

Makengo Interview

Speaker key

IR Interviewer

IE Interviewee

Speaker	Transcription
IR	<p>Hello Mrs Makengo. As you are aware, this interview is about Bridging Cultures. A heritage project funded by Heritage Fund to collect stories of Congolese who migrated in East London.</p> <p>Can you please introduce yourself to our listeners?</p>
IE	<p>Good evening, my name is Makengo. I am a mother of 3 children, I am a Widow, a single mother now... I have 3 children, 2 boys and 1 girl. I work, I work at Iceland, as a Sale Assistant. I work at the till and I have been with them for more than 20 years. But before I started with Iceland, I used to work as an Interpreter, for the home office, but I become sick, and was forced to stop doing the interpreting Job. I was the reason that I remained at Iceland. I like my job and enjoy working with them. I have met wonderful people, I have seen many Managers coming and going, they all have helped me a lot in my situation.</p>
IR	<p>Looking at you, you appear foreigner to me, would you kindly share with us your experience of travelling to the UK?</p>
IE	<p>Of course, When I arrived... I arrived in 1985, I was pregnant of my daughter, hum..., I remember when I went for my first interview to the home office, they called an ambulance for me, as I was really in pain and about to give birth. They took me to a hospital, called May Day Hospital. That is where my daughter was born.</p> <p>Unfortunately, at that time, let me remind you that I came from Congo, I am a Congolese. You know in Congo, we have, hum.... I have learned English at school, because, hum, In fact, I went to a good, a very good school. I learned English, but surprisingly what we learned in School was completely different to the reality in England. What I need, with time, I said to myself, I must go to College and improve my English language. I also studied a Bilingual Course, which gave me the opportunity to work in a School, helping African French Speaking Asylum Seekers and Refugees Children in reading and doing their homework. And then... it was unfortunate that with a different education system to where I came from where by Children respect Teachers, in and those who help them at school. I have decided to leave... I left the teaching job and change my career.</p>



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	<p>Then I went on to do,.....hum... what did I study again?.... I studied different things, I did hum....I wanted to become, hum... I remember now, I wanted to become an Interpreter. I studied the course, passed my exams and found work at the Home Office as an Interpreter. It was a very enjoyable position, which gave me the opportunity to visit other Towns and regions of England.</p> <p>Unfortunately, I failed sick. I had a stroke and could not continue with that Job, I could not keep up the pace. The job requires speed and I started forgetting things. I couldn't do it anymore. Now, I am with Iceland, and I have been with them for more than 20 years as I said previously. Here I am,... voila. My children are educated; they finished their studies and work now. I first child married recently. We are Jehovah witness. My last born, my daughter who was born here also finished her education. She is a Teacher. She teaches at secondary school, hum voila</p>
IR	<p>Thank you, I think you went too fast. I would try to go back to what you have said, as we have to address topic by topic. You said that you were pregnant, when you first arrived, and the authority has to call the Ambulance for you. Would you kindly tell us how where you welcomed? How did it go for you? How where you welcomed by the Immigration Officer who dealt with your case?</p>
IE	<p>When I arrived for the first time at the Home office, I was pregnant and also had trouble communicating in English. They found a lady interpreter who came and helped me. As I was not feeling well, I asked them to take me to the Hospital or call a doctor for me. That why they decided to call an Ambulance. There were all very nice, the lady was very nice. She explained everything in English and the immigration officer decided to stop the interview. And they took me to the hospital, and my daughter was then born.</p>
IR	<p>You said that you had trouble communicating, and coming from a middle class family, you studied in English at school and English is not spoken in your country of origin, why did you decide to come to England Knowing that you would have language barriers?</p>
IE	<p>I knew that I would learn. I like languages, I like learning new languages. For your information, I can speak Greek. People are amazed. I like learning languages, and I said I would learn the language as soon as I arrived, that has helped me a lot.</p>
IR	<p>You mean, you were prepared for these barriers and any possible difficulties you could have encountered?</p>
IE	<p>Of course. Because with what I learned in school in Congo, I have said to myself, I will do my best to improve my English.... (Both over talking) ... and being a Jehovah Witness. The organisation, always help those who have language difficulties,... if</p>



