

INTERVIEW WITH FRÉDÉRIC MUGWANEZA

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
ryayibanjirirje

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Interviewee: Frédéric Mugwaneza (Kiko) (F.M.)

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00:00:04

E.H.: On behalf of the Association and Concordia University, we thank you for agreeing to participate in this research.

F.M.: It's my pleasure.

E.H.: I think we can begin now. First, I would like to make a few general comments. Perhaps some of the questions won't concern you directly. If this is the case, you can answer briefly and we can move on to the next questions. So, if the question doesn't apply, you can say, for example, "Okay, this question doesn't apply to me." And then [inaudible: I will read?] another question. We will go faster this way. As you understand, this interview will be made public, since you have agreed to participate in it, and so you too can [inaudible: consult it?] afterwards and the same is true for future generations. So we will begin. First, I would like to ask you to tell me about yourself and to describe your family. So tell me about yourself: your name, your age, ethnicity, religion, marital status, and tell me about the members of your extended or close family.

F.M.: Well, I am Frédéric Mugwaneza, I am 32 years old, I am of Rwandan origin and I am Tutsi. My father was Jean-[Hus?] Mugwaneza, my mother—Annie Rolland. I have a brother, a big brother, and a big sister, Samuel Mugwaneza and Catherine Mugwaneza. I'm married to Sylvie Gasana and we have a little girl named Sarah.

E.H.: Okay. Let's start by talking about your grandparents. Do you remember what they did for a living?

F.M.: Yes, I remember well—I have fond memories of my grandparents on my father's as well as on my mother's side, because I spent quite a bit of time with them. I liked watching them, they fascinated me. I have always been fascinated by elderly people because they carry historical baggage and they have so much to tell. I remember better my—let's say that I was closer to my paternal grandfather, his name was Eustache Kajuga. He was a pastor but, most of all, he was a decent man. Our family learned a lot from him. Whenever there were tensions or small issues in the family, he would calm things down. He would say comforting words to me and would explain to us how things should be done.

E.H.: What influence, do you think, did your grandfather have on you?

F.M.: He has influenced me, for sure. He left me many memories of family reunions—he loved family reunions, he really liked us being together and that’s something I have inherited from him. I enjoy being with my family, I enjoy family gatherings. So, I remember this grandfather well. I also remember my maternal grandfather, he was Belgian, his name was Jules Rolland. My memories of him are more about the games we played together. He showed me many things: we would go for walks, he was pointing out to me things in nature, little things—small examples that I liked very much.

E.H.: And this was happening when you went to Belgium during the school holidays or when he came to visit you in Rwanda?

F.M.: When I went to Belgium for the school holidays. I was fortunate to have two grandfathers who were very different from each other, who lived in two different worlds and who taught me different values, from both Belgium and Rwanda.

E.H.: And what about your grandmothers?

F.M.: My grandmothers haven’t faded from memory either. I have a paternal grandmother who is still alive, her name is Marion. Like my paternal grandfather, the family gatherings were for her—she was always there, it was something important to her. She was also the one who helped my mother integrate—my mother was Belgian, and my grandmother was the one who helped her integrate into the family. It wasn’t easy for my mother when she first arrived, because she came from a different background, she was, as they say, a *muzungu* [white] and, well, it wasn’t easy. With time, the women’s help—it was the women who helped her integrate into the family and they opened the doors to her. I am thankful to my grandmother for that: for facilitating that, for helping my mother integrate and for considering her as one of the children in the family.

E.H.: Does your paternal grandmother live in Rwanda or outside of Rwanda?

F.M.: My maternal [paternal] grandmother lives in Rwanda. But she likes to go back to—well, she lives in Kigali, because the family and her children are there—but she prefers going back to the countryside, where she has always lived.

E.H.: And when you think about your grandparents and your parents, as a child, what kind of relationships did you observe between them, between your parents and their parents? So, what kind of interactions could you see between your father, your mother and their parents? What are your memories of that?

F.M.: My father was very respectful of his father, of my grandfather. In a way, my grandfather was viewed as a teacher, the one we would turn to when we needed an explanation, when we had a problem. Dad always viewed Grandpa as the head of the extended family. And it wasn't based on fear, we weren't afraid of our grandfather—he really was very nice—their relationship was quite—it was very friendly. Their connection—their discussions—my grandfather really was—he was at the centre of the family. On my mother's side—because of the distance between them—she had decided to live in Rwanda—it was at first a little tense, well, a lot of tension, in fact, due to a lack of understanding: why did she move so far away? why did she leave? why did she go to live in Africa? The grandparents didn't really understand my mother's choice. So their relations were strained, but over time—they even came to visit us in Rwanda. That helped calm down the tension a little and things were going very well after that. My mother wrote to them all the time, I remember the letters in the mail, and my grandparents wrote back, they sent small parcels, biscuits, Belgian chocolates, which didn't last for more than two days. And those are the memories I keep: of my grandparents in Belgium, who lived far away, who sent us little messages as expressions of affection, letters, small gifts, and then in Rwanda it was the lessons learned within the family, the discussions, the sharing of ideas. What I also remember, when I think of my grandparents in Rwanda, what first comes to mind is the countryside. They lived—my grandmother still lives there, in Gahini—every time we went there, I rediscovered the cows, the lake, the walks in the forest. I would play with the kids there, that's where I learned Kinyarwanda. Life was simple there: family, nature and, of course, the Sunday Mass.

00:10:09

E.H.: And then there was you, a little *muzungu*, who was accepted by the children of the hill.

F.M.: Oh, yes, for sure, as soon as I would show up, they would say: “*Umuzungu, umuzungu...*” But as soon as we started talking, they could see that I was speaking Kinyarwanda and, well, the differences between us were quickly forgotten. And I really enjoyed walking around and playing outside with the kids on the hill. And—

E.H.: Did your mother learn—[inaudible: the basics?] of Kinyarwanda?

F.M.: My mother, after 25 years in Rwanda, spoke perfect Kinyarwanda. She could communicate with anyone, she spoke Kinyarwanda very well, she was really well integrated, that's precisely—the fact that she was engaged in the life of the family. She learned the language, she became a true Rwandan.

E.H.: [inaudible]

F.M.: That's for sure.

E.H.: I don't mean to pry, but do you know what her ethnic background was? Was she Walloon or Flemish?

F.M.: She was Walloon.

E.H.: So French was her mother tongue?

F.M.: Yes, her mother tongue was French.

E.H.: I would now like to ask you a question about how your parents expressed emotions—emotions such as affection, joy, anger, fear—what in Kinyarwanda we call *igitsure*: when parents want to instill a sense of fear in their children, not to terrorize them, but to elicit respect, that's called *igitsure*. How did your parents show that? I would like to ask you to tell me first about one of your parents—either your mother or your father, it's your choice. How did they express affection, from what you remember from your childhood?

F.M.: Of course, they raised me based on their own experience. No doubt about that. My mother was educated—and I think my father too—in the old-fashioned ways where the father was the authoritative figure. And they tried to raise us in the same way—myself, my brother and my sister. But I didn't fear my mother, we were close. And I was an agitated child; like everyone else, I was doing stupid things. When I did something really stupid, my mother would hit me sometimes, as a kind of punishment. She was trying to explain to me how I should behave, she had the mind of a psychologist. She would kneel down next to me and that's how she talked to me—she had a more flexible approach to teach me to stop doing stupid things. My mother preferred talking to hitting. With Dad it was—he was quite flexible too, but his was a more African approach. We were slapped when we did stupid things, without much discussions, without much dialogue—there was some distance, [he was] a bit removed emotionally. It was similar to how all Rwandan dads are with their children: they remain at a distance, avoid being too close, too friendly with their children. I wasn't too upset about it since I could see that it was like that in all other families. But it was also a way of fearing him, since we didn't know how he

would react; we were trying to guess his state of mind: is he going to be mad? is he in an agreeable mood?—so there was always this doubt. And then there was the way he looked at us. His gaze expressed a lot: he liked to frown, as if to say to me: “I’m not going to say much more, you understood me.” And I understood what—the message he wanted to convey.

E.H.: *Igitsure?*

F.M.: That’s it. It was in his attitude. But he rarely raised his hand to hit me except, of course, when our actions were stupid and unacceptable and then—well, I sought protection from my mother. In addition, I was the youngest—as soon as Dad raised his hand to hit me or when he scolded me or gave me a look, I ran to my mother. I feared my father, that’s for sure.

E.H.: A quick parenthesis: Do you see the influence of your mother or your father in your own way of being a parent? [inaudible: you are a father, right?]

F.M.: Yes, I have a little girl, she is still very young, so I don’t know. [laughter] My parenting skills haven’t been put to the test yet.

E.H.: How old is she?

F.M.: She is one and a half. I think I will take some features from them both. I’m trying to have a close relationship with my child, to be able to talk to her, understand her concerns, talk to her, be close, but it’s also necessary to be firm sometimes.

E.H.: Tough?

F.M.: To be tough, yes. I’ll take features from both of them, for sure, from both Mom and Dad—because I turned out well. I don’t know if I was someone who—I was an agitated child, difficult to control. I was running everywhere, I broke things around me, and I think that they disciplined me well.

E.H.: Very interesting. Now, when a decision had to be made at home, was it your father or your mother who made the decisions, in general?

F.M.: It depended on the decision.

E.H.: Yes... From what you remember—as you say, you remember there was an exchange, a discussion—and then it was decided. Generally speaking, how were decisions made?

F.M.: Decisions that affected—that impacted life at home, for example, I think it was my mother who made those decisions at home. Now, well, all that was—the rest—[sigh]—I would say, those were Dad’s decisions—whether it was going on a trip, for example, or whether we had to go somewhere, it was Dad who decided when, because his schedule was—he had to look at his

availabilities, because he was working a lot at the time. So it was more my Dad who was deciding to—when we would leave, where we would go. And at home, it was my mom who ran her house, her employees, she made sure that the whole house was clean. She hired the people who worked at home, she trained them, she taught them to cook, Dad never participated in this. Also, when there were difficulties in the family, it was often Mom who would pinpoint the problem and would ask Dad to do something about it. Sometimes—I’ll use the example of an uncle who was going to have his fifth child, and I remember that Mom went to see his wife, my aunt, she went to see her and she told her, “You’re going to have your fifth child, I think it should be your last one.” My mom defended women’s values, she fought for the emancipation of Rwandan women and when she saw a woman who had no say, who unwillingly had [children], many children and, well, when it looked like the husband had decided to have a child and the wife had no say in the matter—I remember that she had gone to see my aunt and tell her that she must not remain quiet and that if she didn’t want any more children, she shouldn’t have any because she isn’t a machine for babies. I remember hearing that discussion and I found it quite interesting.

00:20:19

E.H.: Do you remember how old you were when you overheard that conversation between your mother and your aunt?

