Education and Social Justice Project
INTERNATIONAL SUMMER RESEARCH FELLOWSHIPS 2016

IN COLLABORATION WITH THE CENTER FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE RESEARCH, TEACHING AND SERVICE AT GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY
About the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs

The Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs at Georgetown University, created within the Office of the President in 2006, is dedicated to the interdisciplinary study of religion, ethics, and public life. Through research, teaching, and service, the center explores global challenges of democracy and human rights; economic and social development; international diplomacy; and interreligious understanding. Two premises guide the center’s work: that a deep examination of faith and values is critical to address these challenges, and that the open engagement of religious and cultural traditions with one another can promote peace.

About the Center for Social Justice Research, Teaching and Service

The Center for Social Justice Research, Teaching and Service (CSJ), founded in 2001, seeks to advance justice and the common good through promoting and integrating community-based research, teaching, and service by collaborating with diverse partners and communities. CSJ works in three key areas: community and public service, curriculum and pedagogy, and research. Through such critical and engaged work, Georgetown builds on its tradition of academic excellence and contributes in singular ways to the Jesuit ideal of justice education and action “for the glory of God and the well-being of humankind.”
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INTRODUCTION

This report reflects on the seventh year of the Education and Social Justice Project, which provided five Georgetown University students fellowships, allowing them to travel to Jordan, Kenya, Mexico, Rwanda, and Slovenia to conduct in-depth examinations of innovative educational initiatives, with a focus on the work of Jesuit institutions.

We are learning more every day about the deep connections between the global challenges of poverty and education. Only through better access to education will the world’s poor be able to seize opportunities in an increasingly global economy. While policy analysts have documented the widespread failure of governments to meet this imperative, we still know relatively little about successful local efforts led by religious communities to advance economic and social development through education.

In order to engage Georgetown undergraduates and build knowledge in this critical area, two Georgetown University centers—the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs and the Center for Social Justice Research, Teaching and Service (CSJ)—created the Education and Social Justice Project in early 2010.

Under faculty guidance, Education and Social Justice fellows gather information through interviews, analyze best practices, and share their reports and conclusions with a wider global audience. The project is made possible through the generous support of Rodney Jacob (MSB’86, JD’89) and other members of the Georgetown community.

During its seventh year, the project awarded fellowships to five students who spent three weeks with institutions engaged in efforts to promote social justice through education.

Jonathan Thrall spent three weeks in Amman, Jordan, conducting research at the Jesuit Refugee Service’s higher education center, which serves hundreds of urban refugees as well as Jordanian citizens through its academic offerings and a strong commitment to fostering community. Mariam Diefallah conducted research in Kigali, Rwanda, on the ways of remembering and teaching the history of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsis. Hosted by Centre Christus of Remera, she interviewed survivors, Jesuit priests, teachers, activists, civil community members, academics, and lawyers. Sarah Jannarone spent her time conducting research at the Jesuit College Magis in Maribor, Slovenia, the first Jesuit residential college for university students in Slovenia, as a part of her investigation into the network of Jesuit residential colleges that are to be built throughout Central Europe. Carolyn Vilter conducted research in Mexico City and Tapachula, Mexico, working with the Mexico City campus of the Universidad Iberoamericana to understand how different stakeholders view and address the challenges associated with Central American migration through Mexico. Khaliyah Legette researched in Nairobi, Kenya, at Nyumbani Children’s Home, where she interviewed members of the Nyumbani Children’s Home community and partner organizations for her research on HIV/AIDS services to children and affected families.

During the project’s first six years, students traveled to 21 countries to conduct research: Argentina, Bangladesh, Bolivia, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Canada, Chile, El Salvador, France, Guatemala, India, Nicaragua, Peru, the Philippines, Poland, Senegal, South Africa, South Korea, Uganda, and Uruguay. Full reports and interview transcripts for all years are available on the project website (berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/esj).

The Education and Social Justice Project is administered by Melody Fox Ahmed of the Berkley Center and faculty advisor Andria Wisler of CSJ.
OVERVIEW

Jonathan Thrall is a senior in the School of Foreign Service from Paris, France, majoring in Culture and Politics and minoring in Arabic. Having studied in Jordan in fall 2015, he returned to Amman in May and June 2016 to conduct research at the Jesuit Refugee Service’s (JRS) higher education center. The center serves hundreds of urban refugees of various nationalities as well as Jordanian citizens through its academic offerings and a strong commitment to fostering community. During his three weeks at the center, Thrall sought the varied perspectives of individuals involved in the initiative through his interviews with administrators, instructors, alumni, and students in the various programs, as well as with the Jesuit superior in Jordan.

PARTNER INSTITUTION: JESUIT REFUGEE SERVICE, AMMAN, JORDAN

JRS was founded at the initiative of then Jesuit Superior General Pedro Arrupe in 1980 to respond to the plight of the Vietnamese boat people and has since been dedicated to accompanying, serving, and advocating for displaced persons around the world. The organization considers the definitions of “refugee” codified by international conventions too stringent, and it adheres to a more inclusive standard, termed “de facto refugee,” in determining those whom it serves. JRS also places a particular emphasis on the accompaniment of urban refugees, often disregarded by public consciousness and underserved by the international relief community.

Officially registered as an international foundation in 2000, JRS commenced operations in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in 2010 and has registered as an NGO inside the country. While many organizations in Jordan have dedicated themselves to addressing the situation of those displaced by the Syrian conflict, owing to the fact that a majority of refugees in Jordan are Syrian, JRS serves urban refugees of all nationalities, without discrimination, including Iraqi, Sudanese, and Somali nationals, as well as members of the host Jordanian community. Its main activities include a “home visits” network and post-secondary educational programs.
At the time the present research was conducted, these educational programs were largely implemented in partnership with Jesuit Commons: Higher Education at the Margins (JC:HEM), a network of Jesuit institutions that facilitates tertiary education through blended learning provided for those to whom higher education might otherwise be inaccessible. In accordance with its organizational commitments and core values, JRS dedicates its activities to fostering inclusive community amongst the diversity of people it serves and imparting a sense of service to them.

INTRODUCTION

Jordan has long been a haven in the Middle East for those fleeing violence in their places of origin. Currently, well over one million displaced persons, registered and unregistered, are estimated to be present in the kingdom of nearly 10 million people. With extremely limited natural resources and a growing migratory influx, the country exists in a virtually permanent state of crisis. Despite foreign aid and mobilization, it struggles to meet the many needs of the displaced persons. This strained context presents many difficulties and hardships for refugees in this ostensibly transitory period, many finding themselves underserved and feeling disregarded and unwelcome.

Most refugees in the country are urban-based, like the many residing in the capital city of Amman, the majority of whom actively pursue resettlement abroad hoping to escape their situation in Jordan. Resettlement being a notoriously interminable process, most are left in the meantime to navigate stringent labor laws and public and institutional discrimination with little support and very few alternatives, such as education, to fill their time and invest in their future. For many, this is a context ripe for hopelessness.

The work of JRS in Jordan offers a compelling case study of an organizational commitment to addressing largely unmet needs of marginalized people who are deprioritized in this strained context. As this report shows, JRS’ commitment is manifested through offering higher education to refugees of all backgrounds, without discrimination, all the while seeking to foster a sense of community and dedication to inclusivity among its students. In doing so, the organization acts upon its core mandate of hope and core tenet of accompaniment. The present research is particularly driven by several questions: What is the importance of access to higher education for refugees? What does it mean to foster community in the highly transitory context of refuge, and why do it?

JORDAN, PLACE OF REFUGE

Proclaimed in 1946, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan has a history of refuge as long as the country itself. This history is especially reflective of the protracted displacement of Palestinians, though conflicts throughout the region have driven people of other origins into the country as well. An estimated majority of Jordanians are of Palestinian origin; most can trace their presence in the country to displacement resulting from the wars of 1948 and 1967, but also as late as 1991, following the expulsion of Palestinians from Kuwait in the aftermath of the Gulf War.1

With conflict in neighboring Syria raging well into its fifth year, Jordan continues to grow as an asylum and has become host to the second highest number of refugees relative to local population in the world.2 And while Syrians constitute an overwhelming majority—over 650,000 people, or approximately 90 percent—of refugees registered with UNHCR in Jordan, the UNHCR also counts many refugees of other nationalities; primarily Iraqi (>55,000 people), but also Yemeni (>4,500), Sudanese (>3,000), and Somali (<800).3 And far more displaced persons are present without formal UN registration, bringing the number of de facto refugees to possibly over one million people.4 In 2015, UNHCR operations alone were funded by $220 million, a mere two-thirds of the $330 million budget the agency required to properly respond to the crisis, resulting in the deprioritization of certain crucial needs, such as psychosocial support, host community support, and sufficient cash assistance for non-Syrian refugees.5 Meanwhile, Jordan has dedicated a quarter of its state budget (well over $2 billion) to addressing the crisis, and in early 2016, King Abdullah expressed that the country was reaching its “boiling point.”6

LIFE AS A REFUGEE IN JORDAN

JRS’ work in fostering community through education for refugees in Amman gains particular importance when placed in the context of the hardships that characterize the daily life of those they serve. Urban refugees in Jordan face stringent labor laws and widespread discrimination, lending urgency to the process of resettlement while feeding hopelessness along its seemingly interminable path. While many seek higher education as a meaningful and constructive means to restore hope while waiting for resettlement, such opportunities are extremely limited.

RESETTLEMENT

While many refugees find security, stability, and protection in Jordan, very few indeed seek to make the country a permanent home. Despite finding an open door to the kingdom, not all refugees feel welcome there. This sense of being undesired may certainly stem from the country’s inability to sustain and permanently welcome all displaced persons within its territory. But it could also stem from an aversion to doing so. Indeed, Jordan’s
long refugee history was not always one of harmonious coexistence between the host and refugee populations. This is most vividly illustrated by the 1970 civil war, remembered as “Black September,” which ostensibly pitted native Jordanians against those of Palestinian origin as the monarchy fought to defend its sovereignty against the Palestinian Liberation Organization.

Whatever the reasons, it remains the case that many refugees view asylum in Jordan as temporary, a station of relative safety until they can either return to their country of origin or, very often, until they are resettled elsewhere. As Mahaba, an English student at JRS, plainly asserts, the plan is “always to leave, Jordan is a temporary place.... All the people you will interview [here] are applying for immigration.” Many hope to be resettled in a Western country and initiate the process as soon as they arrive through various channels such as UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration, and various European and North American embassies.

Many refugees, however, find the process of resettlement inscrutable. Candidates report that the process depends on various factors, many of which are indiscernible to them, and that it varies highly from case to case. What is more, notes JRS Country Director for Jordan Matthew Stevens, rates of resettlement are largely subject to the whims of bureaucracy and policy of the various structures and governments involved. The length of the process is thus extremely unpredictable, and as Fadi Khairullah, another English student at JRS, explains, “our life here is depending only on response, only on waiting for call [saying] ‘here is visa’ or ‘here is an interview.’ We spend all the day thinking of who is going to ring or what [they are] going to say.... Every day passes and we get more worried than the day before.”

LABOR LAWS

The most difficult part of this interminable waiting game is that there is very little refugees can do to occupy their time. Labor laws in Jordan so heavily restrict the possibility for foreigners to work that it is effectively impossible for refugees to find legal employment in the country. These regulations respond to a popular perception among the Jordanian population, relayed by local media but varyingly disputed by experts, that the employment of refugees is a burden on the labor market and impedes the employment of Jordanian citizens.

Some add that refugees have no need for work because they are provided with basic necessities in the camps and otherwise
receive a living stipend. However, over 80 percent of displaced persons in Jordan are urban refugees living outside of camps, and many students interviewed at JRS for this research reported that stipends provided by UNHCR are not standardized and often fall short of meeting actual needs, especially since Amman has the highest cost of living in the region. The de facto illegality or inability to work and sustain a source of livelihood is thus the single biggest hardship identified by refugees interviewed in the context of this research.

For this reason, many refugees resort to working illegally, putting them at risk of facing troubles with the Ministry of Labor and even instilling in them the fear of possibly being deported. Moreover, with the inability to claim rights as legal workers, many consequently suffer exploitation and mistreatment by their employers or coworkers. Despite these risks and abuses, many will still choose to work out of necessity or aversion to sitting idle. Without a steady source of income, many alternatives for regularly filling one’s time become prohibitively expensive.

**DISCRIMINATION**

While some refugees express respect for the need for national preference in employment in such a strained context of asylum as Jordan’s, many still see these laws as reflective of broader forms of discrimination that they face in the country. As previously articulated, many who seek refuge from war, violence, and persecution find themselves feeling unwanted in Jordan, where many citizens point to the burden of refugees to explicate the ills of their country.

Interviews conducted at JRS showed that refugees of African origin more ubiquitously express that they experience discrimination from the host society. Not only might they face greater cultural and linguistic barriers than other refugees of Arab origin, but most also report suffering verbal and even physical abuse by members of the host community on the basis of their status, origin, and skin color. Abdulaziz, an English student from Sudan at JRS, remarks that “if you are staying here, in some areas they are hitting you with stones. [And they say:] ‘You are black guy, you are like coffee.’ We are facing a lot of difficulties [because] we are different.” Abdulaziz also reported discrimination in his former workplace, concluding that “this is why I am out of work, out of anything.”

Students who were interviewed shared that assaults of this type are commonplace and, adding insult to injury, they express the feeling that local authorities have little interest in addressing the issue. Fowzia Abdullahi Abukar, a Somali graduate of the JC:HEM diploma in liberal studies offered by JRS, recalls an incident when “two policemen were standing, with [the] one who insulted me and my sister, and I was telling the police, ‘this man insulted us and these guys [are] usually always beating our brothers.’ And [the man] tried to slap me but the police didn’t do anything, he just [caught] the man and they said, ‘go for the police station and do a report.’” Disheartened and also fearing revenge from the undetained culprit, the incident pushed Abukar and her family to leave the neighborhood where they lived, surrounded by their Somali community. “At that point I was like, ‘I don’t trust in anyone,’” she said, “and that’s why we decided to go [live in another neighborhood].”

Distrust in Jordanian authorities was cemented and tragically legitimated in December 2015, when the government deported 800 Sudanese nationals back to Khartoum, flouting the principle of non-refoulement enshrined in international law. The principle, articulated in key conventions and protocols to which Jordan is not a party, prohibits states from returning asylum seekers to a territory where their life or freedom may be threatened. These deportees, most of whom had fled war crimes and human rights abuses perpetrated by the Sudanese government against the people living in Darfur, were rounded up at an encampment in front of UNHCR’s offices in Amman where they had been protesting discrimination in the agency’s provision of services against non-Syrians; more specifically, against Sudanese nationals. While UNHCR denied the allegations, representatives acknowledged that non-Syrian and non-Arab refugees are underserved by the international community. A large number of charities and NGOs specifically target Syrians and, to a lesser extent, Iraqis, owing to their large number and preponderance in media coverage and public discourse. UNHCR reports also observe that, as a direct result of the shortfall in agency funding mentioned earlier in this report, “some 66 percent of refugees of nationality other than Syrian did not receive cash assistance.”

**ACCESS TO EDUCATION**

With the workplace being inaccessible due to discriminatory law or abuse, education presents an important alternative for filling one’s time and investing in one’s future. While the need for proper primary and secondary education for displaced youth is widely recognized and the source of much mobilization and funding, the importance of providing access to higher education to refugees is often less recognized, despite the fact that UNESCO has identified availability of higher education opportunities as crucial to ensuring displaced students’ commitment to pursuing their secondary education. Further, “higher education serves a dual purpose for the refugee community: it is both a tool for sustainable development and a component of immediate security and stability,” as noted by a May 2016 report on “Access to Higher Education in Jordan,” published by an Amman-based NGO, the Arab Renaissance for Democracy and Development – Legal Aid. Access to higher education, this report underscores, is considered a human
right by international conventions, which “should not be taken away simply because of one’s forced migration.”

Nevertheless, just one percent of refugee youth are enrolled in tertiary education programs worldwide. Mobilization to combat this trend in Jordan, where foreign student fees for university study are overwhelmingly unaffordable for refugees, has existed since the earlier stages of the ongoing Syrian conflict. Since 2013, several scholarship initiatives for university study inside Jordan and abroad have been made available to refugees within the kingdom. Among these are UNHCR’s higher education scholarship (known by its German acronym, DAFI), the German Academic Exchange Service (or DAAD), and the Institute of International Education’s scholarship and fund programs for Syrian students. In addition, several opportunities for online learning and blended learning (variously combining forms of online and onsite learning), including the JChEEM programs implemented by JRS, have been designed to ensure access to learning without the requirement of further displacement from one’s family or community. Various vocational training initiatives have also been piloted. More recently, the Jordanian government offered a 20 percent reduction in tuition fees at certain universities to Syrian refugees.

Despite this growing response, refugee demand for higher education in Jordan still far exceeds availability, and obstacles still exist where opportunities are available. Among these are the costs of university attendance for foreign students, which remain unaffordable for most refugees, program-required levels of proficiency in English or other foreign languages, and requirements of official transcripts and documentation, which in many cases cannot be met given the irregular situation of refugees who fled their homes in haste, often without bringing appropriate certificates. Quite significantly, as efforts have galvanized around the Syrian crisis—and Syrians comprise the largest contingent of refugees in the country—the majority of these higher education opportunities are exclusively open to Syrians. For refugees of other nationalities, this represents yet another form of discrimination that can only reinforce a feeling of being disregarded by not only the host community, but also the international community. In this context, JRS offers a much-needed inclusive environment for higher learning.

**THE JESUIT REFUGEE SERVICE IN JORDAN**

In response to these daily hardships of life as an urban refugee in Jordan, JRS Jordan strives to provide free social support and quality English-language education on a basis of full inclusivity. By way of its various educational programs, the organization is particularly committed to fostering a sense of community among all those it serves, with a view to restoring dignity and hope within its students and ushering in a forward-looking generative process.

Serving those who are overlooked and left hopeless in times of need is a foundational mission of JRS in its work with displaced persons. While the organization does not engage in any religious activity in Jordan due to its commitments as a locally registered NGO, its operations are inspired by Jesuit values. Among its core mandates are the principles of dignity, compassion, hope, solidarity, hospitality, justice, and participation. It is this spirit that commits JRS to guaranteeing free access to its services for people in need, regardless of their faith or religious background, and which draws people to the organization without fear of religious indoctrination. In some instances, the organization’s spirit of openness and acceptance makes it the only option for certain refugees, as with the case of the Sudanese community in Amman. Informed by these same values, staff at JRS Jordan also prefer to use the term “people whom they serve” rather than calling them “beneficiaries” of their programs as many common charity organizations and NGOs do. JRS thereby places emphasis on dedicating its activities to the evolving needs of those for whom its programs are in place while seeking to offer the most personable and human accompaniment possible.

To this end, one of JRS’ foundational activities in Jordan, which it recently reinitiated, is its “home visits” program. Through this program, the organization mobilizes a team of volunteers that is exclusively comprised of qualified students from its higher education center to make scheduled visits to refugee families in its network. While many organizations similarly visit beneficiaries in their residences, in the case of JRS, the emphasis of these visits is primarily to offer psychological and emotional support. While team members do file assessment forms, which can lead to referrals or further assistance, these are completed only following a home visit and reflection on the interaction.

