented on and around U.S. campuses as well as how Rwandan scholarship students respond to these representations and represent themselves. The chapter found that the multiple articulations of 'Rwanda' and 'Rwandans' encountered in the U.S. produce a space of responsibility, questions, and discouragement. It also found that students accommodated, played with, and contested these multiple and varied representations.

Program administrators and faculty represented Presidential Scholars as Rwanda's 'Best and Brightest.' The exceptional academic competence and performance of early scholarship program participants set a high bar and subsequent students felt pressure to rise to this standard. In addition to contributing to the stress students experienced as they struggled to maintain high GPAs, the time many students had to devote to their studies to maintain this academic reputation limited their social integration. The combination of this reputation and the importance of academic performance to securing funding for opportunities for further study also limited the extent to which students were willing to engage with the liberal arts curricula at both institutions. While in many cases students expressed appreciation for what they learned in these courses, academic performance remained their primary concern and their drive to succeed reinforced the reputation of Rwandan students as academically dedicated and brilliant.

Students spoke of the naïve stereotypes that characterized the representations of Africa and Rwanda that they encountered in their interactions with many of their American peers and others in the surrounding communities. In some cases, the Rwandan

students played with these primitive representations of Africa by developing elaborate stories that perpetuated these stereotypes while in others, students took the opportunity to educate others about the state of development and diversity across Africa and in Rwanda in particular.

Observations of curricular and extracurricular activities on and off campus revealed the variety of contexts in which students were represented as bearers of Rwandan culture. Students were often called upon to perform traditional dances and represent 'Rwandan' culture through food and fashion. These were the primary ways in which cultural difference was represented and celebrated. In some cases, students were asked to contribute to classroom learning by describing their lived experiences. While students largely accommodated these expectations, they also represented themselves as bearers of global youth culture. The ways in which culture was engaged and celebrated on and around U.S. campuses indicated little recognition of its interplay with historical, political, and economic conditions.

Students were also presented with representations and research that raised concerns about Rwanda's post-genocide trajectory. I argued that practices of risk aversion limited students' ability to engage in conversations about contemporary Rwanda. For many, their responses to portrayals of Rwanda that challenge the government's preferred conceptions indicated not only an effort to protect themselves from judgment but also to maintain hope and optimism about the future.

Lived space: Isolation, struggle, and transformation

Chapter 6 examined how Rwandan scholarship students experienced and negotiated transnational education space in their daily lives, on and off campus. Three widespread experiences among the students were identified and discussed. The first was the transformation in students' spatial understandings and imagined future trajectories. Students described how their images of America produced in Rwanda changed drastically while living in the U.S. They also spoke of developing increasingly transnational and cosmopolitan imaginaries as they sought to re-negotiate their changing spatial understandings.

The second common experience was the isolation many students experienced despite the company and support offered by their Rwandan peers. While some spoke of their experience studying abroad with other Rwandans as a unifying experience, many spoke of the limitations of the support they were able to offer one another. Their hesitancy to share openly about their background and struggles with other Rwandan students was largely attributed to Rwanda's history and current political context. Students feared that their peers would deem them unpatriotic if they spoke of their migration dilemmas. This left them largely on their own to navigate these challenges.

The third theme explored in the chapter was students' struggle to adjust their professional trajectories and post-graduation plans in response to diverse expectations and transformed understandings of the opportunities and challenges present in the U.S. and Rwanda. Dilemmas of place and space were central to their struggles. While many expressed a desire to return to the familiarity of 'home' where they would be close to

family and better positioned to contribute to society in certain ways, they also spoke of social, economic, and political dimensions of 'home' that brought this choice and their ability to make an impact into question. In relation to these dilemmas, a variety of influences that encouraged students to remain in the U.S. upon graduation as well as influences that motivated them to return to pursue careers in Rwanda were discussed. These considerations identified in the students' narratives reveal that while economic considerations are significant, they are not alone in determining the migration decisions students envision making after completing their studies. Students indicated a growing interest in pursuing fulfilling and impactful careers and spoke of migration influences in relation to their desire and perceived ability to make a difference in particular contexts.

Finally, the chapter illuminated several strategies that students employ to resolve the tensions between how transnational education space is conceived, perceived, and experienced. These include remaining abroad long enough to ensure their continued ability to move back and forth across Rwanda's borders, pursuing doctoral degrees, and developing entrepreneurship skills. In some cases, the pursuit of doctoral degrees was viewed as an opportunity for students to further their professional interests and careers while others spoke of this strategy as one misaligned with students' personal objectives and national obligations and pursued primarily due to the absence of alternatives. Similarly, some considered entrepreneurship to be a promising opportunity while others viewed it as an inadequate solution to the limited jobs available in Rwanda. The chapter argued that the transformations students undergo throughout their undergraduate pose challenging migration dilemmas and shape how students imagine and plan for the future

in significant ways. Furthermore, coming from a low-income, post-conflict context constrains their ability to support each other as they strategically negotiate these dilemmas and plan for their futures in ways that exacerbate the burden of privilege these students struggle to negotiate and bear.

Study Contributions

The insights offered by this transnational spatial analysis contribute to existing research, educational theory, policy, and practice in a variety of ways. Overall, they demonstrate that bringing together conceptual tools from transnational migration scholarship and spatial theories of education has the potential to illuminate the experiences of internationally mobile students and their migration strategies in ways that are both novel and significant. They also show that anthropology offers important insights into the role of culture in constituting education space. By shedding light on the experiences of this particular group of scholarship students from the context of Rwanda, this study also has the potential to inform the future investments of the Rwandan government and other policy makers and funding organizations supporting higher education scholarship programs that send students abroad. Finally, it suggests a variety of ways in which those designing and implementing scholarship programs and support services for internationally mobile students might better understand and address the challenges these students face as they negotiate competing pressures and navigate both the possibilities and constraints of their transnational mobility. Each of these contributions is elaborated upon in the following sections.

