

# Longing for home: Pre-genocide and post-genocide refugees in Rwanda

*Cori Wielenga\**

## **Abstract**

Rwanda has a history of violent conflict resulting in mass exoduses of people to neighbouring countries, both prior to the 1994 genocide and after it. This article will consider the experiences of Rwandan refugees in terms of their relationship to their home country. Their differing attitudes towards Rwanda after the genocide will be explored through four life stories that were collected between 2007 and 2009. Two of these life stories are from Rwandan Tutsi who were refugees in Uganda until 1994 and returned to Rwanda after the genocide. The other two are from Rwandan Hutu who have been refugees since the late 1990s. Their relationship to Rwanda while being refugees and their experience of what it means to be a refugee are significant for their differences and for their similarities. This article will explore these and will argue that the similarity of the refugee experience may open the way for dialogue between those still in exile and those within Rwanda. In the case of all four refugees, there is a shared desire for a place to call home.

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\* Dr Cori Wielenga is a post-doctoral fellow in the department of Political Sciences at the University of Pretoria.

## **Introduction**

The genocide in Rwanda in 1994 left in its wake profound devastation and political turmoil. Analysis and commentary have abounded about the complexity of recovery and reconciliation in this context. One aspect of this complexity involves the continued existence of Rwandan refugees. The Rwandan government is calling these refugees back to Rwanda, insisting there is no viable reason for staying outside of the country. And yet refugees in Europe, North America and other African countries insist it is unsafe for them to return. This article will describe the position of current Rwandan refugees, and place this in dialogue with pre-genocide refugees who share the Rwandan government's views that it is safe to return to Rwanda.

There are four distinct periods in Rwandan history during which a mass exodus of people to neighbouring countries took place. The first was with the transition to independence in 1959, the second was during the transition from the First Republic to the Second Republic in the 1970s, the third was directly after the genocide of 1994 and the fourth was in the late 1990s. This article will explore the experiences of Rwandans whose parents had gone into exile in the 1970s and who grew up as refugees in Uganda, and Rwandans who became refugees after the genocide, in the late 1990s. The experiences of refugees will be explored through four life stories that were collected between 2007 and 2009.

## **The Rwandan refugee context**

The first refugee exodus in Rwanda occurred with the end of colonialism and the first democratic elections in the late 1950s. Mahmood Mamdani describes how the Belgian colonisers sided with the Tutsi, so that the Tutsi were seen as colonisers as well, and as having come to Rwanda from elsewhere (Mamdani 2001:70). With the birth of the United Nations and shifts in international dynamics, the Belgians changed their allegiance to supporting the Hutu and helped a group of Hutu elite take power in Rwanda through a violent and bloody revolution. At the end of the revolution, tens of thousands were dead and many more, particularly Tutsi, were fleeing the country. An election took place in 1961 in which Grégoire Kayibanda was elected president by majority vote.

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His one-party state blatantly supported the Hutu cause, and particularly that of the southern region of Rwanda (Prunier 1995:63).

In the early 1970s, violence broke out against the Tutsi, which some blamed on the northerners wanting to create disorder in order to overthrow the southern-dominated government (Des Forges 1999:61). During this period, a second exodus of Tutsi from Rwanda took place. In 1973, Juvénal Habyarimana, who was from the north, took power, claiming that it was to restore order and national unity in Rwanda. During this period, Rwanda was described as being poor, clean and serious, but the one-party state left no room for political debate or opposition (Prunier 1995:77). Although there were positive signs during Habyarimana's presidency in terms of stability and order in Rwanda, Tutsi were largely marginalised from public life through restrictions to education and employment. All Rwandans had to carry identity cards indicating their ethnicity.

While this was the situation within Rwanda, the Tutsi who had fled Rwanda in 1959 and again in the 1970s were in a very different social and political environment. 'As the years passed and memories of the real Rwanda began to recede,' writes Prunier, 'Rwanda slowly became a mythical country in the refugees' minds ... Contrasting an idealised past life with the difficulties they were experiencing, their image of Rwanda became that of a land of milk and honey' (Prunier 1995:73). This diaspora was experiencing increasing marginalisation in their host countries, yet was also successful economically and educationally in the world arena. Where Rwanda was becoming progressively more a closed off island, the diaspora was drawing from multiple resources internationally.