F.M.: I must have been 11 years old, yes, 10–11. Yes, that’s it. So, Mom took care of the house and of the family. She was the one who would nail the problem on the head and later she would tell Dad, “Listen, you have to address that. Can you talk to your brother and see—” And Dad was involved more in all matters outside of the house—travel, the purchase of materials. And school—in terms of homework, Dad was never involved in our homework. He didn’t know anything about what was going on at school. He was interested in the results. Our report cards had to be green; if he saw the colour red somewhere, it meant a failure and that’s when there were issues, questions: Why? We could tell him all we wanted that: “But the class average is... I’m in the average.” He would say, “No, no, that’s not how it should be. I’m seeing things written in red here and that means failure.” While my mom would go more in depth, she would try to understand [why].

E.H.: When you had good grades written in green, did your dad reward you for that or did he only intervene when he saw red writing in the report cards?

F.M.: He intervened only when he saw the red writing. I remember once, I was—I almost repeated a grade. I had to pass the second round of exams. I was in third year of secondary school going into fourth and I wrote the second round of exams, and I was waiting for the results. And Mom—I was so afraid to look at the results at school that I asked my mom, “Can you go instead of me?”—they were posted at the school, at the Belgian school—“Can you go see for me? Because if I go and Dad—if I repeat a year, I won’t be able to come back home, Dad will—I’m finished!” So Mom went to see the results and then she called me at home. I answered the phone and she said, “Congratulations! I think you’re going into fourth year of secondary school.” I was so happy, I ran to the room where my dad was, I ran to him and I said, “Dad, I succeeded, I’m going into fourth year!” His reaction was not one of joy, he gave me a kick in the behind. [laughter] And I—he had been so stressed out I would repeat a year, that he just reacted spontaneously like that. And he said to me, “You see, you can do it.”

E.H.: And as the saying goes, “Tough love.”

F.M.: Oh yeah, that’s it. That’s really how it was. Yes.

E.H.: Do you remember any hobbies? What kind of hobbies did your parents have? What did they do in their spare time? Did they do any activities after work? What kind of things did they like to do?

F.M.: [takes off his glasses and starts to cry, wiping his eyes]

[pause]

E.H.: I was asking you what hobbies your parents had. I don’t know if—feel free, if you want to make a connection with the memory that emerged in your mind and what it—or we can go directly to the question of—

F.M.: So, my parents’ hobbies?

E.H.: Yes.

F.M.: That we did as a family or?

E.H.: —that you did as a family or that your parents did together.

F.M.: Ok, as a hobby, we liked to visit my grandparents on the hill, we spent the afternoon at the lake—

E.H.: At Lake Muhazi?

F.M.: Lake Muhazi. And we would walk around the lake, we would take canoes and paddle on the lake. That's the most significant memory of my childhood: spending time at the lake, with my family, at my grandparents' house, beautiful landscapes, the sunset [inaudible: and all that?]

E.H.: Did your grandparents' property have a direct access to the lake?

F.M.: Yes, my grandparents' house was built slightly up the hill, higher up a little bit, it was surrounded by fields, there was a cow pen, and a small descending path. We would walk to the lake and stay there for a while, we had picnics there, we had meals together as a family, and then we would go out on the lake. Sometimes, I went out with the *bashumba* [cowherders]. I walked with them and their cows—I liked the cows—and I walked along with my little stick. These are for me beautiful memories. When I think about my childhood, I think how extraordinary it was. Innocence, I lived in complete innocence. It was beautiful.

E.H.: When you think about your parents, do you think either one of them has influenced you, in one way or another, in terms of how you do things, your tastes, your behaviours? Do you see any influence from your parents?

F.M.: Yeah. I—on the level of—in terms of how sensitive I am, I'm much closer to my mother, and in terms of my attitude, the way I want to appear to others, I try to be like Dad. I try to—Dad was really loved by everyone. To this day, when I meet people who knew him, they speak well of him. I've never met anyone who has said to me, "Your dad did this or that to me..." Or, I don't know..., "I didn't appreciate..." That's something that I feel deep down—to do good, to be a good person. He was the one who showed me how to be like that, how to treat others. And my mother taught me how to be sensible, how to talk to people in a certain way, to be interested in others. She taught me empathy, to put myself in other people's shoes, to see their problems from their perspective. My mother was such a person. Like a psychologist, she talked to people, discussed their problems with them, if they had problems and if they wanted to talk about it... Yeah, that's it.

E.H.: And [she was able] to anticipate problems? As in the example, that you observed with your aunt, whom she went to see...

F.M.: Yeah, that's right. She was able to see problems that were not readily visible. She was sensitive in a way that I try to be too. I try to be interested when I see someone who has a problem, I ask myself—I try to see if I can help them. And Dad was more like the man everyone likes, who makes jokes, who puts people at ease. That's it.

E.H.: Did your parents—or your grandparents—talk to you about their childhoods? About the memories they had from when they were little? Do you remember anything that either your mother or your father told you about the time they were children? Do you remember anything like that?

F.M.: [inaudible] my grandparents didn't talk much about their childhoods. I don't remember my grandparents telling me—those who were in Rwanda, in any case—telling me about their childhoods. From my grandparents in Belgium, the only memory I have is that when he was young my grandfather had—he was displaced during the World War, he was detained in the Nazi camps when he went to war. He often talked about that, he often told that story. So it's really—that's my grandfather from Belgium, that's the memory I have of him when he was a child—well, not a child but more like an adolescent. He often talked about the concentration camps and how he survived, about the war—that had affected him deeply. From my Rwandan grandfather, I don't have—well, I only heard some stories afterwards, and he wasn't the one telling them. I know he was adopted, no one knew his father, no one knew his parents, he was adopted and he grew up in a family. I learned these things a little bit later. But neither him nor my grandmother told me anything about their childhoods. As for my parents, well, there were many stories on the side of my mother, because there were photographs from when she was little and she would explain: “Oh, here, we are at such and such a place in Belgium...” She kept many pictures of her childhood, adolescence, she had kept all those pictures and that's how I learned about her growing up and about her journey.

00:32:11

E.H.: And when you went to Belgium for the school holidays [inaudible: did she?] take you to visit the places where she grew up? Did she talk to you about her childhood memories when she was showing you, for example, the school she went to, the stores she visited?

F.M.: Yes, yes, she did...

E.H.: She did that?

F.M.: Yes, when we went past—she spent her whole childhood in the same village, and also in a nearby village, the two are close enough, and that’s where my grandparents, her parents, lived. So sometimes we would go there and we would walk around the small village centre, and she showed me where they used to buy bread, she showed me her old school and the nursing school where she studied; sometimes—often—she would show me other places... That’s it.

E.H.: And your father?

F.M.: Dad—he never really directly talked to me about his childhood; it was more by overhearing conversations he had with his brothers that I learned some details, but we never sat down together or with the family to talk about his childhood. I just know that he—well, he grew up with my grandparents in the village. He went to school in the village and he often reminded me—he often told me that he didn’t have the chance to study, that he had succeeded thanks to his determination and that determination is always needed in life because he didn’t have the chance to study, but by his strength of resolve—to find work, to move, to move far away in order to look for work, he has always been very—he always wanted—he always was—as if he had a goal in life, a real goal, and he wanted to achieve it.

E.H.: And how did your neighbours, friends, relatives, perceive your parents? What were they saying about your parents?

F.M.: They were saying—they only had good things to say about my parents, as I was saying earlier, I—everyone I met spoke highly of my parents, whether they were speaking about my dad or my mom. My dad was the first one to help his neighbour finish his roof, buy roof tiles or metal sheets, and the first one to give him money to complete the construction of his house. My dad helped out many families with the education of their children, he paid their tuition fees. Mom played the role of counselor, a bosom friend of many women in the neighbourhood. She had a friend who lived—well, we lived in Kicukiro and there was, I remember, a very, very poor woman there. I remember her because every time I saw her coming, I would say to my mother, “She’s coming to ask you for money again, she’s coming to beg, and her son, who is an alcoholic, will drink all this money!” And my mother kept telling me, “Listen, always help those in need.” That woman was poor, she didn’t have much to eat and she came to our house, but instead of giving her money, my mom gave her food—fruits—and she said to me, “You see? I’m not giving her money, I’m giving her sustenance. It’s not the same thing.” So, really, in our

neighbourhood my parents were—people knew us, they knew my parents, they knew that there was a very nice *muzungu* in the neighbourhood. That was known, it was—

E.H.: A *muzungu* who spoke Kinyarwanda.

F.M.: A *muzungu* who spoke Kinyarwanda. And when people came over, they spoke Kinyarwanda to us. I even remember sometimes when I was leaving the house in the morning and when I would open the front gate, there was a line of four or five women waiting to talk to my mother, to tell her about their projects: “Oh, we’re trying to start a small cooperative” or “We want to start selling things at the market, we want to buy things to sell, fruits...” Every morning, there were two, three, four people waiting to talk to Mom, and Dad was grumbling all the time: “You see all these people coming to the house all the time to... You’re too kind, don’t let yourself be taken advantage of.” In any case, my mother really was a very caring person who helped people a lot. She was especially engaged in the cause of women. She was committed to the cause of the Rwandan woman, and she did a lot. And Dad too had made the most of—he had also succeeded. It was as if he wanted to give back to his friends who had helped him or his family. He was the leader in the family who was trying to encourage others to study, to start their own business. When people were about to get married, they would come to see him and ask him to participate in the expenses, it was—he also helped voluntarily. So those are the memories I have of my parents—their kindness.

E.H.: You told me about—you were the youngest, the last child in the family, you have a brother and a sister. Could you briefly tell us about the links, the relationships, the kind of relationships you have with your brother and your sister? First, who is the eldest? Is it your brother or your sister?

F.M.: The eldest is Catherine, my sister, and the way I remember her in Rwanda—she left Rwanda when she was 16 years old because, well, it wasn’t going well at school and also I think she often spoke of Belgium; she wanted to go study in Belgium and I think my parents sent her to Belgium. So I—during my childhood, my adolescence, I didn’t know my sister very well. The only memory I had of her was her running with my brother in the garden—I was younger and they often played together. She looked after me as big sisters do, but we didn’t play together. She was a bit like a second mom to me when I was little—we didn’t play together much. I only have very few memories of Catherine from when I was a child. With my brother Sam, on the other hand, we grew up together; we played all kinds of games together. I was constantly trying to

follow him, even though he didn't want me to always be in his way. We played a lot together and we were also fighting a lot. My impression is that when boys play too much together they often end up smacking each other. We fought a lot. But we had fun. We are brothers and we had a very straightforward relationship.

E.H.: What are some of the things you've kept from this relationship with your brother? Did your big brother influence you in any way, in your way of—your values, your behaviour? Are there any features about which you can say: "I think I've taken this from my big brother"—is there anything like that?

