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Reluctant to return?

The primacy of social networks in the repatriation of Rwandan refugees in Uganda

Cleophas Karooma
Mbarara University of Science and Technology
karoclare@yahoo.com

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List of abbreviations

GoR	Government of Rwanda
GoU	Government of Uganda
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
REC	Refugee Eligibility Committee
RPF	Rwandese Patriotic Front

Glossary

<i>Gacaca courts</i>	Transitional justice courts in Rwanda
<i>Ibuka</i>	Remembering the genocide
<i>Ingando</i>	Government-run ‘nation-building’ camps
<i>Irondo</i>	Night patrols
<i>Umuganda</i>	Community service
<i>Mutuelle de sante</i>	Social health insurance
<i>Interahamwe</i>	Hutu militias which took part in the genocide

1 Introduction

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) keeps watch over approximately 45.2 million people who have fled the world's conflicts, 80 percent of whom are found in developing countries (UNHCR 2012a; Zetter 2012; *The Guardian* 2013). To address the refugees' plight, UNHCR seeks 'durable solutions': primarily voluntary repatriation, local integration or resettlement in a third country, in that order (Harrell-Bond 1989; Mupedziswa 1993; Hansen et al 2008; Long 2008; Omata 2012; UNHCR 2013). Increasingly established as the most viable solution for refugees, repatriation has come to be designated by the international community of states and UNHCR as the ideal solution to the global refugee problem (Ullom 2001; Chimni 2004; Omata 2012; UNHCR 2012, UNHCR 2013). The primacy of repatriation is based on the assumption that it permits refugees to return home and become re-established in their own community (UNHCR 2012). However, there are some cases where refugees choose not to return home (Chimni 2004), due to strong social networks within their countries of asylum (UNHCR and IOM 2011), as is the case of the Rwandan refugees in this study.

Two decades after the 1994 genocide in Rwanda (see Prunier 1994; Mamdani 2002 on the history of Rwandan genocide), tens of thousands of refugees remain in exile. Since October 2002, the governments of Rwanda and Uganda, and UNHCR have been playing an active role in promoting the voluntary repatriation of Rwandan refugees. Strategies include the signing of several tripartite agreements, with the first one signed in July 2003; confidence building measures (repatriation sensitisation campaigns, 'go and see, come and tell' visits, information meetings with refugees organised by the returnees, UNHCR and government officials); and the forced repatriations of October 2007 and July 2010. Push factors such as restriction of access to humanitarian assistance and bars on cultivation and access to social services have all been applied (Refugee Law Project et al 2010).

The limited success of these efforts culminated in the threat of the invocation of the cessation clause, which was finally invoked on 30 June 2013 pursuant to the 'ceased circumstances' cessation clauses contained in paragraphs 6(A) (e) and (f) of the UNHCR Statute, Article 1C (5) and (6) of the 1951 Convention and Article 1(4) (e) of the 1969 OAU Convention (UNHCR and IOM 2011:6). However, Uganda has not yet implemented it due to gaps and contradictions within Ugandan law – the Refugee Act and the Immigration Acts reveal gaps that create challenges in applying some of the proposals, especially with respect to local integration and citizenship. 'For example, while the Refugee Act provides for eligibility for citizenship for refugees who have stayed in the country for 10 years, for the Immigration Act, a refugee is permanently a refugee including his/her offspring' (MIDIMAR 2013).

Despite all the attempts to return the post-genocide Rwandan refugees to their 'homeland', considerable numbers still exist in Uganda and are reluctant to return, even when the reasons for their flight are said to have abated. Drawing upon insights from some previous researchers (e.g. Refugee Law Project et al 2010; Rwandan refugees and asylum seekers 2011; Fahamu Refugee Programme 2011) myriad factors, mainly related to conditions at home (such as persecution and violation of human rights; political repression; *Gacaca* courts; oppressive laws such as genocide ideology; and property restitution problems), have been advanced concerning why the Rwandan refugees are still reluctant to return. However, my PhD research findings on the attitudes and responses of Rwandan refugees to repatriation, have revealed that conditions in exile (security; time of exile; access to land; access to social services;

international assistance; Uganda's hospitality to refugees and Ugandan laws i.e. the Refugee Act of 2006 which favours refugees; prospects for naturalisation; and personal and family networks) have also contributed to the reluctance to return of Rwandan refugees (Interviews: Rwandan refugees, Nakivale and Oruchinga 2011, 2011).

Nevertheless, this paper critically analyses the role of social networks in the repatriation of the post-genocide Rwandan refugees with a focus on those living in Nakivale and Oruchinga settlements in south-western Uganda. While some studies have been carried out on social networks in relation to migration decision-making (e.g. Boyd 1989, Massey et al. 1993; Massey et al. 1998; Gurak and Caces 1992; Koser and Pinkerton 2002; Binasisa 2011; Omata 2012), little attention has been paid to the role of social networks and their influence on the repatriation decision-making, especially in the cases where refugees are reluctant to return. This paper contributes to the academic arena using the example of post-genocide Rwandan refugees' repatriation in Uganda. Studying social networks of Rwandan refugees in Uganda as a cause for reluctance to return may leave some issues of security, politics, ethnicity and economics unaddressed. This paper, therefore, does not argue that social networks are the only or the most important factor influencing the repatriation of Rwandan refugees (See Refugee Law Project et al 2010; Fahamu Refugee Programme 2011). However, they are an additional factor that deserves more study (see figure 1.1 below).

Secondly, the paper highlights the influence of information networks of Rwandan refugees in the repatriation process and how the information communicated by these networks about the country of origin affects repatriation decision-making. The empirical findings have explored that the presence of their social networks (e.g. the Banyarwanda¹ in Uganda) and refugees' ability to make their own networks have influenced their repatriation decision-making, hence their reluctance to return. Some of the factors that influence the attitudes of Rwandan refugees toward repatriation are highlighted in the figure below.

¹ The Banyarwanda are people in Uganda of Rwandan origin.

