

Elongo Yala - INTERVIEW

Speaker key

IR Interviewer

IE Interviewee

Speaker	Transcription
IR	Good afternoon Mrs Elonga Yala and it is a pleasure meeting you today. My name is Shadrack and my colleague here is George. We will both interview you for our Bridging Cultures
IE	Thank you for the opportunity.
IR	Can you introduce yourself please? And tell us a bit of yourself?
IE	<p>My birth name is Elonga Yala, I am a Congolese and arrived here in the UK as a Refugee. I was born in 1958 in Nzobo Luzi village where my parents originated. District of Tshela in Kongo Central Province, Western DR Congo.</p> <p>When I was about 7 years old, my father who was a Clerk was transferred to Kinshasa, the capital for work. And since then, I never step foot in the village again neither my parents. Relatives and family members used to come regularly to the house and most of them didn't want to go back to the village. I guess people liked city lives as it offers lot opportunities</p>
IR	Do you have a family?
IE	I am married and mother of five children and 4 grandchildren. I retrained as Nurse and I like my job. Especially that all my children are grown up, they are independent, I have more time for myself.
IR	Tell me about your education, your primary and secondary school.
IE	I was fortunate to complete my primary and secondary education. It really pains me when I hear of some children around the World, especially girls not being able to access basic education. Then I went on to do History at University. That's was a matter of prestige to the family. A way to prove others that your family has class.
IR	How many children are there in your family?



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IE	<p>My father had 2 wives and 16 Children. We were all living together in one big compound which has 2 larges and 1 small quarters. My father and my 2 mothers used to share 1 large, all the children were in the other large quarter. And the small quarter was occupied by servants. We all lived happily together. Now I look back and I wonder how my father was able to hold the family together, live a harmonious life with all his children, wives and not forget all extended family members who used to come and go during his whole life.</p> <p>Ours 2 mothers used to call themselves “Sisters: big sister as the first wife and little sister as for the second wife”). My father and big sister, who was in fact my birth mother died in a car crash driven by a drunk driver coming from a wedding celebration. Our now mother, who is in her early 80s is in fact my step mother (laugh ... please don’t let my brothers and sisters here this) has kept the family together, and lined up all 16 of us as her own children as best as she can. She deserves respect.... And I don’t think I could even get near to be what she has been for us. Maybe because she is of that generation.... I don’t know. I really admire her.</p>
IR	<p>Why did you choose to come to Europe and what was your experience?</p>
IE	<p>Born and bred in Africa, coming to Europe is every young person’s dream. For all of us growing at that time, it meant, class, good life, better education, opportunity and wealth. It happened that I marry a man whose Dad was a Diplomat. It made it easier for us to travel around the World. We have been to Tunisia, Morocco and then Europe in early 80S and then England. I had my 2 first children in Morocco.</p>
IR	<p>What was your first impression when you arrived in UK?</p>
IE	<p>At first everything looks fine. We arrived in Summer, although a bit cold for us, we were enjoying with friends who were already here as diplomat working for the Zaire at the time. And after, a week, we were given a temporary free accommodation for a month. We were referred to jobs through our friend’s network, as to support ourselves, now that we have decided to settle.</p> <p>My husband was employed in a printing company, dropping orders in different locations within the city. They worked in pairs and he was the only one doing the box lifting and dropping including the driver. The driver was very weary and he used to come home always complaining of body hack.</p>



