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"Change the World, One Play at a Time"

COVER PHOTO
Craig Lapp
Foreground: Jean Paul Uwayezu (as Stetko), Background: Solange Liza Umuhire (as Ana) in Colleen Wagner's *The Monument* directed by Jennifer H. Capraru. Kinyarwandan translation by Munyarukumbuzi and Nirere.

alt.theatre:cultural diversity and the stage is Canada's only professional journal examining intersections between politics, cultural plurality, social activism, and the stage. Our readership includes theatre practitioners, academics, plus others interested in issues pertaining to arts and cultural diversity.

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MEMORY, MEMORIAL, AND *THE MONUMENT*: CONTESTED MEMORIES IN RWANDA, A FIELD REPORT

by Jennifer H. Capraru

Can a theatrical depiction focused on remembering help to heal the possibly unhealable wounds of genocide? Does it help a brutalized country struggling to heal itself to see its own history onstage, or does it relocate citizens back to the site of trauma? Looking the devil in the face may be a path to healing, and forgiveness may follow, but can theatre help this process? Genocide victims can learn to live with the truth—not to accept it, but to live with it. Re-enacting genocide raises ethical questions: Should plays be put on based on the collective hell a population survived? Or is drama crucial because it serves as a form of catharsis for victims of violence? Can we use theatre for social change—to pick our audience up by the throat, shake them, and say, "We are all responsible for building a world where genocide cannot happen"?

In a barren post-conflict landscape, the young genocidaire Stetko is forced by a grieving widow to remember, to re-trace his thoughts, re-live his deeds, and he is beaten like a dog into submission until he finds again the site of genocide. The widow Mejra seeks to reclaim her daughter Ana by recovering the body from its anonymous mass grave and memorialize it by burying it with ritual and grace. Burying, re-burying. Claiming, re-claiming. Re-membering. The play is *The Monument*, the place is Rwanda. During the spring and summer of 2008, I directed Colleen Wagner's drama throughout the land of one thousand hills and one thousand secrets. I learned that *ibuka* (remember) is one of the most dangerous words in the Kinyarwanda language.

MEJRA: What about the girl you liked the best? The virgin. What was her name?

STETKO: I don't know.

MEJRA: Think!

STETKO: I don't remember.

MEJRA: You don't remember or won't remember?

STETKO: I don't remember.

silence

MEJRA: Where is she?

pause

STETKO: A different place.

MEJRA: Where?

STETKO: In a grave.

MEJRA: You buried her?

STETKO: We dug a big grave and put lots of them in it.

MEJRA: Where is it?

STETKO: I don't remember!

MEJRA: Take me there.

STETKO: How can I when I don't know where it is?!

MEJRA: What will make you remember?

STETKO: What?

MEJRA: What do I have to do to you to make you remember?

STETKO: Some things are just gone from memory. Blocked out.

MEJRA: *Hands him a shovel*. Start digging.

STETKO: It's not here!

MEJRA: Your own grave. Start digging.
(*The Monument*, Sc. 7)

To remember is to dig up the collective graves of memory. Painful memories, which travel from the past to the present to the future. It is of crucial importance to try to comprehend the Rwandan audience and the expectations and needs they may bring to the theatre. It is paramount to remember that the Rwandan people will carry a huge emotional weight for generations to come. Any attempt to represent a story that echoes the Rwandan genocide must never descend to trivialization.

We must consider the act of representation—inherent in theatre—in the context of Rwanda. In re-presenting an applied theatre production made partly with survivors are we re-living or re-writing the trauma? By touring the provinces, we reached audiences unschooled in viewing or critiquing theatre. People's expectations were often unrealistic; many wanted the theatre to be documentary—a mimetic representation of their social context, performance as empirical proof that genocide had happened. After the show, they would comment that they liked it, particularly as it made their communities more aware of the proof and accountable. But is it theatre's job to accurately document and give juridical proof of genocide? Not in the case of *The Monument*. Possibly in a collective creation performed with survivors, using their testimonies, such as *Rwanda 94* by Belgian director Marie-France Collard.