Theorizing student mobility

As described in Chapter 2, this study is situated at the intersection of international student mobility research, transnational migration scholarship, and spatial theories of education. Its primary theoretical contributions come from the connections made across traditional boundaries and its demonstration of the potential for these fields of study to inform each other in significant ways. In his book addressing what determines the decisions of migrants, among other questions, Collier (2013) points out the importance of such interdisciplinary analysis particularly in the area of migration, which addresses problems that don't fit neatly into academic categories:

> Modern academic endeavor is organized into a vast array of specialists. Even within the economics of migration, researchers are highly specialized. … Migration is not primarily about economics: it is a social phenomenon, and as for academic specialism, this opens a Pandora's box. (p. 5)

By mixing insights from these areas of scholarship, the study offers contributions to each.

This dissertation's contributions to international student mobility scholarship are threefold. First, it demonstrates the need for expanded notions of culture and identity in research on international student experiences. It reveals that culture is employed through educational practice in ways that give little attention to its interplay with history and contemporary political dynamics. While other scholars have sought to employ more nuanced concepts of culture in their empirical studies, this study extends such efforts in important ways.

For example, Montgomery's (2010) qualitative study of international student experiences examines how student learning is embedded in influential social and cultural contexts. Like the present study, her work goes beyond nation-centric concepts of culture to consider alternative perspectives on the idea of culture might illuminate student learning. Montgomery draws on two paradigms to recast notions of culture: 'small cultures' – referring to social groupings where there is cohesive behavior but are not related to ethnic or nationality groupings – and 'communities of practice' – referring to groups of people who share a common concern, set of problems, or passion for a topic and who develop knowledge and expertise in the area of shared interested through regular interactions. She argues that, "viewing the idea of culture through the paradigms of small cultures and community of practice is a first step towards gaining a new perspective on positive academic and social interaction at university" (p. 18).

While the study's focus on social relationships as an important context in which student learning occurs illuminates the importance of relationships among international students, Montgomery does not attend to the role of social relationships in more distant geographical locations. Her finding that international students form supportive social networks that assist them in coping with daily life and pursuing academic success study challenges a prevalent assumption that international students lose out if they don't integrate with domestic students. This study of Rwandan student experiences similarly finds that social networks among international students provide an important support, however, it demonstrates that historical and geographically distant relationships shape the nature of these social dynamics of these 'small cultures' in significant ways.

For the scholarship students in this study, Rwanda's history and current political context shaped their social relationships academic experiences in ways that were seldom addressed in or out of the classroom. Culture was often employed in classrooms as a fixed concept synonymous with tradition, and interlocutors generally gave little attention the extent to which students from contexts such as Rwanda were influenced by global youth culture. Moreover, although Rwandan students came from a variety of backgrounds, cultural references tended to be nation-centric and the variety of cultural practices and traditions within nations were seldom referenced.

Similarly, this analysis problematizes limited notions of identity. The study findings point to the importance of examining emerging forms of transnationality and cosmopolitan identities among internationally mobile students and the importance of professional identity formation throughout their educational sojourns. This was a particularly important aspect of identity development that Rwandan scholarship students struggled with as they transitioned from one education system to another. The transition to higher education in the U.S. closed certain options while opening new possibilities in ways that students did not anticipate.

Furthermore, it shows that cultural adjustment is not the primary challenge navigated by internationally mobile students, nor is intercultural competency the sole skill developed through the experience of studying abroad. Rwandan scholarship students spoke of their experiences in ways that both included and went beyond the kind of learning experiences addressed in existing international student mobility scholarship. These students struggled to adjust to a new social status and navigate diverse

expectations associated with their newfound mobility—processes that involved developing new cultural logics. They developed new competencies as they forged their professional identities in the midst of competing demands and sought to strategically position themselves in transnational space. Such learning processes have received little attention in international student mobility scholarship.

Transnationalism helps illuminate the extent to which the space within which international higher education occurs is increasingly characterized by ties and interactions that link people and institutions across national borders in a variety of ways that shape student experiences and their ongoing relationships with their countries of origin. The study provides evidence that concepts of culture and identity need to be expanded to account for the ways in which culture is historically, politically, and economically constituted, as well as the multiplicity and dynamic nature of student identities. In sum, this study adds to the growing body of literature arguing that the concepts of culture and identity employed in research on international students are inadequate. Moreover, the focus on developing intercultural competencies overlooks other kinds of competencies that students develop, such as the ability to navigate competing expectations and strategically position oneself in transnational space.

A second contribution to international student mobility scholarship offered by this analysis of transnational education space is that it illuminates the role of students' ongoing relationships with their families and nation in shaping their experiences and migration dilemmas. The narratives of scholarship students from Rwanda draw attention to the challenges that the shifts in students' identities and social imaginaries pose in light

of the broader family, societal, and national contexts in which they remain embedded. This finding underscores the importance of problematizing individualistic frameworks for studying international student mobility and adopting frameworks that recognize the importance of family relationships to international students' mobility and post-graduation decisions.

While it may be politically expedient, as Waters and Brooks (2012) note, to "construct an image of the 'unencumbered' international student – relatively carefree and unburdened by 'messy' social relationships," (p. 33), this study makes clear that friends, family, and government officials play a pivotal role in both enabling and constructing the meanings of educational mobility. Rwandan students spoke of their perceived family obligations in a manner that confirms Collier's (2013) proposition:

> In many cases migration is more a family decision than that of the migrant alone: the migrant is not escaping from the family but rather is part of a larger strategy of enlarging opportunities. From the perspective of other family members, migrants are investments that often pay off handsomely through a prolonged stream of remittances and enhanced access for further migration. (p. 196)

The Rwandan students also described how the expectations of their family members that they would continue to pursue opportunities abroad rather than return home were in direct tension with government expectations that they would return home upon completion of their studies to transfer their knowledge and solve problems in Rwanda. Their narratives reveal significant efforts on the part of government officials in Rwanda to reinforce students' sense of national obligation. This finding provides support to the

contention that nation-states remain interested and actively involved in defining their transnational connections and developing particular kinds of transnational subjects through their support of international higher education. Rizvi (2010) argues that national governments increasingly view their diasporas as having an important role to play in national development projects. As a result, "international students thus have to straddle a space somewhere between an emerging sense of cosmopolitanism, on the one hand, and national loyalty, on the other" (p. 15). This study demonstrates that such straddling is a challenging task for international students and one that merits support that is not readily available to international students.