As JRS Country Director Matthew Stevens explains, “so many agencies go to people’s homes and they take a form and you tick off the boxes, and if you get the right boxes, you get some cash. And we don’t want it to be that. We want it to be, we’re coming to hang out with you, make you feel like maybe, you know, life is...something close to normal for a little while. And then if you get some cash on the side, that’s great.” While JRS’ very limited funding capacity may be a contributing factor to this model, Stevens asserts that “we don’t want the emphasis on the money.” Rather, the goal is to foster close human interaction, something that is not easily available to many urban refugees in such a strained context.

The primary part of JRS activities in Jordan is providing opportunities for tertiary education. Soon after commencing opera-
tions in the country, JRS initiated a large informal education program focused on teaching English as a foreign language at various levels. The program ran during evening shifts at a Greek Melkite school in the Ashrafieh neighborhood of East Amman and was sustained through the help of foreign volunteers, including refugees who were former students of the program. At its height, the program served nearly 1,000 students, with a large representation from the Iraqi and Sudanese communities. However, the program expanded too rapidly and, without a formal understanding, relations with the school grew strained. The program was ultimately shut down in 2015.

In the meantime, JRS began partnering with JC:HEM to provide formal higher education opportunities in Jordan. The first to be introduced was the diploma in liberal studies, implemented in 2012. It remains the flagship program of JRS Higher Education. The diploma of liberal studies program is a blended online and onsite learning diploma in English comprising a three-year, 45-credit undergraduate curriculum accredited by Regis University in Denver, Colorado. The curriculum comprises a zero-credit Bridge to Learning course and 10 foundational courses in liberal studies, spanning various subjects such as philosophy, mathematics, politics, and communication. For their third and final year, students must choose a specialization, such as education, business, or social work. Students study each course in individual eight-week modules in tandem with students at other JRS-JC:HEM sites around the world, such as a Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya and a Dzaleka camp in Malawi. Courses are taught by university professors from around the world, although they are primarily based in the United States through Blackboard, a virtual classroom platform donated by Georgetown University. Students are further supported through onsite facilitation by an academic officer and volunteer peer tutors, as well as guest lecturers.

Initially hosted at the school in Ashrafieh, the diploma program was relocated shortly after its implementation to a space donated by the Jesuit Mission to Jordan and Iraq. Following the closing of its program at Ashrafieh in 2015, JRS began running all of its higher education operations in this prefabricated two-room schoolhouse behind the Jesuit Center in Amman, and introduced JC:HEM Community Service Learning Tracks (CSLT) alongside the diploma. CSLTs are shorter, 16-week courses designed to address the specific needs of communities. While not accredited, they lead to a joint certification by JRS, JC:HEM, and the curriculum-reviewing institution of higher learning.

Available CSLTs at JRS Higher Education in Jordan are a course in psychosocial case management, following a curriculum approved by the University of Utah, and elementary, pre-intermediate, and intermediate levels of English as a foreign language, taught following curricula designed by JRS staff on-site that was reviewed and approved by Georgetown University. While the CSLT English courses help fill a void left by the disappearance of the Ashrafieh program, JRS has also introduced informal English learning at the center, in the Ashrafieh style. These courses are taught by volunteers, some of whom are students from the diploma program.

Students are largely drawn to JRS Higher Education for the quality and rigor of its English instruction; especially since English acquisition is regarded by most as the most worthwhile occupation while waiting for resettlement. In this regard, JRS views its various programs as linked, evoking the metaphor of a pyramid. Informal English programs are the largest, and are designed to prepare students for admission into the CSLT programs, in which a basic knowledge of English is required. After proceeding through the three courses of CSLT English, students are then expected to have attained a level of proficiency suitable enough to be competitive candidates for the diploma program. Thus, while some programs are competitive, admission is open to all people, regardless of status, gender, religion, or origin, without quotas of any kind and entirely free of charge.

In June 2016, nearly 300 students were enrolled in the programs offered by JRS Higher Education. A cohort of 25 to 35 students is admitted each year to the diploma program, accounting for approximately 50 students total, with attrition, which is largely due to resettlement. Of a usual pool of 300 applicants for each cycle of English CSLT courses, 75 students are admitted, with 25 in each level. Another 150 students regularly attend the informal English courses. A majority are of Iraqi and Sudanese origin, with a sizeable contingent of Somali students, as well as Syrian and Jordanian students.

JRS has thus far graduated one cohort of diploma students—its inaugural class. Of the 21 students enrolled when the program began in 2012, only seven students completed the program and graduated in 2015. However, local JRS staff does not view the low graduation rate (33 percent) too negatively, given that over half of the cohort withdrew because they were successfully resettled before the end of the three-year program. This pattern of attrition is similar across the cohorts that have yet to graduate, but is also largely due to resettlement. Among the 24 students who began the diploma in 2014, for instance, 19 students withdrew before program completion, 11 of whom were successfully resettled abroad. As explored in the next section, JRS staff members credit the strength of their center’s academic programs and their emphasis on community for this disproportionately high rate of resettlement (compared to the
average resettlement rates of two to three percent reported by UNHCR). 19

FOSTERING COMMUNITY

JRS views its higher education programs as more than just offering an opportunity for refugees to further their education for their own benefit. Rather, higher education is “an opportunity to broaden their minds and help strengthen their communities.” In this spirit, JRS is dedicated to doing more than simply educating students, using its center and programs to foster a sense of community among the people it serves. A measure of the relative success of this endeavor is found in interviews conducted with students and staff, which elicited responses describing the JRS Higher Education center as a place of community and fellowship among all members.

A central part of this success is the commitment to inclusivity at the center. With a highly diverse student body, JRS staff members make a conscientious effort to ensure that all students feel welcome at the center regardless of their background and to encourage students to mix with each other and overcome an inclination for self-segregation according to origin or gender. To this end, students are encouraged to sit alongside or collaborate with students of a different nationality or gender in class or while working on assignments. Likewise, JRS classrooms are presented as a place for the free and respectful exchange of ideas and viewpoints. In interviews, students ubiquitously expressed satisfaction with these practices and reported positively on the ensuing discussions, sharing of experiences, and cultural exchanges that emerged as a result.

To further nurture a sense of fellowship within this diverse community of students, as well as between the students and the organization itself, staff members regularly host community events at the center, organize excursions and trips throughout Amman, encourage students to participate in community leadership initiatives, and regularly inform students of updates in JRS’ ongoing activities in the interest of transparency and participation.

Informed by Ignatian pedagogy, which centers on experience-based reflection and transforming learning into action, the educational curricula taught at JRS Higher Education place emphasis on community. Rather than viewing their studies as a solely personal enrichment, students at JRS are asked to connect their learning to their communities. In an English assignment described by Stevens, students are asked to “go into their community and take photos of three places that are important to [them] and describe why.” While the applied communal benefit of English acquisition may not be so obvious or simple, the course is structured to elicit “a reflective benefit to the community. It’s not so much going into the community and doing something great, but sort of thinking about why this place is important and how you engage with it and being a little more conscious in how that interaction takes place.”

Such reflection leads many students to seek ways to bring their learning to the service of their community, and the center certainly encourages them to do so. Tellingly, the overwhelming majority of diploma students encountered in the context of this research opted for or hoped to pursue social work or education specializations in their third year. In response to the question of how they hope to use what they had learned, many of these students responded without hesitation that they were already using and applying it. Several interviewees spoke of sharing their course knowledge and initiating discussions with friends, family, and other members of their community who did not have the privilege of pursuing higher education. For example, many graduates of the CSLT course in psychosocial case management use their acquired knowledge to offer mental support to members of their community. Mental support is a much-needed resource that NGOs often lack because it is often de-prioritized by funding constraints. Mohamed Mohamud Farah, a veteran student and volunteer at JRS, reflects that “since I started [the] JC:HEM [diploma], I became more influential in my community. [I help them by giving] advice, providing the little things that I can, advocating for them, sometimes being part of food distribution or heaters distribution, helping them with translation. Sometimes, I do home-based learning, where I teach English.”

Like Farah, who volunteers as a teacher for JRS’ informal English program alongside his studies, many students are also motivated to give back to the JRS community itself, a type of service that the center strives to foster and support. For instance, JRS fills the ranks of its home visits team with graduates from the course in psychosocial case management. Furthermore, in June 2016, diploma students could count on the assistance of two fellow students who volunteered their time as peer tutors. But often, community involvement will take place even without such structures supported by the center. Indeed, students in the programs shared positive experiences in benefiting from the support and active encouragement of their peers in pursuing their studies.

RETHINKING “COMMUNITY”

Given that JRS serves in a highly transitory context, in which students are only looking to be resettled as soon as possible, one might question the value of fostering community therein. Indeed, the concept can typically connote a deep and long-lasting sense of attachment and belonging. But the motivations
behind JRS’ work in this direction urge us to consider community in a broader and more multifaceted sense.

Fostering community at JRS is most pressing, in the words of Academic Officer Natalie Khoury, about “doing with the now.” Despite the fact that students are not seeking to establish roots in Jordan, the unpredictable resettlement process means that none of the students know for sure how long they will remain in the country. In the meantime, they can quickly lose hope. As English student Fadi Khairullah remarks so poignantly, it is easy to “feel like we have nothing, nobody” when living in “this country [that] is very strange and we have no other neighbors or family that we’ve known before.” In this context, time decelerates to the extent that “here, one year [feels] like five years [back] in your country.” Fostering a sense of community to fill that void is, for JRS, a way for the organization to act on its core mandates of accompaniment and hope. As Khoury shares, “that sense of community—long or short term—I know here for the guys it really [is] like a support system.”

But, according to Stevens, the type of fellowship that is fostered at JRS also extends beyond dimensions of time and space that traditionally shape our understanding of community. In an age of increasing connectivity, members of the JRS community are able to stay connected beyond course completion, graduation, or resettlement by communicating through email, phone, and especially social media. That students do so speaks to the success of JRS’ community-building efforts. Sustained contact between former students who have resettled and current students can serve as proof to the latter that resettlement is actually an achievable outcome, and that perhaps studying at JRS is a good way to get there.

Fostering a sense of community also means nurturing individuals who are mindful of those around them and their needs, to encourage them to be community builders for the rest of their lives. This is a particularly important asset in the context of resettlement, insofar as it can accelerate the resettlement process and ease the ensuing transition to a new environment. In fact, JRS staff attribute the disproportionately high rate of resettlement among their students to the strength of their programs, in which community building plays a key part. Not only do students’ academic experiences make them more qualified to apply for resettlement scholarships, but they also learn to become more affable candidates in resettlement interviews. Of course, this phenomenon could also possibly be attributed to JRS attracting and selecting students who would already be the best candidates for resettlement, but it is also quite likely that the program has an added impact, a point with which most students and staff agree. Higher rates of resettlement among the oldest versus newest cohorts of diploma students also point in this direction.

English learning at JRS Higher Education goes beyond simple linguistic skills. This includes familiarizing students with cultural cues, including popular and appropriate humor, which form a significant part of a language that is second nature to native speakers but often overlooked in foreign language teaching. As suggested by Stevens, JRS students learn to converse, joke, and use their linguistic skills in a more natural, non-scholastic way; in essence, they learn how to be their English selves. Such cultural education can go a long way in helping them present the best versions of themselves to resettlement officers. This, combined with curricular emphasis on respectful intercultural communication and dedication to building and serving inclusive communities, conditions students to display traits that officers are looking for because they serve as indicators of being well primed for adjustment and integration into a new environment.

Beyond resettlement, some students also think forward to returning to their homes someday. Through their community-focused learning, these students find themselves thinking about how they can rebuild and heal their communities in order to help prevent future conflicts.
“If I am selected for resettlement in a Western country,” shares Abdulaziz hopefully, “I want to do a master’s degree in physics. After that, I am going to help my poor [community in] Darfur. They are still suffering, it is hard to describe. In my plans [for] the future, I will make some centers for teaching things in my community there. And a health center.... I talk with my friends, others, they have a lot of plans for our community also.”

In this way, fostering community, both in the present and long-term, plays a significant role in reestablishing normalcy to pave a way forward and usher in an all-too-important regenerative process, thus offering a counterweight to the many difficult experiences that inhere to one’s state of displacement. As Khoury observes, “education has an impact...even in the space of three or four months that people [might be] part of the community, because they feel that they have somewhere to go.”

LOOKING FORWARD

Students and staff shared their hope that the center will grow to serve even more people. As of June 2016, JRS provides services by word of mouth alone, as demand for its programs already consistently exceeds what the organization is able to offer. Given the magnitude of the Jordanian refugee crisis, JRS staff nevertheless hopes to expand programs and grow ever closer to meeting need. Through expansion, the organization would also seek to bridge the gap with the host community by encouraging higher program enrollment among Jordanian citizens. JRS could thereby direct its capacity for fostering community toward assuaging tensions between refugees and locals. This would also demonstrate an organizational interest in serving members of the host community, many of whom may also have been overlooked and disadvantaged by the national and international prioritization of the response to the refugee crisis. Funding for the needs of the host community is, with psycho-social health programs, another area that is quickly deprioritized in the context of an international funding shortfall.

One factor restricting expansion is a lack of space. With its current center, JRS struggles to accommodate nearly 300 students in two small classrooms that are used in shifts. Unsurprisingly, the main improvement suggested by students and staff alike is securing a bigger location. Stevens has also considered decentralizing the educational programs, by opening several smaller centers closer to the loci of the various communities served. In addition to increasing space and strengthening JRS’ ties to the communities, this could help eliminate transportation costs, the most significant burden borne by students of these otherwise free programs. While JRS has dedicated a large part of its budget to defraying transportation costs for students—even providing its own bus route—it still cannot currently meet the transportation needs of all students.

An obstacle to these improvements is JRS’ very limited budget relative to many other NGOs operating in Jordan. Unfortunately, the process of securing significantly greater funding itself not only requires higher staffing capacity, but it is also ethically fraught. Given its donor-based funding model, the organization would have to increase and steady its rate of “testimony collection” among students. However, JRS staff is wary of appearing to push students to conduct possibly intrusive interviews, which tend to emphasize their status as a refugee rather than as students and community members, for the sake of appealing to donors’ emotions and securing funding.

In addition to serving more people, JRS staff also expresses a desire to serve people better. One challenge in making the programs truly centered on “people whom we serve” rather than “beneficiaries,” is bridging the gap between institutional designs and goals and the highly contextual, real experiences and needs of students. Diploma students remark, for example, on the often distant relation between them and their professors online, whom they feel are very rarely able to provide them with the same quality of attention that they do to students they teach on campus. Second-year diploma student Ali S. remarks that “when you get feedback directly in person from your professor, body language plays a fair role, so that you can see in their eyes if they really care or not.” More specifically, students identify professors’ problematic lack of awareness of the realities of urban refugees and how they differ from those of camp-based refugees. Ali S. explains that “in a camp, you are not working. Most of your needs are [met] there so you are free the whole day. So this is a problem that [professors] think that [this is our situation].” Through their misconception, he explains, instructors are not inclined to be very understanding when a student, as a result of a particularly burdensome workweek, falls behind in their assignments.

JRS staff say this same misunderstanding of students’ context is also what underpins institutional reticence, on the part of both JRS and JC:HEM, about offering assistance to students in the resettlement process. While both organizations assert that their purpose is to provide education rather than resettlement, the hope for facilitated resettlement is what drives many students to pursue their studies at JRS. As this report has argued, resettlement is all the more a priority for those facing the daily challenges of life as an urban refugee. For this reason, the staff in Amman feels the organization could better serve these students’ needs if they were able to dedicate more resources to accompanying them along the path to resettlement abroad.
Moreover, many at the JRS center expressed their view that the JC:HEM name* itself illustrates a certain lack of institutional sensitivity for the needs and aspirations of students, showing greater concern instead for branding and fundraising in the West. Of the name “Higher Education at the Margins,” Abukar remarks that “it is really offensive. Because are we considered as that? At the end we’re still human, you know.” Students at JRS are not fond of the reminder that their studies are being conducted “at the margins” when most are pursuing these studies for the very purpose of overcoming a difficult situation of displacement. Some feel that this indication, which is printed on students’ diplomas and certifications, only serves to lessen the perceived value of their education. For this reason, staff and students at the center refer almost exclusively to the programs by the acronym JC:HEM, and many students remain unaware of the significance of these letters. When they do find out what they stand for, most feel like Abukar that the name is dehumanizing.

Notwithstanding, Abukar is adamant that the benefit she and her fellow students derive from the program far outweighs its inelegant appellation. “Yeah, this [name] is really offensive,” the graduate continues, “but they are doing a really good job [and] it’s only a name.” While she suggests that the organization adopt “maybe a better name, a different [name], that meets their needs or their desires,” she also stresses effusively that the diploma program, for her, “was like a dream.”

CONCLUSION

In response to Jordan’s increasingly strained context of refuge, JRS displays a conscious effort to restore dignity and hope among some of the many who feel unwanted and disregarded as a result of the crisis. With very little support, stringent labor laws, and widespread discrimination, many refugees in the capital city of Amman must struggle against hopelessness along the unpredictable path to resettlement. In this context, higher education is an important means to filling one’s time and investing in one’s future. However, such opportunities for refugees are extremely limited and rife with obstacles, and those that are available are rarely open to refugees other than the Syrian majority. By contrast, JRS’ various educational programs, centered on English learning, are free of charge and open to all. Through these programs, the organization acts upon its core mandate of hope and core tenet of accompaniment by working to foster an inclusive sense of community among students at the center. The community empowers students to combat hopelessness by offering a sense of normalcy and the perspective of a way forward.

* In late September 2016, Jesuit Commons: Higher Education at the Margins (JC:HEM) was rebranded Jesuit Worldwide Learning (JWL). “Higher Education at the Margins” appears as a subtitle in its logo.
INTERVIEW EXCERPTS

ALI S., JC:HEM DIPLOMA STUDENT AND PEER TUTOR AT JRS HIGHER EDUCATION

What are the greatest challenges in your studies through JC:HEM?

The biggest challenge here at JC:HEM is balancing work and your courses. For example, I work eight or nine hours and then I have to come here to study. You spend the whole day working, you come very exhausted, so your mind can’t work. You can’t get new ideas. So, it’s really hard.

What do these studies mean to you and how do you hope to use them?

I want to get my diploma, and then I want to concentrate on social work, you know, give back what I’ve learned from this program to my community. My community could be where I live, or somewhere else, so it doesn’t have to be my community in Sudan, wherever I am and wherever people need help. I will definitely help.

KHALID, JC:HEM DIPLOMA STUDENT AND PEER TUTOR AT JRS HIGHER EDUCATION

What were your experiences upon arrival in Amman?

After two months, I realized that there is cultural shock or something like that, because people here are different. I was in a place [in Sudan] where people are African and some Arab, so Arabs could not do everything to hurt me. But here everything is clear, everything is very clear and they do bad things in front of my eyes, very directly, in public places, in schools, banks, public transportation, everywhere. So for me as a Sudanese refugee, the experience is different than others from Iraq and these countries because they look like these people. But I am a bit different, my race is different, my skin color is different so.... Everyday I come across this problem, of segregation and everything. It is the main issue I face here in Jordan. But it is good [overall and] it’s better in terms of security, much better than Sudan.

What are the greatest challenges in your studies at JRS and in JC:HEM?

