



INTERVIEW WITH EMMANUELLE KAYIGANWA

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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Editorial Note:

This interview concerns the story of Kayiganwa Emmanuelle who was born in Rwanda and has also lived in Burundi, Congo Kinshasa and now lives in Canada where she is proud and happy to share her story with the Rwandan community. She has had many experiences related to the history of Rwanda, notably fleeing her country when she was very young because her safety was threatened. She also saw how her family was decimated after the 1994 genocide as she was among the first people who returned to see what had happened in Rwanda, namely in her home of Nyamata. After that, she made the decision to come and live in Canada with her family. Nevertheless, she remains attached to what is happening in her country of origin and invites everyone to seriously reflect on what happened in Rwanda in 1994 so that the country can always move forward and no longer experience the dark moments it went through.

00:05

Sa.G: Emmanuelle, thank you very much for agreeing to share your life story with us and for participating in the Montreal Life Stories project. So, to begin, without further ado, I wanted to start by talking about your... your childhood and the memories you have of your grandparents? Did you know them?

E.K: Ah! ... I only know them... my maternal grandfather, a very, very good memory and... because we used to go there on holiday and... he was a very... [thinking], very, very nice man and who obviously loved us very much... [thinking], he made us... love nature because we used to go and collect plants with him, he would recognize all the plants and we would go with him so that he could explain to us what is toxic, what is edible, what is medicinal, and then we would spend the evenings together and he would play the traditional zither and it was really enchanting and so I have very, very good memories of him [laughs]!

Sa.G: Great! Your grand... your grandmothers, did you know them?

E.K: No.

Sa.G: Okay.

E.K: There were great-aunts but... I never knew the two grandmothers and that's that [laughs]!

Sa.G: Oh! All right! ... could you tell me about yourself first, describe your family, your name... your husband, your religion. Tell me about yourself, who are you?

E.K: ...so if I understand correctly, it's... starting from my childhood...?

Sa.G: Yes.

E.K: You want me to talk about... so... I'm the second daughter of my parents... my parents, that is to say that... my mother got married very, very, very young and then was married for eighteen years without having children, so that's how much I was expected [smiles]! ... we

had an older brother who died when he was very young, I was like... the second, second child of the family, born... born premature and... because my mother had just lost her first child after eighteen years of marriage and I was premature and all that.., so I was always pampered, I was always taken as... how can I put it, as something precious [smiles], and... I always felt that... I was loved, I was protected... so there it is, I had a very happy childhood and... well a childhood... ok, we'll come back to it, happy, that is to say that my parents loved me a lot! ... they were always keeping an eye on me for fear that anything would happen to me. I have a little sister and... thank God, she survived [laughs] the genocide, so... I had a lot of siblings, I found out later that they weren't real siblings, because... my parents were still relatively well-off, so all the children of... the extended family, as my mother and father didn't have many children, they were raised with us. But for us, there wasn't really any difference, that... around '65, '66, when there were problems... all the children left, so we didn't understand where my sister went, where my brother went [laughter]... that's when we realized that no, they weren't really blood brothers and sisters, but extended family.

Sa.G: So you just have one younger sister?

E.K: Yes.

Sa.G: Okay. What was your relationship with her growing up?

E.K: Growing up... she was always my sister, you don't ask questions, so it's normal, she's my little sister, I'm the big sister, so...

Sa.G: Are you many years apart?

E.K: No... it's a four-year gap.

Sa.G: All right! And... what was... what was your relationship with, with your parents?

What influence did they have on your life?

00:05:00

E.K: ... a very big influence of course, because... it's the Rwandan family, I was saying at that moment, it's really classic, that is to say it's mimicry. The parents were very careful to say, "We have to say, we have to set an example for the child". It's not what they say, it's what they do, how they behave which... we have to imitate. Up until now, that's it... the memories that mark me, there are a lot of things I criticized about my mother... her generosity, her... her way of taking things very... [thinking], how can I put it? ... very calmly, and then... I criticized her: "Is this how you think this should be done?" and then I realize that I do the exact same thing [laughs]. So, they were still a great influence, they were landmarks, really, solid pillars. My father didn't talk a lot but... everything was said in his behaviour... he was the authority figure but at the same time, being like I am here for you... and it's especially the mother who is really in charge of... of the children's education...

Sa.G: Oh... okay! ...do you have any aunts, uncles?

E.K: Yes...

Sa.G: ...from your parents?

E.K: Yes...

Sa.G: Do you see them regularly? What was your relationship with them?

E.K:... the extended family... I had an aunt who was very, very close, because she was the only paternal aunt... but she lived for a long time in my own family... so... my mother was just telling me how she got married very young, and she was the one who stayed with her to introduce her to... how can I put it?... the duties of a wife... so she wasn't her sister-in-law but she was really like her... like a sister... like... her protector, like... how can I say it?..,

like a very significant person for her and then this continued for a long time, she was our paternal aunt but we really considered her like a mother!

Sa.G: And she was at home with you?

E.K: She was often with us.

Sa.G: Okay great! And on the [other] side... so that's on your father's side, and on your mother's side?

E.K: I had maternal aunts... I used to see them a lot when I went on holiday to my grandfather's house! Because one of them lived there and until this day... her daughter, she's really like a sister because she grew up with us, so it we were really very close and our maternal aunt... who... it's with her that we often went to... to go on holidays, we are very close because she also lived with us! In fact, she was like a big sister, she was my mother's sister, my mother's little sister, but she grew up with us...[laughs]... So we were really very, very close! The uncles, yes... even recently there was one who... since we lived in Bujumbura between '90 and '94... we'll come back to that, he was very, very, very close with us! So... the uncles I really knew were like... fully integrated members of... of the family!

Sa.G: I see you were... there were a lot of people at home!

E.K: Yes!

Sa.G: You said earlier that your father wasn't a big talker.

E.K: Yes

Sa.G: ... how did he express his emotions, his affection, his anger, his joy, how did he manifest them?

E.K: ... How did he manifest them?... He internalized a lot in fact, he wasn't very demonstrative but there was something in him that... that drew you in anyway... It's the gaze, it's... at home, the gaze counts a lot, and it's by looking at our dad that we could see if he agreed or disagreed. And when there was something that upset him, he would speak in Swahili [laughs]... It's strange because at the time... he was at Court for a long time, he was very, very close to the Court, it's... I'm not going to teach you the history of Rwanda... but the main thing is... Musinga's time was when he was really in the Court and the others... they were prevented from going to the white school, because the white school at that time meant that you had to go to the Seminary, they were the only accessible Western schools... And there it was really like... ethnocide because... they wanted them to adopt... exactly the Western way of thinking, the Western way of behaving and King Musinga was really against it... So, well... they made a parallel school, they said Swahili is very important, you have to learn Swahili, you have to learn how to govern, there was like a school of the nobility, parallel to the white people's school. And that's what my father did [laughs]... So he learned Swahili and when he was angry, he would say "shawuri yako"... [laughs] ... the first words I heard in Swahili were from my father, it means: it's your business, it's your concern, shawuri yako, it's your reason, it's your concern! [Laughs].

00:11:05

Sa.G: And what was it like with your mother, was she also introverted?

E.K: My mother was more... demonstrative, she was more emotional... she spoke right away but in a very calm, very soft way... but she was conveying the message she wanted to convey... and there was no arguing with her...

Sa.G: That was that, or it wasn't!

E.K: Yes, when it came out, she'd say: "Listen, this time it's enough, listen to me... [laughs] so... but she'd still speak up...

Sa.G: Okay.... And what was their daily occupation, who took care of your upbringing for example, just your parents...?

E.K: Just my parents... as I was saying, we were really quite an atypical family... Upbringing is always the mom's concern; the dad is the authority figure when it comes to... when it comes to big decisions. But I didn't... even if I was... how can I say it? ...I was... I had a very happy childhood, an upbringing... a childhood but... I was very young in the 60s... and that's when the problems began... I don't really know how to say if I was hardly carefree, that is to say... the most important thing for me was school... After school what's going to happen... As long as I can remember it was... There were always problems anyway, it was related to the politics of Rwanda, because my father was a sous-chef, which meant that... he worked for the monarchy... And by the time we started primary school... we did everything... all the schooling... There were houses burning down, there were elections being organized... 1960... there was the independence and my father was... imprisoned early on... I can still picture Alphonse's house, he was very young at that time... there were staff at home... so we weren't going out to draw water, we... so we were still relatively well off... And the fact that... Right away, we fled to Nyanza and it was... even today, if I could remember, I don't know how many times we changed houses in Nyanza because it was like being deported from where my father worked, because he was already in prison, we were with our mother but we didn't understand exactly what was going on...

Sa.G: How old were you then?

E.K: Six, seven years old...

Sa.G: Okay. And... who made the decisions at home?

E.K: Since my father wasn't actually there, my mother made the decisions.

Sa.G: How did each of your parents influence your life, so I'm talking about your work for example, your social life today, how did they influence that?

E.K: ... In a positive way... because as I was saying, my mother was generosity incarnate, she was... In the... more desperate times, as my father was in prison, the house was always full, we always had to share, we really had to, how can I say it? ...The door was always open for the most destitute as we were... Her courage, her... her perseverance, her... I remember when I was...like... like ten, twelve, around the time of my confirmation... that's right... She couldn't afford to buy me a new dress for the ceremony and all... I remember she took the prettiest pagne she had... and she started to... sew me a dress, an elegant dress, and I can see her with a mat on the floor cutting, my mother was a very good seamstress... Even today, my daughter has a dress that she sowed, entirely by hand! [Laughs]... So that's it... her generosity, her creativity and it's her... her way... really... social, innate, that I kept of her... My father, it's his integrity, it's his way of staying dignified despite everything that happened... so I think that these are still values... that are... that have influenced me to this day!... [Laughs].

00:16:18

Sa.G: **And, tell me about your neigh—[neighbourhood] about your neighbours, for example, were you free to play with the neighbours, was there a neighbourhood life in your childhood?**

E.K: Yes... that's what I was saying when we were... when we left Kaduha where my father worked, we went to Nyanza, we lived there for maybe six, seven years... I don't really have many memories of... of the neighbourhoods of... because as I said... it was always precarious... First it was like in camps... so obviously... There was life in the

neighbourhoods, it was alive, where do you go to get water, where do you go to get this, so there was... There were still a lot of children there I remember, there was still the school that went on and... No, there wasn't really, like... something that isolated us from our neighbours or... It was a community life like... normal, with a little bit of carelessness of the youth, we didn't understand the seriousness of... And our parents protected us a lot too... That is to say that they didn't spread the problems, they wanted to protect the children: "It's okay, it's okay, it's okay, that's all."

Sa.G: Speaking of your academic life, what memories do you have of the different schools you attended as a child and of your teachers... the relationship between students and teachers, what memories do you have?

E.K What struck me is, in Rwanda... at that time... when we finished the sixth year of primary school, we had to do a State exam... And we didn't realize there were quotas... And before taking this exam, we absolutely had to have a paper from the commune... of origin, and when I went to the burgomaster's office, that's what it was called, "no, I can't give you this paper because you are not from here!"... so I said: "How am I going to do the exam?" ... My father went to see him and said: "We can't go back to the commune of origin, now we have this residence here and we live here." He said no: "You are displaced persons, we are not going to give you any papers." Already the problems... started with, why can't I have papers?

Sa.G: How old were you then?

E.K: I was eleven, it was after school... the sixth grade. So I couldn't take that exam, I had to repeat the year, I changed cities, I had to go live with a maternal aunt, and then they were able to get the papers the following year so that I could take the exam. Everybody told me: "No, you passed and maybe you'll go and study in this or that place." They were making...

predictions... But, what a surprise... when the exams results came out, I wasn't on the list! And it was really a disaster for the headmistress and I remember her reaction... She was a Belgian nun, Sister Andrada, who... It was the first time I saw an adult crying because she said: "... It's not possible... No..." Up to now it was really like... I couldn't see the magnitude of it... but... for her, it was a disaster. And then ... it was only later that I realized: ah yes, it's true, there were quotas, there were the...

