



## INTERVIEW WITH EMMANUEL HABIMANA

Archives vivantes des Rwandais exilés au Canada suite au Génocide et aux violences antérieures

The Living Archives of Rwandan Exiles and Genocide Survivors in Canada

Ubuhamya bw'Abanyarwanda bahungiyeye muri Canada Jenoside n'itotezwa ryayibanjirije

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### Biographical note on the interviewee:

Emmanuel Habimana lives in Trois-Rivières where he teaches at the Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, in the Department of Psychology. He came to Canada in 1980 with his family.

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**Jean-Bosco Gakwisi (J.-B.G.): Please introduce yourself.**

Emmanuel Habimana (E.H.): ... Emmanuel Habimana, I'm ..., well, I live in Trois-Rivières where I teach in the Department of Psychology at the Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières. I arrived in Quebec in 1980 with my family. I don't know what else you would like me to say as an introduction...?

**J.-B.G.: That's good. What country are you from?**

E.H.: ... So I'm Rwandan and I grew up in Rwanda until I was 20 years old. After that I left the country to go to university in Belgium [inaudible, "at the age of"?] 20–21 years old.

**J.-B.G.: So you left Rwanda at the age of 20?**

E.H.: I was 20 and a half, 21 years old when I left Rwanda. Let's say I was 21.

**J.-B.G.: And how old are you now?**

E.H.: I'm over 60 years old [smiles]

**J.-B.G.: It's been a very long time!**

E.H.: Yes.

**J.-B.G.: Tell us about your childhood memories from before leaving the country, before leaving Rwanda.**

E.H.: ... My childhood memories of Rwanda ... First ... when people—foreigners like my teachers at school—were saying, “Rwanda is a beautiful country, it's amazing,” I didn't see its beauty. I never understood what they found beautiful about Rwanda. Because, for me, the country represented what I have lived and experienced there, the childhood memories that have marked me, and there weren't too many beautiful, good things. So that's why I couldn't see the beauty of the country.

**J.-B.G.: The people who were talking about the beauty of Rwanda were undoubtedly talking about its natural beauty. And I imagine that your family had neighbours. Do you have memories of your neighbours in Rwanda?**

E.H.: Yes, of course, I have great memories of my neighbours. It must be said that—to briefly summarize my story—the Rwandan tradition is—and I think that's still the case [makes an expression of doubt], maybe less today, but in my day this was common—I didn't grow up in my parents' house. I was raised in my grandparents' house. My grandmother was a widow and according to the custom, her children, especially the girls, sent one of their children to grandma's to help with her work. It's a way of supporting an elderly mother who is alone, with no one to help, by having someone there helping with her household chores. My mother was very attached to her mom, so she sent me to live there. But there are other, more complex, circumstances that motivated my mother to send me to my grandma's house. It's a very long story [smiles]. Let's just say that I grew up in my grandmother's house and I know better the neighbours on my maternal side of the family than on the paternal side where I didn't really live. I spent my whole childhood with my maternal grandmother until I started high school, which was a boarding school, and later left the country.

**J.-B.G.: As a boy, you must have had friends? You must have had friends? I imagine that you remember the friends you had when you lived at your grandmother's?**

E.H.: Yes, I had good friends with whom I went to school; friends with whom I played games. We went to school, on foot, of course, or running, or playing ball, rolling the hoop, we would walk to school and walk back. These memories... they are all really nice. We didn't have a care in the world.

**J.-B.G.: "Playing ball"—you mean, soccer?**

E.H.: Soccer, yes.

**J.-B.G.: Tell us about the region in Rwanda where you grew up. What region are you from? Just give us a sense of orientation a little bit in the country.**

E.H.: I grew up in Gikongoro, in the Commune of Karama, on a hill called Kiraro. That's where my maternal grandparents were, while I was born in the neighbouring commune Rukondo, on the Kabirizi hill, where I later lived, although not for very long, when I was a little older, around the age of 13–15.

**J.-B.G.: Is this region located in the north or in the south?**

E.H.: It's in the south.

**J.-B.G.: What are your memories of your parents?**

E.H.: I have very good memories of my parents. First of all, my mother was a brilliant, intelligent woman who regretted not having studied because she could have been very successful at it. I remember, when I started living with my parents when I was 14–15 years old, my mother would wake up every morning, she would take her Bible and would read a passage from the Bible to me. Often she read the same passages. Later, when I got older, I wondered if my mother knew these passages by heart [smiles]. It was before she lost her sight—because later she lost her sight. Of course, she was glad to show me that she could read. She was very proud of that, especially because she lived in a region where everyone was illiterate. My father was illiterate, my father never went to school, he couldn't read and when my mother read the Bible, my father would sit next to her quietly, listening. It was a moment of meditation, which started very early in the morning. Other memories—I'm the eldest child in the family. So I told you that I was raised at my grandmother's house. From what my mother has told me, I know she had a very tense relationship, a very conflictual relationship with her mother-in-law, my father's mother, and with her sisters-in-law, her brothers-in-law, and she was afraid that they would poison me, or put a curse on me. Because of the conflicts, she didn't trust them. So she decided, in agreement with my father, to send me to live with my maternal grandmother. After that, more children came—two brothers and two sisters. They all died very young, which reinforced my mother's belief that they were poisoned by her in-laws. My mother believed this, and my father believed it too. So living at my grandparents' was like being in a safe place. Keeping me safe, away from the enemies. It's terrible when the enemies are close family

members and not strangers. And, as we will see later when we talk about the genocide, sometimes the people closest to you can be the most dangerous. And so the fact that up to the age of 14–15 I was like an only child—because my siblings who followed me at my grandparents' all died—my father and mother described themselves as *incike*, parents who have lost all their children. So much so that since I had been living with my grandmother's from a very young age, my grandparents and my uncles and aunts on my father's side had completely forgotten me. They knew that my parents had children, that all the children had died, and the oldest child who had moved away when he was only a few months old—they had completely forgotten my existence. So to them I didn't exist because I didn't set foot in my parents' home until I was 13–14 years old and when I was...—because I always wanted to go there, I said I wanted to see where my parents lived, but my mother didn't want me to, my grandmother didn't want me to either. So when I went there for the first time, people were asking my mother, “But who is this child? He looks a lot like you.” My mother would say, “That's my little brother,” and people believed that. They thought that I actually was my mother's little brother. My mother still felt deep attachment. I understood later, especially as I was studying psychology, the extent of her emotional investment in me, as I was considered an only child without actually being one. To my mother, I was a precious child. Nothing could happen to me, so in a sense, I was overprotected. Often the...—people say, “I don't get along well with my parents.” That's not my case. I was coddled, excessively loved by my parents because I had this special status. As for my father, I would say that I had a very good relationship with my father. He respected me a lot, loved me very much, probably again for this reason—when you have an only child in a country where having many children is considered good fortune, that child becomes precious. It's not the same as when you have five, six children, ten children. I was surrounded by neighbours where the families had dozens of children, while in my case, it was only me. So this has special meaning for the child and for the parents. I remember that often when my father wanted to talk to me, to give me advice—like many young people I would go out to play and would come back very late and I didn't see the sunset, for example at 5:30-5:45 in the evening, I could still see the sun, the weather was good, I continued to play, but I was five, six kilometers away from the house and at 6 o'clock the sun would go down, 15 minutes later, it was total darkness. I would come home around 7 o'clock and my parents would be furious, they were afraid, and my father would say: “My friend, I want to tell you something.” When my father wanted to talk to me, he would always say “my friend.” And I would think to myself, “My god, I see the other dads being rude to their children, they scold them, they insult them, they hit them, while I have all this attention.” I was really ... it's not that I felt coddled, but I was puzzled by this. The other children were telling me how tough their parents were with them, the ... [inaudible] they hit them, while I was thinking, “Why aren't my parents hitting me? Why isn't my father tough with

me?” So I wondered about that. My dad was really ... I had a very special relationship with him. And for many other reasons, I respected him a lot. He passed on to me many important values.

**J.-B.G.: These are very good memories of your parents. What I retain in particular from what you’re saying is that your mother was a brilliant woman and [inaudible] and that your dad was someone who listened, who knew how to listen well and who called you “my friend,” who treated you as a friend rather than a son. I imagine that this relationship gave you something very important in your life—education, training—that it was something very positive?**

E.H.: Absolutely.

**J.-B.G.: Tell me about your school. How did it go, starting primary school?**

E.H.: It went really well. Primary school, high school ... I liked going to school, I was learning quite easily, it never required too much effort and I really liked school. The only bad memories I have from school are the holidays and vacations. I didn’t like holidays, I didn’t like vacations. I wanted to stay at school all the time. Maybe it was because during the holidays I had to do work around the house and in the field, and I didn’t like that. I liked studying. And my mother understood that very quickly. She realized that they shouldn’t expect much from me when it comes to skills for labour, like what the other children were doing—working in the fields, building the house, things like that. While my father pushed me to be a little bit more resourceful like the others, my mother said, “Leave my child alone.” So, often, when I went herding the cows, I would bring books with me. I would read—I loved reading when I was young. I started reading fairly early. Of course the other children, the other shepherds who saw me herding the cows and reading—sometimes the cows wandered off to other people’s properties, other people’s harvests because I was so absorbed by what I was reading. So the neighbours weren’t happy. But I was a weird kid. My father was a bit puzzled by this, but my mother’s attitude was like, “He’s an intellectual, let’s leave him alone.” But I liked school a lot, same thing for high school. I went to the Groupe Scolaire secondary school in Butare, which at the time was one of the best, if not the best, school in the country. I succeeded brilliantly. I was never the best student in the class. Far from it, I never had the ambition to be the best student. I just loved school. The teachers were teaching, I was learning, and time went on. I never did homework. I absorbed the material and I did the exams, I passed them without a problem. But my ambition has never been to be the top of my class. Not at all.

**J.-B.G.: A smart, brilliant boy like you at this [?], I imagine that you established relationships with other people. Can you describe a little bit your relationship with the faculty, the teachers? Because we are often curious about the relationship between a brilliant students and their teachers.**

E.H.: I did indeed have very good relationship with my teachers. Especially in high school. I don’t remember much about elementary school where classes were large and the kids were almost at the

same level. But in high school, I noticed that the Brothers liked me very much, they loved me very much, which made many of my classmates jealous—they thought I was the Brothers' favourite. But it's true that the Brothers liked me very much, I had a special relationship with them.

**J.-B.G.: And after high school?**

E.H.: After high school ... A little anecdote here: I'm a psychologist and this vocation manifested itself for me quite early and by chance. There was a Dominican-Canadian Brother who taught at the National University of Rwanda and he came to give a lecture in my class ... I think I was in my second or third year of high school. His lecture was on personality typologies, personality types. I was fascinated by his lecture and I said to myself, "One day I will study psychology." Another anecdote: a few years earlier, maybe five-six years earlier, I was in second or third grade and our teacher had a younger brother who was studying in Leuven and his younger brother came to visit us in the classroom. I don't remember what he told us, but I do remember him saying that he was studying in Leuven. I was probably 9 or 10 years old at the time. And I was looking at him—he was handsome, he was wearing a nice hat, he was well-dressed and in my fantasies of a young child I thought, "I too would like to go study in Leuven one day." And when I finished high school, I went to study in Leuven. It's really

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a combination of circumstances that an old dream finally came true. At the time you could get a scholarship to study abroad if you had good grades, but, obviously, many students had good grades. I was one of them. I had good grades, and when the time came to award scholarships, I didn't get one. I was sad because people who had worse academic record than mine were able to go; I was desperate. One of my cousins was married to the minister of education at the time. I went to see her, I begged, I said, "Could you ask your husband if I could have even a small chance to get a grant to go abroad?" She told her husband about it, and at the time the Rwandan government offered grants to some students. In any case, that year, Rwanda had sent a lot of students to Belgium, about 30 students, I think. They put me on the list. Many of the students came from the Gitarama region, that's where the former president was from. The majority of students came from that area—and that minister, by the way, was from the same area. But because I was lucky enough to know the minister's wife, I was one of the few students from another prefecture, Gikongoro, who left for Belgium. So it happened really by chance and a combination of circumstances, as it often happens in life.