The Ugandan-based Tutsi refugees struggled to be assimilated in Uganda, and formed an organisation to assist refugees suffering oppression. In 1987, this group became the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), an offensive political party dedicated to the return of exiles to Rwanda, by force if necessary (Prunier 1995:90). They started high-level political negotiations around their return to Rwanda which included several violent attacks on the country in the early 1990s, followed by further negotiations and cease-fire agreements. Not only did the RPF want the right to return to a free Rwanda, they also believed that conditions in Rwanda needed to change. Kinzer quotes Paul Kagame, current Rwandan

president who was one of the leaders of the RPF at that time, as saying that the level of oppression and injustice in Rwanda 'was simply unacceptable' but that many Tutsi in Rwanda had learnt just to 'bow their heads, keep their opinions to themselves and do whatever was necessary to placate their Hutu masters' (Kinzer 2008:99).

On 7 April 1994, the aeroplane which was carrying President Habyarimana and the president of Burundi was shot down. This event, which remains under investigation, sparked off the genocide in which almost a million Tutsi and moderate Hutu were killed (Des Forges 1999; Prunier 1995). When the RPF liberated Rwanda in May, 1994, there was great relief. Their victory brought with it the end of the horror of genocide as well as hero status to the victorious party. The expectation of many, within and without was that order, good governance, democracy, stability, equality and peace would come to Rwanda. Some others, however, feared revenge, retribution and a reversal of the status quo in Rwandan society with Tutsi being favoured over Hutu in terms of employment and education.

Immediately after the genocide, Special Representative of UNAMIR Shaharya Khan, described Rwanda's capital as being 'macabre, surrealistic and utterly gruesome' (Khan 2000:297). In July, 1994, Rwanda was a country devastated of people and resources. While the press and humanitarian aid organisations concentrated their attention and resources on the millions of refugees outside of the country, little aid or assistance was being offered to those within. Apart from the fact that some 150 000 mostly Tutsi homes had been destroyed, hundreds of thousands of old case load refugees<sup>1</sup> were seeking a place to live in a country already over-populated. In this situation, it was not uncommon that the homes of either the fleeing Hutu refugees or deceased Tutsi were 'taken' by these newcomers and survivors. Prunier (1995:324) describes how some 400 000 old case load refugees had entered Rwanda by November, 1994, entering a country devastated of resources and infrastructure. Each group of refugees came from

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1 Rwandans who were refugees prior to 1994 are often referred to in the literature as 'old case load refugees', and those who became refugees after 1994 are referred to as 'new case load refugees'.

different countries, the vast majority never having lived in Rwanda at all, and brought with them their unique cultures and lifestyles.

Amidst this, the government was working hard to rebuild Rwanda. The new government was welcoming people back, inviting all Rwandans to help rebuild their country. The message they were sending was one of national unity; of all Rwandans standing together for a common cause. Government rhetoric and policy supported this vision and new laws were implemented, such as the divisionism law.<sup>2</sup> Also implemented, in 2000, were the *gacaca* courts, a traditional form of justice to help try the hundreds of thousands of cases of genocide related crimes. These developments will be discussed from the perspectives of the refugees further in this article.

### Research methodology

This article is based on research undertaken for my doctoral research on reconciliation in Rwanda between 2005 and 2009. An aspect of the research was collecting life stories from four Rwandan men between the ages of 25 and 35. All four spoke fluent English and had similar educational backgrounds. These men were purposefully selected for having comparative life circumstances but representing differing ideological positions.

The life stories were collected between October 2007 and September 2008. One of the reasons for this long time period was due to geography, as two of the participants were in Rwanda and two outside, so the interviews depended on my travel schedule. Another reason was the hesitancy of participants to participate and the need for several conversations prior to the actual interviews.

The life stories of the four young men were exchanged between them and they were given an opportunity to respond to these during follow-up interviews that were held in 2009. Ideally, the four young men should have dialogued with one another directly, but in the case of the Rwandans who are currently refugees, there was a strong sense that it would not be safe for them to say what they

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2 The divisionism law bars any propaganda of ethnic, regional, racial or divisive character or based on any other form of divisionism. Public incitement to discrimination or divisionism is punishable by up to five years in prison, heavy fines, or both.

shared with me in a public space. On asking one of the post-genocide refugees if he would consider being part of a focus group, his response was: 'I could not expose myself. It would not be safe. It is not even safe talking to you. I still have family in Rwanda.'

The methodology used for collecting these life stories followed the framework of narrative research, which works with a small sample and aims at gathering in-depth, rich data. It is a time-consuming research methodology that requires a sensitivity on the part of the researcher. Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (1998:10) describe it as 'dialogical listening' to three voices: the voice of the narrator as represented by the transcribed text, the voice of the theoretical framework, which provides the tools for interpretations, and a reflexive monitoring voice, namely, self-awareness in drawing conclusions from the material. Narrative research provides ways in which to learn about the inner world of people and gives insight into how people experience their identities. These narratives are not seen as factual accounts, nor can they be dismissed as mere fiction; they are taken seriously for the interpretation on reality that they provide. Rosenwald and Ochberg (1992:8) take this point further in referring to the embeddedness of our narratives in our social-cultural and political contexts and the dialogue that takes place between our own narratives and broader ones.