To jump from our position to the Western student’s position. Because professors deal with us as Western students so they expect from us to have great or good base in English and good base in everything, mathematics and everything. And they expect from us to be good readers, to read all the good books that they have read in their studies and their good novels and everything. And the reality is we are not. Because we are refugees, and most of us, not all of us, most of us [were] young people when the war was very active, so there was no time to read, there was no time to study, there was no time to do anything, it was just to flee. And even to study, it was a luxurious thing. Because now like 99 percent of the young people who were with me in my country, in my region, did not study because of the situation. But I studied by myself most of the time. So to jump from your position to the Western student’s position, who reads a lot, who understands everything, who has a good base, to write the articles that professors want, this is a challenge that we face.

FOWZIA ABDULLAHI ABUKAR, JC:HEM DIPLOMA ALUMNA AND VOLUNTEER ENGLISH TEACHER AT JRS HIGHER EDUCATION

How is life in Amman?

The life here is expensive. Even for the [expat] foreigners, they can’t handle it, what about the refugees? And with a very limited assistance—we don’t take much from the UNHCR. Actually, the UNHCR gave us the rent for the house only. Syrians, they are taking coupons, but for Somalis...we are being hugely neglected and ignored. Like no one....no one cares, I feel sometimes. No one cares.... Even if you raise your voice, no one will hear, or listen.

How do you negotiate the diversity of the center? Are there challenges involved in having such a diverse student body?

Well, education is what brings us all together in the same room. And regardless of differences; different backgrounds, different places of origin, religions, all that, we all learn to appreciate
each other. We became one...community together. One nation, one community. And we would collaborate together, work together. We have a high respect for one another.

So you finished your program but you still come back here and see people?

Yeah and I do volunteering work, I work with them and I teach [an] informal [English class] every Monday, I work with the students. I want to put my knowledge into practice, to benefit others.

What does this diploma that you have mean to you?

It meant a lot. Like nowadays you can’t find a free education. It costs a lot of money. But this was like a dream. Like, ‘oh finally I have a free education [for which] all the materials are provided, all the supplies, all the supporting. So I used to come with the determination.

Since I became close to achieving my goals. I grew up, I became mature, my self esteem increased. I can say, without the diploma program, I wouldn’t be as educated as now, or as understanding and open-minded as now. So yeah, it means a lot.

What was the greatest challenge once you finished the diploma program?

Our certificate is unrecognized [in Jordan] because it is online. [And] here in Jordan the job opportunities [are] so limited, even those who are Jordanian themselves, they can’t find a job, so [as a refugee] you could never find a job. So for me, I’m thinking about a future. Not about [this] moment, I’m thinking about my future. Like how I can help my mother? I want to work and, besides working, I want to even continue my studies. So I can’t find that here. We are only waiting and waiting and waiting...and waiting. Not much progress is seen, even from UNHCR. I have been here five years and...I’m done with it. I’m done with Jordan.

MATTHEW STEVENS, COUNTRY DIRECTOR FOR JRS JORDAN

What are the biggest challenges you, or the organization, face?

A very interesting challenge, actually, was getting JC:HEM to understand that the other two original [JRS/JC:HEM] sites are camp-based sites. And this is an urban-based site and, you know, the budget’s completely different, the students’ needs are completely different.
# LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

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To read the full interview transcripts, please visit: http://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/projects/education-and-social-justice-project
Kenya: Nyumbani Children’s Home, Nairobi
Khaliyah Legette (C’17)

Overview
Khaliyah Legette, a senior in the College majoring in American studies and minoring in education, inquiry, and justice, originally hails from New Jersey. Over summer 2016, she stayed at Nyumbani Children’s Home in Nairobi, Kenya, where she conducted interviews with staff members, students, teachers, and community members. Her research explored the holistic approach to the care of children either abandoned or orphaned due to HIV/AIDS, particularly through Nyumbani’s three programs: Nyumbani Children’s Home, Lea Toto, and Nyumbani Village. These three programs, under the Children of God Relief Institute (COGRI), are the realized vision of the late Father Angelo D’Agostino, a Jesuit who came to Kenya in the late 1980s. He felt moved to do something about the injustices children suffering from HIV/AIDS faced and thus founded Children of God Relief Institute: Nyumbani.

Partner Institution: Nyumbani Children’s Home, Nairobi, Kenya
Nyumbani Children’s Home in Nairobi, Kenya, was the first residential facility in the country to care for HIV-infected abandoned orphans. The Children’s Home functions as more than just a medical facility for the children, as it operates under a holistic vision of care with a particular focus on medical, psychosocial, spiritual, moral, and educational services. In Swahili, Nyumbani means home, and that is exactly what Nyumbani Children’s Home provides for the 100 children currently living at the orphanage. The organization had the capacity to reach more HIV-infected and affected children, so COGRI expanded to include Lea Toto in 1998 and Nyumbani Village in 2006. Lea Toto provides all other holistic services besides accommodations, and Nyumbani Village provides a simulated village for children who lost their parents and for grandparents who lost...
their children from HIV/AIDS. Together, Nyumbani serves over 3,500 children who are infected or otherwise affected by the disease. These three programs are fueled by faith in God, compassion, and respect for these marginalized children.

INTRODUCTION

Out of all the people in the world living with HIV, approximately 68 percent are in Africa, despite the fact that the continent comprises only 12 percent of the world’s population. To demonstrate how severe this epidemic is, consider this fact: over the period from May 1986 to February 1987—less than a year—the number of cases of AIDS recorded by the World Health Organization rose from about thirty to more than 2,600. Along with this epidemic came an immense amount of discrimination against people suffering from the disease. In fact, according to one study, more than 40 percent of those with HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa experience discrimination resulting from their status.

Although scientific studies fail to identify its exact origin, there is general consensus that it began sometime in the 1950s. The epidemic was so destructive as its “official” onset in the 1980s that many argued that “no collective memory anywhere in Africa recalls an epidemic of this kind, with an astronomical number of people dying, while medical personnel, governments, and non-governmental organizations seemed powerless and unable to reverse the course of this pandemic.” Shortly after the first official cases of AIDS in Africa were reported in 1982, sub-Saharan Africa emerged as the epicenter of the epidemic. Unfortunately that region was, and still is, disproportionately affected by the epidemic; over two-thirds of the people who live with HIV come from sub-Saharan Africa.

Specifically, Kenya experienced its first case in 1984. From 1984 to 1989, due to a lack of information about the disease, it was not seen as a threat to Kenyan society. Unfortunately, during this five-year period of inactivity, the disease spread silently. It reached a prevalence rate of 20 to 30 percent in the 1990s. It became so widespread that by 1999, the Kenyan government declared HIV/AIDS a national disaster. While stigma and discrimination negatively impacted all people affected, sadly, children became a substantial portion of those affected. The millions of children in Africa orphaned or abandoned because of HIV were physically, emotionally, and economically at risk, and, without intervention, threatened to compromise the stability and development of Africa.

STIGMA OF HIV IN KENYA

At the onset of the AIDS pandemic, stigma kept many people from seeking treatment for fear of disclosure leading to discrimination, ostracism, and rejection. As Nicholas Makau, program manager of Lea Toto, stated, “Nobody knew what it was, everybody was running away. And there would be kids who were abandoned at the hospital, on the road streets and all that.”

Thousands of innocent children who acquired the disease by virtue of being born to an infected mother found themselves victims of the stigma. A substantial portion of the reasoning behind this stigma resulted from ignorance about the disease, including misconceptions about the transmission of HIV, the chronic nature of AIDS, fear of contraction, few resources for those infected, and its association with social evils. In addition, according to Sister Mary Owens, executive director of the Children of God Relief Institute: Nyumbani, “Part of it appears because it is connected with sexuality, and sexuality, as you know, is still taboo in certain parts of the world.” Despite this misconception, the affected children inherited HIV, and through no fault of their own they now live with the disease. It should not matter how they got the virus. They need to have access to care and treatment and be treated with dignity as an equal person; not stigmatized and wished out of society. However, in the early years of the epidemic, this was not the case. This left the children suffering from HIV in a dire situation, with nobody to advocate for their human rights. This is the situation that inspired Father Angelo D’Agostino to advocate for these children.

FOUNDING OF CHILDREN OF GOD RELIEF INSTITUTE—NYUMBANI

In 1992 Father D’Agostino founded COGRI with a desire to help these HIV-infected children. As a Georgetown alumnus and former professor, he embraced a holistic vision of care for Nyumbani. His vision included medical, psychosocial, spiritual, moral, and educational care. A holistic vision of care ensured that each child that entered the Children’s Home would receive every element of support they would have received had they grown up in a traditional family structure. Father D’Agostino opened up a world of possibilities for these children who, without Nyumbani, may never have even made it to adolescence.

The core values of COGRI are faith in God, compassion, respect, integrity, professionalism, and teamwork. There are many factors that help create a home-like environment for these children to grow up in. It takes a team of many dedicated and compassionate advocates who are passionate about securing equal rights and care for these children.

FROM 1992 TO NOW: NYUMBANI SUCCESSES

By providing these marginalized children with a home that cares for them holistically, they receive the opportunity to grow
to their fullest potential. As Protus Lumiti, chief manager of Nyumbani, stated, “[From] 1992 to 1993, we were shortsighted in the way that we looked at these children on a short-term basis. We thought they would come here, we would feed them within their period of lifespan and, you know? We didn’t think they were going to live into adulthood.”

In the beginning, the health of many children was in such poor condition from being orphaned or abandoned that the initial goal of Nyumbani was simply to provide them as comfortable of a life as possible during the short time they had left. Sister Mary even recalls that, after approaching an international agency along with Father D’Agostino for funding in order to set up a residential facility, they were met with the following response: “These children are going to die anyway; get into prevention.”

This is just one example of how the AIDS pandemic threatened to wipe out an entire generation of Kenyan children. However, 25 years later, the Nyumbani staff is proud to declare that the situation today looks much more positive than it did back in 1992, and the children are living more normal lives.

Perhaps one of the greatest successes of Nyumbani Children’s Home is that the children are growing up like other Kenyan children. As Protus challenges, “Go to the school where they go, there’s no way you can identify who has HIV and who doesn’t. They are equally like any other Kenyan students or children.” This speaks directly to the quality of care they receive at the Children’s Home. By spending a few minutes there, visitors notice the energy and happiness of the children; they are not treated just as patients in need of medical care to alleviate their HIV status. Instead, they are seen as children who happen to have a medical condition. This enables the children to grow and become participating Kenyan citizens. Benard Mwololo, a 2011 graduate of Nyumbani who currently works at one of the Lea Toto sites, stated that through the morals he was taught, Nyumbani helped him prepare for life after graduation. In particular, receiving a job with Lea Toto made his transition into adulthood smooth and easy. Thanks to such support, Nyumbani children know that they have a support system for each stage of life.
HOLISTIC CARE

As previously mentioned, the Children’s Home takes a holistic approach to care, which includes medical, psychosocial, spiritual, moral, and educational care. At its most basic level, Nyumbani provides a physical home for these children. There are cottages that each house 16 children and one “mum” or “uncle.” These mums and uncles serve as parental figures: they clean, wake up the children, wash their clothes, offer emotional support, and, when necessary, enact discipline. Simply providing this structure for the children “allows many children to exclaim ‘my Mum’ or ‘my house’ for the first time,” which has a profound impact on their morale. Although this situation cannot exactly replicate a traditional family structure, it provides a close simulation of a home experience.

Just because these children share a medical condition does not mean they are limited by their status. While the need for specific medical care is the element that most differentiates Nyumbani children from those not affected by HIV, a holistic approach to care is important to ensuring that all of the children’s other needs are supported. For example, as Lumiti describes of Nyumbani’s approach, “If you look at one aspect, say medical, then you label the person as a patient. And that’s not our approach. Our approach is to look at it holistically. This is a person, a human being. No wonder the name ‘Children of God’ was very crucial, that’s why the founders of this organization called it the Children of God Relief Institute. They are all children. And if they are children of God, we have to look at them all around.” Thus, all children are beautiful creations of God and deserve as much care and love as Nyumbani can provide. The following sections describe the elements of Nyumbani’s holistic care.

MEDICAL CARE

The sole characteristic that sets these children apart from other children is their HIV status. Thus, medical treatment is a crucial aspect of their care. Since Nyumbani’s inception, Father D’Agostino lobbied for these children to have access to antiretroviral medication. Without it, long-term care is nearly impossible. Throughout its 25 years, Nyumbani has received access to diagnostic testing, antiretroviral treatment and medication, and other medical services that have extended the lifespan of children as a result of lobbying the Kenyan government for the expansion of governmental programs such as the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). By 2011, Nyumbani created a world-class diagnostic library, which not only provides on-site treatment for the children, but also serves as a source of revenue because it is open to the public. Through the unfailing efforts of Father D’Agostino and Sister Mary, the quality of medical care at Nyumbani has significantly increased over the past 25 years.

Each morning, the mums and uncles wake the children up at 6:00 a.m. to take the first dose of medicine. The children take their second doses at 6:00 p.m. Because all of the children must wake up at the same time to take their medicine, it normalizes the process. This process, however, does not come without challenges. Over time, as the children get older and begin to learn more about their status and go on to boarding schools, they sometimes experience drug fatigue, or even just stop taking their medications because they do not want their school friends to know about their condition. Because the children are so dependent on Nyumbani’s schedule, the independence that comes with boarding school life may come with a risk. However, by providing the children with life skills and moral support throughout their time at the Children’s Home, the hope is that the children have guidance and support to accept themselves for who they are.

PSYCHOSOCIAL CARE

Many of these children experienced significant trauma in their short lives: seeing loved ones die of HIV, not having a home, and being subjected to discrimination. One of the objectives of Nyumbani is to provide parental care; in a normal family structure, parents often engrain life skills as “just part and par-
Nyumbani also enacts a holistic approach through educational support. The children receive education through college, and then receive job placement assistance. Nyumbani graduates have gone on to get degrees in education, information technology, law, and other fields. Education is just one of the tools Nyumbani utilizes to shape these children into their full potentials.

Aside from the medical aspect of the care of these children, education raises some of the biggest challenges, including legal access to education, student motivation, and intellectual capacity. As recent as the early 2000s, Nyumbani faced challenges resulting from discrimination against people with HIV in public schools. Even though Kenya introduced free primary education in 2003, local primary schools rejected several requests to enroll the Nyumbani children. After several failed attempts to enroll the students, Father D’Agostino and the Nyumbani children took the case to court and won. As a result, all of the Nyumbani children were enrolled in public school, and the schools were trained to create a non-discriminatory environment. Once in school, some of the kids excelled, while others underperformed. Recent research indicates that HIV can negatively impact children’s neurocognitive development. So for HIV-affected children in particular, a special emphasis on holistic care and treatment is vital to development. Despite these challenges, Nyumbani holds firmly to the value of education to influence the future prospects of their children. Graduates speak positively of their ability to complete their education, and their successes speak to the effectiveness of a holistic approach.

EXPANSION OF PROGRAM

Through the founding of the Children’s Home, Father D’Agostino reached some of the most vulnerable children in the Nairobi area. However, he realized there were countless other children in Kenya affected by HIV that had yet to be reached. Thus, two other programs of Father D’Agostino’s vision emerged: Lea Toto and Nyumbani Village.

LEA TOTO

Lea Toto, which means “to raise a child” in Swahili, was started in 1998 and comprises eight centers in the informal settlements surrounding Nairobi. The 3,200 children served by Lea Toto programs live with a family member, but Nyumbani covers all of the holistic care beyond accommodation. For these children, holistic care not only includes the elements provided to those at the Children’s Home, but also often includes food support for families who fall below the poverty line and sometimes rent. Depending on one’s circumstances, the holistic care that Nyumbani provides might vary, but it serves one overall purpose: to ensure that each HIV-infected child receives the support needed to develop into adulthood.
Similar to the life skills training provided at the Children’s Home, the Lea Toto programs provide special programming to adolescents that trains them about sexual reproductive health and rights, economic empowerment, and education. This is important because, although the Lea Toto children live at home with parents, their parents avoid talking about issues related to sexual health, even though it is particularly important for people living with HIV. In this way, the Lea Toto programs have an approach to holistic care that provides them with all of the elements of support they would not otherwise have.

NYUMBANI VILLAGE

Nyumbani Village was started in 2006 and is an outreach to the two generations left behind in the HIV pandemic: grandparents who lost their children and children who lost their parents. It is comprised of simulated villages with grandparents leading households of children. Only about four percent of children in the village live with HIV. Evidently, Nyumbani programs serve not only HIV-infected children and families, but also affected children and families. As a result, this simulated village, complete with three on-site schools, aims to provide holistic care to all children impacted by HIV/AIDS in any way.

Across the three programs, COGRI serves over 3,500 children and their families. Where their lives are lacking, COGRI picks up. Nyumbani Children’s Home, Nyumbani Village, and Lea Toto all work together to fill the missing pieces of these children’s lives, giving them the chance to develop to their full potentials.

REACH BEYOND NYUMBANI

Father D’Agostino’s vision to care for HIV-infected children was ahead of its time, considering that 18 years after he established Nyumbani Children’s Home, the Human Rights Watch reprimanded the Kenyan government for neglecting children affected by the HIV pandemic. While Kenyan society was just coming to terms with procedures that need to be established to care for HIV-infected children, COGRI was working to expand and reach a wider segment of children. While Nyumbani can only reach so many children, it is making a positive difference in the way Kenyan society views children afflicted by the disease, as is evident from its three programs and the fact that thousands of HIV-infected children and their families have been supported in some capacity by Nyumbani.

Through Nyumbani, which represents “the story of how one person came up against the injustice of HIV-infected children being neglected, abandoned through fear and ignorance, rejected because their care was daunting and costly and did something about it,” Father D’Agostino set a blueprint for the approach to caring for HIV-infected children, whereas the government largely ignored their plight during the early years. By 2011, the United Nations had set a framework for the care of these children in the Political Declaration on HIV and AIDS. In this declaration, the UN detailed its stance on providing equal opportunities to all orphans and children affected by HIV, which includes education, a supportive legal system, information to support HIV-infected children and their caregivers, and other provisions. Nyumbani had already been working toward these elements for several years by the time the UN made its declaration, and it is proud to state that it is no longer the only organization dedicated to the care and treatment of HIV-infected and -affected children.

LOOKING FORWARD

There are many challenges that Father D’Agostino and Sister Mary faced throughout Nyumbani’s foundation and lifetime, as running a children’s home is not an easy task. Because Nyumbani is donor-funded, one consistent challenge is ensuring there are sufficient funds so that the programs can operate. However, not only does Nyumbani have to ensure that the funding is received, it must also deal with the potential of donor fatigue. Additionally, in some cases, Nyumbani has to make sure every dollar of the donation matches the mission of the donor. For example, USAID is one of the funders for the Lea Toto program, and because of its stringent accounting systems, every dollar Lea Toto uses from USAID not only has to be used toward the right cause, but also has to be used prudently. Despite all of the financial challenges that Nyumbani may face, it has never shut down. Sister Mary credits this to the benevolence of God, saying, “Part of our vision and mission is our dependence on the providence of God, and that sustains me throughout. I’ve never experienced that God has let us down.”

In addition to donor funding, other challenges that Nyumbani faces include making sure the children feel accepted in their new home, gaining access to medicine, assigning the children to schools, dealing with disciplinary issues, getting them prepared for life outside of Nyumbani, and, finally, helping the graduates secure jobs after they finish college. As one may see, these challenges are not entirely different from the challenges any ordinary parent would face.