F.M.: Well, for sure Sam was someone who—in terms of sports, he was very athletic and I wanted to be better than him. I remember, for example, we played sports at school—long jumps, high jumps—and we were very good at these sports. Every time we played, I thought to myself, "I must be better than him." I was emulating him, I watched what he was doing. And with time, I became better at high jump—I wasn't better at all disciplines, but I managed to surpass him in some. We have an age difference of two years, so while growing up I was also catching up with him. He instilled in me good sports values and a discipline at the level of—[inaudible] in sports. He showed determination and I tried to be like him. Determination. Also, the interest in cars, in all things mechanic—all of that comes from him. He was always—I always competed with him: if he liked doing something, I had to do it too. For example, he liked the Audi car brand, so I had to get a car from another brand, Peugeot. We were constantly competing. Same thing with soccer: during the World Cup he was cheering for Germany and I was cheering for France, just to be different from him. It really was—and these weren't my personal choices, these were choices in relation to him: he had decided on one thing, so I had to choose something else.

00:43:18

E.H.: As a way to be different?

F.M.: Yes, I wanted to be very different from him, but at the same time, he was my role model.

E.H.: Right.

F.M.: So, in fact, I didn't want to admit that I wanted to be like him, so—

A.M.: And now that you are both adults and have families, what is your relationship like? And what is the relationship [inaudible] and your sister?

F.M.: Now it's—with my sister, over time, we managed to make up a little for lost years. When I arrived in Belgium in 1994, she took charge of things and I got to know her better then. There was really a gulf between us because we didn't know each other during—pff—a good ten years; I didn't see my sister every day during that time. And there is still a feeling of distance between Catherine and I—no doubt, the distance of all the years we didn't see each other. And also because we have different characters—I'm much closer to Sam in terms of character and in my way of being, more generally. He is still my role model: starting a family, having stability in life. Whenever I have important decisions to make, I go and talk to him, not to my sister. My sister and I, we didn't grow up together, and I feel that growing up with my brother has brought me closer to him and whether it's planning to start a family or talking about future projects, I talk to him about those things. Yes.

E.H.: We will now briefly talk about your childhood, just to situate some of the elements... You mentioned earlier that you've lived in Kicukiro with your parents. Do you remember any friends who lived in the neighbourhood or neighbours, your neighbours' children—did you have any difficulties playing with these kids? Could they come to your house and could you go to theirs? Just briefly talk to us about life in your neighbourhood.

F.M.: I've always considered myself a kid from the neighbourhood. Despite being very mature, I liked going out, being outside of home, going to the neighbours' house... I often found myself in my neighbours' kitchens, eating *ubugari* with *ibishyimbo*. I had no problems going to the neighbours' and [my parents] were looking for me—they would run after me: “Kiko, where are you? You have to come home now!” I would hear them calling from afar and I would go home. So I always was like a—I went wherever I wanted in the neighbourhood, without discrimination. People saw me as a *muzungu*, but hey, no matter! At the end, they would realize that I was no different from them. I was able to fit in easily. I played basketball with the other kids in the neighbourhood. I sometimes even shared meals with the caretakers at home, the *abazamu*, as they are called. I had no barriers, I didn't put up any barriers, it was more the others who perhaps saw me differently. But just by talking to me, they would see that I was like them.

E.H.: And what about the parents' upbringing of boys and girls—how did that play out in your neighbourhood? While you lived there, in your neighbourhood, were parents raising boys and girls differently? Did parents provide a different kind of education to the girls in the family? To your sister, for example? Tell us about that.

F.M.: My sister's upbringing—the few years that I remember because she left at 16—well, things were quite conflictual at home because she didn't get along very well with Dad. I don't remember exactly why, but I think it had something to do with school, things were not going well at school and she also had a bit of a difficult character, so it was very—and with my mom too. My mom tried to be a mediator between them, but—but I can't really make observations on the upbringing of girls, based only on the case of my sister. If I consider, rather, my cousins, it was—I didn't notice anything particular. The girls played with the boys, we played together, there was no—

E.H.: No difference?

F.M.: No, there really wasn't a particular difference.

E.H.: So, at school, did you establish any connections, relationships? You mentioned just now that your father was strict and demanding, particularly when it came to your report cards. But how were things with your teachers? Do you remember anything particular about your teachers?

F.M.: Yeah, well, being at school was not an easy time for me, because from the start I wasn't a good student. I didn't put in the necessary effort to catch up with the others. It was as though I knew I wasn't a good student and I thought, "Well, I'll resign myself to do the minimum of effort." I remember one of my teachers in particular—his name was Monsieur André, well, his name is still Monsieur André—he was my math teacher. Things were not going well between him and I in his classes. It was—I always had bad grades and he—well, he wasn't trying to help me either. His was the class I didn't like at all so my worst memories are from this math class at the École belge in Kigali—[laughter]—with my teacher, Monsieur André, who was very strict, and whom everyone feared, and I was the one bearing the brunt of his punishments: I had to clean the blackboard, anything that needed to be done, anything unpleasant, I was always the one to do it.

E.H.: Was there a school subject that you particularly liked? What was your favourite subject?

F.M.: Geography, history classes, drawing—I was very good at drawing—and also gym class, those were my favourite. I hated anything that had to do with science. And even—I remember one day, I brought home a marked math assignment, and I think he had given me something like two out of ten; I showed it to Mom and said, "Mom, what do you want me to do, I'm not good at

math?” She said—she admitted that math was also her pet peeve, she said, “You know, math is not my strong suit either.” In fact, sometimes I showed her my [math] homework and she wasn’t able to correct it or to help me. And then my dad’s reaction, instead of trying to see if he could do anything [to help], was to say, “I’m going to get you private lessons, okay?” So there was this teacher who was coming to our house and who was trying to bring my math skills up to speed. It wasn’t easy, but I always managed to narrowly pass my math class. That’s it.

E.H.: So what direction did you take, after all, after high school, what kind of training did you find most interesting?

F.M.: In fact, I finished high school in Belgium, because when the genocide started, I was in my fifth year of secondary school and I finished it in Belgium. I had to adapt to life in Belgium, so I lost maybe two years before finally finishing high school. After I arrived in Belgium in 1994, I spent one year without doing anything. I started school the year after that, but it was a different environment: the teachers were different, the relationship between students and teachers was different. So, let’s say I lost two years at the time when I was in high school. Then, when I started again, I became interested in marketing and I enrolled—in Belgium, students go directly to university after high school—so I enrolled to study marketing. Every year at Christmastime, I dropped out of the program. I did that two years in a row: I dropped out at Christmas.

00:53:22

E.H.: Was it because your grades weren’t good?

F.M.: The grades—it’s not that I had bad grades, I was lacking motivation. What was happening was—I was going back to Rwanda—and I felt like something was missing. Before, my parents were the driving force pushing me forward; they were always there to push me even to the point of threatening me. Since I’m not a student at heart, someone who likes to study, it wasn’t surprising I was dropping out since I didn’t have anyone to pressure me or push me, and that’s what happened two years in a row in Belgium, and—

[short break in the recording]

And that's it. I changed—I switched universities, I would start somewhere else and the same thing would happen again. So at one point, I dropped out completely; I started working in Belgium.

E.H.: What was your first job?

F.M.: My first job... My first job, I remember, was coding, I did coding for a company, and these kinds of jobs were—we called them “interims,” because we would change them every six months—we would get transferred to another company. I did a lot of these odd jobs in the meantime, things were always changing, so my life was quite unstable. I noticed a lack of stability [in my life] after the genocide, really, a complete lack of stability. And I couldn't ask—well, I could have asked for help, but I couldn't bring myself to make that request. The person closest to me was my brother; he was going through the same thing, he was going through the same kind of—

E.H.: The two of you left for Belgium together?

F.M.: He was already in Belgium. He was already in Belgium with my sister, and their life wasn't easy either, so I didn't have an example to follow. My life was quite—it was quite hectic after 1994, I didn't know which direction to take.

E.H.: What happened to your parents? Were they with you? Or were they in Rwanda?

What happened at the time of the genocide?

F.M.: At the time of the genocide—I can take as a starting point the 6th when the plane was shot down—I was in my bed, I was anticipating a normal night and going to school the next day. And then, around 6-7 o'clock in the evening, we heard the blasts. Two big explosions. We didn't pay much attention to it, we thought it was grenades exploding in the surrounding areas. There were always the sounds of gunfire, grenades, even in our neighbourhood, which was rather quiet, we were always hearing the occasional shot and so we thought, “It must be a grenade.” So I went to sleep and in the morning—very early in the morning, around 5-6 o'clock—my mother came to wake me up and she said, “You're not going to school today, the plane—the President is dead.” To me this was good news, I said, “Oh! I'm not going to school! That's good!” The President is dead, well, we're going to—the country will open up—because I was always hearing on the radio that the President was against the Arusha Accords, the President this, the President that, so I thought to myself, “Well, this is good news!” I saw that as the end of all of the country's problems and I thought that everything was going to be all right in Rwanda. And we spent the

morning—very early in the morning until—we even had breakfast around 8 o’clock. And then the shooting became much more repetitive; until then, shots were fired only occasionally, but at 8-9 o’clock the bombing started. And, well, we were beginning to—I could see my dad calling people left and right, he didn’t talk to me at all, I don’t remember my father talking to me that day or—at home that day, he was always on the phone, he was pacing back and forth. Without thinking, I went to the garden, I looked out, I saw houses being blown up, I saw grenades, [I heard] shots... Maybe I can provide a bit of context here. When I was a student at the Belgian School, I grew up in—I was like a child isolated from all the problems in Rwanda, ignorant of the ethnic groups, ignorant of Rwanda’s fundamental problems. I hadn’t paid attention to the different political movements, I thought of them as soccer teams—with their flags, their street demonstrations; to me they were like competing soccer teams. I never took them seriously. Even at school, I remember, I was classmates with the children of ministers, the children of high dignitaries. Kabuga’s children were also there, and Mbonyumutwa’s children, the children of all the military officers—almost all of them were there; I was friends with them. I remember at one point it became fashionable to wear small medals [points to his shirt] with the party symbol, and they were wearing those to school. I remember I was making fun of them, I was saying, “Your president is a dictator, he’s not letting the other parties express their voice! The MDR [Republican Democratic Movement] is no good.” I was saying that innocently, without really—just for fun. I knew that Dad was in the PL [Liberal Party] and I was proud to say it. I was saying, “Yeah, one must be a liberal!” I saw the liberals [the members of the Liberal Party] as—the very word, “liberal”—as free. We are free. So, at school, I boasted, I was always saying, “Oh, one has to be free, you are in movements, in parties led by dictators,” and things like that. There was never any aggression, never a threat on my part. And it went on like this. If a child had come up to me and had said, “Hey, you, we’re going to kill you” or if someone had attacked me, maybe then I would have seen the sign and I would have understood some of what was going on, but never, ever, was there a single complaint about—it was all for laughs... We were joking.

