Oral History and Performance in the Aftermath of Organized Violence: An Epistemological Contribution

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Abstract

Oral History and Performance in the Aftermath of Organized Violence:
An Epistemological Contribution.

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Concordia University, 2020

Can transdisciplinary, relational research-creation strategies open pathways to wellness, emancipation, and finding one's voice in a post-colonial context of genocide, war, organized violence, and exile?

What are some affordances of performative inquiry, writing as inquiry, and other arts-based pedagogies and practices when applied to oral histories, memory work and sense-making?

Can community dialogue, creative storytelling, deep listening help move toward healing in the aftermath of organized violence and traumatic loss, and exile?

Can improvisational playback theatre with difficult stories appease the silences, and help defeat intergenerational transmission of the traumas of persecution and genocide and war.

As a child and grandchild of survivors of early anti-Tutsi injustices in Rwanda, as a wife and mother, I seek non-professionalized and non-medicalized solutions—accessible metaphors, tools and techniques—for use within my own afrodiasporic community setting, and beyond, as a new generation works through questions of memory, identity, change and transformation.

My learnings emerge out of a very personal perspective, reflecting more than 20 years of experience as an activist and organizer within the Rwandan diaspora in Canada, my work as a licensed mental health professional focused on the wellness of racialized minorities, my creative collaborations as a community artist, and the community-based research I have undertaken as a volunteer co-applicant of the 7-year SSHRC-funded CURA project *Life Stories of Montrealers displaced by genocide, war and other human rights abuses*, based at the Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling at Concordia University.

Acknowledgments

Seka gororoka! [Smile! Be at ease.] These are the words on my grandmother's tombstone, and on my cousin's tattoo. *Turi kumwe*. [We are together.] Connected beyond life and death. Sogokuru , Nyogokuru, Alain, Samuel, Papi, Valou, Oncle Fred . . . we think of you.

Ziga and David, I love you.
And my big family : Josh and Josi, Bekah and Esteban. Teta and Andrew, Vyara and Mario, Charles, Eza, Rugwe, Kwezi. Alain, Nathalie and Fiona, Emilie and Manu, Jean Philippe and Jr., Nicolas, Raphaël and Travis, Patrick, Julia and Vincent and Victor, Michael, Felicité and Sandra and families, Grégoire, Ngangi, Aimable and Rosalie (Papa et Maman) Nyogokuru, Emile and Conso, Bello and Valérie, Radegonde and Pierre, André and Mathilde, Assumpta (Tita), Jacqui and JP, Mimi and Papi, Isabelle and Claude, Mika and Marie, Philou and Masha and Katia, François and Sylvie, Sarah and Dirk, Ted and Margaret, Genna, Max and the families. Rose and Alfred, Jacques and Josée, Jacqueline and André, Gilbert and Sarah, Gildas and Kenta, Stella, Janvier and all the children. Odette, Dan, Myles and Tasha.

Joliane, Alan, Mira, Lucy, Paul, Warren, Deb, Nisha. Always.
Ramona and Ulla, thank you. I can't wait for the next chapter.
Shira, Dan and Bean, Anke and Chris, Jhave and Sophie. Stephanie. Farah.
Your friendship means so much.
Stéphane, Delphine, Sandrine, Pauline, Marie Josée, Jeanne Marie, Marie Claude.
Femmes de têtes, inspirantes, engagées.

Isangano weee! We are middle-aged:) Even Daoudi is grown! How did that happen?
Leontine and family, Choupette and family. A new generation, coming of age.
I'm so proud of us!
PAGE-Rwanda, merci d'exister.
My community, one love.

My committee, thank you for your patience, your support and your trust.
I am filled with gratitude for all I have received.

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> "I would like to have legitimacy. I would like my voice to count."
> "That is the dumbest reason I've ever heard."
>
> Conversation with an academic elder

> (Following my outraged whining about this comment to a friendly ear)
> "Well, he did have a point, Lisa."
> "What?!"
> "You've got it backwards. You're going to have to stake a claim first. You have to first believe [that your experience counts as legitimate knowledge], defend yourself and convince others. Then, if you're still standing, you get your diploma. That is how it works."
>
> Conversation with an academic ally

In a chapter called *"de l'énoncé à la thèse"* (from question to thesis/argument; my own translation), Louis-Claude Paquin proposes, as a first step in a research creation project, to write up a journey.[1] The journey I would like to speak of is the one I embarked on when I joined Concordia University's Community-University Research Alliance (CURA) project "Life Stories of Montrealers Displaced by Genocide, War, and Other Human Rights Violations" (Montreal Life Stories or MLS for short). The MLS project was based at Concordia University's Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling (COHDS), where I have played a key role for 15 years.

I am not a genocide survivor myself. I was born in Butare, in southern Rwanda, in 1970 and spent my childhood in Cologne from 1972 to 1982. I arrived in Montreal in 1982 where I live to this day with my husband and son. I have not lived in precolonial or colonial Rwanda, nor was I persecuted there in the 1950s, or 60s, or 70s, as members of my family were. I was not raised in refugee camps in neighbouring countries, nor have I gone to war, nor did I experience

[1] Louis-Claude Paquin, *Méthodologie de la recherche création: le praticien réflexif*, 2015,

the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, or the aftermath there. And yet most of my adult life has been spent thinking, writing, dancing, and performing different parts of this (his)story in order to work it through.

Investigating persecution, displacement, and genocide has felt like both an obsession and an abyss of pain and terror and fear. I deeply believed "sense making" to be necessary to create change, but I was afraid of doing it alone. I was afraid I would become a crazy old lady rocking alone in a library somewhere. I felt a tremendous sense of powerlessness and was overwhelmed by the way things were, by pockets of poverty and abuse within my own family, and by unwellness in the larger Rwandan community deriving from people's immigration, education, and employment status. And I worried about the ways in which people had processed what had come before their arrival in Montreal: migration, adaptation, dislocation, exile, refugeeism, war, genocide.

With Isangano, a cultural group of young Rwandans in Montreal, I developed the project Tuganire, which took its name from a Kinyarwanda word meaning "let us talk together, let's find solutions." Even though empowerment was always my intended goal, my understanding that "we" as a community were unwell was a contested premise. During Tuganire, I remember specific people in the Montreal Rwandan community questioning whether we all agreed that we were doing badly or even had problems to try and find solutions for. I persisted. I may not have known what wellness or freedom looked like, but I knew the oppressive silences I had grown up with in my family and community. I also knew the overwhelmingly non-African, vexing external and "expert" colonial Western gaze, the explanations in books or writing about us rather than by us, the incredible feeling of helplessness at the vast range and number of services and help individuals and families needed, and the many layers of trauma we had experienced: the familial

traumas I knew firsthand—loss, suicide, abuse, mental health issues, substance abuse, illicit behaviour, poverty, refugee life, exile, dislocation—and those I knew communally—exile, oppression, persecution, forced migration, multiple loss, war, genocide, and, more broadly, colonization, Christianization, and other imposed oppressions.

In 2005, as an organizer active in Montreal's Rwandan community, I was invited to participate in the MLS project as a community co-applicant and steering committee member.

Image 1. Gatineau: Josias Semujanga has played important roles in the life of the Rwandan diasapora, from early days of exile in Burundi to the present. He was one of the first Rwandan-Canadians to return to help with post-1994 rebuilding of the educational system. Here he leads a history lesson for a group of youth at the summer 2011 week-long Itorero. All images by David Ward unless otherwise noted.

I spent the next seven years experimenting with interdisciplinary oral history and storytelling in the Rwandan-Canadian and other post-trauma contexts. The first two years of preparation resembled a mating dance. I did not know then that I was stepping into an experience that would change my life.

From the very beginning of the MLS project, the aspiration of a shared authority[2] was translated into the project's organizational structure by pairing university researchers with community groups. Only committed pairs went on to be part of the project. It made for much criticism, because many communities living in Montreal today have been afflicted with violent

[2] Michael H. Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History*, SUNY Series in Oral and Public History (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990).

pasts, starting of course with Canada's own aboriginal peoples. However, individuals without official group affiliations (but with important stories to tell) or researchers unable or unwilling to commit to a community organization for the five years of the proposed research project were not accepted as co-applicants. Isangano did become one of the 18 community groups that joined with 40 researchers to form the five-year MLS project. Isangano and PAGE-Rwanda were the two community groups making up the Rwandan working group. We were paired with two Rwandan-Canadian scholars, Dr. Josias Semujanga, professor of literature at Université de Montréal and later Dr. Emmanuel Habimana, professor of clinical psychology at Université du Québec à Trois Rivières.

We knew nothing about oral history when we were first invited by Dr. Frank Chalk, director of the Montreal Institute of Genocide Studies, to be a part of a SSHRC-funded community university-research alliance project (CURA) to be led by Dr. Steven High, Canada research chair in oral and public history. The project sought to bring together researchers and community groups in an effort to make research more accessible and relevant to life beyond the academy. Their stated goal was to gather 1,000 life stories from survivors of genocide, war, and other human rights violations.

By 2007, the different partners had been selected and the actual work began. We were initiated into oral history and, more specifically, life story practice. We were held, or held each other, through a collaboratively crafted ethics protocol and very strong ideals and principles. We were in a higher learning institution, led by a man who had "no skin in the game"—that is, not at all invested in the content of our stories or in defining us. He wasn't a genocide scholar. He was not an Africanist or an expert on Cambodia. He was interested in the practice of oral history, and in progressive politics. It was profoundly freeing. I keep thinking about the generations of

Western historians and other social science scholars and the harm their so-called research has contributed to—how much silencing, misrepresentation, and erasure continues to this day. The MLS project ran completely contrary to that.

Between 2005 and 2012, I interviewed survivors and participated in Elizabeth Miller's Mapping Memories project[3], Sandeep Bhagwati's *Racines éphémères, Gestes déplacés* project[4], and Stéphane Martelly's *Je me suis parcouru moi-même* creative writing workshop. I worked with other members of the Rwandan working group to organize intergenerational dialogue days and with Steven High on "*une fleuve dans le fleuve*"[5] a guided audio walk connecting the genocide stories of my community with public spaces in Montreal. I co-facilitated, with Devora Neumark and Pauline Ngirumpatse, a story circle called Of Blood, Marrow, and Bone and co-founded, developed, and performed with the Living Histories playback theatre ensemble. I created and performed *Le petit coin intact*, an autoethnographic one woman show presented at Montreal's Monument-National. These projects, transdisciplinary in nature, seemed to call for a transdisciplinary study in response. It has not been easy.

For the past eight years, I have been trying to do justice to my experience in the MLS project by sharing my learnings. Two years ago, my esteemed supervisor, Dr. Steven High, broke my heart when he said, "You know you will eventually have to leave, right?" I knew he was right. The project had been over for six years. It has been very difficult to leave, hard to say goodbye to the MLS project. I belonged there. I was sheltered, safe, and finally able to make meaning with the stories of displacement, dislocation, genocide, and war my family and community had been through. My community's stories were centred in the project in ways I had

[3] http://www.mappingmemories.ca/

[4] https://matralab.hexagram.ca/projects/racines-ephemeres-lamentations/

[5] https://livingarchivesvivantes.org/resources/audio-walk/

never experienced before in my life. I felt, and still feel, connected to the research centre, to the faculty, and to the other community affiliates who were a part of the MLS adventure. Working with our stories in a spirit of community, equality, and creativity allowed me to make a home in the MLS and it to make or be a home for me. My status in the project was somewhat liminal.

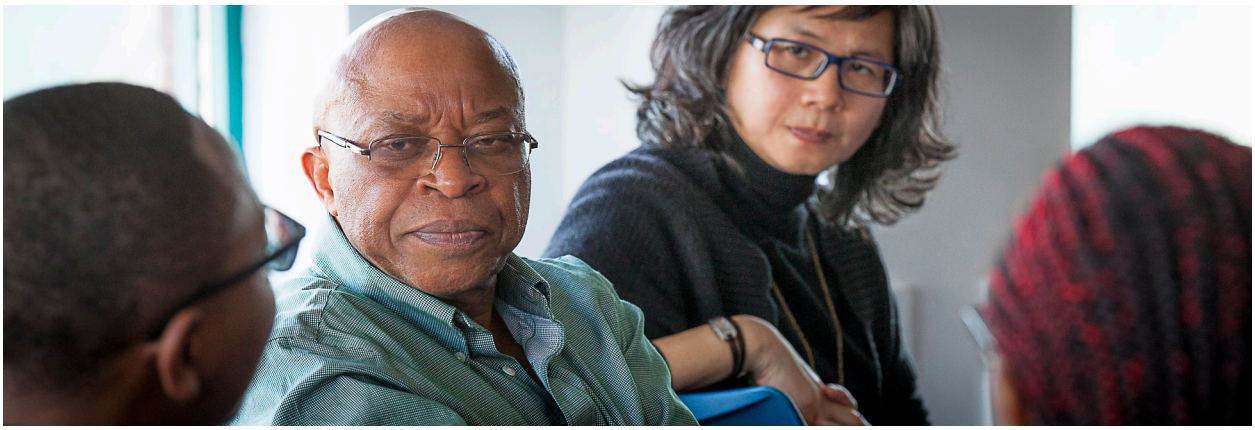

Image 2. Montreal: Emmanuel Habimana was an outspoken critic of the Habyarimana regime (1973-1994) and lost his university scholarship as a result. He did not always identify as Hutu, but in response to the atrocities of 1994 now feels compelled to do so as a gesture of contrition and reconciliation. A clinical psychologist, he works with genocide survivors in Quebec and Rwanda.

As a community co-applicant, I was not faculty and not (yet) a student. I was able to sidestep the usual hierarchies. Working with the community and the arts also meant a disciplinary freedom, and the good relationships among members meant I could participate and contribute in many different ways, and experiment.

My committee has allowed me complete freedom and supported me. And yet, I have struggled to write this thesis. I kept running away from feeling the uncertainty of what was not yet there. As I pulled and cajoled myself back to writing, I tried to stay aware of the thoughts driving my fears. I know today that there was value in the struggle. It is more important to me to document my struggle than it is to conform, or to write to institutional norms. I will not give my power or time away again. The power is in the details: the specificity of my own struggle.

Dissertation overview

In this introductory chapter, I set the scene and explain what is to come, as well as some of the context and concepts I like to work and think with, such as living inquiry. Karen Meyer writes that "as human beings we belong to the world long before birth" and that "each of us is born into the course of a larger human story and existing timeline, place, culture and family."[6] In her essay "Living Inquiry" Meyer explores Heidegger's understanding of being in the world and what that might mean. Being in the world echoes Abbé Alexis Kagame's foundations of a Bantu Rwandan philosophy of *being, being here, being with*. But where the Heideggerian idea seems to be a "unitary phenomenon", *Kuba, kuba ho, kuba na* unfolds a relational attention to self, to place, and to the other. When I asked my father to explain it to me, he became very animated and explained that Kuba was like the fire, the energy of life—a controversial idea in African thought today. Abbé Kagame was a mentor to a generation of African scholars and also a controversial figure who was at once a member of the Basinga clan of traditional court historians and a member of the clergy. In his thesis, he argued that Rwandans (and Africans) were people and had souls, on the basis of an exploration of the Kinyarwanda language.[7] Influenced by Father Placide Tempels' 1945 book *La philosophie Bantoue*[8], Kagame's *La philosophie bantu-rwandaise de l'être* became one of the foundations through which and against which contemporary African philosophy was founded.[9] My father's dissertation argued that traditional body training was

[6] Karen Meyer, "Living Inquiry: Me, My Self, and Other," *JCT Online* 26, no. 1 (2010): 85.

[7] Alexis Kagame, *La philosophie bantu-rwandaise de l'être*, vol. 6 / 1, Mémoires de la classe des sciences morales et politiques (N.S.) ARSOM (Gembloux, Bruxelles: Académie royale des sciences coloniales, 1955).

[8] Placide Tempels, *La philosophie Bantoue* (Elizabethville: Lovania, 1945).

[9] Delphine Abadie, "Reconstruire la philosophie à partir de l'afrique: Une utopie postcoloniale," PhD diss., Université de Montréal, 2018. Abadie's thesis is a beautiful piece of writing to think with, learn, order, and connect African philosophy past and present from a postcolonial perspective.

indeed sport and not folklore or play, by which he sought to rehabilitate the dignity of traditional practices.[10]

I have been trying to explore the knowledge that was there before I was, and that I am also a part of. In what ways does my artistic or reflexive practice, culture, or tradition participate in knowledge or knowledge making (I think about that in the context of the MLS in chapter 2). Rwandan born, I do not speak the language, nor do I live there. And yet that is what I identify with in terms of ascendency. It is a common experience for second-generation displaced people to not belong yet to the place of arrival and to not belong anymore to the place(s) of departure—and yet to feel a need to declare oneself of somewhere or something. As a racialized person, my experience living in Germany or Quebec has not been one of belonging. My preferred position used to be one where I did not have to carry any colours or allegiances. But it makes communication more challenging when I do not say where I am coming from or whether I come from a shared premise. I have had to situate myself several times over the years. For example, when I was co-opted into the steering committee of a large cultural organization in Montreal, I was chosen as a black and young person. Around the table were representatives of the city's largest cultural institutions, and I wondered how to sit around the table when I was representing no group. Thinking I might be able to carry the concerns of a larger body or community to the table, I sought whom I could legitimately serve among several black or minority communities. I could have gone in several directions—first among them, to refuse being co-opted and quit the committee. I chose to stay and serve, as a Rwandan-Canadian artist working with the symbols and practices of my Rwandan community. When I thought in terms of

[10] Aimable Ndejuru, "Studien zur Rolle der Leibesübungen in der traditionellen Gesellschaft Ruandas [Investigations into the Function of Physical Exercises in the Social Tradition of Rwanda]," PhD diss., University of Cologne, 1983.

"we," those were the people I was a part of and the culture and art forms—and questions—I was filled up with. Questions like, why were we dancing kings and cows, warriors and gentlewomen of old in urban diasporic contemporary spaces?

In an essay titled "African Modes of Self-Writing" Achille Mbembe, one of today's most important African scholars, challenges my unquestioned beliefs—I refer here to that stable or singular or homogenous point of departure, which I sought more or less consciously. (I speak to the ideas of dynamism and instability in chapter 4.) Back then I asked questions about dancing cows. But when I stepped into the ring of oral history practice my questions were about wellness. I was claiming a thread from Abbé Kagame to my father then myself, not at all in terms of the content, but in terms of a struggle for value. And I felt ambivalent about it. I didn't want to argue that Rwandans have souls, as the Abbé did in 1955, or that our traditional forms of training bodies were sport, not play, as my father did in 1983. In fact, I didn't want to argue. I wanted to step into the ring as equal.

Looking back at previous efforts, Mbembe writes: "The effort to determine the conditions under which the African subject could attain full selfhood, become self-conscious, and be answerable to no one else soon encountered historicist thinking in two forms that led it into a dead end."[11] He rejects what he calls a "celebration of autochthony—that is, a construction of the self understood in terms of both victimhood and mutilation"—arguing that that sort of thinking leads to a conception of politics as an either/or proposition between "a recovery of an essential but lost nature—the liberation of an essence—or as a sacrificial process."[12] Mbembe argues that African identity does not exist as substance; rather it is constituted through a series of practices

[11] Joseph-Achille Mbembe, "African Modes of Self-Writing," trans. Steven Rendall, *Public Culture* 14, no. 1 (Winter 2002): 240.

[12] Mbembe, "African Modes," 272.

that he calls *practices of the self*: a set of mobile, reversible, and unstable forms and idioms.[13] This dissertation is about the practices of the self we developed in the MLS journey.

In chapter 2, I reflect on the epistemological contribution of the MLS project to the transdisciplinary practice of oral history, engaging thoughts and ideas of artists and scholars, theories, and ways of learning and knowing from Indigenous and other disciplinary backgrounds in the social sciences and the humanities.

Image 3. Montreal: An awareness raising event presented at Concordia University by PAGE-Rwanda. At center left is Callixte Kabayiza, founder and then-president of the organization.

I begin the chapter with a true story, one that has haunted me since the early days of this journey. It involves a question that came up when I had to justify my practice to scholars outside of the MLS project. While the goal of the larger MLS project was to understand the experience of displacement and mass violence from the perspectives of the people who lived it, my intention was—and remains—individual and collective change. Empowerment or freedom or wellness was always my intended goal. When I started, I did not know how I would go about "achieving" my goal. I was asking where we, as a community of Rwandans in Canada, were coming from, where we were, and where we wanted to go. I wanted to get at the "issues" and to "fix" them.

[13] Ibid.

In chapter 3, I explore what liberation means to me, the emancipatory aspirations and intentions I have been holding while on this journey, where they came from, and how I have engaged them. Indigenous governance and decolonization scholar Taiaiake Alfred, in the foreword to *Lighting the Eighth Fire*, writes: "When I think of liberation, I think of how our grandparents and great-grandparents lived. It seems so clear, when we reflect on the words of our ancestors, that liberation is all just a matter of getting back in touch with a way of life that has respect, sacrifice, love, honesty, and the quest for balance at its core."[14] I agree with Alfred, but that is not all. I want the simplicity and clarity of knowing what really has value, but I am not interested in nostalgia. Nostalgia is familiar. I want any relationship with the past to be fluid, generative, and dynamic. I know, for example, that I should have completed my dissertation and moved on from the MLS project sooner, but I must confess that living in a familiar "golden past" was comforting to someone like me who grew up as a child of exiles. My family fled their country in the 1970s and survived by holding on to cultural values and traditions of an era gone by, a time before their own lifetime, when the people they belong to were proud, powerful, and privileged, a time untouched by colonization. In some ways, the MLS project provided a safe, brave, and protected space with boundaries porous enough to allow one to come up against the outside world and feel some friction and confrontation and invitation for growth, while also being firm enough to allow one to have the sense of an inner and an outer world. I was a part of a community-university research alliance project (MLS) and one of its working groups (the Rwandan working group), safely tucked away in a university research centre (COHDS), and thus part of the MLS inner world, a world where the stories of my family and community were centred, just as all of the other working group stories were centred. The inner world was a safe

[14] Taiaiake Alfred, "Foreword," *Lighting the Eighth Fire*: *The Liberation, Resurgence, and Protection of Indigenous Nations*, ed. Leanne Simpson (Winnipeg, MB: ARP Books, 2008), 6.

and supportive place to process particularly difficult stories, creatively and in community. The MLS in its heyday comprised 18 community groups, 40 academics, and countless students and artists and other citizens—enough to allow me to experiment and collaborate and listen and play with others and to start elaborating my voice and point of view. The outer world, in this case, was the academic world outside the confines of the MLS, a world that had not signed up to our values of shared authority. That disciplinary, academic outside world had not necessarily agreed to community members shifting from being informants or sources to collaborators, equals[15], being trained to pick up a recorder and a camera and to interview or transcribe or even be invited to reflect on and interpret what they were hearing and experiencing. For the outside world, the work of community members was not necessarily valuable or receivable, not at all a given, while the inner world was the one within the MLS project, where we had spent quite a bit of time elaborating and deciding on and negotiating the ethics, rules, and principles of our collaboration. My larger objective: making a tasty life of freedom by working through the difficult stories in my family and community. The journey would take me from the inner world to the outer … One of the ways to evaluate the quality of change was to see how easily I could stand in the choices I made, regardless of outcome.

In chapter 4, I think through what our playback theatre practice allowed in the context of the MLS project and in what ways it allowed us to work through our stories and become familiar with the material we were struggling with. I reflect on coming to see the ways in which playing with our own and other people's stories allowed us to engage the silence and ruptures of violence and to "stock the waters and fill the well." I also reflect on choosing playback as a form to encourage multiple perspectives in our complex, polarized Rwandan community, forgoing

[15] Of course there were differences. And even tensions. I do not mean to be reductive. There were structural differences, like very different motivations and working conditions and training, etc.

accepted conceptions of reconciliation or therapy and adopting instead ideas of appeasement and reconciling with our own stories first.

Chapter 5 attends to my family's life stories and speaks to the challenges of listening to family members' difficult stories. I touch on ethical questions that arose within the project and explore what I learned and how I learned it, as well as the receding silence of the stories not told. This chapter aims to honour oral history, the practice and pretext to this most extraordinary MLS journey I have been fortunate to go through. The chapter centres an excerpt of a transcript of my mother's interview where we revisit a period of her life I had only ever glimpsed: her eight-month incarceration in Rwanda's notorious prison "1930."

In chapter 6 I engage the process and potential of creative writing: the becoming of self as author; the journey of gaining authority over the fragments and questions and complexities of life; and the exploration of ordinary questions posed from within: What does it mean to inhabit no more, but no less, than one's own location? In this chapter I revisit the writing and performing of *Le petit coin intact*, the bilingual (French/English) performance piece I created and performed in response to the MLS experience, and describe the creative writing workshop led by author, poet, and scholar Stéphane Martelly. A proponent of Derrida's work[16], Stéphane was familiar with the power in the margins. She invited us to work there alongside the life story and to experience our journey as "a unique progression through words: one which belongs to individuals and which persists, despite history, despite the violence of memory and that of forgetting, to desire to invent something else."[17]

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[16] Stéphane Martelly, *Les jeux du dissemblable: Folie, marge, et féminin en littérature haïtienne contemporaine* (Montréal: Nota Bene, 2016).

[17] Stéphane Martelly, "S'énoncer. Renaître à l'envie d'agir. Ensemble," La Maïeutique du Petit coin intact. Retour sur une expérience d'écriture. Conférence à deux voix avec Lisa Ndejuru. Symposium du Réseau Québécois pour la Pratique des Histoires de vie (XXIIe symposium du RQPHV), De l'austérité à la plénitude, Une histoire à construire ensemble, Centre Saint-Pierre, 21 April 2016.

Image 4. Kayove: My grandfather, Pierre Claver Ndejuru, *Assistant Medical* (circa 1956)

Finally, in the conclusion, I answer the call in Audré Lorde's essay *The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action*[18] and choose to believe there is something important in our differences, in the breaking of silence and in sharing those things that are important to me. I share an excerpt of a letter my father wrote to me about Gisuna, the place where his father's body was thrown after he was assassinated. The letter speaks to some of the more difficult feelings he felt, which he shielded me from as I was growing up, creating some of the silences I have spent a long time exploring, and developing tools for working through. Or, maybe the MLS community, structure, and creative practice allowed for the difficult stories to once again take up the place trauma had evacuated them from. Something is restored in the practice of speaking of and with our dead—a relationship between our world and theirs? A practice of making … peace?

[18]Audre Lorde. "Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches." Berkeley, Calif: Crossing Press. 2007, 41-44

The conclusion also mentions that a possible next step for me is contributing to some of the ideas that are being discussed by Mbembe and other Afrodiasporic thinkers.

Writing from a first person perspective

It is important to note that as members of a Rwandan diaspora, we did not all share the same perspective. I have often wondered whether my perspective of a community in need of healing was simply a projection onto my community of my own malaise. We certainly did not all share the same malaise. Mental health, emotional and social learning, and well-being are themes that course throughout this work. They bridge my earlier graduate work in counselling, my community art work around empowerment, the arts-based, trauma-focused work we did with individuals and communities during the MLS project, and the work I would like to be doing going forward. For some of us, seeing our community struggle seemed normal: There is an acceptance and matter-of-factness about the large number of marginalized or disenfranchised people in our own families and our community and the limits of what we are each able to do. Many of the young adults in Isangano, for example, had been raised as refugees in Burundi and educated in the Rwandan-owned Collège St-Albert by an all-Rwandan staff who had been educated and organized and were intentional and militant in the nationalist pride they meant to impart to their children.[19] Nor did I have a shared perspective with the members of PAGE-Rwanda, the other Rwandan group we would join in the MLS project. PAGE consisted mostly of survivors of the 1994 genocide, people born and raised in Rwanda whose experience of the Western world was that of a haven after the horrors of the genocide.

Issues of identity and belonging played out in very different ways for all of us. I grew up in Germany in the 1970s with no Rwandan community and completely sheltered from any

[19] See Montreal Life Stories project interviews of Jeanne d'Arc Kayigamba (Babine) 2009 or Jean Serge Polisi (Cassius) 2010.

information about Rwandan affairs. My family immigrated to Montreal in 1982. When the war began in Rwanda in 1990[20], I lived in Montreal. I had just returned from visiting Africa for the very first time: Nairobi in Kenya, Bujumbura in Burundi, Kampala in Uganda, and very, very briefly Kigali in Rwanda. I had fallen in love with aunts, uncles, and cousins whom I had never met before: Jacques, Gilles, Jacqueline, Gildas, Kamomi, and Janvier, whose brother Gilbert lived with us in Montreal. I had seen my habitually tense and rather austere father happy, playful, tender, open, smiling, holding hands with his best friend, Sam. I had encountered the reality of the refugee camps my mother's family had lived in since the 1960s. I had met some of the soldiers—cousins and friends—who would attack in October 1990. I understood there was going to be a massive war effort. I had just found important pieces of myself and now I found myself torn apart: I could not sign up for war, nor could I condone the ongoing reality of the refugee camps.

During the early 1990s, communities of Rwandans were mobilizing for the war effort all around the world: in China, Russia, Switzerland, Belgium, France. In African countries, everywhere Rwandans were, we were standing, each community gathering around a group of drummers, dancers, and songs. I was at the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM) working with choreography investigating traditional Rwandan songs and dances about kings and cows and trying (and failing) to reinterpret the steps and stories for the present time. Much like the book of Genesis, these stories reference a time before time, when life was good and resources were plentiful. There was no strife and everything had an order. It was a time when Rwandans

[20] Denied the right to return to their country since 1959, the situation of Rwandan refugees was one of the most protracted in the world. The Rwandan Patriotic Front was born in 1987. Its armed body, the Rwandan Patriotic Army, launched a war against Rwanda for the right of Rwandan refugees to return.

were proud and good and free. A time when we were warriors and princesses. An idyllic time before the white man came as the legendary snake, bringing violence, mistrust, and destruction.

Culture meant different things for the diasporic Rwandan communities during exile, war, genocide, and post genocide. Before Isangano came together with the young refugees who came to Montreal in 1994, there were other groups here in Montreal. Mothers of same-age children would organize and find a space and train a group of children, often girls, in traditional song and

Image 5. Montreal: with the Expo 67 site in the background, a PAGE-Rwanda group huddles in the rain at the end of its annual genocide commemoration walk to the river.

dance and drumming. Almost every sizable Rwandan community had a group of young girls. And if there were enough boys and teachers, it would be a mixed group. Isangano included people like my cousins Jacques and Gildas. People like the Kagabo brothers, Hervé (Loulou) and Christian (Pompon). They had had great training in traditional song and dance and drumming in Burundi and Brussels. Isangano also included the girls who aged into the group from the previous one: Jeanne d'Arc (Tatine), Babine, and their sister Winnie; Sandra Sezi, her sister and their cousins; the Gakwerere sisters, Jeanette and Annita, and their younger siblings; the Gasana sisters, who arrived during that time. Some came directly from Rwanda having survived the slaughter: Frederic (Kiko) Mugwaneza, Yvette (Choupette). Isangano's role was always very important: We were perceived to be a guardian of the cultural aspect of Rwandan tradition.

Organizing and holding that central function in a community, even such a small one, took much time and effort. We were well recognized and appreciated by members of the community. At its peak membership, Isangano had 40 active performing members. It was a family of sorts, taking care of each other and raising each other in many ways, meeting weekly to drum, sing, and dance about cows, pride, courage, beauty, and the glorious days of old. Isangano filled many of its members' needs for belonging, competence, and identification. People could share the strange reality of genocide, the struggle of being newly arrived and having people still in Rwanda or elsewhere. They could share their money troubles. Every week we were together: drumming, clapping, laughing, stomping our feet, singing, affirming our lives. And yet I felt that people were living in a type of suspension. We weren't making lives for ourselves. Isangano, the youth group, was a cultural group focused on traditional Rwandan culture. Its members were mostly children of Rwandans of the diaspora. A few were child survivors of 1994 and a few were of mixed heritage, but the focus of Isangano was youth, community, and culture. PAGE-Rwanda, on the other hand, was initiated for and by genocide survivors. A large part of the membership was made up of direct survivors, that is, people who had been hunted in Rwanda in 1994 and had survived, as well as those who had lived here and had lost many, many of their family members during the genocide. Direct survivors who were actually there in Rwanda, often people of faith, Catholic or evangelical, seemed to be "getting on with life" more rapidly than the rest of us. They married and worked and were very active, studying and finding work. They also tended to be more traditional, with more "authentically recognizable" Rwandan values of hard work and family, whereas we, the children of the diaspora, had been culturally influenced by the many places we had lived before Montreal, and we seemed to struggle and seek solace within the group. In hindsight, and thinking about the importance of the group in our lives, the protection,

community, care, belonging, creativity, art and tradition, attachment, security and safety in numbers afforded by collective life there may not have been many motivators for young immigrants like us to seek our fortunes, take risks in relationships, and struggle in a society that "othered" us.

Image 6. Montreal: Police escort the annual commemoration walk through city streets.

In "Myth, Impotence, and Survival in the Concentration Camps," Anna Bravo, Lilia Davite, and Daniele Jalla write about the capacity of mythical image to help resist hardship and alienation. They write that "the basic and mythical images [survivors] had of themselves helped them survive by offering a means, which had to be extremely simple and solid, to resist the unbearably strong pressure leading to depersonalization. It allowed them to counterbalance the sensation of feeling completely at the mercy of fate with nothing to oppose it."[21] These images also gave them "something to believe in [that] enabled them to reach out to their essential individual being, and back up the daily fight to hold on and keep hope of surviving alive."[22] In Montreal's Rwandan community (and everywhere in the world where there are communities of Rwandans) the traditional dancing had that function of the "mythical image." In it were

[21] Anna Bravo, Lilia Davite, and Daniele Jalla, "Myth, Impotence, and Survival in the Concentration Camps," in *Myths We Live By*, ed. Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson (London: Routledge, 1990), 106.
[22] Ibid.

performed the men and women, and power. Around them gathered the group whose members would recognize each other.

The 1994 genocide perpetrated against the Tutsi in Rwanda devastated the Montreal community in many ways. Ten years later, we were still struggling with the aftermath of one community fragmented into many smaller ones. Early immigrants and those who arrived after the genocide had different realities and different needs. Divisions that had not necessarily defined the Rwandan-Canadian community before the genocide became entrenched. Faith-based groups became popular. Older and younger generations had trouble communicating with each other, each complaining about a lack of support from the other and a lack of common values. The youth were facing rising legal and social challenges around their lack of education and employment, while the older generation faced psychosocial issues, a lack of recognition of their education and work experience, poverty, a lack of housing, and the challenges of making and providing for a family. Performing all over the province of Quebec and for the larger Rwandan-Canadian and Rwandan-American diasporas, Isangano was at once a community group and an artistic troupe. Graham Dawson writes that healing is "working on the connections between the psychic and the social, the individual and the communal, telling and listening" and that art is a fruitful medium for connecting these dimensions.[23] We believed that our Rwandan community needed healing prior to political movement building. The wounds of history are an important hindrance to our freedom and our capacity to reconnect with each other and with ourselves. Our project Tuganire was about looking at our practice critically, reinterpreting reference stories, and

[23] Graham Dawson, "Trauma, Memory, Politics: The Irish Troubles," in *Trauma: Life Stories of Survivors*, ed. Kim Lacy Rogers, Selma Leydesdorff, and Graham Dawson (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2004), 186.

moving from cultural preservation toward empowerment. We wanted to dialogue about and share where we were coming from, who we were, and where we wanted to go.

Tuganire concerned the whole Rwandan community and was based on community empowerment[24] and love in/as action[25]. We asked three leaders of Montreal's Rwandan-Canadian community about the possibility for dialogue along fault lines created by the genocide. The first leader declared, "We can talk, but we must not ignore or deny the genocide." The second countered, "Yes, there is the genocide, but there is not only the genocide. There are other issues, too." The third simply scoffed, "The community. What community? The community is dysfunctional."

Why did the arts matter, and what did they allow me to learn as an engaged community artist, a citizen, and a scholar? Research creation with the members, along with the stories of my Rwandan family and community and of other displaced communities impacted by organized violence, allowed me to engage people (artists, scholars, survivors, activists) and themes (colonialism, exile, Christianization, war, genocide, migration, settlement) in ways I had not imagined beforehand. Engaging creatively with the stories, co-organizing and participating in community dialogue sessions with other members of my family and community, and hearing our stories resonating with each other allowed me to listen to "my" stories in the context of other stories. I was able to contribute to the interviewing and activities of other working groups and/or communities in the project, adding yet another layer of context. Several strands ran in parallel: the people and groups in the project; the working groups; the ethics and practice of oral history; the community; academic, personal, and family life. Weaving through these strands horizontally

[24] William A. Ninacs, *"Types et processus d'empowerment dans les initiatives de développement économique communautaire au Québec,"* PhD diss., Université Laval, 2002.
[25] bell hooks, *All about Love: New Visions* (New York: William Morrow, 2000).

were the artistic practices, projects, and involvements. And then, ongoing throughout the MLS project, our practice of playback theatre, which I describe in some detail in chapter 4.

The practice and promise of oral history

The oral history process of exploring an event or situation through the testimony of those who lived is a very structured process of crafting questions, choosing sources, negotiating permissions, and attending to audio and video quality while listening. My intention in the MLS project had always been to interview my family and community. And after Tuganire, people were not surprised. But convening a collective conversation about common concerns is very different from setting up a one-on-one interview space, with a third party present and using audio and/or video recording equipment and working together to produce a life story interview. Interviewing my family was a challenging process on several levels. First, the working group did not think it was a safe practice (more on that in chapter 5). When asked directly, my uncle Bellarmin told me point blank he would have preferred being interviewed by a stranger. And, while there was nothing visibly holding me back, it took me almost two years to complete my mother's life story interview, even though the interview itself consists of only two two-hour sessions. While there does not appear to be anything extremely gruesome in my mother's interview, I wasn't able to really hear what she actually says for a very long time (more on that in chapter 5). Listening to my father open up so candidly in his interview challenged me as well. Interestingly, neither my father nor my mother appeared to suffer or was emotional in their interview. Neither were my uncles or my aunt. They were themselves: gracious, smiling, and open. I was a mess.

In the MLS project, usually one interviewer and one videographer would make up an interview team. After each interview, the team had 24 hours to submit a written reflection on

their interview and post it in the reflection space of the project's online platform. I remember how conflicted I felt about my co-interviewer for my mother's interview. I felt so intensely about the interviews that I could never submit a single reflection. The experiences were so personal. So raw. And so surprising. The gap between what I wanted and what the project's objectives were seemed too important. I felt too vulnerable. I did not know enough about the eyes that would read my words and what they would do with them. The act of writing is extraordinarily

Image 7. Montreal: The current president of PAGE-Rwanda, Jean-Paul Nyilinkwaya, speaks at a community event. On the screen, in rural Rwanda, Callixte Kabayiza and Chaste Uwihoreye, who both are psychologists. We are building a network connecting mental health practitioners in Rwanda and in Quebec.

satisfying in the ways it allows me to distance myself from my thoughts, allows me to order my ideas and shape my thinking. But being read feels incredibly vulnerable. The measure of my discomfort tells me how much I hide and try to organize the reception of what I emit. I used to say that if I had better integrated some of the interests, language, and concerns of the oral history discipline, I might have tried to write in that language and spoken to some of the concerns of the practice of my colleagues. But I was not in the MLS for any academic discipline or through any discipline. These were the stories of my family, my community, and I was looking to understand us better, understand myself better, in order to live better. I was often told that was not what people go to university for. But I have.

My undergraduate degree was in comparative religion. From it, I took away an understanding of life as an experience between birth and death. And notions like the sacred and the profane, time and space, myth and ritual. As ways people of the world have found to make chaos into cosmos or order. It was tremendously helpful to make sense of my own experience. More so than psychology or philosophy or literature. With the help of my professor Marie André Roy, I was able to analyze and understand what we, in my Rwandan community, were doing when we were dancing cows and kings and warriors, what those dances meant for families in exile and how they became the centre around which the global diaspora mobilized during the war from 1990 to 1994. I could understand what I was doing when I choreographed and changed the movements or the themes or the music. I could attempt to express my individual perspective with this language, but I could not expect for the ritual to carry the same way or have the same impact on people I was sharing that medium with when I was changing all the elements of what make it a common and shared language. Those things that make it so wherever we are in the world, we will hear the drum, raise our arms, and fall into step. Those of us who have been raised with the steps and the rhythms, lift up, clap, and respond when we hear the drums. The drum is a symbol of power. Dancing together and for each other makes a visceral "we" I wasn't even aware of (more about that in chapter 3).

My master's degree was in theology; more specifically: a master's in counselling and spirituality. The program was rigorous and clinical, and the use of self in therapy was mandatory, which meant we had to undergo therapy ourselves to be allowed to serve in the capacity of therapist. I was trained to listen deeply to wounds, to perception of self and others, to ambivalence and coping strategies, to aspirations. I was welcomed within my cohort, even though I held a deep conflict with the church in relation to the ways in which the church powered colonization and

systematically devalued and destroyed indigenous Rwandans' knowledge and being in the world. I was held as an individual, one on one with my supervisor, and invited to unpack my trouble and tend to my wounded relationship with my values, aspirations, God, faith, and the church. I could not, however, bring the subject into the classroom or into my research or my practice. I was not allowed to bring in issues of genocide or complex grief or trauma or intergenerational trauma, nor was I allowed to think on the troubles of immigrant families with trauma, or the traumatized Rwandan community.

Image 8. Montreal: A gathering of young Montrealers who are children of survivors of the 1994 genocide perpetrated against the Tutsi in Rwanda.

My doctorate is about coming home to self and making a home in the world. I was finally officially allowed and even encouraged to think with the pieces that constitute my history, in particular the pieces related to genocide, war, and exile which had never been afforded a safe and generative place before. The Montreal Life Stories project, the larger project that explicitly explored the stories of my community, the "us" I am always thinking about, did so while preserving the stories' relationship to the here and now. Through gathering stories and working them through embodied play, collaborating in a community saturated with stories, I could then craft a language entirely and purely my own to speak my understandings, my questions, and my

tribulations and perform and share them with and for others. I could finally think myself with all of my pieces and help others do the same.

The question of what to say and when in relation to the children is very alive in the survivor community, especially when there are issues parents themselves have not yet worked through. In the past decade, this concern has come up every year during genocide commemoration. I am not the child of a survivor of 1994, but my journey through the MLS project and the creative and therapeutic work I did before it had largely been about understanding the silences I was raised with from the perspective of a racialized person in a majority white Western culture. Today I know what the silences are made of. I can interrogate them when I encounter them. When I use silence, I can articulate what it means, with whom, and to what end. Sometimes it is strategy; sometimes it is care.