Thirdly, this research confirms what a number of other scholars have suggested: that socioeconomic class articulates with international education experiences in significant ways (Ley, 2010; Sing, Rizvi, and Shrestha et al., 2007; Waters & Brooks, 2012). By attending to a minority group of internationally mobile students, it demonstrates variation in the extent to which international education marks a change in class status. While international education is a class marker for the relatively privileged majority of international students, it access to studying abroad entails a drastic class change for scholarship students coming from relatively disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds. Thus, students' adjustment experiences are characterized not only by adapting to a new cultural environment abroad, but a change of social status within their own cultural milieu. Even amongst this group of students from Rwanda, this status change was more drastic for some than for others.

Although this study did not examine whether a student came from an urban or

rural background, their family's socioeconomic class, or their history of living in and outside of Rwanda's borders for a variety of reasons, it is nonetheless suggested by the data that such differences were salient and related to class distinctions within Rwanda. As one student noted in a conversation referenced in the preface of this dissertation: "There are different categories of people in Rwanda." Without systematically examining class difference among my research participants, the data indicate that these differences likely account for some of the variation identified across student experiences.

For instance, there was variation in the extent to which students were expected to contribute to their family economically. Several interviewees suggested that the responsibility to provide financial support to one's family correlates with their level of economic need. I noted that for two students in particular who indicated that they came from lower class families, their fear of failure was even more pronounced due to this heightened responsibility as well as the limited social safety net that their families were able to provide. They had gone from being provided for to being viewed as the providers for their family upon receiving a scholarship to study in the U.S.

There was also variation in the ease with which students adjusted to life abroad. Some with prior exposure to global media culture and familiarity with cultural practice not drastically different from those encountered abroad experienced less disjuncture as they transitioned to life in the U.S. Those from backgrounds where such exposure was more limited found adjusting to life in the U.S. to be more challenging. Inadvertently, this analysis of spatial conceptions, perceptions, and experiences foregrounds the salience of social class and its relevance not just to how students transition to life abroad but the

choices they make and the challenges they face upon graduation. This role of social class is discussed further in the section on directions for future research.

The final theoretical contribution of the study is that of bringing together transnationalism with Lefebvre's concept of spatial production in a way that demonstrates its relevance to understanding the experiences of internationally mobile students. Whereas transnational scholarship has given limited attention to the role of human agency and the connection between economic and geopolitical transformations and how actors interpret and negotiate these processes (Rizvi, 2008; Singh, et al. 2007), this spatial analysis underscores the role of human agency in both producing and engaging with education space. Attending to representational practices that produce transnational education space indicates that scholarship students from Rwanda were not the only ones who imagined that a scholarship opportunity to study in the U.S. would have particular kinds of outcomes. Rather, actors in the U.S. and Rwanda understood and represented this opportunity in contrasting ways. Student narratives show that tensions between concepts, perceptions, and experiences of educational space can pose challenging dilemmas and produce considerable stress for mobile individuals as they develop new imaginaries and seek to strategically position themselves in relation to economic opportunities, fulfilling careers, family relationships, and national governments. These dilemmas are not inevitable but are shaped by the actions of human agents.

Rizvi and Lingard (2009) assert that "a social imaginary is not simply inherited and already determined for us, it is rather in a constant state of flux. It is thus an enabling

concept that describes the ways people act as world-making collective agents within a given symbolic matrix that refuses an ontology of determinism" (p. 35). In other words, the ways in which social agents imagine the world and act upon is dynamic rather than determined and can therefore be shaped by educational opportunities and experiences. This study has shown that in addition to expanding the "canvas of the possible on which to create," (Phelps, 2013, p. 167), globalization and transnational mobility present students with challenging dilemmas as their social imaginaries undergo significant transformation.

Moreover, it has revealed that in addition to structural barriers such as academic systems and financial constraints, social actors in the U.S. and Rwanda contribute to these dilemmas through their representational practices. The expectations and assumptions associated with providing access to high quality tertiary education opportunities both empower and constrain students as "world-making collective agents." The social dynamics of post-conflict Rwanda also limit the ability of this particular group of scholarship students to reimagine and work toward remaking Rwanda collectively. By illuminating the relationship between objective structural constraints and subjective representational practices in producing education space, the study suggests that student agency must be considered in light of the intersecting agendas and roles of diverse actors involved in producing education spaces. The relationship between social structures, representational practices, and student agency merits further attention, particularly as education space increasingly becomes a domain in which diverse actors collaborate on programs and policies that may be envisioned to serve ends that are quite distinct.

In sum, the findings of this study contribute to international student mobility scholarship in three central ways: (1) demonstrating the need for expanded concepts of culture, identity, and understandings of the competencies developed through international education; (2) illuminating the role of family and nation in shaping student experiences and migration dilemmas; and (3) suggesting students' experiences abroad and plans for life beyond graduation are shaped in a variety of ways by their socioeconomic status both globally and relative to their context of origin. They also show how transnational spatial analysis illuminates the variety of objective and subjective forces that shape the spaces in which education occurs, futures are imagined, and migration decisions are made and underscores the role of human agency.

Higher education policy and scholarship program design

This dissertation does not provide a conclusive answer to the complex question of whether or not international higher education scholarships for students from low-income, post-conflict contexts are a worthwhile investment. It does, however, suggest several important considerations for national policy makers and funding organizations considering or currently supporting this approach to expanding access to high quality tertiary education opportunities. In this section I summarize several considerations for policy makers and program designers based on this research and offer two sets of recommendations: one for higher education policy makers and funding partners in general and one specific to the Rwanda Presidential Scholars Program.

One important consideration for higher education policy makers to take into account is that theories of change that link educational opportunities abroad with change

in students' contexts of origin do not operate in a vacuum. Rather, they operate in the midst of a complex array of historical, economic, political, and social dynamics and relationships. One of the primary reasons for remaining abroad that is confirmed in this research is the perception that the social model[24] in one's home country will not facilitate productivity and professional growth. (Collier, 2013). In addition to fulfilling responsibilities, scholarship recipients seek the kind of professional success and meaningful careers that are deterred by ineffective social models. Theories of change need to situate education opportunities and post-graduation choices within the social models that exist in particular contexts where scholarship recipients are expected to return.