E.H.: 15-16 year-old children.

F.M.: We were 15-16, we never... No doubt, I grew up in a bubble where I knew nothing related to the problem, but I was never threatened. I had a cousin who lived at home with us, and every evening he came home very early, at half-past five he was already home. And I thought—he was

older than me, he must have been 18 years old, and I would ask him, “I come home after you, and you’re always here, why is that? Why aren’t you staying out and having some fun?”

[Pause in the recording]

F.M.: So we were—it was—

E.H.: You were talking about your classmates and about the ethnic issues, so questions of— and about political parties—

F.M.: So, yes, as I was saying, uh, I lived in my small world of a white [boy], Rwandan, Indian, it was all good, I didn’t—and so my cousin who lived at home with us always came home very early—very early, at 5 o’clock he was there. I was asking too many questions: “Why are you always home? Why aren’t you going out? Aren’t you going to play basketball?” Sometimes I played basketball in our neighbourhood, and I would say, “Come with me, we’ll play.” He was always afraid to go out of the house, especially in the few months before [the genocide], especially in late 1993, early 1994, he was always at home. One day he said, “Listen, my parents live in Nyamirambo and I go to an Apacope school [Parents’ Association for the Contribution and Promotion of Education].” And I said, “Why are you living with us? Why don’t go back to your parents’ house?” He said, “Because going back to Nyamirambo is more dangerous than coming to Kicukiro.” I said, “But why?” He said, “Because we get attacked sometimes in the street.” In the Nyamirambo neighbourhood—he had to walk through there, and he said that it was dangerous, that sometimes he got stopped by the police and that even in his family home in Nyamirambo there were often—the militia would pass by, soldiers would pass by, just like that, and observe the young boys who were there; he was a tall guy and older than the others. It was only afterwards that I realized that all the young people of that age were getting arrested from time to time, they would spend the evening in prison, they were beaten up. But at the time when he was telling me this, I thought he was being stupid. I said, “No. What are you talking about? No. Come, we’re going out, we’ll play basketball.” And he didn’t want to, he didn’t. Once, I came back home from playing basketball and I was singing, I was whistling in the courtyard of our house and he said, “No! You shouldn’t whistle, you shouldn’t whistle. If they hear you, they’ll come here.” I said, “Who?” He said, “The *interahamwe*! If they hear someone whistling, they’ll take it as a signal to come here—[inaudible: end the—?]” I didn’t understand what he

meant at all. I said, “Are you delusional? What is—? Here, at home? We have caretakers in the house, Dad is well-known, nothing will happen. Mom too, Mom is a *muzungu*, they won’t touch a *muzungu*.” It was my innocence speaking.

01:05:02

E.H.: Very naïve...

F.M.: Very naïve. And what really confused me in this whole story, all this drama in Rwanda, was my uncle. I had an uncle, Robert Kajuga, he was the little brother—he was the youngest son in the family, my father’s little brother. And when he was starting out, all the young people knew him very well because he had a soccer team. He was well-known, he had many girlfriends, really very well-known to the young people in the country. And he was spotted by the President’s clan and the members of the [inaudible] party and he was offered to be the head of the *interahamwe* in Kigali. He ended up becoming their president. When it happened, I found it extraordinary. I thought, “It’s really—the family is protected, the family is this and that...” And that’s—it was—afterwards, after everything happened, so after 1994, that’s what troubled me the most. And it’s the reason why I wanted to do this interview—on the one hand, to explain my version and get it out—it’s like a burden for me and my family. And no, it’s something that I’ve never understood and that I will never understand because he no longer exists, he is dead. But being the president of the *interahamwe*—it’s as though he wanted us to die... And—when he came over to our house or when we passed him on the street he was very nice. He grew up—I grew up with him, by his side, and everything was going well until he became involved in politics. After that there was tension in the family. I remember, he was about to get married and my grandfather talked with the girl’s father, and there were accusations: “Oh, he’s an *interahamwe*,” and this, and that... In any case, this whole story is very disturbing, how he got involved in this. My dad was meeting with his [other] brothers to talk about that. No one understood his [uncle’s] choices. What was clear was that he liked money, he loved success, visibility, and that everything was offered to him. So it’s really—he jumped on it for the profit, to make—for money and success, but I think he was naïve about it, he didn’t see the boundaries, he didn’t see what the repercussions would be, so, really, he jumped on it for the profit, to make—for money or for

the—for success. But I think he was naïve about it, he didn't see the boundaries, he didn't see the—what the consequences would be.

E.H.: On his part.

F.M.: I hear a lot of people saying that his hands were tied during the genocide, that he's saved some people but he's killed others, so it remains—for me it will remain a mystery. And in a way, I think it's better that he's dead. I think it's better because otherwise, it would have caused the destruction of the whole family. So that's it. This is the part where I bring up my uncle, it's also to address that confusion I lived with when I was young and that's where—I also remember when Dad—when I asked him questions, I asked him—because I was thinking about my uncle, but also about my cousins who were worried about being attacked, and I didn't understand. One day I asked my dad, I said, “What is our ethnicity, in fact?” He laughed. My mother was right next to him, she didn't say anything, and we just continued on with our day. Sam also asked, “Yes, what is our ethnicity? We are in the Liberal Party and they say that the people there are Tutsi. You're saying that we have to put the small—” We had to wear the small medallion with Habyarimana's, the President's, picture on it. My dad would put it on when he was going to conferences. Sam said, “But sometimes you wear the small President's medallion, so what are we, after all?” He said, “We are like everyone else, you know, we are Hutu.” And we never spoke about that again. And so I grew up thinking that. I continued on with my life, time passed. In my mind, I was Hutu. And it all made sense: my uncle was president of the *interahamwe*—that was confirmed and [my response] to my cousin who was worried was, “No, our family is protected, don't worry, nothing will happen.” And so, with all these elements in place, the plane crashed in the night of April 6 and then, in the morning, my mom woke me up very early and said, “The President is dead.” And then—well, then we started hearing gunshots, and around 11–11:30 in the morning they were still announcing on the radio that we should stay inside our houses, remain calm, stay at home, stay inside. And then around noon, half past twelve—I remember, we were sitting at the table—that's the image I have from that day, we were sitting at the table—like Jesus' Last Supper. Dad was there, Mom, my cousin, another cousin was there too. It was as though we were going to have our last meal, everyone felt that, and I too ended up understanding that there was tension, something that I couldn't grasp, couldn't understand. No one spoke, no questions. We were hearing gun shots, but we were going to have a meal. I believe

we ate a little bit. We hadn't finished yet when we heard the doorbell ring and there were—grandfather was there too.

E.H.: Maternal? Paternal!

F.M.: My paternal grandfather. He was there and—well, the *zamu* came in and said, “There are soldiers at the door, they say they want to talk to you.” My dad’s face turned white, he was like frozen. “Soldiers? What are they doing here? Why? Did they tell you why they are here and everything?” He said, “No, they want to speak to you. Come, they want to speak to you.” My grandfather said, “Well, if I talk to them, I might be able to send them away and explain that we don’t have—that there is nothing for them to do here.” He went downstairs, five minutes later he came back and said, “No, they want to come in. They say they want to search the house, to see—they had heard gun shots and are wondering if they weren’t fired from here or if—they want to search the house.” So, Mom said, “I’ll go with you.” With my grandfather. “Maybe if they see a *muzungu*, they’ll understand that—” So Mom went downstairs with grandpa and—the same thing. They came back up: “They say that either you go talk to them or they’re coming in.” So this game went on for about fifteen minutes and the more time passed, the more soldiers gathered at the door. They arrived with jeeps and the *zamu* alerted us each time: “Another jeep just arrived. They are numerous, they will break down the door.” There was even—the *zamu* had placed a tree trunk at the door to try to curb the—and so even our Hutu friends—they couldn’t do anything. They were trying to reason with the militiamen, they were saying, “Good people live in this house.”

E.H.: Trying to be peaceful...

F.M.: Peaceful. So, nothing was happening, and the *zamu* couldn’t do anything. Time went by. When we finally looked out the window, we saw that it was starting to—the door was starting to open. At that moment, I felt like invested with—nobody was moving and so I became a different person. I spoke up. I said, “If we stay here, we’re going to die, so we have to leave. We can exit from the kitchen.” I spoke up. I said, “If we stay here, we’re going to die, we have to leave.” I gathered everyone. I was 16-17 years old. I gathered everyone, I said, “Come, follow me.” I knew a small path behind the kitchen, which was leading to the neighbours’ house through a small door.

01:15:54

E.H.: You took a leadership role to save your family.

F.M.: I took over the “leadership” to save my family and I said, “Follow me.” Everyone was like frozen, no one moved. They followed me, we went behind a small cistern, behind the kitchen and—

E.H.: At what time was this, was it noon?

F.M.: It was half past twelve, 1 o’clock, around that time—

E.H.: Which is not a good time to escape and to hide!

F.M.: That’s right, but I thought that maybe if we went to the other side, they wouldn’t find us there. Anyway, when you’re in the moment, you don’t think too much, you try to follow your instinct. So we left the house and we went behind the small cistern. From there, I glanced back, I saw the front gate and the soldiers coming in, I quickly looked back and I saw a barrage of soldiers going in and the door was—we had to go through an open area [in the garden], we had to cross maybe five meters to get to the gate that would take us to the neighbours’. So I thought, “If we go through there they will see us and they will shoot us. So I say we go back.” We went back to the house, because they already had—they were circling the house. I said, let’s go back inside, maybe nothing will happen to us. We tried to run away, but I think it would have been disastrous. So we went back into the house and we waited. The soldiers arrived, they circled the house, they came inside, we were all there gathered in a group. There were ten of us and they placed guards, [...] arms in the air—so, they invaded the house completely, soldiers everywhere, they asked us to go out, to go on the terrace. We obeyed. And at that moment, an atmosphere of death reigned, a feeling that this was the end. Some things you just feel and you think to yourself “it’s over.” So there we were, on the terrace, waiting.

E.H.: And this is happening on April 8 or 9?

F.M.: This is happening on April 7.

E.H.: The 7th, yes.