We must examine theatre as memory, in how we approach the past. Memorial theatre is one that honours the dead and preserves the memory of the victims. One must be vigilant to keep the connection flowing not only from the past to the present, but also into the future. When and to what degree does accuracy in remembering and showing memorial ritual finish in melancholia in the Freudian sense—picking at the scab, remaining in the trauma, investing in victim-hood, all of which result in a population unable to move on? I have seen evidence of this in Rwanda, where memorial becomes the fly embalmed in amber. But in case of emergency, one must break the glass.

Part of theatre's function is to educate: to transmit a lesson. Genocide ideology is alive and well, from Hutu power Web sites, to the first conference of deniers, which was just held in Montreal in April 2008 prior to Ibuka (remembrance) Week, to girls finding death threats in their desks in the schools of Rwanda. In a country where 50 percent of the population is under the age of twenty-five, a youth-quake is Rwanda's hope. It is they who can break the cycle of violence and build a secure future.

Canada's Roger Simon, a pre-eminent scholar in memory, compares three forms of memory in education; historicization, memorialization, and transformative recollection. In transformative recollection, "the possibility of hope is initiated by a rending, a tearing of continuity in that moment in which 'tradition' [...] is recognized as unable to fully provide the terms for remembrance. In this respect, remembrance must become an opening,

RE-ENACTING GENOCIDE RAISES ETHICAL QUESTIONS: SHOULD PLAYS BE PUT ON BASED ON THE COLLECTIVE HELL A POPULATION SURVIVED? OR IS DRAMA CRUCIAL BECAUSE IT SERVES AS A FORM OF CATHARSIS FOR VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE?

a learning, a moving beyond that which is recognized as a concern of the present because it is already known" (29). Adding hope transforms recollection from passive into active. Moving beyond tradition by venturing into the unknown of the imagined—this is the territory of theatre.

Through education, we can look at how genocide is perpetuated. Governments plan and execute genocide for all manner of ideologies, but why do citizens participate? In Rwanda, neighbours killed neighbours, students killed teachers, priests killed parishioners, parents killed children. present affects the future. How do the ways a community re-presents the past and re-members it shape their orientation to the present and the future? Learning from the lessons of the past can help citizens and governments build peace and foster civil societies through practicing justice and tolerance. "Each time history repeats itself, the price goes up" (Wright). The moral price goes up too.

Individual researchers and practitioners out in the field must face their own ethical decisions, as "[t]heatre is implicated in the ethical struggles of the zones in which it exists. It does not sit above

"Is there a spiritual power that connects to something at the heart of theatre, an energy that is focused through the ritual of the stage, which can aid in healing?

American author on nonviolent conflict resolution Barbara Coloroso posits that genocide ideology begins in the schoolyard:

> Genocide is in fact the most extreme form of the drama known as bullying, perpetrated by ordinary human beings who go home to dinner after deeply humiliating then killing men, women and children. By conceding that genocide is not outside the realm of ordinary human behaviour, we can then begin to examine its roots and the climate that facilitates its pathological growth. (51)

The human race has suffered "ordinary" people killing one another in Rwanda, Cambodia, or Nazi Germany. Theatre can raise social consciousness and be part of nipping bullying in the bud so that children and youth will be socialized against atrocity and be able to make the best moral choices.

This brings me to the question of ethics. What happened in Rwanda concerns us all; as Véronique Tadjo hypothesizes, it is "not only a unique affair of a people lost in the black heart of Africa [...] to forget Rwanda is to walk blind [...] into obscurity, arms outstretched, into a collision with the future" (13). The relation of the past to the them" (Thompson 194). In Rwanda, no one likes to admit which side they are on, but everyone is on one, us too. "Every action performed, game played, question asked, story told and scene witnessed includes the theatre practitioner in an active ethical debate. Being implicated, we must therefore start to carve out ways of understanding the limitations [...] of our work" (Thompson 194). These limitations become evident through practice, and are either successfully resolved or not. Even when one anticipates them, they sneak up on you. How you deal with them can be a question of personal ethics: finding right conduct in rehearsal and in writing.

Does belief play a role in reconciliation? There is a Rwandan proverb, "God spends the day elsewhere but sleeps in Rwanda" (*Imana yilirwa ahandi ikarara i Rwanda*). "Where was God?" survivors of genocide ask. "God forgot us." "It was the time when God's face was hidden," (*hester panim*) survivors of the Holocaust say. If "God," or some spiritual power, deserted victims of genocide, can it return and try to help in the healing process? Is there a spiritual power that connects to something at the heart of theatre, an energy that is focused through the ritual of the stage, which can aid in healing? I believe theatre

can help heal. So what is that elusive energy?

