

Book Review: Training for Model Citizenship: Ethnography of Civic Education and State-Making in Rwanda by Molly Sundberg

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## BOOK REVIEW

**TRAINING FOR MODEL CITIZENSHIP: ETHNOGRAPHY OF  
CIVIC EDUCATION AND STATE-MAKING IN RWANDA**

**BY MOLLY SUNDBERG**

**PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, 2016. 276 PAGES**

**\$79.99 (E-BOOK)**

**ISBN 978-1-37-58422-9**

In *Training for Model Citizenship*, Molly Sundberg draws on her ethnographic fieldwork, as well as her experience as a development practitioner for the Swedish International Development Agency, to explore how citizens relate to the state in postgenocide Rwanda. She examines the role of Itorero, Rwanda's "citizen-making project," a state-sponsored, non-formal civic education program that teaches citizens about the state and Rwandan nationhood. The program is open to all Rwandan citizens, but it specifically targets certain groups, such as civil servants, teachers, and youth. Participants attend local or national trainings, where they learn about Rwanda's civic and cultural values. Sundberg's primary argument is that the Rwandan state's attempt to create model citizenship and "political truths" is thwarted by both alternative stories about the genocide and citizens' current experiences with the state apparatus.

Besides adding to the broader discussion around citizenship education in post-genocide Rwanda, this is the first book to focus specifically on citizenship in relation to Itorero. The book examines local government activities and the Itorero program to determine how the Rwandan state influences people's lives and their understanding of citizenship. Over the course of a year, Sundberg collected ethnographic data from three different sources: participant observations at 11 Itorero trainings, interviews with 25 Rwandans about Itorero, and participant observations in a local Kigali neighborhood.

In the first part of the book, Sundberg provides a thorough overview of the historical context for the formation of citizenship in Rwanda and how the ideal of a model citizen is constructed relative to the nation-state. Chapter 2 presents the history of Itorero from the precolonial era through the colonial period and into the current era. The third chapter expands on the Itorero program and unpacks the idea of the "citizen ideal" as part of the nation-building enterprise. It

describes how ordinary citizens in Kigali understand these aspects of the Itorero program, and citizenship more generally.

The second part of the book explores the official state discourse, particularly around issues of national security and national development, and how this plays out in people's everyday lives. Chapter 4 explores citizens' issues of identity, reconciliation, and ethnicity in relation to the nation-state. In chapters 5 and 6, Sundberg draws on data she gathered in her interactions with the local government in a Kigali neighborhood to explore how citizens engage with the state. Chapter 7 explores issues of national security, and chapter 8 ends the book with a discussion of national development.

Drawing on a rich anthropological literature of the Rwandan state, Sundberg offers an in-depth portrait of an important topic in postgenocide Rwanda. Her ethnographic research provides insights and commentary on the inner workings of the state today and on how citizens understand and maneuver within a tightly controlled regime. Her work also brings to light the subtle contradictions and tensions of active citizenship in a postconflict authoritarian state.

There are a number of areas where Sundberg could have gone further. First, she relies primarily on data collected in the capital city and within the government Itorero camps. While this provides an urban or elite perspective of Itorero and citizenship, I would have liked to see comparative data and discussion from the perspective of informants in rural areas, given that the majority of Rwandans still reside in rural areas. Second, while the book provides an in-depth overview of the non-formal Itorero trainings conducted for youth, I was left wondering about the connection between Itorero and civic education in the formal school. While there is brief mention of Itorero trainings in schools, it would have been useful to have more details on the program's connection to the formal education system. Finally, while Sundberg's in-depth knowledge of the Rwandan case and her extensive use of the anthropological literature to explore the role of the state is impressive, at times the writing is quite dense and the main argument is cloaked by an overemphasis on literature and theory. More insight from the author's empirical findings and analysis of primary source documents from Itorero would have been welcome.

While this book may be of interest to education in emergencies scholars studying nation-building and citizenship education, it focuses on a highly specialized topic in the Rwandan context. As such, it may be more appropriate for graduate students and scholars of African studies or anthropology, rather than for undergraduate students or a more general audience.

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