F.M.: One day after the attack. So we were all there, waiting. The soldiers were searching the house. One of them came out, I think he was a colonel or—I don’t remember, but he was the leader. He came out and told Dad to go inside and bring everything he had, whether it was money or—and to show him where he was hiding the weapons. He was talking to him in Kinyarwanda, of course, and in a violent way, he was pushing him: “Go, go, show me the

weapons—and your money—bring out everything!” We were still gathered outside, on the terrace. I remember I took cover close to my mom, I asked her, “What’s going on? Why are they—? What are they going to do?” And she said, “Stay quiet! Stay calm. What is bound to happen will happen, but you are here with me.” Those were the last words she said to me. During that time Dad was inside, I didn’t know what was going on, where he was. I couldn’t see him, but I could hear the sounds of cupboards falling down, windows breaking—they were throwing everything on the ground, as if they were looking for something. The leader with whom Dad left came out of the house and he was discussing something with the other soldiers, he was talking to them. We couldn’t hear anything and that’s when I broke my silence. I walked towards him, I came close, but not too much, and I spoke to him, I said, “*Ntambunda dufite, ntacyintu dufite, turi abantu beza, ntacyintu twakoze.*” I tried to tell him that there was nothing, that we were pacifists, that we hadn’t done anything, that—and even if I didn’t understand the issue of why they were there, I understood that they were looking for something and that we were in a bad situation. The soldier standing right next to him and holding a rocket launcher turned towards me and pushed me back with it, with his rocket launcher. It took me—I really felt how hot it was and he pushed me back towards Mom and said, “*Ceceka wambwa we!*”—“Shut up!” So, I really—I burst into tears and took cover close to my mother who didn’t speak and just hugged me. Then the colonel, the leader who was talking with the others, he went back into the house and the soldiers told us, “Go to the garden and lie down on the ground on your stomachs, and do not say a word. We don’t want to hear a sound from you.” That’s when I thought that those were our last moments—what are we going to do? Should we run? Should we flee? Should we keep our hopes up—maybe they were only pretending? So many questions. I was wondering what—I’m sure the others were asking the same questions, except they knew why they were there, they knew very well what was going to happen while I didn’t know it yet. I said to Mom—I remember asking her, “And what about Sam? Sam and Catherine?” They were in Belgium, they had left to study there well before this took place, so they were in Belgium—I told her, “What—” I said, “Sam and Catherine?” She smiled and squeezed me in her arms. That’s when she told me these last words, “What’s bound to happen will happen, you’re here with me, everything will be all right!” We then went down to the garden, all ten of us, and lay on the ground. And I don’t know how—it was fate—I lay down in such a way that my mother was partly lying on top of me—we were lying on our stomachs—and she placed herself partly on top of me and she wrapped her arm

around me as if to protect me from what could happen. So we were all lying on the ground and there was maybe—we heard the sounds of boots moving left and right, a lot of jostling, and then—there really were a lot of soldiers there, I don't remember how many, but at least thirty for sure—and there was a hubbub that I can't even describe, the house was so crowded—they were breaking the windows—and at one point, I heard the words—they were talking to each other—I heard, “Shoot! Shoot fast, fast!” And he said, “Aim at the heads, aim at the heads—in this way it'll be done quickly and then we'll go.” And then I heard shots, they were starting. They were shooting at us, one after the other. They were at a distance of two meters away, a little above us, at the level of the terrace, we were a little below and they were firing, but I didn't see anything, because we had our heads to the ground and we couldn't see anything. I could only hear the shots, I didn't raise my head, they had forbidden us to look, and I said to myself, “If I get up or do anything like that, it's over.” My mother still had her arm around me and was holding me tight, she didn't speak, and they started to shoot at us, one shot at a time. I didn't hear any groans, no noise. They were shooting, shooting. I thought I was hearing the shots coming closer and I could see, I could feel a head jerk. I could feel it was getting closer, it was getting closer... I could feel the heat. And then it hit my mother, I felt her body jerk, two-three times, I don't remember how many, I think they shot at her three times and I didn't hear any noise, she didn't make any noise, “and now it's my turn,” I said to myself, “it's me, it's my turn.” And I heard like a—the ground trembled, and I felt, close to my face, the sensation of heat, and then very close, between my legs, the ground trembled, my body was still tense, and then it continued on to the next person. It continued on, there were three more people, it passed on to them. It was like I was trying to feel the pain, as if I was trying to—I tried to move, to see where I was hurt, where it—I couldn't feel anything. I thought, “Maybe I'm already dead.” And I thought that if this was death, maybe it wasn't so bad, there was no pain. My hand was placed on my mother's neck, I tried to wake her up, but they were still shooting. I tried to calm down a little. Then finally the shooting stopped, and I heard the sounds of boots. I heard the soldiers speaking: “Go get him too!” And then I heard my father's voice, coming from somewhere, I could guess where he was standing, he was in front of us, looking at us... He said, “What have you done! *Mwakoze iki?* Huh! Oya, *Mwakoze ibiki!*” And then I heard, “Go! *We jyenda nawe!* Go, you go too.” Then I heard him quickly going down the stairs, trying to escape. He stepped in front of me, right near my head and, yes, I heard footsteps, he ran, and they shot him three or four times. I heard his

breathing, the sound of his body falling to the ground, I felt his—I felt his despair, I felt his—I felt that he realized this was the end, I felt all that. He saw his family decimated, he then tried to meet his death head on, and he fell to the ground... I heard his body falling down. And that's when I realized I was alive, that I wasn't dead, that I was still there and that he had fallen. Then the soldiers, they—I think they were checking to see if we were dead, if anyone was still alive, but they didn't examine too closely and they continued on their way. They said, "We have to go someplace else, we'll leave now and we'll come back." They left. And while—at that time, I believe, the tension was so intense, that I fainted, I lost consciousness. Maybe ten minutes later, I was awakened by groans, cries from pain. The three *zamus* were injured. No, actually, two were still alive and one of them was dead. The two were crying out from pain. I also heard my grandfather who was groaning, but the others—silence. My mother was right next to me, but I didn't dare lift my head. During the whole time, I kept my head to the ground and I had mud, dirt in my mouth, in my nose, my glasses were broken, so I couldn't see much, and I didn't breathe. I was breathing heavily, but I tried not to make any noise. I managed to turn my head to look at my mother: her eyes were closed and—she wasn't moving. I tried to pinch her, I tried to make her move a little, but I saw no sign of life and no sign of suffering—her face was impassive, no blood... I raised my head a little, I saw my grandfather, he was wounded in the arm, his arm was completely—I don't even know if it was an arm or—it was shredded. And the same thing with his thigh—and he was an old man. It was a horrific scene. I didn't understand how he could still be alive. The caretakers too were seriously wounded, and were crying out from pain. And I saw that—I asked them if someone—if they can still see the militiamen, if they—I tried talking to them and they said, "No, they are gone!" That's when I tried to sit up, I felt my body. My hand was a little injured, but I was alive and I had no—I wasn't seriously hurt. So I tried to—again, I took the initiative; I thought to myself, "I am able to move, I will get them out of here." I remembered that Dad had been on the phone, he was talking to—before the soldiers arrived, he was talking on the phone with—I didn't know if he was a minister at the time, but anyway—he was talking to Justin Mugenzi.

01:31:12

E.H.: Mugenzi! He was the president of the Liberal Party, I believe.

F.M.: He was the president of the Liberal Party. I remember he was talking to him, so I said to my grandfather, “Dad was talking to Justin, he’s a minister, he can help us, he has soldiers to protect him. I’ve seen him surrounded by soldiers.” Which is more, he lived next door to us. So he [the grandfather] was able to speak, and he—he reached for—he managed to get his address book and gave me Justin’s number. He said, “That’s right, try calling him and tell him we’re wounded.” So I took the number, I ran inside the house, I got to the phone and I called him. His daughter answered, or one of the employees there did, I don’t know. I asked to speak to Justin, I told him very quickly, “We’re wounded, Dad is dead, there is no one left, grandfather is wounded—come quickly!” and I hung up. I went to the window, I didn’t dare going in the garden again, I stayed inside, and I thought, “I just spoke to him, he will come! He will come get us.” I barricaded myself inside the house, I shut the doors closed, I went into the kitchen—it was like I wanted to search the house completely for anyone that might still be there. I went to the kitchen, took a knife and I remember I ran around the house looking for someone who was maybe still there, who had stayed inside, and then I waited. I stationed myself in front of the window overlooking the entrance gate. I waited to see if anyone would come, and then—when—after maybe 10 or 15 minutes, I saw soldiers coming in again, and I recognized their faces. I thought to myself, “The same people are back.” And I thought, “But why are the same people back?” I thought about that for a few seconds, I didn’t understand why they came back—I had spoken with Justin—why hadn’t he come? And then I said to myself, “They’ll look for me and they won’t find me downstairs with the others. I have to hide.” I hid in the attic, it was very high up, but I found inexplicable strength and managed to climb. I hid there and waited. I was hiding in the attic and I was waiting... I could hear them walking around the house, looking for me. And then they stood in front of the bodies and started shooting, they were shooting at the bodies—they shot dead my grandfather, they shot dead the *zamus* and I think they even shot the others again because they were shooting so much. Then they shot the windows of the house, to make me come out. When they understood that I wasn’t going to come out, they didn’t try to go inside again, they left. They left, and I stayed in the attic, traumatized. I waited, I panicked, I didn’t know what to do. I think I stayed there, in the attic, for 30 minutes perhaps. I didn’t hear a sound except gunfire in the neighbourhood. And then, 30 minutes later, I heard the voice of one of my classmates, Gustave Mbonyumutwa, we studied together at the *École belge*, we were in the same class. I could hear him, he was talking to me, he said, “Kiko, it’s me, I came to get you.

Come! Don't be afraid." I didn't move. I didn't understand why he was there, what was he doing there. He walked around the house and I could hear him speak with someone else, and then I noticed he was accompanied by a soldier—from the attic, I could hear what was going on in the house. He kept calling me, "Kiko, come out, don't be afraid! You're not risking anything." Some minutes passed, I thought to myself, "If I stay here, I will certainly die, so I might as well go downstairs and be done with it. What good is my life now, anyway?" So, I went downstairs. I went downstairs and I saw him standing in front of the entrance and I spoke to him, I said, "Are you sure that nothing will happen to me? Are you sure that—why is there a soldier here, with you? What will he do to me?" He said, "No, he's here for our safety, I'm going to take you to my house uptown"—they lived a little further up, in Kicukiro. He said, "I'm going to take you home, you'll be safe." He said, "I know what happened, you'll come home with me." Well, I said—I opened the door, I went outside and nothing happened. He said, "Follow me, the soldier will walk behind us, he will act as if he had found us and he's taking us somewhere to—" So, we left the house. I remember I quickly took with me one jacket and a few small items, documents, I think, my identity papers. And then I left with him. We walked up the road to his house and we passed by groups of men in the street, the soldiers were everywhere. He took me to Matayo Ngirumpatse's house—the houses were—Mbonyumutwa [inaudible]. It was—they lived next door to each other, and our house was not too far either. And since we knew each other a little bit—my mother knew Mathieu's [Matayo?] wife—so I thought that—and Mathieu's daughter was also at the École belge, like me—so I felt reassured, I felt a little bit safe, except when we got there, there were tanks, plenty of soldiers and—but at least I recognized the faces of people I knew from school. I stayed there. When I entered the house, I saw a whole bunch of people that I didn't know, men that I hadn't met yet, but Gustave's dad, Shingiro Mbonyumutwa, was also there, he came up to me, shook my hand and said, "My condolences." I remember those were his first words to me. He said, "My condolences." So he was already aware of everything that had happened—but why is he telling me that? He knew that my parents were dead. In any case, it was a—I felt—I was shaken, in a state of shock. But nothing happened in that house, he even treated my wound. I was wounded here [shows his wrist] and they treated me, they gave me food, and an hour or two later Rose, Matthew's wife who knew my family, handed me the phone and said, "It's your brother in Belgium, he wants to talk to you." I said, "You called him already? What am I going to tell him?" She said, "Tell him what happened." So I took the phone, and—