I cannot say it is a spiritual energy. But I can say unequivocally that it is a creative energy, and that I have seen it around the world and in my own practice. Theatre is unlike any other art form. Through its collaborative nature, it delves deep into the emotions, minds, bodies, and imaginations of the performers and creators in a way that leaves no room to hide. One must be honest and authentic in live performance and in the creation of it. Members of diverse classes and ethnic groups find themselves in the rehearsal studio where they must be emotionally open in a way that is not required in most fields. Through the work of acting, directing, and writing, they are forced to know one another quickly, to learn to see each other as individuals on a deeper level, and are compelled by the demands of the work to bond into an ensemble. They emerge from theatre work with a clearer view of each other, and develop a greater degree of understanding and respect for each other's differences. As these waves ripple through their families, communities, and societies, theatre spreads the seeds of reconciliation. This is the invaluable healing that mindful theatre can provide to the people of Rwanda. Within and outside of our mixed group at ISÔKO, I have experienced reconciliation in action—through theatre in its rawest form.

Jaqueline Umubyeyi as Mejra © Nick Zajicek

As we know, in Rwanda, ethnic identity played a tragic role in the theatre of war. In the absence of rescue from the international community, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) led by Paul Kagame ended the genocide. The RPF government is keeping the peace by legislating that citizens only define themselves as Rwandan. New ID cards no longer bear the tribal designations of Hutu, Tutsi, or Twa that the Belgian Protectorate had put in place in 1932. Unity and reconciliation are the watchwords of the RPF. Although tribal designations may never be forgotten, given that perpetrators and victims live side by side fifteen years later, what choice did Rwanda have? What inspired me after three visits of working and living there was that this was not empty rhetoric, but that the mood in the country was one of progress, peace, and security. But forgiveness is not something which can be mandated by the government. It must come from the heart. What might theatre have to do with this process?

If one is going to introduce a foreign play looking at guilt and forgiveness to Rwanda, it must be an acceptable and inspiring one. *The Monument* is successful—a tried and tested Canadian play written in 1993 that won the Governor General's award, has been translated into seven languages, is produced globally, and has been optioned for a film. Its eternal story of war has fit cultural contexts from Romania, to Germany, to China. In 2006, I was hired as a script supervisor on the Canadian feature based on General Roméo Dallaire's book, *Shake Hands with the Devil*. I went to Rwanda for the first time and developed the idea to mount *The Monument* there. With its current mandate of peace building, Rwanda seemed a perfect context in which to position theatre that looked at remembrance of past injustice and how remembering is essential for civil society. The play examines memory and forgiveness in a post-genocide world and was set originally in a country which may have been Bosnia. It proved to fit tiny Rwanda's troubled history like a glove—not because the Rwandan genocide is exactly the same as the others, but because there is a universality within the particularity of genocide. Rwandans said, "This is our history," and although they meant ours as Rwandan, they were right—as it was "ours" in the sense of the human race.

In 2007, I field-tested *The Monument* by directing staged readings in French and English with post-show discussions on the play's themes. For this I chose the epicentre of memory, the national Genocide Memorial of Gisozi, where a quarter of a million people are buried in mass graves. I needed to be certain that our production would be acceptable to Rwandans. Fortunately, the play was enthusiastically received and discussed. The audience agreed this play must be seen in Rwanda, and soon. But in July of 2008, one year later, as we neared opening night, I was not confident that our theatrical offering would be accepted. This was no reading, but a full-blown production.

