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8-10-2022

Interview with Anon Rushimisha Byringiro

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Recommended Citation

Schrader, Ezra, "Interview with Anon Rushimisha Byringiro" (2022). *Interviews*. 16.
https://commons.clarku.edu/gatumba_interviews/16

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Anon Rushimisha Byringiro was interviewed in-person on 10th August 2022, by Ezra Schrader.

[0:35] ES: Where did you grow up?

[0:37] AB: I grew up in Congo. I was born in Katanga, a province called Katanga, a village called Kasanga. Yes,

[0:50] ES: What was it like there? Like what did your home look like, how many friends did you have?

[0:57] AB: We left the place when I was really young, and it was because of the war. I was really young. That is when we moved to a city called Uvira, that is where we stayed for most of our time in Congo.

[1:14] ES: And so, when did you leave Congo, what year?

[1:17] AB: Personally, I left Congo I think in 2001. I went to Rwanda for school. I left my family in the Congo specifically, Uvira.

[1:34] ES: You left your family in the Congo? So, you were with your uncle?

[1:37] AB: I went to stay with my uncle, yes.

[1:39] ES: And what was the education you were getting in Rwanda?

[1:42] AB: It was good, but I went to a Congolese school in Rwanda. So, it was pretty much in a Congolese system but in Rwanda if that makes sense.

[1:58] ES: And so, you had family that were staying in the Gatumba camp and went to visit them. That's right?

[2:04] AB: Yes, that's correct.

[2:06] ES: And how long were you there for before the massacre?

[2:08] AB: It was like a week, a week before the massacre.

[2:11] ES: And how old were you at that time?

[2:14] AB: Let's just say that I was – maybe fourteen.

[2:24] ES: So how were you spending your time in that week before the event?

[2:27] AB: We would just wake up, play soccer, just chill with people, and eat. There were like a bunch of activities by the way, like soccer and basketball.

[2:44] ES: Did you ever interact with people on the other side of the camp?

[2:48] AB: Not really. I was kind of new there, the event happened a week into me being in Gatumba. So, I did not get a chance to know people, besides my family and few friends.

[3:04] ES: What was the camp like after the event? After the massacre?

[3:08] AB: Well, it was destroyed. It was destroyed like after the event, after the massacre, nobody stayed there. It was burnt down; everything was destroyed and nobody stayed there after the event.

[3:28] ES: And you lost friends and family there, right?

[3:31] AB: Correct. I lost my uncle, my cousins, friends, you know. I lost a lot of people that day.

[3:42] ES: And so, what – the weeks and months after the massacre. What are the immediate challenges you faced?

[3:47] AB: It was tough for not just me, my family, and everyone. We lost people, people were injured, and my dad was shot twice. Life was tough. For me after a week or two, my uncle came to Burundi and took me back to Rwanda and I left my family in Burundi.

[4:20] ES: And when you had to – when you left your family in Burundi and went back to Rwanda, how did that make you feel?

[4:25] AB: I was still going through a lot, trauma in different ways but I was young so adjusting was much faster compared to older people. So, I went back to Rwanda and then I started school and life went on.

[4:52] ES: And how did you go from Rwanda to the United States?

[4:56] AB: Well, from Rwanda, we went back to Burundi with my whole family because of interviews. UNHCR¹ did to bring us here, you know, so we had to go through a process of interviews and stuff like that. So that is when we went back to Burundi for interviews and then finally, we came here in 2007, beginning of 2007.

[5:23] ES: So, in the years since the massacre, what has changed about your life, what has stayed the same, is there anything that has helped you to heal?

[5:31] AB: Yes. Environment. Like coming here, it really helped us in one way or the other. We had to experience different cultures, language, people, and places. It really- I am not going to say that we forgot what happened but like it kind of helped us to not keep dwelling on what happened to us. Yes.

¹ UNHCR stands for the United High Commissioner for Refugees.

[6:10] ES: And as for bringing justice, what would justice look like and whose responsibility is it to bring it?

[6:18] AB: I could be wrong, but I think the government of Congo is responsible to bring justice to our people. They are the ones that caused the war and stuff like that, and they are the ones that killed people. So, I feel like they are responsible for what happened and as I said, we really need justice, we really do need justice. I also think the Burundian government could play a role in it.

[7:00] ES: So those are the questions I have for now, is there anything else you want to add?

[7:03] AB: I just want to thank you. I know you are young, and you are doing your research, but like we need to make people aware of what happened. So, for you to be part of it, it is great. I know we might not see the so-called justice today, or tomorrow, or next year but I know doing this is going to help in one way or the other. I believe that we will get justice as Banyamulenge people.

[END OF THE INTERVIEW]