Sam was on the other end of the line and he said, “Are you okay? What are you doing there? Is everything all right?” I didn’t know what to say, I was searching for my words, and then I think I told him, “Our parents are dead.” Then I think I heard the sound of a person collapsing, I don’t know, a noise... Later, I learned that he had to sit down from the shock, he was a little—and then he asked me to repeat, “What?” “Our parents are dead, and I’m wounded, and I’m here, but—” Just pronouncing the words “our parents are dead” was already the—I had said everything. I don’t think we talked about anything else. I handed the phone back to Rose and she hung up or she spoke to him—I don’t remember anymore... I stayed there that night. I slept there. The next day, they had to take me to the—I think they contacted the Belgians or they called UNAMIR [United Nations Assistance Mission in Rwanda], but I think no one was able to come to the house because of the gunfire and all that. I think the gunfire was getting closer and—we had to move, we had to leave the house because they themselves were no longer safe. So I followed everyone, the whole group that fled Matayo’s house where we were; there were other people there, many, many other people, refugees. We left in a single file and we went downtown, we went past the house where I lived. I asked that we stop there so that I could go in and get some things that I wanted to take with me. There was also something that was bothering me: the dead bodies were in the garden and it had rained; I said to myself, “Can we cover them with something?” So even at 17 years old I thought—I already had that—like I had a mission: I had to cover them. I went back to the house and I went inside, I got my father’s passports, some important documents, identity papers, and then we covered the bodies quickly because we had to hurry up, the gunfire was approaching, and it was very dangerous at that point. I went back in the car and then the whole row of vehicles left. We drove through the city centre, we drove to what was at the time the Hôtel des Diplomates, and everyone—it was like a refugee camp, everyone was there. It was full of people. A lot of people. But I was alone, and I don’t know who called the United Nations, the Belgian army. All I know is that a Belgian army jeep was waiting for me and I got in. And while I was walking in corridors of the Hôtel des Diplomates, going towards the Jeep, I ran into Justin Mugenzi. I remember that we walked past each other, he looked at me, he looked at me, we walked past each other, then he turned away. We did not speak. But the expression on his face was like saying, “What are you doing here?” Or, “How come you are here, what is—” No explanation about what had happened. In short, I found myself in the Belgian army jeep and they brought me to the Belgian refugee camp. A small improvised camp

for the families of the Belgians was set up in front of the École belge. There, yes, I found a younger cousin who was—whose father was Belgian too, so we reunited there. And from then on I was alone with my little cousin. I think we slept there one more night. So I stayed for two nights after the 7th, so on the 9th, all the Belgians—I ended up with the Belgians, the foreigners—and all the French who were there too—we left in a military convoy with the French army towards the airport and we took the back roads, we didn't take the main roads, the main streets, but we ended up reaching the airport. And then we left. I arrived in Belgium and—once there, well, I met with my brother and sister at the airport. Yes, that's about it... Anyway.

01:46:42

E.H.: I am very moved by your story—all that you have lived through, all that you have endured, and this testimony that you are sharing with me 15 years after it happened. I offer you my condolences, my sympathies and I also would like to thank you for your generosity that—this testimony that you are giving to the [inaudible: entire?] community, to everyone, to the people who will watch this video and hear your words. And through this testimony the people who deny the genocide or the people who believe in the words of negationists—because there are some who speak nonsense—so the people who will hear you, the people who will see you can know the truth. Every story is unique and yours is so well articulated. Once again, all my sympathies. And also the courage you've had at such a young age to live through such atrocities and to see your whole family—your mother who protected you, she was a good mother until the end, her reaction that ultimately saved you, to protect you, to cover you...

F.M.: Yes, that's what I remember from this moment—she really protected me. It was my mother who—she was like a shield and maybe she did it unconsciously, but it saved my life, because all of the bullets hit her and none reached me. She really gave her life for me, and it's unbelievable... Truly unbelievable.

E.H.: After a testimony like the one you just shared with me, it's as if the meaning of the questions that follow—I don't feel comfortable, so to say, to ask the remaining questions. It's so moving, of course, to hear a story like that and at the same time, after hearing such an emotional testimony, I feel uncomfortable bringing us back to these questions, some of

which are rather technical: What was your life like afterwards? What did you study? I would like to take a short break. [Speaking to the other interviewer] You have to leave at 4:30 pm?

A.M.: Yes.

E.H.: I don't know if you have anything to add?

A.M.: I think that when he was telling his story [inaudible] several questions and at the same time, the depth of emotion—we can't really go back to some of the questions, which may be a little too—I think [inaudible]

F.M.: And then we will resume?

A.M.: When you have time, maybe at another date, we can schedule another meeting.

E.H. Yes.

F.M.: What are the rest of the questions like? It's—

E.H.: The rest of the questions are—

A.M.: You already answered them a little bit.

E.H.: Yes, yes.

A.M.: It was, uh—[inaudible] you moved away after the genocide. The people who helped you. Whether you felt—you know, the people who uplifted you or made you feel inferior, the people who abused their power—you already told us a little bit about that—the people who would shove you and would call out “*Ceceka ahongaho!*” to you. You know, things like that, which made—which showed—they answered some of the questions. Your friends who intervened, the people who protected you [inaudible] after. I think that answers that part. The other part is about what you [inaudible] a year? Where were you staying in Belgium when you arrived there?

F.M. Ah yes, yes, yes. The time it took me to put things in perspective.

E.H.: And then there are all the other questions about your integration here in Montreal, about how you arrived in Canada, the time from your arrival until now—and for that, indeed, I think we can find another moment.

F.M.: Okay.

E.H.: We could meet at another time.

A.M.: We can talk about your arrival in Belgium.

F.M.: Yes.

A.M.: And about how you were received there.

F.M.: Okay.

A.M.: When you arrived at the airport, were your brother and your sister there to meet you?

F.M.: Are we continuing the interview now? Okay. Uh, well, when I arrived at the airport in Brussels my brother and my sister were there, along with some friends, and—it was quite emotional, we burst into tears, I threw myself into my brother’s arms, into my sister’s arms. A team of psychologists was also there to help the people who needed care, but I have always refused—I don’t—I have always refused the help of psychologists, I don’t know why. I’ve always wanted to heal by myself, but—maybe because I simply didn’t feel sick. There was this one psychologist who came up to me many times, and she would always say, “Frédéric, come to see me!” Sometimes I went to her house and her children were around, she made me feel comfortable. She would say, “You can talk to me if you want to.” But every time I would start to talk, I would stop. I didn’t find it was something I needed. Maybe I should have done it, I don’t know, but it’s—I didn’t like talking about what had happened, I didn’t like telling my story. [pause] And my family too, my aunts—I have family—my mother’s sisters were in Belgium and one of my aunts, Mary Jane, was telling me, “Really, if you need to talk, we are here for you, we can help you.” I received support in Belgium, but every time [I was about to talk] I wasn’t too—I was a little reluctant, I didn’t like to speak, I kept things inside. Even to my brother, I didn’t always talk to him about what had happened, and every time I did speak about it, I would think of another detail to add, and they were all interested and would say, “Ah..., but you didn’t tell us this before.” And—

E.H.: Another very strong feature of your character—already, as the events were occurring, you showed the drive to take initiative to save your family. All this courage, all this inner strength that you’ve always had, what helps you—to the present day, with all that you have been through and that you have experienced, many people [in your position] would ask for help from a psychologist or a psychiatrist, or their social network, but you—where does this force come from, this captain’s resolve, this energy?

F.M.: I don’t—in any case, I feel like I’m a bit like my mother who experienced hardship in her life, but who always hid her suffering. I never saw my parents suffer, really: they have always hidden their pain, so maybe—my mother more so than my father, because my mother had to face

many challenges: the fact of having returned—having left her family, her arrival in Africa, her integration in Rwanda, she had gone through many stages and she was a woman with the spirit of a fighter, very driven. Maybe I drew my strength from her. And especially the fact that she gave her life for me, I have the feeling that I have internalized that, I have her strength, she infused something in me, and often when I have problems, when I don't feel well, I think of her, and it's like she is talking to me, saying, "It will be okay, persevere, it will be okay, keep going, we're here." I feel her support in this way.

E.H.: Indeed, your mother must have had an extraordinary strength of character. I have met many expatriates in Rwanda, people from France, Belgium, Canada, but I have rarely seen—maybe with the exception of one or two people—I have rarely seen a foreigner living in Rwanda and speaking the Rwandan language as your mother did. In fact, I knew only one person, a Canadian, who was also proficient in the Rwandan language. To achieve this, it requires, first, loving the people you live with, respecting them, and having a strong motivation. You know well, it's not an easy language, so it's an act of generosity. I would really like to extend my admiration to the kind of mother you've had, whom I find an extraordinary woman.

F.M.: Yes, for sure, that's how I remember her. It's very inspiring. Yes, yes.

A.M.: Is this protection from the [inaudible: mom?] that left you—especially the fact that you survived, you've had a near death experience—did you turn to spirituality or [inaudible] something like that? Was there something in this experience that has awakened you spiritually [inaudible]?

01:59:27

F.M.: That's a good question. I've often thought about it. I've tried to find explanation within the Protestant religion, I was going to both churches, to the place of worship and to the church, I always—I grew up with the Sunday Mass, which wasn't always easy, we didn't always want to go, but I come from a religious family, on both sides. I try to tell myself that—well, it's true that God—God—ultimately, that's a big question, it's quite, uh—but I don't think religion can provide answers for everything—not for everything. I've often asked myself the question: "Uhm, what is this message for? Is this my calling, a mission that I have to accomplish?" I haven't

found the answer yet. Sometimes when I pray, or when I'm praying with someone else, it feels good. But I haven't found the answer yet as to why I am still alive or what really happened. I'm still asking these questions. I think about that a lot.

E.H.: Isn't your father's name Umugwaneza?

F.M.: Yes.

E.H.: His name is Umugwaneza?

F.M.: Yes, yes.

E.H.: Did you ever ask him why his father gave him that name—it's a beautiful name, Umugwaneza?

F.M.: Yes, yes, it is.

E.H.: And it suits you very well, it's an extraordinary name, I think.