Although it is a laborious process, there is a shared sentiment that the reward of seeing the children healthy and happy far outweighs the challenges that come with running Nyumbani. The children may not realize the magnitude of all of the back-
ground work necessary for Nyumbani to function, but just like any child, when they are older they may come back and say: “I appreciate what you did for me.” To many of the staff members of Nyumbani, realizing that they played an integral role in helping these children realize their full potentials is the reward that keeps them at Nyumbani.

CONCLUSION

From speaking with staff members at Nyumbani Children’s Home to observing interactions between the staff and the children, there is an overall feeling of familial love and connection. Nyumbani provides a home where one otherwise would not have been available. When speaking of the most rewarding part of her position, Sister Mary lovingly declared, “Assisting these babies, toddlers, young people, and adolescents to live full lives to fulfill God’s plan for them. Each one of them is a beautiful creation of God, and each has a vocation to develop and realize their full potential and thank God for their lives.”

The Children’s Home, as well as Lea Toro and Nyumbani Village, provides thousands of marginalized children with the elements of care and support that HIV/AIDS has taken away from them. Whatever aspects of care are lacking in their lives as a result of their status, Nyumbani provides each child with a holistic upbringing. By providing a home guided by Christian compassion, hundreds of children who otherwise had no chance of survival are given the opportunity not only to survive, but to thrive. While the ultimate goal is a society where Nyumbani would no longer be necessary because of an HIV-free world, until that time, Nyumbani will continue to raise generations of HIV-infected children with a holistic approach to care.
SISTER MARY OWENS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, NYUMBANI CENTER

What are some of the biggest challenges your organization faces?

The developed world believes—at least they act like they believe—that as long as we have basic help, the developing world is fine, which is not true. We should have quality healthcare, quality...whatever.

There is also a gross injustice of the stigma of persons living with HIV. It is simply a medical condition, and like any other medical condition, it needs access for care and treatment. But stigmatizing it is totally unacceptable and unjust. Part of it appears to be connected with sexuality. Sexuality, as you know, is still taboo in certain parts of the world. HIV is associated with promiscuous sexuality. But it doesn't matter how people got the virus; now that they have the virus, they need to get access to care and treatment, and need to be treated with dignity as an equal person and not stigmatized in society. Some children have inherited HIV and are living with it through no fault of their own. One of the greatest challenges is to prevent the transmission of the virus to children.

The other area that I'm aware of is that there's still racial discrimination. There's a mindset that I often come across in the developed world, which doesn't see Africans as equal to Caucasian people, and this is often due to ignorance. I get asked: “Can Africans do that?” Which is totally uninformed, and of course also unjust. I come across this sometimes: “Oh, you're doing that...in Africa?”

What are some of the biggest successes of your organization?

Our children are living! Our oldest is 34. Two of our children are in stable relationships, and they have children who are HIV-negative. They're all going through tertiary-level education, so that they are empowered to look for employment and become self-reliant. As children grow up and become adults, they also advise parents—not that parents always accept the advice. So our older children are telling us: “Sister Mary, it's better if you...”So that's marvelous, because they feel they're just like any other young person. That's happening more and more, because there's so many of them.

What is the most rewarding part of your position?

Assisting these babies, toddlers, young people, and adolescents to live full lives to fulfill God's plan for them. Each one of them is a beautiful creation of God, and each has a vocation to develop and realize their full potential and thank God for their lives.

NICHOLAS MAKAU, PROGRAM MANAGER, LEA TOTO PROGRAM

What does “Lea Toto” mean, and how was that name established?

Lea Toto is actually two shortened Swahili words: lea, which is short for kulea, which means “to raise”; toto is watoto, which means “a child.” So lea toto is “raising up a child.” Now, this name was brought in for a purpose when we came into the community back in 1998, to see how we could integrate within the community in a way they would identify with us. If you recall—or if you've read the history of HIV in Kenya—in 1998 the stigma was quite high, and to entice people in the community to embrace bringing up a child, we thought, “Let's have a name that will really mean something to the locals,” so that's how the name was established.

In what ways does Catholic faith play a role in the treatment of these children?

First of all, you know any general religion is out there to provide physical care, emotional, and spiritual care for the people. Just like the Bible says, you cannot live on bread alone. The ministers have always been good and preached the good news, but also attend to other people’s needs. And I think that’s what Father D’Agostino did. Although he did this completely outside the Church because it is an independent entity, we have seen quite a lot of religious support. Most of our team leaders are actually religious nuns like Sister Mary [Owens], and we have seen that commitment of the Catholic Church into missioning to other areas of human needs. Most of the schools in Africa were started by the Catholic Church, and most of the hospitals. The same spirit is going on with saying we aid people’s spiritual needs. What other needs do they have? And one of them is that the ministers speak to us about HIV, stigmatization, people being discriminated against. Sister Mary would always ask:
“If Jesus was here today, would he discriminate against HIV-positive people?”

ELIZABETH AKINyi, STUDENT, NYUMBANI SCHOOL

How do you see Catholic education shaping who you are as a person?

I think it shapes me as a person because through the education we get here—and since the system of learning here is all-inclusive, including the spiritual, the physical, and the academic—we get to learn more compared to if you were just in a system that is only academic. So it changed my life, because I get to know more.

What is the most rewarding part about being a student here?

The most rewarding parts about being here are the people around me and the education I get. Because without the people around me, I could not have been the person I am today. If I compare myself with when I was in form one, I am a different person, because back then I was just focusing on finishing school, getting it by me, and going on with life. But now I’m focusing on learning how to serve people and to be a better person in the future.

What do you hope to be when you grow up?

When I grow up, I want to study law so that I’m able to change the situation here in Kenya. And after doing law and maybe doing that for 15 years, I would like to become the chief justice of Kenya and try to change something in this nation.

LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

Elizabeth Akinyi
Student, Nyumbani School

Anne
Caregiver, Nyumbani Center

Helen
Social worker, Nyumbani Center

Irene Kimani
Adolescent Program Coordinator, Lea Toto

Nicholas Makau
Program Manager, Lea Toto

Faith Njeri
Graduate, Nyumbani School

Sister Mary Owens
Executive Director, Nyumbani Center

Sister Teresa Palakudy
Chief Nurse, Nyumbani Home

To read the full interview transcripts, please visit: http://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/projects/education-and-social-justice-project
Carolyn Vilter of Paoli, Pennsylvania, is studying political economy in the College. In the summer of 2016, she spent three weeks in Mexico City and Tapachula, Mexico, exploring how the country’s various stakeholders understand and address the challenges associated with Central American migration. Despite the overwhelming perception of Mexico as a migrant-sending country, Mexico serves an equally significant role as a country of transit for migrants crossing both of its borders. In recent years, an increasing number of Central American refugees—rather than economic migrants—have passed through Mexico, motivated by the push factor of everyday violence in their home countries rather than the pull factor of opportunities in destination countries. Partially in response to inadequate and inappropriate handling by the Mexican government, Mexican civil society plays an extensive role in providing visibility, protection, and aid to Central American migrants. To understand this role, Vilter conducted interviews with individuals from international organizations, government, academia, nonprofit and direct service organizations, and migrants themselves.

PARTNER INSTITUTION: UNIVERSIDAD IBEROAMERICANA, MEXICO CITY

The Universidad Iberoamericana (Ibero) is a private Jesuit university, founded in 1943 and located on the edge of Mexico City. The university expresses its mission as contributing to the creation of a more inclusive, just, and peaceful society by teaching and shaping the leaders that Mexico and the world need. To this end, Ibero emphasizes a number of Ignatian values—including utility, justice, humanism, and faith—and prioritizes the external relevance and impact of its academic and investigative endeavors. The university offers 34 bachelor’s degree programs and 36 postgraduate degree programs.
programs. Like many Mexican institutions of higher education, Ibero maintains a separate program devoted to incidencia, or impact, which aims to contribute to the study and solution of social problems outside of the university’s literal and figurative gates. This section of the university is comprised of five programs focusing on gender issues, migration issues, multiculturalism and indigenous issues, human rights, and the environment. Vilter’s research was facilitated greatly by the Migration Issues Program (PRAMI).

INTRODUCTION

El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras—the Northern Triangle of Central America—are among the countries that experience the most violence in the world. In 2015, El Salvador’s murder rate reached an estimated 103 homicides per 100,000 people, a record high since the country’s 1979-1992 civil war. Unlike the unrest in other countries, violence in the Northern Triangle is society-wide, personal, and explicit, meaning that all are impacted and none can easily cope or escape. The violence is perpetuated by the long-term instability of the region’s governments. Together, these factors mean that Mexico, Central America’s northern neighbor and the last—and large—frontier on the way to the United States, faces large and growing flows of vulnerable Central American migrants and refugees. Requests for asylum in Mexico have more than doubled since 2013. Mexico’s response to this influx—complicated by the country’s own struggles with systemic violence and government weakness—is strong in some respects and weak in others.

Given the scope, complexity, and seriousness of the conflict in Central America, Mexico’s response to migration demands both refined, energetic attention and critical, impactful scholarship with an eye to the future. Both approaches find their natural home in higher education. Accordingly, this report asks the following research questions: What are the experiences of civil society practitioners currently working on migration issues in Mexico? How is higher education responding to migration, both directly and in an effort to prepare students to address the issue in their future work?

In response to these questions, this report first lays out the ways in which traditional university paradigms intersect with migration. Second, it surveys migration in Mexico at large, with a discussion of the past and present role of Mexican civil society and a survey of insights that current civil society practitioners can offer students who are interested in migration. Finally, it returns to the role of the university to discuss how practitioners’ insights can inform universities’ approaches to migration in Mexico.

THE ROLE OF THE UNIVERSITY

The resources, visibility, and prestige that universities accumulate make them powerful settings with significant potential for supporting social change. This potential must be reconciled with universities’ central purpose—providing an education to students—as well as with the preservation of their neutrality, credibility, and clout. Universities balance these considerations when contemplating if and how to confront social issues that require their attention; for Ibero and Mexico, one such issue is migration.

As mentioned above, one of Ibero’s incidencia departments is its Migration Studies Program (PRAMI). Incidencia relates closely to Ibero’s Jesuit identity and associated values; through programs dedicated to the study and solution of social problems, Ibero attempts to meet its social responsibility and direct its resources for good. Migration also enters the student sphere. While no undergraduate immigration studies programs exist, the first class entered the master in migration studies program at Ibero in 2016, which is administered by Javier Urbano, professor, activist, and former director of PRAMI. Not all opportunities to connect to migration issues at Ibero are official or university-affiliated. For some students, the university setting is a springboard for their own forms of involvement and activism. Educational connections to migration and other social issues are also expanding to lower levels of education; Ibero’s preparatoria, or high school, which opened in 2010, incorporates substantial service and internship requirements. Students like Miguel Lopez, a member of the high school’s first class and a current Ibero undergraduate, take advantage of these requirements to engage with migration.

Ibero and other universities illustrate through their mission statements that work on social issues like migration is a priori
ity. Still, it is a developing and woefully incomplete fraction of the work universities do and the experience they offer students. The project of fully shaping students to understand the migration situation in Mexico and to prepare them for the complex work ahead is challenging and incomplete. In order to understand the changes the educational system is making to meet present challenges, it is necessary to study the role of Mexican civil society in social justice and current society members’ perspectives on migration.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IN MEXICO

A salient feature of the migration arena in Mexico is the overwhelming presence and importance of civil society. Urbano emphasized this point, saying, “There is something the world should recognize about Mexico: We have the biggest humanitarian response system in the world—we have 70 shelters, we have soup kitchens, attention centers, and we have close to 5,000 people doing aid work, volunteering, legal aid, healthcare, everything—but all of this is civil society. It’s not the government.” In contrast to countries like the United States, where immigration is often a legislative matter, Mexico’s immigration dialogue is dominated by civil society.

Civil society takes many forms; beyond academia, it encompasses non-university-affiliated producers of research, such as the Institute for Migration Study and Dissemination (Instituto de Estudios y Divulgación sobre Migración, INEDIM) and the Social Research Laboratory: Justice in the Movement (LIS: Justicia en el Movimiento); nonprofits dedicated to movement coordination, policy promotion, and service, such as Without Borders (Sin Fronteras); and direct service organizations such as Belen Shelter, the Shelter of Jesus the Good Shepherd (Albergue de Jesus el Buen Pastor), and countless other comedores (soup kitchens) and shelters.

Within each of these civil society sectors, many varieties of work take place. Direct service organizations are a prime example of that complexity. Sin Fronteras, a nonprofit organization based in Mexico City, organizes its direct service branch to provide psycho-social and psycho-emotional care to migrants and refugees, in addition to the traditional legal aid. Irazú Gómez Vargas, networks and outreach coordinator at the organization, says, “Everything involved in leaving your country due to persecution, or due to the economic conditions, or due to violence, is likely to create serious psychosocial problems. We provide this psychological attention for more or less three months after the individual receives documentation, so that they can find work, enroll in school, be directed to housing or health services—everything that’s involved in the first stages of resettlement in a new country.” Many organizations and individuals expressed a similar awareness of the complexity of migrants’ experiences and the wide range of services required to truly aid them.

Sister Leticia Gutierrez, director of the Scalabrinian Mission for Migrants and Refugees (Scalabriniana Misión para Migrantes y Refugiados, SMR), expresses the same commitment to providing care for the whole migrant: “The first thing we do here is ensure that the person has lodging and is able to step away from the violence they’ve been fleeing... The migrant will stay with us for an average of two or three months, more or less, depending on the physical and psychological situation of the migrant.” Throughout this time, a complete psycho-emotional community approach is taken so that the individual can discover all the potential he or she carries and can return to their migrant journey.

Meeting migrants’ needs is an ever-evolving, multidimensional task. The work of the Scalabrinianas in Mexico is illustrative of a larger national trend in general social justice work and, particularly, migration work. According to Perrine Leclerc, chief of UNHCR field office in Tapachula, the Church “is the backbone of humanitarian aid” in Mexico. A network of 14 migrant shelters affiliated with Mexico’s Jesuit Migrant Service (Servicio Jesuita a Migrantes, SJM), shelters and kitchens founded or served by religious affiliates, and internationally-recognized migrant advocates like Father Alejandro Solalinde, are all examples of the prominent role of religious institutions, figures, and ideals.

LESSONS FOR STUDENTS FROM WORKERS IN THE FIELD

The importance of civil society in the Mexican migration arena extends beyond its extensive historical influence. Currently, conversations with practitioners across civil society organizations offer insights that both elucidate the nature of migration in Mexico and inform universities’ approaches to teaching it. Current practitioners’ perspectives touch on developing an interest in migration, working from various organizational vantage points, confronting the mixed attitudes of the Mexican public, and staying motivated in the face of endless challenges.

INTEREST AND INSPIRATION

The first milestone in the transition from student to worker is the development of an interest in migration that inspires a commitment to the work. For some, this inspiration comes from a personal history with migration. Asked why migration interests him, Urbano’s first answer was: “Because I was a migrant.” Karina Aguilar, an Ibero undergraduate dedicated
to migration-related work, grew into her interest and activism growing up among the Patronas, a group of women in Veracruz who famously toss food to migrants travelling atop Mexican freight trains headed north.

Others are inspired by faith, such as Hermana Leticia Gutierrez and Flor María Rigoni, both of the Scalabrinian order dedicated to helping migrants and refugees. Others are empowered by a moving experience in the field that sparks or solidifies a passion for the issue. Describing an internship at the Fray Matías de Córdova Human Rights Center in Tapachula during which she was assigned to visit detention centers, Adriana Salcedo said:

“When I was there, I heard all kinds of stories and met people of many different nationalities. What impacted me the most was that these people were fleeing their countries, had arrived in Mexico, and told stories of mistreatment, suffering, and becoming victims of any and all types of violence both in their home countries and in Mexico. Something that also really affected me was that these people were only just beginning—they had only made it to the southern border of Mexico, and they still had an entire, enormous country to go. I think the most powerful cases were the children, because there were children, mostly Central American. There are two Salvadoran children in particular who I’ll never forget.”

This type of story was a common thread uniting many passionate academics and workers. One experience—particularly an encounter with the issue outside of their normal circle—altered their perspective and solidified their commitment to the topic.

THE GENERAL PUBLIC

The Mexican public demonstrates a spectrum of attitudes related to migration, spanning from ignorance and apathy to pushback or aid. When asked to discuss their perceptions of public attitude toward Central American migrants, many experts and workers described ignorance and apathy, explaining that the phenomenon is so widespread that it is often accepted without discussion. Urbanó depicted the public’s apathy as: “What does Mexico think about migration? Nothing. It’s not an issue. It’s never been an issue on the public agenda. Never. Mexican migration to the United States doesn’t interest anyone. It’s simply a theme of academics, researchers, or civil society. But not elsewhere. Why? Because it’s become normal.”

Even those who find themselves intimately involved today often started out disengaged and disinterested. Gutierrez explains:

“When I entered with the Scalabrinian sisters in 1995—not too long ago—I didn’t clearly understand that I was a migrant. It wasn’t a topic that was very well known or explored, the way it is today. I have four siblings who migrated to the United States undocumented; of the four, only one has stayed there, and he’s now regularized and has a family and everything. But this experience of migration was so common among families that it wasn’t a topic that was discussed: It was simply lived, and that’s it.”

Getting a close-up look at the issue tends to transform ignorance into commitment. Gutierrez’s story continued, “The first contact with migration issues, for me, was very impactful. Later, we walked through the areas migrants would pass through, and in the migrant shelter itself, hearing the testimonies, seeing all the injuries, wounded legs, people abandoned with injuries. Encountering this reality is what made me stay there.”

Unfortunately, such close encounters with migration do not always work in migrants’ favor. Sometimes, migrants and pro-migrant efforts engender active opposition, as in the case of a shelter in Mexico State, El Lechería, which was shut down after pressure from neighbors who, according to Ibero student Miguel Angel López, “think that migrants rob, that they kidnap, that they bring drugs. So the neighbors do everything they can to close the shelter.” During her time as a migration project coordinator at Amnesty International Mexico, Adriana Salcedo also observed a great deal of prejudice and resistance against migrants. In her experience, “communities that live around the train tracks are often very hostile and xenophobic. They don’t like having people from other countries or other regions: ‘No, because he’s blond,’ or ‘No, because he’s black.’ I think this implies a huge social responsibility: From your house, from your family, from your school, how do you work to ensure that your children don’t discriminate?” This is a difficult question for entire nations, let alone individual aid workers, to address.

When asked if he had welcomed the heavy community participation at the shelter where he volunteered for a year, López gave a decisive “Yes. Because when there isn’t [community participation], there’s usually a rejection from the community—xenophobia, violence. So the inclusion of the community is one of the most important steps to sustain a shelter, because it creates a support network. Honestly, it’s like the city, the community, the town, is what carries the shelter forward—or doesn’t.”

When the city does carry the shelter forward, it can do so with spectacular generosity. In Miguel’s year at the shelter, “there was not a single day when a donation did not arrive. So this is another reason why it’s important to connect with the community: because we always had food, always had clothes, always had medicine—always. Even to the point of having leftovers.
If a migrant individual couldn't find shoes that they wanted, they could return another day at five in the afternoon and we'd have new ones!” Public opinion and response is a formidable force for those who work on migration issues to reckon with, be it positive or negative—a testament to the importance of spreading understanding and the empathy that comes with it.

