



## **INTERVIEW WITH BERTHE KAYITESI**

**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 Jenocide n'itotezwa ryayibanjirije**

**Status of the interview:** **X public (1A)**

**Interviewee:** Berthe Kayitesi (B.K.)

**Interviewer:** Monique Mukabalisa (M.M.)

**Videographer:** Callixte Kabayiza (C.K.)

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**Editorial Note:**

The interviewee is seated on a couch opposite the two interviewers who are, themselves, not filmed. Monique Mukabalisa is to the left of Ms Kayitesi and Callixte Kabayiza is to her right. When answering the questions, Berthe hesitates and speaks very softly, which made the transcription more difficult.

**Biographical note on the interviewee:**

Berthe Kayitesi is a Rwandan woman who at the time of the interview in 2009 was in her mid-30s. She is a survivor of the 1994 genocide. In the years following the war she fled to Congo and lived there for a while after which she returned to Rwanda with her family. During the interview, she was living in Canada.

**00:00:12**

**M.M.: Tell me about yourself, your parents and the commune where you grew up [inaudible].**

B.K.: ... My name is Berthe Kayitesi ... I am from Gisenyi in Rwanda. I was born in Gisenyi, but I spent part of my childhood with my maternal grandmother in the former Kibuye Prefecture ... the former commune of [inaudible]. ... my father's name was [inaudible], my mother's name was Mukabilima Spéciose, my grandmother's name was [inaudible] Valérie. I think that's [inaudible], I think that's all.

**M.M.: Could you tell me your date of birth?**

B.K.: ...I was born on November 11, 1978 ...

**M.M.: In Gisenyi?**

B.K.: In Gisenyi.

**M.M.: Before going any further I would like to ... ask you [inaudible]...**

B.K.: [laughs] [break in the recording]

**M.M.: Tell me about your parents. What are your memories of your parents?**

B.K.: ... of my mother, I remember her courage in the face of life's difficulties, she was a fighter. She made sure that everything was going well at home, but she was also very strict, that's the side of her I didn't like. But I remember her strong character, her courage, her fighting spirit. That's my lasting memory of her. For example, I remember that every day she would get up at almost five o'clock, five-thirty, and would start working. She advanced ... quite quickly in life. She often regretted not having been able to continue her studies, she always told me: "You know, I was smart, but I was unlucky, so ... you must ... " [laughs]. And also: "I was at the top of my class. How come you allow yourself not to be ... to fail?" So, [laughs] we had to be among the best students in school. And when we weren't, she was on our case ... [laughs], so to speak. She was also a very beautiful woman.

**M.M.: And your dad?**

B.K.: ... my father ... my father had a very gentle character and ... he'd had a difficult past, but he almost never expressed or shared his feelings. He was someone very warm, very, very hospitable—how should I say it—it's really hard to describe my father. But ... it's ... his calm disposition... he also had a certain hardness about him, but he had ... in fact, his kindness ... counterbalanced this hardness, and that's how we remember him. Those who knew him retain that image of my father as someone who was very kind, someone who never complained. I think his father had been unfairly imprisoned for many years, but he never spoke of that. He had left ... well, he kept it all inside and he lived with these feelings, but without letting them affect the family. Thinking about it today, I wish he shared with us a little bit more of what he felt inside, but he had decided to keep it all within.

**M.M.: And what did your parents do for a living?**

B.K.: ... my father was a tailor, he was one of the first tailors in the region where he was born, in Kibuye, Gishyita, which he left to settle in Gisenyi and continued working as a tailor there, well, that's what he continued doing until 1994. And as for my mother, she did many things. At one point we had a bar—actually, we had a bar at different times—and she was taking care of it. And shortly before 1994, she ... she was selling things, food, at the market.

**M.M.: So what I understand is that your dad was often not at home, he had his job and your mom too. ... If you look back, how did they manage to contribute..., to reconcile the work they were doing outside the home and the education of the children?**

B.K.: ... the children also participated, so I think the work was ... shared. So, when my mother got up at five-thirty, sometimes it was because she had to get—how do you say that in French?—because the bar was also serving *urwagwa*, Mutzig and Primus ...

**M.M.: Banana beer.**

B.K.: Yes, banana beer. She had to go get it very early in the morning.

**M.M.: So she was buying it elsewhere?**

B.K.: Yes, the expression we use is "going *kurangura*" ... So she would get up very early in the morning, around five-thirty, and when I got up, she would tell me, "Before going to school you have to buy ... food for lunch." So I would wake up around six o'clock and I

would go buy ... whatever we were going to eat at noon. And after that I would go to school. Upon her return, she would make lunch before going to the bar.

**M.M.: To her work.**

B.K.: So when I came home in the evening, I would take care of the rest for [inaudible]

**M.M.: When you think about it, between your mom and dad, was there one who was more involved in the children's education in the home? Or was it equally shared?**

B.K.: ... What they were both teaching us, I think it was equal, but for the most part, in terms of household work, it was my mother and me.

**M.M.: We are talking about your parents, I didn't even ask about sisters, brothers—how many were you at home?**

B.K.: ... at the time, in 1994, well, when I returned to the house ... after living with my grandmother ... we were ... five. Later, my mother, well, my parents, had two more children so we were seven, but one of my younger sisters died just before the genocide. For us, the children, luck was on our side and we ... survived. The six of us survived. But my father had another marriage before ...

**M.M.: Before marrying your mom?**

B.K.: Yes. So from that marriage, he had three children: two twin sisters who died in 1994 and their mother too, and another sister who survived. So with this sister, and with her brother on her mother's side, we found each other afterwards—it's like being a family of eight.

**M.M.: How many boys? How many girls?**

B.K.: Three girls and five boys. [laughs]

**M.M.: [Inaudible] I would like to go back again to the education of girls and boys. ... When you look back, do you think all the children were educated in the same way? Were you given different tasks? Different instructions? Or was it the same for boys and girls? Or was one parent teaching the girls and the other the boys?**

**00:10:00**

B.K.: ... I think that Rwandan culture at the time ... favoured...—not only through education, but also through social discourse—it's as if the boy child was more important than the girl child. [laughs] I remember, I was angered by this. But that's over now. When I was born—so my paternal grandmother, actually, my paternal grandparents had five boys, so they didn't have any girls. My father was their eldest son, and until I was born, he only had girls. [laughs] So when I was born—I was the first daughter of his second marriage—so my grandmother said, “Oh, it's a girl again!” [laughs] And this made me angry. My mother had not picked up on that, but I did, and it made me angry a little bit. In our family too, as the older sibling and as a girl, I had more on my hands than my younger brother. For example, he could just go get water, but I was expected to do the rest ... and so there was disparity, but there wasn't a ...—how can I say it—... it went without saying: you are a girl and so you do the housework. ... that's how I saw things and then ... if my brother went out to play ... that's okay, he can go play, he can go for a swim, I couldn't go swimming ... [laughs] I had to be ...

**M.M.: A girl in the house.**

B.K.: Yes.

**M.M.: And now, from the position of an adult, do you try to understand that? Is it still the same? How do you see this now, from an adult's perspective?**

B.K.: It's not only an adult's perspective, but also an outlook on Rwandan society from the outside. ... What I appreciate here, I think, is that we try to [laughs] treat both boys and girls in the same way. I don't know if that's something that has changed in Rwanda, but they're making an effort to promote equality. I don't know how things are in people's homes, but at least in the social discourse we try to support girls as well, and in my view, this attitude produced through social discourse can also change things within families. I don't know where we are at on this issue, but I think that if I had children I would try to have a more or less balanced approach, even though a boy can do things that a girl can't necessarily do. But I think it's a question of encouraging ... the child's abilities and helping the child discover what it is that they want to do.

**M.M.: So you find that when you were growing up girls had more to do than boys?**

B.K.: ... Well, yes, in the city where I lived. Maybe that wasn't the case in the countryside, I don't know. I think that women, girls would not be, for example ... making bricks to build houses, so that was work for boys, but I'm talking about ... the way things were when I was 15. I think girls had more to do, but elsewhere maybe it was the boys who..., so I ...

**M.M.: Who were doing other things too.**

B.K.: But let's say, for example, beyond my personal experience, when I was interviewing people in Rwanda, there was a girl who told me, "My mother said that boys can go study, but not me, because I am a girl." That's not my experience, but ...

**M.M.: Someone else's**

B.K.: Someone else's, but ...

**M.M.: But of the six of you at home, did you all go to school?**

B.K.: Yes.

**M.M.: Did they continue, were they able to find work or are they still in school?**

B.K.: ... One graduated from university and works at the Bank of Kigali. Another works for a private company and the others are in school. And even before, in terms of education, our parents ... this was true for all children; so my mother urged me to study in the same way she urged my brother, so there wasn't really any imbalance there. It was more ... in terms of housework, but in terms of education, all of us, we were all encouraged to go to school.

**M.M.: I would like to talk about your grandparents, as you were telling me that you've lived part of your life at your grandmother's house ... I don't know if you've spent time with your grandparents on both sides, maternal and paternal. What memories do you have of your grandparents on both sides, if that's the case, and if not, on the side that you remember most?**

B.K.: ... I personally don't remember my paternal grandparents very much, but I do remember my maternal grandmother. When I went to live with her—I don't know how old I was, I think two years old or less, I don't know—I remember that time, she gave me breast milk from her own breast until I was grown. And ... I remember that my

grandmother was a very sociable person. She had already lost her husband so I never knew my maternal grandfather, but two of her children—my uncle and my aunt—lived in the area and I grew up with my cousins, my uncle's and my aunt's children, and I remember that on weekends we travelled far to visit my grandmother's ... brother. Also, she was a farmer, so we had small fields all around the house and that was what occupied my time and what sustained us, but also her children who were close to her.