A.M.: [inaudible]

F.M.: Umugwaneza—well, I often wondered, "Huh, what does it mean?" The answer that comes to my mind is, "Ah...! I am at the right place at the right time!" [laughter] I remember that I asked my dad this question once, or maybe I asked someone else, I said, "Does it mean that your timing is right or that you were born lucky or that you are—?" He laughed; he said, "No, it's—" It's only afterwards that I understood the meaning.

E.H.: And what did he say it meant?

F.M.: He said that it meant someone who brings goodness to others, who helps others. Someone who is interested in people, who addresses the concerns of others. I don't know if that's the real meaning, but that's what he told me.

E.H.: It means someone with a good character, someone who is open-minded. When we say that someone is *umugwaneza*, it means someone who is always accommodating, who is always kind, who is decent, who is always generous with everybody.

F.M.: That's really how he was.

[part of the recording is missing]

F.M.: —to exhume the bodies from the house—they were buried in the garden of the house—and the family—we didn't talk about this uncle. We don't talk about that. It has become a taboo subject. He died in Congo, in Kinshasa, and that's all I know. He died and we don't talk about

that anymore. But when we exhumed the bodies and had a burial ceremony at the Memorial, one person raised the question and said, “You are forgetting your son, you don’t talk about him! It’s like ‘He’s dead, we buried him, it’s over and—’.” It’s true that he existed, that he did what he did, and for a long time, this was a big question for me. I wondered what made him do that. And to my grandmother, who is still alive, this causes a great deal of suffering. Sometimes when people see her, well, they avoid the subject. I think we must clarify, we must talk about it, because keeping this story silent doesn’t allow us to move forward and to solve the problem. And—

E.H.: And it shows the extent to which this regime turned people into victims—because your uncle is a good example of a victim of the Habyarimana regime.

F.M.: Yes, we can see it like that, he was a victim or maybe he was a weak person, easily swayed. But in some cases—and I’m sure that different families experience such things in a different way—but it must not lead to the—[inaudible] pain, because what happens sometimes is that there are bad people in Rwanda who will criticize my grandmother or my family, who would say, “Ah, but you have an uncle who did this and who did that.” It’s not easy being part of this family. Sometimes it seems to me it’s more difficult to bear because there are two sorrows: the grief of losing someone and the grief of knowing that this person has also caused suffering. But I think that’s what a genocide is: the genocide harmed everyone, and it’s—

E.H.: But I think what’s so terrible in the case of your uncle is to see how the negationists use him, use his name to say, “But there were *interahamwe* among you as well, there were Tutsi *interahamwe* too.” And—

F.M.: Yes, yes, yes... On many occasions...

E.H.: —and that hurts. It hurts and it is rare to, precisely, see them as victims. Did he have children?

F.M.: But I don’t see him as one of the victims, I don’t see him as a victim. I see him as a victim of his own self. He implicated himself in this problem, he was weak, he let himself be influenced, he didn’t follow the advice of his family, of his father. He put himself in this situation and he is responsible for his actions. I personally don’t see him as a victim, because he fell into that voluntarily. He didn’t have a child, nor a wife. That’s it.

E.H.: He was your father’s youngest brother?

F.M.: Yes, he was the youngest. But his hands were tied, I often heard people say that. His hands tied when it all happened. He even knew that the soldiers had arrived at our house, but he couldn't come to us, he was under surveillance. At one point he was able to come out from where he was, and he managed to save—one of our cousins says that he came to get her and brought her to the Hôtel Mille Collines—so he did save some people, but he was under surveillance and his hands were tied. During the genocide the *interahamwe* were split into two factions: the hardliners and those who wanted out. And I think he was among those trying to sneak out, but that doesn't diminish his role in this. And my story—often because—are we still recording? Oh, okay. One day, around the time when the Mugenzi verdict came out, lawyers from the International Tribunal contacted me and said, “You can testify at the trial and say that he was the one who saved you, after all, that he sent his guards to save you.” They contacted me several times, they tried to come over and bring me to the trial to testify, and it's really—I'm in a situation where—well, people on both sides try to use me. But what I said to the person was—I said, “When I called him [that day], I didn't know at all who he was, I didn't know him. I only knew he was a minister. I lived in a bubble, I didn't know what his work was, what he did. And when I called him, it really was to save myself. What happened was that he sent soldiers who came to eliminate—they came to finish off the—my grandfather and the others who were still alive, and they didn't even—they scared me, they fired gunshots in the house, they—how can we be sure that it wasn't him who had sent them to kill me, to erase all traces?” That's what I said every time they asked me. On the other hand, another family sent me questions through an [inaudible: intermediary?]. The Mbonyumutwa family was criticizing me, saying that I wasn't grateful because their son was the one who came to get me out of the house. Except that—being grateful for what? For a classmate's natural reaction towards another human being, who says, “I know him, I will save him”? Is it because their son saved me that the family isn't guilty of anything or the father isn't guilty of anything? In my view, we must think about this a little, we must put things in perspective and—I'm sure that's also something that they must consider for themselves: “He isn't grateful that we saved his life.” But their rescue came too late, they could have saved me a little earlier—and save my parents at the same time. So it's—all of this is—I have given a lot of thought on this throughout the years.

02:11:11

E.H.: By the way, [inaudible] in the same way, or almost the same way, in her book when she talks about the people we call heroes because they've saved several Tutsis. And she asks, "Acting as a human being—is that what heroism is?" The natural thing to do is not to let people kill children, not let them kill those who are innocent and preventing that—is that what we call heroism? It's not. I think she's absolutely right when she presents things in this manner—acting humanely, as a human being should not be something extraordinary because that's how we should act.

F.M.: And I think it's regrettable that—especially while I was living in Belgium—I found myself—I ran into them often, because they also lived there. They were walking in complete freedom and I often ran into them and every time I did, I had the impression that I was indebted to them for something, for my life. Still, it is quite—if I were in their place, I would have done exactly the same, but I wouldn't have boasted that I am a hero, that I have saved so and so. The facts are there. Even if we can't apply the same sentence to a child, someone who—let's take Mbonyumutwa's case—he said blatant things on the radio, his message was full of hate, but I can't judge children by the same standard, because in my mind children are innocent and I would say "thank you" to the person who has saved me if I meet him on the street one day, but to the family—the people who have committed—who have spoken on the radio, who have uttered messages of hate—even my uncle—that's why I said that it's better that he died because if he were still alive I don't think I would have forgiven him. And if I had to go to court, I would have stood there and accused him, I would have been the witness of—I would have testified because we have to fight this ideology, the ideology of eliminating people on the pretext that they are—whether they belong to this or that ethnicity or whether they represent this or that group. This ideology must be killed—not the people, but this ideology must be killed.

E.H.: We have a few minutes left. Could you tell us briefly how did you come here in Montreal? How did you find yourself here in Montreal?

F.M.: [laughter]

E.H.: And your life here so far—how has it been for you, the process of adaptation to life here?

F.M.: Well, I lived in Belgium for ten years and I would summarize those ten years in Belgium like this: I tried to find my path, I got closer to my family in Belgium whom I didn't know very

well, I grew closer to them, my mental health improved, so to speak. And then it just so happened that I crossed paths with my wife, Sylvie Gasana, in Rwanda while I was there for the holidays. And we kept in touch for years while I was living in Belgium. After a few years she came here, to Canada, to study. I visited her during the holidays and I finally decided to move here. So, it's for a reason close to my heart that I am here, and I also liked the city. I moved here, so—it was an easy thing to do and for me it represents, really, a second, even a third life. After life in Rwanda, the genocide, the life of adaptation in Belgium, for me Canada is a like the life of the—things are like—

E.H.: Like a new beginning?

F.M.: A new beginning and everything falls into place, everything is good, it really is like a third life I'm living. Yes. And I'm integrating very well. It's—people's mentality here is different than in Europe, it's easier to integrate here, we find an important [inaudible: multiculturalism?]; so we feel—we don't feel like strangers in this society and—

E.H.: There are, however, problems in the Rwandan community here. Obviously, there are many things related to your integration here, but if we focus just on the Rwandan community, how do you see the relations between the Rwandans who live here? The Hutus, the Tutsis, or the negationist tendencies? Specifically—yes, Canada is a country that is open, that gives people much freedom, but maybe because of this open-mindedness, some may go too far precisely because they live in a country of great openness—

F.M.: I am for freedom of expression, so blocking out the deniers, preventing them from speaking, will—it will just bring more attention to them. Why would we prevent them from speaking? Allowing them to express their point of view will also allow those who disagree with their ideas to immediately say out loud that they make no sense, and the topic will be dropped. But as long as an idea remains hidden, we don't know what it is and we can't know if it's good or not. So, certainly, in the Rwandan community, there is a tendency to—well, it really is split into two groups, that is still clear. The two groups are present among both young and old [members of the community]. Well, the young try to make a greater effort than the old, but it's not easy because then there is this negationist current that is felt and partly currently fed, I believe, by the crisis in Congo; the Congolese who get involved, who lean towards the Hutu side, who try to push them. But personally, I try to talk with everyone, I don't really have a preference. For sure, I have more Tutsi friends, for obvious reasons, it's normal—I'm talking

about my family, my circle of friends, they are Tutsi, for the most part, but it had never really mattered to me, I try to stay clear of politics. But you can still see it in Montreal, something is happening, a separation, that will lead, I think, to what is occurring in Belgium, for example, where there really are two different groups that—I think the same is going to happen here—it's quite strong in Europe and I think Canada will not be spared, so it's—

E.H.: Do you mean that the groups don't talk to each other?

F.M.: The groups don't talk to each other, each ethnic group has its bars they go to—there is a bar for the Hutus and a bar for the Tutsis. But I tend to follow the path of the Rwandan government, not talking about it and integrating everyone. After what we've lived through, it doesn't—I don't know, what's the point of going back to that? For me, that's rhetoric of the past and it's a pity that people [inaudible: buy into?] it, it's—we really need to move forward and—but the important thing is—every time I speak with a Hutu friend, if I don't get an insight into his opinion about the genocide, we can't become friends. Something that needs to be clear, whether with the Hutus or the Tutsis, is this: there was a genocide, it was committed by the Hutus to eliminate all Tutsis. That is clear. If we are to modify this view, that's something I use as a basis to decide whether to become friends with someone or not. Yeah.

E.H.: [inaudible] something to add?

F.M.: [laughter] What time is it? I don't even know!

E.H.: It is four to ten.

F.M.: Ah.

A.M.: Earlier you spoke about your life here in Montreal and that it was love that brought you here.

F.M.: Yeah. [laughter]

A.M.: [inaudible] the communication. Are you—have you told your story? Do you talk about that with your wife? The genocide, the support—

F.M.: The support of the family? Or—at the level of—

A.M.: —of the family and on the part of your wife here in Montreal.

