



Interview with: Rihanna (16)
Interviewed by: Joelle
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Travel: DRC – Zambia – South Africa

Joelle: How long have you been in South Africa? What have you been doing since you arrived and what have been your experiences?

Rihanna: Okay. I have been here in South Africa since November 2002. When I arrived in South Africa, I stayed for three days in Johannesburg, but otherwise I have been living in Durban. Hmm ... when I arrived in Durban I started working as a car guard. Then I left that and started doing a crèche job. I started to look after kids in a crèche. That's what I've been doing in South Africa: I studied how to take care of kids and I finished. I have the papers that allow me to open my own crèche.

Joelle: Can you talk about your experience as a car guard? Did you ever hear of this job before, or did you discover it only here in South Africa?

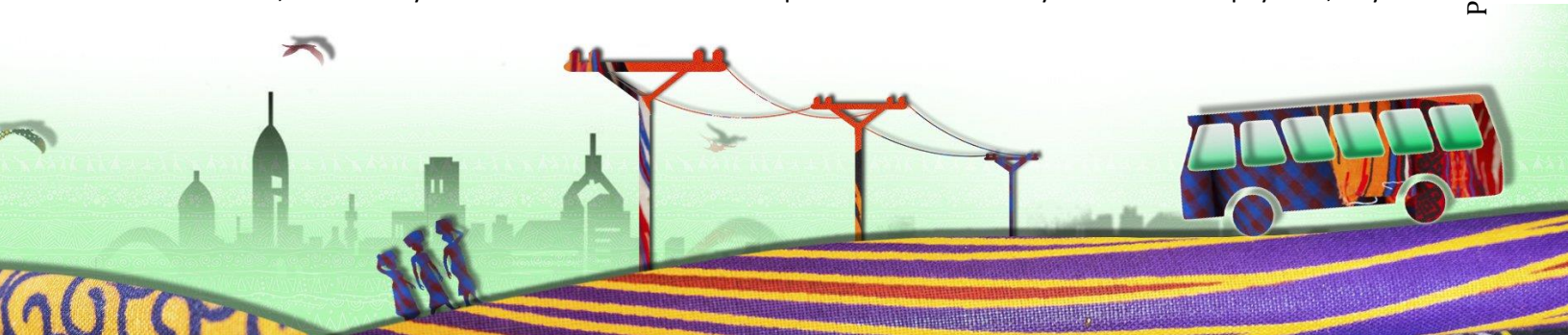
Rihanna: When I came I worked as a car guard. I never thought I would be a car guard in my life. I never knew that the job even existed. When I came here, I still didn't know. But I looked at the [situation] I was in. I saw everybody doing jobs as car guards or as security [guards]. When I looked at my situation, I said to myself: I am a mother. I can't just sit and wait for my husband. That's how I came to be a car guard. It's a job. When you arrive they will give you a space where you will work. You will pay for your uniform and you start working. Just by looking at what others are doing, you [see how to do it]. I was just trying to help myself. It was not a job I wanted to do. I never liked that sort of job but ... hmmm ... as life guides us, I was obliged to work.

But the reality of the job is that you can meet someone who will give you his money, and another will treat you as if he doesn't see you. This means you meet different people. You can meet a white man who will be pleased and will give you his money with all his heart. Another will give you money but tell you to share it. Another will [tear the note] in two. He will say: "This is for you to [guard] my car. I want to make sure that you will [guard] my car." He will go with half and you will keep your half. It can be R50 and I will be pleased. He will tear that R50 in two: you take half, and he will go with the other half. When he comes back in the evening, if you are still there, he will show his half and you will also show your half. He says: "Great" and gives you the half he was keeping. You put the two halves together and you will go to the shop. They don't refuse the money. They take it as it is and you are able to buy with it. That's how it was.

Indians are ... racist ... [when it comes to giving money]. You do what you can for him. If there's no parking, if it's full, you look for a parking for him with all your heart. You think this one will give me money. But when it comes time for him to leave, he will even put his windows up ... and it's painful. You don't have any choice. It's all about the goodwill of somebody—if he wants to give you something or if he doesn't. He will do what he wants—it's not a must. That's how the job was. That's the reality of being a car guard. You can meet someone who seems a nice person, who will give you stuff. Each person has his own luck. I never got that chance, but you can get some money. That's how I was working as a car guard.

