

University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign
HIS 596 Congolese Diaspora Views
Transcripts from Interview # 6
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Interview conducted by Rebecca Vaughn and Abbey Adesope

Rebecca: Ok, so I am recording with this.

Abbey: Ready? And it is recording.

Rebecca: Ok. So we're going to move to the main questions here

Interviewee #6: Yea

Rebecca: For number one what do you think people in the future should understand about the conflicts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)?

Interviewee #6: Um, I think people should remember that more than six thousand people, six million people died. They should remember that today at least 10 women have been raping [raped] everyday. And they should remember that um, uh, we have strength to still thinking about it but we don't have strength maybe to stop it.

Rebecca: So for question uh number two then...

Interviewee #6: Mhmm

Rebecca: In your opinion, were women and men affected differently by the violence in the DRC?

Interviewee #6: Yes, I think the, the people were suffering here (?) it's women because women they are like the, the backbone of society in Africa and women, they give. They give education. Women they're working, the cooking, they're working a lot. Uhh eighty percent of the, the income I think coming from women and by raping women this is like uhh, how do you call it...umm I can't remember how you call it, but this is like uh just killing a society. By killing the society they are killing the strength of our country. And we don't have the strength to fight back because they are just raping, raping the women there. And it's very hard to keep going you can see, yea.

Rebecca: So, in some African countries there have been structured, officially sponsored institutions and programs which have tried to bring about truth and reconciliation after violent conflicts. One prominent example is in South Africa, and there have been others in Rwanda, Sierra Leone, and Liberia. The name given to these institutions is usually a "truth and reconciliation commission" or TRC. Do you have any experience with TRC efforts in central and western Africa (such as Rwanda or Liberia)?

Interviewee #6: No.

Rebecca: Are you aware that there was a TRC in Congo in 2003-2007?

Interviewee #6: No.

Rebecca: Ok. Then do you think another TRC would be appropriate or effective for uh Congo? Why or why not?

Interviewee #6: I think that as you say you give some countries South Africa, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Liberia—I think their problem are very different from our problem. Because our main problem, they are trying to get what are called coltan. And coltan is the main element for your video. It's the main element for your cell phone, for all your and today in the 21st century everybody need it and I think the problem in Congo is it's gonna be hard for the TRC to make effort in Africa, especially in Congo. Maybe it was easier for them to make it in South Africa, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, and Liberia maybe because their main problem is difference with our main problem. Our problem today is monde__ it's just world-wide. It's not just an African problem or a Congolese problem. It's just...

Abbey: So you're saying it may be coming from within outside__.

Interviewee #6: Yes. Yes, it's coming from outside, it's very hard to point just who—where

Rebecca: Right

Interviewee #6: Where, it's very hard for me and for Congolese—but this is not a Congolese problem it's not a Congolese problem. It's just a world-wide problem and our country is the first, you know the first country where you can find the—I think the reserve of the world of coltan. It's like ninety percent is in Congo.

Rebecca: So, uh for number eight then—there have also been other models um of addressing uh the problems of post-conflict societies such as criminal tribunals of top leadership. For example, Jean-Pierre Bemba is being tried at the International Criminal Court in Belgium, for alleged war crimes committed in the Central African Republic. In your opinion, would this model be appropriate or effective for the DRC? Why or why not?

Interviewee #6: Ok, let me re-read the question.

Rebecca: Sure.

Interviewee #6: Re-reading quietly. Can you explain it? I have a hard time to understand it.

Rebecca: Yea.

Interviewee #6: Explain it. Ask me the question.

Rebecca: So, there has been other models besides the TRC and one is the like at the criminal court level, the international level. And so uh that actually took place outside of Africa.

Interviewee #6: Yeah, Belgium.

Rebecca: And in Belgium. Um, do you think something similar should happen for the top people involved? Um.

Interviewee #6: Mmm, why not? But I think the people involved should assess and assessment is gonna to be so difficult.

Rebecca: Right.

Interviewee #6: By the time assess, finishing assessing, the more crimes and more things gonna happen.

Rebecca: Mhmm.

Interviewee #6: Uh, they did it maybe with uh the name you just said here, Jean Pierre Bemba. They did it—but I don't think was the only one.

Rebecca: Hmm. Yea.