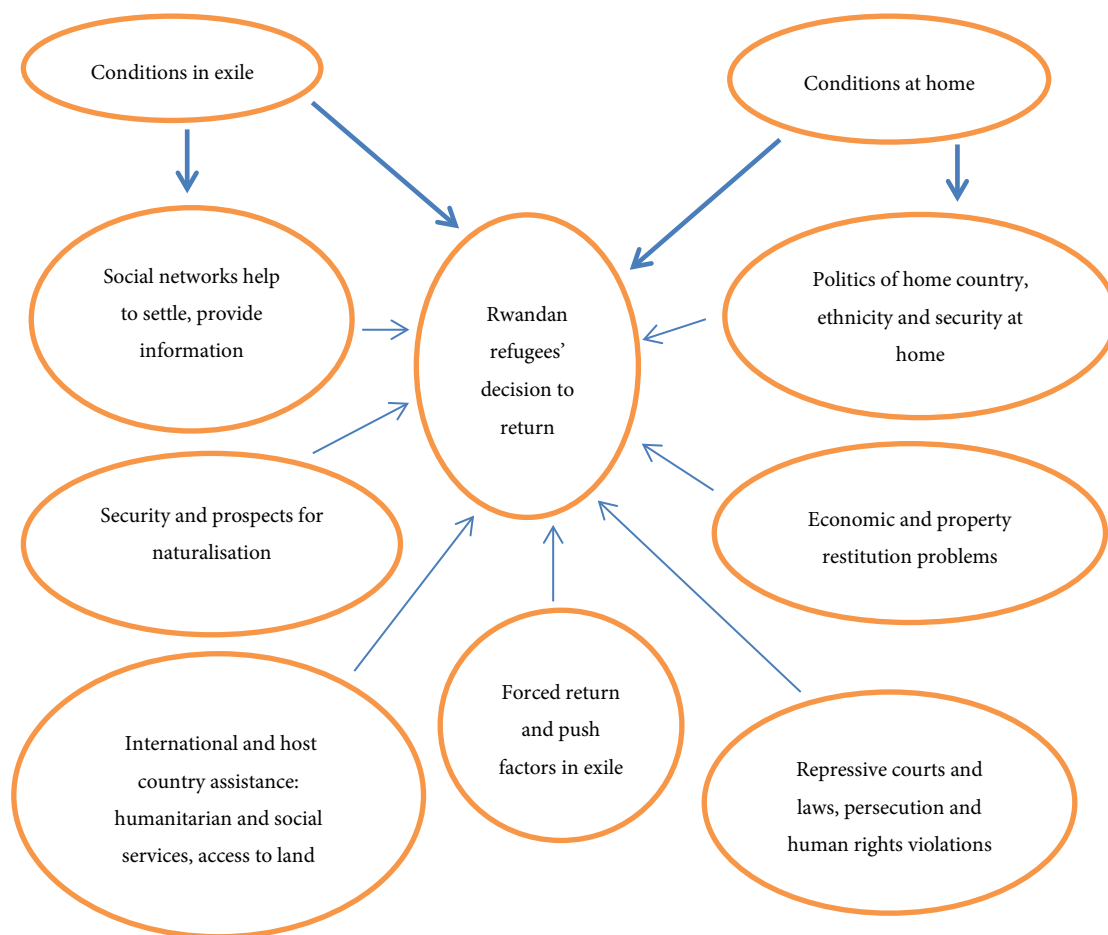


Figure 1.1: Factors in Rwandan refugees' repatriation decision-making

2 Research methodology

This is an empirical study which was carried out between 2009-2012 in Nakivale and Oruchinga refugee settlements in south-western Uganda, which host the majority of Rwandan refugees. This research is part of my PhD study on 'Rwandan refugees and their attitude to repatriation 1994-2012.' In-depth case study approaches – interviews and narratives, observation and focus group discussions – were used in data collection, and over 100 respondents were interviewed. Purposive and snowball sampling approaches were employed to select the study respondents. These included Rwandan refugees, government officials (both Rwandan and Ugandan) and UNHCR officials, as well as host community members around the settlements. Special attention was also paid to some categories of people, e.g. returnees in Rwanda, 'recyclers' (former repatriates) and new asylum seekers who provide information to the Rwandan refugees. Refugees were mainly interviewed on whether/when they would wish to return (and if not, what the reasons were for their reluctance); their expectations; whether they have personal networks in Uganda and their role in repatriation; and their opinions on the Cessation Clause, among others.

Mistrust was the main challenge faced in this research, as some refugees thought I was a spy for the Ugandan and Rwandan governments. However, during interviews, rapport was

created in order to allow refugees to express themselves freely, and so that I was able to obtain adequate data for the study. Their views were written down and recorded simultaneously and later transcribed. In addition, a wide-ranging analysis of documents and secondary data materials, including monthly settlement reports, was undertaken during research. Ethically, clearance by the Uganda National Council of Science and Technology and the Prime Minister's Office (Refugee Desk Office) was obtained to carry out this research. Voluntariness, confidentiality and informed consent of the respondents were observed during interviews. I now turn to the theoretical understanding of social networks in migration and refugee studies.

3 Understanding social networks and social network theory in migration

[...]studying networks, particularly those linked to family and households, permits understanding migration as a social product – not as the sole result of individual decisions made by individual actors, not as the sole result of economic or political parameters, but rather as an outcome of all these factors in interaction (Boyd 1989, as quoted in Elrick 2005).

The above quote gives a general perspective for understanding social networks in migration. Gurak and Cases (1992:152) note that it is important to differentiate between local community networks, networks of internal migrants and international migrants because of different modes of composition, ways of functioning and opposing constraints. For this reason, this research focuses on international migrants, i.e. those that have crossed internationally recognised borders – refugees.

Social network theory highlights the importance of networks in international migration. Once established, networks can lead to so-called 'chain migration' and thus stimulate and perpetuate the migration process. The network approach focuses on the rational actor who takes into consideration the existence of networks and the impact of networks on his or her decision to migrate. According to social network theory, the actor is subject to different networks which s/he can use rationally to maximise utility. Thus existing networks can facilitate the decision whether to move or not (Massey et al 1998:43). As with all networks, migration networks operate through the creation of social capital, which illustrates the value of interpersonal ties and describes networks as an image of aggregated social capital. Compared to human or physical capital, which are embodied in material or individual forms, social capital is embedded in the relations between actors. Thus network connections constitute a form of social capital that people can draw upon to gain access to various kinds of financial capital: foreign employment, high wages and the possibility of accumulating savings and sending remittances (See Massey et al 1998; Coleman 1990).

However, this theory addresses a great deal about the question of migration, but not about return, leaving the question of refugees' repatriation unaddressed. This paper is intended to bridge this gap.

Before embarking on a study of social networks in relation to repatriation data, it is essential to take a closer look at the term 'social networks.' Koser and Pinkerton (2002) have noted that social networks have been studied for many years across a range of disciplines, but there is still a lack of consensus about their definition. According to the pioneers in social network theory,

social networks are simply social relationships. A relationship (or relation) may be conceptualised as the social process that ultimately links one with his/her social network members (Mitchell 1969; Gurak and Caces 1992; Kritz and Zlotnik 1992; Koser and Pinkerton 2002). These early theorists attempted to define what constituted networks and what function they served.

Social networks are normally understood as one of a series of processes that links origin and destination countries in international migration (Kritz and Zlotnik 1992; Koser and Pinkerton 2002). In origin countries, potential migrants are embedded in a set of relations with family and friends. In destination countries, they may have both personal and impersonal contacts (Collyer 2005). Adopting a migration networks system analytical approach, Gurak and Caces posited that:

... networks at origin ... can either restrain or encourage an individual to migrate depending on the extent to which they provide economic and social support ... networks at destination can facilitate or discourage adaptation and integration depending on the extent to which they give migrants/refugees access to diverse resources' (quoted in Kritz and Zlotnik 1992: 6; see also Binaiisa 2011:10).

Gurak and Caces add that 'networks need to be looked at as dynamic relationships and variable social arrangements that vary across ethnic group and shape migration and its sequels' (quoted in Kritz and Zlotnik 1992: 6).

As such, potential network members are that category of people who 'in terms of the general norms or values of the community might be expected to provide [one] with some type of service or support', while potential relationships become a link in the personal network when 'some social exchange or transaction ... converts the possible into an actual social linkage' (Mitchell 1969:43). Willems (2005:53) conceptualises a social relationship to consist of the actual provision of some type of support (material or immaterial) to the refugees.

Social networks are manifest through a range of ties, e.g. institutional and associational, as well as family, friends and kinship ties (Binaiisa 2011:10). Social networks (also sometimes referred to as immigration networks) may also comprise intermediaries such as labour recruiters and travel agents (Koser and Pinkerton 2002). Koser and Pinkerton add that :

... media also transmit information about the range of conditions in the home country. To date, most attention has focused on family, friendship and community ties. A distinction is often made between 'personal' networks including family and friends, and those based on more distant relations, for example with co-ethnics or co-nationals who are not necessarily personally acquainted with potential migrants (Koser and Pinkerton 2002).

For refugees, navigating a new social environment successfully depends upon locating and activating familiar sources of support through available social networks (Simich 2003).

