

Francophone African

Oral History

Interviewer: Good Morning!

Interviewee: Good Morning!

Interviewer: I am going to interview you in the relation to our project "*Francophone African Oral History*". Can you introduce yourself please?

Interviewee: My name is Mamitsho Tomana Buwulu.

Interviewer: Where were you born?

Interviewee: I was born in Kinshasa but I grew up in Madrid, I went to Spain when I was 5 years old and I left when I was 16 years old to Morocco and then I stay until I was 24 years old and then I came here to join my Husband at that time.

Interviewer: Can you describe your family?

Interviewee: My dad was a Diplomat, and my mom was a housewife. I have 10 siblings, we were a big household.

Interviewer: When did you start School?

Interviewee: I started School in Kinshasa when I was 5 years old and then we went to Madrid.

Interviewer: In what language were you studying in Madrid?

Interviewee: We would go to French speaking School, my brothers and sisters were really protective of me at School.

Interviewer: After the primary School, did you go to secondary education in Madrid?

Interviewee: As I said, I went to a French speaking School, I did my Brevet there and when I passed to 1st year at secondary, I had moved to Morocco to do Literature.

Interviewer: Why did you choose Literature?

Interviewee: I love reading that is why I had chosen Literature.

Interviewer: How were you spending your holidays?

Interviewee: We would come to London very often and also sometimes we would have a vote whether to go to Paris to visit our uncle or come to London to see our aunt.

Interviewer: Did you have friends growing up?

Interviewee: Yes, I had a lot of friends and I am still in contact with some of them, from Madrid as well, we still talk on the phone, write on Facebook and WhatsApp.

Interviewer: When and why did you decide to come in the UK?

Interviewee: When I had finished my University studies in Morocco, I wanted to go to France or Portugal to pursue my studies but at that time it was a ban on students to go France to study, so I spent a year in Morocco not doing much. The main reason I came in the UK was because I got married and my husband was living over here.

Interviewer: Where did you get married?

Interviewee: We got married in Morocco

Interviewer: What was your first impression when you first arrived in the UK compare to when you arrived in Madrid?

Interviewee: I cannot really compare because I saw Madrid as a child but when I came in the UK, I was already an adult. At first, I did not really like England, it was hard; I had to make friends again and discover places, it was not easy at all. It had nothing to do with language barrier because I had studied English as my second language; I felt discriminated and marginalised as a person from African descendant. I did not used to it when in Madrid or Morocco, it was quite challenging to me.

Interviewer: Was it like sort of segregation?

Interviewee: Exactly.

Interviewer: When did you move to Birmingham?

Interviewee: We moved to Birmingham from Liverpool, in 2004. There was a branch of a London French speaking church here in Birmingham, so we would come go to church every Sunday from Liverpool to Birmingham. My husband was supposed to open a printing company in Birmingham and then we had decided to move over here in Birmingham. I moved first and then he joined me.

Interviewer: How did you manage to integrate within Congolese community in Birmingham?

Interviewee: Although I like keeping myself to myself but every time I am with people of my community, I am always smiling, curious, asking questions and I think that how I would mingle.

Interviewer: How do you socialise within African community? Do you go to parties, African shops, restaurants and Afro hair salon, so on?

Interviewee: I would disappoint you on this one, I am not a party girl; I do not really go out drinking or going to eat at restaurants. I prefer to cook at home and if I have to drink, it would be just a glass that's it!

Interviewer: How Birmingham has changed?

Interviewee: Birmingham has really changed, now it is more cosmopolitan but back then it was almost like a village, everything would closed by 5pm; it was quite depressing and boring but now it is more vibrating, lively and I think people are mingling more within communities.

Interviewer: Was there many Congolese people in Birmingham back then?

Interviewee: There was not a lot of Congolese people even though I did not really mingle with them but now I can see how the Congolese community has change for the better. There are more Congolese who are achieving great things, going to Universities, speaking English and working.

Interviewer: Let's talk about food. What do you prefer to eat?

Interviewee: I eat everything, I can cook African food, European food etc.

Interviewer: What kind of African food do you often buy?

Interviewee: I buy *Pondu*, tilapia, smoked fish and chicken. I eat everything, I am not a fussy eater.

Interviewer: Does your community knows that you can speak Lingala?

Interviewee: Yes, I suppose they know I can Speak Lingala.