## **The life stories**

This section will briefly outline the four life stories. Although participants were all relatively prepared to share their stories, there was uncertainty about the possibility of being asked 'political' questions which might compromise them. Three of the four participants requested me not to ask them any direct question about the president or anything that might force them to take political sides. Participants were regularly reassured that they did not have to answer any question with which they might be uncomfortable. Interestingly, though, alongside the fear of being compromised in terms of what they said, all four participants expressed a desire to tell the truth as they saw it. For the protection of the participants, their names were changed with their consent.

### **Life story 1: Robert**

Robert grew up in Uganda during Idi Amin's rule. His family lived with other Rwandans who were called 'Ugandan Rwandese'. For a period, he and his family experienced living as refugees in a Rwandan camp in Uganda. After he completed his secondary education, he joined the Rwandan Patriotic Army<sup>3</sup> (RPA) to fight for the refugees to be allowed to return to Rwanda. During the interview it became evident that his ethnic identity had little significance, and even being a Rwandan meant less to Robert than having a place in which he could determine his own future. While living in Uganda this was threatened, and returning to Rwanda was more about securing his future for education, a career and self-determination than about performing a patriotic act per se. He emphasised his desire for an East African community which would allow people to move freely across borders, saying that the denial of re-entry into Rwanda to Rwandan refugees prior to 1994 was at the heart of much conflict.

### **Life story 2: Fred**

Fred also grew up in Uganda. His parents owned their own home in the capital city and lived with other Rwandan families. They never had the experience of being in a refugee camp but did experience being negatively treated because they were Rwandan. Fred completed his studies in Uganda while the RPA were at war in Rwanda. It was only after the war and genocide were over that he went to Rwanda to see if he could find a job there or make a contribution. He did find a job with a humanitarian aid organisation and has stayed in Rwanda since then. Being a Rwandan is important for Fred largely because it allowed him a sense of belonging that he did not experience while living in Uganda.

### **Life story 3: Francois**

Francois' family was from the south but he grew up in the north, and the north-south divide plays a significant role in his story. It was only due to the events of the early 1990s that he became aware of ethnicity. Because he came from mixed ethnic parentage, his sense of belonging to either ethnic group has always been in contention. He stayed in Rwanda after the war in the hope of being part

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3 The Rwandan Patriotic Army was the military wing of the Rwandan Patriotic Front.

of something new. After completing school, Francois was sent to an *Ingando*<sup>4</sup> camp and was told he needed to fight in the DRC, but he was not interested in going to fight and instead left the country. During the interview, Francois stressed repeatedly his love for truth and justice and how he felt that these were two things lacking in Rwandan society today. He had a strong desire to return to Rwanda but only if he could feel free to express his views and bring attention to the injustices he saw. He felt strongly that no person should be forced to live outside of his/her own country.

#### **Life story 4: Reginald**

Reginald's family was from the north and his father was a mayor of his district. His father was accused for allegedly participating in a coup against president Habyarimana. As a result, he spent time in jail and later died in mysterious circumstances when Reginald was nine. Reginald's family, although Hutu, was thus seen as siding with the RPA against the current government. This placed his family in a difficult position during the war as they were seen as the enemy by both sides. After the war, Reginald pursued his schooling in Kigali, and then attended an *Ingando* camp where he received military training and education. During this time he became increasingly aware of injustices in Rwandan society, and like Francois, when he was called to fight in the DRC, chose rather to leave the country. Reginald, too, would like to return to Rwanda were he allowed to speak freely and be himself.

### **Stories from pre-genocide refugees**

Fred and Robert were both refugees in Uganda. Their parents fled Rwanda in the 1970s. Both describe how they were unaware of their ethnicity while growing up, but were reminded that they were Rwandan and 'other' all the time by their Ugandan peers. Robert describes an experience at school while playing volleyball. He accidentally knocked into another player who turned to him angrily and said, 'I've been hit by a Rwandan!' The way in which this was said implied that being

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4 *Ingando* solidarity camps were initially created for the purpose of re-educating ex-prisoners and reintegrating them into society, but have been extended to all those entering tertiary education as well as various other groups in Rwandan society.



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a Rwandan was intrinsically negative. Similarly, Fred describes how at school if children were irritated with him, they would say, *akayirwanda*, which is like saying, 'you're tiny or useless', which made him very frustrated, especially as his family was better off in every way (educationally and economically).

