

Spring 2017

Interview of Richard Mshomba, Ph.D.

Richard Mshomba Ph.D.

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Field Notes

Interviewee: Dr. Richard Mshomba

Interviewer: Daniel Miller

Interview Date: March 19, 2017

Interview Location: Dr. Mshomba's Home. 1465 Shoemaker Road, Abington, PA. 19001

Field Notes written May 4th, 2017

The Interviewee:

Dr. Richard Mshomba is an economics professor at LaSalle University. He was born in Tanzania and spent his early adult life working for the Tanzanian government. When he was 27 he came to the United States to attend school at LaSalle College. While attending LaSalle he lived with the brother of a local Bishop who helped to get Richard accepted to LaSalle. Richard spent three years at LaSalle College earning his degree in Economics. After talking with his professor Richard Garrison, he decided to apply to graduate school at the University of Delaware. While he was earning his masters degree he worked as a graduate assistant and this is where he discovered his love of teaching. From there he applied for his Doctorate degree at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. After passing his entrance exam to the University he began his courses in the fall of 1987. Within his first few days at the University he met his future wife Elaine. Soon after Richard earned his PhD he found a teaching position at his alma matter, LaSalle University. He has been an economics teacher at LaSalle since 1991. Though he lives in the United States, Richard and his family go back to Tanzania every other year to see members of his family. The Mshombas are active in various educational charities within the country. Richard and his wife have helped to put several students through school as well as college. Their most recent project has been the creation of a library in Richards's home town.

The Interviewer:

I, Daniel Miller grew up in Furlong Pennsylvania, a suburb of Philadelphia. I attended East Stroudsburg University for my undergraduate degree where I received a bachelor's in History and Communication Studies. I currently work at Fonthill Castle and the Mercer Museum in Doylestown, PA. Over the past two years I have been a student at LaSalle University in their Public History Masters program. Through this program I have had a chance to learn more about the history of the University through the years. This Oral History has provided another opportunity to discover more about LaSalle's development over the years.

Background:

Dr. Barbara Allen approached our Oral History course with a list of individuals that she and the University were looking to have interviewed. After hearing a few of the candidates, Dr. Mshomba's life and story stood out as a potentially interesting Oral History. Despite my background being in history, and not economics, Richard's story initially sounded like one that would be unique. I started my research on Dr. Mshomba's life by doing a search for him on the LaSalle University web site. From there I was able to gather a little more details about his timeline at LaSalle and the projects that he was involved in.

I performed a general Google search on Dr. Mshomba and was able to find more details about his life growing up in Tanzania. Dr. Mshomba participated in several interviews that were posted online which helped to provide details on his early life. In these interviews I was able to learn about how he came to the United States and LaSalle University. The discussions also covered how he met his wife and his time earning his master's and doctorate degrees. Due to how recent his library project was, I was able to find several bits of information about fundraising for it. This included mentions of it in various interviews and a video produced by a LaSalle student organization trying to raise money for the library. In addition I reached out to the University archives to see if there were any topics that they wanted me to discuss with Dr. Mshomba.

When setting up the interview, Dr. Allen initially reached out to Richard over email and cc'd me on the message to see if he would be interested. He wrote back saying that he would be happy to participate. I sent him an email of my own afterwards trying to figure out a date that we could meet. He responded asking me for my phone number and that he would be in touch later in the week once he knew his schedule. I received a phone call on March 1st where we had our first real conversation with one another. The talk lasted around 10-15 minutes and I explained to him what was involved in the assignment and he was more than willing to help out. Knowing that I would have limited availability later in the semester, I proposed that we meet on Saturday March 10th. He agreed on the date and he invited me over to his home in Abington, Pennsylvania to conduct the Oral History

On the day of the interview I received a phone call less than an hour before I was going to leave for our meeting saying he needed to postpone the oral history. A friend of his with no family had gone into the hospital and he was going over to look after him. This was the first example of Richard's kindness that would come up throughout our talks. The backup date that we scheduled was for Sunday March 19th at 2:00 in the afternoon. I arrived in Abington around 1:30 on March 19th where I met Richard and his wife Elaine. I told them my own background and what would happen with the interview when it was finished. Elaine was a little nervous after a previous interviewer published their wedding photo without their permission. I reassured them that I would run everything by them before submitting it online.

Description of Interview:

The interview took place in Richard Mshomba's home in Abington Pennsylvania. Doctor Mshomba was a generous host offering water and other refreshments during my time there. We sat on the couch in his living room located right next to the front door. Though the space was out in the open Richard reassured me that his family was warned about the live interview that would be taken place. Unless they wanted to be recorded, he advised that they avoid the living room during the two hour session. I went over the interview process again with Doctor Mshomba and his wife and that I would not post anything that they felt uncomfortable with. I also let Richard know if he wished for me to stop recording at any time to let me know and I would pause the session. Several times in the interview I thought that we might be venturing into this territory but Dr. Mshomba always insisted that it was ok and to let the tape roll. At the half way point I stopped the recording because Richard got up to turn off a device that was beeping in the house. The beeping can also be heard on the recording about 10 minutes earlier as well.

The living room of Doctor Mshomba truly offered a snapshot of his life and this only became more evident as we got further in our conversation. The space contained African Artwork as well as religious items on the walls and shelves. As we continued to talk Dr. Mshomba displayed his strong faith and how it has helped and guided him throughout his life. In addition to artwork, there were multiple family photos throughout the area. Half way through the interview he brought over photos of Bishop Durning and his wedding photo showing his "American" parents. Several times Richard offered to show me more photos and details of topics that we discussed but unfortunately I only had time to see a few photos.

During our talk Richard spoke well especially with his second language being English. He would often pause and gather his thoughts before rushing into an answer. His story telling has been mastered over the years with each delay helping to further drive home his point. In addition, his years of teaching have helped him to communicate his thoughts clearly. On occasion Doctor Mshomba would start a point and stop himself midway through his first sentence before regaining and telling his thought. During the transcript, some of this has been added but a decent amount was edited out to make the conversation easier to read.

In regards to the topics, there did not seem to be anything that Doctor Mshomba shied away from. This included discussing difficult life topics such as being an African living in the United States or how God played a role in his life. His answers were insightful and very open, especially since this was the first time that we talked in person. All of his stories rang with a sense of his personality and insightfulness that can be hard for an individual to express to a stranger. With his personal charity projects in Tanzania, especially his library, there was a sense of pride and humility on what he was able to accomplish. After the interview finished we spoke for about another 20 minutes on what future plans he had for the library. Throughout the interview the value of education was notable and clearly showed that even at a young age; this would become an important part of his life.

Notes on Recording:

I used my iPhone's voice memo app to record the interview. Despite not being able to email the file to myself I was able to upload it to my computer via the dropbox application. This allowed me to move the original file without having to edit or compromise it. From there I converted the recording to a .wav file and uploaded it to a USB drive to be turned in.

Editing the Transcript:

- Words such as so, and, because, uh, and other phrases have been reduced. I left a few in to convey the way both individuals spoke.
- Dr. Mshomba had the habit of starting some of his responses with a few words that did not apply to his actual answer. Most of that has been edited out to allow for a cleaner response in his answers.
- Visual cues such as Richard pointing to photos or talking about certain objects have been added with parenthesis around them.
- Laughter and pauses have been noted with brackets in the transcript.
- Quotation marks have been added when he referenced what an individual said.
- Ideas that were applied with a thought are added in parenthesis.
- The time code has been entered on to each page.