Given the strategic imaginaries associated with educational mobility in low-income contexts—imaginaries that construct the U.S. as a land of abundant opportunities and imply that access to such opportunities should neither be turned down nor left behind until they have been fully taken advantage of—linking such opportunities with return requirements or expectations is problematic. While offering scholarships contingent upon signing a contract to return is a common practice to mitigate concerns with fueling 'brain drain', this approach does not take into account the costs associated with return that a student completing secondary school is not likely to fully comprehend. The data presented in this dissertation confirm that scholarship students develop an awareness of

[24] Paul Collier (2013) defines a social model as "the combination of institutions, rules, norms, and organizations of a country" (p. 33). These models differ considerably among and between high-income and low-income countries. Social models are what facilitate the emergence of effective organizations and enable workers to be productive. He argues that in pursuing opportunities abroad, "migrants are essentially escaping from countries with dysfunctional social models" and "voting with their feet in favor of the high-income social model" (pp. 34-35).

the potential costs of returning home throughout their experiences abroad and that fear of failure becomes one of the primary motivators to remain abroad and continue acquiring skills, experience, and capital. These social perceptions and responses to particular choices and outcomes should also be taken into account. They also suggest the importance of tempering the 'magical expectations' policy makers often have of scholarship recipients in light of the unintended consequences for students' social interactions and psychological well being illuminated in the preceding chapters.

Another consideration is the importance of obtaining an accurate understanding of the education opportunities scholarship students obtain and the pathways of return available to students. This study shows that when education programs are not well aligned with employment opportunities and pathways to return and succeed are perceived to be limited, scholarship students are likely to remain abroad for a prolonged period. Misalignment (or misunderstanding of actual opportunities available) produces frustration and anxiety on the part of scholarship students.

Relatedly, policy makers would benefit from acknowledging and addressing the concerns that hinder scholarship students—many of whom would prefer to live and work in their context of origin—from making the choice to return. In some cases these drivers to remain abroad are beyond what policy makers have the ability to address while in other cases they could be diminished through supporting policies and incentives. For example, while policy makers cannot easily change perceptions of political instability or the jealousy of peers, they might support ongoing professional development opportunities or networking opportunities with potential employers to facilitate return. They also might

provide workshops to assist students returning from abroad to translate their training acquired abroad to local contexts and challenges. While student motivations vary, it is important to note that many desire to pursue careers in their home context and would choose to do so if success is perceived as attainable.

These considerations reveal that international higher education scholarship initiatives both present significant opportunities and raise serious concerns that necessitate innovative approaches and policy supports if their potential contributions to development, broadly defined, are to be realized. Several recommendations for policy makers based on these considerations are summarized below:

1. *Develop program theories of change and strategies in light of the broad array of influences that inform the post-graduation decisions of mobile students.*

   Family obligations and employment opportunities are two primary influences that merit consideration. Strategies might include outreach to families of scholarship recipients, facilitating discussions amongst scholarship recipients regarding how to communicate about experiences and opportunities abroad with family members, and providing career guidance and development resources specific to contexts of origin.

2. *Facilitate opportunities for scholarship recipients to expand and maintain professional networks in their country of origin and ensure viable pathways of return.*

   Opportunities to expand and maintain professional networks include internship opportunities that provide forums for students to interact with a wide variety of professionals in their home contexts and an online portal for employers to connect with students with relevant interests and experience. Offering short-term research or

internship opportunities to students several years after their return would provide another incentive by reducing the concern that return is likely to limit opportunities for mobility in the future.

3. *Consider funding master's programs, particularly in Africa.*

   The scholarship students that participated in this study expressed widespread interest in pursuing master's degrees that would provide additional skills needed to transition into workforce opportunities. In the absence of such opportunities, many chose to pursue doctoral degrees as an approach to remaining abroad. This choice was not always aligned with students' professional interests or plans, nor was it likely to lead to opportunities in Rwanda. Funding master's programs, particularly in African contexts, would provide incentive for undergraduate scholarship recipients to return to the continent. Scholarships at the master's level would also be less likely to leave students feeling ill-equipped to compete for career opportunities in their home contexts.

The following recommendations are specific to the Rwanda Presidential Scholars Program:

1. *Improve the internship component of the program.*

   As noted above, internships can be a valuable way for students pursuing education abroad to expand and maintain professional networks. This study demonstrates that if poorly designed, they can also be a significant deterrent to returning upon graduation. It is important that placements are well aligned with what students are studying and that learning is facilitated by supervisors who demonstrate strong leadership qualities.

Exposure to inspirational leaders and opportunities for contributing to change using competencies acquired abroad is essential for motivating students to pursue meaningful careers in contexts where they are likely to encounter significant obstacles.

2. *Acknowledge student dilemmas and affirm that many desire to contribute yet struggle to determine when and how to do so.*

   This study shows that while international scholarship students begin to imagine transnational futures as they study in the U.S., their sense of responsibility and their desire to use their education to benefit others also deepens in response to both awareness of being a national investment and to the commitments to service and volunteerism encountered in communities abroad. Students need support to navigate the dilemmas they encounter as a result of these new understandings and sense of responsibility. They also should be encouraged in their desire to contribute rather than discouraged by messaging that questions their national loyalty and sense of patriotism when they speak openly about the dilemmas they face.

3. *Prepare to engage a growing diaspora of former RPSP students.*

   The study also suggests that a number of Presidential Scholars are unlikely to return to Rwanda in the immediate future. Thus, it is important for the government to develop strategies to provide opportunities for a growing diaspora to remain involved and contribute in meaningful ways to things happening in Rwanda. These strategies should incorporate student input and perspectives to ensure that they are aligned with diaspora interests and motivations to contribute.

Program implementation and student support services

> Certainly, [transnational space] is a dynamic space of personal rewards, but equally it is an uncomfortable, contested and even traumatic space that should not be romanticized in the ways in which some cultural theorists do, but recognized for what it is—full of constraints as well as opportunities. (Rizvi, 2010, p. 26)

The extent to which mobility can be an uncomfortable, contested, and traumatic space, as indicated in the quote above and this dissertation as a whole, suggests that internationally mobile students need safe and supportive spaces while studying abroad. The insight that the struggles of mobile students go far beyond academic and social adjustment has important implications for those involved with implementing scholarship programs and providing support to mobile students. Supports that focus on the initial transition and adjustment phase and the development of intercultural competencies are valuable yet insufficient for the challenges at hand.

