



## **Interview with JACQUES RWIRANGIRA**

**Archives vivantes des Rwandais exilés au Canada suite au génocide et aux violences antérieures \ The Living Archives of Rwandan Exiles and Genocide Survivors in Canada / Ubuhamya bw'Abanyarwanda bahungiyeye muri Canada Jenoside n'itotezwa ryayibanjirije**

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**Name of interviewee:** Jacques Rwirangira (J.R)

**Name of interviewer:** Annita Muhimpundu (A.M)

**Name of videographer:** Annie Fréchette (A.F)

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**Editorial note:**

Jacques Rwirangira is seated in a chair. He often begins sentences with “euh...”

**Interviewee biography:**

Jacques Rwirangira was exiled to Burundi with his parents as a young child. He was raised there and came to Quebec as a refugee in 1994 with most of his family.

**00 :00 :13**

**J.R:** [...] My name is Jacques Rwirangira. I am originally from Rwanda and now live in Canada. I've been here fourteen years now—no, no, fifteen soon—anyway. So, basically I arrived in June of ninety-four, in Montreal. A fairly unique process: first refugee, then permanent resident, and then, citizen. Sometimes I wonder, will I eventually become indigenous? [Shrugs shoulders.]

**A.M:** **Can you tell me about your family—mom, dad, how many sisters, how many of you are there?**

**J.R:** A relatively big family, I'd say... four brothers and two sisters, of which I am the eldest. And I'm lucky because I live in Montreal with most of my family, my parents, first of all: my mother, my father, my three brothers, one sister—the other is in Alberta, which is not too far—and another in Rwanda, another brother.

**A.M :** **Are they married?**

**J.R:** Ah, of course! Well, I have two married brothers, one engaged, one who is a dad. The other two, my two sisters, are married. They each have one child, my sister Stella has a boy and my sister Jacqueline has a little girl, Maya. And Stella is expecting a baby soon. Then... in January, the youngest of us, paradoxically, already became a dad, with his son Tsobe. It's a distinctive moniker because it's shortened, it comes from our clan in Rwanda, the Batsobe. So, he wanted to carry on the tradition, in a way, through his son, of our sort of subgroup, called a clan in Rwanda.

**A.M:** **That's interesting. And could you tell me a bit about your grandparents, on your mother's and your father's side? Did you know them?**

**J.R:** Yes, I was lucky enough to know them. On my father's side... of course there's my grandmother, my grandfather, they are both dead unfortunately. One thing in particular is that my grandfather was a great friend of mine. So when he died, I think I had just started secondary school, so I was away at boarding school, and back home, they didn't know if they should tell me or not. Eventually they did, but it was like, a few days afterwards. And, when the person came to tell me, it was like... OK, I looked at them and at first I didn't know where they had gotten this information because it wasn't necessarily someone I knew in my family. Later, I learned that they were quite close. But when they came to see me, I was writing a letter asking how he was doing, because when I had left home, he had been ill. And, I'll never forget, I tore up that letter right there, until you couldn't even read one letter on it. I was so enraged, so angry with my parents. I was like, "No, no, no, he can't go when I'm not there." I wasn't—I mean, I was in shock. That's what it was. That was in the early eighties. My grandmother, she died because of the Rwandan genocide in ninety-four. And on my maternal side, my grandfather died in ninety-

two, specifically. And my grandmother on my mother's side, she is still alive, she lives in Canada, in Ottawa.

**A.M:** Do you remember a bit about their jobs when you were younger? Just now you were saying you were close with your granddad, what was his day-to-day life like?

**00:04 :56**

**J.R:** In the day-to-day I lived, for sure, because I lived with them, my paternal grandparents. I was their neighbour, we were neighbours, because... Well, I don't know where to start actually because a lot of things happened at once. I'm not sure if I should go chronologically but I'll just tell bits here and there. So... They were our neighbours because when we went to Burundi, in seventy-three, my parents having fled the killings in Rwanda in seventy-three, I was still a toddler... So, they were our neighbours because my grandfather had already fled Rwanda in sixty-three. Very, very strange because in sixty-three, at that time he lived in Bugesera, where he had spent about three years, and before that, he lived in the Ruhengeri area where he was a farmer. He was a guy who behaved very properly. At the time, you can imagine, in the sixties, he already had a car, which was a really big deal. He was a farmer by trade. Then, when they fled Ruhengeri—well, they didn't flee, they were forced out. They were “cleared,” actually, if you're familiar with some of the documents on that, on the history of Rwanda. The Tutsi who lived in the north, particularly in the Ruhengeri area, they were cleared out. Then we were deported to Bugesera, which was a completely arid region, basically completely inhabitable, because it was wetlands, but it was almost... a place beyond fertility, because it was also a particularly dry region. And wetlands are not the best place for farming either... But mostly it was a wild place. So we

were deported there. Some were forced into exile. But we brought them there. But it was practically refugee camps within Rwanda. So we were Rwandan refugees in Rwanda, I suppose you could say. The years went by, they tried to organize, and at some point in sixty-three there was the first attack by what we called the *inyenzi*, which was a rebellion of Rwandans, mostly Tutsis, who were trying to return to the country because they were fed up with being refugees, so there you go. They came from Burundi, and Bugesera is just on the border. It's what separates Burundi and Rwanda. In the joy of seeing it... "Oh! The *Inyenzi* are back!" They passed by the little town in Bugesera and kept going, the *inyenzi* I mean, kept going toward Kigali. So he was in the centre of town, in the little shopping centre and there, the *bourgmestre*, who was like the mayor of the place, he was there and he started shouting to people and all that, saying, "Hey! You there, stop!" And he caught him and gave him a couple smacks, and said, "You're finished, it's over for you. Go to your office and wait and see what's going to happen because it's all over." It didn't take long, the rebels were pushed back, and he left with them, that's how he ended up in Burundi. Anyway, so he was our neighbour, my buddy, he had his work, he led a very simple life given the circumstances being a refugee in Burundi. Being as old as he was, he couldn't ply his trade anymore. But he was still a very busy guy, he had his little banana plantation, coffee trees, all that. Especially the banana plantation; he gave me a row of it. He had a row of banana plants that he gave me as a gift. And that was just the holidays before his death. So, we had a fairly unique relationship, you know... And... my grandmother was there, of course. I'll never forget... it sounds pretty silly, but you know kids—I know, generally Africans, we eat pretty spicy food, but not as kids. You couldn't let a single pepper touch the food or nobody would eat it. Especially—I don't know about you, Annie, but Anita probably knows. There was also what we called *im-*

*vange*, which was food—potatoes, bananas, manioc, anything—but mixed, prepared mixed with beans. At our house if they made that, they knew that was it, the kids, we wouldn't touch it. We'd come home to grandma's, she'd prepare whatever meal, we'd scarf it down like pigs. Pepper with... they're these sort of eggplants common in Rwanda and Burundi. We call them *intoryi*, they're pretty bitter anyway, for children's tastes. At our house, nobody could touch that. At grandma's, that's all there was... and we scarfed it down! So, she had ways like that, of making everything sweet, even if it wasn't good elsewhere.

**J.R:** As for my maternal grandparents, unfortunately, for most of my childhood I didn't see them. Because they had fled in the first wave, in fifty-nine and [nineteen-]sixty, to Uganda. So, I never saw them. Because my mother married my father, because she stayed in Rwanda to try to work and to help her brothers and sisters who were in school. Because the others all became refugees. So I never saw them until I took a little trip to Uganda in [nineteen-]ninety. That's the only time I met my grandfather. A really little guy, despite my height, but a natural leader, lots of... presence. I'll never forget, it was a little village, the first I'd been to, it's really a lot of completely destitute little villages of refugees. And so I had to go and see him there because he had gone, and there was a funeral for one of their friends there. So I arrived in the village—this is just a little story, it seems silly but you'll understand why I say he had... so I arrived, and I had already seen... no, not even in photos, I hadn't even seen photos yet. So I arrived there, and it was these, these little huts made out of straw, not even sod where they were. At his friend's place, anyway, it was really just straw from top to bottom. They were sitting there outside the house, it was around five o'clock in the evening, starting to get a bit dark. And there were like, mats and little benches and there was one chair that was relatively a bit higher. And coming back in, I don't know why,

into the enclosure—because I walked a good fifteen metres before... after coming into the enclosure, inside the fence, basically. I was brought straight to the guy sitting on the highest chair. I didn't know why, I had never seen him before. And then... it was him, and... then we got up, had a big hug and all that, lots and lots of tears.

**A.M: How old were you?**

**J.R:** I had just turned maybe, twenty-two, twenty-three. So, lots of tears. With us, we famously cry a lot more out of joy, for example, rather than sadness. And well, no, it was memorable. And then I went with him, we went to the village. That's where I met my grandmother for the first time. And then of course we didn't see each other for a period of time, but then in ninety-four when we left to come to Canada, we came with our maternal grandmother, the grandparent who has stayed with us the longest as it turns out.

**A.M: Memories... So, you've talked a bit about your grandparents. What values did your paternal grandfather give you, like, pass on to you? What has made an impact on you?**

**J.R:** One thing in particular is that he was very kind, he loved people. I think I have a bit of him in me because if there's one thing that interests me in life, it's people. You could tell me, oh wow, we'll pay for you to go and see the pyramids, that's nice and all but if you tell me I have to go alone, honestly, I'll say thank-you but keep your pyramids, I don't need them. But if you tell me I can go with Annie or Anita, then that's fun, then it gets interesting. So, it's that side but especially it's... You can be patient, generous, kind, loving the world but there are certain things you don't touch. It's that side of it, when you go too far, you know, it can be... it doesn't seem like it but when it gets to that point, it gets overwhelming, and that, I think I get a bit of that from him.

**A.M: And your paternal grandmother?**

**J.R:** My paternal grandmother?

**A.M: [Inaudible]**

**J.R:** Oh, yes. That's true, I do like spicy food now and I like it a lot! Really, honestly if you asked me today my favourite food, it's really typical Rwandan food: *imvange*, *ibitoki*, *ibijumba*, I really wouldn't trade it for anything. And it's lucky my mother is still around, so I'm able to go over to her place... anyway, my maternal grandmother, I wonder if you can really capture a particular thing about one grandmother. They're just that special person who loves like no one else can love. Because when you're a kid, you don't really know that mom loves you particularly, well, anyway. For Western societies, maybe it's different. But in Africa, I think in Rwanda particularly, because that's what I know, grandmothers are special. Quite simply, I was her first "husband," or *umugabo wanjye*. Sometimes I think, my good old pal grandfather, he got pushed aside because I was number one. So it's that kind of love that's indescribable, that's at home... When you're getting yelled at and everything... it's almost like, you look Dad in the eye and tell him, "Wait until Grandma gets here, I'm telling on you." It's that, the feeling of protection, that infinite love, you know. Having been fortunate enough to live with her, that's what stays with you, really.

**A.M: And your paternal grandparents, how many children did they have?**

**J.R:** Uh, ten who lived, because in the middle of their family, they had twins who died. So they could have had twelve but they died almost at birth, or very young anyway. So we didn't know them, we don't even know their names or anything, but there were ten of them. Quite something.

You ask me the question and I don't know if it was the trend of the day, but my two grandparents, I mean my two grandfathers, they didn't live in the same area but they had this way of naming children because the names were in vogue. Because both my grandfathers had gone to school for a bit and then they were baptized so they also baptized their children. So they gave them names, but like... on my father's side, all the boys' names started with A: my father, Alfred, his brother Alphonse, Alexandre, Albert, Alexis. On my mother's side, all the guys' names start with A: Alphonse, Albert, Alexis, Alexandre, and so on. On my mother's side, all the girls are named Rose, Rosette, Rosalie, etc. On my mother's [sic: father's] side, it was "Do" instead: Donatilla, Dorothea, and there were Denises too. Anyway, it was odd but it was all A, Ro, A, Do. And it stuck. I don't know how they did it but there you have it. And... what else to say about that...

