



Photo of Jean Hatzfeld by Catherine Hélie (éditions Gallimard).

Scholar-Practitioner Q + A . . .

An Interview with Jean Hatzfeld

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While preparing this volume devoted to literary journalism in French, Jean Hatzfeld appeared as an obvious choice to help us navigate the porous border between journalism and literature. Hatzfeld is a French journalist and author, born in Madagascar in 1947. He started his career as a sports journalist and then worked as a reporter for the French paper *Libération*. Later on he became a war correspondent and covered conflicts in Lebanon and ex-Yugoslavia, where he was severely wounded by a sniper. Parallel to his career in journalism, he has also written an essay and four novels. But his major breakthrough came following his experience in Rwanda, a watershed moment in his career, which led to the publication of five books in which he experiments with new narrative forms.

On April 6, 1994, the plane transporting then-president of Rwanda, Juvénal Habyarimana, exploded above Kigali. The Hutus had been calling for the killing of Tutsis for quite a while, but the president's assassination triggered the genocide, whose magnitude and speed had never been seen before. Eight hundred thousand Tutsis were slaughtered in three months. In the region of Bugesera, near Nyamata, where Hatzfeld initiated his literary project, in daily massacres from April 11 until May 14, 50,000 out of 59,000 Tutsis were murdered. The *Interahamwe*, a paramilitary organization, chased down the Tutsis hiding in marshes, desperately trying to avoid Hutu machetes.

Hatzfeld decided to write about the Rwandan genocide because he came to perceive a journalistic failure. In all the reportages of the time there appeared to be one glaring omission: as sources, the survivors were nowhere to be found. This was the author's cue to go and look for their stories. His determination to spend time with survivors, but also with killers, and later

with their children, resulted in a number of stories: in 2000, *Dans le nu de la vie* (Life Laid Bare: The Survivors in Rwanda Speak)¹; in 2003, *Une saison de machettes* (Machete Season: The Survivors in Rwanda Speak)²; and in 2007, *La Stratégie des antilopes* (The Antelope's Strategy: Living in Rwanda after the Genocide).³ The next two volumes, *Englebert des collines* (2014) and *Un papa de sang* (2015), will be available in English soon.

Stunned by the poetry of the survivors' language, Hatzfeld does not tire of exploring its sense of possibilities. Walking a tightrope between real facts and creative writing, the author has opened new avenues of expression to tell stories of survival. He kindly accepted our invitation to discuss the specificities of English and French reportage, the challenges of literary journalism, and the promises of good journalistic literature. More particularly, he revisited his epiphanic transition from journalism to literature in the context of Rwanda, and shared with us his pleasure of the text.

We met Jean Hatzfeld at Éditions Gallimard, in Paris, on July 8, 2016. Some additional notes were added via email. Isabelle Meuret translated the conversation.

Isabelle Meuret: In our email exchanges you wrote that literary journalism has a long history, but that anglophones are much more comfortable with it than francophones.

Jean Hatzfeld: I am not learned enough to answer this question, but my impression is that almost all great American authors did or are doing journalism.

Meuret: Hemingway. . . .

Hatzfeld: Steinbeck, Jack London, Mark Twain. They were often trained in journalism and they were proud of it. What distinguished them from the French is that they did a lot of reportages. Granted, Camus or Sartre also did journalism, but usually as editorialists. They were thinkers writing in newspapers rather than storytellers. The Americans are much better storytellers. They love telling stories, and can wear different hats (author or journalist). It seems, though, that there was a great, albeit little known, tradition of literary journalism in France in the nineteenth century. Émile Zola, Colette, Alexandre Dumas, Victor Hugo—in *Les Misérables*, some digressions are pure reportage. For a long time there existed a love-hate relationship between authors and journalists. Mutual incomprehension. It is changing today, with authors such as Emmanuel Carrère.⁴ Everybody draws from reality, but some lean on the real more than others.

Florence Le Cam: In your practice, were you aware from the beginning that you were building a bridge between journalism and literature?