My own son was conceived as the MLS project ended. When I think of our relationship or his relationship with our family's traumatic history, I feel very ambivalent. One part of me feels the need to protect my son from the community, from the vulnerabilities and precariousness and the way the community's unwellness sometimes results in the wounding of innocent people (I think here of abuse, for example). And yet I know that to keep him away from it is to cut him off from an important part of his identity. The other part of me encourages his relationships: to my family, both here in Canada and in Rwanda, to the Rwandan language, to the survivor community, and to the larger Rwandan community. There is a tension between a need to shield him and a need for him to know where he comes from and how to integrate and synthesize all the information and experiences. I will not be able to shield him completely, nor will I be able to do his work for him. My son is 7 years old and he doesn't need to know everything yet. I remember the interviews we did with children in the community in 2011. I am inspired by the little boy of 9

who was telling us how his father had explained to him that he would know more when he was older. That his father wanted to protect him a little bit more and that he would know when he was older. That child had looked quite happy and confident in knowing that he knew enough, that he was safe, and that in time he would be big and then capable of holding more, and would be entrusted with more. Inspired by this story, I carefully monitor my son's questions and try to recognize his desire to know more, as well as his desire to be protected, and then I do my best to stay simple in the answers I offer him. I believe I speak a lot more with him than I was spoken with. I name feelings, analyze situations, tease out different points of view and different relationships. But in the end, these are the tools I wish my parents had possessed for me. My son's struggle may be completely different from mine, and I remind myself to "mind the gap"[26], to check my blind spots and ask others to help me be attentive to what is real for him rather than what was a struggle for me. Chapter 6 speaks to these ideas.

A (woven) framework for working with difficult knowledge

I chose research creation as a framework and practice as a means to think through the journey, collaborations, and creative practice I was a part of, to explore and refine my understanding of what I did, why I did it, how, and to what end. Research creation holds a double objective: on the one hand a practical and theoretical understanding and on the other hand the empowerment of "the making and the maker."[27] I have experienced research creation / creative knowledge production as a way to make space for living with, and amid, an overwhelming amount of very troubling information.

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[26] Lynn Fels, "Mind the Gap: Outrageous Acts of Political Solidarity," *Educational Insights* 13, no. 3 (2009).

[27] Paquin, *Méthodologie* (updated 25 March 2017), 4, http://lcpaquin.com/metho_rech_creat/praticien_reflexif.pdf (accessed July 13, 2020).

In trying to find language to think through my journey in the MLS, the work of two education scholars, Deborah Britzman and Lynn Fels, has been important. Britzman's work on "difficult knowledge"[28] has been invaluable in terms of understanding the difference between learning from violence and the challenge of learning and growth. The work of learning, she says, "is not so much an accumulation of knowledge but a means for the human to use knowledge to craft and alter itself."[29] Lynn Fels' practice of performative inquiry offers such a means, giving

Image 9. Montreal: An improvised tableau speaking to the challenges of working with stories of mass violence.

"educators and researchers the opportunity to make visible political, social, economic, cultural, communal, and individual injustices, conventions, expectations, presumptions, ambitions, hidden motivations, the unspoken, the not yet known"[30].

All through this work, I have taken up Laurel Richardson and Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre's invitation to write as a method of inquiry.[31] They prompt one to change one's metaphor

[28] Alice Pitt and Deborah Britzman, "Speculations on Qualities of Difficult Knowledge in Teaching and Learning: An Experiment in Psychoanalytic Research," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 16, no. 6 (2003): 755–76.

[29] Deborah P. Britzman, *Lost Subjects, Contested Objects: Toward a Psychoanalytic Inquiry of Learning* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998), xvi.

[30] Lynn Fels, "Performative Inquiry," performative inquiry (with Lynn Fels), http://performativeinquiry.ca/ (accessed 14 July 2020).

[31] Laurel Richardson and Elizabeth St Pierre, "Writing, a Method of Inquiry," in *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*, ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, vol. 3, 2008, 473.

for theory to something close to oneself to see where that takes us, and what our writing can do. In understanding and writing about what I have learned through the MLS project, one metaphor close to me is Fels' "moments that tug on a sleeve"[32]—those moments that invite us to pause and reflect on the pedagogical significance of such moments for our work, for our relationships with others, for who we are in the world.

Britzman asks, "What obscure relations work within the capacity to think, to live, to love, and to dream as if learning were the self's own work of art?"[33] She believes education is "best considered as a frontier concept: something between the teacher and the student, something yet to become."[34] For me, the "obscure relations" that work in mysterious ways resemble that which tugs on a sleeve, which, if I continue to ignore stays present or, if I choose to engage it, takes me, teaches me, or offers me an opportunity to understand or at least to encounter something of myself I didn't know.

Weaving these ideas through the geographies of my journey in the MLS project has allowed me to envision what the wellness I was after for myself and my community might look like.

[32] Lynn Fels, "Collecting Data Through Performative Inquiry: A Tug on the Sleeve". *Youth Theatre Journal* 26, no.1 (2012).

[33] Britzman, *Lost Subjects*, 2.

[34] Britzman, *Lost Subjects*, xvi.

Chapter 2: A Confluence of Theories

In all the tellings of all the tellers, the world never leaves the turtle's back.
And the turtle never swims away.

Thomas King, "The Art of Indigenous Knowledge"

In this chapter I reflect on the relationships and practices I was drawn to in the Montreal Life Stories Project (MLS) project. I explore their principles, theories, and alignments, my praxis of remembering, listening, and shaping stories, and the relationship between thinking, feeling, and doing in the project. I begin with a question I was asked at l'Institut d'Histoire de l'Amérique Française (IHAF)—a question that has haunted me for more than ten years. I tell how my point of departure for this inquiry was the feeling that my family and I were unwell, and the realization that our history—and more precisely, my grandfather's assassination in Rwanda in 1962—was at the heart of the pain. MLS has been a good container for experimenting with research creation through life stories. I offer my insights to other community researchers and artist-scholars..

A haunting question at the Institute

"Au delà de la dimension heuristique de votre travail, quelle est la contribution épistémologique du projet Montreal life stories?" (Patrick-Michel Noël, IHAF 2009)

"Beyond its obviously heuristic dimension, what is the epistemological contribution of the Montreal Life Stories project?" (my translation)

Questions of teleology, ontology, and epistemology have been haunting me since 2009, when I was unable to answer a young man who asked me what the epistemological contribution

of my work in the MLS project might be. The question was put to me on a beautiful October afternoon. My colleagues and I had been invited by l'Institut d'Histoire de l'Amérique Française (IHAF) to speak about our work in the Montreal Life Stories Project (MLS). I had just finished presenting a story about my learnings as a community co-applicant in the MLS when a question was lobbed at the panel. I later found out the bespectacled, serious-looking young man who got up and asked me that question was named Patrick-Michel Noël. I sought him out after the panel because his question had struck me dumb, and I wanted to better understand where the question had come from and what he meant to say. After talking for a little while, I asked him to send me the paper he was writing and thinking about at the time, *"Une question de (méta-) épistémologie historique: La liberté de l'historien ou l'autodétermination disciplinaire."*[35] His article was an argument for the historian's freedom as a knowledge producer to self-regulate, and against what he called the wave of science studies and their use of socio-anthropological approaches to attempt to weigh in and interfere with historians' affairs. In the article, Noël was reflecting about the scientificity of the historian's knowledge residing in his capacity to methodically align his discourse on reality and the inherent limits to freedom by the mandatory submission to objective fact (his discipline). Citing Georges Bachelard, Noël wrote about the "epistemological rupture" between historians and amateurs, a chasm formed when the study of the past is distanced from common understanding and conditions for historical discourse are made and maintained as science (or scientific). In order to evaluate, legitimize, and transmit their knowledge, historians institutionalized their profession.

[35] Patrick-Michel Noël, "Une question de (méta-) épistémologie historique: la liberté de l'historien ou l'autodétermination disciplinaire," in *Actes du 9* colloque étudiant du département d'histoire*, 2010, 303–320.

According to Noël, one cannot improvise being a historian: A gap exists between what can be considered scientific and what cannot emerge from historians' own agency to discern, over time, what pertains to history and what is merely partisan production. Noël writes:

> *Le «nous» disciplinaire médiatise ainsi non seulement le rapport que l'historien entretient avec le présent, mais aussi celui qu'il entretient avec le passé, son objet, la principale détermination de son discours. Cette seconde médiation empêche que le rapport historien au passé soit strictement subjectif.*[36]

Image 10. Ngoma (Huye): The roofless ruins of a typical colonial era home for a Rwandan *fonctionnaire*, identical to one in the same neighborhood where my paternal grandfather, wife, and children lived at one time.

> (The disciplinary "we" thus mediates not only the relationship the historian maintains with the present, but also that which he maintains with the past, its object, the main determination of his discourse. This second mediation prevents the historian's relationship to the past from being strictly subjective.)[37]

Here, Noël makes reference to historians as a community of scholars in which a type of ongoing negotiation or interplay occurs between a researcher and their peers, who can admit or refuse the researcher's knowledge claims and act as a system of checks and balances. If I had

[36] Noël, "Une question," 307.

[37] My own translation.

known better, I could have smiled with interest, welcomed his question as interesting, resonated with his position on self-determination, and maybe asked him to tell us more about his work. I don't know that I needed to necessarily engage with his somewhat rhetorical question. I could have pointed to different takes on the "objectivity question" as outdated or as myth, and, for example, quoted William K. Storey: "Historians and biographers have been debating objectivity and subjectivity since the days of Herodotus and Thucydides."[38] Instead, Noël's initial comment hurt me quite a bit. I saw it as a complete rejection of my contribution, of the things I had brought to the table and was holding up and sharing. Adrienne Rich wrote that

> when those who have the power to name and to socially construct reality choose not to see you or hear you ... when someone with the authority of a teacher, say, describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked in the mirror and saw nothing. It takes some strength of soul—and not just individual strength, but collective understanding—to resist this void, this non-being, into which you are thrust, and to stand up, demanding to be seen and heard.[39]

When Noël asked his question, he was not a teacher but a scholar in an academic milieu. I was a community co-applicant in a community-university research alliance project. I had no idea how to answer what the value of my work was to him or his people, nor did I appreciate the question for the depth it presented in terms of exploring what value, and for whom. My fear of what "epistemology" might be, and what I might not know but should, effectively silenced me.

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[38] William K. Storey, "Lives in Context: The Art of Life History Research (Review)," *Biography* 25, no. 4 (2002): 684–85.

[39] Adrienne Rich, *Blood, Bread, and Poetry: Selected Prose 1979-1985* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994).

There were definitely things I wanted to learn, but I didn't know if what I wanted to know was considered epistemological enough, or a contribution.

Epistemological clutter

If epistemology is the theory of "how we know the world and of how we gain knowledge of it"[40], epistemology also asks, "Who can be the knower?"[41] Lorrie Blair recommends that any doctoral student tasked with producing new knowledge ask themselves what knowledge is and how to go about acquiring it.[42] Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre, on the other hand, encourages her students to "begin with Foucault, or Derrida, or Deleuze and not with the conventional qualitative research process"[43] in order to align epistemology, ontology, and methodology. She assures her students that "if they've studied the theory carefully their methodology will follow."[44]

I did not start my research-creation journey with the question "What is knowledge?" Instead I started with a felt sense or a knowing. I knew I wasn't well and my family was not well. You couldn't see it from the outside, but I was struggling, and I was not alone. My parents and their siblings did exceptionally well. They survived prison and persecution against the Tutsi in Rwanda in the 1960s and 1970s and went on to leave the country to study and work. Today, half of them are back in Rwanda. Not everyone in similar circumstances did as well as my parents did, and yet, the people that they raised, my generation, was not able to do well for a long time.

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[40] Norman Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*, vol. 4 (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2011), 12.

[41] Patricia Leavy, *Method Meets Art: Arts-Based Research Practice*, 2nd ed. (New York: Guildford Press, 2015), 3.

[42] Lorrie Blair, *Writing a Graduate Thesis or Dissertation* (New York: Springer, 2016).

[43] Elizabeth St. Pierre, "A Brief and Personal History of Post Qualitative Research: Toward 'Post Inquiry,'" *JCT Online* 30, no. 2 (December 5, 2014): 3, http://journal.jctonline.org/index.php/jct/article/view/521 (accessed 14 July 2020).

[44] Ibid.

Survivors of the genocide against the Tutsi in 1994 are similar to my parents in how highly functional they are. But we, the second generation, who were raised outside of the country, even though materially we were often given much more than they were given, struggled tremendously. My father and his five siblings had 14 children in total, of which I am the eldest. Two survived the genocide, one of us committed suicide at 15, another overcame serious heroin addiction, two had experiences in the sex trade, two dealt in illicit substances, and except for the two youngest and the genocide survivors, all have dealt with substance abuse. Alcohol was very present for my paternal grandfather as well for his children, our parents, but it was culturally normalized and not framed as a problem. He and his children remained highly functional and, save one, are all university-educated, high-achieving professionals. In my generation, we now range from 26 to 49. Six of us (or eight, depending on how we are counted) have gone to university, five (eight) have careers, two of us have graduate degrees, four of us (or six, again, depending how we are counted) are married, and we have eight (or eleven) children. Things are improving.[45] In 2002, the situation was much worse: Although all but two of us were over 18 years of age, it felt like we weren't able to move into adulthood at all. With my aunt, a psychologist, I agitated to seek help. We organized and my family came together in a series of psychodrama[46] sessions with a highly skilled facilitator. As we played and processed, what came to light was that the assassination of my grandfather, my father's father, in March 1962 had

[45] These markers of "success" in terms of education, marriage, family, and career may seem random or questionable but correspond to our family and community values and are the standards against which parents and children evaluate their standing and performance.

[46] Psychodrama is a form of group therapy in which clients use spontaneous dramatization, role playing, and dramatic self-presentation to investigate and gain insight into their lives. Psychodrama is based on the work of Romanian American psychiatrist Dr. Jacob Levy Moreno.

impacted the family to such a degree that all the relationships severely enmeshed[47] and shaped in response to that event and its consequences.

Pick a detail, any detail. When I was a young adult struggling with overwhelm and feeling lost, I would use this as a writing prompt, and writing was a way to stay afloat. I remember how I relied on that thread when I came back to Canada after a two-month trip to Rwanda in 1996. Haunted by the images of 1994, the stories of survivors and community tellers,

Image 11. Montreal: Bernadette Kayirangwa served as PAGE-Rwanda coordinator. Prior to immigrating to Canada, she worked with the late Dr. Naasson Munyandamutsa, the father of psychiatric care and repair of social cohesion in post-genocide Rwanda. With Dr. Pierre Rwanyindo, Dr. Naasson founded the Institute for Research on Dialogue and Peace (IRDP), an important participatory, dialogical research project that included the diaspora in its studies. Dr. Naasson visited Montreal several times as part of this research, and visited COHDS. His legacy continues through the work of a new organization called Never Again Rwanda.

and the memories of my family and the young soldiers I was related to, I visited Toronto, where my first love, D, another Rwandan, was roaming the streets, almost homeless. He came to Montreal to live with me. We could speak so easily about life here and the genocide. But where I had an existential angst and paralyzing bouts of depression, he was struggling with psychotic episodes. And so… pick a detail, any detail… it offered this very clear premise that no one can possibly fall off the world. And so, I could just pick a thread, any thread, and follow it. And it

[47] The idea of enmeshed relationships was first developed by psychiatrist Salvador Minuchin and is used to describe a typology of relationships where boundaries are more porous, where "the quality of connectedness is such that attempts on the part of one member to change elicits fast complementary resistance on the part of others" (excerpt from Salvador Minuchin et al., *Families of the Slums* [New York: Basic Books, 1967], 358).

would invariably take me somewhere. And somewhere would invariably be here, as soon as I got there. It was a funny way to try and stay head above water, to nurture my sense of being related to the world and to others, to meaning. In the end D and I could not help each other, and had to separate. I went back to school to study counselling.

There are quite a few concepts that speak to the wound. The idea of alienation is not a new one; Frantz Fanon[48] was writing about it in the 1950s. And before him, Aimé Césaire was writing about the many ways people of African descent were dispossessed.[49] I understand alienation like a cut between self and time and space, here and now, other people, and even though it has been documented, it still isn't easy to articulate. As I write, claiming a clear relationship between struggling in the day to day and historic ruptures brought on by Christianization, colonization, exile, migration, immigration, war and genocide still seems too vulnerable a position. Even though language is available and a growing community of scholars are thinking about concepts like historical trauma, post traumatic slave syndrome, "ethnic selves in education," cultural alienation[50], intergenerational trauma[51], cultural discontinuity[52], symbolic annihilation[53], representational belonging[54] … what I want to say unravels…. And that is part of it.

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[48] Frantz Fanon and Charles Lam Markmann, *Black Skin, White Masks* (London: Pluto Classics, 2000).

[49] Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: NYU Press, 2001).

[50] The process of devaluing or abandoning one's own culture or cultural background. A person who is culturally alienated places little value on their own or host culture and instead hungers for that of a (sometimes imposed) colonizing nation.

[51] The transmission of historical oppression and its negative consequences across generations.

[52] The lack of cohesion between two or more cultures.

[53] The profoundly negative affective consequences of absence and misrepresentation (e.g., in mainstream media and historical narrative and archives).

[54] The positive effect of complex and autonomous forms of representation in community-driven initiatives.

My Living Histories Ensemble (LHE) colleague Alan Wong writes in his doctoral thesis about his location as an intimate insider researcher inquiring into the life stories of his fellow racialized, ethnicized, and colonized allosexual activists in Montreal. Writing specifically about his journey of domesticating the art of the oral history interview, he learned to distinguish in himself different qualities of listening. Wong found that listening to strangers without "wayward or distracting thoughts or assumptions arising from personal knowledge"[55] allowed him access to more depth in listening, reflection, and presence and to let him give the interview his "full, undivided attention."[56] He called this quality of listening being free of epistemological clutter. I have found fear to be the most challenging kind of epistemological clutter. As irrational as a fear of flying, the fear and insecurity brought on by Patrick-Michel Noël's question at the Institute deeply unsettled and fueled my research creation journey. I have tried several times over the past decade to articulate the contribution to knowledge our MLS work brought forward, but to no avail. Not only did I fail to articulate convincing contributions, but I also began to experience debilitating dread presenting any work in writing. It was even difficult for me to offer my working documents up for discussion. And although I rationally know what it takes (i.e., that writing work is done in the doing, in the showing up and writing, and that it is better and quicker if I trust the process, write regularly, easily offer my work up for comment and critique, integrate commentary as tonic, and strengthen and improve my output), I froze when it came to putting words onto paper, or when the time came to show my work.

I have hesitated to include this last piece. I was often told that a thesis is not therapy, just as a classroom is not a therapeutic space. As an artist, community organizer, psychotherapist, and

[55] Alan Wong, "Between Rage and Love: Disidentifications Among Racialized, Ethnicized, and Colonized Allosexual Activists in Montreal," PhD Diss., Concordia University, Montreal, 2013, 62.
[56] Ibid.

facilitator working with life stories of genocide and war, I have found these injunctions troubling. If the thesis is not therapy, writing certainly is therapeutic and political. The classroom is hopefully therapeutic as well. Of course, I am interested in therapy in order to live a better life. I am interested in learning in order to live a better life. I use the language of wellness, but to me wellness is also political. It is also economic. As I learn, I am interested in what I learn and also what I observe. I pay attention to my inner workings and reactions, ambivalences and overcomings, as well as how this all translates into the ways in which I am in the world, into my work, my parenting, my relationships, and my joy in living. In *Teaching to Transgress*, bell hooks writes, "For black folks teaching—educating—was fundamentally political because it was rooted in antiracist struggle. Indeed, my all-black grade schools became the location where I experienced learning as revolution, about how education was, at one point, 'the practice of freedom.'"[57]

I have often wondered whether my inquiries are legitimate or whether I should simply take them to a therapist to work them through or a doctor to diagnose. In this instance, for example, the fifth and most recent version of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-5)[58], the handbook used by mental health professionals in North America and much of the world as the authoritative manual for the diagnosis of mental disorders, offers social anxiety[59] as a disorder that might explain my plight.[60] In the end I chose to continue my inquiry

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[57] bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 2.

[58] American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 5th ed. (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

[59] According to the DSM-5, there are ten diagnostic criteria for social anxiety disorder: (1) fear or anxiety specific to social settings, in which a person feels noticed, observed, or scrutinized. In an adult, this could include a first date, a job interview, meeting someone for the first time, delivering an oral presentation, or speaking in a class or meeting. In children, the phobic/avoidant behaviours must occur in settings with peers, rather than adult interactions, and will be expressed in terms of age-appropriate distress, such as cringing, crying, or otherwise displaying obvious fear or discomfort. (2) Typically the individual will fear

as a legitimate scholarly inquiry because (a) my fear is not my thought trying to be and take shape in the world and become a contribution; I want to value it, push through, and see what it might be; (b) I want to include the inextricably linked affective, reflexive, and emotional dimensions in my epistemological journey; and (c) the recommended treatments for social anxiety are medication (which remains an option) and exposure-based cognitive behavioural therapy, or learning to push through the fear. Return to (a). Let me give a bit of context to situate the period and event I want to think about.

A bit of context

The 1950s and 1960 were a time of political turmoil on the African continent. After World War II, a new world order was struggling to make its mark on the world. After years in which the church and the European colonial powers held sway, it was time for the Cold War adversaries to seek influence and resources on the continent and support decolonization. Former colonizing nations and the church were seeking to protect their assets and privileges. In 1959, Mwami (king in Kinyarwanda, the Rwandan language) Rudahigwa Mutara of Rwanda visited the United Nations to request the lifting of the Belgian protectorate. Rwanda, then a part of a

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that they will display their anxiety and experience social rejection. (3) Social interaction will consistently provoke distress. (4) Social interactions are either avoided or painfully and reluctantly endured. (5) The fear and anxiety will be grossly disproportionate to the actual situation. (6) The fear, anxiety, or other distress around social situations will persist for six months or longer and (7) cause personal distress and impairment of functioning in one or more domains, such as interpersonal or occupational functioning. (8) The fear or anxiety cannot be attributed to a medical disorder, substance use, adverse medication effects or (9) another mental disorder. (10) If another medical condition is present which may cause the individual to be excessively self-conscious (e.g., prominent facial scar), the fear and anxiety are either unrelated or disproportionate. The clinician may also include the specifier that the social anxiety is performance situation specific (e.g., oral presentations).

[60] One psychiatrist, after listening to my preoccupations with old stories of 1960 and before, offered that maybe I should let go of the past and get on with the present, and that I seemed to be suffering from "ruminating thoughts." Although most people will dwell on "negative" thoughts when they are sad and worried, persistent rumination may be a sign of a mental health condition like depression, anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorder, phobias, and schizophrenia.

colonized territory named Ruanda-Urundi, had been a German colony until Germany's defeat in World War I, when it became a Belgian protectorate. Belgium was already exploiting neighbouring Congo. If granted too early, the Rwandan request for independence might have triggered a similar request from neighbouring Burundi and then possibly Belgian Congo. The Congo, five times the size of Belgium, is and has been one of the richest countries in the world in terms of natural resources.

Image 12. Ntenyo: The rural homestead of my paternal great-grandmother, Emma Mukaruhama. My grandfather grew up here.

The Belgian plan for Rwanda became to replace the Tutsi elite created by the German colonizer to enact indirect rule by a Hutu elite sympathetic to Belgian interests and oversight. When Mwami Mutara was killed or died in mysterious circumstances after a visit to the Belgian administrator, the traditional council of elders (Abiru) quickly crowned a new[61] mwami, Kigeli V. In 1961 while "in Leopoldville to meet UN secretary-general Dag Hammarskjold, Kigeli V was informed that Belgian authorities would not allow him to return to Rwanda." Elections held in Rwanda in 1959, were not recognized by the UN, therefore new elections were held in September 1961. Grégoire Kaybanda's PARMEHUTU party won over 70% of the votes. On October 2, 1961, Rwanda's national assembly voted to abolish the monarchy and voted in a

[61] Without Belgian go-ahead.

constitution. The cleavage between Hutu and Tutsi became more pronounced as Belgian colonel Logiest organized Parmehutu thugs who killed tens of thousands of Tutsis while over 150,000 fled into exile in neighbouring countries. Tutsi houses were burned, cattle were killed, people fled. My grandfather, a medic, was chased from one post to another. My grandfather refused to swear an oath of allegiance to the government, citing the UN's not recognizing it. In March 1962, my grandfather was picked up at a friend's home and shot. Three times. His wife witnessed the shooting. My uncle André says that his mother was haunted by those shots. And by the sight of his body being dragged away, never to be seen again.[62]

My grandfather's murder wasn't an isolated case by any means. As Randall Fegley writes, "hidden in the euphoria of independence and a revolution that empowered Rwanda's majority, a genocide began that would not be recognized by the world for another thirty-five years."[63] Grandfather was but one of many people who were killed or imprisoned in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. My maternal grandfather was imprisoned. My mother was imprisoned. Aunts and uncles on both sides of the family fled the country. For those who fled, exile was a three-decade-long collective experience that was not necessarily talked about. Not much was said about the war of 1990 to 1994 except among involved members of the diaspora who were raising funds and awareness.

There is quite a voluminous literature on the genocide against the Tutsi in 1994 and its aftermath. But while I was growing up there weren't as many words or images to express the earlier experiences my parents went through. For example, my parents would never identify their

[62] From the way my uncle told the story, my grandmother had flashbacks for the rest of her life and suffered from PTSD. It was never discussed. Complex grief: because no one saw the body, my father the eldest, held on to a belief that his father might not be dead until he was in his forties. His little brother, André, remembered searching for his father when he first came into the country in 1994 as part of the RPA army stopping the genocide after fighting the bush war for four years.

[63] Randall Fegley, *A History of Rwandan Identity and Trauma: The Mythmakers' Victims* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016), 31.

45-year absence and dislocation from Rwanda with refugee status. But they would certainly identify with notions like exile and diaspora. The life story format allowed all of it. When we started the MLS project, the idea had been to gather life stories of genocide survivors. I remember how one of the first difficult negotiations I waged with the two chairs of our Rwandan working group was about including among the survivors we would interview the generation of experiences before 1994.

Image 13 Near Huye (Butare): In 1962, two days after my grandfather refused to swear a loyalty oath to the PARMEHUTU government during a ceremony on these parade grounds, he was tracked down and murdered.

Although both chairs initially resisted, mostly in order to stay on task and limit the research population, I believe that the opening was salutary for the group and the research, especially after the first two years, when survivors of the 1994 genocide began to connect their experiences with earlier ones. Like Philibert Muzima, who realized how many people in his family had been killed over the years, and who said in his 2009 interview that no one in his family had died of natural causes in three generations. As an unmarried younger woman, going up against two mature community leaders was strange and exhilarating. One gift and a contribution of the MLS was certainly how, through the seven years of the project and the eight years since it ended, we, in the community, came to know each other in very different and layered ways than the roles we usually played.

We cannot pass on what we have not received

> The story of trauma, then, as the narrative of a belated experience, far from telling of an escape from reality—the escape from a death ... rather attests to its endless impact on life.[64]

I knew (roughly) what I wanted to achieve when I joined the MLS project. I was engaged at the time in a community art project, "Tuganire," a Kinyarwanda word meaning "let's talk" (let's find solutions). It was a project I developed with Isangano, a cultural group of young Rwandans in Montreal. It concerned the whole Rwandan community and was based on "community empowerment"[65] and love in/as action[66]. While the goal of the larger MLS project was to understand the experience of displacement and mass violence from the people who lived it, my intention was—and remained—individual and collective change, empowerment, freedom, or wellness.

I knew we weren't well as a family and I knew we weren't well as a community. My understanding that "we" as a community were unwell was a contested premise. During "Tuganire," I remember specific people in the community questioning whether we all agreed that we were doing badly or had problems to try and find solutions for. I spent quite some time wondering whether I was projecting my difficulty onto my community. But in 2004, we had already begun the series of community arts dialogues[67] when I was commissioned by the

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[64] Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and* History (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 7.

[65] William A. Ninacs, *"Types et processus d'empowerment dans les initiatives de développement économique communautaire au Québec,"* PhD diss., Université Laval, 2002.

[66] bell hooks, *All about Love: New Visions* (New York: William Morrow, 2000).

[67] Lisa Ndejuru, "Tuganire: parlons-en, discutons! [Let's Talk about It, Let's Discuss!]," In *Affirming Collaboration: Community and Humanist Activist Art in Québec and Elsewhere*, ed. Devora Neumark,

Rwandan community in Quebec City to organize a conversation with youth and parents. Our Montreal group went to Quebec City, where the community was in shock: young Rwandans had been apprehended as part of an organized criminal gang. Parents and other members of the community were worried about the children and youth "losing their way." The dialogue day was incredibly well attended: it was an occasion for parents and youth to exchange. Youth would ask: "This Rwandan thing we are, what does it mean here, now? Is it useful, or even realistic to cultivate 'Rwandan values' here?" Parents' responses spoke of ruptures with culture and challenges in transmission. They would say: "We don't know some of the things you are asking. We haven't ever asked ourselves. We weren't taught, in any special way, some of the cultural things you ask about, we didn't have access to any more, either! We cannot pass on what we have not received."

Academic literature on transnationalism speaks of the intergenerational struggles around identity, values, and meaning and the impact of the host culture on received cultural codes, but this knowledge is not shared with the people in the community actually struggling with this reality. Although there is, here in Quebec, a considerable body of knowledge[68] and models using

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Johanne Chagnon, and Louise Lachapelle, 224–29 (Montréal and Calgary: Engrenage Noir / LEVIER, LUX Éditeur, and Detselig, 2011).

[68] Cécile Rousseau et al., "Classroom Drama Therapy Program for Immigrant and Refugee Adolescents: A Pilot Study," Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry 12, no. 3 (July 2007): 451–465; Catherine Montgomery et al., "Contexts of Exile: Refugee Families and the "Family Novel" Project," Centre de santé et de services sociaux de la Montagne, May 2009; Cécile Rousseau et al., "Creative Expression Workshops in School: Prevention Programs for Immigrant and Refugee Children," The Canadian Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Review 14, no. 3 (2005): 77; Michèle Vatz Laaroussi et al., Écriture et histoires familiales de migration une recherche action pour promouvoir les compétences à écrire des élèves allophones immigrants et réfugiés, Fonds de Recherche, Société et Culture Québec, May 2013; Cécile Rousseau et al., "Jouer en classe autour d'une histoire: ateliers d'expression créatrice pour les enfants immigrants exposés à la violence sociale," PRISME Psychiatrie, recherche et intervention en santé mentale de l'enfant 28 (1999): 88–103; Michèle Vatz Laaroussi and Lilyane Rachédi, "Les migrants de la mémoire et de l'histoire : des témoins de la culture arabo-musulmane," Insaniyat / إنسانيات Revue *algérienne d'anthropologie et de sciences sociales*, no. 32–33 (September 30, 2006): 69–85; Michèle Vatz Laaroussi, "Les usages sociaux et politiques de la mémoire familiale: de la réparation de soi à la réparation des chaos de l'histoire," *Enfances, Familles, Générations*, no. 7 (2007).

storytelling for migration journeys (e.g., in working with immigrant and refugee populations), their use is still not standard practice in healthcare, social, education, or employment services. Young people today ask the same questions as we did back then. I have found that growing up as a visible minority in a country not one's own confronts a young immigrant's process of identification in ways that someone raised in one's own country or in a majority black or African country cannot imagine. Parents migrating to places of opportunity (as well as host countries) need to factor in these aspects and prepare ways to engage with them. Beyond working with trauma (which may also be useful), these are but some of the ways in which working creatively with life stories can help host communities as well as refugees and immigrants today.

The power of story

In "The Art of Indigenous Knowledge," Thomas King writes about three stories he tells "over and over again." He tells these stories often, he says "to myself, to my friends, sometimes to strangers. Because they make me laugh. Because they are a particular kind of story. Saving stories, if you will. Stories that help keep me alive."[69] He ends this way:

> Of course, you don't have to pay attention to any of these stories. Louis's story is not particularly cheery. Alexie's story doesn't have a demonstrably happy ending. Neither participates fully in Western epistemologies, and my three don't have a moral center nor are they particularly illuminating. But help yourself to one if you like. Take Louis's story, for instance. It's yours. Do with it what you will. Cry over it. Get angry. Forget it. But don't say in years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had

[69] Thomas King, "The Art of Indigenous Knowledge: A Million Porcupines Crying in the Dark," in *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research: Perspectives, Methodologies, Examples, and Issues*, ed. J. Gary Knowles and Ardra Cole (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2008), 25.

heard this story. You've heard it now.[70]

This story has stayed with me since I first read it. I resonate with the way it is nondeclarative and open ended. King challenges us to take or leave it, as though he were saying the stories are about him as a writer, not us as readers: "I tell these stories to save myself." There is an important lesson there in terms of centring one's own stories: I was never able to find the presentation I made that day at IHAF in 2009. Instead I acquired and read Noël's paper, obsessed about it, and five years later, in 2014, I read his dissertation. What if I had simply centred my own story instead?

Image 14. Montreal: A community conversation, convened by PAGE-Rwanda.

Trying to see what that might look like right now brings me to my take-away: and that is to document where one is coming from—even and especially when one is on a creative journey or a journey of change. Documenting where one is coming from and where one wishes to go and why and how … My learning is that there is value in the questions that drive our research or inquiry. In many ways, that centredness is what I aspire to the most. It's the flip side of "otherness"—it would mean no one had to centre my concerns for me; instead I could do that for myself. Getting through difficult stories, struggles, and strife is precisely to get to a place where I

[70] Ibid.

am comfortable and easy, clear and confident. Where, paradoxically, I no longer need to centre my thoughts, and I can take care of others.

Having lost my initial point once, when faced with a confronting question, I can appreciate its value. It feels as though I experienced a blank, a blackout. But I cannot fall off the turtle's back. I don't believe that much is lost, in that I will be able to get back to it through what I am seeking, the things I am attracted to, and the things I try to make. The blank does not threaten my integrity or my continuity. I feel somewhat uneasy writing about my concerns. But I want to get used to it and be less clumsy. Maybe I too will end up telling the same three stories over and over again. Because they save me. They help keep me alive.

Shari Stone-Mediatore conceives of stories as "a making." Citing Hannah Arendt, she writes that "stories promote understanding or being at home in the world. 'Understanding' is 'the specifically human way of being alive.' It is a lifelong process by which we strive to come to terms with the constantly changing and alien environment."[71] If understanding makes us at home in the world, she writes,

> it does not necessarily make us comfortable with accepting the world as given. On the contrary, when a storyteller modifies her received narrative resources in response to the strangeness of specific historical phenomena and when she presents her story as only one historically contingent proposed interpretation of that phenomena, then her story makes us at home in the world only to unsettle our familiar sense of "home" and to emphasize our responsibility to examine our home's darker corners. Ultimately, storytelling makes us at home in the world not so as to make us complacent with the world as we have known it but so as to enhance our responsiveness to the full range of hopes and dangers

[71] Shari Stone-Mediatore, *Reading across Borders: Storytelling and Knowledges of Resistance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 43.

that are possible in our midsts.[72]

There is no pressure for the story to be anything other than what it is. And that is extraordinary.

What I have learned

What can I offer to what has already been written about or come out of the MLS project? My contribution is my point of view as someone inside the Montreal Rwandan community relating to displacement, genocide, and war, not as a survivor of 1994 but as a member of the diaspora one and even two generations removed from the anti-Tutsi persecution that took place around the time of Rwanda's independence.

I learned that intergenerational transmission was a key concern in survivor communities in 2014 when PAGE-Rwanda initiated a community research study with peer survivor communities[73] to inquire into the ways that individuals, families, and communities had coped with genocide. PAGE-Rwanda was worried about survivors faring much worse 20 years after the genocide than they had immediately after the event. Myra Giberovitch's work with Holocaust survivors and their descendants stays with me.[74] Myra participated in our community research project, and I was struck by the origin story of her work. She identified as a child of Holocaust survivors born in the US and explained that she and others of her generation struggled without understanding why they had such a hard time when they did not lack for anything, while their

[72] Ibid.

[73] One of the incredible relationships to have come out of MLS multiyear commitment to sharing stories is the Alliance for Genocide Awareness and Remembrance, a peer group of genocide survivor communities. The Alliance members are the Armenian Genocide Centennial Committee of Canada; the Montreal Holocaust Memorial Centre; PAGE-Rwanda; Centre Khemara; and the Ukrainian Information & Anti-Defamation Committee.

[74] Myra Giberovitch, *Recovering from Genocidal Trauma: An Information and Practice Guide for Working with Holocaust Survivors* (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2014).

parents, the actual victims, had had nothing. Like my own Rwandan generation of survivors' descendants, Myra's generation also struggled with issues of identity and repair. Myra told us that her work and that of her colleagues—all children of Holocaust survivors—was inspired by a pop culture 1980s movement of African-American community groups in New York. Loosely inspired by the Pulitzer prize-winning novel and subsequent television series *Roots* and African-American author Alex Haley, who claimed to have traced his family history back through seven

Image 15. Montreal: A meeting of the PAGE-Rwanda leadership.

generations to Kunta Kinte, a Mandinka warrior from The Gambia who was enslaved in 1767, the groups were tracing origins and family histories beyond slavery and seeking, finding, and sometimes creating connections to African traditions, heritage, and communities. *Roots* was, of course, more art than science. And what I loved most in Myra's story of one community being inspired by another is the creative licence in the work. Haley's work was part fact, part fiction. Myra and her colleagues felt different from the mainstream surrounding them and not connected enough to the culture they were supposedly of. Haley's work gave them permission to reimagine their culture and their relationship to it: When heirlooms or heritage could not be transmitted because everything had been destroyed or because no one knew how anymore, artifacts or rituals were created. This idea of creative licence (there might be a better word for it) is very important

going forward. It is neither new nor original. I recognize it as part of a set of tools and techniques in my own repertoire. I am thinking of the powwow created or adopted in the 20th century to celebrate indigenous resurgence, or the reinstitution of Hebrew as a spoken language. There is a wealth of human experiences of relational ruptures and repairs in terms of identity and continuity, culture, belonging, migration, trauma. I saw this with other Rwandans of my generation in the working group and as we were interviewing. My relationship to Rwandan identity, for example, as someone raised in Germany and Canada, a non-Kinyarwanda speaker, is different than for others of my generation who were raised with the language in majority black countries or in strong Rwandan communities, like in Burundi, for example. Even if they were raised in exile, they were raised in a community organized and protective of their identity and values. I don't know that there are a lot of sources that speak to the work of professor Josias Semujanga, for example, and what his generation managed to do while exiled in Burundi, where in response to the struggle with quotas and accessing education, Rwandans organized and created the Collège Saint Albert, an institution staffed and frequented by Rwandans, where the standard of learning was so high that local notables registered their children to study there. The Collège placed a very strong onus on Rwandan values and culture, instilling in their young a pride that could and would be awakened in the mobilization and subsequent war of 1990–1994.

Because there were very few Rwandans in Germany, I only ever caught glimpses of Rwandan culture and pride when I went to visit my family in Brussels. There was a large Rwandan community there, and I remember watching the beautiful men and women, the drums, and the dancing. There is a particular kind of female voice, tonality, and cadence that I associate with Rwandan women and that soothes me wherever I am. It greets me and welcomes me home wherever I may be. There is a drum beat that activates me wherever I am, a rhythm that, when

clapped—or better yet, stomped—when heard produced by the *mayogi* (ankle straps with bells)—these sounds are like a call to me when I hear them. I practiced them extensively through traditional dance groups like Isangano and the community that Rwandans created here in Montreal. Practicing traditional dances and groups (i.e., steps executed together in repeated ways) and performing gender roles, themes, and rhythms is a powerful, visceral way to nurture traditional values and culture. People knew to transmit it to their children and how to do it. It held at once an activity to gather around and the reason to gather. And when the call to arms came in 1990, people were ready. When the RPA went to war, people came together and mobilized for four years. There is a whole other paper to be written here about that period in time, about what happened to the different communities where they were exiled.

I don't speak my language. This was a big deal when I was young. Was I a real Rwandan if I didn't speak the language? Did I *want* to be a real Rwandan, and what did that even mean? Was I a real Canadian, or a real Québecoise? Could I be? Today I believe there are better questions to ask. Even if these questions are still important for youth in today's social climate, better language and thinking are available now. Relationship to heritage plays out differently for each of us, and it shifts in time. In my family, for example, there are three girls. My middle sister, five years younger than I, is very removed from Rwanda and the community. My youngest sister, nine years younger, grew up during the height of community mobilization and was a leader in the youth and traditional dance groups. She went back to Rwanda, married a Rwandan, had two children, and lives there today. I, the eldest, have been thinking and playing with wellness and the relationship to culture, continuity, and rupture since I was 16 and my cousin killed himself here in Montreal. I had immigrated from Germany four years earlier and was not adapting well. I was beginning to understand that we did not belong to Germany, and why. I

became aware of "home," of not having one, and what it meant to "belong" or not. Three years later my family and I went to Africa. I was introduced to the refugee camps and fell in love with all these people who were my family. In 1990 the Tutsi refugee situation was one of the longest protracted refugee situations in the world. That summer I saw young soldiers getting ready to take arms in Uganda. October of that same year saw the war begin and the Rwandan diaspora mobilize all over the world. For four years communities mobilized; youths went to fight at the front. Cousins and friends, from Ottawa and Toronto, from Europe and the US were mobilized in the war for the right to return to Rwanda. Four years after that, the genocide was perpetrated against the Tutsi in Rwanda. I was marked by these events because I came of age during those times. I could have gone to war, either to fight or to support the fight, especially considering how lost I was here in Montreal. But I did not. The dilemma has haunted me.

At first inchoate

If we were in a playback theatre workshop and we were to check in, and you were part of the ensemble, everybody would come in and check in one by one and share what they're filled up with and receive an embodied interpretation reflected back to them. When it was my turn to be the teller (short for storyteller) I could say, "I'm filled up with my writing. It's difficult. It feels like a tangled mess, a gap, something on the tip of my conscious mind but not there where I need it to be, a thread of words unraveling, nice and clean, sentence by sentence. That's just not how it is. I feel as though the different layers (colonialism, religion, migration, exile, identity) ... the silences ... the differences in each one of these ruptures (identities[75]?) … how it all comes together and gets expressed in a positionality … could it all be sort of nice and tidy? One

[75] Amin Maalouf in *Les identités meurtrières* (Paris: Grasset, 1998) speaks of an *examen d'identités*.

sentence after another? But no, it resists. I can't even think of a better question right now. I'm so frustrated."

