

University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign  
HIS 596 Congolese Diaspora Views  
Transcripts from Interview # 1  
March 24th, 2011

Interview conducted by Margaret Fitzpatrick and transcribed by Emily Steiner McGhee

Question 1: What do you think people should understand and remember about the conflict/conflicts in the DRC?

This is a major question about the DRC. The conflict in my country has killed more than six million people. That is a lot of people dying from the conflict. The world should remember specifically the Congo. People should know and remember again that this is the bad time of our country. Everybody should know that this conflict should never happen again because we cannot all the time kill people for nothing. In the future everybody, every Congolese people, should study thoroughly what was the source of this conflict: why. And teach to their children, the children will teach to their children, from generation to generation, to make sure that Congolese people will never go back there again to kill. We have to stop this conflict once and for all.

Question 2: In your opinion, were women and men affected differently by violence in the DRC?

Of course. This violence affected first women, they were affected more than men, because most of the people involved in this conflict were men. And those men were members of armed groups. The women were used like a weapon of war. They were used in the mind of the members of rebels groups...to rape women was like a symbol of power in order to get power from those women. And women were more affected. And if we try to see in different places where they tried to support, to give some moral and material support, to those women, those people, we see most of the victims are women. They were affected more than men.

Question 3: Do you have any experience with TRC efforts in Central and Western Africa such as Rwanda or Liberia?

Well, I don't have any experience with these ones, but I know that they created such a commission for my country too. After the dialogue between the Congolese in 2002, in 2003 they created a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, but the fact is this commission didn't get the job done. The job for what it was created. This commission didn't resolve any problem. The conflict, the violence against women, is going on until today. And the commission is still there. It was not effective.

Question 4: To your knowledge, were women included in that 2003-2007 Truth and Reconciliation Commission?

In our country, we want women to be involved in all processes of democratization, in all politics stuff. But this is not easy to get because women have to get involved themselves, they have to do this, and that. At the end, it was like a wish without anything inside. It was a wish to have women involved, but they were not. Nobody can go like: women, ok, come here, we want you to be in this commission. No. They have to wake up themselves. They have to be interested. They have to have some knowledge, some background about any experience from college or university. They have to feel like they should do it themselves. Men cannot just say ok, we need women in this commission, then ok we go to get them. [Margaret: Yes, alright, so it is not as easy as it sounds]. It is not easy. On the other hand, men themselves they just say, but they don't have the will to do what they say. That's why when women cannot themselves get up and say ok we want to do this and we do it. Men will say: ok we won, 50-50 women and men in this commission, if they [women] don't come, ok let them.

Question 5: Do you think men would be supportive of their wives being on this commission, of their wives participating in this type of thing? Or do you think they would not want their wives to participate?

I think they want to. There are some associations or women's organization which are trying to make women aware about the problem, their role in the society, what they can do. They are trying to give some formation [training] and to inform also women about their role in the society. They need time.

Question 6: Do you think another TRC would be appropriate or effective for the DRC? Why or why not?

I think another TRC would be appropriate. But to have such a commission is not all. The problem is about the people, the agents, the ones who can work in the commission. This is the problem. The problem is not the commission in itself. We can have a commission at least because we went through conflicts for a long time. We lost a lot of people in these conflicts. And we cannot just say ok we need to bring everybody to the justice, to the courts. There is some problem, ok we can find a solution like in family. That's what it is about, this Truth and Reconciliation Commission. It is like in African culture, every time we have a problem, we say: ok we come together, stay around the table, and try to talk about our problem. This is what this commission is about. And for this one, we don't need only to create the commission, we need the people who are willing to participate in this commission, who have some determination to find a solution, to say: ok we have the ability to call people together and to talk together about our problem. This commission would be appropriate.

Question 7: There have also been other models of addressing 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 no?

