

Clark University

Clark Digital Commons

Interviews

Gatumba Survivors Project

Summer 7-21-2023

Interview with Esperance Kabakunda

Keasha Buchana

kbuchana@clarku.edu

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



Part of the [African Studies Commons](#), [Holocaust and Genocide Studies Commons](#), [Oral History Commons](#), and the [Race, Ethnicity and Post-Colonial Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Buchana, Keasha, "Interview with Esperance Kabakunda" (2023). *Interviews*. 14.
https://commons.clarku.edu/gatumba_interviews/14

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.

Esperance Kabakunda was interviewed in person in Kigali, Rwanda on July 21, 2023, by Keasha Buchana.

[0:12] KB: So, we can begin with you introducing yourself and telling us where you grew up?

[0:19] EK: Okay, so my name is Kabakunda Esperance, I am twenty-two years old, and I have a home, a family, and one child. I grew up here in Rwanda.

[0:39] KB: How old were you when you became a refugee?

[0:45] EK: Yeah, I was four years old.

[0:50] KB: Where did you flee upon becoming a refugee? Did you travel alone or with family?

[0:55] EK: After those things had happened?

[0:57] KB: No, before that

[0:59] EK: Before, I was together with my family, yeah.

[1:04] KB: So where did you flee to?

[1:06] EK: We fled to Burundi where that happened.

[1:12] KB: What was the event that made you/your family decide to leave your home country?

[1:18] EK: To leave our home country?

[1:20] KB: Yes

[1:21] EK: Yeah, because there were also issues of people killing one another and so we fled into Burundi.

[1:30] KB: Do you remember what year you fled?

[1:36] EK: I don't quite remember well.

[1:44] KB: So, do you recall what happened the day of the massacre?

[1:50] EK: Yes, I do not remember a lot of things because I was really young, but I know of it because I was told about it, they are also things I saw even though I was really young. So, there was a massacre, we were in...we were refugees who lived in sheetings. What I remember is they set on fire the place we were in, after that they began shooting some people and others died. After that I was able to escape, I am the only one who managed to escape in my whole family, of seven people, I was the only one who escaped, yeah. So that's pretty much it unless you would like me to expound.

[2:39] KB: No problem, you can expound.

[2:40] EK: They told me it was something that started unexpectedly in the night, with people being unaware of it, they seem to have fallen into a trap. They arrived and set the sheetings on fire and shot at people, so many people died, yeah. So those who managed to escape were few, and I am among those who escaped. A lot of families lost their own and we remained as the Gatumba survivors.

[3:15] KB: How did you manage to escape?

[3:17] EK: Yeah, I wouldn't say that I escaped like this or that someone came to rescue us, no one came to rescue us. Yeah. We escaped like the way God saves someone, that is what I would say, by chance. Like me, I was shot, but I was not killed. There are others that it happened to, you find that they were shot but they did not lose their lives. So, I was shot in the back here, but I survived, so we managed to escape, people went on escaping/surviving in different ways. Those who were able to run ran, but I did not even know what was going on, so that's that.

[3:58] KB: So, we know that even till you have never quite received justice, how do you feel justice should be or should have been imparted?

[4:11] EK: Yeah, so you see since it happened, it seems that the country has ignored it as if it did not happen, yet we lost our beloved ones and have the right to commemorate their lives with honour and wish the perpetrators will be brought to justice. So now because that has not yet happened, it is something that hurts and takes us behind, so we feel like we are blessed, yet our people lost their lives. So, we then feel like we have to give justice to ours that left.

[4:50] KB: So, who would you say is responsible for bringing you all justice?

[4:55] EK: Yeah, so about that, I would not say I know much about that, I do not know enough to speak on it, but I would start by.... we can talk about it again.

[5:08] KB: Okay, no problem. So, in the 19 years following the massacre, how has your life been different because of what happened?