**M.M.: How old were you when you went back to your parents' house?**

B.K.: ... Nine years old.

**M.M.: Nine years, that's a big part of your life. The affinity you had with your grandmother during the seven years—how do you compare these two things ... living with your grandmother and then returning to live with you parents? Do you ... Did you feel the same on either side or do you have a preference, or is it...**

B.K.: If I had a preference [laughs]..., but at that age... I remember when my mother would come to visit [at my grandmother's], I would always say, "I want to live with my parents." And my mom would say, "Next time." So it was always "next time," but I wanted to live with my parents ... But when I arrived there, I ... I felt like a stranger.

**M.M.: In your own family.**

B.K.: In my own family. And I even think that [laughs] in a sense I remained a stranger [laughs]. You know, coming from life in the countryside and suddenly finding yourself in a big city where ...—before, I used to go in the fields or in the forest to collect wood for my grandmother—and then I arrived in a city where ... So I felt out of sync, I think, [?] yeah.

**M.M.: You had to adapt to a new life. [B.K. wipes a tear?] That couldn't have been easy, I would think.**

B.K.: Well, when you're a child, you don't think if it's easy or not, you just go about your life. I can look at that time now, from the perspective of today, but back then I didn't think whether it was difficult or not. Besides, I adapted very well during the first two years. It was as though I really wanted ... my feeling of nostalgia for my family was strong. Yeah.

**M.M.: Precisely, I'm going to ... I'm curious to know ... Maybe you can give me your view [B.K. wipes a tear?] of both sides. You grew up**

**00: 20: 00**

**in the countryside, but you still visited the city. I would like you to tell me about your surrounding environment, what were the relations with the neighbours ... either at your parents' house or with the family at your grandmother's house?**

B.K.: At my grandmother's house ...

**M.M.: So, how would you describe the neighbourhood?**

B.K.: The neighbourhood where my grandmother lived was ... in Africa we say that the child belongs to the whole village, so I would go here and there in the neighbourhood and my grandmother was never worried about me. I could go to other families' houses and so I was always out and about with the other children, herding the cows or fetching wood

together and ... so that's how life in the countryside was in my grandmother's village. But once I moved to my parents' house, it was more like, You must not go ... to such and such ... People would not necessarily know who we were and I couldn't go to the neighbours' house like I did at ... like when I was at my grandmother's. There were restrictions ... Luckily, sometimes—there were several houses in a ..., well, in a ...—how can I say this? [says the word in Kinyarwanda]. It's like several apartments...

**M.M.: It's like a complex of...**

B.K.: Yes, a complex of houses and so we would also ... socialize with the neighbours, but it was really different. I think if I had a preference—in fact, I appreciate that I had both ...—but if I had to choose one, I would prefer the countryside, there was a certain freedom there [laughs] that we didn't necessarily have in the city.

**M.M.: I'll stay with the past for a little longer. Sometimes we look at ourselves and we think, "This part of my character, or such and such flaw or quality, comes from my parents." When you consider who you are and when you consider who your parents were, your grandparents, do you think there is one person whose character you resemble the most? Or one person who has influenced you the most in your life?**

B.K.: ... I don't know. I don't know. I learned later on—because I did stay for a short time with my paternal grandparents—I didn't know them very well, but later, talking to people who knew them, I was told that my paternal grandmother was a very brave woman. During her lifetime, she was someone who was also ... a great fighter. When her husband was in prison, she kept the family together. She made everything look as if ... as if nothing was happening, while it was, after all, a family drama. She had to take care of her brother's children who had just lost their parents. And, apparently, she was also quite strict [laughs]. ... So there are these two traits: the courage of my paternal grandmother and also her severity. I don't know if we can say it's this or that. I think I have inherited some traits from my father and I also have in me much from my mother's personality, but I don't know if my identity has been shaped by who they were or by the force of events, so it's hard to say ... We are influenced by many things in life. I've probably kept qualities from both of them, but what happened to us is also a very important experience, which brought out aspects of our character that would have never come out had we not gone through these events. So, it's hard for me to say ... to say that my character was formed by this or that, I think it's a bit of everything.

**M.M.: You have this fighting spirit like your grandmother and your mother, as you said. So if you describe yourself as a fighter and as courageous, it is due to life circumstances, but you also have your ancestors.**

B.K.: Yes, or maybe that's only an assumption, so I don't know [laughs].

**M.M.: And your brothers and sisters who are still alive, when you think about them, how is the connection between you? I guess you're the oldest?**

B.K.: ... I'm not the oldest, but I'm like the most ... it's me who's taken over.

**M.M.: [laughs] Why is that ... Why do people think that you're the oldest when in fact ...**

B.K.: ... I think that my half-sister...—I connected with her later, after the genocide, two or three years—I think, I don't remember exactly—but two or three years after the

genocide. I had already lived with her in my parents' house as the eldest of the family and I think it stayed that way.

**M.M.: A strong bond?**

**C.K.: Yeah ... before the genocide, your half-sisters and your half-brother, if I understood correctly ...**

B.K.: My half-sisters.

**C.K.: That's right, your half-sisters. Did you have a family bond? Did you live together or ... did you know them? What was your relationship like?**

B.K.: ... I knew the twins who died. But the other sister, whom I found later, after the genocide, I didn't know her in 1994. So, it's... But I already knew her name because one day I looked at my father's ID card and I saw a name written on it. I didn't know who that was, but I remembered the name. And later someone said to me, "Oh, you know what? One of your sisters survived." So I began looking for her.

**C.K.: So before that you didn't know you had half-sisters except those you...**

B.K.: Except the two [other sisters]. They came to visit from time to time. But not her.

**M.M.: Are they all in Kigali now?**

B.K.: ... No, my half-sister works in Gisenyi, but the others are in Kigali. And then there's Marie-Ange who is here with me.

**M.M.: Before moving on from this period of your life ... you grew up in your parents' house and you moved there to go to elementary school, if I understand correctly, when you were nine years old you were still in elementary school. ... What was it like to be in school? Try to describe the relationships with the students, with the teachers. How would you describe the life of a nine-year-old schoolgirl? What motivated you? What influenced you? What were the things you hated?**

B.K.: I think I didn't have ... I don't remember the things that I hated, but I know I liked school. ... I liked school very much. As for my relationships with the other kids—we played together. And I remember there was competition between us—who would be the best student in the class. We had to study a lot if we really wanted to have the highest rank. I was doing my best to be among those at the top, especially since I also felt pressure from my mother. I think it came naturally to me—I was learning quite quickly. And I think that when you are a good student relationships are formed more or less easily because the teacher likes you and your classmates do too ... those students who are more or less smart enjoy a certain respect and I think it [laughs] it played..., it allowed me to...

**M.M.: To move forward.**

B.K.: Yes, to move forward.

**M.M.: Did the teachers motivate you?**

B.K.: Yes. Yes, they were always ... they were good to me, even if sometimes they told us to stand up as groups of Hutus and groups of Tutsis—everybody would stand up, but we were always a small minority of Tutsis so sometimes, [inaudible] the others were looking at us a little strange, but that was all it was. So we knew there was something, but it wasn't explicit in the way they looked at us. And it was ... so, we would stand up and

sit back down, and we would know in this way who was also Tutsi, but that was all, we would then carry on with our day.

**M.M.: And after elementary school you went on to high school?**

B.K.: Yes ... No. Yes and no. [laughs] When I took the exam to get into high school, my mother said, "In any case you are Tutsi, so I would be surprised if you get a place in secondary school in Rwanda." She asked her brother, my uncle who lived in Bukavu, to get me a place in a school in Bukavu so I could go study there. I went there and my uncle placed me in 6th grade in Bukavu. A few months later ... so I think that when I left [Nyundo]—I don't remember exactly—but I think that when I left, the lists had just been released and I was not on the list of those who had passed the national examination. Later, my mother sent a letter to my uncle's house saying that I had to go back because there was a second list and my name was on it. So I remember I started high school—I came back to Nyundo and I think the others had started classes a month and a half or two months earlier, and so I jumped on board with them.

**0:30:00**

**M.M.: So, if I understand well, already in elementary school and in the beginning of high school you felt, at your age, discrimination between the ethnic groups in the country. How is a child at that age aware of discrimination—when asked to stand up as a Hutu and as a Tutsi—how does a child know, and how does a child grow up with that?**

B.K.: I think you know it, but you don't understand it and you don't dwell on it. So, when I try now to understand what those experiences meant to me back then, I think I knew it, ... but I was closing my eyes, so I think that I was living in denial. ... Already in 1990, there was in Gisenyi an operation called Operation Zulu, so Tutsi families—mostly those that were more or less well-off—were threatened and grenades were thrown. I remember that I was the only one in my family who had left home and I hid with the nuns and a few other children from Tutsi families near my elementary school; later, we left our hiding place. So we could see the ... it's hard to interpret this today. I think the discrimination was there, but we ... we didn't talk about it in my family and it was happening, it was going on, but it was surrounded by silence, and so we didn't know ... why were grenades thrown at this or that place. We knew where it had happened, but we didn't talk about it, and life went on. It was as if something had happened and then—silence. And I think we knew, we knew, but without understanding it or without necessarily attributing to it the importance that ... And our parents were trying to live with it, and that was the example we followed.