This is a tough question but it is not so complicated to talk about this problem. There is one part, a political problem, and on the other hand we have a court, or judicial, problem. We have to be able to separate. The first question will be: why bring someone to the court? This should be a judicial problem. And the political problem, we can call to the commission, like a Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

This is my opinion about the Jean-Pierre Bemba situation:

In the case of Congo, we just came from the conflict, we organize our first election, and I think we didn't need to bring a person like him to the court. We brought him to the court, not from our will, because the president said it was not his problem. The problem was about the international tribunal. And it was not the Congolese president who asked the international tribunal about him, it was another country. So if it was like for me, I could say our democracy is still fragile. We need to come together. We don't need to put everybody into jail. We need to reinforce our Truth and Reconciliation Commission to talk about our problem, in family, along the table, like in the ancient Africa, under the tree. People would stay and talk about the problem. We didn't need to bring him to the court. We should say, that's what I said before, about the political view of the problem, and the judicial view of the problem. So if I can say something it is: we don't want this man at the International Tribunal. We want him home.

Question 9: There have also been other models of addressing the problems of post-conflict societies such as community level courts for victims and alleged perpetrators. In your opinion, would this model be appropriate or effective for the DRC? Why or why not?

Ok, question 8 was about political leaders. This question is about other people involved in the conflict. I can give the example about people who willingly raped women. Those people, if I was in power, I could say ok, the first one [level], each of those perpetrators should recognize their faults in front of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission: we recognized that what we did was bad and we really apologize, we regret to do so. After that the people, we, African people in general and Congolese people, we can forgive them.

The second level would be that if somebody knows that he is a perpetrator of such a crime, and he says: I don't want to apologize, then we should bring such people to the courts, at the community level. We cannot just say: ok he raped and doesn't feel anything about it, he was wise to do so, it's ok for him: it's like an insult to the community. We have to punish these kinds of people. No matter who he is. He can be a police officer, he can be a member of the army, he can be a rebel, whatever... Everybody should respect everybody. And our moral as a community should be kept, we have the values that we have to keep all the time. The women are such kinds of persons that we respect from the ancient times, in our culture. We cannot say: ok he raped, ok and we let him go. No. we have to establish the courts at the community

level and to bring such people there so they can be judged for their crimes and punished.

Question 10: How should women and women's issues be included in future efforts to address the legacies of violence in the DRC?

To get women involved in this problem, the first I think is education. As a country we have to do all we can to promote female education because in the ancient times in my country, a lot of times women didn't go to school. They were like ok if a parent has to make a choice between a girl and a boy, if he doesn't have enough money and he has to send children to school, he has to make a choice: ok I will send first the boy, then maybe if I have the money, I can send the girl.

It was like a choice in the family, it's a cultural problem. Today what we need is to give a chance to everybody, especially to promote women's education. That will be the first step. And the second one: we need to inform all women about their rights like citizens in the country, like God's creations. We want to make them aware about what they are, what they represent in the country. In our population, a majority of Congolese population are women. They should know this, and to say "we can stand up, speak out for ourselves, we should not all the time play like the victims. We can ok we understand, we were victims. Now we refuse to be considered and be treated all the time like victims. Now we want to take action". Go to the first place, they have the ability to do that. But somebody should tell them that what we need to do to stop all kind of violence in our country. If we try to see the history of the world in some other countries when the women said "ok enough is enough" and things changed. They [Congolese women] can do the same. But they need somebody to tell them. To make them aware. They can do it.

Question 11: Should the legacies of violence be addressed in the Congolese educational system and if so how?

My answer is yes. We have to do so. Because this is what we are. This is our history. To refuse to address these legacies of violence in the educational system is like to refuse the history of our country. To refuse ourselves. We have to tell our children what difficult situation the country went through in the past until today. We have to tell them at school. Design a program, a teaching program about our political history and to (insert??) in our educational system. We have to do so. How to do it? First of all, our minister, educational system, the minister, the number 1 of this system, I mean at the level of the government, they should create a commission. This commission is going to study precisely what is going to be taught at school at what level. Once they find the material, what the country wants the children to know, then they are going to give this to the minister, to the government. And the government is going to say now we can insert this program in our educational system. This can be done.

(Proposed commission consulting the govt on educational policies)

Question 12: Should members of the Congolese diaspora play a role in the efforts to address the legacies of violence?

