

## MEMORY DIALOGUES PANEL II: EMPATHY

Kigali Genocide Memorial Center: July 2018

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### Panelists:

- Eric Nagangare : Actor, hip-hop artist, spoken-word poet (Rwanda)
  - Jean Nepo Ruhumuriza Ndahimana: AEGIS Trust (Rwanda)
  - Samantha Lakin : Fulbright Scholar (USA)
  - Atiq Rahimi : Filmmaker (Afghanistan)
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### Moderated by:

- David Cotterrell
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### Extracts from panel discussion

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#### David:

-.... Here we are a group of ... cultural practitioners: directors, actors, and artists, all desperately trying to find a voice, to find an audience. We thought it might be interesting to see if this could be an opportunity to bring people who work in different fields, together.

One of the problems we have is that sometimes artists speak only to arts audiences, and in policy-making the language that is used is more efficient to speak to people who are already involved in policy making.

It is sometimes difficult for us to find forums where there is equality of knowledge. There are hierarchies built into the way we develop our ability to be professional and to find authority to make decisions. And that can sometimes mean that the logic, the insights and the evidence from people of different training or a different experience can appear to be irrelevant to the way in which we are working and how we understand and interpret the world.

What we are trying to do through the Memory Dialogues at this Festival, is to suggest a model, a conversation that can be formed between people from the arts, from social sciences, from government, from policy-making and from different areas of activism; where we can, maybe, explore the weaknesses in the kinds of conversations we are used to having within our respective, exclusive worlds. This is a small group and what is most likely is that we will try and use the panels to provoke a conversation that will incorporate the audience gathered here in this room as well.

We had a very informal first session, where we simply sat in a circle and threw ideas at each other. What that did was it led to a point where we had a whole range of unresolved questions which might be worth exploring in this panel.

We have constructed the two panels of today in two ways. The first panel which we just concluded looked at **Legacy**. (Although it ends up morphing into other areas as well).

The proposal for the conversation around **Legacy** was that we would try and address the questions of how we frame reflections of the present against the pressures of the past. How is it possible for a young generation to assert authorship over their future when the past is so dominant?

In some ways we skirted around that issue, but we did begin to talk about the challenges of generational power and the way in which it may be necessary for people to own their own actions within a timeline which extends beyond their own life and their own careers; as well as look back at achievements of people in the past.

The second panel, (which is this panel) will look at **Empathy** - a broad word which most people feel they could endorse because it sounds like a good thing for society to have. Empathy. But it's also, possibly one of the most difficult things to pin down.

The need for this kind of forum is rooted in a belief that Ruwanthie de Chickera and I have been wrestling with for the past three years, which is: "How is it possible to avoid society pulling itself other apart, in war, in violence, in regression and in racism? In other words, in a whole range of different ways in which people see other people as more different from, than similar to, themselves".

If we look at a conflict or at an artificial distancing of understanding between persons, it is not unreasonable to assume that Empathy may still exist within both parties. The easiest way to erase the anger, the hatred is to somehow separate ourselves from the relationship with the person we are upset with. This can be done through armed conflict; it can be done through domestic struggle; it can be done through individuals not seeing, or not necessarily understanding the impact of their actions on each other.

Of course, as individuals we're constantly being told to demonstrate sensibility and kindness. But it breaks down if you are asking, for example - young people to join the military, if you're asking young people to become part of the government, if you're asking young people to be part of an organization. They will exercise their own judgment, but they will also sign up to some collective judgments which were made before they joined the organization about who they are close to, and who they are further apart from.

The reason why it might be interesting to talk about this basic construct here is because we have, on this panel, a range of extraordinary people. People who have different perspectives, equally valid, but then probably quite contradictory about life, about the way in which they might interact with society. The question is, if we recognize empathy as a good thing, do we then recognize the understanding that we are not simply the subjects to each other's actions, but that we are people who may have as much to offer as receive, as much to teach as much to learn from.

What we are particularly interested in exploring today is how we then embrace this recognition, or this commitment when we move in wider and wider structures? How do we allow for government policy to reflect that particular understanding of the infinite complexity of society? How can we be part of an organization and also try and understand the weaknesses of what we do, as well as try and understand that "*we do what we do*". And how is it possible to scale up from the individual, so that individual understandings can somehow challenge or feed into wider institutional or organizational assumptions of truth?