Hatzfeld: It all depends on what you call literature. If it means telling stories, then certainly I did. I have always loved telling stories, and I have always tried to do it well. Now a genuine journalistic literature also exists. There are two very different attitudes—the author's, and the journalist's—which you cannot tell apart by the quality of the writing, although they can be distinguished by a different grammar, vocabulary, or syntax. A journalist is a go-between, a mediator between the readers and the event. So he must ask himself the questions that the readers ask when faced with that event. An author answers his own questions. An author only thinks of his book. He does not think of his readers. So they have different attitudes. During the first twenty-five years of my career, I did not want to address my own questions. I was happy to be a journalist. It is an extraordinary job. There is a true ethic in journalism. There are rules that authors do not need to comply with. It is a different attitude. Storytelling comes more naturally to the Americans: the story is always the driving force. If you follow Hillary Clinton's presidential election campaign, stories come up every day. Politics is made of stories. For us, it is not so natural. The French press has always been defined as ideological, political; points of view should not be radicalized, but still, there is some truism in this.

Meuret: There is renewed interest for storytelling and narrative journalism in France, though, with the emergence and proliferation of journals like *XXI*.⁵

Hatzfeld: I wouldn't say so. I think *XXI* emerged because narratives had disappeared from our daily papers. It is the principle of communicating vessels: newspapers such as *Libération* or *Le Monde* used to have many more storytellers in the 1970s–1980s than today. But stories were written to illustrate, like photos. Narratives are central in magazines such as *XXI*. They compensate for the shortage of stories in newspapers.

Le Cam: You said earlier that there exists a genuine journalistic literature.

Hatzfeld: I want to go against the idea that there is a first and a second division. I think authors and journalists do not write in the same way. Modiano⁶ does not write like a journalist. Journalists do not write like Modiano. We tend to think—it was not the case in the nineteenth, but it was certainly the case in the twentieth century—that those who can write are novelists. That is not true. I believe that quite a few novelists cannot write, whereas there exist excellent pieces of journalism. We tend to elevate the novelist, while the journalist is seen as a schemer, a trickster. That's not fair. For instance, in sport, we used to have great storytellers at *L'Équipe*, *Le Monde*, *Le Figaro*, in the 1970s and '80s. Novelists and journalists do not write in the same way, but their difference is not qualitative. When your job is to answer

other people's questions, you do not write in the same manner. Journalists create a distinctive world. Of poor or high quality, but they also create a world in which enters the reader.

Meuret: Did you move from journalism to literature because you were disappointed with readers? In another interview you said, "Readers don't do their jobs."⁷ They no longer ask questions.

Hatzfeld: There is an exchange between the journalist and the reader; there is a transmitter, and there is a receiver. The transmitter is always criticized—often rightly so—but no one ever questions the receiver. Sometimes, with particular events, the receiver is not working, and it is difficult to know why. When I covered the war in Bosnia, I started writing on the seventh or eighth of April 1992, and continued until the end of June, without there being any interest from readers. Then the Americans began to show interest. It is difficult to know why things suddenly change. I did write about ethnic cleansing in Bosnia. You can find it in the records at *Libération*. I wrote about it in April, May, but nobody cared. Then, all of a sudden, there was some uproar and everyone wanted to hear that story. It is difficult to say why the receiver did not accept the message in the first place, and then did, almost overnight. What I mean is that transmitter and receiver are interconnected; they cannot work independently. That relationship between journalist and reader is very different from the relationship between author and reader. An author may be disappointed if he is not read, but that won't have an impact on his writing. Conversely, if the connection does not work between journalist and reader, there is a disjunction. Journalists can also be a bit cynical—a French malady—and stop believing in their interlocutors. This condition is also what protects them, gives them staying power. Journalists can either lose heart or be passionate about a story. When you spend three months in Ceausescu's Romania, you don't give a damn whether the reader cares or not. You just try to find some space to tell your story.

Meuret: At the time of the war in ex-Yugoslavia, Martin Bell, a former BBC journalist, coined the term "journalism of attachment" to describe a situation in which the reporter had a moral obligation to "record the human and emotional costs of war,"⁸ demand intervention, and not simply transfer information. Were you aware of this change in reporting, which foregrounds emotions?