These experiences of being seen as something 'lesser than', just because of your identity and not because of anything you have done, was a repeated theme in Robert and Fred's life stories, and the emotions expressed when mentioning specific incidents were of frustration, a sense of injustice and an underlying anger. When Robert was around ten years old, Ugandan policy towards Rwandans changed and he and his family watched as their homes were burnt down by their neighbours. They spent a year in a refugee camp with other Rwandans who described being badly treated on numerous occasions. It was while in the refugee camp that Robert began to learn about Rwanda and what it meant to be Rwandan. In the early 1990s, when he heard that Rwandans were fighting to re-enter their country, he decided to join them.

Robert described his experiences with the RPA very positively and appreciated its Pan-Africanist philosophy, with its focus on the African continent and a united Rwanda. Their training was not only military but also included Rwandan and African politics and history. Robert says,

In the RPA, Hutu and Tutsi wasn't spoken about. They dealt with segregation, with military discipline and strictness. They wanted to show that Rwandans could live without those, and it was forbidden. You couldn't even speak of being Tutsi. They promoted patriotism and unity.

When asked if he felt any hatred towards Hutu during the war, he replied, 'Not at all. In the military we were mixed and what we were doing was a military operation. I never had a background which gave me a reason to hate anyone.'

Robert suggests that his first experience of ethnic stereotyping was when the war started and he heard how Tutsis were classified as animals. After that, the survivors and those who came back from the diaspora where there had been a lot of segregation, especially in Burundi, wanted to glory in the fact that they had survived. According to Robert, Rwandan Tutsi suffered a great deal in Burundi and celebrating their ability to survive was a matter of pride.

Robert's primary aim in joining the RPA and returning to Rwanda was to be able to settle in a country where he would be a recognised citizen with access to education and employment. This was similarly the case for Fred. What frustrated him the most living in Uganda was that it didn't matter that his family was well off, worked hard, were honest, good people, were well educated and so forth – he was always seen as 'less than' just because of being Rwandan. When the RPF invaded Rwanda, Fred was still studying and chose to complete his studies, waiting to see what would come of this. In August of 1994 he went to Rwanda and secured a job. Even though he grew up in Uganda, Fred does not feel like an outsider in Rwanda. He says it feels like home. 'Even when I go to Uganda to visit my family, I don't feel that is my place. I have a home here'.

But what kind of home do they envision Rwanda being? Both Fred and Robert support the strong policies and actions the government has taken. In response to the divisionism law, Robert says,

To stop all the division one has to be very strict. It's not something you can theorise about... It takes too much to hate someone, to kill someone, to kill your wife, your kids. Anything that can save future generations from a mentality that will lead to that, is worth it.

He argued that the government needed to step in and protect people from allowing their differences to lead to genocide through strict policy and legislation.

A strong policy can assist the process of leaving behind differences – until people are ready to talk and think about these things without it inciting violence. The issue is very sensitive, the wounds are very fresh.

In terms of the route of justice that Rwanda is taking through the *gacaca* courts, Fred says,

[Those guilty of genocide] should be punished and they should pay back .... If we feel sorry, or say this is a child, it was his father who killed, we shouldn't touch his property as the son will stay poor, I don't think that is the way it should work. We have a justice system and the justice system should do its work. People should be brought to justice. The whole world

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should understand this was a crime that was performed that should be punished ... If they bring people to justice, people admit they were wrong, we can sit at the same table and say, okay, how will we move forward.

In the excerpt above, Fred is referring to the strong emphasis that Rwanda has on justice in the reconciliation process, over the alternative that South Africa chose of truth telling and amnesty. In the following extract Fred supports the approach the government has taken in terms of reconciliation, comparing it to the failures of the International Criminal Tribunal of Rwanda (ICTR) held in Arusha, Tanzania.

I think [Rwanda is] moving on because the phases are so clear. One, the justice system is doing their work. We feel they are doing something. The international community is disappointing us, it is not doing what it's supposed to be doing. If you are to bring people to justice let us do it in the quickest possible time and then we forget all about that phase. But they take too long on that. And Rwanda stepped in with the *gacaca* system. Groups of people are judged. Sometimes there are failures of people being competent in justice but there are other levels to rectify that. But whatever the case, it is faster than the Arusha court. People are brought to justice, and after most of the *gacaca* courts are closed, people have been judged and need to pay back by doing physical work ... doing something for the community. Justice is taking its steps, and if that one is going on I see reconciliation as not being very far. We are about to move on which is the way forward.