Joelle: What is the reality here that makes you be a car guard?

Rihanna: Yeah ... the realities I find here. You look at your salary. If your husband is getting a salary at work, it is already calculated. I don't know if companies calculate what you will need to pay rent, buy





food and all that. You will also need bus fare for the children. You need bread every morning. You need milk. But you find that all the money you earn is all going to paying for electricity, the rent and food. The house is not even your own. Maybe you are sharing. Then you are surprised that all the money is finished. You have kids in the house but not even R1. You see? Your child can be asking you: “Mummy, I want bread. I want a biscuit.” And you find that you don’t have that money. Now, as a parent you must be able to afford this. You will have to start looking for a job. You ask yourself if you should do a maid’s job or car guarding. You choose to be a car guard because there you make money every day. Those were the realities that made me do that job.

Joelle: Did your car guarding job help you improve your lifestyle? Does your money cover all your needs— school fees, food. How are you managing?

Rihanna: Okay. When I started working we had a small balance. It helped with small things that we didn’t have in the house. For the first year they asked for school fees at the school and, yeah, it was helping. When we registered the kids at school, we were paying slowly, slowly. Now they are grown. It was helping but I’m not a car guard anymore. I found some other job. That’s it.

Joelle: You told me before about government help and the house problems. Can you please repeat that?

Rihanna: Okay. This government ... gives money to children. That is what is helping us. It covers things— the small needs of children. But you pay your own rent. You pay electricity yourself. The electricity can be more than the rent you are paying. We don’t know if they are doing it because we are foreigners. They know by our names that these are foreigners and these are South Africans. We pay sometimes R3000 or R3500 for electricity, but you don’t have anything more than a TV, a fridge, a microwave and a stove. You have to pay a lot of money. If you look at the money that you have to spend and the salary that you have, you find your expenses are more than your salary.

We are just living. There is nothing we can do. The government only helps us with grants for the children. The school also helps us with [fees] exemption, but you are responsible for the house and everything else. If you sleep outside, you don’t eat. You have to work, depending on your [strength]. The [UN]HCR (United Nations Refugee Agency) helped me with my crèche studies. I went there and those people helped me. They asked me what I wanted to do. I proposed to them that I wanted to study restaurant work. They said it was too expensive and they would not be able to assist with that. They suggested that I study to be in a crèche—it would take only a month. If not a crèche job, there were other things on offer like learning to be a cashier which takes just three days or I don’t know how many. So I said I would find crèche study advantageous. That how I came to train for the crèche and it was the [UN]HCR that helped us. We found a school [in Greenwood] called ‘Save the children’ that was not asking a lot of money. There was even a lot of South Africans studying there. We paid R50 for our studies. They gave us a syllabus and we studied. At the end they gave you a certificate which they said would be accepted everywhere you go to look for a job. They said the ‘Save the children’ was a big association. It is known everywhere. I could look for a job and I had a letter that says I can even carry on with my studies at university, depending on the money I have. I was happy for the way they helped us. Otherwise, you are responsible for all other things yourself.

That is how we are living in South Africa. What makes me happy to be here is the children’s school. Their [school certificates] give you an advantage in looking for work. This is what is good for me. I don’t know if you have another question.

Joelle: You say electricity is too expensive maybe because you are foreigners. Did you ever compare what you were paying with another building?





Rihanna: Yeah. I have friends. When we walk together, I ask them how much they pay for electricity. People tell you that their electricity may be R400 or R300. How come? Is it because in your building you are mixed with a lot of South Africans? They say: “Yeah, maybe it is like that.” Now, in our building there is no one who pays [a low rate] for electricity. Maybe there are just two or three people. But all the remaining ones are crying when the electricity bill comes. If it is cheap it is R2000 or R1500. We are all surprised. Why are they doing this? Is it because this is a foreigners’ building that they are doing this? The majority of people in our building are Congolese. Maybe that is why they are doing this to us. That is how I think. When you ask what South Africans in the same building are paying, they say: “If my electricity comes to R600, it is a lot.” Another will tell you that R500 or R300 is really a lot for them. That was how we concluded that our building is known as a foreigner’s building and that’s why our bills are so high.

Joelle: Do you like the area your children are growing up in?