The conductor would turn to the actors and summarize what I've said: "Lisa is feeling really frustrated with a jumbled, tangled piece of writing, trying to find words about ...." They would call out a form.[76] So they might say, "It's a *fluid sculpture*; let's watch." And the actors one by one would offer a gesture of sound and movement, and one by one compose a live

Image 16. Montreal: I report back to the community during a meeting of PAGE-Rwanda members. On the large screen is an image of a playback theatre-mediated session we had presented at an earlier meeting in the same space. On the screen within that image is a photograph from one of the 2014 focus group sessions convened as part of our research among other local post-genocide communities.

tableau of sound and movement to reflect back what they heard of what I said and how I said it, each focusing on just a piece of what they heard. Maybe someone would have been pulling an imaginary thread. Making knots. Going back to it and back to it in practice. Another person might come into the tableau and grab her head in the likeness of Edvard Munch's "The Scream." Another would … and then at the end, all three or four actors would freeze into one beautiful reflection back to me—my current state—making me feel heard and validated. Opening up space for my continued questing.

[76] Playback is played through a series of forms the conductor suggests and the actors play into. I explain playback theatre more thoroughly in chapter 4.

Even not knowing how to articulate, I would be enough to participate in the moment. Be enough, in the moment. And then it would be somebody else's turn to check in. And I would then serve their story, either as a conductor or as an actor. I say this to illustrate how, whether I knew it or not, I was fine. Playback theatre allowed me to come as I was and be validated, every moment of the quest. I didn't start with Deleuze or even with a question. I could start with a disquiet, my own malaise, if that was where I was, and in time there would be more information, and shifts and language and eventually a question and eventually, maybe, elements of thought, words, answer.

Practice and collaboration

I did not know what the goal of wellness or freedom looked like, but I knew the oppressive silences I had grown up with in my family and community, the overwhelmingly non-African, vexing external and "expert" gaze and explanation of books or writing about us, the feeling of helplessness, and the many layers of trauma—those familial that I knew first hand—loss, suicide, abuse, mental health issues, substance abuse, illicit behaviour, poverty, refugee life, exile, dislocation—and those I knew communally—exile, oppression, persecution, forced migration, multiple loss, war, genocide, and, more broadly, colonization, Christianization, etc.

Neither did I know how I would go about "achieving" my goal. I had designed a community art project around asking and answering the questions of where we are coming from, where we are, and where we want to go. And I used "we" because boundaries between family and community in the Rwandan diaspora were somewhat blurry. Tuganire ended horribly (Ndejuru 2011) right around the beginning of the second phase—the phase of interviewing. Max, a beautiful young man, a member of my extended family, was murdered, and the murderer, another of our young men, a family friend, was imprisoned. The community was traumatized.

The questions of where we are coming from and where we want to go had brought us together as a community. Eleven subgroups of Rwandans in Montreal had started working together. We had started opening up and working together only to end up bludgeoned again. I felt broken and dangerous: I felt responsible and that I had put the community at risk by insisting that we engage with each other and get closer.

After that experience, the MLS project became a safe space, a haven where I caught my breath and got back on my feet. The life story interview format and practice were in some ways a more systematic and supported continuation of the questions I had posed through Tuganire but I was not responsible to hold it all. And so it came that, rather than studying theory, I started doing long before I started reading, first playback theatre, then interviewing, community dialoguing, then collaborating, creative writing, mapping, performance creation, performing. The people I worked with came from different fields, disciplines and sensibilities, and each brought their premises to their work: history, oral history, literature, relational and material arts practice, performance, education, media studies, creative arts therapies, trauma and genocide studies, anthropology, philosophy, applied human sciences, etc.

The Montreal Life Stories practice and posture

When I began thinking about pursuing a doctoral degree, the Montreal Life Stories project was in its second-to-last year. I knew I wanted to reflect on the journey and the different collaborations, methods, and practices we had used. I had interviewed, practiced playback theatre, and worked in numerous capacities within the project. Interestingly, each of the practices carried with it its own guiding principles, ontology, and epistemology.

The oral history practice and organizational structure of the entire MLS for example, was inspired by two guiding principles: namely “shared authority,” an idea of oral historian Michael

Frisch[77], and listening to survivors. Our principal investigator, Dr. Steven High, took it further, put the idea to work, and made it a verb. Sharing authority permeated every nook and cranny of the project and the practice and brought with it a politics and values of fairness, equality, and social justice. Not enough has been written about Dr. High's influence on the MLS project.

The other idea that shaped our practice was Henry Greenspan's posture of "listening to survivors"[78], an understanding honed by 30 years of dedicated practice, which saw the interview as a co-construction between interviewer and interviewee, where both put themselves in the service of elaborating the interviewee's story.

Research-creation, collaborations, influences

The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) defines research-creation as an "approach to research that combines creative and academic research practices, and supports the development of knowledge and innovation through artistic expression, scholarly investigation, and experimentation."[79] In their essay, Chapman and Sawchuk reflect more precisely on some of the ways in which research-creation challenges "the normative frameworks that have traditionally structured academic contributions to knowledge, disrupting the reigning paradigms for qualitative and quantitative methodologies in the process"[80], and how it can contribute to elaborating "new paradigms of knowledge production and dissemination"[81].

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[77] Michael H. Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History*, SUNY Series in Oral and Public History (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990).

[78] Henry Greenspan, *On Listening to Holocaust Survivors: Beyond Testimony*, 2nd ed. (New York: Continuum, 2010).

[79] Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, "Definitions of Terms, May 11, 2012, https://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/funding-financement/programs-programmes/definitions-eng.aspx#a22.

[80] Owen Chapman and Kim Sawchuk, "Research-Creation: Intervention, Analysis and 'Family Resemblances,'" *Canadian Journal of Communication* 37, no. 1 (2012): 23.

[81] Chapman and Sawchuk, "Research-Creation," 8.

Neither qualitative nor quantitative, research-creation asks "What does it do"? To that question I would like to add "For what purpose?"

Stéphane Martelly, for example, brought a very Derridean approach to creative writing[82], and the art and therapy workshops for refugee women I created with Ramona Benveniste were strongly inspired by Alfred North Whitehead's process theory[83] and the ideas of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari[84]. Stéphane is an author, poet, and scholar of Caribbean literature. She was a member of the Haiti working group of the MLS project. I met her during a short workshop she gave and I organized for her to give a longer and very important creative writing workshop (more on that in chapter 6). Within the oral history and performance working group, one of the seven groups that made up the MLS, we founded the Living Histories playback theatre ensemble. The LHE's work was obviously steeped in playback theatre creator Johnathan Fox's idea of playback as "acts of service"[85], but we also used the ideas of other applied and therapeutic theatre greats like Augusto Boal, Jacob Levy Moreno, and David Read Johnson. Inspired by the emancipatory writings of Brazilian popular educator Paulo Freire, Boal's work was always about helping so-called non-actors to shift into being actors and masters of their own situations. It was about making understanding, thinking, and action accessible to every human, about democratizing and demystifying theatre, therapy, and politics. Romanian-born American psychiatrist Moreno, who created psychodrama and sociodrama and such ubiquitous performance techniques as role reversal and empty chair, was a defender of "spontaneity," "creativity," "love," and "community," while David Read Johnson's developmental

[82] Stéphane Martelly, *Les jeux du dissemblable*, 12.

[83] Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010).

[84] Erin Manning and Brian Massumi, *Thought in the Act: Passages in the Ecology of Experience* (University of Minnesota Press, 2014)

[85] Jonathan Fox, *Acts of Service: Spontaneity, Commitment, Tradition in the Nonscripted Theatre* (New Paltz, NY: Tusitala Publishing, 1994).

transformations practice, while pulling from many different sources, centred on the notion of the instability of Being.

What was I presenting that afternoon at the institute? What was it exactly that for me held tremendous value in terms of stories I was hearing from my family and my community and the ways in which we were learning to fill or engage the silences that had weighed on our life. Finding the language and praxis to think through my journey in the MLS has felt like being

Image 17. Gicumba, Byumba: The home where my paternal grandfather's assassins found him. He was killed in front of the house, near the road. (The wall and gate were a much later addition).

pushed and pulled between seemingly conflicting needs for strategy, defensibility, conformity, legibility, authority, legitimacy, and truth, or, more precisely, vulnerability. From a standpoint of the practitioner self-studying, I have found education scholars like Lynn Fels (performative inquiry) and Karen Meyer (living inquiry) to be particularly resonating. I will return to it. The work of Deborah Britzman and specifically her ideas on "difficult knowledge" has also been important in terms of understanding of the tension between learning from violence and the "violence" or challenge of learning and growth. Originally I had simply assumed "difficult knowledge" to be a shorthand for "violent, tragic, gruesome, horrific, and painful" historical

subject matter, as seen through a life stories window.[86] In doing the work, however, I soon discovered that the focus of my own efforts especially involved addressing the consequences of political persecution, assassinations, exile, refugee camps, and genocide that occurred long before I was born, the much more familiar events of 1994 as well as their "active remains" in the here and now, where we were making our lives. I knew the experience of targeted, organized violence to be carried deep within my loved ones, moving with them through time and space, affecting everyone we are close to in insidious, sometimes destructive ways. I claim that these things often block my people's capacity to dream and to realize our potential. My father's angry outbursts and deep anguish characterized my formative years. My mother has experienced bouts of utter helplessness, debilitating sadness, and unqualified pain since before I was born. For me it was heaviness and sadness and the debilitating silences—the fear to even speak the name of our demons. For all of us it is about the multitude of ways in which people respond to complex trauma. In his interview, previously mentioned Philibert Muzima, a survivor of the 1994 genocide, regrets that his parents did not warn or prepare him, that they struggled to live and make lives in Rwanda, first under state-sanctioned persecutions since colonial times in the 1940s and 1950s, then during the social unrest and persecutions during independence (the first and second republic) in the 1960s and 1970s. After his interview, he went on to write a book. He is active and outspoken in the community and speaks to his children. In my family as well, silence has wounded my parents' generation and my own: my sisters, my cousins, me. Today, I worry about our children. Silence is easy to continue.

[86] Erica T. Lehrer, Cynthia E. Milton, and Monica Patterson, *Curating Difficult Knowledge: Violent Pasts in Public Places,* Palgrave Macmillan Memory Studies (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 7.

If indeed "epistemology is the theory of how we know the world and of how we gain knowledge of it."[87] It's about noticing the ways in which these narratives influenced our—or at least my—present and my thinking of myself as "a part of" or "other," then we're no longer in a realm of the objective; au contraire, we are entirely in the realm of the subjective where the way in which life tastes better or tastes more meaningful is entirely a subjective thing and to seek it is to search for the qualities or the ingredients of a life tasty life is a worthwhile academic or intellectual artistic and human endeavour. Adrienne Rich wrote about the discomfort that some audiences and publication outlets expresses and demonstrated in relation to her being an "out" lesbian. She wrote:

> This experience has reminded me of what I should never have let myself forget: that invisibility is not just a matter of being told to keep your private life private; it's the attempt to fragment you, to prevent you from integrating love and work and feelings and ideas, with the empowerment that that can bring.[88]

For example, objectively people survive the genocide but some will speak to or about themselves as though they had died with their loved ones. This makes for an entirely different quality of existence. And even though they are not factual about whether they are alive or dead, we can appreciate that they are alive but just barely, or that, to them, it doesn't feel that way. The experience of feeling alive or not, of being rooted, of being satiated, secure and safe … or feeling as though one is unfurling (and not exploding but rather sort of blossoming) is a satisfying, gratifying feeling. Is mine-yours-theirs a gratifying life or is it an existence of pain? I feel as though I have a responsibility to scholarship, and what that responsibility means is not clear to

[87] Denzin and Lincoln, SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research, 12.
[88] Adrienne Rich, "Invisibility in Academe," in *Blood, Bread, and Poetry*, 200.

me at the moment. Is it enough to think alongside or to think with different thinkers in my eclectic reading habits to gather these different ideas, like the idea of the cultural forager, for example, or the aesthetic forager? Getting back to Noel, maybe my contribution is also in part about unlearning the ways in which the knowledge communities he is a part of described me and those I am a part of.

Engaging ongoing remains and psychosocial legacies: An offering

> *When the heart breaks, there must be made, from this loss, a work of mourning.*
>
> Deborah Britzman, "If the Story Cannot End"

In 2011 my uncle André took me to this place called Gisuna where, allegedly, the body of his father, my grandfather, had been thrown after he was shot. The story goes like this:

> That evening, my father fled to his friend's house after two men knocked at the door and asked to see him. His friend tried to hide him, but my father refused. He did not want to attract any trouble to the home because of the women and children. My mother, Patricia, was there with him, as was my sister Assumpta, still a baby. The two men asked him to meet with a local official. When my stepped out of the house with them and they started in the wrong direction, he balked. The mother saw them shoot her husband and drag his body away.

My paternal grandfather, Pierre Claver Ndejuru, was assassinated in Rwanda on March 27, 1962. Even though he was killed a decade before I was born, and even though no one spoke of him very much before the Montreal Life Stories Project, he has loomed very large in my family's life stories and my own. My father, as the eldest, learned to take care of his mother and five siblings In the decades after my grandfather was killed. They became very close and

survived by counting mostly on each other. My grandfather had made sure that they had the foundations of a house and some money for schooling. My father and his brothers finished the house. Their mother and her sister Therese would live and work there with the children when they were home from school. The experience would forever shape the family. In my father's life story interview, he talks about how few people were left after his father's assassination. How few reached out to his widow and family after he was killed.

Image 18. Montreal: A community walk from the center of the city to the St. Lawrence River is a focal point of the annual PAGE-Rwanda genocide commemoration in April. Weather conditions at that time of year often are miserable.

How people were afraid to associate with our family. Carved in my memory is his interview, where he bowed his head to indicate how people submitted, how they were made to be afraid through the use of violence. My grandfather had been a larger-than-life figure. He was gregarious and known for a fearless kind of outspokenness. He liked to drink with friends. A story goes that once, the Mwami had taken exception to his comments and said, "What is this I hear, Ndejuru, you call yourself the king?" My grandfather had answered, "King of fools, your highness, king of fools!" He had laughed and placated the king. As a western-trained "assistant medical," he had cared for, provided medical treatments to, and had known many people and in his lifetime, had had many friends.

Deborah Britzman writes that "understanding itself can offer no consolation, and if it is treated as if understanding settles anything, all we are left with are repetitions of the suffering, and suffering unattached to thought, a suffering whose value has shattered, a suffering that cannot become the transference that is also crucial for the work of mourning."[89] The lack of solution or resolution we are left with in this model, is a difficult concept to accept and integrate and goes against everything inside that asks for closure. It is the struggle of complex grief. Britzman writes, "Yes, it is important to think. But that sometimes means, we are no longer in the realm of interpretation, where, if we have the proper story, all will be settled."

Growing up in a family where things are not spoken, breaking silence can feel like transgression: If this thing is never mentioned, maybe it's because it's dangerous. What happens if I speak it? Will I hurt someone I love?

In 2011, PAGE-Rwanda, an association of parents and friends of victims of the genocide, undertook a series of interviews with children to try and see what they knew of the genocide and what, if anything, they would like to know about it. The children, aged 7 to 18, were the children of survivors in the organization. The interviewer was a member of the community, herself a survivor, a school teacher, a trusted and familiar family friend and a community organizer. She visited the families in their homes, interviewed the children, and came back to the Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling, where we spent hours choosing and editing excerpts to create a video that we showed to the community during commemoration that year. Our elders held more authority in the final choices and we learned and figured out the software. We spent nights together watching the interviews and selecting clips and days going to work and fulfilling

[89] Deborah Britzman, "If the Story Cannot End: Deferred Action, Ambivalence, and Difficult Knowledge," in *Between Hope and Despair: Pedagogy and the Remembrance of Historical Trauma*, ed. Roger I. Simon, Sharon Rosenberg, and Claudia Eppert, 27–57 (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), 49.

our other obligations. Although it took hours and hours of peering at video content, forward and back, selecting content, and creating clips late into the night, all I remember is a time of closeness of making something meaningful together. Listening to "our" children. So much love and laughter. The children's answers were varied.

One clip that has stayed with me was a little girl, 10 or 11, very subdued, eyes downcast and voice barely audible, talking about what she didn't know of her mother's experience. The interviewer asked her what she wanted to know and the little girl, her whole body lifting toward the interviewer, her eyes rounding in wonder and awed excitement said, "You were there?" Part question, part statement: a quiet energy visibly filling her. "How was it?" The interviewer chuckled: "That is too big a question. I don't know how to answer that." And the little girl asked, "Were you hungry? Were you cold?" Her question to M was: How did you survive? And Monique found this beautiful way to say "Well you know, back then we didn't know when it was going to end. We figured it out one day at time, a little bit at a time, and then it was the next day and another day and so on until it was over." The something really, really big and worrisome was made manageable and familiar again, in part because of what was said, but also how it was said: calmly, openly and with a smile. Nothing bad had happened in asking the question. The big round eyes drank Monique up. The girl quietly nodded along. Of course, big things—even impossible things like that—get done in smaller, manageable pieces. Another little boy announced that he didn't know much. When he was asked whether he would rather know or not, he said that he would rather be protected and not know for a while. When asked why, he answered that the knowing was really hurting his parents and he didn't want to hurt. Another boy of 9 explained that there were some questions he could not yet answer because his father had decided that he did not need to know until he was older and could more easily deal with it.

Nodding vigorously, he told us that he agreed with his dad and happily shared an order of things that he was comfortable and in agreement with. An older boy, almost a man, felt that he had a pretty good idea about the genocide, but he wanted to know more about Rwandan history. He was curious to know more about colonization and what had come before and after that time. So what does epistemology then mean? What does it mean to create knowledge or to contribute?

Image 19. Gisuna.

"Gisuna", the place where my grandfather's body is said to have been thrown, is a metaphor for my work. Looking at the scene, no one could know what it represents unless they hear the stories. Something happened there in 1962 but no body was ever found. My family's lives were changed forever. The most remarkable thing about Gisuna in this photograph is its quiet, ordinary loveliness. A sunny day. A quiet place. Productive farmland. No one ever saw the body after he was shot. There is no evidence it was ever in that field. Yet so much has happened since that day he died. Britzman asks, "What if one could picture education from the advent of impressions left behind and as containing what is questionable in experiences of loss and uncertainty?"[90] The Montreal Life Stories project offered an incredible container for learning with and about loss and uncertainty. The principles of sharing authority, structured into the

[90] Deborah P. Britzman, "Between Psychoanalysis and Pedagogy: Scenes of Rapprochement and Alienation," *Curriculum Inquiry* 43, no. 1 (2013): 96.

design at every level and the foundation of "listening to survivors" centered both: the teller's story and, the dialogic nature of the construction of stories, even life stories. In our community dialogue work and with the Living Histories Ensemble listening went beyond the one on one interview and took many, maybe not a village as the saying goes, but at least a community to come together to pull on that thread, and witness and weave the story.

Image 20. Montreal: Each year a community mass at Notre Dame de Lourdes Chapel begins the central day for remembering those who died in the 1994 genocide perpetrated against the Tutsis in Rwanda. For many, the genocide began 35 years or more before the events of 1994.

We experienced the container as individuals in groups or projects but also as communities working as part of a larger community. Each community working on their own story, each individual being affirmed in their unique tale. We saw those elements and the collaboration to story also in the dialogical nature of story making (I will write later about my experience of creative writing and maïeutique). The MLS was a gift. Especially after the tragic end of the Tuganire project and Max's murder by Billo. It provided a haven.

I became a psychotherapist to better understand and process my own journey and serve my community. I moved toward art and collaborative creative practice with life stories because engaging a political event (or a series of events) that touches thousands of lives across multiple generations and confining it to a one-on-one therapeutic relationship to work through trauma felt as though a lot of the social, collective, and political dimensions of the experience

were lost. Most therapeutic models presume the problem, or the trauma, to be within the patient. I want to highlight the wounds and the work done to the in-between: in between self and self, self and other, self and time, self and place, self and the more-than—the relational wounds. On one hand that requires the social and community aspect or what Judith Herman (Chapter 4) called a "solidarity of resistance" and on the other hand there is a personal intention or drive that I call emancipation.

Chapter 3: Emancipation

Theory is not inherently healing, liberatory, or revolutionary. lt fulfills this function only when we ask that it do so and direct our theorizing towards this end.

bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*

This chapter situates my research-creation journey in the encounters, influences, and difficult moments I experienced in the Montreal Life Stories (MLS) project, ending with this dissertation. The chapter therefore documents where I was coming from and what drove me. It touches on the objectives and motivations of the larger Montreal life stories and then my own, within this larger context. I begin with a story of a time when I felt a yearning to feel upright.

My thinking and learning developed through difficult moments and over time. These moments have become wobbly, sometimes slippery stepping stones. It is good, not only to get to the other side, but also to stand and take stock—to find balance, to look around at the various possibilities and enjoy my options: maybe a crossing; maybe the experience of a rushing body of water; maybe something yet unknown. Writing as a method of inquiry[91] encouraged me to find my own metaphors to think theory with. The language of difficult knowledge[92] allowed me to think about confrontation as learning and the journey as an open-ended, psycho-educational experiment. Performative inquiry[93] offered a process to revisit these confrontational stop

[91] Laurel Richardson and Elizabeth St. Pierre, "Writing. A Method of Inquiry," in *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*, ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, vol. 3 (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2008), 473.

[92] Deborah P. Britzman, Lost Subjects, Contested Objects: Toward a Psychoanalytic Inquiry of Learning (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998).

[93] Lynn Fels, "Performative Inquiry," in *Playing in a House of Mirrors*, ed. Elinor Vettraino and Warren Linds, 151–74 (Rotterdam: Sense, 2015).

moments. And after being confronted, it was thinking with living inquiry[94] and the idea of always being born into something already existing that helped me think in terms of being a part of a lineage and a community of scholars and thinkers who have thought and articulated what might be called a *drang*[95] for emancipation.

In the previous chapter I mentioned the works of educational theorist Deborah Britzman about "difficult knowledge." When she coined the term in 1998, difficult knowledge stood for an

Image 21. Montreal: A heavily attended session organized by PAGE-Rwanda to help its youth learn more about Rwanda's 20th century history.

understanding that "love, hate, conflict, pain, loss, resistance, and desire are part of learning as well as part of life."[96] Britzman observed that the learning process, far from being easy or natural, can be and often is fraught with obstacles and resistance. The idea has been used by educators and museum curators to "denote the affective and epistemological challenges in teaching and learning about/from social and historical traumas"[97] in classrooms and exhibition spaces. Because I was working with both intergenerational transmission and life stories of

[94] Karen Meyer, "Living Inquiry: Me, My Self, and Other," *JCT Online* 26, no. 1 (2010): 85.

[95] A German word meaning pressure; aspiration; drive; strong desire; something that pushes for actualization from within (my own translation).

[96] Britzman, *Lost Subjects, Contested Objects*, 133.

[97] Michalinos Zembylas, "Theorizing 'Difficult Knowledge' in the Aftermath of the 'Affective Turn': Implications for Curriculum and Pedagogy in Handling Traumatic Representations," *Curriculum Inquiry* 44, no. 3 (2014): 391.

genocide and war, I found both ideas useful: the difficulty of learning with traumatizing information, and also the challenge inherent in learning as growth.

During a conference on cultural mediation organized by Eva Quintas at Université du Québec à Montréal in 2006, retired sociologist Jocelyne Lamoureux stood up after listening to people sing the praises of cultural mediation as a hot new thing. She told the audience it sounded to her a lot like the old, familiar practice of popular education—except, she warned, without any teeth, without the struggle to develop political awareness and agency.[98] She said the aim or purpose of popular and critical education is to edify individuals and equip them to become citizens and to enter the public arena of conflicting ideas. I remember crying when she spoke of the edified person stepping into the ring of conflicting ideas. To listen to her was to breathe deeply, to sit straighter. The idea of "education to edify" rang like the ultimate objective.[99] What struck me so physically at first was shifting conflict, violence, and aggression away from the literal to the realm of ideas—and imagining a safe place for confrontation—and the idea of conflict as something edifying, something to seek out rather than to avoid at all cost. It lit something inside of me—a yearning for a thing I did not quite know or fully understand—and I turned toward it like a flower to the sun. Doing so, I found that (a) one should indeed be careful

[98] She of course had a point. Various forces were at play in relation to cultural mediation. Culture Montréal, the organism at the inception of the notion of cultural mediation, had been a "citizen's" movement to accompany the creation and implementation of the city's first cultural policy. The "citizens" in question sitting around the table and leading this movement were also the decision makers of Montreal's largest cultural institutions. Culture Montréal's president, Simon Brault, is at the helm, at the time of writing, of the Canada Council for the Arts. *Médiation culturelle* was in many ways about creating citizens engaged with their cultural institutions and so could be interpreted either as a way to foster feelings of ownership by the citizens in their publicly funded cultural institutions and/or as a way for institutions to prove their relevance and broaden their markets and share of consumers. At the time, the struggle did not involve citizens so much as cultural workers, and tended to play out between artists and the cultural institutions.

[99] Today my focus has shifted toward material consequences and future imaginaries.

what one asks for; (b) confrontation, even in the realm of ideas, can hurt; and (c) confrontation may not be necessary for learning, but it can be generative.

Stretching beyond the comfort zone sometimes meant stepping outside the protected space of the MLS and into the academic ring, where one may be confronted, questioned, and doubted, sometimes aggressively. I discovered that the "safe place" of conflicting ideas was not as safe as I had imagined, and that there is a danger of learning becoming about defending

Image 22. Montreal: Introduction to the community of a new PAGE-Rwanda genocide education web platform, which includes selected life story interviews from the Montreal Life Stories project.

oneself, and learning to parry, thrust, and feint. A big challenge for me has been to keep coming back to my inquiry and recentring my praxis, to sharpen and clarify what, how, and why I seek, what I find, what some of the blind spots are, and why it is important to continue on my journey.

Who is "we"?

The late Joe Kincheloe wrote that "knowledge is never free and unconnected to diverse power blocs because it is always produced as part of a web of power relationships."[100] For Kincheloe, "the idea that the production and mediation of information in higher education is a highly politicized process demanding careful monitoring of the ideological interests involved is

[100] Joe L. Kincheloe, "Critical Pedagogy and the Knowledge Wars of the Twenty-First Century," *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 10.

still unwelcome in academic circles."[101] He wrote, "Most researchers, politicians, and educators still live in a state of denial about the political dimension of knowledge production and the relationship between validated information and the international purveyors of economic power. One is inseparable from the other."[102] I had an experience a little later, during the "Little Berks" conference of women historians, where I learned that even feminist milieux are not immune.

In 2011, the American Association of Women Historians had written to Dr. High to send someone to the Berkshire conference to present about the MLS project and they agreed to invite Anna Sheftel and myself. The event took place at a beautiful resort in Saratoga Springs, New York. Our small team from the MLS was welcomed warmly and it was easy to meet people and to connect. At lunch I met a very friendly woman scholar who was studying East Africa and we had a great conversation. I asked a lot of questions about what it was like to write and do research about Africa in North America. I wanted to know how she found it as a young white scholar—whether she had opportunities for teaching and research and funding for travel. Was there any interest for things African in American universities? What were some of the questions she was grappling with? What were some of the journals she liked? She in turn asked about me and my work. It was a moment of connection and possibilities.

In one of the break times, sitting in the comfy chairs in one of the salons, one young woman historian asked me about oral history. I shared what I knew, and when I asked her if she was interested in it, she shuddered delicately and exclaimed that she would never want to do history about or with people that could speak back. She said she liked her subjects nice and dead. I remember laughing out loud, saying "fair enough." It was friendly and relaxed. I had never thought about it that way. Working to make sense of stories of colonialism, persecution, and

[101] Kincheloe, "Critical Pedagogy," 11.
[102] Ibid.

genocide, for myself and with my community, I was grateful to be able to work with my family and others inside of the MLS project. I was sharing my observations and learning in a spirit of community, not to stake out a field or make an argument. Since I had never seen the kind of work I do in a university setting, I wasn't invested in making a living studying the things I cared about in a regular university environment. Back then, I did not yet identify as a scholar or an oral historian. I wasn't sure who my thinking would be useful for, what or how I would pass on to them and what they would be able to do with it. I presented at "Little Berks" on the larger MLS project, on the intergenerational dialogue day the Rwandan working group organized for the larger Rwandan community for genocide commemoration in April 2010[103], and on the work the playback theatre ensemble was doing in the Rwandan community in relation to creating spaces for all the stories to be heard. Because the conference theme that year was digital storytelling, I started my presentation with the making of the digital stories we in the Rwandan working group had curated and edited ourselves out of the existing interviews in order to work with the whole community on a timeline spanning over 50 years, from 1959 to the present day. I completed my presentation with some of the promising ways we had been able to hold space for multiple stories and perspectives with the playback theatre troupe. The through line for me was the challenge in our Rwandan community to receive, welcome, and compose with all of the different perspectives.

"Who is 'we'?" asked Ardis Cameron, one of the senior scholars. Claudia Koons, a senior genocide scholar, added that when I said "we" they heard "Tutsi." "You speak of Tutsi memory," they said. I could not answer right away, because to my ears it carried so much charge that I lost my balance. All I was able to do was ask what they meant by Tutsi. And they replied

[103] Steven C. High, *Oral History at the Crossroads: Sharing Life Stories of Survival and Displacement* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014), 89.

that it meant anti-democratic and also the "silencing of Hutu voices." Olivia Rutazibwa writes in the field of international relations about the "silencing that befalls Rwanda"; she concludes that "it amounts to a binary presentation of a complex place."[104] Rutazibwa writes that "most of us seem incapable of transcending the Hutu/Tutsi, rural/urban, men/women, rich/poor, dictator-autocrat/democrat, pro/contra FPR regime categories."[105] She writes, "That these categories are used to initially approach a complex reality is in itself not problematic. However, when they

Image 23. Montreal: Young readers lead a commemoration event.

operate as blinds, incapacitating us to see and convey the complexities and developments in the making on the ground, they are a silencing device."[106] To this day I am happy that I asked, because it made explicit what they thought and what I felt. I did not need to wonder whether the attack had been in my head. It was a very dissonant moment. When I was thinking of the different perspectives in the community, I was thinking beyond the Hutu/Tutsi binary, and I had expressed that. I had explained that even within "one" group, there were so many diverse experiences, griefs, and resentments. Arden said that I was probably too close to my subject to

[104] Olivia Umurerwa Rutazibwa, "Studying Agaciro: Moving Beyond Wilsonian Interventionist Knowledge Production on Rwanda," *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 8, no. 4 (October 2, 2014): 2.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Ibid.

have any kind of credibility. The senior genocide scholars who questioned me were explicit: I was "not credible." I was not "a knower," even when I was talking about my own work inside my own community, something I felt I knew a lot about. I was not a knower because of intentions I did not hold but were explicitly projected by them onto me (i.e., silencing Hutu voices and being undemocratic). When the women started ganging up, I froze. It was a younger scholar who "saved" me. She halted the words coming at me and questioned her colleagues—was it not ironic for members of a feminist circle of women historians to criticize a female community scholar for making knowledge from her own experiences to address her own concerns? And while it was true that not all women historians work on issues pertaining to women, many do. The rest of the evening was awkward, with an odd feeling left in the air. At supper, a Canadian contingent of women historians made a deliberate gesture to invite me and show their support. And the next morning, more awkward conversations and overtures.

Laurel Richardson writes that "we are fortunate, now, to be working in a postmodernist climate, a time when a multitude of approaches to knowing and telling exist side-by-side."[107] She writes, "The core of postmodernism is the doubt that any method or theory, any discourse or genre, or any tradition or novelty has a universal and general claim as the 'right' or privileged form of authoritative knowledge. Postmodernism suspects all truth claims of masking and serving particular interests in local, cultural, and political struggles."[108] My work is explicitly about making sense of things for myself and my community; there is no masked interest. I was talking to them about working with the challenges of different perspectives. I had not expected non-Rwandan North American scholars to be invested in such a polarized perspective or to be invested in an ethnicized understanding of the Rwandan conflict. In hindsight I wonder why not.

[107] Richardson and St. Pierre, "Writing," 961.
[108] Ibid.

But back then I felt completely sidelined. I wondered why they would see me as trying to take advantage of them and lie, when I was not asking anything of them. I had been invited. That episode, entitled "You Speak of Tutsi Memory," made its way into Le petit coin intact (the small intact place), a monologue I created during an MLS artist residency and performed at the end of the MLS project. The piece relates what happened but also expresses feelings of shock, disbelief, and hurt at being questioned, maligned, and typecast, being pushed into a polarized, sterile position when the work I was reporting on in the already-polarized community I am part of was hurtful and profoundly generative all at once. As with Noël, I spent a number of years trying to process this episode. At first it was about never wanting to find myself as destabilized as I was then. Then it became about learning.

"Who" is we?

> *Grandfather, why did you let them in? Why did you believe them when they said their god was better than ours?*

It took a long time for me to answer who "we" is or to parse out where I was thinking from. In April 2005, during genocide commemoration, the Kagabo brothers Hervé (Loulou) and Christian (Pompon), Rogrigue Mugisha (Mugi), and I had devised a performance piece: We had each written something in relation to where we were at. Mugi was talking to a nanny he had in 1994, wondering what had become of her. Pompon was explaining to his Canadian friends what this commemoration was about. Loulou was feeling into memories of killing and hunting, of hiding and being killed. I talked with my dead grandfather. My mother had been telling me for years to talk to my ancestors. Having been raised by her grandmother, who was not a Christian, she had been doing that since she was very small. She hadn't ever taught me how to do it, though. Instead I was baptized, went through communion and confirmation, pursued an undergraduate degree in religious studies and a master's degree in theology. My mother had a

challenging relationship with the Catholic church and its monopoly on education in Rwanda. She had terrible experiences with nuns at boarding school. Just before graduation, she was singled out by the sisters and was taken by soldiers from the cleric-run school to prison because she allegedly slept with a revolutionary poem under her pillow. In her interview she mockingly said, "They told me I was a threat against national security." She stayed in prison for eight months.

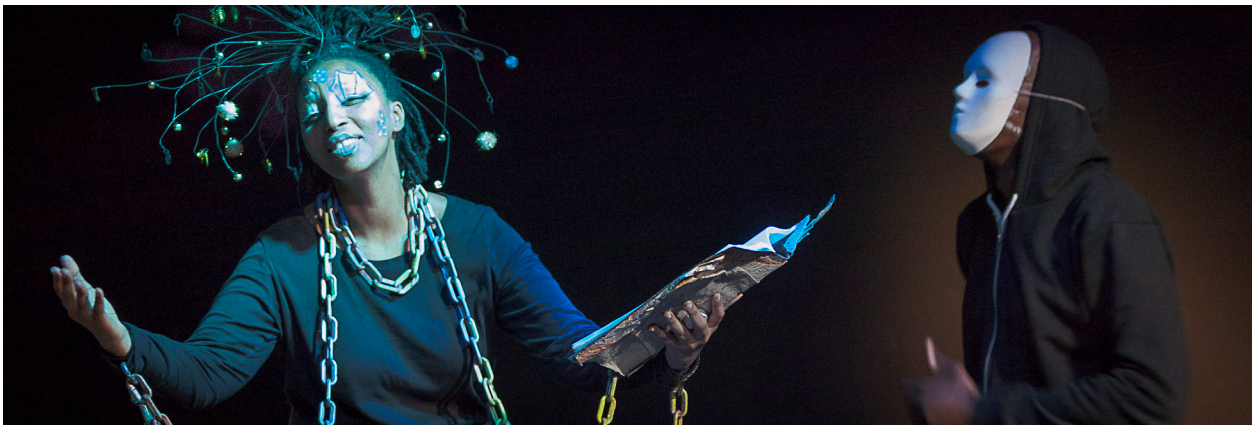

Image 24. Montreal: We have encouraged each other to find our voices and engage creatively with difficult stories. Foreshadowing the Mediterranean boat people of recent years, Rodrigue Mugisha wrote a whimsical, poignant stage play entitled *Malédiction des nuages* about leaving Africa in search of a better life, only to drown at sea.

I don't know that the way I wrote to my grandfather was what my mother had in mind when she encouraged me to engage with my ancestors. It felt as though speaking to the ancestors should involve something much more reverent. When I spoke to my grandfather, I was upset and disappointed. I poured years of frustration into our previously nonexistent relationship. I wrote to express that I felt stuck with the "decision" his generation had taken to let colonial power and Christianity take hold. I didn't like the way history had played out between "us" natives and "them" colonials. I felt that "we" had lost too much in that battle, and its consequence was that nothing of us, of ours, held any value anymore. I told him I still needed to be worth something, to be someone, inalienably. And that even if I did not believe we could ever go back in time, I did hope there was such a state—a place. A "home" I could step into. A feeling of "self" or personhood: solid, dense, real.

Today I am also a mother. I can better understand being afraid to pass on a belief that makes our child more vulnerable to attacks, but growing up, I was hurting. My mother would criticize the church for its hypocrisy and call out the gap between the text, what the clergy said, and what they did. From a very young age, I could feel the pain the church had caused my mother. It made it difficult to connect, have faith, and believe, and yet she would not—or could not—share the language or the traditional ways to access and negotiate the sacred.

My mother was shocked at the tone I used to speak to my grandfather in the performance piece. She was also shocked at the depth of my despair and found a way to allow me to have that conversation by inviting Mutware[109] to stand in for my grandfather and answer my concerns. Mutware was of my grandfather's generation, and he had known both my grandfathers. He also was the son of a chief, and like them, he had been raised and educated in Western ways and religion to become a colonial administrator. They were called *les évolués*, the evolved ones. They wore special clothes, lived in special houses, and had special meeting places. "Special" in this case means just as the whites did, but not together with them.

In my mind, Mutware stood for everything romantic: pan-African freedom fighters of the 1940s and 1950s; political organizing; pride. The struggle to be, to stand upright. I wanted him to explain what had happened. Are we bad people? Were we weak? Were we stupid? Mutware helped me understand, or maybe more importantly, he helped me accept that we had lost. I had heard of resistance growing up. I could not imagine there not being a push for self-determination, autonomy, and the end of colonial rule, and I had believed that Mutware was actively pursuing sovereignty and emancipation. When we interviewed Rwangombwa as part of the MLS, he said in the interview that "everything happened in the 1950s and 1960s" and that we did not know our

[109] A Kinyarwanda word for chief.

history. He wanted to set us right. And him saying it made it okay. Mutware told me that he had not in fact been part of any emancipation movement. He said the directive for decolonization came from the United Nations. Mutware told me, "Your generation does not know colonization; you do not understand what it is." He did not want to be an administrator, but as the son of an indigenous chief, he was automatically sent to train to become an administrator for the colonial

Image 25. Toronto: Callixte Kabayiza and I prepare to interview "Mutware"—Jean-Chrysostome Rwagomga.

power. He said he had wanted to be a doctor like my paternal grandfather had been. But my grandfather had not been a doctor; his title was "medical assistant." The anger I felt when I wrote to my grandfather completely drained when I met Mutware. He was beautiful. And dignified. So upright and alive. And when he told me how they did their best in very challenging times, it resonated. Wasn't that what we were doing to this day, each in our own tiny sphere of action?

Colin Legum offers the following quite helpful understanding of pan-Africanism: "Pan-Africanism" he writes, "is a revolt by people of colour against what Aime Cesaire has called `the influence of the colonial, semi-colonial or para-colonial situation.'"[110] He situates a triangle of influences: "The situation existed in the New World and Europe, no less than in Africa; hence

[110] Colin Legum, *Pan-Africanism: A Short Political Guide*, rev. ed. (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1965), 21.

the 'Atlantic triangle of influences' that nurtured Pan-Africanism."[111] He explains that "the emotional impetus for Pan-Africanist concepts flowed from the experiences of a widely-dispersed people—those of African stock—who felt themselves either physically through dispossession or slavery, or socially, economically, politically and mentally through colonialism, to have lost their homeland; with this loss came enslavement, persecution, inferiority,

Image 26. Rubona: Rural *fonctionnaire* housing where my paternal grandfather with his wife and children lived during one of his many postings around the country.

discrimination and dependency. It involved a loss of independence, freedom and dignity."[112] Legum speaks directly to the motivations I had in common with my elders when he writes, "Dignity: that majestic magical word in the vocabulary of Pan-Africanism; to regain dignity is the mainspring of all their actions."[113] Those were the ideas that were circulating in the minds of people like Mutware in the 1950s and 1960s. When they were thinking of emancipation, it was in a broader context. Mutware had been a member of the Counsel of Five, a consultative indigenous body to the Rwandan court under Belgian guardianship. As a younger female person born in Rwanda but raised abroad, I had believed that they, the traditional governing body, had some power. Mutware was telling me they did not. It was one of those times where I really resonated

[111] Legum, *Pan-Africanism*, 22.
[112] Legum, *Pan-Africanism*, 15.
[113] Ibid.

with a comment made by an undergraduate student : "It's hard when you've got this lovely theory and you have to give it up"[114].

Alice Pitt and Deborah Britzman distinguish difficult knowledge from lovely knowledge. "Lovely knowledge" is easily assimilable, the kind of knowledge that reinforces what we already know and gives us what we are accustomed to wanting from new information we encounter.

Image 27. Montreal: The young people I worked with in Isangano have grown up. They are establishing themselves professionally and some have children of their own. Several of these impressive young adults have come together to form Réseau des professionnels Rwandais du Canada, to inspire and support entrepreneurship and wellness among its members and the rising group of children who look up to them.