**J.-B.G.: You were lucky, then. Did you leave right after high school or did you first start university and then left?**

E.H.: No, I left right after high school.

**J.-B.G.: You were very young when you left.**

E.H.: Yes.

**J.-B.G.: Tell us a little bit about your friends when you were in high school and what was happening at that time. So you were at school and during the holidays, as you were saying, you went back home. Did you have to work to be able to afford food? Or were you helping your parents? What was happening at that time?**

E.H.: In high school, the tuition fees, called *minerval*—I would say they were relatively expensive for poor families because many young people didn't have enough money to pay the *minerval* and they ended up not going to school, they dropped out because of that. So when I successfully completed elementary school, or rather, when I passed the exam to get into high school—I remember at the time one percent of students could go to high school. So I was among that one percent who could go to high school. My father ...—I can explain this later—my father wasn't at home. He had gone to Uganda as a seasonal worker. In fact, what I realized afterwards was that when my father and my mother had a fight—she was strong-headed, she was very intelligent, she was domineering, she came from a very rich family, she was used to comfort, she had a great deal of self-esteem, so she was really domineering. My father, on the other hand, came from a modest family and he was very peaceful, he didn't like drama, conflicts, so when my mother was fighting with him, he absolutely didn't want to argue. He would leave. He would say that he was going to work to make some money—because at the time a lot of people went to Uganda—but he wasn't really working, he would just travel around. He would make some money and then he would go travelling and when he returned home, he would tell me about his trips. He had travelled all of East Africa, up to Zanzibar in Tanzania. He travelled by train, he travelled by boat and every time he came back, he would say that the Rwandans think that they are intelligent, they think, they think that they know how things work, but that they know absolutely nothing. He looked at the Rwandans with disdain because he thought that they were self-absorbed and haven't travelled at all. He would say, "I've travelled, I've seen many places, many, I've seen many countries." He really had an open mind. So I think I got that from him. The curiosity, the travels, and also, the propensity for spending [smiles]. He's someone who can't save. When he had a little bit of money, he would leave, he would travel. So when I was accepted to high school, my father wasn't there, he was away on his trips again and my mother asked her cousins for help. She came from a bourgeois family. Her cousins were middle class, merchants. Her older brothers had large properties. It's a really prosperous family. I remember, at my grandmother's when I was young, there were so many cows that there were cows in the back yard, *mu gikari*, and *mu rugo*, in the front yard. And I remember when we were milking the cows, we filled jugs and jugs of milk and poor people often came by the house to ask for milk. It was the distribution of milk. We gave a portion of the land to people who were poor and hungry so they could have sweet

potatoes, cassava. So a middle class family like that. My mother had grown up in this milieu, which was bourgeois and authoritarian as well, because I would say that she was quite authoritarian herself. So, I succeeded in school, and she thought, “I will ask my brothers, my cousins, they will help me so that my child can continue studying.” But they all refused because I was in the same school as their own children and I was the only one who had succeeded. So the children of her brothers and her cousins who studied with me, none of them had succeeded to go to secondary school, while I, the foreign child—that’s my interpretation, which I made up later on—that I came from elsewhere. The child who came from elsewhere, had succeeded. So they thought, “Her husband is not there, they’re poor and if we don’t help them, this child won’t go to school.” So they sent my mother away empty-handed, and she only had three months—because we learned that I was going to high school maybe ... it was around July ... end of June, beginning of July, and I had to start in September—so she didn’t have much time to get the *minerval* together and buy me a school uniform and other things. So she said to me—well, obviously on her husband’s side, her husband’s family, there was no way, there was no one there she could ask for help. So she was all alone, with almost nothing. She didn’t expect that ... and she also didn’t know what it cost to send a child to high school. So she told me, “We’re going to the market.” We went to the market every Wednesday and Saturday, the local markets, and we would sell produce: sweet potatoes, cassava, beans. One week before school started I had finally raised the *minerval* but it was not enough, not even to buy a suitcase. I remember I took an old suitcase that my father had brought back from Uganda, the only valuable thing [smiles] that I could use. So I took my father's suitcase and I went to school, and when I got back for the Easter holidays ... —pardon me, for Christmas—my father was home. So maybe sometime in October my mother had sent someone—because there were travellers, seasonal workers who went regularly to Uganda—and I think she had sent a message for my father through someone, saying, “If you ever find out where my husband is, tell him to come back home because I need him.” So when I came back for the Christmas break, my father had come home and my mother said that she had scolded him. She had told him, “From now on, you will stay here. We have a child who has succeeded in his studies, it is absolutely necessary that you help me work to pay for his studies.” So my father stayed, obedient [laughs], and they worked hard. When I went back for

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Easter break or for the summer vacation, I always went with my parents to the markets, carrying goods on my head, to get some money to pay for my studies. I remember those years well. And I’m glad to be able to say, “Yes, I worked a little bit to pay for my studies”—because, sometimes, we had to walk for almost ten kilometers, with a basket on our heads, to get to one of the markets. It wasn’t

close, it was pretty far and it was important not to spend even one franc to buy a Coca-Cola or a Fanta. All the money we made, we brought back home.

**J.-B.G.: And after that, at school, I would like to know—and we will speak after about when you arrived in Belgium—I would like to know what was the relationship like between you, when you were in high school, at the Groupe Scolaire as you said, what was the relationship like between the students?**

E.H.: When we ..., I started high school—my first year in high school was in 1964. That year, there were—in 1963—there was unrest in the south of the country. Tutsis were massacred, I think, in retaliation for the *inyenzi* attack that came, I believe, from Burundi. The *inyenzi* was the nickname given to the Tutsi refugees who had left the country, so *inyenzi*, cockroaches, and they had attacked, but it was suppressed with force. Not only were they fended off—I don't know if it was with the help of Belgium or Congo—but there was also a retaliation against the Tutsis—their huts were burned, their cows were eaten and people were killed, massacred. So when I arrived at the Groupe Scolaire, the Brothers of Charity at that time felt great animosity towards people who came from Gikongoro—I was from Gikongoro—and there had been many massacres in Gikongoro, particularly in the Cyanika Parish, the parish I was from. So they regarded us as criminals, as murderers. So everyone ... they were saying, "Everyone from Gikongoro," they were saying, "you, the people from Gikongoro, you are murderers, you are rapists, you are assassins." So this situation was particularly difficult. It's true that there were people who came from important Hutu families and who were big activists, but I remember that because of the Brothers' reaction to the massacres—especially the killing of students from the school, students who were older than me by a year or two, and who didn't come back—and those [Hutu] students who were a bit [militant?] were pretending to be nice. Other than that, the relations between Hutu and Tutsi classmates were relatively good. As we were moving from one grade to the next, the number of people from the two ethnicities was balancing itself out. At the beginning, there were a lot more Hutu students, but in fact many Hutus had obtained a place in the school even though they weren't very bright, they weren't very smart, and little by little they dropped out, while the Tutsis were often much brighter students. So, as we were going forward in the upper years of high school, there was a balance in the numbers of Hutus and Tutsis.

**J.-B.G.: From what I understand, you had a good relationship with your classmates, there were no problems. But it also seems to me that there was something a little ...—I don't know if I would say strange—but the Brothers' attitude towards the people from Gikongoro—it was a bit hurtful, was it not? Treating a young boy like a criminal, that's not a small matter.**

E.H.: I must say that it ... I have memories from a few years prior to that, three years prior, from 1960, when I saw the burned huts of the Tutsis, when I saw the people that were about to be thrown in the river. These memories were still vivid in my mind and so for me the Brothers' reaction wasn't

exaggerated. I thought their reaction was perfectly legitimate because there were indeed in my school people who, in my opinion, were there not because they were smart, but simply because they were Hutu and because they were taking the place of the Tutsis who had been killed and who couldn't come back to school. For a teacher, it must be a terrible thing to see the third, half, or three quarters of your class disappear after the school break, due to the students' ethnic origin. So I felt it—the fear I had was, rather, that they would say, “But you too are Hutu, you are a criminal,” whereas I wasn't a criminal, and that, obviously, would have been hurtful. But they were speaking generally, without necessarily, to my knowledge, show animosity towards particular students. They were speaking more generally, and it was like they were telling us, “You, the people from Gikongoro,” and when they would say that, we felt as though they were saying, “you, the Hutu from Gikongoro, we are watching you, be careful.”

**J.-B.G.: This is something that can mark you for life.**

E.H.: Yes, absolutely.

**J.-B.G.: So you finished high school and, as you said, you left for Belgium. How did things go there?**

E.H.: It was much more problematic in Belgium. When I arrived in Belgium, the situation was such that there were some Tutsi refugees and a lot of Hutus. As I mentioned, when I got the grant to go to Belgium there were many Rwandan students with grants, but they were mostly Hutu. In fact, I don't remember a single Tutsi who had received a government grant. All the grant recipients were Hutu. There were some Tutsis there too, but I don't know how they had managed to come. Maybe with private scholarships or through very special relationships with people working in the government, but the Tutsis were really few and far between, the majority of students were Hutu. So there was a small minority of Tutsis, especially those who had arrived earlier, so they were older than me, and I remember they were divided into Hutu and Tutsi groups [makes a gesture of separation], especially in the local bistros: the Tutsis had their bistros and the Hutus had theirs. Two years later, the coup led by Habyarimana happened and the division became even more pronounced: the Hutus from the north, who had their bistro and who now felt in power and felt much more powerful, and the Tutsis from the south who were trying to become friends with these Hutus from the north. So the ethnic tensions became even stronger at that time, in 1973–1974.

**J.-B.G. It was as though Rwanda's problems were transferred to Belgium.**

E.H.: Absolutely. It's ... even now they say that things ..., it hasn't changed. That's how the situation was at that time and it seems that it's still the same today.

**J.-B.G.: If I understand correctly then, as you told me in the beginning, when you left the country you were around 20 years old, you are in Belgium, you are studying, and after graduation, did you start working or did you get married? Tell us about your family.**

E.H.: When I arrived in Belgium, these ethnic issues made me feel extremely uncomfortable. The people who were strongly asserting their Hutu identity were scaring me. It was mostly people from the north, or people from the south who were a bit too militant. Given what I was explaining earlier, coming from a family ... where I was like an only child—actually, when I was in high school my parents had other children that I didn't really get to know because I wasn't there. So I grew up as an only child, and I was protecting myself, I was being careful. I was paying attention to everything that had to do with these violent games. So, for me, this activism, these demonstrations, I kept a distance from that. When I lived in Belgium, I avoided Rwandans. I didn't have any Rwandan friends except one of my friends from high school whose family background was more or less similar to mine. So we just kept it to ourselves and avoided these [militant?] small groups that others adhered to. And very quickly, many other students went to the bistros, they were drinking, they would get drunk, they got into fights, etc. ..., or they would go dancing. I always stayed away from them. And I got married very early. I met a fellow student who was Congolese. It had been just two years since I had arrived, maybe a year and a half, and I married her. And it was, of course, a scandal among the Rwandans, to marry a Congolese, because for a Rwandan, the Rwandans are the elite, they are almost like the chosen people. At the time, Rwandans still felt contempt for people from other nations, especially our neighbours, the Burundians and the Congolese. It was as if I had betrayed my compatriots by marrying a foreigner. But curiously, for the Congolese—because my ex—because we are divorced now—she is of *ruba* origin and the *baruba* are the proudest Congolese [laughs] who consider themselves Africans above everyone else. So they too were saying, with contempt, “Their daughter is going to marry this little Rwandan.” They almost sabotaged the marriage and the situation was pretty tense. When the Rwandans learned about that they said, “The Congolese want to beat one of our own, we will fight back”—that was the situation, more or less. But after the wedding, I spent more time with the Congolese community. I've always liked the Congolese, I've always liked their spirit of openness, they don't take life too seriously—the small groups—in any case, at the time it was like that. They are people who rose above these things. They are also great intellectuals because it was ... at the time I was spending time with people who were great intellectuals and gradually, later on, I think, when I was in Rwanda I lost contact with the Rwandans. I was more in the Congolese community.