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	you want to go to a French speaking or English speaking congregation, the choice is entirely yours. I first went to the French congregations to support my children then with time, they attended school and I did the same.
IR	You were well prepared?
IE	Yes, because I know in England is a good country, that welcome Refugees, that why I choose this country.
IR	You talked about how you have access to education. How about housing? (<i>both over talking</i>)... I meant access to education, access to accommodation, a place where to live, access to health and all other service you may require? (Both Overtaking). I want you to expend a bit.
IE	It was a bit easy for me, I guess. Because when I had my baby, I suffered high blood pressure, I was made to stay a bit longer in hospital. I stayed there for more than a week, social service people who visited me at the hospital. One of the ladies, called Suzan I think, promised to bring me another Congolese lady for a visit so we can speak in Lingala. Surprisingly, when the lady arrived, she turned up to be one of my friends. She helped me throughout the process. She was already in the country and helped me all the running to Council office. She brought me application form at the hospital. She helped me completed them. She is the one who helped me with everything.
IR	You are black, African, this is a white people's county. Have you encountered any discrimination; in the way you were threatad?
IE	No, no, no, not all! Maybe because I didn't have any negative ideas when coming here, I didn't know people could be a bit racist, I did not think of that. The woman was very kind with me. The social worker. Maybe with time yes but when I first came, no. Then they found us a hostel, from I left the hospital. We stayed there for a week, before being rehoused where we were in South Croydon. Then, they started bringing us Roman Catholic believers for visits. Back in Africa, I was already introduced to Their Jehovah Witness preaching, although I was not yet baptised. Once here, I was not sure how they were called in English, I didn't know. I remember, once, I was asleep, very tired and I sick. People buzzed my door and it was Jehovah Witnesses. But the Catholic church helped us a lot. They were visiting, helped my children, brought books; they helped them with reading, doing homework, reading English. There are the ones who started doing those good things. And, as soon as I met Jehovah witness, I have to stop with the Catholic Church. Jehovah Witness also helped us lots, in many things.
IR	Ok, you stayed in for many years, you left your native Africa, and You made this



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	country your second country. Do you still consider yourself African or British?
IE	Yes, I am African. Mon county, yes, honestly, I miss my country. I love my country very much, I lived there well. I just left because there were circumstances which I wouldn't explain here. I lost my husband 3 years after arriving here. Hence my husband died, I think that could be the reason why remain in this country till today. Would he has been here, honestly, we could have been in Congo or here, I dint know. But, if I had a choice, I would have returned to Congo. My current health couldn't allow me to live in Congo because it is hard. Treatment is expensive and especially being a single woman and unemployed, honestly, I don't think so. All that has contributed of me remaining here.
IR	You mean that there is only treatment, not other thing?
IE	Yes, there are many reasons.
IR	What are there?
IE	I worked for social service, the national pension service (National social service Institute). You cannot compare what they do there with what is happening here. I was in charge of working out what pensioner should get, but it was really meaningless. But here, we had a lot of opportunities. Housing, education, children education and adult alike. If you want to study... There are a lot of opportunities. People can take up these opportunities if they want. But where we came from, things have dramatically changed. When we were growing up in Congo, primary and secondary educations are nothing to compare to compare with now. Here in the UK, we have free NHS, better than in Congo. Better Education, social life is far different.
IR	Now, in comparison with Food. A man cannot survive without food. What do you do, what kind of struggle did you encounter?
IE	Hum, I think in England, as a multicultural country, we can find everything. We have Congolese shops, you get anything you want. Years back, when we first came, of course, we had to eat everything eatable we found in shops. We were not fussy about eating Congolese food. But it was when I started seeing a lot Congolese that I discovered that there are Congolese Shops where we could buy African food.
IR	Now, when I take into account the time you spent here, hearing you talking about food, is there anything you have kept as a legacy from where ever you came from? Regardless of many years spent in England?
IE	You know, this is fantastic. Even when all my children were staying with me, they