Sa.G: And you worked hard for that?

E.K: Yes!

Sa.G: Yes, first encounter with injustice?

E.K: Yes, yes.

00:20:30

Sa.G: Okay. And did you work while you were studying or did you wait until you finished school to work?

E.K: No, no, I worked during my studies because since I didn't pass this infamous exam, I went to study in Kigali, I lived with a cousin, so we found a way around to... to allow me to go to school and during the holidays, I worked in the company where my cousin worked, NAHV [laughs]... and then I put... it was a... he sold spare parts for Peugeot cars so... oh my God, I was proud because I was earning money, I could help my parents who were deported to Nyamata in the meantime, so it's... It was like wow... so I... [Laughs]....

Sa.G: Was it easy for you to combine work and studies?

E.K: No, no, just during the holidays.

Sa.G: So it was really just during the holidays!

E.K: Yes. No, I didn't do both at once.

Sa.G: Okay. And then when school resumed...?

E.K: I went back to class... yes.

Sa.G: Okay... Once you finished your studies, what did you do?

E.K: I didn't really finish my studies as such, because... in '73, I had to leave Rwanda...; I am of the '73 generation, what they called the social revolution, because all those who worked, all those who were in school, all those who were emerging, really, from... where they had been confined, they noticed—no, the Tutsis are still going to school, something's not right here... So... All those who worked, there were lists that came out in their companies: so and so, the following names, they need to leave. In the schools, it was the same. There were even students who were murdered. As I was living in Kigali, I was... the Easter holidays again in April, I didn't even say goodbye to my parents because they had said, “No, you leave and you don't look back.”

Sa.G: That's tough.

E.K: Yes. So I left in '73.

Sa.G: And when you left in '73, where do you go?

E.K: To Bujumbura. First to Goma... and then Goma was like... it was easier in the sense that... No, we wanted to go to Bujumbura first, because we had friends who helped us, we were like a group of young people, it was the French who helped us cross and... [thinking]. We went through Butare and then... at the border of Burundi, they had just murdered a few people who were trying to cross, so we turned back. So we went back up from Butare but we could no longer go through Kigali because at that time there were still barriers, we had to show permits... You couldn't go from one prefecture to another without showing

identification and a driver's license. Which meant... which meant that we changed course to go to Gitarama, from Gitarama directly to Kibuye, Kibuye to Gisenyi to get to the border. We spent a few days in Gisenyi before we found someone who was going to... get us across the border, then we went to Goma. In Goma, there were planes that... from the High Commission, that were there to evacuate people. We thought it was good... staying in Goma is still very close to Rwanda and for me, as I had just left my parents who never left Rwanda, it was very difficult not to be tempted to go back... [Laughs]. But for safety reasons, they said: No, you have to go to Burundi, there are... already... measures that... are in place to welcome you. So we were... after a week, I think, we were registered, and we went to Burundi.

00:25:08

Sa.G: When you say we, how many people were you in the group?

E.K: Umm, as I recall there were like ten of us... but... there were some who opted to stay in Goma, four or five, we went to Buja (Bujumbura).

Sa.G: When you arrived in a new country alone, without your parents, how did you manage in the first few months?

E.K: Well, thank goodness for family [laughs]. My uncle lived in Bujumbura, so... And there were a lot of... families who were in the same situation, sometimes entire families left, so that... There was a... cousin, there were aunts, there were... who rebuilt their lives there, so it was easier because they knew each other and then... As I said, there was already my paternal uncle there. I went to my paternal uncle's at first, but then... well, I moved in with my extended family because... You know their routine better, they know you better, with the others it's like you are a stranger... even though you are family. But you don't have the same... ways of life, you didn't... grow up together, there were things that were harder,

especially since my uncle didn't have a daughter, so I was like, the only girl in the house and you know, being one girl in a traditional family, you have to do all the chores [laughs]... It was hard for me [laughs].

Sa.G: Ah, you were happy to leave!

E.K: I used to be loved and pampered, there it was like... for them also it was also kind of weird to have a girl at home, it's like... it's weird because... it's funny because... like, just... Really, the boys who lived with me... We would all eat from one platter and... that was really the meal we had, they would bring it and put it on the table... At home it wasn't like that... And sometimes I would watch them eat, I would forget to eat. When it was done, they'd say to each other: "What happened? Why didn't you eat anything?" I was fascinated, really... to see this, oh my God, it's... [Laughs].

Sa.G: [Laughs]... It was culture shock!

E.K: That's it! [Laughs]

Sa.G: Okay! But when you left to go with the aunts, the people who knew you better, did you feel... were you completely at ease, did you feel at home?

E.K: Yes, yes... but still... exile is... that's when I... I didn't understand the word exile... it's... what is it? You know, in Burundi, at that time... let's say... it was a... It was a new wave of refugees from '73 who were really... educated and who were... competitive, who were... thriving and everything... But at the same time who... who were being held back. The... the people who went back to school to take an exam, they needed to get, I don't know, a grade that wasn't the same as the one Burundians needed. In order to work, you had to have a special paper from the labor force that specified that if you were given that post, it meant that there were no Burundians qualified for that job.

Sa.G: They gave first priority...?

E.K: Absolutely.

Sa.G: And then...

E.K: We managed, we could get through it, but if you didn't provide that paper, you couldn't work. I remember that I went to work for a while at... it was called METALUSA, and when I was working for a few months in Burundi, in the early days, the head of personnel came to me and asked, where is your paper? Even though I had taken the exam and everything, I was qualified for the work I was doing... It was... a metal factory... I was an accountant... And did customer service taking orders and all that, keeping records... calculating... At that time there were no computers, we had to do everything by hand. I had to go to the factory to place the orders and sign the purchase receipts, keep track of deliveries and everything... And then he comes to me with the labor papers and I'm like, "What's that?" And he says to me, "Well... actually you are not allowed to work here." And I said, "What do you mean?"—"Because you're a refugee." So, we were registered as refugees and that was our status.

00:30:05

Sa.G: There was no way to obtain papers, eventually get papers... after a process of consensus, deliberation?

E.K: No, no, no, no... In Burundi, you registered, and you were a refugee within the convention, so... that's it. Well, there were some people who had been there for like 30 years and applied for citizenship, but even then... that citizenship was like, second class, it wasn't really... all the rights they had for... full-fledged... for Burundians. But us, the wave of '73? Forget it... And that's when I noticed that... well, there were several things that were wrong, I couldn't work... school yes, I could go back to school, but under what conditions, and then, I was starting to miss my parents and I was told: "Well... you came at a bad time because in

Burundi, relations have always been tense between refugees from Burundi and to go back to Rwanda, you won't have papers that will take you, that will allow you to go back home.”

So... forget it. So, I had a cousin still in Bukavu, he came to visit Bujumbura, ah, and then we talked—“Well, listen, these are things you have to think about... if you want to come to the Congo, there is a way to get you papers and you can go back home, you can do what you want to do...” And then, there were more opportunities at that time in the Congo, because it was the Zaireanization... All the expatriates had just left and the Burundian mentality was not at all the same as the Congolese. So... in '95 [sic, '85] I went to Bukavu and so...

Sa.G: But you stayed in Burundi for a few years? A good dozen?

E.K: Yes, because we were looking at whether there was a way to do this, whether there was a way to do that, when I realized that it was saturated...

Sa.G: You decided to move?

E.K: Yes.

Sa.G: And that's when you saw your parents again?

E.K: When I went there, that was the advantage, when I arrived in the Congo, in Bukavu, that's where... thanks to this cousin where I lived, I managed to obtain Zairian papers, then I could work like any other person... how can I put it, normal. To fully understand that... “Oh! Now I'm Congolese—well, on paper...” [Laughs] I can have a travel document, I can go back to see my parents... but stealthily. I couldn't just go through Cyangugu, because they know you there. I had to go through Goma, where I wouldn't run into people from... the other side on a daily basis, where they didn't really know me, to enter Gisenyi—Kigali, Kigali, to go to Nyamata...

Sa.G: And you did all that to avoid...

E.K: Yes. And then, I couldn't stay very long, nor really go out anywhere, because everybody knows everybody.

Sa.G: So they had to ask themselves, who is this person?

E.K: Where do you live, who are you with?... So, on top of that, all the people who lived in Nyamata at that time, they were really under surveillance... Because it was... Nyamata was really a land of deportation for all the Tutsis of all of Rwanda...

Sa.G: [Speaking inaudibly]

E.K: Yes.

Sa.G: "..."

E.K: And that they had brought many people from the North, Hutus from the North, and refugees from Burundi in '72, they had even built a school for those people, that's where he studied... The late Ndadaye, all the notable figures of '72, they were the ones who had power afterwards because they were close to the Rwandan government.

Sa.G: The things we learn from you in this interview!

N.S.: ... [Laughs]

Sa.G: And... so now you have more job opportunities, what was your first job?

E.K: In Burundi or in the Congo?

Sa.G: In the Congo.

E.K: In the Congo, it was in a pharmacy [laughs]. I worked in a pharmacy in... it's like, who knows... Now I understand, even here, it's the network—someone who knows someone who knows something [laughs] and then by convenience, really, because of who my cousin knew

and then... there was... there was... a pharmacy and they needed... someone to work in the pharmacy and that was my first job.

00:35:27

Sa.G: Did it go well?

E.K: Very well, it was good, how can I put it... my work ethic was... How can I put it... I was serious, I really wanted to honour these people who made it easier for me to get into... into the job market. And then... [Thinks]. In the meantime I met the father of my children [laughs] and I worked for a doctor...

Sa.G: After the pharmacy?

E.K: After the pharmacy. So there was a place that became available, it was closer to home, it was more... it was more... rewarding, it paid more because I had more... I was learning a lot. In fact, afterwards, I started a program there that I was unable to complete. I had started... studying to be a medical technician, that's it... so... [laughs].

Sa.G: And over there, you didn't have the impression of being discriminated against, of being a second-class citizen like in Burundi?

E.K: Yes in a way, but not really like in Burundi. There, it was like... with the papers that protected us, you know, in the Congo—Zaire, then—it's not... how can I explain it? Even if you... you have features that show you're not Congolese... it was no reason to... You know, there were always people who would say, “She has the face of a Tutsi, she has the face of a Rwandan, she has a face of...” But they don't dwell on it because you're not a threat to them, there is room for everyone and if you live well with them, it's... You share what you have with them, that is, there's no competition, there's no... You don't take anything away from them. They feel... the way I understand it, the Congolese didn't have that inferiority complex,

it was like... Okay, you're here, you're here, you don't look like us but it's not a problem. It was later that it became—when the seed of hatred was planted, when the resources started to dwindle, when... it was really put into their heads that we were bad, that we were... enemies, that... that it started. But not at the beginning, because I saw teachers who were Tutsi, the... people who... the big traders were Tutsi, Pakistani or... Hindu. It was more social class... rather. And... in your world, you didn't really feel any threats and... But when you felt... that there were things that weren't right... Unfortunately I hate to admit it, but that's how it was, you paid to get what you wanted... [Laughs].

Sa.G: [Inaudible]...

E.K: Yes, sometimes it gets to you: why do I have to pay for a driver's license, I know how to drive, why do I have to... But that was their way of surviving too, so it's... We can think about it now in retrospect, but at the time, it didn't bother anybody, and it didn't bother me to say: OK, he needs this, if a policeman stops me, it's not because I am Tutsi, it's because he needs something to live and if I have that, he felt that it's not because of my race, it's not because of my ethnicity, and then... I didn't feel the threat of death, that came afterwards. But at the time, it wasn't like that.

Sa.G: And then you... you mentioned earlier that you met your partner... at that time, in the Congo...

E.K: Yes.

Sa.G: Tell us about how you met him... how did it happen?

E.K: How did it happen...? [Laughter and inaudible comments].

