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### **Reflection Paper #7**

#### ***Home is where the heart is? Or where my kin are buried?***

Eight hundred thousand of Rwanda's Tutsi population were erased from their country's history in the very making of it. The genocide was perpetrated in a widespread, systematic fashion, endorsed and even spear-headed by the government, leaving no Tutsi family without loss. The perennial questions plaguing the nation post-genocide revolve around how to seek justice when responsibility was so diffuse, when "the plan and its execution had been ingeniously designed to look planless" (Gourevitch 1998: 252), as well as how to rebuild and reintegrate the nation. In this essay I argue that a unifying sense of home is the compelling force behind efforts of both coping with and reconciling with the genocidal violence.

It is important to understand the motives behind the genocide in order to cope with their outcomes. Hutu Power, which believed itself to represent all the Hutus who were historically the majority yet also comprised the lower socioeconomic echelon, wanted to reclaim the nation for themselves via their "bastardized 'majority rule' principle of physical might" (Gourevitch 1998: 259), and this mirrors Tambiah's arguments of how collective violence results from sentiments of group entitlements. The target was clearly and solely the Tutsis, and their eradication was the prime objective. But after the genocide, when Hutu Power was finally driven out of Rwanda, how does the nation piece itself together when its population is decimated and internal ethnic conflict and resentments still color the everyday interactions of its citizens?

A great part of the rebuilding of Rwanda can be attributed to the exile population that had fled the country mostly in the late '50s and throughout the '60s. Their sense of home had not been scarred by the mass violence that their Tutsi kin had experienced in the mother country, so the exile sense of solidarity was shaped not out of pain but instead: "Living outside Rwanda, you don't see each other as Hutu or Tutsi, because you see everyone else as strangers and you are brought together as Rwandans..." (Gourevitch 1998: 210, quoting Tito Ruteremara). Jean Améry said "homesickness was

alienation from the self (Améry 1980: 43), and Tito Ruteremara echoed this when Gourevitch quotes him in saying, “But deep in our hearts and mind we knew we belonged in Rwanda...” (Gourevitch 1998: 214). This “sense of belonging” (Gourevitch 1998: 231), of intrinsic identification with the homeland – with one’s true self – helped to shape the politics of reconciliation in post-genocidal Rwanda.

It can be argued that this influx of the Rwandan exile population immediately after the genocide in 1994 robbed the *victims* of proper reconciliation and imposed a national identity that was cultivated from a foreigner’s standpoint. But I argue that because there was such a large influence of the exile population, most notably in the reconstruction of commercial enterprises (Gourevitch 1998: 231-232), the national sentiment of unity was furthered and the cause of reintegrating the country, the people reinforced. Reprisal killings were not as widespread as anticipated, and “reconciliation through accountability” (Gourevitch 1998: 250) became the focus of the post-genocidal government’s efforts, as evidenced through their petitions to the UN for help in bringing fugitive *génocidaires* back home as well as the implementation of Gacaca trials. And though accountability is rooted in the difficult and seemingly impossible task of finding those responsible, the national sentiment to recover via these means reflects a sense of home, a reclamation of the land and country so “to salvage the spirit of Rwandanness for all Rwandans” (Gourevitch 1998: 211). The exiles were not the victimized Tutsi of native Rwanda, nor were they the perpetrators, but their mass flooding into the country set the stage for a unified effort of recovery since the resentments of the victims were now in a daily intermingling with the returned exiles’ notions of Rwanda as the motherland to be reshaped; and the combination of these two perspectives gave birth to a concentrated effort at a justice in the sake of solidarity.

Justice and reconciliation in Rwanda did not manifest in complete impunity, but it did aim to do what it could under the circumstances of diffuse responsibility. But the integration of the exile population, fixated on ‘returning home’ and making the war-torn Rwanda a new home served as part of the impetus to pick up the pieces and address the genocide through *both* accountability and unity.