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Learning with and from Rwandan Survivor-Historians in the High School History Class:

Testimonial Oral History as Relationship Building

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Abstract

This chapter examines challenges and promising practices of producing and bringing oral and life histories into the history classroom and especially the introduction of testimony and documentary film in the study of violent pasts. It weaves the voices of four educators and partners in a unique ongoing university-community-school participatory research project foregrounding Rwandan Canadian community knowledge production and expectations concerning the study of the 1994 Rwandan Genocide against the Tutsis at the secondary level. We ground discussions of complex ethical challenges within school-based practice, asking what this means for the historian-survivor/co-creator, student as witness and listener, and teacher as pedagogical facilitator.

I. Introduction: Researching the Pedagogical implications of Oral History as method in the study of Genocide

What are the promise, challenges, and potential best practices of producing and bringing oral and life histories into the history classroom, especially in the study of violent pasts?

We understand oral and life histories as oral in origin and mode though multiple in media: while delivered by the individual subject or survivor, this performance can be heard or read in its recorded form through a range of media¹. Rather than considering oral histories as a

mere primary source, we see them as both a cultural practice within different communities and an interpretive practice with the potential for unique historical insight and analysis.² A particular case has been made for the process of oral history as a narrative practice of collective memory that can ground structural analysis to generate popular consciousness, political education and action for social change.³ In our research, we contextualize oral history as one of diverse shared forms of knowledge within Rwandan diasporic communities that have been shaped through histories of trauma and migration (e.g., oral history, music, literature, and artistic or healing practices).

The expanded use of oral history in education reflects several trends: the democratization of history as a discipline (and the expansion of the fields of feminist, Indigenous, working class, postcolonial, and other popular, social and public histories); democratization of curriculum development (along with the professionalization of teaching and movements of re-conceptualizing curriculum studies, critical pedagogy and social justice education); and the democratization of knowledge with new media and digital culture that have facilitated and popularized the creation and dissemination of primary historical accounts within a technological age of secondary orality.⁴

In this chapter, we share some of the insights gathered and conclusions drawn from a unique ongoing university-community-school participatory research project that seeks to expand the sources and pedagogical approaches used in the study of the 1994 Rwandan Genocide against the Tutsis⁵ at the secondary level. Initiated as a partnership between a university researcher and members of the Rwandan Canadian community in Toronto, the project has since 2011 pursued collaborative curriculum development and research with Professional Learning Communities (PLC's) of Toronto District School Board (TDSB) teachers of the course "CHG38 Genocide and

Crimes Against Humanity: Historical and Contemporary Implications”, a locally developed adaptation of the grade 11 Canadian and World Studies course offered in boards throughout the province of Ontario.⁶⁷ This collaboration has been part of a qualitative case study evaluating the challenges and pedagogical implications of foregrounding Rwandan Canadian knowledge production, perspectives, voices, and priorities or expectations in the study of the 1994 genocide. Activities to date include community-led in-service workshops, curriculum development and piloting using community-produced oral history resources and guest speaker classroom visits, and qualitative analysis of student work and participant observation.

A key community-produced resource introduced into classrooms in this project is the documentary, “The Rwandan Genocide as told by its Historian- Survivors” (hereafter referred to as “Historian-Survivors”)⁸. Created by Marie-Jolie, Umwali, and a collective of Rwandan Canadians in response to a growing body of academic, journalistic, and popular discourse about the 1994 Rwandan genocide produced largely by non-Rwandans, the film situates the voices of Rwandan genocide survivors at the centre of an experientially grounded analysis of the genocide, its colonial origins and conditions, its political legacy and implications, and the politics of knowledge production surrounding it. The documentary explicitly demands the audience critically examine the politics of their gaze (ie. how they are listening and looking) as the survivors testifying in the film frame their accounts within the larger context of imperialism in which viewers themselves are inevitably implicated.

In this chapter we do not discuss the data analysis or conclusions of the project. Rather, this collaborative piece interweaves the distinct voices of four key research partners offering key insights and guidelines for practitioners interested in bringing testimonial oral histories into their classroom.

Each of the four co-authors—Lisa, Marie-Jolie, Umwali, and Shelley—writes from her disciplinary and embodied location as researcher and educator and offers insights arising respectively from the research collaboration, from documentary film production and reception, guest speaking engagements, or developing pedagogy to support the documentary and guest lecture. In writing this introduction to the project, Lisa draws from a history of participatory action research and anti-discriminatory teacher education with a focus on pedagogies of witnessing and remembrance⁹. Marie-Jolie Rwigema and Umwali Sollange are members of the Rwandan community in Toronto and have been active as equity educators and organizers in community processes of healing and commemoration. Shelley Kyte, the Assistant Curriculum Leader - Canadian and World Studies at Silverthorn Collegiate Institute in Etobicoke, Ontario and a teacher with one of the longest history teaching the course (for which she has written numerous curriculum units, workshop and conference presentations).

The research thus far has clarified two central challenges in bringing oral history into classrooms as a method and resource. The first is to include key stakeholders as partners in developing curriculum in a way that is both equitable and accountable to the diverse communities that schools serve. The second is specific to testimonial oral and life histories of mass trauma and violence. This is a challenge of curricular and pedagogical development, demanding a careful cross-pollination of the fields of anti-racist/social justice education, pedagogies of remembrance, and history education so that these might mutually refine and critically inform each other to respond to the expectations of community partners.