00:40:10

Sa.G [Question for E.K's spouse]: Do you have two minutes?... [E.K's spouse, inaudible answer]. Okay, fine, you can, you can gloss over it and do what you want... How did you meet her?... [E.K's spouse replies inaudibly]...

E.K: [Laughs] ... You won't let me... because... As she said, if you don't want us to talk about it, we can turn off the camera! [Speaking to her partner:] Eh?... [Silence]. Actually, he was a neighbour of my... he was my cousin's neighbour and colleague, they were colleagues, they were teachers at the same school, so neighbours... That's how we met.

Sa.G: Oh, Okay!

E.K: He was also a friend of my boss, where I worked, he was Syrian too! So... it was like, I tell you, the same environments, the same... neighbourhoods and everything. That's how I got to know him. I'm not going to elaborate on that because... he doesn't want me to! [Laughs].

Sa.G: Okay. No problem. Tell me about your children, then.

E.K: [Thinking]... The eldest is over there [looks], he was born in... '81 and...

Sa.G: Still in the Congo? You were still in the Congo?

E.K: Yes, in Bukavu... I'll show you later... where he was born and then... I have a daughter; the boy is twenty-eight and my daughter is twenty-four...

Sa.G: That's right. Okay...

E.K: Do you know Atilla?

Sa.G: Of course.

E.K: There you go!

Sa.G: When you raised... When you were raising them, what was, in your eyes, the most important thing for you?

E.K: Safety and... really... to give them all that we could give them... Like, a good upbringing, like the basis of... of a good upbringing... how to say it? All that a parent... a responsible parent could give to their child...!

Sa.G: And it's good that you had a girl and a boy, do you think raising girls and boys is... Is it the same thing?

E.K: There are nuances. So... We didn't raise them like... I'm going to raise you like this because you're a boy, I'm going to raise you like that... They had every opportunity. But according to their personalities. Children don't all have the same needs, you put more emphasis where you feel your child needs it... That is... If he was stronger in mathematics, then he had to work more in French, you know, like that. If it's a kid who was more unruly when they were younger, you sort of try to set limits. My youngest was so, how can I put it...? Difficult, she cried all the time, so then you have to say, it's not because she's a girl that she cries a lot; you adapt to the way your child is. But they went to the same school, they had all the same opportunities, they ate the same food—obviously, I didn't dress them the same way [laughs]... But apart from that... they had... each one, what... they should have, but they weren't raised differently based on gender.

Sa.G: And comparing your attitude toward your children, for example, was it different from your parents' attitude toward you?

E.K: ...I believe that each generation has its... particularities. First of all, they are children... from two worlds... I am Rwandan and he is Syrian, that will teach them to be full and complete people, to assume their identities, which wasn't a question for me. I was a Rwandan, I didn't ask myself any questions. But for a child from two communities, what... what does it take to reinforce this advantage—because it is an advantage. It's quite different from how I was raised...

N.S.: Of the values you have passed on to your children, what do you think comes from your parents?

E.K: ...Dignity, the ... The way that, each time they say to themselves, “My God, if I did this or that, it's not all about me, it's also about... I'm the son of ... and of ...” So, you have to honour your parents, I think that's really what I passed on to them, to always ask yourself the question—this isn't an isolated act, before I do anything stupid, I have to think of my parents... [Silence]. Does that answer...?

00:45:45

Sa.G: Yes, thank you. Great! How many years did you stay in Bukavu before you decided to leave?

E.K: Uh, I... We were in Bukavu from '75 to '90.

Sa.G: ...Fifteen years!

E.K: Yes!

Sa.G: And what made you leave?

E.K: In '90 that was already really the... The events in the Congo after the national conference, that's what I was saying, it was the hatred that began, the divisiveness; people were starting to say: “There are people who obtained citizenship fraudulently, so there are people who are not really Congolese.” That's when they really started to... persecute people, they were calling people... What did they call them? People of dubious nationality. That's when you began to understand, it's true, when you saw the businesspeople, when you saw the teachers, when you saw that... It's like there's a resentment people had from... whether it's the Bashi, whether it's the Barega, whether it's the Hutu of Rutshuru who were in parliament, who had something to say and who were really targeting people who were close to Mobutu, there

were... the Bisengimana and company... Excuse me for mentioning names, maybe later they'll be edited out... But... it was really the resentment that started towards the Tutsis, it was the hatred sown by... Rwanda, that started the war and the national conference... in the Congo... The rise of racism in Burundi, of the Hutus who... It was like the Great Lakes were catching fire... They were starting to say, these people are dangerous. They really need to be removed. There was looting in Bukavu, there were attacks, the schools, they were at the school, and it closed, and then we said "No, we are really under threat and... it is absolutely necessary for the children to continue their schooling." We had expatriate friends who were there, everyone found a solution to go, for now, to Burundi. We went to Bujumbura, I remember we even lived in a hotel while waiting for... things to settle down.

Sa.G: Did you still have family that you left behind in Bujumbura?

E.K: We didn't really have family there, we were staying in a hotel...

Sa.G: Okay.

E.K: And the children thought it was so good... Living in the hotel, with the breakfast, and then going to school and going back to the hotel on the beach—for them, it was really a wonderful vacation [laughs]! But then we asked ourselves, "What's going to happen? We can't afford to stay at the hotel for, I don't know how long... as much as for the cost as the logistics, because school starts at 7:30, breakfast isn't served at the hotel yet, it's a little early, we have to come back at noon, we have to go back, it's quite a distance... We have to buy gas, we have to pay for the hotel, so..." After a while, when it didn't calm down in Bukavu... Then... we thought, well, okay, we had to stay at least one term so as not to uproot the children, we went to live with friends while we looked for a little apartment, and we never went back to Bukavu. But their father went back and forth because he taught in Bukavu, the children were at school in... in Buja [Bujumbura] and just when things were going well, the

war started in Rwanda. We couldn't go through Bugarama because... At the border, for some people like me, you couldn't show yourself, you had to go through the cliffs, it was really tough. It was this road, they called it the German road, it's like, an escarpment, the road... incredible, and you could see Rwanda down there, but you couldn't get through. That's it, so...

00:50:50

Sa.G: And that was in '90!

E.K: That's right!

Sa.G: And how long did you stay in Bujumbura?

E.K: Until '94.

Sa.G: Okay. At people's houses...?

E.K: No, no. Afterwards, we found an apartment and then... my family came and, and the stories started to get really, really bad in Rwanda in '92. Especially in Nyamata, because they had just murdered a very, very dear friend, an Italian woman with whom I communicated a lot, or contacted when my mother needed something. She was the one who went to see her and there was a very serious attack in Bugesera right where she was killed, that's when my mother was evacuated and she came to join me in Buja [Bujumbura]. My sister and brother-in-law and the children came a little later. But that's a whole other story.

Sa.G: And then, how long had it been since you had seen your mother when she came...?

E.K: Since '90... because she came to Bukavu from time to time, I went to see her from time to time in Nyamata. So... but since '90 I hadn't... I hadn't visited her again.

Sa.G: How did the reunion go?

E.K: Very, very emotional... in the sense that... But first, I don't know how to say this, there was always a question: why didn't my parents leave like the others? Like the... the people who went to Uganda—when there were problems, why didn't my father leave with mother like the other refugees who went to Burundi, why not Uganda, why not like the others? Why... So we always... Despite the fact that there were always problems, why did my father never leave? And then, what he used to say is that... because he was at Court, he accompanied the king in 1930, I don't know exactly when he was banished, but they forced him into exile. My father accompanied him as far as Cyangugu and then the king said: “No, you young people, you don't cross with me. You must return to Rwanda. I have to go, but not you.” And when we asked my father: “But you went back, and every time you were put in prison, every time you were tortured, every time you had problems, why didn't you leave and go to...?” And every time it was negative, he said, you who are young, leave. Because for me, when you go into exile, it's for two reasons: either to save your property, or to save your life. I have neither, I'm not going to die in exile. So you have to see that it was imposed on my mother and when she came here in '92, we told her: “Do you think, now, that it's time to forget Rwanda for a while, given what's happening, and... save your...?” [She said] “Your father never wanted to leave, I respected that, at my age now, I'm not going to start... a new life. You're here, you're my children, I'll visit you when I can, you'll come and see me when you can, but I don't want to, I have...” She had her little life, she had her routine, she had her habits, she had her neighbours there and... She didn't want to experience the unknown anymore, even though she had family, like I said, it's still another life. Over there, she had her fields, she had her cows... [Laughs]. So it's... For her, it didn't make sense...

00:55:00

Sa.G: Even when there was unrest?

E.K: No.

Sa.G: It wasn't...?

E.K: No, it wasn't reason enough... to change her way of life. She always believed...

N.S.: Had she lived anywhere other than Rwanda?

E.K: Yes, because I told you that she used to come to Congo, she used to come often. Now, she came because of the events in Burundi, so she stayed for long periods, but she never felt at home... There were things that she missed, there were things that... that seemed strange to her, it wasn't really her home. Even if we'd... managed to find her a home, with her things, her routines and all that... She couldn't... how can I put it? And then, as I said, there were still other children, there were... people in the family. It wasn't just us to think of, it was also other people who were... part of... part of her own family. She had adopted a lot of children, in a manner of speaking, not just children from... our extended family, there were children who felt at home with her, who said, "I'm going to stay with Grandma," we all called her Grandma, because she took them in, and took them in...[laughs].

Sa.G: She probably felt responsible for all these people?

E.K: Absolutely, absolutely!

Sa.G: Take a break! We're going to change the tape.

[...]

Sa.G: So... we were talking about... about Bujumbura and your mother's visit, who came to see you and left some time later. So, what happened between '92 and '94?

E.K: She came, and my sister—her children, my brother-in-law, went back because... He wanted to protect his family, he said: "If ever something really happens, it will be easier to

leave alone... without family.” At that time, it was the negotiations with Arusha, and... there were ups, there were downs, everybody was really hoping that... these agreements would lead to something. There was a lot of propaganda, there were a lot of... unknowns, too. But... like I said, for my mother it wasn't a life... it was like waiting. After '92, they had murdered our friend Tonia, for us it was really as if an important connection was severed, we said, “If you fall ill, now there is no one close by, my sister is here and her children, you are there, who is going to look after you?” And then... “Stay with us for a while,” but for her it was really like, “You're exaggerating.” And remember that Bujumbura was not really at peace, because there were problems every day. There were dead towns, Ndadaye had just been elected president, there was a lot of unrest, there was... there were... fuel shortages, shops were closed, there were strikes, there were... They called them ‘dead towns’ in those days. So all they had to do was... from one day to the next, one group decided to put up barricades, they would put stones in the street. We lived, I remember, five minutes from the school... Even though it was only five minutes, the children didn't go on foot, because they had all their books in their schoolbags; you absolutely had to drive them. And they knew what they would encounter, there were stray bullets, there were... They were ransacking houses, they were throwing grenades, and... What was even more dangerous, for us in particular, was that we had a Congolese license plate, and that—when things were bad during these times, all the Hutu governments had taken refuge in the Congo, Uvira and the surrounding areas of the Congo. So when they saw a Congo license plate, it was like no, it's an ikimwenyi, that meant a Hutu. At the time, there were these young people called the "sans échecs" [without fail] who were on the side of the Tutsis, who were in fact the ones making barricades to oppose the... the Hutus. When they saw our car, it was like a provocation, and when someone who knew my children and who knew me, saw me in it, they would say, “What are you doing in that car?” I couldn't change the license plate because my husband was still in Bukavu, and I was living

temporarily in Burundi, I couldn't clear customs in the car to change the license plate... These are details but they are quite important administrative details. I had a visa, but no... no residency. I had a temporary visa but I couldn't clear customs in the car, I couldn't, if I went back to Bukavu like we used to sometimes, it would have caused me problems. I had to go to the border to change it, to extend it, more or less... [To change] the license plate, and because of that... It was really causing problems and my family didn't feel safe, because they said, "Even there, you are not safe. In Rwanda, it is better, the Arusha agreements are being implemented, we can breathe easier at home than... than over there." And the way I lived, I was juggling, with the children and the school—one time it closed, barricades, we would make detours—so I knew how to juggle that. But to them, it was really not safe, because they would say, "Are you coming home?" Especially since we lived in a French neighbourhood, where these kids would come and ransack the place, saying, "These are French people who are causing shit everywhere" and attacking houses every day. They attacked all the mixed-race children because they said, "Maybe some of their dads are French!" So they were really putting pressure on us, and we wondered, "What's going to happen?" You had to be careful, and especially with the house staff, the staff was mixed; you didn't only hire Hutus, you didn't only hire Tutsis, and sometimes there were fights in the fields and the two had to be separated. So, it was really unbelievable things, you would hear gunfire all night—and then the last straw... the straw that broke the camel's back, as they say... was Ndadaye's assassination. We lived right by a military camp... My mother was there; meanwhile my sister was... She said, "No, I can't, I'm going back home, I can't wait." When there were the first agreements—maybe you remember a bit—when the RPF [Rwandan Patriotic Front] soldiers came back to Rwanda, when they said, "okay, now you're going to share the power," they arrived at the NDC [National Development Council] and everything—for all the people

who were like, away... [They thought,] “There’s peace at home, we’re leaving, we’re going back home”.