Interviewer: How was it difficult for you to integrate within British Society?

Interviewee: Finding a good job was challenging, usually people would expect you to do the cleaning job, I have nothing against that but I did not want to do cleaning, so I was dealing with the printing business that my husband had set up, although we had to close at some point and then I would work for a charity called *CADA (Central African Development Action)*, I had worked there for two years until the project run out. After that, I stayed at home a little bit and then I started working as a health care assistant and I was promoted manager later on.

Interviewer: Going back a little bit. Why did you have to close your own printing business?

Interviewee: It was a bit complicated, clients would not trust us as African; it is only when they see our work then they would put their trust on us and possibly refer others to us but business cannot be run with words of mouth, unfortunately we had to close.

Interviewer: You were discriminated from British people?

Interviewee: Yes, Africans go to Western shops but Western people do not shop from Africans.

Interviewer: After closing your business, how did you manage to find a new job? Was it through an agency or job centre?

Interviewee: I tried job centre, I would go interviews; although my names are difficult for them to pronounce. After many interviews, nothing really would come out of it.

Interviewer: You said that you like what you are doing now. How long have you been doing it this job?

Interviewee: 4 to 5 years now.

Interviewer: Do you think that you will stay longer on doing this job?

Interviewee: It will be difficult now that I am pregnant, once I give birth, I don't think I would be able to work.

Interviewer: But you would go back working when the child reach a certain age?

Interviewee: Yes indeed.

Interviewer: What is more important for you in life now?

Interviewee: The most important thing in my life is my family and then comes my job.

Interviewer: Can you describe the first day of your job as Health Assistant?

Interviewee: I was a bit nervous and I did not know how to handle the *key safe*, so I had to call my manager to explain it to me but overall it went well.

Interviewer: What do you like doing on your spare time?

Interviewee: I like classical music, gospel and sometimes I would listen to the radio.

Interviewer: You said that you go to French speaking church, do you socialise with other members of the church?

Interviewee: Although I like to mingle with people but at the same time I am very private person as well and I do not like people trying to take over my way of life. I do not let myself to be influenced by a Pastor or any church member and many people do not like me being that way. I left the church.

Interviewer: Where do you go to church now?

Interviewee: I pray at home with my family.

Interviewer: How do you keep in touch with your culture?

Interviewee: I still eat Congolese food and keep in touch with those in the Congo, I follow the news as much I can.

Interviewer: What is home for you? Is it Spain, Morocco, England or the Congo?

Interviewee: Home is where the heart is and my heart is here in England.

Interviewer: Is there anything you miss about the Congo?

Interviewee: The only thing I miss the most in the Congo is my father and some of my sisters and brothers. I visited the Congo but I am sorry to say that, it is not a place I would like to live in.

Interviewer: When was the last time you went to the Congo?

Interviewee: It was 2 years ago.

Interviewer: You would like to forget about the Congo?

Interviewee: No, I did not say that but I said "It is not the place I would like to live"

Interviewer: Why?

Interviewee: I think mainly because I grew up where I was more comfortable compare to the Congo.

Interviewer: Where would you like to retired?

Interviewee: That is a very good question, being myself around British health care system, I wish the Congo would get better and stable enough to allow me retire over there, maybe in 20 years to come.

Interviewer: How many languages can you speak?

Interviewee: I speak English, Spanish, French and Lingala.

Interviewer: You said that Birmingham was like a village when you first got here. What did you not like?

Interviewee: I did not really like Birmingham when I moved in, I was not impressed at all.

Interviewer: What about now?

Interviewee: I like it in here, Birmingham is my city and my home now.

Interviewer: What do you think of cohabitation between minor communities?

Interviewee: I think people still keep themselves from others but there are some people out there that embracing other communities as well.

Interviewer: Is there anything I forget to ask you about?

Interviewee: not really.

Interviewer: What do you think has changed the most in your community? In term of mentality.

Interviewee: Congolese people are more open now than before, they have friends from other communities as well but before we used to think of what people may think or say about us, but that perception has changed.

Interviewer: Apart from the discrimination you have experienced in printing business, have you physically or verbally experience a racial abused?

Interviewee: Me, personally No, maybe because I can make myself understood but I have heard of from some people experiencing that. It has not happened to me.

Interviewer: Thank you for your time.

Interviewee: Thanks for having me.