**KEEPING THE FAITH**

Faced with all of the challenges above, migration workers understandably struggle with their commitment and state of mind. In Mexico, the decision to begin and continue in social justice work is a risky one—but it used to be riskier. Until recently, undocumented migration and aiding undocumented migrants were considered criminal offenses in Mexico: “Before the change in law,” Urbano explains, “there were many people in jail for defending migrants—just for protecting them. Giving them food. But they no longer go to jail; now we have laws that defend us. I’m a defender of migrants, and now I can defend myself.” Still, such changes are not always meaningful in Mexico. Urbano tells a story of visiting Chiapas to advocate for migrants in 2016, where he was arrested and charged with trafficking by a police officer and judge who were unaware of the legal revision. When Urbano filled them in, “Suddenly the judge says, ‘You’re right—it’s not a crime.’ So I asked him, ‘Did you really not know that our national immigration law doesn’t classify advocacy as a crime anymore?’ And he said, ‘Look, I hadn’t realized.’ Take in how serious that is. So, I repeat to you my diagnosis that it has fundamentally to do with the fact that in Mexico, many laws are made, many agreements are signed, but then they don’t work. They have no effect.” Experts like Urbano find it difficult to maintain any faith in systematic solutions when so many examples illustrate the resistance of the Mexican system to change.

For newer generations of advocates, it remains a formidable decision to leave typical careers—like a lucrative, stable path in law—and enter the more difficult world of social justice practice. Unfortunately, this concern is demonstrably warranted: Cases like the daughter of Ramón Verdugo, founder and director of the All For Them (Todo Por Ellos) comedor in Tapachula, Mexico, who applied for asylum in the United States after receiving threats based on her involvement in the pro-migrant cause, demonstrate the dangers that Mexican activists face.

**RISING TO THE CHALLENGE: REINVENTING THE ROLE OF THE UNIVERSITY**

Even a brief catalog of migration workers’ wealth of experience and information uncovers common threads, insights, and best practices that inform the education of future migration workers. Some lessons speak for themselves, some can be extracted, and some are already in the early stages of implementation.
MASTERS IN MIGRATION

One lesson relates to the development of Iberos new masters degree in migration. Describing typical academic work on the subject, Urbano says, “Rarely do migration researchers in Mexico do fieldwork, because the level of difficulty involved in working with migrants in the field is high, and involves risks.” Experts typically produce and teach theoretical work, and migration-focused higher education programs tend to rely on textbooks and theory. At Ibero, Urbano hopes to create a different kind of masters program, one taught by individuals with concrete field experience through attending to migrants, taking risks, and observing the issue firsthand. This experience “gives us the authority to say that we can create a very good training program for our masters students. But this university is a rare case, and that’s because it’s a private university—perhaps the most expensive one in the country.” More outward-facing, field-oriented higher education programs offer invaluable experience to students; still, they remain out of reach for some universities and are the exception rather than the rule.

EDUCATION AND INCIDENCIA

A significant area for improvement in university engagement with migration is the gap between incidencia programs and undergraduate students. While exemplary for their concrete efforts to use universities resources and achieve social impact, the staff of Iberos incidencia program still express an unfortunate disconnect from the undergraduate student body, which could learn a great deal from staff. At Ibero, there has been some movement toward student-engaging programs—PRAMIs recent partnership with the Red Cross where undergraduate students in different disciplines applied their studies to some migration issue, for example. In one case, communications students created radio spots with migrant self-care and safety tips and broadcasted them in communities of origin.

Another incidencia program, the Human Rights Program, worked with undergraduates to create a social justice-related advertisement campaign. Students can gain significant knowledge, understanding of the work process, and lasting interest from such partnerships and projects.

STUDENT ACTIVISM

According to students, the climate around student activism on campuses like Ibero remains unconducive to students social justice growth and advocacy. As a college student, former Ibero undergraduate and current Ibero PRAMI assistant Mariana Wheelock felt misunderstood and actively disliked for her ties to activism. Current Ibero undergraduate Miguel López cannot decipher why students are not interested but asserts that they are not. Since high school, only a core group of the same few students are interested in discussing and planning activism. López sets a promising example. His passion for the issue and networks with other students began during his Ibero high school migration field trip. To engage more students, awards like the one recently given to Karina Aguilar, an Ibero undergraduate, are a positive force: The importance of university-supported avenues for active engagement and learning experiences like community-based research are not overstated.

A NEW TYPE OF CLASS

Many professors and students recognize improvements they need for the most basic higher educational unit: the class. A challenge for professors is taking steps to modify traditional educational practices and create models that both produce more interest in the subject and better concrete skills. A possible avenue for those developments that is already underway at Ibero is the creation of practical courses such as the universitys new Alaide Foppa Legal Clinic for Refugees, in which students assist with refugees asylum cases with the aid of experienced lawyers Lorena Cano and Diana Martinez.

Describing why she decided to work on the clinic, Martinez said, “In the end, there is a necessity to begin in universities, because we didn’t used to have these types of courses of study in the university, and I think our motivations would have been different if we had. We worked a lot on skill-building for the job, and I also liked the academic angle a lot, and this was the combination that interested me—being at a university teaching classes, and at the same time instilling the theme of asylum into the students.” Courses can be improved not only by becoming more practical and engaging, but also by concertedly entering more than one discipline. Students and faculty described a notable lack of interdisciplinary classes and perspectives at Mexican universities in general, including Ibero, a phenomenon that contributes to the difficulty of focusing on and effectively teaching deeply interdisciplinary issues like migration. This traditional disciplinary paradigm leads to practical difficulties with cooperation—and even basic issue comprehension—when students grow into roles as researchers and practitioners.

LOOKING AT AND LISTENING TO MIGRANTS

Finally, the importance of continuously remembering to return to the root of the issue by including migrants voices and ref-
erencing their stories cannot be overstated. Deference to migrants themselves not only facilitates students’ inspiration and engagement, but it is also necessary for instruction on migration to be fundamentally accurate and respectful. With this in mind, Urbano says:

“One of our plans for the master’s is for students to go to shelters, to go to civil society, to speak with migrants themselves, to exchange points of view, to say, ‘You, migrant, how can I be useful to you?’ And through this, specialists will come out much better-prepared. The only person who can tell us what migration is like is the migrant. They’re the only one who can say. We can imagine whatever you want, but the reality is that, if we don’t listen to their voices, we’re committing a grave error, and doing the same thing the world does: excluding them.”

In Urbano’s experience, students benefit vastly from this approach, and migrants rise to the occasion as well. “The impact that the migrants have on students is marvelous—they’re teachers. Because they tell you to your face, ‘They hit me, I was raped, I was kidnapped, a police officer hit me, they took my money,’ how they travel by train, the dangers, everything. In general, you don’t believe it from a professor, but when you hear it directly from someone’s mouth, you learn much more than you would from a teacher or a book.” Both the theoretical importance of listening to migrants’ voices and the practical value of incorporating their real-life experiences makes reference to migrants’ themselves a central part of a successful higher education program.

The critical importance of the migrant perspective came up in a conversation with Carmen Escobar, a woman who fled from her native Honduras to the southern edge of Mexico to escape a direct threat from a gang. Waiting with her young daughter to be called into the offices of the Mexican Refugee Aid Commission (Comisión Mexicana de Ayuda a Refugiados, COMAR) in Tapachula, Escobar expressed a desire to have her story communicated as widely as possible for fear that the conflict and struggle she and her fellow migrants experience would otherwise go misunderstood or unnoticed. In the end, “the ones who tell the truth are the migrants. Professors and employees aren’t going to tell what we’re living.”

**A DIRECT IMPACT: EDUCATING MIGRANTS THEMSELVES**

Amid the focus on understanding migration in order to learn, teach, and work in the field, certain community organizations provide reminders that migrants themselves can be the direct beneficiaries of education.

Some of the most critical education of migrants is also some of the most basic: ensuring that migrants clearly understand their
circumstances, the system, and their rights. Along with many organizations in many locations, UNHCR strives to do this work in Tapachula for the countless migrants passing through. Their work is largely limited to cosmetic, minor interventions and filling in the gaps. The office produces signs visually and verbally explaining the asylum application process, conducts interviews with migrants to explain the concepts of “refugee” and “asylum,” assesses their potential eligibility, directs them to the appropriate government office, and visits detention centers to fulfill the same purposes. As Perrine Leclerc describes it:

“What we do above all is dispense information about the right to solicit asylum—basically identify people who are eligible for international protection. In the detention center, they need to explain the rights migrants have to them, but we know that in practice this is an enormous challenge—it’s written in very small print in the documents they need to sign before being deported, and they don’t understand their right to asylum, which is to say that nobody explains it to them—although we have these posters in migrant detention centers, it’s still a complicated problem. Some people think it’s a process that resolves in two days. So we identify eligible people, direct them to the asylum application process, and ensure that this whole process works well.”

The majority of migrants and refugees do not know their rights or understand the system available to them before this type of intervention, “and there’s also lots of false information circulating, so it’s important to really clarify and explain the processes” in order to make sure the imperfect system works.

Some models of migrant education, like the one explored by La Aldea Arcoíris, or Rainbow Village, take migrant education a step beyond the necessities. Recently opened in Tapachula in association with the Belen Migrant Shelter, Rainbow Village provides migrants multi-week courses in hairdressing, pastry decoration, and other skills. When individuals apply for asylum at the COMAR office in Tapachula, they begin a waiting period of 45 business days during which COMAR processes and adjudicates their application. With its classes, the organization aims simultaneously to improve migrants’ job prospects and to occupy them while they wait. Rainbow Village turns this period from a painful impasse that can frustrate and deplete migrants—or even discourage them from applying at all—into a period of productivity. This paradigm is relatively new. While some may argue that resources should be dedicated to basic work like UNHCR’s work while the system continues to fail refugees, it certainly has its own immense value.

CONCLUSION

Education that directly and indirectly impacts migrants is a critical area for development and growth, and today’s students are the ones who will mastermind and undertake those changes. It is critical that they are given the knowledge, experience, and psychological resources required to take on the innumerable challenges they face. To understand those challenges and refine the current approach to educating tomorrow’s migration workers, it is logical to consider the challenges of current workers. The present system has many inadequacies. Talking to the scholars, government officials, service providers, and migrants who shape the system reveals gaping holes as it also sheds light on best practices.

Looking ahead, it is up to the education system to harness and refresh that history as productively as possible. Urbano says, “Migration isn’t solved, it’s managed. We have to administer it, to govern it—but stop it? No. If we could stop it, the world would end, because the entire world was born out of migration.” It is a matter of understanding that, with knowledge, these workers can manage migration with the utmost possible awareness, intentionality, and humanity.
CARMEN ESCOBAR, MIGRANT

In my case, if I could get to the United States, I would do it. For something better for me, but above all for my daughter. A better future. Work above all, because my baby needs many things. I just had to stop giving her milk, because I don’t even have the resources for that. And it hurts me because she cries. It really hurts me.

When you left, did you know where you wanted to go?

When I left, no. I just left without knowing. From Honduras, you have to pass through Guatemala. We left irregularly to be able to get past the migration officials there. I went through Guatemala, and from there to get to here I travelled irregularly, too, because I had to evade the immigration officials of Guatemala.

It’s a long trip, isn’t it?

But it’s worth it for my daughter. Because she deserves something better. The insecurity—I don’t know if you realize what the situation is like in Honduras—it’s very bad. It’s horrible. I was working; I was doing very well. This [one] person was checking on my routes. I didn’t see anyone, but it becomes normal to you to come across someone covered in tattoos, pass them, and if they said something I wouldn’t have answered. But I began seeing him very frequently. I realized that, too often, I was coming across him exactly where I needed to pass. One morning, I went outside, I encountered him. I was with my baby, he followed me, and he trapped me. So I started to tremble out of nervousness. And I started to cry. Because I had my daughter in my arms, and I didn’t know what he was going to do to me. I start asking him in my head because I couldn’t speak—asking for compassion, asking that he leave me and my child [alone]. He was still there, and he took me by the arm and started saying things to me. “Do you know what I belong to?” And I didn’t answer him. “I belong to Mara 18, and you need to do what I say.” I just shook. The fear really took me over. I couldn’t do anything. Then two people went by, and upon seeing other people, he went away and left me there.

PERRINE LECLERC, CHIEF OF THE UNHCR FIELD OFFICE IN TAPACHULA

What is the greatest challenge you face in your work here in Tapachula?

I would say the whole question of coordination between various actors. Coordination with authorities, ensuring that when they make a decision at upper levels between UNHCR and immigration [authorities], that all these proposals and decisions are actually being implemented. This requires a lot of work, a lot of energy, and yes, lots of pressure day to day. What we want to see is more actors here involved in the issue. Now, UNHCR is basically the only voice of refugees here. I think things are changing little by little, but it’s really hard to be here on the border, and it’s hard to change the modus operandi of the authorities, of migrants themselves, of the whole world. So we’d like to have more visibility for the issue, a more collaborative relationship between all these actors, and a relationship with expert partners.

Why did UNHCR decide to establish an office in Tapachula in 2003?

We realized that the flows were getting larger, that the profile was totally different now—many children, many women, families, LGBT individuals—and we think that within this population, roughly some 50 percent need international protection and less than one percent apply for refugee status. So it is really important for UNHCR to be present, because it’s not sufficient to do trainings and the like on a simply theoretical level; monitoring and also being here, going to the detention center—we can’t always prevent the deportation of every individual, but this type of presence at least lets us document and be there to know what’s happening, understand what the authorities’ practices are, to be able to improve our response and our negotiations with the state. This presence is fundamental to understand what’s happening and to have a concrete impact.
When did you start working for UNHCR, and how have you liked it?

I began nine years ago, in 2007. I think the issue of refugees is so hard to wrap your head around. Never being able to return to your country? The simple act of thinking about this, I think, could break anyone’s heart, and for this reason UNHCR’s mission is something I could keep defending forever. Because I see that it’s important to make a difference. I know that it’s unjust, that every human being should be treated equally, but given someone who flees persecution and violence and can’t return and another person who leaves for another reason, I think it makes sense that they should receive different responses.

**XIMENA GALLEGOS, DIRECTOR OF THE MIGRATION ISSUES PROGRAM AT THE UNIVERSIDAD IBEROAMERICANA**

The problem is obviously larger than a single shelter or a single community. Do you think the only way to change the mind of an entire country is shelter-by-shelter, person-by-person, or are there things that a university can do?

I think there are small fronts, or efforts, on different levels that we can do. The work that I spoke to you about earlier, with different organizations like the Red Cross that do something concrete is one part; the work of sensitization and efforts with different university departments to create spaces for students is another. Other parts are direct outreach in spaces outside the university; for example, creating and disseminating materials. I think there are lots of ways for a university to make change, and the trick is to take advantage of everything we have at our disposal from our position to achieve better outcomes and become as effective as possible at generating change. Working in collaboration with other university departments will definitely be very important in this next stage of our work—for example, the new legal clinic here at Ibero. The key is for different organizations’ work to be complementary, so they don’t clash. I think we have to be alert to the importance of not competing, but rather, collaborating and complementing.

You’ve mentioned lots of very hands-on programs, with students doing concrete work with external aims rather than just sitting in class, thinking and reading but not doing practical work. Is that a feature of this university as a whole?

That’s a Jesuit postulate: humanism, involvement of the university community in the necessities of society. So that goes beyond this university. I do think that we’re at a decisive time here, in having much more of a focus on this—on pressuring ourselves to do work that links the university community with external needs. But it’s not like there’s too much of that here, either: there are spaces where students can get closer to and connect with social issues—visit shelters, serve at a migration organization—there are lots of ways. Professors have initiatives that involve students in this specific topic, too. But it needs considerable strengthening. There’s a big push right now for academics to become involved in working on issues like migration. There’s a long way to go, but I think this university is working on all of this a lot right now.
Willy Hernández
Fundación Para La Justicia (“Foundation for Justice”)

Martín Iñiguez
Professor at the Universidad Iberoamericana

Pepe Jacques
Technical Secretary of the Mexican Senate Migration Commission

Perrine Leclerc
Chief of the UNHCR Field Office in Tápachula

Claudia León
Professor at the Universidad Iberoamericana and activist

Miguel López
Undergraduate student at the Universidad Iberoamericana

Diego Lorente
Director of the Fray Matías de Córdova Human Rights Center

Lorena Cano and Diana Martínez
Lawyers at the Refugee Legal Clinic “Alaide Foppa” at the Universidad Iberoamericana

Sergio Monroy
Assistant in the Senate of the Republic of Mexico, former Technical Secretary of the Mexican Senate Migration Commission

Elsa Simón Ortega
Founder and Director, Superación de la Mujer

Graciela Polanco
Psychology professor, director of an exchange program for bachelor’s students at the Universidad Iberoamericana

Adriana Salcedo
Former student at the Universidad Iberoamericana, co-founder of Laboratorio de Investigación Social (LIS) Justicia en Movimiento (“Justice in the Movement Social Investigation Laboratory”), Office of Research Development at Iberoamericana

Yeny Santiago
Collaborator in the Institutional Development Network of the Miguel Agustín Prodh Human Rights Center

Héctor Sipac
Guatemalan Consul in Tápachula, Mexico

Javier Urbano
Professor at the Universidad Iberoamericana, Coordinator of the Master’s of Migration

Fabienne Venet
Director of Institute for Migration Study and Dissemination (INEDIM)

Ramón Verdugo
Director of Todo Por Ellos (“All for Them”)

Ailsa Winton
Researcher at el ECOSUR - El Colegio de la Frontera Sur (“College of the Southern Border”)

Mariana Wheelock
Assistant at the Migration Issues Program at the Universidad Iberoamericana

To read the full interview transcripts, please visit: http://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/projects/education-and-social-justice-project
OVERVIEW

Mariam Diefallah is an undergraduate at Georgetown University’s Qatar campus, majoring in culture and politics and pursuing a certificate in media and politics. In June 2016, she spent three weeks conducting research in Kigali, Rwanda. Her research is concerned with the ways of remembering and teaching the history of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsis. Hosted by Centre Christus of Remera, she interviewed survivors, Jesuit priests, teachers, activists, civil community members, academics, and lawyers. Diefallah also attended a two-day conference on “Peace and Security in the Great Lakes Region” at the University of Rwanda, which discussed methods of genocide prevention.

PARTNER INSTITUTION: CENTRE CHRISTUS OF REMERA, KIGALI

Centre Christus of Remera is one of the few Jesuit centers in the Great Lakes Region and the first Jesuit house in Rwanda. Built on the Remera Hill in Kigali, the center has been a spiritual home for many Rwandans since the 1970s. The center has three chapels surrounded by gardens and rooms available for guests. These facilities are used to host various sessions, seminars, discussions, weddings, funerals, and two daily Masses. The center has a small team of Jesuit priests and sisters who take part in all the activities of the center, including maintaining its eco-friendly nature.
The center became a genocide site after Jesuit priests and nuns were killed there by a Hutu militia on April 7, 1994, the first day of the 100-day genocide. Since then, the center’s activities expanded to include healing and social welfare. Moreover, it is also famous for its assistance to the genocide survivors seeking spiritual accompaniment, as well as urban refugees from surrounding countries like Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The center also offers individual retreats, lectures, and discussions on various theological and biblical questions for those in need of spiritual guidance.