Hatzfeld: This situation affected the Anglo-Saxons more than it affected us. We had another term, "militant journalism." We have often been activists. Both journalists and authors have championed causes. That is a very French tradition, from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Now on the Anglo-Saxon side, George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia* is a case in point.

Attachment is not new. But the Americans have always felt more embarrassed by this. British journalist John Burns, who spent forty years reporting for the *New York Times*, defended that idea—slightly iconoclastic in the US—that he was on the side of the victims. Some French were siding with the Algerians. The Americans used to avoid taking sides. They did all the Vietnam War behind the US army but were very critical, even violent. In Bosnia, the BBC also played a role of paramount importance. It put a lot of effort in covering the conflict with radio, television. They developed a variety of narrative forms: daily news, magazine journalism, fiction. The BBC produced *Warriors*,⁹ and also this remarkable documentary series in six episodes, *The Death of Yugoslavia*, on the breakup of the country. Their narrative commitment was extraordinary. Some journalists, like Allan Little and John Burns, were put in the hot seat because they stood by the victims. Geography was part of the explanation. The war in Bosnia had two main characteristics. First: freedom of movement, at your own risk. That's why it killed so many journalists. Thirty-seven died, others were wounded. You could cross the frontlines very easily. It was dangerous, but not forbidden. Second: the siege. You were either in it, or out of it. Some decided to stay in. John Burns did.

Le Cam: The journalist's commitment is somehow similar to the author's engagement, for instance in the case of Rwanda. How do you, as a journalist and/or author, develop or apprehend reality?

Hatzfeld: We all lean on reality, the real. Then there are rules. The main difference between an author and a journalist is the so-called *mise-en-scène*: how you present the facts. Authors can present a reality in a way that is not possible for journalists. In my own situation, there may have been a kind of complementarity. Some stories are terribly difficult to tell because time flies. Let me give you an example. At war, we get bored. The most important moment of the war is boredom, waiting. And that is impossible to tell in a newspaper, so we don't talk about it. The readers want to know about actions—decisive moments, massacres—and therefore the journalist instinctively takes an interest in highly tense moments to the detriment of slower, less relevant moments, which are nevertheless constitutive of the event. The author—and that's what I tried to do—will use the notes that are left aside. We meet a lot of people that never or hardly appear in our reportages. We listen a lot but use little material because we must work fast. As journalists, we leave lots of people by the wayside. But as authors we can come back and spend time with them, not just out of duty, but because they are truly important in the war. Their role was underestimated and they never had due recognition. And yet they are interesting characters. As an author, you can come back to these moments of silence, boredom, and cheerfulness. It is difficult, in a war, to tell stories

of intense love, which explain the nostalgia, because people and relations are different. Everything is upside down, and this disruption is a difficult story to tell. So you may be tempted to get back to this and to recreate characters that you actually met. So you recreate a reality. That's where the difference lies. If you read Faulkner, you are in the South of the United States; if you read Victor Hugo (*Les Misérables*), you are in nineteenth-century France. Cosette and Jean Valjean do not exist, but in fact they do. Madame Bovary existed in all the small French towns at that time. So there are different situations and temperaments for authors and journalists, but the difference is actually minimal.

Le Cam: Fiction makes it possible to tell something that actually happened, but also to introduce elements that would transform that reality?

Hatzfeld: Authors have the liberty to do so, but it is forbidden to journalists. In the case of fiction, reality may be distorted. The official boundary is the way in which you represent reality. It also depends on your point of view (racist, sexist, etc.). The First World War is the most blatant case where novelists—namely the French, Henri Barbusse (*Under Fire*), or later, Céline (*Journey to the End of the Night*); the Canadian, Timothy Findley (*The Wars*); the German, Erich Remarque—all wrote about the reality of the trenches with more truth and understanding than the journalists and historians at the time, who were handicapped by the urgency, the technical issues, and above all the censorship and patriotism. There is also Vassili Grossman, who was an immense war correspondent for *Krasnaya Zvezda*. He was on the frontline for four years and covered the battles of Kursk and Dniepr, and the siege of Stalingrad. He was one of the first journalists to arrive in Treblinka, and then Berlin. Twenty years later, starting from unused notes, gripping memories, abandoned characters, forgotten moments, unexpressed impressions, he created a story and presented that reality using his imagination, to write his masterpiece, *Life and Fate*.