Support services for international undergraduate students are often provided by student affairs and international student services professionals. These professionals would benefit from developing an understanding of transnationality and the conditions in which international students are expected to make professional contributions upon graduation. They would also benefit from attending to the variety of reasons that the families, national governments, and other groups support mobile students in their pursuit of international higher education opportunities in order to comprehend the challenging dilemmas they contribute to producing. Furthermore, attending to the variety of constraints students face based on their national affiliation, social status, and other factors

as they interface with these social obligations would provide considerable insight into the kinds of challenges students face and the strategies they employ. While these motivations, expectations, and challenges vary across individuals and groups of students, there are certain trends, as demonstrated by this study's focus on scholarship recipients from Rwanda, which have the potential to inform a variety of approaches to supporting mobile students.

Directions for Future Research

In addition to the implications for theory, policy, and practice, this study also suggests several directions for future research. The first would be to develop a grounded survey based on the themes identified in this study that could be used to further examine the experiences of international scholarship recipients. Groups that might be surveyed to expand this research include Rwanda Presidential Scholars at a broad sample of institutions, Rwandan students pursuing undergraduate degrees in other international contexts (e.g. Belgium, France, China), and students receiving scholarships to pursue MA degrees. Given the wide variety of approaches that characterize international higher education scholarship programs (Perna, Orosz, Gopaul, Jumakulov, Ashirbekov, & Kishkentayeva, 2014),[25] further comparisons of the migration decisions amongst participants in different programs would offer important insights.

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[25] Perna et al. (2014) provide a typology of international scholarship programs in higher education supported by national and federal governments that would provide a valuable resource for informing the design of a comparative study. The authors themselves suggest that their typology may be used "to facilitate cross-national comparisons of program design, implementation, and outcomes" (p. 63). The program criteria included in the typology include study level, program intensity, priority fields, expenses covered, destination restriction, return obligation, and demographic target. The typology also takes into consideration some of the characteristics of nations sponsoring the programs, including economic competitiveness, political freedom, and region. These criteria align with many of the themes identified in this study.

Given the widespread interest in understanding what determines the decisions of migrants and the limited attention given to mobile students despite the size and significance of this group, migration influences would be a particularly important area to explore through a grounded survey. Another aspect to explore would be the relationship between influences on migration decisions and students' socio-economic class background and family circumstances. The study suggests that the question of whether or not the burden of privilege is more extreme for scholarship recipients from lower class backgrounds is an important one to explore and is of particular significance given the interest among some scholarship program supporters in providing higher education access to extremely economically and socially disadvantaged groups of students.

Another area for further research is to follow-up with this particular group of students as a longitudinal tracer study. Such studies are limited within international student research in particular and alumni research more broadly (Paige et al., 2010). Such a study could explore the actual career and migration decisions scholarship students make upon graduation, the ways in which they contribute to their nations of origin, and the opportunities and challenges they identify in the initial years of their career. This would enhance understanding of how to support scholarship recipients in their efforts to fulfill their multiple responsibilities and secure their livelihoods.

Conclusion

If our spaces and places, our human geographies, are socially constructed, it logically follows that they are not immutable or naturally given. This means that

> they can be socially changed, made into something better than they were through collective action. (Soja, 2004, p. x)

> Critical disbelief, in pursuit of a reinvigorated praxis, is the beginning of a solution. (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2000, p. 335)

In *Millennial Capitalism*, anthropologists Comaroff and Comaroff (2000) provide a critique of capitalism presented "as a gospel of salvation; a capitalism that, if rightly harnessed, is invested with the capacity to wholly transform the universe of the marginalized and disempowered" (p. 292). As demonstrated in this study, families and national governments place considerable faith in the hope that a U.S. education will lead to significant transformations. By interrogating the magical expectations that frame education as a solution to complex development challenges, this dissertation draws attention to their implications for the lived experiences of scholarship students suggests the importance of questioning the faith that diverse actors place in international higher education opportunities as a source of personal, familial, and national transformation.

It does not, however, suggest the absence of possibilities for change or deny the potential for international higher education to contribute to economic and social change. On the contrary, as articulated in the quotes above, spatial analysis opens a 'sphere of possibility' in which human agency might be engaged to trouble and shift spatial relations (Massey, 2005). In this closing chapter, I have outlined several possibilities for improvement in how educational migration is theorized, higher education policies are designed, and programs and support services for mobile students in general and scholarship recipients in particular are implemented. The finding that framing scholarship

recipients as a ‘diaspora of hope’ (Appadurai, 1994) places a heavy burden on the shoulders of youth from economically and socially disadvantaged contexts does not call for abandoning the hope that supporting higher education opportunities for youth from such contexts might contribute to the pursuit of social justice altogether. Rather, it calls for creative response and reinvigorated praxis. As the Comaroffs note, critical disbelief is the first step toward a solution.

AFTERWORD

Youth are underestimated as positive agents of change and key actors in peace-building, both by policy-makers and academics.

If youth are only perceived as the "devil in the demographics" (Urdal, 2004) or as helpless and powerless actors, their power and potential will not be harnessed for peace. … Young individuals, who are directly affected by violent conflict and who have grown up immersed in violent cultures and structures are indeed able to challenge these cultures and structures.

(Felice & Wisler, 2008, p. 2, 28)

As I reach the end of writing this dissertation, it is April 2014. On the 7th of the month, Rwanda began its 20th commemoration of the genocide that began in 1994. I am now working with a new group of scholarship students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds across Sub-Saharan Africa, several of whom come from Rwanda. Reflecting on the implications of this study for my daily work of supporting these students to develop as leaders and change-makers, I return to the question of what this study has taught me about the potential of youth—particularly those from conflict-effected societies—to act as positive agents of change and the role that international higher education might play in the process. It was this question, along with claims that international education experiences contribute to more peaceful global relations, that provided the impetus for this study in the first place. I begin with a vignette that conveys

my observations of genocide remembrance events on two campuses and conclude with a word of cautious hope.

