

Makanzu Charlotte - INTERVIEW

Speaker key

IR Interviewer
IE Interviewee

Speaker	Transcription
IR	Hello Mrs Makanzu! My name is Brandon a Volunteers from Community Active Support (CAS). I hope you are keeping safe
IE	Hello Brandon. I am indeed keeping safe. You know what happening around and with my underlying health issues, I am really at risk.
IR	Thank you Mrs Makanzu. 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. Can you please introduce yourself to our listeners?
IE	<p>My name is Makanzu Charlotte. I am a 60 years old grandmother originated from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DR Congo). I was trained as a nurse and I am fully involved in my local church and dedicated campaigner of local issues and social justice. I was born in 1960, in a town called Masimanimba, a city in the Kwilu Province, southern of the DR Congo and about 400 km of the capital Kinshasa. I was born in a small family of 2. I have 1 only Sister.</p> <p>I started primary school aged 6. We didn't have to go Nursery at the time. We stayed at home until we reached school age. We used to envy children who attended schools, seeing them in uniform and we were praying to reach that school age. I remember reaching age 6 was everyone child's dream and you have to behave right otherwise everyone will laugh at you to the point of teasing you and suggesting that you are still a baby and have to wait another year before being enrolled in year 1. That was part of our upbringing and proving to parents and friends that we are grown up and we mean business.</p> <p>Then, I went to do my secondary and high school education for further 6 years and graduated in 1979 with a state diploma. I went to University where I graduated in Nursing.</p> <p>I began my professional career and kept on helping into the running a family Business and life was good and promising. Then, one day, in a broad light, we were victim of an armed robbery by unidentified group of people wearing masks. They run away with our weekly cash money before taking it to the local cooperative bank.</p>



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	<p>Police Inspectors were called to do investigation and help us catch these rubbers and try to recover monies. Unfortunately, no one was arrested. And as if what they took wasn't enough, a week later, another robbery happened in the house. Robbers in full military gear with a lorry, came to our family house, handcuffed everyone in the house and took all our family possession, monies and threatened to kill us if we resisted and give any information that may lead to their arrest by the police. We were very traumatised and father believed that they were getting closer to him, and with the autocratic regime at the time, everyone becoming powerful and influential without the backing of the regime and security service is a potential treat to them, and must be targeted and silenced. Then my family decided to leave the Country.</p>
IR	<p>How did you take your parent to leave for safety reason?</p>
IE	<p>The hardest bit was trying to convince ourselves that we have to go to. But where? To an unknow destination and leave everything behind. Families, friends, possessions and everything our parents and ourselves have worked for. We were very traumatised, faced numerous threats, the fear of the unknown, what could happen if they return again. We heard stories of how other families were being raped, and my parents and all of us finally decided to leave the country.</p>
IR	<p>Sorry to hear that. Can you elaborate a bit on your childhood?</p>
IE	<p>I was born in a very united family, dad and mom; we are 2 of us as I said, good atmosphere in the family, a typical African family, respect to parent and adults first of all and respect to one another. Dad was very strict as in all African families, never mess with school. Dad always told us Education is priorities if you wanted to succeed in Life. Dad was the main bread winner and set the rules and directions. Mum was very quiet and humble. All that you will expect from a real African woman. At home, we used to communicate in 2 languages. We used French to speak to Daddy and between ourselves and our native language to speak to Mummy. Not only because Mummy never stayed longer in the education system but also at that time girls were trained to become housewives not professionals. My mother was a very conservative, she really loved her role. She would only speak to us in our mother tongue or native language until we understood what she meant. This is how we picked up an additional language. Mothers were guardians of our Customs and Culture. That was very interesting and real Wisdom.</p>
IR	<p>How did you feel when you arrived in the UK?</p>
IE	<p>It wasn't a straight journey. We went to Kinshasa and stayed at our Uncle for 2 weeks, then crossed by boat to Congo Brazaville where we took a place to</p>



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	<p>Switzerland and then here in England. Very happy to be in England, happy to have found a century. Peace and security.</p> <p>After few days, things started being a bit awkward. We didn't think that we could ever face a communication issue. We speak French, which is an international language on its own and that would be enough to communicate with some people. We were sure that a big percentage of people in England speak French. Then it will be alright. We felt disqualified, completely illiterate. We could not speak any English, except few words; my qualifications and diplomas thrown in the windows, they were not considered. I had felt useless. The only way was to put up a brave face and start learning English.</p>
IR	Did you have to apply for visa?
IE	Yes. We had proper entry clearance.
IR	How did you end up remaining in the UK till now?
IE	We stayed with a family friend who knew that we were seeking safety and the visa was to allow us to reach the UK. And once in the UK, we will explain ourselves to authorities who will assess our situation. Two Nights, after our arrival, father discussed with his friend then with everyone, he suggested that he couldn't keep us any longer and that we should apply for asylum and seek protection. We did not know how to go about it. We contacted a Solicitor's office where they took each and every one statement and arrange to take us to the Home Office for a full statement with the authority.
IR	What happened?
IE	We were seen by the immigration officer, who took our statements and give us a paper ID with our picture son them.
IR	Were you entitled to benefits?
IE	Yes, we were entitled to many different benefits. We had access to Income support and housing benefits. We could study but prohibited from doing any paid job or paid activities. We could apply for work permit if I am interested after six months. Social services, benefits office, housing department, GPs and health service people
IR	How did you feel?