Interviewee #6: Yea. Yea, maybe on it's case he was trying only to help. And maybe, you know, they just you know arrest him because he was trying to help—because he is originally from, of Congo. Maybe he was trying to become our president. Maybe he was trying to help Congolese and maybe that's why they arrest. Uh, saying that we need another like uh you know top thing for uh, I don't know. I don't know.

Rebecca: So this kind of leads into the next question because there have been other models of addressing the problems of post-conflict societies such at the community-level rather than the last question at the international level, this one is focusing on the community—um, community courts for victims and perpetrators, alleged perpetrators.

In your opinion, would this model be more appropriate or effective for the DRC? Why or why not?

Interviewee #6: Um, I saw a movie, I don't know if you saw that movie, but I have a short cut of that movie and I would like you to see that movie.

Rebecca: Yea.

Interviewee #6: And by seeing that movie it explains very well what's going on in Congo. By talking about you know, the low level, you will understand why it is just so difficult because um, they send, um how do you call it, uh, mm, it's like an international organization in Congo to try to keep you know, to keep you know, the people, you know, quiet—to try to maybe protect them. And in that movie you can see how those people—and they raping women and by saying that we need an organization. I can't—you know, I'm not trusting anybody anymore—I don't know.

Rebecca: Right.

Abbey: Yea. Do you remember the name?

Rebecca: Yea, do you remember?

Interviewee #6: Yes, I remember the name of the movie. I have it cut short maybe like thirty minutes, all the information thirty minutes. This is a movie I would like you to see. I can, I will do my best, I can give you my phone number and we can during the week and uh let me think about the title.

Rebecca: Sure.

Interviewee #6: Just uh, I will think about it.

Rebecca: Ok. Thank you. Go ahead, Abbey.

Interviewee #6: Silence something. Silence something—I will remember.

Rebecca: Ok, yea, whenever you can think of it that would be great.

Abbey: Yea, that would be good to watch.

Interviewee #6: Yea, yea.

Abbey: Um, so earlier we had talked about you know, you talked about how men and women were different and the issues of men and women were different

Interviewee #6: Mhmm

Abbey: How should women and women's issues be included, um in future efforts to address the legacies of violence going on in the DRC?

Interviewee #6: I think we mentioned these things for women, for Congo. Two years ago I did a speech, it was at Parkland and her lady called I think, Eve. She, she's the founder and president of her V Day—you can go over online and see the video. Uh and then they had it I think two years ago and the big problem was about the Congolese, you know, girls and stuff. I may try to find some paper for you and you can read it. And uh we uh, we talked that day and I was the speaker and I did many research about it—it's something

that I told you, I left my country ten years ago and it's something—I was there when it started because I'm, myself, like a victim. Because when it started it was like a war like a civil war and military was coming to the house of you know, people and raping people and stealing. In my house I have a girl, they raped that girl—in front of me. They raped my neighbor in front of me they were about to rape me but I had just the courage they didn't rape me—they want money from me materially they took everything from me but I saw them--they. My husband, they just you know, they stop him, the how do you call it, they,

Abbey: Tied him

Interviewee #6: They tied him. The person—the guard (?) they tied him and they were asking me about money, they were asking me about everything—I didn't have it but I have the niece of a husband there. They raped the niece they raped my neighbors but to answer to your questions, it's just, again, I don't know. I don't know where to start with. Yea, women, to answer your question—women, we need to speak we need to speak. That speak is gonna be so hard. We need to speak...

Abbey: You mean they're not given the chance to speak

Interviewee #6: They give the chance to—that movie they're given the chance to speak because it's like—stop the silence. Something like that, stop the silence. I can't remember the title but it's something like stop the silence, something like that—but they were trying to—women started talking. They were explaining how they were—what they were doing to them. They were explaining, explaining, explaining, explaining but this is like a movie maybe one hundred or two hundred thousand people saw the movie. But, we, everybody, you know, school didn't see the movie, university didn't see the movie. We should have most because I was trying to start doing it but trying to do it first of all because the language, second because I was alone. Thirdly because sometime maybe Congolese people, they, part of them, they just after they left Africa they are here. We have other challenges. And I was, um, I am trying. I don't know how, but I'm trying. And I'm just so glad that there is people here that you talking about it. I'm just so glad to see you talking about that issue because uh, this issue is uh, a big problem.