Meuret: Nonfiction, however, brings us closer to a vibrant truth. With the voices of witnesses, nonfiction transcends reality. You compare, with a great deal of caution, the Rwandan genocide to the Shoah, because no one was there to collect what the survivors had to say about their traumatic experience. Telling true stories, rather than using your imagination, brings an extra touch of soul or sensitivity, a humane awareness, to the texts. Primo Levi's *If This Is a Man*, Elie Wiesel's *Night*, or Robert Antelme's *L'Espèce humaine*,¹⁰ shake you to your foundations. These authors attest that the extermination project was a failure, as the Nazis did not succeed in ousting the Jews from the human species. These stories are not imagined—they are written with a pen dipped in harrowing experiences.

Hatzfeld: With genocide there is no room for fiction, contrary to what

Lanzmann says.¹¹ I have been looking for stories that would lead to a novel, but I haven't found any. War is a river that overflows. Genocide is a river drying up. In genocide there are no humane relationships as in wars, where there is love, friendship, solidarity. It's all gone. That's when I stopped journalism. It fell short. When the Rwandan genocide started in 1994, I was in Sarajevo. I didn't even notice. There was no Internet, hardly any phone. I heard about the genocide during the World Cup in the United States. My editorial staff had taken me out of Sarajevo, where I had been staying for too long.

When I arrive in Rwanda, I describe what I see—distraught, starving people fleeing to Congo; the Rwandan Patriotic Front's progress; the blue helmets; corpses; fallow lands; Kouchner¹²; journalists—and I think I'm doing a good job. In September I come back, and I am in shock.

We, the journalists, had written about all the characters in the genocide except the survivors. We had forgotten the survivors. I had copiously read the American and the French press between 1944 and 1946 to see how the end of the war had been narrated. Those who had survived Treblinka or Auschwitz were conspicuously absent from the papers. That was my cue. I had read Primo Levi and Charlotte Delbo.¹³ We always say that history never repeats itself, but it does repeat itself. Henceforth my project was to focus on that silence. The survivors were not excluded from the story because they were disliked, but simply because no one had seen or heard them. I went on working in Sarajevo and in Iraq, but by 1997–'98 I felt I had to change attitudes. There was no need to ask *Libération* to send me to Rwanda. I went back on unpaid leave to spend time on the survivors' silence. I felt it was the subject of a book. I crossed the country before finding a place, thanks to a woman.

Here my project becomes literary: I start with this paradox of beauty and horror. I start in Nyamata, a village with 50,000 corpses in the marshes, ghosts, survivors, and killers. I don't need to go through files and records. I am no longer a journalist. I work with the fourteen people who show up first, who agree to work with me thanks to a woman who understands my project. I am not asking the questions a journalist would normally ask. I work with a lot of women, because women are less suspicious. I make several trips to Nyamata, and then back to Paris. I do not investigate; I hardly read anything on Rwanda. I essentially work with Shoah texts, mostly from Primo Levi's last book,¹⁴ forty years after *This Is a Man*. So I fly to and from Nyamata for two years. I travel with notebooks.

With these people conversation is impossible, so I use topics. And I work with Francine, Berthe, Jean-Baptiste on these various themes and I discover a lot of things. For instance, something shocked and embarrassed me right away: lies matter more than truth. In these stories, the most important mate-

rial will be lies and silence. The first time I meet sixteen-year-old Jeannette, she tells me she has been hiding in the marshes for six months. It is impossible, I tell her. Then she says, “Six hours.” I understand that it does not matter at all. She has confused memories. She can remember only some things distinctly.

Angélique said, “Some memories are polished like glass; others are thrown down the hole of oblivion.” This was spot on. The survivors were together and were always telling the same story. I came and asked questions. I prevented their conversations from going nowhere. I understood that I was going to work with that memory, the lies (sometimes deliberate: if you abandoned your child while running to save your life, you lie; also, several women survived because they were raped). My project was a different way of working that was not fiction and not journalism either. It was something else.

Meuret: The subtitle to the collection of your first three books is “Récits des marais rwandais” (Stories from the Marshes in Rwanda). “Stories,” not “testimonies.”