As an anti-hierarchical methodology, oral history informs both the community-led action research and the curriculum and pedagogies being developed. In terms of the former, we have found it essential that our process be consistently guided by oral history research practices of

horizontal collaborative relations, reciprocity, and shared authority.¹⁰ This includes a practice of knowledge co-construction that is based on a sustained relationship of ongoing dialogue, shared respect, trust, leadership and benefit, and concern or care for the other's well-being.¹¹ Such a relationship implies a method that problematizes and actively works against hierarchies of knowledge and knowers: this involves setting the academic authority of the researcher alongside the *equally valuable and irreplaceable* epistemic privilege,¹² thick contextual cultural knowledge ("insider knowledge")¹³, and embodied experiential knowledge and interpretive resources of the subject of the life history or testimony.¹⁴

In terms of the second challenge, in this project, Rwandan Canadian partners have specifically prioritized that teachers practice critical and anti-oppression pedagogies. This reflects an expectation that their testimonies of survival be received not solely with sympathy or interest but more importantly with critical reflexivity and historical knowledge contextualizing them within long and ongoing histories of imperialism. As Marie-Jolie and Umwali elaborate below, this insistence is grounded in a rigorous critique of the colonial representations of the genocide within Eurocentric discourses of African violence, helplessness, victimhood, and voicelessness especially as these play out in educational spheres.¹⁵

In her section below, Marie-Jolie offers principles for the practice of shared authority in introducing oral history into the classroom, guidelines that emerge from the production and reception of the documentary, "Historian-Survivors". She describes this process as a consensus-based practice of critical, resistant, remembrance-based healing and knowledge generation.

Introducing oral history into the history classroom has particular implications for the 'what', 'how', and 'so what' of studying the past. It demands pedagogy that develops students' appreciation for historic truth as well as evidentiary truth. While the latter is essential in legal

processes, Dori Laub argues that the former allows listeners to attend to not merely the speaker's individual subjective truth but "the very historicity of the event".¹⁶ Building a nuanced and agentive appreciation of historicity is a key element of historical thinking.¹⁷ Teaching for historical consciousness means that students come to understand the present conjuncture as part of longer historical forces and processes in which we each have responsibility, agency and multiple possibilities for action that have historical significance. As Llewelyn has argued¹⁸ this moves the study of history from questions of What happened? to those of Why does it matter? To whom? For what social projects?, and In what time or place? (including how this history matters to me here and now). It directs historians' and students' attention to questions of subjectivity, significance and memory:¹⁹ What did a past event or moment mean to the person experiencing it? How does a community remember the event even today? Which people's memories are important to listen to and how is our access to them filtered through relations of power? How does the meaning of this event change as each generation remembers it differently according to their lives and context? How are collective identities defined through contemporary practices of remembering the past through oral history?

Offering classroom examples and strategies from extensive experience teaching this course, Shelley explores in her section the challenges of building critical empathy and historical thinking, as well as engaging respectfully with competing historical accounts and tensions within and between different communities.

It is worth noting that our research in curriculum development focuses specifically on challenges and directions for introducing oral and life histories of survivors of mass violence. That is, our research is concerned with pedagogies that attend to the particular genre, address, and dynamics of testimony.²⁰

Oral history is testimonial when the witness or survivor has an additional purpose for telling their story: this can include a desire that this event never be forgotten, that the dead be honoured, or that the living be vigilant and intervene into ongoing historical conditions that make mass violence/atrocity possible.²¹ In other words, oral history is testimonial when it grabs the listener and says “You need to pass this story on! This story must not be forgotten or disappear! It has too much to teach us and we owe the dead this respect! Our listening must enact the promise: Never again shall this violence be permitted to recur.”

Introducing testimonial oral and life histories into the history classroom has a series of curricular and pedagogical implications. These include an understanding that learning from testimony is always an emotional process. Emotions are intensified by oral history’s emphasis on building personal relationships, not just between a speaker and a listener but between and within whole communities. Recognizing this affective dimension of witnessing testimonial oral and life histories points to the need for students to learn new listening practices.

As Umwali explains in her section below, the visiting survivor does not simply testify but also brings their traditions and conventions of sharing and witnessing testimony. The oral history practice of shared authority might ideally include students learning from these community practices in which oral histories are told in order to teach children moral principles, ground their sense of identity within longer, complex histories of collective becoming, and build ways of living that honour those who have passed away. Umwali examines the possible values and aspirations informing a classroom speaker’s decision to share testimonial oral histories of genocide and survival. To the degree that survivors are motivated by larger goals of building a more just world when they share the gift of testimony, she elaborates the kind of listening

practices, critical thinking and emotional support a guest speaker might expect from teachers as part of a relationship of reciprocity and mutual respect.

II. Marie Jolie: The value of documentary film as Oral History and Educational Tool

Within our research focus on best practices of learning from testimonial oral history, I want to distinguish the value of documentary film as oral history and educational resource, a value that lies in the processes both of creation and pedagogical reception. I do this in particular from my vantage point as a jack-of-interrelated-trades (social worker, therapist, scholar, educator, active member of the Rwandan Canadian community in Toronto) but also as a participant in the collective creation of the unique documentary, “The Rwandan Genocide as told by its Historian-Survivors”.²² The overarching goal in this documentary was to archive the stories and analyses of a community of which I am a member—the Rwandan-Canadian diaspora.

The film

My purpose in bringing a group of Rwandan-Canadians together in 2006 to share our perspectives on the 1994 genocide in Rwanda was to address the glaring absence of films made by Rwandans themselves about the genocide at that point in time. The genocide itself was an outcome of colonial power relations and specifically Belgian ‘divide and conquer’ strategies and the institutionalization of ethnic differences and divisions in Rwanda, a process later fueled and manipulated by French neo-imperial policies of military intervention and support.²³ Given this context, the documentary participant co-creators and I felt it was important that we make an intervention into the neo-colonial power relations evidenced by the dominance of Western voices in cultural and academic knowledge production about the Rwandan genocide.