Does that make sense as a start?

So what I asked the panel to do is very briefly to introduce themselves.

On the panel we have Samantha Lakin over here, Fulbright scholar engaged in very deep and meaningful research with this archive and is currently developing her doctoral thesis, working in the US and over here in Rwanda.

Then we have - Atiq Rahimi. Atiq is an extraordinary filmmaker from Afghanistan, currently living in France. He's been involved in, not only making his own films but also training a generation of filmmakers and supporting and encouraging the importance of this.

And then we have Jean Nepo Ruhumuriza Ndahimana... and I'm going to call him Jean. Jean very generously participated in the earlier panel and so has already been involved in some of the framing conversations. Jean has been involved in the AEGIS Trust for about ten years, is that right-

**Jean:** Eight years-

**David:** Eight years. He has distinctly done some pioneering work in terms of the school curriculum in Rwanda. The curriculum has shifted away from simply being the transmission of knowledge to young people. It is now gearing itself towards looking deeper, with a kind of critical understanding, empathetic engagement, and a sense of independent thinking. This is particularly outstanding.

And finally we have Eric Nagangare, who has also worked with Ruwanthie and I in an arts project which you may have walked by two minutes earlier – the Mirror:Legacy video installation. Its on display in the Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre – and you will see him speaking on a large screen. Eric is an actor, he is also a hip-hop artist, spoken word poet, and more things I think?

**Eric:** There are a lot of things.

**David:** He is also a blogger, and I really wanted him to be on the panel because I believe he also has a really deep and personal understanding and interest in politics and society.

So I will ask the panelists to, possibly, very briefly, introduce yourselves and also to try and raise something of what they each think might be the most important question – related to Empathy - to try and raise and discuss in this group within this hour-and-a-half.

So perhaps we can ask Samantha to say a few words?

(Section Missing here – maybe Samantha can fill us in?)

**Samantha:** ... I now live and work in a nation that deals with the issues of memory and justice, in the aftermath of genocide. So I live here in Rwanda. I did work here at the AEGIS Trust and also the Department of Research. But most of my work, the essence of my work is dealing with local individuals and how they interpret policy and mechanisms dealing with memory. So I am looking at Rwanda as we have a high case of memorialization. There are many memorials here.

A question that I've been wrestling with and which I think is quite important, (in fact I see it as a mindset shift) is how do we think and act when we are in positions of power, or leadership. Wherever we are in our careers - in the public service or in a position of power or leadership – are we there for a private or personal gain? Let's find out what that means.

**David:** Yeah, that's very interesting. Atiq?

**Atiq:** [Translation] I'm just going to speak very briefly about my own, very personal experience and then come back to this central question that I've been asked to talk about. So I come from a complex family. My father was a monarchist and my mother was a mystic. My sister is a feminist, my brother is a communist. So, coming from a family of diversity... I didn't have any choice but to be anarchist. That's why at a young age I left Afghanistan to become a refugee in France.

So, I was in France, I was a student, and I didn't even know that two years later there would be two great crises in humanity. Human crises. Civil war in Afghanistan and also in Rwanda.

I lost my brother who was communist in the Afghan war.

It impacted me deeply the ... the war in Afghanistan. And also what happened in Rwanda really impacted me. The war between brothers in Afghanistan and Rwanda...

Now I was in France and at the time I didn't know my brother had been killed... My family hid it from me for two years.

So my first question was why did my family hide the death of my brother from me?

I didn't know what to do about the mourning of my brother. I was in my solitude as a refugee in France. The only thing I could do was to mourn... mourn the loss of my brother. That is how I wrote my first book titled 'Earth and Ashes'. In writing this book I realized something really important. I asked myself why Afghanistan never came out of war... why did Afghanistan go from one war to another? My personal situation actually reflected this; the impossibility of mourning: the impossibility of actually mourning a loss. If, after each war, if after each brotherly war, wars of brothers killing brothers, if you don't mourn, we actually go back into violence.... Vengeance. So it's been forty years and part of why we're still in this situation is because our people cannot go through the mourning.

