

Eloko Marie - INTERVIEW

Speaker key

IR Interviewer

IE Interviewee

Speaker	Transcription
IR	Good morning Madam and thank you for making this interview possible.
IE	Good morning. It is my pleasure.
IR	We are interviewing you in relation to our heritage project, exploring the journey and resettlement experiences of Congolese in East London. We will therefore be asking you a number of questions. Please introduce yourself, tell us who you are, your name, your age, why not, what do you do, etc.
IE	My name is Eloko Marie and that's my name. I have lived here for a number of years now, and my (work) experience is quite diverse. I am a single mother of 4 and I am turning 78 now. I worked for the government Inspector in the department of Education and I travelled around the world for international Conferences in relation with my work. Also, I run my family fashion business and travelled Europe, Asia and middle east for business. I was forced to flee the Congo during Mobutu regime in early 1980, when my late husband was accused of conspiring with his colleagues to overthrow the regime. I wouldn't go into details, as it brings fresh memory. I am sorry.
IR	Pease can you share your experience with us?
IE	As a government Inspector, my work allowed me to travel everywhere within the country. This helped me to meet people from diverse cultural contacts. I can speak almost all the 4 languages. I am fluent in Lingala because I was born in Kinshasa, But I am not originally from there. But that wasn't really a barrier for me. But the fact that I came here, in a country where the language is completely different to our own, I mean that of our country of origin, is already a first barrier. And when you add to this the fact that I arrived here after a certain age, that couldn't be easy, considering the need to study or having stuff translated. So, that was the first barrier. You have to adapt, integrate as they say, and that is the first difficulty, both socially and culturally.



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IR	Did you have your family with you when you came?
IE	Yes, I came 2 children, and the third joined me later. It has not been easy. You know, if you can't speak the language you do have to rely on interpreters, even though you're never sure your arguments and points are accurately put across. And I should highlight at this point that, for someone who comes here for what I can call sensitive reasons, and not being able to fully express yourself in a language you really understand, is really traumatising. Adding to it the whole immigration procedures, have really left us in limbo for many years. And this causes a lot of stress to those who end up seeing their application for asylum being rejected. Some have even been deported or removed from the country, even though many of them had perfectly founded reasons to be here.
IR	Do you mean that not having immigration status constituted a big barrier?
IE	Of course, a fundamental barrier. You have no valid reasons to be here, you can't read and write, you can't speak the language, you may not be able to effectively and efficiently put your case forward and defend yourself. Everything is done through interpreters. It becomes even awkward when you have personal issues and you have to face a male interpreter. Many times, I kept everything to myself as I didn't want to look like I dislike the male interpreter as he has a family to feed, that's a job for him. And this can cause you more problems and may end up working against you.
IR	Why the choice of United Kingdom (UK)?
IE	I didn't choose the UK. I ended up here.
IR	What do you mean?
IE	Circumstances brought you here
IR	How are people and food like?
IE	<p>This is another funny experience. Oh my God! I really had to adapt because. Despite visiting other countries, I am a conservative like person when it comes to food. And when you are of certain age, you'll certainly know nutritional values of your home food, and, honestly, there is no comparison. It really took me years to adapt. We have chicken, meat vegetable, etc. back home, but it's honestly not the same at all.</p> <p>Back home in Congo, we essentially eat organic food and it tastes different. No doubt about it. We used to home grown food, fresh and original food. And when</p>