Lovely knowledge allows us to think of ourselves—due to our identification with particular groups—as, for example, timelessly noble, or long-suffering victims, and to reject any kind of information about ourselves or others that might contradict or complicate the story. Difficult knowledge, conversely, is knowledge that does not fit. It therefore induces a breakdown in experience, forcing us to confront the possibility that the conditions of our lives and the boundaries of our collective selves may be quite different from how we normally, reassuringly, think of them. Such knowledge points to more challenging, nuanced aspects of history and identity, potentially leading us to reconceive our relationships with those traditionally defined as "other."[115] Pitt and Britzman go on to write, "Difficult knowledge is what one makes from the

[114] Quoted in Pitt and Britzman, "Speculations," 765.
[115] Lehrer et al., *Curating Difficult Knowledge*, 8.

ruins of one's lovely knowledge."[116] Coming to terms with having been colonized is challenging. It made it difficult to be proud, to feel equal to others, knowing you have lost. When I was younger, I could not accept that as a people we had meekly accepted colonization. How were we singing and dancing kings and warriors of ancient times, drumming, clapping our hands, and celebrating who we were if we were losers? How could we aspire to being worthy, brave,

Image 28. Huye (Butare): The old jail (now hemmed in by modern buildings), where my mother at age 19 was detained after her politically-motivated arrest, prior to being transferred to the "1930 Prison" in Kigali.

beautiful, and wise? Thousands of years old? I was younger, and I did not know how important it can be, especially when you have lost a lot, not to lose everything. Not to lose yourself. I didn't know that the past doesn't necessarily determine the future. That as long as we are alive, we cannot give up. We have to keep fighting, and sometimes fighting means taking out the big drums and calling forth in our bodies the rhythms and songs of ancestors and times gone by. Stomping our feet and raising our arms and hearts and remembering what we are made of and where we come from and that we are alive. Mutware's wish was that everyone should know that he and his colleagues were not alone in requesting the movement for decolonization. He wanted to set the record straight and remind us of all of the different people who mobilized.

[116] Pitt and Britzman, "Speculations," 766.

In his 2011 interview for the MLS project, Mutware says, *Tout ce qui s'est passé chez nous … comment est-ce que je peux vous le résumer: l'effervescence, la prise de conscience; c'est dans les années … entre 1950 et 1960*. (Everything that happened in our place … how can I summarize it for you: the effervescence, the raised consciousness, all happened between 1950 and 1960).[117] His interviewer wants to steer him away and answers, *Okay, c'est ça. On y reviendra plus tard.* (Right, we'll get back to that later). But Mutware insists: *Non. Ce chapitre est mal connu parce qu'on croit que la révolte est venue des autorités indigènes comme on nous appelait, les autorités indigènes, mais les commerçants étaient associés, les évolués étaient associés, la presse était aussi du jeu … Nous allons en parler.* (No. This chapter is misunderstood because people believe the revolt to have come from the indigenous authorities as we were called then, indigenous authorities, but the merchants took part in it, the evolved ones took part, the press. We will indeed talk about it.)

Tout ce qui c'est passé chez nous. I am trying to give you a sense of what "we" is for me. I was going to translate "chez nous" but it is already a translation, because the interview was held in Kinyarwanda and French. When asked for his preference in terms of language, Mutware said: *En kinyarwanda autant qu'on peut, mais notre enfant [Lisa] a aussi le droit … elle peut nous poser des questions … elle peut poser des questions dans une langue où elle se sent à l'aise et je la comprends très bien. Si tu as quelque chose à me demander … tu [Lisa] peux le glisser en français. Sinon* … (In Kinyarwanda as much as possible, but our child [Lisa] may also … she may ask questions … in a language she feels at ease in, I understand her very well. If you have something you want to ask … you [Lisa] can slip it in, in French. Otherwise …) Mutware spoke

[117] My own translation of a French translation of an interview with Jean-Chrysostome Rwangombwa, Montreal Life Stories project, video, October 7, 2011, 21, The Living Archives of Rwandan Exiles and Genocide Survivors in Canada.

to me. As the youth. As the grandchild of their generation. Everyone mobilized. "We" all mobilized. He wanted people to know how much of our history of the times of independence was erased, misunderstood, and forgotten, how little we know and grasp of what colonization was, what the struggle against colonization actually meant, and how many forces were at play in the region and in Rwanda.

Image 29. Montreal: Well-educated, energetic young leaders are emerging within our community. Most have strong connections to the socioeconomic transformation occurring in Rwanda.

Some of what he wanted to convey may be Tutsi memory … but it is really so much more. I was told because I asked my elder. Just as I am now an elder-in-the-making for younger Rwandan people needing to make sense of the 1990s and what came before. I was very grateful, but Mutware was sad to be one of the only people of his generation remaining. He said so a number of times. He would have liked me to have more versions of the history I was asking about. To him, I was precious; I am the future, just as the millions of children pouring onto Rwandan sidewalks after school all over the country are my and "our" collective and precious and demographically pressing[118] future. To say that to say that the Hutu/Tutsi appellations have

[118] According to the CIA World Factbook, Rwanda's median age is 19 and the percentage of people 0–14 is over 40%. The feeling I got when travelling in the country and watching the children pour out of school and onto the sides of the road to go home was a feeling of gratitude, responsibility, and pressure. As though a river, or a body of kinetic energy, was making itself be felt. There is a pressing need or urgency

no meaning or weight or bearing would be to lie. After all that happened in the name of them (revolution, pogroms, exile, quotas, genocide, war …) of course, people, young and old, still struggle with them all the time. But how do we as Rwandans, get to a place where we can decide what those things stand for and how much consideration we give them? What is at stake, precisely because of our past, is how to create a horizon where all have access to health, education, and opportunity for the makings of a good life and living. Today, a grown man in Rwanda will call me "Mom" in the street. I am part of a parent generation in the Rwandan diaspora, and in the larger diaspora of Afrodescendent people in North America and globally, and all those children are "our" children. As I weave solidarities with other Indigenous people, other Blacks and people of colour, I care for our youth and creating common futures here on Turtle Island.

I remember in 2007/2008 in the early moments of interviewing in MLS, I visited JM, a woman in Montreal's Rwandan community. She had wanted to hear more about the project and I was hoping to recruit her for an interview. It was summer. Warm air was coming through open windows. We were sitting in her living room in Montreal, discussing 1990–1994, as well as what came before and what came after. She herself had not been in Rwanda in 1994, but she had grown up there and left as an adult. Of her large extended family, only three people had survived. She was severely affected by her grief and identified as a survivor. As we spoke about the war of 1990, she told me she was glad the war had taken place and that "we" had won.

I was shocked: As a rule, survivors resented the war. Survivors of the genocide against the Tutsi are Tutsi, because they were identified as such. Countless interviews mention the identity card people had to get when they were 16. This identity card was introduced by the Belgian

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to create horizons of access, possibilities, spaces, and opportunities for this power to flow into and grow into itself and feel good about itself ... and continue on.

colonizers in the 1930s and required one to fill out a category called *ubwoko*, which literally means clan but was translated to mean ethnic group, even though Rwandans had one culture, spoke the same language, held the same beliefs. These cards were required to be produced at roadblocks during the genocide in 1994, and they could mean life or death. Survivors are also Tutsi because they were hunted, persecuted, and killed as such since the late 1950s, early 1960s when my grandfather was killed, then again in waves until the culmination of 1994.

Image 30. Montreal: The youth of PAGE-Rwanda are entrusted with important responsibilities for memory and commemoration activities.

A prevalent sentiment among survivors of 1994 was that if the Rwandan Patriotic Army, or RPA, made up of those Rwandans who fled the first anti-Tutsi pogroms in the 1960s, who had been barred from returning to the country and had lived as refugees and exiles in the diaspora, had not gone on the offensive in the fall of 1990, then maybe the government, militia forces, and population would not have turned on them and killed them. Instead, JM thanked God that the RPA had gone to war and had continued to fight once the genocide began, and had won. I had never heard a survivor say that. It was deeply unsettling, because for many Rwandans, all of the people who were killed during the genocide made it impossible to count the mobilization and armed struggle as a win. When I asked her why she would say that, she answered, "It could have been worse. They could have killed us *and* we could have lost the war *and* we would still be

walking ‘folded in two’—as half people—bowing our heads.” JM never agreed to a formal interview. There are things that can be said between us but that cannot be said “out loud” or in public. Very few feelings feel safe to share, or they may feel too intimate. Rwandan culture requires quite a bit of emotional restraint. One of my aunts said to me during the MLS project that she could see I wanted to learn and know and that I should get in touch with her and sit and she would tell me.

Image 31. Muduga: On a hill called Musebeya, PAGE-Rwanda member Marie-Josée Gicali searches for fragments of her childhood home. Not only were many members of her extended family murdered on this hill, but the houses and farms of Musebeya were demolished and practically erased. Marie-Josée was a university student in 1994, and was badly wounded by a genocidaire in Kigali, narrowly escaping death.

“These stories are difficult and sad,” she said. “I don’t want you to record them, but come, I can see you care. I’ll tell you. Because you want to know.” It was an interesting feeling to think I would be the only repository of the stories she found so difficult to tell. Sometimes in the community, I hear memories, positions, or reactions framed in a way that allows the conclusion “at least they did not die in vain.” And although I understand the need to create sense out of tragedy, I believe the tragedy to be precisely that people died “in vain.” There is no “purpose” that could have justified murdering men, women, children, and elders. It’s what so often gets decentred or buried in competing discourses: the senseless murder of innocent civilians going about the business of living their lives. As someone who had experienced life

both inside the country and in exile, JM knew both realities. The tragedy of senseless murders and lives lost remained whole, and the struggle for human rights and dignity also remained whole. I had never before that moment allowed myself to simultaneously hold the unspeakable tragedy of over a million people murdered and the struggle for the right to return of Tutsi refugees in that way. I cannot express in words the humiliation JM conveyed with her face and body when she spoke of having been bent in two, having had to live as half-human. Nor how familiar it was for many.

Shari Stone-Mediatore writes beautifully about the power of storytelling, using Hannah Arendt's idea of "being at home in the world."[119] JM's story showed the need for our work to go beyond "understanding" or "coming to terms with things." Instead it became about finding a place in the world to stand upright in, where no one is allowed to arbitrarily take away your right to exist, or work, or live. And even more than that: where you don't have to make yourself small, play nice, or stay silent for fear they will take away what you have. That had been my default perspective: not making waves; hiding. Another "Tutsi memory."

Later, during my visit to Rwanda in 2011, I went to visit the Dominican compound in the Kacyiru neighbourhood of Kigali. I wanted to meet a very knowledgeable elder, Bernardin Musungu, a cousin to Feu Alexis Kagame, also of the clan of the Basinga. I was sent into a room to wait for him. I couldn't sit, I was so excited. The house was a beautiful cloister. The blinds were somewhat drawn and light was shimmering through. The room was cool. Father Musungu came into the room and his eyes were covered with a milky film. He eyed me with suspicion. I had not called ahead. "Whose are you? *Wa nde*?" I recognized that formula and answered, "*wa Ndejuru*." "Of Ndejuru?" An eyebrow raised. "Ndejuru who?" he shot back. "Ndejuru Aimable."

[119] Shari Stone-Mediatore, *Reading across Borders: Storytelling and Knowledges of Resistance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

I said my father's name. "Ndejuru Aimable?" "Mmmm," I hummed to indicate yes. "The one in Canada? Of Claver? *Wa Claver*?" I hummed again, and by then I was crying. Silently, but blubbering nonetheless. He did not see me at first. He was looking down as he was figuring out where to situate me. He raised his bushy eyebrows as he placed me as the grandchild of Pierre Claver. And he said, shaking his head, "Your grandfather … he was… something." Looking up, he saw me crying and frowned, somewhat alarmed but mostly exasperated.

Image 32. Kigali: With Emmanuel Habimana and my aunt Radegonde, I have just voted for the first time in a Rwandan election.

"What?! What is wrong with you?" "I'm so happy," I wailed. I made him uncomfortable, expressing my emotions so uninhibitedly. His hand brushed the air a few times, as if he could make me / it all disappear and make me straighten up. He could not wait for me to be done. I tried to explain what it felt like to be known, seen, recognized as part of an entity, to be a part of the fabric, inscribed ... in memory. My emotionality made his skin crawl, and I just wanted to hug and kiss him.

"What do you want?"

"I want to learn about history," I said.

"Well, what do you know?" he asked brusquely.

"What do I know?"

"Yes, what are we starting with? I don't want to repeat things you already know."

What did I know? I was so used to going on about what I did not know that his question took me unawares. I told him I had read some of the epic bovine[120] poetry that he had taken the time to transcribe, translate into French, and put online. I thanked him for his tireless work and devotion, and explained that I didn't get it. I couldn't feel anything at all. "Pah! Normal!" he said. "You have to be initiated into it. It's like anything." He gave me a little fuchsia book, *abrégé de l'ethno-histoire du Rwanda*[121], to start my education. "Start with that!" he said.

We did not know each other, and we have not met again. He probably did not like me very much, but I was "home." I was recognized and claimed. That was one "we" I was a part of. And that "we" had a history.

Affective force

The late museum scholar Roger Simon wrote that "the locus of difficulty within 'difficult knowledge' resides in the indeterminate yet potentially problematic relation between the affective force provoked within the experience of an exhibition and the possible sense one might make of one's experience of this force and its relation to one's understanding of an exhibition's images, artifacts, text, and sounds."[122] For Simon, there was no perspective where the visitor would be spared, because witnessing or revisiting violence or representations of violence could trigger a negative, unsettling affect. A visitor might feel "anxiety, anger, and disappointment,"

[120] There is a Rwandan tradition of writing epic, very flowery poetry about cattle. The cow is sacred.

[121] Alexis Kagame, *Un abrégé de l'ethno-histoire du Rwanda*, vol. 1, Collection "Muntu" (Butare: Editions Universitaires du Rwanda, 1972).

[122] Roger I. Simon, "Afterword: The Turn to Pedagogy: A Needed Conversation on the Practice of Curating Difficult Knowledge," in *Curating Difficult Knowledge Violent Pasts in Public Places*, ed. Erica T. Lehrer, Cynthia E. Milton, and Monica Patterson, Palgrave Macmillan Memory Studies (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 195.

for example.[123] Should deeply held ways of seeing things be challenged, there may be feelings of revulsion, grief, anger, and/or shame, especially if there is a possibility that one's nation, cultural group, or family was complicit in the seizure of aboriginal land, the slave trade, the perpetration of genocide, or some other form of systemic violence. There was always the risk of viewers being traumatized should they identify with pretty much any of the historical actors: "the victims of violence, the perpetrators of such violence, or those identified as bystanders passively acquiescent in regard to scenes of brutalization."[124]

Image 33. Montreal: On the occasion of Kwibuka25 (the 25th commemoration of the 1994 genocide), Jacques Rwirangira, Vice-President of PAGE-Rwanda, addresses the crowd gathered at the base of the Montreal Clock tower in the Old Port. Flowers are thrown into the St. Lawrence River in remembrance of the bodies floating down the Nyabarongo River in 1994.

James Baldwin famously said, "Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced."[125] It is easier said than done. I have consistently denied and underestimated this force even though it helps tremendously in understanding the struggle to complete my mother's interview, and the issues and numerous Freudian slips I would make while interviewing family and working with the archives. I have consistently denied it, even though the bulk of my work has been to learn what conditions and practices work best to engage

[123] Ibid.

[124] Simon, "Afterword," 193.

[125] From the unfinished manuscript *Not My House*, which became the basis for the documentary *I Am Not Your Negro*. Bina Venkataraman, Notes on Quotes, https://notesonquotes.com/articles/bina-venkataraman (accessed 12 July 2020).

negative, unsettling affect. Working with direct witnesses, with their life stories, family and community memories and the material and emotional consequences on survivors and their families, I would feel irritated and impatient at Simon's discussion of "affective force" in relation to curated artefacts in an exhibition. I got a taste of my own medicine when I found my own research and considerations completely dismissed and invalidated when I presented the work with 1st, 2nd, and 3rd generation survivors in the Rwandan group at Columbia University in the summer of 2012. A group of MLS presenters had been invited and our offerings were met with contempt by the gathering of oral historians and students in the context of the yearly summer institute. Their theme of oral history and human rights was focused intensely on gathering life stories from current hot spots of human rights abuse and mass violence. And centring stories of experiencing or escaping violence. My research on the effects of my grandfather's murder 60 years ago on his descendants held absolutely no interest for people who were feeling the urgency and relevance of attending to present-day and ongoing sites and stories of open violence. More broadly, the shared authority approach all of my MLS colleagues and I had in common seemed to be received as somewhat distasteful. I remember interventions by archivists who questioned the value and validity of community-gathered and therefore nonprofessional interviews.

These three encounters—the afternoon at the institute where Patrick Noël asked me to explain my epistemological contribution; the presentation at the "Little Berks" conference of women historians where senior genocide scholars asked me who the "we" was that I was speaking from, and who accused me of speaking "Tutsi" memory, where Tutsi meant the rejection of democracy and the silencing of Hutu voices; and the afternoon at Columbia

University, where our work just wasn't urgent or professional enough to be valuable—were what I have come to call difficult moments.

I found them to be "moments" in the way performative inquiry taught me to appreciate "stop moments" and seize the opportunity to engage with those moments that "tug on a sleeve" by recognizing "spaces of action and interaction as possible sites for sense making" and "creative and critical (re)imagining"[126]. These moments were also like magnets, tugging, pulling my thoughts to them again and again. I found them " difficult" in the way I understood Pitt and Britzman's "experiment of psychoanalytic research" when they found that a large part of learning was unconscious, that it cannot happen outside the self and that the self is not a blank page into which knowledge can simply be poured.[127] For me, affective force has come to mean the active, often unconscious material that people carry around, scholars included, and that resonates, dissonates, or denies when in contact with difficult knowledge. I had not expected it to be so challenging.

I was familiar with the ideas of popular education in the work of educator Paulo Freire and *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, his foundational text of critical pedagogy where he dismantled the banker system concept of teaching and learning in which "knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing" to replace it with "problem posing education" where people are "beings in the process of becoming" and "develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world … they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation"[128]. I found transformation to be a challenging process: The self has come to mean a battleground, a

[126] Lynn Fels and Karen Meyer, "On the Edge of Chaos: Co-evolving World(s) of Drama and Science," *Teaching Education* 9, no. 1 (June 1, 1997): 76.

[127] Pitt and Britzman, "Speculations."

[128] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 30th anniversary edn. (New York: Continuum, 2000), 12.

place roiling with information, conscious and unconscious, learned or not, coherent and conflicting, and learning like adding into that teeming cauldron yet more ideas and experiences that must then find their place in my perspective on the world or change the frame, which implies that everything else is questioned: some is tossed; some is reviewed in light of the new information; some finds its place; and so on endlessly. The process is emergent, and I do not know ahead of time the final meaning it settles into. Relationships and encounters too have become more dynamic and therefore potential battlegrounds or grounds for negotiation. Initially, I sought voice, alignment, authority, and legitimacy for myself. I sought a workable framework to satisfyingly think and act myself in the world. I never thought I might set something in motion and that, in expressing a perspective, I could or would provoke reactions, some of which would be challenging. I was focused on the work of articulating, expressing, and aligning observation and insight with expression. One image might be the stacking of vertebrae from the bottom up in order to make a spine. It's what I imagined "personing" to be.

Personing

I was introduced to the work of artist-architects Arakawa and Madeline Gins by my friend and artistic accomplice Ramona Benveniste. Gins and Arakawa used "personing" in relation to design and architectural propositions they would invent. Propositions were designed for a freshness of experience, endlessly renewed. They called their inventions "organisms that person the world."[129] Personing the world is a different focus than just personing. Gins and Arakawa focused on the interface between the human and the built world and how one could imagine designing unexpected environments to live or play in, where the human would be challenged always. Where the human could not be complacent and would be aware of their

[129] Madeline Gins and Shūsaku Arakawa, *Architectural Body* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002), 2.

limitations and possibilities. In their proposition "Bioscleave House," for example, shown in the image below, they organized the house as a means of keeping vivid "the convoluted and ominous mystery we live as"[130]. Arakawa and Gins' work is a singularly surprising and delightfully playful oeuvre: surprising to me, at least, because I could not have imagined "playing" with something on the scale of a park, or a building, or a home. As delightful and important as Arakawa and Gins'propositions were, I could not grasp their whole idea at once.

Image 34. Arakawa and Gins. Bioscleave House (Lifespan Extending Villa), interior. 2008.

Madeline Gins: "We are playing very bravely here today within Bioscleave House – consistently being brave for hours at a time by continually not denying the convoluted and ominous mystery we live as. This house has been organized in such a way as to keep that vivid for us."[131]

At first, and for some years, I stayed only with what the word personing evoked: the upward stacking of vertebrae into spine. But where they offered a point of departure, I sought a

[130] Léopold Lambert, "# INTERVIEWS /// Architectures of Joy: A Conversation Between Two Puzzle Creatures [Part B]," *The Funambulist Magazine*, November 9, 2011, https://thefunambulist.net/architectural-projects/interviews-architectures-of-joy-a-conversation-between-two-puzzle-creatures-part-b (accessed July 12, 2020).

[131] Ibid.

place of arrival. Arakawa and Gins' point of origin and impetus for change came from a need to challenge the complacency and lack of imagination of their fellow humans, or at least the desire to take play so seriously as to build it into the house or home through its architectural design. My point of departure was a thirst for equity, as the idea of "arriving," of humanizing, of stepping from the less-than into the actualized, stepping into the world as home. "Home" to me was the point of arrival after a long and tiring journey: the relief of a haven, of sanctuary. Strangely static, the world as a place of arrival, yearned for, a place where one is allowed to be, to rest. A place of welcome, of safety, an opportunity for dwelling, for radical, unquestioned belonging.

Image 35. Montreal: One of the focus group research conversations I led in 2014, bringing together four of Montreal's post-genocide survivor communities represented by members of PAGE-Rwanda, Montreal Holocaust Memorial Centre, Centre Khemara (Cambodia History and Civilization Center), and the Montreal Armenian community. We found that all the groups have at least one common concern: the wellbeing of our children and the need to create appropriate, intentional forms of intergenerational transmission of collective memory.

Arakawa and Gins' imagination and oeuvre opened whole other realms of possibility. To me, "personing" was an experience, a process a person could go through to arrive at well-deserved rest. I heard it much like the French word *élever*—to elevate, lift, raise, uplift, or build … to edify. To Arakawa and Gins, arrival as a destination was death and instead life was the impetus to focus on the opportunity availed by art and design, playful environment, constraints and contingencies that would keep us on our toes. That which had me catch my breath and cry with emotion—the possibility of inhaling deeply, stepping into an arena, and standing tall—was

of no interest to them. They went beyond just standing there and offered ideas on what to do once in the ring to shift the fighting into motion, play, and possibility, toward futurity.

It was very challenging to surrender to vulnerability and confront my own biases and internalized ideas about what research is and is not. I thought that legitimacy and authority would come from conforming to normative understandings of knowledge. But the scholars who actually helped me to think while remaining in action, to be free, to stay centered and yet connected were scholars like Karen Meyer, Laurel Richardson, and Lynn Fels, who each in their own research and scholarship practice freedom and creativity. Freire writes that

> the oppressed suffer from the duality which has established itself in their innermost being. They discover that without freedom they cannot exist authentically. Yet, although they desire authentic existence, they fear it. They are at one and the same time themselves and the oppressor whose consciousness they have internalized. The conflict lies in the choice between being wholly themselves or being divided; between ejecting the oppressor within or not ejecting them; between human solidarity or alienation; between following prescriptions or having choices; between being spectators or actors; between acting or having the illusion of acting through the action of the oppressors; between speaking out or being silent, castrated in their power to create and re-create, in their power to transform the world. This is the tragic dilemma of the oppressed which their education must take into account.[132]

I haven't found a better way to express the profound ambivalence I experienced in making choices that I felt were making me more vulnerable and yet were allowing me to be more myself.

[132] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 48.

When I was younger and I was struggling, writing helped me to cope. *Pick a detail, any detail* ... helped me to keep my head above the water. When panic or despair threatened to take over, I could pull at any thread … engage whatever my attention landed on: a sound, a thought, a smell, a feeling. I scribbled on anything: a sheet, a notebook, a coaster, a paper napkin ... I had read *The Artist's Way* by Julia Cameron and the practice of writing morning pages, of writing without censure accompanied me day and night. Coping was enough—until I wanted more.

Image 36. Montreal: Jean-Paul Nyilinkwaya and Jacques Rwirangira, current leaders of PAGE-Rwanda, have been instrumental in creating a coalition with other post-genocide communities in Montreal, called Alliance for Genocide Awareness and Remembrance (AGAR)

Freire writes that "liberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it."[133] Performative inquiry was such a praxis for me. I used it to engage literature, creative practice, and memory work. For Fels, "performative inquiry carries the assumption that knowledge is embodied in creative action and interaction. As such, knowledge is not a representation of what is out there, but a 'bringing forth of a world' as part of living it."[134] She writes that "the arising 'Aha!' is the moment of transcognition, a space-moment

[133] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 51.

[134] Humberto Maturana and Francisco J. Varela, *Tree of Knowledge: The Biological Roots of Human Understanding*, rev. edn. (Boston: Shambhala, 1992), 11.

of learning that comes into being through (re)writing the landscape of knowing."[135] I loved the seemingly simple, beautifully sustainable focus on the doable, the "ordinary," the "real"—the everyday world I am a part of and that I can be attentive and attuned to. As I practice, my attention and awareness shift the quality of my experience and allow for more intentional encounter and interaction with what is.

Image 37. Montreal: Frédéric Munyaneza brought to one of our survivor focus group sessions the sweater his father was wearing the day he was killed. He told us how sometimes he throws it around his shoulders to feel close. Another survivor said she has nothing tangible to remind her of her lost loved ones, and now is having trouble remembering the sound of their voices. As part of our collaboration with the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21, Frédéric loaned the sweater for use in the traveling exhibit Refuge Canada.

Difficult knowledge

I found our stories and material in the MLS project to be "difficult knowledge" work in several ways: First, it was difficult as in impossibly lengthy, because in some ways it felt as though it must be worked through before even allowing a point of departure: for example, the different historic ruptures, the trauma of my grandfather's murder, the following years of fear and survival and their lingering effects on the relationships inside the family and the relationships of individuals with their world needed a certain amount of engaging with before I could even ask questions or read and weave with other ideas and other voices. Second, like a

[135] Lynn Fels and Lee Stothers, "Academic Performance: Between Theory and Praxis," in *Drama, Culture, and Empowerment*, ed. John O'Toole and Kate Donelan, 255–261 (Brisbane: IDEA Publishers, 1996).

renovation project, I could not always know what else I would discover or excavate and that also would have to be dealt with Third, the moments of tension within the project and the confronting moments outside MLS haunted me. The sense making took a long time. Stop moments were in many ways the logical next step to go beyond the "pick a detail" practice of my youth and provide safe strategies for moving back and forth between spaces of vulnerability, reflection, and engagement.

One of my most important learnings has been to stay centered, to value my point of departure and to document the beginning and keep it in mind so as to know where one is coming from and where one needs or means to go. I have found that whenever I was confronted it was easy to forget where I was from and why. It reminds me of a story that an uncle told me about the ways in which landowners in traditional Rwanda established, archived, and transmitted the boundaries of their land. They did not have measurements. They would meet their neighbour, establish the limit of their territory, and bring a young child. One of their own. The child would be taken to the limit, shown it, and be slapped very hard so that the place would forever be marked in their body. Large swaths of academia have felt like that, where territory is staked out, through thesis and argument, and everyone agrees that the best way to strengthen an argument or proposition is to hit it hard, try to take it apart, beat it within an inch of its life, because beating down the argument will strengthen it, and should it survive, it would be better for it. Survival of the fittest, as it were. In some ways, I was trained for fighting. And for receiving blows. I just did not expect it. Or I thought it would be different because I had experienced better: For community members, the MLS was a very nurturing environment that allowed for vulnerability and growth.

After spending over a decade in academia, I have a better appreciation of the unique space offered by the MLS and I wonder what is lost when we don't fight for more of these

atypical spaces like the MLS. The current moment of reckoning shows that without repair, the traces of historical violence stay in people and their stories. The foundations and what we build on them as a community are unstable. Our progress is threatened, and we cannot move forward when the things we say we stand for are not true.

Image 38. Montreal: PAGE-Rwanda welcomes the participation of its children and youth, and is sensitive to their needs and concerns.

Glass and Newman argue that collaborative community-based research can help universities, communities, and the public more broadly to fight what Miranda Fricker calls "hermeneutic injustice".[136] They write:

> Very often, groups that are discriminated against because of identity prejudice and structural marginalization are simply not asked what they know (being presumed to know little), and thus, their collective (not individual) testimony gets discounted and excluded. Similarly, groups facing structural discrimination are seldom included in formal knowledge production. Thus, their research questions, interests, and understandings receive scant attention. These exclusions from epistemic activities that strongly influence politically powerful policy circles lead to the impoverishment of the broader interpretive

[136] Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

resources available to both oppressed and dominant communities, and so can be generativity analyzed as forms of hermeneutic injustice.[137]

Now that the MLS project has ended, I am hearing more stories. My father and his siblings want to write a book to remember their father. My aunt published an essay about him. If it is possible to have these vulnerable conversations, it is in large part because of the years we spent in the MLS recording oral histories, playing with the stories and silences with the Living Histories

Image 39. Montreal: I moderated the keynote evening of the Beyond Testimony and Trauma conference, part of a series of Montreal Life Stories project culminating events in 2012.

Ensemble, and holding community-wide dialogue sessions with the PAGE-Rwanda community partner. For example, I heard only recently that my grandfather was already being persecuted in the years leading up to his murder. After he hit a white colonial administrator and stole his firearm, my grandfather would be stationed in faraway places and the population would be worked up to commit violence against him and burn his house. When he was sought out by the three government agents that night in February of 1962, he had found sanctuary at his friend's house with his wife and baby. He had fled his last post after his neighbours warned him of the

[137] Ronald David Glass and Anne Newman, "Ethical and Epistemic Dilemmas in Knowledge Production: Addressing Their Intersection in Collaborative, Community-Based Research," *Theory and Research in Education* 13, no. 1 (March 1, 2015): 29.

violence coming. They left the house in the nick of time. When they got to the next hill and looked back, they saw billowing smoke. People had gathered all of their belongings on the ground in front of the house and set fire to it.

Growing up with ideas of emancipation and popular education

Western-trained in Rwanda, both my grandfathers were interfaces between colonial and missionary influences and the old and once-powerful families they were sons of, who still had access to and respected their elders and the traditional governance structure. Both men had certainly been obsessed with community development and wellness. My paternal grandfather was the closest thing people had to a doctor; he was stationed in communities and people would come from far and wide to receive care from him.

My mother's father built schools and organized education. Years later, as a refugee in the camps in Uganda, he was still organizing people and building schools. Although she did not grow up with her father, my mother was raised with a strong sense of personhood by her father's mother, a wealthy woman with her own estate and cattle, a strong woman steeped in the culture and tradition before contact. In Germany, my mother gravitated to the feminist movement and popular education, where she is active to this day. When she came to Canada, she built up and ran the Centre de documentation de l'éducation des adultes et de la condition féminine. Today she has moved back to Rwanda and is conceptualizing and implementing the national library and archives.

I grew up in Germany in the 1970s. My parents, aunts, and uncles were young and beautiful students who left Rwanda's climate of persecution for a Europe flush with the movements of social transformation of the 1960s. In his interview, my uncle Bello speaks of growing a beard and an Afro as soon as he arrived. He was very tall, over 6'5'' and very thin.

I remember his big beard and his afro. Bello loved to tease us children. When our friends were over, he would crouch and greet us and take our toys out of our hands, plop them in the Afro on top of his head, rise to his full height and open his eyes round and wide and look around wondering where the toys might have gone. We would squeal and laugh until we got them back. The children who did not know him yet would whimper in fear at the towering giant stealing their toys. I have lived with Bello my whole life. That was my childhood memory of him. But what he was telling adult-me in the interview was how visible he had been in Rwanda. How vulnerable and at risk he had felt since his father's murder. His height and appearance made him an obvious target for anti-Tutsi sentiment. Arriving in Germany and wearing bell bottoms, colourful shirts, a huge Afro and beard were the ultimate freedom: he no longer had to hide.

I tell these stories for two reasons: (1) to recount how the struggle for emancipation and wellness has been active in my family for a long time, and (2) to try and shed a different light on "we" and "Tutsi memory" … What I have inherited is a concern for a "we" that is on the order of the family, the community, the nation. It is democratic despite the ways democracy was operationalized by church and colonial agents to construct majority and minority categories and incite hatred in order to preserve domination and control outside of Rwanda or her people.

Mutware, in his interview, said several times, "You don't understand. We lived with decisions taken on the Parquet in Bruxelles." The "we" I am a part of was concerned with sovereignty and emancipation from colonial rule in the time of African independence. It is part of a pan-African sensibility for an emancipation of the mind. Personally, I also challenge the legacy of the Catholic church. But when I asked my very pious grandmother how she could reconcile praying and lauding the god of a church that had demanded we give up our beliefs, she

only laughed and shook her head at me: "You don't get it, you think Jesus is white." She said, "Jesus is not white. He doesn't have a colour."

I could have gone so many places, and held on to my anger and my mother's, but what for? A battle for another day. Stone-Mediatore writes that if understanding makes us "at home in the world," it does not necessarily make us comfortable with accepting the world as given. On the contrary, she writes,

> when a storyteller modifies her received narrative resources in response to the strangeness of specific historical phenomena and when she presents her story as only one historically contingent proposed interpretation of that phenomenon, then her story makes us at home in the world only to unsettle our familiar sense of "home" and to emphasize our responsibility to examine our home's darker corners. Ultimately, storytelling makes us at home in the world not so as to make us complacent with the world as we have known it but so as to enhance our responsiveness to the full range of hopes and dangers that are possible in our midsts.[138]

Through the constant centering of "our" (the community's) stories, promoting self-expression, long-term commitment, and recalibrating the relationship to others, to self, to each other, I experienced the MLS as a place that nurtures storytelling, an organism that persons and that persons the world. I was a professional psychotherapist and a longtime organizer/activist and community artist within the Rwandan Canadian diaspora when I was invited to be a community co-applicant on the MLS. Throughout its life I was implicated heavily in the governance of this complex community-university research collaboration. I interviewed members of my family and other members of the local Rwandan community. But I also was a participant/seeker/researcher

[138] Stone-Mediatore, *Reading across Borders*, 43.

in several distinct project roles: as a representative of my community on the project's Great Lakes working group, a member of Living Histories Ensemble (playback theatre), a member of Stéphane Martelly's creative writing workshop, a participant in Elizabeth Miller's Mapping Memories workshop, a co-collaborator with Steven High and Philip Lichti in the creation of the *Fleur dans le fleuve* audio walk, and an actor in *Racines éphemères, gestes déplacés* by Sandeep Bhagwati. Engaging creatively with the stories, co-organizing and participating in community dialogue sessions with other members of my family and community, and hearing our stories resonating with each other allowed me to listen to stories in the context of other stories. I was also able to contribute to the interviewing and activities of other working groups and/or communities in the project, adding yet another layer of context. I learned on many levels. The arts-based approaches to the life stories were particularly important in my process of working through my family and community histories of political violence and migration. But these practices took place in the larger, complex context of the project and people and practices, each doing what they needed to do. I look for metaphors, and when I think of the creative work within the MLS project, one metaphor that keeps coming up for me is that of weaving, of warp and weft, of labour, rhythm, making and unmaking, weaving and unravelling the individual thread and the fabric of collective, of community. Several strands ran in parallel: the people and groups in the project; the working groups; the ethics and practice of oral history; the community, academic, personal, and family life. And then weaving through horizontally were the many artistic practices. Punctual projects and involvements like *Racine éphémères* or Mapping Memories and ongoing practice like the playback theatre. And life. Life story interviewing as a verb, a doing, a base rhythm through the entire project.

Chapter 4: Learning through Play

While my roles and contributions in the Montreal Life Stories (MLS) project were many and varied, some of my most important, lasting, and ongoing learnings came via the work of the Living Histories Ensemble (LHE), the highly skilled playback theatre troupe I helped form within the project. Playback theatre, popular with community organizers, educators, and therapists around the world, is a form of unscripted, improvisational community theatre where an audience comes together to share experiences, memories, fears, hopes, and dreams around a given theme or question.

Image 40. Colourful scarves are the only props used in conventional playback theatre; although the Living Histories Ensemble does step across some boundaries, we respect this one. Laura's veiled presence behind Lucy suggests that her improvised conversation with Lucy represents an internal monologue.

LHE came together in 2007 at the invitation of Nisha Sajnani. Her organization, Creative Alternatives, had become a community partner to the MLS project. LHE started as an open and diverse group of students, teachers, researchers, therapists, and educators, all practitioners of playback theatre for a number of years. Over the life of the MLS project, the goal of the ensemble was to facilitate collective storytelling and inquiry within the project and within communities who share historical legacies or current experiences of displacement and mass violence. From 2007 to 2012, our group developed a particular way of "playing with" stories of

displacement, genocide, and war. Our work was based, in large part, on playback theatre (PT), developed by Jonathan Fox and Jo Salas in 1975[139]. To this, we added practices drawn from Theatre of the Oppressed[140], which is the work of Augusto Boal, and from developmental transformations, developed by David Read Johnson[141].

Members of LHE included educators (Joliane Allaire, Paul Gareau, Warren Linds), graduate students (Florise Boyard, Emily Burkes-Nossiter, Lisa Ndejuru, Chu Lynne Ng, Mira Rozenberg, Nisha Sajnani, Deborah Simon, Lucy Lu, Alan Wong), and artists (Catherine Dajczman, Bernard Fontbuté, Margarita Guitterez, Dramane Kobe, Sergio Mendez, Laura Mora). Most of our work was documented in still photography by David Ward. We all were attracted to, and invested in, the subject matter, either because of our family backgrounds or our research interests, usually both. Steeped in the MLS's ethos of shared authority, we presented together extensively and coauthored our learnings.[142] I experienced a lot of important "aha!" or transcognitive moments in our work/play with stories.

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[139] Fox, *Acts of Service*.

[140] Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed* (London: Pluto Press, 2000).

[141] David Read Johnson, "Developmental Transformations: Towards the Body as Presence," *Current Approaches in Drama Therapy* (2000): 87–110.

[142] See Nisha Sajnani et al., "Turning Together: Playback Theatre, Oral History, and Arts-Based Research in the Montreal Life Stories Project," in *Remembering War, Genocide and Other Human Rights Violations: Oral History, New Media and the Arts*, ed. Edward Little, Thi Ry Duong, and Steven High (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010); Nisha Sajnani, Warren Linds, Lisa Ndejuru, Alan Wong, and Members of the Living Histories Ensemble, "The Bridge: Toward Relational Aesthetic Inquiry in the Montreal Life Stories Project," *Canadian Theatre Review* 148, no. 148 (2011): 18–24; Nisha Sajnani, "Improvisation and Art-Based Research," *Journal of Applied Arts & Health* 3, no. 1 (2012): 79–86; Nisha Sajnani, "Coming into Presence: Discovering the Ethics and Aesthetics of Performing Oral Histories within the Montreal Life Stories Project," *alt.theatre: Cultural Diversity and the Stage* 9, no. 1 (2011): 40–49; Nisha Sajnani et al., "The Living Histories Ensemble: Sharing Authority Through Play, Storytelling, and Performance in the Aftermath of Collective Violence," in *Creating Together: Participatory, Community-Based, and Collaborative Arts Practices and Scholarship Across Canada*, ed. Diane Conrad and Anita Sinner (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2015), 93–110; Lisa Ndejuru, "A Modest Reconciliation: Coming to Terms with Conflicted Stories through Oral History, Dialogue and Playback Theatre in Montreal's Rwandan-Canadian Community," in *Forced Migration, Reconciliation and Justice*, ed. Megan Bradley (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015), 123–44; Lisa Ndejuru, "Reconciling Past, Future, and Place: Digital Stories, Dialogue and Performance in

In this chapter I describe how our deceptively simple practice was both ritual, to conjure negative affect, or alternatively, technique to conjure the confidence, spontaneity, and joy of voice. I also reflect on coming to see the ways in which playing with our own and other people's stories allowed us to engage the silence and ruptures of violence and to "stock the waters and fill the well." And finally, I reflect on choosing playback as a form to encourage multiple perspectives in our complex and polarized Rwandan community, eschewing accepted conceptions of reconciliation or therapy and adopting instead ideas of appeasement and reconciling with our own stories first.

Stories flattened by violence

Genocide, war, persecution, and other events of mass violence tend to flatten the individual life. The events are often thought about in terms of large numbers of people, and the individual experience has little or no meaning. Living with that direct experience in a "normal" quotidian means a day to day where the difficult stories only seldom, if ever, find space. When, in a school, work, or social setting, can one reflect about or unpack an experience of that order? Even if, every year, final exams in the university winter semester, for example, overlap with the period of genocide commemoration that starts on April 7th. Even if this kind of experience affects trust in relationships professional and personal, in ways that are not always clear, even to the person concerned.

Trauma can also affect the capacity for risk, for imagination. There are countless ways in which we use shorthand presuming of shared understandings of things. In 2009, the Rwandan working group was invited by Humura, the Rwandan association of survivors in the Ottawa region. They wanted to hear us on the subject of long-distance grief. One of the things survivors

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Montreal's Rwandan-Canadian Community," 2012, http://digitalcollections.sit.edu/conflict_reconcilation_symposium/jan13/memorializationpanel3/2/.

suffer from is the concern for their murdered loved ones to have a dignified resting place. One of the reproaches most often levelled at perpetrators or bystanders is to reveal where the remains of their loved ones are. We listened to many stories of people concerned about the remains of a loved one—about them organizing proper burials, at a distance, going to Rwanda and finding it was the wrong information, or going to Rwanda, having to deal with removing remains from truly awful places and then being informed that those were not the remains they were seeking.

Image 41. Toronto: Public performance during the Living Histories Ensemble's 2014 residency at the Art Gallery of Ontario.

Several people told us they had experienced it several times. And were traumatized each time. One of the ways perpetrators have been known to torture survivors is by withholding information about remains. One woman recounted being told of the remains of her child. She had not needed or sought mental health support before; she had not felt she needed it. But that phone call came, unsolicited, in the morning, right when she was about to pick up her keys and get into the car to drive to work … Where to put this?

It's difficult to evoke the disruption that things connected with that period can have in the lives of people who have lived it, and yet living with intergenerational and therefore indirect traces of the experience can feel very confusing to the person: Since they are not experiencing anything that can explain their feelings, they may not understand what is bothering them nor

have words to explain it. In Montreal's Rwandan community, the telling, listening to, recording, and archiving of life stories we were doing in the MLS had been helpful in giving back life to stories flattened by violence. But the question became: What can we do with those stories? How can we relate to our stories and engage with the affect, good and difficult? Performing oral histories added nuance and complexity, colour and textures.