**00 :19 :55**

**A.M: Did you know them? Your aunts and uncles?**

**J.R:** Yes, that's what I was going to say—I was trying to find the words—because I didn't meet all of them, but most of them at least. Because they, some of them were in Uganda, for example, the younger ones had more mobility. They were able to take on Ugandan identity and were able to travel. For my uncles on the paternal side, and my aunts, some of them... some of them left in seventy-three with my parents. So... then some of them left to go to school in the Congo, which was Zaire at the time. They all came because, without realizing it... incidentally if you know, I don't know if you know that little quirk among family but when we call mom Mukecuru, it's not because it's us, we didn't give her that name—Mukecuru meaning 'that old lady,' 'that old mother.' She was called that before I was born, because she was the big sister. So there were her little

brothers, my father's little brothers, my mother's little sisters, little brothers... her little sisters who lived with us. And even though they were almost as young, but they, they had started working, so they seemed like older relatives all the same. And so, they called my mother Mukecuru and my father was called Mutware. And it's stayed that way up to now; that's what we call them, even us kids. After, well, after some time—when we were young we called them papa, maman. But when we started to grow up a bit, those were the names... So I was lucky to have known them, particularly like, Rosalie and Donatille, at the time, those were my two aunts who lived with us. When I was first born, as a baby, those first few years, I was really spoiled, I was their darling and all that. To the point that at some point, I don't even know what silly thing they did but my dad got angry. He said, "I'm going to kick you out, that's it! Pack your bags and go!" You know, trying to intimidate them a little. Okay, well, they thought, that looked pretty serious. So, they packed their bags—but they packed Jacques' bags too!

**A.M and A.F: [Laugh]**

**J.R:** Because if they were going to leave, it was going to be with Jacques. It would not be them alone... Growing up, I was able to get to know my uncles, some of them in particular. Alexandre Kimenyi, on my mother's side, he lived with us for a period of time when I was finishing primary school. So we were in Burundi at the time—and that was hard. Because for Rwandans, you had to pass with a mark of eighty per cent to go on to secondary school, while the Burundians, the nationals—because we were refugees, basically—while the Burundian nationals could pass with fifty, fifty-two per cent. So anyway, you had to get especially good grades. And Kimenyi was very gifted, and during that time, just before my exams, he would be at home, and he really

put me on the straight and narrow and that really let me work hard, while most people in Burundi... Well anyway, if you happen to meet some of them, it's rare to see folks get to the sixth year of primary and pass the first time without repeating, or even the second or third time. And I did it on the first try, and it was really thanks to him. He always stayed calm, but he had this way of being able to get you to work harder, and when it came to that, he was uncompromising. And he really enabled me to do it, hands down... And growing up, I had another uncle who left an impression on me, who influenced me a lot. So... with all the Burundi-Rwanda chaos and all, in ninety-four we came here, and then there was my uncle who... no, ninety-two... I'm getting it mixed up... No, he left Rwanda, he was in prison with the whole... the famous coup. So, when the Inkotanyi attacked, and they made it seem like all this, there were attacks in Kigali. They rounded up all sorts of Tutsis, including my uncle. By the way, at the same time, I had three uncles, two aunts, and my grandmother who were all put in prison. Anyway that's a little story, given the circumstances because that was before the big... before he died four years later. But he had left in the meantime. So I lived with him in Burundi for some time. He was an interesting man, with an extraordinary vision, very ambitious. He influenced me because up until then, I had really never found I had that leadership quality before, no, it's really something that came from him. And it wasn't because he told me I had to be one. But he told me what he saw in me, in my way of doing things, of looking at things... You don't realize but you really affect things. And I realized that after a long time. You do things and then, you realize that you're putting yourself out front and telling people, "Okay, this is how it's going to go." Yes, that's it. Other aunts, my God... there's my aunt Donatilla, we didn't see each other very often. She is the one who wanted to leave with me and my bags with my aunt Rosalie, the one in Montreal. And... You know when

you meet someone and you know, they're just fun. You just like them and you don't even know why... it's that, yeah. You forget that they're your aunt, you forget they're... But then... my God, the times we had together when I was... how old was I... It was when we fled Rwanda together in seventy-three, we lived together. I never got a beating from my parents, never—almost never. Really. But her, I remember it from her. But other than that, she was my darling, just like I was hers. I don't know how to explain it, but there you go. So yes, but then after... Well, now that I'm in Canada, I have uncles like Tony who are practically the same age as me. The ones like Odette, who are practically younger than me, because like you were saying, because of how many kids they had on each side. On my father's side it's ten, on my mother's side it's eleven. I have a little anecdote that's really, really good: so, because they were having children for so long—like, my maternal grandmother, she had her last baby at the same time as my mother had her third daughter, her third child, and my other aunt Rosalie's first child and they're all the same age, Lisa, Jacqueline and Odette, same year. And so there you have it. So I met my other aunts, mainly on the maternal side, because most of them are here in Canada, and we have a lot in common. Some of them are more like friends than aunts. There's Tony, we really often have fun when we're together, everywhere we go: *mu banyarwanda... umuhungu wanjye w'imfura* [my eldest son]—we're the same age. And on top of that, he's like five-foot-eight while I'm six-two-and-a-half, six-three. So yeah, that's really strange.

**A.M: [Laughs] And when you were younger, with your grandparents, did they ever tell you anecdotes about your dad when he was younger? Memories, *warakubaganaga* [were you rowdy], things like that? Was your father a handful, was he well-behaved?**

**J.R:** That's a really, really good one, yeah, I have to tell you. My father is someone who does not speak, almost not at all. Really, no, you would never use the word chatterbox. You couldn't call him a chatterbox. No, he speaks very plainly. Really only when absolutely necessary. And he's been that way ever since he was a child. And then, when he was around ten years old—no, a bit less—there was this lady who lived with them, who did housework, but I think she was also related to him somehow. And I don't know about you, Annie, but the 'nagging aunt' isn't just from Quebec! We've got her too, terribly.

**A.F:** [Laughs]

**00 :30 :03**

**J.R:** Ah, they're all over, always complaining, they're always complaining: '*Ariko rwose jyewe abantu bahangaha nzabagenza gute muranyanga* [I don't know what to do about people here... nobody loves me].' So, famously tight-lipped as he is, because everywhere, everywhere you go, my father—you go to an event, he says nothing, does nothing. But if you have the chance to chat with him, he'll say something to you and everyone will be there, gather round, we've never seen such a thing. But because he doesn't talk, he observes, he sees things no one else sees. So he was one of the people who actually paid attention to what this lady was saying. Basically, she was complaining and saying, 'Oh no, I'm sick of this life, I want to get out of here, this is no life, ugh, I'd rather die. Nobody loves me here, nobody wants to take care of me. Nobody even cares, you might as well take a machete and cut me down, and I'll die, I'll go.' So the astute little guy, that got into his head. Some time later, he went and got—I mean, he was a kid—he got a little knife that we called a *serpette*... The kind you use for...

**A.M: ... cutting grass.**

**J.R:** Yeah, but not the sharpest one, it was one you use for removing grass when you're sweeping the terra cotta courtyard, that kind of thing. It was all rusty, no good, not sharp. But for him, he heard her say *serpette*. He went and got the *serpette* and she had asked for it on her neck, so he went up to her with all the strength of a little child and hit her on the neck with it.

**A.F: [Laughs]**

**J.R:** And at that, she went, *sinababwiye* [I told you so]. Look, even their kids are trying to kill me...

**A.F and A.M: [Laugh]**

**J.R:** So yeah, that's the interesting side of him. It's an anecdote that sort of reflects his personality even today: calm guy off in the corner, listening, observing everything, but he doesn't do anything silly like that anymore, he's grown up. But another thing is that he did get into mischief, I don't remember why... So there are these things, *ibiseke*, what is that in French? They're these big... A big sort of basket that we used to have, but they came with lids. They're made in really a triangle shape, a bit like my hats, like that, anyway. So they're looking everywhere for him because he's in trouble. He's thinking, that's it, I'm finished. So he runs, jumps into the basket, takes the cover and puts it on. But it doesn't really work because he's a bit too big for the basket. So then, grandpa's looking all over for him, but at the same time, he still has to watch where grandpa's looking in case he comes to look in there and then, maybe it's time to run.

**A.F and A.M: [Laugh]**

**J.R:** So while he was in there, grandpa's looking everywhere for him. When he goes one way, of course my father moved to watch him. But then the lid was moving with him because it was stuck on his head [all laugh]. So everyone burst out laughing on the other side. And my grandfather was getting annoyed, he said, "You're all laughing—he's goofing around, and on top of that you're laughing, don't you understand?" But no one dared say why they were laughing, which made it twice as funny, and he's starting to get annoyed. And then, from where he was hiding, it's like he was saying, "Don't laugh, don't laugh." But there you go... At some point, he fell out of the basket, and then, my grandfather, seeing him coming out of there, he started laughing too. And that's how that ended [laughs]. Anyway...

**A.M:** [Laughs] **Those are great anecdotes. Children are funny, really funny—funny stories, that relationship, the family love and all that. How would you describe the relationship between your parents? Between Mom and you, her son Jacques. The relationship between your Dad... Does it bring up emotions...?**

**J.R:** Uh... I don't know how to say it. [Pause.] Dad isn't someone who talks a lot. With Dad, he'll tell you something, once in a while, maybe once every few years. Well, on a regular basis when we were kids, of course, certainly things we weren't supposed to do. And... Even with hitting, not really hitting, I don't know how to say it... Even when we were kids, he'd come, he'd have something to say, everything was blocked, a smack, you go like this [turns head], a kick in the pants and that's it, you get the message. Because you know, you know if you were making trouble... But he wasn't one to stick his nose too-too far into his children's business. Some things, he absolutely did: school meetings, he was on the parents' committee, things like that.

Basically, he was an authority, but... without being on you all the time, “bugging” you, to use that expression. But you feel that he’s there, so, you know... he’s on the parents’ committee, he knows all the teachers, the principal is his buddy, I’m better off not goofing around at school because he’ll find out. So you choose where you’re going to instead and... well, okay, everywhere you go you have friends. In the end it’s like... well, it’s preventative. Personally I’d say it works more as a preventative measure than as a punishment exactly. I used to see—this has nothing to do with my story, but when you talk about speeding in Quebec, you know, on the road—there’s this thing that works really well in Europe, I don’t know if folks have already heard of it or seen it... But they put cardboard police officers up on the highway. It’s simple: someone sees them, they flash their lights at other drivers, and they slow down, by the time they realize, oh! It’s a deterrent, basically. That’s a stretch but it’s sort of like that... My mother, she wasn’t more punishing, but she was very present. Very, very present, okay... Very present. You couldn’t get rid of her, no way, you’d answer her! She’d ask why this, why that. You had to, yeah... You had to give a full report. And at the same time, in the same vein, actually... You always knew that you would have to give a full report. You had to be prepared so that things would go over well sometimes.

**A.M: When it did go over well, was she encouraging, with hugs and kisses? I imagine your Mom gave you more of those...**

**J.R:** Yeah... I don’t know if I’d say that. My parents, they weren’t the sort of parents to spoil their kids, just to spoil them... like, *gaga*, no. But at the same time, when we were kids and even growing up, we never wanted for anything. We never wanted for anything and we always had enough. We didn’t grow up... I didn’t grow up in need. So much so that I think it’s something

that had a big influence on me sometimes, and it can even be negative at times because I really don't envy people. Okay. And so that, I think, that really comes from childhood, that I don't envy people. Okay, he did this, he got that. Okay, well that's his business, I'll have my own and it'll come. You know the sort of thing, you know, you got to this point and someone else, they got to there, someone else got that. Okay, fine, good for them, congratulations! It doesn't bother me to congratulate someone who's having their moment. But I don't envy them, I don't feel a shred of jealousy. And that, I think, is the result of upbringing, how they raised us, because we were never in need. So we never felt like we had to have what another person had, and another, and another... You have what you have because that's what we have and it's fine just like that.