And the reason I'm here today to start to direct a film here in Rwanda, is to really learn and understand how to mourn.

(Section Missing here – maybe Jean can fill us in?)

**Jean:** ... That was working within her heart and made her take risks and put herself in the shoes of that man who was dying. And she saved that baby. In this kind of situation, you get insight into what you have already acquired. A situation that is taking place can work as intrinsic motivator which pushes you to act. That way, a context that is, maybe, related to what you have gone through, can motivate you to do something.

For example, if I was saving someone during a crisis, when the same scenario happens to someone, I think that would push me to put myself in that person's shoes. But it is not something everyone can do. It is something that only few people can do. Because people always behave like bystanders. They feel that it is not their concern. But when you feel connected to a situation, that connection with the situation will motivate you to work. If there is nothing that connects you to that situation then you will just bypass.

(Section Mission – ask Eric to fill in)

**Eric:** I worked for a while in the Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre transcribing and translating testimonies. Through this, I think I've been able to... get a little bit of an idea about what happened in the genocide.

What I have understood is different from what people who experienced it understand; but as somebody translating the testimonies... I came to realize that there are so many things that are way above this thing which we call "Hatred" - you know... just "hatred". For instance I discovered that there is so much passion.

So... there are these stories where ... they kill them... and then they remove their intestines, then bind them together, and then they turn these into a roadblock and then they are drinking beer by the side of the road.

It was like sports at the time. In the evening people would talk about it in the bar. Conversations over beer or alcohol or something like that. You can't tell which side they are... you know... because they all love to become Rambos and Schwarzeneggers. In movies that's what they saw.

I think my first time when I held a gun was maybe when I was ten years old... you know... TA-TA-TA-TA-TA you know... it just like feels good to hold a gun... we used to make toys from guns, we do... we

do make toys from ... guns... . So it seems like it's a part of your usual life - we become consumers of violence 'cos eventually at the end of the day the manufacturer of guns makes money.

And so... we are somehow part of the worst experiment ever... you know. Today we are dealing with the consequences of something that we don't even know who came up with ... who's idea was it to extinguish humanity from this earth? It seems like some people just wanted to get rid of some other people. Maybe for space... maybe for their personal interests... Who knows? So here we are and we have to just deal with the consequences.

When I grew up as a kid we used to kill dogs for fun. These were street dogs we used to call them 'bobo'. Every time they run to the corner we'd get them. Some others had done it before... so we grew up doing it... you know...

Some of the games I would play, for example - like football - were pushed to so many really extreme levels of violence. For example you touch the ball everybody had the right to beat you up. In the most violent way. And we had fun doing that. And we grew up into that...

And then you get to a level where you want to think of empathy... you know, I mean, I just don't see it. It's just that ...

It does not mean that because you've been through pain you automatically understand what it is to inflict pain on others. Because it comes down to choices as well. But, if I look at society, and people who are in power today. There are places where the poor are just starving. And people drive past and have luxurious lives. A lot of people they are supposed to provide for and care for are in the same position they themselves used to be twenty, thirty years ago. You think - maybe because you went through that, they would see or understand or want to effect change. But as Samantha was saying ... "What do you do with power when you have it?"

So my question will be – "How do we reimagine ourselves in a way that our existence doesn't harm others?"

**David:** Thank you. So we've got four powerful questions. But potentially some are connected together. I think we should start off with this fundamental question - which is, "Do we believe that empathy is learned through life, or do we think that empathy is undermined by life?"

As a child there's a good chance that our parents... at least a parent or a family member will [inaudible] see us, as this person who is deeply dysfunctional, highly vulnerable. And we may have a sense of that person sharing the identity of a parent, at least. An embodiment of self, outside of the body

which allows people to potentially not to draw a barrier between the barrier on their own life or a barrier for the child.

Now this perspective could be extended to the family unit, in some cases, it can be extended to communities, it can even be extended to nations, but generally it's not extended universally to all of humanity. So, I might be encouraged, through education, to think of myself as British: which means that somehow I feel have more in common with people of the same passport as me than people who are outside our borders. So somehow, I should agree with the system which means that my t- whatever I- whatever I'm [inaudible] [0:00:33] will be more on people within the country and these borders rather than shared equally around the world. I might decide in my family that I care more about protecting the welfare of my children rather than the stranger on the street. And so then I might decide that that's the boundary, or I might decide the boundary is based on race, or religion, or it might be somehow that these are constructed.