Hatzfeld: There are two reasons for this. First, these people don’t want to testify anymore. Out of respect for them I opted for “stories.” The survivors were speaking, but reluctantly. They feared they would not be believed, or were ashamed of what they had to say. This shameful feeling may be linked to a maternal or fraternal gesture they failed to make, or to the fact that some had lost faith in God. Talking about God was very complicated. Or maybe it was too late. A testimony is often useful to put an end to a situation; but here, why would they testify? The survivors did not want to make that effort. A testimony is on a voluntary basis, and they did not want to talk.

Le Cam: They do not want to testify. Yet they talk to you. How does that communication happen?

Hatzfeld: Sometimes, it was extremely long. We became more familiar as time went by. For the first book, a lot of people refused to talk. Being French, it was rather delicate. I was in rural country, and a lot of people from Nyamata don’t want to talk. Women saved me. They protected me. Others accepted out of politeness. I was very kind to them, never brutalized them. I asked them questions they did not dare to ask themselves. Several years after the genocide, they were all wittering on about the same old things. I helped them to reconstruct their days and thoughts. I intrigued them. It then became possible to understand the silence. It really helped them to talk about their becoming animals. I did not show sympathy. I took all of this naturally, including the stories they dared not tell each other. In *The Antelope’s Strategy*, I explained how a population of 5,000 was decimated at Nyamata, and only twenty survived. They don’t see each other. When they do see each other, they

dare not talk. When people survive a war and go through that kind of experience, they stick together, celebrate. Here they avoid each other because they are incapable of telling that story together.

So I came along and invited them to tell their stories. “How was life then?” “How was it in the mornings?” Innocent explained that he imagined he was a monkey, living in trees, licking leaves to quench his thirst; he was ashamed. Marie-Louise told her story in one day; for Francine, on the other hand, it was a very long process. She wanted to say something but did not dare to say it. You could guess she had been raped. She had been engaged to Théophile, but while they were hiding in the marshes they found they had no feelings for each other anymore. She was ashamed of the fact that she had stopped loving her fiancé. I had been very patient. The process took two years. For the first book I had enough material to write thirty books. They talked because they had nothing to lose.

Meuret: The survivors’ poetic language is steeped in Kinyarwanda, leavened with their pain and suffering.¹⁵ The project is also therapeutic, a talking cure?

Hatzfeld: It’s not exactly therapy but it helped them. It’s not therapeutic because there is no healing. Talking can alleviate the pain. They realized they had gone through the same experience. I had no duty of remembrance or attachment. First was the beauty of the language—I would never have worked for seventeen years on this project were it not for the beauty of their language. In that story, there is a literary beauty. Pleasure is in the beauty of the landscapes—a paradoxical beauty, as it is tainted with the horror of fifty thousand dying in the marshes—and the searing intensity of the language, the superb metaphors. When Francine says, “When the soul of a person leaves them for a little while, it will then be delicate for them to regain their existence.” When you hear this, you just need to put pen to paper.

Le Cam: You have notebooks, pencils, and highlighters. You work and edit. How do you write?

Hatzfeld: I flew to and from Nyamata several times. In Rwanda I never left Nyamata, a village with hills and marshes. I understood early on that this would be the place. The characters were the first fourteen people I came across. I had questions, so I talked to people and had long conversations with them. Back in Paris I transcribed every single word, punctuation, hesitations. New questions emerged. So I asked these new questions when I went back, questions about God for instance. The story took shape little by little. For the first book, the choice of monologues was quite natural. Some texts also provided context. I started with Cassius; then Francine, the schoolteacher; then Angélique; then Innocent; then Berthe, her friend; etc. The book was always

the priority. I was looking for rhythm, a narrative thread that would help me write a book where the characters would respond to one another. The rapes were narrated by different voices. Life in the marshes was also told by several characters. Everything in the book was said, but not as written—I did major editing and pruning. First, I connected elements that were said at different times. Then I deleted a lot to avoid boredom, repetition, weariness, triteness. A literary tension must be maintained throughout. With the killers, I did not respect the monologues but worked with themes. I hacked their monologues into pieces, interspersed them with texts that provide context and explained how I got access to them. It was a lot of editing work.