It is difficult to explain playback theatre to someone who has not experienced it. One can describe actors and tellers and the conductor and explain how the actors improvise to play back the story they have just heard by the teller, but that does not convey what happens in an audience when someone takes the risk to reveal something of themselves in public. Nor does it express what it does to a teller or an audience to witness the actors' attentiveness to what they have heard. It does not allow for sharing the feeling of seeing adults taking the risk to meet a teller with their necessarily partial understanding of their story, playing as seriously as children do. It does not convey what it does to see many facets of one's own story reflected back, or how it feels when one story calls for another, then another. It does not allow one to hear the music or see the colour.

This is how Fox describes the beginning of a playback theatre performance:

> The performers begin as themselves, with a song, and an introduction that models the self-disclosure and public sharing that is a necessary component of Playback Theatre. The conductor, who acts as a kind of master of ceremonies, sets the stage by welcoming the audience and saying a few words about what Playback Theatre is and what people might expect in the next hour or so. The conductor then begins to invite audience members to tell short moments, feelings, and experiences that are played back by the actors and musicians. The process continues—the conductor asks questions, audience

members respond, and then actors embody the story onstage.[143]

Picture a Brechtian lack of staging, actors dressed in black, a conductor, a musician sitting or standing with his instruments handy, a few boxes or chairs to sit on and use as props, a few coloured scarves. Picture a stage, or more often than not just a room. Playback actors often enjoy being on the same level as their audience, and since one never knows where there might be stories to be played back, they are always ready to improvise a given space into a story sharing place. Although there is a "classical" repertoire of forms and stage elements, the aesthetic very much depends on the troupe and the people who make it up. Different troupes have different textures, sounds, specialties. The seemingly simple repertoire of forms available to the troupes for their improvisation has grown and yielded sometimes very elaborate forms of expression. A conductor elicits narratives in the audience and eventually calls for tellers to come forward and share their stories. The stories are heard by the conductor, the actors, the musician(s) and the rest of the audience, and performed on the spot. For every story, the conductor instructs her ensemble on the salient points she feels are important. She also calls a form from a repertoire of short and long forms available to the ensemble, and the stories are played back for the tellers in the moment.

Fox refers to the form as "engaging whole systems" and the spirit or posture of the playback troupe as an "act of service."[144] He would like forms to serve the stories and reflect them as respectfully as possible. I agree with this idea of service, but I am no longer convinced that it is in the literal repetition that the interest of the teller is best served. I have found our form

[143] Sarah Halley and Jonathon Fox, "Playback Theatre," in *The Change Handbook: The Definitive Resource on Today's Best Methods for Engaging Whole Systems*, ed. Peggy Holman, Tom Devane, and Steven Cady (Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler, 2007), 260.
[144] Fox, *Acts of Service*.

of playback theatre particularly appropriate to process the fraught, complex stories of post-genocide Rwandans because it does not insist on the power relations in any given situation, as in Theatre of the Oppressed, nor is it a therapeutic method per se, like psychodrama or developmental transformations. (It does, however, have a distinctly therapeutic aspect, which I discuss in a later section.) Playback allows for the experience of play and possibility, imagination and creativity. It is a methodology to recognize, play in, explore, and attempt understanding, restoring, and expanding in/of our subjective, intersubjective, consensual, and conflicted constructed realities through telling, listening, witnessing, and play. In the context of massive loss of meaning, we need both fact and fiction, and at the same time we also need each other. We need others to recognize the "facts" and we need others to believe in, invest, imagine, and tentatively hold a different reality in order for it to become possible. In an interview about her book *Trauma and Recovery*, psychiatrist Judith Herman said that "patients, survivors, victimized people cannot recover in isolation. They need other people and they need to take action in affiliation with others ... Ultimately, if you're talking about horrible abuses of power, you're talking about atrocious things that one person does to another … You're dealing with profound questions of human evil, human cruelty, human sadism. The abuse of power and authority." In her view, "The antidote is the solidarity of resistance. Nobody can do that alone."[145]

Validation, play, and possibility

Bringing playback to the Rwandan community in Montreal was a dream that took years to realize. I faced resistance from the actors (I had trained Rwandans in the community, who enjoyed the form but did not want to perform in our community) and I faced resistance from

[145] Judith Herman, "Psychological Insight and Political Understanding: The Case of Trauma and Recovery," Conversations with History, September 20, 2000, University of California at Berkeley Institute of International Studies, https://conversations.berkeley.edu/index.php/herman_2000 (accessed July 12, 2020).

multiple angles within the community. I am not sure I could still believe as strongly as I did then, but when I encountered playback theatre for the first time, I knew I wanted to bring it to the community. I knew I wanted us to share stories and be vulnerable together. I knew I wanted to get at the invisible: that which we do not say but are so full of that it can make the rest of living a challenge. With LHE, we started with intensive all-day or half-day workshops exploring for ourselves using body and sound, space and time, the safety in our relationships to each other, to

Image 42. Montreal: The Living Histories Ensemble performs at the Montreal Genocide Memorial Center. Organizers of the event were adamant that we not work with stories of survival, but that rather we should explore their "less difficult" experiences as Holocaust educators.

the form, to the themes, to the narratives of displacement and conflict in our own lives. In our workshops (which were not open to the public) we were the actors as well as the tellers and we played our stories for each other. Our research questions were constantly present: What is the relationship between archive and repertoire? What are conditions for safety? What does art bring to the telling of difficult stories? Are we fetishizing[146] the difficult aspects of stories by focusing on them? Whether in the workshops or during performance, our questions were integrated into our play, processed live in dialogue with our audiences and documented either simply on video or more in depth through transcription and publication. Working side by side in the MLS project,

[146] Julie Salverson, *Popular Political Theatre and Performance*, vol. 17, Critical Perspectives on Canadian Theatre in English (Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2010).

collecting stories, listening and performing them during community events, we cultivated and deepened our relationships with the different partners in our MLS community, first the researchers and interviewers, then every cultural community group in the project. The themes were quite different and resistance grew stronger the closer we came to communities and their stories. Our first invitation came from a colleague in the MLS project who knew our work and was education coordinator at the Montreal Holocaust Memorial Centre. She had been part of the

Image 43. Montreal: Seated in the middle of an audience of child survivors of the Holocaust, under a red veil, Laura gave a powerful performance of a teller's story. When she finished and rejoined the other actors, the woman in red stood to tell the next story. For years she had been carrying in her purse a letter to her now middle-aged sons, she said, a letter describing her experience during the Holocaust. She had never been able to bring herself to deliver that letter, and had never told her story to another person. And then she did.

audience at a number of our earlier performances and felt strongly about the pedagogical power of sharing stories through improvised theatre. She enthusiastically introduced the idea to the Centre's decision-making body and overcame the natural resistance of this important community institution by framing the LHE intervention in mutually acceptable terms. This became standard practice for the ensemble. Whenever we were invited into a community for a performance, we had a preliminary meeting with organizers to show what we did and ask how they would like us to frame the question or theme.

Working with difficult stories through roles, ritual, and forms

Our work with LHE has never been neutral. There are postures implicit in our approach, in the choices we make as actors, as conductors, in the themes we are drawn to, in the work we are wanting to pursue. One of the important questions we have asked ourselves is whether we should qualify the stories and the contexts we deal with as "difficult" or not. For example, should they be framed as therapeutic or cultural? Should we offer psychological support on site or not? Even as we were playing, people kept asking us—and each other—if they were ready for us to "play" with their stories, if we would take good care of those stories. Would playing with the stories change them, render them painless? Was it "right" to feel no pain, or would that betray those who had perished?

Writing about his work with Holocaust survivors, psychiatrist Dori Laub, himself a Holocaust survivor, writes:

> The analyst must often be there first, ahead of his patient, and once having acquired factual information, must wait patiently for the latter to join him in that place, to allow the psychoanalytical process of evolving knowledge to be set in motion, a place that is safe and safeguarded by human presence has to be created … both parties have to pass a mutual test of safety: … prove to each other that they are stable enough and strong enough to affirm the reality of the terror of the extermination camps in actual non metaphorical statements. It is only then that surrender to the process is possible and the survivor is able to reclaim both his life and his past.[147]

[147] Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 69.

We were not analysts, nor was factual information the most important preparation we needed to do. But we did need to prepare. We needed to have worked through our own traumatic material enough so as to be able to serve and perform the difficult stories. As I revisit the LHE rehearsals, I wonder what some of the procedures and techniques were that we employed to achieve the outcomes observed.

Image 44. Montreal: Lucy leads a playback form called a narrative-v during a performance with the Cambodian survivor community.

One big takeaway was that, because of the way we played with our own stories first, we became more limber and available for hearing other people's stories, and hearing them deeper. Working with story in rehearsal was a whole-body working through of our stories, a kind of shaking down, like one would shake and beat an old carpet to dislodge the encrusted dirt, dust, and debris. Rehearsing among ourselves means rehearsing the different playback forms: Playback theatre is played through a series of forms, and it ends up being a structured and ritualized way of sharing stories. The liveness and emergent, unscripted nature of the live performance event with an audience, the spontaneous sharing of story, is held and scaffolded through the roles, ritual, and forms. When we rehearse among ensemble members, we move into and out of the forms and appropriate/absorb them into our body/being/vocabulary by investing them with our own stories first. We play with them; we play with each other; we tell each other

stories and learn a bit about each other (meaningful moments and relationships as well as reactions, learnings). We see each other evolving through time, through the practice. We support each other's play, and we get to know what we as individuals are attentive to.

Taking up Richardson and St. Pierre's invitation for new metaphors to think with, I want to offer that playback theatre practice felt a lot like a through line across time (before, during, and after the project), as well as a practice of "shaking loose" stories we are made of and are not necessarily aware of as actively influencing our present lives. As though stories could settle like dust, or stick or slither into available cracks. As though stories could get musty and might need shaking out, like something that has been compacted into protective or sometimes constrictive layers solidified against our bodies or emotions or outlooks. Telling and playing back each other's stories, it was as though our stories were being tickled and loosened by the stories of others, by the attention and care in reception and interpretation, and shaken up, shaken out, like carpets and down covers after storage. Sharing our own stories, and the challenging ones in particular, also felt a little like a hollowing out, like the carving out of an instrument—a violin or a cello—where the greater hollow inside allows the sound to resonate, and then other people's stories and music can be played better with the instruments we have made ourselves to be.

A practice of listening

Playback theatre is, at its core, a practice of listening. Actors listen to the tellers' stories; they listen to the conductor's invitations and prompts; they listen to what comes up inside of them in relation to what they've heard of the story; they listen to their ensemble colleagues. Actors listen to what others offer and what comes up as a response. They listen to how it shifts when one of them commits to an action, a word, a sound of movement. For the conductor, it is the practice of listening to the audience, to the quality of energy in the room, to individual tellers

speaking up or hiding or wanting to come onto the stage and needing just a little help. It's about eliciting stories and listening into the silence before they rise. It's about listening to what is said by the teller and to what is not said. It is listening and being able to encapsulate, to synthesize, what was shared. It's to emphasize different qualities of the story, possible points of connection, of leverage, of engagement, for the actors, the musicians. For the musicians, it is listening for entry, exit, and rhythm. It is listening for energy lows and highs, listening to support and score, listening to temperature, to texture. And of course the audience also listens, on many levels: witnessing the tellers' storytelling, the ensemble's interpretation, the conductor's facilitation, the musicians' score. And whether they become a teller or not, the stories they hear will resonate with stories inside and call forth yet more stories.

Often experienced as uncomfortable, playback is also somewhat misunderstood. Although we call it performance when we are invited into a group to share their stories around a theme or question of their choice, playback is not a performance in the sense of a spectacle, where partaking allows for comfortable distance. It is meant to implicate us. When a teller tells a story and the ensemble misses in their interpretation, the whole audience is affected. It feels uncomfortable, and it questions the container and the feeling of safety necessary for a "successful experience." Inversely, when a story is met in a particularly satisfying way, it is of course the teller who feels it specifically, but the collective body is touched. And a noticeable shift takes place in the quality of what in French one might call *être-ensemble* (the collective being … or sense of togetherness). In "A Ritual for Our Time," Fox writes, "since the subject of the play is the audience themselves, their life-world. The process of identifying one's own story and witnessing another's often leads to a feeling of communal renewal."[148] He uses play

[148] Jonathan Fox, "A Ritual for Our Time," in *Gathering Voices, Essays on Playback Theatre*, ed. Jonathan Fox and Heinrich Dauber, Centre for Playback Theatre.

erroneously, just like we use performance, for recognizability, but the practice of ritual is a far more accurate term to describe what is actually happening.

The first time I went to Africa to meet my family, it had a smell I can't describe but recognize every time I go back. I was with my mother and father and my two sisters. It was 1990. My mother had wanted us to meet our grandparents, her parents. When we landed in Nairobi, I felt like I had never felt. And my father was so happy. I had never seen him so happy. My father was a very stern person. A fierce athlete. Very dark, long, 6 feet 4 inches of lean

Image 45. Montreal: The first time Living Histories Ensemble performed with the Rwandan community, I was the conductor (moderator). But not for long. My effort to engage the audience was falling flat. Nisha tapped me on the shoulder and invited me into the teller's chair. Everyone was wondering why it was so important to me that we do this strange playback thing with their most precious stories. I sat in the teller's chair and Nisha sat next to me, and I told my own story to the community.

muscle. But when he met his childhood friend, a shorter, round man full of laughter and love, they were hugging nonstop and holding hands, as men do there. They would walk and laugh, never letting go of each other; they took each other everywhere and talked day and night. I was stunned: Who was this man I had never seen? I did not know him. My mother too felt lighter and happier. I couldn't shake the feeling that something was wrong. I would tug at her every so often and whisper, "There's something weird here." She would shoo me away. And then, at one point —it was during the Mundial, the soccer cup—I looked at the TV and a lightbulb went off: Oh, I

know what it is. Everyone here is black. Even the commentators on TV. I remember telling my mother, "Everybody here is black."

I told this story of realizing everybody was black to my community, as part of the Living Histories performance for the Rwandan community. It was the moment that unlocked our work with the Rwandan community. It was the first time we had been invited into the community to play, a moment I had been waiting for for eight years. I was conducting. Nisha[149] wrote about the moment when the community of survivors asked me why I wanted them to share stories in this way, why I wanted to "play" with their most sacred memories. Nisha had been performing as an actor. She stepped forward, tapped me on the shoulder, and sat me in the teller's chair and asked: When did this all start? I blurted, 1990. And I told the story of meeting all the beautiful people in my family in 1990. And how I fell in love all the time. So many people looked like me or members of my family. I could look at someone and know we were related. I had never experienced that growing up. And some of the people I was related to were soldiers. There was going to be a war. How could I agree with that? And my newfound cousins would say, but you've been in the camps now. I had visited my grandparents who lived in refugee camps. And the children and the young adults who had to go to town and make a living. I saw a lot of scarcity in terms of food, water, education. Children, old people stayed in the camp. Alcoholism was rampant. There was a lot of disconnection with reality. Everybody of working age was away in the city somewhere. It was an odd feeling, heightened by the pale colours of dry land, the reddish earth, the smell. There was this strange horizon, this feeling that there was no future, just sameness and every day seeing beloved people drunk at noon. And my cousins, whom I was newly in love with, were saying they—we—were going to war to fight to "get our country back."

[149] Sajnani, "Coming into Presence," 15.

I was horrified at the idea of war. And they would ask, “Well, can you live with the camps as the status quo?” I couldn’t, and neither could I be okay with the coming war.

What could I do when none of the propositions were okay? I was completely unable to hold both propositions when neither made any sense to me. I went crying to my mother, “This is terrible! What is going to happen inside of the country if they go to war?” And my mother shooed me away, saying, “Don't worry about it. This has been going on for thirty years. Nothing’s gonna happen.”

Image 46. Montreal: Everything changed after I trusted the group with my own precious stories.

We came back to Canada in September. The war started October 1st and with it a mobilization in the entire global diaspora, something I had never seen. People who couldn’t get along, or who bickered over a case of beer, were upright, mobilized through something more. And even though I did not trust it, I was part of it. Four years later was the genocide. And that was the end of sense, the end of reason.

Once I offered my story and my struggle, Nisha asked me to choose someone to play myself. I chose Lucy Lu because she is a master of the metaphor; she can take any story and translate it into symbol. When she played the landing in Nairobi and my wonder at realizing how

everyone was black, something eased in the room … and one by one other stories came forth … completely different perspectives, different stories.

The life stories project was a godsend because I needed to listen, to talk, and to process all of it. And there were many more people doing the same. They weren't all Rwandans. They were Cambodians and Haitians and Jews and refugee youth and all kinds of people in other diasporas beyond the working groups. Everybody had a story and wanted to do this, and we were playing. And interviewing. We were practicing all kinds of arts-based ways to play with these stories of trauma and of life. The life stories listening, telling, playing was like a rhythm. And through it all, the Living Histories Ensemble was a container where we could process through embodied play the traces and gaps and hurts and sorrows and …

When I think of the ways in which our "embodied deep listening" practice shook our stories loose, allowed us to work through them and become available to serve other people's stories within MLS, one metaphor that keeps coming up is that of a familiar hum—a sound we are made of and do not pay attention to, the rhythm of making and unmaking, warp and weft: weaving and unravelling the individual thread and the fabric of the collective, of community. Another image is that of a pond (re)stocked, an ecosystem (re)created. A universe contained within. Not the same one that would have inhabited me if I had grown up with the stories of "my" people or families. A different one, rich and diverse, that fills me up with things I don't know that I know. Silent and peaceful, they live within and surface when I am told a story or asked a question. I feel an increased capacity for presence: an experience, a connection, a feeling, an idea, a story. The silences I grew up with are appeased.

The therapeutic aspect of playback theatre

I came to playback theatre as I did to oral history as I did to therapy in the sense of seeking meaning, clarity, and resolution in order to better engage. Interestingly, the therapeutic aspect of oral history I discovered for myself was not in the one on one of an interview space, but in the relational dimension of the diverse interdisciplinary learning community created by the CURA. I know that through talking, witnessing, playing, listening about experience, memory, and identity, I have acquired a framework through which I can learn about the wider world.

In *Improvising Real Lives,* Jo Salas, co-founder of playback theatre and life partner to creator Jonathan Fox, writes about the tension between the demands for aesthetic expression inherent to theatre as a performance and the focus of their work on theatre as a service to community. She also writes that playback theatre was never meant to be a therapeutic tool, but it was eagerly taken up as such by therapists, so much so that Fox himself started training in psychodrama, a therapeutic theatre approach created by Jacob Levy Moreno in the 1940s, in order to better understand the uses and limitations of playback theatre by therapists.[150] As a group, LHE always refused to allow our practice to be labelled therapy, even though quite a few of the ensemble members are therapists: Nisha Sajnani and Mira Rozenberg are drama therapists, Lucy Lu is an art therapist, and I am a psychotherapist and psychodramatist. Working with life stories of Montrealers displaced by genocide, war, and other human rights violations in the MLS project, we felt that the idea of therapy reinforced the erroneous notion that something inflicted on a collective of people had to be processed and metabolized by the individual alone or one on one, in a space apart. As my work with trauma continues, an interesting question to work on would be, which parts need to be private and which parts need to be shared? With whom, how,

[150] Ibid.

and when? LHE refused the idea of emotional labour as external. We wanted to bring back into the community this idea of working things through together. I chose playback theatre specifically to work in the Rwandan Canadian community. I felt that Boal's work with Theatre of the Oppressed, for example, felt too polarizing in an already polarized situation. Playback theatre is about reflecting a story back, gifting a teller back with an interpretation of what they have offered in a community. It's about community building, about serving the community. Playing back the story is a lot like reflecting, a very common therapeutic technique. Reflecting promotes or allows or invites insight. You reflecting back my story to me allows me to see it. Making the invisible visible in this way allows for (or at least intends to allow for) awareness, insight, and ultimately agency.

I am still haunted by a pivotal story during the commemoration performance: a story I call "The Broken Promise." It marks a turning point in my research and practice. During the performance one young Rwandan-Canadian woman pointed toward another who was crying and said, "She would like to tell a story." The "she" in question was crying hard, sobbing. I went to her and held her for a while and then she came with me to the stage. The story she told was that in 1994, during the genocide in Rwanda, she was a child and her mother had taken her to a safe place, promising she would return to get her. She never returned. The storyteller chose Catherine to play herself and Nisha to play her mother. Normally, Catherine as the teller's character and main protagonist would have started the scene. Catherine was left alone on stage. She took a moment to centre herself. Nisha as the mother was standing behind her and said, "I know I said I would come back. I am sorry." The teller and the audience would not have been able to see how far a departure that was from orthodox playback. Instead of reflecting the text as it had been given, she used the end as a beginning. Visually and emotionally, she and Catherine were

stunning. Still looking forward and away from her "mother," Catherine nevertheless seemed entirely focused on her. "I missed you." "I'm sorry." They started weaving from side to side, Catherine's front to Nisha's back. "Where are you?" Nisha put her arms around her from the back, rocked her gently and responded, "I am here. I am watching you. I am proud of you." And Catherine stood straighter, as if taking courage and reaching up. She called again: "Look, Mother, look, I am here. I am striving. Can you see me?" And Nisha responded, "Yes, I can see you. You are so beautiful and strong and wonderful. I am so proud of you." First taking tentative steps away from Nisha, then gaining confidence and rising onto her toes, Catherine walked, all the while telling her mother how she needed her to be there, to see her, to care, in order to be strong and well and happy. And Nisha kept responding until Catherine finally said, "I can do it now. I can walk. I can build and make a life."

The story haunts me for many reasons. Initially I thought the pain lay in the fact that a promise had been made and broken. But the actors stayed with the story, really listened to the teller and to what came up in the inner self, in their inner selves. Dori Laub writes that "in order to undo the entrapment of the traumatic reality and its re-enactment, one must engage in a process of constructing a narrative, reconstructing a history and essentially, of re-externalizing the event."[151] But there was more to this than re-externalizing the event. There was the healing of a dialogical connection that had been broken, and a floating, hopeful suggestion for a way out of a circular, frozen-in-time trauma narrative. The woman missed her mother's voice, her eyes upon her warm and proud reflecting her own pride and goodness, believing in her. How many

[151] Dori Laub, "Bearing Witness, or the Vicissitudes of Listening," in *Testimony: Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, ed. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub (London: Routledge, 1992), 69.

connections were broken in the genocide? How many have been broken since? How many others in the room that evening were spoken to by that one particular, very personal moment?

The broken promise has stayed with me because it disrupted the rules of the ritual so effectively. The way the story had been told, it began with the teller-as-child, crying out to her mother for never coming back. Then, rather than Catherine-as-protagonist telling the story of crying out, Nisha-as-mother heard and responded to the teller's cry—the teller as a child and the teller still crying in the present. "I am sorry," she said. And the scene started precisely in the here-and-now, where the mourning teller was stuck in the past. "You promised you'd be back." "I'm sorry." And Catherine stepped into that moment with words not yet said by the teller—"I missed you"—and eventually Catherine said she felt she could walk on her own … "I love you, Mama." "I love you."

Reflecting on the performance, an audience member, herself a survivor, longingly said, "I want to start another story from right here. I want to know how the story will go."

I know as a psychotherapist that to begin a session by asking a client "What ails you today?", "What are you filled up with today?", "What would you like to see happen?" or "What would you like to work on today?" addresses different senses, directs their focus to different places and will elicit very different narratives and attitudes. I have learned to listen as a psychotherapist; it is called "active listening" and I listen for change: what promotes it, what hinders it. I find the question "What would you like to see happen?" useful because it triggers the person to draw me a picture through their words. It's a doorway into the symbolic. A passage opening up. Working with analogy and metaphor frees up availability to creative resources, theirs and mine, and allows us to engage with sometimes very difficult issues in a spirit of playful possibility. By asking to see how the story might go from there, the woman in the

audience was speaking to the gap or silence inside. There was no idea for her yet of how the story might go, or how she would like it to go.

The way I experienced it was this: In the beginning, there's not yet a word, and then there's a word. And then you come in and whatever you were holding, and processing, whatever you're with, you bring with you. And as a group, you process each other's words' lives. You are moving your bodies and you're responding to emotionally tuning to, validating, and reflecting back each other's stories. It feels a lot like when you have a carpet—if *you* were a carpet. A grimy carpet. And some dirt comes off airborne. It shakes loose the stories, and then you're awake, because the stories weighed you down … and then you're playing with stories. You become fluent in the stories, and then once it becomes supple and clean again, you can play with other people's stories. bell hooks writes, "I came to theory because I was hurting—the pain within me was so intense that I could not go on living. I came to theory desperate, wanting to comprehend—to grasp what was happening around and within me. Most importantly, I wanted to make the hurt go away. I saw in theory then a location for healing."[152] I came to the MLS and the living histories because I saw that same location for healing in our embodied practice of listening, care, and acceptance.

Retrieving the self: Witnessing, performing, and creating memories and story

In the summer of 2011, LHE was invited to play at an event called Itorero[153] in the Rwandan community in Gatineau, Quebec. The event was organized in collaboration with

[152] hooks, Teaching to Transgress, 59.

[153] In days of old, the intore were the young warriors, the elite who came to train at the court of the mwami (king), where they were schooled in song, dance, poetry, athletics, politics, and warfare. It does not translate entirely but, Itorero is the school or cohort of Intore. During colonial times, Protestant missionaries appropriated the word to mean their religious schools. After the genocide, faced with a very diverse and heavily impacted population (Rwandans who lived in Rwanda had very different life experiences than those exiled all over the world) , the current leadership reclaimed the term, and itorero

various regional Rwandan Canadian community organizations and the Rwanda High Commission. It was meant as an invitation for all young people of Rwandan heritage in Canada to gather to get to know each other and learn about their common heritage. Scholars, elders, and artists were brought in from Rwanda and across North America to teach about history, politics, culture, and the economy of Rwanda and the wider East African community. I was invited as a psychotherapist and a core member of LHE. Our mandate was to facilitate dialogue and sharing

Image 47. Gatineau: In 2011 the Rwanda High Commission and the Rwandan-Canadian community of Hamilton, Ontario organized a week-long Itorero, an updated version of an important traditional civic education program for Rwandan youth. The event attracted young adults from across Canada. The Living Histories Ensemble worked with the group, and I also was available to provide mental health support throughout the week.

of stories around the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda. Earlier that year, in April, we had been invited for the first time to perform during genocide commemoration. To be asked to perform by PAGE-Rwanda[154] was, for me, in many ways the attainment of a dream. I had worked for years to find a way to facilitate difficult conversations and sharing of perspectives in my community. I struggled to find a way to hold two opposing perspectives of community

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became retreats for collective teaching and learning. Initially the idea was to bring people to a similar understanding of history, culture, etc. Today all kinds of groups (e.g., professional, interest groups, age category, neighbourhoods, diaspora groups) can request itorero. It serves for building collectives (e.g., moto taxi drivers in one area will create a cohort and stay connected and organize their working conditions) or when youth attend it can also serve as a kind of rite of passage. After having been a part of one such gathering, one remains intore of that cohort.

[154] PAGE-Rwanda is Montreal's association of survivors of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, their families and friends. Since 1995, they have organized Montreal's annual genocide commemoration.

elders. When asked in 2004 about the dysfunction in our communities, one important elder had told me that one prerequisite to any form of engagement was that "we" needed to "be able to talk about the genocide." I took this to mean that no dialogue could be engaged in with anyone who would deny, minimize, or relativize the genocide. Another elder told me just as seriously that a prerequisite to dialogue was that we had to "be able to speak about the genocide, but not only the genocide." This I understood to mean that any dialogue or conversation would have to be open to

Image 48. Gatineau: There seemed to be a value in giving space for difficult questions and fears to be heard, then reflected back, amplified, and held: What if after going to war, then the genocide, losing so many loved ones, running away from a ruined country… what if it all comes tumbling down again?

hearing concerns other than those centered on the genocide and the suffering of Tutsi survivors. I tried for years to find a way to hold both concerns. Thus, being invited by Rwanda's high commissioner to Canada to hold the fraught and difficult space with the Living Histories Ensemble and being trusted to create a container for young and old alike to process their own relationship to the genocide was an honour and the highest recognition. Belarie Zatzman writes that "contemporary research examining memory and memorial underscores the fact that in provoking history as an act of remembrance for a new generation, we are narrating a sense of self."[155] She then asks: "How might the performance of memory invite youth to theorize their

[155] Belarie Zatzman, "Drama Education and Memory," in *Key Concepts in Theatre/Drama Education*, ed. Shifra Schonmann (Rotterdam: Sense, 2011), 95,

lives in performance as acts of retrieval?"[156] I want to think about the idea of a retrieval of self through the witnessing, performing, and creating of memory and story and the performance as a way to become familiar with difficult memories.

The day of our session was very hot and sunny. The presentations took place in a beautiful, airy, white tent on the very green grounds of the Gatineau site. Our performance took place in the heat of the afternoon sun, shaded by the ceiling of the tent. The wind blew softly.

Image 49. Gatineau: One young man explained his deep need to be proud of his Rwandan heritage, and pass it on to his descendants. Catherine and Nisha echoed the teller's key phrase: "My children, they will knooow!!"

I was conducting. The conversation started slowly, gently. As a way to introduce what playback theatre is, we, the members of LHE, presented ourselves one by one, each of us taking a turn to say our name and a little story about our relationship to the theme of the performance and then waiting for the others in our team to play back what they understood of our story. Then I turned to the audience and asked how people were doing. What were they filled up with? Did they know playback theatre? As a conductor, I was eliciting responses, stories, from the audience. And in so doing, I was slowly building a container of conventions and trust: We were there to listen to and interpret the stories in the audience for everyone to share. We were using our bodies and scarves and music to do it. We honoured one story at a time and we always came back to the teller of the

[156] Ibid.

story to check in after we were done and before listening to another story. As conductor, I was building trust between the audience and me and between the audience and the actors, by first asking for small-stake feelings/states. As the actors were satisfying the tellers by giving each story their best effort—in empathy, in imagination, in spontaneity—the audience responded by individuals resonating with something they heard and telling, in turn, a story of their own. And, as the risk from the teller in the audience was met by the actors' risk and commitment in

Image 50. Gatineau: Sometimes the stories weren't even stories yet. We worked with expressions of raw fear, pain and hope.

interpretation, the audience increased the stakes, offering stories with more depth for the actors to meet and interpret through the repertoire of playback forms.[157]

As a conductor I like to use the playback forms in order of complexity. First, the fluid sculpture: a composition where, in response to a story, each actor in turn offers one sound and one movement. The actors build spatially and sound-wise on each other's offers, then freeze together into a beautiful tableau. After a few fluids, I like to show the audience a form—the pair—that can accommodate tension or conflict. In the pair, one thought or idea or desire is in tension or in conflict with another. For that form, the actors work in pairs. There are several ways to do this, but one way involves two pairs standing side by side. Each pair connects in the

[157] There are many forms in the playback theatre repertoire and companies across the world are creating more, some of which stand the test of time and are picked up by the larger community.

middle; they hook the arms of the sides that are touching and connect their feet as though they were shackled side by side. Connected in the middle, they now form a two-headed organism where each actor embodies, pulls, and pushes their side of the argument. There are other short forms to choose from: the rant, for example, serves the elevated energy of an exasperated pet peeve very well; the three-part story beautifully highlights three important moments in a story; the narrative V invites a radical shift into metaphor, etc. After the short forms, there will be a few

Image 51. Gatineau: Living Histories Ensemble created a new playback "form" we call The Bridge, in order to share vulnerablity with the teller and respond more effectively to stories of trauma. In The Bridge, the players present personal story fragments that resonate with what they heard from the teller.

longer stories, where tellers are invited to come onstage and tell and watch their story from a chair next to mine. I facilitate their telling, their choosing of the most important protagonists in their story; they give them motivation, background, and texture. I call "Let's watch!" and the actors move into their assigned characters and give life to the story, thus offering their interpretation back to the teller. Sometimes the performance will fall flat. Other times, it works well. Because it is improvisational and no one consults each other, there is a feeling of magic, of seamlessness. "Let's watch" brings something that wasn't there before into being in that instance; it unfolds right before your eyes.

In the tent in Gatineau, we had warmed up with fluid sculptures and I was ready to move into the tensions and conflicts represented by the pairs. The audience was made up of youths and

educators, Rwandan officials, artists, elders, and other adults who had come to be with the youth to help hold the space. I asked them for a tension. Did they live with any conflicts or tensions, like on the one hand this and on the other that? An older gentleman, a Rwandan senator, offered the following: "I have a question," he said. "I often wonder whether the children of the killers, whom we have been educating, will choose to follow our teaching [i.e., the national policy and teaching on unity and reconciliation] or whether they will choose to follow the way of their

Image 52. Gatineau: The most important element of our Living Histories Ensemble practice is intense, respectful listening.

elders [i.e., continue acting on genocidal ideology]." There was so much compassion in that question. It spoke to traditional Rwandan values of respect for the elders, of pride and upholding one's family's honour. It spoke to the value of loyalty. On the other hand, it also spoke of fear: fear for the future, fear that the country's long-term strategy might fail. We played back that story as a pair. Two stories later, a young man stood up and said, "I want to answer the old man." He began his story by apologizing for being "half"[158] and told us his story of being a small child when the genocide took place. He spoke of his uncle bringing his brother a gun to help protect them. His brother had been a child himself, a year or so older. He told us—the members of the ensemble and the audience and the old man—that of course he wanted to be a part of the society

[158] The idea that someone should feel the need to apologize for being who they are has haunted me for a decade. We are each born of egg and sperm. The young man's question said so much about who he felt he was, how he thought he was perceived, and who he felt he was talking to.

they were building. He said, “I could be out there working, making money. I chose to be here instead.” He spoke about wanting pride and belonging, and hoping to pass a sense of identity and pride to his children. He risked saying his truth: “I am sorry, but I am half.” He chose someone to play himself and someone else to play his brother. The actors, in turn, also chose to speak things that were not usually said. Instead of saying “half,” Catherine, playing the young man, said “both”—“I am both, I have deeply tasted both. I am the youth! I am of one race. The youth

Image 53. Gatineau: Sometimes the inner feeling of struggling to hold it all together can be supported with images of strong walls and containers for the struggle.

are telling you ‘enough!’ Enough! It hurts too much.” It’s difficult to express in writing how the affect in the room, the felt experience of that moment and that performance, shifted, and of the ripples of that experience.

What we meant to do

Thinking about what we meant to do with the work in the MLS project speaks to a relational ontology, an understanding of being part of and active in the world. LHE’s work alongside the Rwandan community was about countering helplessness/ powerlessness/ alienation/ objectification of passive victims. It was about shifting positions: from listening to and seeing narratives about us to explain difference or otherness, poverty economy, inferiority, or violent death, to experiencing emancipation, liberation, and reappropriation of self and

story[159]. In my case, the (re)appropriation of self and story continued through the arts-based ways we worked with life story and, in particular, through the writing and performing of a monologue entitled *Le petit coin intact*. My process echoed Zatzman's idea of a retrieval of self[160], but not in terms of taking back something one had possessed but rather taking back from "circumstance" something we can feel the absence of. I see my work as a continuum, from the initial drive and desire to facilitate conversation or difficult dialogue and serving the community or communities

Image 54. Gatineau: He stood and explained that he is "half" (meaning that like a great many other Rwandans, he is of mixed Hutu and Tutsi heritage.) Catherine, who is the granddaughter of a Holocaust survivor and a rural Christian Quebecer, understood immediately. She improvised a stirring celebration of the value of "deeply tasting both", an important shift in perspective.

I am part of, toward a development of my own vocabulary, my own concern, my own aesthetic expression, my own performance. There is a piece about self and community I can't seem to articulate, yet it feels like a joint—the pivot piece about dialogue and self and other—but it isn't quite formed. The story that comes to mind is of a beloved friend, a Rwandan scholar and poet. She had followed my experimentations with dialogue and my need to have us "talk and listen to each other." Our attempts to do that in the last two decades had been more or less successful. She came to the premiere of my monologue in 2012 and told me that in some ways the telling of my own stories, questions, and concerns had allowed her to sit in the audience and have them

[159] I wanted to write self-determination, but I'm struggling with the word because what I aspire to is more like a horizon, an open horizon of possibility that allows anyone to be anything they choose.

[160] Zatzman, "Drama Education and Memory."

resonate with her own in the privacy of her own mind. To sit together with others as part of an audience, but never confronted. She said that it was ultimately the most effective form of dialogue with me that she had experienced.

What would it mean to explore the retrieval of self as understood in the Rwandan philosophy of being: to be, to be here, to be with? And more specifically, what would it mean to explore the self-being-fire as aliveness, and its qualities of intensity and heat, or dampening and

Image 55. Montreal: A community dialogue day, organized by PAGE-Rwanda. People simply share their experiences, concerns and points of view.

struggling, or dying, kindling, building, stalking too much or too little, through creative practice and a posture of engagement, care, and tending?

More than the fire, or alongside the fire, I have found that a pond is a useful metaphor for the life we hold. Where fire speaks of the qualities of vitality, intensity, containment, and contagion, a pond evokes the ecosystem and life in its coexisting diversity. It speaks of the constant activity and the transformations. The pond as a body of water speaks of the different expressions and scales of life and living… from the whale to the plankton to the cell, sea anemone and smaller. All the different ways life has found to express itself ... colour and kind, dynamic and static ... constant ...

What we know

Looking back across the years of the MLS project, at the work of the various working groups within the projects and the work of the individual projects within the working groups, the Community-University Research Alliance has been an exercise in heteroglossia—listening to multiple voices from multiple perspectives. Heteroglossia (many voices) puts a name to and validates the diverse, multimedial, polyphonic, interdisciplinary, multilingual, and transnational

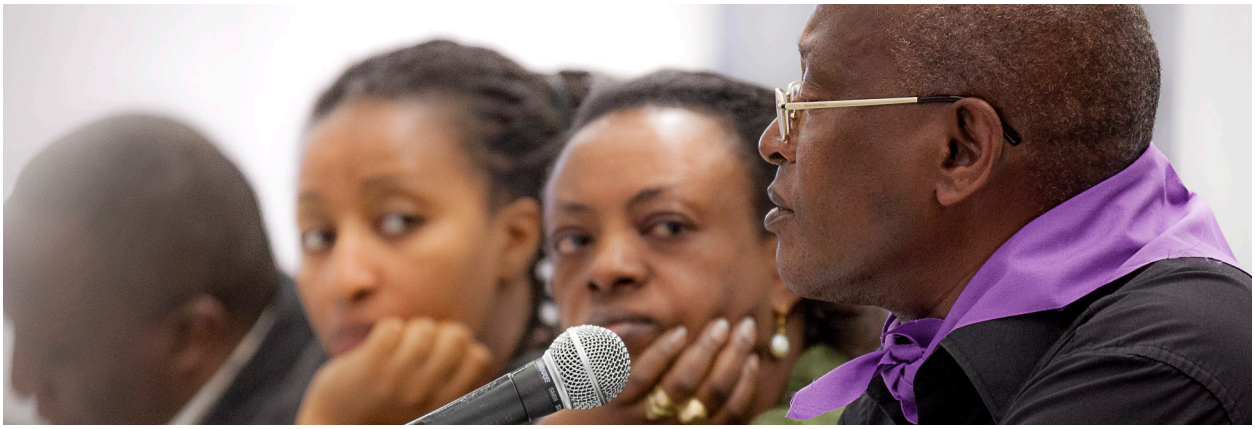

Image 56. Montreal: Another community dialogue day in which we heard migration stories from community members of different generations. It is important to preserve the memory of these many and varied jouneys among our community members.

voices of my own life and practice. It speaks as much to the various hats I wore[161] as to the multiple perspectives and approaches we used to engage our difficult stories.

In *Reading Autobiography*, Sidonie Smith refers to heteroglossia in relation to the dialogic work of the subject becoming conscious.[162] I remember very clearly a moment of my own coming into consciousness. In April 2010, during genocide commemoration activities in Montreal, the MLS project's Rwandan working group had organized an intergenerational dialogue day. My father's dark hand held a piece of white chalk to the blackboard to situate the 1955 Bandung Conference (the first Asian-African conference) into a timeline highlighting 1959,

[161] I am a community organizer, a psychotherapist, an artist, a facilitator, a scholar...

[162] Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

1973, and 1994, particularly difficult years in Rwanda's history. The word "re-membering" came to mind. Quite literally, we were putting pieces back together and connecting to something vital. Antiquity, modern European history, facts and figures learned by rote over decades in Western schools all came alive and became meaningful by watching video excerpts and listening to live testimony of Rwandan lives from 1959 to 2010. When my father related events in Rwanda to the Cold War, my understanding of Rwanda's place in history connected with other parts of my

Image 57. Montreal: Yet another community dialogue day. Sometimes in the aftermath of violence it takes decades before a person is ready to step into the conversation.

knowledge and began to form a coherent whole. It was like a light going on. Referencing Adrienne Rich, it was to look into the mirror and finally see a reflection.[163] A non-event for many but incredibly precious to me. Born in Rwanda, dislocated as a toddler, raised in Germany then later in Montreal, I had learned history and geography in school with other children, but was never taught how those stories had helped shape my life.

For Sean Field, "oral historians can make a contribution toward meeting that need for a personal past, not as isolated biography, but as a personal past meaningfully created and

[163] Rich, *Blood, Bread, and Poetry*.

struggled for within a matrix of social and collective relationships."[164] Analyzing the impact of our playback theatre troupe, I would argue that the practice LHE has developed at the intersection of oral history, performance, and trauma studies is a particularly important culmination of the project, well-suited to engage with the historical complexities and political conflicts that have shaped the lives of people like me. In some ways, having spent all of this time allows me to affirm that time does not heal all wounds.

Image 58. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Living Histories Ensemble was one of four groups invited to perform at the North American Playback Theatre Festival held at Leslie University, where 96 playback groups were represented. Here, four of us along with three conference moderators answer questions following a performance.

During commemoration 2014, the survivor community had gathered and requested the research on mental health. Many survivors were still struggling (some for more than 25 years), and many more were concerned about the intergenerational transmission of trauma and the struggle faced by certain youths to find their way. Somewhat less obvious but very important were the struggles of the pre-1994 diaspora, those who had been persecuted since the 1960s. Some of this group had lived in exile for 30 years and migrated up to six times before establishing themselves in Montreal. Also struggling were the non-survivor youth who grappled with group identity associated or identified with negative action. The PAGE-Rwanda group

[164] Sean Field, "Interviewing in a Culture of Violence: Moving Memories from Windermere to the Cape Flats," in *Trauma: Life Stories of Survivors*, ed. Kim Lacy Rogers, Selma Leydesdorff, and Graham Dawson (Transaction Publishers, 2004), 69.

requested a research intervention because they realized that 20 years after the genocide many people were coping less than immediately after the genocide. And then there was the work with my father and his siblings, where we are only now starting to gather memories of my grandfather. The collaborative creative work on life stories has allowed me something that other types of processes, therapeutic or artistic, do not allow. Rather than closing on an argument this work has opened possibilities, opened the facilities.