Ok, in general this question is important because today a lot of Congolese people are living outside the country. They are in Europe, they are in America, they are everywhere. Some of them, they went out of the country not because they want to, but because they were forced to do so. And today there is no organization in which all Diaspora Congolese are working in to try to address the legacies of violence. But there are many different organizations around the world in Europe in the United States, everywhere, created by Congolese people. They are trying to do what they can. To address this problem. Because there was no such person or an organization which controls each of them are acting differently. Some of them can use everything they want to stop or to help the victims of of the conflict.

Here in Champaign there are some Congolese people too. They try to do what they can. And I am one of them. I and some friends, we created an organization we called Peace and Development for All. This what to make ourselves aware of the problem. Everything we are going through in the country. And to see what we can do to help, what is going to be our role, as Congolese to those problems. And we are trying to do what we can. The vision is: one day all Congolese with their organization, if they can come together, and speak out about these issues, this is going to be a great step.

Question 14: Would you see yourself as being involved in such a process?

This is an example. Last year Congolese people in the United States met together and they tried to think about what they can do specifically, what can have a specific impact on social life of Congolese people in the Congo. Those Congolese they made a plan for what they can do. And we want, like I said before, if we can as Congolese come together the most we can, Congolese organizations around the world come together and act as one voice, we can change a lot of things.

Question 15: If something should be done, should efforts wait until the conflict(s) end?

We don't have to wait that the conflict is done in order to for us to stand up and to act and to do something. Because at the same time that the conflict is still going on, at the same time, the crisis, the victims are still going through a difficult time. So we don't have to say ok: hey, calm down, we can wait until the conflict is done, then we are going to start to do what we can do. No. we cannot lose again more people. We have to stand up and do something. It's like when you see your house take fire, will you say ok I will wait until the fire is going to stop then I am going to call the firefighters? At the same time that you see the smoke from your house, the same time you act. This is common sense. We don't have to wait. The conflict is going on now, we act now. To find a solution.

Question 16: Is there a product from our research that would be useful to you and your community?

Yes. This research I think comes at the right time. Two years ago I was thinking myself what can we do as Congolese Diaspora to the problem, the crisis in our country. They can say officially, there is no more conflict in the Congo but unofficially, everybody knows. It's not the conflict but the consequences of the conflict. They rape, every day, until today. This is the consequence of this conflict. And there are still some groups of rebels in some places. So I was thinking what can we do? Because most of the time, when somebody wants to rebel against the government, against something, against somebody, he has always somebody else outside the country. And this somebody is his friend, his brothers, his sisters. So we as Congolese Diaspora, we have to come together and say: we cannot support somebody who is going to rape, kill our brothers and sisters. We cannot. This brings me to think about what we can do and we created Peace and Development for All. It was for this purpose. To tell ourselves first, what can we do. And to say ourselves: if we do not do anything, nobody is going to do anything for us. We have to do it ourselves. If you want the conflict to stop, we have to do it ourselves. If we want to see the rape stop, we have to say no by ourselves. If we don't say no, nobody will do it for us.

21: 47. This research comes to remind me, again that I have a role to play. This research come to say: hey, don't sleep, you have something to do. People are still dying in your country. You cannot say: oh, it is a politician problem, it is an international community problem. We can yes, but you are on of those citizens in that country. Wake up and do something.

Through this research a lot of Congolese people can wake up. They can say: oh, this problem is still there? Yes this problem is still there. We need you. Your country needs you. If not you, who else can do it? Stand up and do it for your country.

(Stresses the role of Congolese in doing something)

Question 17: Do you have any questions that you would like to ask us?

My question is this one: from your research, can you go and see political leaders from this country and remind them, because they know this problem. Tell them that this problem is still going on, and the victims, they are there, they need help. This problem is related to the economic problem from this country, from Congo. A lot of people, a lot of countries are involved in this conflict because they take advantage of the minerals and all natural resources from this country. If nobody from those countries can stand up and say no we exaggerate, so the conflicts will be still there. All the time in the Congo, we are going to have rebels. Because there is some place, somewhere, where somebody is ready to buy, to give money in order to have gold, diamonds, coltane, everything. Can you do such a thing?

We want specifically political people, they can do something