Le Cam: You are very modest when you say it's just editing: there is so much rewriting. In *Un papa de sang*,¹⁶ we hear the youth's voices, the transformation of language.

Hatzfeld: You are right, that's a lot of work. But it's also a question of intuition. Questions have been finely honed. The writing is more intuitive. I have the attitude of a novelist. I recreate a world.

Meuret: Your books also question what it means to be human. The killers say, for instance, "We did not see human beings when we found the Tutsis in the backwaters. I mean, people like us. . . ." The killers do sometimes think about what they have done, although they do not feel guilty and talk about the massacres as if they were a regular job. The split inside the killers is apparent. Pio says, "This wickedness was like someone else's, someone with a heavy heart. The worst changes in me were in my invisible parts, i.e. in my soul and feelings. Which is why I do not recognize myself in that person." Despite the horror, we touch upon something human here.

Hatzfeld: Yes, indeed.

Meuret: The survivors' stories usually fascinate the readers, but the second book, with the killers, fascinates even more. Cruelty fascinates.

Hatzfeld: The fascinating thing in that book is that I succeeded, unwittingly, and without any merit, in doing something no one had been able to do before. I say it quite frankly because I deserve no credit and benefited from exceptional circumstances. On the question of killers, Lanzmann failed; even Rithy Panh,¹⁷ to whom I talked a lot. My characters have a particular story: they are prisoners, locked up in jail, and they believe they'll stay in there forever. Yet they will be released. But when I interview them, they don't know this. They think they will die in jail. They have been tried, so they do not think that what they are telling me can either be useful or harmful to them.

Exceptional is the fact that they killed until May 14, and overnight they were on the run to escape the Rwandan Patriotic Front. So they took refuge in camps in Congo, where they spent two years before being herded back

to prison, where they lived between themselves. Eight thousand killers were jailed. They never faced scrutinizing looks. So it created an altogether different attitude. In the beginning, they lied. It was pointless.

Then they get on with it because the stakes are nil and they can learn a little bit about themselves. So I ask them, "Pio, you are a Christian, and you, Fulgence, you are a vicar, so how do you do with God?" And he tells me that he did not believe for one second that God was on his side when he killed with his machete. So he asked God to give him a break. He asked God to forget him for a little while, and that he would be even more devout later. I helped them say such things. Alphonse said at some point this incredible sentence: "We were less embarrassed to use our machetes than to face the scoffing and scolding of our comrades." He said something extremely important about social conformity. They killed just to be with their folks. They did not see it would end in disaster. I allow them to say those terrible sentences. At some point they tell me that if they did not kill, they would be punished. I was reading Christopher Browning at the time,¹⁸ who explains that Nazi officers always had the choice to kill or not to kill. Nobody obliged them to kill. But if they did not, they were punished. Latrine duties, potato peeling, washing, etc. No big deal. Nobody was sentenced to imprisonment in Germany for refusing to kill a Jew. When I asked one of the killers in Rwanda to tell me what the punishment was, he replied, "A crate of beer." He himself realized, at the moment of speaking, that this was pathetic. So my characters are incapable of facing the killers they were, but they can try talking about it. After they were released, they agreed to meet me again.

Le Cam: This is a long-term project—seventeen years on the Rwandan genocide. Do you keep writing because the first interactions were so promising?

Hatzfeld: The first idea was the book on the survivors: silence and absence. Sylvie, one of the survivors, had this superbly clever sentence that should be repeated in all schools of journalism: "the international reporters walked past our doors and did not bother to stop because they had no time to lose with people who were at a loss for words." That is the starting point of my book. The story of the killers are different. I was moved by the story of the first book and could not get away from it. I had this urge to go back to the village. The second book was born from the idea that I could talk to the killers. And the third followed because someone told me, "You know, the killers will be set free." They were released and sent back home. Telling the story of men leaving jail and walking twenty-five kilometers back to their plots of land and neighbors was almost a journalist's idea. Ten years had gone by, so it was interesting to ask the same questions again. The killers had changed

since they were set free. More than the loss of confidence, the fact that they had become animals was the hardest part for the survivors. That's the topic of the third book.