INTRODUCTION

In 2016, 22 years after the genocide, the eighth annual conference on “Peace and Security in the Great Lakes Region” convened to review methods of genocide prevention, recovery, and peacebuilding. Held at the University of Rwanda, the conference featured international panelists from various disciplines who evaluated methods of good governance and the impact of policies on facilitating interaction among Rwandans since 1994. More than two decades after the genocide, this landlocked, predominantly rural country with the highest population density in Africa is grappling with questions of how to remember and commemorate the atrocities. Haunted by a history of murder, rape, and crimes against humanity, Gacaca, Kwibuka, Ingando, and many other Kinyarwanda words became signifiers of unity, reconciliation, and development. Pivotal themes for reconciliation emerged for the panelists and keynote speakers: a return to tradition within a framework of inclusive governance and local ownership; an emphasis on peace enforcement as a point of departure for a legitimate future of development; the importance of a commemoration for Rwanda’s peacebuilding; and education as the focal strategy for implementing this vision. Finally, commemoration, not narrowly defined as a mere act of remembering the past, but rather as a method of paying respect to the victims, will remind people of the necessity of conflict prevention for a better Rwanda for generations to come. This challenging context provides a noteworthy case study of remembrance, acculturation, and enculturation as factors shaping the ways contemporary Rwandans think about themselves, their identities, and consequently, the methods they use to shape the future. With the Catholic Church acting as a healer, and education as a dissemination tool of a newly inclusive identity, this report attempts to better understand the role of various narratives’ creation in identity construction and social justice. How and why is the history of the genocide remembered in Rwanda, and what purpose does the legitimization of the currently existing narrative serve for the country’s future and the international community? Through an interdisciplinary approach based on community interviews, the report explores the social construction and politics of remembrance of the 1994 genocide.

THE HISTORY OF THE GENOCIDE

Prior to the Belgian colonial period in Rwanda, the society was divided into three main ethnic groups: Hutus, who comprised the majority of the population and the lower socioeconomic level in the Rwandan social system; the Tutsis, who occupied the higher strata of society; and the Twas, who represented a very small percentage of the population. The society was divided by socioeconomic status and not ethnicity. In other words, each of the three groups had some degree of social mobility; for example, a Hutu who was capable of acquiring land and property could have moved upward within the existing hierarchy and become a Tutsi. This enculturated mobile system was transformed into a rigid form of ethnic division under Belgian colonial rule with the support and involvement of the Church. As a result, each group became locked within the limitations of their group.

The new system stayed in effect until the wave of African decolonization in the 1950s. In 1959, the Hutu majority political movement was capable of gaining power after the “Social Revolution,” marking the start of a long series of violent incidents targeting the Tutsis. By the time Rwanda gained its independence in 1962, nearly 120,000 people had fled to neighboring countries, primarily Burundi, Uganda, Zaire, and Tanzania. The increasing number of refugees prompted the creation of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) in 1988 in Uganda. Their aim was to pressure the Rwandan government in order to secure a repatriation process and restructure the existing political power-sharing system between the Tutsis and the Hutus. With Rwandan President Juvenal Habyarimana’s negligence, the situation worsened, and in 1990, the RPF launched an attack by Uganda. Pressured by the attack, President Habyarimana signed the Arusha Peace Agreement in 1993, agreeing to an increase in Tutsis’ access to positions of power. However, the situation continuously worsened, and Habyarimana’s death from a plane crash on April 6, 1994, ignited increased violence. The radio television Libres des Mille Collines aired a broadcast the following day blaming the crash on the RPF and inciting an extermination of the “Tutsi Cockroaches.” The genocide was initiated by the brutal murder of Prime Minister Agathe Uwilingiyimana, a moderate Hutu leader, along with 10 Belgian UN peacekeepers. Throughout the 100-day genocide that followed, Rwanda lost one million citizens and almost 250,000 Rwandan women were raped. Moreover, with the RPF’s success in gaining control over Rwanda, almost 1.4 million Hutus fled over borders, paving the way for additional tensions that led to the war between Rwanda and the Congo in 1996.
TRAUMA AND THE POLITICS OF REMEMBERING

The foremost recurring theme across all interviews centered on trauma. Across sectors of Rwandan society, all seemed to share a common understanding of the history of the genocide, its ramifications, and subsequent challenges. It is important to understand how that collective national understanding took hold within Rwandan society and to examine the produced narrative of different paths of dissemination. The narrative of the genocide was initially claimed by the RPF, which announced, “Rwanda was Dead,” and subsequently, the genocide declared the Tutsis as victims and the Hutus as perpetrators. This narrative created tension between the two groups and their respective roles within the collective memory, marking a fundamental and sensitive function in creating the new Rwandan identity.

The approaches to tackle that challenge are reflected in the interview with Dr. Eric Ndushabandi, researcher and vice dean of the School of Social-Political and Administrative Sciences at the Centre for Conflict Management. In his view, the Rwandan society after the genocide was living in a “Hobbesian state of nature” with no common vision or identity. In that sense, a structure of a strong state had to be put in place for any post-genocide peacebuilding attempts to succeed, and grassroots movements could have only started contributing after the society established a minimal state of stability to give various groups the chance to start taking ownership of the genocide and discuss their roles within the new collective identity. As a result, the society was composed of diverse, conflicting memories: individual memories and experiences, group memories, and official and institutional memories adopted by the state. However, for Dr. Ndushabandi, the Rwandan conflict was to be reconciled with time as long as the country started “a walk of memory” and took into account the creation of a “common narrative that is guided by common values and a common destiny that is bigger than anyone’s personal memories.”

“IT WAS A GENOCIDE AGAINST THE TUTSIS THAT HAPPENED IN RWANDA”

The construction of a common, inclusive national narrative on the history of the genocide meant that Rwandans had to agree upon various definitions and understandings of that history. On the importance of such definitions, Dr. Jean-Damascene Gasanabo, director general of the National Research and Documentation Centre on Genocide at Rwanda’s National Commission for the Fight against the Genocide, explained:

“When you talk about a genocide, you first have to understand the concept itself because we are not talking about a civil war, which is very different from a genocide. If we go back to the concept of genocide—if we go back to Raphael Lemkin’s definition—you will find that in a genocide, there has to be an intention to kill and exterminate the targeted group. In Rwanda, who was targeted and who was targeting and committing the genocide? There was an intention to kill the Tutsis by whom? By the Hutus. I am not saying that all Hutus participated in the killings, just like in Germany as not all Germans participated in the killings during the Holocaust.”

But among the Rwandan population, the seemingly simple equation of identifying perpetrators and victims produced many questions about the challenges of the impact of such a persistent division. Twenty-two years after the genocide, the tension of identifying two groups and establishing an inclusive identity is still one of the key challenges Rwandans have been tackling through remembrance and education.

A STRATEGY OF UNITY

Walking around Kigali, it is impossible to miss the legacy of the genocide’s history, whether it is the main Memorial Site in Kigali, the various name stands of Tutsi victims, or the hundreds of Kibuka posters plastered across the city streets. In the words of Serge Rwigamba, the head guide at Kigali Memorial Site:

“For the genocide survivors, remembrance is essential to teach them not to feel guilty for staying alive, but rather to learn from the past and understand how to use their experiences to build the future of the country. For the genocide perpetrators, remembrance humanizes them as it teaches them the root causes of the violent acts committed during the genocide. In that sense, remembrance becomes a way of recognizing the issues of trust among Rwandans and realizing it will take time and patience to rebuild relations, and thus build our future.”

The genocide’s legacy is still alive, indicating that for many Rwandans remembrance is not about the past as much as it is about the present and future. In other words, remembrance in Rwanda is a strategy of unity, as Rwigamba continued:

“We are now promoting a newly created Rwandan identity that teaches people about their history under colonialism, and under the international community’s negligence during the genocide. Focusing on those external factors of division will protect future generations from internal divisions and teach them how to be active citizens who can prevent future conflicts. Identity formation is what you acquire as first knowledge—this is why
I think future is all about identity. Moreover, from our history we learned that Hutus were victims themselves, as they were brainwashed by [hateful] speech and media.”

This understanding is reflected in the Kigali Memorial Site, as it is a place of remembrance and education. In addition to tour guides, the site offers educational workshops for Rwandan students to educate them on peacebuilding and responsible governance in order to help them discern the difference between apologizing for the genocide and establishing a deep understanding of its causes.

FROM DENIAL TO INCLUSION: THE ROLE OF EDUCATION

The national narrative and its understanding of the historical events of the genocide are closely integrated into the Rwandan educational curriculum. Historically speaking, the first changes in the curriculum were made in 1996, marking an initial success in removing the pre-existing chapters of propaganda against the Tutsi population. Instead, there was an emphasis on ethnic similarities between the Tutsis and the Hutus, but with no direct mention of the genocide. However, continuous educational reforms were introduced for years afterward. From complete avoidance of discussing the atrocities, the reforms in 2008 directly referred to the genocide. Moreover, they focused on the root causes behind the genocide and placed them into a comparative context with other conflicts including the Holocaust and the Armenian Genocide. It also focused on shifting the Rwandan values from that of ethnicity to citizenship.

In addition to reforms, an interdisciplinary approach was introduced in early 2016. According to a history teacher, Rwandan schools are currently implementing a new method of empathy-based education that teaches students about the genocide through storytelling. The teacher explains:
“It is required in all classes. Even in chemistry, mathematics, and language classes, teachers tell stories about the genocide and try to relate them in a way to the subject, this started happening since the changes in curriculum. If it is not related, then the storytelling becomes an activity that happens in the class during breaks, for example. Teachers are getting trainings on how to bring up the genocide in their classes. The stories talk about what happened and about the importance of remembering what happened. I think it is a good idea because we come from an oral culture, so students remember stories easily and storytelling is more appealing in Rwanda in general. I think it makes you feel like you were there; it is very powerful.”

In addition to storytelling, UN documents were introduced to the curriculum, along with films and other visual representations. Moreover, discussion on genocide denial ideology became encouraged in classes.62

HEALING THROUGH EDUCATION AND WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT

The new inclusive Rwandan identity was upheld, integrated, and actively disseminated to civil society. In Kigali, many initiatives were created as early as 1994 to educate citizens about the genocide and help them overcome trauma. One such initiative is Never Again Rwanda, a peacebuilding organization that aims to empower Rwandan citizens with a focus on youth. According to Immaculee Mukankubito, the organization’s director of operations and quality control, “In Rwanda, young people played a negative role—they were mobilized and manipulated by politicians, they were involved in killings during the genocide—but after the genocide, young people tried to reflect how as young people they can actually play a positive role. This is how Never Again Rwanda was created.” In that sense, the organization sees itself as a catalyst of healing, reconciliation, and development for the country.

Along the same lines, another influential organization is Ibuka, an umbrella organization for various associations involved with legal, psychological, and other challenges faced by Rwandan survivors. A key initiative in education is the Association of the Genocide Student Survivors (AERG). Jean Paul Kagabo, executive secretary of AERG, explained the necessity of education for young survivors: “Our motto is to strive for a bright future. We encourage our members to study and to search for a better future. We tell our members that the best revenge is to become a powerful person in your field of study—to take responsibility and work hard for the government or for a good business. This is what we ask our members to do, to become independent.” This raises the importance of shedding light on what independence means for the majority of the current Rwandan population, especially women.

As a result of the severe demographic change and population displacements Rwandans faced after 1994, women’s roles have been increasingly crucial. As millions of men joined the militia or were killed during the genocide, poverty, unemployment, loss of property, traumas caused by rape, and physical and sexual violence became some of the challenges faced by Rwandan women across the country. Another organization under Ibuka’s umbrella is the Association of the Genocide Widows (AVEGA). Two of the founders explained, “The idea came after the genocide in 1994, when different widows started meeting to discuss their mutual problems, concerns, and affairs. At the beginning, precisely in 1995, 50 women survivors started having regular, informal meetings to help each other with the healing process after their losses. With time, the meetings started becoming more formal. Now, AVEGA is an organization of advocacy that is concerned with social affairs.” AVEGA encourages women not only to go to local courts and give testimonies, but to also learn about their and their children’s rights. For the organization, remembering the genocide is essential for two main reasons: to avoid future conflicts and to assist survivors in overcoming their troubles and traumas. On that goal, the founders explain:

“We think it is very important to consider how to teach children about their stories, what words to choose, and what history to tell them. We bring survivors together and divide them into small groups of similar age. We teach those groups about the history of the genocide and about what happened to their families. It is very important to do that from an early age before the kids learn about their experiences from other places that could be extremely traumatizing with future negative consequences. This is why education can be healing. Education gives children hope for a different and a better future.”

Another pressing issue is teaching children who were conceived by rape that what happened is not their fault. On that, the founders elaborate:

“Another problem many women faced is dealing with their children whom they bore as a result of rape. For those kids, it is extremely difficult to explain to them why they do not know their fathers, and in some cases, why their mothers are very aggressive with them. This is where we do our best to educate those children about their own histories, before others stigmatize them. For example, we teach children that rape was a weapon used during the genocide to humiliate and torture Tutsi women. We also teach them that being born out of rape was not their fault—not their mothers’ fault, of course.”

The success of AVEGA can be reflected in the creation of similar initiatives focused on women’s empowerment that have spread all over Kigali. Nyamirambo Women’s Center is one of those initiatives.
In the Muslim neighborhood of the capital, Nyamirambo Women’s Center offers sewing, literacy, and legal classes to women. Marie Aimee Umugeni, president of the center, describes the work the center does and its importance:

“Women are always facing many more challenges compared to men everywhere. But our center is aware of that and we try to help women have better access to different opportunities. We provide training workshops on Rwandan law regarding women’s rights. In these workshops, we teach women about the rights they have and how they can use them for their own benefit. We even teach them about the government’s new rules, as our government now has a system of gender surveillance that makes sure there is a gender balance in different companies and centers around the country. We basically tell women ‘these are the laws; you have to call the police if one of these problems happens to you.’ For example, we teach women that they have to go the police’s hospital if their children were raped. In that way, we teach them how to live [justly] and be part of a just community.”

In conclusion, various Rwandan initiatives have been grappling with the question of healing. However, despite the focus on educational, psychological, and legal assistance, many Rwandans believe in the importance of religion as an essential path of healing, which requires a closer investigation on the contemporary role of the Church.

THE CHURCH IN RWANDA: RESPONSIBILITY, FAITH, AND JUSTICE

After 1994, the Catholic Church had to face its shameful history during the genocide. Churches like Ntarama, Nyamata, and Kibeho are now known as sites of torture, rape, and mass killings. Tens of thousands of Tutsis were murdered inside churches during the genocide, leaving human remains, clothing, and victims’ belongings on display for current visitors. As a result, the role of priests, nuns, and religion itself was put into question after 1994. Father Elisee Rutagambwa, the former rector of Saint Ignatius High School, elaborates:

“The leadership of the Church should have stood against what happened, but there was a failure to do that. For many people whose relatives and families were killed in the churches, of course it has been very difficult for them to go and feel comfortable while praying in the Church after the genocide. But people evolved, and the Church itself has evolved. Now, I think no one can deny that the genocide took place and that some of the killings were in the churches. I also think that as an institution, it is crucial to take responsibility and acknowledge that those crimes happened in such [a] way so that we make our voice heard that we do not accept this kind of behavior. It has been done, but the current stance of the Church is that it can do more.”

In that sense, Father Rutagambwa highlights the necessity of differentiating the Church as an institution and Christianity as a religion.

Moreover, according to Father Rutagambwa, helping with the country’s developmental plans is essential to overcoming the shameful past. He explains the Jesuits have been playing a fundamental part in this new chapter of the Rwandan Church's history: “After the genocide, Jesuits have been trying to bring people together. Many meetings took place where Jesuits and different religious figures tried to talk to the people and figure out what happened to them and listen to their stories.”

In that sense, the Church in Rwanda has been actively engaging the community on a spiritual and educational level.
That involvement can be seen in the examples of two major Rwandan Jesuit institutions: Centre Christus and Saint Ignatius School. Spiritually, Centre Christus offers a physical space facilitating unity, where many Rwandans gather for Sunday prayers, choirs, biblical classes, special prayers for the genocide victims, and support groups for survivors and the thousands of urban refugees residing around Kigali. Educationally, another Jesuit institution plays a pivotal role in Kigali. As the only non-vocational Jesuit school in Rwanda, Saint Ignatius reflects the Jesuit values by offering scholarships to those with financial need as well as to refugees. Moreover, lessons on social justice are offered in the school through various trips that give privileged students from the school the opportunity to visit refugee camps where they learn firsthand how to live faithfully and justly.

Those Jesuit initiatives reflect the larger picture in the predominantly Catholic country, as that fresh spirit of the Church is reflected in the words of a teacher: “Religion is very important here in Rwanda. Religion gives people hope. They need it especially after what happened during the genocide to be able to live normally again. Also, when it comes to schools, churches have a very important role and a lot of connections with different schools. I think the most important connection is the help the churches give to orphans.” In that sense, the Rwandan Church can be seen as a spiritual and educational institution that takes a vital part in Rwandans’ everyday lives and portrays itself as an important actor within the dynamics of the Rwandan civil society.

**COLONIAL PAST, DIVIDED PRESENT, AND TRAUMATIC FUTURE**

For many Rwandans, the challenges caused by the current narrative can be summed up under three main categories: colonial legacy, duality between the schooling system and the private sphere, and the re-traumatization of new generations. The theme of colonialism and inherited colonial legacy was dominant at the eighth annual Conference on Peace and Security. Father Rutagambwa, a panelist, reflected on the topic of the current African colonial mind by proposing a theoretical understanding of the ways colonial history has destroyed the African identity. According to him, the colonial mechanism started by teaching people that they have no history. Through that suppression of memory, Rwandans lost the legacies of their heroes as they were replaced by Western heroes and colonial stories. In that sense, decolonizing the mind is a prerequisite for rebuilding an identity aimed at development. But, for Father Rutagambwa, decolonization is not enough, as it has to be followed by institutional changes reflected in an education based on critical thinking skills to give new generations the chance to explore their histories, its contexts, their heroes, and their authentic identities.

Another main challenge faced by educators and civilians in Rwanda are the contrasting values taught in schools and at home. Despite the current national curriculum and attempts of constructing an inclusive Rwandan identity, 22 years in the history of a country is an extremely short period for such a change to take hold and overcome the long years of division. On that challenge, Dr. Gasanabo elaborates: “At schools you do not teach kids to kill, but at home, parents and relatives can talk about hate. Kids will believe their families, not some strangers they just met at school.” The current Rwandan educators are aware of this duality, which goes back to the necessity of critical thinking. Dr. Gasanabo describes: “When you have an inclusive education system, the kid will be able to think, they will know that what the teacher said at the school is very different from what their families are saying.” Moreover, for Dr. Gasanabo, the role of the government is extremely important:

“The government has to educate people through media, for example. National programs are important. Also, how justice is achieved and made in the country is important because if you have injustice and impunity in your system, you will be creating hate and divisions. There has to be justice in education, justice in health, and justice in economy. Justice is very important because when people see that their community has justice, they will respect others because the society as a whole will be avoiding inequality, and as a result, will be avoiding divisions.”

Dr. Gasanabo highlights the importance of sustaining the positive steps planted by the Rwandan society and the necessity of persistence for those steps to take root in familial, social, legal, political, and religious spheres.

