

## INTERVIEW WITH RITA MUTESI

**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  
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**Interviewee:** Rita Mutesi (R.M)

**Interviewers:** Monique Mukabalisa (M.M), Agnès Lamarque D'Ornano (A.L.D)

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**Editorial note:**

Rita Mutesi is seated on a chair. She speaks with her hands and laughs often.

**Biography of the Interviewee:**

Rita Mutesi was born in 1966 in Rwanda. She arrived in Québec in 1994. Her husband is named Charles Gakuba and they have two sons. The family lives in Laval, Québec since 2000.

**M.M: Good... Good day Rita.**

R.M: Hello [smiling]

**M.M: I first want to thank you for granting us this interview. For those who will be able to access and consult It... I would like to ask you to please identify yourself, tell me your name, your place of birth, and if possible, also the time or date.**

R.M: My name is Rita, I was born in Rwanda, [inaudible] ...In the Butare prefecture, it changed names, it is called Huye now... And I grew up there [inaudible] always. [I have always lived there]

**M.M: "...".**

R.M: Yeah, until [tries to remember the date] until 94 in fact, I left in 94.

**M.M: Ok, thanks a lot [inaudible]. You were telling me that you were born in what was known as Butare and now became Huye. [inaudible] If you would allow me, I would ask you about your family, your parents— your birth or even before— What did they do?**

R.M: My parents, well my father worked for an agronomy institution... we were born [inaudible]. I was born, in fact, all my brothers and sisters, we were born in Rubona. It's a research [inaudible], center for agronomy and my father worked there as the center's accountant.

**M.M."...".**

R.M: And my mother— My mother— Me when I was very very small she was teaching— Oh my god I don't remember how we could call that. We called it "les foyers" [homes]. There were ladies anyway—

**M.M: Ah ok! Who were learning, trades, like—**

R.M: Who were learning to organize the house, but I was small, I was told about it later and I'm the fourth and— She stopped working [Laughing]. In fact, I have not known her while she was working.

**M.M: Ah ok.**

R.M: When I was small, she was at home and I even believe that she may have stopped earlier, and she would go back from time to time, but it wasn't official work that she did all the time. So, I was born while my mother was at home. A stay-at-home mom.

**M.M: So you're telling me that you were the fourth but how many children were you in factin total?**

R.M: We were six children, I had two sisters and three brothers.

**M.M: "...".**

R.M: Three boys and three girls.

**M.M: And you with the force, I am curious about—**

R.M: [Cutting in] I'm the fourth it's not even true, I'm the fifth.

**M.M: The one before last.**

R.M: Because after me, there was only one boy [Laughs]. Yes.

**M.M: I've just understood that you are the last of the girls.**

R.M: Yeah!

**M.M: Ok. So if we go back to again that time, Daddy was working, Mom was rather at home, you had big brothers and big sisters.**

R.M: [Nods]

**M.M: From what you know and remember, how was education— of parents towards the children? What was most important? Was it the same thing for the boys as for the girls? Do you have any memories of this?**

R.M: No it wasn't the same for the boys, neither for, anyways. [Laughs] The boys, it was very different, you have to know that [Laughs] as you come from the same country as I do.

**M.M: Yes [Laughs]**

R.M: But, in fact, just as in most rwandan families, I would say that it's more mom, my mother, who took care of the children's education. Well, organizing us [Gestures], know if we have eaten, teach us good values, proper behavior, caring for the home for the girls and of course my father as well. But my father just as most fathers there was more of the authority figure. And I remember in my memories that when he came home from work, we would lower the volume almost automatically. [Laughing] Even though we didn't fear him. I remember however that my mother was fairly strict. She was as strict a mom as she was joyous [Broad movements with her hands].

**M.M: Us too.**

R.M: She laughed with us or she played with us.

**M.M: "...".**

R.M: But when she became strict, we had to really hurry and she was the one punishing us, she was the one telling us what to do.

**M.M: "...".**

R.M: My father, didn't know how to punish [Laughing]. He was simply there, I think it all happened by itself. But, you asked me that question in relation to values...

**00:05:00**

**M.M: Yes.**

R.M: I would tell you that what I remember is that respect was very, very, very important; supporting each other, family, that we be united, that we love each other because we are part of a family. That was very, very, very important. School was important. Here it was more dad who [Laughs] would give orders. It wasn't very different from other families, all families had some variations but the way families work is somewhat recognizable. So going to school was important. To be honest — honesty — authenticity and loyalty I would say. People had to be very very loyal, that, for dad, was very clear. Life and death [everyone laughs (R.M, M.M and A.L.D)]. Yes there was all of that.

**M.M: Would he tell you this, I am curious, sometimes culturally... as you say, it was automatic or implicit, do you have memories of being told in clear terms or was it through experience, by observation?**

R.M: Much was done through observation and of course I had older sisters, I watched them, I followed and there were things that were implicit but we were also told. You have to respect your big sister because she is your big sister. Well [laughs]. And, for school, yes it was very clear we were told: we must work hard, we have to make efforts, we have to be together, love each other, help each other— among families. Brothers and sisters, that too we were told clearly. There were other things we would pay attention, see our parents, observe. That was really through them modeling. We [four times]— I believe that for my mother, having relationships was something extremely important. She did not tell us one, two, three but we would see her do her thing and she would send us messages left and right. You will not live alone, think about it, we would learn it that way [laughs].

**M.M: Yes [laughs]**

R.M: We would in fact, make a lesson out of the great messages gleaned here and there.

**M.M: Exactly.**

R.M: Yes.

**M.M: And looking at yourself now, with all of what you have said you have been told as well as what you observed, at the age you are today, whom do you most resemble among those two, what remains important for you? What do you hold on to?**

R.M: [smiles] I think I've inherited traits from both of them. Physically I much resemble my daddy. However I have a lot of, my— I tell you when I think on it, I have my mother's temperament I... My mother was determined, my mother was— she was a go getter and in that sense, I take after her.

**M.M: "...".**

R.M: And I would tell you that... Sometimes, I tease that it really is sad that my mother was born in that country, at that time. I tell you, had she been she born in Québec, she would be Prime Minister [laughs]. But seriously, she had that side of her that would just charge, she loved people, she laughed. That side... I haven't much inherited to be as funny as she was like the organizer side— and loving people. But I don't have lots and lots of friends like she had but those who are my friends, I cherish. And I'm determined, I charge, there isn't much that's able to stop me when I want something. I believe that what I have inherited from her are authenticity and loyalty— even if I can't give you any examples, it constantly runs through my mind. And respect, that I even tell my children, I require it from them. It's not [laughs]— It's not negotiable and I know that's what it was for my parents as well. There are things that are nonnegotiable, like respect, whether one is small, big or young or less young. It's extremely important for me.

**M.M: You just answered my question that was coming.**

R.M: Ah!

**M.M: It was: what do you plan on teaching your children who are growing in Québec?**

**00:10:00**

R.M: Ah there are plenty of things which [repeated several times] that. Of course, I've, met someone. I'm jumping from one subject to another [Laughs].

**M.M: That's alright, that's it [Laughs]!**

R.M: But I met someone who says... and I liked the way she introduced things. She works— she works with children. I work in schools. And so I invited a person who does literary facilitation and who works on intercultural issues, on tolerance, on knowing oneself and when she engaged that theme, she told the children, she's a woman who comes from— native from France. She told the children, I carry many countries inside of me.

**M.M: Wow.**

R.M: And then, she explained that she carries France, that she carries Quebec, that she carries Canada, that she carries other countries because her parents are from elsewhere. And she asked the children what countries they carry. And then she got to me and she said: "what country are you carrying?" And really this stayed with me and so, in what I want to teach my children, I told myself well, I carry so many things [laughs]. I carry quite a lot because I went through Rwanda but I have known others and so what I want to teach them comes as much out of my culture of origin as it comes from here.

**M.M: "...".**

R.M: And respect is important but— There is something I don't know how to name, I shall call it freedom but it isn't so much freedom like the word freedom— it's to feel whole [se sentir soi-même]. I don't want to say free and have people think we don't care. There are always nuances when we speak of a word but to be yourself and to feel it deeply. That is something I would like to teach my children. And I try to live it. I tell myself that they will have to feel that I am myself, that I live it, that I take full responsibility for what I am. I don't always take that responsibility, that's okay, we're human. But, I would like for them to learn to be themselves, and to grow without losing that sense of self and that comes as much from my culture as the culture here. Because I grew up there but when you grow up in Rwanda, you know that there are times when— Even if down deep we were proud to be ourselves we were constantly pushed around there. Really from the inside, there was almost no room to be yourself, and I really thank the heavens to have brought me here because I know you can be sick, you can be anything else but we have the choice to be ourselves. And that I want to teach my children.

**M.M: That's very beautiful [laughs], that's beautiful. So, we were talking about what you carry with you and what you are going to transmit. Then I spoke of your family but I know that sometimes family is broadened beyond the nucleus of the family. I would like to know if you have memories of your grandparents, your parents' family, your grandparents history, your aunts, your uncles, did you know them, did you spend time with them in your life?**

R.M: I didn't know my paternal grandparents, they died before I was born. I didn't know my maternal grandfather but we had a substitute grandfather if you will, who was my Mother's uncle and my grandmother, the real maternal grandmother I knew her deeply, she is constantly in my memories. She is in my anecdotes and so [laughs]. Yes she has, because when I was young, my mother was the youngest of her children, of her whole family in fact and she had lost her brothers and sisters in an epidemic of— my god I can't remember very well anymore. And her mother became disabled when she found out that her— that her— one of her boys passed away, she fell and broke her foot. And while that was healing and all, she came to live with us for a while. And so I got to know her when I was very young but I don't have any real or accurate memories of that. And afterwards, we had a house built for her somewhere, she went to live elsewhere and when I was, I would say 11, 11, 12 years old, she fell ill a lot, she was very lonely. She came back to live at home.

**00:15:25**

**M.M: "...".**

R.M: And she raised me as much as my mother raised me [laughs], which makes so that I have very, very clear memories of my maternal grandmother. She passed away, actually. She passed away [tries to remember the date] in 89. So I had time to know her a long time.

**M.M: It would be very interesting— To see how you lived with a mom and a grandma? It's like two moms in the home [laughs]. Did you at some moment, feel the difference in their— approaches with children?**

R.M: Yes! But— as I told you my mother could be very crazy, quote unquote [does air quotes]. She could be very, very close to us, then she was so strict at certain moments that it was clear that the limit was passed, we could not cross the limit, make her cross the limits we could not cross [Laughs].

**M.M: "...".**

R.M: And in these moments, my grandmother played the other role. Of the one who pampers, snuggles, she who get close to us, she who tells us— “careful,” or “be careful, your mother is not in good spirits.”

**M.M: [Laughs]**

R.M: [Laughs] Yes, so that I still remember a lot, a lot and also she was funny and she was quite a character my grandma [laughs].

**M.M: [Laughs] Did you also get the chance to get to know uncles and aunts?**

R.M: "... So the other, the "substitute" grandpa I've been telling you about, had children. And his daughters— And his daughters were almost always home during the holidays. Listen we were about 20 or 30 at home, all the time during the holidays when I was young, I still remember. And— But afterwards, my sisters got to know them more because they're much older than I am. I was of course the youngest. In 73, when there were the riots...

**M.M: The coup d'état.**

R.M: Yes, the coup d'état in Rwanda, they left to go to Europe. And so they I, I did get to know them somewhat when I was younger, but they were aunts who came during the holidays.

**M.M: Did they also give you— Were they also there to educate and pamper— the nieces and nephews?**

R.M: In fact, there was one who played with us a lot, a lot. She made us food and told us stories, she would call us names— I can't say in French but [laughs].