Rihanna: I would say that the area where my kids are growing up is not nice. It’s not safe. It’s full of people that are doing bad things like drugs and theft. We have it all here. But I don’t have the choice to leave here. If only it was easy. If I could get money in the way that I’m thinking of having it, I would not make my children grow in this area. I would look for another place. Because of my means I have to make them stay [in these conditions]. I tell them ... why I have to make them stay here. But if I had money I would not stay here. The area has become worse since we arrived.

Joelle: For you, what makes this a bad area?

Rihanna: The area has become so bad. They steal a lot. We also have ... these drugs. There are a lot of drugs and it is damaging the area. The police don’t do anything about it. Even if someone’s attacking you, they will not do anything. These problems were here before, but it has become much worse now.

Joelle: If this area is not good, which one do you think is good?

Rihanna: A place where they will be far better—a place far from those friends that are doing bad things, *hein?* If they are far away it will be difficult for them to go out because maybe they will not have bus fare. It will be hard for them to go and meet their friends. [Those friends] are influencing their behaviour in a bad way because of what is happening around them. They always say if you are walking with a thief, you too you will become a thief. If you are walking with a drunkard, you will become a drunkard. But if you don’t have these friends, if you stay far away, you will be forced to stay at home. You will stay at home, read your notes and finish. There is no other distraction. But here, with what is happening, [my son] goes out and comes back. Outside of this area, far from town, this will be hard to do.

Joelle: What about his school, because isn’t it possible for people to influence even him there?

Rihanna: We depend on education and the way you bring him up and the things you already give him. You start while they are still at home. [It depends on] how you bring them up and how you talk to them. A child has three places where he is being educated—firstly, at home, then with his friends, then at school. Also in the road—so we can say there are four places. If I fail in the home, he will go and learn bad behaviour outside. So it’s good to start with education in the house. You will see they are listening to you and your repeat yourself everyday. When he goes to school you have to be sure that even if he meets other kids, he will always listen to you. If he has that fear of his parents, he will not change under the influence of school.

Joelle: Were you already married when you left Congo?

Rihanna: I was married in Congo. They paid my bride price and everything and we started to live together in Zambia.





Joelle: When you compare your life before you came in South Africa and your life here, which one is better?

Rihanna: For me, when I compare my life here and my life in Zambia, my life in Zambia was better. If I had remained in Zambia I don't think I would be at this level of life. Here I was supposed to be much better.

Joelle: What makes you say that?

Rihanna: Why am I saying that? You know in Zambia they gave us opportunities. Anyone is allowed to do anything for him to survive. Even in the market you sell every day and you have your money. You can flourish wherever you are staying, even if you are in township. In a township, houses are cheaper than they are here. Here foreigners are not allowed to stay in a township—we are not allowed to be there. But in Zambia I was staying peacefully in township. You will not see anybody threatening you in a township. You will be welcome. You get on well with people even if they come to ask you something and you have very little money. The way you are together is different than it is here.

Here your money finishes quickly. It all goes on [rent] and that is why we don't have a better life. If we were staying in townships with the money we have, we would have a nice life, a better life. It's hard. It takes a long time for a person to improve his lifestyle because we pay a lot for rent. If you delay payment, they will add ten percent. And at the end of the year, the rent always goes up by ten percent. How can somebody flourish? If they favour us to stay in townships and to pay the same rent, I'm very sure that everybody would have a better life. There you pay R1000 for two bedrooms and R1500 for three bedrooms. But you will never find this in town. In town we are paying rent of up to R7000, even R12 000. As a foreigner, I can't afford that R12 000. It is too much. So when I compare life in Zambia with life here, Zambia is a better place for somebody to flourish because in Zambia they are giving us a chance to stay in the township.