**A.M: And their fears or worries, did they let onto that? For example, when they were afraid, could you kids feel it? Did you hold back?**

**J.R:** Here's an anecdote... well, one that I was there for, another I was not. So, as a young couple, well, actually I'd already been born, and even Gilles too, I think—not Jacqueline yet, but with all the younger brothers and sisters-in-law and brothers-in-law living with us, at my parents'. One evening, or night, I should say, the girls are there, Mom is staying up with them, but my father, he's already asleep because he works the next morning and has to get up really, really early—because he had to be up by around five-thirty, five o'clock in the morning almost every day. So at one point, there's all this noise in the living room, it's too loud, he gets up. He gets out of bed, comes into the living room, and says, "Can someone explain to me exactly what is going on in this house? Really, it's what, eleven o'clock at night?"—I don't know what time it was—"I'm trying to sleep, the kids are trying to sleep, and here you are screaming like this for

no reason, what is the meaning of this?” And they all got quiet at that and then, he notices, it’s strange, they’re not sitting relaxing on the sofas. No, it’s like they’re each off in their own corner... Maybe he thought, oh, did I scare them away when I got up? No, I didn’t scare anyone off... anyway. So then, one of his sisters-in-law says, “No, it’s just that, there’s a mouse over there, it’s right there!” And he says, “Well, really... A mouse, that’s what’s causing this hysteria that has you all cowering in the corner? Up on chairs... this is unbelievable. You’re screaming like that while people are sleeping, kids and everything. I have to work in the morning.” And while he’s making this speech, really grilling them, the mouse comes out and runs across the room. And he’s not as tall as me, but almost, and he jumps up with both feet onto the table!

**A.M and A.F: [Laugh]**

**J.R:** Right up there, a real athletic feat. And everyone was like [grimaces]. What? And nobody said anything. He got down from the table, went back to bed. Can we put that into the ‘fear’ category? If you like. But I think [laughs] other than that, yes, they had fears. Personally I think it’s like this with all parents, and I saw this a lot with them: they’re much more afraid for their children. I think that’s the biggest fear I saw from them. These are people who were very hardworking and the worry was always, ah, are the kids going to be okay, are the kids going to be okay? I think that’s the big fear. Other than bugs, because my youngest brother, one time, he had some fun with that. My mother is afraid of bugs, but like, unbelievably so.

**00 :45 :05**

**J.R:** So, I don’t know if you know inyongos... They’re, they’re millipedes, millipedes is what they’re called. But millipedes in Africa, not the millipedes with... Because here, when we talk

about millipedes, we think of those ones with the scales and spikes on them. No, no, these ones are smooth, yeah. The ones made up of rings and when you touch them, they automatically curl up on themselves, so you can hold them in your hands. It's like you're holding a little piece of plastic or something. So us kids, we'd pick them up, we had fun with them. So my little brother, the youngest, he was playing one day gathering them up and he went to go show Mom. 'Ah, Mom, I have something for you, I have something for you.' And poor sweet Mom, she held out her hand. She held it out, he put it in her hand... and oh, her dress, her pagne was flying, "Papa!"... He thought that was really funny. So after that, whenever he was mad at her, it was "You wait... Gonna get another millipede, you'll see..." Anyway, fears. Yes, those bugs, yes.

**A.M: [Laughs] That's very funny, this is a great interview. And speaking of your childhood, and your parents, who... Who was more involved in raising you? Who—who made the decisions at home?**

**J.R:** Well, I think I already mentioned this earlier. My father, with his deterring ways, you know he's there, you feel it, without him really... But my mother was really very present. And yeah, I think you find that in a lot of families, especially Rwandan ones. But that's more or less it. But they were always very present people, people who... yeah.

**A.M: Was there a difference between how they raised the girls and the boys? At home, especially with your Mom and Dad, did you feel like there was a difference with the boys and the girls in a way? Were you treated the same way?**

**J.R:** You know, with my father, I never heard any of the classic phrases coming from him, the ones you often hear: "Hey, no, you don't do that, you're a boy, you're a boy. A boy has to act like

this”—no. Now, it’s true that he didn’t say much of anything. But besides that, it wasn’t his goal, it wasn’t the classic way of telling what you were allowed to do, no. It was doing the right thing. Here, I’ll give you an example: There was a family who were neighbours and friends of ours, the man worked with my father, his wife—my father’s colleague’s wife, well, he was practically his boss. They were almost at the same level but he was still above my father. So his wife, she was a cousin, a distant cousin, of my mother’s. She wasn’t her first cousin or anything, but they were really the people we were closest with, who we spent the better part of our youths with—I’m talking like, primary school, secondary school, all of that. We lived in this little neighbourhood, we were a bit of a ways outside of the city of Bujumbura. And where we lived, it was more... Because my father was a farmer, right, so he was working on a project for the Belgians, which was in Burundi. So we lived outside of the villages, close to the countryside, so for neighbours we really just had... his colleague’s family. And in our house, it was always, you have to respect one another, you have to respect people especially when they are older than you, whether they’re the worker out in the fields, the very lowest rank—as long as they were a grown-up, I had to show that grown-up respect, full stop. So if you were really getting disciplined at our house, it would be when you disrespected someone, when you insulted someone, when you... You know, when you were making silly kid jokes that went there, that’s when you got a thrashing in our house. However... In the neighbour family—neighbours, friends, all that—they had kids who were insubordinate and completely rude to everybody. But, unlike us, their father, if a kid broke a glass in their house, out came the belt, it was a full beating, he beat them half to death, almost made them bleed. So, when you’re talking upbringing, that’s how it was. Those are the kinds of comparisons I experienced, you see that and you think okay, that’s your choice, there are differ-

ent perspectives, but no, you can't kill a kid because of a mistake... because he played with a glass! But then when you insult someone, for example, stupid things like, they would set... They would see peasants passing in the street and set their dogs on them, just to see what happens... If I had done that, in our house, they'd have killed me, that's for sure. It's those kind of things that were completely unthinkable. Okay, did we goof around? Yes, in a sense, but not really at anyone's expense. For example, I remember, where we lived, there was a big pass where herds of cattle would pass by everyone in the village to go grazing. We really had all sorts of animals there. You know, normal farm animals, but we even had wild ones, like guinea fowl, partridges, black crowned cranes, a monkey, all sorts. Anyway we enjoyed ourselves with the passing herds of cattle. We'd bring the monkey down and throw it into the herd. Just picture forty cows all running away furiously. That was the kind of mischief we got up to, but it wasn't to hurt anyone. But yeah, anyway... we weren't exactly saints either!

**A.M and A.F: [Laugh]**

**J.R:** But yes, that's about it. Coming back to upbringing.

**A.M: And at home, were girls and boys the same? Were there things, household chores for example, did you do the dishes? I imagine you had a house boy?**

**J.R:** During... well, we didn't have one, we had maybe six or seven, I don't remember, there were loads of them. But during the holidays, we all had chores. We would send them to do other things, but you'd get up in the morning... no, no it was all the same. If it was my turn to sweep the yard, I swept the yard. Normally—traditionally, let's say, that's a job for the girls. No, at our house, you just did it. It's my turn to iron the clothes? Yes, I'll do the ironing. My turn to wash

the saucepan after cooking? Yes, I'll do it. Yes, we did it all. All the children had to take a turn doing everything. We had to do it all, everyone in turn, no difference. But for sure... On the other hand, in our play, in our games, the girls would gather around with their dolls and it was like, whatever. And we would play ball, or go throw the monkey into the herd of cattle, and so on...

**A.M:** And from the outside, how were your parents perceived by others? Neighbours, colleagues...

**J.R:** Very well. Very well, like... [Pause] Even as an adult, when people call my mom by her name, her first name, it surprises me every time. Because when I was growing up, all the grown-ups, even sometimes ones older than her, they all called her *maman*. Some people, people from elsewhere or something, or old mothers, like Rwandan ones—there weren't many in our area—but with them it was *umukobwa wanjye* [my daughter], something like that, *mukazana* [daughter-in-law]... I always felt that there was a touch of name, of respect, when they called my mom those things. Anyway, I remember, when there were still... When we started having meetings, when Rwandans were trying to band together because in Burundi, it was still terrible because we were persecuted for anything at all. Since the Tutsis, who were in power, had the protection of the army and all, but the Hutu were still angry, they always set their sights on Rwandan Tutsis. So at some point, we had to get together, you know, find ways to organize. And then, when there were Rwandan moms coming to have these meetings, I would hear, *niko Ro* [Hey, Rose]... My God, *Niko Roza we*, that like, that felt insulting to me, the meetings would end and I would say, "Mom, do you have to have meetings with these people? They don't even respect you!" You see what I mean? Because, it wasn't because they didn't respect her, they were just the same age as

her, maybe even older, it was just that I wasn't used to hearing my mom called by her first name like that. No! For the people in my immediate family, like I said, with my uncles, my aunts, it was *Mukecuru* [old lady], which is like Mom, Auntie, anything like that. So it was people who were called... who were really regarded with a lot of respect. My father was either *Mutware* [boss] or, generally in the outside world, he was called by his job title, Farmer. I didn't see people coming up going, "Hey, Alfred Rwirangira." No, no, it was Farmer, *Mutama* [old man], *Mutware* [boss]. You know, it's that kind of thing, and I think that yes, you can call people those things insincerely or something, but you never felt any insincerity. I remember when things started getting bad, like in ninety-three and all that... There were people who were really... after our skins, pushed and emboldened enough that they were saying, "No, no, no, they've put up Kagame back home, let's go and attack them." And that was one of the most turbulent areas of Burundi when we were there. "Oh, no, no, we're going to attack them with grenades, with guns, everything—we'll knock down their big house that looks like a church"—that's what they called it, anyway. And at some point... but no matter what they said, even that same afternoon, my parents would know about it. There was always somebody, someone they knew who would tell them everything they said. So it's that kind of respect, that kind of love that's really sincere because, and that's really what saved them, really, really, really, because there was always someone there to say, "Something's going on, something's going on."

**A.M: Do you think—if I can back up a little bit... You said your mother and father met in Rwanda, because your mother stayed in Rwanda. Did they get married in Rwanda, then move to Burundi and you were born in Burundi?**

**J.R:** Exactly. So, they got married in Rwanda... They got married in Rwanda... in sixty-six... Well, they kept working in Rwanda, they were living in Butare. In seventy-three, then things got nasty, sort of like in the sixties and in fifty-nine. Because there, for several years, well it's all in the Rwandan historical archives, anyone can read it. Basically, the problem was that the Hutus in the South had taken power and they'd kept it for themselves. But this time, it was the Hutus in the North who were mad at them, but they had to show that, "Look, what you're doing isn't working, even if a lot of the Tutsis have left, all their children, all their youths, they took them all with them, you're not controlling anything," all that kind of thing, "You're sharing with the Tutsis." So they had to find scapegoats, and... So that's when they left again, and they fled to Burundi, and anyway.

**A.M: So you went to school in Burundi?**

**J.R:** For the most part.

**A.M: And going back a bit to before, where were you in terms of education, with regards to neighbours and especially education at home from your parents. Do you think it would have been different in Rwanda? Is that something typical in Rwanda at all?**

**J.R:** No.

**1 :00 :03**

**J.R:** Yes, actually, somewhat, because I don't think they got it from any special school anywhere, no. It's more something that came from the upbringing they had, that forged their characters, their ways of seeing things, thinking, understanding things. And the desire to educate their chil-

dren as well, in a sense. No, I think it's in the continuity. Would I say it's a matter of "calquing" [gestures scare quotes] one way of doing things over another, a Rwandan education? I don't know if I'd say that. But... I'm simply saying... I think it's universal values. I think you find it everywhere, in Iceland, in France—well, minus the volcanoes. In France, Italy, wherever. I think you can educate children in that way. I don't think that—well, maybe they would have done it in Kinyarwanda. Others have their own languages. But I find it almost touches on universal values. It also depends a great deal on people's temperaments, how they want to do things, you know.