01:03:37

Sa.G: So how long did your sister stay with you?

E.K: About a year...

Sa.G: Ah, really?

E.K: ...!

Sa.G: And then she left?

E.K: In '92, just after Tonia’s murder, and then... in '93, just after Christmas... All night long, we could hear the tanks going by, and the mortars, all night long. My mother was terrified, my mother was like, truly on the verge of having a heart attack, the next day it was... That's how it is now, it's over, how are we going to live after the assassination of the president? Are we going to collect our belongings...? What are we going to do? Then... we couldn't go back to Bukavu, that... that wouldn't fly, because the people of Cyangugu knew me very well, because on the border between Bukavu and Cyangugu, we crossed almost every day before the war, before '90—that's where the post office was, we'd go there to get our mail. In Congo the post didn't work, so that was where we made international calls because the phones worked. Neither of those things worked in Bukavu. So there, they knew who you were—and, by the way, even today, it's in the... in the propaganda, that all the Tutsi girls who married expatriates, that it was us who caused problems with the media, because we were informing, we were lobbying... and above all, it was us who sent money to the front, because we had the means! So... people knew that very well, if you went to Cyangugu you'd be a target. “We know who you are,”—sometimes they'd wrecked your car. They opened the

gate, and they dropped it... there's like, a barrier, they have something that can be removed, it's like made of concrete—and as I was going through in my car, he dropped it. And then someone said to me, “Don't make a fuss. If you're insured, keep going.” Now, that was a warning. So there were signs that said: “No, watch out, there are people—the list is made, and so... watch out.” And you are being specifically targeted. So we couldn't go back to Bukavu... Bujumbura wasn't as bad, but things still weren't good at all, in Rwanda... I had left in '73, even though the RPF soldiers were returning to the NDC, I had nothing in Rwanda. I couldn't say to my husband, we're going to go to Rwanda now, with the children and everything... no. So that's why... from '92 until '94 it was hell, but the decision was made in '94 when we said: It's over now, there is a genocide. We are not going back to Bukavu, it's very bad, all the militia went to Bukavu—it was really the retreat—Bujumbura is no good either, we will never be Burundian, we won't get a permanent visa to... stay in Bujumbura forever. We can't go to Rwanda with the genocide, we have to leave. That's where the decision came from... I have a niece in the United States, and a cousin, and then they said, "Listen... people can apply for refugee status and then come and see what happens, and then... you can stay in the United States, or you can go to Canada but... For the children's schooling, it was better to go to a country... where they spoke... Well, they could speak the language, they could learn English right away, but it's really another system—even for me, I said, I'd prefer a place where I can contribute what I can contribute but... as much as I'm comfortable. The children were not going to start translating what they learned in school, as is sometimes done. Why not Europe? Because... no. It was a... how shall I put it? Honestly, he [my husband] had studied in Europe, he had studied in France and all that... but it's not at all... We had friends in Quebec, what we were hearing... And he had already visited Quebec and everything... It's different. It's a really different mentality, it's a different life. The image I had in my mind at the time were the ghettos [laughs]. Yes, so I said to myself, no. I saw the

people who lived there, who weren't happy, they weren't really happy—that's not what I wanted for...

01:09:17

Sa.G: So your choice was more...

E.K: Yes, more toward either the United States or Canada.

Sa.G: So that was '94, around what month did you decide to leave?

E.K: In July.

Sa.G: In July '94. And being in Bujumbura, how did you hear about what was happening over there? Did you get regular updates? What was your...?

E.K: Directly. Yes, direct updates because I had expat friends who lived in Rwanda, the phone lines were never cut... The expats were travelling between... You know, Bujumbura at the time, it was really like... the ideal place for a vacation, there's a lake, there are restaurants, there are cinemas, there are... direct flights all the time, direct flights especially for people going on vacation. Everyone knows everyone, so... Through those networks, we communicated. We knew that... so and so was murdered on this day, so and so... We don't know where he is... Of course... You hear news but you can't... It's powerlessness. You can't do anything. You can't take the car and go... take them away, you can't... how can I say? ... tell them what to do. You can ask an expatriate: Go, take them with you—even the people who had that authority couldn't do it. So, it would put those people in danger too, if you ever asked them to intervene...

Sa.G: And when you heard about Habyarimana's plane and all that... Did you know it was going to be that bad? Or did you think, well, okay, it happened?

E.K: That, I can tell you exactly... [Thinking]. When the plane came down, it was the Easter holidays... and the Easter holidays, in the Belgian system, that's two weeks of holiday. Since [my husband] was in Bukavu, he had come to Buja [Bujumbura] so that we could go on vacation to Bukavu and the road was—since the Arusha agreements, it was open, the borders were open. We could go through Rwanda again. And it was the first time in two years, three years, that we could go through Bugarama. Oh my God, the asphalt road, what a joy, what happiness! And for the children too, it was like, wow, a week's holiday with Dad, the carefree time at home and then... our friends who were still there. So it was really their true home, in Bukavu, where there were the maids that they had known since... early childhood, they were going to be pampered by Josée, they were going to eat food made by... how can I say it? By... by someone who had worked for us for a long time. So it was really like, total happiness! We were going through Bugarama, at the same time, I had to pick up... my mother had to come to Bukavu. And as we were crossing, waiting to cross the border, there was a customs officer who asked us for... a lift... He came from... Cyangugu... I don't know where from... He had malaria, and he was going there to get medicine. So we drove... half of the way as a group, to drop him off at the border, my husband was in the front and I was in the back with the children, and he wouldn't stop provoking me. From the moment he saw me, he started saying: "Now how about those cockroaches! We have good roads, good schools, these thugs, what are they trying to prove? There was peace in our area, they're f***ing everything up, they're..." I don't know, "what are they after?" And my husband was looking at me in the rear-view mirror as if to say, "Don't answer." He was looking at me, eyes wide. I obviously kept quiet; it wasn't the time to talk about any of that. And this is April 6, 1994. We arrived in Bukavu on April 6, at night, and then... In the evening, let's say... The next morning at around four o'clock, I think to myself, I'm going to take like, a sleeping pill, because the stress we live with every day in Bujumbura—now that I'm at home, I can afford the luxury of

sleeping for a long time and letting go. I don't know what time the France Inter news is at... [E.K's husband: 6:00 AM]. He starts telling me: listen, listen. So we always have the radio next to the bed—even here, we've kept that habit of listening to the news—so he tells me to listen... I say, “What am I listening to?” I'm dozing off... He says: “This is serious!” ...I swear, what came to my mind was Yugo[slavia]... since that's where it was the worst. I said, “That's too bad, but...” Then he really shook me awake and said, “Sit up and listen, Habyarimana has fallen and... the president of Burundi.” I swear, what worried me the most was the President of Burundi, because that's where we lived.

01:15:35

Sa.G: So you left the house, all your things, and nobody could go back?

E.K: Yes, yes.

Sa.G: So right away, you thought, oh my God...!

E.K: My God, this is going to be very serious. What are we going to do? We can't stay in Bukavu, the schools are going to close, the Burundian president is dead... I wasn't even thinking about it at all, because I thought... Sorry about the problems in Rwanda, but I can't think about it, not even for a second. I thought the worst was over. And then the sleepiness went away completely. I was starting to think, what are we going to do? We lived close to the... cathedral, I put on a pagne and grabbed a sweater because in Bukavu, it's colder, ah... I went to mass, which... which starts at half past six. I went to mass; when I arrived at the mass, I went outside. There were two other Rwandan women... who were celebrating, truly. There was a professor's wife and [my husband's] colleague, there was another woman I knew, her parents were in Burundi—we knew each other very well, she's the little sister of my cousin's wife—it was jubilation. Deep down I was thinking to myself, “Am I that selfish that... I am really... so blind that...” I felt no joy. And they said to me, “What's going on?”

Aren't you happy? He's dead, Kinani, he's gone." They called him Kinani [invincible], the president. "Listen, I... my parents are here, I... I... I'm not really sure, I live in Bujumbura now, the president of Burundi is dead and all..." And they said, "Wow... you're really unbelievable..." The words that came to me at that time were, "The joy you have now, you are going to pay dearly for it." They said, "But why, what's going on? You're so... pessimistic, really..." I said okay. We parted ways... I tried to go... contact... Rwanda; I couldn't, of course, the borders were already closed. But there was a German company called Pharmakina, they had a satellite phone. I asked, who knows somebody at Pharmakina? I had a Pakistani friend who said, "I know some people, you can ask them because they have family in Rwanda, too." So we could... go and get the news. But during the day, just by looking, left and right, we could see houses—it's like, you live here, and the other side of the hill is Cyangugu—the houses were already burning, and people were starting to cross. And what those people were saying—it gave you goose bumps. There had been incidents—in '60, in '73—there had always been incidents, but these were really horrors. Because the things they were saying, you said to yourself, that's not possible. People can't do such things. And then you forgot that sooner or later, it could be your family that was going to be next. They were saying things with such cruelty that you thought, it's not possible! But I didn't even take it in, it was like... maybe I would have gone crazy. I... I was able to... to really get some distance, by thinking, "It has come to this, but I'm not going to end up like that," because I would have been crushed. We had a house that we rented with someone from the High Commission for Refugees, and the first expatriates started to cross the border—they were the ones who organized the return of, the evacuations from Bujumbura, so that they could take the plane. So we had news of the people who were coming, who had been there and seen it. I remember one Sunday, we went to the home of Tunisian friends, it was... They were always having gatherings there because they worked on the plantations, and the place was a bit further away

from the city, it was in the country side. It was very pleasant, there were reunions, people who had left, who were coming back for the holidays. It was people, children too, who came back for the holidays, who were in Europe, women who had left, or men, who came back. So it was really like a gathering, and we couldn't stop talking about it. People were saying: "We have to go back to Buja, even though the president is dead, it's the only place where we can be safe, more or less..." So, we decided to go back quickly, before things got out of hand—and now I'm talking about, it was like, Wednesday... April—we had to go back to Buja. We were part of this convoy, we saw the French embassy, the Belgian embassy, all the embassies were at the border to welcome their nationals. And it was only little by little that the people who returned from Rwanda, who were able to escape, they started to talk, to testify. That's when we'd say, "Oh, she's arrived, he's arrived, we have to ask him what happened," but in fact, the people who were coming at that time, they were like... how can I put it? They hadn't seen anything, they had been hidden and then they were evacuated, so they didn't witness it. So they couldn't testify, they couldn't tell you what happened from the hiding places at the border. Maybe they saw horrors and they heard people talking too, but they had not experienced it because they were hidden, they didn't really see anything. What we wanted to know was what had happened, what they saw, what they experienced. They would tell us their suffering—I don't know, that they hadn't eaten yet, they hadn't washed, and how they managed to leave, but they couldn't tell you...

