

Margaret Mead Award Speech

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Thank you. I'd like to express my very sincere gratitude and continued astonishment for the honor of receiving this prestigious award.

Very special thanks are in order to:

President Whiteford,

Executive Director May,

SfAA Past President Linda Bennett,

Members of the Board of Directors,

AAA Past President Lamphere,

Members of the Margaret Mead Award Selection Committee,

Will Sibley,

and everyone else who was involved with this process at both your Society and AAA.

I have other expressions of gratitude to quickly mention: to Allan Hoben, Jane Guyer, Thomas Barfield, Warren Weinstein, Art Hansen, Francis Sichona and Bernhard Staub in Tanzania, and many other friends and colleagues.

But more than anyone else, I want to respectfully thank, in necessary absentia, Pastor Albert and the three most remarkable young men I've ever known: John, William, and James, who are the primary subjects of *Fear in Bongoland*.

My goal for *Fear in Bongoland* was to write a "nifty paperback." I tried hard to take a difficult and unusual story and aim, as best as I could, to make it accessible to a general audience. I wanted to tell the compelling stories of three refugee youth while describing how genocide, urbanization, and Pentecostalism influenced their lives. I also wanted their stories to be an avenue for interested readers into a new, emerging Africa by writing about the extraordinary resilience, strength of character, dignity, and faith that emerges from the lives of these three young men.

John, William, and James had heard, while growing up in refugee camps, horrifying stories of murder and escape from Burundi's 1972 genocide from members of their parent's generation. It shaped them in many ways. Through their words and actions, they revealed the mechanics of *Kujificha* (hiding oneself) and the furies of *Kuogopa* (being

afraid). With this heavy baggage, they nonetheless joined Africa's vanguard, the migrant youth who are actively and rapidly transforming their mostly rural continent into a mostly urban one.

In a way, the entire continent is becoming one great big "Bongoland."

Bongoland means "Brainland", the nickname given to Tanzania's capital by the migrant youth who have come to dominate it. Brainland refers to the fact that only those with "brains" or "smarts" can make it in the big city. As the continent increasingly turns its eyes towards its cities, young Africans are testing their wills and skills in urban areas already dense with competition.

So much occurred between the research and writing of my dissertation and writing *Fear in Bongoland*. More than anything, however, there was Rwanda.

I worked in Ngara, Tanzania, Rwanda and Somalia for UNESCO and the Academy for Educational Development beginning in August of 1994, a month after the genocide had finally ended. [The 1994 genocide, by the way, began 10 years ago on this coming April 6.]

I went to Ngara first. It's located just where the Burundi and Rwanda borders meet. I thought it was hell on earth: half a million traumatized Rwandan refugees crammed onto hillsides. At the end of each day, we watched brand new Burundi refugees arrive, having just escaped the horrors of their own civil war, silently walking in single file along the road near our house.

But working inside Rwanda was much, much worse. It was burdened with a truly awful silence, an echoing emptiness. Beyond the smells arising from mass graves, beyond evidence and stories of raw malevolence and truly profound tragedies all around, beyond the outrageous inaction of the international community, I remember most how Rwandans would matter-of-factly tell me that they were already dead.

This book, itself about genocide survivors from the very same region, is informed by those days in Rwanda – drawing near to the intimate evils of acts bent on human extermination, and the transcendent fears that such acts can bequeath to generations of survivors.

John was one of the Burundi refugee teenagers in Bongoland, all of whom were second generation survivors of genocide. He also unexpectedly became a mentor to me. In public, to hide his refugee identity, John played the youthful innocent: eyebrows raised, alert, naive, and shy.

But in private, John was an altogether different person: shrewd, analytical, and wickedly sharp. Sometimes, during our private Sunday afternoon conversations, he would ask me what I'd learned that week. I'd try out some recent findings.

“Ah, yes,” he’d say. “And did you also know this?”

“No, what’s that all about?” I’d ask.

“Humph. Let me tell you something,” he’d say, and then go into a long explanation that would connect my recent findings to larger themes in Burundi refugee society.

This teenager was giving me a master class on his world. In the days and weeks after his explanations, I’d test out the issues he’d raised with other refugees. They always checked out, and often they would startle others, who would give me surprised looks that said something like, “How did you, a *Mzungu*, learn *that*?”

Let me leave you with an image that never made it into the book. Near the end of my stay in Dar es Salaam, John asked if I’d take him to the Kilimanjaro Hotel. It was famous with youth across Tanzania; in refugee camps and villages alike.

John told me that its reputation was one of magnificent glamour, like no other place in the country! What would his friends and relatives say when he told them that he had visited *Hoteli Kilimanjaro*? He could only go with me, a white man whom he believed the police and immigration officials, and the Tutsi spies and their Tanzanian accomplices that he suspected were everywhere, would not question.

The Kilimanjaro was, to me and other expats, a rundown, government-run hotel with an outdoor pool. Entering with John my nervousness about the chances of him being somehow found out kept the brief visit tense for both of us. We went to the cafeteria. I saw tired, bored waiters in worn-out uniforms and flip-flops serving us at tables where flies hovered over your food. But John was dazzled. I think he couldn’t believe he’d actually made it in there.

Then he wanted to leave, but I asked if he’d like to see a view of the city. We traveled to the rooftop restaurant; his first elevator ride. He carefully entered the restaurant, which was closed.

A bulky Tanzanian cook discovered and then berated him: “*Kijana*, what are you doing here?” I gently told the cook that he was with me, and we’d be leaving after enjoying the view.

The restaurant was designed so that diners could look at the harbor, but John wasn’t interested in a view of the water. His quick eyes discovered a narrow walkway leading behind the kitchen. After softly leading me over there, Bongoland, the mushrooming metropolis, came into view.

John was quiet for a moment.

Then he said, with great pleasure: “It’s very beautiful.”

Again, thank you for the honor of receiving the Margaret Mead Award.