Abbey: You know, you said something that leads us to the next question in terms of education and people need to learn more and know more. Um, should these legacies of violence be addressed in the Congolese educational system? If you, you get what I mean? Should kids know about it? How do you think they should if they could?

Interviewee #6: Do you mean in Congo?

Rebecca: Yea, in Congo.

Abbey: Yea, in Congo.

Interviewee #6: Yea, they should address it but how they can address it if everything is controlled?

Abbey: What about generations to come—I mean if it could be included in the textbooks? Maybe it should be in books. Do you think it should be talked about?

Interviewee #6: Yea.

Abbey: Should your children's children know about it?

Interviewee #6: Yes, they should.

Interviewee #6: This more than the first war and this is more than the second war. This is more than that.

Rebecca: And you're saying right now the government is controlling so it can't be taught?

Interviewee #6: Yea.

Abbey: Should the members of the Congolese diaspora play a role in any efforts to address the legacies of violence?

Interviewee #6: Yes.

Abbey: How do you think they can play a role—people here?

Interviewee #6: I don't know. We just think about it and we're doing some effort but I think their effort was scattered, but they're trying to get together but how people get together because this is a five days week work. This is no Africa, you know, you leave your work and—this is five days or six days over time, you know. You need to pay your bills, you know? If they could have a week off or something like that they could do more things, but I think it's because of the America challenge, their own struggles.

Rebecca: Right.

Abbey: Right, their own struggles.

Interviewee #6: I know that. We talk about it, but we don't have strength.

Abbey: Hmm.

Interviewee #6: We talk about it but they are some ladies—there is a doctor his name is Mukwege (?)—you will see him he is in the movie. I went to see him—I saw the movie and I saw him in the movie. He is trying to heal those women. He is trying to heal them and he has been giving his life for these women. And then when I heard that he was

coming I flew to Atlanta to meet him you know, to watch him you know. To see what he is doing and the person who invited him was Eve, Eve from V day. I went there and I got some pictures with him and stuff. Yes, the Congolese we met, we were trying to do stuff, our big, I think the main problem here is like awareness just to try to give information to people because we think that people don't know. They don't have the right information. They don't know what is going on. They have a part of it but they don't have all of it.

Rebecca and Abbey: Yes, yes.

Abbey: So, would you see yourself as being involved in such a process? I know you said that you know if you were given a week off and there was time—so let's say that you were given a week off or a month off would see yourself as being involved in such a process?

Interviewee #6: Oh yea, I see myself as being involved. Yea, I see myself, yes.

Rebecca: Do you see um within being here in Champaign Urbana too that uh maybe this venue and this church that the Congolese community here —is that a way also that you could be involved in a process—or you could start...

Interviewee #6: Yea, yea—myself every year I'm celebrating the International Women's Day on March 8, yes International Women's Day. The first time I did it was in 2009. They watched a movie and then I tried to explain to them like uh a day of pain and a day of joy there's a part of the world where they have joy and part of the world where they have pain because of the war. I was trying to give them the awareness that uh even we are here we have shelter and food but there is some people in Congo, our sister who is still suffering, yea. And then I was invite one day. It's a school of U of I somebody called me and they asked me to go. They have a week like an African week, yes, and I went there and I gave that speech. There were teenager and I have to explain to them that what is like a girl in Africa you know—like how she's living and then I explained to them how she before the war she is playing and going to school and then I explain to them that and then I show them the movie to explain to them that she is sick, that she has aids. She is pregnant she has maybe two kids from the war after being raped. She's not smiling anymore she can't play anymore.

Abbey: So earlier you had talked about how, um, it's frustrating and it's hard—if something should be done, should these efforts wait until the conflicts end?

Interviewee #6: No.

Abbey: So when do you, when do you think people should take a stand, when? When do you feel...

Interviewee #6: Oh, as soon as possible. This is not a problem like ohh, ok, wait, hold on until the occasion come—no .

Interviewee #6: No, this is something that must happen. The most we talk the most things gonna...

Abbey: Is there—the next question, is there a product from our research that would be useful to you and your community?

Interviewee #6: A product? What do you mean?

Abbey: So after we're done with this, do you think this research would be useful...