**M.M: It's in kinyarwanda, we'll try [laughs].**

R.M: But, she would say, she would say, she always had names oh

*mabuja* [inaudible] oh *Kagaragunahatsekera* anyways [rires]. She had a nickname for every one and it make reference to loyalty, like.

**M.M: [inaudible]**

R.M: And that, I remember.

**M.M: And the children love that.**

R.M: Oh yes, yes, she played with us a lot. Yes [laughs]. She was the one who washed us, she was the one who fed us. Yes.

**M.M: Yeah, it was good, it was good [inaudible] if I may say so.**

R.M: No, I think that I— I have nevertheless had a happy childhood. I had and then— I was born into a milieu, I would say a stimulating milieu, in that it was a research environment therefore we were exposed to educated people. We met many foreigners, we played with the expat children who were working there. Right next door we had a house where a chinese community lived who came to plant rice. So very early on we met people from different countries and since it was a site for research in agronomy, we would plant lots of flowers, many— Lots of fruit and— I feel as though the smells are still imprinted in my head. When I go to the grocer, when I go to Adonis, I often say "han", it smells like home, it smells like something, guava!

**00:20:00**

**M.M: Hop!**

R.M: That is always in my head [exclaiming], and then I, but what is it that smells like guava in the end... but you know we would pick them on our way to school and we would eat them on the road to school [laughing]. Those are things that remain [with you?].

**M.M: That's right, I had the same— I had the same feeling in a grocery store somewhere.**

R.M: Yes [laughs].

**M.M: It wasn't long ago [laughs]! Not long ago it smelled like guava.**

R.M: Yes.

**M.M: [Sigh] I'm going to come back to your brothers and sisters. You were the little one, the one before last.**

R.M: The one before last.

**M.M: And as I was saying earlier, about the parents you tell yourself, well ...I had both but in this I take after that person and in that other things after the other. I remember that. How do you describe your relationship with your brothers and sisters ?**

R.M: I would tell you that there were several stages. I am among the last and I— In fact, my sisters are the two first then come two boys and there is me and there is my brother. So when I was young I played lots and lots with the boys. I was almost a tomboy. But since we were raised with sayings like: “here are the girls’ chores, and here are the boys’ chores,” I think I’ve learned to assert myself in a group of boys [laughs]. Because I had to find a place. Therefore the relationship with my brothers was pretty— We were very close and yet not, anyways— The one I followed— I was 2 years younger than him, the other one who came after me was two years, two or three years younger than I. My big sisters were much older, they were the sisters who would arrive, they were the sisters who studied abroad who came back during holidays. And there the oldest was really almost like a mom. And yet she wasn't very very old. The second oldest was the one who— she was the one who was— like the center [laughs].

**M.M: Passe-partout [laughs].**

R.M: Yes and she was really really funny and at the same time when she would arrive it was “oh, have the children eaten?” The children for her meant my brother. My little brother. He was really her little darling. She had to care for him, he had to go to bed early, he had to eat on time. He was really her little baby. And I understand because when I was younger, I was told that when my brother was born, my second oldest sister, she always wanted to care for the baby.

**M.M: Ok.**

R.M: For the baby who was the youngest and who was— And she was asked to take care of me

**M.M: [laughs]**

R.M: She didn't like that [laughs].

**M.M: She wanted the other one.**

R.M: She didn't like it and she had a mind of her own. And so she would [inaudible] in order to be taken to task and then she would be told: "no you cannot take care of the other one [laughs] either."

A.L.D: [Laughs]

**M.M: [Laughs] That's a good one.**

R.M: Yes and this influences the relationship, even though we were very close. She never took care of me. She took care of the other one [Laughs]. They so forbade her to take care of him that when she got older, well, she decided to do the opposite. But when we were younger, we played together a lot. And then, all of a sudden, I was almost... It was almost as if— The older one became my model. She was my model. She performed well in school. She was the one, with our parents, making sure things were in order at home. It was her, making sure chores were done: "who did this, who did what" because my mom, she was very demanding about such things. It is so-and-so's day to do this, it is so-and-so's day to do that [laughs].

**M.M: Yes, it wasn't difficult when you came here [laughs].**

R.M: [laughs] So it's the oldest who took care of it a lot. She became somewhat of a role model. But otherwise— When I became older it balanced out. It changed by itself [laughs].

**M.M: Yes, it was a question of curiosity.**

R.M: Yes.

**M.M: Sometimes fights happened with one and then competitiveness with another and then we keep that, and grow up with it.**

R.M: Yes.

**M.M: That was the part I specifically wanted to explore.**

**00:25:00**

R.M: Yes but I would say that it was rather— with my sisters anyways when they got older, of course— as much as they were close, when they fought, they would fight just as hard. Because one of them had a big temper, the second one. I would find myself in the role of the mediator, against my will. Otherwise I played a lot, a lot with my brothers because I stayed with them a long time. When my sisters got married in the end I was the one who stayed home with the brothers. I had more time with the brothers. Yes.

**M.M: We've talked a lot about family, it was very interesting. You said that you stayed there, you grew up there until 94. And so I take it to mean that you studied there for primary school as well?**

R.M: Yes.

**M.M: And do you have memories of teachers who impacted you, of friends you had in primary school, of anecdotes of a little girl's life in school?**

R.M: Listen, I only remember one teacher, a woman actually. She was our neighbor. She really left a mark because she was a really good teacher and she was my neighbor as well. I don't remember, my God, primary school it's so long ago [laughs].

**M.M: [laughs] Yeah.**

R.M: But there I remember what went on in class. I know I liked her a lot, deeply.

**M.M: In what grade was she teaching you?**

R.M: Pardon?

**M.M: She taught what grade...?**

R.M: 5th grade.

**M.M: When you say she was a good teacher, what was it? What of her remains with you that struck you?**

R.M: She asked questions, she wanted everyone to succeed, she would take a lot of care of youths. She thought, I remember we had... the one who was the director—

**M.M: Like the principal—**

R.M: The principal! He was a bit strange and she was always advocating, telling him that what he was doing made no sense, that it wasn't what the children will learn. That I remember but the rest, I don't remember much [laughs].

**M.M: Do you have girlfriends from when you were that age?**

R.M: No. But I have one, she is not a girlfriend but a person from my childhood who played with me when we were little. And we lost touch of course at some point, but last year she sent me an email

**M.M: "...".**

RM: And I have others who didn't really go to school with me but when we were younger, we, we lived— actually, it was like a village where we lived. Like a neighborhood apart from the others. And we all knew each other, and there were many children and we all went to school together and we would

wait for each other. Also there was a kind of stone, a kind of stone. Really a rock right at the edge of the middle. And I remember that to know whether so-and-so was gone, we would use the stones as a marker, every person had their stone and so when I passed by I knew, oh such-and-such a friend is gone, that friend is gone, and we knew where to wait for each other.

**M.M: Wow! [everyone laughs] You see, this brings back memories.**

R.M: Yes but there is another one who lives in Toronto. I found out about this recently.

**M.M: That's good. So, after that, you would have gone to high school in the same neighborhood?**

R.M: No, no I did high school in boarding school like most people there.

**M.M: Do you remember how it went, the transition from primary school to secondary?**

R.M: It was rather easy for me because I had—

**M.M: [coughs]**

R.M: I had big sisters who went through there. And there you know how it was. We did national exams and then— [takes back her voice] sorry— and then we could access high school and we awaited that moment as a very special one. So I had the chance to get in directly because most children were redoing the exam, redoing sixth grade, redoing the exam, but I got it on the first round.

**M.M: "...".**

R.M: And I went to high school and my sister had friends at the school where I was going so it went rather well but the three years I spent there, were three interesting years for a child. Of course, we were in boarding school, we had a good principal. We were young, we liked each other, we had fun together.

**M.M: "...".**

R.M: There was nothing of—

**M.M: Nothing in particular, nothing difficult for a child leaving her family to live in boarding school?**

**00:30:00**

R.M: It was— actually it was fun to know that you were leaving home to go study when three quarters, 90% [laughs] of children stayed there. And so it was a privilege. It was actually a privilege to leave, you were given a new suitcase, you gathered your things and you left, a big girl leaving going to high school.

**M.M: Yes.**

R.M: And there, we would be with other children, we—

**M.M: But nonetheless, if I properly understood your story of a dad who was working with the foreigners in a research environment, you were quite well off as a family if I may say so, or—**

R.M: Well off might be saying too much. Well, we were not poor [laughs].

**M.M: No, my question, was— that in my understanding of boarding school, students had to do everything themselves. One had to wash and clean, one had to do things and—**

R.M: Yes.

**M.M: The children who came from the kind of milieu I am trying to describe yours to be, they were not used to doing all of that.**

R.M: Ah. But I told you how my mom was.

**M.M: [Laughs]**

R.M: We were already doing all of that [laughs].

**M.M: You were well prepared.**

R.M: The boys were less ready; because those chores were usually assigned to girls. But I would tell you that even my brothers, when they came home, they washed all of their linens and all their other things. But I didn't have that problem. You know, you know how I told you, that I stayed with the boys. Listen I was the one, I was sweeping the courtyard, even if we had hired help. I was the one who made the beds at home. I was the one who— on school days— seriously though, Sundays, listen, I was cleaning, I was doing the housework and all kinds of things.

**M.M: So boarding school wasn't difficult for you.**

R.M: No, not there, not during the three years we called the common core [tronc commun]. No, I had a good connection with the children and we had at least one visit per each month by the parents. We missed them of course. In the beginning we missed them just like all the children do. But after that one starts to enjoy it. Except the food. We were missing that [laughs].

**M.M: [laughs] Am I understanding properly, after 3 years, you had to leave that school again?**

R.M: After three years, obviously, one had to pass another exam. I don't. In fact those who arrived after me— there was a school reform after me. That made it so that the children spent eight years of primary school and then went to— they went to, what we called sections ... [asks Monique]? Anyways.

**M.M: Yes but they stayed in the same school for eight, six more years.**

R.M: Six years and that's right, they stayed in the same school. We went three years into one school. We would finish primary, we would go three years into a school. And then, we would pass another exam and then we would be oriented differently. We went to another school three or four years depending— So, when I finished and that is where it was, I found it really hard. I finished the common curriculum. I passed the exams. I was actually a good student, and— I was sent into a two year normal school [école normale]

**M.M: Ouch!**

R.M: That was a really short cycle. And that, hurt me profoundly [laughs]. Really profoundly hurt me and at that time, the minister of education was— he was a rather— minister from the North, and who was known to want to crush all the young people from Butare or elsewhere. And I believe that, the majority of Tutsi who were in school left... during those short cycles. It had just happened to my brother a year earlier. Finishing sixth grade, he had been admitted to the seminary. Could he have had a different choice? And so this, this hurt me deeply because I thought that I deserved better. And in my eyes those of a child raised— who was told that school was good, that it was important; who wanted, what I wanted, who, had a model, my sister who was in university and had fiercely battled to get there. Of course, I wanted to go to university. But I saw my odds were diminished tenfold because

**00:35:00**

**M.M: It didn't give access.**

R.M: It didn't give access to university. And so, I went there.

**M.M: And after that?**

R.M: I went there, you want me to tell you everything? [laughs]

**M.M: [Laughs] But I'm curious about [inaudible] as it was supposed to come to an end?**

R.M: No, it's funny, I went there! I finished my two years. When I was done, I was told: “Ok you're going to teach.” I said: “absolutely not.” But I didn't really know what I would do [laughs] and my father said: “well now you don't have a choice.” We can always try something, and we would try and try and it didn't work. I thought I would be allowed in or at least be sent to another school. But you had to work hard, going to the ministry with formal requests, using acquaintances and it was too complicated. And I think my papa was tired of fighting with all of that and what I didn't tell you is that my mother passed away when I was— exactly when I was in that school. In 86 [whispering], in 86 and, that's right, my mom had passed away in that time. And I think that my mother would not have accepted that. She was the go-getter. And there I was telling myself: “this is not possible.” And to have

lost my mother and to end up teaching in some bush, I couldn't believe it. But in the meantime, they opened a long cycle in two, in two schools for people like me, who had completed the short cycle. And then later by maneuvering right and left, I got into a school [laughs]. And I finished the humanities there and was given access to university. These were, of course extremely complicated steps, that would take two days to explain all of that. But I finished university.

