

Clark University

Clark Digital Commons

Interviews

Gatumba Survivors Project

8-12-2022

Interview with David Munyamahoro

David Munyamahoro

Ezra Schrader

Follow this and additional works at: https://commons.clarku.edu/gatumba_interviews



Part of the [African History Commons](#), [Gender, Race, Sexuality, and Ethnicity in Communication Commons](#), [Holocaust and Genocide Studies Commons](#), and the [Oral History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Munyamahoro, David and Schrader, Ezra, "Interview with David Munyamahoro" (2022). *Interviews*. 13. https://commons.clarku.edu/gatumba_interviews/13

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Gatumba Survivors Project at Clark Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Interviews by an authorized administrator of Clark Digital Commons. For more information, please contact larobinson@clarku.edu, cstebbins@clarku.edu.

David Munyamahoro was interviewed in Indianapolis, USA, by Ezra Schrader on August 12th, 2022.

[03:36] ES: Where did they grow, what town, what village?

DM: I was born in Minebwe in (?) January 3rd. 1964, that's when I did my elementary school and studies in Minebwe and the first two years of my high school as well. After that, I spent the rest of my studies in Uvira, Isange, and (?), then I went to the University of Institute Salama, Lubumbashi. I was a teacher for a long time in Congo, but I also taught in Burundi for many years. I also did my master's degree at Lumia (?) University, Light University of Bujumbura. I did my master's in gender and development.

In Congo, I worked for the government for a while, and in Burundi, I worked for some non-profit organizations. Still, I have also been in Congo, involved in our community social organization and community organization. I was a leader of the Banyamulenge, mutuality or community in Uvira. Even in Burundi, from the time we fled to Burundi until recently, when I moved to the US, I was among the leadership in Burundi. In 2018, I got here in the US. In 2019, I was elected as part of the board of the Namahoro Peace Association, and so even in Indiana, where we came, where we, [noise interruption] When I worked in the leadership team in the community, they worked with me. That's what I did in the summer.

[06:12] ES: How old were you when you became a refugee? Also, share how you fled and who you fled with.

DM: And now the question is when? Because we fled multiple times, what is it that you are referring to? What time?

[06:40] ES: How was it the first time?

DM: So, if I were to go back until when I was little, how many times I fled we had to become refugees here and there to be displaced, internally displaced, and all of that it could take us a long time 66' I was a baby I couldn't remember everything. Minebwe was destroyed, and we all moved and fled to Baraka near Lake Tanganyika 68' We went back to Minebwe that's when I started becoming knowledgeable of what was going on, so in 1993, I was working in Burundi. I had to flee from Burundi to Tanzania when the president (?) was killed. But again, I went back to Congo in 1996-98' we fled again to Burundi the same year in 2004, in August that's when people of Gatumba were killed. So, you asked me how many times I can tell you, but I'm not sure this is what happened.

[08:41] ES: When you arrived in Gatumba before the massacre, what was the camp like?

DM: So, the Gatumba camp was a transit camp that was close to the border, and it's like four kilometers away from the borders of Congo and Burundi, I doubt even if it is four kilometers, close to four kilometers maybe. The Burundians received us very well; we fled because people in Bukavu were being killed, and now this had a consequence in Uvira as well, so we planned to flee before it happened to us, like in Bukavu. Three years, three months after we started thinking about going back to Uvira since there was relative peace in Uvira, and there was even a delegation of the government of Congo from President Kabila to come to talk to the refugees in Burundi to mobilize them and bring them back to Uvira. So, we even as a community, we even selected a few people who were planning to send them back to Uvira to check on our belongings, our house that was destroyed. That's when this happened.

[10:47] ES: How was the camp like after the attack? How was your community in the week after the massacre?