01:23:15

Sa.G: Details.

E.K: The... it was in the newspapers, it was on TV, but knowing the media, you also wondered [gestures]... They weren't filming what you wanted to know. I wanted to know what happened in Nyamata, I wanted to know what happened in Kigali, in the specific place where my sister lived, but no one is going to tell you that. You went to see so and so, or you

said, so and so arrived, go and see him—my brother-in-law, we were told, it's over, he's dead. Because they had taken the people who were at CELA, next to Saint-Paul, they put them in a van, and they... they went and shot them on the edge of the ditch, he was part of that convoy. We were sure of that.

Sa.G: Who gave you that information? The people who were there...?

E.K: Yes, people who were like... because it was a Mission, it was members of clergy arriving at that time, who were evacuated by their... by members of their congregations. It was a nun who told me that, who was leaving for Switzerland. Because her sister was also there, that's when I went to see her. But the story I heard when the... really even he didn't tell us—because he survived, we found out later. But it's in the... It was rumours, that he was in it. So that's when I said to myself: “In ten years, we'll know. Fourteen years later, fifteen years later, we'll know more... details of what we didn't know at the time.” And it was true, every time I went back, I learned something new. I learned one more detail. So there are still a lot of details that we don't know... Anyway, to come back to that, that's when... we went back to Buja, but it was like no, we have to do something, we have to leave. But the visas, you know. I had a Congolese passport, he [my husband] has a Syrian passport, you can't get a visa for the United States overnight. So, he had a colleague who had gone to... who lived in... in San Francisco, he was teaching there, and he said, “It's okay, I'll send you a pickup, you'll come like you're on vacation.” I have a niece who lives in... I had two nieces and a nephew who lived in Minnesota, and they said, “We can take you in, it's no problem.” So from Buja to Europe, of course, and from Europe to the United States, to my nephews. There, they introduced us to a gentleman who could help us, who was in Michigan. He told us how to apply for refugee status and we lived in a coalition, we applied because it's not like here in Quebec. There, at the Ontario border, you do the first interview, they record everything, you... you answer a questionnaire and then you... You go back for digital fingerprinting, and

that's where you cross. You come back and then you're told what date you're actually going to go through.

Sa.G: And so you did all that.

E.K: [nods]

Sa.G: You all came. And then that was the end of April, when was it?

E.K: No, July, July.

00:27:10

Sa.G: Oh July, right. And you said you'd received news about your brother-in-law?

E.K: Mhm... I skipped... I skipped ahead a little bit, because I really think memory is selective. Even now it's hard for me... to say, and like the people who came back—as I was telling you—who told you things; they didn't tell you what you wanted to hear. You sympathized with what they experienced, you said to yourself, “my God, that's terrible,” but at the same time, you don't know. And when the first people started to... to go back to Rwanda in July, I knew that two of my friends were leaving, and I said, “I absolutely have to go, I have to... I have to have... an image in my head of what's happening, of what happened.” There, I found out through the nun that my brother-in-law had died, I found out that my sister had survived, that she was living in Saint Paul, but how, I didn't know. Then... she was somewhere, and then I was told, “Listen, someone over there knows something, you are going to know what happened.” And that was the fourth of July, I think, I left on the fourth—yes, on the fourth of July, and the children had just started their holiday, [my husband] was in Bukavu but I knew he was coming. I had a friend who came from Bukavu to see her daughter. I said, well, I'm not going to abandon my children, but I have to know. [Opens photo album]. So that's what I said: no, I absolutely have to go and see what's going

on. And then obviously, the first thing was to go to Nyamata, going to Nyamata... You see, after '94, we found out it looked like this [points to photo in photo album].

Sa.G: [to camera] Can you stay on the photos?

E.K: At the border...

Sa.G: [Looking at photos] **This is above?**

E.K: No, you see them at the border, he's... You think, oh, things have changed. You see [points to photos], okay, you don't feel the horror that happened, but you see it anyway, so my heart aches to see someone like that at the border. You say, oh my God, now he's the one who is in control, who has the power. But then, you have mixed feelings... You say, it's true that there are people who have cause to celebrate, there's... For him [shows picture of a soldier], it's a victory, for him it's... it's something. But I don't relate to that victory, not right away, no.

01:30:20

Sa.G: **In the moment, for you—just the fact of seeing him, did you feel reassured, safe?**

E.K: That's right. Yes, yes, to say, anyway, he won't ask me for ID papers, he won't look me over from head to toe. When he sees me, he won't debate it, he won't say, "Do I let her in or do I turn her away?" So for me, I said, ah! They've done it... but as I said, it's mixed feelings.

Sa.G: **Mhm.**

E.K: [Pointing to photos] So this is the car that... that we took, there are people just waiting to cross... I don't know—wait, I'm going to find... [Flipping through photo album] You see a border like that, you think, [laughs] what's going on? So it's still... You say to yourself: he [points to photo of a soldier], that gentleman there, he's capable of enforcing the law, he has authority, this [points to photo of a tree branch serving as a border], you can step over it and go, [laughs] but he still has the power to say, no, you need to obey this.

Sa.G: And which region is this?

E.K: This is in Bugesera, I think... or Sake, because between Burundi and Rwanda, we couldn't go through because the bridges were blown up. We couldn't, there was no bridge, we had to go through the Sake, I don't even remember, personally. And then we arrived in the Bugesera region; we took a long detour. The first thing was to go and see my mother's house, to go to our house, to say, my God... and that's it [showing photos]. To confront that, to see that. Everything is destroyed, the metal sheets are gone, the... It's all brushwood... And they said that maybe... people were... That's the church [shows photo]... There's one photo in particular that... Look, there [points to photo of herself], I didn't want to be photographed, I didn't want my face shown, I said that—that's enough, that's going to remind me that I was there. But I'm not posing, so cut my head out because... I don't have a head at the moment, really [laughs]. I've got legs to walk on, I've got the other things that move but... no.

Sa.G: And who are you with there, in that place? [Points to photo].

E.K: I'm with two friends, but you can't see them because I actually lost the camera, this is what we were able to save [pointing to photo]. Because I left it there, it's like, maybe I was afraid to confront it... But later, I'll show you the photos, because my husband went back there. And this, I absolutely wanted to... to show this [points to photo], in the corner, that's when I said to myself... I really think in French, because I thought they were weeds, because... in Kinyarwanda we call these trees... those ones [points to photo], it's *gereveliya* [grevillea], I don't know what to call it in Kinyarwanda, it has very thin leaves. They're very pretty trees, they are what marked the entrance to our house [points to photo] and then, there... I thought it was the same thing, that's the Nyamata church [shows photo]. I thought those were dead leaves, but if you look carefully, there are black things [points to photo]. I didn't want to look up, and I'll tell you why—I didn't want to look at all those blood stains, all those stories, that were still in the church... In the back [points to photo] there was a mountain

of bodies. They hadn't... removed them yet. But those... I realized that they weren't all... dead leaves, they were scalps, with hair on them. But we didn't zoom in on them because I said, I'm not a reporter, I don't do that stuff. But just seeing it, I remember what it was. I said, my God. But at the time, I wasn't even shocked. I said, "Oh, that's why they call scalps "*cuir chevelu*" [literally, hairy leather], because it really was like leather, like tanned leather, with hair on it. I said, "Oh my God... Okay. Those are scalps." And it took me a really long time to realize that that was our home [points to photo of house]—you take a wrong turn, you park, you go somewhere else, you come back, finally, that's it. That [points to photos] is when my husband went back with my paternal cousin and my aunt and look how—I swear, my mother did everything she could to make those plants grow back; they never grew again.

01:36:07

Sa.G: And how could it...

E.K: And there, it grew a little bit [points to photo]. This is actually inside the church [points to photo of people standing]. And that is my father's grave, because it was next to the church. And that's when you say to yourself, nature is really just, incredible, it's... it's like it has no modesty. And then... that's it, that's my father's grave. He died... He has the same name as your [Sa.G's] father!

Sa.G: Gasana? Oh!

E.K: And this is Tonia's grave [shows photos], the Italian friend. Yeah. And inside the church... I went back, I'll tell you... That's the inside of the church. [Shows photos of rows of human bones]. But there... they had been able to build... two... They were like catacombs. The house was repaired a little so that it wasn't completely destroyed, just a little bit to make it look a little more...

Sa.G: [Looking at photos] And you put a grave at the entrance of the house?

E.K: No, no, that's my father's grave again...

Sa.G: Okay. I see. Behind the church...

E.K: And that's the ceremony we did to take care of my mom a few years later, that's my sister, I'll get to that now. That's inside the church [points to photo of skulls].

Sa.G: Ah, so it's one of the places that people can go and visit and see everything, like a memorial?

E.K: Yes, yes, but it's more... how can I say it... It's... It's not that it's less shocking, but it's... Really, it's... It's less painful than... than what I saw in '94, because that was like... Seeing bones, seeing things in garbage bags, that gave me quite a shock. And I actually remember that... in the first photos, when I saw that in the back, the bodies were sort of... stacked, you know, with just a little bit of earth over them. That's all they could do. By going through, I could maybe find my mother's body. I thought... I might recognize her, but there were thousands and thousands of them. I said, okay. I felt like I could do it, but at the same time, I thought... If I recognize other people, what am I going to do? Would she really want that? Because she would say, my neighbours, my children—would she want to be treated in a special way compared to others? I said, “No, that's... You have to respect her last will; she wanted to help others so... It's not my decision anymore.” So, we continued after that, and we arrived at... Because you have to understand that we were going through... the checkpoints, as they say, the checkpoints... There were officers, there were RPF soldiers, and we asked them, the people who had been in the centre who survived, where are they? It was well organized, they would say, the people from central Kigali, they're all in Kabuga, and the people from this place, they are in that place. So we went to Kabuga and we said... “My little sister's name is Caritas, she was evacuated here and... Did you know her? She's so-and-so's wife,” you know, over there it's like, she's the daughter of, she's the wife of, friend-of-a-

friend, and then they explained, well, it's her, it's her and oh yes, go and check at this place, there's no number—and then finally, I managed to find her. She was there, yes, with... Her husband was in Uganda because he had bullets in his knee, he went there to get surgery. He was evacuated to Uganda, that is... He was with his sister-in-law, he was with other people in the house—there were like, twenty people sharing the same space where they had put them. And my sister is a fighter. She was the one who cooked food for everyone, who organized everyone, who was five months pregnant, but she really organized everyone, it's... She found this energy, and... I say to myself... Who am I to crumple and fall? So, it's in... It's when you survive these moments that you say: I survived this. And I realized that... they were really brave to move forward... Life goes on, so... we have to eat, we... We survived this already... like a miracle. We are not allowed to withdraw into ourselves and... It wasn't the time to live the trauma, because for them it was incomprehensible. But, on the other hand, she had much more sympathy for me, because she said, “You come from Nyamata. It's true, your mother died, you didn't get to see her, it's...” So it was like poor you, you really had to face it, you had—you lived through it, so it was like... She was fine, she was okay. It was me that wasn't okay.

01:42:25

Sa.G: Even though she's the younger sister!

E.K: Yes. And she always wanted to protect me, to this day she still says to me: “You're the one who wasn't there, you suffered more than us, we have this luck, this happiness to have survived. And yet, there are things that you have experienced that we have not. We were just afraid to think to ourselves, maybe it's tonight, maybe it's tomorrow, but I imagine you were in as much pain as we were, knowing that we could die and that you could not save us. And to this day, you're the one who has seen everything”—as I told you earlier—“There are things

that we have never seen, that we will never see. We have the joy to say that life goes on, that we are here and...”

Sa.G: I think it's beautiful, how she said that!

E.K: Yes.

Sa.G: Did you think that someone was... [inaudible]

E.K: They suffered from thirst, they suffered from misery, from not having water, they felt it right in their bodies, but their minds were... really for most people, were not affected because they had this energy just to make it another day, to...