**M.M: Go-getter in the end. It worked. [laughs].**

R.M: I don't know if it's the go-getter or the— I don't know, it wasn't me doing it. Because I was still young. But I would insist that we do it [laughs].

**M.M: That's good.**

R.M: Or—

**M.M: Aside from that bad experience of going through the common part of education that in the end leads toward a career. Do you have other memories of your secondary school when people were talking about Rwanda and the whole story that we now know. Talking about discrimination, talking about barriers to access to secondary school for some and opportunities for others, professors who or educators, who— in one way or another, impacted positively or sadly negatively— well showed ideas or ideals since that could nuance or impact your progression. Have you experienced— ?**

R.M: Well in fact, that common core, might be part of the elements that made it positive for me. There were actually a lot of people from the South, there were a lot of rather Tutsi teachers. And we had an interesting lady who was principal, the atmosphere was good— While I was doing my short cycle, I didn't feel it too much except for that one episode where I knew that I was— Anyways I thought it was unfair that I would find myself in that situation. But to finish my humanities, yes anyways I felt— First of all I was in Cyangugu.

**M.M: [laughs] Yes.**

R.M: And— we had a lot of professors from Zaïre and Burundi. Burundians who left their country because they were refugees. Who were expelled from their country and held particular dislike[??] for us and that I remember very, very clearly! Where I was studying to become a teacher and I would get comments, there was one who would come and tell me : “you didn't write your daily agenda or lesson plan at the beginning.” I didn't write my lesson plan... it was very well written. But there one had to constantly be— and even the nuns there you had to constantly— It was of course a type of school where the rules were pathologically rigid. And me... Rigidity and I make two [don't get along] And there were people, many, many, many Burundians who came from Burundi and really particularly did not like us, and who— must have thought that we looked too much like those who chased them away [laughs].

**00:40:00**

**M.M: [laughs] Yes.**

R.M: But I have negative memories of that. Of professors who really would have liked for us to fail, for us not to be there. There I have negative memories of it and it— it also impacted me, but anyways.

**M.M: We are— it stays with us.**

R.M: Well it taught us— Sometimes I tell people, you dont know what we went through but it made us grow in some ways. It allowed us to take some things more lightly anyways [laughs].

**M.M: [Laughs] Yes. And among student colleagues, were there some who also showed—**

R.M: Oh yes, yes, yes, sometimes there were very clear splits. We were even already, we even already— at one point, I remember, I was in secondary school, or the equivalent of secondary there. It was 6th grade in fact, I needed one more year to be done because we did, I was in education, and we did four years. And— I remember that we had been summoned and told that we— we foment stories, that we make Tutsi cliques, but we didn't know at all what people were talking about. And then it was said that, that one is the president that one is the vice president. We had all been aligned and been given roles.

**M.M: But who told you all of this?**

R.M: That was the sisters.

**M.M: The nuns.**

R.M: The nuns. It surely originated with the students. I don't know where it started. But we were told that voilà Claire is the president, and Rita you're vice president. "What are you talking about? First of all what are we going to do? What do you think that we can do in a completely closed school." Yes, I remember that very well. Yes things like that, happened [laughs]!

**M.M: Yes, there you're reminding me of another question. You tell me, but we, we didn't know who people were talking about, what people were talking about. I was going to say, in your knowledge, when did you become aware that you were Tutsi?**

R.M: Well we did know in primary, we were asked there while we didn't know what it was we were told: "Tutsi raise your hands, Hutu raise your hands." Were you never asked those questions?

**M.M: Yes [laughs].**

R.M: [laughs] And that I remember, I was maybe seven, eight years old but honestly I didn't know what it meant, I remember even in primary, there it's coming back to me. Even in primary, we were told: "Oh look, she is Tutsi" but it made no sense.

**M.M: [laughs]**

R.M: Yes I was aware of it, I wasn't aware of it but I knew it [laughs] yes.

**M.M: As far as you know, in the conversations you had with your parents, were there at a certain time, where you had to sit down and be told what ethnic group you belong to and to be careful because there are divides as you say or hate. Do you remember having had a conversation with parents?**

R.M: No, my parents didn't speak about it. I could hear things in the adult conversations. But our parents didn't tell us about it openly. Later when we became older, because we ourselves, were provoking conversations. But the time I realized something not quite right was happening, was actually in '73. In '73 I was young still but I remember families who were our neighbors, who left, and every evening I still remember. I believe my parents were one of the families at least one of the older couples in the neighborhood. And every night, that lasted at least two weeks, we would gather the same people at the house, every night. All the people, who were surely Tutsi [laughs] who were from the neighborhood, would gather at our home every night. and that I recall... I have a crisp— the image is still very very clear. And that evening, on top of everything that evening... my father, someone threatened him at work. And I don't remember anymore, but just after the change in government, he was fired.

**00:45:00**

**M.M: From his work.**

R.M: From his work. That, I remember. And I remember that had been something, I wasn't told “you are tutsi” but I understood that we were different. And so I grew up a little with that. We were never clearly told. Because, of course as you get older you get to an age where you transition from one step to another; let's say I finish primary, I go on to secondary. I realize that it's not working; why not me because we were talking about it and also I felt it. The parents certainly were experiencing tension, whether the child went to school or— [ laughs] What are we going to do, anyway there was a strategy to be worked out for the children to go to school. Then we would start to understand some things and then we knew that we were Tutsi. But we grew up surrounded by so many other people— I don't know— we started to feel insignificant [laughs].

**M.M: [laughs]**

R.M: it's not the right word, you will take it out— [laughs].

**M.M: Don't worry, it doesn't matter. Well, it's getting out what you felt [laughs]. Yes, in the end, it's the feeling of that moment in time. Yes, yes. And there I took you a little further, with**

**your progression, I was telling myself the short cycle well we figured out a way for me to finish the pedagogic humanities. I believe that's what they were called.**

R.M: how was that called? “*L'école normale*”?

**M.M: “*Moyenne pédagogique*”**

R.M: “*Moyenne pédagogique*,” yes.

**M.M: Something like that [laughs]**

R.M: [laughs] yes.

**M.M: Afterwards, either in the short cycle and often the, the two other years that you did to complete the degree, did you have the opportunity to work? Or between secondary and university did you have the opportunity to work in the end, well opportunity [*chance*] or not, to work in that field?**

R.M: Yes, yes, yes I worked but not— In fact, I taught one month before going— and, what really happened— No, no I didn't work during the short cycle and the long cycle. And anyways, I didn't want to go there.

**M.M: OK.**

R.M: I was still unaware enough to be doing silly things. After that, I went to study. Then, after, as I was waiting to go to university, I worked, I taught for a month. [Asking herself the question] One month? I don't remember what I taught in primary school. Then, I went to study at university, again in education. I finished my undergraduate degree in '88. And then, I started my private graduate degree.

**M.M: You do everything not to teach— it's working! [laughs]**

R.M: it wasn't working [laughs]. But I taught afterwards.

**M.M: [Laughs] Finally.**

R.M: I taught in '90; from '90 to '93, I taught.

**M.M: I'm going back to the last time to ask you how was university. So, you just left secondary school, you were seeing some of the tensions around you and then— I'm curious, I'm going to ask you this question because I have the same... almost the same pathway as you do.**

R.M: "..."

**M.M: But... The *école normale* wasn't a direct or automatic path to university either. And now I'm going to repress, or rather let loose on you. [Laughs].**

R.M: [laughs]

**M.M: I'm going to ask you how...**

R.M: You had less [inaudible] than I did [laughs] yes.

**M.M: [Rires] I was asking you what you did to get into university?**

R.M: it is really really funny at university. First I was at *école normale* in Cyangugu, a pathologically rigid school. There we are told, we are told: "you cannot go to university." I wanted, really, I wanted to attend university. That was my objective. To go to university but "everything" was working against me. At that stage, there is no one, quote unquote, except those who had strength (power) went to university directly. Then I was saying, we can still try something. But at that point, the principal was clearly telling us: "to go to university, you have to teach for two years." My sister knew— my sister had a friend whose husband was working at the ministry. It was very complicated.

**00:50:00**

So I would tell my sister could you go and see— she goes to see, she is told that the forms were still sent— that some forms were sent to the *écoles normales*. And so there it is good to have a hard head

sometimes, she tells me, how is it that we didn't receive them? So then, I find myself in the principal's office and I say: "I know that you have received the forms." [laughs]

**M.M: [laughs]**

R.M: I got into so much trouble it was incredible. I said: "all right, we know we have to do two years but the ministry sends forms anyway. If they send forms, it's because some people will go there." She was really not happy. And she hadn't been happy with me from the start. And so she says: "you're going to work, you're going to blablabla." I go back to class and the next week, I'm back there, I say: "have you— did you think about it? I made a request, have you thought about it?" And then I don't know who writes from the ministry, saying "the forms that we sent to schools"— I found out about that later, much later, "the forms that we sent to the schools, give them to the students anyway." Then she decided that she would give some, that she would give three of them.

**M.M: To a class of how many students?**

R.M: We were 15-20, I don't remember but we weren't very many. She comes to class and then, she decides to give out two forms, but she gives the first. She says: "based on the grades of this trimester." For me that semester, if she had given the third form, I would've been the third. She gives out two. Do you believe me? I went back to see her [laughs].

**M.M: [laughs]**

R.M: I think I was crazy. I said: "but I really don't understand. I don't understand but give them to us. Why aren't you giving them out? It's the ministry who will decide. If they sent us more"— Then, she says: "how do you know?" "I know, I went there." And I hadn't gone, my sister had told me that she was told how many were sent to the schools. I said I went there during the holidays. And when I said that... it was, you know... who does she think she is. She made me wait two weeks. She came back, she said: "I'm going to give two more forms." And so she gave me a form. And I completed it. [laughs]

**M.M: It was worth it.**

R.M: It was worth it. Well, after that I had to work in order to pass but in the end, they gave me a scholarship and I went to school.

**M.M: [laughs] So we would've had to go to the same school as you.**

R.M: No it was really by chance. In my school, it was a complicated school, it was difficult. Yeah.

**M.M: So in the end you got your university, you got to university?**

R.M: In the end, I started university the following year. In fact, I had a holiday, I went to teach because I didn't know that I would go to university. And I was under the impression that my father had had enough of fighting for us and he was telling me: “you're going to go to work, you're going to calm down, you completed your humanities degree, it's enough.” Listen, it made me cry, it made me cry. But it was really my sister who pursued it. And in the end, I went to university, I started and I completed my three years, it was difficult. And when you were talking to me about— realizing that I belong to another world. I realized that there [laughs].

**M.M: Yes how? [Laughs]**

R.M: But it wasn't something novel because my sister had been through it and she had experienced all kinds of things. All kinds of things that make you ask yourself “what am I doing here?” And I started telling myself “my only hope is that I won't experience the same things that she did.” And I entered university and I understood clearly that I was a world apart. It's strange and sad to say, but university was a jungle for me. Especially as a girl. You didn't go to— University there?

**M.M: No, no I respected the sequence imposed on me. [laughs]**

**00:55:00**

R.M: [laughs] You're wiser. Yeah, no, there it was really very clear that you weren't supposed to get there, and that you weren't allowed to be there. It was very clear that people were expecting you and that you were shown that you weren't supposed to be there.

**M.M: The colleagues.**

R.M: Yes the others, there were a lot, a lot of students from the North and it really became two worlds. It wasn't even ethnic group against ethnic group, they had invented words there. In any case... all the girls, that they called quote unquote “beautiful,” whether Tutsi or not, who came from the South, were whores from the start. As soon as you put your feet in the university you were a whore. You were identified that way.