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	<p>didn't really fancy African foods. Maybe they were not used to it anymore. Even now that my daughter is with me. Whenever I cooked cassava leaves (PONDU), she doesn't like it. The day before yesterday, she asked me to cook Fumbwa (peanut based vegetable dish), that's what she like from time to time. She liked it with salt fish. However, I am really rooted in African Cuisine. I like pondu, you know it very well (laugh...) I am not supposed to say that, sorry!</p>
IR	You like your food and you have remained in your tradition?
IE	Yes
IR	You like it and what to keep it that way?
IE	Yes
IR	Is there any other thing such as friends, music?
IE	Yes, the music! I love Congolese Music, I love it very much, hum, ... it depends
IR	What do you miss very much? Seating down and saying to yourself: "I really miss such thing, regardless of how many years I stayed in the UK". What could that be?
IE	Maybe the weather. (Q agreeing) when I was young, I like the cold weather, I like the winter. But when one gets older, time changes, the body changes, and I don't like winter anymore. If could, If I have mean to travel to a hot country in Winter, I would run off to Congo. But except that, it is a country like any other. You arrived, you have to integrate and adapt.
IR	Tell me a bit about your children? I interrupted you early on when you wanted to talk more about them. Is there anything you would like to share with us? Your experience, so on.
IE	My Children ... hum..I have 3 children, my first born Alex Mbuyamba, Alex is 33 years, He graduated and work for rail company. He is a Jehovah Witness as well. What has really helped me with my children, as I was saying when we first arrived in the UK? I did not allow my children to visit their school mate after school. I didn't allow that. First of all, I didn't know the other parents; therefore I didn't allow any contact or friendship outside school. Being a Jehovah witness, our faith has not encouraged smoking and my children never smoke. As soon a child starts smoking, there is drugs and other associated behaviours. That has really helped a lot. Then, their only contact where within the congregation members. He lives in North London, somewhere. He works in train's operator. He is in IT department, that's what he does. And my daughter Antoinette, graduated. She teaches English in



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	secondary school.
IR	When you see what your children have accomplished, looking at your tradition, is there anything that you think they have lost?
IE	<p>For that I don't know. I don't know the answer to that. I though them even Lingala. My children can speak lingala. My first child speaks better lingala compared to 2 others. Maybe knowing their roots back in Africa. I once took them on holiday. Because, they dad didn't died in the UK, I took them on visit and see their father's grave. They learned about the country. I will assure you, that they all really loved it. They really loved Congo. My daughter has planned to visit again in August last year. Unfortunately, she has to cancel following my poor health. Maybe if everything goes well, she may travel next year for a short visit. They really loved it, when they last visited. They eat local dishes such as barbecued meat, kwanga, they really loved it. However, my first child never understood why were there younger children selling, hum... petrole/oil all nights till done. He couldn't understand how ... because we were staying in Binza Area, at my sister. We were staying at my sister's hotel. Everything was very nice, she has a nice house. However, 1 km from where we were staying, things were different. It looks like we were not in a different country not in Congo. I started explaining the disparities, the reason for the contrast behind it and I think they understood. They really loved Bandal district because it full of life. That's where we go to eat barbecued meat (Ntaba), they loved the area, and it's not like in Binza District where people are hidden behind their big compounds with large fences. They really loved Congo.</p>
IR	Is there something with regards to your children, which you claim to have proudly achieved or a legacy which you want to be remembered for?
IE	<p>I think my religious believes. This is something that has helped; it has really helped me and my children to become what they are today. I am not saying that they are perfect children, but there are, hum (coughing), the are respectful towards other and respect themselves as well. And, I believe that is something that I am proud of. It is unfortunate that second child does practice anymore. I know that he has not forgotten. I am sure, I has not....(becoming emotional)</p>
IR	Do you regret coming here? Or you are proud to have taken this decision?
IE	<p>Hum, yes, there are times, I do regret sometimes. Maybe if we had come together with my husband and children, He would have been alive today. I don't like talking about it; I hate it, (becoming emotional). ...</p>
IR	Now, how do you rate your life? Do you have a positive or negative note on your life?



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IE	<p>Hum... I would say, I would say that it is positive because the life I have in the UK with my children, hum... has really brought me closer to my children. We have a strong bond between us. When they have something to share, they are not afraid, nor are they ashamed. I am their mother; their mother friend and I love that. In our African tradition or maybe in Africa, things would have turn to be different. This is how I grew up in my family as well. My father and we children was friend. We were telling him daily how we loved him, and he was saying that to us as well. He was a very good father. And when I married my late husband, he was a wonderful man, who loved his children. I think that plays a role in my first child's life. He decided to get married the same date that I married his father. I last met his dad when he was two; He remembers how his father loved him and how he loved me as well. That could have been the motive behind him choosing our wedding anniversary day as his wedding day. I told him that wasn't a magic date. You must work for it.</p>
IR	<p>So, referring to culture, you have had children here, some came up little, how you deal with the food/diet issue because you are of different generation. Can you establish any difference? Is there any radical attachment to a particular diet? Have the children taken a different path?</p>
IE	<p>I think that, even when we were in Congo, I was born in Kinshasa /Congo, where I grew up, I think it depends,... it depends on your family. If you came from a well-educated family, my father was very educated; he studied in Congo and also in Belgium. He helped us a lot. He has made our life easier. Even ... at the time, He was an HR Manager at Congo Airlines. Even in school, if you do well, he will offer you a Holiday on a business class. Hence, we had lots of opportunities at that time. However, my mother, despite of being a very good mother and hardworking, she was tough. But she was a very good mother. I believe that everything contributed for me becoming what I am today, as well as my 2 sisters, my brothers and more my 2 sisters. But here in UK, the difference is that children, .. Children are not diplomatic. Not knowing how to talk to their peers, parents and others. But what else can be done, if not trying to educate them in that way. I think I have achieved that. I have respectful children, there are ...um... yes, very polite.</p>
IR	<p>How do those children see themselves? Africans or Europeans?</p>
IE	<p>No, they will say that they are Africans. Even my little granddaughter, who was born here, will tell you that: "I am from the Congo". I am muluba (from baluba tribe)! But she has never been there. It is because her father, my son has told her so. These are things ones will have to teach children. They know that they come from Congo, even though they were born in Europe. It is about their origin. That's why I decided to take them to Congo, for them to see and learned how people live there. I remember going to Kinkole, we went there and ate Liboke (roated fish in traditional foiled paper kind) , it was the first for them. They enjoyed it, honestly</p>