**C.K.: Speaking of that, you talked about your mother who was a smart student, who was among the best, who didn't go to..., who couldn't get access to high school. Does it have anything to do with that? And your grandfather, you said he was in prison ... did it have anything to do with ethnicity or was it because of another crime he had committed?**

B.K.: Actually, for my grandfather, according to the information ... I've asked the people who knew most about it and they told me, "Someone killed somebody else and put the body in your grandfather's field, and it was the Hutus from the village who did that." So, it was related to ethnicity. That's true in my mother's case too, but she didn't talk about it that much. We can't know how she felt about that, what really happened, but there was a connection.

**M.M.: So it was something that was pretty obvious, but families kept quiet about it to protect the children.**

B.K.: Yes, I think that maybe they wanted to protect us. But it's... Today, we can only look back and ask why we didn't talk about it. And... In fact, why didn't we know more? Why didn't we discuss it to at least have a clear understanding of what was going on? But today we are stuck asking why. Why didn't we revolt? Why didn't we say, We'll all follow my uncle? Why did we accept all of that?

**M.M.: So ... you went to high school in Nyundo. How did that go? What year did you start high school?**

B.K.: In 1992... 1992–1993.

**M.M.: And you finished high school in Nyundo as well?**

B.K.: Yes, later on. After the genocide, I did a year in a private school in Gisenyi. But later I went back to Nyundo.

**M.M.: And you finished school in...**

B.K.: In 1998.

**M.M.: Had you already chosen a career? Or was it necessary to continue studying before choosing a career?**

B.K.: Before 1994, I was taking courses in literary studies (*option littéraire*) in high school. Later I took some courses in general education (*l'option normale*). I returned to the literary option after that, but it wasn't literature as such any more.

**M.M.: And after high school?**

B.K.: After high school, I went to university to study psychopedagogy.

**M.M.: That's a lot of [inaudible] [laughs]. Did you graduate in psychology there?**

B.K.: In psychopedagogy, my undergraduate degree (*BAC*), yes. Not in Nyundo, but in Kigali [inaudible].

**M.M.: And now, you're still studying, so you're still in this field?**

B.K.: Yes, almost. I am in education sciences, I've had a career as a student.

**M.M.: Did you choose to ... study all these things, literature, psychology?**

B.K.: No, it wasn't my choice.

**M.M.: So how were you guided in your choice?**

B.K.: We were profiled in advance. So when I went to Nyundo, I was told, "You've been placed in literary studies," so it wasn't me, really, who decided what to do. Later, I went back to literature, but that's because that was what I knew. I would have preferred much more to study law at the university. When I was in my fourth year in secondary school, I thought I would go into law, but my grades were not good enough to enrol in the university in Butare where I could study law more easily. And the ULK (Kigali

Independent University) had just opened, so I didn't want to go there. That's how I enrolled in psychopedagogy.

**M.M.: So that was your second choice?**

B.K.: Yes, it was my second choice.

**M.M.: Before going any further, in all we've been talking about, on many occasions you mentioned the year 1994. If I understand correctly, after 1994, the children, the six or eight children, you found each other. I would like you to tell me about 1994. How could we..., how did you see that coming?**

B.K.: ... In fact, I think it was already happening in the Gisenyi region. There was this period called Zulu. I don't remember which year, but it was between 1980... I think it was 1993. But at the school where I was ..., in high school in Nyundo ... very close to the cathedral, the Bishop of Nyundo at that time, the Monseigneur, had given refuge to the Bagogwe who had been chased from their region where ... well, from their homes. So when we went to Mass in Nyundo, we saw those refugees who were refugees inside their own country and who were there not because they were bad people, but because they were Tutsi. And so, in Gisenyi during this Operation Zulu..., I remember that after that period, many Tutsis who had the financial means left Gisenyi and moved to Kigali. And there were displaced children in my high school, displaced because of the war of the RPF [Rwanda Patriotic Front], and from time to time they were ... showing hatred for their Tutsi classmates. My classroom was ... actually ... I didn't really see much ... I didn't see anything going on in the classroom. But since we were at a boarding school, we could see that small groups were forming. I remember one time, I was with two other girls, we walked by a small [group?] of children, some of whom had been displaced by the war, and I remember we saw them spit on the ground.

**00:40:00**

But it was just ... it was an insult directed at us. At the junior seminary, there were things ...—the seminary was nearby—things of the same nature were happening there too. People, students, were sharing stories in the evenings. And the atmosphere was starting to get tense because of that. And, I think, when I look back at that time now, these are the kinds of events that foreshadowed the worst to come. But at the same time, I didn't think about it too much. I don't know if at some point you get used to living with things like this. But also, not all Hutu children were like that. I remember in one of my groups there was a girl, actually, several girls with whom we were often together and we never really noticed any animosity against us. So, those things were ... were there, they weren't widespread yet, but we could really ... we could understand them if we wanted to see the situation as it really was. But, once again, you had to close your eyes and, you know, ... move on. When 1994 happened I was both lucky and unlucky. My luck was that I wasn't at home. So, prior to 1994, I had run away from home and I had met some of the nuns from the Auxiliaries of the Apostolate, after which I returned home. So from time to time I would spend the holidays at the convent. And it was Easter in 1994, so I was going to spend my second week of vacation with these nuns. I left home on Easter Monday and

the genocide began on the 7th. But I remember that already on the 6th, the night of the 6th, one of the priests came to pay a visit to one of his friends among the auxiliaries. And as he was there, we were told...—since the routine in this convent was to get up in the morning and go to the church to attend Mass. So every morning, we went to Mass. By chance, this priest was there and the priest said—actually, one of the nuns told me: “Since the priest is here, he’ll celebrate Mass at the convent, so you don’t have to go to the church tomorrow morning, the Mass will be held here.” So we got up to go to the Mass and the first thing the priest told us was, “The president’s plane has been shot down.” Everyone was ... I was surrounded by adults and later that day, sitting around the table, we continued discussing the news and I remember I said, “It’s over.” Today, every time I think about why I said “It’s over,” I don’t understand why I said it. And it was indeed over. I don’t know if that phrase was the expression of everything that I had seen until then and stockpiled in my mind. And then something else was going on in Gisenyi—there were these big buses that ... big buses that were transporting...

**C.K.: The militia...**

B.K.: It was the militia, I remember, but I think there was an odd euphemism used for them—people were calling them “the magicians.” So they were people who... They always filled the buses and sometimes, they were on top of the buses and they were dancing, you know, they were always making noise, they were singing. I had seen this frequently in my hometown, so...

**M.M.: Before 1994.**

B.K.: Yes, before 1994. And sometimes we watched them go by and we applauded—they were the magicians. So, I think all of that made me think “Okay, it’s over.” A few minutes later, the nuns were receiving phone calls informing them about the priests from this place and the nuns from that place..., what the situation was like outside, so on that day ... it began, the genocide began.

**M.M.: And how did you live through it? You lived with the nuns...**

B.K.: Yes.

**M.M.: And you didn’t go back to your parents’ house?**

B.K.: No, I stayed in the convent.

**M.M.: And how did you live through this event with the nuns?**

B.K.: [Inaudible] [laughs].

**M.M.: With the others who were there with you?**

B.K.: And I said “It’s over” once more, but at the same time I didn’t really grasp the magnitude of this phrase, “it’s over,” and what they were saying. I remember I felt such fear around me that I ended up not being afraid anymore. All around me there was ... [laughs] there was really a feeling of terror, everyone was moving in all directions.

**M.M.: You were panicking?**

B.K.: There was panic ... you would be talking to someone and then they would go away. People were moving around. I’m trying to visualize it, I was saying, “It’s not possible!” So people were going up to the attic and I saw them coming down, they were looking for Félicité. “Hey, Mother, what’s going on? Do you have news of this or that person?” People would abruptly go into the room, they would go in ... and talk in low voices

behind locked doors. Others would be listening to the radio ... they were trying to capture [?] to find out what was going on. Still others spent time in the chapel. And it was in this atmosphere..., but since I knew the house well... and actually, later the female students of Saint-Fidèle University also sought refuge at the convent and other people from the city who could reach the Saint-Pierre Centre, came as well. And since I was..., since I knew the place better than others, I continued to help. I helped with the cooking and with the housework. I continued participating in the life of the convent as I did before, so ... I kept myself busy and I didn't really have time to stop. It's only now that I stop and become frozen ... at that time, I was much more in the action. Félicité made sure that I had things to do, but she prohibited me from opening the door when someone rang—I always liked opening the door, but she prevented me from doing that.

**M.M.: Félicité was the nun you had gone to see?**

B.K.: Yes, well, I went to see many of them, but she was the nun responsible for all others. But I was worried about my parents and especially about my father because a week prior to that he was attacked by militiamen and by soldiers in a bar, and on the way home we went to see him. My mother brought some money and I ... right away, I don't know why, but I felt afraid for my father. And my mother was a sociable person and she had a lot of friends. I always had the impression that maybe...

