



## “Declaration of love”

“At the Innovative housing project during my break, Michel comes to give me a letter where he drew hearts and he asks me to read it in front of him. After having quickly understood what it is, I refuse and remind him of what we said to each other last time on this subject, he answers me by looking at me very intensely almost like an animal: “We remain friends but you will end up being in love with me””

*Paris, June 2017*

### THE NARRATOR

is a 23 years old french woman who's a trainer in an intercultural association. She's from a middle social class and isn't doesn't belong to a minority.

### THE OTHER PERSON(S)

is a 26 years old malian man who's a participant in a workshop made by the narrator's organisation. He's from a lower social class and belongs to a minority.

### SIMILARITIES / DIFFERENCES

What brings them together are their ages. What separates them is their genders, their social classes, their places in the organisation and the fact that he belongs to a minority and she doesn't.

## CONTEXT

### PHYSICAL CONTEXT

The narrator is taking her break in a public place without other people present.

### OTHER PEOPLE PRESENT

The conversation occurs in private.

### LARGER SOCIAL CONTEXT

Odile and Michel know each other from an art mediation whose goal is to bring closer the employees of the Innovative housing project and the migrants who are hosted there; Odile was an intercultural trainer during the workshops of the project and Michel a regular participant

### PREVIOUS RELATIONSHIP, ANTECEDENTS

Michel and the narrator have known each other for a couple of months. Their usual encounters happened in the art mediation workshops, but sometimes they met in informal settings too in the site of the housing project.

## FRAMES OF REFERENCES OF THE NARRATOR “ODILE”

MISUNDERSTANDING

SHOCK

FRUSTRATION

DISAPPOINTMENT

Michel gives the letter with the drawn hearts to Odile and tells her “We remain friends but you will end up being in love with me”

**Role of the intercultural facilitator:** Considering the objectives of the Photovoice project, the difficulty was to rethink the balance between professional and personal identity and to be in an inter-permeability. It was clear that for the narrator in the professional context, no romantic relationship is allowed. But it was important for the facilitators to create an atmosphere where friendly relationships could develop and so work has been done on the issue of gender relations with residents in order to remove preconceived ideas and avoid misunderstandings. The opening of the boundaries between professional and personal identity is inevitable (considering the logic of the 'non-formal' intervention), it opens the door to a certain intimacy. This intimacy remains manageable and friendly for Odile, but perhaps not for her interlocutor. On the other hand, it is one of Odile's first professional experiences, so in relation to this border she has less distance, she is discovering the limits in front of this balance.

### **Gender in the love relationship:**

There is gender equality in the right to initiate, accept or terminate a relationship. A woman's word is worth as much as a man's. The narrator expects her words to be heard and respected as much as those of a man.

**Rationality:** Michel cannot believe and insist that the narrator is in love with him while at the same time he understands that they are friends (love should be spontaneous, not planned, not decided).

**Representation of the process of falling in love:** The declaration of love or the usual way of courting shouldn't be done suddenly and insistently. It must be built especially if the relationship is friendly at first. This requires caution due to the uncertainty of the situation(rejection).