	<p>I was disillusioned of whatever I imagined of Europe and couldn't believe my eyes.</p> <p>I was really disappointed and adding to it the fact that we couldn't really communicate in English added strain in our life, relationship with my husband and many more.</p> <p>While thinking of to do to come out of this situation by getting enrolled in a College to learn English, we had another dilemma of renewing our residence papers. Not only Language barriers made me feel disqualified, and was behind our decision to return to school to have a chance getting a job. We were stressed to find how long it takes to formalise our papers. Would I have known, I would have stay in Africa and live in peace?</p>
IR	<p>Tell me your experience of settlement in the UK?</p>
IE	<p>As the economic and political situation was worsening in the Zaire, we decided to apply for asylum protection. Our father in law was dismissed from his work, accused of plotting with some international interests to overthrow the Mobutu regime. With this new route, we will feel safer than being found in streets of Zaire. We sought political asylum we were given accommodation, something which, even back home, doesn't happen. For us this was an extra.</p> <p>It takes time to master the English or any new language. As a key tool for communication and integration, many find this as the biggest barrier for integration for all new settlers, especially those whom English isn't their first language.</p>
IR	<p>Would you have done better if you were from an English-speaking country or had master English language before arriving here?</p>
IE	<p>I think so. What the authority did is to regroup people in their communities of origin. People lived in Cluster and make it difficult for them to mingle with others. I guess the idea intended first to house people from the same background or language together to reduce isolation among communities.</p> <p>Although it was a good intention, it made people live in cluster and maintain their habits rather than learning to adapt to the new country way of living.</p> <p>From our own experience, I can confirm that when we first came to this country we were always living and enjoying being among ourselves (the Congolese community). We spoke our languages and French. People often say that they will not speak English when they return to DR. Congo. This was exactly the problem we had. That's why I often advise anybody who just arrived not to stay within a</p>



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	limited circle of people from your country, but try to reach at new friends, new people, new communities as it helps learn and adapt easily.
IR	People are still accommodated together, especially if they speak the same language.
IE	I would rather see the system stopped. The Authority doesn't apply the language criteria when they create new areas and build new homes today, which are often very expensive, they also build some, maybe 10% or 20% of them, for those on benefit? This is about mixing people, allowing the less fortunate to live next to those fortunate ones? Same thing can be applied for our communities.
IR	This argument is more is essentially economic or financial.
IE	I am still strongly against that. You know, there are people for instance, coming from Spanish speaking countries, who never went to school here, but able to found jobs, and very quickly start speaking English. It is because they started mixing up with other people at work who do not speak their languages. And because they now have to work together, communicate their peers. They then have no other options than to learn to speak the language. They did not remain stuck in their communities. They went out, mixed up with other people and learnt by doing. That's why I am always against putting people together in communities. They will never progress that way.
IR	What do you miss the most about Congo?
IE	A lot. The living conditions over here are different to ours, this is an artificial world but back home is more natural way of life; Natural and wild grown fruits, pick up for free in the nature that God already planted for us. You can still buy of course We eat fresh food back home compare to here; we grow vegetables and herbs just on the backyard, fresh foods picked, cooked in your eyes and straight on the plate.
IR	What new things did you learn since arrived here in the UK?
IE	There is a big misperception of Europe in Africa. People in Africa still believe that Europe is all sparkles, things are roses, thinking that as soon as one land in Europe life changes for better; big mistake. And no matter how you explain to them, nobody believes you and prompting questions like why don't you come back if it is was that hard? I think that the fact that we stay here for longer, will always



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	<p>convince them that, life is all roses here.</p> <p>As for cultural value Africans promote togetherness. Let me say that things have really changed now with internet, medias and so on. However, when we grow up then a child knows who is father, mother and relatives, I child knows how to value elders, show them respect when see them on the street.</p> <p>It is a completely 2 different worlds. Life here is just parents and children together. You learn to do things together as a family. The more I live here I began to like this side of things where you care for your family rather than the entire village.</p> <p>If we could set up a project to educate and guide our children in the right direction, it would be a good thing. Teach them what is essential such as their own culture, their heroes, early pregnancies and etc, ... rather than hammering them with lesson such as history of Europe.</p> <p>In term of development, we can bring the knowledge gained over here and make difference in Africa, to start up businesses that would give people jobs.</p>
IR	Would you like to add something?
IE	To all newly arrived Migrants, Education, education should come first. Start by learning the language of the country. A good English will open lots of doors. And to finish thank you for giving me this opportunity
IR	Thank you for having us and for your willingness to share your experience with us and time.
IE	Thank you for selecting me to be part of this project.

[00.57.42]

[End of Audio]

Duration 57 minutes and 42 seconds