4 Social networks in migration decision-making

Koser and Pinkerton (2002:10) note that a significant body of literature shows that social networks can play a central role in explaining decision-making in the migration (repatriation) process (see also Ritchey (1976); Boyd 1989; Gurak and Cases 1992). For instance, Gurak and Cases (1992:156) postulate that '[t]rust and affinity can attract people to migration as well as keep them in the origin area.' Although the early theorists of social networks do not directly address the question of refugees' repatriation, they summarise the role of social networks and how they influence the migration decision-making using three social network hypotheses which can be applied in the context of repatriation as well:

- The **affinity hypothesis** states that the higher the density of the network of friends and family in the origin society (country of asylum), the lower the probability of migration (repatriation);
- The **facilitating hypothesis** states that social networks can facilitate migration (repatriation in this case), because social contacts based in these networks provide support, for example by lending money or helping to find a job in the place of destination or supporting integration in host societies;
- The **information hypothesis** focuses on the way that information provided through social networks about potential destinations (countries of origin) can influence migration (repatriation). It also points out that migration is directed towards the places where social contacts are located.

Through these hypotheses, social networks have been found to impact on the repatriation decision-making process. Social networks can influence repatriation decision-making, i.e. who does or does not repatriate. Those refugees with closer ties in their host country will be less likely to repatriate. In addition, the refugees for whom it is easier to integrate in countries of asylum (for example, socially and economically) may be less likely to repatriate (UNHCR and IOM 2011). Information about the security or economic conditions in the country of origin may also influence repatriation decision-making. In the context of information, social networks are almost invariably the most trusted sources of information. They are perceived by refugees to provide the most relevant information and unlike other sources, are trusted not to distort information. The information they provide is also perceived as up-to-date (Koser 1993, 1997; Collins 1996).

Williams (1993) discovered that social networks are channels par excellence through which refugees are able to rebuild their livelihoods in a new and unfamiliar environment, and they provide help to refugees (See also Willems 2003, 2005). Refugees variously define and negotiate those significant ties to family and friends that provide social support during the repatriation process (Simich 2003). However, Malkki (1995:46) suggests that refugees can rely on networks of their own making within the host community, as well as fellow refugees, to obtain social support, social capital, employment, resources, assistance and obligations and information about their country of origin.

Homans (1965:133) proposed that 'the more frequently persons interact with one another, the stronger their sentiments of friendships for one another are apt to be' (as quoted in Bulcha, 1988:174). However, Koser and Pinkerton (2002) state that kinship is an important source of support to refugees. In their research, Wellman and Wortley (1990) assert that kin appear to be a primary source of support, while residential proximity proved essential in supporting

transactions involving material aid. Strong ties or ties between individuals with common characteristics (also called homophilous ties) are said to be more important conduits of social support than weak ties or those between individuals with dissimilar characteristics (also called heterophilous ties) (Wellman and Wortley 1990). Individuals who are embedded in dense, homogeneous networks receive more social support in emergency situations than do individuals in wide-ranging networks (Beggs et al 1996, Willems 2005:54).

According to Barnes (1954, cited in Leliveld 1994), there is a difference between social networks that depend on kinship versus those that depend on neighbours and friends. Kin relations are theoretically very strong; they have a high level of solidarity. They are durable because blood relation is for life. Furthermore, they are composed of a broad range of people of different age, sex, socio-economic status and geographical location. Moreover, kinship relations provide a strong normative insurance. When it comes to neighbours and friends, cooperation is mainly social and economic, and because of proximity often more intensive. In his study of 'repatriation and integration of Liberian refugees from Ghana: the importance of personal networks in the country of origin', Omata (2012:6) argues that, among the various types of contact, immediate linkages such as family and kinship are particularly crucial in the migration process because these networks often serve as the most reliable sources of assistance. His empirical findings in Liberia show that Liberian repatriates who were able to draw support from immediate kin had much better access to housing and food.

In addition, social networks function as systems for the transaction of information, services and resources between individuals. Networks of people engage in communication in order to transfer information, establish social norms and create a degree of consensus (Scott 1991; Koser 1997). The transfer of information is not only important for the functioning of people's everyday lives, but it may also be essential in establishing a sense of security. According to Massey et al (2005: 42), sustained growth in migration flows is strongly rooted in migrant networks as 'sets of interpersonal ties that connect refugees in origin and destination areas through ties of kinship, friendship and shared community origin.'

From this background, this research establishes that inadequate analytical attention has been given to the role of social networks of refugees in the host country when they are reluctant to return 'home.' The contribution of this paper in the academic arena is to critically analyse the role of social networks of post-genocide Rwandan refugees in Uganda and how they influence their choice to return. For better understanding of the social networks of Rwandan refugees, the following highlights the history of the Banyarwanda in Uganda and how their arrival and settlement in Uganda has contributed to networks important to post-genocide Rwandan refugees.

5 Banyarwanda in Uganda as social networks for Rwandan refugees

The Banyarwanda have a long history in Uganda (see Gingyera-Pinycwa 1998, Mamdani 2002:164), and they have formed a body of social networks for the Rwandan refugees in the country. Their background can be traced to the pre-colonial era, when they were moving with their herds of cattle in search of pasture, and some of them settled in parts of western and south-western Uganda. According to Mushemeza (2007:73), there are four categories of

Banyarwanda in modern Uganda: those who belonged to Uganda due to colonial boundaries (the Bafumbira); economic migrants to Uganda; those who escaped the skirmishes of the conflict between the Belgian colonialists and the anti-colonial Nyabingi religious movement; and those who arrived after the social revolution of the 1959. Mamdani (2002:164) categorises them as nationals, migrants and refugees.

The first category consists of Banyarwanda who came to what became Uganda after the colonial boundaries that were created in the scramble to partition Africa. These, Mamdani (2002:164) refers to as nationals. These people inhabit the district of Kisoro at the extreme south-western tip of Uganda and Ntungamo District. During the constitution-making process in Uganda in 1994-95, the representatives of the Banyarwanda in Kisoro rejected the name 'Banyarwanda' and were recorded as Bafumbira in the third Schedule that recognises the indigenous communities of Uganda as of 1 February 1926 (Uganda 1995). Nevertheless, Banyarwanda from southern counties of Bukanga-Isingiro, and in counties of Ruhama and Rushenyi-Ntungamo District and Sembabule District, prefer to be called Banyarwanda-Ugandan citizens because that is what they consider themselves to be (Mushemeza 2007:73).

The second category consists of the economic migrants to Uganda, mostly of the Hutu ethnic group, who came to the country in the 1920s due to 'push' and 'pull' factors that prevailed at the time in Rwanda and Uganda respectively. Some Tutsi, with their cattle, fled the Belgian colonial system as well as the feudal rule of the Banyiginya dynasty. In Rwanda, the Tutsi occupied a privileged position that enabled them greater access to Western education and technology than the Hutu. In 1920s and under this power imbalance, the Belgian administration imposed food cultivation, anti-erosion measures, the use of manure, afforestation and other steps thought necessary to save the people from famine and other hardships (Mamdani 2002; Mushemeza 2007:74). Much of this implementation involved the use of force and it was the Hutu who were compelled to do such forced labour. These measures forced the Hutu to migrate to Uganda and settle in the countryside:

The two chief motives for immigration according to Powesland, were: to obtain money for payment of taxes, dowry and to escape the unpaid labour which the inhabitants were obliged to undertake on road construction and maintenance and other Government work of various kinds (Powesland 1955:30 as quoted in Mushemeza 2007).

The 'pull' factor was further strengthened by the conditions that existed in Uganda between 1870 and 1920. In this period, Uganda experienced a sharp decline in population due to war and disease (Mamdani 1996, 2002; Mushemeza 2007). The British were in the process of introducing cash crops, particularly cotton and coffee, which required considerable labour input. To remedy the situation, the British recruited migrant labour from Rwanda-Urundi, as the region was called at the time. Generally, the Banyarwanda immigrants settled and integrated in Ankole and Buganda regions, although some returned to Rwanda annually (Mushemeza 2007:74).