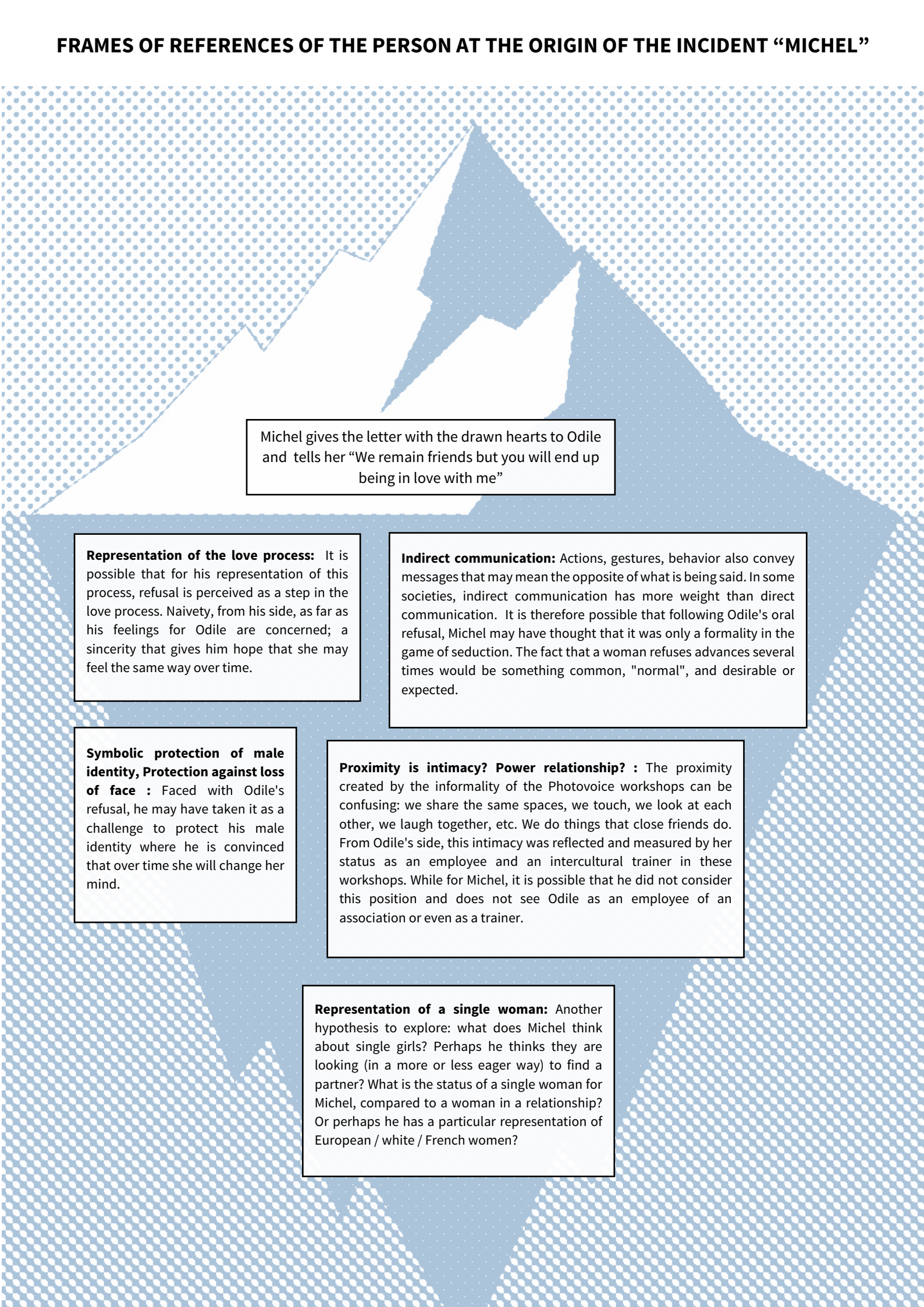
**Direct communication:** In Western societies, direct oral and verbal communication is more important than other types of communication. By using it, the narrator considers that she has given a clear and explicit answer that leaves no room for interpretation and closes this case.

**Vision of male / female friendship:** Her vision of friendship was shaken to the point of doubting the possibility of a male/female friendship.





## FRAMES OF REFERENCES OF THE PERSON AT THE ORIGIN OF THE INCIDENT “MICHEL”



Michel gives the letter with the drawn hearts to Odile and tells her “We remain friends but you will end up being in love with me”

**Representation of the love process:** It is possible that for his representation of this process, refusal is perceived as a step in the love process. Naivety, from his side, as far as his feelings for Odile are concerned; a sincerity that gives him hope that she may feel the same way over time.

**Indirect communication:** Actions, gestures, behavior also convey messages that may mean the opposite of what is being said. In some societies, indirect communication has more weight than direct communication. It is therefore possible that following Odile's oral refusal, Michel may have thought that it was only a formality in the game of seduction. The fact that a woman refuses advances several times would be something common, "normal", and desirable or expected.

**Symbolic protection of male identity, Protection against loss of face :** Faced with Odile's refusal, he may have taken it as a challenge to protect his male identity where he is convinced that over time she will change her mind.

**Proximity is intimacy? Power relationship? :** The proximity created by the informality of the Photovoice workshops can be confusing: we share the same spaces, we touch, we look at each other, we laugh together, etc. We do things that close friends do. From Odile's side, this intimacy was reflected and measured by her status as an employee and an intercultural trainer in these workshops. While for Michel, it is possible that he did not consider this position and does not see Odile as an employee of an association or even as a trainer.

**Representation of a single woman:** Another hypothesis to explore: what does Michel think about single girls? Perhaps he thinks they are looking (in a more or less eager way) to find a partner? What is the status of a single woman for Michel, compared to a woman in a relationship? Or perhaps he has a particular representation of European / white / French women?

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