**J.-B.G. So you got married and then you had children ... so I guess the family of your ex-wife was wondering how come she married a Rwandan and on your side the Rwandans were saying, how come he married a Congolese. So how were things for you as a couple, how was your relationship?**

E.H.: I was a responsible person, of course, I was a good father, I had two children, I looked after my children well and my studies were going well. Many of my fellow students from the same faculty

took many years to graduate and I finished in ..., I was going from one year to the next in my program without a problem. So, as I wasn't seeing the Rwandans much, it's as if they completely forgot about me and as for the Congolese, they ended up understanding that, yes, I was just a small Rwandan, but a small Rwandan who was respectable, who respected their daughter, who took good care of my children and who worked hard. So the Congolese accepted me and I lived in their community like one of them, really. I felt much more at ease there because there were no ethnic issues. I must say

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that I was more in the *baruba* community, which was a very big community, with very proud people. They are really very proud, great workers too who loved working, who were brilliant and who had something to be proud of because they came from a great country, that was a fact.

**J.-B.G.: While you were in Belgium, did you maintain your relationship with your parents who remained in Rwanda?**

E.H.: Yes ... of course at the time we communicated by letters, I wrote to them, and like all Rwandans who were not very well-off, I would even say poor, I regularly sent money, from my grant, I sent money to my parents. I was able to go back to Rwanda only once during the holidays to see my parents, in 1975. I went by myself and it was then that I met my young sisters who were still tiny little babies. So I saw that we finally had a family and the neighbours now knew that this child that they had never known was my father's son. They looked down on my father, hated him, but then began to respect him because they saw that he had a child who had gone far away, abroad. So people were looking at me, I would even say with some sort of fear. It was really respect mixed with fear because they knew—all that they've made my parents go through, all the discrimination that my parents had to endure, the rejection, the contempt and now they saw that my parents had a child who might later have a good future. But I would say that it was too late to invest in this relationship with the neighbours. It was too late, on both my father's side and on my mother's side, because I hadn't forgotten that my mother's family had refused to help us, and I thought, "I don't have a relationship, I don't have a connection with that family, I've got nothing to do with them." So since I left in 1964, I didn't set foot again in the place where I grew up, at my mother's family, until very recently, actually, last year, after 45 years. So I cut them off—and on my father's side too—the people who had persecuted my parents so much that I never wanted to have a relationship with them. So I was like an only child with no attachment, neither on my mother's side, nor on my father's, which is something very rare in African cultures, and in Rwandan culture particularly, not to have attachment on either side of the family.

**J.-B.G.: And you were talking about your younger sisters—I hadn't understood that you had younger sisters—whom you saw when you returned to Rwanda?**

E.H.: Yes.

**J.-B.G. How many sisters do you have?**

E.H.: Now there are three. They're old women now [bursts into laughter]. But I still see them with this age difference between us, because when I was 20 years old my oldest sister was 5-6, so there is no relationship.

**J.-B.G.: We will return later to when you went back to Rwanda—as you said, last year you went back. But after your studies did you stay in Belgium and work there?**

E.H.: No, after my studies in Belgium the circumstances were such that I went back to Rwanda. One of my cousins was rector of the university. And another set of circumstances—the National University of Rwanda was, as you know, founded by Canadians, by Father George-Henri Levesque, and there were many Canadians who taught in the different faculties there at the time. But in the year when I returned, Canada had decided to gradually withdraw from the various faculties and had started by withdrawing from the faculty of economics and the social sciences. In this faculty there was a teaching position open in psychology and it was the first position that was *rwandanized*—this was part of the process of *rwandanization* of the workplace. So the Canadian psychologist who worked there had left and the position was vacant. And when I arrived my cousin, who was the rector of the university, told me, “There's an open position for a professor of psychology and you can fill it”—because there was no other psychologist at that time. I was one of the first psychologists in the country. So, again, by a set of circumstances I became professor, I would say, without having to go through too many steps. The position was open and I was the only person who could fill it.

**J.-B.G.: So your family moved to Rwanda and you worked at the university?**

E.H.: Yes.

**J.-B.G.: For how long?**

E.H.: For three years. After three years I got a grant to come to Canada.

**J.-B.G.: Oh, so that's when you came to Canada?**

E.H.: That's when I came to Canada.

**J.-B.G.: So tell us how did everything go when you arrived in Canada?**

E.H.: First, maybe I can tell you how I got the grant, because it wasn't easy. I was a professor of psychology and I was teaching courses in social psychology. Social psychology courses address many issues: crowd psychology, manipulation, how we form opinions, critical thinking and I was excessively critical and wanted my students to develop their critical thinking too. Many people thought that maybe I was going too far, because I was too critical, of course, especially when I was talking about manipulation and when I was talking about how people sometimes collaborate with a

ruling regime out of fear or in order to obtain privileged positions. So many people thought that talking about all of this was a dangerous thing to do, that I was on a very slippery slope. It was a military regime, the rule of Habyarimana, but I thought to myself, “I’m a professor, my mission is to educate young people and I’m a psychologist, I would feel bad if I taught lies, if I taught things I don’t believe in,” so I just continued and hoped for the best. I knew that some of my students were secret agents, and I would address them directly. I would tell them, “There are students among us who are secret service agents.” Some of their fellow students were scared by this, because they would come and tell me that some of their classmates would scare and threaten them, and I addressed this in class with my students. I would speak directly to those students and say, “If you are a secret service agent of this country—there isn’t a country in the world that doesn’t need secret service agents. The Americans have the CIA, the Russians have the KGB, and so on. So if you do your work, if there are enemies who want to attack the country and you really are a person who has to inform the secret service, well, that’s great, you are doing a service to your country. But if ever you make a case with false information against a fellow student, know that sooner or later you will pay for that. Especially since, as you know, revolutions often take place in Africa.” At that time, in the 1970s, there had been a military coup every year. So I would say to these young people, “Look, the ruling powers change constantly. If you accuse someone unjustly today, tomorrow the regime might change and the person could seek revenge. So be conscious of what you’re doing when you’re doing this.” The students were scared, they were shaking from fear. Some of the students who felt close to me came to see me and said, “There are many unhappy students and they are putting together a dossier on you.”

[Pause]

**J.-B.G.: So you were teaching at the National University of Rwanda and you were going to tell us how you obtained the grant.**

E.H. So, given my attitude—I was very critical and I didn’t want to play the same game as other professors who were really pandering to the regime. The President’s brother was teaching at the Faculty of Medicine and I still remember that many of my colleagues [indistinct] to get on his good side, and every time I saw him when we went out for a beer, I used the opportunity to criticize him and denounce his brother’s policies. I was behaving like an academic should, like what I was used to doing in Belgium and I think that in a way, I was telling him: “Listen, Séraphin ... when you consider ... you are an academic, when you consider everything that’s happening in this country and there are journalists and people who write about our country—you have to give good advice to your brother.” Some things are unacceptable. For example, when professors in a university like this one can go as far as be afraid **even of a driver[?]**, be afraid of their students, it’s shameful.” And I think that because

I was saying out loud what I was thinking, people were looking at me as a sort of a court jester. That guy wasn't stupid. And I think maybe he understood that it was better to know the truth directly instead of receiving false praise. I was never scared of Séraphin. Especially since I said to myself that I have nothing to lose, after all. I didn't have any material possessions, I didn't have properties, I had absolutely nothing. I only had my job, which I liked, and that was all. But at the same time, I knew that I couldn't really hope to obtain a grant. Still, in 1980, in the early 1980s, the Canadian delegation arrived to select the fellows. They were awarding grants. Most of us, professors, we had master's degrees, but not doctorates, and after teaching for two-three years, we could get a grant to come to Canada. I wasn't eligible because I was in the social sciences. Those who were eligible for a doctorate were in science, agricultural science, in the faculty of biology, but I was in the social sciences. It was no longer a priority for Canada and that's why my position was the first one to be *rwandanized*. But I had a very good relationship with my Canadian colleagues with whom I spent more of my free time than with my Rwandan colleagues. At Hotel Ibis or Hotel Faucon, where people usually went for drinks, I was there more often with my Canadian friends, my Canadian colleagues than with other Rwandans, because Rwandans always talked about politics and I couldn't control what I was saying, because I was too critical of the regime. So I was thinking that it's better to avoid socializing with Rwandans. I was much more at ease expressing my views in the company of Canadians. So the Canadian delegation was there to select fellows and then the dean of my faculty, who was a good friend of mine, asked the members of the delegation

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if he could still put my name on the list of people to consider. They said, "Look, he's not in science—we'll place him on the list, but his application is not a priority." So it was like telling me not to get my hopes up, I won't get the grant. So it was around the time of the holidays, in 1980, and we were supposed to have left, the fellows were supposed to have left in September to come to Canada. When the holidays came, I said to my wife and children, "We are going to Kinshasa. We'll go on vacation to visit the grandparents because if I ever have a chance to go to Canada, we won't be able to come back because it's too far. I wouldn't have enough money to pay for the plane ticket for [inaudible, scrambled recording] ..., little children." All the other fellows, grant candidates, said to me: "Are you mad? If ever you have a slight chance to get the grant you have to stay here so that they can process your application. You have to go to the ministry, you have to go to your administrative district, you have to be there to move your file forward." But I was thinking that the best way to take care of my file is actually to stay away, so that they don't think of me, that they don't know that my name is on the list. So I did it on purpose. I thought that if I had a slight chance to go to Canada, the intelligence

service agents shouldn't be aware that my name was on the list. So I left for Kinshasa with my wife and children [inaudible, scrambled recording] and by mid-August, I went to the Canadian embassy in Kinshasa to pay a courtesy call to the ambassador. One of my former colleagues was already working there, and when the ambassador learned that a professor from the NUR [the National University of Rwanda] was there, he asked me to go into his office and said: "Listen, [inaudible, scrambled recording] ... and it's too late to send via diplomatic bag. Could you bring on my behalf to the minister of education the envelope that I'm going to give you?" I said: "Yes, no problem." So that's how I ended up carrying the diplomatic bag [laughs]. I don't think these kinds of things would be done now, but in the 1980s a lot of things were done this way. I asked the ambassador: "Can you tell me the names of the grant recipients?" Yes, he read the list of people and all my colleagues' names were on it and by chance my name was also on the list. So I was really happy, I brought the envelope, I asked for a meeting with the minister of education [inaudible, scrambled recording] ..., "I bring diplomatic mail for the minister and the ambassador asked me to hand it to him in person, not to his secretary, not to anyone else, but to the minister himself. If he's not there, I'll come back." So finally they said I could see the minister, he was there [inaudible, scrambled recording] and I said, "Mr. Minister I was just in Kinshasa, I have the list of fellows going to Canada and the ambassador showed me that my name is also on the list. So to avoid too many complicated steps, I normally have to come here and ask your permission [inaudible, scrambled recording]." He couldn't refuse. He gave me the papers and right away I went to the administrative district, they immediately filled out the papers for me, then I went to immigration and handed them the documents. Of course, the people who worked there were my former students, [inaudible, scrambled recording]. I said, "I know you." He said, "Yes, I was your student." "Oh, you work here now?" "Yes, you failed me." [laughs]. So I thought, "Forget it, I have no chance." Finally, two weeks later I had the passport, I never understood [laughs] what happened. I jumped on the plane and I came here.

