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### Interview with Kalala Shoni

Kalala Shoni

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Kalala Shoni was interviewed over Zoom on April 5th, 2021, by Monica Miramontes.

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[2:59] KS: My name is Kalala, Shoni. I'm also the survivor of Gatumba, 2004. [inaudible] I'm one of the survivors.

[3:32] MM: Where did you grow up?

KS: Well I grew up in Uvira - I was born in Uvira and grew up in there. When I got fourteen that's when we left Uvira.

MM: So at fourteen is when you would say you became a refugee?

KS: Yes.

MM: When you guys left your hometown, where did you go, and did you travel alone, or were you with your family?

KS: I was with my family. We left the country - we left the Congo - when the war started. So we have to flee the country. I was with my mom, my dad, and my other three brothers. And my auntie also.

MM: Ok big family.

KS: Yeah.

MM: And you mentioned it was the war that made you guys leave the Congo right?

KS: Yeah it was the war. So the war started at that day so we had to flee because they was looking at Tutsi, Banyamulenge, they wanted to kill us there, so my daddy said "no, we have to leave."

[4:49] MM: When you arrived at the refugee camp, what was the atmosphere like before the violence started, and what was it like after?

KS: Before it was real chaotic, you know. Everybody was like, "eh we have to live here?" they tried to kill us, all of us, so we didn't get a chance to put our clothes together or our stuff so we can live with it. My father just came home, I remember he were somewhere, and he just came home, "hey guys. We have to leave." At that time I was hiding under

the bed, you know, because it was too loud - chaotic - of bullets, and there was shooting everywhere. So my father came and got us and said "we have to leave." At that time there was no time to take a car, so there was a bicycle. We ride the bicycles to the border of Burundi and Congo.

Before we got to the border, we stop in the way, there was people there, waiting for us, to kill us, but my father, you know, told them "hey you guys please, we have little bit money, we can give you this money and go." And they were shouting, "no, you guys have to die today." My father was like, "no, please, look. My kid's here, you guys don't want to see me dying with my kids here." So my father kind of give them a little bit of money so they let us go. So that's when we went straight to the border and we crossed to Burundi. So when we got to the camp, there was everybody there - everybody I know - it was good, we got received by UNHCR [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees].

[interview paused]

[7:20] MM: So you guys were received by the UNHCR, you said, right?

KS: Yes.

[interview paused]

KS: Did you know that I live in Africa?

MM: Yeah, I think you said you were currently in Rwanda, is that right?

KS: Yeah. I'm in Rwanda. I've been in America, but I got deported. [both chuckle]

MM: I'm so sorry - no, my family moved from Mexico, so dealing with immigration is so scary.

KS: Yeah I used to live in Michigan, 2015. In 2017 I got charged with a felon so I have to get deported.

MM: That's tough.

KS: But I didn't want to fight because you have to be in detention for so long.

MM: Yeah it's really rough.

[8:45] KS: So yeah, that's when we got there - to the refugee camp. I see everybody was there, we were happy - at that time when I see everybody. At first I was so scared, everybody was really so scared.

MM: And when the violence started, what was that like at the refugee camp?

KS: At that night, it was I remember August 13, at night. We were so, "we were ok, there was no problem" - at that day, we had a soccer game, we played a game. And at night, everybody was home, telling stories, talking to families. At the middle of the night - I remember - that's when I heard the first shot. It was really chaotic. [inaudible] it started on August 13, 2004.

[10:11] MM: Did it kind of happen just like all of the sudden, or were you kind of expecting something like that to happen?

KS: For me, because I was young, I didn't expect anything to happen right away. We were in the refugee camp protected by UN, protected by government of Burundi, so I was not scared with anything, I was not expecting anybody to attack the camp - no one. So we were very peacefully, and suddenly everything changed in a minute.

[10:49] MM: Did you have any friends and family that were directly impacted by the violence that night?

KS: Yes. That night, if you wanted me to tell all the story of that night, if you don't mind, I can just break it up in a little bit. Actually I was, in the refugee camp, I was sleeping in the room, me, my young brother - he lives in Michigan - and my other young brother who died at that night. We were sleeping in the room. In the living room, my father my mom and the young brother - was little, he was so young - so there were sleeping in the living room. I didn't hear the bullets or the shooting until late. So I was in deep sleep. I heard thirty minute later everybody's dying, everybody's crying - that's when I woke up. When I woke up, my other brother was sleeping in the middle. He was already dead, he got shot in the head [taps center of forehead] right away. So that's when I wake up I found - I tried to touch him - "hey" - his name was Moosa [sic], I tried to, "hey Moosa wake up." He couldn't, he was already dead. So my other brother was already left - the one lives in Michigan - he heard the shots and leave. He didn't even tell anybody. So that's when I went to the living room. I find my father on the floor also dead. He was not dead, he was trying to say something to me. When I tried to cross him, he grabbed my legs, and tried to tell me something, and he was like - he wanted really to tell me something, then, he just died.

