

Francophone African

Oral History

Interviewer: Today is May the 2nd, 2017, I am going to interview you in the relation to Francophone African Oral History project. Good Morning!

Interviewee: Good Morning.

Interviewer: Can you introduce yourself please?

Interviewee: My name is Shomari, originally from DR Congo in South Kivu province, Fizi district. I am currently living in Birmingham and I work for a charity called **Care Link West Midlands** that helps people who are going through difficult time.

Interviewer: Can you talk about your family, your parents, sisters and brothers?

Interviewee: I am from a family of 7 children, my mother and my father are still alive, they live in Darussalam in Tanzania since the Congo war that started in 1996, my father is a Pastor, my mother is a manager and myself, I am involved in religion as well, even though I work for a charity.

My childhood was characterised by ups and downs, I was born in 1964 in Fizi, then we had moved to Tanzania due to the rebellion movement of Laurent Kabila, we had lived there for 4 years. The education was not good in Tanzania, so my parents had decided that I should go back to the Congo to continue my studies.

Interviewer: When did you start your primary education?

Interviewee: I started my primary school in Kalemi in East of Katanga.

Interviewer: And your Secondary School?

Interviewee: My Secondary School was still in Kalemi and my Higher education in Kamina for 3 years, I did English & African culture, after that I went to Lubumbashi to study International relationships.

Interviewer: What did you do when you had achieved your education, did you work?

Interviewee: After my Higher education, I started teaching in primary School because I did Pedagogy and after I have achieved my education, I had taught English in Kamina for a year, 2 years in Lubumbashi, then I would be promoted as Prefect of Studies in Kalemi at a Protestant School. Because there was not a good salary, I had decided to stop with teaching and I started working in Development in Fizi, I worked for an NGO called SOCODEFI (Société de Cooperation pour le Développement de Fizi), it was sponsored by Netherlands.

Interviewer: How many years did you spend at SOCODEFI?

Interviewee: I spent 3 years at SOCODEFI, I was Secretary of Directions, just after General Director, we were working with the Cooperatives. I had started interesting in politics and had started working for human right and my Director sent me to Netherlands for a training courses in Human Right & Peace, I went to La Haye for nine months and then I went back to the Congo.

When I went back in the Congo, I started organising conferences, speaking about peace and the people social life but it was not easy at all, I had difficult times with the military etc.

Interviewer: How is your relationships with your brothers and sisters?

Interviewee: My relationships with my family is positive, my parents live in peace in Tanzania, my brother who is a doctor lives in Kalemi with his family, my other younger brother lives in USA in North Carolina and the rest of my sisters and brothers live in Tanzania, they are all well and we are in touch.

Interviewer: Let's go back a little of bit, how were you spending your holidays? When you were young.

Interviewee: I would spend my holidays in town, around the neighbourhood and I would also do Biology experimental with teachers, I would also spend time helping other students with their studies. In Kalemi, it's more agriculture and fishing that people are interested in.

Interviewer: When did you come in Birmingham?

Interviewer: I arrived in Birmingham in April 1996, I came here as a student, I Studied Conflicts resolution (always in Peace domain), I wanted to do something good for my country.

Unfortunately, the situation in the Congo was terrible in the way that I could not go back, the Country was not safe, that's why I had to stay over here until now.

Interviewer: What was your first impression when you came over here?

Interviewee: There is a huge difference, in Europe, people live in peace, people are safe here compare to the Congo where the killing happen more often, rebellion and trouble can be occurred at any time. There is also big difference in infrastructures, here things are well organised, health service, education and social life are way better than in the Congo. In the Congo, there is more corruption.

Interviewer: What really made you, personally decide not to go back to the Congo?

Interviewee: Personally, I was involved in campaigning in making peace in the Congo and most of my activities were against the government, so I was receiving threats from the government both from Mobutu and Laurent Kabila's regime. I could not go back to the Congo to continue my activities because I was myself a target.