**J.-B.G.: In any case, your trip to Kinshasa was opportune.**

E.H.: Absolutely. By the way, two of my colleagues who had stayed in Rwanda to process their files, unfortunately were not able to come. They were too conspicuous by their presence. I think that's the reason why.

**J.-B.G.: You were very lucky. So you arrived, you came here, how did the process of adaptation go?**

E.H.: Oh, it went very well. I think what made it easy was my experience in Belgium and the fact that I had traveled a lot before. I arrived at the airport [inaudible, scrambled recording], I looked at the list of housing for rent, and there were weekly rentals. I phoned one apartment [inaudible, scrambled recording] right away and then [after renting the apartment] I went next door to Provigo, I bought groceries and that night we had dinner at home. I didn't spend a single night at a hotel and the

following week I took the time to look for a less expensive apartment and a week later I was at the university, at UQAM, where I started my PhD. I adapted very quickly, without any problems.

**J.-B.G.: In which university?**

E.H.: At the Université du Québec à Montréal.

**J.-B.G.: I imagine that here you've met other Rwandans or ... the Rwandan community**

**[inaudible, scrambled recording]. How did that go?**

E.H.: I don't remember ... there weren't many Rwandans at the time. Those who came were my former students who were grant recipients. Many of my former students received grants and came here. And because they were my former students, the age difference and my status as their teacher made me feel very comfortable socializing with the young people I had taught. So I was with my family and my children. Once again, just like in Belgium, I avoided socializing with my compatriots [inaudible, scrambled recording]. Rather, I became friends with my university colleagues and expanded my social network by having more Québécois friends rather than Rwandans.

**J.-B.G.: So how long have you been here now?**

E.H.: It's been 31 years.

**J.-B.G.: You've been a Québécois for 31 years.**

E.H.: Yes [smiles].

**J.-B.G.: So at some point you finished your studies, did you start working? How did it happen, getting a job after graduation?**

E.H.: It was a very difficult time, but at the same time I've always been very lucky in my life. Maybe I was born under a lucky star. One of my old friends, a colleague from the National University of Rwanda, we came to Canada at the same time, and he was program director at the Université de Montréal. We had taught together in Rwanda, and at one point he was recruiting lecturers, he knew the courses I had taught and that I had the skills for that, so he hired me as a lecturer at the Université de Montréal barely three months after my arrival. So I started teaching as a lecturer at the Université de Montréal. Also, I was invited to CIDA's pre-departure sessions in Ottawa. When Canadian aid workers were about to leave for Africa, they received training in preparation for their travel, to get to know the country, to get to know the customs, etc. So CIDA would call in resource persons [to brief the aid workers]. There weren't too many of us at the time, resource people from Africa, and in those years there were still a lot of aid workers going to Rwanda. So they phoned the university and learned that there was a Rwandan working there. They were looking for a resource person for the aid workers going to Rwanda and I got a small contract to go and talk to people. There was no special preparation. I was to talk to them about the political system, the social, religious, educational systems, and so on. But the person who ran the program at CIDA at that time saw that I had good knowledge, that I had a lot of experience and he offered me to be not the resource person briefing the aid workers,

but to give pre-departure training workshops. There already was a small team of resource persons who were giving workshops for people going abroad. So because of my background in psychology and in anthropology, I was hired as a resource person at that time at CIDA. So I started working at CIDA. I had at least one contract a month because there were regular pre-departure sessions for aid workers who were leaving; so once a month I had at least one pre-departure session, and it was very well paid. Later, when my grant got cut for political reasons, the one day that I was working at CIDA was enough to pay for my rent and food—modestly, but I never had the slightest problem paying my rent or buying food. Because of a single day of work—I did my job well, I was well-respected, I had very good evaluations, so I kept this job for years.

**J.-B.G.: You said that your grant got cut for political reasons?**

E.H.: Because I was very critical, at one point I think it got to be a little too much. One day, the embassy summoned us to Ottawa because they intended to form units. A unit ... like the units in Rwanda, political units, here in Canada as well. So we were called to Ottawa, all the students—an important meeting to which all the students were obliged to go because if you didn't go—and since it's basically the Rwandan government that pays your grant—actually, it's not the Rwandan government that pays your grant, but that negotiated your grant—it was very frowned upon. So I went. I didn't really know what it was going to be and the ambassador told us that we were going to form units, political units here, a unit of the [inaudible, scrambled recording] and that's why they had summoned us, so [inaudible, scrambled recording], and so on. And I said, “No, it's out of the question. It's an aberration.” And I firmly opposed that during the meeting. I gave my reasons, I said, “Look, we already have too many problems, there already is too much tension between us Rwandans. **We don't talk about it here[?]**. But at the same time, we are lucky to be abroad and for once to be able to say what we want. And some of us are in political science, others are in psychology, sociology, in disciplines where we are being asked to speak up our mind, to say what we think and now you're making up these units that will [inaudible, scrambled recording].” In any case, I said, “I personally am completely against this and I think it's stupefying, I think that it shouldn't be imposed on students studying abroad. Those who want to, when they go back to Rwanda, are free to join the National Republican Movement for Democracy and Development (NRMDD), to wear the movement's uniforms and so on, to wear the little medals that they were already distributing, but here I think it's not doing any service to the students.” And what happened then was people were afraid to approach me during the dinner we were later served—I don't remember in which hotel—nobody dared come close to me. People avoided me. It was as though they were saying, “That guy is dangerous, he's crazy. If they see us next to him, they'll think we share the same views and the same ideas as him.” As it happens, when the minister of education visited six months later, I learned that my grant had

been cut. Why? The ambassador explained that it was because of my pride. When you say ... when you say of a Rwandan that he is proud, it really means that he is

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insolent, ungrateful, someone who is contemptuous—that sort of thing. So the minister told me that there were bad reports against me, that I was someone who had an evil spirit, that I was a bad citizen, that I was ungrateful to the country that had given me the chance to come here and that, as a consequence, they were ending my grant. And I said to the minister: "Look, yes, you awarded me the grant, I'm the one who goes to the library, I work, I study and what I said at the embassy, I was expressing my thoughts." The minister—whom I knew well because he was a former friend from my university years in Belgium, we knew each other there too—I said, "Look,"—his name was Charles—I said, "Charles, I'm sorry, but do your homework and I'll do mine. You can end my grant"—it didn't matter much to me. In fact, it suited me that they would cut the grant. Why did it suit me? Because at that point, I was divorced and my wife had already been granted refugee status here with the children. She had obtained this status while I was in Rwanda doing fieldwork. So when I came back to Canada, I learned that I was separated, that my children already had a special status, and as a former CIDA fellow, I had to go back home after graduation. But as my scholarship had been cut, I considered that I no longer had ties to Rwanda. The country had reneged on me, I had been blacklisted and therefore I had nothing to do with the country anymore. So I stayed here, almost in a limbo. Luckily, I was teaching at the Université de Montréal and afterwards at UQAM because I was a good teacher and I had mastered the subject and I had good evaluations from CIDA. So CIDA ends my grant, but at the same time I get hired at another department at CIDA [laughs]. Luckily, these departments do not communicate well with each other. So finally I was able to continue working like this until I submitted my thesis, and I got a job almost immediately after I submitted it.

**J.-B.G.: So, several things happened almost at the same time: the separation, the end of the grant, and I guess it was then that you decided: "I'm staying here, I'm going to make a living here in Canada"?**

E.H.: Yes, I didn't have a choice because the situation—as it often happens when people divorce—the relationship with my ex was very tense, the communication was really bad. She obtained a refugee status at the time when I was outside of the country and, in fact, I don't know what she had said about me at the immigration office. When I left for Rwanda my file at the immigration office was small like this [shows "small" with his hands] and when I came back my file was like this [shows "big"]. Every time I went to the immigration office and they saw my name, they would send me back. They were waiting for me to submit my thesis so that they could kick me out of Canada. When I

understood that, I said, “Well, I won’t submit the thesis.” So I dragged it on. The problem was that ... to renew my student status it was necessary to prove every year that I had enough money to live for a year, to be able to extend the contract. And because of this little job I had with CIDA, I had managed to save money, to put a certain amount of money in my account, and regularly made deposits at the bank, and I showed to immigration the photocopy proving that I have money in the bank. So they had no choice but to renew my visa. So I started the immigration process. At the time we had to—and I think that even now it's still the same—you had to apply for an immigrant status from outside of Canada. So I went to New York. The file was not moving forward. Every time I inquired, I was told there was some kind of a problem in Montreal. And when I came back to Montreal, nobody at the immigration office wanted to look at me. I was really discouraged and I felt really depressed. I didn’t understand what was happening. Then, by chance, one of my former Canadian colleagues from the National University of Rwanda, to whom I told my troubles, told me that one of his friends worked in the immigration office. He gave me a little note and I went to see this person at the Quebec immigration office. The person received me well and gave me a little note and said: “Go to the Quebec consulate in New York, to the Quebec delegation in New York, you will see the person in charge with this note, we will try to unblock your file.” I went there, and then everything got resolved just like that, in less than a year I finally got the famous documents [smiles] of a landed immigrant. And when I got them—I remember, it was December 17th when I went to get the papers in New York—I got the status. When I arrived there I wrote the conclusion of my thesis and I submitted it. At last I was safe.

**J.-B.G.: It's been a long process, a lot of emotions, a lot has happened.**

E.H.: Yes, absolutely.

**J.-B.G.: Can you tell us, from that moment on, did you start working on a regular basis?**

E.H.: Yes, at that time they wanted to hire me at CIDA since I had a long ... a lot of experience, so they actually wanted to hire me [inaudible, scrambled recording], but the job ... even though I loved the work, but I could just see myself becoming a civil servant and doing things that didn’t correspond to what I had ... I thought, “Well, I didn’t do a PhD just to become a civil servant, to manage development projects when that's not my expertise.” And I hesitated. And they insisted, they said, “You have to sign the contract so we can hire you,” and I said: “Give me three more weeks.” They did and I used that time to think. Three weeks passed: “Will you sign or not?” I said, “Give me three more weeks,” and they gave me three more weeks. So finally they understood that I wasn’t interested. Why did I do that? Because I had seen a job posting for a teaching position in my field at the Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières. So I said, “I’ll try my luck.” I was really naïve. I thought that seeing a newspaper ad for a job and applying for it, that I would ... that I would be hired. I hung on to that thought and while my application was reviewed in Trois-Rivières, the people at CIDA were

becoming impatient and didn't want to wait any longer. They said, "Look, it's clear that you don't want this position so we'll give it to someone else." I said, "Okay, give it to someone else." So I clung to that slight chance that maybe I will get the job in Trois-Rivières. So finally, I was called for an interview in Trois-Rivières. In the 1980s, the universities were not hiring. They weren't recruiting much and I learned that 15 candidates had applied for that position. What happened was that I got the job [surprised look]. The salary was half of what I would have received at CIDA. I knew that because I had seen the work contract for the position. But I was so happy to finally be able to say that I'm working in my field and also because earning a lot of money as a civil servant, but doing a job I didn't like—no, I wouldn't have been happy with that at all. I knew a lot of government workers, many friends at CIDA with whom I went for a beer and with whom we chatted, and many of them had a very complicated personal life. They had serious personal problems and I didn't want that to happen to me too. I really wanted to have a career that I like. I've always liked teaching and research, so I was very happy. To me, to be welcomed in Trois-Rivières was like a blessing.

**J.-B.G.: And that's where you've been since?**

E.H.: Yes.