**A.M: On love, upbringing, and so on... Is there someone from your childhood, and up until now, a brother or a sister, one of your siblings who made an impact on you? A particularly memorable personality, a particular influence?**

**J.R:** Oh, yes. Well, they all made an impact on me in their own ways... luckily nothing bad... I don't know what to tell you. It's so... I don't have a [snaps fingers] a clip that I can pull out just like that. Maybe that will come with time. But... I have brothers and sisters, and there's something very unique between us. For one thing, with all of us, we're not the kind of brothers and sisters who are always arm in arm all the time, going "Oh, what did you do, what did you eat today?" No. It's not like that, no. We fundamentally respect each other's bubbles. In a really particular way. We love each other very much. I think all brothers and sisters love each other. But I know that we love each other very much. Of course, depending on personalities, there are certain affinities. There'll be one that you, I don't know, have more to do with, who you're more comfortable talking about one subject or another with. But yes, all the brothers and sisters in any

family love each other, love each other very much. But they fight a lot. They can fight. Fighting is almost non-existent with us, my brothers and sisters. Really, no! As adults, I can't say we ever fight. It doesn't happen. Okay, there might be a disagreement because we're talking about a particular subject. But a fight... no... "I'm going to have to take my phone and call Jacqueline because she's fighting with Gilbert to try and smooth it over," no. That doesn't happen. But that, I think, is a direct consequence of the respect that we have along with the love. Respect for the bubble. I don't know where that comes from, where it came from. I don't know if it's the excellent upbringing, the having to respect a person no matter what. But there is a very, very, very special core to it. But beyond that, yes, brothers and sisters influence you in all kinds of ways. Some will do things, and you think, how brave, and you'll find that inspiring. Some will do things and you think they're very courageous. It's inspiring. Some will maybe do something foolish and you'll say, that's a lesson. I didn't know that existed but when you see it in your own back yard, you see it does exist and you say... But it all happens with a certain serenity to it... I don't know if you even know most of my brothers and sisters. I have one sister who's married to a Beninese man, I have a brother who's married to a Cambodian woman. My other brother is married to a French woman. I mean, she's his girlfriend, his fiancée. I have my other sister, whose husband is a Quebecer. And actually, I think that kind of goes along with that respect for one another. Because otherwise, if you're out there trying to influence everybody else, you might end up like, ah, okay, everybody going the same way. But I think it's also in line with a family that listens. We respect each others' choices. We support each other one hundred per cent in our choices. Even foolish ones, we just say, "Get back on the right track." That's another way of being supportive. Yeah... Last year was a really special moment, because I saw my brother who I

hadn't seen for nineteen years, and it was when he was getting married. Reunions, and wasn't that your question? Yes, that made an impact on me—that's not in the way you meant but it made an impact. [Laughs]

**A.M:** ... Now that you're here, are there things that... What do you miss about... let's say, your house, the location, the neighbourhood, the neighbours. Now that you're here, what do you miss from your childhood?

**J.R:** As strange as it might sound, it's not far from the pyramids. For me, it's places like that [shrugs shoulders]. The world around, interesting.

**A.M:** When you were young, did you play with all the children in the neighbourhood, or was it more so your parents inviting children to your house, or possibly going out to play with other children outside?

**J.R:** As I was saying earlier when I was describing our neighbourhood, we were definitely there by coincidence. We ended up there but we could have been in town. Maybe it wouldn't have happened that way, but where we did live, we were sort of in a, quote-unquote, "league of our own." Yes, we played with the other children when we went to school, right, I remember, we had these shoes. And at the first street corner, we'd take them off, because most people didn't have them and it sucked because you'd get them dirty. Like when you played in the sand, or played ball everywhere and all that...

**A.M:** In the dust.

**J.R:** ... In the dust. You'd get yelled at for getting your shoes dirty, no problem, take them off. But at the same time I think it was a way to put yourself on the same level as the others...

**A.M: Even at that age you...**

**J.R:** And... I don't know, I think... Well, it was the best way to do it because if you got them dirty, those shoes, or if you wore them out too fast, you'd get yelled at at home. Okay, so... as long as you take them off, you can do your thing like normal, have fun with your friends like normal. Before you get home, you hide them, clean them off, put them back on. No one sees, no one knows, it's all good. But aside from that, to come back to your question, as a younger child, it's not really the case, but I saw it more... As an adolescent, okay, you sort of start to have your friends, your real friends. No, I have very, very good memories. At every stage of my life, at every age, I really have memories that... Yes, I'd get home when my friends were getting home, they'd be welcome over. It wasn't going off to run around the street. No, no, no, okay, it was—we had them over. It's true that we were a bit far away. But when they did come, we had friends over. They'd be like, ah, okay, we were over at Jacques' and it was good, the food was good and his mom was there and gave us this, and it was so, there was this special meal we ate. [Coughs]. As I got older, it was the same thing. I remember when I started university, we went down with my friends from Bujumbura, we went to Cibitoke, in Rugombo... which is about, what, sixty kilometres away! No, they came out, and when we got back to campus, they told everyone how well they were treated and all that. Pretty much everyone wanted to come visit, could we organize a neighbourhood picnic, all that. So look: no, it was at my house. Just to say that, yes, our friends were welcome at our house. Yes, they were treated well. And they were recognized...

And not necessarily, no, like we were there doing our own thing. But when the time came, time to eat, to drink... You could tell that yes, when a kid left there, they'd say, okay, we were like family and the parents were... they came and they talked to us, we were guests. And it was really like that.

**A.M:** Could you tell us about your time at school?

**J.R:** Ah, well... Very disappointing. Super bright in primary. I remember when I was a kid, I was second, third... terrible. I got to secondary, went through adolescence like everyone, grades dropped and all that. But towards the end, still very high marks. But again, the system in Burundi *sucked*. But I still finished with good marks in secondary school. But I didn't get into the program I wanted to, which was... okay, at one point, I tried to cheat, and there were people you could go to and say, "Can you pull some strings for me?" And I got into the faculty I wanted. But after that, I was found out. It was a mass revelation, there were a lot of people. They put a stop to it that year. Afterwards, I went back, and it still went well. Even... when—before I left Burundi, I was finishing my bachelor's, the equivalent of a bachelor's. I hadn't finished writing my thesis. But we had to flee, so we went. So I arrived in Quebec, and at first, I enrolled here, thinking, "Oh, got to keep going, got to finish it." But then you get caught up in real life here. Okay, you don't have the scholarships yet. Oh no, okay, no. So you have to stop because you don't even have a job. We arrived here in ninety-four. I don't know if there are people here who... no, you were young. But it's strange. The thing I remember about Montreal when we arrived... You couldn't pass two blocks of apartments—no, not two blocks of apartments, you couldn't look at one block of apartments, and when you'd go [lifts head] in the windows, and not see "for rent."

Montreal was empty. I don't know if there was some kind of movement, I don't know about the economics at the time... And it was really terrible, there were no jobs. I remember when we arrived in Montreal, we would go to the temp agencies at six in the morning, no, it was a little before six. We'd stay there and wait for them to give us job placements, day labourer jobs. It wasn't getting you a whole job, no, just for the day. Oh, and by around eight, you could be sure that all the jobs for the morning were taken. So they'd tell us to leave at eight-thirty to hang around just in case, when we came back... At one o'clock, we'd be back to wait for the afternoon's jobs, so the three to eleven o'clock shifts. We'd wait and sometimes we wouldn't get anything and we'd go home. Over and over. It was pretty tough. So, honestly, my arrival in Canada didn't go very well. Okay. I can't use that as an excuse because you always have to overcome and find ways to get by. But the real problem, like you said, was to do with the whole school thing. At a certain point, I was able to have access to scholarships but I live in an apartment, I'm alone, I can't do it. At a certain point, you're not getting the grades anymore, so you say, "I'm going to quit, I'm going to get a job." Honestly, I'd say in that respect, personally, organizationally, my adjustment was not easy. It might have looked like it was going well. I even helped a lot of other people make it work. But I didn't help myself. Honestly, in that respect, it wasn't great.

**A.M:** But originally, at university in Rwanda, what program was it that you wanted to do?  
**And what did you end up doing in the end?**

**J.R:** ... Well, I did end up doing it afterwards, in Burundi, so I did do it. I did what's called Institute of Management Control. That was really the vision, because I wanted to be an accountant. Like an auditor, a CPA. So, that was the program that I also continued with here, it's just that, you know, you get into the program but then, you get into your second year... Okay, you have to find an accounting firm that will give you internships because otherwise you're never going to graduate. You're disillusioned at every turn. You try to talk to your professors, and oh, no, you just have to go knocking on doors at firms. But I don't know any, I have no references. Okay, but that's because... At a certain point you think, really, these little barriers, no, no, no. I'm really not proud of that because I didn't succeed. Okay, I should have, should have found ways to overcome. Listen, we may have escaped wars, but this—I didn't win this one.

**A.M:** You can't win every war.

**J.R:** Well, no. You can lose battles, but win the war. This was a battle I lost. And it carried a lot of weight in the battle—in the war, I mean. But still, the better part of the war is life: I'm alive, I'm doing fine, I'm carrying on well. As Annie was saying, at my age, I can't complain. I'm carrying on fine, I'm in good health. I'm in good shape and... *there must be more to come. Why not?*

**A.M:** Were there teachers who encouraged you or discouraged you, in your time at school?  
**Were there certain teachers who really...**

**J.R:** In life?

**A.M:** In your time at school... relationships you had with your teachers, were you anyone's favourite student, first in your class, or what... What was your relationship like with your teachers?

**J.R:** More often than not it was pretty good... There was one... But that was when I was a teenager. I had just finished my third year of secondary, or I was finishing it. But he wasn't my teacher, he just came sometimes to observe, for discipline and all that. But at the time, look, you're a teenager, you're this fit little guy, I got lots of exercise, and... I'd get in trouble. And he was this teacher who was still relatively young, so... well, I think, I think he was a bit young, a bit jealous, anyway. So at one point he was always trying to catch me in some situation to try and punish me. But I had my ways around.

**1 :20 :13**

I remember, back then, one time he was catching people who were making trouble. I think it was... just before going into class, we were lining up. And so he was catching people who were making trouble, and he tried to include me with them. And I said, "I'm sorry, I was not with them. You can ask them, they'll tell you that I was the one who let them know you were coming. I saw you from far away, I wasn't with them, not at all." The others were like, okay. So he comes back and he goes, "Okay, you. I'll see you next year," because the next year, when we came back for fourth year, he was the one teaching the math class and he had a reputation for being really, really tough. But I was still relatively good. And at the time, we did the class... because in Africa, I don't know about here... You took the class from September to June, all year. Then you did your final exam, and if you passed, it was all good; if you didn't, you had another chance to

redo it at the end of the summer. Anyway, he failed me. But really, like, at a certain point, it was just so I would have to work all summer and redo my exam. Really, I did my exam, just to give you an idea, he failed me with a forty-nine. And I did my exam at the end of the summer and, honestly, I hadn't even worked that hard, but I passed with an eighty-nine or a ninety, something like that. And I looked at that and, in the moment, it was like, ugh, that's so annoying. But afterwards, you look back and you think, okay, maybe it was just a way of saying, in life, you shouldn't be a smartass. You don't necessarily have to challenge everybody unnecessarily—but, well, not unnecessarily, but... you take a step back. Because, I did sort of scoff at him that time, when he said, "You were with them." I could have just accepted the punishment. After all, it was most of my friends who were there, that were going to do it. But it was because he had this thing, and I knew very well that sometimes he would say stuff about me, oh, Jacques, with all his stuff... with his girls... I mean, we were teenagers, *anyway*. After that there was another teacher, also math. He thought... I mean, he made me—he made me feel like I wasn't good enough. And by this point, it was really an algebra class, analysis, and we'd do functions and all that, limits, derivatives, all that stuff. And one time, he gave us a question, but it was like a word problem, so: "I have a sheet of metal, of—I don't know—a certain size. I have to make the maximum number of cans out of it, of a certain height and with circular bases of a certain size... What is the maximum number of cans I can make?" So I used functions, limit equations, derivatives, and I got my answer. So then, of course, he goes, "Okay. What are your answers?" So he collects them, and you had people who were really good, your Thomases and all that. And it didn't work. So then, it seemed like, okay... and after a bit he said, "Does anyone have something else?" [Raises hand] "Okay, go on, ha-ha! What are you going to do?" I went up to the board,

wrote out my thing, and he stands there speechless, totally speechless. And from that moment on—well, it was actually my last year of secondary. But I had earned so much respect from that guy, so much that like three, four years ago he came here, to Canada. He had some particular purpose with, I don't know, something about Rwanda. And he called me. And I don't know... For me, he was the guy who didn't take me seriously, who really underestimated me. And there we were, talking on the phone. And then I went to see him, man to man, and this time we got a beer. And he said to me, "Do you remember this thing, that thing, you did in class?" Okay. I kept quiet, here was the guy who underestimated me. Sure, that day, he was singing my praises. But to see that, almost twenty years later... Okay, sure, maybe he was looking for people he knew in Africa who wanted to reconnect in Montreal, which is normal, but the fact that he brought up that anecdote... okay, anyway.