Interviewer: Let's talk about your integration within the British society as you had decided to stay here. What was the difficulties and opportunities you have come across with?

Interviewee: The opportunities was a lot, first, I felt peace, I could sleep in peace and not worried about what could happen to me. I felt welcome here, even though not everyone is

nice but overall, I would say that British people are nice, you just have to stay out of trouble. I really liked Anglican church, they had helped me mentally, physically and financially.

Over here in the UK, there is security, peace and you can study for free. To integrate, you have to study something that would give you opportunity to work in your community, so I have done HND in business administration, and after that I went to study Human resources management at the University of Wolverhampton and I have completed my Master degree. I have worked for a housing organisation that provides accommodation for homeless people. To be integrated here, you have to behave like British people, have the same mentality as them otherwise, you would get deported.

Interviewer: How did you find your first job? Was it through an Agency?

Interviewee: I got my first job thanks to a Somali guy that was working at the refugee council while I was an Asylum Seeker, he used to look after us and when he stopped working at the refugee council and started his own business alongside another guy from Uganda, he gave me a job as the manager of a hostel, I at that time I had my permission to work, so I could work at night and go to the University during the day.

Interviewer: Why did you stop working there?

Interviewee: I did not really stop, I was given another role by the same people in another project called Sungate that was dealing with refugees from Iran and Iraq, the government did not have enough accommodation, so they have to collaborate with other organisations, I had worked there for 5 years as coordinator until the organisation had financial problems and got closed.

Interviewer: What did you do then?

Interviewee: With my experience working with refugees, I started contacting different agencies in my community and we have started our charity Care Link West Midlands, which provides help to refugees.

Interviewer: Are you married?

Interviewee: Yes, I am married with two children, everything is fine now.

Interviewer: How do you keep contact with people back home?

Interviewee: I keep in touch with people I had worked with at SOCODEFI, friends and family, via social media, telephone, television or people who travel to Africa bring us information; I have never gone back to the Congo since but I have visited my parents in Tanzania.

Interviewer: What about the local community here in Birmingham? How do the community keep in touch?

Interviewee: We have a network between different organisations within our community, we organise workshops, events, parties and we also assist each other in difficult times like death or sickness. We also have a Congolese guy (AB TV) that works in media, he has YouTube

channel and Facebook account that give information regarding what is happening in the community.

Interviewer: let's talk about Birmingham, you came here in 1996, almost 20 years. What has changed?

Interviewee: Britain is conservative, there is changes in some areas and some areas are still the same, I have notice more changes in transport, with the new technology, there is Tomtom system that helps to find routes; there is also changes around the city centre, now there is a new Library building, tram routes. There is more people, which makes it sometimes hard to find a job but overall Birmingham is still the same.

Interviewer: Let's talk about your family life and your professional life. How do you spend your time?

Interviewee: Now, I am more dedicated in church service, I am a Missionary Apostle at a church called Universal Church of Jesus Christ, it's spiritual church that sees God as a spirit but not as material god. We have a branch in Scotland, Sheffield and here in Birmingham; I am the church leader here in Birmingham, I spend more of time doing church services and being with my family.

Interviewer: Are you a Pastor?

Interviewee: Names are just to describe a role, I am a Missionary Apostle, I have a mission from God, once my mission is accomplished, I would step aside from my role, it is different to Pastors.

Interviewer: 20 years in Birmingham, do you think of going back to the Congo?

Interviewee: Yes, return for a visit but not to stay. I would like to contribute for my country even though I am British now but Congo is still my birth country. From what we are seeing happening the Congo right now, I cannot see any changes in 10 or 20 years' times.

Interviewer: We are reaching the end of our interview; do you have anything to add?

Interviewee: I am really pleased for the opportunity you have given me to talk about my personal life, I am honoured. Please let us know when you held the event exhibition.

Interviewer: Thank you very much

Interviewee: Thank you.