**J.-B.G. Talk about ... I don't want to say the setbacks, but the whole process you've gone through to get that famous landed immigrant status. I guess that here in Montreal or in Quebec many people often find themselves in this situation and you, as a psychologist, I imagine that you've met a few people—I don't know if that's the case—but I assume that you are the right ..., you are in a position to help people who are in a similar situation?**

E.H.: I am available to help, that's for sure. In fact, on many occasions, when people were going through a tough time, I was available to help, to encourage them to get through those difficult times, help them get through this process and, especially, to tell them, "Don't be discouraged." One thing I always tell immigrants is: "We decide to immigrate for a reason. We leave behind much more difficult conditions of living and when we arrive here, it's not always easy either. But even if it's difficult, I always say, think about your children. Think about the next generation." The first generation is the one that has to make sacrifices in the name of the generations to come. All the better if in some cases, as in my case, exceptionally, you can be lucky and get a job in your field of work, but I tell people, "Don't expect that you will necessarily work in your field. That can be difficult. And even if it doesn't happen, if you don't get a job in your field of work, don't despair, think about your children, because if you help them, if you are strong, if you don't get discouraged, your children will have a much better chance to find what is good for them." That's really my message. I know, there are people who are doctors, engineers and here they have to work in a convenience store or as taxi drivers, but the important thing is to say to yourself, "I'm doing this for my children. At least I live in a free country"—because you can live in your country and ... A lot of research was done in the early

1990s with teenagers from different countries, and I remember one of the interviews we did was with a gentleman who was ... who used to be university president. At an university in the Middle East. He was university president and what was his job here? He worked in a convenience store. But he had remained the same gentleman, the same individual. The fact that he was working in a convenience store wasn't the problem. He said, "I live in a free world and I work for my children. I earn my living honorably." He recounted the life he'd had in his country, as university president—it was horrible, to always have to bow down to the police, to the secret service and to know that at any moment all kinds of problems can befall you. And now he was living in a free world and I think it's the same thing ... My hope, of course, is that the host society will make an effort to really integrate immigrants because, on the one hand, many immigrants are accepted here, thousands every year, but on the other hand, we don't really make a big effort to integrate them, whereas immigrants are among the most educated people in Quebec. That's a shame, I think, it truly is unfortunate, because many resources are left unused in this way.

**J.-B.G.: And ever since you came to Quebec—it's been a long time since you left your country even if you went back to visit last year. Since you left, many things have happened in Rwanda, your country of origin—there was a war and then a genocide, and then [inaudible]. I would think that even from a distance, you couldn't have remained unmoved by these events. I don't know if you wish to share what you felt at that time.**

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E.H.: Yes, it's ... certainly the tragedy and the drama of the genocide that our country experienced has shaken not only all Rwandans, any good Rwandan citizen, but also all citizens of the world, because, as they say, a genocide is a crime against humanity, it strikes at the very psychological integrity of every individual because it's an utterly barbaric act. In fact, I can look back and say that what happened ..., the genocide in particular—because you mentioned the war—yes, the war of 1990. When the war broke out in 1990, my father had passed away three weeks earlier. My father died in the beginning of September and when I learned about his death, the semester was just starting. I said, "I'll go visit my mother in December, because, in any case, by the time it takes me to leave, he will already be buried. And the semester is starting, it's of no use, I'll go in December." But I couldn't go in December because the war started in October.

There was an attack by the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) and I couldn't go to Rwanda then. And the war went on and at one point I felt scared. My young children who hadn't seen their grand-parents, were growing up and I thought, "What would happen if the war persists?" That's when I thought, "I'll bring over my mother so she can see her grand-children, since you never know what might

happen.” In fact, I already had that idea, to bring both my parents to Canada, when I got the position in Trois-Rivières. Both of them—thinking that it would be a nice gift I can give them for having paid for my studies. I will show them Canada. And since I also have a training as an anthropologist, I wanted at the same time to do a little research. I wanted to see what impressions they would have of this country. I wanted to see them walking around, travelling, visiting cities and so on and just listening to them comment on what they were seeing, observing two people who had left their native village, who have never lived in a city and who are propelled in a city like Montreal. That was the project I had in mind. It didn’t become a reality, because my father passed away. But my mother came right away because I thought, “No, it’s out of the question that she might die without having seen her grand-children and without her grand-children having seen her.” So my mother came, she saw her grand-children and I showed her around. We even went to the United States to visit a friend who lives there, in the state of New York and then my mother went back to Rwanda. Two years later, in 1992, she passed and when I phoned in Rwanda, my friends told me, “Listen, stay where you are, we don’t want to have another dead body here”—because at the time, people were being killed in a haphazard fashion. They were killing people left and right, political opponents, and my friends, who more or less knew my history with the regime—even though I never officially proclaimed myself a political opponent, but I never carried the Habyarimana banner, either—nevertheless, people were aware of my political positions. So they said, “Listen, stay there, we will do the funeral rituals for your mother, and you’ll come see your younger sisters after the war—if the war ever ends.” And after that, unfortunately, what happened, happened: the tragedy that struck our country. And the fact that I couldn’t go back to see my mother, to me that was... she had just died ... her child ... my mother loved me very much, she spoiled me. I didn’t go back to pay my last respects to my father. And I thought to myself, “My parents passed, I live abroad, it’s strange.” I found this situation really unfair. At the same time, of course, I was aware of the risk of visiting Rwanda at that time. I thought, “It will be too dangerous.” It was very difficult for me. It was very difficult that after everything my parents have done for me I wasn’t there to do the proper rituals sending them off on their final journey. When the genocide happened—I can tell you, I’ve always thought that—considering Habyarimana’s regime—I always thought that there would be ... that there would be retaliation, a continuous and systematic killing. I wasn’t surprised. I never thought that a genocide would happen. In fact, I think, many other people didn’t either—starting with the Tutsis themselves—I don’t think anyone ever imagined such a thing, or the people would have left the country because I remember that even when the killings had started in Kigali, I phoned several friends who were in Butare and I told them, “Listen, come here, it’s time to leave the country. It’s not going well. In any case, from the news we get here, it looks like things are bad.” My friends were saying, “Oh no, it’s not that bad, here in Butare all is calm, all is under control, we have a good prefect who manages things well, don’t

worry,” and so on. And we were really surprised when it happened. But at the same time, when I look back, it wasn’t all that surprising. I look back to 1960, I was 9-10 years old then. My teacher was Tutsi and when they were burning the houses on the hills in front of Bunyambiriri, I remember I ran to my teacher and said, “I’m scared. Look, everywhere they are burning the houses.” And then they started burning the houses close to the school. I said, “I’m scared, what’s going to happen to us?” And he said, “Don’t be scared, this shouldn’t concern you, nothing will happen to you, be calm.” A true *umubyeyi*, a good parent. He knew that his time would soon come, yet he was still kind enough to calm a frightened child. Several weeks later they came, destroyed his house, massacred many of his relatives. He narrowly escaped, but they killed his sister and they killed his little sister who was in the same class as me. The memories I have from that time ... I remember it was during the rainy season. It must have been April-May. The images I remember when I was 9-10 years old ... it must have been in April when many of the killings happened. I was at my grand-mother’s. There weren’t many Tutsis where I lived, in my grand-mother’s village. Only Hutus. After that, of course, I found out ... well, those are things that I could only know afterwards—that there weren’t any Tutsis there, only Hutus. So there were no burning houses near where I lived, because there were only Hutus, but I saw troops in the distance, people with spears, with arrows. And I saw fire on the surrounding hills. And my grandmother told me, “Don’t move, stay here, because there is a war going on.” But a 10-year old child—try holding back a 10-year old who is also curious. And I was a very curious child. I was scared, but at the same time I was curious. And I think, at one point, she asked me to get some wood or go buy some salt, I don’t remember, but I went running to the small trading centre, which was maybe a 10-minute walk away from my house, up the hill, and that’s when I saw the troops and lines and lines of Tutsis who were going to be thrown in the Rukarara river. I hid behind a house, behind a shop and I have this image of one of my aunts coming out of her house and running towards a woman who was holding a little girl by the hand. It was a friend of my aunt’s, she hugged her, the two women hugged, and my aunt told her, “*Murabeho rero*” [“Goodbye”]. She had the courage—she was the only one who had the courage to hug a friend of hers who was facing death and she realized that. So I witnessed this moment and I saw elderly people, women, children, all very calm, who weren’t saying anything, who were walking as if in a religious procession, and the people who were going to be thrown in the river. I went back to the house and that’s one image ... it was in 1960 ... an image that I’ve remembered since then. All of those people perished. There were some stories of children who were able to escape—some by swimming, others simply by chance, clinging to a reed in the middle of the river—but most of those people are dead. It’s a traumatizing scene for a 10 year-old child to see. In any case, for me it was a very traumatizing scene. I don’t remember when exactly, but I think it was after the holidays, sometime after the Christmas holidays in 1961—other massacres

happened in 1961 and some of my classmates had to flee, as well as one of my teachers. They fled to the Cyanika Parish. That's where they

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took refuge. They stayed at the church for weeks. They were even going to the toilet inside, because they would have been massacred if they went outside. These people were under the protection of a white missionary priest called Father De Jamblinne who saved many people in Cyanika in 1960. I remember one of my classmates—we must have been in 5th grade—I remember, after three weeks, I think, or a month, he came out of that church and came back to our class, and I felt ashamed. To see my Tutsi classmates, who for three weeks, a month or more [?], I don't remember exactly ... in that church ... I didn't know what to say. We said absolutely nothing to each other. We continued to study in the same class, later we went to the Groupe Scolaire high school, and it was the same thing there. We would learn that the family of such and such young person had been killed. He had escaped, maybe he had a brother or a sister, but we weren't told absolutely anything. In high school, we never—not the Brothers, at the time, nor any of the teachers—it was like a taboo, we didn't talk about what had happened in the country. It is completely strange.

**J.-B.G.: And there was a lot to talk about!**

E.H.: There was. But the subject was taboo. My classmates and I were playing, we were playing together, and one of my classmates had a big scar on his arm and I learned that he had been thrown into a fire. His arm was completely burned. I was never able to ask the question. None of my Hutu classmates asked him the question. If he had told the story it must have been to some of his fellow Tutsis. So we were studying together in the same classroom, maybe half Hutu, half Tutsi, but it was a taboo topic. We never talked about what happened in 1960, or in 1961, or in 1963. It was a taboo topic at school. I had many friends at school. I found out later that they were Tutsi because they were killed in 1994. I could guess that some of them were Tutsi, but we were friends, their ethnicity wasn't of concern to me, all the more because I didn't come from one of those big and powerful Hutu families. I came from a very low-key, very poor Hutu family, *nta maboko*, really powerless. So, I'd say that I was much more likely to relate to those who were as powerless as I was, rather than to the powerful ones. Clearly, I was more drawn to—I felt I had more in common with several of my Tutsi classmates, rather than the Hutus. In any case, the Hutus who were quite militant and who were proclaiming their ethnicity were scaring me because I could see that they were people one should really be wary of. So for me 1960 is ... when the genocide happened in 1994, I thought about those years, actually. I never forgot those years of my youth. They're imprinted on my mind. And in 1994 when, like many Rwandans, I was watching the events unfold on TV and reading about it in the

newspapers—my wife was seven months pregnant in April 1994. I could see her belly, big like that, and I was reading the horror stories happening in Rwanda—pregnant women being disemboweled—and I would look at my wife, I was reading these stories and I was thinking, “It’s not possible.” I’ve always believed in God, but now my faith had abandoned me. I was thinking, “How can God allow such things to happen?” At the time of the genocide, I challenged many religious people. I say “challenged” because I would ask them, “How can you explain the presence of God if things like this are happening? How can God sacrifice people in this way?” And after the genocide, I was even asking those survivors who were believers, who went to church, who prayed. I often asked them this question; I said, “What is the source of your faith? Do you sometimes feel abandoned by your faith? I’m asking you why does God allow things like this to happen? Whole families have been destroyed, separated. What happened?” These are just questions ... without answers. I think that faith ... God truly is a

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mystery but these are questions that haunt me, still to this day. My son’s birth was approaching, and following the Rwandan tradition, I thought, “What name should I give to this child?” I found him a name, I called him Uzaribara: he will be the one to tell the story. His mother is Québécoise, but he has a double Rwandan-Québécois identity. Now he’s 17 years old, as are all children born during the genocide, and he is proud of his name. Last year, we went to Rwanda together. People would ask what his name is and ... Habimana, and he would add Uzaribara. People were saying, “What does Uzaribara mean?” He will be the one to tell the story. Of course, the genocide, he didn’t really ... on the one hand, he didn’t experience it because he was in his mother’s belly. But on the other, the genocide ... he knows about it because he hears his father talk about it almost every day. He even said to me, “You live in the genocide.” Because when I talk about my research, when I talk about my publications, when I talk about ... since 1994, I’ve only done research on the genocide. I abandoned the other lines of research that I was interested in and dedicated my work to studying the genocide.