[5:18] EK: Following that, there was a family that took me in/adopted me. That family is the one that helped me get over it, they helped me heal my injuries, they gave me love, they stayed beside me, and protected me from trauma because it was going to happen, yes. But I think there is a way that I seem to like, somehow...I don't know if it is forgetting or something that causes me to forget, I do not know but for sure at this moment I am healed if I can say, for lack of better words. I can speak on what happened, I can talk to someone about it, it is how I feel I have healed. The family that helped me did not put me back into that trauma, they did not torment me, but rather showed me ways to heal and taught me the Word of God.

[6:19] KB: Do you have friends and family who were directly impacted or killed?

[6:28] EK: Yeah, my whole family, I was the only one who remained. For friends, I do not quite remember because I was young, but I did have friends.

[6:39] KB: I am sorry to hear that.

[6:41] KB: So, what challenges did you face following the violence?

[6:48] EK: Okay, the challenges I faced, I was shot, there is a way my leg constantly hurt, but it slowly got better. Apart from that, losing your family is not something easy, it is something that is very difficult, but you have to hang in there so that it does not take you back, rather it should be the reason the Lord makes sure you go ahead/forward because you feel like you have to make your family proud and fill the void they left. So, the journey is not easy, but right now I thank God who helped me, because it was not by my own might, for sure, the Lord was beside me and so was the family I was with you, so I feel like that was the way.

[7:33] KB: How would you describe the general atmosphere at the refugee camp? Before the violence?

[7:49] EK: I hear that we were doing well, together with our parents as in life was good, we had no problems right. We were refugees, but we had no issues, we were alright with our families. Our families loved us, we were together with our parents, grateful, so there were no problems at the time.

[8:08] KB: How would you describe it after the conflict? Do you recall or?

[8:12] EK: I do not quite recall because after the massacre was done, I was taken immediately, yeah, so I do not remember.

[8:18] KB: Did you know those who took you?

[8:20] EK: I know them. I was raised with a family friend of my dad, my dad by birth, his friend is the one who raised me, let alone the person who took me to the family. He had a lot of children, and I was among those, yeah.

[8:35] KB: How many, how many kids were you?

[8:37] EK: They were twenty-two, with me they were twenty-three.

[8:42] KB: What do you feel still needs to occur in order for justice to be fully achieved?

[8:51] EK: Let's skip that.

[8:53] KB: Let's skip. Alright.

[Brief Pause]

[9:01] KB: How is your relationship with the Banyamulenge community? Could you speak on it?

[9:07] EK: A lot, I can speak on it because they would call on us, they helped us heal, they loved us. Our elders do whatever is possible to ensure nothing happens to us and that we do not feel lonely. There are also parents among us who became parents to us, we have brothers like for example me who lost my family, so right now I cannot say I do not have a family. I have brothers, I have sisters, I have my elders, and I also have my younger ones. I also have those I call my parents, because there is nothing you can lack, as in, nothing I cannot not tell someone. So, I do not have feelings of loneliness because I have them.

[9:57] KB: So, did you know that conflict would break out, that something bad would happen?

[10:03] EK: No, no one knew anything about it, it was something that came out of nowhere.

[10:11] KB: So those are all the questions I have, but would you tell us how sharing your story helps or would help you?

[10:35] EK: Okay so, the way it helps society in general is, for example, me who healed, there is another person who could have gone through, experienced, and survived the same things I did but are lonely, feel like they are still behind, they feel like they have no hope or purpose for tomorrow, they feel like, yeah as in, there is nothing of value they can do. So, when they hear that someone like me got somewhere, like right now I have a good family, I have a child, I have a husband, and I am completing my studies. They can see the way I speak on this, I can speak willingly and so it helps take that fear or timidness out of them, so they can see that that it is something they can do as well, to say that they ought to get up and struggle to work hard and be resilient, to show that they respect those they lost, because we

believe that where they are, they see us. For them to say where our child is, they are working hard so it helps ensure that even those who are lonely like us rise, come out of the solitude they are in, and get healed.

[11:37] KB: That's very true.

[11:38] EK: Thank you so much.

[11:39] KR: Thank you very much for your time and sharing your story with us.

[END OF INTERVIEW]