A final challenge faced by many Rwandans is closing the chapter of the continuous reproduction of trauma among the youth. For young adults who were direct victims of the genocide, overcoming trauma has been a daily challenge. On that topic, Kagabo, a survivor himself, elaborates: “If you have trauma, you will not be able to study. First you have to talk about the social problems you are facing—your trauma, your genocide story—before being able to join in a classroom and do well or study at school. It was not easy for us to study at the beginning when many people were still facing these problems. When the young survivors started making families, they would gather with their synthetic family and discuss the problems they face.” In that sense, social support structures such as synthetic families are essential for that generation. Such an effort of organizing survivors in constructed families guarantees them comfort and a sense of belonging and solace, especially during
the annual 100 days of remembrance when many Rwandans find themselves reliving the painful memories of the genocide.

The challenge is reflected in a teacher’s words: “There are many traumatized kids in classrooms, and trauma can lead to violence sometimes. It is a big problem.” Nevertheless, the challenges of trauma are seen differently according to other civil society members in Rwanda. Thierry Kevin Gatete, a human rights lawyer and activist, explains: “You are here in a traumatized country already. Everyone here lost relatives or has relatives who participated in the genocide, so we are traumatized. It is not something we can escape, so the question should be, how do we build a society like that?” For others, trauma is not only an inevitable result, but also one that can be employed positively. Rwigamba, the head guide at Kigali Memorial Center, argues, “Trauma is not necessarily negative as it is another way of expressing yourself and understanding your experiences. In other words, even if remembrance can be traumatizing at times, it still is a way of facing what happened, and as a result, a way of healing from what happened.” These various understandings of trauma raise the question of what different methods of tackling the nation’s trauma between Rwandan values and international standards are.

BRIDGING THE CHASM: TRADITION AND MODERNITY

The challenges outlined in the earlier section have resulted in a heated debate among Rwandan civil society members and educators. How can modernity and tradition be reconciled? And how can the role of the civil society that has been conceptualized as a “Western invention” be redefined in terms of an authentic Rwandan identity? That debate and the answers to those questions are directly linked to what this report sees as a “transgenerational hypothesis” emerging from a dichotomous narrative between two generations: those who have witnessed the genocide and those who were born in a post-genocide context. For some Rwandans like Gatete, the concept of civil society has to be deconstructed and reevaluated to better understand the connotations and values attached to it. Regarding the current status of Rwandan civil society, he explains, “Civil society is not the Rwandan government or the Rwandan people; they are mostly funded by non-Rwandan corporations. It is very dangerous to have groups in your society that have a big influence and that are not funded by the government. It is not surprising when you find that the product of this is not Rwandan.” He offers his understanding:

“Civil society does not require funding...civil society...is a gathering of people who have conversations. It is not complicated or difficult. We have poets, street photographers, artists—they are civil society. They do not need to go to workshops, conferences; they do not have annual agendas; they talk to the people, to their own society. Civil society is social activism. It is movements, not business and markets. People should organize themselves to address their problems.”

This reflects a deeper concern within Rwandan society. In 2016, a new generation is growing into a daily dichotomy between traditional Rwandan values and a “mere colonial inherited ideology.” At one end of the spectrum were Gatete’s views on the matter: “We do not care about Western democracy or those values; we care about our Rwandan values. We need social cohesion. We need to know how to survive with dignity and not to go back to that history. We are trying to be a tolerant society. Other people’s theories of democracy and human rights can wait, or it can be implemented as long as they do not undermine social cohesion in Rwanda.” On the other hand, others expressed a more reconciliatory tone, as Father Rutagambwa reflected:

“We need to understand that neither modernity nor tradition is fixed; they are both dynamic. So the concept of development has been ideologized and shaped in such a way so they would be defined in a fixed manner to show that whatever is non-Western cannot be modern, and that humanity has to be going in a fixed linear path to reach modernity and development. This is why when our country tries to pose its own solutions for its own problems, many people do not like that, claiming they are not following the international standards. But the international standards are not international in the first place. For us, we should take what works for us, things that work with our resources. Using our own system this way will contribute better to the country’s modernity because it fits its traditions and culture. We are trying to keep standards that would help us achieve the ideal situation for Rwanda.”

But not everyone agrees on this notion of history, as this debate poses questions on which Rwandan values to employ in the new narrative and how to talk about the effects of the colonial legacies.

STORYTELLING: DEVELOPMENT AND CONNECTING TO RWANDAN ROOTS

Some performing artists in Kigali explore their own alternative narratives of an earlier history they have not witnessed. Eric Ngangare, a singer, poet, and storyteller, explains his intention of exploring an alternative history: “We live in a world where things are easily forgotten, especially here in Rwanda. In other places, people, for example, have buildings that tell a story of their history, but we do not have that, as everything is new. For
us, it became like every day is a new day, which is not a bad thing, but at the same time you need to know and connect to your roots. The only thing that we had from the past is our stories, our storytelling, and poetry.” According to Ngangare, also known as 1Key, going to a museum or reading a history book is not enough, as Rwandans cannot find themselves in that history. For 1Key, the younger generations are not interested in the past for one simple reason: “We are not really talking about it. All our stories begin either before 1994 or after 1994...all of our stories seem to have happened in the past two decades. What we have to understand is that history is not where the story begins. This is what some of my storytelling is about, about the history we do not know much about.”

Through his storytelling, 1Key explores new narratives of a past of Rwandan kings and prestigious dynasties, of proclaimed poets and ministers whom history has forgotten and deemed to be “primitive” for its oral nature. 1Key is reclaiming a history of pride and honor. He explains his perspective on the way Rwandans currently perceive history:

“We say we do not have any ethnic groups, but in fact, when April comes, you mention the same ethnic groups and during testimonies people use the same words: Hutus and Tutsis. You basically go back to that history, to that same narrative you are trying to move on from. It is much more complex than what we think, it is not something we can easily solve...We do not realize we are mixed up. For me, I only know my grandparents. I cannot trace my ancestors. For example, my grandpa used to talk about his father and how glorious he was, but he never talked about his mother, never, so how much do I really know about my history? It is complex, but if people start talking about it, if it becomes like football, we will pass it, because the more we keep inside, the more it becomes a big problem and a complex of superiority and inferiority. Just like patriotism, it is good to love your country, but you first have to ask yourself how much you know about your country to love it. Loving your country should not mean you hate others or feel like you are better than other countries because that becomes fanaticism that can bring hatred toward others.”

The question now is how Rwandans can reconcile those various understandings of history, tradition, and modernity. The debate also raises questions about how contemporary Rwandan youth view themselves and whether they understand their history in a different manner from their parents.

PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT: BRIDGING GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES

According to Father Rutagambwa, the generation that lived during the genocide has many challenges and problems due to the discriminations and traumas held against them. The new generations who live in post-genocide Rwanda have no references to discriminatory laws or a dividing national curriculum at school. Moreover, he highlights a possible explanation for what he views as an age-related developmental change:

“A problem we had was that right after the genocide, it was very difficult to teach a history course because the existing curriculum at the time was very dividing and discriminatory, as it was telling some groups that they do not belong to the country. So it took some time to find new ways to teach the students about the history of the country.... Now, people who lived through that gap of the transformation of history are the ones, in my opinion, who might have the impression that there are differences between the people living before and the people living after the genocide.”

Mukankubito poses alternative explanations surrounding a lack of communication:

“In Rwanda, the old generations are not used to [communicating] well with their children and to open up with them about
sensitive issues. It is not common because sometimes it is very difficult to explain to the kids what happened to the family during the genocide. Sometimes it is traumatizing to the older people as well. Also, how can a family tell their children they participated in the genocide, and how [will] their kids feel about that if their father is in jail for genocide crimes?”

She elucidates the generational gap through indicating the existence of differences in understanding key concepts and definitions between generations:

“With young generations, there are many opportunities open to them and I think they have better chances in accessing those opportunities. So for them, the meaning of peace means economic development, access to education and employment, freedom of speech, and interaction with different people. While for elders, peace means justice, commemoration, remembering the history of the people they lost, talking about their traumas and experiences within themselves because for them this leads to peace...the meaning of peace depends on the perspective and backgrounds and events they experienced.”

For Dr. Ndushabandi, the new generations born after the genocide can be divided into three categories: those who want to learn about their past, others who are still victims of colonial ideas of divisions, and finally, young people who are not interested when the older generations talk about the genocide, as it is no longer relevant to their lives. But for him, this indifference is not necessarily negative: “I find that very interesting with the new generations. For many of them, all of that history is behind their backs now. I think it is a result of the education as well, which proves that with time, everything changes. People will feel more comfortable with regional and global identities, with globalization and technology.” He does not focus on an existing gap between modernity and tradition, but similar to the Rwandan artist 1Key, he is concerned with methods through which the younger generation can bridge the gap between Rwandan traditions and their future:

“As a new generation, to look for your future, that does not mean you will leave your identity behind, that you are Rwandan. Culture and traditions are part of this. The government of Rwanda is trying to build the country by looking back at our traditions and by adapting them to international standards.... We should go back to our traditions and culture to look for solutions. To go back and find our common values and use them in civic schooling. In that way, when people go and explore global identities, technology, and new perspectives, they will not forget that they are still Rwandans with specific values.” His words show optimism and confidence that the young generation has a positive, inclusive understanding of identities with a belief in Rwandan traditions bridging any existing gap between those traditions and global values.

CONCLUSION

The genocide against the Tutsis in Rwanda left the country with pressing challenges: trauma, population displacements, decolonization of the Rwandan mind, and the question of how to build an inclusive identity based on authentic values. For the country, 1994 marked a “death,” but also a birth, as the state adopted a national narrative that set the foundation for the civil society to develop and for the younger generations to uphold it. The top-down approach appeased the elderly and the generations that lived through the genocide’s atrocities. The state guaranteed them protection and restored their dignity and respect through a legal, religious, and educational framework. But 22 years after the genocide, the country is challenged by alternative narratives calling for a bottom-up approach. That new focus has been disseminated by the Rwandan civil society groups, including artists and activists who are reaching out to a pre-genocide past to integrate within their present reality. Bridging a gap between Rwandan early history and international values, young Rwandans are extending the national narrative into a global one without losing their authenticity.

Despite the optimistic view of many Rwandans, there are some concerns that require further research. Firstly, this report was entirely based on interviews conducted in Kigali, leaving out the majority of the country; the newly created narrative might differ between urban and rural areas. Second, despite the current inclusive Rwandan identity, most of the interviewees in this report associated themselves with various survivors’ associations, leaving out perpetrators, their descendants, and their take on that new identity. Third, it is important to highlight that it is still difficult to assess the results of the Rwandan identity, as it is still taking root within the society itself and amongst the generation that was born and raised after the genocide.
FATHER ELISEE RUTAGAMBWA, FORMER RECTOR OF SAINT IGNATIUS HIGH SCHOOL

Under colonialism and during the genocide, the Church was viewed negatively. Do you think this has affected how people here view religion?

The concept of the Church itself needs to be understood as an institution that had some gaps regarding its response to the genocide because the leadership of the Church should have stood against what happened—but there was a failure to do that. For many people whose relatives and families were killed in the churches, of course it has been very difficult for them to go and feel comfortable while praying in the Church after the genocide. But people evolved, and the Church itself has evolved. Now, I think no one can deny that the genocide took place and that some of the killings were in the churches. I also think that as an institution, it is crucial to take responsibility and acknowledge that those crimes happened in such a way that we make our voices heard, that we do not accept this kind of behavior. It has been done, but the current stand of the church is that it can do more. They have been working on that. For example, there were gacaca (community-level) trials organized within the churches, which helped with the reconciliation process and helped people integrate within their communities again.

IMMACULEE MUKANKUBITO, DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS AND QUALITY CONTROL AT NEVER AGAIN RWANDA

Would you say different generations view the history of the genocide differently?

I work with youth and I think there is a big difference in perspectives because with young generations, there are many opportunities open to them, and I think they have better chances of accessing those opportunities. For them, the meaning of peace means economic development, access to education and employment, freedom of speech, and interaction with different people. Meanwhile, for elders, peace means justice, commemoration, remembrance of the histories of the people they lost, talking about their traumas and experiences within themselves. For them, this leads to peace. So the meaning of peace depends on the perspective and backgrounds and events they experienced. Of course there is also a risk of transgenerational trauma, but many people overcome that. This is why we look for how other societies managed in post-violence contexts and how they avoid and minimize the risks of transgenerational trauma—also, how they used techniques of healing and how it affects the society.

SERGE RWIGAMBA, HEAD OF GUIDE AT KIGALI GENOCIDE MEMORIAL/ AEGIS TRUST RWANDA

How would you define reconciliation?

I would say reconciliation is a way of connecting, or rather, reconnecting with your past. In the context of Rwanda, reconciliation has been a process of rebuilding peaceful cohabitation among different people. In our country, we realized that remorse is different from understanding; this is why there is a focus on the importance of both apologizing as well as understanding. In other words, the perpetrators have to apologize, but most importantly, they have to understand what they are apologizing for in order to be forgiven by survivors. In that sense, education was, and still is, a key in the Rwandan reconciliation process.

How can remembering the past be used as a way to build the future?

It is essential to remember where we come from, but this does not mean we live in the past. On the contrary, remembrance helps in building the future for both the survivors as well as the
perpetrators. For the genocide survivors, remembrance is essential to teach them not to feel guilty for staying alive, but rather to learn from the past and understand how to use their experiences to build the future of the country. For the genocide perpetrators, remembrance humanizes them as it teaches them the root causes of the violent acts committed during the genocide. In that sense, remembrance becomes a way of recognizing the issues of trust among Rwandans and realizing it will take time and patience to rebuild relations, and thus build our future.

Can we say remembrance brings about justice?

Of course! This is why the memorial has a burial place for more than 250,000 genocide victims. At the memorial, mass graves became a symbol of justice. People deserve life and respect, and those who lost their lives deserve dignity. The mass graves bring justice to those who lost their lives, as they remind those who did not protect the victims or stop the killings that they failed to do their jobs.

**LIST OF INTERVIEWEES**

**Two of the founding members of AVEGA-AGAHOZO**
Association des Veuves du Genocide Agahozo

**Unnamed History Teacher**

**Dr. Eric Ndushabandi**
Vice-Dean of the School of Social-Political and Administrative Sciences and Researcher at the Centre for Conflict Management

**Dr. Jean-Damascene Gasanabo**
Director General of National Research and Documentation Centre on Genocide at the National Commission for the Fight against the Genocide

**Eric Ngangare/1Key**
Poet, singer, and Storyteller

**Father Elisee Rutagambwa**
Former Rector of Saint Ignatius High School

**Immaculee Mukankubito**
Director of Operations and Quality Control at Never Again Rwanda

**Jean Paul Kagabo**
Executive Secretary of AERG, Association des Etudiants et Eleves Rescapes du Genocide

**Lauren Milewski**
Director of Curriculum at Kepler University

**Marie Aimee Umugeni**
President of Nyamirambo Women’s Center

**Serge Rwigamba**
Head of Guide at Kigali Genocide Memorial/ AEGIS TRUST Rwanda

**Thierry Kevin Gatete**
Human rights lawyer, blogger, and activist

To read the full interview transcripts, please visit: [http://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/projects/education-and-social-justice-project](http://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/projects/education-and-social-justice-project)
SLOVENIA: Jesuit College Magis, Maribor
Sarah Jannarone (C’17)

OVERVIEW

Sarah Jannarone of Vineland, New Jersey, is a senior in the College majoring in American studies and minoring in education, inquiry, and social justice. In the summer of 2016, Jannarone spent three weeks conducting research at the Jesuit College Magis in Maribor, Slovenia. While at Magis, she interviewed members of the community, including students, administrators, Jesuits, and the rector of the college. Jannarone also interviewed students from the Saint Ignatius College in Budapest, Hungary, and Jesuits in Ljubljana, Slovenia, as part of her investigation into the network of Jesuit residential colleges that are to be built throughout Central Europe.

PARTNER INSTITUTION: JESUIT MAGIS COLLEGE, MARIBOR, SLOVENIA

The Jesuit College Magis is the only Jesuit-run residential college in Slovenia. Opened in October 2015, it housed 10 Catholic university students in its first year of operation. More than just a dormitory, it serves as a student center for learning and as a community. The word “magis” means, “more” and represents the Jesuit challenge of striving for excellence. Its mission is to “offer a healthy and active environment for student living, supplementary training, and developing contacts normally not found in the traditional university setting. The college provides an environment conducive to achieving high professional goals.
and to growing personally and spiritually.” As a first-year institution, its mission is shaped by its residents, their needs within the university community of Maribor, and in Slovenia as a whole. The college has succeeded in fostering community for Catholic university students within its first year of operation. Jesuit College Magis is a part of a larger effort facilitated by Jesuits throughout Central Europe to build a network of residential colleges to provide informal educational opportunities to undergraduate students. These include locations in Poland, Slovakia, and Hungary, as well as a residence in Ljubljana, Slovenia, that is set to open in 2017. The initiatives that Jesuit College Magis pursues are innovative, considering that the free Slovenian higher education system solely exists to educate students and offers little in terms of personal formation.

BACKGROUND

Following approximately 600 years of rule under Catholic Austria-Hungary, the dissolution of the empire in 1918 resulted in Slovenia’s merge into the State of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs, later renamed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1929. Following the Axis invasion of Yugoslavia in 1941, Slovenia was annexed by Fascist Italy, Hungary, and Nazi Germany. The Slovenian response to its newly occupied, trisected situation was split between two opposing factions: the Slovenian Partisans and the Slovenian Home Guard. Slovenian Partisans, led by the Yugoslav revolutionary communists, resisted Nazi occupation with some priests and lay Catholics joining their movement, while the anti-Partisan Slovenian Home Guard or domobranci cooperated with the occupiers with the official support of the Catholic Church and a majority Catholic demographic. By the end of World War II, many priests who had not fled to Austria were imprisoned or executed by the Partisans, as were more than 11,000 members of the domobranci.

The official interpretation of the history of World War II remains a sensitive issue in Slovenia. While former communists consider the Partisans as the victorious coalition that defeated the Axis powers, Catholics view the events of World War II in Slovenia as a civil war. These standpoints, “have served as a line of demarcation between the left-wing parties, which [think] highly of the Partisan struggle, and right-wing parties who more or less [condemn] the events in Slovenia as civil war.” In Slovenian society today, the interpretation of World War II events remains divisive, with Catholics seeking reconciliation for atrocities committed by the communist government immediately following World War II, while former communists evoke Catholic cooperation with Nazi forces during the war. Undergraduate student at the University of Maribor Petra Zavišček mentions World War II memory when discussing how being Catholic in Slovenia is perceived: “I think in Slovenia, it is really divided because of World War II.... This division is still prominent in Slovenia, and why Catholics are perceived negatively.” Father Damjan Ristic, S.J., who is pastor of International Catholic Community in Ljubljana, Slovenia, describes the lasting effect of the nation’s World War II history:

“This all left very deep wounds.... And I think my generation [who grew up in the former Yugoslavia] doesn’t want to go there anymore; they think we should just let the older generation fight and die, but we have to be responsible about who we are and who our children are going to become. It’s not to deny it, it’s not to forget it, but we don’t want to be pulled into hatred. Now, the hatred is among the Catholics and former communists. I think sometimes the Church has not played the most positive role in terms of calling for forgiveness. They say forgive but not forget, and that people should be held responsible, and of course that is true. However, this does not necessarily lead to a resolution; it only leads to further aggravation.”

Despite an official symposium held in 2004 at the Slovenian Parliament building for the victims of World War II and a seventieth anniversary commemoration, reconciliation surrounding the events during and after the war is still pending for Catholics and former communists.