These interviews with Robert and Fred show their frustrations with having been treated as 'less than' while living as refugees in Uganda. They were less concerned about ethnic identity than they were about being part of a Rwanda where everyone was welcome. They express being in support of the policies, laws and approach to justice and reconciliation that Rwanda has adopted since the genocide. They speak positively of the Rwanda they live in today. In the following section, the experiences of those who lived in Rwanda all their lives and left it as refugees in the late 1990s will be described and compared to Robert and Fred's experiences.

## Stories from post-genocide refugees

Both Francois and Reginald survived the genocide and remained in Rwanda for a few years afterwards, pursuing their studies. Both left Rwanda in the late 1990s, saying they no longer felt welcome or at home in the new Rwanda that the RPF was creating.

Growing up in Rwanda, Francois and Reginald seemed to have a clearer sense of ethnic identity and stereotyping than Fred and Robert did growing up in Uganda. Reginald told the following childhood story:

When visiting my friend, the son of the family next door, there was an argument between his friend and his sister as to whether a friend who was visiting them would buy enough bottles of Fanta to include me or not. I was in the room but only my friend knew. As the two children were fighting the visitor turned to the mother and said, 'Oh my goodness, your children have turned into Hutus! This is not the behaviour of *imfura*'. *Imfura* means 'first born' and Tutsi consider themselves as having the position of the first born in Rwandan society. They continued having this conversation and when they discovered I was in the room there was a shock.

Francois expressed experiencing a distinct lack of belonging in either ethnic group as a result both of his appearance and his mixed parentage. He says,

You can even hear it amongst people, you can sit down, and the people you are with think you are Tutsi so they start telling me certain things, then they realise I'm a Hutu and change what they were saying. When I'm with a Hutu they don't tell me anything. They think, they don't know with this guy. You have to fight to convince someone you are a Hutu or a Tutsi. You have to fight to say that no matter what I am doing, I am still a Rwandan.

When discussing ethnic stereotypes, Reginald commented that:

Tutsi are considered to be superior, more collected, more intelligent, more secretive. Hutus are considered to be indifferent, don't care what will happen tomorrow, concerned only with today; derogative depictions were used, people who are greedy.

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Francois was much more direct in response to the questions of ethnic stereotypes:

I don't want to lie now, I'm going to tell you as a Christian, mostly the Tutsi they are manipulative. Secondly, Hutu, they are stupid. I say this because Hutu sometimes don't know what they want .... I don't know how to put this, Hutus have a reaction now and it's over. You will never see a Tutsi being angry now. They keep quiet and you think everything is fine and after a while something happens. Hutu get angry quickly. Tutsi try to be clever, which doesn't mean they are clever but they think they are which adds to their arrogance.

Being 'less than' because of affiliation with the Hutu category was repeated again after 1994. Francois describes being made to feel guilty or responsible for genocide even though he had no part in it. Both made mention of what they felt to be an injustice in Rwanda: that the son of an RPF soldier who died is looked after by a government supported fund but the son of a former Rwandan government soldier is held responsible for his father's behaviour, even though both children were caught up in a war not of their own making.

In addition to this, frustration was expressed about the fact that the current government only makes mention of crimes committed by the former government during the genocide, but remains silent about the crimes committed by the RPA, prior to and after the genocide. Francois says,

If someone were to say, 'Tutsi did not kill people' but then in five years the truth comes out that they did, what then? But you only want to believe what you already know. Always, we are busy lying. Now if my parents, I know were killed by the RPF, maybe in Rwanda or probably in the DRC [and] it happens that you become my friend and your parents have been killed by Hutu or *interahamwe*, now I have someone to pay for me but you don't have anyone to pay for you for school fees. Just because of what your tribe has done, you are not responsible and yet you have no school fees.

Another theme that arose was that of being forced to do military training and fight in the DRC. For both Reginald and Francois, this was not in line with their

expectations of a democratic country at peace. When asked why he did not want to stay in Rwanda and rebuild the country, Francois responded:

So, rebuilding a country, so I really thought we would be in a country that would be having peace, but my expectations were not met. I was keen to help but the system did not allow it. If you take a high school student and force them to military training, that is not right .... It happened to me three times that I was called from high school for military training but each time I escaped .... The system did not allow me to do what I dreamed to do.

Further, Francois argued that no one is innocent and this makes punishing people a complex issue. Rather, he argues that only punishing some or unjustly punishing the wrong people can result in yet another crisis requiring justice and reconciliation.

If you deny as a Hutu that Hutu killed, you are either one of those killers or there is something wrong. But also Tutsi are not innocent. The innocent people are those who were killed .... The solution, if one hits you is not to hit back .... But you find that this person is not in jail. Probably, he is innocent. But we don't want to see him because he is Hutu. So we put him in jail because we have the power and the rights to do it. So now the survivor is no longer innocent. We are creating something similar as what was done.