So, what you were talking about was teaching empathy. This means - 'how can we encourage people to find the vocabulary to think outside of themselves and recognize themselves in the other person?' And my question to the panel is 'do we believe that society essentially has obligations to teach empathy or do we feel that empathy is something which is undermined by society?'

**Samantha:** Let's start off by looking, at this from a social, psychological perspective. Schematizing and separating is normal, right? Our brains schematize and they create categories naturally. So naturally, I look around a room, I see... who's a man, who's a woman. I see... who's dressed in clothes because it's hot out and who's dressed in clothes because they think they're cold. I see what nationality you are, I see what race you are, I see... how old you are... I might see certain things about you and in my mind it's normal because what it does is, it allows each person to create an organization in the world. Otherwise the world is too chaotic for us to consume, and to intake and to interact with. So we normally create schemas or categories.

The problem is, I think when we create schemas of in-group and out-group, Us versus Them or cleavages where we say 'ok... the people I affiliate with are "X", they have "X" colour, they have "X" age they have "X" gender, they have "X" nationality and the people who I don't care about or don't affiliate with are "Y" ... or "Z".

So it's not schematizing that's the problem, but the judgment on top of it. And then when you exacerbate that with poverty, with conflict, with guns, with learned behaviors of violence instead of learned behaviors of peace, with instability, with lack of belief in government... with lack of belief in a



future of peace... the schematizing that we do naturally only becomes that more complicated to combat. So people say 'I'm going to stay with my identity because it's threatened', and push people out. And that is how I think the undermining of identity happens.

The problem occurs, when all those factors come together. if we take each of these issues individually maybe we can handle it. But when we put all the factors together, when we look at a society that might be in collapse or in a cycle of civil war like the war in Afghanistan or a post-genocidal conflict that's still nascent and new in many ways: how do we deal with the overwhelming reality of that?

And for me... I do think that empathy, on many levels, is taught, and can be learned. I think it's not only a question of 'should it be taught?' but also *can it be learned?* Can people *unlearn* that killing dogs as a child is not good? When I was a child we would give Christmas presents to people. Some people only think it's their teachers who deserve but in my family we gave presents to the custodians, the janitors, people who cleaned the- the floors and the bathrooms. That was something taught to me from an early age – that everybody's jobs mattered. So how exactly did we see and create these circles of inclusivity via empathy, I think that's kind of the question we should be asking. Especially in the face of so much change and turmoil, for me, teaching... *teaching* it as a value, and as something that can be generated and created and fostered and improved like any other skill or any other care, matters a lot.

**David:** That's a really interesting perspective... It's really impossible to comprehend the scale of the human species. Even within Kigali I can possibly imagine what would it look like to see where most of us are. I will create a construct, with people whose names I know, people I recognize and essentially I will construct a community which I can relate to, rather than, relating to the abstraction of the city.

And this is natural. I mean... I can understand that what you are contending is that there's a model of convenience, which is simply a digestible amount of information. I can just about cope with around twenty people. So maybe I ignore the people further away because I only remember the names of those closest to me.

But then, the issue is, whether we believe that has importance? Think of the amount of walls we've got around our houses. You see it's easy to clean and keep safe the area within- that partition. My main question is, I suppose... do we start realizing this before? That people outside are less like us? *we're less likely to attract [inaudible] [0:00:08] or do we just assume that it's a [inaudible]?*

**Samantha:** I think also when identities are threatened, they become stronger, and we have less empathy. We protect ourselves more and we feel comfortable with the level of harm we may inflict on others. We feel comfortable with the level of harm we may inflict on others because it means self-protection. So how do we undo a structure like that where someone else's welfare does not threaten my own?

**Atiq:** [Translation] When we go to Afghanistan what we ask is... are these the same people who really lived through forty years of war? Afghanistan compared to other Muslim countries, lives in a sort of schizophrenia. It's partially because the individual is one thing, and the individual living within the society is another thing. We don't only have ethnic problems in Afghanistan, we have problems of religion. There are Shiites, Sunnis etc. Even worse are the problems geopolitically. We're completely dispersed and confused between our own - where we are individually and where our society is at large.