> *"Men and women, guard against a desire for vengeance*
> *and the perpetual cycle of violence and reprisals.*
> *The dead are not at peace because your hearts are still shot through with hatred...*
> *We must not deceive ourselves, the present is not what it should be."* (Tadjo 60)

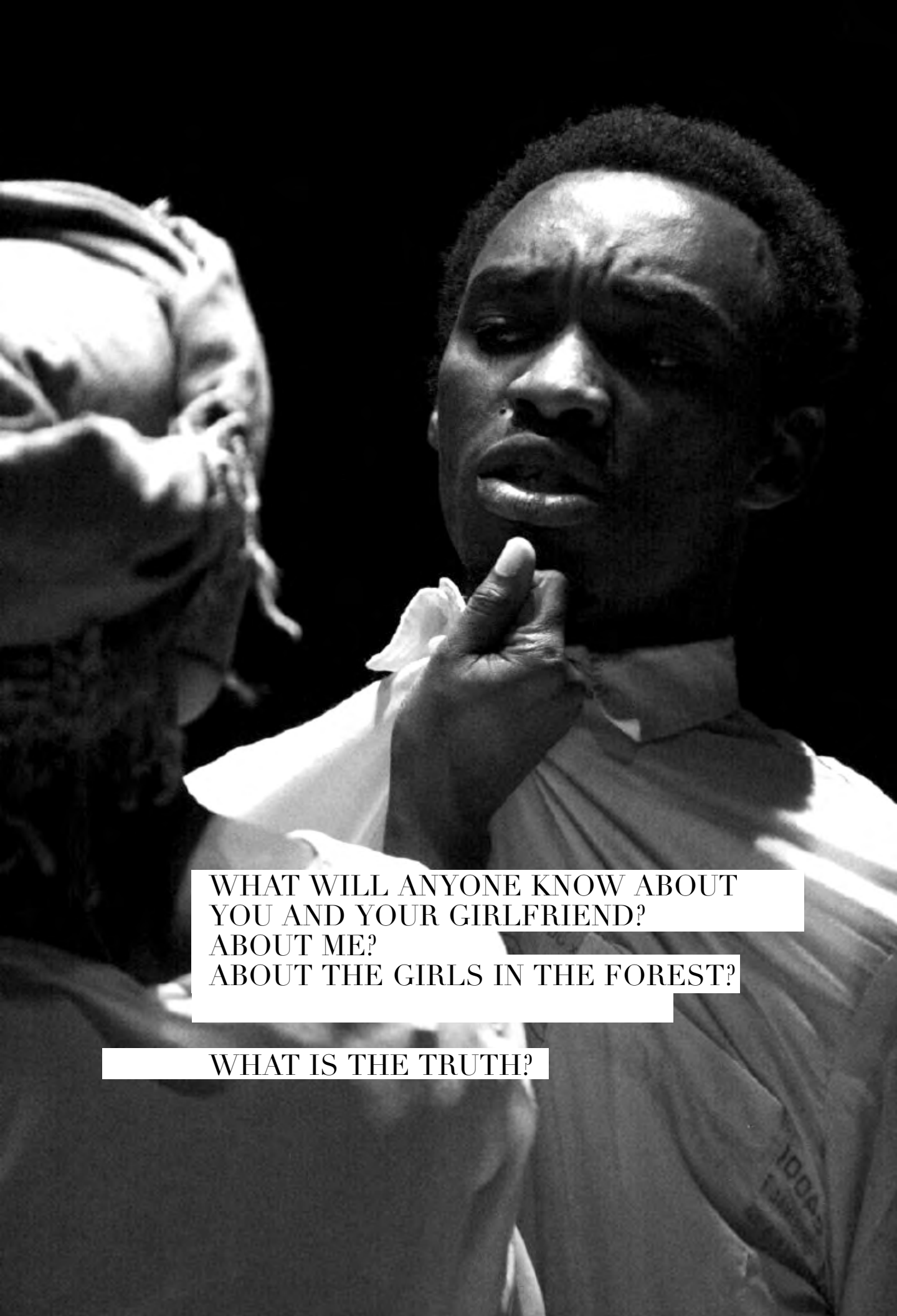
The play is provocative in juxtaposing a nineteen-year-old soldier convicted of war crimes committed during genocide with a grieving war widow whose daughter he may have raped and killed. Just as he is to be executed, the mysterious woman offers him freedom, at a price. The play mercilessly dissects the roles of victim and perpetrator and is a timeless testament to the choices of ordinary people in not so ordinary circumstances. "Me or you?" wrote Wagner, as forty-three civil wars raged in the world. Might that ever change into "us"? The audience was one with little theatre culture, but with slowly healing wounds that would be prodded by the incendiary dialogue the characters spat at each other as they fought for moral and physical supremacy against a background of ethnic hatred.