I asked Francois what would need to be in place for him to return to Rwanda. He said that he wanted to see a government that was not obviously affiliated to any ethnic group. Further, he would want a leadership in place that allowed all Rwandans to feel free and punished those who were guilty, regardless of their ethnicity. 'What is happening now is that people with power who have any links to the opposition are being removed, accused of crimes. Or else, people from the street are being jailed without knowing or understanding what they did'. Reginald adds to this that the problem in Rwanda is that its history has always been one-sided in support of those in power. The truth about history needs to be revealed, according to him, in order for justice and reconciliation to take place.

For Reginald and Francois, a major issue is the contradiction they see in the government's position on ethnicity. According to them, on the one hand the

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government preaches the message that ‘we are all Rwandan’ and has outlawed the use of ethnic categories. On the other, they insist that a ‘genocide of Tutsi’ took place and that it is Tutsi survivors that need to be looked after by the government. Both advocate accepting and coming to terms with ethnic identity rather than denying or disallowing its existence. As Francois says, ‘We need to sit down together, without denying you are a Hutu – because I don’t agree with the RPF idea of saying we are all Rwandan. No, no, no. We can’t deny our identity. If you feel you are a Hutu or a Tutsi, fine, but can you allow each other to stay together’.

Reginald believes that a reappropriation of ethnic identity as something positive and unifying, as opposed to the suppression of ethnic identity, is the way forward.

My argument is that we must be able to display those [ethnic] traits without hurting others, in a way that is accepting of others .... People say Hutu were in slavery but we are here now. So what? If you take pride in having such a difficult past and making it to where you are now, out of slavery, then that is something to celebrate! Why wouldn’t you, rather than feeling victimised? Also, [with regard to Tutsi history], so what? In all typical definitions of Hutu and Tutsi that I’ve seen in literature and experienced there are good and bad qualities, things I wouldn’t necessarily take on. But there are others I would like to be associated with.

In this section, Reginald and Francois’ experience of feeling ‘less than’ because of being Hutu was described. Both outlined their reasons for leaving Rwanda and their continued belief that they could not return to Rwanda for reasons of truth, justice and security. They also differ with the current government’s position on ethnic identity and feel that they would put themselves in danger in terms of the divisionism law were they to speak openly about their own views on ethnicity.

### **Longing for home**

All four Rwandans emphasised the importance of every person having access to their home country and having the freedom to decide their own future. When asked what it meant for him to be a Rwandan, Fred said the following:

All in all, I have a home, I belong somewhere. I feel an added value being in my own environment. I feel I need to protect my own identity as a Rwandan. I wouldn't enjoy seeing any Rwandan out as a refugee.

In a Working Paper around the topic of refugees and belonging, Kebede (2010:11) argues that 'home' refers to both a geographical place and a community in which one experiences a sense of belonging. Although all Rwandans may now be allowed to live in the geographical area called Rwanda, some still feel they do not have a sense of belonging there. Both Fred and Robert could see no reason for anyone to stay outside of Rwanda but Reginald and Francois said it was impossible for them to live in Rwanda at this time. They gave as reasons the injustices, the lack of freedom of speech and the inability to freely be who they are, without apology.

Being able to call a place 'home' is closely related to feeling accepted and feeling that one can be oneself (Kebede 2010). Further, Kunz (1981:43) discusses the phenomenon that refugees who do not feel accepted by their home country may be ambivalent or embittered in their attitudes towards their former compatriots and their home country. They would like to return but feel unwelcome, thus holding both positive regard for their home country and frustration with their home country for rejecting them. Not only are the feelings about the home country ambivalent, but also regarding the host country, to which refugees may feel both gratitude and again, frustration, for not being accepted as full citizens. This experience of being seen as something lesser because of your identity as refugee was a repeated theme in Robert and Fred's life stories, and the emotions expressed when mentioning specific incidents were frustration, a sense of injustice and an underlying anger. These same emotions were expressed by Reginald and Francois as they described their lives in Rwanda after 1994.

The experiences of Reginald and Francois in terms of being a refugee thus hold many similarities to those of Fred and Robert. While the latter two experienced feeling discriminated against because of their identity while being outside of their country, Reginald and Francois experienced being discriminated against within their own country. And yet all four long for the same thing; the right to make decisions about their own future, access to education and a career, a family



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living together freely in their own country, and the freedom to be who they are without being made to feel like they are 'less than'.

But a recurring theme in both Francois' and Reginald's interviews was that being Rwandan today seemed to go hand in hand with accepting a certain version of Rwandan history and of what happened during and around 1994. Further, being Rwandan seemed to require being trained for the military and being sent to fight in the DRC, at least in the late 1990s. Francois struggled to be proud of being a Rwandan as every time he mentioned where he came from he sensed people were wondering if he had been a killer.