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And she had an MRMD (the National Republican Movement for Democracy and Development) membership card, but my father had an RPF card. I remember, when I was in Congo, my uncle told me: "Your mother has an MRMD membership card, she's really brave!" [laughs] So, I thought that maybe that would save her. Because, later, I was afraid for everyone..., but right away, I felt that I was losing hope for my father. [wipes tears]

**M.M.: And in those moments of panic when you were at the convent, was everyone concerned by what was going on? Is it..., was there... Was there solidarity between all of you who were staying with the nuns? You were all in this together, how did it...**

B.K.: No, life continued. Well, I can't know everything that was going on in the communes, but we knew that the Tutsis were targeted, that it was about the Tutsis. I don't remember being hustled by any of the Hutus who were in the convent. Even though Félicité and Nathalie went to—in fact, on account of these students from Saint-Fidèle—I remember they went to get another Saint-Fidèle student who was injured and was in the hospital and they brought her to the convent where she was treated. And Félicité had sent two Hutu nuns to my parents' house. Upon their arrival, they found out that my parents had been killed, but they didn't tell me that when they came back. And I don't know if they had tried to save them or what, but I know that the next day Félicité asked me, "Do you know anyone in Congo? Do you, by any chance, have family there?" I said yes—that was around April 19–20. I told her that and she said "okay." I think it was on the night of April 19 to 20 when she told me, "Don't go to sleep tonight." Actually prior to that date

my brother had come—my younger brother, Jean-Baptiste, had arrived at the convent. And she told me that on the 7th, on April 7th, a classmate of mine from elementary school, whose brother was taking part in the killings [a *génocidaire*], had said, “You know what? All Tutsis will die.” And then my brother had told my parents, “I’m leaving.” And my mother had said, “Okay, go to this family.” One of my mother’s cousins had a husband whom we didn’t know if he was Hutu or Tutsi. Afterwards, I received written information confirming he was Tutsi, but at that time we thought he was Hutu. So, my ... then my mother had said [to my brother], “If you’re going there, take Marie-Ange with you.” And so...

**M.M.: Marie-Ange is your sister.**

B.K.: Yes, my sister. And so Jean-Baptiste went with Marie-Ange to Jacqueline’s house, but once there, Jacqueline’s husband told Jean-Baptiste: “We’ll keep Marie-Ange, but we can’t keep both of you. Do you know where Berthe is?” Jean-Baptiste said yes. “Okay, go to her.” So, Jean-Baptiste came to where I was staying, but on the way there, he met someone who asked him: “You are Alexis’ son, aren’t you?” My brother said, “No, I’m not Alexis’ son.” After that he arrived at the convent and so we were both staying there together. And one night Félicité told us not to go to bed. Later, around midnight, she came back and said: “Okay, you can go to sleep now, we were just told that there are militiamen everywhere and you can’t cross [the border].” She wanted us to cross over to Congo where she had sent about fifteen people already and she wanted to try that a second time, but it didn’t work. So until the 21st. ..., when the militiamen came to the convent, so around 3–4 pm. ... I was in the kitchen, and Félicité came running: “Tell everyone to hide, the assassins are here.” I ran around the convent saying, “Hide! Hide!” I hadn’t even finished saying that when the *génocidaires* arrived and I was then saying that I wasn’t Tutsi. They brought us to ... one of them took me along with several others and there was ... they were people all over the place, so the militiamen had ordered many of the people to come out from their hiding places. I went to the exit door and I saw many people on their knees and a ... a killer pointing his rifle in their direction. They told us to kneel and we did. They had two minibuses parked outside the convent and we were told to get on the bus. I fought back. One of the killers was bringing people in ... and I said, “Don’t hit me.” Félicité hadn’t gotten on the bus yet, and they forced her to. So we left with the first bus and they told us that they were going to take us to the red commune. Inside the bus—one of the nuns had been teaching us a song—so I started singing it and then we were told to keep quiet because “You killed President Habyarimana, so you don’t get to sing. The only Hutu who’s on the bus can continue singing.” So, we took ... the driver took the road to the cemetery.

**M.M.: So that’s what the red commune was?**

B.K.: That was the red commune. And on the way there, we saw that, outside, life for some people was ... continuing. While you are on the bus heading to certain death, right next to you—in any case, for the Hutus—life hadn’t changed, the market was open and you could see people in the street; at the time when you were afraid to come out of your hiding place and we were going to ... to the cemetery. And when we arrived, many people ... came to assist. On arrival, I also saw militiamen coming out of the [inaudible] with

machetes, even with old, traditional machetes... And in the bus I had..., I had learned the name of one of the ... well, the name of the bus driver ... well, of my killer, a militiaman, and someone was saying ... who was saying, “But Thomas, don’t you recognize me? Don’t you know I’m from such and such a place?” I remember that. But I also remember that they didn’t really want to kill Félicité, because while we were driving, they said: “The colonel’s sister must not go on the bus.” But she had insisted, “If you’re going to kill these people, I’m going with them.” At the same time, even though the colonel’s sister had to get off the bus, they never forced her out—it was just empty words. So when we got to the cemetery, I thought, “Maybe they won’t kill her.” So I got off the bus, took her hand, and we all got out. The others got out and immediately lied down on the ground. One man, about thirty years old, tried to escape, but the *génocidaires* ran after him and caught him. It’s one of the most vicious images I have from that moment. They caught him and he was held on both sides by two *génocidaires* and two others ... were ... cutting him, and everyone was watching. So, in the meantime, Félicité, who, I imagine, didn’t really want to see that whole scene ... let go of my hand and she turned away...—the cemetery was at the foot of a mountain—and so she gazed up towards the mountain as if in a prayer. So, when she let go of my hand ... I took Thomas’ hands, the bus driver. And Thomas took my hand too. I saw in the crowd a former classmate of mine from elementary school, and I

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made a sign with my hand, like that [makes a sign with her hands] to ask for help and he did this [makes a sign of helplessness], meaning, he couldn’t do anything. And while Thomas was holding my hand, one of the killers snatched me from Thomas’ hands and Thomas kicked him. In the meantime we realized that Omar, who is now in Arusha, was shooting those who were lying on the ground. There was a child there, about two years old, and Thomas, who was holding my hand, told me to take the child and go back on the bus. A few of the *génocidaires* had stayed behind in the bus, there was also another girl in there—she was the child’s aunt, but she didn’t want to reveal her identity, anyways, the child’s aunt...

**M.M.: The child that you were holding in your arms?**

B.K.: Yes, the child’s aunt, the maternal aunt of the child I was holding in my arms. They were saying that the child’s father was Hutu, but the militia didn’t want to hear that. At the moment when I took the child to get on the bus, I saw Félicité falling to the ground, and at the same time I saw the priest—the same priest who celebrated Mass on the first day, who had stayed with us at the Saint-Pierre Centre—I saw him approaching with three policemen to save Félicité, but it was too late. So we got back on the bus and ... and it was over. Omar returned to the bus with Thomas, the driver, and we started on our way back. While we were driving Omar asked Thomas what was I doing in the bus and Thomas replied: “She just lied to me that she is Tutsi.” Omar said, “You have to stop the bus, I have to kill her too.” But Thomas didn’t ... didn’t stop the bus. We dropped Omar off at one of the big hotels in Gisenyi, Palm Beach, where I saw people ... people who

were drinking, who were eating, so Omar joined them and Thomas then dropped me off at the Saint-Pierre Centre.

**M.M.: And the Saint-Pierre Centre is...**

B.K.: It's the convent, that's what it's called.

**M.M.: Where you were before you left?**

B.K.: Where we were before we left. And when I arrived there, I saw two policemen and I saw Nathalie, who was Félicité's assistant. Nathalie asked: "So, is Félicité dead?" And the driver, Thomas, said, "I saved these two children," as if...

**M.M.: As if not to answer Félicité's [means Nathalie's] question.**

B.K.: Not to answer the question or: even though Félicité is dead, he saved two people. Surely, since Nathalie was angry and ... she was scolding him, he told her, "But I just saved..." Later, in the evening, the policemen who were there, apparently came back to protect me ... and they said ... There were people still hiding in the convent who had heard the *génocidaires* saying, "Next time, we will burn it all down." The *génocidaires* had said they would burn everything. And I began to regret not having died ... not having been shot dead in the cemetery. But that didn't happen. The next day, actually, that same evening, several soldiers came by to ask how Félicité had died and it was as if she was the only person who had died. I tried to tell them what had happened, but I didn't know that they had captured several of the killers. And the next day, Félicité's brother and some of his friends went to dig up Félicité's body and give her a dignified burial, among the thousands of dead bodies. And the people, the Hutu sisters who were there, later told us that all the corpses were naked. And on that same evening of April 22, we ... sought refuge in Congo. We decided ..., we decided to leave with the few people who were still at the convent. In the meantime, my brother had gone out of the convent and when he came back we told him to come to Congo with us, but he refused. He said, "I'm not going." We woke him up around midnight and he said, "I'm not going anywhere." And I knew that this was a serious mistake—but fortunately he survived...—to leave...

**M.M.: To leave him.**

B.K.: Yes. He said, "I'm not going anywhere." So I left without him.

**M.M.: In moments like that, we don't think.**

B.K.: So it's... I don't know, maybe we could have forced him to come with us since we were quite a small group, but he refused and we all left him there. I left with a feeling of guilt, but I'm lucky he survived, which eases that feeling a bit.