**A.M: It was memorable for him.**

**J.R:** Yeah. And it was memorable for me too, it's just that after, well... In the moment, I felt proud because I thought, I can take this thing, that's completely pointless. And when you take it—because the thing is, I always hated math. I found it completely pointless. But even if it seemed completely pointless, I had found a way to apply it to a real problem. And it was like, no, this is good, *anyways*...

**A.M: Speaking of math, was there a particular subject you liked in school?**

**J.R:** It's all rather complicated, for me. With math, there was this pointless side to it that I never liked. So even when I got to economics classes, when it came to doing probabilities... Because, for me, it was like, "Why are you asking me to calculate the probability? Okay, so it's probable.

It might happen, but that's as much as you can say. Why are you asking me that? If it happens, it happens." I don't know, that side of it can be... But other than that, I always really liked geography and biology. Those were my favourite classes, and they had nothing to do with it. One is almost closer to the humanities, the other you're in the sciences. But on the other hand, don't even talk to me about chemistry, which is very, very close to biology. Anyway. Do I make any sense? Maybe not, but hey...

**A.M: Let's talk about your social life, your professional life. What was your first job when you were younger? Did you have your first job here in Canada, or was it in Africa?**

**J.R:** In Africa, my first paid job... I had gone to work in the agricultural plantations where my father was the manager. So we were picking coffee beans, but that didn't last long. It didn't work out, I couldn't do it. It appeals to kids but it was hard. And after that, I worked a bit in Burundi. I would do accounting work for companies until they found their real accountants, or do taxes and all that. Or banks. I would do the bookkeeping work, the big books, the ledgers. Preparing the financial statements, but on a very basic level, for businesspeople. They didn't know how to put it into the proper accounting form, so if they had to meet with a financial advisor or tax people or something, or even the accountant who was going to sign their books at the end of the line. And I'll never forget, the first time I did this it was at this company that was altogether pretty well established. We were doing inventories and transposing them into accounting terms. So, writing them up to create a stock management profile. And after that, when I was working more with accounting books... I went back, and it was this Pakistani guy, it was his business. One of the richest, most loaded guys in Burundi. So I got there, and there were these two big soap boxes full of

papers. So I get there, I'm like, what's the job? It's that. It's what? It's that: *Fanya* [do] accounting. He spoke a bit of swahili, *fanya* accounting. You're doing the accounting. I said, "But this..."—"These are my receipts for purchases... These are my receipts from renting out what I bought. This is what I sold." Okay. "Do you have your books, or...?" "Well, isn't that your job?" Okay... So that was really strange, I went in, keep my head down, a job's a job, I'm making money. And so I spend the whole day working on this. I try to look like I'm writing things down but honestly there's not much to write because I don't really know where to go with this. The second day, I fill out some other forms. He comes by, how's it going, it's going well, I tell him [sighs, gives thumbs up]. So by the end of the second day, I'm thinking, ah, come on Jacques... So I say to him, *by the way*—because that's just normal accounting practices when they're there. There's always the update for the bankers, the update for the taxes. It's part of the jargon. So I say, perfect... I wanted to ask, last year, how were your books overall? Did you end up with losses or gains? And with finances, with the ministry of finances, so taxes, what did you pay? And what about at the bank? Do you have your books from previous years? And he says, yes, of course! So he gets it out for me. So, perfect... so, I didn't copy it, but it put me on the right track. And when he hired me, he said you have three weeks to do this. One week and two days, not even, I finished it, *tight!* And I said, for the bank, it's this. For taxes, it's this. And he looked and it was even better. So then at the end, towards the end, "Compared to last year, do you want to be a little more, or a little less? What's your current strategy? Ah, ah, okay, okay, perfect. That's what you want, perfect." I adjusted it all perfectly. The documents, too, it'll be like this. That was my, one of my first jobs and it was the most fun. That's what I really wanted to do. But when I arrived here, I was disillusioned. I thought that I could just throw myself in, find myself a job

just like that. But nothing is recognized. You've been in school but you have to start over in first year, like... When I came here, I was finishing my internship at a bank in Bujumbura. Listen, in the six months after that, I was working as a credit agent at a bank, or doing automated foreign trade. Not a teller, no, it was automated. But you come here, zero. Okay, but that's all part of it. We won the war.

**A.M: It's never too late to win the war. I'm wondering, at what age did you leave your family? When you arrived here in Canada in ninety-four, did you come with your family or were you on your own?**

**J.R:** No, we arrived at the same time.

**A.M: The same time.**

**J.R:** Yeah, it was really great. We hit the jackpot, really. We were very, very lucky there because we arrived, I had two... I had my brother and my sister who were already here. Then my other brother who is in Africa, the one who was in Rwanda who stayed in Africa. But everyone else: my father, my mother, my two brothers, my little sister Stella, we came here, *one shot*. My grandmother too. Yeah, that was good.

**A.M: You were saying you had some hard times, living in an apartment and all that. At what point did you leave your family to live on your own?**

**J.R:** Ah, that was a long time ago. Because for me, ever since I started secondary school, at thirteen, fourteen years old, okay, I went home for the holidays, but I always lived at boarding

school. In university, I lived on my own, and even when I came to Canada I had my own apartment.

**A.M: Then, when you arrived in Montreal, you met the Rwandan community. You met others, from many cultures, I imagine. In the Rwandan community, was there mutual support? Were there people who helped you with integration? What was the Rwandan community like?**

**J.R:** Good. I don't know, it was so complexe, you know. There's these people, and you feel comfortable with them. I got involved very, very quickly in our community. Just as well with grown people as with young people. I felt like I belonged. As far as integrating myself into the community, my God, I'd say A+. Because it went really well. But in the community, if we're talking about community are we talking about the community in a broader sense in Quebec, in life in general in Quebec? Was that your question or was it more the community within the community?

**A.M: The question was about the Rwandan community.**

**J.R :** Well [gestures].

**A.M: It went really great, basically.**

**J.R:** Definitely.

**A.M: And in the destination community of Quebec? It was a bit difficult, you said...**

**J.R:** It's hard in... Because, for one, the structures really are good. Okay. But you still have to know the right ways. That, I think, leaves something to be desired. The programs are there but they are made to work with the goals they have with immigration. But is the program tailor-made

for immigration? No. I don't know if you know what I mean. That is really something that is very, very difficult because, yes—this is true—it is absolutely normal for immigrants to come and then blend into the crowd. Yes. But you can have a program that is adapted to your particular immigrant who is arriving, that can make it so that they *fit* in better in that crowd. Because if they can't make progress, in their view, if they can't be seen for their true worth. If they can't fulfill themselves. Then they will not truly fit into the famous mosaic that you want them to fit into. So that's the little difference that I see. And it's even worse when you're talking about... I don't have kids myself, but... Well, it's not so bad for me anyway. I'm getting along fine and I can't—I'm the last person to complain.

**A.M:** [Laughs]

**J.R:** But just to say, when it does go wrong. When that integration isn't done, when you aren't fulfilled, when you don't feel like you're making progress and all of that, it can have repercussions on your family. It creates “fractured” families. It takes families that maybe have to work two jobs to get by, so that automatically means children that are not supervised. And that means children who are left to their own devices. And God only knows what will become of those children. Because, as I like to say... there is never a void. In my book, for me, there isn't, there is never a void. The void fills itself. I don't know how I would put it poetically, but look: a void fills itself. It fills itself with one thing or another but it always, always, always fills itself. And that's what's a bit difficult, that's what kind of sucks, it affects lives, it affects people. Personally I think that if there were a bit more listening, more of a sense of where the person is going, it could be better. Speaking of which, I remember, I was talking to my brother. He arrived in Cana-

da a bit before me. In secondary school, he had already come here. And he had his meeting to do the...

**1:40:01**

**J.R.:** You know when you finish secondary school—What do you want? What should you go into? You know, there are like three or four school counsellors there, and you go in and see one and then the other and the other. So he's there, he has good marks, he's talking about what he sees himself doing, what he'd like to do. He sees all four of them and at the end of the day, they tell him: "No, go and do a little technical CEGEP, do a technical CEGEP." "Why? Don't I have the marks for what I want to do?" They tell him, "Well yeah, but if you do all that, it's long, and university, and ultimately, no, you don't want to do all that, right? You're better off, you go this route and then right away, you're in the job market. Then you're making money, that's what you need to do." And at a certain point—I remember, he told us about this—"Why do you think I have to make money faster? Why? Why do you have this idea about me, [air quotes] 'you're poor'? No." And that's the thing, it kills people's dreams. And I find that doesn't fit with that mindset of wanting the cream of the crop, wanting good people, it's like, the potential is there. And of course, it's certainly not just dependent on the system. Because you have your failures, you can be unprepared... I told you about my story, I put that completely on myself, I'm not talking about the system there. I should have found the way to overcome it. *That is it*, that's the end of that.

**A.M:** So if I understand correctly, when you arrived in Quebec, Canada, there were members of your family already here. So you had already heard about Quebec, so it was like, natural for you to immigrate to Quebec.

**J.R:** Yes.

**A.M:** What was the first thing that surprised you, when you came to Canada? As an African?

**J.R:** *Bienvenue*.

**A.M:** The word “*bienvenue*”?

**J.R:** Yeah. I went to the dep... Because I lived with my aunt when I arrived at NDG [Notre-Dame de Grace]... And every time we would go to the immigration bureau, we'd say ah, so polite, what a nice guy! They'd tell me things, I'd thank them. “Ah, *bienvenue* [you're welcome].” Okay, *bienvenue*... ah, that's right, they're from immigration, that makes sense. They know I just came here, so they're welcoming me, that makes sense. So then later, I'm in my neighbourhood, my borough, going about my business, walking around, I go to buy something—I don't remember what it was, I think it was some chocolate or a Coke, anyway something that was by the entryway, like in the little display area where they have peanuts and candies that have been drying out for four years in Africa. Now that's a shock. *Anyways*. First thing that surprised me. So, I buy a Coke, it's a buck. I'm like, wait a minute... I do the math... I do the exchange rate from Burundian francs—three hundred francs at the time. So I think, okay, well that doesn't make any sense because Coke there was thirty francs. So, I'm paying for ten Cokes, you're giving me one? Okay, that's all right, I have enough... anyway. He serves me, *Chinois du coin* [dep, literally

“neighbourhood Chinese”]—for me, I thought that was really special, I hadn’t seen any others yet. Not Chinese guys, but depts. So I say thanks—[affected voice] *bienvenue!* And at that... I leave, but I’m like [gestures]... I get home, I hadn’t gone far. It was a Sunday, I remember. So I get home, and say, can somebody explain something to me? Everyone was there, it was literally Sunday morning, everyone sitting around, my cousins, my brother, everyone. Drinking tea, everyone was in their pyjamas or sweats or something comfortable, and chatting. It was really the best audience I could have had. Everyone was there, relaxing. “Can somebody explain something to me?” And everyone was like, “What’s the matter? Why are you angry?” No, no, no! Don’t play dumb, my friends. Because this is the second time, no, it’s the third time. I even tried getting changed, I even put on my brother’s clothes to see if it was true. But every time—and now, now you’re going to have to explain yourselves. He always says to me, *bienvenue*. Was it really necessary to tell the whole neighbourhood that I just arrived? Can you tell me what the purpose of that was? So of course [frowns] ... But, what are you talking about? I say no, this is the third time, I even got changed. I even put on *his* clothes [points], maybe he’s the one that told him. Yeah. “He always tells me, *bienvenue!* Why?” So yeah, you can be sure, that was a good Sunday tea. Oof!