**J.-B.G.: Emmanuel, by revisiting the history of your country from 1960, 1994 and now, what are the emotions that stir within you?**

E.H.: The emotions that stir within ... it's not sadness. It's stronger than sadness. I’ve gone through many emotions. Of course, there is the feeling of discouragement with the human race, there is the feeling of abandonment, and there are also all these baffling questions. For many years I felt a heavy burden. A feeling of shame. Shame to be a Hutu. I have to say, in the beginning, when I first arrived here in 1980, people were asking me, “Where are you from?” And I would say, “I come from Rwanda,” and people often said: “Rwanda?” [expression of ignorance] They were thinking of

Angola. Rwanda was an unknown country. Nobody spoke of Rwanda. So it was often necessary to explain: “Well, it's a small country, it's in Central Africa” and people would say, “Oh, Rwanda, Burundi. That's where the Hutus and the Tutsis are. Are you a Hutu or a Tutsi?” That's the question that people asked me often. Obviously, for me, back then, that was hogwash [makes a gesture showing that he ignored the question]. It's a lot more complex than that. I never answered this question, if I'm Hutu or Tutsi, because I never felt Hutu. I never identified as Hutu and the fact that when I lived abroad, in Belgium, I was more a part of the Congolese community, I socialized with the Congolese, married a Congolese, had Congolese friends, I identified more as an African. I was close with intellectuals who were activists, with whom I discussed issues of postcolonialism, issues of decolonization—that was my identity. The identity of being black, of living in Belgium where black people were discriminated against and feeling that black people ... whether you come from Angola, from Senegal, from wherever, you are first and foremost black. But when the genocide happened and people would ask me “are you Hutu or are you Tutsi,” I couldn't hide anymore. I would say that I'm Hutu and that's when I started to take on this identity. Yes, I saw myself as Hutu. To be Hutu after the genocide is to be seen as the villain, to be seen as the murderer. I have accepted this identity and it's very difficult to live with this identity, especially when you are a professor and every year you meet 150, 200, 300 students and at the beginning of each year I ask students to introduce themselves and when it's my turn to introduce myself the students always ask me, “Where are you from? What is your accent? What is your country?” I can't simply say I'm Rwandan and this Hutu-Tutsi identity business is hogwash. I tell them I'm Rwandan and I'm Hutu. And every time when people ask me that question and when I say that I'm Hutu, some feel a little uncomfortable because in their minds a Hutu is a murderer. He's a villain, while they see an intellectual standing in front of them. Someone who doesn't seem to be mean, who doesn't look like a bad guy. And they say, “It's strange, we thought that the Hutus were the bad guys.” And then I take the time to explain, “Not all Hutus are, the story is much more complex. In fact, there are those we call moderate Hutus who also died during the genocide.” And I take the time to explain what really happened during the conflict. But to go back to your question—a feeling of sadness, a feeling of desolation and also a feeling of shame. Shame when facing my Tutsi compatriots. I live in Trois-Rivières. To this day, I'm the only Rwandan there—I think there may be one or two others that I don't know, that I haven't seen, but it seems that there are a few, but I live alone there. But when I come here in Montreal, obviously there is a large Rwandan community here and I have friends, I know people who are Tutsi and I felt bad meeting the Tutsis when I came here in Montreal. What would I say to them? I thought, if I tell them “I sympathize with your tragedy, with your suffering,” will they believe me? Because we are Rwandans, and we know that Rwandans can say nice things, but things they might not believe in. And I thought to myself, “I can't express my feelings of sympathy to someone who is suffering because he will think that I'm a

hypocrite.” I felt this unease, but at the same time, I thought, “This feeling of uneasiness is nothing compared to the tragedy this person has been through.” I felt really torn from the inside and even more so when I met Hutus and the Hutus thought that since I’m Hutu, they can criticize the current Tutsi regime in front of me. That really makes me mad. I’ve experienced all these mixed emotions of sadness, anger, shame for almost 10 years now.

**J.-B.G.: You’ve felt different emotions because of the events in Rwanda, but are there things that have stayed with you even to this day?**

E.H.: Yes. The images we saw on TV of bodies being thrown in the river, or of decomposing bodies, or people being cut by machetes. These are things that I’ve seen and that have devastated me. I couldn’t understand how one can commit acts like these, how one can hate and carry out such atrocities against another human being. Even animals are killed with certain dignity to avoid their suffering. It’s unspeakable. I cannot describe the feelings I’ve had since the genocide happened. I’ve lived for a long time with these wrenching emotions: a kind of shame, a kind of guilt. Why guilt? It even happens that I would remember a Tutsi friend or a classmate whom I’ve criticized, with whom I’ve had a fight, with whom I’ve argued, and I would feel guilty. I thought, “Oh, if he’s alive now, he might recall that I am Hutu and he would see me as a potential genocide perpetrator.” I would go so far as to imagine stuff like that, while in life, of course, we argue, we have conflicts, disputes with all kinds of people. Whenever a commemoration of the genocide was organized here in Montreal, I would watch the news, read the newspapers, watch the procession of Tutsis going to the river to throw flowers, and I wanted to come. But I thought, “I can’t show up among the Tutsis. I’m Hutu—what are they going to say?” They will say “*naje kubashinyagurira*,” they will say “*naje kubabyina ku mubyimba*.” These are Rwandan expressions that are very difficult to translate. It’s as though I was ... “*kubyina ku mubyimba*” is dancing over the pain of a neighbour: he has just lost a family member and while the others are mourning the deceased, you come and dance around the body. You are so happy, you drink, you beam with pleasure. That’s what *kubyina ku mubyimba* means. And I thought, “If I join my Tutsi compatriots who are commemorating the death of loved ones, I’m Hutu and they’d think I had come to dance around the corpse, *kubyina ku mubyimba*, they’d think that *naje kubashinyagurira*, and I thought, “I can’t do this to them. Out of respect I will live through my suffering and distress on my own, watching the commemorations on TV, but I can’t do this.” But, at the same time, year after year, I was thinking, “But I meet these people occasionally anyways because I know some of them and I ask them for news, if there are any survivors ... they’d say I’m a hypocrite: ‘He doesn’t even come to help us, he doesn’t even come to our aid, not even to the commemorations’.” I was torn between these emotions. And for the 10th anniversary commemoration, I talked to a friend of mine about it, he’s one of the organizers. One of my friends, Callixte Kabayiza, I told him that I wanted to come to the commemoration. But I told him that I

absolutely didn't want to make people feel derided in their suffering by a Hutu in their midst. I said, "I really don't want people to think that. I would like to come and commemorate with you because I also lost Tutsi friends in the genocide and I lost Hutu friends in the genocide, but that's not my main motivation. It's because this has shaken me to my core. It's a crime against humanity. One doesn't need to be Rwandan to feel heartbroken by what happened. I would like to be there with you in solidarity." Callixte told me: "If you only knew that, on the contrary, we would be glad if Hutus come as well, if someone like you could come to the commemoration." And so I was there for the 10th anniversary commemoration. That year, Callixte and I also organized a conference on the topic of survivors' mental health. There were presentations, I participated at the round table, and from then on I started coming to every commemoration, to the vigils with the Tutsi community and I also became involved in research on the genocide, and in initiatives like this interview project.

**J.-B.G.: Did you feel welcome in the community of genocide survivors?**

E.H.: I was really touched, I was surprised by their welcome. I thought that people will feel insulted and that people will feel angry, but at the same time I thought to myself—once I made the decision to come, I said to myself: "Yes, there may be some Tutsis who would feel angry to see a Hutu there and this at least would allow them to express their anger towards a Hutu who's there, to let them get those feelings out because that would make them feel good. I know that I haven't—not only have I not committed a crime, but I didn't support—I wasn't an accomplice. But if my presence allows someone to let go of their anger and that I am, at least, a scapegoat, that would be a good thing. Even if they insult me, even if they pour beer on me, even if they point a finger at me as a genocide perpetrator, what is my suffering, my humiliation compared to what they have gone through? That's what I always think. I always think, "Wherever I am, if a Tutsi begins insulting Hutus, even if at some point I feel angry, if I feel annoyed, whatever feeling I have—shame, fear, tension—it's nothing compared to what people have experienced. It's nothing compared to the wound that they live with. Since then, not only did I go to the commemoration, but a year later, a few Rwandans came here from Rwanda for the conference and I met them and they said: "Emmanuel, it would be good if you come to Rwanda." Because after I left Rwanda in 1980, I only went back there to do fieldwork, because CIDA required us to go back to Rwanda and do work on the ground, and I was afraid that I would be held there, that I wasn't going to come back. And when, luckily, I came back here, I said, "That's it. I have nothing to do with Rwanda, it's over." I didn't return there during the whole time of Habyarimana's rule. Then the genocide happened and I didn't go back to Rwanda. So, in 1985, I returned to Rwanda for the first time after 25 years. After 23 years, let's say, because the last time I was there was in 1983–1984, so for 22–23 years I had not set foot in Rwanda.

**J.-B.G.: You told me that you went back again last year.**

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E.H.: The first time I went back to Rwanda was in 1985. I attended a conference there. I didn't go to the country's interior. But I did go to Butare, where I grew up and where I taught. Of course, I visited the Kigali Memorial. I think when we go back to Rwanda, when we visit this memorial, it's a truly moving place. Especially when you go to the section dedicated to children. I had shivers when I was there, I flinched, I cried, I became almost inconsolable. Once again I was thinking, "It's not possible." No one can understand how things like that can happen—neighbours who kill their neighbours, things like that. Remembering the images from Gikongoro when I was young in 1960—so from the village where I grew up at my grandmother's—I wanted to go back to Gikongoro, especially when I learned that the biggest memorial, the most harrowing in Rwanda is in Gikongoro, in Murambi. So in my imagination, in my memories, I thought that there certainly are people in this Murambi memorial that I knew and they were killed by people I also knew, people from Gikongoro. And not only people I knew, but maybe even members of my family, particularly on my mother's side. So to go back to Gikongoro, where I went to elementary school, I didn't want to set foot there. I really didn't want to go back to that place. Last year, I went to Rwanda for my sabbatical year and my friend Callixte was there too and I accompanied him to his home in Kibeho. Then ... he was going to show me his home for the first time and I remember asking him ...: "Callixte where was your house? Where was your parents' house?" He said, "I think it was here" ... because he had [shows "a house" with his hands], the sorghum has grown, it was all fields now. And then at one point he said: "Oh no, it wasn't here. No, actually, it's there [points to a place]. It's over there." And I said, "Callixte, how do you feel coming here, to the place where your parents were killed?"—because we went to the Kibeho memorial where his parents had been killed. And I said, "Where do you get the courage to come here?" He said, "It's important to come, because I grew up here and the people who killed us, who killed our people must see that we are survivors and that we are still alive. That's why I'm back here." Actually, when we were leaving his house, we met a man who was suspected of having killed many people on his hill. That's when I told Callixte that I don't have the courage to go back to the place where I grew up, and which I left in 1964, because of my memories as a little boy, in 1964, when I saw the people who were going to be thrown in the Rukarara River, and the memory of that aunt who was hugging her friend—the image had stayed in my mind like a photograph. And Callixte said to me, "Maybe you should go back there. You should go back because you grew up there." [sighs] I summoned up my courage and I went there with my daughter. My daughter was born in Belgium and this was her first visit to Rwanda after 30 years. And so she saw the neighbourhood where we lived in Butare and she had never been there before, to this place where I grew up. She had visited my parents' house, where my parents lived, but not this place where I went to primary school.