**M.M: Not supposed to be there.**

R.M: First of all, you were not supposed to be there, if you're there, it's because you're a whore and because you found a way to get there and they would demonstrate clearly through attitudes, insults, awkward ways... of doing things. But well, in the end we would, you know, since we were young, we learn to turn around in circles, to find the ways.

**M.M: So we were talking about your stay at university. And as were talking about it earlier, I was reflecting back to myself and in feeling perceived this way by others. Did the Tutsi who were there and said “we’re not in the right place,” didn't you then have a tendency to make groups and cliques?**

R.M: Yes.

**M.M: And did that make things easier or harder?**

R.M: I don't know.

**M.M: [laughs]**

R.M: I don't know but we felt safer. And also— I would tell you that I believe we had nothing left to lose, now with some distance. Whether we were together or not, we were identified in one way or another. We were recognized, the boys were very tall in general, people recognized us, people insulted them. And so being together gave us strength. We weren't always together with the boys because boys and girls didn't always stay together. But... but I remember anecdotes where we would be insulted, and

then the boys would go and see those people and address them very clearly so they wouldn't just be allowed to say anything they wanted. And for us, it would give us a type of safety, anyways there wasn't anything to hide anymore. We would tell ourselves: "what do we have to lose?"

**M.M: But this never escalated to bursting and making—**

R.M: It could have, it could have. I actually stayed at university until— in fact I went back to do my graduate diploma [*licence*] that I didn't complete. Ah you see well I will tell you about that [laughs]. There were times in university, because we lived there in student housing and there were times where we organized parties and I remember times where we organized parties and we were told that we were organizing parties to foment stories. And I remember a time where a lot of us who had participated in an evening of dancing were interviewed.

**M.M: By?**

R.M: By— how were these things called? By—

**M.M: Not by the intelligence service?**

R.M: By the intelligence service. And at the university there were always people, students who were working for the intelligence service, all the time.

**M.M: And you knew this or you didn't know this?**

R.M: We knew it, but there was one especially when I was doing my undergraduate degree because I started in Butare and was transferred to Ruhengeri. And when I was doing my undergrad, there was one really clearly identified one. And in the end, I don't know how it happened but it was friend of Charles's uncle— it was through— Charles's uncle's friend. That calmed things down.

**M.M: Charles your husband?**

R.M: Who is my spouse now.

**M.M: He was in university at the same time as you?**

R.M: Yes yeah but— those are memories. And we would wonder are we going to be interviewed. This is actually why they refused to give me a scholarship for my graduate degree. We were identified on this list of questionable people who are against the government. Where that came from, nobody knew.

**01:00:00**

**M.M: What were you asked during those interviews?**

R.M: I wasn't part of those interviews. But the kinds of questions were: "what were you doing when"—

**M.M: Those were interrogations, in the end.**

R.M: They were really interrogations and people were filmed from every angle like prisoners. The front, the side, the back, they were searched.

**M.M: And the questions were about: "what are they fomenting?"**

R.M: You know, nothing is ever clear there. You could be arrested; I remember once, my sister was arrested in the street. Then she was taken to the investigations office— She was told: "you're against the President of the Republic?" But why should my sister be against the President of the Republic. But it's that kind of question. We didn't know where it came from, where it went to but then we understood, and— During that night, African cloth was in fashion and we would put it... on our heads. And people said that the girls were— certain girls, me included, that we were working for Kayirebwa the singer. And of course Kayirebwa was linked to the refugees. And refugee in Rwanda meant those who are against the government. It meant the enemies. Therefore, we were automatically deemed enemies of the state. But I was getting dressed up because I was young and I was getting dressed up, is all. [laughs] That was just to tell you that everything, everything was a source of conflict.

**M.M: Yeah.**

R.M: It could go very far. When I went back for my diploma for example, some girls were raped.

**M.M: By students?**

R.M: [Nods] somewhat like during the war, and nothing happened that's what is terrible. Afterwards the Bureau of— the office that takes care of, my goodness it will come back to me.

**M.M: In the school where—**

R.M: Human rights, human rights got involved. They went to investigate long after that but there were two girls who really were raped.

**M.M: What year was that?**

R.M: That was in '93.

**M.M: Okay it was starting to heat up.**

R.M: Yes. Yes.

**M.M: It's almost as though it was taking me back a little, to follow your progression, you were in Ruhengeri maybe in '90?**

R.M: In '90, I wasn't actually there. I could've been there, but I didn't go.

**M.M: [Laughs] Lots of zigzags.**

R.M: [Laughs] No but I finished. No but— Rwanda's history is complicated. So in '89, '88-'89, when did I finish my undergraduate... Old age... I forgot but [laughs] I finished around '88, '89, '88-'89, academic degree in '88-'89.

**M.M: You finished your undergraduate.**

R.M: And so I had to go and study, no.

**M.M: '89-'90?**

R.M: '89-'90, I went back. I did...

**M.M: Well, then you had been done the year before?**

R.M: Yes, I finished and then came back in September, we were starting. I went back in September. I started my graduate diploma as a private student. Then we went on vacation, I think and they started—I don't remember which month it was exactly but this is when they started gathering people. Where people started being imprisoned.

**M.M: That was '90.**

R.M: '90. And I didn't go back, it was too dangerous to go back.

**M.M: This time you decided not to go. [laughs]**

R.M: I did not go. [laughs]

**M.M: For once this was something you changed your mind about [rires].**

R.M: No, but I knew a lot of people who were put in prison. It was that time, it was critical. People had been imprisoned. Some people close to me, Charles, my partner, Charles's dad, passed away during these times. We weren't married yet but we were going out.

**01:05:00**

Many people close to me. And I thought that it wasn't a good idea to go there. And therefore I stopped, I didn't go back.

**M.M: And what did you do?**

R.M: I stayed home, I stayed a long time, not that long. And then, finally I went to teach at the Belgian school.

**M.M: That's in Kigali?**

R.M: In Butare. There was a Belgian school and I taught there until '92-;93.

**M.M: I wanted to maybe touch back on [coughs] some things for those who might not understand in the university system, one have to do a baccalaureate and then after that one had make another request to continue and do the graduate diploma [license]?**

R.M: Yes, it was constantly—

**M.M: It wasn't an exam, it was a request or was it an exam or how did that work?**

R.M: It was a request but you understand that the system was organized to shut people down, I would say. And so despite all of these innumerable exams and passages and stops nothing would happen automatically or because a person was good at doing it. But one finishes the undergraduate degree and then it has to be recognized, a request must be made, it goes through the ministry. And there you are oriented toward the diploma. It was always like that and for people who might not understand, there were quotas in relation to ethnic representation. There was always a percentage let's say 90% were Hutus who got into school. 1%, I don't remember the percentages but it was ridiculous.

**M.M: And it continued all the way to university.**

R.M: And at every level, it had to be respected, yes.

**M.M: That's how, some at the end of their undergrads had to stop rather than continue toward the diploma?**

R.M: Yeah.

**M.M: And that's where you— even though you hadn't been accepted, if I understood correctly?**

R.M: Yes.

**M.M: You got in but as a private student, without a scholarship if I'm understanding?**

R.M: Yes because in Rwanda most people studied on state scholarships. Before that very few people— Well in fact I don't know anybody else besides me [laughs].

**M.M: [laughs] Who—?**

R.M: Who went to study there and the others went elsewhere. I should've gone elsewhere [laughs].

**M.M: Well you couldn't afford it, you had to.**

R.M: That's it. you had to have means [laughs]

**M.M: You were just talking about that time, you said no now it's too dangerous I can't continue studying in the North. In the university where you had started. And I'm going to— It brings me back to my question, I'm going to continue it because we're on that subject. When people speak about Rwanda, they immediately see '94. What's the beginning of the genocide, the moment of the genocide against the Tutsi but we can't talk about that without speaking of all the things we saw coming.**

R.M: Yes.

**M.M: When I hear you speak, I get the impression that you saw it coming?**

R.M: Yes, '94?

**M.M: Yeah.**

R.M: Everybody saw it coming.

**M.M: But you especially, specifically how would you have seen it?**

R.M: I saw it coming.

**M.M: Can I say early warning signs?**

R.M: Listen, already in '94 the tension was palpable, '90, sorry— First I tell you about the episodes at the university, we were always living in the state of, if ever something should happen what do we do? We were aware that something could happen. But we didn't know what; and since we were a little, everyone perceived us as a threat. The idea that people would think that they were threatened by Tutsi was not new. That people should feel they were threatened, I don't know when that started but I can tell you that the first time I had an awareness of it was '73 but it was a child's awareness. I didn't clearly understand things. But all along we would hear oh the *Inyenzi* [cockroaches], those... Those were words that were part of people's conversations and they were not positive words. So in '90, it was very palpable. We heard more about the refugees, and when the Rwandan Patriotic Front first attacked, the population really reacted.

**01:10:00**

Let's say the leaders actually reacted. And— there was the death, I don't even remember his name, he was from the Rwandan Patriotic Front... The one who headed the Patriotic Front...

**M.M: Rwigema.**

R.M: Rwigema, so they had attempted to cross into the country and he was killed there. From then on, all of the Tutsi inside Rwanda became threats. We were told, people would tell us, that we walked in the streets against the Patriotic Front. People were forced out of their houses to go and march and not long after that people were put in prison. And that we could see very clearly so. We all said: "tomorrow it's me, day before yesterday it's me." But when they first put people in prison, in Kigali it might not have happened the same way but in Butare they first took influential leaders like Charles's father. And even the Tutsi felt a little, anyway they would say: "you didn't tell us."

**M.M: The Tutsi or the Hutu.**

R.M: Even the Tutsi.

**M.M: Ah ok, they weren't told that he was.**

R.M: That they knew the thing which... No one knew about, that they knew what was going to happen.

**M.M: That they hid something?**

R.M: That they hid something from them, they have secrets. And not long after that, they were almost all rounded up [laughs].

**M.M: [laughs] They went to— they also knew.**

R.M: And all of that, you asked me when did we feel it, we felt it a lot in '90.

**M.M: "..."**

R.M: Yes and there too, people started mobilizing. And I think it's during that time where we started realizing that individuals were missing among families. Tutsi families, children who were going to the front lines. It wasn't said but when, it wasn't said because it was dangerous for the family but when there were no more children, although children wouldn't tell their families. We knew that they had gone to the front, to the war against Rwanda. And yes all of that were signs. Those were all early warning signs [inaudible].

**M.M: You see me thinking, I am going over question in my head— I see your family in my mind's eye, your mom had passed away just a little before as you had said. And the fear ruling the small square where you lived— I'm almost asking you how your father experience this?**

R.M: My father well— after— with some distance, and like many, many people of his generation, I found him unaware. Unaware of what was happening. I was an adult at that time. We were all adults, we were very, very aware of the threat. And we knew what was going on outside. Even if he was scared, he was scared but in fact, I don't know how to explain it to you. We were raised with the fear to

be linked to the refugees who were, quote unquote, “our own” [laughs]. We would push them away. And to be told that they were coming back it was almost a crime. And so, our elders, those who had known ‘59 who were killed or almost in ‘59. Those who had known ‘73 preferred not knowing. In any case, my father, those things, no, no, no!

**M.M: Don't tell them anything, don't tell him anything.**

R.M: No! No! No! Kids, it's not workinghe didn't even want; you know at home, we would hide to listen to the radio—

**M.M: Muhabura**

R.M: Muhabura of the Patriotic Front. We hid because they didn't like it. But it's true, he was right because if someone knew that you listened to that radio station, well you were associated to these people whom no one liked, who were dangerous forthe country, who were dangerous for the country. And so, I believe that he preferred to stay in the void, hoping that magic might happen but sadly for him and for us all—

**M.M: I'm going to continue and I'm going to tell myself that the magic worked until ‘94?**

R.M: It never worked [laughs].