Put simply, we were all exasperated that the most popular Rwanda genocide story in Canada was one of two films: “Hotel Rwanda”²⁴ or “Shake hands with the Devil”.²⁵ Survivors commonly consider the first as a historically inaccurate story that creates a hero out of someone many consider a genocide opportunist.²⁶ The latter selectively heroizes a Canadian general (Romeo Dallaire) that many survivors feel failed them, along with the UN whose peacekeeping forces he led.²⁷ In short, those of us who created the film felt that these popular and dominant narrations of the Rwandan genocide added not only insult to injury but additional injury to injury.

As the director-editor of the documentary, I deliberately approached Rwandans with whom I shared an anti-colonial worldview and asked that they share these on film. My intention was that the film be explicitly critical of colonial discourses concerning Rwanda. As a practicing social worker and mental health counselor, I was also very interested in how survivors in our community cope with their trauma.

The process of making the film

While not explicitly employing the language of ‘shared authority’, the collective’s approach to making the documentary bears much in common with this principle and practice of oral history. In my observation, I would trace this less to methodological commitments than a personal sense of accountability inherent in our pre-existing relationships as members of a community. Even with this implicit understanding, it was our shared anti-colonial, anti-oppressive politics that led to our commitment to a filmmaking process that was accountable, transparent, and horizontal. Consequently, the decision making around both the documentary’s content and its dissemination has been as collective as possible. This process was crucial to deciding the thematic and editorial

focus of the documentary. As a collective, we chose to steer away from a focus on individual survivor stories of trauma and healing common to other accounts, a focus that can construct suffering as ‘spectacle’ for empathic consumption.²⁸ We preferred to focus the editing on participants’ discussion of the socio-political and neo-colonial context of forces leading to the genocide, a context that has not ended but continues to shape contemporary knowledge production and cultural representations of the genocide. When possible, we share decision making around the uses to which the documentary is put (i.e., screenings and distribution). That being said, the group ultimately entrusted me with editing the final product.

The value of the documentary as an oral history, and as an educational resource

The film was created to be an educational resource that provides interested viewers (scholars, trauma practitioners, students etc.) with a Rwandan-centered perspective on what happened during the genocide. The documentary provides less an account of ‘what happened’ and more a recounting of how some of us as survivors and intergenerational survivors make sense of the genocide and its subsequent representation. As an explicit critique of who it is that gets to speak for Rwanda, we made sure that the “experts” in the film were Rwandan survivors (broadly defined), whether they were speaking to their own experiences or the broader socio-political and historical context of the genocide.

The value and strength of the documentary, then, is its insistence on the primacy of the perspectives of Rwandan genocide survivors in the process of historiography, that is, the researching and writing of the genocide as history.

This documentary is also valuable in the explicit politicization of contemporary understandings of genocide survival. It broadens academic and professional discussions from a

focus on individual trauma and healing to a sociopolitical analysis that contextualizes such trauma within larger systemic processes of colonial violence and inequitable international power dynamics. Seen within this context, historical and professional discussions of trauma, survival, and healing must become critically self-reflexive, broaching questions of accountability, reciprocity, voice and expertise. As described in the introduction, these are the very debates around shared authority at the heart of the emerging field of oral history.

As a scholar and educator, I would argue that this is where the strength of oral history as an educational resource lies. In contrast to traditional, hegemonic, ‘top down’ histories (both in popular culture and academic research), oral history as a methodology focuses on the perspectives of people who do not have at their disposal the institutional power to ensure their perspective becomes widely accepted as truth.²⁹ Oral history prioritizes the epistemic privilege³⁰ of people whose voices are often deliberately de-legitimated and silenced if not unintentionally drowned out by those with systemic and institutional access to write over/ over-write the history of others.

Oral History as a methodology for listening to and learning from Genocide Historian-Survivors

To this point, I’ve focused on insights into testimonial oral history that emerge from the making of the documentary.³¹ This research project also surfaced salient aspects of the documentary’s pedagogical reception in teacher workshops and the classroom. I’ll focus here on one insight I have gleaned from bringing the documentary to high school students.

I would argue that, in contrast to traditional approaches to the study of history through primary and secondary written texts, the oral dimension of oral history has the potential to engage students in both emotional and critical forms of learning. In my classroom visits, I’ve

observed a consistent intensity of students' affective engagement with the narratives and analysis of the survivor-historians in the film. The fact that the historian-survivors move back and forth between, on the one hand, sharing personal experiences of suffering and, on the other, socio-political and historical analysis of the genocide (in its colonial origins, imperial complicities, and continuities with the ongoing oppression of racialized groups globally) effects an important shift in the film's reception. That is, this movement shifts the classroom discussion from a sympathetic focus on individual suffering to critical questions of remembrance, responsibility, and global justice. This strikes me as entirely appropriate for a course focused on contemporary Canadian and world studies.