The African premiere was on 4 July 2008, Liberation Day. The date was chosen as it marked the end of the one hundred days of the genocide. We performed in Rwanda's only theatre, in Butare with the National University of Rwanda, and later on tour in makeshift playhouses. The mixed Tutsi and Hutu cast consisted of Jaqueline Umubyeyi, Jean Paul Uwayezu, Solange Umuhire, and Sonia Uwimbabazi, in the Kinyarwandan translation by Munyarukumbuzi and Nirere. Lighting and technical direction were by Ben Butera, the production manager was Claude Kamba, and the music was by Solange Umuhire. Of the touring ensemble, only the director was from another continent, race, culture. It was a tense opening night, but it was a success.

Politically, Rwanda proved to be a fitting setting for the play, due to the country's mandated path of social reconstruction. The dramatic conflict based around remembering and forgetting in the play was all too familiar to Rwandans, due to the Gacaca court system. Gacaca uses the ancient practice of community justice, sitting on the *gacaca* (grass) together and discussing the village problems. These traditional courts were established in 2001 and began their first trials in March 2005 in order to deal with the more than 100,000 prisoners who were potential perpetrators of crimes during the genocide, some of whom had been incarcerated since 1994. The cells were bursting, and the government needed a method to process the prisoners. At Gacaca, a victim's family would gather with other families, families on both sides of the conflict, making up an ambivalent audience who sat under a tree on long wooden benches, and waited patiently to finally hear the testimony of those who had tortured, raped, killed, and disposed of their loved ones. The prisoners' role was to tell the truth—the facts—acknowledge their crime, and ask for forgiveness for their deeds. If it were granted, they would be freed from prison. If not, they would return. Everything hung on that elusive thing, the truth. But as with Stetko, the truth was buried deep in the minds of the killers. Somewhere.

> **STETKO**:
> Next thing you know, I'm being tried for war crimes.
> Makes me laugh.
> If war is a crime why do we keep having them?
> Why isn't everybody arrested?
> They show us porno films and tell us doing it to women is good for morals and they bring women in
> and then after the war is over they tell us what we did is a crime.
> After it's over you find out there were rules.
> Like no raping women.
> *(ironic)* No massacres.
> Just good clean fighting as if it were a duel, as if it were honourable.
> As if you were brave. (*The Monument*, Sc. 1)

People often told us we must perform at Gacaca as "it would make them confess." The structural parallels of the play with Gacaca resonated profoundly to a Rwandan public that felt deserted by the world and needed justice to be done. There were many similarities, from releasing prisoners post confession, to locating the bodies, to details of how people were murdered. Though the facts did flow out both in Gacaca and *The Monument*, I did not understand how one could truly forgive a person who showed no remorse for their crimes, as some of the prisoners in their pink uniforms seemed not to do. They just wanted to be released. The survivors just wanted closure and to re-bury the bodies. This is a part of the uneasy truce Rwanda has had to reach. But in


WHAT WILL ANYONE KNOW ABOUT
YOU AND YOUR GIRLFRIEND?
ABOUT ME?
ABOUT THE GIRLS IN THE FOREST?
WHAT IS THE TRUTH?

the diaspora, free of a geography or a poverty that might force them to live together, they choose not to, as friends and colleagues in Canada, Belgium, and France tell me. They choose instead for the most part to stay within their ethnic group.

At our version of Gacaca, the post-show talk, we the artists stood trial. Discussions lasted hours after the performance, and often had to be cut short. At times people would leave, or sit sobbing quietly. A few times, survivors would stand after the show and give testimony. But the first questions we invariably received at talkback sessions were not emotional and were from men. Women were mostly shy to speak. For the men, legal questions came first, fast and furious, emotional responses later, as they questioned the verisimilitude of the play.

"How did this woman manage to do this?"
"Did she bribe the judge?"
"Who is she in fact?"
"Are you advocating this become law in Rwanda?"
"What if everyone took a prisoner home? What then?"