Now Jean and Eric spoke about something important which is responsibility. The essence or the primary sentiment that exists in our religion is the culpability, the guilt. And that does not exist... it doesn't really exist in Islam. The fault is always in Iraq, in other countries, the fault is always someone else's, never my own... never our own.

So if we're in this system, in this mindset, how do we generate empathy and how do we create empathy when the fault is always someone else's, and never our own?

So when I was in Afghanistan I worked on writing workshops. So, I always asked the boys and the girls to put themselves in the skin of someone else. It's an exercise that I find very, very important and that has quite good results. It's also the same exercise that I do in the Gaza strip in Palestine. I ask the Palestinians to put themselves in the skin of an Israeli soldier.

In the beginning, it shocks people, it shocks them. How can I put myself in the skin of my... perpetrator? But then people start to understand slowly, that the fault is not another individual, in fact the fault is the fault of the system. The mindset, the system of thinking... the social system... and the religious system as well. So putting yourself in the skin or in the shoes of someone else makes you ask questions from yourself, including, what is my victimization, how am I a victim? Or how would I become a perpetrator... how does it happen then: how does a victim become a perpetrator?

So, this starts the cycle of vengeance because we understand how the victim can eventually become the perpetrator.

**David:** I think it's very beautiful how you illustrated how, if we know that individually we can see ourselves as being different from the system, we are able to step outside of ourselves. [But, take me, for example, I'm born a Socialist under Margaret Thatcher, I can't change my government.](#)

I am recognizing that this is not real, this is a construct; the hatred of somebody because of their nationality, because of religion is something which I can individually recognize, by placing myself outside of myself. The question is, then, why is it that when we take a role within an institution, whether it's the university, whether it's the civil service, or a bank, or a small shop; why don't we use that awareness to challenge the bigger structure, the bigger institution?

How is it that we separate that? Possibly what I am getting at is a great generalization but, is it possible that we could actually move this "personal empathy" to a level of "institutional empathy"? Because if we recognize that empathy is one of the defining human characteristics, that we as a species are quite proud of, (for example we think, possibly, that cats have less empathy than humans; so we think we're quite clever because we have empathy).

But if we think, potentially, that this skill is something that is valuable, that we're proud of - our ability to empathize; how is it that within the institutions we work in, we are represented in a way that makes us appear less able to empathize. How do we make institutions more open to this idea of looking back at themselves as well as trying to perfect their engagement from their perspective?

**Samantha:** One of the things we spoke about in our earlier panel was about the permission to create a space for reflection; and the permission to create the space for looking at how we're doing things and what the methods are; and how that can make our institutions or operations more empathetic and geared towards serving the people that need to be served. Of course, in time of crisis or conflict when immediately there is an urgent need, you need to get water to someone that's a priority. But then at what point do we step back and think about which systems are creating violence; or are creating the concept of structural violence... at what point do we recognize that some systems are inherently violent? So it's not the Israeli soldier that's the problem; it's the system that created Israel; it's maybe the system that created the Israeli defense force in the way it is. That's the problem. Or the system that talks about masculinity - that's the problem. These structures. And breaking those structures down is hard, I can say. I did some work in DRC about corruption. Now, no work that I engaged in for about a month about corruption was going to break down the system of corruption in Congo, but what it made us understand was how and where we get power from, and how, what the alternatives for power-wielding might be; and by understanding this, it might be possible to challenge

the status quo – that accepts that corruption is normal, that corruption is the way it works. So, how do we create a different system?

How do we undo this structure? I will ever have an answer for that in my lifetime, even collaborating with amazing people and working, dedicating your whole life this cause, to this pursuit. Structures - sometimes they take over generations to undo. I don't think that excuses us from doing the work to try and undo the structures. In terms of methodology, linking people together centrally is a manner in which you can hold each other accountable to make sure that when you're in the company or when you're in the civil service or when you're in the NGO, you don't lose the experiences you've had as an individual to the organization. It could be a way of holding each other accountable.