So I have to go outside and see what's going on. That's when I heard people crying, people dying, people get burn, people get shot, women get cut in the stomach - the pregnant women - they removed the babies. I was watching all of that at that night. So my mom and the other baby, they got burn - they burn them. My mom, my father, my two young brother - they all dead at that night.

[13:30] MM: So out of your whole family, was it just you, and your brother in Michigan, and your auntie that survived?

KS: Yeah my auntie at that night, she wasn't in the refugee camp. She slept somewhere - I don't know - there was like, outside of the camp you can go there and spend the night with friends. She wasn't there that night, but my family - all of hers - we were there that night.

[14:10] MM: After that, what challenges did you and your brother face immediately after?

KS: Well, I had a lot of bad dream.

MM: Nightmares?

KS: Yeah. My brother had some mental issue - even right now. I see he's not ok. He's been drinking since then, drinking, smoking. Once I asked him, "hey why you start drinking?" And he told me "I always have the bad dreams. I always have nightmares." Even me, once I was sleeping, then I start seeing everything in my mind I just wake up and start screaming. I had that for long time. But when I was in America, I had a couple therapists talking to me - I got better when I was there in America.

[15:23] MM: So besides therapy, what has helped you heal after all of that?

KS: Well, reading the Bible. Listen to the therapist, to the counselor, so that's when I start getting better. Not even take time to think about it, just focus - I was working in Michigan, I had two jobs, I was focusing on job, and doing some stuff - so when I was there I kind of forgot a lot of things happened that night. Because I was so young, and that bad memories grow up in my mind so I would just thinking, "this happened. They can happen anywhere or any times. So I have to be ready if to die or to live, so I have to be ready."

[16:28] MM: How would you say your life has been different because of what you experienced that night?

KS: My life right now, I can say, is very different. When get in America, everything was right. I met good people. People to talk to. People can tell me "hey man, sorry what happen to you." And right now, when I got deported, I got chance and I got married.

MM: That's awesome, congratulations.

KS: Thank you. I got married - also my wife talks to me a lot. Two days ago, memories tries to come back again - because I don't have any family, I don't have a father, I don't have nobody, so when you get deported, they send you to Kinshasa, the capital. Right there, you got to be homeless, and the government doesn't help you out - even when they see you like, "oh this is Munyamulenge, what he is doing here?" Even now, when I was there, they was telling me "this is Munyamulenge - why - we have to kill this guy." Because in Congo, they don't like no Munyamulenge, you can get killed easily.

Even today, I was following the news, they even killed thousands today, of Banyamulenge in Congo. Those memories - when I heard that news, the news like that - I have to remember what happened, when I was fourteen. I have to fight my life to come in east, because the capital is very far, so I have to come in east. So you have to walk months to get there. So if you don't go, you get killed in the capital. They don't like Munyamulenge there. They don't like Tutsis. I got a chance, I got to here in Rwanda, so I got a friend. Somebody offer me a job - it's not big, but a small job can just try to help me. Now, I'm living in Kigali, I got married to this women, so she talk to me, she's like a counselor to me. Sometimes she tells me, "you always have this dreams - I don't understand it." I'm like, "I'm sorry." I told her we have to live this life. You choose me. And you know, I've been through a lot. So you have to accept it.

[19:31] MM: Now that it's been about, sixteen-seventeen years after, what happened, do you think that there's been attempts for justice on behalf of you and the other survivors of the massacre?

KS: For me, we tried our best to get justice. Even the people who did it, they still have freedom - they're in Burundi and Congo. We tried our best. We cry everyday for justice, but we haven't got justice yet, so what we need right now is justice. Those people who did it - those people who killed the innocent children, innocent moms, innocent father - they have, they have to pay for what they did.

[20:23] MM: So for you personally, what would justice look like?

KS: For me, the justice is to catch them. I heard the news one of the members who did the killings in Gatumba, he was speaking on TV - then I got so angry, why this guy he

still free? My wish is to catch them, to put them in justice, to pay for what they really did that night.

[21:11] MM: Who would be responsible for achieving that justice - would it be the international community? the government of Burundi, the government of the Congo? Who do you think that responsibility to achieve justice falls on?

KS: As you said, the international community. They can work with Burundian's government to put those people on justice. Well UN also can persecute them, because we were refugees, so the UN also can stand, fight for us, and give us justice. Burundian people, Burundian government, can stop those people and put them on justice. Even the Congolese, they can help us, because there were some people who come and do the killings. For me, I think Burundian government, international government like the UN - they can work together to put those people in justice.

[22:39] MM: Hopefully one day we work towards that.

[interview paused]

[22:57] MM: What has given you hope? As you were healing, as you're seeing that justice haven't been served yet, what keeps you hopeful that one day it will be?

KS: I believe in God, and God sees everything we do. I hope one day - I always say that one day, there will be justice. We tried, we tried many time to get justice, and we keep pushing, and even right now, we are pushing so the government can hear our cries, so they can give us justice. So we will not stop until we get justice.