What indeed. In Africa, where corruption is sometimes rampant, Rwanda is proud of its zero tolerance policy towards bribery. But the drama's point of attack—that Mejra obtained the release of a soldier sentenced to death and took him to her farm to use as she wished—was of endless consternation to Rwandans. I too was curious. So when playwright Colleen Wagner landed in Kigali, I asked her. "I heard some rumours out of Yugoslavia" she replied. I never found hard evidence to support the premise of Stetko's release, but Wagner's set-up made for riveting theatre. When the audience asked her, she would say that theatre is not documentary, but a place of imagination. This did not satisfy them. Often it was their first experience of seeing and being invited to comment on theatre, and their dissatisfaction took us into excellent discussions of what theatre was, what is was for, and why we were doing it in their country. I learned a great deal from the audience and aim to continue to do so.

Another point of intense questioning and also connection to the work was to me as director, and revolved around the twenty-three bodies of the murdered women Stetko is forced to dig up in Scene 7. At the top of Scene 8, stage directions state: "A monument has been built. The bodies have been seated in a circle facing out." After much thought on how to bring these dead women to life on a stage, I decided on symbolization for the mise-en-scène. I took my inspiration from the glass cases I had visited at Auschwitz, where towering piles of shoes, suitcases, and eyeglasses glinted amid a submerged ocean of memories.

In a country that disobeyed its own sacred traditions with regard to the burial of the dead, but so that no one could say it never happened (though there are voices beginning to say it), acres of blanched, bleached, and twisted corpses have been left on display in churches, crypts, and schools. I thought depictions of anything too close to reality would be crass, and at worst, re-traumatize the public—not to mention our company members, some of who were survivors. I became props mistress and painstakingly buried, dug up, replaced, sanded, painted, burned, tore, and melted items ranging from a night dress, to a baby's blanket, to a crucifix, to a pair of spectacles, to a school uniform, to a battered identity card bearing the tribal designation of Tutsi. On opening night I set them in the wings with trepidation, and watched the audience intently during the time of the unveiling. Deep and perfect silence. One could hear a pin drop. A collective intake of breath as each lost girl was unburied and named. A collective exhalation as each was laid to rest. Each night I carefully added a bit more blood. Another tear. A slash.

My goal was to individualize each dead girl and take her as far away as theatrically possible from the piles of corpses we have seen too often as they are bulldozed into mass graves in Bosnia, Darfur, Congo, or Poland. These images have somehow over time managed to lose their shocking resonance. However, after the careful preparation of props, though sophisticated audiences found that the symbols created the right amount of distance from the trauma, it was rural audiences who shocked me in their harsh demands for realism.

"Theatre's job is to show life, isn't it?"
"This is not for real, we want to see the bodies."
"Maybe you can borrow some skulls from Nyamata Church."
"This what you are presenting to us, it is just playing."

Yes. It was. "A play is play," as Peter Brook has said. But one that reflects us back to ourselves. Though the writer was from a different race and culture, *us* meant the human race. Some artists are capable of deeply articulating universal truths, as Wagner did in *The Monument.* To get closer to "us," I had added two "ghost girls" as a kind of chorus; Ana, the disappeared daughter of Mejra, and Ini, the disappeared girlfriend of Stetko. No audience member once questioned the existence of ghosts in the play. My two invented characters were part of *us* too in the universal sense; to bring the dead to life and to show the loss on both sides of the conflict. And to focus on what was for me, the deepest, most primal relationship in the play: that of mother and daughter.

"Abstraction is memory's most ardent enemy.
It kills because it encourages distance and often indifference.
We must remind ourselves that the Holocaust was not six million.
It was one, plus one, plus one...
Only in understanding that civilized people must defend the
one, by one, by one [...] can the Holocaust, the incomprehensible, be given meaning."
(Miller 278-287)

Theatre that spoke to the public? One could not ask for a more profound, truthful, or heart-wrenching experience than in mounting *The Monument* in Rwanda to a rapt, engaged, and tough audience that always asked the hardest questions. They owned the show; it was their story and they knew it. They sat around their play in a circle each night, drinking in the words, gestures, song, and drumming of the actors. Their actors. They often insisted it had all really been written by a Rwandan. Or that Colleen had snuck into the country during the genocide to research. "No" she told them gently. They did not believe her. Due to the play's subject, it being in Kinyarwanda, with a mise-en-scène that fit their context, they had a psychic attachment to this Canadian play, and took it to heart, as their own story.