The third category is made up of those who escaped the skirmishes of the conflict between Belgian colonialists and the anti-colonial Nyabingi religious movement at the beginning of the twentieth century. This category took refuge with and ultimately integrated among the Bakiga in what used to be called Kigezi region of Uganda (Murindwa-Rutanga 1991).

The fourth category comprises refugees who arrived after the ‘social revolution’ in Rwanda in 1959. This revolution was precipitated by the sudden death of King Umwami Mutara Rudahigwa who died mysteriously in Bujumbura. This heightened tension and suspicion in Rwanda and became a trigger of the revolution (Mushemeza 2007). The refugees left their country during a number of successive episodes, mostly between 1959 and 1961, 1963 and 1964, and 1973 before and after the establishment of the Second Republic in Rwanda. The majority of these refugees returned to Rwanda after the takeover of the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF) following the 1994 genocide, while the rest self-settled in Uganda. This was followed by the flight of the new wave of the Hutu refugees fearing reprisals, as will be explained in this paper.

‘Is Banyarwanda a tribe in [the] Uganda constitution?’ Otto (2009) asks. According to the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (2006), the Banyarwanda constitute about 6% of Uganda’s population. The 1995 Constitutional Review Commission Ssempebwa report states in section 11.6 that ‘... the existence of the Banyarwanda as an indigenous community in Uganda by 1926 is not in dispute and should be recognised...’ (Otto 2009).

In addition, Chapter Three, Section 10, sub section (a) of Uganda’s Constitution on Citizenship by Birth states: ‘Every person born in Uganda one of whose parents or grandparents is or was a member of any of the indigenous communities existing and residing within the borders of Uganda as at the first day of February, 1926...’, thus recognising the Ugandan Banyarwanda community (Constitution of Uganda 1995: 30). The Banyarwanda tribe is also listed in Uganda’s indigenous communities (see the Third Schedule, Article 10 of the Constitution of Uganda 1995: 186).

The long history of the Banyarwanda in Uganda and their recognition in the country has formed a basis for the strong kith, kin and co-ethnic social networks of the post-genocide Rwandan refugees in Uganda, and their presence has been said to have created an impasse for repatriation decision-making. As Zetter notes in his study, *The Greek-Cypriot Refugees*, co-ethnicity of hosts underpins or intensifies the dilemma of return (1994:309).

6 Post-genocide Rwandan refugees in Uganda

Since the 1994 genocide, many Rwandans have been taking refuge in Uganda because of the political turmoil their country has experienced (Refugee Law Project et al 2010). Those who fled during and after the 1994 Rwanda genocide are settled mainly in Nakivale, Oruchinga, Kyangwali and Kyaka II refugee settlements in Uganda, while some are urban refugees. Other Rwandan refugees are secondary movers –those that came from neighbouring countries such as Tanzania and Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) following the forced repatriations of 1996/1997, and who faced persecution upon return because of their previous flight and then fled to Uganda. There are also asylum seekers still fleeing Rwanda with claims of human rights violations, human insecurity and persecution in Rwanda (Iyodu 2011).

Since 2002, the government of Rwanda (GoR) has exerted pressure on most of the governments hosting its nationals within the Great Lakes Region and in Africa as a whole to sign tripartite agreements to implement return (Refugee Law Project et al 2010). This is because of a desire to see refugees return and take part in rebuilding their country, as well as

vital security and justice issues which flow from Rwanda's history of genocide. Strategies including push factors such as a ban on cultivation and a reduction of food rations, the forced repatriations of October 2007 and July 2010 and the invocation of cessation have been put in place to force Rwandan refugees to return. Some of the returns so far conducted in line with tripartite agreements have been characterised by the use of force, threats, deceit and coercion (Human Rights Watch 2009, 2010). Despite these pressures, a number of Rwandan refugees have stayed put. In addition, new asylum seekers and former repatriates ('recyclers') continue to be registered as new arrivals, having made their way back to Uganda (Avenir 2010, Iyodu 2011).

As of July 1, 2012 the total number of refugees in Uganda was estimated to be 197,770. The estimated total of the Rwandan refugee population in Uganda stood at 20,565. Nakivale and Oruchinga host 9,574 and 1,413 Rwandan refugees respectively, while the rest are in urban areas and other camps such as Kyaka II and Kyangwali (UNHCR 2012b). The majority of these Rwandans have in common an unwillingness and/or reluctance to return to Rwanda despite campaigns conducted to encourage their repatriation. As explained previously, myriad factors for their reluctance have been categorised as either pertaining to conditions at home or conditions in exile, among which are social networks that have been found to play a crucial role in influencing their choice to return.

This study examines the role of social networks of post-genocide Rwandan refugees in Uganda, and how they influence their repatriation decision-making. Social networks in the form of information networks – recyclers, new asylum seekers, returnees and stayees – who provide information to Rwandan refugees about conditions in Rwanda are also highlighted.

7 Social networks and repatriation decision-making of Rwandan refugees in Uganda

On hearing the news of repatriation, the Rwandan refugees tend to escape to their relatives and friends in Uganda's communities which impede repatriation (Camp Commandant, Oruchinga, April 2011).

While repatriation has been assumed to be the primary (and the only) available durable solution for the Rwandan refugees in Uganda by the GoU (government of Uganda), the GoR and UNHCR (See Refugee Law Project et al 2010), a considerable number of refugees are still reluctant to return and those who have been repatriated have come back to Uganda. In relation to the statement by the camp commandant above, this study found out that the support from the refugees' social networks in Uganda has greatly influenced their repatriation decision-making. Additionally, more new asylum seekers are still coming to Uganda partly because of the aforementioned 'unconducive' conditions in Rwanda, as well as the presence of their relatives and friends in Uganda (Interview: Ugandan official April 2011).

During my field research, I asked refugees, 'Do you have relatives or friends in Uganda within and outside the camp that have supported you during your stay and in the repatriation process?' The majority said that they have more than one relative or friend in Uganda resulting from their personal networks. Following the history of the Banyarwanda settlers in Uganda long before 1926, some refugees talked of having chosen to flee to Uganda during the

1994 genocide because of the presence of their relatives and personal networks. The Rwandan refugees were found to have formed social relationships with their kin and non-kin individuals who support them (i.e. the hosts who help them to settle in Uganda) during the repatriation process (Interview: Rwandan refugees, Nakivale and Oruchinga, April 2011). This was supported by some host community members who said that they originated from Rwanda and occupied some places in south-western Uganda which had vacant land. Some of these were pastoralists who left Rwanda in search of grazing land even before colonialism, and others had left as migrants. Some came as refugees in 1959 and self-settled in Uganda around Nakivale and Oruchinga refugee settlements. These did not return when others left after the 1994 genocide and they are now Ugandans. They noted that some of their colleagues had settled in farther-away districts of central and western Uganda (Interview: host community members, April 2011). A Rwandan host community member said:

Since we originate from Rwanda, we interact and relate with people or refugees from Rwanda. We support them in different ways and help them to integrate in our communities. We have many people we know in Ugandan communities or even Ugandan government that originate from Rwanda who also support refugees accordingly (Interview: An elderly man, Kabingo², May 2011).

The social networks for Rwandan refugees were found to have been formed with the immediate families, neighbours, extended families or kin, co-ethnics, fellow Rwandan refugees, self-settled Rwandan refugees in Uganda, Rwandans who are citizens in Uganda, refugees from other nationalities and Ugandan nationals-host community members.

In Nakivale and Oruchinga, refugees are settled according to their families, clans, ethnicities and nationalities in order to bring together people with the same cultures and norms. According to Harrell-Bond (1986:6), for most refugees, the central unit of organisation is the immediate family forming a single productive unit. In exile, most refugees seek to maintain ties between family members, as well as members of their kin group. Whether refugees are settled in camps, or are self-settled, the family remains a central focus of refugee life (1986:6). Ryle argues that outside the context of the immediate family comes the extended family or kin. Most refugees settle alongside members of their own clan or those with a similar ethnic background. The importance of kin relationships varies from one refugee situation to another (1992:22). Therefore, kin relationships have been found to be important in the flights and repatriation of Rwandan refugees.