The fourth book is about Englebert, a man who had always refused to participate in my other projects. He started talking about his childhood, how he lived with his grandmother, bred cows, went to school, and then his adolescence, the constant threat—that was the story. The last book was premeditated: conversations with the children of the survivors and of the killers. The kids have always seen me talk to their parents. For years I was the only white person in the region. I saw them grow up. Inevitably I wanted to ask them questions too, and I was very pleasantly surprised. I had not imagined what they would tell me.

Le Cam: Getting back to this connection between journalist and author, as for instance in your semi-autobiographical novel, *La Ligne de flottaison* (The Waterline),¹⁹ how do you define your approach?

Hatzfeld: Whatever the situation, you always have your imagination. The journalist's imaginative world is based on his reportages. Duras's imaginative universe is her childhood in Vietnam. For Modiano, it is his adolescence during the war. For Faulkner, his village in the South. My own imagination is fueled by situations I experienced when I was a journalist. I was first a sports journalist, then a war correspondent, and then I came back to the subject of war for the pleasure of the text. *La Ligne de flottaison* is about the addiction to war journalism. It is possible, for intellectual, sensual, psychological reasons, to be addicted to war. As a journalist, you become addicted because there are so many—love, war—stories to tell. If fear is no obstacle, then it is pure exhilaration. So here we have a piece of journalistic literature, created from reality, without fictive characters, but it can be novelistic in style. Telling the story of the siege in Sarajevo or Beirut is addictive. Very addictive. In *L'Air de la guerre*²⁰ I wanted to tell the story of characters that had gone by so quickly in my reportages, but also to tell the story of the journalist's position: where is he when he tells his story; what does he see when he moves about with his interpreters; how does he feel the fear, or the absence thereof; what does it mean to be on the frontline? I have written novels because some events struck me when I was a journalist, but I did not have the opportunity to tell them. I also write novels because I have lost patience to fight with newspapers. I used to be more pugnacious.

Le Cam: All the narratives you write result from a wish to tell stories inspired by real events, but which require different forms.

Hatzfeld: I'm interested in various narrative forms. As a journalist I feel frustrated. I spent three years in Bosnia. At some point dissatisfaction is so

unbearable that it becomes productive: why not come back on that story, with memories and notebooks? With a little imagination I can recreate characters, and in my imagination these characters are real. I devise characters that exist in my imagination. I do not invent them. And then there is the pleasure of writing, a different type of grammar. With reportage, there is not much surprise. I enjoyed the demands of journalism. To live by twenty degrees, without water, with shells and bombs falling over my head. Fine with me, provided you get something in return.

Meuret: Literature gives you more latitude?

Hatzfeld: Not everyone is as gifted as John Burns. There is a true pleasure in telling real stories differently. All forms of narratives are equally valuable. It is a question of quality, not status. I'm lucky enough to practice different forms of writing. In the stories of Rwanda, the survivors' words are so aesthetically pleasing that I didn't need to ask myself ethical questions. The long-term relation also explains the confidence, and the fact that you can only write true stories. I enjoy striving for truth. It is a question of pleasure: I enjoyed meeting the people in the village, the energy I spent trying to be smart and resourceful. When you have become impervious to cynicism, then it is a pleasure. These stories did not look like anything I had experienced before. War reporters failed in Rwanda. I was blessed to go back to Rwanda and to discover a language.