Image 59. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Unknown stories of violence surround us. People everywhere struggle with legacies of mass violence.

In my 20s and 30s Cocteau's *difficulté d'être* described my struggle with being. The image is one of a ceiling that weighs and weighs. Or maybe the myth of Sisyphus pushing the boulder uphiill. Today I don't have to go back down into the valley day after day, I am free. I don't feel the weight anymore. Which does not mean I have defeated all of my demons. I still have bouts of paralysis. Like an elephant who grew up in chains, I can sometimes live small, as if the chain still existed. I must now do the work of learning to live amply, freely. But I don't have to push the boulder anymore. I can get up from my bed. I imagine and do and accomplish things in my day. I don't depress anymore.

The language then is of course no longer the same at all. The MLS was important, because I learned over time (and over many performance events) that our issues touched many

other communities, not only our own. Many (and other racialized) communities have dealt with mass violence. I keep thinking about the teleological dimension of the work. What was I (were we) doing? And what for, and for whom? There is a piece around emancipation and voice that echoes the idea of the "retrieval of self."

In January 2019 I was invited to give a keynote at the University of Quebec in Rimouski. The theme of my presentation was *Du pouvoir libérateur de la narration de soi: libre pour… ?*

Image 60. Catherine has a remarkable gift of presence. Trauma provokes absence. And one of the challenges for people touched by genocidal trauma is to find their way safely back to full presence in the world.

(On the liberating power of self-narration: free to / for ... ?) In it I reflected on the creative work in the MLS project and in particular the healing or liberatory quality of the work. As I prepared, I noticed that there had been real labour all through the MLS project, a real process of creatively working through our "difficult" stories. First, the stabilizing container of the MLS, then the active processing of trauma through playback, and then the different ways of reinscription through the many arts-based methods. The way I started saying that I was free in 2009. The sense of having attained something. I would have this feeling again and again throughout the rest of the project, and even today I say that I am free. What I mean today is that although I still avoid friction and procrastinate more than I want to, I no longer suffer from debilitating bouts of depression. I no longer need medication. I can and do project myself into the future and imagine

what I would like to do. The meaning keeps shifting. I did not know then what I would later learn through the other collaborations and creative explorations. In the same way, I know more today with the distance I have acquired than what I knew at the end of the project. Of course, a lot of time has passed—over 15 years since I first encountered the project. I have done psychotherapy, psychodrama, community art, 15 years of life story work.

Stocking the waters, filling the well

What can research do?

Owen Chapman and Kim Sawchuk,

"Creation-as-Research: Critical Making in Complex Environments"

In an essay on what constitutes "good playback theatre," Jo Salas, musing on the inevitable tension between artistry and community service, offers an analogy with psychiatrist Bruno Bettleheim's idea of the "good enough parent"[165] Salas writes that "'good enough playback' fulfills both the artistic and interactive criteria to an adequate degree despite inevitable shortcomings."[166] In the same way, I would offer that in the processing of the life stories of Montrealers displaced by genocide, war, and other human rights violations, there was a first critical level of doneness where I felt solid enough. And the ground felt solid enough to walk on. Things got better, but there was definitely a first level of "good enough," a particular moment when I recognized in myself "Oh, yes, I'm done."

Engaging creatively with the stories, co-organizing and participating in community dialogue sessions with other members of my family and community, and hearing our stories

[165] Bruno Bettelheim, *A Good Enough Parent: A Book on Child-Rearing* (New York: Vintage Books, 1988).

[166] Jo Salas, "What is 'Good' Playback Theatre," in *Gathering Voices: Essays on Playback Theatre*, ed. Jonathan Fox and Heinrich Dauber, (New Paltz, NY: Tusitala Publishing, 1999), 30.

resonating with each other allowed me to listen to "my" stories in the context of other stories. I was able to contribute to the interviewing and activities of other working groups and/or communities in the project, adding yet another layer of context. Several strands ran in parallel: the people and groups in the project; the working groups; the ethics and practice of oral history; the community; academic, personal, and family life. Weaving through horizontally were the artistic practices: durational and one-time projects and involvements. And ongoing throughout the project, our practice of playback theatre.

And there was being able to listen to those stories and play and reflect and process. And then listening to a different group and different stories and playing those back made it so that after a while the silences receded. I knew more because I understood more, I could better read between lines. I could imagine and double check. And even before that I could feel comfortable with not knowing. Questions were acceptable. Negative feelings, like shame, for example, were acceptable.

When I started on my journey of understanding 30 years ago, I was struggling with many silences that felt like a cold, silent body of water without any life in it. I felt empty and could not project myself into the future. I could not imagine having children or a family. How would I cope? What would I tell the children? To move forward, I had to anchor myself. This process allowed me to hear and be touched by lots of stories and pieces of stories. Of course, it is not the same as if the historical ruptures that took place had not taken place. But I have no way of knowing what that would have been, nor am I interested in that idea. Just as education is not a banking system, intergenerational transmission is not like sitting at a parent's or grandparent's knee as they pour stories and knowledge and skills and wisdom into us. I have found that yearning for information, connection, and belonging made every encounter especially valuable.

And knowing that pieces of our stories can be held and given to us by people outside of our family is important in a context where so many were murdered. To think of a larger generational "we" in this way allows for a sense of responsibility to the upcoming generations and the contribution we can make in their memory work. That's not how it happens—transmission and learning and growing up happens through connections and over time. This connects with this other thing which connects with that other thing, and living this way allows these weird connections so that now I have a restocked pond of stories that might not have been the same story that would have been in another time. If I had stayed there uninterrupted ... But it's full. I feel I am a full pond. And it's a good pond. I'm good with that.

I found that the processing of difficult stories—and by difficult, I mean the way in which a detail, a very specific detail in a story will make it impossible to move forward and will have us stuck or circling back unless we work through it— processing difficult stories then, was sequential. We would attend to those kinds of specific details, pieces that don't allow the rest to flow and settle, and one can have on or several in a particular story, but we would forground one at a time and work through that and then that would settle and then either the person feels appeased or another piece is sticking out that we can forground and attend to…. There is a popular piece of advice/metaphor that circulates among storytellers. It has to do with when one can tell a difficult story, and it goes something like: If it's a scar, we can tell it. If it's a wound, we need to do the healing work first.

An appeased story is a healed or scarred story. It no longer actively hurts. It isn't reactive anymore. We have learned something—a new perspective, a skill, an idea … It can be tender and it may not tolerate strain, but it no longer needs our attention. Working through stories is telling them over and over, playing them and having them played back to us, until the piece that needs it

has been heard and digested, appeased. Working things through allows us to be available to listen, more and better, to others. The process, the containing, the working through of difficult stories allows us then to also be available to listen to other stories—to listen to and to like the living. We become more available to what is offered and able to hear more clearly.

In the next chapter, I describe the challenges of listening to family members.

Chapter 5: Filling in the Family Blanks

I was not unhappy in prison. It was not a time in my life that was unhappy.

It is [what came] after …

R.N., Montreal Life Stories interview

Interviewing my family was a challenging process on several levels: the working group did not think it was a safe practice, which made me question my decision. In the beginning I was not able to think that someone else would interview my family. I could not have imagined it. Wasn't the whole point for me to engage the silences I grew up with and hear and listen. Hindsight is wonderful: back then I did not and could not separate the interview process from the documented outcome. In hindsight and with a lot more familiarity with archived material, I could have saved a lot of time and stress if I had let other people interview the members of my family and used the archived interview and its transcript to work with. But in the moment that just felt impossible. It was a strange idea that the interview, that relatively short moment in time, should be invested with as much importance. I could feel it and yet. As a psychotherapist I was used to going over moments multiple times and seeing new things come to light and different awareness. It was strange to think that capturing one moment in time would be so significant. Even though I knew that of course it was.

Maman

Vous aviez quel age? Dix-neuf ans. "How old were you?" My mother answered that she was 19 at the time. She laughingly said: *J'ai été accusé de subversion. Je ne connaissais pas du tout cette expression. On m'a dit que je voulais renverser le gouvernement. Je trouvais ça tellement ridicule. Si vous pensez que c'est vraiment moi qui vais renverser le gouvernement*

alors j'accepte l'accusation. ("I was accused of subversion. I didn't know that expression at all. I was told that I wanted to overthrow the government. I thought that was so ridiculous. If you believe that it is really I who will overthrow the government, then I accept the accusation.")[167]

Just before graduating out of her social work program at l'Ecole Sociale de Karubanda Kigali, my mother was sent to her sisters by the nuns at the boarding school. She was charged for having a subversive poem under her pillow. It was 1966. Rwanda was newly independent since 1962. Anti-Tutsi sentiment was running high and had not abated since the pogroms of 1959–1961.

In the interview, she said offhandedly: *On a pas parlé de la prison la dernière fois? Oui, je suis allé en prison pendant huit mois. Les trois premiers mois était difficiles les cinq derniers étaient très faciles parce que j'avais le contrôle. "Tu avais le contrôle de la prison?"* ("Didn't we speak about prison the last time?" "Yes, I went to prison for eight months. The first three months were challenging, the five last ones were very easy because I was in charge. I had control." "You were in charge … of prison?")

Steven High writes about how intergenerational transmission became such an important theme in the MLS and how "entire families were activated."[168] His sense that "the regenerative possibilities of oral history are amplified when individuals take part in a sustained conversation as part of family or community based memory work" had always been the point for me, and I fought for it. My first battle was when our Rwandan working group co-chairs were first defining who would be interviewed. The project's final name was broad: Life Stories of Montrealers Displaced by Genocide, War, and Other Human Rights Violations. But in the beginning, when

[167] R.N. interview, *Life Stories of Montrealers Displaced by Genocide, War, and Other Human Rights Violations* [MiniDV], Concordia University Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling, 2010, translated by the author.

[168] Steven High, *Oral History at the Crossroads*.

we were just starting out, the idea was to interview survivors … and the definitions of who was a survivor, and what they were a survivor of, were not shared.

Initially the Rwandan working group meant to concentrate on survivors of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi. In the very beginning, I had even asked that we interview more "Hutu" voices. I was thinking of the groups who had been in Montreal throughout the period of the war and the genocide but who had a completely different experience. Those who had

Image 61. After their father's death, my father and his siblings completed the construction of the little family home on a hill called Bihana. As a baby I lived here with my mother for a year and a half while she worked out a way for us to join my father in Germany. The house was badly damaged during the 1994 genocide. It has been rebuilt in recent years.

collaborated in the Tuganire project and creation of the Umurage cultural centre. Interestingly, people were not keen to be included (not that recruiting was easy in the very beginning, but I received several negative responses when I asked for expressions of interest). Then I thought of some of the more polarized and hostile voices in Quebec City. I remember sitting in one meeting and wondering out loud about inviting dialogue with genocide deniers or others who held extreme views, to try to understand that point of view. That idea was shut down hard. We were not going to give any air time to denial of the genocide. NONE. It is a position I truly appreciate today but that I took on faith back then. I would develop my ideas about dialogue and "reconciliation" over the following years. I did not insist on those ideas, but I vividly remember going up against two mature men to fight to broaden the category of interviewees to include the

survivors of anti-Tutsi persecution since 1959, specifically to allow me to include my parents, aunts and uncles, and grandparents. The co-chairs I was confronting were my elders, friends of my family. People who were younger than my parents, yet closer to my parents' generation than my own. I was over 30 but unmarried and not yet a mother, therefore still considered a "girl" (or maybe a spinster). And although I was their equal as a representative of the youth group Isangano[169], I was also their "youth"—and they held authority.

Image 62. Bihana: During my first return to the family home in nearly 40 years, I met some of the neighbours.

The project has in many ways changed and deepened the relationships among us in the community. Relationships between the genocide survivor community and the exile community have evolved a great deal, in part because the collaboration and telling and sharing of stories. Survivors were able to recall family members who had experienced or spoken of previous anti-

Tutsi pogroms and were able to make the connection between what happened to them in 1994 and what happened since 1959 organically rather than feeling as though that was an imposed narrative.

The community that was in exile for 30 years held ancient and more rigid codes and hierarchies, in part because of tradition and in part because it is very difficult to change tradition

[169] Isangano and PAGE-Rwanda, the group of survivors, were the two official partners to the larger MLS project's Rwanda working group.

when in exile, because when in exile, tradition is meant to help the individuals and the group hold on to a stable sense of self even as the environment does not reflect back who they are (as it would if they were in the environment that gives rise to them as a people).

The genocide has left Rwanda in shambles. The country has had to reinvent itself. There is more space now for Rwandans to imagine themselves and contribute to a contemporary society. The relationship with Rwanda, for those who, like me, were of the diaspora, changed

Image 63. Kigali: My mother's education was temporarily interrupted in 1966, at the age of 19, when she was arrested and imprisoned for 8 months in the colonial era "1930" Prison" for allegedly possessing "subversive poetry".

completely. Today the global diaspora is considered Rwanda's sixth province. We perform our roles differently in the diaspora. Genders aren't performed in the same way, at least, socially (I don't know if it translates into more intimate spaces as well). Our youth today are nurtured, coveted, as they were before, but today they are encouraged to question, speak up, take space, lead.

These changes are due in part to the evolution in our local community and the larger society's social norms. And, in part, Rwanda's policies and accomplishments around gender balance. But back then ...

(transcript)

Pas de la prison mais du département où on était. comme je vous avez dit j'étais formée en travail social ... quand je suis arrivée là-bas j'ai regardé les gens et je me suis dit, tu avais plusieurs catégories, et en majorité c'était des prisonnières politiques, on n'était pas juste des femmes, mais il y avait aussi des criminelles et parmi les criminelles y avait des femmes qui avaient avorté mais il y avait aussi des femmes qui avaient tué leur mari et des femmes qui avaient tué des enfants! Pas leur enfant mais les enfants des autres. Il y avait aussi des itinérantes. Donc il y avait un mix que je ne trouvais absolument pas mixable. je trouvais que mettre ces gens-là ensemble pouvait créer des difficultés de vivre ensemble. Alors j'ai ...j'avais deux filles qui étaient des enseignantes, et on a fait un comité de vie communautaire. On a organisé le théâtre, le chant et la danse, mais aussi la cuisine collective, le ménage et un comité des sages pour régler des problèmes et les conflits

(my own translation)

Not in charge of the prison, but of the section where we were. As I told you, I was trained in social work ... When I got there, I looked at people and I said to myself, you had several categories, and most of them were political prisoners, we were just women, but there were also criminals and among the criminals there were women who had aborted but there were also women who had killed their husbands and women who had killed children. Not their child but the children of others. There were also women in situations of homelessness. So there was a mix that I found absolutely not mixable. I thought that putting these people together could make it difficult to live together. So, I had two girls (young women) who were teachers. And we organized a committee for community life. We organized for theatre, song and dance, but also collective cooking, housekeeping, and a committee of elders to resolve problems and conflicts between people.

entre les personnes.

Il y avait même des petits enfants: des femmes qui étaient emprisonnées sans famille et qui étaient là avec leurs enfants mais des enfants de 2 ans des enfants de 4 ans qui était en prison! Alors on s'est dit, ben que, la première chose, il faut que ce soit propre, la 2e chose, il faut que les gens mangent convenablement et il faut que j'ai une certaine créativité il faut qu'il y ait une certaine vie. Alors les enseignants faisait des cours d'alphabétisation, donc enseigner à écrire et à lire. Et il y avait une autre fille une jeune qui faisait du chant et elle avait de l'aide pour faire du chant et la danse.

There were even small children: women who were imprisoned, without family, and who were there with their children, but children two or four years old, in prison! So we told ourselves, well, first thing, it has to be clean. Second thing, people have to eat properly and you have to have creativity, there has to be a certain life. And so the teachers were doing literacy classes, so teaching writing and reading. And there was another girl, a young girl who was singing and she had to help facilitate singing and dancing.

Pour tout le monde ?
Oui, tout le monde même les enfants, toi! Tout le monde était impliqué dans la vie communautaire de la prison.

For everyone?
Yes, everyone, even children were implicated in the prison's community life.

C'était la prison pendant trois mois. Après c'était vraiment agréable (rire). On était une grosse famille d'à-peu-près 60 femmes.

It was prison for three months. After that it was really nice (laughter). We were a big family of about 60 women.

Mais il n'y avait personne qui venait vous déranger?

But was there no one who came to bother you?

Oui, on venait nous déranger tout le temps, ce qui nous dérangeait beaucoup et sur quoi il fallait toujours travailler. Il y avait une femme, une religieuse Cécile et elle m'aidait beaucoup. Il y avait beaucoup de torture: on venait nous chercher et les gens ont torturé les gens individuellement physiquement et mentalement.

Yes, we were always disturbed. It bothered us a lot and we needed to work on it constantly. There was a woman, a nun, Cécile, and she helped me a lot.
There was a lot of torture. We were picked up and people were tortured individually, physically and mentally.

La torture?

Torture?

La torture, par exemple comme de mettre la cigarette devant le nez et tu n'avais pas le droit d'éternuer quand tu éternuais on te frappait ou bien la torture comme te dire qu'on va ... tu sais pas où est ton mari mais qu'ils qu'ils l'ont tué puis ...vont... c'est pas juste lui qui vont tuer même tes enfants ils vont les tuer ... donc il y avait ... on savait que ces gens-là voulaient nous faire mal et ils nous faisaient mal et il y avait des gens aussi qui disparaissent et on savait ce que c'était, la

Yes. For example, like putting a cigarette in front of your nose and you were not allowed to sneeze. When you sneeze someone hits you. Or torture like telling you that ... we're going ... you don't know where your husband is but that they killed and it is not just him whom they will kill, even your children they will kill ... So there was ... we knew that these people wanted to hurt us, and they hurt us, and there were also people who were disappeared, and we knew what disappearance

disparition.

meant.

Ca voulait dire quoi?

What did that mean?

On les tuait. Ça n'revenait plus, c'etait fini.

They were killed. No one came back. It was over.

Est-ce que c'est sûr qu'ils n'étaient pas vivants?
On le sait pas, mais il n'avaient pas pris leurs affaires et ils ne revenaient plus les chercher, c'est pour ça qu'on disait qu'ils ne vivaient plus. Donc on savait que n'importe qui, n'importe quand, pouvait aller "là où ils vont et dont ils ne reviennent pas" donc il fallait tout le temps se préparer à ce que ce soit notre tour et donc les pemiers 3 mois ont été difficiles.

Is it sure they weren't alive? We don't know, but they hadn't taken their belongings and they never came back to get them. That's why we'd say they didn't live anymore. So we knew that anyone could at any time go to "where they go and do not come back from" so we had to prepare all the time for it to be our turn, and therefore the first three months were difficult.

Comment vous vous prépariez pour toujours être prêtes?

How do you prepare to always be ready?

C'est accepter que ça peut être ton temps. Ceux qui priaient ...bien... se rapprochait de leur Dieu. La majorité priaient. Donc se dire que chaque jour on vit c'est un don et le jour

It's accepting that it can be your time. Those who prayed, well, got closer to their God. The majority prayed. So to tell ourselves that each day we live is a gift and the day we no longer

où on vivra plus on va être avec Dieu et puis que ...la prison éternelle n'était pas vraiment très reluisante en réalité quand tu es en prison. Quand on te dit qu'on va te tuer tu te dis, regardes! Je ne suis pas vraiment très proche de la vie. (rire)

live we will be with God and then ... the eternal prison was not really very attractive ... when you are actually in a prison. When you are told that they are going to kill you, you tell yourself, Look! I'm not really that close to life. (laughter)

Si tu l'enlèves, ce sera au moins ça en moins mais on faisait ...disons qu'on faisait tout pour ne pas être misérables , pour que la vie ait un sens à tous les jours, et que ...

If you take it, at least it will be … but we were doing … let's say that we did everything to not be miserable, so that life has meaning every day, and that

Et puis quand on l'aura perdu, au moins ceux qui vont rester là où on était, continuent à recevoir la vie, puis en faire quelque chose, jusqu'à ce qu'il n'y ait plus personne.

And when we will have lost it, at least those who will stay where we were will continue to receive life and do something with it until there is no one left.

Peut-être qu'ils nous libèrent? On ne savait pas ce qui allait allaient être notre sort.

Maybe they'll free us. We didn't know what they were going to do to us ... we didn't know what was going to be our fate.

Et puis on était avec des mamans ... Ma mère adoptive était avec moi en prison, on était donc avec les mamans et on se disait qu'il

And then we were there with older moms ... My adoptive mother was with me in prison, so

fallait tenir pour les mères, c'est elles beaucoup qui était torturé.

we were with mothers, and we managed for the mothers. They were the ones who were tortured a lot.

(maman parle tout ducement)
Il y a une femme elle était enceinte et puis elle est venue, elle a perdu son enfant parce qu'on l'avait mise dans une auto et puis et puis l'auto roulait mais dans des bosses. Quand elle est revenue, elle saignait puis à peu près, dans l'après-midi l'enfant est sorti. On avait pas de médecin c'était pas un grand enfant mais c'était quand même un enfant formé et il est sorti. Ils avaient fait ça pour lui faire perdre l'enfant et c'était très dur pour elle. Cette violence comment tu la vit collectivement? Et puis ...alors on niait pas qu'il y avait une violence mais on reconnaissait qu'il y avait quelqu'un qui voulait nous exterminer et puis que nous exterminer, c'était tuer un à un, c'est pas tout le monde en même temps, donc il faut pas prendre la chose d'une façon globale, il faut

(Mom speaks very softly)
There was a pregnant woman ... she lost her child because they had put her in a car and then and then the car was driving but on a bumpy road. When she came back, she was bleeding, then roughly, in the afternoon the baby came out. We had no doctor. It was not a big child but it was still a fully formed child and it came out. They did that to make her lose the child and it was very hard for her, this violence … How do you live it collectively and then ... so we could not deny that there was violence, but we recognized that there was someone who wanted to exterminate us and also that to exterminate us was to kill us one by one ... It’s not everyone at the same time, so we must not think of it in a global way, rather we must see that exterminate means to kill one person, then another person,

voir que exterminer, c'est tuer une personne puis une personne puis une personne. C'est ça qui va faire l'extermination ...qu'on regarde ça, plus comme des séquences avant d'atteindre leur but. Peut-être que quelqu'un peut arriver à les empêcher d'atteindre leur but, mais peut-être qu'ils vont aussi arriver à atteindre leur but.

then another person. That's what will achieve extermination ... so we should look at it more like a sequence of events and maybe someone can prevent them from reaching their goal and maybe they will reach their goal.

Parce que nous, on était en prison, ils pouvaient tous nous tuer. Nous on était dans leurs mains en prison. Il pouvait nous tuer n'importe comment et n'importe quand. Collectivement ou individuellement.

Because we were in prison they could kill us all. We were in their hands in prison. They could kill us anyway, anytime, collectively or individually.

Il y avait une conscience que les gens voulaient vous exterminer?

You were aware that people wanted to kill you?

C'était pas une conscience, c'est qu'on nous le disait. Même le curé. Parce qu'on avait les dimanche, la messe. Il venait à la messe des prisonniers et il nous disait régulièrement que les prisonniers politiques, on peut les tuer à n'importe quel moment. Donc ce n'était pas une conscience qu'on avait élaboré, c'est une

It was not an awareness, it was told to us. Even the parish priest. Because we had Sunday mass. He came to the prisoners' mass and he regularly told us that political prisoners can be killed at any time, so it was not an awareness that we had developed, it was a lesson we had learned. It was very conscious.

leçon qu'on avait apprise. C'était très conscient. Seulement ce qu'on avait élaboré nous, c'est que de toutes les façons les gens meurent. On n'est pas ici pour vivre éternellement, ça c'est sûr, et là, on était peut-être plus proche de la mort et plus conscient qu'elle était proche, que le reste des humains. Mais que c'est pas parce que on est plus conscients ou plus proches, que la vie vaut moins, au contraire! Au contraire, c'est quand tu connais sa fin, qu'il faut en faire quelque chose. Et il fallait que la prison, là, ne soit pas l'enfer. Le seul pouvoir qu'on avait là, c'est d'éviter que la prison soit l'enfer. C'était que la prison ne soit pas l'enfer. La mort, on avait aucun pouvoir là-dessus. Ils pouvaient nous tuer à n'importe quel moment. Les murs étaient à peu près à dix mètres de haut. On voyait le ciel, mais on ne voyait pas l'extérieur. Même pas les arbres plus grands... rien... On voyait le ciel, on voyait les oiseaux qui était gentils qui volait par-dessus ...

Only what we had developed is that, in any case people die. We are not here to live forever, that is sure, and there we were perhaps closer to death and more aware that it was close than the rest of humans. But it is not because we are more aware or closer (to death) that life is worth less, on the contrary! On the contrary, it is when you know its end that we have to do something with it. And the prison there could not be allowed to be hell. The only power we had there was to prevent the prison from being hell. Death we had no power over. They could kill us at any time. The walls were about ten metres high. We saw the sky, but we did not see the outside, not even the tallest trees ... nothing ... we saw the sky, we saw the birds, who were nice, and who flew over the walls ...

Donc pour la nourriture, tu m'a posé la question: tu as deux repas, le matin ou enfin le jour et puis le soir. C'était des haricots avec de l'huile de palme, qui sont à moitié cuits et puis de la pâte et ça tu le manges tous les jours, tous les jours, tous les jours! ...il n'y a pas un seul jour où tu les manges pas. Mais c'est succulent. Tu sais combien je les aime toujours... Encore aujourd'hui je les aime, les deux.

So for food, you asked me the question: you had two meals, in the morning or during the day and then in the evening. It was beans with palm oil which are half cooked and then dough (foufou is manioc dough) and you eat it every day, every day, every day ... there is not a single day you do not eat them. But it's delicious, you know how much I still love them ... Even today I love them both.

...

...

On s'est dit c'est pas possible, on se fait ami avec les livreurs de bouffe. C'est normalement les gens qui sont condamnés à vie, qui viennent livrer la nourriture, mais c'est eux aussi qui sont dans la cuisine. Alors on leur demandait de nous ramener le charbon et on leur a demandé deux grosses marmites. Donc ... les mamans plus vieilles, leur job, c'était la bouffe, parmi les plus jeunes il y avait la vie sociale et puis l'hygiène. C'est comme ça que ça fonctionnait

We said to ourselves it's not possible, we make friends with the food deliverers. Normally, people who are condemned for life deliver the food, but they are also in the kitchen, so we asked them to bring us the coal and we asked them for two large pots. So ... older moms, their job was food (to finish cooking the beans) among the younger ones theirs was social life and then hygiene. That is how it worked.

C'est toute une gestion.

It's a whole lot of managing (operations).

C'est toute une gestion et ça fonctionnait!

La prison pour moi n'a pas été une période difficile. C'est une période, où je prétend avoir été utile à l'âme de plus de 40 personnes, donc ce ne peut pas être difficile ...la vie est difficile quand ça n'a pas de sens. Ce n'est pas parce qu'on te met dans une circonstance matérielle difficile, que c'est difficile. C'est quand le sens manque... mais là j'avais un sens: il fallait absolument que ces gens ...tu sais des mamans de 50 de 60 ans qui sont désespérées ...tu te dis wow minutes! Tu n'es pas encore morte! On ne va pas mourir avant! Vraiment ça a été ...

It's all management, and it worked.

The prison for me was not a difficult period; it is a period where I claim to have been useful and cared for the souls of more than 40 people, therefore it cannot be difficult ... Life is difficult when it has no meaning. It is not because one puts you in a difficult material circumstance that it is difficult. It is when there is no sense ... but there I had sense: It was absolutely necessary that these people … you know, moms of 50, of 60 years who are desperate ... You say to yourself, wow, just a minute! You are not dead yet! We're not going to die before death really is here.

J'étais excessivement occupé. J'avais des cahiers et des cahiers (rire).

I was excessively busy. I had notebooks and notebooks (laughter).

Tu écrivais des choses?

You were writing things down?

Comment tu veux surveiller si tu n'avais pas écrit?

How can you check up, if you hadn't written things down?

Et puis on faisait la ronde la nuit parce qu'on était des filles.

And then we kept watch at night because we were girls.

Ce sont les plus vieilles qui m'ont dit ça, moi je ne savais pas que les gens pourraient penser nous violer, mais il fallait, parce que il y avait des prisonniers qu'ils avaient la clé. Comme ceux qui nous amener à manger, ils avaient la clé, donc ils essayaient d'attaquer, de venir dans la nuit, et il fallait absolument qu'il y ait des gens qui veillent. Donc on faisait la rotation pour être sûr qu'il n'y a personne qui vient dans la nuit.

It was the oldest who told me that. I did not know that people could imagine raping us, but it was necessary, because there were prisoners who had the key. Like the people who brought us food, they had the key, so they tried to attack, to come at night, and there had to be people watching. So we had a rotation to make sure no one came during the night.

On était organisées, je te jure. On se disait la mort, elle va venir mais seulement quand elle va être là, pas avant. La mort ne vient pas ici avant.

We were organized, I swear. We told ourselves, death will come, but only when it will be there, not before. Death is not coming here before that.

Je suis sorti la dernière de ma gang de prisonnières politiques. Je suis sorti la dernière. J'étais très contente.

I left the last of my political prisoner gang. I left last, I was very happy.

(elle n'avait pas peur de confronter)

(she wasn't afraid to confront)

Qui?

Who?

le directeur de la prison...

The prison director ...

Comme la femme qui a perdu son enfant...elle saignait et...

Like the woman who lost her child ... she was bleeding and ...

Je veux bien qu'on me torture, mais je ne comprends pas comment des gens peuvent accepter qu'une personne meurt de la douleur comme ça intense ...

I don't mind being tortured but I don't understand how people can accept that a person dies of pain like this intense ...

alors j'ai appelé le directeur de la prison je lui ai dit ....

So I called the prison director, I told him … *(she makes a movement as though she walked through the door)*.

Tu avais la clé?

Did you have the key?

Lui avait la clé!

He had the key!

Mais si. J'ai fermé la porte derrière lui je lui ai dit! Cette femme !

But yes. I closed the door behind him. I told him! This woman!

Mais tu avais une clé?

But did you have a key?

il ne m'a pas donné la clé...

He didn't give me the key ...

il est ... il a ouvert la porte, il est rentré j'ai fermé la porte!

He is ... he opened the door, he came back. I closed the door!

Venez ici! J'ai fermé la porte derrière lui.

Come here! I closed the door behind him.

Je lui ai dit: regardez cette femme.

I told him, look at this woman.

Je vous demande pas de ...mais regardez la femme et dites-moi!

I'm not asking you ... but look at the woman and tell me!

Si c'est nous que vous voulez torturer en voyant quelqu'un souffrir et sans force, vous avez réussi.

Mais la personne, elle, quand elle doit mourir comme ça, c'est votre conscience, c'est pas la nôtre. Parce que nous, on a pas de moyens, on n'a absolument pas de moyens, c'est à vous de l'amener chez le médecin.

Alors il m'a dit que j'étais insupportable. J'ai dit oui c'est vrai, mais il faut faire quelque chose...

If it is us you want to torture when you see someone suffering and without strength, you have succeeded.

But the person when she has to die like that, it's your conscience, it's not ours. Because we have no means, we absolutely have no means, it's up to you to bring her to the doctor.

So he told me that I was unbearable. I said yes, it's true, but something has to be done ...

...

Les autres qui avaient quand même eu la chance de vivre cet espoir de vie... ça a dû créer un trou après notre départ, parce que là elles étaient seules et puis tu sais il y avait une maman... c'est elle qui avait une petite fille de 4 ans qui était une merveille mais elle avait assassiné des enfants dans son village et elle était condamnée à perpétuité et comme elle avait tué les frères et soeurs de son enfant elle pouvait envoyer l'enfant nulle part, même pas

...

For the others who got to have this hopeful life ... it must have created a hole after our departure, because they were alone and then you know, there was a mom ... it's her who had a four-year-old daughter who was a wonder, but she had murdered children in her village and she was condemned to a life sentence and as she had killed the brothers and sister of her child she could send the child nowhere, not even in his family, his family

dans sa famille. L'enfant avait déjà 5 ans 6 ans... Si on avait été là, les enseignantes auraient fait une école pour elle, mais là, on était parties.

did not want either. The child was already 5 years 6 years old ... If we had been there, the teachers would have made a school for her, but we were gone

On était très occupées, très occupées....

... we were very busy, very busy (when we were there) ....

La chorale du dimanche c'était

(rire)

(laughter)

Avec des basses!

The Sunday choir was.. (something else :)

With bass

C'était sérieux il y avait une maman, Immaculée, et elle disait, on va chanter et tous les garçons vont perd la tête.

It was serious! There was a mom called Immaculée and she would say, we will sing and all the boys will lose their heads.

Est-ce que les gars étaient bien organisé comme ça?

Were the guys as well organized?

Non, il n'y avait aucune vie communautaire chez les garçons. Mais ils n'étaient pas mélangés non plus. Il n'y avait que les prisonniers politiques. Ils étaient tout seuls. Les criminels étaient ailleurs, nous on était mélangées et puis la conscience que ce mélange était tellement explosif et puis la conscience que le directeur pouvait nous faire

No, there was no community life among the boys. But they weren't mixed either. There were only political prisoners. They were all alone. The criminals were elsewhere. We were mixed and then the awareness that this mixture was so explosive and then the awareness that the director could play us against each other, so we had to, we had to

jouer les unes contre les autres, donc il fallait, il fallait qu'on s'assure que ...

make sure that ...

J'étais pas malheureuse en prison. C'est pas un temps de ma vie qui a été malheureux. C'est après ... Parce que après, je n'avais plus confiance en personne. J'avais été en prison à cause des collègues à l'école... je n'avais plus confiance en personne. La famille et puis rien d'autre. Ça s'arrêtait là.

I was not unhappy in prison. It was not a time in my life that was unhappy.
It is after ...
Because after, I no longer trusted anyone. I was in prison because of colleagues at school ... I no longer trusted anyone. The family and no one else. It stopped with family.

Ça fait la rupture entre toi et les gens autour de toi?

It made a break between you and the people around you?

Ça l'a exacerbé, parce que moi depuis l'âge de de 12 ans, je savais que mon père était recherché. Là, on était encore une colonie. Tu sais, l'indépendance a eu lieu en 63, mon père avait déjà quitté, donc tu te dis que les seuls ennemis que tu as, ce sont les colons, les colonisateurs. Mais petit à petit on a compris qu'il y avait leurs sympathisants, qui donc rejettent les enfants ou qui rejettent les personnes que les colonisateurs ne voulaient pas.

It exacerbated it, because I knew from the age of 12 that my father was wanted. Then we were still a colony. You know, the independence took place in '63, (62 actually) my father had already left so you tell yourself that the only enemies you have are the colonists, the colonizers gradually put it we understood that there were their sympathizers who therefore reject children or who reject people that the colonizers did not want.

Donc depuis l'âge de 12 ans, j'ai pris conscience que j'étais Tutsi d'abord. Ce que je savais pas, je l'ai appris ...je trouvais ça assez bizarre, Tutsi. C'est quoi? jusqu'à aujourd'hui je ne sais pas. Il y a beaucoup de personnes qui voulaient dire du bien de ça, mais dans le Nord où j'ai grandi, êtes-vous Tutsi ou Hutu, ce sont des insultes. L'un et l'autre sont des insultes: les Tutsi ce sont des fainéants...vraiment quand quelqu'un avait des chiques dans les pieds, pour nous les enfants, c'était un fainéant de Tutsi. Et Hutu, c'était des malpolis. Quelqu'un qui était malpoli qui n'avait pas de façon c'était Hutu. Et là tout à coup, à 12 ans, on me dit que les Hutu, c'est quelqu'un, les Tutsi c'est quelqu'un. C'était pas les malpolis et les fainéants. C'était des gens qui les hommes pouvaient tuer. Et pourquoi je me trouvais dans la classe qui devait se faire tuer ...j'ai pas compris. Alors quand on m'a dit que j'étais Tutsi, j'ai dit non. Non, je suis première de classe, ma chambre est toujours propre, je

So from the age of 12 I realized that I was Tutsi first. What I did not know I learned it ... I found it rather strange. Tutsi. What's this? Until today I don't know. There are many people who wanted to say good things about it, but in the north where I grew up, are you Tutsi or Hutu, these are insults. Both are insults: the Tutsi are lazy ... really when someone had snags in their feet, for us children, he was a lazy Tutsi. And Hutu was rude. Someone who was rude, who had no way was Hutu. And then suddenly, at 12, I was told that the Hutu is someone, the Tutsi is someone. It was not rude and lazy. They were people who men could kill. And why I was in the class that was to be killed ... I didn't understand. So when I was told that I was Tutsi I said no. No, I am first class, my room is always clean, I am not lazy, I am not Tutsi. I was told you are Tutsi because your father is in prison. Another element to become Tutsi again was to go to prison, and then it was the people who had to kill, so when you learn it is

suis pas fainéante, je ne suis pas Tutsi. On m'a dit tu es Tutsi parce que ton père est en prison. Un autre élément pour redevenir Tutsi c'était" fallait aller en prison" et ensuite c'était "les gens qui fallait tuer" donc, quand tu apprends ça a 13 ans ... Mes parents étaient partis, il fallait que je me trouve d'autres parents si je voulais rester à l'école.

13 years old … My parents were gone. I had to find other parents if I wanted to stay in school.

…

...

... la prison, c'était une continuité. Ce n'était pas quelque chose qui m'a étonné, ce n'est pas quelque chose qui m'a froissé, ça faisait partie des choses qui pouvaient m'arriver... parce que j'étais devenue adulte... donc la mort pouvait ...

Prison was a continuity: it was not something that surprised me, it was not something that offended me, it was one of the things that could happen to me ... because I had become an adult ... so death could ...

Ce que je ne comprends pas, c'est pourquoi je suis restée au Rwanda. Pourquoi j'ai respecté l'ordre de mon père?... Pourquoi j'ai respecté ça malgré tout ce que je voyais? À l'âge de 15, 17, 18... à 15 ans j'étais déjà vieille.

What I don't understand is why I stayed in Rwanda, why I respected my father's order ... why I respected it despite everything I saw ... at age 15, 17, 18 ... at 15, I was already old.

Et si je te pose la question: comment se fait-il que tu as écouté l'ordre de ton père?

And, what comes up if I ask you how come you listened to your father's order?

Et bien dans le temps je pensais que ce que papa savait c'était bon, que c'est ça qu'il fallait faire, même s'il ne devait pas savoir. Ce qu'il avait décidé c'était ça qui était bon, c'était ça qu'il fallait faire, même si ça coûte... ou pouvait coûter ma vie.

Well, in the old days I thought that what dad knew was good, that it was what was necessary to do, even if he did not know. What he had decided was what was good. It was what had to be done even if it would cost my life.

Avant la prison je ne pensais pas qu'ils pouvaient me tuer: j'étais une fille. J'avais plus peur pour mon grand frère. Je me disais, lui, ils peuvent le tuer, parce qu'ils l'avaient jeté une une fois dans l'eau: les mains liées, dans une rivière. Il n'avait pas de papiers, ils l'avait jetée dedans après lui avoir lié les mains. Donc je me disais, lui il est plus menacé, il est plus à risque. Il est plus à risque que moi. Mais finalement, c'est moi qui ai fait la tôle. Lui n'est pas allé en prison, mais on lui a refusé son diplôme. Lui non plus n'a pas eu son diplôme.

Before jail I didn't think they could kill me: I was a girl. I was more afraid for my older brother. I said to myself, they can kill him, because they threw him in the water once, his hands tied, into a river. He had no papers. They threw him in after tying his hands. So I told myself, he is more threatened, he is more at risk. He is more at risk than me, but ultimately it was I who went to jail. He did not go to prison, but he was refused his diploma. He didn't graduate either.

****

This transcript speaks to a moment in my mother's story that I would return to again and again because to me the affect and the story did not add up. My mother would speak of this eight-month period as something very positive, and I would find it painful. Looking at the

transcript, I realize that it is both an incredibly empowering moment in her life *and* filled with horrors that she does not accommodate as horrible, in part because she had people there who were themselves despairing. She did not allow herself to despair.

Before I interviewed them, I never thought of my parents as having survived oppression. This, even though my mother and her father both had been political prisoners, and even though my father's father was assassinated. Compared to so many Rwandans whose families were decimated, my family considers itself very fortunate. The difficult history was never discussed,

Image 64. My mother (center, holding a flower) with classmates and friends, photographed in 1964.

at least not in my presence. Was it because my parentsfelt that nothing could be done about the past? Was it because they were not really aware,so accustomed were they to their own stories that they no longer noticed? Or perhaps it was because they had never known anything else? I don't know. What I do know is that whether they were conscious of it or not, history has had a dramatic intergenerational impact. Although my paternal grandfather's story was seldom told when I was growing up, I found out later, during a psychodrama exercise, that our entire family system had been organized around the big hole left by his brutal passing.

In the same vein, my mother never spoke much of prison. In *Trauma and Life Stories*, Jan Coetzee and Otakar Hulec explore the human ability to survive, grow, and work toward

personal growth and moral strengthening in the face of humiliation, suffering, and hardship.[170] They interviewed activists who had known incarceration in South Africa and Czechoslovakia. One former Czechoslovakian prisoner is cited as having said "we were not looked at as political prisoners. There were murderers and thieves and people like that with us"[171].

Image 65. Huye (Butare) : Rural farmers en route to the public market stream past the walls of Ecole Notre Dame de la Providence Karubanda, one of the schools my mother attended.

In her life story interview, my mother spoke of her experience in prison in similar terms. She said the women she was a part of were indeed political prisoners; she had been accused of wanting to overthrow the government, but one of the reasons she felt the need to organize in prison was that there were criminals:

> *Il y avait aussi des criminelles et parmi les criminelles y avait des femmes qui avaient avorté mais il y avait aussi des femmes qui avaient tué leur mari et des femmes qui avaient tué des enfants! Pas leur enfant mais les enfants des autres. Il y avait aussi des itinérantes. Donc il y avait un mix que je trouvais absolument pas mixable. je trouvais que mettre ces gens-là ensemble pouvait créer des difficultés de vivre ensemble.*

[170] Jan K. Coetzee and Otakar Hulec, "Oppression, Resistance, and Imprisonment," in *Trauma and Life Stories: International Perspectives* (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2004), 80–94.
[171] Coetzee and Hulec, "Oppression, Resistance, and Imprisonment," 85.