The Ugandan official noted that since the repatriation process began in 2003, the number of Rwandan refugees in the settlements has continued to fall – from about 25,000 to less than 9,000 now. This drop is not due to repatriation – the majority have left to settle alongside their supportive personal networks in Uganda’s communities as a coping mechanism and as a strategy to avoid going home. Through their networks, some move to cities in search of unskilled jobs such as carrying luggage at the bus terminals and in shopping centres; washing cars at washing bays; transporting passengers on motorcycles commonly known as *boda bodas*; and working in bars, homes and hotels, among others (Interview: Refugee Desk Officer, January 2011). In the same vein, Simich (2003) notes that refugees can engage in internal or ‘secondary’ migration within the country of asylum in order to exercise greater self-determination and to cope with displacement. And in a study, *Coping with Displacement: Social Networking among Urban Refugees in an East African Context*, Willems (2005:60) also

² Kabingo is one of the surrounding areas of the Nakivale settlement.

found out that refugees moved to their supportive social networks in Tanzania as a coping strategy.

My research findings further showed that the social networks of Rwandan refugees are a system of relations. Refugees keep connecting their associates – including new asylum seekers – to their personal networks for support, which expands the web of relationships (See figure 1.2 below). They find common ground in the fact that they are all refugees facing the same challenges, regardless of ethnicity and date of flight, and through the continuous circulation of people, money, goods, employment and information. They are also linked through one or more specific types of interdependency. These include: friendship; kinship; common interest; financial exchange; dislike; sexual relationships; relationships of ethnicity; nationalism; beliefs, knowledge; prestige; fellow refugees; neighbours; relatives or in-laws; friends; religious congregations; daily activities; work; schools; hospitals; and interaction with host community members (see also Willems 2005:62 for the case of social networks of urban refugees in Tanzania). Their relationships and ties can be simply illustrated with a graph-based structure, as shown below.

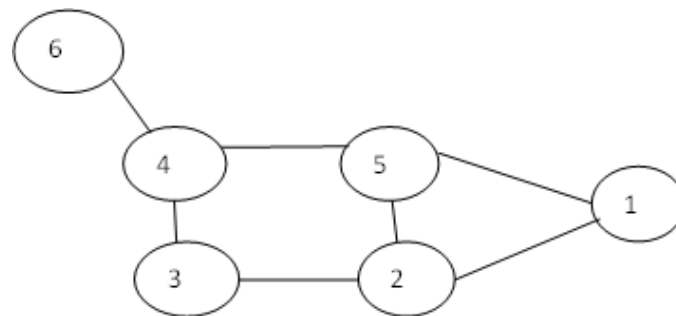


Figure 1.2: The inter-connected networks of Rwandan refugees

8 Social networking: a coping mechanism for Rwandan refugees in Uganda

A comprehensive strategy to bring to closure the Rwandan refugee problem in Uganda (UNHCR and IOM 2011:3) acknowledges the role of social networks in repatriation decision-making and recommends local integration or an alternative legal status to be the most appropriate durable solution. It states:

Many Rwandan refugees are long-term residents in their countries of asylum, one-third of them having been born in exile. Many refugees have established family ties through marriage to nationals of the country of asylum or third-country nationals residing there. Many are contributing to the local economy. After decades of exile the links of these individuals with their country of origin have weakened considerably (UNHCR and IOM 2011:3).

Minister Tarsis Kabwegyere³ supported the view that people may not be interested in returning due to the presence of their social networks in Uganda. For example, the second generation (children of the Rwandan refugees) may not want to return because they have established their own networks and have little or no attachment to Rwanda (Interview: 7 May, 2011). Youth in Nakivale said that they cannot return to Rwanda because they have been born, brought up and are studying in Uganda. Most of them have their parents, relatives and friends in Uganda and they have no interest in returning to Rwanda, which they know little about (Focus group discussion: youth, Nakivale 2011). As one youth said:

My parents died and were buried here in the settlement; they had never taken us to Rwanda nor told us about our place of origin in Rwanda. They had told us that most of our relatives were killed during the genocide. But in Uganda, we have relatives and friends who have looked after us since our parents died, so why should we return to Rwanda?

Social networks through intermarriages were also cited to be a crucial factor in the repatriation decision-making of Rwandan refugees. Some refugees have married Ugandan nationals and others fellow refugees. A refugee man who is married to a Ugandan national said that he cannot return to Rwanda because he has established strong relationships of family, in-laws and friends in Uganda through a marriage bond. He said that his in-laws have offered them land on which to settle and re-establish themselves after the Cessation Clause in order not to return to Rwanda. The research also found out that some Rwandan women have married Ugandan nationals. These women were said to have brought their immediate family members from the refugee settlements to live with them. An example given is a certain prominent politician in Uganda who was a refugee but married a Ugandan national and then resettled her family members in Uganda (Interview: refugee man, age 43, Nakivale, April 2011).

Another Rwandan man talked of having married a Congolese refugee woman and said they have three children. He feels it is not safe to take his family to Rwanda and moreover, his wife is not willing to go to Rwanda following the news of insecurity there. He said that they must stay in Uganda which is a neutral place for both of them and where they both have strong connections with friends (Interview: refugee man, age 43, Nakivale, April 2011). These strong links and connections through marriages in Uganda were said to be a challenge to the repatriation process (Interview: Refugee Desk Officer, 2011).

The protracted exile – two decades after the genocide– was also found to have weakened the social networks of Rwandan refugees in Rwanda. It has changed their meaning of ‘home’ to ‘exile’. The majority said that due to the time spent in exile they feel Rwanda is no longer their home. As a Ugandan official noted, Rwandan refugees are already habituated in Uganda because of the time spent there, and they feel less attracted to their home, which is an obstacle to repatriation (Interview: Ugandan official, June 2011). This is supported by Zetter (1988) who suggests that the duration of ‘refugeehood’ can influence the definition of home, such that people may feel more ‘at home’ in countries in which they may have been in exile for the whole, or the majority of, their lives.

³ Minister Kabwegyere is the former minister of Disaster Preparedness, Relief and Refugee Affairs in Uganda.

The UNHCR Uganda Protection Officer added that the presence of Rwandan refugees' social networks in Uganda has led to a poor response from refugees in the repatriation process (Interview: UHNCR official, February 2011). In addition, the Camp Commandant at Nakivale stated that, 'due to various factors such as social relationships, many Rwandan refugees and asylum seekers come to Uganda to stay because they see their fellow Rwandans self-settled and comfortable in Uganda.' He noted that when some of the applications and appeals of those seeking asylum are rejected by the Refugee Eligibility Committee (REC), the majority disappear and melt into Uganda's communities. Further interviews revealed that there are also illegal asylum seekers in the camp. They do not receive any humanitarian assistance but are being housed by their relatives and friends and coping with their support. This affirms that these refugees have already established social networks in Uganda even before they flee their country (Interview: Camp Commandant, Nakivale, February 2011). In the words of a refugee woman:

We left Tanzania following the forced repatriation of 1996. On arrival in Rwanda, my husband was killed. I remembered some villagemates/neighbours and friends who fled to Uganda. I decided to leave Rwanda with my children to look for them. We found some of them here in the settlement. They helped us until we acquired our refugee status. I will never return to Rwanda to be killed like my husband. If my refugee status is terminated after Cessation Clause, I will join other relatives who are self-settled in Masaka district, Uganda, rather than returning to the jaws of death in Rwanda (Interview: Refugee woman, Oruchinga, June 2011).