Did our production help in the reconciliation process? Did it tell me what I, the daughter of a Holocaust survivor, needed to know: is reconciliation possible after genocide? The production helped by showing Africans as lead players in central roles, by focusing on women and girls, and by remembering and honouring the dead. But to say that it helped reconciliation—I do not know yet. I must continue to dig deeper to get closer to that question, to learn how to ask it better. This way I will get closer to a true answer. As a foreigner I knew I had been invited onto sacred ground. My own personal connection to genocide, through the loss of my mother's family in 1944 Belgium, and the research and practice I had undertaken for years on the Shoah, provided me with a kind of passport. Many had never met a Jew before. But if they knew one thing of Jews, it was our shared history of genocide. As well, perhaps the fact that I was a woman helped open doors.

Rwanda has a high percentage of women at 55 percent (McCrummen). We reached out to women, and performed for groups such as l'Association des Veuves du Genocide (AVEGA). In 2008, women took 56 percent of seats in Rwanda's parliamentary election, setting a new world record for female representation in parliament. Women are a leading force for positive change in Rwanda, where the patriarchal parliament of past president Habyarimana failed. Depictions of the Rwandan genocide, or arguably any genocide, do not look deeply enough into the lives of women and girls, nor into the ongoing hell that is gender-based violence. In Rwanda in sporadic attacks against Tutsi since 1959, when the Belgian powers left, and today across Lake Kivu in Congo, rape as a weapon of war is being played out upon the geography of the female body. The crime is *femicide*, as Eve Ensler referred to it on 28 November 2008 in the lecture she gave with Stephen Lewis and with Dr. Denis Mukwege of the Panzi Hospital, Congo, where Dr Mukwege is chief and sole surgeon. He reconstructs women's bodies destroyed by systematic gang rape suffered at the hands of militias from Congolese government troops to the Mai Mai to *Interahamwe* (those who fight together), the ex-Rwandan genocidaires.

MEJRA:
We'll read about the war in the papers—new territories divided among the victors.
New leaders.
Economic decisions determined by outside interests.
There will be medals for the dead soldiers on all sides.
Plaques for the brave and foolhardy.
Monuments for the Generals.

What will anyone know about you and your girl-friend?
About me?
About the girls in the forest?
What is the truth? (*The Monument*, Sc. 6)

Theatre is an art form with which Rwandans have an immense fascination. Theatre is home for them, it resonates with their ancient traditions of court entertainments, of the *Intore* (the best)—the warrior dancers, their sacred drums, songs and oral storytelling, all the way to the Batwa, the pygmies who lived in the forest but could be chosen to entertain the Mwami's (king) court with diabolically clever and sometimes lascivious tales. In its performative capacity, combined with its manifestation as art for social change, theatre proved to be an excellent tool to bring about dialogue around issues concerning civil society, overcoming cultural barriers, and peace building. In quickly growing Rwanda, citizens want to progress and move beyond 1994. As well, they are tough customers. So many people sing, dance, tell stories—it is woven into the fabric of life in Africa. Why should we watch you, or even pay to watch you? You had better be good.

The actors felt this keenly. Jean-Paul played Stetko. At twenty-five, he was about to graduate from l'Université Libre de Kigali in Management, had acted in one short play, and participated in theatre in high school. Jaqueline, our Mejra of forty, had two children, worked at the University

Arts Centre, had never been in a play but was a public speaker, had acted in two public health films, and led Rwanda's only all-women drumming troupe. I have never had such a difficult rehearsal process. This was due to lack of infrastructure, changing rehearsal and performance venues, and the backgrounds of the actors. But it was one that brought the cast to a professional level, as I did not want to propagate mediocre theatre for development. We worked hard to make a production that would shine in Paris, Toronto, or Cape Town.