**A.M and A.F: [Laugh]**

**J.R:** Which just goes to show, yes, there was the language.

**A.M: The language.**

**J.R:** Yes.

**A.M: The seasons?**

**J.R:** Pardon?

**A.M:** The seasons?

**J.R:** No, not all that much. Because I arrived in the summer, too. It may seem strange, but I don't know. I don't know how to say it. Even though in general, they say that Africans feel it more. But I arrived at the end of June. But the first time I went into the metro, it was daytime, it was like, noon, one o'clock, something like that. I smelled a human body odour that was massively bizarre. I said, *tabarnouche*, what is that stink? But it's because it's a smell you're not used to. Even if the other... Because after a while, you start to compare, eh, it's not so bad. But because it was new, I was like, these people stink!

**A.M:** [Laughs]

**J.R:** But then once you're inside, you don't smell anything with the air vents and everything. But then you get in the train... The car, the doors open like this and... [leans forward] oh! *Anyways*. Any other surprises? Oh... Well, the worst one of all, my shock... So I like to discover neighbourhoods myself, by myself, walking around alone. So when I arrived, my brother had bought me a bus card. He knew my little habits like that. On the second day, he gives it to me. The third day, I start going on these little... I'd say, okay that's the direction I'm going to go. He had explained to me a bit about how the directions worked. I think it was in my first week, it hadn't even been seven days that I'd been there. I said, my first spot is going to be Berri. That seemed fairly central to me. I go to Berri, I go down. I come out, look around at everything, and I say ah, I'm on St Catherine. I look over, I see the Jacques Cartier Bridge. I say, now that will make an excellent starting point. That's a good reference point, I'll walk straight ahead looking at the

bridge. If I turn back, I'll get back to the metro and it's all good. Direction: East... I've got my little backpack. I'm walking, it's summer. I get there, and I see these leather jackets. I had gone into some stores before, I don't remember, but I'm saying... So I see these leather jackets, and I'm like, *yes!* Leather jackets, they're very rare in Africa. And listen, they were really popular. If you had one, it was like, *wow*. The people that had them, I don't know, there were like, two or three of them. Now there are lots, I saw last summer when I was there. But at the time, it was very rare for people to have a leather jacket. So I said *wow*. I went inside, completely taken in by these leather jackets. And there was this gentleman who said, "Ah, sir, you have to leave your bag at the counter." So, all right, I put it down, I turn back, and he says, "No, just a second, I'm going to give you a number." Okay, perfect, I take my number, thank you, *bienvenue*—ah, not him too.

**A.M and A.F: [Laugh]**

**J.R:** So I'm looking at the jackets. Wow, they're great. Now, it's summer, so maybe a cropped kind of jacket would be good, like that. I try one on, you know, like cropped to a little jacket like that, with the sleeves cropped to there. Okay. So, I see more, there's a staircase that goes down. Let's see what else they have. So I head down, but after a second, I realize, it's like these tapes... but it's nudes. I'm thinking, ah, they even have... [raises eyebrows] movies. So I look closer, and I'm thinking, that's really weird, maybe I haven't seen a ton but generally, it's mostly women that you see. Why is this all men?

**A.M: Oh!**

**J.R:** So I'm thinking, that's really weird. Then I see some cases that are much more explicit, I see it's guys and I'm like oh... What's this? I'd heard people say this exists before but... So I look up, I look around the whole store, and I only see men. And I'm like, uh... I think I'm in the wrong place. "Check!" Jacques the Stairmaster, run into someone, hey watch it! I go upstairs. "Sir can I have my bag." He says, "Your number?" I say "Sir. My bag. It's black, it's right there, give me my bag."—"Your number."—"I don't know where it is, give me my bag I am getting out of here."—"But that's not..."—"Sir. My bag, please, or you can just keep it because I am leaving." I mean my bag was pretty much empty. So I take it, he gives it to me. And he's like, "What was that about?" I leave, I'm back out on St Catherine Street, and I cross the street without thinking [imitates car horn]. I go to the other side of the street, I'm looking around like, what was that? That was my shock.

**A.M:** *Bienvenue!*

**A.F:** [Laughs]

**J.R:** Oui.

**A.M:** **Rude awakening!**

**J.R:** But with time, my God, it becomes normal. It's part of life. One of my good friends from work is gay. Sometimes he'll invite me out, we'll go out to Gay Village. We go, have a beer, look... no one touches me, I don't touch anyone. That's his space, I respect it as it is, and there you go. We have a beer. And when I think of a couple years ago, how I ran out of there... well, there you go. But that's part of it and it's a part of integration, you know.

**A.F and J.R:** [Laugh]

**A.M:** Other than the word [for] “welcome,” did you feel welcome in Quebec? Were people friendly?

**J.R:** Yes, that is one thing to emphasize. Really, people are very welcoming in Quebec. And... yeah.

**A.M:** You tried working, going to school, despite... I imagine you didn't find it easy to balance work and studies?

**J.R:** No, not easy at all, because it's a whole other rhythm... Basically, when I got here, I liked it, really because it allows you to get into the *beat* of society here. I find that in Africa, it's unintentionally a little too boxed in. When you're in school, you're in school and that's it. If you have the means to pay for it, or your family, or a scholarship or something. But when you don't, you don't. But here, there are so many possibilities. As I like to say, Western society, society here, there's something amazing that... It's choice. But at the same time, that's the most terrible thing. So, there you go, yeah.

**A.M:** You arrived here in ninety-four, how old were you?

**J.R:** I had just turned twenty-three, I was going on twenty-four. No, what am I saying, no, twenty-seven [nods].

**A.M:** You had maturity.

**J.R:** Yes, I had finished university, like I said.

**A.M:** Apart from [community] involvement, work, school and all that, did you get involved in groups? Maybe a sports group in your community?

**J.R:** Oh, many, many, many! I'm a community guy, completely. I've been on the board of directors for all the Rwandan organizations, practically... that I attended, especially for the Rwandan community. I even sat on what's called the Table de concertation pour les immigrants [immigrants' roundtable], which is totally general, outside of the community. But I sat as a representative of the community in a way, and yeah, at one point I was even... We had gotten government subsidies, we decided to open a permanent office of the Rwandan community. I worked on that for six months straight. So my involvement at the community level, that's... look, if I get talking about that, we'll never get out of here! Right away, I got involved in an administrative capacity with our soccer team. I was on the committee, as treasurer, organizer for this and that. In a cultural capacity, don't even get me started. I was one of the founding members of Isangano, one of the leaders, really part of the inner workings, really putting it on the map. And I got really involved with everything to do with the genocide, as far as commemoration, fighting against injustice, against impunity. The memory must be preserved, that's very , very important. We have to fight against negationism when we have the chance. There's this thing, for example—I don't know, you're young, and maybe I could ask that we discuss it some time. There's this little monument that the city of Montreal put up in remembrance of genocide. But it's really special because it talks about the genocide of the Tutsis and the Hutus. And that, I think, at that level, the city of Montreal—there's no amount of negationism that can overcome that because... well, no! It doesn't work. There's this kind of denial where you say, well, look, if you say it like that, then... Basically it just didn't happen, it was like this little ping-pong match where everyone

took their shot at the ball? Is that it? No. Listen, you have eight hundred thousand people who disappeared in a period of a hundred days. Does that sound like nothing? It may sound like statistics, but for us, it's human lives. And it really is heavy. So, that's the level of my community involvement, my God... Yes, I'm in... And let's be clear, it wasn't really so demanding for me. Like I told you, what I like is people. So... [shrugs shoulders].

**A.M: While we're talking a bit about negationism and things like that. What do you think of the films that have been made by outsiders, who made films about Rwanda, for example...**

**J.R:** You know, film is really a funny thing. There was one that I enjoyed. And, seeing the developments after it, that I also really did not enjoy. It's like, *Hotel Rwanda*. When I saw that film for the first time, I was really happy. I really liked the work. But... what I also found from that, was that it was actually a romanticized version. But the fact that some people are trying to distort that, really... That's the kind of negationism that's truly terrible. Because you're betraying the foundation of the story, you're betraying the very foundation of the idea behind it. You shouldn't, you shouldn't try to do that. Just because your name is Rusesabagina doesn't mean you're the hero of the story. You're the hero of the story, but it's not a documentary. So don't make it your story. Don't try to take it for yourself. It's a romanticized version. So, that's what can be annoying. But there are other films. Like, there are some that were made, like *Shake Hands with the Devil*. My god, it's really interesting. Because for one, it's the absolute best way we have of sharing the history of the genocide and what people went through. Because when you see how someone, who was not a victim, comes out of it so messed up... You sit there, you say to yourself,

how was... this the real victim? It's an extraordinary lesson. And, I don't know. Because I've had the opportunity to see it multiple times, and sometimes, you watch it with people and sometimes, because of the images that are so striking, they'll miss the most important part, I think, of that film. If you miss the part where you see that he is at an appointment with a psychologist, you've missed 80% of the film. Because that is the key. So, there you go.

**2 :01 :57**

**A.M: Do you think that the community, like here in Montreal, do you think they see that in the same way?**

**J.R:** ... Look, it would be very hard to interpret something like that. Because you see, when I compare our history to that of the Jewish people, for example, the thing is our story is like a snake with all these different heads and it's not all that linear. I'll start with myself. Am I a survivor of the genocide? It's a big question. Yes, I consider myself to be. But the fact is, in April of ninety-four up until July, I was not in Rwanda. And it's very, very important for me to say that, because in spite of that, it had a huge impact on me. And everyone can only express their own grief, their own feelings about it. But beyond that, I am completely convinced of one thing: if I had been there for those three months, or if all my lovely family that I've told you about had been there at that time, and if half of them or all of them had died, would I be the Jacques that sits before you today? I couldn't tell you. And that is why I would never in my life, I never really like to compare myself to the people who were *there*. Comments happen. They can live through it however they want. They can recount it however they want. They can remain silent if they want. They can run from it if they want. They can ignore it if they want. They can drive it out of

their minds, their thoughts, their conversations if they want. They'll take it however they want and I take it for granted the way they tell it to me. Because they are the ones who have to heal. I'm trying to heal from it myself, even though I was really almost twelve thousand kilometres away. So for the person who was in it, you really have to respect that. You really have to.

**A.M: What does the word “survivor” mean to you? Who is a survivor?**

**J.R:** It's so complex, because the only thing... that is also important to look at, is to say okay, if you had been there, Jacques, what would have happened? I am sure I would have been among the eight-hundred thousand, or otherwise I would have turned out to be resourceful and escaped. By luck, because I don't believe there was any genius involved in getting through this genocide alive. I've listened to many accounts, and frankly all the people who talk about being able to escape, to get out, I'm not sure how you can qualify that, hiding in the bushes from your killers and all of that. It almost takes magic. But when I think, when I look at what they did to my uncles, my aunts, my grandmother, to my cousins, some of them even very young, two or three years old... What would they have done to me, this twenty-six-year-old guy? No, I don't think it could be seen any other way. And on top of that, there's that... ninety-four was found to be the pinnacle of the event. But if you go back to the fifties, the sixties, it was already a genocide: it was in sixty-three, it was in seventy-three... It was in ninety-two, with the Bagogwe and all that. Those people, all those years, all those incidents, they were never killed, executed, massacred, for any other reason, for any other allegiance, but just because they were born Tutsi. Yes, I'm a victim of that.