The sixth tripartite agreement⁴ signed between the GoR, the GoU and UNHCR on April 22, 2009 recommended a deadline of July 31, 2009 for repatriation. It also recommended a ban on the cultivation of settlement land and a reduction in food rations to encourage refugees to return. Despite the resolutions, most refugees stayed and those who were repatriated came back to Uganda. An interviewee pointed out:

Since 2009, we have been denied our rights as refugees to push us out of Uganda. The government of Uganda and UNHCR think that we do not want to return because of access to land and humanitarian assistance in the settlement. However, our failure to return is based on lack of peace and reigning persecution in Rwanda. Even if we have no food and humanitarian assistance, we can still survive here with the support from our personal networks (Interview: Interviewee, Oruchinga, June 2011).

The refugees also noted that they survived on the networks of their own making as a strategy to avoid returning home. They work for food and money from the host community. Some refugees said that their friends in the host community have offered them land for cultivation as a means of survival following the 2009 ban on access to land in the refugee settlement. Other refugees mentioned carrying out low capital businesses on roadsides such as selling chapattis, pancakes, boiled eggs, yellow bananas, millet porridge, soft drinks and firewood to the passers-by from the host community in order to cope with the situation.

The refugees' ability to speak the local language, 'Runyankore', has also enabled them to make their personal connections and to present themselves as Ugandans. As a refugee noted, 'since we can speak some Ugandan local languages like Runyankore and Luganda thoroughly, we must stay and survive here. We can work and interact with people outside the camps without

⁴ Minutes of the sixth joint communiqué 2009 on file with the author.

difficulty.’ As a strategy to avoid returning to Rwanda, some refugees said that through their personal networks with their friends in Uganda, they have acquired documents from the local authorities (Local council I) to identify them as Ugandans. Some said that they have managed to obtain voters’ cards by paying money to the local leaders. These documents have helped some of them to move out of the camps to further-away areas in central and western Uganda for fear of being forced to return to Rwanda. An interviewee noted:

Following the repatriation deadline of 31 July 2009, I acquired documents from the Local Council One (LCI) chairman in the surrounding host community and moved away from the camp with my family. We went to Kiboga District where we did not know anyone. I introduced myself to the local authorities and presented my identification documents to the area’s leaders. Due to my ability to communicate in the local languages, I was able to obtain some casual jobs for a living in the area and stayed for three months until the repatriation process was over and we returned to the camp. I made a number of friends there and I expect to buy land and migrate to that area in future (Interview: refugee man, Nakivale 2011).

Others said that they were hosted by their friends and relatives in the host community during the repatriation process for fear of being forced to return to Rwanda. Some kept their property with them. Others left their animals in the custody of the host community members. Some refugees talked of receiving psychosocial support, accommodation, resources, money, food, information and advice from the host community during the repatriation process (Focus group discussion, 2011). A participant noted that: ‘If it was not for the support of our surrounding host communities, we would not have managed to cope with the repatriation pressure. We are indebted to our hosts –the Ugandan nationals for understanding our problems’ (Interview: Refugee woman 2011). Another interviewee pointed out that through his networks with the host community, he was eventually in a position to purchase land, where he has built a house and settled his family.

The presence of social networks in Uganda was also said to have provided refugees with capital to start-up businesses. Others depend on remittances from their relatives and friends. For example, a man spoke of opening a shop in Nakivale with support from his relatives in Kampala. Another refugee said that with the support of his relatives in Uganda, he has managed to educate his children, who are now working in Uganda. One of the children I interviewed, working with an NGO in the camp, said that they are self-settled in Uganda and are planning to resettle the rest of their family members from the camp. Some refugees added that they are stable socially and economically with personal networks, businesses and other properties in Uganda, and thus there is no need to return to Rwanda (Interview: Male, age 73, Nakivale 2011).

It is important to note therefore that their economic position through their networks acts as a strong deterrent against repatriation. To some refugees, repatriation means losing their personal networks, accumulated wealth such as land, property, businesses, jobs and animals (e.g. cattle), which they are not allowed to take along on repatriation. This contradicts Rutinwa (2002:23), who suggests that educated and economically well-off refugees might be the first to repatriate when conditions allow since they are more empowered.

Building relationships with host community members through commerce was also said to be of paramount importance to refugees’ stay in Uganda. This has made them not only economically stable but also socially networked. It was determined that both refugees and host

community members trade together. Refugees who run businesses in Nakivale noted that they have established relationships with traders in Uganda. They source their merchandise in Kabingo town (a nearby trading centre), Mbarara town and even Kampala city. Their trading or business partners in Uganda were said to support them in case of any financial setbacks. They give them goods on loan, which are repaid after the goods are sold.

9 The voices of the host community members

The host community members around the settlements who were interviewed said that they lived harmoniously with the refugees. They noted that they have much in common and support each other economically and socially. The host community said they interact with the refugees through religious congregations (i.e. churches and mosques); markets; grazing land; social occasions (bars, parties, marriages, funeral services, village meetings, etc.); health centres; schools; work (e.g. teachers and nurses who are recruited from both Ugandan nationals and refugees); research; buying produce and firewood from refugees; and interaction in daily activities. In these ways, refugees and the host community have been in a position to form close relationships.

The host community members said that they have benefited from refugees' cheap labour. The refugees work on their farms and as their house helpers. The refugees also sell part of their food and non-food items to the host community at a cheaper cost as a survival strategy. As one Ugandan national noted: 'If you befriend them [refugees], you can benefit from the cheap labour and services provided by them.' Through these networks, some Ugandan nationals reported having supported refugees in different ways, such as by providing counselling and advice; by giving them social, financial and moral assistance as well as emotional support; and by hosting them in the case of repatriation deadlines and government's ultimatum. Some said that they have helped refugees to buy land from Ugandan communities to help them settle. Other benefits of being near the refugee settlements were also mentioned. These include infrastructure development such as access roads. The area is developing at a fast rate with the construction of schools (primary, secondary and tertiary institutions) and health centres to benefit both refugees and the host community members.

However, the Chairman of Local Council Five (LCV), the political head of Isingiro District, said that some refugees live a better life than some Ugandan nationals. They have access to abundant fertile land which some nationals do not have, and they enjoy free social services and freedom (Interview: Isingiro District, July 2011). As a host community member noted: 'When we try to access the land for cultivation, the refugees' administrators chase us claiming that we are encroachers. How can we be called encroachers on our land? Who encroaches on who, refugees or nationals?' (Interview: Male, Nakivale 2011). This was said to have created some resentment against refugees since they are seen to be favoured more than Ugandan nationals.

However, the refugees' strong social networks in Uganda have been found to influence the repatriation decision-making of Rwandan refugees. Like some of their counterparts who are self-settled in Uganda, refugees believe that they can integrate in Uganda's communities without returning to Rwanda. The majority are reluctant to return because they have hope for naturalisation in Uganda and feel they want to settle near their families and friends.

I now turn to information networks and how information portrayed about Rwanda through different social networks influences repatriation.

10 Information networks and repatriation decision-making of Rwandan refugees in Uganda

Information networks were found to be crucial in the repatriation decision-making of Rwandan refugees. The Rwandan refugees actively search for information about their home country in order to decide whether to return or not. They spend part of each day seeking information about Rwanda through their personal networks. They then spread the information received throughout the camp to keep everyone informed.

As in the Rwandan refugee camps, Makanya (1991:25) notes that in Zimbabwean refugee camps in Zambia and elsewhere, the refugees' lives revolved around the reception and redistribution of news about conditions at home (See also Collins 1996), while Ruiz (1987) notes that the Chadian refugees in the Sudan with networks at home disseminated information they received to the rest of the refugees who might not have had contacts in Chad. Similarly, Nunes and Wilson (1991:13) note that despite the fact that there may have been extreme disruption during and immediately following the flight from their homeland, refugees, their families and communities soon develop sophisticated social networks in their settlement areas. Using these networks, the refugees actively seek out information that they consider reliable in order to learn about what is happening back home. Koser (1997:2) argues that 'When refugees are provided with an opportunity to make a free choice, they can compare their information obtained concerning events at home with what they know in exile.'