Beyond shifting reception from apolitically sentimental to critical modalities, I've observed a particular agency in the documentary as oral history. The protagonists are not words on a page. They address audiences actively and directly, and explicitly self-position as historical subjects and experts. In doing this, they demand a particular mode of attention, such that they are 'seen' and 'felt' by students on their own terms. That is, the film's protagonists and I as the editor don't speak to the students as helpless victims and 'speechless emissaries'³² as imagined by the 'white savior industrial complex'.³³ Viewers find themselves addressed explicitly by Africans speaking not simply from immense suffering but with epistemic authority. The kind of listening we demand is neither empathetic nor anthropological but critically reflexive and self-implicating in both the larger geopolitical conditions of genocide and the politics of its representation. Our testimonial address invites viewers into a relationship of responsibility and accountability central to oral history as method.³⁴

III. Umwali: A Guest Speaker's perspective on Bringing Oral History to Classrooms to Teach about Mass Violence

Oral history is a common form of intergenerational, remembrance and pedagogy in Rwandan culture both nationally and in the diaspora. In fact, a sect from the *Abiru clan* historically held the role of knowledge holders of Rwandan tradition, monarch secrets, and other forms of collective memory. As a member of the Rwandan community, then, oral history is part of how I have integrated and shared knowledge all my life.

Within these broader Rwandan traditions, my interest in the context of this chapter is to discern the ways I have experienced Rwandans passing on memory of mass tragedy and honoring the dead. I then draw out the implications of this for teachers wishing to invite survivors to share testimonial life- and oral histories of mass violence in their classrooms.

In my experience, family, friends, and community members share stories of atrocities they have witnessed or survived in very informal ways—ways that are woven into the fabric of everyday conversation. These stories and memories arrive unannounced and incidentally, almost unexpectedly (at least for the listeners). The art of storytelling, including tragic accounts, is interspersed with jokes and laughter and the flow of everyday, intimate family conversation. The stories told are familiar—we might have heard them once or many times—and the protagonists are family or community members whom we know as whole, complex beings. Testimonial histories, in this context, are an everyday practice.

The hardships and suffering described in these stories are not distant, shocking or unfathomable. Without essentializing, I wish to make the point that, as a community, we are accustomed to hardship: death is a part of living. Telling stories of violence, like telling stories of life and love and strength, is a means by which older community and family members pass on a

common heritage. For those of us listening, we learn more than ‘What happened’. We learn the cultural values of our community; we learn what it means to lose a loved one, how to console the survivors for their loss, how to stay grounded and strong as a community, and how to survive with tears and laughter. It is through listening to these stories of atrocity and survival that we develop a shared set of memories and understandings, cultural norms, and values. It is also through taking up these memories that we affirm our relationships to ourselves, and to our family members both present and dead, close and distant.

This speaks to the pedagogy of oral history in family and community contexts that I have known. I remember the sharing is aimed to acculturate us into a collective memory, worldview and community or, in the case of a distant issue or culture, to offer an experience from which we need to learn. In other words, testimonial oral histories are a form of interpersonal, historical, humanist *education* in which we learn to respect and apply that knowledge in how we move through life. Most importantly, the practice of sharing oral histories of collective trauma is treated implicitly as a conversation and a relationship between people, in which everyone is *involved* in the content, the collective practice, and the lessons learned.

Implications for learning from Testimonial Life and Oral Histories of Violence in Classrooms

What do the community practices of testimony and remembrance practices I’ve outlined mean for the ways that I would hope the larger global community would receive and value the expertise and wisdom gleaned from traumatic histories of the 1994 genocide as told by survivor communities?

I would argue that there is a method to oral history as it is practiced in different cultural traditions and (diasporic) communities in Canada. These shared understandings and conventions

have implications for receiving speakers in classrooms including: a relationship of reciprocity and responsibility that humanizes the testimony and extends pre- and post-visit; practices of listening and honoring information in a dialogic etiquette especially when listening to trauma; equal power between the speaker, teacher and students to support a dialogue rather than monologic communication that speaks to or speaks at; follow up to the conversation in order to process any after-reactions.

In offering these to teachers as guidelines, I want to emphasize that the experience of recounting testimonial oral histories of mass violence to classrooms of strangers is, for a speaker, fraught and demanding in many ways. And yet we accept to take on these challenges. Our motivations are too strong to remain silent. For this reason, I'd ask educators to honor our goals in offering the gift of testimony.

As a guest speaker, I am primarily motivated by the urgency of building a more equitable, democratic society and world. This means developing students' capacities to analyze and actively transform discrimination of all forms and expand all groups' access and opportunity to contribute to social, economic, political and cultural spheres in society.³⁵

This personal motivation places me somewhat at odds with the contemporary context of systemic and institutional inequity, one that is still invested in maintaining Eurocentrism, patriarchy, classism, and sexism. This means a certain implicit trust is broken and I arrive in classrooms with a certain skepticism and set of expectations. My specific concern is with apolitical or relativist approaches to studying history—and especially histories of mass violence—through the dominant Canadian lens of multiculturalism. My point is that a relativist focus on 'cultural difference' misreads the geopolitical—and specifically imperial—forces behind mass violence and camouflages social inequality in our very

conditions of learning, undermining the struggles of minoritized groups for equity and justice.

The goals and priorities I bring as an invited speaker have implications for the relationship I ask teachers to honor in their invitation to me. I offer oral histories not as “contemporary tourism which exploits the past”³⁶. Rather, I agree to enter classrooms as a community stakeholder and Canadian citizen with an investment in the ways action-oriented, anti-discrimination and social justice pedagogies frame and inform the history curriculum.