**M.M: [laughs] At least he pushed, pushed and pushed until then?**

**01:15:00**

R.M: He pushed, he pushed like all the others. I think that he didn't really have a choice. You know, even in ‘73 my dad was part of the generation who wanted wanted to die right here where he lived. He didn't see himself, and I'm telling you this, I was a child in ‘73, and I can see people. It's the picture I have of people who every night are there and drink, drink, eat what [inaudible]— and every night my mother was packing suitcases. I remember that, we would unpack the suitcases and I think I hear the conversations, I don't remember them. But I have this feeling that she wanted us to leave. We never left. There was even one of our neighbors, one of our neighbors who left, their little girl drowned

because they walked a long time, and she would have fallen in the river as they crossed to go to Burundi and she drowned there. I don't know how my parents found out about it but I never asked but I think that is why our suitcases stayed there [laughs]. And so my father never wanted to leave, to flee. I can't explain to you why. He was a part of that generation. And yet his brother left in '59. And he experienced the same thing in '90, in '94. Until his death, he wanted to be found right where he had lived.

**M.M: And so then, it happens again, as you say and then '94 happens. We cannot avoid it we have to talk about it. How did you experience '94?**

R.M: '94. '94 first of all I wasn't at my father's house. It's a long story. I had gone back to university [laughs].

**M.M: [laughs] You ended up going back!**

R.M: I went back at the start of '94 then afterwards, but I did an internship in Kigali and stayed there. And I remember, '94 when the President's plane crashed. I was returning from Kibuye. I was with friends and girlfriends. We had spent the weekend in Kibuye and we came back. I remember very clearly I was at my brother-in-law's. I went to bed at my brother-in-law's who was in Kigali who lived in Kigali— And even that day, I was hesitating, I was hesitating about going home to my father's house for Easter weekend or going on a weekend with friends. I ended up going on a weekend, it's certainly what saved me. And I came back telling myself: “ok let's let things settle and then I'll go home.” And it's the same night that the plane crashed. I heard it very well [laughs]. I heard the uproar and it started that way.

**M.M: So you were in Kigali—**

R.M: and so I was in Kigali— I was right in Rugunga, my brother-in-law used to live in Rugunga facing the President's brother-in-law, I think. And so from that moment on I never saw my dad again, and in fact I never saw anyone again.

**M.M: Because everyone was in Butare and you were in Kigali?**

R.M: My brother, one of my brothers was in Butare, my little brother, he worked in Kigali and that night we had even spoken. I had told him, you know all this time we were feeling tension and all this time, grenades were exploding left and right. There was really tension, there was no one who could not know that something was going to happen. And there I had talked to my brother I had said: “come let's sleep at my brother-in-law's tonight.”

**M.M: That's your sister's husband?**

**01:20:00**

R.M: Yes it was my sister's husband, my brother-in-law is Hutu. We, in my family, we were all mixed.

**M.M: People married across the board.**

R.M: Yes. And so I felt that we had like a bit of safety there but he said: “no, no, no.” And so we were not together. He was elsewhere, I was there, my father and my brother were in Butare. My married older sister lived in her home in Butare. And so war broke out, I didn't see anyone again, I talked to my sister for a week until the lines were cut, but still she made it out. She lives here, she lives in Sherbrooke. Then my brother died trying to save himself, my other brother who was with my father we don't know where or how he died; he went to hide with a friend who sent him back at some point and he was killed, we don't know where. And my father was killed in his home.

**M.M: At home?**

R.M: [Nods her head. Silence].

**M.M: And so you were in Kigali in the end, at your sister's.**

R.M: "...".

**M.M: I think we're going to stop a little and we'll take a break.**

**M.M: Yeah, so we were talking about the ‘94 episode, finally [a bird calls]. And then you just told me you were in Kigali [a bird calls] finally that it was the last time you spoke to your family [a bird calls].**

R.M: Yes.

**M.M: And then it was [translators note: not clear]— April 7 [a bird calls out]. I want to know, I understand that you learned that your dad died afterwards but I want to know when you found out? You. Where were you? How did you get out of there? How did you experience what came next?**

R.M: Well I actually stayed there, a week and a half and— Listen, we had also hosted many people including a cousin and a friend and we really played hide and seek. And then my brother-in-law finally got out because it was less compromising for him. And he went to talk— Actually, every day you know, we used to go to bed in our jeans or pants and when we heard screaming, we’d go hide, we’d come back. [Sigh] It was constantly a huge tension and then you know it was that time, someone called on the phone and then you heard him talking and then all of a sudden the person was killed. It happened to me twice and then my brother-in-law finally went out. But what saved us, we were really in Kigali. We were, it was called Rugunga but it’s close to Kiyovu and the President’s brother-in-law lived not very far. Who wasn’t there. But his house was guarded by the military and the military chief who guarded the house, he was a very religious person and he promised my brother-in-law that we would not be harmed. And so let’s just say he took care of that, too. But in the long run, it got complicated for my brother-in-law. He would say “How long is this going to last?” He too was tense from having compromising people in his home [laughs]. And I think a week later he asked someone he knew who was coming from his region, a soldier, to come and get us. No, there was a girl among us who had a Belgian boyfriend and Belgian soldiers were sent to get her. One of the people who was with me left with them. And my brother-in-law thought I had left with them. And he came back later because they did rounds there.

**01:25:00**

When he came back and saw me at home, I felt like he was depressed. And that same day, he called someone, a soldier he knew, to make them take us to the Hôtel Mille Collines. In the meantime, we

came to know that there were people hiding at the Mille Collines. The soldier came, he took my sister-in-law, my cousin and I finally who could come back, took us in his car to take us to the Mille Collines. But between Milles Collines and Rugunga, there was a roadblock. And there, at the roadblock, he was threatened. They pulled us out of the car, but he was still a high-ranking soldier. And then he told them, let's negotiate something: "I'm not taking them back to the Mille Collines, I take them back to where I found them." And then after 30 minutes of insulting us, they brought us to the car, and he then, brought us back.

**M.M: To the house.**

R.M: To the house. So we thought, well, what are we gonna do, we're gonna die here. It's funny, but at that time I wasn't so afraid of dying. I was afraid of getting raped. Because I knew all the people I was meeting almost every day in front of the house who came in morning, noon and night. And that's the fear I had, and I thought that's what's going to happen. They're going to have to kill us first. And you see, we came back the same day. The next day, two days later, there was a soldier, a Guinean who was passing by, he was with UNAMIR [United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda]. And I don't know how I got out, I saw him pass by and he was around, I don't know what he was doing because he was picking people up. Because we were actually stuck together, we were stuck together, there was a— It was a place where there were rooms, to house people but it had been transformed into a dispensary that the red cross used to save people, there were a lot of people they brought here. And so there were a lot of United Nations troops going around. So I snuck in and talked to him. We barely understood each other because he only spoke English. I said I wanted to get to the Milles Collines that I was looking for a way. He put us in his car with my sister-in-law and my cousin. He had a jeep there, and he put us in the back... and the UNAMIR could still go through. And when he passed, I don't know— he gave food to the people but they didn't stop us that time. And then he brought us to the Milles Collines. And then I lived there for almost the entire duration of the war. And in the end, it was tense, it's a long story the Milles Collines but still there were lots of refugees, there were lots of people coming in. And we ended up like family. We made a family with lots, and lots of people then we organized to have food to eat, to make food, to spend the night together talking because we were afraid of what would happen at night. Until we were told: "we're going to let you go." I don't know how but they said it was the UNAMIR military that was negotiating this. But there are people who left and were hit.

**M.M: Left where?**

R.M: In fact, they had to go somewhere else, to flee through the airport. Then there were some people who somehow had received, I don't know, visitation rights or people who took them in and took care of them, but they were all gone once and were beaten, hit.

**M.M: Did they come back?**

**01:30:00**

R.M: They returned. And we said, okay, we're gonna stay here, we're gonna die here, and that's it. And so, when almost the end of the war; there were negotiations between those who finally took power and those in power. And what they negotiated was to let people go to the side which they thought it was the safest. So there are some who left; there is a part of the country that from then on belonged to those who—

**M.M: To the Rwandan Patriotic Front.**

R.M: To the Rwandan Patriotic Front, which was coming in and there was a part that belonged to the rest. And they came to ask us, actually I think it was arranged with the military from the United Nations Mission in Rwanda, General Dallaire and company. They made lists of who went where. And we made lists and we put ourselves on the lists, we had nothing to lose. But we were going to the RPF side [laughs]. As soon as we had made lists, they drove us back in a Mission truck of the United Nations in Rwanda, that time I was really scared but the agreements were very clear, they didn't touch us. They picked us up, I don't know, two or three times. We left several times, three times and they took us to the camp, in fact, there was a camp not too far away in Kabuga there. It's in Kigali, but the camp, that camp belonged to the Patriotic Front. And I lived there until the end of the war almost. But now you see when I was at the Milles Collines that's when I learned that my brother was deceased.

**M.M: The one in Kigali.**

R.M: Yes, it was my brother-in-law who wrote to me to tell me. And I learned long after that, that my father died and my sister, I didn't know what had happened to her. We ended up meeting here, actually.

**M.M: The one you lived with before you went to Mille Collines?**

R.M: No, the oldest.

**M.M: Ok.**

R.M: The oldest is the one with whom I lived before I went to the Milles Collines. She died as a result of the war. But the oldest one who lived in Butare, she stayed in Butare. She managed to get out at some point, but we ended up here. But I actually knew she was alive, she knew I was alive— when I was at the camp.

**M.M: What about Kabuga?**

R.M: Yes, and we stayed at the camp. I stayed a long time. I mean, I think so, I left, I left in July. I left while the others returned home after the war.

**M.M: You went home [laughs].**

R.M: [Laughs] No, I didn't feel like going back. I didn't want to go back.

**M.M: I'm listening to you, you tell me it's a long story but because I have the microphone, I'm going to ask you the question. What was the routine made of, daily life, what did it look like? The daily life of someone who suddenly left where they were to go live in Milles Collines? Now you say 'look, we got food', where did you get food? How?**

R.M: You know that looking back, I wonder, I don't know how things happened. [laughs] When we first arrived, I had nothing on me. I was always in— I always wore pants like leggings underneath all the time, I would sleep that way. I had jeans, I had a passport in my pocket every day. I had a paper of my diploma, I had some coins, whatever money I had left. [laughs] I always lay down like that, I was always like that, I always lay down like that; so I got to Mille Collines like that. And we come in, we meet people we know. And then I don't know how things are organised, my cousin knows someone and then we organize a room. We find a room and we live there. And as people came in every day, we ended up— we were like ten in the room at some point. But every day we got up, there are— In fact there are some who went out, they were going out, I don't know how. But actually, there were Hutu

and Tutsi. There were Hutus going out and there are people me— there are people who came to bring me milk there. Some *Interahamwe* I knew. [laughs]

**01:35:00**

**M.M: Who knew you were there after all.**

R.M: Who wanted a woman, whom they were looking for [laughs].

