

Towards Justice? Post-genocide rights and wrongs in Rwanda

ABSTRACT

This Role Play Simulation was developed for a Masters on Human Rights, Development and Social Justice run at the Institute of Social Studies in The Hague. It forms part of an advanced course on 'Realising Human Rights and Social Justice'. The idea is to bring out the importance of attitudinal learning in conjunction with applying lessons of readings related to the context and the specific role played. Generally students played in teams of two, but some had a role on their own. The sticky problems of post-genocide justice and peace were to be engaged with in the run up to a Conference at 'Hotel Rwanda' (Hotel Mille Collines) at the end of the Simulation "The Way Forward for Rwandans". The simulation can be found at www.fablusi.com/renderer/launch.asp?simId=rps2_576ryj-1zaa/

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KEYWORDS

Rwanda; Peace; Justice; Post-Genocide; Human Rights; Land; Government; Civil Society; Media; Gacaca (local courts); sim-mail; Moderator; Simulation





A basic text for all roles:

Peter, Chris Maina & Edith Kibalama (2006) "Searching for Sense and Humanity: Civil Society and the Struggle for a Better Rwanda", fact-finding Mission Kituo cha Katiba (advocacy, democratic governance NGO) – 120 page report in pdf format at <http://www.kituchakatiba.co.ug/ffrwanda.pdf>

DESCRIPTION

The Rwanda Peace and Justice Simulation uses the internet and Web and a platform, Fablusi, to enable students to understand the complexity of human rights and social justice in a specific context – in this case, post-genocide Rwanda. Extreme poverty and social polarisation along lines of gender, class, identity, rural and urban and politics all affect what roles can do. Real characters are used for roles to produce a mix of civil society, national and regional government people, local and international researchers, human rights advocates, NGO and survivors' organisations, as well as exiles and media roles. Students are encouraged to play a part they are not familiar with. In the Fablusi site, participants use Sim-mail, engage in Chats, post messages in meeting rooms, upload files and publish media articles. Their main tasks are to profile their role, prepare documents for the final conference, and complete a post-simulation 'Role Review Summary' evaluating the experience. Debriefing is a vital part of the learning process. This Role play was run for the first time in 2008, replacing a previous successful role play on Venezuela.

AUDIENCE/GROUP SIZE

Masters students (this would also work with undergraduates) in Human Rights and other International Development-related degrees. Teams of two students per character, as well as a some observing and non-assessed roles with specialised information on the Rwandan context. Rwandan students acted as 'commentators', kick-starting debriefing at the end of the final conference. We had 25 students.

LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Participant students had the chance to:

Learn about how complex it is to achieve rights protection and promotion

Understand the vital role of the media to justice, security and rights

Try out collaborative and positive attitudes to change and finding out what is possible

Organise a conference and present their cases for peace under pressure.



TIME AND SETTING

The simulation is set two weeks or a month or so into the future. It runs for two weeks, not including the preparation time and debriefing. This is shorter than ideal because the Simulation has to fit into the confines of a tightly-scheduled Masters programme. Students have preparatory workshops, but after they are assigned a role and know how to use the site, they work in their own time and are asked to communicate daily. There is a concluding real-time conference which in the past has been just two hours. However, this needs to be extended to three or four hours if there is to be discussion in addition to presentations of proposals and ideas, criticisms and information. The conference enables the students to condense, focus on and make more explicit their concerns of the previous two weeks in the sim-mail, chats, postings and media. The media do not take part, but write up the conference afterwards.

PROCESS

Once students are assigned a role, they write a short profile of their character on the web-site and this is accessible to all. The simulation starts with the posting of a scenario by the moderator. Role play then proceeds in response to the 'story' posted. Pursuing their own private and public agendas, participants are asked to consider some key questions:

- What are the main challenges for social justice and rights being realised in Rwanda today?
- What role can different actors, including the media, play in the reconstruction process in Rwanda?
- How do national and local criminal justice, for example gacaca hearings, contribute to peace and justice?
- How are post-genocide identities represented, including in the media?
- How are power relations evolving along class, identity, gender and location-lines?
- What room do different actors have to make decisions?
- Can they exercise agency?

In the 'Way Forward' closing conference, you will give your vision of a more just and peaceful Rwandan society, and suggest practical steps to achieve this. Messages and media postings are checked by the moderator. A 'moderator tool box' gives an overview of players' activities. The real-time closing conference then becomes the start of debriefing. It was followed by considering how the simulated post-genocide Rwanda case relates to the country today. The students' role review summaries (evaluations) are due 2 weeks after the closing conference.

RESOURCES

The simulation relies on a customised web-site which includes video resources, media, websites of all kinds, academic articles, reports, NGO links, film, music and images. Roles were carefully selected after research and consultation, to bring out issues of justice and peace, conflict and injustice in post-genocide Rwanda. We decided against international diplomatic roles: it was noted that in future the 'grassroots' and poor rural Rwandans' concerns should have more attention during the simulation, but this too seemed unrealistic.

ASSESSMENT

Students were assessed on their overall performance, which had to be satisfactory (pass/fail only). The final grades were based on their role review summaries. However in future it might be decided to also evaluate the role profile and performance in the final conference.

DESIGNER'S REFLECTION

Interesting ethical and political issues arise in this Role Play Simulation. The issue of trauma, of the ethics of exposing those from war-torn countries, for example, to genocide and post-genocide atrocities, is one. Our experience suggests how important debriefing is for this case. Student feedback is built into the simulation, making it easy to be responsive to many of their concerns. It is important to spell out learning objectives and assessment criteria very clearly at the start. AACE Conference paper:

http://www.editlib.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Reader.ViewAbstract&paper_id=29718