The Rwandan refugees interviewed said that they cannot return to Rwanda because of persecution. These risks and problems include the lack of right to life; ethnic discrimination; the absence of reconciliation; political oppression; *Gacaca* courts; *ibuka* (remembering genocide); property restitution problems; undemocratic elections; the absence of freedom of expression and of association; a non-independent and manipulated judiciary; oppressive security services; , arbitrary arrests and imprisonment; institutionalised slavery (i.e. *Travaux d'Intérêt Général* – TIG community service). All of these pose insuperable obstacles to return (Interviews: Rwandan Refugees, Nakivale and Oruchinga, 2011). The refugees have well-established information networks through which they access this information about their home country. These sources include 'recyclers', new asylum seekers, returnees and those who have settled in Rwanda. Through their social networks, this information is spread to every Rwandan refugee in the settlements, which influences their attitudes to return.

Recyclers as information networks

Recyclers are people who have been repatriated to Rwanda but have returned to Uganda claiming violation of human rights and persecution in Rwanda. Information received from them has been found to have demotivated those who may have wanted to repatriate. Following the first tripartite agreement⁵ of July 24, 2003, repatriation of some Rwandan refugees from Uganda took place. However, according to Williams and the Jesuit Refugee Service (2004:11), by August 2004, nearly 700 out of 2,000 repatriated refugees returned to

⁵ First Tripartite Agreement document, on file with the author.

Uganda. One of the interviewees, who repatriated in early 2004 and came back to Uganda, said that he had encountered persecution in Rwanda. He reported that his wife and child were killed in a grenade attack on the home he had repossessed upon his return to Rwanda, and he showed me scars on his body (Interview: refugee man, age 58, Nakivale, February 2011). In another case, a widow said that she had been unable to reclaim her property and land, leaving her without the means to re-establish herself. Such stories by recyclers would obviously influence the attitudes of those considering returning to Rwanda.

In October 2009, I interviewed refugees who had been repatriated before July 31, 2009 to find out their reasons for coming back to Uganda. They said that they had repatriated against their will due to push factors and threats from the GoU. In addition, they recounted poor reception and abusive language at Rukomo-Byumba reception centre in Rwanda. They added that the majority had been taken to *ingando* (investigation camps), where they said they were interrogated about their participation in the genocide by Rwandan government officials for two weeks before going home (Interview: Recyclers, Nakivale, October 2009).

Other recyclers enumerated more reasons for coming back to Uganda: One older woman (aged 61) told me about the disappearance of her two sons who went missing during the night security patrols (*irondo*). Similarly, a woman reported that her husband was taken at night and killed. Several women reported imprisonment of their husbands on arrival in Rwanda. Another man reported having been summoned to a *Gacaca* court on genocide charges but escaped, knowing very well that no Hutu wins a case in the *Gacaca* courts. Others spoke of failure to recover their property in Rwanda. A Tutsi woman who survived the genocide explained that she was rejected by her family for testifying in defence of a Hutu man who saved her during the genocide at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) in Arusha, Tanzania. The recyclers also noted that they had no social networks and they were not welcomed by the community members in Rwanda. As Human Rights Watch (2010) also indicates, despite the will of the Rwandan government to create optimum conditions for return, the Rwandan population at home may themselves be less than excited by the prospect of extending welcome to Hutu exiles. The recyclers said that there is no peace in Rwanda and the whole situation is traumatising, but that UNHCR does not listen to their pleas (focus group discussion [recyclers]: Nakivale, October 2009).

More recyclers interviewed in 2011 said that since returning to Uganda they had not been re-granted their refugee status, which leaves them impoverished with no assistance. However, they noted that they are surviving with the support of their social networks (i.e. fellow refugees), who are housing them in the camps while they await the results of their applications (Interview: recyclers, Nakivale, May 2011). My interviews with the Senior Protection Officer and officers from the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) in Kampala about re-granting refugee status to recyclers indicated they had no sympathy for such people, and they maintained they were ineligible for consideration by the REC. They said that recyclers' reasons for returning included: 'I did not find my land, my neighbour was arrested, when we reached Rwanda some people were imprisoned, some people were abducted.' According to these officials, these are not good reasons for granting them refugee status again, hence they have been rejected. (Interview: Senior Protection Officer and OPM officials, Kampala, July 2011).

New Rwandan asylum seekers as information networks

How can you tell someone to return to Rwanda when there are people still fleeing? (Interview: Rwandan refugees Oruchinga, 2011).

The Rwandan refugees have continued coming to Uganda. Amnesty International (2010) reported that 98% of Rwandan refugees newly arriving in Uganda have been refused asylum. The Refugee Desk Officer said that they receive over 14 people from Rwanda on a weekly basis, but sometimes they come in larger numbers (Interview: January 2011). I carried out most interviews with asylum seekers in April 2010, when considerable numbers (about 2000) of new asylum seekers from Rwanda came to Uganda. The fluidity of Rwandan refugees in Uganda is also on account of persecution, human rights violations and repressive laws in Rwanda as also mentioned by the recyclers (Interview: asylum seekers, Nakivale, March and April 2010). The asylum seekers said that when a Tutsi dies in a village, it is always a Hutu who is accused of the murder. Even causes of deaths are differently explained. As one interviewee said: 'If a Hutu dies, it is taken as normal death but if a Tutsi dies, they say s/he has been killed.' Other reasons for flight were cited: Being forced to pay for the property destroyed during genocide, racial discrimination in different sectors, being forced to work for genocide survivors, people forced to testify against those accused of genocide, forced to join Rwandese Patriotic Front/Army (RPF/A), no freedom of expression, people forced to share property with unknown persons, unfair treatment, Hutus labeled as belonging to the *Interahamwe* (Hutu militia which took part in the genocide) and high taxes such as those for *mutuelle de sante* (social health insurance).

Today, the many people fleeing Rwanda include both Hutus and Tutsis, judges, journalists, army generals, government officials and ministers (Interview: Rwandan refugees, 2011). In a presentation at Oxford University in February 2013, Filip Reyntjens (2013) said, 'In one regime, over 13 government ministers have fled Rwanda so far.' As one interviewee commented, 'The hunters are now the hunted. If President Kagame's right hand people in the government are fleeing Rwanda, like Kayumba Nyamwasa, who are we to return?' Another interview, a refugee leader, said: 'If the elites are fleeing, why then is the government of Rwanda interested in us the peasants to return? I do not think we have a greater contribution to the country compared to the fleeing elites.'

While refugees attribute their flight to persecution and human rights violations in Rwanda (Interview: asylum seekers, 2010), the Ugandan officials interviewed said that the porous nature of the Uganda's borders, poor immigration policies, the availability of land and the refugees' social networks have led to massive flows of refugees into Uganda. I interviewed a Ugandan official, who suggested that refugees from Rwanda are just coming to Uganda because of what he described as a 'diffusion' factor – moving from an area of high population density to one with a lower density – and are following their relatives who are already habituated in the refugee settlements in search of land. But, he asserted, they do not have any well-founded fear of persecution that has made them flee their country. A UNHCR official added that most of them are looking for opportunities in Uganda but they use insecurity in Rwanda as a scapegoat. When their claims of refugee status are rejected by the REC, they do not appeal, but immediately disappear within Uganda's communities (Interview: UNHCR Protection Officer, February 2011).

