

International Mountain Day 2016: Learning Culture of the Mountain People of Congo

This year for the celebration of the International Mountain Day (IMD), we, students at Utah Valley University (UVU) had the opportunity to hear from Dr. Patience Kabamba, about cultures and traditions of the mountain communities in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).



Dr. Kabamba presents results of his research about mountain communities in Congo

Dr. Kabamba was born in the DRC, but left to further his education in other countries. He currently is Assistant Professor of Anthropology at UVU. Students and members of the Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF), a coalition of student clubs at UVU, invited Dr. Kabamba as hosts of the event. UIMF commemorates IMDs every year since 2010 as part of

experiential learning. This means students learn new skills and experiences through practical actions, while faculty serves them as advisors and mentors to assist only when there is an urgent need.

Dr. Kamamba was able to extensively research new social formations emerging in war torn parts of Africa and specifically, the Great Lakes Region of Africa (including the DRC). Kabamba began his lecture by telling of the life of the mountain people during colonization before the first half of the 20th century. Interestingly, anyone residing in the mountains were left alone by those coming in to colonize. While those inhabitants in the valleys were adapting to western culture, the mountain people continued to do things the way they always had done them. When war broke out and many of the nations' institutions were damaged and collapsed, it was those in the mountains who were the strongest and able to prevail.

Dr. Kabamba was able to further study how rebels have been getting bribed into peace. There were those groups of civilians who had food, but no weapons or means of protection. And then there were those communities who had weapons, who could pretty much control anyone with those weapons. They were fighting to occupy lands. The territories were based upon geography, so many tribes were split up and some would just end up joining new tribes.

We were shocked to know, that as a result of the Congolese conflict, greater suffering of civilians has happened from a humanitarian point of view in comparison with any recent war. "As of 2006 out of a population of 58 million Congolese people, 4 million had died; 7 million suffered from malnutrition, 3 million were HIV positive, at least 40,000 had been victims of sexual violence, 2.4 million were internally displaced, 880,000 had become refugees, and 3 million children were orphans. [Coleman S., 2005]¹" This was absolutely devastating. This whole group of people has been plagued by rebel groups and militias. Yet, "in the absence of

effective state sovereignty and national government and in the presence of numerous armed contenders for power, traders have managed to build and protect self-sustaining, prosperous, transnational economic enterprises in eastern Congo”.

As Dr. Kamamba demonstrated in his research, the people with the weapons were the most powerful; they in turn were the wealthiest, as well as the most uneducated. The culture then started to boom with mercantilism. It went from a father asking the man wanting to marry his daughter about what kind of man he was, to asking him what kind of business he was currently doing with Dubai. As Dr. Kabamba said: “They started importing textiles, motorbikes, and automobiles to spare engines, medicine and other goods from East Africa, the Persian Gulf, Southeast Asia, and China.” Also, they started to “export agricultural products ranging from coffee, potatoes, and beans to papaya latex and other vegetables”. In addition, they would export “minerals such as gold, cotton, wolfram, and *cassiterites*.” It was interesting to learn from Dr. Kabamba’s presentation that religion has a lot to do with their trading. To this day traders attribute a part of their success to the Baptist missionaries during the colonial era because of the worth ethic they were taught. Additionally, the Protestants left a lasting impression by teaching them to work hard and honestly, not to waste their money on prostitutes or alcohol, and to delay gratification.

It is amazing to see the way colonization has affected the outcome of the Congolese way of life. Even through the war ridden country, the people were able to thrive through mercantilism and have a great flow of trade in and out of the country. Dr. Kabamba did an incredible job of painting a picture of the culture of the mountain people of DRC. As part of the experiential learning approach of the IMD celebration, Dr. Kabamba involved Jacques Baraketse and Sam Kabwika, two UVU students from Congo who contributed their part to the joint presentation. It

was a very educational lecture and it inspired me to research and be involved more in the promotion of the sustainable development of mountain countries.



UVU students in the audience during the 2016 International Mountain Day celebration

Due to the need for me to go to work, I was not able to stay until the end of the entire gathering of the IMD celebration. But I know from the opinions of my peers that it was very interesting and impressive event, which demonstrated a great potential which our students possess and demonstrated thanks to the experiential learning approach.

Katherine Snow, member of the UIMF

References

1. Coleman S. (2005), "Congo's Conflict: Heart of Darkness," in Beliefnet, June 2