In such pedagogies, teachers, students and guests work side by side as active seekers of critical and self-reflective understanding of difference. It may seem I’m overstepping my boundaries when I’m invited into someone else’s classroom but I see myself as more than a guest. The act of giving difficult testimony is an affirmation of a relationship with mutual obligations and I’m deeply interested in the ways my testimony will be received and the agendas framing that reception. As a racialized immigrant-Canadian woman who has spoken in several classrooms, I find it vitally important to speak in ways that are pedagogical, that develop students’ analysis of and appreciation for how this event matters in their lives and in mine in terms of not only building collective memory but also defining our civic rights and obligations as Canadians. This means that my oral testimony will include a focus on the dangers of prejudice, imperialism, colonialism and miseducation (factors in the 1994 Genocide against Tutsi but also issues today in Canada). For example, as a speaker for the Passages Canada Program at Historical Canada (formally, the Dominion Institute), I would recount and explain the pre-1994 role of colonialism, prejudice, miseducation in Rwandan classrooms in terms of revisionist curriculum and the targeting of students who identified/perceived as Tutsi. This critical pedagogical

orientation implies that very clear links can be made between my testimony and that of, for examples, survivors of Canada's Indian Residential School system lasting over a century until 1996.³⁷

Before being invited to a classroom, I expect teachers (and administration) to build students' critical consciousness and agency in relation to power dynamics in their worlds, including within the current education system. I consider this an essential condition for listening to testimony, that is, strong respectful relationships that value and empower all students and build equitable school cultures and healthy learning communities. By creating a safe space for marginalized voices and difficult conversations, I hope in my testimony to shift interpersonal dynamics among groups, often fraught with stigma, stereotypes and hierarchy.

As a community member and stakeholder, my priorities lie in extending the learning process beyond the classroom to ensure that lessons learned promote social justice in the society and world we share. There are several conditions I see as necessary for this.

Financial Investment: While it may also seem beyond my purview as invited guest, I would argue that schools need to financially invest in accommodating oral history into the curriculum. This would include teacher and administration training, time extension for the courses to prepare students for the speaker, and psycho-social supports in case the speaker or students need it. I would further argue that it is ethically important to meaningfully develop a compensation strategy for employing community-historian-experts who offer a diversifying and expanded dimension to the history curriculum. Taking oral history seriously as an institution implies an acknowledgment of the value and respect for content, recognition of expertise and curricular and pedagogical strategies to develop a more balanced approach to questions of authority between oral and written histories.

Contextualized, respectful listening to and learning from Oral Histories of Mass Violence rooted in Continuing Structural Violence: The practices of recounting, listening, and collectively remembering that I have described in Rwandan diasporic communities imply the importance of *context* in listening—both an attention to power inequalities and attending to the context of relationship building. The practices of listening I envision would approach survivors with respect as knowledge producers. Often testimonies and personal accounts offer forms of cultural meaning, memory, and knowledge not captured in text, especially if the oral community is one in which background, context and analysis is shared in informal settings such as home, relatives, and community storytelling. Culturally and linguistically embodied perspectives can give uniquely detailed insights that carry their own forms of analysis and theory. Experiential knowledge cannot be trumped by theory or other disciplinary practices of knowledge acquisition. To give a full picture, all sources and forms of knowing need to be valued and respected. For example, testimony humanizes loss so that it's no longer one million people who died but a parent, a sibling, a friend, a relative, or a neighbor. As Patrick Sharangabo eloquently states, it the unique loved one whom the survivor or witness is remembering, not a number.³⁸ Testimony also honours the courage of the dead in ways that historical accounts, with their disciplinary conventions of impartiality, simply cannot. All of this is combined in the unique act of testimony. Many community members have observed that one would write a book for each minute of their ordeal.

I gesture here to the kinds of listening practices described above by Marie-Jolie. As a member of a survivor community, I am not interested in looking to the audience for spectacular fascination, sympathy, salvation, or the opportunity to become a poster child for the campaign of the month. I am interested in leveraging Rwanda's tragic past as a conversation platform for

students to examine what Rwanda can teach all of us as we are differently situated in contemporary relations of power, violence, and potential change.

Social Supports in Place for Students and Guest Speaker: Have teachers made accommodations to support students or speaker if the content has an unexpected effect? In a diverse city like Toronto, there is likelihood that there are students and/or teachers who could intimately relate to the trauma. Putting in place these supports would begin to shift and expand the infrastructure of the education system as a learning community space.

Schools can utilize existing resources such as 1) intentional buddy systems for students and teachers to debrief in a safe and informal space—building on the trusting relationships that are already in place; 2) alerting the school counselor of potential need for their support. It would also be preferably but perhaps not practical for a speaker to come with accompaniment because in my experience it is essential to debrief after the talk.

There is much schools can learn from oral history practices in communities that build informal relationships of support and healing as part of learning. In trying to build an empathic and critical learning space, I would like as a speaker to know that the conversation will not end when I leave the class. As a Rwandan, I inherit the cultural understanding that caring community is integral to my healing. It is from this experience that I recommend ongoing dialogues that promote interpersonal skills that allow students to work through differences and create a loving space. I would hope that listening to testimony of mass violence might serve as an opportunity to prepare teachers and students to embody compassion while building critical consciousness and dismantling power structures. As a community activist and speaker, I know that love and caring have kept the community functional (as best as it can) – and supported our working through very difficult situations. As ambitious as this may sound, my aspirations in giving testimony include

building school spaces that encourage and develop students' emotional connections and social skills. I believe that the kind of listening practices and supports demanded by the address of testimony also compose the ability to 'see each other' in our complex and true nature, allowing students to see themselves as whole beings. In my experience as a speaker, the focus was more on details and information about the 1994 Rwandan Genocide against Tutsi or on the experience of being a youth and immigrant. I would argue that oral history is most powerful when students are focused on reflectively finding their relationship to this story. As dark and depressing as testimonial oral histories of mass violence may seem, the gifts they can bring are not pessimism but a vigilant, committed optimism. This is the hopefulness of an emotionally engaged student community invested in "the aliveness and strength in each person concerned".³⁹

IV. Shelley: A Teacher's Perspective on the Context and Implications for bringing Testimony and Oral History of mass violence into the Classroom

The Value in using Testimony and Oral History to study the Rwandan Genocide

For teachers, genocide education poses a particular set of challenges: beyond apprenticing young historians, genocide education has the broad civic goals of building empathy within students as a means of engendering their sense of universal humanity and social agency. Bringing testimony and oral history into the classroom is an ideal way to achieve these ambitious aims.