02:21:32

F.M.: In terms of my story, my experience, yes, well—

[short break in the recording]

I don't talk about my story constantly, every day, but my family, my wife's family here in Canada, they are well aware of what I have lived through, and I took solace, so to speak—I found a family again, after losing mine, and that's what has always motivated me since the loss of my parents: I've always wanted to rebuild my family, to recover a little bit the emotions that I felt before and, uh, I've grown. We were a big family, we would get together, we had family gatherings every week and I rediscovered that here, with my wife's family, and it's very nice, it's comforting. When I speak about it, I can freely tell my story and it's important that the children—when my daughter is old enough to understand more serious things, I will tell her about it and I will especially like to teach her the neutral values of the—about what happened in Rwanda. To explain things in a concrete way, but without fueling hatred. If every parent did that, I think the results would be good. To live with the past, with the wounds of the past and to pass them on to another generation, that's not helpful at all. We see it in conflicts around the world and it doesn't help, it only perpetuates hatred. And I think that if we, the survivors like myself, can advance this message and say, “Well, we've suffered, we're not even going to ask for your forgiveness, but the future generations and us, we are even now, so we are going to stop this.” I think that can give us some sense of peace. But what is important is the recognition of what happened, the negationism is not—cannot be tolerated. For me, that's the basis for—if that's something we don't recognize, it's—a dialogue is not possible—but—yeah, that's it.

A.M.: It must be something [inaudible] hurtful, violent, especially for someone like you who is a survivor, who has lost your family and friends, and your country too. There are [inaudible] that we make about the country and to see those who hold negationist views like that—

F.M.: Yes, it's—you want to scream to their face, to shake them, to—but my feeling is that responding with violence won't change anything, the best we can do is, I think, to have a discussion. And especially us, the survivors, especially the people who have suffered, the first victims, so to speak—it is our mission to talk about it, to say, “It really happened, there really was a genocide, this is what happened to me, this is what happened to others.” Talking about it. And, in relation to that, if—I believe that the negationist message will be silenced. That is why, I

don't think it's right to prevent these people from speaking, because the message will then never be buried and it will continue [to be spread] within their families and little by little they will— while if they speak openly about it, okay, the message is in the public sphere, for everyone to see and hear and it is up to us to do the groundwork, to say, “They say this, but our experience is different.” And I believe that an eyewitness account compared to a negationist message—which is non-existent, or which is nothing more than words—I believe that a lived story is stronger than an invented story. We do not rewrite History. History exists and there are people for whom it is a concrete lived experience and we are here to say that out loud. The more numerous we are, the more that negationist message will be silenced, but we must talk about it and, by the way, that's what I often say to my cousins in Rwanda who don't want to talk about what happened, or who are still hurting deeply, or who dare not talk about it: to talk, to get it out, to tell what happened—that's very important.

E.H.: Are you happy here in Montreal?

F.M.: ?

E.H.: Are you happy here in Montreal?

F.M. Oh yes, yes, yes! Yes, yes! Yes. I am happy, I have a small family. There is, for sure, something missing: my little girl won't meet her grandfather, her grandmother, and many other people who are no longer there—that's for sure. But it's my turn to live the life of my parents, so to speak.

A.M.: You've been back to Rwanda a few times? And you've gone there with Sarah, right?

F.M.: Sarah hasn't been to Rwanda yet, no, she hasn't been yet, maybe next year. I'd like her to—in fact, I would like for her to live in Africa, in Rwanda or—to get a glimpse of the life that I had there and I would like to show her—the same way my mother showed me— when I visited the village of her childhood, she showed the places where she'd grown up—maybe one day I can do the same with Sarah, and it would be nice.

A.M.: [inaudible] go to Africa for a longer period of time so that she experiences all that you have lived through.

F.M.: If I can go back and live there, that would be even better, that would be ideal [laughter] but it's—

A.M.: And your grandmother still lives in the Lake Muhazi area?

F.M.: Yes, she goes back—her children are in Kigali, but she likes to go back to Gahini, to Lake Muhazi, it's—we always return to the places where it feels best.

E.H.: [inaudible] To this day, it's one of the most beautiful places in Rwanda.

F.M.: Oh, it's very beautiful, the lake, the plains, it's very beautiful, it's true.

A.M.: With the memories you have of the past when you were younger and when you returned [to Rwanda], were there any changes—the country, how do you perceive the development of the country, the changes—

F.M.: When I was there, I met many of my old friends and they feel a little abandoned by all these new Rwandans who have arrived from abroad and who haven't really taken the time to integrate them, to integrate these older Rwandans who had been there, we call them “the *Sopecyas*.” It's as if the country has begun anew; we started from zero and we forgot everything that was there before. The older ones, they are a little overlooked. I often talk with my friends who live there and it's as if no one wants to hear their stories anymore, they're told to forget it all and to—that it's a return to the past. I hear that often, this message, this discourse: to forget and to move on. But every month of April, these people—well, April is a month of mourning and we can't ignore the genocide, I think, even if we become—even if one day we become the richest country in Africa or something like that, the genocide will always be part of Rwandan history and the people who have experienced it directly must be placed front and centre in connection to it, they must be respected, they must respect their rights because they are [inaudible] that open and they really are the first victims of the genocide.

A.M.: Exactly, I was going to say that you have managed to raise this issue, it is—

E.H.: I'll be right there. [inaudible] my parking... You can continue.

F.M.: Okay.

A.M.: It's important to talk about it and all, but [inaudible] that people are well-equipped [inaudible] to talk about it? They are not provided the tools they need to talk about it. If they feel overwhelmed or crushed by the newcomers, by the developments in the country and they have to talk about it, there is also the process of mourning that hasn't been completed yet.

02:31:38

F.M.: No. But the example I usually give is of a friend who was wounded during the genocide, he had been hit with a machete all over his body. He's still in pain from his injuries and he's struggling to live his life, to find work, just to find a house, to find something to eat, he's always chasing after a job—he's trying to survive. There are organizations and things in place for the survivors, but it's—it's either badly managed or it's not efficient enough, or, anyway—and his injuries hadn't healed completely, he would often show me his scars and I'd think to myself, "Isn't the government helping you heal or shouldn't it send you abroad for treatment?" Well, time passed, his injuries worsened and—there are things in place, I know that there are organizations to help the survivors, but it looks like they are not doing enough. If this person came here, abroad, he would have been treated, he would lead a more pleasant life. Sometimes I have the impression that all genocide survivors are left to fend for themselves, that they have been abandoned. We take for granted that "it's all over now, everyone has healed, we must move on," but it's not possible, eh, we must—there are people who are still sick, who are suffering, but who don't speak about it simply because they don't have the framework or the—there are no resource people for that, to help them with that.

A.M.: Knowing the Rwandan community, people in general don't like to talk about their problems. I think the resources are there, yes, but people don't have the courage to look for certain resources.

F.M.: Yeah, our Rwandan mentality is to be a little withdrawn; we don't like to talk about our lives just like that. But I say to myself that the more eyewitness accounts there are, the more—those people, precisely, who are a little inward-looking, who don't want to tell their story, they would look up to us as an example and would speak up. And the more stories are told, the more—because talking is healing; through talking we sometimes find answers, if we don't, well, at least the people who heard what we had to say can help us. But for sure if we don't talk, it's—living is more difficult, life is harder and there is—and especially when you're in Africa or Rwanda, it's even harder, that's for sure, yeah.

A.M.: [inaudible] integrating the people who are there, they are the ones who must—it's all reversed, it's like they feel abandoned, crushed—[inaudible]

F.M.: At the same time, it was necessary to rebuild the country. I can also understand that we cannot be worrying only about the sick and the survivors, and making sure that all is well—there is also a country to rebuild, no doubt, but there has been a lot of international aid—aid that was

directed especially towards the survivors. I'm not saying that all is bad, because many projects worked out well, for sure, but my impression is that we're not doing enough. We're not doing enough and we don't give survivors a chance to succeed in life. Many of their anchor points have changed: the language is in the process of—many of the survivors are francophones and now Rwanda is switching to English. Also, the mentality, the old Rwandans' ways of doing things are different from those of the Rwandans who have just arrived. So some of their bearings have been lost, that's for sure. Yeah, that's for sure.

A.M.: As a Rwandan in the Montreal community, when you look at your country of origin, when you look back to Rwanda, as a Rwandan who lives abroad, how do you—what is it—what do you think is your contribution to your country from here? Do you think you can make a contribution through your activities or—[inaudible]

F.M.: Well, at the community level, I try to help as much as I can in my field of work, computer science; as soon as there is something that needs to be done, I try to get involved. And I certainly would like Sarah to grow up knowing what it means to be Rwandan. If she can, as soon as the opportunity presents itself—even if it's only learning Kinyarwanda, taking Kinyarwanda lessons or dance classes, I'm going to try to sign her up for—to teach her what Rwandan culture is; the little that I know, some of which I have lost in the meantime, maybe I could teach her what I know. Since we live far from the country, if we do nothing, well, we lose the thread a little bit, we lose the notion of what we know about the Rwandan community, about Rwandan culture... I think I am tired now. [laughter]

E.H.: Yes, I think—[inaudible] I would like to thank you for your generosity, for what you have offered to the Rwandan community and to the international community—because we want the history of Rwandans and the history of peoples, other peoples who have experienced massacres, and especially a genocide—that it be disseminated throughout the world, so that the negationist movement is stopped. And it is also for your little Sarah, it is for her as well, so that one day she will know her father's story, her father's traumatic story, her grandparents' story, her great-grandparents' story. I thank you very much for the generosity and courage that you have shown. I am a psychologist, I'd like to end on this note: that we don't treat people who are sick, that's not psychology's—

F.M.: Okay.

E.H.: —uh, the work we do is work of solidarity, aid, help people and relieve suffering. Suffering is a horrible thing and not everyone has the strength of character like you, sometimes there are—even if a person has the kind of a strength of character that you have, sometimes one can feel the need to confide in someone else and especially in places like here, where families are spread out, scattered, sometimes all we need is a close friend, a confidant, and the psychologist can fulfill this role and be someone who is there to listen and help.

F.M.: Yes, absolutely.

E.H.: Your suffering is completely legitimate, but when we can't share our suffering with someone who is able to understand it, we can't find solution to what we have been through. You'll keep your suffering inside of you, but it will serve you well—[inaudible]—all of us, everyone, to see that, yes, we can experience such atrocities in our lives, but we can get through it—

F.M.: Yeah, yeah. That is true.

E.H.: —and be a good father and that we are able to forgive. I heard you just now say that even if people don't ask for forgiveness, but that at least they stop—they stop harming others.

F.M.: Yeah, that's it.

E.H.: So, thank you very much on behalf of Concordia University, on behalf of the Rwandan community, on behalf of the Community-University Research Alliance (CURA) project—thank you very much for giving us this great interview.

F.M.: You are welcome! [laughter]

[they shake hands]

E.H.: It was nice to meet you.

F.M.: Yes, and we also got to meet [laughter]

E.H.: Indeed...

[end of the interview]

02:41:24