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	you arrive here and try to compare you will see that the gap is too wide. In fact, people who go around various ethnic shops to find ethnic food, even though they are often more expensive, are certainly right to do so.
IR	How did it affect your diet or eating habit?
IE	Not at all, I am a very strict person and I have worked around what I have found here. However, I believe that owe to learn and embrace new things if possible. There's always something to learn. If you are open minded you will still try. There is always room for learning. Just taste and appreciate. There's nothing wrong with that.
IR	How easy was it to learn new language?
IE	That was a nightmare at first but we have to along with it. It was a must if you really want to feel part of the community. It opens more opportunities. You know, the problem has always been that, if you have mastered the language you normally use in your professional life, but find yourself in a situation where you have to struggle to speak another language. You feel disoriented and weak, there are things you can't express, and can't do.
IR	Did you face any other issue?
IE	Loneliness can kill you. That's one of the social and sociological realities many of us Africans live with here in the West. We came from countries where, culturally and socially, everyone is in contact with everyone else, people put their noses in everyone business. Here if you try to speak to someone you don't know, it's evading someone privacy. This is a very different social reality. In buses, tubes or any public place people mind their own business. There's never an attempt to get to know each other. It is not natural for someone to even speak to you. It is a different social reality. Whereas in Africa, everyone speaks to everyone else, and it is easily done. The system here leads people into loneliness and isolation. It is not that you want to be isolated, but that's how society is set up. It's a way of life. People are confined within their very limited networks. You simply don't step out and start talking to anyone, not even your neighbours or someone you happen to see regularly. It is a different way of life. Despite all that, there are people who does cheer you up, even someone you don't really know. Someone who will boost your moral and saying hello out of nowhere.
IR	Did you experience of discrimination?
IE	Not really. It is a foreign land, what do you expect. Certain people do look at you differently because you are, so what. I never experienced any threatening



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	behaviours.
IR	What can you say about the culture, customs you encountered here?
IE	<p>Medias, papers talked a lot about crime, young black killings and all that really make me very uncomfortable and pray every day for my children safety and that of their friends.</p> <p>Also, parents have less power over children here. I believe it is because the state provides what African parents do for their families as they are the main bread winners. That makes children seem to escape parental supervision, especially when parents themselves aren't attentive to that reality. I believe that we parents should change our ways of thinking and adapt to the new reality</p>
IR	Do you regret coming here?
IE	<p>No and Yes. No because, I would have been death by now. And Yes because there's no better place than home. I have had enough time to appreciate where I come from, and can confirm that no one is better than home. I'll understand someone who knows nowhere else to compare home with denying this fact. And this isn't only about only material stuff. It's a combination of a number of things. As far as I am concerned, as an African and Congolese person, my socio-cultural reality is very different from that of the West. And once you've lived it, you start to appreciate what you have left. It's a living experience that no one else is better placed to explain it.</p>
IR	What would you say to thousands of people who are trying to come to Europe?
IE	<p>Not much really because no one will listen to me. People don't really know what happening here. When you try to discourage them, there always ask "why don't I go back to Africa and I am still here? I want them to come and experience it for themselves. Everyone is looking for a better life. The only way to refrain them from dreaming about the West, paying the higher prices, all their life saving to come to the West, they will do it. A good leadership in Africa is the answer to most migration enthusiasm.</p>
IR	Any thought of going back to your home country?
IE	<p>That's my dream. My dream is to help my country in one form or another. It's always good to learn new skills, and in fact, there's so much to learn you should never stop learning in my opinion. When we look around us, we realise that we know very little of our surrounding. There is so much to learn, so much we can learn and benefit others. Africa needs knowledge, investment, technology and</p>



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	qualified people to pull it out of poverty.
IR	The medias always portraits Africa as a corrupted place. Why think of going back?
IE	There is no place like home and I belong in Africa. I am working hard and saving to make it possible in few years. I have seen lots of changes and it is time for me to return.
IR	We are getting to the End. Do you have anything else to add?
IE	Not much, I think I should encourage the younger generation to do everything possible to better their education. Education, Education is key to prospect. I encourage the younger generation of Africans to diversify their knowledge in all areas and aspects of life. Africa need them. Whatsoever we admire in the West, Africa can do better than all of them combined. What Africa long is good leadership. Thank you again very much for your time

[00.51.03]

[End of Audio]

Duration 51 minutes and 03 seconds



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