During the month of April, Presidential Scholars organized a variety of events to offer members of their campus and surrounding communities a glimpse into their lives as Rwandans. I was honored that two students from Metro had invited me to begin commemoration week by attending church with them.

At church, the pastor spoke about the challenging tension of living between rescue and renewal, redemption and restoration. "Change is in process," s/he explained, "and we envision a better future. Yet we live day to day in the midst of brokenness. We are called to mourn with hope." Later on at lunch, one of the students commented on the sermon. "When the pastor said that thing about mourning with hope, it was like he was speaking about today, about Rwanda." The other student nodded in agreement.

The following day, the same student invited me to attend a commemoration event at one of the nearby universities. I agreed to drive a group of students. Upon arrival, three young men in black that looked like bodyguards approached us. They were Presidential Scholars dressed in black suits and concealing their eyes behind dark sunglasses. They greeted their friends and escorted us inside, where the entryway to an auditorium had been decorated with purple ribbons and Rwandan baskets. "Why are they wearing those glasses?" I whispered to one of the students. "They're trying to be like the Rwandan officials," s/he explained. "They wear them at commemoration events to hide their tears."

Inside, a popular Kinyarwanda song about genocide remembrance was playing on the speakers. As the auditorium filled, I noticed that Presidential Scholars from several schools study were present. Looking at the many familiar faces, I was grateful to have had the opportunity to get to know so many of the students. The event was also well attended by their fellow students, faculty, and people from the surrounding area. The presentation began with an overview of Rwanda's history leading up to the 1994 genocide. It followed the familiar storyline that I had encountered every time I visited one of Rwanda's official genocide memorials, emphasizing a peaceful pre-colonial period followed by a period of tension caused by colonialism, bad politics and poor governance. This was followed by a documentary that gave a brief overview of the genocide and focused primarily on recovery and reconciliation efforts. After the film, another student spoke for several minutes about Rwanda's development plan, Vision 2020, highlighting the country's progress.

The next presentation was by an American student. S/he shared a poem called Their Hearts Are Strong, inspired by friendships with the Presidential Scholars at her/his school. After the poetry reading, several others from the host institution also took the opportunity to express their appreciation for the things they have learned through their interactions with these students. "You came here for your benefit, but really, the benefit is ours. You have brought the world to us. I talk about genocide in my classes, about the nature of evil, but you bring this conversation to life," one professor commented. A panel of Presidential Scholars fielded the questions from the audience. "You mentioned that the U.N. has apologized to Rwanda for not intervening – what about Belgium?" one attendee

asked. The men in black discussed briefly amongst themselves. "Some countries have apologized, like the U.S. But Belgium, no, we don't think they have apologized," one replied.

"Is it possible that some people don't know if they're Hutu or Tutsi, or that that might happen?" another person from the audience asked. "Well, I was one of them," a student replied. "When I was young I didn't used to know. Some parents tell their kids to create divisionism, but patriotic parents like mine don't tell their kids. I asked my mom when I was in school because I really wanted to know my family's history. We were in Uganda and if I hadn't been there, I probably wouldn't be here today to talk to you." The final question of the evening was: "Other than money, what does Rwanda need?" "We need psychologists with expertise in human behavior. There are a lot of psychological problems and pain and trauma people struggle with, they hold in their hearts. Does any other Rwandan student from another school want to answer?" "We need ideas that can help us use what we have efficiently," another added. "That's my opinion."

In closing, all the students from Rwanda present at the event moved to the stage and stood quietly beside each other as they passed a candle from person to person. Looking at the many familiar faces of students I had interviewed standing on the stage together, remembering the past and looking to the future, I wished that I had some shades to cover the tears that began to well in my own eyes. The shared sense of pain and hope was palpable.

After the program, the audience was dismissed to the lobby for refreshments, where a variety of Rwandan-made handicrafts were on sale. I chatted with a professor

and several students that were planning to travel to Rwanda during the summer break to teach science lessons at secondary schools. It would be an opportunity for some of the Presidential Scholars to introduce their American classmates to their home country. After mingling for a while with their friends from other schools, we headed back to Metro. I dropped the students off on campus and drove home.

A few days later, I returned to Liberal for their commemoration event. Upon arrival, I found one of the Presidential Scholars seated at a genocide remembrance table decorated with some flowers and electric candles. S/he was handing out purple ribbons and bracelets that read "1994 never again in Rwanda or elsewhere." As I stood chatting with her/him, several other students passed by to say hello. The seniors updated me on how they were feeling about graduating. "It's a combination of excitement and nervosity," one student shared. "If I get money for grad school, I'm all set. If I don't, I don't know what I'll do. It's all about money." I wished her/him the best.

That evening, I arrived early to the space where students were setting up for their commemoration event. The event included a series of reflections on the theme of growing up in a post-Genocide society. Students handed out programs that provided a timeline of events leading up to the genocide along with a personal message from the students. It read:

> *Thank you for attending our event. It truly means a lot to us, your fellow Liberal students, and to all Rwandans in general. Rwanda is now a better country as it heals and strives to continue its course towards reconciliation, nation building and socioeconomic development. However, we will always remember our*

families, friends, and fellow Rwandans who were killed in the 1994 Genocide. We will also let the world know so that such a tragedy doesn't happen again in Rwanda or elsewhere.

In contrast to the previous event that had focused primarily on Rwanda's history and vision, this event involved students sharing personal reflections on a variety of aspects of their experiences living in post-genocide Rwanda. The first presentation was about the experiences of children during the genocide and the prevalence of orphans. This was followed by a reflection on some of the challenges facing post-genocide neighborhoods. The next presentation was about the struggles of children born outside Rwanda and was given by a student who grew up in Uganda and only returned to Rwanda after the genocide. After this, a student that had lost a parent in the genocide spoke about the adult roles and responsibilities assumed by orphans. Another student then spoke about post-genocide trauma and treatment efforts.