DM: After the massacre, of course, everybody was sad. With a lot of sadness, we were fleeing death, but death followed us, and we were refuged we were under UN protection. There was a BNEP (?), BNEP is the Burundian United Nations Commission, and we were under the UNHCR protection (they killed). I was not, you know. When the first gunshot started in the camp, I was still in the street, so I was not in the camp yet nor sleeping. I called upon help from the first gunshot until they finished. I was sitting together, and I was sharing a drink together with the military, who was the head of the infantry of the Gatumba area, and I was sharing drinks together. We were too close to the camp. After that, nobody rescued us, and I went back to the camp after the gunshots were seized. I was with a friend of mine called (Vumbea Mutushi), and I was with Nehemia Sivagabo. We went there and started pulling people who were burning and putting them into tents, so other people came to rescue, but we had already taken people from the fire, from burning, so we also called them, telling them my name, to tell me if they're hiding somewhere so that we can help get out, in the morning it was a catastrophe skill.

[10:47] ES: What is it like to look like a victim's survivor of Gatumba, and whose responsibility is it to deliver that justice?

DM: We created the Gatumba Refugee Foundation, a survivor refugee foundation, for two reasons since 2005. and among the three people who created this organization, which had two missions. The first mission is to bring all the survivors together to commemorate the fallen and those people who were killed; the other principal purpose or vision is to seek justice so that justice can begin and be given to us, 2007 we put together a complaint, we put together a case, and we put it to the Hague, the International Criminal

Court, but they denied since they said that we are not qualified to give, to bring up the case to court. They told us yes; we can receive the case, put together by your country, which is Congo, or from the country in which you are seeking refuge, or the country in which you were killed, or the UNHCR, of which you guys are under protection can bring the case to the court or the prosecutor himself or herself can make an initiative of bringing up the case. Congo did not do anything, so we decided to bring our tribunal, our case in Burundi; we deposited our case in Burundi, they received it, they gave it a case number, they even invited witnesses and people to bring evidence and testimonies to help build the case. The court in Bujumbura and the prosecutor in Bujumbura invited Pascal Narimana (?), who claimed the massacre, to come and interrogate or interview, so they invited us to take our interview as well, and then the next day, they called Agathon Rwaso. So, his followers, his political followers' supporters, came to the streets in big numbers to support him in this case, and the government of Burundi, for political reasons, decided to withdraw the case and decided to put it in a pose.

[19:05] ES: In the 18 years since the massacre, what about his life? Is there anything that has changed, (?) Is there anything that is helping him to heal?

DM: The first years of the commemoration of the Gatumba massacre and the first few years after, people would collapse during the memorials. I was among the people who put together the movie, the documentary of the Gatumba. The first day we projected that documentary, people went into the hospital because they collapsed, and some lost consciousness because of what happened. Because we kept repeating this and talking about this, we give people platforms to talk about it, people are now healing, and a lot of people are now healed. Some of the kids, or the young men or women that are here today, some of them have lost their family members and left a hole in the entire family, and so because we keep repeating this and talking about this, some of them have accepted it and healed, and so right now is very difference compared to the first time we commemorated.

[20:50] ES: Is there anything else you would like to add?

DM: One thing I can add is that please share this with the world to commemorate one way of seeking justice. It's almost like remaining justice. I am sure if we do this and those people who would have received our case when they see us come together again, coming together to commemorate, I am very sure something will remind them in their hearts that they need to do something. So again, we will continue to seek justice until justice is delivered to us because the crimes they committed will never be forgotten when people who have committed them are still alive.

[22:14] ES: Do you think Burundi will take the case now, or things will change a little bit? Or where is the legal case going to be taken?

DM: I don't think so, even right now, for us to be able to go to memorial sights. To commemorate is even a challenge. It's a problem, so they were blocking people from going to the sites to the site to commemorate. Only thirty people were allowed to go to the site to commemorate and put flowers, so they didn't want people to go there, so they wanted people to go to the churches and not go to the site.

[23:09] ES: So, this happened last year as well?

DM: So, this happened last year, and it will repeat itself again this year. They took it from the minister and put it on the local administration to make the decision, so it's a way of blocking us and stopping us from remembering. This is an international event. There was a gathering around this event, and they put it in the hands of a local administrator to determine whether people could go to the site. We know that [FNL], the residence of Gatumba. The FNL who committed the crime most of them were from Gatumba, so there is less chance that they will continue to open up. I think they continue to block it and block it, and if I can add, I think at some point, they will/can destroy the site, so they removed the gate.

- End of interview -