One of our main challenges was a complete lack of infrastructure. You want lights—make them; you want actors—train them; posters might be printed in Nairobi, and only one actual theatre exists. There is a lack of awareness in society of theatre (*ikinamico*) as an art form. They describe it as film or radio after having just seen it live. Regular performances and touring are still rather new to Rwanda post 1994. It was a challenge, but we saw in concrete terms how we built awareness for theatre, and watched audiences discover how a play can be both provocative and entertaining. We felt how they responded to us and, we hope, to each other in their communities. I saw really, for the first time, that theatre is not a luxury, it is a necessity. Our production set the stage for cultural collaboration in communities across the land. Every audience asked when we would return. In spring 2009, the fifteenth anniversary of the genocide, we plan to tour Rwanda again, and east Africa, where we have secured invitations to the National Theatre of Uganda and the French Cultural Centre in Bujumbura, Burundi. Our next production will be *Littoral* by Wajdi Mouawad, a play that echoes the current situation of diaspora returnees to Rwanda from exile in countries such as Uganda, Canada, and Belgium. Following that, *Les Belles-soeurs* by Michel Tremblay will examine poverty and social class issues in relation to women's lives.

In Rwanda today, the play's central theme of the challenges inherent in forgiveness is intimate to citizens, as they struggle daily to find paths towards healing. But unlike the films they may have seen or worked in—set in Rwanda 1994 and made by France, England, or Canada, featuring white male saviours in the eye of the conflict—in *The Monument* they were seeing women, their own African folk up on stage performing their nation's story, in their own language Kinyarwanda. And there were no heroes or Hollywood endings. Only more questions. But then, "Art is the art of asking questions," as playwright John Murrell reminds us patiently.

Imagination is the muscle of saying, "This could be different." It is the suspension of disbelief. Thus, it is choosing to believe, despite the ongoing legacy of genocide, that our world can change for the better. Situating *The Monument* in Rwanda brought me to a much deeper understanding of my cast, of Rwanda, of how useful theatre can be, and of why I stuck with it. In rehearsal, we shared a level of commitment and an emotional connection to the text and to each other that are rare. Later, this complicity extended to our audiences. We will likely not have another experience such as this one. In the end, we wanted to be messengers for the thousands of people who have no voices.

I am committed, with our ensemble at ISÔKO, to continue to research and practice Applied Theatre to contribute to the development of Rwandan theatre culture: one that will help build civil society. I am interested to help share the tough lessons Rwanda has learned with others across the globe—about why this little land continues to be a beacon of successful reconciliation shining brightly in a troubled world.

MEJRA:
The truth has a way of emerging.
Nothing can stop it
once it's started.
I may be gagged
my husband tortured
my house burned down
my land stolen
my children savaged
but the wind will speak my name
the waters will tell the fish
the fish will tell the hunter
"I am".
I am. (*The Monument,* Sc. 7)

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INFORMATION ON THE WEB

At present there are four active theatre companies in Rwanda--all headed by women. Mashirika Performing Arts and the Centre Universitaire des Arts were founded in 1999, Ishyo and Isôko were founded in 2008. Isôko has been invited to perform The Monument in October 2009 at the 2nd Arts Azimut Theatre Festival in Butare and Kigali. www.powerofculture.nl/en/current/2004/september/cua.html

On Rwanda's population statistics and poverty:
www.undp.org.rw/Poverty_Reduction.html

On women in parliament in Rwanda:
http://us.oneworld.net/article/357617-rwanda-sets-world-record-women-parliament

On the Gacaca courts:
www.inkiko-gacaca.gov.rw

On gender-based violence in East Congo:
www.worldpress.org/Africa/1561.cfm#down

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BIO

Jennifer Capraru, ORIGINALLY FROM MONTRÉAL IS ARTISTIC DIRECTOR OF THEATRE ASYLUM, WHERE SHE DIRECTS INTER/NATIONAL PLAYS BY AND ABOUT WOMEN AND HUMANIST ISSUES (WWW.THEATREASYLUM.COM). SHE HAS BEEN ASSOCIATE DRAMATURG AT FACTORY THEATRE, A COURSE DIRECTOR AT YORK UNIVERSITY, AND MOST RECENTLY IN CANADA SHE DIRECTED *LULLABY* FOR DARK HORSE (DORA NOMINATION OUTSTANDING PRODUCTION). ALSO ACTIVE IN FILM, SHE CREWED ON *SHAKE HANDS WITH THE DEVIL* IN RWANDA, AND IN 2008 SHE FOUNDED ISÔKO (WWW.ISOKO-RWANDA.ORG).