Stayees as information networks to Rwandan refugees

The Rwandan refugees also get news through their social networks – relatives, friends and community members – who have remained in Rwanda. Some have relatives in government who keep them up-to-date by phone. Rogge (1991:26) states that, while whole villages or communities often flee as a group during a refugee migration, frequently, some members of the community are unable or unwilling to flee. These stay at home and become essential to the repatriation decision-making process by passing on to the refugees news about conditions in the home country (see also Collins 1996).

Interviewees said that the stayees have been important sources of information for them. They update them on everything that takes place in Rwanda. An interviewee pointed out that his home in Rwanda is near the border with Uganda, which enables his relatives to visit him. One of his relatives came to visit him in Oruchinga Settlement and told him that if it was possible, he would also flee Rwanda because of fear of persecution and lack of means of livelihoods, e.g. land for agriculture (Interview: refugee man, age 39, May 2011). Some of those who have participated in ‘go and see, come and tell’ visits pointed out that stayees in their communities informed them that some returnees have been imprisoned while others have gone missing. Hence, conditions in Rwanda are not yet conducive to their repatriation. This information received has been shared amongst refugees’ networks within the settlements, hence their reluctance to return.

Returnees as information networks

Refugees in Uganda said that returnees who have managed to stay in Rwanda provide them with valuable information that helps them in repatriation decision-making. During interviews (2011), some refugees said that they believe in returnees’ information more than that from their relatives who stayed in Rwanda. This is because of their previous experience as refugees; they are believed to provide true and accurate information about Rwanda (Interviews: refugees 2011). In the words of a refugee in Nakivale:

We also get information about Rwanda from those who returned and stayed in Rwanda. They tell us that exile is better because life is not easy for them at home. They have not obtained their property and land leaving them with no means of livelihoods. They are harassed and not well accepted in the community. They feel more of refugees at home than when they were here in exile (Rwandan refugee, Nakivale, April 2011).

This is in line with Hogan who noted that an essential part of any refugee information system is the returnees who report back to the refugees in exile about the conditions at home. The information returned by these repatriates is often considered by the refugees to be the most reliable of all possible information sources because they have been refugees themselves. Returnees understand what kind of information is most valued by those still in exile (1992:423).

The returnees in Rwanda I interviewed in August 2012 redefined repatriation as impoverishment in their own country. They noted that they lack freedom and proper means of livelihood, i.e. land and property, food, jobs and other opportunities. Some said that it has been difficult for them to get social networks to lean on in Rwanda. As a returnee said, ‘In Uganda, you could easily get someone to give you food when you are hungry, but this is not possible here.’ The majority interviewed noted that if they could get a chance, they would escape back to Uganda and join their relatives and friends. Some women reported

imprisonment of their husbands on arrival, while other returnees have not been able to reclaim their property since returning. Other challenges mentioned were participation in civilians night patrols (*irondo*) and participation in community service (*umuganda*) which they were not doing in Uganda. Rwanda was said to have complicated laws such as that pertaining to genocide ideology, which are not clear enough for them (Interviews: Returnees, Rwanda, August 2012). As one returnee noted:

Since I came back in 2009, I have not felt at home, I live in fear of breaking any law. If one misses to participate in the community work even when sick, a returnee is punished first. We work for others such as genocide survivors and we have no time to work for ourselves. Some people have been killed during night patrols. We live in fear of who is next to flee, to be imprisoned, to be killed or abducted. It was better in Uganda and I hope to escape back to my home.

The information obtained from their networks about Rwanda has been found to affect the timing and motivation of those thinking of returning. Coupled with the role of social networks in Uganda, this information has helped Rwandan refugees to decide not to return.

11 Conclusion

Many countries in Africa are grappling with the question of what to do with refugees who choose not to return home and even those who repatriate and return again to the country of asylum, as in the case of Rwandan refugees in Uganda. Social networks through social capital or the capacity of the individual to command resources through adherence to networks and broader social structures have been found to play an important role in supporting refugees, especially in the repatriation process in Uganda. These refugees already have close ethnic, linguistic, social or economic links with the local population and the country of asylum. The field data suggests that the presence of Banyarwanda in Uganda as nationals, migrants and refugees (see also Mamdani 2002:162; Mushemeza 2007:73) and the time spent in exile – two decades of exile – has created strong social networks for the Rwandan refugees, contributing to their reluctance to return. Moreover, intermarriages were said to have strengthened their bond and increased their networks in Uganda. From their networks, refugees benefit socially, emotionally, psychologically, economically, information-wise and materially. In addition, during the repatriation process, the Rwandan refugees have tended to escape to their relatives, friends and co-ethnics in Uganda's communities as a strategy to avoid returning.

Both kin and non-kin relationships for Rwandan refugees in Uganda were said to have been important in rebuilding their livelihoods in the country of asylum. Information networks comprised of recyclers, returnees, new asylum seekers and stayees in Rwanda were also found to provide information on the current security situation in Rwanda, which keeps the refugees abreast of information that influences their repatriation decision-making. The news obtained was said to be disseminated to every Rwandan refugee in the camp to help them in the repatriation decision-making process. This information influences their perception towards home. As Koser (1997) notes, the way refugees perceive conditions at home is crucial to their repatriation decision-making. Koser and Pinkerton (2002:10) explain the presence of social networks using the affinity hypothesis, which states that the higher the density of the network of friends and family in a society, the lower the probability of migration. In the context of Rwandan refugees, the presence of their social networks in the country of asylum has lowered

the probability of them returning to Rwanda. The refugees also feel that they enjoy better access to social services and land, enjoy more security and have greater prospects for naturalisation in Uganda than those who return to their country of origin.

Whereas there is a growing body of literature on social networks and migration, much of this work has not paid adequate attention to the role of social networks in repatriation, especially where refugees are reluctant to return to their countries of origin. The ultimate contribution of this study has been towards the generation of knowledge on this contemporary issue in refugee repatriation. Using the case of Rwandan refugees, I hope to help policy makers design repatriation policies that are people-centred and mindful of the historical, social, economic, ethnic and political context.

12 References

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13 Appendix

Interviews (in order of appearance in text)

Interviewee	Location (if given)	Date
Camp Commandant	Oruchinga	April 2011
Ugandan official	Mbarara	April 2011
Rwandan refugees	Nakivale and Oruchinga	April 2011
Host community members	Around Nakivale and Oruchinga settlements	April 2011
Elderly man	Kabingo	May 2011
Refugee Desk Officer	Mbarara	January 2011
Minister Tarsis Kabwegyere	Kampala	7 May, 2011
Focus group discussion: youth	Nakivale	April 2011
Refugee man, age 43	Nakivale	April 2011
Refugee Desk Officer		2011
UNHCR Official	Nakivale	February 2011
Camp Commandant	Nakivale	February 2011
Refugee woman	Oruchinga	June 2011
Interviewee	Oruchinga	June 2011
Refugee man	Nakivale	2011
Male, age 73	Nakivale	2011
Chairman of Local Council Five	Isingiro District	July 2011
Male	Nakivale	2011
Rwandan refugees	Nakivale and Oruchinga	2011
Refugee man, age 58	Nakivale	February 2011
Recyclers	Nakivale	October 2009
Focus group discussion (recyclers)	Nakivale	October 2009
Recyclers	Nakivale	May 2011
Senior Protection Officer; officials from the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM)	Kampala	July 2011
Rwandan refugees	Oruchinga	2011
Refugee Desk Officer		January 2011
Asylum seekers	Nakivale	March and April 2010
Rwandan refugees		2011
Asylum seekers		2010
UNHCR protection officer	Mbarara	February 2011
Refugee man, age 39	Oruchinga	May 2011
Refugees		2011
Rwandan refugee	Nakivale	April 2011
Returnees	Rwanda	August 2012
Refugee woman	Oruchinga	June 2011
Interviewee	Oruchinga	June 2011
Refugee woman, age 34	Oruchinga	June 2011