Building Relationships with Community Groups: I'll reiterate Marie-Jolie and Umwali's emphasis on the ethical importance of building relationships but include an additional motivation for teachers. There is a lack of resources in optional courses at the secondary school level. Even if a teacher is willing to supplement resources with their own, it can be difficult to access quality

sources. Using testimony and oral history allows schools to engage in partnership building with survivor communities. Once contact has been made, it is like ripples in a pond—more opportunities tend to follow. This partnership is interactive. Allowing community groups into the schools provides survivor groups with a greater voice in how knowledge about the Rwandan genocide is constructed. As a teacher partner in this university-community-school research project, this relationship with invited classroom guests is ongoing and my students now have access to documentaries, documentarians, survivors, and educators they would not have had otherwise.

Building Critical Empathy: While life histories and testimony humanize history, it is the interpersonal and interactive nature of oral testimony that pushes students not only to feel but also to think. Not only should the students get an opportunity to ask questions, they should also be challenged in turn by the speaker. This process is not designed to belittle students but rather to engage them to a greater degree in their own learning. This was certainly the case with Marie Jolie's questioning students before and after screening the above-described documentary. Educators can guide student engagement through a series of open-ended prompts to assess if they are making connections, have questions or are indeed having an emotional response. For example, the following prompts can be used with almost all testimony: "The following points cause an emotional response or resonated with me...", "What big ideas of right or wrong are raised for me...", "What connections can I make to class concepts...", "Am I left with any unresolved questions or moral concerns...".

Challenges for Pedagogy

Applying the Historical Thinking Skills: As the Rwandan genocide is primarily included in schools as part of History curriculum, incorporating testimony into one's classroom allows for the application of historical thinking concepts such as those required by the Ontario Ministry of Education curriculum.⁴⁰ The development of historical consciousness in students is fundamental to the critical study of history.⁴¹ By applying a critical thinking approach to the study of history students can come to understand that history is a constant process of knowledge creation. Students must always be reminded that history is not fact but rather is society's construction and interpretations of the past. As such, students studying history should be examining a wide range of historiography that includes both primary (first-hand or eye-witness accounts) and secondary (second-hand accounts) sources. Testimony and oral history give students opportunities to apply their historical thinking skills to analyze primary sources and to evaluate how knowledge is constructed and assigned value by society and institutions. Ideally, their historical inquiry process should include an examination of competing sources or those that present different narratives of events. For example, *Smile through the Tears* is an oral history in graphic novel format by survivor Rupert Bazambanza.⁴² This source can be read alongside *Rescue in Rwanda*, a non-oral history graphic novel.⁴³ Students can then use these sources to evaluate historical significance and identify competing points of view in the construction of history. One of the higher level thinking activities students can do is to evaluate which sources—primary or secondary—are more credible and reliable and what criteria can act as the basis of such a judgment. The greatest value of this activity lies in challenging students to articulate and then defend the criteria they design in order to answer this question.

Primary sources should not be an underrepresented add-on to the resources in a history classroom examining mass violence. Far too often they are viewed as someone's 'story' or

dismissed as a legitimate source of knowledge. Obviously, students need to be taught how to listen to oral testimony/primary sources and apply a structure in order to critically analyze it. There are many scaffolds that teachers can use. For example, in a lens-based approach, students are assigned one lens or perspective to focus on at a time (they might focus on facts learned, emotions evoked, negatives or positives presented, or conclusions that can be drawn). This introductory structure allows students to eventually come together to critically discuss all assigned perspectives.⁴⁴ The use of lenses both structures and supports students in accessing their prior knowledge and in critically analyzing the source. Whatever scaffolds one uses, they should be introduced to students early on in the course before they are even exposed to oral testimony. Ideally, students should be used to applying pre-, mid- and post-reading strategies when approaching primary sources. *Think Literacy*, a cross-curricular support document created by the Ministry of Education in Ontario, offers sample scaffolds for students in grades 7 to 12.⁴⁵

Questions of Context: Using testimony and oral history to teach mass violence is certainly different from teaching any other history. The varied emotional considerations, the institutional power relations shaping how history is written, and the end goals of genocide education all require that the educator provide an anti-racist, global education lens to teaching about the Rwandan genocide. It is insufficient to start one's examination of the Rwandan Genocide with the 'One hundred Days' of violence in 1994. Cause and consequence (another concept of historical thinking) requires that one looks to the origins of the genocide much farther back in the history of colonization and postcolonial imperial forces. Other concepts that need to be addressed include concepts of identity formation, the divisive formation of ethnic identities into dichotomies of 'us versus them', the role colonialism played in institutionalizing ethnic divisions in Rwanda based on racist ideologies, and the power-triangle that examines the ways

discrimination occurs not only interpersonally, but psychologically, institutionally and structurally.⁴⁶

Marie Jolie and Umwali have described community priorities that pedagogy support students in approaching and listening to the speaker less as ‘witness’ than ‘expert’. One of the challenges in genocide education is the sources that are available to high school teachers and how they are weighed and valued. Why is Romeo Dallaire recognized as a major source on the Rwandan genocide (especially in Canada) given that he was an outsider? Clearly his experiences can offer insight into the role of the international community but the question raised by Marie Jolie remains: where is the voice of the people who experienced the genocide themselves? Having students examine the availability of sources and the degree of respect they’re afforded in peoples’ responses can help them gain insight into how institutions create knowledge/history through inequitable power relations (again, power-triangle exercises are useful here).

