

01 DIASPORA STORIES

ENDINGS

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Diasporas in Dialogue: Conflict Transformation and Reconciliation in Worldwide Refugee Communities,
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“MARIE’S STORY

My name is Marie – I am from Rwanda.

I left my country in July 1996. I left the country because of what happened. You know, in my country we had bad time in 1994, when we have genocide. At that time, many people died, and I thanks God to be alive right now. I don’t know how I can start telling what’s happened over there, cause I was there, but it was so sad. I lived in central Kigali; we didn’t understand what’s going on at that time. But the people, they were suffering.

And that time it didn’t touch my life that much, because we were thinking that perhaps in one month or three months we gonna find a solution. But after four years nothing good happened, and the genocide start. The war went, they says, 100 days. I didn’t count. Because my husband’s school was closed, they asked him to move to Ivory Coast. And my husband left. I remember when during the war I was pregnant. And my husband left when my son was four months. And I stayed in Rwanda by myself with my son. After 15 months when my husband finished school, he find a job over there, and I decide to leave the country to join my husband in Ivory Coast. Some of my family were there but some got killed during the genocide – the rest of the family was in Rwanda.

What happens after genocide? Many people from Rwanda moved to Congo. I never went to Congo, but after what happened in Congo you see what’s going on right now ... the people from Congo are saying that the Rwandese are the enemy. Because they come kill, they fight and they kill their people. Even when I was living in the Ivory Coast, Congolese people came in Ivory Coast, at least that time I start hearing that now the Congolese don’t like the Rwandese people because they kill their people. There were many Rwandese and Congolese, but they could not talk to each other because they say they are enemy. But myself because I never went in Congo, only what I saw on TV; I can’t describe exactly what happened over there at that time. But, I know the people from Rwanda were in Congo and killed the Congolese people. And the government, the Rwandese government say that they follow the people who killed the Tutsi. But the Congolese say that we welcomed the people because they are coming to us we give them everything – we didn’t expect to see them coming and kill us. It’s why they were not happy, because they welcome the people because they love them, they didn’t know that someone was going to come and kill them because they did.

I lived in Ivory Coast for seven years; my husband was working over there. And when the war started in Ivory Coast my husband was a victim. And after that he died, and when he died I was not feeling secure to stay over there and I decide to move and come here in the United States. And it’s how I end up to come in this country; it was not my choice before, I didn’t think even that I gonna come in this country. But because I was not feeling secure, I didn’t want to stay over there, and I didn’t want to go back in Rwanda also. I left there in 1996; I could not imagine going back because what I was hearing or see on TV. I was scared to go back. I want to be in country where I feel secure and have peace of mind and just start over my life.

What happened after genocide the people tried to revenge. The people was killing. The Tutsi was killing the Hutu, because they say the Hutu killed the Tutsi. That was a scare. That scared me. And there were many people in prison, and there were many people coming from Rwanda, and they were trying to quit the country because there was no secure over there. Before I left my country I didn't see that. But after the people who were in Congo returned in Rwanda, it changed very much. I didn't want to live that – not because I didn't want to go back in my country, because I want back in my country.

After when I start hearing the people saying the Rwandese are the enemy, even see when the genocide start in Rwanda, the Tutsi and the Hutu was killing each other. Even they do that they have to live together, they have no choice, each one, Hutu and Tutsi still live together. The people become enemies when they have some interest they fight for the power. Or the people who took other people's stuff. But, until now the Tutsis and Hutus still get married, still work together. I think the people who use the word enemy are the people who want to separate the people. Because the people use those ethnicities to kill each other or to have power. I think the people from outside see that as enemy, but between Congolese and Rwandese, that is something you see that happened and everyone can say that and what I don't like to hear is if Congolese says I am enemy. I never went in Congo, I don't know anything about Congo. And someone kill me because of that? Or tell me I'm bad because of that? I am innocent. I don't know anything related I did. But as human when I see what happened in Congo, I understand very well why some people are upset. But, if the people have to move their country or lost the member of their family because of the Rwandese who crossed the border to come to fight in their country. I understand very well how even myself I can feel that way. As a person I don't know how it depend of the situation for each other because if I lost my family, I live in refugee camp because of Rwandese who fight in my country. I gonna be upset too. But on the other hand I gonna be upset to all Rwandese or to the government is my question?