So I went there with my family. It was like a pilgrimage. I thought to myself, “Who am I going to meet in this place and, especially, what have they done?” Because my fear was: I will meet people who may have killed others and they will hug me. I will shake hands with people who have also held machetes, who have severed the head of a child or the head of a woman, and I will hug those people. To me, going to this place ... I forbade myself to go there, I said “I can’t go.” So, I summoned up my courage and I arrived on this hill and I saw an old man working in his field. I recognized him: one of my cousins. I greeted him. Of course, I didn’t say who I was, no one could know who I was—it had been 45 years since the last time I had set foot there. But he had heard that I had come, and he guessed it: “Is that you, Emmanuel?” I said, “Yes, it’s Emmanuel.” His name is Antoine. I said, “Yes, Antoine, it’s me, Emmanuel.” He came closer, we hugged, we greeted each other, I introduced him to my daughter. So I saw the place where I had grown up, and, of course, I was curious to know what he had done during the genocide. How he had behaved. This was for sure the burning question on my mind. I absolutely had to ask him. So I asked him the question. I said, “Can you tell me what happened during the genocide?” He is now 80 years old. He said, “Listen, me ... one of my children was sick, the people ran away, the neighbours left but I stayed here, quietly. My child was sick, I am a widower, my wife had died, and I didn’t want to go abroad. I didn’t kill anyone, I didn’t steal anybody’s cows. I am comfortable in my property here, that you see, I had nothing to fear—why go abroad? Why run away when I wasn’t guilty? I stayed here.” It was really like a weight lifted off my shoulders to see that [wipes tears from his eyes] ... I get emotional when I speak about this man who for me truly is a righteous man. I was deeply moved seeing him and it was like a confirmation that there are still righteous people in this world. He’s a righteous man; there are also survivors among the righteous. Those were the thoughts that were going through my mind. I was so happy to hear that, to see that this man, who is 80 years old, he stayed there, he didn’t move, he didn’t kill, he protected his family. So he told me that the RPF soldiers came, at some point everyone had fled but him. So they wanted to know why he hadn’t run away. He told them, “I didn’t run because I haven’t killed anyone.” “Do you have money?” He said, “Yes, I have money.” He had a lot of money. He said, “I have cows, I have a property, I sell things at the market.” Finally, they let him go, they left. And I was happy to see this righteous man there.

**J.-B.G. It was a pilgrimage, as you said.**

E.H.: Yes, and then I went to my elementary school and ran into one of my old classmates who now teaches there. With his class of children and with my daughter—we took a lot of pictures of the children. I couldn’t talk to him, though. Of course, I didn’t want to come off as an investigator, asking people what such and such person had done, and so on. I was happy to see the little children who were there. The future, the young children, innocent smiles. And my daughter was so happy to see where her father went to school, and we took a lot of pictures. In fact, I made them into a photo

album and then a calendar, which I sent to my friend the teacher so he could put it up in the classroom. A calendar with the pictures of his class of children, thinking that it is good for the kids to see that someone who has studied well, who has sat on the same school benches as them, someone from this little village, has been able to go far in his life. It could be inspiring for some to see that I had come back with my daughter. I'm sure that this will inspire one or two of them to dream that one day they can go even farther, they can accomplish things, leave that place or stay there and help develop the country further, saying, "There is one man who is from here and he went far in his life, and he didn't forget about us, and he came back to see us." I was really happy to be there. Another person who made my return a happy one was a cousin of mine. We grew up together as little children and she was very protective of me. She is an extremely kind woman and I remember, in 1960 precisely, when the killings were happening, when they were killing the Tutsis' cows and eating the Tutsis' cows, she told me: "If anyone offers you meat, don't take it. It's devil's meat. These people are criminals. You have to pray and guard your spirit against corruption." This woman overprotected me. She was extraordinarily kind. So, she told me that during the genocide, she had hidden a little child whose parents had just been killed. The child was playing with my cousin's children and at night they went to pick up the child and they hid the child in her home. Then at some point ... because the neighbours were sending other children to investigate if there weren't any more children hidden there—you've got to be pretty depraved to send a child, because you know that an adult will hide the truth—so the neighbours were sending young children saying, "The kids like to play

02: 22: 15

together. Go check if there're any children hidden there." But my cousin is smart and she had told her own children: "We shouldn't say that we are hiding a child here because they're sending their children *baje gutata*"—that's the expression she used: "they come here to spy"—"we mustn't tell them that we've hidden a child here." So they kept this child safe until the end of the genocide. My cousin remained true to herself. Her name is Marguerite. She is a truly wonderful woman.

**J.-B.G.: So, your visit to Rwanda was very beneficial for you, after all?**

E.H.: Yes, it was healing. For example, when I visited my cousin with my daughter, I said: "Tell me, what did you do during the genocide? Did you flee to Congo like the others?" And she said, "Why flee? We haven't done anything. We haven't killed anyone." She had told my younger sisters ...—I had bought another property for my parents, I didn't want my parents to stay in the Gikongoro region, so I bought them property near Nyanza. During the genocide, my younger sisters ... my mother had passed, my father had passed, they said, "We don't know anyone here, they are killing people, we must go back to where we're from because we know people there." So they went back, and when

they arrived, my cousin Marguerite told them: “Go home, stay in your house, you haven’t killed anyone—why flee? Why should you go to Congo?” Because people were saying, “We have to flee, the RPF is coming, they will kill everyone.” “But they won’t kill you—you haven’t killed anyone, stay quietly where you are.” So she did well to give good advice to my younger sisters who stayed in their house, the old family house, and she also stayed with her husband until the end of the genocide. I must say that my imagination had been fired up because with the stories I had in my mind from the 1960s of people who were burning houses, of people eating Tutsis’ cows, of people killing, and so on, it was like ... I was getting a little paranoid. I was thinking, “I’m going to meet people who had killed others and these people will hug me, will shake my hand. And I don’t want to shake hands with someone who had held a machete, who had killed. I don’t want to hear that. I don’t want to be among people like that.” So, to see these people who had not spilled anyone’s blood, who had not committed crimes, made me feel good that I had come back.

**J.-B.G.: What stands out for me from what you said is: when you arrived in Rwanda, the most important thing is the place of commemoration, this site where people gather and the people you met who reminded you of the important things that you have experienced when you lived there. I would like to know what was your overall impression of Rwanda when you arrived in the country, how were people living after the genocide—what was your impression of Rwanda when you arrived there?**

E.H.: It is strange because I’ve visited many African countries in the last few years. I spent my sabbatical year in 2004–2005 in South Africa, I’ve been to Senegal, to Mali, to other countries, to Burkina Faso. And then I arrive in Rwanda and I see a well-organized country. I see a clean country. I see a country where people are working. I see a tidy country, I’d say. Before going there, I imagined that the country would be completely broken. I imagined roads full of holes. I imagined dilapidated houses. I imagined a country that had been destroyed like some of its neighbouring countries that I’ve visited. And when I went to Rwanda, I saw real efforts to physically rebuild the country. That’s amazing. I say “physically rebuild” because, certainly, when you start talking to people, when they ask questions, they talk about the dead. Especially in Kigali—since I taught at the university there, I couldn’t go five meters down the street without seeing someone I knew. The first year when I was in Kigali, I could walk down the street without meeting anyone I knew. When I visited Butare, where I had taught, where I had studied, and where, theoretically, I should know many people, I walked around a lot. I had taken a taxi from Kigali to Butare and when approaching Butare, in Rwabuye, so up the hill, really towards the town of Butare, I told the driver, “You go on, I’ll continue on foot from here.” I wanted to reconnect with this little town where I grew up, where I had worked and I thought to myself, “Let’s see how many people I know here.” I ... from Rwabuye to the National University of Rwanda, I didn’t meet anyone I knew. I went to the Groupe Scolaire where I had studied—I didn’t

see anyone. I couldn't believe it. Not knowing anyone in the country where you grew up. It's quite strange.

**J.-B.G.: It must have been a shock for you.**

E.H.: It was a shock. But at the same time I could see the physical reconstruction of the country. Geographically, Rwanda is really a beautiful country. That's when I remembered ... I began this interview by saying that Canadians or Europeans would say that Rwanda was a beautiful country and I didn't see its beauty. Now, after having seen other countries in Africa, after having travelled, it's true that it's a beautiful country.

**J.-B.G.: Going back to the idea of physical reconstruction—I don't know if there was also a psychological reconstruction?**

E.H.: Some efforts are made towards a psychological reconstruction too. I think that something ... as a psychologist ... and I talk about it during my conference presentations—when I meet colleagues, psychiatrists, I tell them that there are things we don't know on the level of psychological reconstruction of individuals. Why? Because the genocide of the Tutsis is a trauma for every Rwandan Hutu, Tutsi, Twa, the expatriates who were there, anyone who was in Rwanda at the time, it's a trauma in the sense that we define trauma. It's a trauma that can lead to what is called "post-traumatic stress disorder": witnessing extraordinary atrocities. So seeing someone being killed, stepping over dead bodies in the streets, roadblocks, and so on—whatever your ethnicity, this is a traumatic situation. One million people died in three months. And we're not talking about the wounded, we're not talking about the people who were raped, we're not talking about the other millions of people who were deeply traumatized. So travelling around this country and seeing people who don't ... yes, there are people who have had serious psychological traumas, dissociative states, psychotic states, depression, or syndromes of post-traumatic stress, but we would expect this to be the case for almost all Rwandans. I would have expected that at least five million Rwandans fell into depression and almost seven million fell into major depression and experienced post-traumatic stress. And what do we see? People are still standing. Yes, some might say: "It was very hard for so and so, he doesn't seem to be able to pull through, it's very difficult," but the majority of people are standing on their two feet. No doubt, on the inside, many of them feel distressed, but they are standing on their two feet. They are standing without being helped by psychologists. Last year I was again in Rwanda—there are now many psychiatrists there. Last year there were three. Now, after the genocide, there are about a 100-150 psychologists in the whole country. The three psychiatrists are in Kigali; two of them work full-time, the third works part-time. And most of the psychologists are in Kigali and work for NGOs. It must be said that most of the people who have experienced these deeply traumatic events have not received counselling help in the sense that we understand that here.

In any case, they haven't received help from specialists. And they have still managed to pull through—how can we explain that? That, to me, as a Rwandan psychologist, remains an unknown.