Interviewee #6: Yes, yes, yes. Yea.

Abbey: How so? How do you think we can get this message to your community?

Interviewee #6: I will organize something and I will invite you—you gonna have a speech, you gonna explain everything. Yea, because seeing American people or other people country knowing more than yourself, this is just—I see, I see you coming and talking and talk to those women and we organize it and we will organize it.

Rebecca and Abbey: That would be good. That would be great.

Abbey: We were talking about something like that so that people even other Africans know...

Interviewee #6: Yes!

Abbey: Know what's going on because they don't.

Interviewee #6: They don't. By the way, we have a musician here. He went through this war. He was running. He moved here now. He is in America. He is making a CD and he has a song. I may ask him you know if you want to use his song

Rebecca: That would be great if we could use it in the documentary.

Interviewee #6: You have a song.

Abbey: That would be great if we could play that. That would be really nice.

Rebecca: And like we were talking about how we would like to have a showing of the documentary and maybe leave a copy here with the church and have a discussion, a public discussion afterward.

Interviewee #6: A public discussion, yes. And he can sing because he already has made the song. But he made the song for all Africa because all the African people have many problem.

Abbey: Congolese music is really well known in all Africa so I think like that's a great way to get the message out there with that type of music. That was very, very smart.

Interviewee #6: Yes, mmmm.

Abbey: So do you have any questions that you would like to ask us? Or do you have any questions that you think maybe we should include in this.

Interviewee #6: Ok. What is the purpose of your or your interview? That's my first question. Is it something temporary because you want to graduate or it's something you want to help women from Congo.

Abbey: I think it's more than women...

Rebecca: Right

Abbey: I think not only help—we, we're concerned about the opinions of people, of Congolese people. You know, we can read about it, but we want to know about it from people who have lived and experienced it

Interviewee #6: Oh, that's great.

Rebecca: We want to hear your voices.

Abbey: Right, we want to know what you guys think. And we're hoping that this more than graduation because like we said, we want to present a paper or a forum for not only Champaign Urbana community, but for our peers, people at U of I, for people of the African American Association so they know what's going on because Congo is the heart of Africa—it's right there in the center.

Interviewee #6: Yes, in the center.

Abbey: Yea, so I think this something that we want maybe we can even put in the library so that if people ever have questions about what happened —you know were these people saying about Congo back then, then we can...

Interviewee #6: Yes, that's right. That's good.

Rebecca: And we've been talking to Pastor Guy about um you know, keeping a copy of the documentary that can address the history of the Congolese people here in Champaign Urbana because not a lot of people know because there is not a lot of information out there.

Interviewee #6: There is not a lot of information.

Rebecca: And youth need to know-- youth in particular need to know about their history and here--they are a part of the community here. So um, we're trying to think of ideas where we can keep that information...

Interviewee #6: This is such a blessing.

Rebecca: And we started out last semester with the same professor, Dr. Barnes and talking about truth and reconciliations around the world but we focused on Africa and we thought that instead of just keeping it within the classroom that we should move outside of that and not just keep it amongst us but that we should talk to the Congolese community.

Abbey: The Congolese community is the largest African community...

Interviewee #6: Here in Champaign!

Abbey: Here in Champaign Urbana.

Interviewee #6: We should have our own mayor and

All: laughter.

Interviewee #6: Five hundred, that's a lot.

Abbey: And it's grown...

Interviewee #6: Ten percent of this church.

Rebecca and Abbey: Wow, that is a lot.

Abbey: So it is amazing what people have to say. Because you know, like she said, we learned about this stuff last semester so this semester was more hearing the voices of the people. We really appreciate your time.

Rebecca: Yes, thank you for taking the time to meet with us.

Abbey: And we would so love to know whenever we can set something up whenever our project is done so that we can talk with the women or whenever you can

Interviewee #6: Yea! Yes, mmmm, yes, yes.

Abbey: That would be great.

Rebecca: And the same with the film that you mentioned the...

Interviewee #6: Where you gonna be?

Rebecca: We will, we will keep in contact with you. April 22 we are supposed to kind of give an initial talk about the work we have been doing...

Interviewee #6: I'll have that movie.

Rebecca: So, yes, we can look for that movie.

Interviewee #6: You want me to give my phone number? You can call anytime.

End of recording