**Eric:** I've worked in organizations, you know, I still work with some organizations. Right now, we are working on a few projects to introduce this type of theatre that's based on the Theater of the Oppressed. So in this kind of theatre you can switch roles within a play - we get the audience to participate and at the end you have the actors on the side, watching. The community actually gets involved in the real issues and tries to find solutions. And this helps, for example, you can say you're an Israeli soldier now, and this will make us wonder 'What's a soldier?' A soldier is someone in a uniform and a gun doing what they've been ordered to do. This is the construction that is the soldier. We could perhaps delve into the psyche of the soldier and realize that he may not be happy to pull the trigger despite being ordered to do so. It's a body of construction; of everything we've learned, everything we've been taught. Society is the manner in which all this has been designed. It's one society basically. It's the same man but in different places. You will hear many times Africans' reference pre-colonial Africa - the violence that was there. All this violence over the years means that when we hear that violence today we think about what the society was back then, four-hundred years ago. In Rwanda there is a saying: 'It should not be allowed, if somebody comes to your house and you don't offer them milk.' It was like a policy - if somebody comes to your house, you'd offer them milk, alcohol or something to drink. In Congo they offer you food. But this also talks about the abundance of those commodities. You cannot offer what you don't have.

In terms of evolution we've pretty much reached the final cycle of survival for existence.

Now Jean spoke about empathy in genocide. I was working with stories of the genocide, here in the memorial centre. We had some incredibly complex situations. *There were people who would beat certain people, but in morning they would go to the road block and then butcher people there and then come back and bring foods to people that they beat. Not that they know them, but it just, for*

them the justification is that if I don't show up at the road block I put my family in danger, but I really don't want to do this, so I'm butchering other people separately. And when he came to the justice system after, the same person was the killer and the savior at the same time. Now who's to judge that then? These are very complex situations.

Like I said in the beginning we are living at a time where we have to deal with the consequences of this system that was created before us.

So how do we create a society that, maybe, is not based on the structures that exist today? And how do we even have the mind to think about this, to think otherwise because we are products of the same systems as well.

For example, you might talk about, you know, development in Rwanda but I've been talking with different companies and institutions about creating a system whereby we can monitor progress... so, questions like what determines the budget, how you make the money and what is going to be done with the money over the course of the year. So we can imagine that this will work. But on a national level, we don't have that. We don't know what the government does with the money from taxes. We see things happening, but we're not sure where it all comes from, you know? Now if this comes down to an individual level it becomes a sort of mindset. Everybody's responsible for it.

**David:** What we're looking at is barriers to empathy.

**Eric:** - The system is designed to suppress empathy.

**David:** And potentially that's less of an issue when everything's fine, when there's enough of everything or when society is not under a sort of stress or pressure. In times like these, these barriers still exist but they may not be so apparent or so active. So, I might decide that the people down that part of the street are not like me but I'm not necessarily going to threaten their food supply or restrict their engagement with me because I don't feel threatened by them, but in a situation of distress, the fear of conflict, or the fear of threat maybe become more solid.

**Eric:** We live in a very 'empathy-less' society. If it's not about me, I don't care about it. So already I cannot talk about empathy.

**Samantha:** If we deconstruct too far we end up almost in a Hobbesian state of the individual looking out for themselves and nothing else, so I think there is a use for constructs and for structures. And as I said to start within use for saying 'who am I and what do stand for, and who do I identify with?'

It is that sense of responsibility that we try and teach children and maybe we'll see the fruits of this twenty-five years later, or nineteen years later. I think that it's important to have structures. The

question is what do we do when the structures come under stress? Or the individuals within the structures are under stress, and it operates in a way that is violent, or harmful. And of course the ultimate extreme of this stress are things like the genocide in Rwanda.

**David:** So if I know that, okay I'm British but I've got more in common with people in Sri Lanka than people in London, then I'd take being British as a rather abstract rather than a defining construct. I may have maybe more in common with people who are doing visual art all over the world than with people who are born down my street. The question is how do I know that? How do I know to find that out, or how is that reinforced in my mind *to me*? Because, you won't, as you say, you won't bring it down to a point where we can't function. You'd still want a surgeon to be able to disengage himself enough to make the cut on somebody to save their life. There's a good chance that if you show empathy to the subject under surgery you'll be shaking uncontrollably, and unable to function. But you do... you do want a surgeon to be able to understand what it's like *not* to be a surgeon as well, to look back at themselves.