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IE	Mix reactions really. People were amazing. Everybody supported us. All these servicers were free in developed World whereas in Poor African Countries, we will have to pay for everything. I could not comprehend to be honest. It should be the other way around.
IR	Did you meet other Congolese people and/or have they ever offered any help to you?
IE	Oh yes, of course. They directed us to the solicitors, we were going to their house enjoying their companies and African's meal. Some had relatives in Europe who use to bring them African Foods, newly released Congolese and African DVDs and Songs. It was nice for them to have us around, entertained and surrounded with our people. However, such support does not support people with their integration.
IR	Immigrants tend to justify why they live in cluster?
IE	Although it may have some benefits, it has many disadvantages and I wouldn't encourage it. Let consider what used to be Barking then and now? The area is fully transformed for better. It used to be a rough area, but look at it now. You have a living diversity. It is very expensive now, old residences have been demolished and some being so, residents dispersed, house prices have rocketed that poor people could never afford it anymore.
IR	Did you mingle easily with people?
IE	Not really. I think It is to do with my background and the way I was living my life back home. I felt very disconnected. At time I would pretend to be interested in a conversation but couldn't take it anymore. I am fluent in French, this is the language I grow up with.
IR	Can you describe your settlement experience in the UK?
IE	We considered myself very lucky. I was given the new that my interview went well 10 mins after the interview ended and the Immigration Office retreated himself to consul his manager. He looked at me and said, Congratulation, your statement seems convincing and you should expect a positive response in the next two weeks by post. So, it was the case with all my family and my little child. All I had worked well for us.
IR	You did hear anything from the Home Office for over 2 years?



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IE	Oh yes. 2 years is nothing. People stayed 20 years in a limbo. I was among the luckiest people.
IR	Have you ever experienced any racism or discrimination?
IE	I am lucky that I, personally or my family never experienced any racism. You know these things are rooted in the system, you will never work it out. I always tell my children to remember where they come from, to grab every opportunity and do best out of it. They will face discrimination by the skin colour but remain focused and positive.
IR	What advice would you give something who is planning to come here?
IE	It's hard to advice as everyone circumstance and case is unique. I would advise them to seek creditable advice online, embassies before living unless they live in a hurry. Things have changed a lot. Europe is not what African people think it is, especially England It's not easy for us Francophone. Everything appears to be the opposite of what we know.
IR	what is your experience of English Culture?
IE	When it comes to the culture, it's a nightmare. As I said earlier; back home, it's all about respect within the family; we respect the elders, we respect our parent. You could not answer back your parent, you would listen and stand still. You need to be careful as you risk getting in trouble with authority. Children have lot whims over here; my son would come back home even after 8 pm while in Africa he could not. Here children have their rights and you as a parent could not do anything about it. Parent authorities are undermined in Europe. But we had to learn and adapt to British culture, I had set myself a discipline for my children. "They live as African when are At Home and They live European outside Home".
IR	Do you feel of the British Society?
IE	Partial integration yes. I do our best; talking about integration at my age is misleading people. I have learnt the language but my accent remains. if I have to learn English, it would be different to children born here or those who arrived at a younger age. They can easily adapt to the new environment. As for food; I'm used to Congolese food, like fufu, Kwanga and so on but it's hard for me to get into chips and chicken; I do my best but it's not my thing, I'm a conservative and I like my Congolese Cuisine. It's also a way of preserving African Culture, cuisine and Congolese way of cooking.



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	In the other hand, I befriended people from other countries, and I learned great deals of other cultures.
IR	How is your relationship with the rest of Congolese community and its culture?
IE	<p>Congolese community in Europe is very diverse, we came from different background, each of us has his way of thinking and education but we have to live together.</p> <p>Congolese people have “love” between them, they do support one another in most circumstances. This is something really positive within Congolese community overseas. On the other hand, there is “hate”; Congolese does not like to see other progress; so, you have to balance and try to live in peace with everybody.</p>
IR	Do you think that Congolese community is fully integrated?
IE	<p>They try their best as any other new communities. We have problem with the weather while back home, we used to a hot weather, which is different to western weather. Also, when it comes to food, language and life style; it’s not easy for us to be fully integrated.</p> <p>We miss our culture in all aspect of life and if we had a choice, many would pack their suits cases and return back home. Being amongst the first generation, I believe those who are born here would have a different experience.</p>
IR	What did you learn coming to the UK?
IE	<p>It is said that “the World is a big book”. By travelling the world, have taught me a lot. I believe that was very important. Let me compare two or three things: In term of civilisation, science and technology, Europe is far advanced.</p> <p>An uneducated person coming from Africa, once in Europe, is automatically considered as civilised because of western way of living. Not everybody could afford to buy a car in Africa while here; you can have a car from just two-week wages.</p> <p>Education for children is free over here; it’s a great privilege for us, which is not the case in Congo. Way of living is different here than back home; e.g. modern toilet. Back home, children even adult will share their clothes between them because they are more people than they are clothes available. Therefore, everyone has to share. We would wear each other clothes while here everybody has their own clothes. In Europe, you do not have to struggle for material things in contrary to Africa but in term of culture and moral, we do miss Africa.</p>
IR	Do you have anything to add?



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IE	Not really. However, I would thank you for encouraging me to take part in this project. And would also thank your organisation for running such a good project. I fully support it.
IR	This is the end. Thank you very much for your time.
IE	Thank you to you too.

[01.00.01]

[End of Audio]

Duration 60 minutes and 01 seconds



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