Alors j'ai ... j'avais deux filles qui étaient des enseignantes, et on a fait un comité de vie communautaire.

Several things prompted her to take on the organizing. She speaks of being aware "that this mixture (of criminals and political prisoners) was so explosive" and then also "that the director could play us against each other so we had to, we had to make sure that ..." She also expressed concern for her adoptive mother and the older moms: "You know, moms of 50, of 60 years who are desperate ... You say to yourself, wow, just a minute! You are not dead yet! We're not going to die before death really is here."

When I first encountered the chapter[172] by Coetzee and Hulec, it helped me understand my mother, or what I first understood as dissonance: that is, what she was saying and how she was talking about it. I knew she had been to prison, but she would also refer to prison as if it were a place of agency and autonomy, where she was in charge of things, where she and other women would take turns cooking and cleaning and washing. She would always say, "There was even a choir!" It is a fairly common feeling when interviewing parents. Steven High writes about parent interviewing in the MLS with Paul Tom and Thi Ry Duong and their fathers in the Cambodian working group and with some of the Rwandan parent-children interviews.[173] The Czech former political prisoner went on to say of himself and his mates that they "started not to care for health, not to care for life"[174], whereas the South African prisoners' position was that, "in prison, if you were not constructive it was very dangerous ... you could become mentally deranged"[175]—a posture very close to my mother's. I heard more and more and it grew in

[172] Ibid.
[173] High, "Regenerative Possibilities," *Oral History at the Crossroads*, 126–36.
[174] Ibid.
[175] Coetzee and Hulec, "Oppression, Resistance, and Imprisonment," 87.

increments, especially after the interview. It came in bits and pieces at first; now she refers to it more often and I know it, up to and including more about the woman who had adopted her and who allowed her to stay and study after her parents fled to Uganda. Her best friend was also

Image 66. Nyamirambo: My grandfather and two colleagues were held for several months as political prisoners in a building located at this street corner, until friends organized an escape to Uganda. (The neighbourhood has changed much in the intervening years.)

imprisoned with her. Until recently the story ended with the episode where she and her friend were taken out of the cell by a soldier, driven in a truck to a mass grave, and ordered to jump in. Both my mother and her friend were nineteen years old. My mother argued with the soldier for their lives: "If you want to kill us, do it, but we won't do your dirty work for you." Somehow they both cheated death.

When I went to Rwanda in 2011, a woman had come to visit my mother. She asked me, "Are you proud of your mama?" She went on to tell me about being a young girl in that period of the early 1960s. She told me about being a little girl in school and being told that if there was ever any trouble to go and find my mom, who was a teenager at that time. When I ask my mom about this woman, she does not recall her, nor does she remember playing such a role. At least, not always. I suspect there was a semiformal network of solidarities among the families at risk of persecution. I have heard several times about the solidarity among the men who studied at the *groupe scolaire*, the church-run school for the male children of the *évolués*, even into adulthood.

Sometimes, snippets come loose. Like when I ask my mother for the name of her school, and she remembers how they had sent her home to her sister's house and how national security officers came to get her and her friend D. They locked them up in a cell and one of the soldiers came back to rape D. She remembers grabbing the gun he had put aside and sitting all night with it pointing at him. She said, *Il est resté tranquille. Il ne savait pas que je ne savais pas tirer.* "He stayed put. He didn't know I had no idea how to shoot."

Sometimes probing into the silences also feels like seeking out something that has needed to be silent for longer than I have been alive. I have never adhered to any political organization, and I am not sure I would want the responsibility for carrying those memories. But I hope that in some of those spaces there are mechanisms to gather some of the memories of resistance and survival. Especially the memories kept by the women. There is so much dignity in the ways people carried on. That is not captured in the official narratives. I think of younger me looking for stories of resistance and dignity. There are so many. In every family. Every one of the people alive today is alive because of stories just like this one in my mother's transcript: Not everyone was in prison, but if they were here, they migrated. Almost every migration was a bit of a miracle.

The excerpt where she recounts her experience in prison is tiny, part of her life story, less than a year in her life, and yet it has haunted me for years and continues to tug at me, on so many levels. Performative inquiry offers a series of questions to engage the moment.[176] The making of the interview was challenging. I think that interviewing close family should be encouraged and supported. It allows for so much to loosen up. But it needs to be safe, in the same way

[176] What was your experience in the moment? Why did you choose this moment? What is it about? How do you understand it? What troubles or challenges you in it? What does it affirm? Why does this moment matter to you? What new questions or areas of investigation emerge from this moment?

community members were encouraged to interview safely. “Mistakes”" were simply part of learning. No one commented on the quality of the video if the sequence was too dark, for example. Both my parents have gone on to initiate interviews and writing about their own parents, just as the community group initiated community research inspired by the MLS project. In 2011, we interviewed our children aged 7–18 about what they understood and what questions they might hold. And in 2014, we recorded a gathering of peer genocide survivors in four different communities about coping. When I first encountered that story of my mother’s imprisonment, I was a little afraid: Why was she feeling so cheerful about it? I can’t say better what it is about than she does: *La prison pour moi n'a pas été une période difficile c'est une période où je prétend avoir été utile à l'âme de plus de 40 personnes donc ce ne peut pas être difficile … la vie est difficile quand ça n'a pas de sens ce n'est pas parce qu'on te met dans une circonstance matérielle difficile que c'est difficile. C'est quand le sens manque ... mais là j'avais un sens.* That period wasn’t difficult because she felt responsible for more than 40 souls. As she says, material difficulty is not hard. Lack of meaning, that is what is hard. I recognize the woman who has loved and raised me. Material difficulty is not hard. As long as we are together, we can face anything. I could always make something out of not much. This excerpt reveals the deep values my mother held in my family as I was growing up. Values of survival, solidarity, dignity, and pride. I understand it as a blueprint of sorts.

In the fight against forces that want to diminish and humiliate you, make you want to feel small, threaten your life—even if they kill—organize. No one can diminish you unless you let them. Death isn’t there until it is. And if it comes, mourn and keep going. Focus on the things you can influence. Make sure the children are clean, and that they eat, learn, play, and sing. Take care of those loose hopes; put them to work: everyone makes a contribution. Those who have

energy to give, give. Those who need it, take. In the face of those who would dehumanize you, your humanity must be what you do, every moment of every day. Remember who you are. What troubles me is that my struggle with mental health (and hers) resembled depression, which is the opposite of that sentiment. Relationships become difficult. Doing things becomes difficult—hygiene, food, sleep. Maybe it makes sense.

Mom always said that prison was not what was unhappy. She told me once that her years in Germany were the most challenging, in large part because of her uncertain status. Never knowing whether she could stay was too difficult. When I look at the excerpt, though, I can see that other elements for success were missing in Germany. In prison she took care of women, just like her, who were struggling. Older women knew things—like when the elders knew about the threat of rape—even if they did not have energy to organize, they had the knowledge of experience. There is safety in being young and having to contribute only one's energy and having a collective to make decisions and bearing the consequences together. In Germany there was uncertainty and there was also isolation. Mom was always active in women's groups and had many female friendships. But there were no other Rwandans in Germany. When she got there, she had never seen so many white people, and so few black people. She didn't speak or understand the language. She had been separated from her husband when they were newlyweds and they were making a family after being separated for two years. Another element that made the situation in prison bearable for my mother was the leadership position. Being the one with the clipboard (figuratively) she always felt in charge. And conceived of herself that way. There is a moment in the interview, for example, where she said she confronted the prison director. Living together with women also meant sharing chores. In her life in Rwanda, before emigrating to Germany, house chores were hired out, or, if there were no means for that, they were taken up

by the family's women and girls. But the family was rarely a nuclear family. And so in Germany we were a nuclear family (with my uncle Bello and my aunt Tita) with very few means. And even if my father has always been active in the home, it meant a lot of responsibilities that are not managed in the same ways as what she was used to.

Mom says she stopped trusting after prison—that may have lasted a little while. But the woman I know not only trusts people but also trusts norms and rules. In my father's family, we are much less trusting. The excerpt affirms life during and after trauma.

I am finally able to listen to my mother's interview, and as soon as I could, I wondered what was so hard about it. It took less than a decade. The excerpted moment matters to me because a pattern is emerging to work with difficult knowledge and its negative affect. It starts with the feeling—negative affect, or let's call it a negative space. Like silence, or a feeling of powerlessness. Something I find difficult, I struggle with. I can't do it. Some ingredients to get going are community, solidarity, play … the possibility to start with whatever there is or isn't. Art. Inspiration. It can take years. I still get it done. And that feels wonderful. It does not need to be resolved entirely. For example, I do not know, nor do I need to know, all of my mother's life story. There is such a thing as good enough. Not all of the ingredients that seem to work for her work for me. I have questions around my relationship with leadership, for example. Is my preferred position to be the one with the clipboard, organizing and checking up on systems and processes? No. I can incorporate some of it, and happily share chores and I also very happily participate in decision making bodies, but my gifts are related to art, healing, and meaning making. How do these qualities play out in positions of leadership? There is something to probe about my relationship with gender, authority and leadership. Something that goes beyond the

excerpt but has to do with my mother. I feel that other parts of her life story, in particular her childhood growing up with her grandmother, can offer insight.

I had not integrated an understanding of the interview as an object. Alistair Thomson asks, "What are the unconscious or explicit motivations that bring us to our research? What issues are we exploring in our own lives and what psychic and social needs are we meeting through the process of research?"[177]

Image 67. Montreal: At a PAGE-Rwanda event, my father speaks with Paul Bélanger, an old family friend and professor of the sociology of education at UQAM. Their relationship typifies the web of relationships between Rwandans and Quebecers. Paul was a student of Georges-Henri Lévesque (Dominican priest and professor of social philosophy at Université Laval), who is regarded as one of the fathers of Quebec's Quiet Revolution. Fr. Lévesque also was the founding president of Université Nationale du Rwanda. He presided at my parents wedding in Butare and encouraged their departure for studies in Germany and later their immigration to Canada. My mother worked with Paul Bélanger for more than 30 years as she developed and directed le Centre de documentation sur l'éducation des adultes et la condition féminine. (CDEACF)

After working on my own story, through psychotherapy, I thought I could resolve some of my remaining challenges by studying my parents' and community's stories. I had explicit motivations: I wanted to know my family's history, or at least hear the older generation talk about our past in some structured way for a considerable length of time. What I did not know how to deal with were the blocks. Things I just could not do. I suppose I could call it avoidance because I simply could not do it, until I could. And sometimes that takes years. From the very beginning I asked the Rwandan working group to stretch our notion of "survivor" so that

[177] Alistair Thomson, "Memory as a Battlefield: Personal and Political Investments in the National Military Past," *The Oral History Review* 22, no. 2 (1995): 56.

Rwandans having suffered since 1959, when the first massacres of Tutsi occurred, would be represented among the interviewees. As the daughter of parents who survived that period of time in Rwanda, it was clear to me that those who had to flee, or who had been incarcerated and/or lived in exile, did so for the same reasons people in 1994 were murdered. Just as the people who waged war, from 1990, for the right of the Tutsi refugees to return and who are running the country now are people of my generation whose need to take arms had come out of the events

Image 68. Huye (Butare): My father and his three younger brothers attended Groupe Scolaire Officiel de Butare. Many stories are told of the networks of solidarity and support forged here, and how they helped Tutsis survive in the 1950s, 1960s, and beyond. At the center of the image is the school's genocide memorial remembering students and staff killed in 1994.

in the 1950s and 1960s. I knew that if we wanted to understand what survivors had to say we would need to hear life stories of people across a 35-year sweep of Rwandan history. 1994 did not happen in a vacuum. My perspective was not necessarily shared by survivors, even though it was close to Rwanda's official narrative (or maybe because of it). We all agreed that we were hoping to find our own perspective on our situation rather than simply accepting those of Africanists or genocide scholars. But some were seeking to memorialize the dead and "never forget," while I was looking for a past that could help unlock the future. Thomson asks, "How do our conscious agendas shape our research relationships? And how are we changed by the processes and discoveries of our research?"[178]

[178] Ibid.

In "Interviewing in a Culture of Violence" Sean Field speaks to what safety meant in his process of interviewing members of the Windemere community in South Africa.[179] When the MLS Rwandan working group began in 2007, our objective was to gather 100 life stories over the course of five years. We started slowly. Much like Field had experienced, interviewing members of our own community safely meant "resolving issues of confidentiality, the physical location of the interview and how information conveyed would be used."180 After we received training in interviewing techniques, ethics, and post-production, the same as everyone else in the larger project, we started taking group-specific decisions. We accepted the life story framework.

The scholars among us may have understood the suitability of the methodology, but the rest of us took it on faith. We also accepted the idea that the questionnaire should not be rigidly perceived or used as a tool to extract information but rather as a guide for an open and attentive conversation between interviewer and interviewee, an encounter for recounting and forging relationship.[181] It was an interesting proposition: From an academic point of view, the idea may have been to humanize the process and/or render the research relationship more accountable. In the Rwandan working group it influenced the relationships we had with each other and with others in our community. Cultural communities can be like families, where familiarity breeds perhaps not contempt but a certain disrespect for boundaries. People know each other in some ways but not in others. Before each interview, we took the time to read through each two-page confidentiality agreement, ready and willing to allow a person to withdraw at any time they chose to do so. We held to each unique set of agreed boundaries, for example, asking for specific

[179] Sean Field, "Interviewing in a Culture of Violence: Moving Memories from Windermere to the Cape Flats," in *Trauma: Life Stories of Survivors*, ed. Kim Lacy Rogers and Selma Leydesdorff, with Graham Dawson (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2004), 65.

[180] Ibid.

[181] Henry Greenspan, *On Listening to Holocaust Survivors: Beyond Testimony*, 2nd ed. (New York: Continuum, 2010).

permission to use an interview excerpt in an article, or in a few cases destroying an original video file once the transcript had been completed. We were focusing the serious and benevolent attention of two people (an interviewer and a videographer) on the details of a third person's life story, gently rummaging around in memories together, taking time to revisit events. Strict adherence to the ethical framework began to change relationships and helped build trust among us in the working group, and within our community.

Image 69. Montreal: My mother speaks at an event in 2016 where we presented the 50-page report of findings from our research among peer post-genocide communities in Montreal, which we called *À la rencontre se l'autre survivant de génocide*.

The group members translated the questionnaire to Kinyarwanda and adapted the questions culturally, shaping some, leaving others out. There was much laughter about questions felt to be inappropriate or too awkward to ask or answer. We agreed that survivors of the violence before 1994 would be part of the interviewees.

Thomson writes that the questions of how our concerns shape our agendas and how we are changed by our projects, though "relevant to all research, are sharply focused in oral history, which requires a direct, personal relationship between researcher and researched, and in which the researcher both creates and analyses her or his primary source, the oral narrative."[182] I struggled tremendously. When I thought about setting up and following through with my

[182] Thomson, "Memory as a Battlefield," 56.

mother's interview, I could not bring myself to do it. It literally took two years to record two sessions of two hours each. And this had nothing to do with her not wanting to do it. To the contrary, my mother was finally ready. And smiling. For years she had refused to revisit her past, explaining that she would need to be retired to do so, in case she lost her mind.

I never published or shared any logs after my mom's interviews, but I did write about the experiences. On March 5, 2011, right after the end of our last interview on March 4, I wrote,

> *Le récit de vie de RN est terminé après deux ans. Une expérience très difficile car ma contribution fut remise en question et minimisée par ma co-équipière sous prétexte de ma relation familiale avec RN. Ayant fait des efforts pour répondre au malaise exprimé par ma collègue en privé ainsi que le questionnement éthique abordé en grand groupe dans le groupe Rwanda, je lui lui proposais de changer de rôle en lui offrant le rôle d'interviewer. J'ai tenu à ce que nous terminons le récit ensemble car nous l'avion entamé ensemble.*

I wrote that the interview with RN was finally over after two years and that the experience had been very challenging because my contribution was minimized and questioned by my co-interviewer. She had called for a meeting with the larger Rwandan working group to challenge my right to interview because of my relationship with the interviewee. I wrote that I had tried in private to engage with my collaborator's malaise and in doing so I had offered her the role of interviewer and insisted that we should finish this work together since we had started it together. She was not Rwandan. I had asked her to collaborate with me and support me in interviewing my mother. We shared a background in psychology, and I had shared some of my struggles. She had extended an offer of friendship, but I had refused more closeness because I felt I had no extra time to properly care for another relationship. Between work, community,

family, MLS, and LHE commitments, I felt I was at capacity. In the first interview with my mom, we had shared the interviewers' role and she had been able to ask questions. I felt that she had issues and dynamics of her own around the "mother figure" and attention that were playing out in the triangle we formed with my mother. I felt quite clearly that she wanted to be the one interviewing my mother. When she called on the larger Rwandan working group to challenge my right to interview members of my family, one of the questions they raised was whether I was able to properly care for the welfare of my interviewees if they were my family. The way it played out felt very punitive or retributive. Although I would have argued the premise of my collaborator's presumed objective location—and even if I felt really wounded by the group (it felt as though they, especially, should understand what it meant for me to do the work of reconnecting, bringing movement back into the silences of intergenerational transmission)—I was not willing to chance that I might do harm to my family. None of what I did was secret. I had written it into the application letter to the MLS, and if other youth interviewed their parents in our working group and did this very significant work, it was because of my initiative, just as the intergenerational community dialogue was directly inspired by the Tuganire project that ran from 2004 to 2008—again, my initiative. I felt so much. So strongly. And yet, because there was so much questioning of precisely interviewing family members, I felt defiant, then very private and defensive rather than supported. I did not stop.

I did not speak about it, except to say that I had trouble with the interview logs.[183] In the MLS, usually, one interviewer and one videographer would make up an interview team. And after each interview, the team had 24 hours to submit a written reflection on their interview and post it in the reflection space of the project's online platform. I felt so much but never submitted

[183] High, "Regenerative Possibilities," *Oral History at the Crossroads*, 128.

a single reflection. Maybe if I had better integrated some of the interests, language, and concerns of oral history, I might have spoken to some of the aspects of the practice. But it was so personal. So raw. So surprising. Steven High wrote that after interviewing my father I had not posted a log and that I was still finding words. I realize that I chose my battles quite carefully. To my mind, the MLS space was a once in a lifetime opportunity to go on this journey (of exploring the stories that were so important to my life) over that length of time (seven years! not counting the decade since) with those people (artists, scholars, other community people who all had stories and were invested), in these ways (the traditional and established academic techniques, the ways we were inventing as we were going about the doing), in this spirit (of shared authority, and community and care). When I encountered MLS, one of my fears was that I would end up alone, like the cliché of the old crazy lady obsessed with her stories in a basement somewhere. The MLS was like my mother's prison in that it provided a space for incredible community, support, agency, leadership, exploration, empowerment. It could have been a very gloomy place to interview for life stories of large-scale trauma and dislocation. But it wasn't. It was a place of meaning, of community and inspiration. I was not going to risk all of that for one relationship.

And yet I did not trust the relationship to weather conflict. Or to protect or disappoint me. I did not risk it. In the end, there is a reflection here about the use and ethics of silence. I did not know if what I was doing was okay. I wasn't sure and did not know to ask, because I did not know what I would have done had I been denied. Today, the question would not arise in the same way. I feel that my process has been validated over time. I may not need to hide any longer. I don't know that anyone knows whether what they are doing is "okay"? Okay for whom, when and how? I believe that I would also want to risk more to improve our common container (the project) and pose my questions or complaints.

My intention had always been to interview my family and community. And after Tuganire, people were not surprised. But convening a collective conversation about common concerns is very different from setting up a one-on-one interview space with a third party present, audio and/or video recording and working together to produce a life story interview. The oral history process of exploring an event or situation through the testimony of those who lived it is a very structured process of crafting questions, choosing sources, negotiating permissions, attending to audio and video quality, listening and interviewing, recording, archiving the material, transcribing and then working to interpret the texts and recording of several sources to answer or engage with the questions. I didn't have clear questions because I didn't know what I did not know. I knew I had grown up with silences. I knew there were gaps and bumps in our family and community stories that made it so that "being at home in the world" was challenging. Over the years in the MLS I learned that persecution and dislocation can leave traces and tears in the fabric of understanding and relationships. That my parents, for example, never had the time or the conditions to reflect at length about their struggles and experiences and how their/our present and ongoing life was impacted by the past. Life needed tending to: adapting to a first host country, then to another, learning the language, finding work and shelter, negotiating visas, education and work permits. Our family shaped itself around the holes and bumps and kept going as best it could.

Over the years, I have learned many things about myself, family, community, about history, politics and mental health, about research, creation, intervention—some are clearly expressed or speakable and others I discover as I write and play. Looking back, some important learning moments "tug at my sleeve"[184]: preparing for an intergenerational dialogue day inside

[184] Lynn Fels, "Moments that Tug at my Sleeve," performative inquiry (with Lynn Fels), http://performativeinquiry.ca/ (accessed July 12, 2020).

the Rwandan working group, for example, where I heard my uncle Bellarmin's life story resonate with that of Emmanuelle Kayiganwa, a community member. Understanding that they were of a generation that came of age surviving 1972–73[185] and fleeing the country. Their experiences were not isolated events but part of a larger fabric, of a cohort, a place and a moment in time. Working with the different stories, theirs and others' in earlier and later cohorts, working with other community members to prepare the stories, holding live dialogues and working creatively with their stories somehow filled in the blanks in mine. Today I don't know all that I do know.

[185] When we interviewed the exiles in the Rwandan community, three distinct waves of anti-Tutsi violence became clear: 1969–1960, 1962–1963, 1972–1973. People fled to Uganda, Congo, Burundi. High writes about it in "Flower in the River," *Oral History at the Crossroads*, 75.

Chapter 6. The Creative Writing Process

Il ne s'agit pas de donner des leçons, mais il s'agit d'atteindre une certaine authenticité.

Stéphane Martelly, *"S'énoncer, Renaître à l'envie d'agir, Ensemble"*[186]

Reflecting on the heuristic nature and what she calls in French the *fonction instaurative* (edifying function or mechanism, my translation) of research-creation, Danielle Boutet borrows the words of French painter Pierre Soulages: *"C'est ce que je fais qui m'apprend ce que je cherche"*[187] which I translate to "it is through what I do that I learn what I seek." In this chapter I would like to learn what I sought and revisit the writing and performing of *Le petit coin intact*, the bilingual (French/English) performance piece I created and performed in response to the MLS experience.

The Montreal Life Stories (MLS) project was a place of transmission, transformation, and intense experimentation. I was implicated heavily in the governance of this complex community-university research collaboration. Continuously and throughout its life, I participated in the project-wide steering committee, the Rwanda working group, and the Living Histories Ensemble (LHE). I also collaborated on several of MLS's more creative projects, like Liz Miller's Mapping Memories, a 10-week creative process to support refugee youth to craft memories connected to meaningful places in the city. The project culminated in a bus tour of the city touring the places with stories and live tellings by some of the project participants. With Philip Lichti, I

[186] Stéphane Martelly, "S'énoncer, Renaître à l'envie d'agir, Ensemble," La Maïeutique du Petit coin intact. Retour sur une expérience d'écriture. Conférence à deux voix avec Lisa Ndejuru. Symposium du Réseau Québécois pour la Pratique des Histoires de vie (XXIIe symposium du RQPHV), De l'austérité à la plénitude, Une histoire à construire ensemble, Centre Saint-Pierre, 21 April, 2016.

[187] Pierre Soulages, Noir lumière: Entretiens avec Françoise Jaunin (Suisse: La bibliothèque des arts, 2002), 15.

collaborated in the making of Steven High's *Une fleur dans le fleuve*, an audio walk from downtown Montreal's city centre to the Saint Lawrence River. The audio walk, populated by curated excerpts from the stories in the Rwandan archive, takes people on the commemorative walk that the Rwandan community takes every year to throw flowers into the river. I took part in Sandeep Bhagwati's *Racine ephemères* project where he chose to turn off the sound of the video interviews and remain with the gestures of the interviewees. This became a language of its own that we as performers would try on and perform. And ultimately I received residency to create *Le petit coin intact* in response to Rwanda. Alongside traditional oral history methods, I tried a variety of tools and techniques to work with the life stories and the storytellers.

Although I served the larger project and the different communities very happily, I thought most deeply and consistently in terms of the Rwandan community. From the beginning, I thought it important to concentrate on the creative approaches, because I wanted the stories to be shared easily and live in the community and because I wanted us to be able to make something of our stories.

I experienced different degrees of involvement and appropriation. I participated in shaping some tools and techniques that I can pass on, like the Living Histories Ensemble playback theatre. Other processes, like the making of the audio walk, were creative collaborations. The creative writing workshop, I feel, was a process afforded me. I would not be able to pass it on. When I think of the experience of the creative writing process created and led by poet, author and scholar Dr. Stéphane Martelly, I experienced it as a gift: She awakened my senses, helped ignite something within, welcomed what I created as a consequence and gave it back to me. To this day I cannot speak of it without feeling moved in a fundamental way I would love to be able to stay connected to and share.

I met Stéphane in an earlier workshop for refugee youth led by filmmaker and researcher Elizabeth Miller. Professor Miller's project, Mapping Memories, was proposing a bus tour of Montreal made of site-specific memories of participants. Participants were trained and supported in various media and storytelling ways: writing, editing, photography, audio recording, and soundscaping. Stéphane was offering participants a way into their narrative. She proposed that we write fragments. Her involvement, while very brief, allowed me a taste of something I would yearn to satisfy until she finally proposed her creative writing workshop and we found a place for it in the larger MLS project.

Stéphane often said that the impetus for proposing the workshop in the context of the MLS project was the feeling that something was not or could not be said and was being lost: Our life stories framework, although it was very generous in allowing us to interview as long as interviewees wanted, did not allow us to say everything we wanted to say. The life story, no matter how long, could not say everything because there necessarily was a shape to the narrative—there had to be a backbone or arc to the story: "Since these often very heavy stories, had to be communicable, and accountable to the deceased as well as to the living, they needed to ground themselves (*se fixer*) in order to be receivable. Therefore, certain things would necessarily need to be left unsaid."[188] The decision to offer the *atelier de création littéraire* emerged out of the awareness that things were left unsaid and the desire to care for them.

I don't know whether the process would have meant as much to me outside of the larger life stories project, or whether I would have invested in it quite so completely: I was never late and I handed in all of my assignments. It went to the heart of something the stories alone could not reach. I don't believe it would have meant as much without those stories running through us.

[188] Ibid.

Not that they don't run constantly. But in that long moment (years) of interviewing, reflecting, listening, transcribing or chronologuing, playing and working the stories, we were as saturated with the stories as we had been before in the silences.

I also—and this could be seen to go against the idea of finding replicable learnings and/or techniques—I also don't know that it would have meant as much, that I would have wanted to identify so intensely, with someone else. Stéphane is intelligent, black, and no longer entirely young: she is a mother and a wife.

Today I too am a mother and a wife, and it is difficult to put into words the importance of that or the profound gratitude, peace, and satisfaction I have found with my husband and son. In traditional Rwandan culture one says of a childless woman that she is like dead coal: she cannot ignite, make fire, and give life. Of course, my "modern" Western mind rejects that image as profoundly problematic and doesn't quite understand how I would absorb it considering I don't speak the language. But three years earlier I had lost a baby in utero at 29 weeks and concluded my womb was unsafe for life. I felt that deadness existentially. It was another way I felt stuck.

I thirsted for motherhood and marriage, parched for the capacity to weave it all together and make life, make family—all things that felt out of reach in part because of these stories—or in my case, the lack of them. I didn't feel that I actually had a story. It was my parents' and grandparents' stories I was recording, the stories that came before mine, the stories and silences I needed to be able to metabolize and put into words before I could weave my own.

When working through or with a person's story in psychodrama or in playback theatre, we ask them to choose people to play characters in their stories. In choosing someone, the teller invests that person with trust and meaning. It often takes very little time for a teller to make that

choice. As facilitators, we don't take the time to ask why or how a person will choose or be chosen to play in another's story, even though it is an important ingredient for "it" to work. I chose Stéphane. And even though there are many reasons why I did—because she is sensitive and sensible, outspoken and fearless, because she makes me proud, because she is deep and learned, political and intellectual, because she is an activist and community person, an inspiration, a muse, because she is source, origin, and creator: word artist and poet, author and subject, sovereign, female, black—I am not sure that process was rational at all.

Image 70. Gisozi: The amphitheatre on the grounds of the National Genocide Memorial in Kigali has been home to the Ubumuntu Arts Festival since 2015. Founder and director of the festival is Hope Azeda, another member of the diaspora who has returned to play a significant role in the national reconstruction. The word "Ubumuntu" means to be human, open and generous, sensitive to others.

There is something so important about her intentionality, her capacity to stir and soothe, provoke and receive. About the way she has owned or claimed the margins as a racialized feminist poet and scholar. And how, from those margins firmly owned or claimed, she has crafted a place and a way into / out of "margin" and agency that she shares in a way that cares for the end and for the relationships involved.

Her poetry, as her theoretical language, has to be encountered and is full of twists and surprises. She doesn't believe in transparency and stands unapologetic. I probably needed that part the most: the unapologetic part: upright and unashamed, constructive even when angry or

outraged … so constructive and decent. So much tenderness, love, and care. It makes me wonder how to do justice *à la fois* to the technique as well as the uniqueness of the relationship. Is it the chosen person themselves and what they do or our investment in the relationship that makes them effective in the working through of our story? Maybe a bit of both. And maybe something more.

How this translates back to my tale of knowledge creation is that I feel strongly that the life stories I gathered (and keep gathering) from my grandmother, from Mutware (chief), who stood in for my grandfather, from my father and four of his siblings, from my mother, my cousins, uncles, my fellow community members, young and old. I feel that all of those stories were/are like kindling, matter, *concrétude*, fuel to build and feed the fire, and that the process with Stéphane was a match, a spark to light the fire within. My fire.

Maïeutique

> *J'aimerais que nous reproduisions pour la représentation le cadre de l'atelier, qui était essentiellement un cadre dialogique ou chaque interlocutrice résonne face à l'autre même si comme dans toute maïeutique il y a une bien une parturiente et une maïeuticienne, mais ici les roles sont poreux et partagés, et à la fin renversés. Tout le monde apprend tout le monde enseigne, tout le monde fait.*
>
> Stéphane Martelly, *"S'énoncer, Renaître à l'envie d'agir, Ensemble"*

In May of 2016 Stéphane and I were invited to present at the annual conference of the *Réseau Québecois des practiciens en histoires de vie*. I wanted to reflect on the maieutic dimension of our relationship within the writing circle. I recorded and transcribed our presentation to think with in this chapter. I have incorporated Stéphane's ideas in this text in

order to recreate some of the dialectic of our exchanges. Her parts are often transcribed verbatim and left in the original French. Sometimes when dealing with a shorter idea, I have translated and edited her part.

Reciprocity

> *Une gestation était dans l'ordre du possible, de l'espérance en tout cas, un désir d'incarnation, d'abord dans les mots et éventuellement dans le corps. D'une manière très profonde, à la fois métaphorique puisque nos corps sont cela aussi (des métaphores) mais aussi charnelle et littérale.*[189]

When I talk about our work together, I tend to give Stéphane all of the credit as facilitator, and yet, listening to the transcript of our presentation that is not how she said it. To her, even though the roles were clear, the boundaries were much more porous, and I brought something very real and valuable to our collaboration: I held a desire and my desire was one of/for … incarnation, into words certainly, but maybe also as a first step that would eventually move into the body (*le corps*). "Flesh" somehow does not translate the liveness or voluptuous sensuality I feel when I hear *chair* or *charnelle*.

I would not have recognized my desire as one of embodiment. I knew I aspired to voice, to a subject position, but for some reason that felt very dissociated, disembodied. I had not realized that I dissociated my mind (up) / body (down). I never took "voice" literally enough. I conflated it with authority and felt as though the way to it was "upward" toward more abstraction, more theory. And yet what she proposed was to move inward then out again, to focus on the senses, on a heightened awareness of our perceptions: that which is perceived and

[189] Martelly, *"S'énoncer*."

that which emerges in the writing. She proposed to engage more deeply with experience and help establish or root or raise the foundations of our setting, our experience, to words.

From the very first exercise, where we were asked to write an identity statement, I worked in my immediate surroundings, my relationships and tensions. Writing became a way to access subconscious. Objects and symbols I encountered took on a different meaning, and the process of writing became a metaphor for living. I learned to simply let my fingers run on the

Image 71. Gisozi: I have begun to work with the "Vansina Collection", a large, seldom explored archive of traditional Rwandan stories that were transmitted orally across centuries by precolonial court historians and wisdom keepers. In an extensive, multi-year project in the late 1950's they were recorded and transcribed just at the moment when social revolution and anti-Tutsi persecution began. At the 2019 Ubumuntu Arts Festival I connected with three Rwandan collaborators and in a few days we created a 45-minute multilingual spoken word piece that we presented at a Saturday evening main stage event. The work interwove an ancient origin story with Didacienne Nibagwire's personal story as a 1994 genocide survivor, fragments of the stories of our other two collaborators Dolph and Tony, as well as my own story. During the performance, Dolph Banza and Tony Bakatubia made real-time iPad drawings that were projected on screens at either side of the stage.

keyboard rather than agonizing and letting fear paralyze me. I made the work applicable to real life and transposed it in very real day-to-day ways.

I wonder if the process was so meaningful because I don't speak my mother tongue and so to put my own meanings onto the words felt profoundly life giving, breath giving, breadth giving, like gaining a third or fourth dimension. Like moving from the flatness of a two-dimensional image to a 3D object or body in space and in motion.

In a conclusion to our presentation and speaking to her own process, Stéphane said the process had haunted her and influenced her own writing and creative work:

Comme si je pouvais enfin affronter à travers cette expérience l'absence et la catastrophe pour faire aboutir une oeuvre et une pensée qui me hantait moi même depuis longtemps.

And where our work in the writing circle started my labour, it allowed her to deliver.

It takes a village, or a writing circle

Every Monday evening over 15 weeks, six women convened. We had not intentionally decided to exclude men, but there were none in the group. Every week we wrote in response to

Image 72. Gisozi: During a rain shower, "Dida" and I rehearse near the eternal flame at the National Genocide Memorial.

some very careful cues given by Stéphane. Every week we shared our work and constructively critiqued each other.

We were all participants in the larger MLS project. Each of us came from different places within the project, and our life trajectories were also very different. We each performed several functions, such as community organizer, research assistant, scholar, artist, workshop participant/trainer. We were each somehow related to the content as well as the functioning of the larger project, and over the weeks we spent together, we were each finding voice and/or negotiating authorial authority.

Stéphane crafted our *va-et-vient* between thinking, making, and experimenting on the one hand and reading and critiquing on the other hand around two dimensions/experiences of time: the troubling or creative "moment" of opening and fragility, "where unpredictably, beauty emerges," and the "labour" of writing that she describes as a patient, rigorous, demanding process. She wrote that we would "create a space to approach the practical aspects of writing through our discussions, conceive of writing projects (short and long) and question ourselves on the continuous research of one's own voice in the context of a personal writing project."[190]

Image 73. Gisozi: Onstage with Dida at the Ubumuntu Arts Festival. I needed to know whether the old stories, translated through contemporary writing and performance practices, could speak to young artists and general audiences in Rwanda. Our reception at Ubumuntu suggests they do.

In her invitation, Stéphane had written: "This workshop will allow participants to approach their life story, marked by violence and displacement, in another way, in a creative process that aims to liberate their words and to complicate them through the work of writing. In freely writing texts, participants will have an unhindered space to say the part that history killed and that autobiography does not always permit."

As a scholar of Derrida's work[191], Stéphane was already familiar with the power in the margins. She invited us to work there alongside the life story and to experience our journey as "a

[190] Martelly, *"S'énoncer."*

[191] Martelly, *Les jeux du dissemblable*, 12, 17.

unique progression through words: one which belongs to individuals and which persists, despite history, despite the violence of memory and that of forgetting, to desire to invent something else."

Ours was a singular experience, something unique—not in structure: Stéphane had taught creative writing before. She knew the steps, and even though it was going to be very different, the same things were at stake: something needed to be provoked, then there needed to be permission to seek or search, to speak, to write, to read, and to speak again … and it would all need to be repeated, five times.

What Stéphane calls "provocation" I heard as a call ... something I had wanted for such a long time and had even tried to create myself. I had written, published, and performed (*Je me souviens*, in 2002) but had also also organized with others in the community who needed to express/create something out of the experiences they had no words for. From 2005 to 2007, a group of four of us in Isangano wanted to revive a dormant theatre organization, SpektAfrica, to play works that concerned us. We staged *Pitié pour la reine*[192] by Rwandan playwright Jean Marie Kayishema, a tragedy based on a piece of Rwandan history: the story of Mururonkwere, the queen mother to Rwabugili. We did a lot of work with playback theatre and then with Jeanne Biaje, another Rwandan playwright then based in Toronto, we staged readings of *Une voix au chapitre* [193], once in Toronto and once in Montreal; it was about a Hutu-Tutsi couple after the genocide. After a falling out with Jeanne around intellectual property rights, we organized workshops to write our own stories and created and performed *Écriture à quatre main*.

I knew the value of an authorial voice but not how to grow it beyond the "known" into the creative. I knew to trace what I felt, to share with others how to do the same, but I didn't

[192] Jean-Marie Vianney Kayishema, *Pitié pour la reine* (Paris: D.A.E.C. Coopération, 1974).
[193] Jeanne Byiaje, Une voix au chapitre, unpublished, n.d.

know how to enliven the margins. I knew not to work alone with our heavy stories but had not experienced the *douceur* of facilitation, the value of the special back and forth with a trusted guide. I wanted to share this with as many of my companions in the Rwandan community as possible, but the process and its demands did not suit everybody. Stéphane's take on one of my colleagues is that even though she wrote very little, her engagement was essential because it allowed her to keep her silence, her refusal, and that it may have been the opportunity to prepare soil to receive what it was meant to receive.

I recall the experience as extremely concrete, literal, poetic. In reflecting, I realize that what I qualified as concrete is actually the sensory emphasis of the work. I didn't remember the five cycles Stéphane explained. What struck me instead was the experience of being allowed and encouraged to feel, to identify and name our favorite things in relation to taste and smell, to vision, to hearing and touch. I remember how we were encouraged to present our delights, to share them, to broaden our vocabulary outward from those words invested by our delights. Delights we could share in writing. I remember being arrested by the way smell, taste, and texture had run together for me to coalesce in … Nutella (one of my very favorite things, a proof of human achievement)—not only the taste and bliss of sucking it by the spoonful, but also the creamy smoothness, the deep, gooey comfort, and all the words that went with that ... all my words.

I remember keenly feeling permission and encouragement. I was allowed and encouraged to create a world of feelings with words—my feelings, my words. I wondered about the running together of the senses, but it didn't stop me. I did all of my homework ... on time. There was no stuckness, none of the usual paralyzing fear of being read.

When Stéphane highlights the very concrete dimensions of the work, she means her invitations for participants to reflect on a subject by finding objects, asking them to circulate in the city and bring back books, texts, images. To her the concreteness of objects, of places, of books, texts, and images is put into tension with words: first spoken then written then read and on and on … in order "to allow words, voice, and ideas to circulate again, to reconnect the person to their five senses, to allow them to name and move those senses."

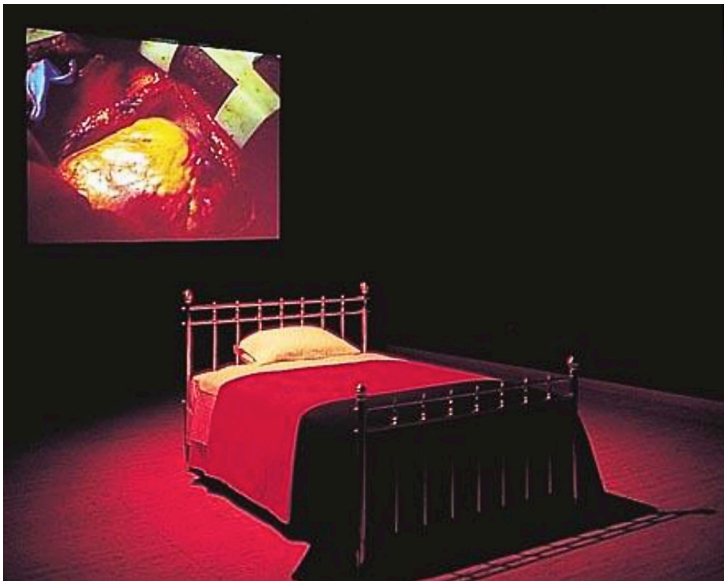

Image 74. Bill Viola. Science of the Heart. 1983. video/sound installation, Collection edition 1, Collection of the Frankel Family, Edition 2, Milwaukee Art Museum

Enlivening the margins

> *L'écriture donne à revoir à revisiter, à réfléchir la sensation et à ramener brusquement par un travail sur les mots, ramener à la conscience une expérience passée inaperçue. C'est peut être seulement ainsi que l'écriture peut changer les perceptions comme on dit, ce sera en effet par elle, les perceptions qui seraient changées*.[194]

[194] Martelly, *"S'énoncer."*

One of the things that we had to gather and bring in was art. I looked for a particular piece I loved, "Science of the Heart," a 1983 installation by Bill Viola that had impacted me very powerfully years before when I experienced it at a gallery.

Walls of black surround a brass bed with pristine white sheets and a red coverlet; above the bed is a screen and projected on it an open chest cavity, ready for surgery, with a heart in it, beating. All around us the sound of the heart beats at us, slow at first, then faster and faster, then it loops. The piece has an admirable economy that speaks to me in a visceral, existential way. My language is more chaotic: objects of my day-to-day reality, things that clutter or stick out, that are in the way of the ordered reality I aspire to. Is it enough to show that there are things sticking out? Or do I need to order them?

The incredible neatness of Viola's piece: the bed made up with military precision, so tidy, and then above the surgery, a granular video projection of an exposed heart, also precise but messy, slimy, gross. The highly contrasted inside/outside and the gap between what I am and what I aspire to is a never-ending theme in my writing.

I have come to see it as a barren theme. I have decades of writing on this theme. Stuck, it speaks to perceived shortcomings but goes nowhere. My change in perspective came when I looked everywhere and could not find a trace of "Science of the Heart" and instead came upon another piece: a video by Viola titled *Fire Woman*. Inspired by his work on the Wagner opera *Tristan and Isolde*, Viola worked on a number of standalone video pieces, one of which is *Fire Woman*. The piece feels very slow. It lasts 10 minutes, and we see a woman in slow motion, floating or walking, possibly on water, possibly toward a wall of fire and spreading her arms wide and letting herself fall/drop backward into a pool of water. As she does so, the surface is soothed, from fire to water.