**Audience Member:** - In some ways you alluded to what you were taught. I think what you were saying was that it was the *systems* that were problematic - I think there's that window in childhood between survival mode when you're just trying to get milk or whatever you need to survive and to thrive, and it's all about *me, my*; it's not about sharing.

Then a little bit later in childhood, and this is where parenting is critical, experiences are learned by the child about the dignity of life - human life, or animal life. OK – if your family is still in survival mode, you're not going to care about the rabbit's life, you will eat the rabbit. But, your culture and your context matter at this moment.

The power of parenting at this stage, and the teaching of examples, not so much about empathy so much as the idea of dignity, of life – this happens in different ways in different cultures, different societies. And parenting is also a reflection of the system. But one of the things that tragically crosses the many different systems is the fact that children experience a lot of violence. Sometimes at the hands of families, sometimes at the hands of siblings, people in the neighborhood. But, I think if you're able to reach those children, in school out of school, and teach them the concept of dignity; not so much that they deserve respect, but that each individual - no matter where they come from, no matter what color or creed they are – each individual has got something in essence that is worthy of respect.

You teach them to give the janitor a gift as well as the teacher. So you're not looking at stratification, you're looking at the person and that is, maybe the anecdote to problems down the line.

And we're seeing... where there's been research done on violence against children: sexual violence; emotional violence, physical violence, and almost across society whether it's Rwanda, whether it's the United States, whether it's Canada, Kenya, the amount of violence that children experience even beyond the corporal punishment that happens in families is quite extraordinary. And then you wonder why is it that people become violent in their young adult lives, or their friends or family. They experience it. You replicate what you know. And then you come to the problematic, that in a genocide or in the moment of stress, what comes out is what you know.

**Audience Member:** [Translation] I feel that humanity surpasses all barriers. And yes, we may be different but we live within a structure, so how do you live with yourself so you feel that you're different and that you are empowered to be different, when the system is the way it is.

I would like to know, isn't there anything that you can do with the arts to surpass the structural barriers? What are the other things we can use?

**Atiq:** For me it was the personal suffering that put me in the shoes of my father for my first book. My inability to mourn made me think about the personal suffering that my father had gone through. From my experience, I believe we can put ourselves in the skin of someone else in order to start to write from a place of empathy.

It is that personal suffering that can open our eyes to the broader suffering. How do we not fall back into this natural state of survival which is survival only for yourself as an individual and your family? That's the natural state. How do we create ways to not fall back, into that natural state which is violence in itself?

**David:** Eric, do you have anything to say about the role of the arts? I just thought one of the things you mentioned really earlier on was fascinating. You talked about arts' manipulation of empathy, sometimes not necessarily as a benign force but potentially as a dangerous thing as well. And I thought that was an interesting point because it's not quite as simple as it might appear.

**Eric:** I would use the video installation that I recently was in as an example. (Mirror:Legacy). While we were making it, I actually I saw what happened. I am not going to try and recall everything that happened, during the making of the installation we had this conversation on camera for like six hours about, the character that I was supposed to be playing – who is a son of a killer. Through the preparation I had to honestly deal with issues like - what are the ramifications? What is the setup? Where you still still friends? What is the situation? And in my character that we had, the way it evolved, the success is the character still lived.

Basically, the father of my character killed my friend's father, but me and my friend remain. The father went to jail, and now when the father is back in community he cannot live where he was because he's a shame to society.

And so you have these two friends of these two men, who are living together. And sometimes it so happens that these two have switched positions. There are situations where survivors of the genocide were occupying land that was owned previously by the killers' families. And if some of the killers come back into the community they don't have access to life anymore. So what are the dynamics? The question was for the children - now that we're here we have to live together. How do we talk about this issue now? How do we talk about it?