**M.M: It was a way to soften you up [laughs].**

R.M: And there were people going out to get food outside. But when we got there, there was still food from the hotel. And so we arranged things with the cooks. In fact, we managed by giving them a little bit of money, by talking to them nicely. By forgetting that we were human and could be told anything, we managed to get into the kitchen. Everyone had power, even the cook who ran a heating plate. It is really the part that I found the most difficult [laughs] among— In the rest of it, the dead and all of that, I admit I didn't have time think about. I cried a little when I was told my father passed away. On top of everything, the person who told me, who lent me the phone to call, started yelling at me. Because I had nothing to cry— [Who worked at the hotel?] so I thought, "this is not the time to cry, this is not the time nor should I do it in front of this person." And so all this I think is part of the instinct. You decide "I'm closing the door," it's gonna open one day. But at that time, we thought... and then my cousin who was with me had lost her three children. Her three children had been killed at her sister's house, along with her sister and sister-in-law. And I felt that my misfortune was insignificant compared to hers. These three children had died at the same time. I say it and then my hair stands on end but it's like I don't have the right to mourn in front of a mother who had lost her three children at the same time. And every day, we'd get up, wipe our faces with a little water in a glass. We were just there. We watched a lot, a lot of TV. We knew about the international news [laughs]. We used to watch a lot of TV, and then we didn't do much, we'd go around in circles, we'd contribute to the rumors because that's what you wanted to do.

**M.M: [chuckles]**

R.M: But that's really it, we would meet in a room and then sometimes, we hid, we had to hide because there was— Noises like bombs. We called them bombs. And some days *Interahamwe* tried to get back into the Milles Collines. Then we had to go into the cellar and hide. Sometimes we could stay hidden, let's say half a day, other days we laughed... what can I say. Some of us had jokes and then we laughed. It was a life and then sometimes, we could eat because the soldiers who went outside brought us some food. There are all kinds of— It's like in prison I'd say... there are all kinds of networks that are formed, internally and then externally, and then people who are connected with so and so. But I found, we were, like, there was my cousin and I and then there were other people who lived with us all those people— and there are other people whom we harboured. Then there was another room where there were many young boys and a gentleman who lives in Quebec City and his wife. We did everything together, we organized together, like if let's say I found something, we shared everything. If the other person managed to get something, we shared it with everyone.

**M.M: To give you milk [laughs].**

R.M: I used to give milk when I had milk [laughs]. But some of them went out like I said, and then those who had some money managed to buy some. And then there are— people who worked at the Mille Collines whom we knew who opened the doors for us a little bit like here and there. But there was no routine, daily life was “will we get to the end of the day today?” It really was that. But I would tell you that we were safe compared to those who were in the church. In the church, what was the church next door?

**M.M: [Inaudible]**

R.M: At least we were, at least we had rooms [chuckles].

**M.M: [Laughs] Yes.**

R.M: We had no water but we had rooms [laughs].

**01:40:00**

**M.M: [Laughs] Then when you get to Kabuga to the camp, I'll ask you again the same question. Was life too difficult? Was life easy?**

R.M: In Kabuga the first day we arrived, we were put, we shared the same house. There were a lot of us, let's say 200 people like, I don't remember how many of us there were. First we arrived... a truck full. A big truck full of people. I think it had done two or three trips. And there was a wealthy person's house there. And we went into the same house. Listen, it was horrible. The incredible promiscuity. So we were lying one on top of the other up and down, left to right. But then when we got into that house, it looked good, there was room, it was relatively clean there. But obviously no water, no toilets for that number of people. It was a disaster, so we stayed there for a few days. And we decided that it was no longer possible to live in that house; let's say, you take a thousand people, you put them in a house like that. But despite everything, there were still social ranks. I can't believe it when I think about it [laughs]. So we decided that we were each going to find— in any case we formed small families where we were going to move into houses. But it was hard because, you know, we'd take dead people out of houses and then we'd clean up then we lived in it. And people were still there— [silence]. In any case, it was still the war, I think that despite all the people who moved let's even say, from Rugunga to Mille Collines, we passed anyway, we saw dead people in the street. And I think we really realized that, yes, there had been a genocide. That people were still in— the houses. Houses that stink but we had to survive. The human being is strong. To ignore everything, to take the dead out of a house, to decorate it, to wash it, to enter it and live there. We did all this. And then after that the rest was easy. We got organized, the men went to get food [laughs]. Men went to get food, women made food. We got so organized, we opened a class.

**M.M: Is that right?**

A.L.D.: [Laughs]

R.M: And I taught... what can you do? [laughs]

**M.M: The children went to school?**

R.M: No, but let's say "...".

**M.M: I'm not sure [laughs]**

R.M: A few months later there were so many people and so many children that I don't know who said "why don't we make a school" and then I think I have something inside me, I'm good with kids. One of the families who lived with me there had even picked up a child. First the woman had given birth during the war. And then they picked up a baby who wasn't dead, whom they found in their brother's bush. And since she had just given birth, I would be with the other baby three quarters of the time. And then as I often had children around me I started to make them dance, sing, I found a way to be busy. Once I was finished making food or [laughs] I had found myself an occupation. And then we said, "Why don't we at least teach them some reading and writing" and we made a school in a few days.

**M.M: Oh yeah that's great.**

R.M: But you know, we didn't know how long it was going to last. And there were soldiers from the Patriotic Front who came and said "when we were in the camps, I don't know when, in '59 we learned things; that's where I learned to talk and do this or that."

**01:45:00**

And then we thought, "Maybe we'll spend years here, maybe we should get minimally organized," as I'm telling you that now it sounds thoughtful, it wasn't. We didn't think it through. Then one day, we went and said to the children: "come study" and I don't remember what I did with them [laughs]. There were two of us. There was me and another lady. Yeah.

**M.M: [Laughs] Yeah, that's good.**

R.M: We were teachers and others did other things. But that's it, we ended up doing, getting— like we do at home.

**M.M: So life resumed a little.**

R.M: Life resumed a little. We mixed up as a family, we made extended families. And these people, they're in my memory. You know, people we've shared moments like this with. When we went back to

Africa last summer, I wanted to see them all again. Some I didn't see, but I wanted to see them all again. Yeah—

**M.M: Then at a certain moment, as you said in July somewhere, you are told that everything is fine you can go back to the houses in Kigali.**

R.M: In fact, we are told, and we are not told. First when we arrived in Kabuga, there were people who were leaving from Kabuga to Byumba, which was another area where there were a lot of refugees. But according to the rumour of the time, things were better in Byumba; I had always wanted leave and I thought I'd leave. And I didn't want to go to Byumba, I wanted to try to get out of there. And— Then we started having people come back from Kenya to settle down in Kabuga to go to Rwanda afterwards. And it still took a permit to leave the country in those days.

**M.M: But who gave the authorization?**

R.M: Well these are the leaders of the Patriotic Front. There was an organization like there is now in Rwanda in the state there was an organization with superiors, I don't know what they're called at least not there.

**M.M: The local government.**

A.M:: The local government in the region had levels. And there was one that gave permission to leave. And you had to get it. Finally some time later I got permission and as there were people coming from Burundi, which came from Burundi, which came from Kenya, and actually the family who lived with me there, there was one of their friends who lived in Burundi who came to see how Rwanda was. Who was planning on coming back. But in the meantime he was going back to Burundi; that's who I left with.

**M.M: Did you know people in Burundi or you were venturing again?**

R.M: No I knew, I had cousins, I had cousins there. In fact my father, his brother who fled in '59 moved to Burundi. And then the kids, we were together later. So when I left at the time, I went to see my cousin in Burundi. Then from there I went to Kenya then from Kenya, I went to Canada.

**M.M: Wait, so you didn't come back to Rwanda during that period?**

R.M: [shakes her head from left to right] No.

**M.M: In Canada, how was— I ask questions, you left the camp. Did you go to Burundi because you knew someone?**

R.M: I went to Burundi, my sister-in-law, my cousin were there. And I stayed there; in fact I didn't stay there very long. Meanwhile my sister was in Kenya and there finally my sister sent me a ticket and I went to Kenya. But while I arrived in Kenya she was leaving.

**M.M: To come here?**

R.M: Yes. And in Kenya I was hosted by a family, people I adore; people I didn't know, who are people who lived in Burundi, in fact who were related to my cousins in Burundi. And I lived there for, I think, two months, while I was looking for the papers to come. So I stayed there for a few months and I came here.

**M.M: Is it '94?**

R.M: Yes, I did not return, I did a one-way, I did not feel like going back.

**01:50:00**

**M.M: Until when?**

R.M: Until recently, until last year [laughs].

**M.M: Until 2011?**

R.M: But you know... for me, there is something broken between, I don't know I think there's something broken between me and my home country. I didn't want to, I never— But there are many

people who have family there. I have no direct family other than people who have returned from abroad. And for me... And that stopped me for a long time because I was trying to go, I was trying, I wanted, I didn't want it so much. At a certain point, I thought: "I'll go to Cuba and then I'll go who knows where." I don't care. There is of course always the family part, going back home. But I didn't miss it. I didn't miss it. And when I was thinking of going home where I was born and staying at a hotel it didn't make sense in my head. But then the kids reconnected me I think [laughs] they reconnected me with my origins. Not because I want to lose or forget them, even returning last year, I found it difficult. Of course there are interesting things but I found it challenging [inaudible- some parts?] Because I believe that a country is people. And [right left head movement] no I don't necessarily feel at home. Too bad, but that's the way it is. I'm not gonna forget! It is my country and I was happy to go and see. To think I'd seen the pictures of where we lived, where we came from. There's a family history, but other than that, I don't want to go, except for being in the sun again [laughs].

**M.M: [Laughs]**

R.M: You will take that away [laughs].

**M.M: No, we're not going to remove it because I'm, almost here to tell you. I don't know how to tell you maybe I'll ask you in two steps. What precisely is the process for someone who has left the country like that and then comes the cut is there I understand you very well. In fact, I'm asking you how you finally decide to go back?**

R.M: To go back?

M.M: I question that when you left in such a situation, I understand the cut very well. And then you told me you went back in 2012. My question is rather what makes you finally decide [inaudible] you agreed to go back?

R.M: I never thought I'd never go back but I didn't feel an urgency to go either. At one point I thought, "I'm going to go, I'm going to get my parents' land back" because there's nothing left but land. And then there were other times, I thought, oh, is it urgent? Is it necessary? Actually, I did it fast. I arrived here, I went to the university that same summer, in any case, I arrived in the month of August, I started university in September. And when I was in university, I didn't have time. Actually, there were some

things I didn't have time to make sense of. I didn't have time. I think that when I try to rationalize it there's nothing rational but— It's as if I had lost everything, but I did lose everything; everyone was killed but I don't have the right to give up, it's like they exist through me [tears well up in her eyes]. And I was still lucky because when I arrived, Charles was there.

**01:55:00**

And he was a good support. If you'll excuse me... And so things happened fast. I didn't have time to think. I'm at the university, I finished my master's degree in eighty..., I don't remember any more [chuckles]. I'll get a handkerchief [blows], sorry. That's right, I finished my master's degree in '90 no, '94-'95-'96-'97, '97 or '98. So I finished my master's but I had to work a little and I still got lucky [wipes her tears] anyway. When I arrived at the university, I got into a research center that really nurtured me intellectually a lot, a lot. I love doing research. I love to think, I believe that's what saved me. So I got into it, 100 miles an hour. And I went all in, I worked with them— I worked around the research but and but I couldn't launch my career there, I still had to get out of there so that I could do other work. Unless I did a PhD to teach at the university. But I didn't have the energy for that. And in the meantime, I got pregnant too, Tristan arrived— and really I didn't— Like I said when I was rationalizing, I didn't have time or I didn't take the time: so it became go home and study, finish, have a baby. Now it's time to build something, get a job, join the school board, start working. I had a baby, I went home, I'm a mom, I can't afford to feel sorry about myself. I'm rationalizing it now, but I feel like that's the way it went. And then we start living, we move, we lived in Montreal, now we live here. And so it all happened quite quickly. Until five, four and a half years ago between Tristan and my youngest. And when I got pregnant with Kélian, I started thinking. Then I started thinking that maybe it would be good if I thought about the other side. But well, I was pregnant, and life was still pretty nice— I had finished my studies, I had found work, I had bought myself a house— So what else is there to ask for [laughs]. I think that everything is as it should be. There are other things to ask but I wouldn't consider myself unhappy, when I could even have said: "ok we made it, we are good." So there I am, pregnant and, night after night while I was pregnant I wasn't sleeping. And I said to my doctor: "it is not normal, I don't normally have insomnia." And then okay you're pregnant, you're pregnant, hormones, hormones, hormones. And then my doctor who is a lady, my gynecologist who doesn't have much time but who is completely present for the two minutes she's with you, and who remembers everything, moments during childbirth.... And then one day she said: "You know, I'm going to send you to see someone." She says: "but you will have to be on leave, I don't want you to go to work anymore." I say:

“but I am immune to everything, I will go to work.” She says: “No, you will not go to work but I will send you to see a psychologist.” “Why should I go to a psychologist, I have insomnia because I’m pregnant, I’m not going to see a psychologist.” Then she says: “look, I’ll send you to see a Belgian psychologist at Sainte-Justine who knows the Rwandan situation well enough. I’m not telling you she’s gonna follow you, I just want her to make sure you have a leave of absence.” [laughs] And then finally I went to see her. A lovely lady who welcomed me and said: “How are you?” Talking to me like you’re talking to me right now. And of course, she put me on leave and told me that I was having a major depression. So I said major depression, Charles laughed.