The final presentation, a reflection on the strong hearts of Rwandan women, was given by another student who had lost a parent during the genocide and explained to me earlier in the day that s/he had been experiencing stomach pain all week—a common phenomenon in Rwanda during this period of widespread post-traumatic stress. S/he asked the audience to forgive her/him for sitting down while s/he spoke about the experiences of women during the genocide. In closing, s/he thanked the audience for listening to their "horror stories," and invited the program coordinator to come forward and make a few remarks. S/he came forward and expressed appreciation of the students for sharing their experiences and of the Liberal community for creating environment

where such an event could be possible. "Tonight demonstrates that trust has been built in the Liberal community. You should be proud," s/he concluded.

After the event, one of the American students who had studied abroad in Rwanda came up to me and asked if I knew the percentage of the students in the program who were Tutsi. "I don't know," I replied, "but I appreciate their commitment to trying to move beyond such distinctions. Clearly there is so much more that shapes each person's identity." I was impressed by the way in which the event conveyed such a variety of perspectives and experiences of the same event, and slightly disappointed by the question about ethnicity, as it seemed to take a way from the evening's emphasis on unity amidst so many diverse backgrounds and experiences.

These events reveal both the pain and the hope that Rwandan youth carry as their nation emerges from conflict. They show the possibility of building spaces of trust where stories can be shared and hard questions can be asked. Furthermore, they indicate that representational practices are in on one hand prescribed by the Rwandan government, and on the other, appropriated in creative and transformative ways by youth themselves. However, international education does not happen in a void; it happens in a transnational space where distant economic, social, and political dynamics are ever-present, shaping individual identities and relationships in complex ways.

While youth are indeed underestimated as "positive agents of change and key actors in peace-building," (Felice & Wisler, 2008, p. 2) it should not be assumed that challenging the cultures and structures of post-conflict societies is not an easy nor a safe task. Neither should it be assumed that international experiences inevitably contribute to

peaceful social relations.[26] Policymakers and educators must recognize that lofty expectations and fear of voicing dilemmas and concerns produces a space of burden, while open conversations and acknowledgement of complex challenges can produce a space of reflection and hope. Transnational education spaces offer a unique, but not uninhibited, opportunity for transformative agency to grow.

[26] See Campbell (2011), Fry (1984), Institute for Higher Education Policy (1998), and Gundykunst (1998) as examples of works claiming that study abroad contributes to more peaceful global relations by cultivating intercultural competence. Others, such as Ward (2001) and Brown (2009) argue that such claims lack sufficient empirical support.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide for Students

Name:

Year in Program:

Date:

Beginnings/Adjustment: *I want to start out by talking about back when you were in Rwanda, when you first found out you were going to be a Presidential Scholar.*

1. *Do you remember what you were first thinking (your hopes and fears) when you found out that you were going to be a Presidential Scholar, as you got ready to depart for the U.S.?*
2. *When you first decided to participate in this program, what were your hopes and goals for the future?*
    a. *How did you hope that studying in the U.S. would contribute to achieving your personal goals?*
    b. *Did you hope that your education would benefit others (individuals or groups)?*

As you arrived and started settling in to different communities here and as you started classes at [Institution]…

3. *Do you remember what surprised you the most about [your campus]?*
    a. *What kind of views/ways of thinking about Rwanda have you encountered during your time here? Have you been surprised at all by what people think of Rwanda, or what it means to be Rwandan? Can you give an example of an encounter where this was talked about?*

4. *What kind of support have you received so far that has been helpful? (Could be from anyone)*
    a. *How have peers from Rwanda supported you?*
    b. *How has [your institution] supported you? What kind of activities have you participated in (symposiums, etc.)?*
    c. *How has the community supported you? Are there any influential organizations other than host families?*
5. *What are the biggest challenges you have encountered so far?*
    a. *Are there additional kinds of support that would help you overcome these challenges?*
    b. *Are there any aspects of your experiences prior to coming to the U.S. that you think helped prepare you to respond to/overcome these challenges?*

Education: Curriculum and Pedagogy

6. *What would you say have been the most significant or meaningful aspects of your education experience here at [your institution]? What have you appreciated most about the curriculum and/or teaching?*
    a. *Can you think of any examples of a time when you were in a class and really appreciating the learning experience you were having?*
7. *What do you think about the liberal arts curriculum here at [your institution]?*

a. *Has the emphasis on liberal arts here influenced how you think about your studies and your future in any ways?*
b. *What are the advantages and disadvantages?*
c. *What about the [institution-specific probes]?*
d. *Other aspects of the curriculum?*

8. *Do you think other students or faculty have learned from you during your time here? Has your perspective as an international student been valued in your classes?*
    a. *Can you share any examples of times when your perspective as a student from Rwanda has contributed to learning among faculty or students, in or outside of classes?*

Communities: *One of the things I am quite interested in understanding is the communities that are important to you, and if those communities have changed over the time you have been here. <u>When I say communities, I mean that very broadly</u> – any groups that you are part of. They can be big (the nation of Rwanda, [your campus] community, a church) or small (a host family, campus club, international student group, sports teams…).*

1. *Since coming to the U.S., what communities/groups would you say you have become a part of? (These can be at [your institution] or in the broader community, formal or non-formal). What about groups you hope to become a part of?*

2. *Are there groups/communities outside the U.S. (in Rwanda or somewhere else) that you hope to stay connected to/part of while you are abroad?*
    a. *How do you stay connected with these groups while you are here?*
3. *Tell me about your personal goals.*
    a. *What communities do you hope to serve?*
    b. *Can you give an example of how you hope to serve your communities and/or world?*
4. *Do you think about your "communities and world" differently now than when you first came to the U.S.? How? (For instance, has your sense of connection to a particular group become stronger/weaker since coming to the U.S.? Does meaning Rwandan mean anything different to you now?)*
    a. *What do you think has contributed to these changes?*

Future Hopes/Plans: *I'm also interested in understanding what influences how you think about your future plans – these can be aspects of the program or other things.*

5. *How does the responsibility of being a Presidential Scholar feel to you?*
    a. *Do these expectations match your personal goals?*
    b. *What do you think might make it difficult to fulfill the program's expectations?*
    c. *What do you think might support fulfilling the program's expectations?*
6. *Have your hopes and plans for the future changed in any ways from when you first started this program?*
7. *Was the internship a helpful part of your experience?*

a. *What did you do for your internship?*

b. *Did your internship experience help you prepare for the future?*

c. *Did you find it difficult to readjust to being in Rwanda?*

d. *Did your experience influence how you think your studies in the U.S.?*

e. *Did you participate in any activities – government organized or other – that contributed to how you plan for and imagine your future?*