The piece lives with me to this day. At the time it spoke to the necessary ambiguity of perception, inside/outside, coming/going, fire/water, falling backward/forward—none of it was clear. Falling into water. The piece ends as she abandons herself into the pool of water / wall of fire: an act of life or of death, elemental but also life giving. And slowly rather than burning brighter because it is fed, the wall of fire is appeased / transformed into a pool of swirling water slowly quieting.

Image 75. Bill Viola. Fire Woman. 2005. Video/sound installation

At the time I read it as an invitation to let go, to let myself fall into the process, to trust. The process of writing through writing became a symbol/metaphor for living. I was reminded that there was no other way to the other side but through. That there was no point in worrying about the future or what I am not yet, or where I should be. Instead, all I had to do was to do it: go/break/fall through the surface, the barren stuckness.

In a conference about his work, *An Evening with Video Artist Bill Viola*, Viola speaks about the making of "Fire Woman" and reveals that while there are no special effects in the work, "things are not always what they seem"—the woman in front of the wall is a real shot, she is "coming toward us, falling into water we did not know was there," but the camera was aimed at the water, not the woman. The water was "as still as a sheet of glass when the piece began."[195] We are left with an image of someone disturbing their own self-reflection and creating beauty and mystery at the same time.

I could have chosen any number of Viola's pieces to bring to the workshop, or a work of a completely different artist. But that piece spoke to me: fire/water, coming/going, falling/surrender. Art or the symbolic is interesting in this way; it needs not be either/or. It is the antidote to violence in that something pulls or moves us. It is in paying attention to that which holds "appetite" (Whitehead 2010, 32), to what titillates our unique senses, that we ignite the margins, that we get closer to what is uniquely us.

An ethics of attention and care

> *Par l'écriture nous sommes appelés non seulement à visiter la sensation mais aussi à les nommer et en les nommant de dire les choses qui ne sont pas normalement dites mais vécues. Amener à une prose de conscience du monde, de soi, des autres, et restructurer le monde, le repenser, réparer le divorce entre les mots et les choses et le structurer nouvellement et conduire à travers les lignes le lecteur à une nouvelle expérience qui peut devenir à ce moment une expérience partagée. De tout ceci nait un texte, une*

[195] An Evening with Video Artist Bill Viola, 2016, 28:25, https://techtv.mit.edu/videos/16536-an-evening-with-video-artist-bill-viola (accessed 16 July 2020).

interface, c'est un pont avec le lecteur.[196]

Stéphane often speaks of her horribleness. She holds on to it because she says that, as with every maïeutique, there is a certain necessary violence: "participants needed to be sufficiently shaken, disturbed to move out of or away from the ordinary language of their day to day concerns, to rupture the linearity, that the project called forth."

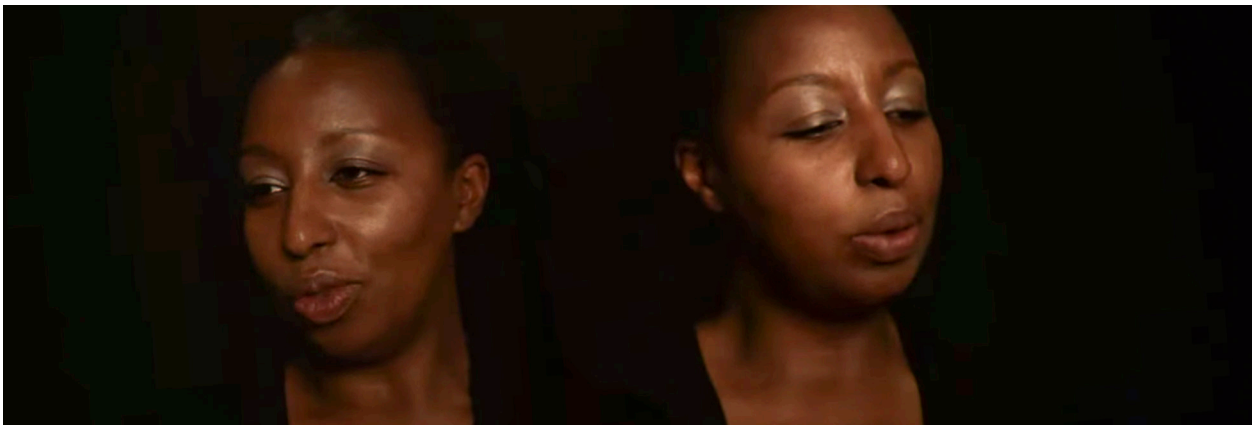

Image 76. Performing my bilingual autoethnographic monologue, *Le petit coin intact*. A still photograph from a video adaptation by independent filmmaker Shahab Mihandaoust.

I don't remember feeling shaken or disturbed by our exercises. It may have had to do with my familiarity with facilitated and psychotherapeutic processes, but I felt grounded, guided, and safe. There was very clearly a framework, an intention, and steps to take us from point A to point B. There was also a valuing. Stéphane made observations; she held and shared insights and opinions about the things she saw, heard, and read.

The violence needed to be just enough so as to distance us as participants from the inherently sequential narrative of the life story to allow us to perceive our own voice, because just as we don't perceive our own scent, we can't hear our own voice. Stéphane calls that distance a defamiliarizing: It "allows one to surprise oneself, and in the active hearing, create

[196] Martelly, *"S'énoncer*."

something new, bring back to life. And show through writing all the ways (already present in the first proposition) the senses can unfold."

I don't know this violence. I cannot recognize it in anything she did or anything I felt. It worries me because it points to a blind spot, which in itself is rather normal, but as a facilitator and therapist, what if I am numb there and therefore unsafe for others? I knew I could not lead such a workshop because I do not have the literary chops. I don't feel equipped to comment on form or influences or to gently guide as Stéphane did with our writing. This is why I feel that the process was afforded me but that I cannot pass it on. The blind spot points to another limitation in relation to feeling violence that I want to explore further. So even though Stéphane talks of her horribleness, what I remember are sessions that would end on a sigh.

Stéphane would receive every one of our written words (no matter how timid, unoriginal, or small) with an encouraging expectation, an absolute benevolence. And every time we would try more, risk a little more. The weight she gave our words made us work harder, invest more of ourselves, craft ourselves … There was really something that landed in this workshop something that preceded it, but something that was allowed to be and become. It was an exercise in motion where we each compromised ourselves and this is how the workshop became a time-space of possibilities, a creative space. And isn't a creative space a place of possibilities?

We would read our texts out loud or read each other's texts. We were at once origin and destination, and we would read, discuss, and rewrite. Stéphane said that "our words needed to be heard and we needed to be encouraged to dig and deepen them with the meaning we ourselves had intended for them. We had to be able to see the structures or possibilities in the text, and when the structure was good to deepen or solidify it." For Stéphane, no one is transparent: "Forms allow things that are not necessarily present or visible when we attempt to transmit or

communicate in a so-called transparent way. Therefore working with form allows us to envisage spaces of opacity, of silence."

I did not feel that part until I worked on *Le petit coin intact*. During the workshop, I remember feeling titillated gently all over to create something live ... Our writings were received with a profound tenderness. We felt a lot of love—for humanity, creativity, literature … Stéphane loves the French language. My own relationship to it has always been ambivalent.

Image 77. Gacuriro: The gleaming first phase of Kigali's Vision City housing development simultaneously evokes the ambition, urgency, hope, and challenge embodied in Rwanda's commitment to accelerated socioeconomic transformation while leaving no one behind.

I learned it through circumstance, because we never knew if we could stay in Germany or if we would have to go back to Rwanda. And my parents wanted me to know at least one of the languages in use there. I've lived with and through it for so long that I have developed my own way with it. I find that some things are better said in French, but—a Gallic shrug—I am not overly attached to the language, or, as some people are in Quebec, to its survival. However, after spending time with someone who loves the language in all of its flowery excess, after imbuing it with my own meaning and after learning to craft with it better, I love it more.

Igniting

Si parcours nous avons fait ... il s'agissait de partir comme un artisan à la recherche du

mot juste, de l'expression nue et de la parole fuyante pour créer un espace de vie et ressembler à quelque chose qui ne serait pas une chose morte mais un objet vivant.[197]

Stéphane's challenge was to help us tackle the difficult question of sensation through writing, the issue of the singular voice in relation to the larger story, and how to weave meaning, intentions, and possible resonance for the reader, starting with an object, a representation, or an emotion. I especially felt that we had found our voices, each different from the other. Many beautiful texts were written and everyone found the forms and the voices that allowed them to make what they needed to make. But I was not done. After the workshop I contacted Stéphane to ask her to work one on one and go deeper. Or start something of my own.

I had been awarded an artist residency in the life stories project. My project had started as a conversation with Catherine Dajczman, ritual practitioner, actress, and fellow LHE member. We wanted to create something (perhaps a ritual) to honour the interviewees. We felt that surprisingly, and despite the violence of genocide or war or displacement, we were hearing in what people were telling us in interviews and performances that something in them remained very much intact, and so we thought to start there and from that place create a ritual or invitation to lay down what we wanted to leave behind and pick up what we wanted for the road going forward. After a few false starts, Catherine told me that she felt I needed to say something and it was getting in the way of our project together. I should find it and say it. It was a wonderful feeling. Another gift: permission and faith in finding one's way to text are crucial as well as something we can do for one another when we cannot hold that trust in ourselves.

I had no idea what, if anything, I needed to say. But I knew I wanted the opportunity to try it in writing. The residency provided a framework and a deadline in which to do it. And I did.

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[197] Martelly, *"S'énoncer."*

I created a monologue of which Stéphane says that people like to engage with because they can feel my investment. I would not have been able to invest it if no one had believed in it first.

> *Un texte qui si il sait dire, pointe toujours quelque chose qui est au delà des mots et fait vivre autant que la mémoire, la parole individuelle qui nous fait persister finalement comme des sujets alors même que l'histoire de la violence, la violence comme histoire tend à effacer la place singulière de notre humanité.*[198]

A "writing story": *Le petit coin intact*

Laurel Richardson writes that

> honoring the location of the self-encourages us to construct … "writing stories." These are narratives that situate one's own writing in other parts of one's life such as disciplinary constraints, academic debates, departmental politics, social movements, community structures, research interests, familial ties, and personal history. They offer critical reflexivity about the writing self in different contexts as a valuable creative analytical practice. They evoke new questions about the self and the subject; remind us that our work is grounded, contextual, and rhizomatic; and demystify the research/writing process and help others to do the same. They can evoke deeper parts of the self, heal wounds, enhance the sense of self—or even alter one's sense of identity.[199]

I wanted to write a performance piece. I wanted to find a narrative structure, but a narrative weighted by this reflective journey and process of creative writing and more aware and confident of the means available in its core. Even If I could not quite envision the project from

[198] Ibid.

[199] Richardson and St. Pierre, "Writing," 965.

start to finish, I wanted to "weave connections, insert resonances, and work through the text's possibilities as well as its impossibilities."[200] I also wanted to use the creation and performance of *Le petit coin intact* (LPI) as methodology for research. The questions I asked were very clear and simple: What can I learn from the forms I choose to transmit/share what I stay with and feel is important? What does choosing individual voice afford that community collaboration does

Image 78. Montreal: The process of working through the stories and the silences continues.

not? How does the making and performing of LPI inform/transform the perception I have of myself, of community, and of the audience member?

I started by situating myself. I chose the Rwandan community out of a felt sense. Because of the questions I had always carried around dancing cows and kings in modern urban diasporic spaces. Because of the pull I feel for the songs and the voices of my elders even though I don't understand what they say. I chose "us" because I was obsessed with our community since having been in Africa for the first time in 1990 and experiencing the massive global mobilization and exodus of young men enlisting in the war for the right of return of the Tutsi to Rwanda. Because obsessed was not enough of a word to qualify my preoccupation after 1994 and the genocide with wanting to contribute and help make sense of things.

[200] Martelly, *"S'énoncer."*

I also situated my practice proposing as a baseline "*Je me souviens*," a piece I wrote in 2002 and published in *Montréal Cultures* and then performed with the Rwandan youth dance group Isangano as invited artist at Montreal's national theatre school in 2003. In it I was presenting elements of my discourse: the relationship with memory that is and is not my own, dislocation and the feeling of loss of continuity, of anachronism, of feeling othered, and of not understanding the origins of the challenges yet feeling responsible for them or somehow misshapen. Feelings of inadequacy, guilt, and powerlessness. I also claimed Rwandan symbols of the drum, the cows, and the king, as well as the warrior and gentlewoman characters in traditional dancing. I knew I was not comfortable with the politics inherent in using symbols of precolonial Rwanda. And I wondered what symbols would emerge to speak to 21st-century reality.

I made an inventory of what I had done so far, like (a) honing skills for 19 years and rigorously tracing what was emerging. It had drawn me toward religion, psychotherapy, traditional Rwandan dance, new media, community theatre, oral history, community arts, etc. (b) Integrating different ways of thinking and making. For example, for the past 10 years I integrated a community arts framework and explored new media, community theatre, dialogue and ideas around creativity and art as a means for empowerment, and aesthetics in relationship. I also (c) developed skills in collaboration, (d) made commitments to a community, to an issue, to a writing ethic, and to an emergent self. (For the past decade I had deepened my commitments to the Rwandan community, both the Rwandan diaspora living here as well as groups and communities living in Rwanda. (e) I also deepened my commitment to stories and storytelling. I had listened to many life histories, actively nurtured collaboration with communities of practice within the context of the MLS project, and served the Rwandan working group, the Living

Histories playback theatre ensemble by playing, writing, and publishing, as well as the education working group, working to get the stories out to teachers and schools.

The specificity of oral history is precisely the idea that "stories matter"—a rare find in a larger context where the written word trumps the spoken. In a culture of written agreements, of records, where objectivity and fact still rule, truly precious is the idea that oral sources, the stories people hold and share about events, have weight and matter in and of themselves.

Although I am very grateful for the existing archive[201], my objective was never to constitute an archive. From the very beginning, the stories were meant to live in us and to be shared, to help us live better, understand better. We were quite literally asked about where we came from, where we were, what we had been through, what our relationships were with the past and our places of origin, and what we hoped for the future. If that process was to be active, or activating, in our collective, if we were to reflect about these things together, it meant that information had to circulate.

The performance piece was not meant to document the life stories project. Instead, the creative process was to serve to articulate/shape/edify voice or authorship, a struggle I qualified as legitimate in any circumstance but maybe more challenging in historical, cultural, familial, communal, and collaborative contexts such as the ones I evolved out of. I wanted to engage with colonialism, Christianity, war, and genocide and to look more critically at my aspiration to authenticity and generativity.

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[201] "Funded by Canada's Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, this bilingual online life stories platform is built by Concordia University's Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling (COHDS) and the Association des Parents et Amis des Victimes du genocide des Tutsis au Rwanda (PAGE-Rwanda), representing survivors of the 1994 Rwandan genocide now living in Montréal. Over eighty life story interviews were conducted by the Rwandan Working Group (led by PAGE-Rwanda) of Montreal Life Stories, twenty-eight of whom gave their permission to include their life stories here." The Living Archives of Rwandan Exiles and Genocide Survivors in Canada, https://livingarchivesvivantes.org/ , excerpt from the "about" page.

What the writing created

> *Le petit coin intact ... est à la fois narratif et il y a des pause d'écriture, des pause où on sent que tu t'articules quelque chose à toi même, quelque chose qui te permet d'arriver à la prochaine étape de la narration. Et c'est intéressant de voir comment le partage de la langue se fait et quel type de contenu tu as choisi de mettre en anglais et quel type (pas le même du tout) tu as décidé de mettre en français ...*[202]

"What can it do?" is the way Chapman and Sawchuk speak to the specificity and value of research-creation.[203] Where Richardson and St. Pierre see research-creation as deconstructing qualitative inquiry[204], Chapman and Sawchuk posit it as a third option in addition to the either/or of qualitative or quantitative research.

In "talking back" bell hooks writes that "moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, and those who stand and struggle side by side with a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and new growth possible. It is that act of speech, of "talking back," that is no mere gesture of empty words, that is the expression of our movement from object to subject—the liberated voice."[205]

Le petit coin intact started as a collection of 12 vignettes: stories created from my own memories and from life stories heard between 2005 and 2012.The bilingual monologue was first performed at Montreal's Monument National in March 2012 and since then has been performed in conferences, schools, and classrooms. The stories speak to the violence in Rwanda that began long before 1994 and how it has seeped into my/our day-to-day life as a family, as a community.

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[202] Martelly, *"S'énoncer*."
[203] Chapman and Sawchuk, "Research-Creation."
[204] Richardson and St. Pierre, "Writing."
[205] hooks, *Talking Back*, 9.

The story has changed in the years I have been performing it. I have translated some of the French into English or vice versa depending on the audiences I am invited into. I have also added pieces, when something else has happened or when something becomes clear or another question forms. And I have removed the pieces I don't agree with anymore, like when a question has been answered, for example, or something shifts in my understanding.

Some of the French pieces came out of or began in the writing workshop. I would probably need to explore them further elsewhere, but for the most part they express my emotional struggle, how the history has landed on me. And it was only after I wrote them that I was able to write the English pieces which are more conventionally narrative. And tell little snippets of life: my childhood and life in Germany, the war in 1990, the genocide in 1994, the aftermath, the war in Iraq, and the questions, conclusions, or positions I have come to. I also wrote to my unborn child, the son I had written about during the circle.

Lifting the silence between my generation and that of my parents and grandparents was the whole purpose, for me, of the life story work. Exploring what, if anything, my parents knew of their grandparents and parents meant I was working on the effects of ruptures in time and place. Ruptures brought on by Christianity, colonization, modernity, persecution, exile, dislocation: huge fissures and tiny cuts bleeding all over our histories, developments, futures, over our bodies and relationships. Ruptures not necessarily acknowledged or dealt with at the individual level, yet borne daily and affecting (actively) individuals, families, and communities.

Maybe rupture isn't quite the right word. It brings forth an image like absence. Or silence. A cut. The image I associated with life or time passed on from generation to generation is more like a river, and the rupture like a dam. Something solid that blocks the flow or diverts it elsewhere. It wouldn't make sense to break a dam. It would threaten whatever had been able to

grow or become. But there were cracks in the dam when I was filming my father's interview and he talked of the memories of his grandfather—the way his hair was shaped into moons, just like the half moons he was wearing on his shirt. I remember him saying that "of course we had no cloth back then, we wore …" (he rubbed his fingers together) "ficus (barkcloth) … like" and he looked around him and pointed to huge hide-like beaded tapestry on the wall. I had not realized, nor do I think he had, that the huge wall covering I knew for decades was familiar in that way, and how my parents surrounded themselves and us with elements and symbols of the past. Of course, it took the interview, the prompt, to invite the story and the story to shine meaning on the object, but it feels like something gentle, something that connects.

Today I understand and accept the silence between generations as part protection strategy for us (me) as children, a way to shield us from hatred and persecution, and in part a lack of awareness about the difference between parent and child, a lack of individuation or self-awareness created by the changed circumstances one finds oneself in where the parent doesn't know how or when they have, or have not, adapted to their new circumstances. Where the child feels the dissonances between what the parent knows and what is known or exists in the new environment. And where the parent doesn't necessarily know what the child knows, doesn't know, or needs to know, nor how to adapt to the child's new circumstances (or help them to adapt).

Before MLS I might have written about the cultural dimension of speaking and silence, but having worked with all of the different groups in the project and more since then, I have learned that intergenerational transmission after trauma and dislocation is a universal concern. Although the concern is universal, silence is not the only strategy and has not been perceived as effective by any of my interviewees: It offers no protection (its primary objective) and leaves

people defenseless and unprepared. Knowing how important transmission can be, and being a mother now, I think a lot about what exactly it is that I could/should transmit that would offer my son protection and tools and techniques to be well in the world, capable of adapting or defending himself and creating a good life.

Image 79. Montreal: Marie-Josée Gicali is one of several of us whose writing has been shaped and encouraged by our larger Montreal Life Stories experiences. At the Librarie l'Eugélionne, launch for Marie-Josée's new memoir, Stéphane Martelly and I opened by sharing some of our thoughts about the "maïeutique" created through our writing circle.

The process of collecting and engaging deeply with my family's and my community's stories—from the recesses they had to be excavated from, to memory, to orality, to recording, to story and text and back to orality—that process of transforming and being transformed allowed for some things. It changed me. When I began, I had the stories and years and years in notebooks and folders and objects. I had amassed an unwieldy assortment of unaesthetic data. Moving from one dwelling to another when I was younger, for example, I found myself unable to make a home for myself or to fit into my home. Even when I started over, I would soon find myself with very similar types of objects and without other types of recognizable objects that indicate one is alive and thriving among peers. And in parallel the behaviour to what was out of reach: not giving oneself the things one craves the most and gorging oneself on things not good for one. The tension between the obvious lack of aesthetics and the no less obvious hunger for it were remarkable in their mirrored intensity. Psychoanalyst Melanie Klein best articulated splitting, or

how what is sought/aspired to most is at once craved and vilified (or vilifying). Going through the "research-creation" process[206] troubled my understanding of who "I" am and who the "we" I am a part of is, in profound and generative ways. This inquiry is at the root of my interest in research-creation and my approach to making a useful, constructive, adaptive, and adapted way, space, and living in or from an overwhelming, often unqualified amount of very troubling information. In the way that psychoanalytic theory proposes a witnessed process of free association as a means to access and address an ill-adapted construction, research-creation may be a way to engage with existential inquiry. And propose valid outcomes in terms of aesthetic and/or cultural production but more usefully as a means adapted to engage with complexity. Complexity is only one of the ways to address the questions of simultaneity and heterogeneity.

In writing *Le petit coin* and in performing it, I did something, but what? And it did something to me. If I wanted to find a word to speak to my process in relation to the research-creation projects in the MLS project, I would have to turn to French and say *butiner*. It's a word used for the action of bees gathering nectar and pollen in a field of flowers. I was completely immersed and committed to the steering committee, the Rwanda working group, and playing with the Living Histories Ensemble and then I would discover other fascinating members of the MLS community, artists and researchers, and their amazing projects. And I would get invited, stay and collaborate, contribute, and get inspired until I finally composed my own research-creation project: *le petit coin intact*.

To go beyond quantitative and qualitative inquiry into embodied creation research may have elements for integrated inquiry and research outcomes. Writing allowed me to disclose. In writing so intimately I sometimes felt like a traitor and sometimes like I was finally breathing. It

[206] Chapman and Sawchuk, "Research-creation."

allowed me to unearth stories or re/access memories I did not know I had buried. I was able to reconcile with a memory that was "forbidden"—the story of my brother Charlie and the difficult relationship he had with my father took on a very different meaning. Writing allowed me to (co) respond to (with) silence or absence, like in the case of my grandfather or even my whole lineage—names on a paper, devoid of any meaning, that I could not say have found their way into my text. I am Lisa, daughter of Aimable, son of Claver, son of Ngwige, son of Karenzi, son of Gitondo, son of Karorero, son of Kivunangoma, son of Rwiru, son of Murahire, son of Nkongori, son of Makara, and on it goes on my father and my mother's side. I stop at Makara because, like my grandfather, he would not bow down to the king when he felt it was not right. Because his is the larger story, like an accord that is strummed, when we speak of that streak of independence *vis à vis* authority. As though there is a moral fibre that will not submit. It gives meaning to the assassination of my grandfather in 1962.

Writing allowed me to engage with the bittersweet difference between story and history, realizing for example that the pan-African freedom fighters of the 1960s may have had less to do with "decolonization" than the United Nations did. And yet their stories fuelled the aspirations for sovereignty, for equal status, human and civil rights in my father's generation and my own.

I wrote about or in relation to the consequences of organized violence, as well as indigeneity and colonialism, displacement, and dislocation in the context of globalization from a personal standpoint. Not in terms of nostalgia for a better or mythic past. In a way it is about reconciling with my own story, with the way my family and I have managed to navigate the constraints and contingencies of the river, the choices we had and those we did not. It's about trying to express a situation and taking a stand in a moving reality that can be viewed through multiple lenses. It's about agency and creating different experiences of self and/in the world, and

what I write and perform can keep changing as I learn. Writing allows me to trace the limits of my understanding and my questions going forward.

Conclusion: Toward a Transformation of Silence

Of course I am afraid, because the transformation of silence into language and action is an act of self-revelation, and that always seems fraught with danger.

André Lorde

On May 1st of this year, 2020, my father wrote me a letter. He and my mother had returned to Rwanda in 2017, after 45 years of absence, to live there and contribute to its reconstruction. *Gisuna de moi à Lisa*. (Gisuna, from me to Lisa.)

Image 80. Gisuna, Byumba: It is said my grandfather's body was thrown here after he was murdered. The body was never found.

In the email he wrote,

"I thought you had to wait, that you can't write angry. Yes, we can, and I retract! You have to be reconciled. I know that writing is a special medicine if you want to heal."[207] I could feel him smiling at me. He had jumped into the fray: So let us heal, beginning at Gisuna.

My father wrote, "the word and the name Igisuna, I feel, come from a verb that I imagine to be gusuna, which, translated into French means oozing.

I share excerpts of his letter.

[207] Translated from French.

Ku Gisuna, de Byumba, je savais qu'il y avait un marais. Pour moi, c'est un lieu marécageux d'où émane un souvenir d'une tristesse sans fin, qui tournoi indéfiniment telle une maigre colonne de fumée ou de nuage triste dans le ciel …

Ku Gisuna, in Byumba, I knew there was a swamp. For me, it is a marshy place from which emanates a memory of endless sadness, which turns endlessly like a thin column of smoke or a sad cloud in the sky…

Je porte Gisuna quelque part en moi et je ne suis pas le seul.

I carry Gisuna somewhere inside and I am not alone.

La photo de Gisuna, ce n'est pas le souvenir de mon père que l'on a jeté dans le Gisuna entre 21h et 23 heures, le 27 mars 1962. C'est l'image souvenir, vivant, le lieu, le temps, les phrases claires que ma mère m'a répétées. Ku Gisuna devenu Mu Gisuna lieu d'hébergement de mon père serait un lieu ou poussait une herbe spéciale avec lequel on confectionnait les très belles nattes fines qui ornaient les planchers et le sol, chez les gens et les personnes aisés. Un petit baume dans le cœur, une pensée consolatrice me disant. Papa a été jeté dans un lieu ou poussait l'herbe fine et tendre pour faire des nattes

The photo of Gisuna is not the memory of my father, who was thrown into Gisuna between 9 and 11 p.m., March 27, 1962. It is the image-memory, alive—the place, the time, the clear sentences my mother would repeat to me. Ku Gisuna became Mu Gisuna, my father's resting place, where a special grass grew with which were made the very beautiful thin mats that adorned the floors of the well-to-do. A little balm to the heart. A consoling thought telling me that Papa had been thrown into a place where the fine, tender grass grew to make especially fine mats.

spécialement fines.

Il faut accrocher l'espoir sur quelque chose ou bien quelque part ou dans quelque chose. Il me laisse toutefois, un héritage pour toute la vie. Il me restera toujours, l'image de fond, d'un humain, mon père, à qui l'on a fait des gestes horribles et inhumains. Alors, beaucoup de sourde colère mais aussi de tristesse qui mutent avec l'âge, quand je pense à la fin de sa vie. Une mort gratuite, un assassinat, lâche, à l'égard d'un homme qui aimait et servait beaucoup ses semblables. Pourquoi ? Tout cela ne fait que gusuna dans mon intérieur profond, on ne sait pas trop où. Quelque part en soi.

You have to hang hope onto something or somewhere or (invest it) in something. He has, however, left me a legacy for life. I will always have as background the image of a human, my father, to whom horrible and inhuman gestures were done. So, a silent rage, but also sadness that changes with age, when I think about the end of his life. A gratuitous death, a cowardly assassination, of a man a man who loved and served his brethren. Why? All of this only makes Gusuna deep inside of me. We don't know quite where. Somewhere in the self.

Où donc ? il doit y avoir un trou profond chez l'humain. Est-ce un trou ? Une rigole sinueuse sans fin, comme la bêtise humaine. Dans ces tréfond, du trou ou de rigole sinueuse, s'engouffrent les mauvais souvenirs, les horreurs, sous forme d'un long et immense chapelet qui n'en finit pas.

But where? There must be a deep hole in humans. Is it a hole? An endless winding gully, like human stupidity. In these depths, be it hole or winding channel, are engulfed all the bad memories, horrors, in the form of a long and immense rosary that never ends.

La tristesse y trouve aussi sa place facilement, elle se colle d'ailleurs facilement partout. La tristesse est multiforme, tantôt liquide, tantôt dure comme un glaçon multiforme, elle a des couleurs aussi et même un goût âcre, celui d'ubuvunderi, résidu de nicotine noire qui reste collé dans le fond des pipes des grands fumeurs.

Sadness also finds its place easily, and it sticks easily everywhere. Sadness is multifaceted—sometimes liquid, sometimes hard as a multishaped ice cube, it sometimes has colours and even an acrid taste, that of *ubuvunderi*, the residue of black nicotine that sticks to the bottoms of the pipes of heavy smokers.

(My father himself was a pipe smoker in Germany. It left him with stomach ulcers: oozing holes inside his body.)

Gisuna c'est un peu tout cela, parce que Gisuna, cette petite surface de terre et le souvenir qu'il incarne, vit et demeure en nous, et voilà que nos enfants embarquent dans la galère. L'injustice ne s'apprivoise jamais, elle est difficile à excuser.

(...)

La loi de Lavoisier

demeure intacte. Rien ne se crée, rien ne se perd… A Gisuna, alors que l'on traînait papa

Gisuna is a bit of all of that, because Gisuna, this small area of land and the memory it embodies, lives and abides in us, and here now even our children are embarking on the same boat. Injustice cannot be domesticated, or excused.

(...)

Lavoisier's law remains intact. Nothing is created, nothing is lost ... In Gisuna, while they dragged Papa on the ground to throw him

par terre pour aller le jeter dans le Gisuna, Il a crié aux trois hommes qui le traînait par terre, que le meurtre, retomberait sur eux et toutes leurs progénitures.

into the Gisuna, he shouted to the three men who dragged him that the murder would fall on them and all their offspring.

Quand les Inkotanyi ont débarqué à Byumba pour dénouer, la géopolitique du chaos, imaginée par la France en 1990 et les Belges dans les années 60, la phrase de mon père m'est revenue en tête.

When the Inkotanyi landed in Byumba to unravel the geopolitics of chaos, imagined by France in 1990 and Belgium in the 1960s, my father's phrase came to mind.

Je pense souvent à papa, qui était avant son temps dans presque tout ce qu'il faisait (il pressentait certainement que sa vie serait courte, 44 ans). Par exemple, l'éducation qu'il nous a donné. Par l'amour, à sa façon qu'il nous gratifiait. On ne peut aimer qu'à sa façon.

I often think of Papa, who was ahead of his time in almost everything he did (he certainly sensed that his life would be short, 44 years). For example, the education he gave us. In the love he gave, in his own way he gratified us. You can only love in your own way.

Le souvenir de nos ancêtres possède un sens. Parler aux êtres chers qui ne sont plus de ce monde est réconciliant avec la vie. C'est aussi une préparation saine à l'après vie d'ici, car

The memory of our ancestors has meaning. Talking to loved ones who are no longer of this world is reconciling with life. It is also a sound preparation for the afterlife here,

il doit y avoir une après vie, qui donne un sens et qui valide, celle que nous menons aujourd'hui.

because there has to be an afterlife that gives meaning and validates the one we lead today.

La pratique dites païenne des rwandais, qui est d'honorer les ancêtres morts est une très bonne pratique, et je n'irai jamais me confesser pour cela. Et c'est un plaisir aussi d'accomplir les gestes qu'ils affectionnaient, de manger et boire ce qu'il aimait boire et manger …

The so-called pagan practice of Rwandans, to honor dead ancestors, is a very good practice, and I will never go to confession for that. It is also a pleasure to perform the actions they loved: to eat and drink what he liked to drink and eat …

Sa vie continue en nous, car nous sommes et restons sa victoire sur la mort.

Il continue de vivre en nous et avec nous. On devrait célébrer plus souvent nos ancêtres, avoir le temps pour eux, car le meilleur cadeau que l'on puisse donner à quelqu'un, c'est lui consacrer son temps.

His life continues in us, for we are and remain his victory over death. He continues to live in us and with us. We should celebrate our ancestors more often, have time for them, because the best gift we can give someone is to devote time to them.

****

My father has blessed me and the decades I have spent working with these stories. *Ça fait un peu de bien, de murmurer à voix, très basse, un long ressenti de ce qui fait partie d'une vie. Un ressenti commun des rwandais.* (It eases a little, to whisper in a very low voice a prolonged feeling about what has been a part of life. A common feeling among Rwandans.) In sharing his memory of Gisuna, the pretty field becomes a dark swamp where the bones of his father may still

be. For years, my father carried around a horror-filled, oozing hole, and his grief and rage at injustice perforated his insides. He writes that he no longer lives this way, and yet he started the letter by saying he was not sure he could write while still angry.

Nothing is ever what it seems. The unconscious is unwieldy and difficult to work with. Engaging psychoanalytic theory can feel like wading into the unknown. Why would anyone willingly do that? Especially in a work like a dissertation, which aims to demonstrate to its readers the mastery of something: a large body of literature.

"Oral history will neither heal nor cure," South African oral historian Sean Field writes, but it "offers subtle support to interviewees' efforts to recompose their sense of self and regenerate agency."[208] In an article about oral history's potential to help people heal after experiencing mass trauma, Field wonders who and what the language of healing serves. Having interviewed South African survivors of apartheid and Rwandan survivors of genocide and finding himself disappointed with and dubious about the post-truth-and-reconciliation language of healing and closure, Field asserts,

> The legal or political closure desired by lawyers and politicians is not equivalent to the ongoing struggles of trauma survivors to at least reach a symbolic emotional closure. But emotional closure in the complete sense is not possible. The term 'closure' evokes a-historical fantasies that it is possible to emotionally sever 'bad' events or periods from people's lives.[209]

Field recentres survivor needs, writing that "a central challenge" survivors face is "how to tolerate and integrate" traumatic memories. Some survivors, he observes, "work through

[208] Sean Field, "Beyond 'Healing': Trauma, Oral History and Regeneration," *Oral History* 34, no. 1 (2006): 34.
[209] Ibid.

mourning their losses and 'adapting' their lives, while others lead their lives in melancholic ways."[210]

I have found this to be true. In 2014 I wrote the following piece, entitled "Now What?" I was trying to express the struggle of letting those who want to grieve do so while also letting those who, like me, want to move forward do so. The question that causes me unrest is how can our community do both and stay in solidarity rather than fragmenting yet again?

Now what?

This past April
at a genocide commemoration event in
Montreal,
A survivor asked
"Who perpetrated the genocide?"
He wanted to hear someone speak a name.
Right now that box is empty, he said.

He argued that
blaming the Interahamwe militia
could not explain why he was persecuted by
his school teacher at age 16,
long before 1994,
when no one had ever heard of militias.
He wanted to hear a name, speak a name,
because he – who survived –
and the others – who were murdered –
all had names.

He has the right, he insisted, to know the
name of the perpetrator he hates.

Another survivor spoke of his constant pain:
a bottomless pain, wide and deep.
He claimed his right to speak it
over and over again,

[210] Ibid.

infinitely if need be ...

To ask him to stop,
to stifle his emotions,
would be like asking him
to cut off a vital part of himself
and die a little more, he said.

Navigating alongside
such an abyss of pain
is a terrifying proposition.
But I want to find a posture
I can hold long enough
to respect the grief and hatred and pain
while protecting my own need to move
forward, shift, and change.

I think of the displaced Rwandans
living together in Montreal
since before 1994,
who could not possibly have killed,
and who did not die,
yet now have become mortal enemies.

I think of all the young people
born after 1994
for whom this is not their story.
And those who helped others survive.
Those who refused to inflict pain.
Those who are "half" –
with one "Hutu" parent and
one "Tutsi" parent.
They suffer both ways.

We cannot resurrect fathers and mothers,
brothers, sisters, sons and daughters.
We cannot afford to freeze our time
at the moment some of the bereft have
frozen theirs.

We cannot find a posture that is
comforting enough to reach all the way
to their deepest survivor-pain.
We cannot calm the fears of some that
the rest of us might be
moving on without them.

(Maybe we'll have to.)

We may not be able
to repair our tattered social fabric
and yet we must try,
whether our difference
is a construction or not.
To leave this problem for our children,
as if they are not worthy of our best efforts,
cannot be an option.

Not only do I not want to silence
Hutu voices[211]
I need desperately to hear them.
Our futures are forever tied.
Who is "we"?[212]
I believe that many of us
are men and women of goodwill
and I expect the best.

My mother often told me that
in times gone by
the King of Rwanda
would walk after sunset
among the huts of his subjects
to listen for their snores and farts,
signs of their wellbeing.

I would love to discover clear, simple
signals that we are doing well, once again.

[211] This line references another text that came before this one and was part of a larger performance piece called *Le petit coin intact.* The piece emerged in response to my work with the MLS project.
[212] Idem.

But it's complicated.

My involvement in the MLS project has been a journey on which I have been able to name and interpret, take and make meaning. But maybe more importantly, it has been a safe space to work through some of the negative affect, fear, or epistemological clutter and become familiar with the stories of survival and the stories of colonization, persecution, exile, and life in the diaspora.

Field writes that "oral historians can contribute to forging public spaces where people talk, write, perform and represent their memories. The multimedia and multilingual dissemination of oral histories through books, radio, film documentaries, audio-visual exhibitions and the internet increases possibilities for mirroring both individuals and communities."[213] This has certainly been the case for the MLS project.[214] With 18 community partners, 40 researchers, students, artists, and community members, the project was a busy hive: radio shows, sound theatre, applied theatre like playback, verbatim theatre, a play, live and video installations, documentary films, digital stories by interviewees… There were special projects like the writing circle but also the choir and cooking and storytelling; there were projects with schools, projects with community organizations. People were interviewed in French and English but also Khmer and Creole, Kinyarwanda… Students with special projects came in to interview others. Research collaborations took place across the country, and relationships developed with researchers in other countries as well: France, Australia, Scotland, the United Kingdom, the US.

[213] Field, ""Interviewing in a Culture of Violence," 40.

[214] Steven High, *Beyond Testimony and Trauma: Oral History in the Aftermath of Mass Violence* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2015); High, Oral History at the Crossroads; (UBC Press, 2014); Steven High, Edward Little, and Thi Ry Duong, *Remembering Mass Violence: Oral History, New Media and Performance* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014).

The project culminated in March of 2012 with a month-long series of events and activities all over the city of Montreal.

But as Field cautions,

> for the potential of oral history methods to be harnessed, it needs to be combined with strategies to build accessible archives, museums, memorial sites, schools, work and urban/rural renewal projects. These strategies create opportunities for people with shared memories to make meaningful connections with each other. This is significant for trauma survivors who frequently bear the legacy of believing they are the only individuals feeling this way and that there is no choice but to endure in isolation. Interviewees' choice to participate or not in the dissemination process must be respected."[215]

This means, of course, a keen understanding of what is private and what can be shared. But it needed not be decided alone. Collaborative spaces like the MLS, where authority was shared— even and especially at the governance level of the project—meant decisions were taken together, ideas were reviewed and strengthened together. For example, PAGE-Rwanda and the Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling spent the last few years creating a bilingual online platform and innovative tools for engaging interviews. Then they chose and gathered permission for 25 of the 80 interviews collected during the MLS project to be shared and engaged with online.

Through recording and disseminating oral histories, Field writes, "we can help people to identify the social interconnectedness of past experiences and current memories. These moments of social identification create possibilities where marginalised people might regenerate

[215] Ibid.

themselves as historical actors."[216] The MLS project was very much a moment of regeneration—for myself as an individual and for my community. The project was open—all were welcome and presumed to be allies. As long as one had passed the four introductory workshops, one was admitted into the MLS research community, where one could interview, record, archive, transcribe, use the Stories Matter software, invest in interpretive spaces, write, and present. Students at all levels, as well as faculty researchers, community members, interns, and volunteers—all new co-researchers—were trained in interview methods and ethics, and then they led interviews. And the intention of the creative work with life stories in the MLS was to move between individual story, generation, communities…

Where trauma makes absence, working creatively and collaboratively with oral histories of mass violence has meant restoring relationships with self and others across time and space. The MLS project was *an organism that personed* in that it allowed us to re-involve ourselves, re-engage our senses, recirculate stories and art to share them, and breathe life into stories, silences, and absence. For me personally, it allowed me to arrive and re-member, and to take stock of important pieces of my family and community stories I was otherwise not allowed to integrate: important historic events from before I was born, like the 1950s and 60s in Rwanda; events that shattered my family, like my grandfather's assassination in 1962. As a person born in Rwanda and dislocated as a toddler, the opportunity the MLS project provided me to fully arrive here and now has been transformative.

In the aftermath of organized violence, oral history, as both a method and a way of thinking and working—and arts based aproaches to life story in particular—have opened worlds of possibility. Everybody has a story, and inquiry into life stories makes for inclusivity. We have

[216] Ibid.

room for all of us, as well as all the complexities our lives are made of. Some of the most exciting writing by the current generation of Afrodescendent and Afrodiasporic thinkers and authors[217] are calling for ways to work through our colonial pasts and imagine futures in which we become our own epicentre, our own intelligence, our own light, and the subject of our own history.[218] I look forward to discovering and investing in this new community, and to contributing not only some of the tools, practices, and possibilities we in the MLS community developed over the life of the project, but also some of what I have learned—my epistemological contribution.

[217] Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, Studies on the History of Society and Culture 41 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Achille Mbembe, Felwine Sarr, and Ateliers de la pensée, eds., *Écrire l'Afrique-Monde: Les Ateliers de La Pensée, Dakar et Saint-Louis Du Sénégal, 2016* (Ateliers de la pensée, [Paris] : Dakar, Sénégal: Philippe Rey ; Jimsaan, 2017); Felwine Sarr, Drew Burk, and Sarah Jones-Boardman, *Afrotopia: A Univocal Book* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020); Nadia Yala Kisukidi, *Bergson, Ou, L'humanité Créatrice* (Paris: CNRS éditions, 2013).

[218] Felwine Sarr, "L'Afrique a besoin d'une utopie," *Revue Projet* 2, no. 351 (2016): 78–81.

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