**02:00:00**

Because major depression, what is major depression? And then she told me in the medical terms, we call it that, but know that for you this is not dangerous. Go on leave, you’re fine, take care of your child, you haven’t lost your mind. It’s just a term. So I went on leave, but I was functional. Except instead of sleeping at night, I slept during the day. [laughs] And then she said, “I’ll explain something to you.” She was really, really good at doing things. I would come in with a book and then she would tell me what they were talking about in the book. Then she worked with me around that all the time. Finally, she said: “you know what I think.” She said, “Are you pregnant?” I said: “Yes.” “The child you’re carrying connects you to your life, connects you to your origin.” She said: “you told me everything, all the episodes of your life.” She said: “you never, never had time to think about it.” She said: “In your head there was no availability for you to allow yourself to go to the source.” She said: “now things are in order.” I still remember it. “Now things are in order: you have finished studying, you have settled down, you are grounded, this is your home. Now is the time for you to get back to the basics, to what is essential which is your initial life.” Anyways, I thought it made sense. Anyway, I still remember how she named everything to me. And I think that’s what happened. So— Then, in addition she said: “Allow yourself, try to see if you can create a ceremony.” And it is from that moment that— well from that moment on that I told myself I’ll have to go back one day. To do a little— for closure. I don’t know if I closed. [laughs]

**M.M: That was the question.**

R.M: But it was a long time before I went back for closure. [laughs] But I actually went back last year. It didn’t happen as clearly in my head as what I’m telling you right now. I’ve had a lot of episodes. I

had a lot of dreams. But I, you know, my parents, my sisters, I never talk about them in the past tense. It's very funny I never realized it, especially my sister where I lived before leaving. I always talk about them in the present as if, as if they were [there?] deeply all the time. I wear her ring every day.

**M.M: Is her husband still there?**

R.M: "...?"

**M.M: Is her husband still there?**

R.M: No.

**M.M: So you took the ring. [laughs]**

R.M: No, but her little ring that she had, I left with it and kept it. Well, that is it.

**M.M: I was going to ask you when you were there, did you feel that... it was tickling somewhere or it was hurting?**

R.M: Yes, it was very, very painful.

**M.M: Did it soothe... the pain you had? You got— actually how... How you live— Did it answer what you wanted, or awaken other things, where did it all leave you?**

R.M: I honestly didn't know what I wanted when I returned. I knew that I wanted my kids to know where we came from. Especially since the older one starts asking questions, he wants to understand. And I didn't want him to feel ...troubled maybe, not troubled, but I wanted him to experience it from the inside. That's a lot of how we thought. We go back there, show the kids their origins, so that they can feel, that they can see but at the same time it was heartbreaking because...

**M.M: Because at the same time you were living it at the same time as the children, you did not have time to live it before.**

**02:05:00**

R.M: Yes, and then they go there, and then I don't know your children but my children, they don't know what it's like to have a grandparent. Well, they know, we have adoptive grandparents here who adopted us. But it's not your blood, they love us. They like us very much, too, but to have a grandparent and then ask questions. And they know that their grandparents died during the war. Yes they know but. Basically their paternal grandparent died in prison in 1990 as a result of the war. And that for me was heartbreaking. I take them to see whom, see what? I take them where, because seriously I'm telling you; I'll tell someone, they'd think I'm not well, but it's not my home.

**M.M: [whispering] I understand it.**

R.M: For me it is not home. It's somewhere else. Yes I was born there, yes I speak the same language as the people there, the same language and yet. And yes— And of course we arrived and well, I don't know what it did to me. I can't describe the emotion but I didn't go wow. I wasn't deeply unhappy. When we got there, okay, we got there, we get there. We're at the airport. Yeah, I knew the airport already. The first day was like that. Then we ended up with Charles's big brother. Because he lives in Kigali. And for the kids it was great because there was warmth, they met, they met some cousins. They met— Well at least an uncle, an aunt but when we went to Butare, that was the height. First we didn't know anyone there. [laughs] Anyway we don't know anyone there. We know Charles' uncle. There's a mom, an old mom who used to live with Charles a long time ago, who's still there; and a few people. We were born there in that town. You took one step, you met someone you knew, you took another step, you met. So much so that sometimes you would find little roads to walk so as not to talk to people. We went there, and we were strangers. So the other thing that deeply destroyed me— So I told you, we were born in Rubona and my father built a house not too far from there. And during war, they destroyed everything. And since we had not gone back, there was nothing there. It was bush. And then when we went, I was trying to see but oh... Is this the place? Then we passed and went past it. Then I told Charles, no, it's too far from home, it's not here. Then there was, there was a hedge of cypress trees around there. But they became big trees. But I was looking for that image, and now we've gone a little past it. Then I said: "stop there and I'll walk." And we stopped, I walked back to see. And then I saw it was there. But it— And when I arrived, my grandmother and my mother... their grave was there. I had been looking for them. There was nothing [whispers], there was nothing left. Because when they destroyed, yes the foundation of the house I... they showed it to me and then I could touch, I could see.

Because they destroyed, but the foundation is there. But they destroyed and they took the tombstones too. They are not humans. You know, you know... What do you... you know sometimes you think— what happened, I don't keep the hate to keep the hate. But when you come back to these things you tell yourself: "something here does not pass— it does not work anyway in—."

**02:10:00**

It's beyond what the animal can do. What do you want to do with the grave stones. You kill people, you destroy their things and you destroy the dead too! That really did something to me. And of course I went to visit the place where they say we placed, I don't know if it's my father but you know there are graves all over Africa. [laughs]

**M.M: In Rwanda.**

R.M: In Rwanda. Not in Africa, no. But in Rwanda in every region there are special places for memorials. To remember people. But that too, my God, to think that the person who is there may not be there. All this to say that when I went to Butare it was difficult. It was so difficult that we slept there once, the second day, we said: "No, it's not working, we're going to Kigali, it's much better." [laughs] And we went back, but when we went back, I wanted to get things back. I wanted to go and register the land. So I ran around to do all those things. I didn't have time, but at the same time, I didn't want to sleep there. It destroys me because you're there, you feel like you're home, you're not home, you're nowhere. No one knows you. So for me, it's a shame. Then I went back to Rubona to see where we lived... there was nothing left... Anyway, I don't know what the kids felt through me but really it's... This is not imaginable. It's kind of a feeling... You know, sometimes you think, "okay, people are dead, I know, we're moving on." But did returning allow me to close the loop? Of course I don't want to close the loop. I personally believe that... I believe that we will live with all that happened, all of our life. Closing the loop might be to forget those people. Maybe that would be thinking that... No, I think what we're not going to close is really deep-seated. It is not going to stop me from going. But it's also not a priority for me. Maybe I'll go because the kids will ask me more and more. But in my heart there is unfortunately something broken with that country. Even though logically I understand all these things. But there's something broken. I don't feel like, you know, people want to go live there. There are people who want to move there, do things there. I don't feel that way. I don't have to make an effort. I don't feel it. [laughs] And I didn't identify with— No, the people I met, that I knew before the war, we

were connected. And that was a little of what allowed me to have a pleasant vacation. That, and because I know Charles' family well. His sisters, there are two sisters who live abroad, one who lives in Kenya and the other one who lives in England. And they were on vacation with us. They're like my sisters. And if they hadn't come, I would have thought it awfully ugly. But other than that, I don't feel. [laughs] It's a shame, eh.

**M.M: [Laughs] But this is reality. It's reality as you say and we live with it.**

**02:15:00**

R.M: Yes but the others go and they have fun; seriously sometimes I ask myself what's wrong with my heart.

**M.M: That is not true.**

R.M: [chuckles] You don't. It makes me feel better.

**M.M: No, it's not because there's something wrong. I think it's— It's a different way of life, perhaps.**

R.M: Yes.

**M.M: There is one who will tell you that he will live there. Maybe that's a way to reconnect. "If I don't live there, [taps on the table]. Where I saw them last time, it's not okay." Then the other one will tell you "I don't want to go any further."**

R.M: Yes.

**M.M: I think— you can't tell yourself that there's something wrong.**

R.M: No, it doesn't matter, it's not something that prevents me from living you know.

**M.M: [Laughs]**

R.M: We get through it..

**M.M: There I was listening to you and thinking to myself that behind all this, we even have children who are growing up. Who see you in this inner battle, who saw you there, who are big enough to understand and ask themselves questions. Then there are questions that will be asked openly and there is also the duty of telling them something. How do we transmit this story, this reality to children?**

R.M: Good question [takes a sip of water]. I think we transmit it in spite of ourselves badly. [laughs] At least in my case, we didn't start telling them: "things happened this way, things happened that way." When they ask questions, I try to be honest, I try to give clear answers. But there were not many questions until last year. Of course there are the younger ones, the questions revolved around grandparents. Where are the grandparents? Have the grandparents died? How did they die? In the war during the war. It revolved around that but the nuances were not very clear. And then we went to Africa. And it may be the right thing to help us pass on that story. Because we're gonna have to transmit it whether we like it or not. And of course they won't have seen it, but for example... For example, we went to the memorial in Kigali, where everyone goes. And Tristan insisted on going. Of course he's a teenager, he had started to wonder before he went. First of all, here, he gets asked where he comes from. And he must answer that he is Rwandan. But he realizes he doesn't know everything about Rwanda. And so he comes back, he asks the questions again. And then when we went, he said: "Mom, I want to go see." We weren't sure we wanted to take him there. Finally I went, we, Charles and I went together first. And finally... we said: "why not." And I took him there. He read everything, heard everything. Saw everything—I don't know how, he figured it out. It's very difficult, you'd have to go with a special camera in his head. And then he remained deeply calm afterwards. And then he started asking questions. Then he made connections, then he wanted to know why such and such hutu, such and such a thing happened. But that person is your friend and how is it that.... And I think he's learned a lot. Of course there are blurred areas, many, many blurred areas. I have a little book here. Which I was asked to read and comment on. It was written by a Quebecker, the title is "My father is Hutu, my mother is Tutsi." But it's a book for young people. It's a youth book. And it's been lying around here ever since because I wrote my comments to the publishing house and then they gave it to me as a gift. I have a two or three copies. And it was lying around, I wanted to let it lie around out so he

could read it but he had not read it. But then that year, he read it, he came back, he read it. And it allows him to ask questions.

**02:20:00**

For my youngest it is more or less. I have the impression that for the moment he is more or less interested. He took the positive side from it, there's family there. It's very interesting, he keeps that in his heart. But it will eventually be transmitted. This child... we went everywhere, wherever he saw the picture of his grandfather, he took the photos [laughs] and kept the photos. So how do we transmit. Of course there is what we transmit clumsily through us, through what we say. By showing them around and telling them the story and then we let them live and ask their questions. It's not simple, I think it's not easy to pass on that story.