Migration: *Another thing I'm interested in is how students think about working abroad or working in your home country after graduation. If you don't want to answer, that's fine. I know that this program has certain requirements for after graduating. I'm not asking what you think about those requirements, but from a long-term perspective – after you have fulfilled the program's requirements.*

8. *In general, what do you think are the main things that influence how Presidential Scholars think about the options of working in Rwanda or working abroad?*

Community Impact: *I have recently decided that I'd like to expand my focus to explore how Presidential Scholars are building relationships in the academic and surrounding community that having an impact on students and community members.*

9. *Are there ways you think that this program is contributing to change that we haven't talked about?*

    a. *What impact do you think it's having at [your institution]?*

    b. *What impact do you think it's having in the surrounding community?*

c. *Are there individuals/organizations you would suggest I look into to learn more about how the relationships/networks Presidential Scholars form are making a difference?*

Final Question:

10. *Are there any additional things you would like to share that you think it is important for others to know about scholarship programs like this one?*

Thank you so much for sharing your perspectives!

Appendix B: Interview Guide for Faculty and Staff

Name:

Position and Organization:

Date:

1. To begin, please describe bit about your role and how long you have been here at [YOUR INSTITUTION].
2. What do you enjoy about working in the [YOUR INSTITUTION] environment?
3. How did you first learn about the Rwanda Presidential Scholars Program?
4. What was your impression of this program when you learned about it?
    a. What is your understanding of how this program contributes to the mission of [YOUR INSTITUTION]? What motivated [YOUR INSTITUTION]'s involvement?
    b. What is your understanding of how it contributes to the objectives of the Government of Rwanda?
    c. Has your perspective on the program changed over time?
5. Did you have any interest in/experience with Rwanda prior to learning about this program or interacting with the Presidential Scholars?
6. In what ways do you interact with Rwanda Presidential Scholars?
    a. Are there any examples you can think of that were significant educational moments, either for you or for one of the Rwandan students?
    b. Are there any challenges you have observed this particular group of students struggling with?

c. What are your observations of how this particular group of students integrates academically?

d. What are your observations of how this particular group of students integrates socially?

7. How does [YOUR INSTITUTION] create spaces for learning from diverse students?

    a. From your perspective, has *teaching and learning at [YOUR INSTITUTION]* been enriched by the presence of Rwandan Presidential Scholars? How?

    b. Can you provide an example of a significant teaching/learning moment related to the program? (curricular or extracurricular)

    c. What are other students learning from Presidential Scholars?

    d. What's difficult/challenging about engaging with the diversity Rwandans and other students bring to campus?

    e. In what ways, if any, does [YOUR INSTITUTION] support faculty to teach diverse students? Are there ways that learning from diversity in the classroom is supported and encouraged by [YOUR INSTITUTION]?

8. How have you *personally/professionally* been impacted by your experiences interacting with the Rwanda Presidential Scholars Program?

    a. What is something you have learned from these students?

9. How has the academic/social environment been impacted by the presence of this

scholarship program?

a. What do you think students are learning from their interactions with Rwandan scholars?

b. What do you think faculty are learning from their interactions with Rwandan scholars?

10. How has the wider community been involved with these students?

a. What do you think community members are learning from their interactions with Rwandan scholars?

b. What kind of networks, if any, do you see developing between scholars and community members?

11. How do you anticipate or hope that the academic and social experience Presidential Scholars have at [YOUR INSTITUTION] is preparing them to contribute to the future of their nation?

a. Are there additional ways this could be supported?

12. Is there anything else you would like to add?

13. Is there anything that you would be particularly interested in knowing about this program regarding how it is experienced by students and host communities?

Thank you!

Appendix C: Interview Guide for Community Members

Name:

Position and Organization:

Date:

History & Mission

1. To begin, please describe bit about your organization (if applicable), your role and how long you have been in that role.
2. How did your organization (or you personally) become involved with the RPSP?
3. What is your involvement with the Rwandan students?
4. What is your understanding of this program?
5. Describe how your involvement with this program contributes to your organization's mission and vision.
6. Describe what you/your organization contributes to the experience of international students.
7. Do you face any challenges interacting with this group of students?
8. Were you prepared in any ways to interact with/support this group of students?

Opportunities and Challenges

9. What challenges do you see this particular group of students facing?
10. Has this scholarship program created spaces for learning and cultural exchange?
    a. Can you provide any examples?
11. What challenges do you think these students will face as agents of change?

12. How do you think their experiences here are preparing them to address those challenges?

Impacts and Contributions

13. Has the program impacted you personally? What have you learned from your interactions with these students?
14. Has it impacted the wider community? What do you see others learning?
    a. Thinking about Africa/Rwanda
    b. Thinking about missions/engagement
15. What kind of networks do you see developing between students and the community?
16. How do you anticipate/hope the academic and social experience here in the U.S. will prepare these students to make a difference in Rwanda?

Appendix D: Feedback Form from Member Check Meeting

Please note your responses to the findings shared under each topic. I am particularly interested in knowing what **surprises** or **resonates** with you, and what you think is **missing**. There is space at the end to share any **questions, comments or concerns**.

Your feedback is greatly appreciated!

Meanings associated with the U.S./U.S. education

What surprises you?

What resonates with you?

What's missing?

Academic experience: Challenges, supports, benefits

What surprises you?

What resonates with you?

What's missing?

Social experience: Challenges, supports, benefits

What surprises you?

What resonates with you?

What's missing?

Transnational dimensions: Local

What surprises you?

What resonates with you?

What's missing?

Transnational dimensions: National

What surprises you?

What resonates with you?

What's missing?

Transnational dimensions: Global

What surprises you?

What resonates with you?

What's missing?

Strategizing for the future

What surprises you?

What resonates with you?

What's missing?

Migration: Push & pull factors

What surprises you?

What resonates with you?

What's missing?

Implications

Suggestions?

Concerns?

Questions?

Comments?

Thank you!