

STEVEN HIGH

"Une fleur dans le fleuve": Remembering the Rwandan Genocide in Montreal, Quebec

From its earliest days, the Life Stories project has benefitted from the significant and sustained involvement of Montréal's Rwandan community. In many ways, the Rwandan working group is as much a committee of the local Rwandan community as it is a constituent part of the project. The memory work of the Working Group presents us with an opportunity to explore the social and political function of remembering. I am particularly interested in how Rwandan Montrealers are negotiating a single community narrative that couples the experience of Rwandan exiles who fled anti-Tutsi violence in 1959, 1963, and 1972-3 with that of those who personally survived the horrors in Rwanda during April, May and June 1994. In this emerging community narrative, Rwandan exiles are now understood to be early victims of a thirty-five year genocide. Interviewees and interviewers alike spoke in terms of "59, 63, 73, et le point culminant 94." The oral narratives of exile and survival thus represent a reconstitution of community identity, unifying previously divergent experiences into one constitutive narrative of the Montréal Rwandan community.