At the end of the war, Slovenia entered into the newly formed Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which granted varying freedoms to Slovene citizens largely dependent on the decade. Throughout the postwar period, the relationship between the Catholic Church and the Yugoslav Partisans, now the Yugoslav government, remained uneasy. In 1952, Yugoslavia “prohibited the assembly of worshippers, isolated them from foreign contacts, repressed the religious press, and banned religious instruction in schools, while the Vatican intensified anti-Yugoslav propaganda.” Conditions did not improve until the Vatican and Yugoslavia signed a protocol in 1966 that affirmed both religious freedom and the separation of church and state. The protocol also allowed for Vatican jurisdiction in spiritual matters over the Catholic Church and its believers, while the Vatican agreed that priests would not use their position for political purposes. By the 1980s, as the nation moved away from the Yugoslav Federation and toward independence, Christmas was acknowledged on Slovenian public television by the president of the Socialist League of Working People and the archbishop of Ljubljana.

After Slovenia’s independence in 1991, church and state remained separate, but political debates surrounding the property restitution of Church land that was confiscated by the Yugoslav Federation caused political and civil tension, as did the 2010 financial scandal involving the Archdiocese of Maribor.
versity of Maribor undergraduate student Andrej Cizl describes the bankruptcy: “This was a huge crisis for the archdiocese, a question of hundreds of millions of dollars in debt. They even had to sell the bishop's seat, though they were eventually able to arrange for the neighboring diocese in Austria to buy and hold the seat for them until they could buy it back in the future. It turned into a national scandal. All newspapers and television programs broadcasted news for about two years about this bankruptcy. Many people were shocked, and it’s been said that many Catholics left the Church afterwards.” Assessing the 2011 Slovene Public Opinion Survey and World Values Survey indicates that “trust in the Roman Catholic Church in Slovenia has fallen to an all-time low in the post-independence era: only 25 percent of Slovenes expressed a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in the Church.” Post-independence, Catholic identity inhabits a new political significance.

**JESUITS IN SLOVENIA, POST-INDEPENDENCE**

Following the country’s independence in 1991, the Jesuits began to reassess their mission in Slovenia and committed to working more actively with youth. After receiving the Jesuit spiritual center of St. Joseph’s in 2003 following the restitution of Church property from the state, the Jesuits in Slovenia questioned how to use the reacquired space, which had housed a state film studio since World War II. Father Ristic notes:

“Since getting [St. Joseph's] back in Ljubljana, we were really looking for what our purpose would be here. The idea that we came up with was to bring as many people that were interested in the Jesuits here, so some organizations like the Catholic Teachers Association or different volunteer groups have their offices here. These were all connected with Jesuits, more or less tightly. But after hosting so many organizations, the question became, ‘Who are we as Jesuits?’ So we went searching into who we are and what our charisma is, and our charisma always has been education and working with young students. So the idea has come bit by bit to really start something for students.”

This shift in the understanding of the Jesuit mission in Slovenia influenced the conception of Magis. Though working with youth was previously a part of Jesuit work in Slovenia, it had been connected to existing groups or organizations. An example is a Jesuit serving as a spiritual adviser to a Catholic Scouts group or a youth group in a parish. Instead, the Jesuits wished to work with students in a more concentrated effort, and this was accomplished by offering residential spaces for college and university students to live in and create communities in. According to Father Peter Rožič, S.J., who is the rector and founder of Magis, the idea was to provide students with study space to help fulfill their mission as students and give back to the community while growing as a person. This started about four or five years ago, but it took a while to develop and present it to the Jesuit leadership because in his words, “as young Jesuits with many ideas we had many [ideas that] were not immediately realizable.” Eventually approval was granted to open a residential college modeled after the first Jesuit residential colleges from the mid- to late 1500s, Hungarian Jesuit residential colleges, and others across Central Europe. Father Rožič maintains that despite this Jesuit effort, Magis only opened because students were interested and invested in making the residence a reality.

**MAGIS: FOSTERING COMMUNITY**

History plays a part in how Catholics live their faith in Slovenia. As Father Tomaž Mikuš, S.J., student chaplain in Maribor, explains, “One of the challenges [for Catholics in Slovenia] is that that we learned to live our faith in private. This means that if we find ourselves in a group of people who are discussing something, we won’t say anything or state our opinion. There are more initiatives now encouraging people to stand up for what they believe in because they learned that faith isn’t discussed in public. This is evidenced in students having problems saying that they are Catholic.”
In this climate, the community fostered by Magis fulfills a need for Catholic university students. Miha Prelog, a Maribor undergraduate student, states, “I think it’s a community where the residents feel like they belong. Those living at Magis have a religious background. They most likely practiced a traditional type of religion, like going to Mass every Sunday, but some of them are now trying to live their personal faith. By personal faith, I mean not only going to Mass, but also living their faith every day. It’s harder to live your faith without support. If you don’t have this community it’s a little bit difficult to find a foothold somewhere.” Undergraduate student Jakub Murko suggests that Magis can “help students to find their potential, find good friends and to live in a good atmosphere.” This is accomplished “by creating community... That’s the most important thing here I think, feeling accepted.”

MARIBOR IN CONTEXT

The local context of Maribor, the second largest city in Slovenia with a population of 94,318 as of 2012, also sheds light on the importance of the Catholic community fostered by Magis. Father Mikuš illustrates the history of the Church within the city. “In many cities like Maribor that were communist cities, it’s still hard for the Church.... People came here for economic reasons, so they aren’t very keen or interested in spiritual issues. The churches here in Maribor are quite empty. It’s a city where people from all of Yugoslavia came to work, mostly in factories, but they haven’t survived because they were built on military and state industry. Once Yugoslavia fell apart they couldn’t survive.”

Cities in Slovenia tend to be less religious than villages where many university students originate. According to the 2011 World Values Survey, 60.7 percent of those living in villages or in areas with a population under 3,000 people describe religion as “very important” to them. In towns with a population between 50,000 and 100,000, including Maribor, the percent of those who list religion as “very important” drops to 1.7 percent. For Catholic university students entering a new environment, an existing Catholic community makes the transition to a more secular environment easier. For these students, the opportunity to engage with a Catholic community like Magis is often different from their previous experiences with Catholicism in their home parishes. Cizl explains how exposure to this community helped him develop his faith: “I was the boy from the village who didn’t realize that faith could be lived in such a rich way. Coming to university was a completely new world for me and I was under a lot of stress because everything was new. Even the Catholic way to hang out was different from my parish at home where there were no young people.” Prelog explains that the opportunity to be deeply involved in a Catholic student community is unique for many students: “I think younger people have issues belonging in their [home] parishes because it’s mostly geared toward older people. For me, that’s a bit of a problem in the village where I live, even though I work with the priest to help run Mass on Sundays. There aren’t very many opportunities to become involved, though in some communities there are youth groups led by priests.”

Within the Catholic community in Maribor, there are two other Catholic student dorms, one run by Ursuline sisters and the other by Franciscan monks. In contrast with Magis, both are same-sex dormitories that use the concept of freedom as a pedagogical tool. Mirjam Jelnikar, a graduate student living at the Ursuline student dorm, expands on these differences. “When I compare Magis to the dorm I’m living in, it’s very different. I like my dorm with just girls, but when you have boys it can be more relaxed and I think it shows you that you can live with the other gender. I’m not quite sure why I feel this way, but Magis also seems like a more open place. Here we have two leaders of the dorm and we just follow them. At Magis it seems like you can live on your own with your own thinking and values.” Magis student representative Maja
Žnidaršič says that in the other Catholic student dorms in Maribor, “there seems to be more of an emphasis on rules than building community, or working on increasing one’s individual responsibilities and building trust. I felt that there might be too much control, which I don’t like because I had lived on my own for five years. I didn’t want a strict system after living alone; I moved to Magis because I wanted to live differently than I had been, with different values, but I wasn’t looking for more restraint.”

Magis seeks to work within the existing Catholic student community in Maribor and is closely linked to the Catholic Student Chaplaincy Sinaj. It is the most active Catholic student group in the area with approximately 40 members. Sinaj’s director Father Mikuš lives at Magis, and many residents are involved with the group in some capacity: Five out of 10 residents actively participate in Sinaj’s student choir, which is the organization’s largest initiative. While both organizations strive to work together, Magis presents a challenge to Sinaj as the already small population of active students in Catholic groups has become stretched between the two organizations. Magis’ focus on community fulfills a need for Catholic university students; community is a Jesuit educational value, and this focus falls under the college’s umbrella of services that provide personal formation opportunities. Most of these services are aimed at the personal formation of individual residents, but they largely occur within a community context.

EDUCATING THE WHOLE PERSON

Though cura personalis, or educating the whole person, is not emphasized as a concept at Magis, when viewed holistically, the services offered by the institution equate to the Jesuit value of “caring for the whole self.” Commenting on Magis’ mission, undergraduate student Tadeja Dobre describes it as both a living and learning community. “It’s more than just a dorm, so we get an extra education, like the chance for international exchange and the opportunities for spiritual growth. I think the mission is to help us grow in other fields besides our area of study so that we develop as a complete person and so that we aren’t just students with our heads in our books for 24 hours.” By offering services involving academic, spiritual, personal, and professional formation, Magis works to educate the whole person through informal education programs.

OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED BY MAGIS

The academic opportunities that Magis provides involve a tutoring service with professors or experts who volunteer to meet with residents once a month or as needed. Lectures and workshops on subjects like opening up a business are aimed at exposing residents to a discipline outside of their field of study, as well as giving them personal and professional growth opportunities. Weekly movie nights incorporate Ignatian reflection. Another important aspect of Magis’ informal education involves exposing residents to international environments by including trips to other residential colleges and hosting international guests.

On a spiritual level, Jesuits help with faith formation. Father Milan Bizant, S.J., serves as the spiritual assistant to Magis. Weekly meetings called “Face Sharing” sessions are held in order for students to discuss topics surrounding faith and personal growth. Father Bizant and the Jesuits who live in the residence make themselves available for spiritual conversations, which entail addressing questions about personal growth, career development, and faith. Student Mass is held weekly on site at the student chapel in the residence and is officiated by Jesuits. Residents also have the option of attending Mass every morning in the chapel attached to Magis.

LOOKING TOWARD SOCIAL JUSTICE

As the institution grows, Magis may expand its services to incorporate social justice initiatives, including community service work. However, in keeping with Jesuit educational values, this would be voluntary—as is participation in all Magis activities—and thus would only result from a decision made by future residents. Since residents are typically involved in
volunteer work in their hometowns, where most university students in Slovenia return to over the weekend, there may be time and logistical constraints in this expansion.

In light of this context, Father Rožič recognizes the novelty of certain Magis initiatives. “The aspect of mentorship or tutorship is heavily underdeveloped here. The students don’t even feel the need for this because they don’t know it exists. So when we started with it in Magis they didn’t know what to do with it; it was something that was very new. We discuss things that they otherwise wouldn’t have exposure to but that pertain to their lives, such as spiritual growth and discovering their vocation. We’ve also had successful entrepreneurs speak about opening up a business.”

BUILDING A NETWORK: JESUIT RESIDENCES ACROSS CENTRAL EUROPE

Magis is a part of a wider Jesuit collaboration that aims to build a network of Jesuit residential colleges across Central Europe. The Saint Ignatius Jesuit College in Budapest, Hungary, is one of the largest Jesuit residential colleges in the region with over 60 residents and is widely considered a model for surrounding colleges, as well as for future colleges in Central Europe. Opened in 1990 following the fall of Soviet communism, Saint Ignatius was started as a szakkollégium (college of excellence), which originated as a movement against politically biased universities in Hungary. The szakkollégium remains a unique institution in the Hungarian education system with a tradition of providing supplementary classes for academically talented students. Hungarian undergraduate student and Saint Ignatius resident Kristóf Hódsági explains the services provided by Saint Ignatius.

“The whole point is to gather Christian students from different universities in Budapest, and also from all areas of studies. We learn a really wide spectrum of things. I myself studied philosophy, a bit of Jesuit history, law. I had a course on intercultural education in English, and a bit of psychology. The logic behind this is to provide courses that are sometimes theoretical but mostly focus on debate between students, so it’s kind of an interactive, theoretical mixture. And we have skill courses like Essay Writing and Jesuit Prayer Methods. The upperclassmen also participate in projects and they decide the topic. I was in a science course in the first semester and now I participate in a project that tries to find new ways to measure blood sugar. But these project topics are very wide. For instance, there was one on immigration issues last semester.”

He also explains the need that Saint Ignatius meets, stating: “[Saint Ignatius] show[s] me how to be responsible for my own opinion. In [Hungarian] public education we are not asked for our personal opinions; we just have to reiterate the knowledge we were given, and it’s not our opinion. Here, there are 60 students and not much hierarchy between us. We are equal partners in dialogues and conversations. I think because of the sense of community, we basically have debates and dialogues each day. It’s really this whole atmosphere of debate-loving people that makes education here really unique. Our courses here can’t compete with the level that we receive at university, but how we are taught is really different. It’s a mindset that we learn here, and we couldn’t do this without having such a community. These services are offered to students in order to further the mission of exposing residents to various aspects of the world, while teaching them how to interact with different people in it.”

Saint Ignatius also serves as a model for Magis, and residents have traveled to Budapest to learn from the institution. While Magis does not have resources to provide the academic framework offered by Saint Ignatius, it has focused on building its community.

LOOKING FORWARD

From Magis’ inception, ensuring an equal number of male and female residents was challenging, with female residents outnumbering male residents eight to two in its first year. As Magis enters its second year of operation, this remains an issue. Its status as a co-ed residence helps to distinguish it from other Catholic residences in Maribor, and current residents believe that an equal number of male and females would provide a more balanced community.

Another challenge faced by Catholic entities within the Slovenian university setting is that much community involvement revolves around word of mouth. Moreover, laws involving the separation of church and state make advertising and recruiting potential applicants from the University of Maribor an obstacle, potentially limiting the number of applications.

CONCLUSION

Slovene citizens face challenges as their country continues its transition to democracy, including reconciling contemporary history while also navigating religion within civil society. All participants in this project recognized the value of the community for Catholic university students that Magis offers. Magis has empowered its residents academically and socially, and in doing so, has worked to enable a post-communist generation with better access their newly free society.
INTERVIEW EXCERPTS

PETRA ZAVIRŠEK, STUDENT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MARIBOR

How are organizations like Magis and Sinai important for Catholic students?

They are quite important, because if you study something like medicine or psychology, you really experience the lack of acceptance for Catholicism. At Magis and Sinai, the students see that it’s okay to be Catholic even though they often hear at university that they are stupid for believing in religion. My friends Tadeja and Maja, who study medicine and psychology, are sad because their colleagues do not accept them for being Catholic. It’s easier for me in my field of study, but it is also important for me to go to these sorts of groups, because if I didn’t, I would lose contact with my faith.

TADEJA DOBRE, STUDENT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MARIBOR

How do you think Catholic communities are important for Catholic university students in Slovenia?

I think it’s important for students to have a safe harbor. I’ve been using that expression a lot this year, because in my field it can be quite hard to be a Catholic since there are a lot of bioethical questions, like about abortion and euthanasia. When I am at school I think that everyone thinks differently than me and it’s quite hard to express my opinion. When I’m here, it’s nice to have a group of people that understands what I mean because they come from similar faith backgrounds.

SIMON BREZOJNIK AND SARA ZADNIK, CATHOLIC SCOUT LEADERS

Can community be found elsewhere in Maribor?

Sara: In other dormitories you only cook for yourself and you don’t have activities together. At Magis, there are men and women living together. In other Catholic dormitories there is also a community, but it’s not mixed. Most people at the state dorms are there to have fun and party. It’s hard to make really tight connections.

How do students at Magis form connections with one another?

Simon: I think the first thing is that the community members share the same way of thinking. Secondly, there are activities to connect them like Mass, discussions, and events. There are also open areas for people to hang around with each other, like the library. That is not common in the state dorms.

ANDREJ CIZL, STUDENT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MARIBOR

What is your personal experience as a Catholic in Slovenia?

The best way to explain is through my Wikipedia contributions—I write articles for the Slovenian Wikipedia website. Wikipedia contributors in Slovenia form a society that cooperates for the purpose of collecting knowledge and is an entity that really has the spirit of a society. However, most of the contributors aren’t religious. Some of the contributors try to avoid anything that is connected with faith, but that’s hard to do because Catholicism has been a part of Slovenian culture for centuries. It’s been a part of the language, culture, and national identity. They try to separate the nation and faith. When I try to contribute theological facts and knowledge, there is sometimes a strong negative reaction from my colleagues. Just as in society, the liberal and conservatives emerge in these situations. The most problematic topics that come up are usually the historical topics or personalities of the last 50 years. For example, Gregorij Rožman, the archbishop of Ljubljana during World War II, is controversial. I’ve tried to assert that the communists spread anti-propaganda against him, but many people have been influenced by the regime’s version of history and still believe he betrayed the nation because he cooperated with the Nazis. The same problem has occurred when I tried to translate an article about Croatian Archbishop of Zagreb, Aloysius Stepinac. Though I think that is somewhat a mini-model of Slovenia, I don’t have a similar experience like that in my daily life because I usually don’t associate with non-religious people, since most of my friends are Catholics.
MAJA ŽNIDARŠIČ, STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE AT THE JESUIT COLLEGE MAGIS

How has Magis aided in your personal growth?

My personal growth started when I joined the Sinai community, but living in Magis has been a continuation of my development—of both my personality and my personal faith. For example, here at Magis when I want to think or pray, I can go to the chapel and no one will ask me why I would ever want to pray. I feel more comfortable here because I know that everyone shares the same values and that I’m understood. We also have a Jesuit spiritual leader here, and every Monday we have the chance to meet and talk about life. We talk about questions that you usually don’t ask yourself every day. Here, you are given time to think about these things. This is something that I didn’t have the opportunity to do anywhere else. I think it is a step toward personal growth when you get to discuss these things because many people are accustomed to following a more traditional faith. Here there is the opportunity to grow personal faith.

How has your involvement with Magis or Sinai made you more open with your faith?

When I lived in the state dorm, even though my roommate accepted me, I had to explain to others why I go to church. It was challenging to me because it’s not so cool to be Catholic in Slovenia right now. There is a lot of propaganda in the media about how the Church is bad. At my university, I don’t expose myself as Catholic. I don’t talk to my colleagues about my faith. I only talk about this with people that I really know or trust. In the psychology department at my university, there have been many times when a professor has talked about how the Church is bad and that it is too conservative. In class, they have laughed about statements made by the Church. I never respond because my classmates are not open-minded and ready to listen to what I have to say.
ENDNOTES

3. UNHCR, August 2016.
8. Su.
9. UNHCR Global Focus.
12. UNCHR Global Focus.
17. Sherab and Kirk.
19. Lucente.
22. Bonabom, 211.
27. Mombé, Orobator, and Vella, 30.
32. Mary Owens, IBVM, “Care and Treatment of Children Living with HIV,” in Mombé, Orobator, and Vella, 310.
35. Owens, 310.
42. Protus Lumiti, interview by author, Nairobi, June 9, 2016.
44. Protus Lumiti, interview by author, Nairobi, June 9, 2016.
45. Owens, 316.
46. Owens, 317.
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57. Ibid.
58. Information in this section is cited from Kigali Genocide Memorial
59. Kigali Genocide Memorial
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62. Interview with Dr. Gasanabo, Director General of National Research and Documentation Centre on Genocide at the National Commission for the Fight against the Genocide.