Sa.G: To survive...

E.K: No, to fight. Because I talked about it one day with a friend: What is survival? Is it a special power, is it some grace that you have more than others to... to be like that? She said: “No, at a certain point you say to yourself: you survive because you're afraid, but when you decide not to live a full life, that's not... You can't call that a life. And we have to live.” She says, “Never call it surviving. And that's what gives you the courage to understand just the slightest bit—to have a sense of what is going on. Because I would never claim to understand what she went through, but for her it's like no, you're the one who was more affected mentally. I was hungry, I was thirsty, but... here I am, life goes on. There are other joys, but when I saw her, I don't know how to explain it, but there were some people who were more affected than others and you couldn't withdraw into yourself and your own pain. There was this sister-in-law who was in bed with a baby... not even three weeks old. She had been shot in the back and left for dead, nine months pregnant. But she gave birth, she had her baby, they were able to save her from among the corpses. All her family above her. So Jeanne is lying there with three-week-old Grace; me, I'm coming down with a raging flu, my heart, my body says no, you're not going to—you're not going to stay there, you have to lie down and sleep—

that's how my body reacts—and I lie down right next to Jeanne; I forget about my sister, [laughs] the reason I made this trip, because she's like, I don't have... I don't need that, I don't need you crying over me, I don't need you to... And in my mind, I was going to... maybe spend a few days with her, I'm going to cook the food, I'm going to take care of everyone. First of all it's not possible, because there are about twenty people there. A little girl, if you bring a suit—because there was nothing. We would say: What should we bring you? “That question doesn't make sense, we have nothing, bring it all.” But all of what? In principle, we would say, when we go to see family, we'd bring baskets of... baskets of potatoes, we'd bring a bag of rice, we'd bring I don't know how many kilos of potatoes, we'd bring sugar... That's what we know. That's really the tradition. But after the genocide... they'd remind me, they'd say but... even a baby's bottle, we don't have one. Even a candle for light, we don't have one. You in Bujumbura, you're thinking, what? We bought some... panties, we bought some... Kotex for the girls, so there was... there was nothing from a box for... medicine for... But really, nothing... nothing. So we made bags, but since we'd never worked for disaster relief, we didn't know what a first aid kit looks like, we're not the Red Cross, we're not... You get there, you have a little outfit of... panties and a shirt, you give the panties to the... to the little girl so she can be partly dressed on the bottom, you give the shirt away because it's a little bit too big for the little girl. So, a girl will say: “Can you lend me your slippers? I'm going to go see what's going on in the street.” So... just, destitute in a way that... you wonder, oh my God. And for them it's okay. It's a joy just to be alive. We were driving, I remember, and a girl said: “I need to go to Nyamirambo,” they were in Kabuga, and then... she said: “I heard there was a member of my family who is... There's no transport, there's nothing, can you please take me?” We go with her, we pass by, see the Sainte-Famille Church. She closes her eyes, she starts to scream in the car, she says: “We never thought we would pass here again and look now, we're crossing!” So, they never thought they would have food again,

they never thought they were going to get dressed again, they never thought they would have sugar to put into their tea, so it's like a rebirth. And that rebirth is like a miracle. It's like they just couldn't believe they were alive. So I find my sister like that and then... I see that she's fighting, I see that her children are there, that she survived, I see the incredible solidarity all these people have. So everything they have, they share. I see that they are stronger than me [laughs]. And okay, you saw me, I saw you, it's okay, and we went back to Buja and right after that I said to myself, well... no, we're not staying here.

01:50:22

Sa.G: And your sister, since she was there, was she able to answer some of your questions? Did you manage to talk a little or was it...?

E.K: Not at that point. I went back in 2001 and then... it's like I told you earlier, we learn every day, we try... not only to learn but to understand. It's like a quest for meaning, for what went wrong. We can talk because about it, I can see that, okay, for her, they built a house, her children are at school and there are ups and downs, there are days that are more difficult than others, but I am not saying that there was a before '94 and after '94. For me, I have not yet answered this question and I cannot answer it for her. But as I told you, every time we talked, even here, even there, we can't have a conversation without '94 coming back up, every day. Whether it's in detail, or it's... what happened, or else it's a question we forgot to ask... Every time it comes back, every day it comes back. So it's like... I don't know. There was a symposium once at Concordia... it's not... I don't know, they were talking about victims and they were talking about... they were talking about survivors: who is a survivor? Who isn't? Oh my God, it bothered me, oh my God! And it was like, my friends kept doing these colloquia, whether it was Jean Pierre, whether it was Béatrice. For me, I didn't get into it much because, okay, I understand, these people are academics, these people want to make certain things understandable, but me and my sister, we didn't really experience the genocide

in the same way. Do the survivors have the right to call themselves that, even if... because there is no scale of suffering. We must let people identify like that. And I have... when just I ask her how's it going, what's going on, we'll come back to it. Maybe it's because she doesn't really want to face what happened to her. But for her, it's like she empathizes with me more because she's not able to bear it all, it's as if... if I'm bearing another person's suffering, it saves me from facing my own. I don't know, I didn't study psychology but... maybe that's it. It's a journey that we don't really have the answer to today. Even if afterwards we can tell her, here's what will make it easier... We have the right lawyers for refugee status and we know how to look for the first apartment, we're here, we can—how can I put it—take the first steps with you and show you how to do it, introduce you to our friends to make it easier for you to adjust. But... here, every path is personal! I can't tell her 14 years ago I did this, it's not the same reality anymore.

01:55: 05

Sa.G: So, we finished the second tape with... the reunion with your sister, the time you spent there, and after that you decided to leave. You told me that you didn't have time to talk with your sister about what happened... in more detail, it was... in 2001 that you talked about that. Tell me about your trip in 2001, how was it different from in '94?

E.K: ... It was less catastrophic, I... I had... taken a step back, because life here is not like, it wasn't the same emotions, it was like a real reunion. It was also the return where I said: I have a Canadian passport, my family is safe, and... even if I had gone to Bukavu for other issues... property... but that time it was really like, I'm going back home. You know they are at the airport, they welcome you, you go to sleep at home, you... it's not the same atmosphere. It's not... and then... as I see it in my mind's eye, they had gone on with their lives between '94 and 2001. So I went back, it's the joy of the reunion, it's not the same pain, it's not the same... it's not the same feelings.

Sa.G: And the distance!

E.K: Yes.

Sa.G: And how was your sister?

E.K: Very, very moved, to say that... it's not easy. Even though it wasn't '94, you know... I haven't seen her since 2001, it's been six, seven years, that's a pretty long time. We've never spent so much time without seeing each other. But [we're] very close, we call each other every day, but it's not the same as seeing her. The children have grown up... a lot of things have happened and there have been deaths, there have been... So there's a lot of news to share, anyway. And then just this distance, it's... You don't see her when you want to, you don't see her, you can... I can travel freely, but can I afford it? The ticket is expensive, she can't get the visa even if she had the money, so there's all that, that's the reality too, so... We try to maximize the... the joy of the reunion rather than dwelling on... what's wrong. That was when we said, listen, we have to do... We didn't have time in '94 to... to do a mourning ritual, and this is very important. We have to call the family members who survived, we have to get together, to be together, to celebrate life and take care of those who have gone. Write something about each missing person, because... my parents lived next to her parents-in-law, so it was always, like the sister-in-law—she was the one who just called, actually—it was really like the same family, very, very close.

Sa.G: And in 2001, for example, did she talk a little more? Did she get some distance compared to '94, was she more comfortable talking about what had happened?

E.K.: Because this happened in the village where my mother lived in Nyamata, while she had a different experience in Kigali. Which meant that... what brought us together was... was that we had to celebrate where my mother had lived. What made me really... it's complicated.

What gave me a lot of pain is that normally, when I went back to Rwanda, I would, of course,

pass through Kigali, because it's the largest city, it's where the airport is. But for me, I was just passing through, even though I had friends there, even though... the ultimate goal was always to go to my mom's. And now arriving in Kigali, you say: I will never go there again. Like I said, you don't buy rice, sugar for... so it was like... you were cut off from that place. But to come back, to go and do this ritual is like going back home. It's not like, it's finished, what will bring me there again? I found it courageous in a way, because there are people who were not able... to return, who know it's over, it's over, they put an end to it. My parents are gone, what am I going to do there? But for us, it was as if we had returned home, it was like a ritual, perhaps because my father's grave is still there, because... we said to ourselves, maybe my mother is there, maybe she's not, so it's not... But there are things that we can be sure of; there are things that will always draw me there. It's not the house, there's no one there anymore, but it's been renovated a little bit, because there was this widow who had nowhere to go, who couldn't go and live on the outskirts—because we are really like, in the centre. But it wasn't safe at the time to go and live on the outskirts, really like in the remote villages, it was better to stay in the centre there, and since the house was renovated... why not? And we thought that was just perfect, it's like my mother's spirit is still there, who was always helping everyone, she would have approved [laughs] of her being there!

2:01:40

Sa.G: We talked a little while ago about your father, but we didn't talk about the conditions that led to his death. That was in '94?

E.K.: Yes, it was in '94. Well... out of decency we always say he died of old age... knowing that... what he suffered through, he was imprisoned, he was often tortured, he was uprooted several times, removed from wherever and put somewhere else. He never wanted to leave. There, we still have a little bit of... It is not to victimize him, but we know that if it had been different, if he had had a life... without suffering... maybe he would have lived longer...

Because he was hearty, he was in really good health, he was someone who was very mentally sound, who kept his head, as we say here, for a very long time he walked a lot, he had a very strict lifestyle... That is to say, he ate at the right times, he walked a lot—he could do Nyamata to Kigali on foot; not round trip, but he passed through the villages obviously, he didn't take the road all the time, he knew the shortcuts, so... He was really... He got up very, very early, he napped, and then... really... He didn't drink alcohol, he... I have never seen him, like... Often men of his generation would spend evenings... in bars, but no. His favourite drink was tea... but he needed the whole pot! [Laughs]. And then... that's it... and then... We had a neighbour who was a medical assistant and every time he fell ill, he was the one who treated him, he was like his doctor. We would come to see him and at one point he said they were trying to take him somewhere, and since I was working in that field I wanted to understand, I wanted to know. And he told me that sometimes he had really, really bad pain in his joints, sometimes he had swollen feet, swollen eyes, and then he said it was... with modesty, always, he said it was the result of what he had gone through. He was beaten many times, he was often... But at that time, as I said, they were really very discrete people, he never wanted to give us details. As I said, there was a certain modesty in not talking, not naming things, and especially when it came to suffering. And it's like, later on, we asked ourselves: if he had told us exactly how he had suffered, what they had done to him, maybe it would have protected us a bit. And when we talked about it with the slightly older people who were of his generation, they said no, he never wanted to plant the seed of hate, because it wouldn't have protected you. You would have grown up with bitterness, with hatred. That was out of the question, that wasn't what we wanted to pass on to you. So that was my father... He was a man of his generation... and he never complained about what he went through. And when we asked him specific questions like... I remember when we left Kaduha, we were in Nyanza, we were all alone... We were evacuated in a truck, it was like, saying: ah, who left

the children—at the market, who left the children here or there? We... it was said like we were animals, or eggs, but in that moment, it meant nothing at all. And then there was someone who said to us, ah, your dad is in prison, I know their father, they can go see him because he's been hospitalized. And I didn't recognize him in the hospital. I said no, that's not my father. Because he was all swollen... the only thing I asked... If he is really is my father—because I often used to play with the buckle of his belt, which was shaped like a lion, his belt buckle was a lion—I said show me his belt. But obviously, he was beaten, he was tortured, they took his clothes, how [laughs]... how are they going to show me his belt? But when I ask him about it, what happened, why were you in the hospital? He says, I was sick, that's all. Why were you in prison? What did you do, Daddy? Then when you got a little older, it's like, what they impressed upon you was the fact is that... They did bad things so they must be punished... but he couldn't say... I'm in prison because I broke the law, because I did something wrong, it's the Hutu... No, he couldn't say that. So when you ask specific questions, he says... These are things that happen. There are words in Kinyarwanda that really... that don't say anything directly... so you understand that... That's enough. You are a child... This is not an interrogation and... there are things that I cannot tell you, other things that do not concern you... that's it.