**M.M: Then the question of— we would like to avoid it but we were asked, about reconciliation, forgiveness, everything that revolves around that?**

R.M: I think it's just politics. Well, I mean, I... Reconciliation... Does anyone believe that? Firstly, forgiveness is something we ask for, and so we are deeply conscious that we want to ask for it because we recognize that it is important. What we are being told... those requests for forgiveness are rather imposed. And sometimes we wait instead of asking for forgiveness, they start unloading everything they have done. I don't know, I think that is "not getting it," as the kids would say. [laughs] I don't need forgiveness, I don't need to reconcile, I'll tell you we all have friends, Tutsi and Hutu. We lived together, went to school together. We all have, or almost all have, Hutu friends. It's not complicated I have them in my family. [laughs] And I can't ignore them, they're humans. We are still smart enough to say: "there is history, what happened and there are individuals and all those who, most at least, have— who survived, did survive because someone saved them, ... usually a Hutu. And our history is complex, but I don't need forgiveness, reconciliation." There is forgiveness, I think everybody says that. Before forgiveness there is justice, so let's do justice and then the rest...forgiveness. People will end up living together, they have no choice. In Rwanda, they live together, do they have a choice? They have no choice. Have they been, have they been asked forgiveness? The Tutsi who are there, who have lost their family members, have they been asked for forgiveness? No. We did— I was angry about that. The whole story of forgiveness, reconciliation, it made me angry. Let's let it be and move on. Work on justice, the rest we'll live. That's how it is. I don't need forgiveness. I don't even need to forgive

anyone. Our people are dead. I think the greatest forgiveness we can... maybe— I think the most important like you said, it's keeping their memory. Pass something on to our children. And there is still a grey area: to transmit a story but not to transmit hate. You know that hurts me terribly. I work with children, I work in education. I think tolerance is extremely important. But passing on our history and hate overlaps a lot, a lot. [laughs] So how are we going to really separate the two. [sighs] It's complex.

**M.M: That's the big challenge too.**

**02:25:00**

R.M: Yes. And at the same time, we have to believe in the youth. In their ability to think. They are much more open toward others than we have been. Maybe they'll see them differently. [laughs]

**M.M: [Laughs] We'll hope for the positive.**

R.M: Yes.

**M.M: I could stay on this for a long time but I listen to you and I tell myself that apart from today where I destroyed you, you are normally a smiling, strong, positive person. If I had met you in other situations, I wouldn't have thought. What motivates you, what makes you live beyond that?**

R.M: Ah life. [laughs] Life! I don't know myself— I said to myself: "we are in the world in order to live." While we are here... Let's just enjoy it. And at the same time that's what I'm telling you. That I feel like all those people are living through us. They would have wanted to live now. They would probably have had a good life. They lived a good life, they were honest, there was no reason to end up the way they did. So we have the chance to go on. So I tell myself that since we had the chance to continue, we have no right to do otherwise. Of course, we run into challenges but I believe we always have to get back to here and now. I have also had the good fortune to have children. It certainly weighs heavily in favour of, it connects us a lot, a lot, a lot to life. I'll also tell you, that I received support. I've met a lot of people that... without knowing... I tell you I have grandparents, it's a good support in my life. They are people who love us, when we didn't ask for anything. People often say, I hear people saying: "Oh in Canada, people are cold." That's not what I feel. [laughs] Of course there are cold

people. Of course like everywhere else but I have a lot of people who love me just to love me. For no other reason. And I have no right to do otherwise. I don't know what motivates me. I love life. [laughs]

**M.M: And you will answer the question, how do you describe today's Rita?**

R.M: Compared to what? The one before [laughs]?

**M.M: No I don't know, the Rita I see in front of me.**

R.M: My God, you're asking me quite the question. I never thought about it. It depends on the context. I believe I'm deeply authentic though. I think I'm the same. You know, when I think of myself as a kid, what used to get on my nerves, still gets on my nerves today. When I told you earlier that what I would like to pass on to my children, is to be able to be oneself. I wanted it when I was a kid. to demonstrate who I was, what I wanted, how I wanted to do it. And I still am. Depending on the context, we adapt, but I'm still the same person. Now I am a mother of a certain age. [everyone laughs] Who has gained experience. Who assumes— I think I take full responsibility for who I am. I've had the good fortune to be surrounded by good people, I live with someone I've known for a long time, I'm stable enough in my life. And I still think it's rubbing off on me. All things considered that makes me a strong person. And who's happy in her own skin and it could have been the other way around. But I think our story is an unfortunate one and I mean that in the plural because I'm not the only one who's still like that. Who lives things that way. But it taught us to go for it, to put things into perspective, to reframe, to say: "I can get in through this angle here and through this.

**02:30:00**

Things are not going well here, there may be a way to go towards something else." Everything we live makes us who we are. I hope I'm the authentic person I wanted to be. But I think I feel terribly good and—

**M.M: Wow [laughs]... We can't ask for better [laughs]...**

R.M: Yes [laughs]

**M.M: If there was a message to send to survivors of this genocide, what would you tell them?**

R.M: Not to consider themselves as victims. — It's a very personal thing. It's very easy to get carried away by thinking that, yes, we were demolished. No! Okay, we were demolished but once things are there— That's it I haven't always known that. I haven't thought about it in a long time but more and more it comes with old age and our age, our experience and what we do with it. I think we always have a choice. There's something going on today, tomorrow morning. We live it the way we live it. But we have a choice to do whatever we want with it. So for the survivors, we have a choice to mourn our deceased and our lives. Yeah, we have to. But if we choose to play the victim. It doesn't work. To rationalize it and say: "okay, fine. I still have strength, I still have a head that thinks, I still have energy, I still have resources or at least I have a mind to find resources." That I believe, at least I believe for young people. I think that— If I manage to give a little of this to my children, to give them desire to tell themselves: "There is a solution here. We can go elsewhere, we can find something else, we can find a way anyway. There are a thousand ways but there is a solution at the end." I think that is important.

**M.M: If there was a message to say to any— We are here in Montreal, or else in Canada, and then we rub shoulders with Canadians who have learned a thing or two about Rwanda. If you had a message to tell them, what would it be?**

R.M: It would be to see us as humans. [everyone laughs] No, but— You know when people ask us "ah where do you come from?" And that the answer is "ah I come from Rwanda." There's always a little— a malaise. And that discomfort, disturbs me deeply. The discomfort, bothers me deeply and at the same time I understand it very well. But the people around me, they know me, and that it's part of my life. But that I am also a person and that I live somewhat like everyone else. So that's why I say, see us as humans. Once you're done thinking that the person who has experienced genocide, is not crazy, that she is something else. And, she's not, yes of course we can be sick because of it, we can— It touches us deeply. But everybody has challenges and maybe it's a tiny thing that brings you a long way and that really destroys you because you don't choose to live. And you can experience something very big, and you get through it. Of course we are different, some take it harder than others. Some people find resources more easily. But I believe that on this issue— we Rwandans at least, must always help each other out. Or at least support each other. I feel like that is missing. And not the kind of support— but I went into a question that you did not ask me.

**M.M: —I will ask it, what kind of support? [Laughs from everyone] Which support can we offer?**

**02:35:00**

R.M: I don't think it's— I don't know if it was Charles who said it in his interview. Trying to think about how we help each other. It is true that we tend to go and help those who are in Rwanda. Before— in any case to strengthen the ties, the links here. I don't know what our children want to become but— but help each other so that everyone can grow. Grow up no matter the— to have a resource, know where to go in order to— Those who arrive... how do we support them? Of course I can't talk much, since I don't get involved much.

**M.M: Another way.**

R.M: But how do we support those who arrive? It's really adapting; when you're adapting, you don't think about it, but adapting is extremely difficult. And so here you were telling me how to support them, how to support them by showing them what it is like here, how we live here, what we need. How to grow up and get through it— Let's not pretend, to live in western countries you have to have money, you have to have money. I'm not exaggerating, millions. But you have to work minimally. Otherwise it makes you mentally ill. I think they need to be supported by showing them where to go. Of course it is not done overnight but—

**M.M: We need a network that—**

R.M: A strong network but there too there is hope. Because I find that the community begins— not the community, the individuals they are pretty well organized. When you think about what happened and when you see people living, working and evolving, I say to myself: "it's not so bad." And then there are others where you feel like they live in Canada but still have one foot at the end of the world.

**M.M: How to get to them?**

R.M: I don't know. Next step.

**M.M: [Laughs]**

R.M: I don't know, it's sobering.

**M.M.: There is the will, but sometimes there is also knowing that a person is in need. But we have to figure out how to do it.**

R.M: It's part of our culture. We're not, I don't think we're being very honest. It's probably part of our pride, but...

**M.M: We do not ask.**

R.M: Well not very much. They might ask, but they won't necessarily tell you the truth. I really don't know, I don't have a solution for this. It's probably because it's part of the complexity of our world and all that we live, everything we've been through. I don't have an answer. But I think we're gonna have to think about it.

**M.M: Another challenge.**

R.M: Another challenge but it's not very different— It's not just us, if I look at Inuit communities. Everything they are experiencing as problems; perhaps we should go and learn from what is happening elsewhere but I do not have an answer.

**M.M: We are also a recent community.**

R.M: That's right.

**M.M: We can hope that it will age.**

R.M: Well in fact, those who are doing well, are doing well, and those who are not, that too is serious. [laughs] There's like no balance. There is no balance. But don't give up, what can we say?

**M.M: I almost feel that we're at the end then I tell myself that maybe sometimes we ask ourselves questions. We ask— What would I have asked you, what have I forgotten to ask what would you like to add to your interview?**

**02:40:00**

R.M: I don't know. [laughs] I didn't think about it. Anyway, even if you didn't ask me all the questions, I think I covered themes you didn't ask me about [laughs], next interview! I do not know. No, it's fine. I think we've covered everything. What I would have liked to say in terms of— I don't know. How I see my children's future maybe? Through all of this.

**M.M: Yeah.**

R.M: But the question has no answers. [laughs]

**M.M: [Laughs]**

R.M: Listen, I hope they're going to be able to detect what's best in us. And in our culture. And about the culture— I told you of the lady who says: "What country are you carrying." That they will know how to carry their country of origin and their country... well their host country, they were born here. But— that they'll be able to balance all of this and become... To make good people out of them because I believe there is good in each of the cultures. I really wish for them to be able to be open to the world. I don't know, I tell myself all the time and wonder: "What led us there? What led the Rwandan people to kill each other, to get to that point." We're no worse than the others. I've never found answers because locally, despite everything that was going on, we still managed to live together. But— to be able to analyze, hold doubt, think before acting. I wish them that. [laughs] I hope they find that.

**M.M: And what can we wish for you?**

R.M: To live long enough to see them grow! [everybody laughs] That is not complicated.

**M.M: Is there anything more difficult that you still want to achieve?**

R.M: More difficult to realize what do you mean?

**M.M: You know in life you have ambitions, you have things— The course of life as you can see.**

R.M: But I haven't achieved great things. I just realized— anyway. I like what's there. But I haven't realized great things.

**M.M: Please, its already a lot. That is the point!**

R.M: But that's it. But actually I didn't [am not] extremely ambitious. I just wish I could enjoy what I have, and then I guess that's it. I think we have a very similar path.... Imagine going through all this when you look at history, my story, I've come from afar! [laughs] [translator's note: a song title by singer Corneille]

**M.M: But that's it! But this is it! [laughs]**

R.M: We've come from far. To be a balanced person is already— huge.

**M.M: Yeah, listen I hope you live a long life. [everybody laughs]**

R.M: [Laughs] Thank you.

**M.M: To see them grow up and realize their potential and then mine in the best possible way what is left to develop.**

R.M: Yeah. [nod, nod]