**J.-B.G.: This phenomenon should generate a lot more research rather than treatment.**

E.H.: Absolutely. I'm shocked when I see people ... when they talk about the genocide and what is of interest to them is depression and post-traumatic stress. And I say to them: "What should be of interest to us is, rather, the question of how people who have been through such horrendous events can continue to function." Including the Rwandan Tutsi survivors who are here in Montreal. I've talked to many of them about this. I said, "Have you gone to see a psychiatrist? Have you done a psychotherapy treatment?" Many have not; they haven't seen psychiatrists, they haven't seen psychologists and they are able to fulfill their family and professional and social responsibilities. It's surprising that someone who has experienced such terrible things ... and we're talking about not only witnessing them, we're talking about people who have lost their entire families, relatives and who have been traumatized, who have lived in appalling conditions for months and months. As a psychologist, I—really, no psychiatrist nor psychologist could write about it because when the Holocaust happened [inaudible] and they started working on the Holocaust [inaudible] years after that. There was the Cambodian genocide, which has been completely suppressed; the trials of the former Cambodians are just beginning. There hasn't been much research on this. In fact, it's the Rwandan genocide, really, that has generated scholarly interest, but we still have a lot to learn from the Rwandans. To understand what happened and where they get this strength from. That people have experienced post-traumatic stress, in the sense that we understand it—for some, that's indeed the case. But it's surprising to see how many people have pulled through. And ... well, there are many terms we use: resilience, post-traumatic awareness. I think that at one point we have to put the theories aside, work closely with the Rwandans and ask them to talk to us, so that they can enrich our theories. Because the danger is starting work, starting research with a questionnaire that we have developed, a questionnaire on post-traumatic stress, developed on the basis of the experiences of people who have been in car accidents, American soldiers who have fought in the Vietnam war or who have come back from Iraq and who have seen psychiatrists, psychologists and who have flashbacks, and so on, and we have created a questionnaire based on that and we want to apply the same questionnaire to Rwandans. Or a bus driver who's been in an accident or a taxi driver who's been in an accident and who have seen blood and other things, and who have experienced trauma, etc....—but we can't compare that to the genocide. The Rwandans have lived through something different. That's what I'm interested in, that's what I'm trying to understand and I would humbly say that I still can't understand it.

**J.-B.G.: That's what you are trying to understand.**

E.H.: That's what I seek to understand.

**J.-B.G. Emmanuel, we are moving towards the end of the interview. I don't know if I can ask you this, but, generally speaking, how do you feel now in relation to all these challenges, to your journey so far—if you take a bird's eye view of your life, how do you feel now?**

02:36:15

E.H.: I feel ... I still feel sadness, loneliness when I think that this abominable crime, this genocide committed by hundreds of thousands of Rwandans—that there isn't a movement on the part of the Hutus to ask forgiveness. That there aren't any Hutus able to do a symbolic gesture of reparation like that. I don't think it's enough just to ask forgiveness with speeches, with petitions—there must also be reparations. But to me the reparation will be symbolic. The survivors who have lost their parents, the men who have lost their wives, the women who have lost their husbands, the people who have lost their brothers and sisters—nothing can restore those losses. The reparation will always be symbolic. But there must be reparation. We shouldn't only ask forgiveness. Everyone can make amends according to their means. So the question you're asking me—it really is a feeling of loneliness because when I visit Rwanda, I see there signs of physical rebuilding. The people are doing everything they can to live together, Hutus and Tutsis. But people continue to act as if nothing has happened. As if ..., once again, this denial that I saw when I was in high school when we knew that there were Tutsi students, that their houses had been burned, their parents had been killed or injured, or some had their parents leave as refugees abroad and they remained in Rwanda to be brought up by an uncle or an aunt, but we knew that their parents were abroad—we said absolutely nothing about that and my impression is that the same thing is happening in Rwanda now. The price we are asking from Rwandans, from the Rwandan Tutsis, those who were in Rwanda, the price we are asking them to pay—the reconciliation, the reconstruction—it's enormous. In my opinion, it rests on the shoulders of Tutsi survivors. It's like asking them to close their eyes, to forget. And to remember during moments of commemoration only. I, as Hutu—yes, I now accept this identity that I didn't accept until I was 50 years old. I didn't care being Hutu, but from the age of 50 I was forced to recognize that, yes, my ancestors were Hutu. I have to live with this Hutu identity. And to me, this Hutu identity is really shameful. I'm not personally ashamed, but I feel shame for the Hutus and that makes me feel so ... not pain, but ... I don't know how to name it. I think that even if it's humiliating ... for sure this humiliation ... than asking forgiveness. But what is that humiliation compared to the people who have lost everything? What difference does it make recognizing that my people have committed a crime and that I'm asking forgiveness on their behalf? In this act of humility, I'm asking forgiveness on behalf of those who don't want to ask forgiveness. To show humility, to kneel, to beg for forgiveness from a survivor. This gesture of showing humility is considered a form of humiliation by many Hutus

who don't want to ask forgiveness. But they must always consider that this humiliation is nothing compared to someone who has lost everything, who is like a tree in a bushfire, a tree that stands alone, everything has burned around it and it starts to grow a few branches—some of the survivors remind me of such a burnt tree—a bushfire that completely destroys everything and this one tree whose branches are burned and, little by little, starts growing a small leaf and then a branch, and it starts coming to life again, although the burns are still visible. And next to it, the Hutus are like the nearby forest—thriving, green, with its branches, its trees, rich with game, and they are there. The future of this country ... fortunately, there are young people, but it's a pity that the Hutu adults who were in Rwanda and who are still there, continue to live by this kind of thinking: "We'll get older and then we'll be buried and forgotten, and as the years pass, all of what happened will be buried." So they start new businesses and continue to act as if nothing has happened. That's what really makes me sad.

**J.-B.G.: I was particularly touched by the name you gave to your son, Uzaribara. I felt that memory is of importance to you and everything you just said: a tree that has burned but there's still something in it that begins to grow, and I can feel in your testimony the importance of memory.**

E.H.: Yes, it hurts ... we often ask this question and we see during the vigils ... and there are survivors who don't want to come to the commemorative vigils because it hurts to remember ... it's not only at that moment that one thinks of the loved ones lost, but many feel distraught during these emotional moments. Some people even say, "Is it worth it to continue doing these events? Shouldn't we stop that, it seriously affects people?" Some people don't even want to attend, including some survivors—but I think it's important. It's important to attend the commemorations. History should not be buried. If we are to say "this must not happen again," we can only prevent it from happening if we have the courage to face these horrific scenes and to talk about them to our children and to strangers. For me, a Hutu, to be able to tell that to other Hutus, to be able to tell it to strangers and to tell it to the Tutsis I meet, and who might say, "Should we listen to this Hutu? Is he sincere or is it simply *indyarya*, a hypocrisy?" I wouldn't be hurt if people think that. I would understand completely and definitely wouldn't be angry at a Tutsi who says, "We don't trust this Hutu who pretends to distance himself from those of his fellow Hutus who are rejecting us and who don't want to do the honorable thing and apologize." It's quite understandable that one can be wary of all Hutus because, at present, the Hutu people—when I was in Rwanda and everywhere I go—I ask the question "Is there currently a movement organized by Hutus with the intent to ask forgiveness? Would there be Hutus who..." I was giving a presentation last year, last December, I was invited to a forum organized by the first lady. After my presentation someone asked me a question—at some point after I finished my presentation—and the question was how do I feel being a Hutu. How do I see the future of the

country? And I said that when I go back to Rwanda my hope is to find several Hutus—two, three, five individuals—with whom we can sit down together and see how we can start the work of repair, symbolically of course. As I was saying, the work of repair here can only be symbolic because we can't bring back the dead. We can't forget the horrors that took place, but at the same time what happened has happened—the tragedy that the Tutsis have experienced, the appalling act of genocide. But life goes on. We must rebuild the country. But to rebuild the country there must be people who are able to say: “We have done horrible things.” Even if one didn't personally participate, to be able to say that there is a guiding ideology. And that ideology was collectively fueled by the people of our ethnic group with the intention to eliminate another ethnic group. We have to be able to denounce that because currently there are still deniers. I can tell you, I hesitated going to Rwanda after the genocide and I went because I was invited, mainly by my Tutsi friends. I didn't want to go because I didn't want to go places and be seen by a Hutu who comes up to me and hugs me and starts telling me about how miserable things are and how tragic things are for the Hutus in Rwanda today, and, unfortunately, that's how I felt on two or three occasions during my trip to Rwanda. The people I knew ... especially two women I knew in the 1980s before I left—knowing that I am Hutu, they felt comfortable talking to me about their misery, because currently they say that the power belongs to the Tutsi and that the Hutus are left behind. And who else can a Hutu confidently say this if not to another Hutu? Witnessing the plight of these people, who at the same time say absolutely nothing about the genocide, who say absolutely nothing about their neighbours, but who only talk about how distressed they feel now, *akababaro ka bahutu*, at present. It's terrible and when I see it happening I ... I find it disheartening. That's why I say: I wish there were a few Hutus with the good will to get together and say: “What can we do to repair the harm done?” What are the best actions to do that? Create a small foundation for example, help the orphans, the many children in Rwanda who are heads of households. Help the widows. Engage the young people. Have the courage to speak to the deniers, who are numerous both in and outside of the country, to say to them: “We have committed a crime and we must be able to forget.” Not to judge the current government. Have you seen a current African regime that doesn't commit excesses? All regimes, and not only those in Africa ...—we talk about corruption in Rwanda, but is there a country without corruption? In this beautiful country [Quebec, Canada], we talk about corruption in the construction sector. There's corruption everywhere. But it's as if the opponents of the current regime in Rwanda focus on what is wrong in the country as a pretext to avoid the subject of the genocide. And I say: “These are two different things.” We can't pass judgement on Kagame's regime and mix it up with the genocide. We can't talk about how opposition in Rwanda is muzzled and use that as a way to avoid talking about the genocide. These are two completely different things.

**J.-B.G.: I think that what you're saying shows the importance of knowing how to put things in perspective, which, as you say, is something that is often lacking and people don't always put things in perspective. But I would like to conclude this interview with something you said. You said that despite everything life goes on. So I think we can end on this hopeful note. I don't know if you have any final words you'd like to say before we end?**

E.H.: [Sighs, expression of deep reflection] I would especially like to say a big thank you to the Montreal Tutsi community. I think the Tutsi survivors in Montreal are very brave. They've worked very hard, they've gotten involved in this project and they welcomed me. They welcomed me as a Hutu who wishes to express his sincere sympathy with what they have gone through and who ... they have understood that, yes, it's possible that Hutus also participate in the rebuilding of our country. It is possible and, if ever Hutus can see this testimony, I'd like to say to them: "Let us have the courage to rebuild our country. Our country's wounds are many. And many people have been terribly scarred. Let us have the decency and the humility to ask forgiveness and help these people at the time of their grieving. This time of grieving is painful for the majority of survivors." Yes, there are some Hutus who have experienced misfortunes during the genocide. Some Hutu families have been decimated. Some Hutus died during the genocide. But they didn't die because there was a genocide [directed?] against the Hutus. They died because of this genocide, they died because of the war, they died no doubt because of the retaliation of the RPF army, they died because of the consequences of this genocide. I would like those Hutus who show good will to be able to put things in perspective and to be able to...—and I would like to conclude on this point—if the Rwandan community of Montreal, both Hutus and Tutsis, if they could at some point commemorate their dead together, because the Hutus have also lost members of their families. That they be able to commemorate with the Tutsis saying, "Yes, we have also lost loved ones during this genocide, but let us build our country together. Let us be true brothers and not only in the rhetoric of demagogic speeches, let us be brothers because we are destined to live together in this small country and abroad, to share this Rwandan identity because we said no to *Hutuland*, to *Tutsiland*, and we are all Rwandans. We must continue to live together and that's important. Let us truly forgive each other so that we can work together."

**J.-B.G.: Thank you, Emmanuel, thank you for these last words—that we work together because we are all Rwandans and we are destined to live together. I thank you for your generosity in speaking to us and wishing you to persevere in your authenticity as an individual, to continue to be true to yourself. Thank you very much.**

E.H.: Thank you.