2:07:40

N.S.: Afterwards, did you, did you discuss this with your mother or did it remain... sort of...?

E.K.: It wasn't a question of taboo, what I later asked my mother was, I said: I remember that you brought food to the prison, that we moved, and that... I remember this place because it's... There are things that are coming back, and you want to share them, or there are questions that... Now it's coming back to me again, but it's... That pains me as well, to think that I forgot to ask her that. But the little I did ask her about this period was when I said: you

brought food to him. And then she said, “but... you do realize,” that's how she said it, “he wasn't even the one who ate it. They told me that he was there, but he wasn't even there”... So, it's like saying... it didn't make sense...

Sa.G: It's memories like this that are coming back to you?

E.K.: Yes, and I say to myself, well, what happened? Why did I forget to ask you that? But... also just around you, how many people are left of that generation, in your family, to ask these questions? Sometimes there are none; you even look at the photos, you say to yourself... I have a cousin, actually I showed you him, when he went there in 2001, he is so, so... how to say it? He keeps everything, he has photos that, we imagine, when we need something, he's the one to call. So sometimes... my nephews send me photos, you know, with technology now... On Skype, he sends me photos, and I say to myself: wait, who is that? I see a child in my mother's arms, I see all these relatives, I don't know if it's my aunt, if it's her sister-in-law, so it's like, who is that? I can't make a phone call, make a long-distance call to Kigali and say: the third person in the photo, who is that [laughs]? But if I had actually had the photo when my mother was around, she would have told me the story, she would have told me under what circumstances the photo was taken, who these babies were, when it was, why they were there... So for me, it's... it's like there will be zones... And if later on, my children ask me the same questions looking at this photo—but it's terrible not being able to... tell them, because I can't... and I don't know where I'd turn to ask, who, when...?

Sa.G: And those relatives, the aunts and uncles who stayed, who were there in Rwanda, are there many of them left in your family?

E.K.: Whenever I am asked this question, it's difficult for me, because the extended family, I explained the situation... They grew up with us, those who were closer, those who were further away, not to mention people from the diaspora now who are back, but to whom we

don't have, we haven't really had any ties, who are there, who are kin, but who don't know it, and we don't know, because they left a long time ago, and... the people who would introduce us are no longer there. So for me, those I knew, the ones I used to see, those who were closer—I can't start counting, and I think it would be better to ask, how many do you have left. That, I can estimate more or less but... those who are gone... I don't even dare to count. But as I said, there's my little sister, there are my two paternal cousins, who were very close because I lived with one and then the other is... his children grew up with us in Bukavu, it's... We're really very close... There's Pauline's family—you know Pauline—so there's Pascal, there's Patrick, there's... and then... There were people with whom we have forged strong ties. Like I said, if I'm coming to Montreal, it's for a life here, but we lived together in Buja because he was studying there, but there was her maternal aunt, there were her grandparents, we often saw each other, but it's not the same thing to be together in Montreal, where I was like, the referring parent who has... who became much closer because she, for her... it's like, okay, she's my aunt, I realize this now, my mother is not there, my parents are far away, but now in Montreal we have become closer. It's the climate that does that too, so I have to count on them, too, on those who are close to me, even if... at the time, we weren't really so close. She went to the Belgian school, I saw her every morning when I dropped off my children, but we weren't so close at the time because there was no need.

02:13:27

Sa.G: So there are ties that were forged afterwards because of all these circumstances?

E.K: Absolutely! And I explained the situation.

Sa.G: So to conclude, so your reasons for leaving, for immigrating, which—what do you think you left behind when you came here?

E.K: ...A bit of ourselves. It's like they say: to leave is to die a little, I don't make literary references but... it's really the truth because... I lived there. There is... really, the fabric that you wove, what you lived every day, there's your family that you can't see as often as... you would like, who can't see you as much as they would like. For us... my nuclear family, as they say, my husband, my children and all that, until '94 it was like... Life was good, we built a house, we... The children were born there, we were well-off, so it's like... everything is more or less complete, it's familiar, it's your home. So you don't even have to ask yourself if you're good or you're not good. Suddenly there's war, you leave your house, which is then occupied by the Banyamulenge, and it's like you've invested all your will in this and one day it's all gone, you return to Rwanda and half of... even three-quarters, like I said, I'm not counting again... Everything that made sense and everything you had woven together, it doesn't exist anymore. You say to yourself, as they say here... the snow, you've just arrived, you're a refugee, and there's all that's in... all that comes with being a refugee here, so it's like you go and learn French, you have to go back to school, your children are from Africa, they don't... they don't know anything, so... education—really, you start your life over here. It's like... we'll show you how to do it, so you didn't exist before. If you weren't one of the victims, you're in total ignorance. I don't have any issues with Canada, that's the way it is in the system. But in the sense that you come, still, you've left behind a comfortable life, you come here because you have to, you're treated like someone who has everything... “You must be happy now to be here, you're lucky to be here.” So everything you've experienced before is denied or, I don't know where they get that idea. If you complain that... you don't have cars, you don't have staff at home, they don't get it. And yet if you say, if you try to muster the confidence to explain your life there, that you had three, four staff at home and that that's normal, that you even had a garden that was three times the size of the apartment... When I visited apartments, I said: I don't see anything—well, what do you want to see, ma'am? We

had a view of the lake, the photo right there [shows the photo], you went back to the other side, you saw the mountains, here you hit the walls, you hit the walls. It's not the first time you've seen a dollar... so it's like, why are you complaining? And it's like you have to sing hallelujah every morning. Life here is hard for us; what's so hard? When you say these things, it's incomprehensible. And when you get someone to realize, when they start to realize, that's when they say: what the hell are you doing here? So there's really work to be done, but we don't have the energy right now to put all those things in context, to help, to help his children because he [his son] had problems at school because they asked him where he lived in Africa, did he live in a tree, how did he get to Canada, do they have airplanes? The first time... my daughter had a paper, they told her: you're going to watch TV and then you're going to do the paper in the evening, she said, "We just arrived, it's not our priority, so we don't have a TV" and everybody looked at her. Obviously, it reinforces these prejudices—they're poor people, they can't afford, they don't even have a TV. The whole class laughing, they don't know. So it's all these little incidents that make it like, yes, you're safe, but at the same time it's not total bliss... the first days.

02:19:20

Sa.G: You said you went to the United States first.

E.K: Mhm.

Sa.G: Then you have some friends from Quebec that you'd heard from, so that's why you chose Montreal?

E.K: Yes. And Quebec City.

Sa.G: And Quebec City.

E.K: We could also have go to Québec, because we also have friends in Québec, who had enrolled their children in school, but... between Québec and Montreal we felt closer to those in Montreal, because they are a mixed couple too.

Sa.G: Okay!

E.K: The father is Senegalese, the mother is Quebécoise, and... they went to school with my children, and even though it's true there was this break in the time between, I still felt more comfortable in Montreal and all the more so, as I was telling you, all the diaspora, all the refugees of '94 from Rwanda, there were still more of them in Montreal than in Québec, it was like there was more mutual support. You met people in the... shelters, people you knew or who would visit, who helped you look for an apartment, who told you about the neighbourhoods, there were people who knew places where you could buy things cheaper, so... Really, you were there to surround yourself with others going through this process, they knew the good lawyers who would accompany you in court, so it was more... And also the accessibility of Montreal, the public transportation, the market...[laughs] the ethnic market as a stepping stone, because it's a little unsettling to be in a place where you have to do everything yourself, where you know almost nothing.

Sa.G: Do you feel that the Rwandan community in Montreal has helped you integrate better?

E.K: Yes, very much so at the time...

Sa.G: And how have you made a living since you moved to Canada?

E.K: Uh...

Sa.G: Did you have trouble finding work...?

E.K: It's the first shock, as they say, because as I was saying... everything you are is overlooked. You don't understand it immediately, you're like what's happening? How am I being perceived? Where do I belong? Because it's like the seats are already assigned, it's, it's like it's coded. You don't find yourself right away. Okay, the equivalencies of diplomas, or did you learn French, how... It's a whole other system here. It's not like you're instantly going to... and since my studies in Africa were always kind of fragmented, I had several experiences without really having a specific institution, I worked in a pharmacy, I worked in a doctor's office, we had our own business at one point, in Bujumbura I couldn't work because... I was all alone and [my husband] sometimes went back and forth... So it was a different life, you can't drop off your children in the morning and go to work and then pick them up at noon so they can do their homework in the afternoon, it's like I was a single parent in the true sense of the word. So you come here, they ask you what are you specialized in, what specific field do you work in? That's why I've had a lot of friends, I'm not talking about me right now, who have gone to work in factories, because they have reserved slots, excuse the phrase, for newcomers. You don't need any experience, you don't need... right away. But as I said, I had... these friends who told me that to make my life easier, maybe I shouldn't really work right away, but perhaps... I could do some volunteer work. By doing volunteer work, you're going to build your network, they're going to see what you're capable of and if there are places on the inside or if you're going to hear about it, it'll be by getting in. And at that time, I was the one who was in a lot of government programs, I don't even remember what they were called, there were two of them, it was like you had income security but they always give you a little extra money because you're a participant—I mean, you're not at home, it's like, it's not like you're taking advantage of the state, you work, it's not charity. For your dignity, that was really the best thing. And I got... they found me a place to... to volunteer, but they didn't... They don't find a place for you. They give you leads and you sort through

them. It really took me some time to understand how it works, because it's a whole life story, it's really life lessons. At home, there are people they call pistons: they know the place, they know someone high up who will introduce you. But here, it's not like that. Even if you have friends, they show you the way and you make your own arrangements. But it took me some time to understand that it's like that. I didn't understand why they didn't offer me this, why they didn't give me that, but nobody will hand you things on a platter. You are the one who has to fight, you are the one who has to look for things, because you have to know if that's what suits you, you have to face that. So I said, "Okay, let's cut to the chase, let's start volunteering." Where? At Henri Bourassa, at a volunteer organization that does... that does Meals on Wheels. You either cook or you go and get dishes that... were cooked, for elderly people who can't go out or cook from home. And I said in all humility: oh my God, I'm not the only one, or we're not the only ones with problems. It's another vision of the host society, and you feel useful. It... it opens you up a little bit to a different perception of the place where you are, and to face that ah, my God, there are problems, this is real life, here. Meals on Wheels, until there was an opportunity, because there was a toy bank, which we set up... which was set up. I started working as a member of the group. I'm at Meals on Wheels and I'm working. That's good, that's my first job. From program to program, from unemployment to work, that's it, so I understood. But the problem was, first and foremost, the work-life balance. The first time I gave my daughter a key [to the house], I was traumatized, because they didn't finish school at the same time... Racem, he was 13 years old, so that was perfectly... Here, by law, it's... it's perfectly fine to... to leave a 13 year old child at home, but my daughter was 10 years old, so... she was finishing... she was in the local school, she finished at half past three, and how is she going to get home before her brother? It was a dilemma.

02:26:48

Sa.G: To give her a key?

E.K: To give her a key. She's going to come home, there'll be no one there—it was hell. It was hell, but all around me people were telling me, that's how we live! I said, but you do the cleaning, you do the shopping, you take care of the children and you work, you do it all by yourself? Yes, that's right. So... programs... [I went from] government programs to working in daycares, to going back to university, because it was important for me to have a degree from here—everything I had, experience counts for a lot, and even though I studied in our country it was like... no, we don't recognize it, don't even bother. But as soon as they see Université de Montréal, it opens more doors. I studied immigration and then multi-ethnic intervention, I worked in refugee reception and then... I worked a lot on call at... a shelter and it's been a year and a half now, it's more or less a permanent job at the shelter, and mental health. So yeah!