**A.M:** And as a survivor, what can be done so that this never again... What can we do around us to avoid this happened again elsewhere, or even...?

**J.R:** Very complex, my dear. If only I could find that...

**A.M:** In your opinion, what could help?

**J.R:** Listen, there are so many things, so many variables. We have to love and respect others, first of all. That's where it begins. We have to... We have to not envy others. Every time we talk about the history of the genocide and everything, all the repeated massacres in Rwanda, I can never remove myself from the idea of—this, this is very powerful. I'll give you a little story. I was in university in Burundi, and at one point, there were Cameroonian students who came to Burundi.

**A.M:** Around what year?

**J.R:** Ah, this was ninety-one, nineteen-ninety, thereabouts. There was one of them who was named Michael. We were friends and all, we had our little group of friends, all that. Basically, us Tutsis, we stuck together. Mostly Rwandans from elsewhere... Well, sure, I may not be the poster child of Tutsis exactly, but I was part of the group all the same. But what I wanted to say was that he was there, and okay, he had integrated with us, little by little. But at one point, he stood up and said, "I just don't get it. From what I understand, from what I see, Tel, Bosco, Jean-Marie, Tony, Jacky, Jean-Paul, Alphonse, Jacques, all you guys. You pass for good-looking guys. The girls are all over you. I don't get it." We were like, "What don't you get?" He says, "Well no, it's just that I can't understand how you could, how these girls of yours could find guys with small noses, no calves, weak shoulders, and they say you're good-looking guys! It's unthinkable,

it's completely absurd." Okay, and there we are back in the reality of our cultural history of the neighbouring Rwandans and Burundians. And that's something that's particular to a culture, the traits, what we consider attractive, it is what it is and it is for everyone. It's not like you're Hutu or Tutsi so you say, this is attractive for Hutus, that's attractive for Tutsis. Because, like it or not, we are part of the same culture. These are the subdivisions that happen. But as far as what's attractive, it is what it is for all Rwandans, across the board. The right way to carry yourself, the right way to—it, it's for everyone. It applies to everyone. So, I think there's something fundamentally wrong—well. No, it's not wrong, it's a fact, it's a reality in our culture that's happened over time, like it or not... There are a lot of things we associate with Hutus that are not part of the realm of the beautiful. Beauty, good manners. Ah, he always talks at the top of his voice. He doesn't choose his words well. It's almost like you're calling them barbaric, you know. But these remain completely cultural notions. And that, all these bad things, unconsciously they'll stick more to Hutus. And the result... Because it's not economic, it's not about money. It's just that there are "those people" who, unconsciously, even if he's poorer than him, he'll find him more interesting. Because the Hutu who's made money is going to want a girlfriend who's Tutsi. So, okay, you see, he's broken our line. If the Hutus had had the same attitude, thought the same way as Michael, they wouldn't had envied the Tutsis so much. Because fundamentally, the Hutu inferiority complex with regards to the Tutsis remains the fundamental key that pushed them, every one—and there I'll soften my words on the subject—to kill the Hutus—to kill the Tutsis, I mean. But that being said, it's not all of them. Okay, you know, not to generalize. Because I don't like to generalize, but it's to simplify things. But for the people who built the movement, the *Intera-hamwe*, the politicians who were there putting out their slogans, their campaigns and all that,

they were playing off of these little things. Okay. And that got people on board, even people who were not necessarily involved in that movement, to take action. Because they said, look, it's not complicated: if you don't get rid of them... you won't be able to breathe. For me, I think, it's sort of logical: you're in a lake, a pool and you're sinking. What's your first reflex? You come back to the surface, you have to breathe. And with that idea, that someone is constantly overtaking you—"Look, you're shrinking, it's over—and if it has to come to death, so be it." I don't know if you sort of get it, but I find it's fundamental, and the anecdote about Michael speaks volumes about that.

**A.M: That's profound. Profound. It's part of a motivation that's been displaced somewhere.**

**J.R:** ... It's terrible, because—well, you know, there were these slogans during the genocide. They were on RTL (Radio-Télévision Libre des Mille Collines) [Thousand Hills Free Radio and Television]... they printed them all over their newspapers. You see, we have to finish them all off, even the little babies, because if we hadn't left the little babies in fifty-nine, we wouldn't have had today's attack! It went on and on. Have you read the Hutu Ten Commandments? 'Thou shalt never approach a Tutsi woman.' It went that far! Listen, that's what it is. I find that fundamental. But that complex, it's terrible. It still remains, it's still alive, it's still being fed and that is terrible.

**2 :15 :09**

**A.M: So in some ways... we can never really say, "never again." Because really...**

**J.R:** Oh, look, we have to dream—it must be said that we have hope, and we still aspire to a better humanity. Without slipping into controversy and blaming everyone and all of that because, look... First of all, the responsibility for Rwanda is Rwando-rwandan. But at the same time, we're in a global system more and more, for everything. Whether that's economics, famine... and war. With the slightest involvement of foreign powers, what happened in Rwanda would not have happened. If they hadn't left it up in the air... and that's all it would have taken. No more. A bit—like my father: deterrence gets the job done. Just saying: okay, if I do this, they'll see me. If I do this, someone will hold me accountable. But when it comes to a line of thinking of: no, we're doing it. Everyone's doing it... Senselessness becomes easy then. But yes, if you don't feel watched, if you don't feel supervised, you can't be held accountable. It's not as though... Because it's very important to... When we look at what happened in Rwanda, there were no B-52's flying over Rwanda, there were no atomic bombs and hydrogen bombs falling on Rwanda. Even during the genocide, it wasn't the weapons, the guns and the bombs, no! It was really machetes. Work tools, hoes, clubs, all that. And that means... look, to kill eight-hundred thousand people in a hundred days, you have to do it. Even with bombs, I don't know how you would do it, it really takes so many people doing that. And that, unfortunately, is how the Hutus were used, that committed that genocide. Not to incriminate them all, because we know well that there are survivors who will talk to you and who will tell you how many... I mean, I saw my aunt, last year when I was in Rwanda. Yes, she did a lot with the children who stayed to survive. But as a last resort, there was actually a Hutu who helped them find their way to get to Burundi. Without them, she might not still be alive. So I can't paint them all with the same brush. But to make this happen, there was a large majority involved in it. With good reason? Because they had conviction in what

they were doing? Not necessarily. But the slogans, the manipulation, the ones who were forced, the ones who were recruited in some way, and that's it. Now, does that revoke your responsibility for taking someone's life? No! No. And I find that very, very, very difficult. Because it is incredibly difficult to heal. We need to find much simpler ways. Politicizing it, saying okay them, they are the ones responsible. But in reality, it's very difficult because even the people who could be held responsible, most of them are simply not there anymore, they're dead. So it's difficult. How do we envision *never again*? Listen, we've been saying *never again* since the forties about the Jews. But maybe it's because of that slogan that it finally got to the level of the UN. So words are useful. But it's also true, we could have, could have used it for the Armenians, too, twenty, thirty years earlier. These are things that are terrible, and then we talk about it in Rwanda... When there was Rwanda, there was Bosnia, it's thirty minutes from France, excuse me... So it becomes really terrible. I think the human race is... it's self-destructive, as they say. Man is wolf to man. Is that what should determine demographics beyond that? I don't know. It's true that Rwanda was overpopulated and still is. But did that justify going after one tenth of them? No. I think that that would be chilling to a Canadian, demanding their two-hundred-fifty thousand immigrants coming in a year, to be sure to keep up the rhythm. It's total absurdity. Will we ever reach *never again*? Yes. In terms of humanity, in respect for others, in love for others. In respect for one another, because those people who were sitting up in New York with their piles of capital—if they had had the slightest bit of love for the people of Rwanda, for others, if they had had the slightest respect for the people of Rwanda, for the Tutsis of Rwanda, for others... They could have taken the small actions that could have made all the difference. Now that's coming into *never again*. If that was what was done. But also... look, be like Michael: take your calves or your big, beautiful

nose, and be content with that. Okay. And don't envy others just to envy them for such stupid things. Things you can't even change. That's it.

**A.M: What would you like other communities to know about your history, to understand about your history? About the history of Rwanda?**

**J.R:** When we started working with the group Isangano in Montreal—well, you know, obviously—I was the one who did almost all the external representation. I went and met all kinds of people. I had a slogan and we all had it as a group. I would say, we have come, we are here in Canada. We came from many different countries—Rwandans, yes, but we came from many different countries. We met each other, we have our attachment point, that became Montreal. We live in a culture. We live in a society of relative multiculturalism. We are... we are at an intersection of giving and receiving. It's true that we may not come with much, but once you're there, contribute what you have. Yes, because of this war, you're on the run, a refugee, you're running to the hills and all of that. But there's this thing that I like to call the little carry-on baggage that you never lose. That's your culture. Okay, so you bring it with you, you share it with your host society. Because, in the strangest way, that's the thing that distinguishes you from anyone else anywhere on this earth. So, when you carry it, share it, share it well. It becomes interesting. But what's even better is that it brings something particular. I wish that, instead of meeting me as a Rwandan: "Ah, your Rwandan, ah, Tutsi? Hutu?" Okay well, Tutsi... "Were you one of the victims or the persecutors?" I mean, okay, I wish it went: "Ah, you're from Rwanda. Oh, the people with the great *Intore* dancers who do those incredible dances, with the beautiful ladies stretching out their arms!" You know, something positive! You know, there are positives! Okay, we are not

just persecutors and victims. We come from a country, and honestly... I have come face to face with people before, who were a little too, too confined to the idea of persecutors and victims. I said well listen, I came here in ninety-four. When the results of the ninety-four referendum came out, I was downtown. Okay. We were there, we were walking down St Catherine Street, and there was, it was really this mob, this big nasty mob coming out of the Palais des congrès. And people coming out of the Métropolis. And you look at them staring daggers at each other, and you think, *mondou!* If there hadn't been the thousand police officers among them, I'd love to know what would have happened. That's the human race! Okay... When you look at... nineteen-seventy, that was the human race. So don't fall into that thinking of persecutors and victims. If we're not organized, if we're not prepared, look: the break can come out of nowhere. Because if we tear down the city over a win for the Canadiens... The human race is the human race. It takes little reasons or sometimes, big reasons. But it is that... An organization, an intervention can mean that we're able to control that impulse of human folly, when it happens at the right moment. Yes.

**A.M: How do you think the Rwandan community can tell its history, in museums for example? With that little baggage that each person has... little baggage...**

**J.R:** It's very difficult. It's very difficult. We were saying earlier, we were asking how people can live through... how, you know, survivors can live through that. Look, if people decide to run from it, to forget it. If that's what it takes to survive, okay. Will memories disappear that way? Yes. Is it an extraordinary account, perhaps the best of all, that will disappear? Yes. But if it is to save that human being, if it means they are still here... It's worth it. But yes, it is a bit difficult.