**M.M.: What is the distance between Saint-Pierre and the other side?**

B.K.: I think it's five minutes.

**M.M.: So it's a fairly easy crossing.**

B.K.: It is, but that distance, during a genocide, becomes huge. Today, when I think about it, I wonder: "We had to wait for two weeks before we could cross over." We were there, we could see Congo, so it was...

**M.M.: That was the other side.**

B.K.: I don't know. I think you can be there in ten minutes. Normally, it's three minutes to the border, but if you go through the fields, it may be ten minutes—in any case, it was really close. But during a genocide that distance becomes huge.

**C.K.: But you left with ... the nuns who were there? You left...**

B.K.: No, the people who left were several Tutsis who had not been found in their hiding places. The nuns and all the others who were not targeted stayed behind.

**C.K.: But you're leaving alone without...**

B.K.: No, I was with several other people.

**C.K.: Yes, but all alone...**

**M.M.: The Tutsis who were still in the convent managed to get to the other side, to Congo?**

B.K.: Yes. We were about to arrive in a few moments and we slept on the ground in ... we were sitting on the grass, waiting for the sun to rise. Around five o'clock in the morning, we set out towards the houses in Birere, in Goma and we arrived at a church, I think it was a Pentecostal church. We went inside and ... those who were there could see that we were people escaping death. There was a Tutsi woman who was living in Congo and she decided to take care of me, and it was as if everyone found a place to go. There were several female students from Saint-Fidèle ... and there was one who was studying at the Adventist university at the time and she said, "I'm going over there to join the Adventists." And I ... When Félicité had asked me if I knew anyone in Congo, she was thinking of sending me first to Goma, to a nun who had left with the first group, among those who ...

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And I said, "Can you take me to the bishop or do you know Adria?" And that's how many of us were sent to different places. I was with Immaculée, one of the nuns who was Tutsi, and with Adria—actually, the nun brought us to the episcopal see in Goma where Adria and the other sisters came to see me. And we went to Adria's family in Goma—there were several of us from the Saint-Pierre Centre. On May 3, the orphanage in Nyundo was evacuated. After our departure from the convent, Nathalie brought my brother and three other kids whose mother had left with the first group [inaudible] to this orphanage. So when the evacuees from the Nyundo orphanage arrived in Goma, my brother was among them. I then demanded to go to the orphanage in Goma and so we left this family and went to the orphanage. Later, in May ... my uncle who was in Bukavu, found out where I was and sent his wife to come and pick me up. But he thought that I was the only one there from the family. When his wife arrived and when she saw that my brother was also there, she said, "Okay, I'll take you both to Bukavu." ... So she signed me out from the orphanage to bring us to Bukavu. And on the same day we signed all the papers in order to leave the orphanage and after we left the orphanage and were going to spend the night in Goma before leaving the next day to Bukavu, ... my friends from the orphanage came to tell me, "Your three brothers just arrived at the orphanage with the Red Cross." And so I went back to the orphanage. We couldn't get a place in the orphanage again easily because there were many children there. But with luck, some would leave [and we could take their place]. I said, "I'm not leaving" ... they were trying to convince me that I had to leave because the director ... that we couldn't ... that we

couldn't have a place there anymore ... that the UNHCR [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees] had to sort this out. And we went back and forth to ... to the UNHCR and ... it wasn't ... it really was a whirl of people trying to..., I [inaudible] who had other things to do and who told me: "Go! The children will stay at the orphanage and you ... you will go to your uncle's." I said that was not possible, so I [inaudible] [laughs]. At one point, there was a priest who intervened, Abbé Martin ... Abbé Martin who knew someone at the UNHCR, I think. The nuns, my uncle's wife and I were in the process of trying to get permission, and then Martin intervened and after his intervention, the UNHCR ... allowed me to go back to the orphanage, and so we stayed there. Later, we returned to Rwanda with the other people from the orphanage.

**M.M.: So the five of you stayed together at the orphanage?**

B.K.: Yes. In the case of Marie-Ange, she had arrived in Congo with a wave of Hutu refugees. One of the Hutu nuns had gone to a [refugee] camp—I don't know if she had stayed in this camp or not—she came to the orphanage and told me: "You know what? I just saw your little sister in a refugee camp, the [inaudible] refugee camp." So, I accompanied this nun and she showed me where Marie-Ange and the family that had taken her in during the genocide were. And when I arrived, Jacqueline said, "You have to be very careful." So, we found Marie-Ange who was ... not looking well, she had been jostled around. We took Marie-Ange from ... from the crowd of refugees and we went back together to the orphanage. So, that's how we all reunited.

**M.M.: Those who joined you at the orphanage ... actually, did you find out what happened to your parents?**

B.K.: Yes, the three [brothers] who arrived with the UNHCR, were with our parents when the *génocidaires* came for them. The children hid behind our bar, but they saw the *génocidaires* leave with our parents. They didn't see them die, but they saw them leaving with the *génocidaires*. And then they tried to find shelter at the neighbours', but the neighbours turned them away. And then they tried to reach the church, the Gisenyi church, and along the way they came across several *génocidaires* who captured them. And then—I don't know who among the three..., I don't remember which one...—I think it was Gaétan who said, "We just saw some people looting a shop." Because when the *génocidaires* captured them, they said, "Come, show us your home, show us where your parents are." And the children had the idea to make up a lie about a place that was being looted and the *génocidaires* left them alone [laughs]. They were going to loot too, they were going to look for that place where the others were looting, and the children managed to reach the church and the Bizeramariya convent, which is next to the church. But in the meantime, the *génocidaires* showed up to kill the nuns in the convent and I don't know who among the nuns brought the children to the prefecture and it was at the prefecture that the Red Cross took them and brought them to Goma.

**M.M.: So, that's all you knew about your parents, that they were taken out of the house? You didn't have...**

B.K.: Yes, that's at least what my brothers knew. Later, when I was in high school ..., after the genocide, before I went back to Nyundo—I went to the Pentecostal high school ... in Gisenyi, the École normale primaire de Gacuga [?]  
—and that's where I met

someone who had seen them die, this girl who told me, “[inaudible] I saw your mother, they clubbed her until she died, your father was cut down with a machete.” It was ... it seems that it happened on her street and that there were also several Muslim men there who were playing *gisoro* and who tried to plead for my mother’s life, but ... it didn’t help or they were just pretending to want to help—I don’t know, that’s what she told me.

**M.M. So you stayed at the orphanage until...**

B.K.: Until 1998, well... I never liked the orphanage, I never...

**M.M.: But you fought so hard to stay there.**

B.K.: [laughs] I’m an eternal rebel. I said to myself, “I will not stay here.” You know, you’re in the orphanage and you ... after I left [?] when the Notre Dame *lycée* opened in Nyundo, and since it was very close to the orphanage, I went back so that I can be closer to my brothers and sisters. But when you’re in the orphanage and then you go to high school, and everything is within a well-defined area, so you’re really ... it felt like two prisons and sometimes I would just leave, I would go to my uncle’s and my uncle [would say]: “But where is it that you are going? You have to stay at the orphanage.” And I would say, “Okay.” So, since my third year in secondary school, I’d had the idea to get out of the orphanage, and I was hoping that it would happen miraculously after high school [laughs]. So I studied like crazy in my third year, I never worked as hard in school as I worked that year. After the genocide, I thought, “I’ll finish school fast and I’ll leave the orphanage.” I thought that I would get a job right away and that everything would happen naturally. I made contacts with people outside of the orphanage. And later, when I learned that I had a half-sister and that she was living with her maternal aunt in Kigali, I went to look for her in Kigali and when I found her, she said: “Oh, I have a very good friend here and you must meet her before you go back to Nyundo.” So, [inaudible] she is my sister’s friend and she is really a very warm person and she told me, “If you want to come to my house during the school break, the doors are open.” And she was someone I had just met! [laughs] I said, “Okay.” So, from time to time during the holidays..., I ... we kept in touch. And 1997–1998 was ... the period of the infiltrators, it was still a dangerous time in Gisenyi. They were burning buses, so it really was another war. And I thought, “We can’t die now!” I was knocking on people’s doors, I couldn’t see ... I went to my maternal uncle in Bukavu and I said, “We can’t stay there, in this chaos of shooting. It might not seem scary to you, but if our fate is to die now, we should do everything we can so that at least some of us are saved.” My uncle tried to find an orphanage,

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but he wasn’t able to. And my friends, well, the families of my classmates were also trying to find an SOS orphanage in Kigali, but we made the mistake of saying that we were leaving one orphanage to go to another and the SOS told us, “We don’t take children from another orphanage.” So I didn’t know what to do, but I kept in touch with this woman and she told me, “You can bring your three sisters, Marie-Ange and, well, at least the youngest children.” And this was not something we did at home. It’s a family ...

well, after a genocide, anything is possible, but when I told my uncle about it, he said: “My goodness!” [laughs] And he turned to my two other brothers and asked: “So, what do you think—your sister is doing well, isn’t she?” But I didn’t care ... I didn’t care about what the others might say. I said to my younger brother, “You will sign as if...”—it was clear that my relation with the director of the orphanage was strained because of these comings and goings, so I didn’t dare showing up there and [I said to] my younger brother: “You’re going to sign as if it were my uncle, you’ll say that it’s my uncle who...”