When I suggested to Robert that many people were afraid to discuss anything genocide-related due to the divisionism law, he said they should not be afraid as, 'You are not arrested for talking. You are arrested for inciting'. I then described the fear of some of my Hutu friends outside of Rwanda. His response was,

The fear is not substantiated. There are very distinct things you can be punished for by law. Through staying outside of Rwanda they have not seen how the country has progressed. I think it has to do with exposure to changes over time .... They have not gone through the process of the country's changes. They have been targeted by oppositional media with negative stories.

Yet both Reginald and Francois feel they cannot speak out about the injustice they see. Francois said,

As a Christian I don't like to see injustice happening. If you're my brother and you're missing the point I will tell you. I won't keep quiet because you are my brother. When I see injustice somewhere I don't tolerate it, I have to say, this must stop .... Someone you know is innocent is treated unjustly because he is who he is. You can't participate in that system.

Francois insists that the truth must come out. 'What is known in Rwanda is only one side of the story. If both sides of the story are known no one is going to ask questions .... Now, someone reads an article about Rwanda and asks if it is true I have to explain that this is half the story but there is more to it too'. It is difficult

for Francois to endorse the punishment of those guilty of genocide when others just as guilty of heinous crimes walk free just because of their ethnic identity.

During his interview, Fred repeated that those who are abroad need to 'come home'. He says that only if they are in Rwanda can they begin to work through some of the issues that remain in the reconciliation process. Robert says that it is not easy for young Hutu but that they need to be part of the process. But Francois insists, 'I don't feel okay to go home'. He stresses that it is not because he could be accused of any crimes but cites again the injustice and people being jailed even when they are innocent. 'I don't know what will happen if I speak out over there.'

Fred suggested that Rwandans would only choose to stay outside for their own advantage, but Keller (1975:90), in his research with refugee communities, dispels the idea that refugees would flee their country for opportunistic reasons, describing the trauma, pain and loss that someone experiences when they leave behind all that is familiar to start over in a country where nothing is certain or secure, particularly when this change has involved fleeing without the kind of preparation that would form part of an emigration process. The insistence that they would prefer to remain in Rwanda but did not feel it was possible was evident in Reginald and Francois' stories. Reginald reiterates that he is not free to voice his opinions in Rwanda. 'You can't stand in Kigali and say the RPF killed people'. He describes how many Rwandans in the north have lost family members to the RPF but that you never hear from them. 'Do you think their pain has healed?' he asks. 'If there is no fear in Rwanda, why are we not hearing their stories?'

Fred found it difficult to understand why someone would choose to be a refugee and remain away from home. He described how several Hutus he knew had returned to Rwanda, and through the legal system had reclaimed their properties. He added that Rwanda needs all the educated people from the outside to come back to help rebuild things and kept reiterating that those outside must 'come home, feel free'. But, like Keller, Barry Stein (1981) suggests that most refugees do not leave their home country for opportunities elsewhere. He argues that refugees are normally not 'pulled out but pushed out'. 'They have

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not failed within their homeland; they are successful, prominent, well educated individuals who fell because of persecution' (Stein 1981:322). This describes Francois and Reginald's experiences well. They are both resourceful people who have fled Rwanda not out of opportunism but out of fear and frustration.

What is evident from Francois' interview is the high level of fear. He expressed fear that I was a government spy and fear that some Rwandan refugees may have been planted by the Rwandan government to secure information about other refugees. There was a sense that Francois could not trust anyone, even being outside of his country. This same fear was not shared by Robert and Fred, who seemed confident of the freedom of all Rwandans who wanted to contribute to the development of the country. Fred said that he would like to buy flight tickets for people who are outside the country to come and have a look at how things have changed and then to decide if they want to stay or go. The fact that Fred and Robert defend Rwanda is not surprising. Bernard (1986:620) describes how refugees are a symbol of 'profound critique' of their home countries as their very existence suggests that their home country 'has failed to provide them with the minimum requirements of life' forcing them to flee at great cost to themselves.

All four participants have revealed a similar desire for all Rwandans to be free to be themselves in the new Rwanda, but they differ on how to make this a reality. For Robert and Fred, the strict government laws and policies, such as the divisionism law, the protection of survivors, and the execution of justice for genocide related crimes, seemed the best way forward for reconciliation. Such an approach seemed necessary due to the risk of renewed violence. For Reginald and Francois, these laws and policies were seen as the root cause of injustices and an impediment to freedom of speech and the freedom to be themselves.