So, in the discussion I was trying to explain this character from a point of view of shame. The feelings of a son of a perpetrator. How can these feelings be converted into a language that he understands as well? Because, we understand that we don't speak a language in the same way, we don't use the same words and we don't understand each other the same way. So what are other forms of language that we can use to mitigate this because the core of this whole thing is communication. And communication is being used in different ways through time. Like in the genocide people made songs, in order to recite in order to kill. To justify the fact that what you're doing you are doing for a noble cause. And so it gets into people's minds to do whatever you're supposed to do.

Today, the government is changing that. If they are using song, the songs carry a positive energy: it's about living together; it's about sharing what we have together. Even though it hasn't maybe reached a personal level or implantation, but at least the idea is planted through different media.

We create things, we create on a daily basis. I call myself an artist today professionally because I quit every organization that I worked for, and beauty of it is that I can do anything I want. As opposed to being part of an organization where they tell you when you join the organization "these are the rules we have to go by these. You should dress like this, you should speak like this, do not do this *this* way, everything is gonna be like one rule".

Actually this is why it's easy for us to do jobs like this, because one format has been created for it. And everyone has to comply. The format doesn't allow you an interaction. If I'm angry, how do I tell you, I'm really angry at what you said? I have to find a format that you understand, a line that is approved by the structure, but it may not be exactly how I wanted to say it.

So that's the beauty of being an artist, I can say it many different ways: I can say it with dance; I can say it with poetry. It could be the energy that you give me, it could be what I saw, it could be what I want to communicate as well. That's why I think you're life is beautiful when you are an artist, but



then, at the same time, you have a lot of responsibility. A lot of responsibilities. Everything you put out is going to be given extra interpretation and not necessarily how you interpreted it either.

**Samantha:** I would say that about academia as well. You need to write. This needs to be said to anyone who's producing, who's a creative, that they should not lose their individual voice even if they are working in an organization. But we do what we can, I think that's what makes any of this serious. These kinds of panels – this Memory Dialogue series – these conversations curated by David and Ruwanthie are a chance to reflect on all this and to develop methodologies and ways in which we can keep reflecting and have that impact.

**David:** Well, thank you, I was just going to say some of that, but you said it very well. We've run out of time, we've been promising to finish now. However, there is one audience member who has been waiting to make a comment...

**Audience Member:** - We see others like constructs, like we are the products of the society, the environment. Then maybe someone will tell us we are born empty.

When we speak of the conflict in Afghanistan, in Africa we have to go back to the beginnings of the conflicts. When we refer to the conflicts in Africa, it was bad lesson for Africans. Because they subjugated Africans and they enslaved them, and they kept them, and they thought that we are not human beings. This is not easy. And it has not been corrected.

Later Africans trying to get independence had to fight. They had to fight. Look at what the legacy is then that we leave in the minds of this African people? Why are we fighting? Because of colonial history. And still there is involvement. Look at what is happening in Syria. What is happening in Syria right now? Is that because Syrians are bad? I don't think. They are like all of us. Like me, like you, but there is lot of interference and lot of outside forces.. There are forces outside our control.

So, for me, one of the best solutions – education. Then we have to focus on the system, in the government. If we focus on the government, the structure of the government, maybe we can find a way that individuals will not manipulate it; individuals will not mobilize people to kill one another. The system will be so good that people will feel included. Nobody will feel excluded. So this means that even if I try to mobilize people to fight against one another then, they will not accept me.

However if these people hold in their anger inside them, they find somebody who tells them 'hey, you are excluded' and then they are ready. They are ready to kill. So, for me, I believe, the focus should go to education and govt. systems.

**Samantha:** As the timekeeper I'll say a few last words. At the Ubuntu Arts Festival where I'm volunteering. I want to say a big thank David and Ruwanthie for bringing us these conversations. I think the last three questions we need to answer are things that you need to continue on as the festival continues as the memory dialogues continue as well.

**David:** - And obviously within the role of empathy is the idea of a conversation where we try to find the space to air ideas and to try to persuade, engage, and inspire people. It's very easy to shout at people but it's very hard to get them to actually see a side of the world from another point of view. That comes from the ability to humble ourselves about our own position. To look back at the way we may have appeared, or the way we may have been heard. I think, what happened in this group here, and what happened with some of the very valuable contributions from audience members remind us of the value of such a conversation.

So, thank you all so much!

**End Transcript**