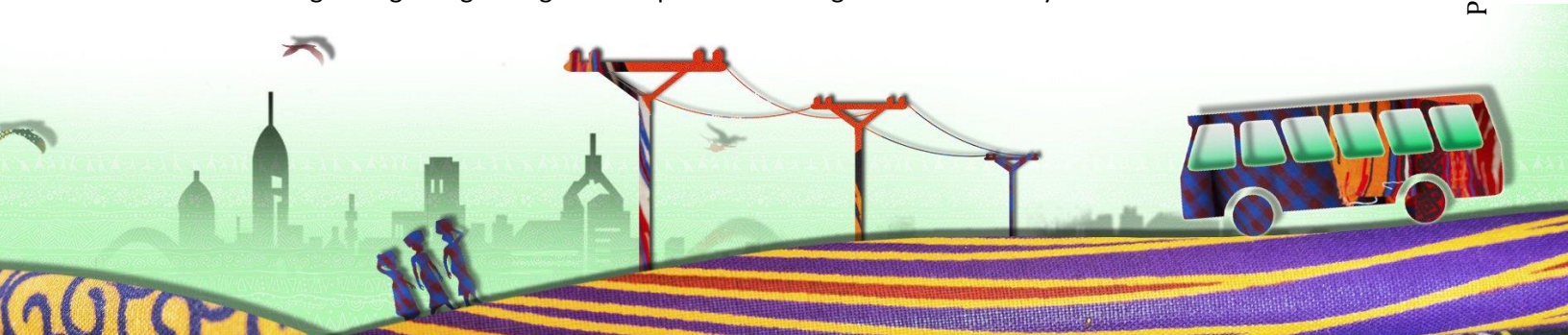
Joelle: Taking into account all these realities, would you prefer to go back home or remain in South Africa?

Rihanna: Okay, yeah, when I look at my children's lives, [I see] they have to study and finish and become independent. They have to reach a stage of being responsible, to be able to do everything for themselves. Only at that stage can I leave them. I can start doing my own business. I can be going and coming back, but I can't do that now. They don't even know how to work. Me leaving them? *Enh, enh* (no). I will not make it. But if they give me a big amount of money and say we are giving you this money for you to go back home, I will look at it and see what I can do, and I will go back. But I would leave my children here for them to study, because when I look at schools back home, they don't give [opportunities]. Today a lot of people who studied [in Zambia] are jobless. They do business. So I would say that kids in today's world have to study just for their future.

Joelle: Talk about your experience of having a job in South Africa.

Rihanna: Well, yeah, when I was a car guard, it was helping, but I did it because there was nothing else for me to do. I went to a security class, but at that time they were already closing security jobs for foreigners. They can do this again. They were no longer giving the SOB (Security Officers Board certificate). Only those that already have the SOB can work. As for us, there is no SOB and there is no way of working as a security without SOB. Do you understand? That's how it was.

When I studied to work in a crèche, I said to myself I can't just hold onto this paper (certificate) like this—I need to find the courage to look for children. I knew that kids would not find me. They don't even know that I studied. I took the courage to go and talk to some parents and explain my job in looking after kids. Some of them were interested and they brought their kids. I started with four kids—no, two, then three, then four. I didn't give up. With those four God never leaves me. The number started growing and growing. So I keep on with taking care of kids in my crèche. That's how I started





this job and it has really helped me. This has been the answer to many of our problems. My husband is paying for the house. I'm taking care of some kids. The crèche money helps me. Up to now it helps.

Joelle: How long have you been doing this job? How long did you work as a car guard?

Rihanna: Ehhh... I did car guarding for almost two years and then I stopped it. Then I went to study for working in a crèche. I've been doing this job for a long time now. I started in the year I had my son, that is in 2006. Now it is 2017.

Joelle: Is car guarding a healthy job?

Rihanna: Oh!! Being a car guard is a job. I didn't have the choice. But first it damages the skin. You get burned in the sun. You will be always tired. You go back home tired and you have to cook for your kids. It's hard work. You will sleep tired. Sometimes they even ask you to work a night shift. You start at 4pm and you may only come back at midnight. Because you are a married woman, the husband comes back to take care of children. That's how we were living. But what I'm doing now is better because I'm doing it at home. I don't have the money yet to register myself and to open up a crèche outside. That's why I'm operating in the house and it makes things easy for me. I'm able to do all my housework and I have to take good care of kids. I do my housework, I feed the kids, change them so their parents find them clean and there are no complaints. That's why I keep on doing the same job. I'm happy with it.

Joelle: You don't think you will change your job one day?

Rihanna: Well, I may because I'm human. I need more money. I always tell myself to do this first. At the right time I can give this to someone else and open another one outside in an open place. I can hire somebody to do this and I can go work on the second one.

Joelle: What can you say in general about life in South Africa?

Rihanna: Well, what I can say in terms of studies is that South African education is better from ours back home. They have their own way of teaching which is different from ours.

Joelle: What is the difference that you are talking about?

Rihanna: At the moment all I can say is that it is better here. In Congo ... no (laughing) ... when you look in terms of schools it better here.