Presumably the aim of genocide education is not simply to teach “What happened” but rather to prompt students to ask “So What?” and build meaningful understandings of what they have learned. This objective is shared by oral history as a methodology. As Umwali argues, these questions need to be framed as something teachers, students and guests are investigating together, and not just with respect to a far-away place where bad things happened to other people but within a holistic global contemporary context of power relations active in students’ own lives. This translation of discussions into context of immediate relevance and action will enable genocide educators to help students realize a sense of civic-mindedness.

Challenges and Questions for the future

Time. This is a luxury that is usually missing from classrooms. And it is required if one is going to do justice to testimony and oral history. Sometimes a stranger in the classroom changes the dynamic and students need time to adjust. Ideally, speakers don't pop by for one class but a relationship builds over several visits: one class for an introduction, one to speak, and one for debriefing activities that can bridge into social action projects. If possible, teachers need to take the time and sacrifice other activities or content. It also takes time to establish the context necessary for any guests coming into one's classroom, both in terms of the receptive classroom context and kinds of scaffolding activities that historically contextualize the testimony. Finally, more time may need to be taken if teachers assess that students have missed the enduring lessons and implications of the commitment "Never again." Given the importance of these goals, something else will have to give.

Culturally diverse school boards can offer a number of challenges when bringing testimony into the classroom. Some cultures celebrate and venerate oral traditions and are accustomed to placing value on it as a source of knowledge. As Umwali explains, this may include story telling or the ways some communities preserve their collective memories through memorializing family histories and life stories. Other cultures may be dismissive of non-academic or non-institutional sources of knowledge. This may be due to a family's desire to leave behind traumatic experiences of civil violence, flight or emigration when coming to Canada. Both orientations in students' family cultures need to be addressed with explicit instruction about how to respect and evaluate testimony, in terms of the history thinking skills expectations of the curriculum.

Another challenge that diversity offers is that students may strongly identify with perpetrator or target groups, something that can be difficult for the most experienced teacher to

handle. This was particularly common in the early years of the *Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity* course. There was a great deal of opposition from the Turkish community within Canada and the Turkish government for including the Armenian genocide as a unit of study in the curriculum. This sometimes gave rise to tensions in the classroom between different ethnic groups. Another source of conflict revolves around students who identify with perpetrator or target groups from former Yugoslavia. Parents may also get involved quite heatedly. Teachers should view this as a rich learning opportunity rather than a reason not to get involved in genocide education. This very opposition and tension illustrates why it is so crucial to engage students, parents and survivor communities in conversations framed by goals of social justice and building civic relationships, protections and agency.

For a teacher new to genocide education, deciding whom to invite into one's classroom is also a challenge. When one part of a survivor community disagrees with another part over which testimony has value, it illustrates that perspective makes the use of testimony more nuanced than it might appear. This does create rich learning opportunities as both the teacher and students examine why there are disagreements over voice. It also means that one's curriculum planning needs to stretch to incorporate very different sources. For example, this could include viewing and discussing the differences between documentaries like *Finding Hillywood*⁴⁷ and *Sweet Dreams*.⁴⁸ Both documentaries offer oral history of the Rwandan genocide and its aftermath and have as a focus the ongoing journey of reconciliation. However, students could compare how the two films differently represent the genocide, imply different conclusions, and are received by differently positioned audiences.

Testimony and oral history on mass violence by its very nature is going to feature dark and depressing subject matter. Students cannot simply be left to wallow in the violence that

occurs during genocides. They can bear witness to the survivors and what they experienced as an act of memorializing what occurred. As Marie Jolie and Umwali argue, students would ideally gain critical perspective on their own lives and worlds, one that would inspire a desire to take action. This expression of social justice principles in action is one of the most challenging aspects of genocide education to teach and to assess in the short- and long term. More traditional tests may not do this. Guided writing activities such as double-entry diaries can support a holistic evaluation of enduring learning as they allow students to respond to specific prompts using their own observations. Assessment also offers an opportunity to encourage students to take action in more than imaginary time-place assignments. For example, when Kobe Bryant was the Global Brand Ambassador for Turkish Airlines, my students wrote letters to him attempting to dissuade Mr. Bryant from this role as the Turkish government is a major owner of the airline and has yet to accept responsibility in relation to the Armenian genocide. Perhaps the best part of genocide education is that once the teacher has modeled what it looks like, students come up with their own ideas for the many ways to become involved.

Despite the challenges, I would encourage any teacher to jump at the chance to use testimony and oral history in one's classroom. The enrichment it offers is well worth the work demanded and the response of students is really all the evidence one needs.

V. Conclusion: Weaving the Past into a Shared Future

Portelli argues that one of oral history's distinguishing features as a methodology is the way it foregrounds the creative, collaborative process of historiography and remembrance, that is, of making meaning and making identity within a complex web of relationships. As a story told by one person to another (or a video or textual document of this telling), he argues,

oral history presents itself as an (inter)subjective practice in which “the narrator is now one of the characters, and the telling of the story is part of the story being told”.⁴⁹

Finding oneself from one’s specific positionality as an inseparable part of the story being told can, as we observe in this project, generate a whole set of critically reflexive questions about conventional practices of ‘studying’ this thing called ‘history’. That is, it draws attention to ways that ‘studying history’ is also *making* history (in both senses of the word). Taking responsibility for one’s role in this partial, situated, but collaborative process of remembrance implies learning how to act as a witness who is inside, not outside, the ‘big picture’. It also implies attending to the kinds of relationships that survivor and stakeholder communities, teachers, and students are building and how these participate in larger social or political projects of forging multi-directional historical memory and vigilant, engaged and critical publics.