**M.M.: [Inaudible]**

B.K.: Yes. Or my uncle was forced to sign, I don’t remember exactly. In any case, it was on behalf of my uncle that we left the orphanage ... actually, my two youngest brothers and Marie-Ange left the orphanage to go to this other family. I stayed in Nyundo, and it didn’t matter whether my other brothers and I were going to finish high school or not, because I was comforted to know that at least some of us from the family would survive. So, Jean-Baptiste, Gaétan and I remained in Nyundo since they too were in high school—in the art school and I was in the *lycée*. And Marie-Ange, Jean-Yves and Yvan were [inaudible] in primary school in Muhima and they went to live [inaudible] with this family that we had just met [laughs]. During the holidays, I would visit my youngest brothers and my sister and then I would go back to Nyundo, and I was doing that until I graduated.

**M.M.: You shuttled between the school and the new family.**

B.K.: Yes ... and after that [inaudible] [laughs].

**M.M.: It's true that you're a fighter.**

B.K.: There was a sort of madness to it too, I don’t think that if I found myself in the same situation now I would do the same thing.

**M.M.: Well ... maybe that brought positive results in what you were going through. So you finished high school and...**

B.K.: And then we stayed with this family for some time. But, there were too many of us there. She had her five children, there were two other children on her husband's side and there were the four or sometimes the five of us from our family. Jean-Baptiste and Gaétan stayed at the orphanage or went to my uncle's house, but the rest of us, we stayed with this family. It was getting more and more difficult, especially because it was the mother in the family who took care of everything. Then I learned about the FARG and I started going to the FARG.

**M.M.: What is the FARG?**

B.K.: Assistance Fund for Genocide Survivors [laughs]. I went to ... I started going to Ibuka first and one of the sisters-in-law in the family who was hosting us, Pauline, was working at AVEGA [the Association of Genocide Widows / AGAHOZO] and introduced us to Ibuka so that the children can study for free. And it was there that we started addressing our problem that we were ... that we were nearly homeless. So I started the process. At that time, in the beginning of the FARG, I had a friend from high school whose cousin was a secretary at the FARG—a secretary who later married the secretary general of the FARG at that time. So we opened a file on our case and they said, “Okay, we can pay you the rent for a house.” So, we agreed with our host family that we would

look for a house nearby so we wouldn't be far and the family would know what was going on with us. We started looking for a house near where we were ... near Donatille's family who had welcomed us. And so, in 1999, we started living in...

**M.M.: In a house that you rented.**

B.K.: [laughs] That's when we really became children, well, children and one head of the household. We settled there, we had the rent, but that was it [laughs].

**M.M.: That was precisely my next question. That was it.**

B.K.: Yes. We also had to jump through many hoops. It's really hard to explain, but it worked [laughs]. They told us, "Rent a house for no more than 25,000 Rwandan Francs." We found one for 15,000 FRw, 15,000 francs and so we saved 10,000, but that's cheating, so it wasn't ... Well, afterwards I didn't care since we did the deal without ... agreement with the owner of the house. I did the deal with Donatille who had hosted us in her house and ... with another mom who was with us ... in this together.

**M.M.: It was helping you have some money for food.**

B.K.: Later, the owner of the house found out about it and she went to the FARG. I told the FARG, "I don't care. You knew that you had given us a house." Her complaints did not amount to anything since she had her 15,000 FRw anyway. But life in that house—that's where things got really difficult and I thought, "Why did we leave the orphanage?" At that moment, when we started living by ourselves, I was having regrets.

**C.K.: So you started living alone and it was you who was responsible for everything?**

B.K.: Yes. Sometimes I would go to my uncle's ... who was helping us out, but there were many of us, so it wasn't really ... it was more or less regular help, but it wasn't enough. At other times friends also helped, I sent letters to strangers, to people I was corresponding with when I was at the orphanage, and this was more or less fruitful. [laughs] Today I avoid thinking about that time, because I don't know how we went through that period. But at the same time, well, when we were in that situation, we didn't perceive it as alarming, which means that my brain was working all the time: Where will I be going today? I'm going to Ibuka again, and one time they sent me to [inaudible]. Tomorrow I'm going to ... So it was always...

**M.M.: Always having to knock on different doors.**

B.K.: And it was an experience that...

**M.M.: Were you going to school at the same time or was it a situation where you couldn't even go to school?**

B.K.: No we continued going to school.

**M.M.: It was during university, I guess?**

B.K.: It was around the time when I started university, so I also had to cover transportation costs to the university. My brothers were still at the boarding school, well, some of them were still in primary school, but we had a very good neighbourhood, so there were also [inaudible], there was another family of orphans who were heads of their household, but their parents had died of illness and we were really supportive. And we had fields, we planted things, sometimes, we shared. But it wasn't ... you know, it was harvest season, so there wasn't a day when we went to bed without having eaten. But

when we would be able to eat was—how can I say this—it was both luck and it wasn't at the same time.

**M.M.: It's hard to explain.**

**01:30:00**

B.K.: Yes. Afterwards, I think my brain worked like ... Today, I feel like my brain is frozen, but at that time it was—whew!

**M.M.: And that situation lasted more or less how long...?**

B.K.: I think it lasted about a year, since I ... I also knew that my aunts had survived, my maternal aunts had Hutu husbands, and so I went looking for them. And at the time when I went to look for them, I was also ... working on a project of [inaudible] that the FARG had ... At one point the FARG told us, "We can't just keep giving you charity, you have to do a project." So we did a project ... to help ourselves, but that was also the time when I went searching for our maternal aunts. One of our aunts had a good situation at the time, and when she came to see us, she said, "Okay, but there's three of us in the family. Why don't you split—everything is going to be simpler that way?" So ... and Donatille said to me: "That's not good." But I was all excited to have found more relatives, and I think that was a serious mistake I made with regards to my younger brothers. So I said, "Okay, we can disperse within the family." We split—I think it was in 2001, so from 1999 until 2001 we were ... or until mid-2000 we were alone. So the aunts..., so we dispersed. I went to live close to the university with my university colleagues and my brothers were in the host families, so at my aunts' houses. But one of the aunts had AIDS and we didn't know that, and shortly afterwards she ... she died. And it was she who, at least financially ... she had a difficult character, but she helped us a lot financially, she supported just about everyone. And that's when it became difficult because it was this other aunt who then took care of my brothers. That aunt had a husband in prison, so she had her own problems. And she took in my brothers as well as the children of my aunt who had just died. So the children survivors were living with other children as well as with the children whose father was in prison—even if they were all family, it wasn't easy. And my younger brothers Jean-Baptiste, Jean-Yves and Yvan suffered a lot. They stayed there until I graduated from university and, once again, I went to the FARG. At one point, it was like I was working at the FARG—I don't know how many times I've been there. So after that, after graduation, I went back to the FARG and I was able to get the house in Kimironko where we are still today.

**M.M.: So you gathered them from the different families and brought them together?**

B.K.: Yes.

**C.K.: And how did the young, the youngest, especially your brothers who lived in these families—what was their reaction? How did they ... did they speak about this situation? How did they experience it? Was it...**

B.K.: Yes, one of them even ... the youngest, he often ran away from home and he was saying, "I want to live either with you or with my uncle." And so I had promised...—

when he would run away I would take him in sometimes and he would spend time with my university colleagues because I couldn't [host him] at the time ... I had one room in the university dorm—I couldn't. The other children were deeply affected, but we have a good laugh about it today. But things were not going well at all at the time. The second youngest, Jean-Yves, he was quite affected, while the youngest ... the youngest brother, who was running away—today we laugh about it—but he suffered a lot too, so I don't know if there will be any further consequences later on, but today we're able to laugh when we talk about that, and we talk about it from time to time.

**M.M.: At one point, all of you were once again together. I have a question: How would you describe this family, which after so many years, after so much scattering, you say to each other, We are all here now—how would you describe this family? How was your daily life organized? What was your life like?**

B.K.: We were all there, but we evolved differently. So, it's ... I think during the years when we were scattered around, there are things that happened in everyone's life and I think that it—how can I say that—we love each other very much, but it's as if ... it's as if everyone has taken their path. So, to say that we shared family moments—such moments were missing [she is crying] ... and even today, each of us is still searching for who we are so it's ... it's again time to...

**M.M.: Right. You are here now, but those who still live there—where are they at in their journey?**

B.K.: One works in ..., in the [inaudible], another works for an oil company, a third is waiting to get into university and the youngest fell very behind in school and is now in fourth year of secondary school. My half-sister is there... So they see each other, they were telling me ..., the boys prefer to go out rather than just sit at home with the youngest brother, but life goes on ... there's no comparison with what was before, things are happening ... things are looking up.

**M.M.: At least, you're not carrying the responsibility for everyone.**

B.K.: Yes, I tried to ... the sense of responsibility is there, but it doesn't weigh as heavily as before.

**M.M.: [inaudible] that you understood with age.**

B.K.: Yes, I'm trying to let go, but for the child who is in his third [fourth?] year in secondary school and ... well, for the two youngest brothers, I still try to be there for them as before.