But to come back to... to museums, that sort of thing. That is a long-term endeavour. It's an interesting thing. I mean, this is a good start, what you're doing here. But we also have to go and find things, but again, we are not a society that has developed in that sense. Material things, symbols of the material, they are not very much a part of Rwandan culture. Our symbolic system is very, very, very oral. Very, very, very much so, and that... So, for example, what are you going to say? It goes far back because our history itself has been profaned throughout time. Because it has always been framed, with the arrival of colonialism, as the savage point of view. So we had to be civilized. Go to school, leave all that behind, don't wear your clothes. Don't wear your traditional clothes. Don't carry your baton, your spear. Ah, you're a savage, you walk around with a spear! But all that, the little outfits for women, with the *urugori*... They have a sort of crown for a woman who is married and has a child. These are things that are so symbolic but they are all things that, with time, have been profaned, that have been framed as being completely backwards, that have been devalued over time. Especially with people going to school and all that and learning Western values and the like. All of that, it's been abandoned. So, in ninety-four, did people still have those things? Unfortunately, no. Okay.

**2 :30 :14**

**J.R:** Here, when we have events, and we say, let's wear our traditional attire, people are so resistant. We know what it is, we've seen it, you know, you've seen it before. But it's terrible. When you see people from West Africa, for example, when you see how they are so proud to wear their traditional dress and all that. Does that relate back to Michael? I don't know, but it's a whole collection of things like that that make cultures a little bit different. I wouldn't say that Rwandans

aren't proud of being Rwandan, but our symbolic system is much, much, much more on the oral side than on the side of physical artifacts and such.

**A.M: It's important to keep those elders who have these stories to tell.**

**J.R:** That's where the stories are, really. That's it.

**A.M: If we could go back a bit in the history of Rwanda. When you look at Rwanda, I think you said you went back after some years. How many years later did you return?**

**J.R:** Ouf, a lifetime... Many.

**A.M: Many years. So when you returned to Rwanda, what was the first thing that... Why did you wait so long to return to Rwanda, first of all?**

**J.R:** Ah, lots of reasons. Before, I couldn't go, I didn't have enough money to. [Laughs]. But, well, you can still try, even so. Here, you can do it. I would say that the main reason was... I thought that if I went to Rwanda, I would never come back here. And unfortunately, when I looked around—I felt that I really might not come back. And when I looked at it rationally, trying to find a reason to stay there, I couldn't find one. Absurd, you might say... but that's what it was.

**A.M: But when you were there, when you arrived there, did you feel that you could possibly live there again?**

**J.R:** Rwanda is so nice, you know. It's really beautiful. First of all, the real surprise, I couldn't... Because the last time I had been in Rwanda... and you look at Rwanda today. It has developed so much! These buildings have sprung up, all these big, beautiful buildings, like pimples on a

teenager's face. And lovely roads... It's so well-kept, it's so clean. Listen, I'm a smoker, you walk down the street in Kigali, okay. Like in Montreal, I light a cigarette and suddenly, when I go to toss the butt, I don't even know where to toss it—there's nothing there! Okay. It's not the Africa I left behind me after fourteen, fourteen-fifteen years. It's the impetus. It's the drive. And it's also annoying things like, say you arrive at the airport, you can't come in with a plastic bag. Even in your luggage, okay. Really. You hear that, you're like, where does that come from? What's the purpose? Just because some goat might eat it a plastic bag and choke on it? No, that's not it. It's much more serious than that. It's the drive to go in the direction of global policy, the policy of ecology, of a green world. But it's a good contribution, I personally think it's such a brave action. Because for me, when I left Rwanda, a plastic bag was a status symbol. I'm not joking. And now, it's banned in the extreme. Bravo, it's clean, it's well-kept. You go everywhere, if you need some service, everyone gets in line, and it's respectable. It's a good thing. There are a lot of things that are very interesting, the signs of safety.

**A.M: Road signs?**

**J.R:** No, I mean in the neighbourhoods. My third day, we were driving around in Remera, not far from Lando's, *ku Gisimenti* [a neighbourhood], around there. It's so noisy, it's really like, well, I don't know which borough you could compare it to in Montreal. It's not like St Catherine because that's downtown. It's like if you had a St Catherine but somewhere in like Hochelaga-Maisonneuve, or a Saint-Michel. Somewhere there's people, it's loud... It's really a lot more people gawking, you know. Anyway, you can't really describe it. So it's eleven o'clock at night, I'm in a car with my brother and my two cousins—one cousin, one friend. And I say to them,

“Can you slow down a little?” They slow down. “Actually could you stop?”—“Yeah, why?” Because I see this white guy nearby, in his twenties, long hair. You know, he’s walking down the street, but he’s dragging his feet. He’s relaxed, completely relaxed. It’s eleven-thirty in this bad part of town, full of people yelling all over the place and everything, and here he is walking around in his baggy T-shirt and his pants, his jeans. Relaxed. So I’m looking and I say “wait, wait.” And he says to me, “What is it?”—“That’s a *muzungu*, that’s a white guy, isn’t it?” He says, “Yes... You know them better than us, you live with them. What’s the problem?” I say, “But it’s eleven at night.” He says, “Yes.”—“In a bad part of town like this!”—“Yes, I suppose you could say that. But what’s the problem?”—“Well it’s just that he’s walking alone and he’s relaxed, not worried. You know, he’s just walking around the neighbourhood.” He says, “Yeah, maybe he lives in the neighbourhood, or he’s meeting friends. Getting a drink.”—“And you think that’s normal?” And he says, “Why do you not think that’s normal?” I say, “Look, it’s simple: I’ve seen so many great things since I’ve arrived but that, that is one of the best things.” Because safety, that’s priceless. All these Western countries that talk about, wow... Safety is a goldmine. Because, imagine, that guy—I’m looking at him like I said, he’s in his twenties. He works somewhere for some organization, some company or other. And you know, sometimes people, they’ll have social conversations at work. They’ll talk about their lives. But you know, a *muzungu*, they’re open, they talk about their lives. They’re not secretive like us. So that guy, he’s going to talk about what he did the night before. He was in Remera, he was walking around at that hour and then he went and got a beer and he’ll talk about it openly. He’s not embarrassed. But for the investor that’s there, he’ll be thinking, “Ah, cool. Great, I can have a secure place there. I can grow my business.” Is the problem that there isn’t enough money? No. It’s just saying, am I

putting my money in the right place? And that's what... When that happened, I was like, okay, but... Because the guys I was with, two of them were in the military. They said, "That's why we do this. That's what we're working for, just that. Yes, it's normal." And I said, "Well that's amazing." They said, "You see, if for whatever reason, we're not on duty, we're going out for a beer with you, welcoming you. If he were to stumble and fall, if someone were to lay a hand on him, my time off ends right there. Right away. My work shift starts the next second."—"Oh yeah?"—"Yes, because we have invested a lot in this. We want it to work. Not just for him, for anybody." Oh, great. But that's it, that's Rwanda. To finish my anecdote, we parked not far from there, and then we went into this bar. Not three minutes later—it wasn't even a guy. No, there were two girls, who were there with another girl, a Rwandan, and two or three Rwandan guys. Side-splitting laughter, relaxed as could be, having their beers, their kebabs. I was like... You don't even realize, honestly, it was beautiful. I find that so beautiful. The last time I was in Africa, yeah, you would see people relaxing like that, having fun, sure—but in fancy hotels, in restaurants downtown, not in a neighbourhood like Remera. No! But there it was. And that's part of it, and that is so good to see because you think, there is hope. In sum, it's the youth who are running things. When I was in Africa, you'd see that it was grown-ups who were living life. People my father's age were the ones living real life then. But now—young folks everywhere. They are running things, they own businesses, they're working, they have jobs. There are people there who are executives of ministries, of companies, who are young, in their forties, their thirties, and that's excellent, there's potential there, and it's great.

**A.M: Could you see yourself going back there?**

**J.R:** Yes. Yes, but I wouldn't want to go there looking for a job from somebody. No. Either I would have... I would create my own job, or I would own a business. But I don't like to fall into that thinking... Because after so many years, yes, I am Rwandan. Yes, I left as an adult. But with what has happened, the years that have gone by, things are going so fast. I don't think I could fit in at a company, like, no. I would have to be fairly independent, yes, I would need services, partners. Yes, I would offer my services. But I would like to be able to work fairly independently for my business, or my job.

**A.M:** **What would you say to people who haven't yet returned to Rwanda? Who are afraid, who don't know what to expect, despite the fact that the country has changed a lot?**

**J.R:** You have to go to believe it. You have to see it to believe it.

**A.M:** **So, you would encourage them to go experience it again?**

**J.R:** You have to see it to believe it. It's as simple as that.

**A.M:** **Is the population... I'll rephrase my question. Between the Rwandan diaspora and Rwandans in Rwanda, do you feel a difference?**

**J.R:** Yes, yes you feel the difference because... well, I'll say that for me, it didn't impress me as much honestly, which I often say, but I'll repeat it since you've asked me the question. It didn't appeal to me to go and sit in cafés downtown and drink the same, the same coffee. Or to go into little restaurants and eat slices of pizza or hamburgers. Look, I hate that. That's not what I want. What I like is going to real neighbourhoods, meeting real people and relaxing there... look... Honestly, that's what I liked because... yes, the diaspora is interesting because when you meet

them, you have the same [inaudible], the same way of seeing things. There are things that made an impression on you, and you talk to them about what made an impression on them. They tell you what would be great to see, depending on how well they understand your tastes and what you want to do. Yes, because you, you get it. Is that what makes the difference? I would say no. Sure, you will have things in common, things that you agree on. It's true that you can meet someone who... In Montreal, you barely say hello. But when you meet someone there, it's special. You fall into their arms, you don't even know—because, really, that person there with you becomes someone from very far away, but they're very close. Because they're people, a person, from your home, no matter what. But does that make a difference? I don't find it does.

**A.M: Do Rwandans in Rwanda fall into the cadence, the rhythm?**

**J.R:** No, no, no. It's the one who comes from somewhere else that falls into the cadence of Rwanda, *come on*. Oh, yeah!

**A.M: But when I say diaspora, diaspora living there, who are running businesses and managing businesses. And the small population of Remera that's been there since...**

**J.R:** You're talking about Rwandan diaspora who go to Rwanda, or people, foreigners who move to Rwanda?

**A.M: Rwandan diaspora who have moved to Rwanda. In business?**

**J.R:** Oh, no. Yes it's honestly that, it depends on what people do. What area they're doing business in, and business is business. You succeed or you fail. There are some who succeed, there are others who fail, and well, there you have it.

**A.M: So Rwanda is thriving?**

**J.R:** It is. It is really thriving, Rwanda is really thriving. Yeah, no, I think it has all the marks of a developing country. It's really developing [laughs].

**A.M: [...] Jacques, thank you so much for your time.**

**J.R:** You're very welcome.

**A.M: Thank you so much for your generosity.**

**J.R:** Well, *bienvenue*.

**A.F and A.M: [Laugh]**

**A.M: And anyway, on behalf of the CURA [Community University Research Alliance], thank you for your time and we'll see you very soon. I hope we continue to work together in many capacities on all sorts of things.**

**J.R:** No, it's been a pleasure, and yes, this is a really great project. Because it's important to find a way to immortalize these moments. Starting with human beings and, there you go. Maybe, who knows, one day in 2087, they'll screen my interview somewhere in some little school that we've created, the Rwandans in Montreal, to show... When the Rwandans had just arrived, what was it like? Can you imagine? That would be amazing, but it takes, it takes testimonies, and like I said, when you were asking me the question in relation to Rwandans, it's very, very, very important to document what we're doing, how we're living. That's a terrible shortcoming of Rwandans. And this, this is a good way to start making up for that, and you were talking about museums, this is a really good start. This can be part of it.

**A.M:** To help you do just that, to keep your story alive, CURA is going to send you a CD of your story so that you can share it with your family, your children possibly, and that way, the oral history can be passed on... from generation to generation.

**J.R:** I'll keep the physical artifact, the CD.

**A.M and A.F:** Thank you.

**J.R:** Yes, it was my pleasure, and all the best going forward, say hello to the whole team for me, tell them congratulations and you're doing a fantastic job. And I'm completely available if there is any other way I can contribute, it would be my pleasure. And I'm proud of you.

**A.M:** [...]

**J.R:** My pleasure.

**2 :48 :25**

**[End session 1 of 1]**