All four have experience of what it means to be a refugee and what it feels like to be treated badly, not because of having done anything wrong but merely for belonging to a particular identity classification. This common experience between participants holds the potential to be a starting point for dialogue. The shared desire for a country in which all Rwandans can build a home and live freely is a vision all four participants share and may be willing to build on.

As each of the four Rwandans grapple to make sense of a constructed yet prevalent ethnic identity, each of the participants would most likely agree with Fred's words:

I would claim I'm a Tutsi because that's what I've been told; but genetically, if I look back a hundred years, am I one? Where do I belong? I don't know. I am Rwandan. That one cannot be denied, whatever I am, I am Rwandan.

Perhaps the shared experiences, and shared Rwandan identity, are enough of a starting point for pre- and post-genocide refugees to begin the dialogue that will allow post-genocide refugees to feel heard and pre-genocide refugees to begin to understand the challenges post-genocide refugees feel they face in today's Rwanda.

## **Concluding summary and recommendations**

This article, through the words of four young Rwandan men, has described some of the complex realities in that country. The deep-seated inferiority and superiority complexes that the literature describes in terms of Rwandan identity dynamics, as well as ethnic stereotyping (see for example Prunier 1995; Pottier 2002; Mamdani 2001), is evident in the excerpts in this article. The excerpts also reveal the one-sided history and double-standard justice that seem to exist in Rwanda, or are at the very least perceived to exist by certain groups in Rwandan society and the diaspora.

Another strong theme in the excerpts is that of belonging or not belonging. The new case load refugees describe how they feel they are not able to be themselves or express their concerns and frustrations openly. Their excerpts express feelings of fear and frustration. These feelings are reminiscent of those experienced by refugees (Kebede 2010; Kunz 1991).

Perhaps the theme that most significantly draws together what the four Rwandans have been expressing is the idea of 'home'. What are their expectations of Rwanda as 'home'? In the excerpts they describe recognised citizenship, accessible education and employment, freedom of speech, determining one's own future, and equal-handed justice as important factors when experiencing a

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place as home. All of these are also factors that are seen to promote reconciliation (Kriesberg 2001; Lederach 1997). These are thus important themes to be considered in the post-genocide Rwanda.

Much important work has been done in Rwanda in healing the relationship between victim and perpetrator (Clark 2010). Far less attention has been paid to the relationship between new case load and old case load refugees.<sup>5</sup> Dialogue between these two groups is significant for several reasons. Firstly, they have the shared experience of having been refugees, longing for their home country. Secondly, ideologically, they are often on opposite sides of the political divide in terms of understanding the past and envisioning the future in Rwanda. Thirdly, these groups have often gained skills and education during their time outside of the country, making them particularly resourceful, either as contributing citizens within the country or dissenting voices outside of it (Turner 2008).

One recommendation this article makes is that these groups are brought into dialogue with one another through the efforts of NGOs and the Rwandan government's National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC). For those in the diaspora, dialogue can be facilitated through online mediums, which are used extensively by those outside of the country (Turner 2008). International NGOs working with Rwandans in the diaspora are in a position to facilitate dialogue between old case load refugees who are studying abroad and new case load refugees who fear to return.

Another recommendation is that the government publically acknowledges the important role that being a refugee has played in Rwanda's history and recent past. The NURC has worked significantly in the area of encouraging community dialogue around a range of themes related to reconciliation (Clark 2010). This article recommends that they include the concept of 'home' as one of their areas of dialogue. What would it mean for Rwanda to be 'home' to all Rwandans? How could communities and the government work together to create the kind of environment that would be more inclusive to those currently outside?

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5 Although in the recent Rwanda Reconciliation Barometer, of the nine social categories in Rwanda that were officially recognised as significant, old and new case load refugees were amongst them.

Those outside are quickly labelled as guilty of genocide or opportunistic, but perhaps their concerns need to be heard for what they offer in terms of creating a more inclusive Rwandan society.

Other factors that need to be considered but fall outside of the scope of this article include reconsidering the legal rights of returning refugees, particularly new case load refugees, in terms of land and employment, the support and reintegration of returning refugees, and creating incentive programmes for particularly skilled and resourced refugees to return to Rwanda to contribute their skills in their country of citizenship.

Various other researchers have made recommendations that the government becomes more inclusive and equalitarian in their policies (Clark 2010; Pottier 2002; Mamdani 2001). There has been particular criticism of the emphasis by the government of punishing genocidaires but turning a blind eye to crimes committed by the RPF (Clark 2010; Pottier 2002). These criticisms, however, need to come from Rwandans themselves so that change and transformation can be brought about from within. This article suggests that through dialogue between old and new case load refugees, facilitated by NGOs and the NURC, shifts in government policy and within communities may be brought about.

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