**C.K.: You talked quite a bit about this situation, since the orphanage, since you were in the Saint-Pierre Centre, your crossing to Zaire [Congo?], the orphanage, the studies ... What is your view on having to assume responsibilities as a child and as a parent at the same time? You were a child and you were also a parent, you were ... we say "head of the household," although I don't find this term appropriate, but you were a child and you were a parent too.**

01:40:00

B.K.: Yes. And I also don't accept the term "parent" because you can't be a real parent in this way.

**C.K.: No, "parent" in the sense of responsibility, parental responsibility.**

B.K.: Actually, I think it adds a sort of [inaudible] to a person's sense of self. I have a hard time thinking of myself as either a sister or a parent as [inaudible] it's ... I'm swaying between the two. And it's also paradoxical—now that I don't have all these responsibilities, it's as if I've become childish, at times I feel more ... [laughs].

**M.M.: I think my question was going in this direction. I was going to say, after all that, do you say to yourself, "I come out of this stronger, I now feel like a fighter or I feel more vulnerable?"**

B.K.: I think it's both. It's a situation that makes you vulnerable, so now that I don't have to spring into action or in my way of doing things sometimes, I realize, "But that's really childish!" [laughs] At the same time, I also say to myself, "Allow yourself to finally be a child, if you can." Still, if I act like that around other people, they might find it strange that at my age I react in a childish manner. And so, it's ... I think about that, but these things happen spontaneously, so it's not ... it's not an easy topic. I think I have a divided identity.

**M.M.: And you're swaying between the two?**

B.K.: Yes, I'm swaying between the two.

**C.K.: It bothered a lot of people ... that you ... friends, relatives. Earlier in the interview Monique asked you who had influenced you the most, your father or your mother, but it's not only your parents who've had most influence on you. Among the people close to you during all this, who were those who had a positive impact on you and, perhaps, a negative one? But talk first about the positive.**

B.K.: ... I think there were many people like that and ... at different moments. I think, for example, before 1994, when I met Félicité and the other nuns, it was initially another nun who introduced me to Félicité and she was around 60 years old. At the time I was only 11 and I was dealing with family situations that I didn't accept and she welcomed me and took the time to talk to me as if she was talking to an equal and she treated me ... treated me with me a very positive attitude, a compassionate and welcoming disposition. And especially ... to also see how she treated everyone, not just me. She was someone who ... who knew ... who took care of some of the vulnerable people in the town. I remember there was an elderly woman who did not leave her home and that nun was taking care of her. She was paying someone to stay with the lady—I think one of the other nuns was staying with her, but she supported the elderly lady in her needs. It was the nun's simplicity and especially her disposition towards others that were remarkable. And during the genocide nothing in her behaviour changed. And I think that knowing that—despite how broken we were by the events—I think knowing that gave me confidence in life, as if no matter what happens, I don't have to necessarily expect the worst and I can believe that even one individual among the thousands can spark brightness. Later, whether at the orphanage or at school, I was lucky to have teachers who always listened to me, who always appreciated me as a student, well, I could see they loved me and that, I think,

carried me forward. Also my schoolmates, even when leaving the orphanage, even when ... many people were saying “This child won’t get anywhere. She’s taking her younger brothers out of the orphanage. What will happen to her? She will become *mayibobo*, she will become *ikirara*, a street child.” Despite that, my classmates who knew me, and even their families whom I got to know through my classmates, were supportive. And then there was Donatille and her husband Fénariel who welcomed us without knowing us. Donatille was someone exceptional, she was ... a very kind, very generous woman who was really there for us during a difficult time. We ... it's as if we were sisters, we didn't know each other, but she regarded me as her younger sister and she loved my little brothers as she loved her own children. So, there were many positive things. Today, we've moved past this situation and when we look back on it we realize that it has weakened us, but that there were a lot of things that ... that, despite our vulnerability at the time, helped us get where we are today. So, I think that's it. Life here or there, well ... I was living in that situation, but I can't say that ... that it was dramatic. Perhaps it seemed dramatic on the outside, to the people observing the situation, but I never experienced that. Our situation was what it was, I couldn't stop and analyze it, so I lived with it and I carried on. But it's really thanks to ... to all these people that I've met. And then, when I arrived here, you were here, Emmanuel and Callixte were also here.

**M.M.: That was my next question. How is it that we are now speaking here, in Canada? When did you arrive? And how?**

B.K.: ... Actually, after my studies in Rwanda, I got a job in [inaudible] in Kibuye ... but I liked to study, so I entertained the idea that if the opportunity presents itself, I will continue studying. So, I learned that there were scholarships for students from the Francophonie, I applied and I was lucky to get one. The destination was Canada. So that's how we ... [laughs]

**M.M.: You came as a student?**

B.K.: Yes, I came as a student. I arrived in Trois-Rivières and I think that was the moment when I started to look back and to see that it wasn't ... a normal or an ordinary situation. And that's ... how I could get in touch with Emmanuel and with Callixte with whom I spoke, I think, in the first months after my arrival in Canada.

**01:50:00**

And that's how it happened. Emmanuel and Callixte asked me to share this experience in public and so here I am with you today! [laughs]

**M.M.: How ... how does one arrive in another country, so far away, and, after all you've been through, leaving behind brothers and sisters? How do you live your new life? How are you adapting? You say to yourself, “I'm there.” How do you reconcile being here and there, studying and [inaudible]?**

B.K.: ... I think a big part of me is still there ..., so I think I live here physically while I'm often there mentally. And even if it's not there as a physical place, it's there as an experience. So ... all the years I lived in Rwanda, that's what ... made me who I am. I came here as a student, in conditions ... in good conditions, compared to everything I

went through there. Being here has allowed me to go back..., well, it gave me the time to think about what I had experienced in Rwanda. In recent years..., actually, all the years that I've spent in Canada have been years of reflection. I don't know if I'm really integrating in the culture here [laughs] or if I'm inside my shell. At the same time, I'm starting to have a social network in this country—I have friends in Trois-Rivières, people from my cohort in graduate school, people from my summer work, people from the place where I teach French in the summer, so I meet a lot of people, and I embrace ... I more or less embrace the culture here, Western culture. I also think that having shared my experience on different occasions ... I think that has also allowed me to ... to adapt, in a way, to adapt by accepting ... who I am. Although I should not remain in this role of a witness, because it's a vulnerable position, but I ... being here as a student ... has also been a kind of a stepping stone for me.

**M.M.: Yes, I was wondering—when you arrived, the community was there to support you—was it more the Canadian community in Trois-Rivières that helped you integrate? Or were there Rwandans? Or both at the same time?**

B.K.: Both at the same time. Well, there was ... when I arrived, Emmanuel wasn't really here, he put me in touch with Callixte. But it was mainly with a couple of friends from France, who were also foreigners in this country, that I built a very strong friendship, right from the first months of our studies in Canada, and these friends later came to Rwanda and I went to visit them in France. So, with them it was ... and with other Québécois friends who joined our group towards the end of the master's degree. It was ... it was much more the community ... So I think it's both, it's the Canadian community, well, the Western community, but also a large part of the Rwandan community. Actually, there wasn't a Rwandan community in Trois-Rivières, but I was in contact with Page-Rwanda, although not regularly. And then I met Josée, Josée Gicali, who had known my paternal grandparents whom I didn't know, and it..., it helped create a very strong bond between us. So she also helped me integrate in the first months, and later I expanded my horizons elsewhere.

**M.M.: Listening to you reveals that you've found friends in both communities, the Canadian and the Rwandan one. How would you compare the conversations you have with Canadians, well, with Montrealers, Quebecers, Ontarians and when you find yourself in a conversation with Rwandans?**

B.K.: I think..., well, I've never compared them, it's a bit of a difficult question, but I think it's different. Most of the Rwandans I meet here are survivors so ... obviously [?] ... [laughs] we speak ... our language. I remember the first time I was in Quebec City before meeting other Rwandans, it was ... it was wonderful to see ... I was at this place where they were performing dances from different cultures—it amazed me to see my culture in Quebec. Most often, when Rwandans get together ... we talk as if we're still in Rwanda ... we also talk about our experiences during the genocide, we talk about everything, actually. ... In the company of Canadians, we talk about a bit of everything as well and we share our experiences too, but our experiences are very different. So, they'll talk to me about vacations and I'll talk to them about Rwanda. Maybe I will slip in a few words about my experience ... During my first months in Canada, that's all I was talking about

and I felt overwhelmed, so today I don't talk about it much. But at the time, I spoke about it often even to Canadians and to my French friends so it wasn't ... But they are removed from my experience, so the conversation takes on another shape and there is a very big gap between what they tell me and what I tell them. Still, they were listening, they were very ... they didn't rush or pressure me, well, I have been pressured, but not ... not on the part of these friends.

**M.M.: What would you like Canadians to know about you?**

B.K.: I don't know [laughs]. ... It's a question of mutual acceptance. Sometimes we can be suspicious, thinking that Canadians haven't lived through such major events, but ... they also have things to share ... I think it's a question of ... opening up to the experience of others. But it shouldn't go in one direction only: just because we've had a painful experience doesn't mean that we should not listen in return. I think that the history of Canada also contains some traumatic events and I think that sometimes we must accept to open ourselves to positive experiences. And especially when we're talking about a genocide, I think, it's an issue, a phenomenon that is of concern to everyone. So during those conversations, it's not only about listening or accepting my experience, but it's much more about using this experience in relation to others, since, I think, genocides continue to happen, but they don't happen twice in the same place. They always happen to other people, other places. So, I think that not only Canadians, but everyone has to become aware of our experience. That's the greater usefulness of witness accounts— if possible, to protect others in other places.