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	they really enjoyed it. We spent quality time. They loved it. They have bits of knowledge and it has helped and encouraged them to learn the language. Also, their grandmother never went to school. She can only speak Luba or Lingala (Congolese languages), they were forced to learn it so they can communicate with their grandmother.
IR	You have a remarkable experience not only professionally, but as a mother and grandmother. If someone, a boy or girl who freshly arrive from Africa. What would you advise them?
IE	You mean advising that child who arrives from Africa? Maybe I would ask them why they choose to come to England as you did. What do they want to do in England? And I may advise them, hum... in a way that... (Laugh), I don't know, maybe I like more talking about my religion and I may more likely approach it that way. To seek God, be in a Godly environment, to be surrounded with people who love them, people who will guide them to acquiring that nice live they aspire in England. Good life doesn't mean having a lot of monies, not necessarily, no. But I think that's what I would do. Because I did the same things for my children. Because I always say to myself, hum... I always say that if we were not Jehovah Witnesses, frankly, I don't know how, hum... how I would have helped my children. Because now days, its everywhere, in social medias, how African children lose their lives easily here, just because they get involved in gangs groups, and so on. Maybe I has helped me ... I personally say that it has helped me with my children. If I want to advice a child, I can only point him/her in that direction.
IR	So, looking back to what we have said all along. Is there anything you want to add? Any aspect of live that we forgot to talk about and you wish to address?
IE	I think I have touched on everything. Children, first of all, you have to love them
IR	Friends you have here?
IE	I have friends, I have good relationship with people in my congregation, I have friends. I normally say, hum... I also advice my children to build good friendship, because... when... when you have honest friends, we become honest. When you have Troubled friend, you become like them. You must, even the Bible teaches us that you have to choose your friends. This is what I did and my children followed my example. It was easy as we started when they were younger. When they were younger, they used to follow me everywhere I go. Hum... I was building relationship and they were doing the same with my friends' children. Now here, I remember one of my brother in law in Congo come for Holiday, just after I had my operation, he saw how my friends were looking after me: bringing foods, helping me and doing plenty things. He went back and told my sister; honestly your sister doesn't need



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	<p>you out there. She has another family there. That was his way of expressing what he saw, how we were living, what kind of friend do I have here, and so on. I am confident, even if I am not home, I can leave my keys to my friends and I would be assured. I would think of things such as they have stolen, it wouldn't even come into my mind. So, you what kind of friend I have. All of my ladies friends are Jehovah Witnesses. This doesn't mean that I don't have other friends outside my religious circle... (Laugh). All my male friends are Jehovah Witnesses.</p>
IR	<p>Any closing statement as we have reached the end of our interview?</p>
IE	<p>Even you, I would urge you, you never know, maybe if you meet them one day, please ask them questions... But England is not a bad country, it's a country that helped me and my children and continues to support me until now that I am doing poorly. Although I am working, I said to myself even though I am doing poorly, I cannot just sit at home, I work. I work 2 days a week and I love my job. Because... first of all God has blessed me to always have good managers at work, who understand. Even my team at work, it is made of people whom I have known for years and newly recruited, we entertain a very good working relationship. I love my Job. I really love it.</p>

[01.02.00]

[End of Audio]

Duration 60 minutes and 02 seconds



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