Sa.G: It's interesting how all the jobs and volunteer work you've done, it's always involved helping people.

E.K: Helping relationships.

Sa.G: Helping relationships. It's... Was it by choice, did you know you were going to be doing this for a long time when you came arrived here, or did you just keep finding yourself in this area?

E.K: No. I had... I don't know, I had other experiences, like when I worked for Info Afrique... That was communications, it was different. But I worked at the FFQ [Fédération des Femmes du Québec] as... Assistant for Punctual Projects, but it was more like... Even though it's helping, there's a little more distance from... the field. But I wasn't really happy, I... it was like research, I agree we have to do research to have... to advance in certain... understandings of... of life, but for me it wasn't really my place. My place is out in the field.

Sa.G: When it comes to Montreal... What do you think, for example, of the division here between Anglophones and Francophones, is that something that surprised you when you arrived?

E.K: Yes, to this day, because I work mainly in an English-speaking environment, and this difference in... my God... in philosophy. Uh... it's true, when you come here, you say you're going to Canada. You don't realize that [laughs]... Quebec is a bit special. You learn that when you come here, you're a refugee... You're not under Quebec jurisdiction, except for school, health and the police... They start talking to you about the federal government, they start telling you about the forces of power and then... Until you say, I made the choice—it's true, I've said it before and I'll say it again—I chose Quebec because of the language, I didn't want my children to translate for me, I wanted us to always be on the same... on the same wavelength. The mixed nature of my marriage means that French is our language, it's our everyday language. We don't speak [my husband's] language, we don't speak my language, but it's... It's the common language, it's the family language, like the mother tongue, you could say. So for me, it was very important, but I don't get into the politics of... division. Anglophones, Francophones, I think that... they are capable of sorting it out amongst themselves, I don't take sides, it's not my place, so... I look at what suits me when it suits me, it's really not about playing the diplomat or the hypocrite, but... There are things that are convenient for me, but I will always take what's good for the other person. So it's not a matter of telling me to make a choice, do you prefer the Anglos or the Francophones—no... I like them both, I'm in Canada and at the same time I'm in Quebec, so I'm fine with both.

Sa.G: Do you... How do you think your feelings... about your home country of Rwanda, have they changed since you moved to Canada?

E.K: Well, of course! Yes, everything changes, there is nothing that is... immovable. So... except that... in these changes maybe I'm in or maybe I'm not, I don't know, but I did leave,

and it was... I left for a reason. I can't live here and live there. I can't really... you know... I'm going to tell you the truth because, for example, when they want to get me involved in what's happening now in Rwanda, when I see people telling me, well now, over there... it's your people who have the power, it's paradise, what are you doing here? But what do you know about it, about what made me choose to come? It's not because they're my 'people,' as they say... maybe they're further away than the ones who are here with me, because we're going through the same thing. So it's not the same reality, it's true that it's changed, every time we go back it's... I don't know, you can tell. I'm going to look again at the pictures of the people who stayed over there [flipping through photos], I... I go to places I never thought I'd go, I see things that are, wow, you see shops you've never seen before... I see people who came back from the diaspora, I see... really a lot of things that have changed, and at the same time these changes, and me, how I interpret them, how I experience them is not the same thing. Excuse me [coughing]... It's not... it's not the same reality as... living here. I might know a lot more about Quebec than I know about Rwanda now. I'm attached to my country because I can't say... I'm a Quebecer, although sometimes I say that as a joke, but... it's true, I've been living here for 14 years, and not living in Rwanda. So I know more things from here than I knew 14 years ago in Rwanda. When I go back, I see children who have grown up, new people, children who have been born since, I see... alliances that have been woven, marriages that have been made, I... So the family is growing... but I'm no longer there... And besides, my sister used to tell me, when you leave here, they say you went home to Rwanda. So here, I'm a Rwandan, and that's absolutely true. When I get to Rwanda—hello, how are things? What's the news from there? When are you going back home? And there, my sister, I used to say every time: tell your friends never to ask me when I'm going back home. Because home is wherever I am in the moment. Because there, they'll tell me: when are you... Where are you from? I'm Rwandan, I'm a Quebecer, I say, I've eaten a lot of blueberries and it's changed my

skin [laughs] and they can see that I don't talk like them, I'm not dressed like them, I behave differently, I've changed, they've changed, and... Ah, where's she from? She's from Canada, okay, when are you going back home to Canada? But... that's the reality, even now as I speak... I'm getting flashes, I have to remember, where am I from again? [Laughs]. I'm from wherever I am in that moment.

02:37:10

Sa.G: Great! ...So you went back to Rwanda in 2001, and did you go back after that?

E.K: 2004.

Sa.G: In 2004 as well.

E.K: [Nods].

Sa.G: And what... How do you feel each time you go back there? Your most recent trip...?

E.K: When I go there it's always... for something specific, it's like a mission, so not only for a vacation, but it's also an opportunity to see the people I love, I have... We had built a house in Bukavu, in 2001 we had to go back home to see what had actually happened... do the ritual at the same time, go to look at the house in Bukavu... What happened was that's where the Banyamulenge were, and that's where... Later, I'll show you the photos, it's true, you'll understand, and that will work to illustrate what I'm going to tell you... [laughs]. So, in 2004, it was trying to really... it was like, now I'm sure we won't go back to live there.

Sa.G: Okay.

E.K: So we have to... get rid of the house, as they say... though Racem [her son] still disagrees, he says when we have enough money, we have to go back and buy the house... but for us it's like, it's over. It's over, so we had to go sell it and then... Just this fluidity of

movement, of being sure... no matter what happens to me, that... I'm going to go back no matter what... So I'm... It's behind me, I'm not caught in... in problems for which I don't have solutions. So, I know what brought me here, I know what to do, I... I have to go back, my family's here now, my work's here now, so... yeah.

Sa.G: You've put an end to any possibility of going back and settling there?

E.K: [Nods]. Except that people... people from there, when they go back, they don't understand. What are you doing over there? Knowing just how hard it is, it's like, now that everything's okay—you left because it wasn't okay, now it's okay, why don't you come home? They don't understand that time has passed, there are things they can't understand because they're not there, it's like there's something wrong with you because...

Sa.G: Usually...

E.K: Yes... and then it's like... you're a woman, you have a family, so it's always in the tradition, in the context of saying... you know, we know what's best for you... They don't understand that you've changed your way of thinking, your way of being, your way of... It's like... it's a shock, too, to say: we don't really have the power to decide, to influence her anymore, it's like she leaves us and then... so maybe she doesn't want to be with us. But at the same time, it's... it's true, it's frightening to say: ok, if I said, I've decided to go to Rwanda, maybe my social life would be easier, but there are some things that I wouldn't be able to handle anymore... Because you belong to everybody, and everybody belongs to you, especially in my family, it's something else [laughs]. They're not going to knock on the door at a certain point. Even if I'm fine, if I go back, if I have a beautiful house, to say that I don't have 10 or 20 dollars to give them because the children have to go to school, because someone is sick and they have to go and get treatment... It's not out of selfishness, but at the same time, I don't think I could stand it anymore. At one time, maybe I could, in other

circumstances, but now... I've faced the reality that it's something I might not be able to handle...

Sa.G: Mhm.

E.K: And... that doesn't mean that... There's an age-old tradition of mutual support, the mutual support is quite normal. I support that idea, if I see my sister today, I still see her, I do it... I'm close [with her] and all, but... it's not just my sister. Even my sister will come and ask me, I have a friend, I have a cousin, I have... So she will also ask... for me to help other people. If I say no, I'm the bad guy. Could I? I don't think so... [laughs].

N.S.: Did your sister, more than the others, perhaps, sort of understand your choice to stay here in Montreal?

E.K: Yes.

N.S.: Yes?

E.K: She understood my choice because she knows that, because of my mixed marriage, that maybe it was the right place... that my children are more fulfilled here than there, that my husband is more... It's true that for me, it's home, but if I only thought about myself personally, and didn't think about my... daily life, I'd be... really missing the mark.

Sa.G: And do you know people who moved back, people from Montreal who went back?

E.K: Yes.

Sa.G: What do they tell you about their return to Rwanda?

E.K: I don't know if we touched on it quickly at the beginning, but not everyone can really handle immigration and exile. There are people, like I've been telling you, like me, it works for me because of... adaptiveness, because of... my own family's history, because of personal

experiences, migratory trajectories, these are all factors. The others, maybe they came to Montreal when something wasn't right for them, and they went back for family reasons. I know, I have cousins who went back, because for them, maybe it's... They need to live there, supported. They need that security. Because most of them are not whole families, sometimes it's an individual who left because his own personal... how to say... material satisfaction, it didn't happen, his dream didn't come true, he didn't find a job in his field. And he went back to Rwanda, he found a good job, and maybe the woman stayed with the children and they joined him later, or he went back and forth. There are girls who left because they got married and they found husbands and then... happy to start a family, to continue to have a life that suits them. There are others who tried and found the factory work very difficult and found that the little they had versus the security... So, they weighed their options, they found that it was much better to live there.

02:44:50

Sa.G: So earlier, we were talking about the question of the symposium, where they asked who's a survivor and who isn't, I think that was last year's theme. Do you consider yourself a survivor?

E.K: Oh my God, that... Yes, honestly, yes. Because I think if I hadn't left in '73, maybe I would be dead. I tell myself this every time I go back to my parents, I could have been murdered, I took risks. I tell myself that in '94, even in '90 when I was in Bukavu, because I was registered, because... unfortunately or fortunately, I had a telling face... Like, my sister, you saw her photo. She could blend in, but not me [laughs]. I don't have any camouflage... She sometimes passed as mixed or... but I had no choice. There were several times, either in Bukavu, or in Bujumbura, or if I had stayed in Rwanda and seen what had happened to my people, why wouldn't I have been killed? I say to myself, no, they don't have the right to assign me a place. Yes, I am a survivor! [Laughs].

Sa.G: That's great... So, how do you think your story, and the story of the community, can be presented in classrooms, in plays, in museums, for example? How do you think the history, Rwanda, and what happened, could be represented?

E.K: I don't know... Maybe like, giving examples of what... Really make it into a teaching opportunity, because... how to say... the Rwandan tradition is... When you are given a chance to speak, it's to make something out of it. That's why I agreed to testify, to... to share my story with you, because if I knew that it was just to hear myself speak or to make a document, it would mean very little to me. I mean...there are things that I'm going to say, maybe, in a way that it's going to affect someone, or it's going to lead them to reflect on things. I would really like the younger people, whether it's in schools and things, to be led to reflect, to say: oh my God, what happened? There was a big debate about... the film Hotel Rwanda. There was a lot of criticism, it's true that, well, personally I can tell myself how I see it, how I think about it, but... By the way, this man... It's shot in a Hollywood style because it's the understanding of the younger generation, they had no choice, and sure, they made money, okay. But there are young people who saw it and understood that something happened, anyway. It's up to them to reflect on it. So, the way I say it or don't say it, I know that there is some little sentence, even if it's three cassettes, where there will be... someone who will say: actually, if we develop this part, if we think about this part, it can sort of help to understand, and that's why. It's because... that's why. Yes.

Sa.G: But what would you like your children to learn about your story with this DVD?

E.K: Well, there are things I didn't tell you directly. By watching, by listening, they won't have the same pain as me, when I said I didn't ask my mother, so it will also allow them to ask questions—Mom, you said this, was it really like that, did you say it like that—or maybe also to say, okay, we heard something that we never dared to ask you.

Sa.G: All right, we're going to end the interview here, but thank you again for taking the time on a Sunday to talk to us for... a good three hours!

E.K: Listen, I am the one who should be thanking you, because just... again, in Kinyarwanda, when you are given the floor, it's an honour.

02:51:00

[Photos are projected at end of DVD].

[End of Session 1 of 1]