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⁴ Marshall McLuhan, *Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962).

⁵ We give primacy to the designation "the Rwandan genocide against Tutsi" in recognition of the reality of discourses of denial and revisionism (i.e., the propagation of theories of "double genocide" and outright denials that the 1994 genocide was primarily aimed at decimating the Tutsi population of Rwanda). Nonetheless, we recognize that those targeted for massacre extended beyond ethnic lines to include those identified as sympathizers, traitors, or internal threats. We use a range of terms, including "1994 Rwandan genocide" and "Rwandan genocide."

⁶ Toronto District School Board. *TDBS Ontario Ministry of Education Approved Proposal for a Locally Developed Course: CHC38 Genocide and Crimes against Humanity (Course Profile)*. (Toronto: Toronto District School Board, 2008).

⁷ Developed by equity leaders in the TDSB and the organization Facing History and Ourselves, the course curriculum encompasses Lemkin, the UN Convention against Genocide, the Holocaust, and the Armenian, Cambodian and Rwandan genocides.

⁸ Marie-Jolie Rwigema, Axelle Karera, Natacha Nsabimana, Ntare Sharangabo, and Umwali Sollange Sauter, *The Rwandan Genocide as Told by Its Historian-Survivors* (videotape), dir. Marie-Jolie Rwigema (Toronto: Kabazaire Productions, 2009).

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¹¹ Dwayne Donald, Florence Glanfield, and Gladys Sterenberg, "Living Ethically within Conflicts of Colonial Authority and Relationality," *Journal of the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies* 10, 1 (2012), 53-77.

¹² Uma Narayan, "Essence of Cultural and a Sense of History: A Feminist Critique of Cultural Essentialism." In *Decentering the Centre*, edited by Uma Narayan and Sandra Harding (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 80-100.

¹³ Indeed, the concerns animating our project are grounded in a profound scepticism regarding the expert/survivor binary and the hierarchies of knowledge this underpins. These essentialist

binaries fuel reductive framings of “insiders,” including the colonial construct of “native informants.” See Shahnaz Khan, “Reconfiguring Native Informing in the Global Age,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 30, 4 (2004): 2017-35.

¹⁴ Cynthia Callison, “Appropriation of Aboriginal Oral Narratives.” *UBC Law Review* (1995): 165-81.

¹⁵ Heike Härting, “Global Humanitarianism, Race and the Spectacle of the African Corpse in Current Western Representations of the Rwandan Genocide.” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 28, no. 1 (2008), 61-77; Sherene Razack, “Stealing the Pain of Others: Reflections on Canadian Humanitarian Responses,” *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 29 (2007), 375-94; Liisa Malkki, “Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism and Dehistoricization,” *Cultural Anthropology* 11, 3 (1996), 377-404; Achilles Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Rwigema et. al. *Historian-Survivors*; Lisa Taylor, Marie-Jolie Rwigema and Umwali Sollange, “The Ethics of learning from Rwandan survivor communities: The politics of knowledge production and shared authority within community-school collaboration in genocide and critical global citizenship education.” In *Beyond Testimony and Trauma: Oral History in the Aftermath of Mass Violence*, edited by S. High and Concordia University Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2015), 88-118..

¹⁶ Dori Laub, “An event without a witness: Truth, testimony and survival.” *Testimony: Crises of witnessing in literature, psychoanalysis, and history* (1992), 75-92.

¹⁷ Peter Seixas ed. *Theorizing Historical Consciousness*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004); Kent den Heyer, “History education as a disciplined ‘Ethic of Truths.’” In *New*

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¹⁸ Kristina Llewellyn, "Oral History as Peacebuilding Pedagogy." Unpublished conference paper. (Ottawa: University of Ottawa, May 24, 2015).

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²⁰ On the educational scholarship of Roger I. Simon see: Simon, *Touch Of The Past*; Simon, Roger I. *A Pedagogy Of Witnessing: Curatorial Practice And The Pursuit Of Social Justice*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2013; Simon, Roger I., Rosenberg, Sharon, and Eppert, Claudia, eds. *Between Hope And Despair: Pedagogy And The Remembrance Of Historical Trauma*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000; Taylor, Lisa K. "Curation As Public Pedagogy: Roger Simon, *A Pedagogy Of Witnessing*." *Journal of the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies*, 12, no. 3 (2015): 175-196. For the implications of pedagogies of testimony and witnessing for oral history, see Taylor, Lisa K. "What Does It Mean To Story Our Shared Historical Present? Listening To Testimonial Oral And Life Histories Through The Play Of The Personal." In *Storying Historical Consciousness in times of Reconciliation: Oral History, Public Education, and Cultures of Redress*, edited by N. Ng-a-Fook and K. Llewellyn. Vancouver: UBC Press, forthcoming.

²¹ Simon, "Innocence Without Naiveté".

²² Rwigema et. al. *Historian-Survivors*.

²³ Mahmood Mamdani, *When victims become killers: Colonialism, nativism, and the genocide in Rwanda*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

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- ²⁴ Terry George, *Hotel Rwanda*. (LA: MGM/United Artists, 2004).
- ²⁵ Roger Spottiswoode, *Shake Hands with the Devil* (Toronto: White Pines Productions, 2007).
- ²⁶ Alfred Ndahiro and Privat Rutazibwa, *Hotel Rwanda ou Le Genocide Des Tutsis vu par Hollywood*. (Paris, France: L'Harmattan, 2008).
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