**M.M.: And what would you like Rwandans, your community, to know about you and that maybe we don't already know, maybe we [inaudible]? If it were necessary**

...

**02:00:00**

B.K.: [laughs] ... I don't know. It's a difficult question ... I don't know since ... I think that all Rwandans, well, every Rwandan has his or her own experience and I'm not sure that I should be asking them to think about me in a certain way. Perhaps I should be asking how we should all consider each other. I think everyone lives their experience in their own way, and we should maybe try to listen to each other and abstain from judging each other. What upsets me the most, I think, is to be judged: "Oh, you'll become *mayibobo*." The perception that others have of you can really weaken you and you might think, "Oh, maybe ... I really am like that." We live in a society and, unfortunately, one downside that I ... that I've noticed often about our community is that we're always looking on a surface level and ... not everyone is like that, but in general it seems that we're focusing on what is wrong with the other person. So, in this case [inaudible] we need to always make the effort to bring out those qualities in others that can help them advance, not the ones that can knock them down. I've been knocked down to the ground enough times that I don't see the point of, for example, sitting around and, you know, criticizing others: "You know what? Oh, now [inaudible] is constantly drinking. But why do they drink? It's ... [inaudible] of orphaned children, it's a catastrophe! All they do is make babies and do

drugs. Why do they do drugs?" Why don't we try to find out what's wrong, instead of ... , I mean, to try to focus on the good things.

**M.M.: So, according to you, we always focus on the negative?**

B.K.: I don't mean to say that it's always the case or that everyone is like that, but it's something that I have noticed occasionally.

**M.M.: That we forget to bring out the positive.**

B.K.: It's also normal that we are more curious about the things that are not going well, but it's just a matter of going further, of ... not stopping at that ... you can ... In the orphan village where my brothers and sisters live there are, say, two or three young mothers. When we see that the girl is pregnant, we might think that, for example, only orphans get pregnant. But that's far from the truth! And it's not just the orphans who drink a lot. People whose parents are still alive drink too. For me, that's ...

**M.M.: [Inaudible], and there are others who have been able to study and work.**

B.K.: There you go. So that's something that often makes me mad and I don't have an outlet to express this anger, but it makes me mad.

**M.M.: I know that you've gone back to Rwanda after you arrived here—how do you feel about that? How was it, going back?**

B.K.: I feel very nostalgic for certain places and people. I'm always afraid when I'm in Rwanda because I know that there are killers walking in the streets. Well, people who have killed back then and I don't know if they won't kill again. So I'm afraid. But it's also with great joy that I return to the places I frequented for the most part of my life.

**M.M.: Have you visited the places where you grew up?**

B.K.: ... Not at my grandmother's, I haven't been able to go back there, but every time I visit Rwanda, I go to Gisenyi, I go to Nyundo, I visit the orphanage and I stay in Kigali.

**M.M.: Have you been able to finally recover the bodies of your parents?**

B.K.: No, because when they were killed in 1994, their bodies were immediately thrown into a mass grave dug in the cemetery, so we don't know where they are and since it was in a cemetery, we're not able to disinter the bodies.

**M.M.: Have you been able to find out who was directly involved in the death of your parents?**

B.K.: No, but what I did find out, although I don't know if it's true, is that one of the killers died in Congo. A gentleman came to see me after the genocide to ask me to testify against someone who had been imprisoned and who had taken part in the killing. But when he came to see me ... , well, I wasn't there when my parents died, so it was difficult for me to testify against whomever ... I didn't know that person, I had never seen him. But for the moment, we are looking for the bodies of my twin sisters who died in Bisesero. We haven't found the place yet, but we're looking.

**M.M.: So you haven't met the people who caused the death of your family?**

B.K.: No, and for the time being, I don't think I want to, anyway, at this point in my life, I don't think I want to meet them. I know that my brothers sometimes go back there. And when I go back to Gisenyi I ... can't bring myself to ... I went once where we ...—actually

twice, once to see if there were any photos left and a second time with my friends from France to show them the place. But we didn't ... I didn't stay long. I saw the neighbours who are still there, but I'm not really interested in ... staying in contact with them.

**M.M.: Related to this, I know that there is also the Gacaca court where the survivors try to face and confront those who have killed their families and that's where some people learn who the killers are. What are your thoughts on that?**

**02:10:00**

B.K.: Yeah, I don't want to meet them, so I don't know if I would have the strength to go to the Gacaca, but one of my brothers has gone. The people from the neighbourhood where we used to live were denying that we had lived there and were saying that they didn't know our parents, so my brother had to go there. And while he was there words were exchanged that didn't really make sense. The neighbours were saying, "Oh yes, that's right, you are the son of [inaudible]. Oh, I wasn't here during the genocide, I was ..."—I don't know where they said they were. And so they started admitting that our parents really lived there, that we lived there. But they were also saying that everyone had moved away by the time my parents died. It's a difficult subject. I think that the survivors would like to know more about certain aspects of what happened—for example, where the bodies are. But I don't think that it really..., I don't know if it has a healing effect. Someone who's actually been at the Gacaca ... will be able to say more about it, I think. Since I've never taken part in the Gacaca, I can't say ...

**M.M.: That's not something that appeals to you personally?**

B.K.: It concerns me personally and collectively speaking, so ... if I try to understand the politics behind it... I don't really understand it ... I can't find the words, but ... personally, I'm opposed to forgiveness, I'm opposed to reconciliation. That doesn't mean that my heart is filled with hatred and that I want the killers to be killed, no. But I think I prefer ... to live with whomever I want to live, whether they are Hutu or Tutsi, but that it is me who decides. So if we choose to live with each other, we know we'll have to deal with those questions and that's a personal choice. But I can't see myself meeting someone who has killed my father, who has cut him with a machete, and who says to me, "I cut him with the machete, forgive me." So, I think ... I think, I won't be going any further with ... the Gacaca. I see it as a policy that perhaps restricts choice. If I had to give a choice—the people who held the machetes and who were killing for months and months should be relocated and live elsewhere. I think that the survivors of the Rwandan genocide are a sacrificed generation, they see their killers day after day. I think it's like ... inadvertently, this might be reinforcing their denial. With a crime like that ... justice has to be done first and I don't know if the Gacaca bring real justice. And for this too it's not really up to me to say, because I don't have direct experience with it.

**M.M.: You came to Canada to study, you finished your master's degree, you are now a doctoral student. What is your message to—I was going to say to the survivors, but I'm thinking especially of the young survivors who've been through almost the same situations or worse—what is your message to the young survivors?**

B.K.: I don't know if I would address the young survivors specifically, since everyone is dealing with this experience in their own way, so I don't want to assume the role of a counselor. But from my personal experience, some of which is shared by others, it is more important to convey a message ... to the young survivors' circle of friends and family. And of course the survivors ... I think that every survivor's story must be heard in the singularity of experience that it recounts, so I can't come forward as an example or a model. Or if I am to be such an example, it is up to the young person to request it—it shouldn't come from me. I think that's the way to do it. But, more important to me is the message to [inaudible] the survivor's circle of people. It's ... to really listen intently, to try to understand. The experiences we've been through ... can change our outlook on life, can change our ways of ... our behaviour. So it's up to the people around us to try to understand what is going on ... because what's happening is not, sometimes ... necessarily under our control, you know, and so I can encourage the survivors to say *nanana* but ... [break in the recording]

**M.M.: We were talking about your message to the young people and to the survivors in general.**

B.K.: It's really a question of solidarity and ... understanding each person's experience in its singularity, even though it's an experience shared by many survivors ... I think.

**M.M.: Would you go back and live in Rwanda when you finish your studies?**

B.K.: I really don't know if I would live there. Until I graduate, I'll continue going back and forth. I don't know where I'm going to settle in this world [laughs].

**M.M.: You haven't found a place yet that meets your criteria?**

B.K.: ... I think I need to continue with the process of recovery. I love Rwanda very much and I go back as much as I can, but for the moment I'm not planning to live there. That doesn't mean that I won't think about it tomorrow or in the future.

**M.M.: Do you know people or friends who were living here and who then returned to live in Rwanda?**

B.K.: Not really. But, it's a question of how I feel when I'm there and how I feel when I'm here—that's what will determine my return there or my choice of another place to live.

**M.M.: Is there a question you would like to answer that I haven't asked you yet?**

B.K.: I didn't think about the questions [laughs]. I didn't really think about the questions.

**M.M.: It's like an open question.**

B.K.: Yes, I know, but, no, I think ... I think we covered everything ... Thank you. [laughs]

**M.M.: Thank you. [cut in the recording] I know I've already seen your interview somewhere and I'd like to know what is it like for you to talk about the genocide as someone who has gone through such an event?**

B.K.: ... At times, it feels good to talk about it, but the moments right before, the preparatory stage, if you will, when we know we're going into the conversation, is not always easy, especially when we talk about it often and when we become ... overly solicited [for interviews]. It's like ... it's as if we [inaudible] since we continuously go back to it, even though there are variations in the story, we often recount the same things. At the same time it's up to me to decide not to talk about it. But sometimes, because

we've become used to it, we can't bring ourselves to say no. But ... at a certain point, it's mentally exhausting.

**02:13:00**

[End of the session]