“ RUKIA’S STORY

I am Somali.

What I have experienced is that life in the refugee camp is very difficult. There are different kind of Somalis and they will tell you that you are lower rate; what they give you is really hard, because you have hard hair or you have darker skin than them. It was really hard, though we are all Somali. There is some mentality that some of the other Somalis they are either not Somalis they are something else. It was really tough and hard. I was living in a refugee camp in Kenya because of the civil war that happened in Somalia. We left Somalia in 1992; I was three years old. I have no clue what happened there. The civil war break out. And my mom and my eight siblings – I remember what my parents told me – we run to Kenya; we came to Kenya by walking. And then we spend like four, five, two weeks maybe, on the way, on the way walking to Kenya. And we were in the bush, forest. Animals, lions and all that stuff they were hunting something to eat, so it was really hard, but we made it.

Life in the refugee camp was really hard and difficult. The hard thing was the survival. You have to depend by food that was given by UNHCR, which is not enough for family. The whole month you are given food for 15 days, the other 15 days you have to survive. It was really hard. And for family that don't have any other family outside the refugee camp it's really hard for them to survive. Because either one of the family one of the head of the household have to work or build house or either something else, to help family, yea. With the other clans it was violence. Nighttime you sleeping in your little small house, people will knock to your house, just to come and steal something from you, to take something from you. They know you don't have anything but they will try to get – they will take a penny if you have it just to harass you, just to put you down. Sometimes they were violent – they were raping, beating, all of that stuff. On the school side it was really tough because some of the teachers were Somalis from different clans and when you are a good student, you work hard, you are doing all you can, what they will try to do is to give your points to another student. If you get an A and one of the students from their clan get a C, your A goes to him and you get a C. You did the hard work but someone else get it for free because no one from your clan is teaching at the school. It was really challenging and tough.

My expectation was big when I came to the U.S. Chicago was my first city, very big city. I was 18. 2004 was the time I came. Snowy, we have never seen snow in our whole life because we are from a desert area. The surprising thing is our sponsor took us to our apartment. They took us there, no food, no explanation. We don't know how to get access to all these electronic things, like stove and other stuff. We never used them before. Then we were left there, no one to help us; we don't know what to do. Just eight of us in the house looking at each other, nothing to eat. We were told when we go to U.S. we get all this help, but it is not right – I don't think we are in U.S. After four days, the sponsor came back. She say, “How are you guys doing?” The first thing I told them

was, “Take me back from where you guys brought us from. You left us here without helping us, so you just disappear, after four days you ask us how are we doing.” I really get upset and in a fight with those people. And they say, “Oh we are sorry. We thought you guys know.” And I thought, how would you think that we know how to use these. And they apologize and they thought that maybe someone, a Somali might help us. But it just make it worse. Someone came, she saw us that we are not from her clan, and said, “Oh, I am not gonna help these lower class people.” She disappeared. It was really challenging. It was really scary because when you have this person that you thought that you left them back home, you think that you are free from them, you are not scared anymore of them. But when you get here you still get the harassment, you still get the abuse you used to get back home. You feel like, I am not in a safe place still; I thought I was but I am not in a safe place. When she talk to us like that I was like so pissed I thought that you a human being and I am a human being and you live in USA before me. When you came to USA you went to training, people show you how to do this. You didn’t know how to do it too.

I was avoiding people from other clans when I was in Chicago. I did a lot of avoiding. I don’t used to interact with them, I don’t use to communicate with them. I see them around; I don’t want to interact with them. My sisters have most of the challenges because they were going to school with them. All the advice I give to them as try to avoid them as much as you can because I don’t want you guys to get into trouble.

I used to feel so bad that they are still around me or they are still around us. It was really hard for me, to confront or have a conversation or just like exchanges names saying hi my name is ... it was really hard for me, I didn’t trust them, it was really hard.

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