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Notes

1. Jean Hatzfeld, *Dans le nu de la vie* (Paris: Seuil, 2000, trans. Linda Coverdale, *Life Laid Bare: The Survivors in Rwanda Speak* (New York: Other Press, 2006).
2. Jean Hatzfeld, *Une saison de machettes* (Paris: Seuil, 2003, trans. Linda Coverdale, *Machete Season: The Survivors in Rwanda Speak* (New York: Picador, 2006).
3. Jean Hatzfeld, *La Stratégie des antilopes* (Paris: Seuil, 2007), trans. Linda Coverdale, *The Antelope's Strategy: Living in Rwanda after the Genocide* (New York: Picador, 2010).
4. Emmanuel Carrère (b. 1959) is a contemporary French novelist and scriptwriter, best known for his nonfiction, translated in English as *The Adversary* by Linda Coverdale (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2000), based on a true crime, and *Limonov*, trans. John Lambert (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2014). He is among this generation of French authors that find inspiration in *fait divers* and real events, together with Régis Jauffret and Jean Rolin.
5. *XXI* is a French journal created by Patrick de Saint-Exupéry and Laurent Beccaria, specializing in longform journalism. It contains pieces of narrative journalism, but also photo and graphic reportages. Some of its contributors are Emmanuel Carrère, Denis Robert, Jean Rolin, and Joe Sacco. In French we call it a mook, a portmanteau (magazine + book), as it contains no advertisements and sells in bookshops, not at newsstands. *XXI* created a sensation when it emerged in 2008, and has proved an immense success since then, with an average of 50,000 readers for each issue. A plethora of other magazines are trying to emulate it.
6. Patrick Modiano (b. 1945) is a famous French author who was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 2014, “for the art of memory with which he has evoked the most ungraspable human destinies and uncovered the life-world of the Occupation.” He is best known for his *Occupation Trilogy: La Place de l'Étoile, The Night Watch, Ring Roads* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015).
7. Laure Adler interviewed Jean Hatzfeld for *Hors-Champs*, France-Culture, October 24, 2013.
8. Martin Bell, “The Journalism of Attachment,” in *Media Ethics*, ed. Matthew Kieran (London: Routledge, 1998), 15–22.
9. *Warriors* is a 1999 BBC TV series on the war in Bosnia, written by Leigh Jackson and directed by Peter Kosminsky.
10. Robert Antelme, like Primo Levi and Elie Wiesel, was a Holocaust survivor. His *L'Espèce humaine* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000) (literally, “the human species”) is a major work on concentration camps, trans. Jeffrey Haight and Annie Mahler, *The Human Race* (Marlboro, VT: Marlboro Press, 1992). Before deportation, Antelme was married to Marguerite Duras, whose *War: A Memoir*, trans. Barbara Bray (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), is a journal of her husband's absence.
11. Claude Lanzmann (b. 1925) is a Jewish journalist and filmmaker. He was in the French Resistance during the Occupation of France. He is best known for his 1985 documentary, *Shoah*.
12. Bernard Kouchner is a French physician (cofounder of Doctors without

Borders) and politician, who was minister in several governments. At the time of the genocide in Rwanda, he took initiatives to evacuate Tutsi kids from the country.

13. Charlotte Delbo (1913–1985) is a Holocaust survivor. She is best known for her trilogy, *Auschwitz and After*, trans. Rosette C. Lamont (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997).

14. Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal (New York: Summit Books, 1988).

15. The texts, originally in French, alternate French from France (contexts provided by Hatzfeld) and Rwandan French, influenced by Kinyarwanda, the official language of Rwanda (the survivors' accounts). This reinforces, Spiessens argues, the authenticity of the witnesses' testimonies. See Anneleen Spiessens, “La Mise en scène du bourreau: Jean Hatzfeld et Gilbert Gatore: Fictions sur le genocide rwandais,” in *Témoigner: Entre histoire et mémoire/Getuigen: Tussen Geschiedenis en Gedachtnis* 102 (2009): 29–40.

16. Jean Hatzfeld, *Un papa de sang* (Paris: Gallimard, 2015).

17. Rithy Panh (b. 1964) is a documentary filmmaker born in Cambodia and who took refuge in France to escape the Khmer Rouge tyranny. His oeuvre, which includes *The Missing Picture* (2013) and *Exile* (2016), is entirely a tribute to the victims of the genocidal regime of the Khmer Rouge.

18. Christopher Browning (b. 1944) is a US Holocaust historian, best known for *Ordinary Men* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), a book about the German officers who deported and killed Jews. Browning posits that the officers committed atrocities partly due to pressure and influence.

19. Jean Hatzfeld, *La Ligne de flottaison* (Paris: Seuil, 2005).

20. Jean Hatzfeld, *L'Air de la guerre: sur les route de Croatie et de Bosnie-Herzégovine* (Paris: Éditions de L'Olivier, 1994).