



World in transition: Migration and Trade

Moving to England.

Narrator:

African people have been settling in the UK since the 17th century as a result of the slave trade. Other maritime connections saw small communities of Africa people settle in Britain's port cities and in London. The number of African's coming to Britain grew substantially after the Second World War. When people from the British colonies were invited to work in Britain. A third period of migration began in the late 1970s, when many Africa economies experienced tremendous decline. Many Africans fled human rights abuse. And political intolerance by escaping to Britain.

More recently many Africans fled civil wars, like that in Sierra Leone. I visited Liverpool, long a centre of Africa settlement, to learn how African migrants draw on diasporic connections. To help them settle, and how they're links back home help development there.

Narrator:

What's it like to leave your native country and begin a new life in the UK?

Yenkin Borbin:

The dreams that I had for England, was in the way you're supposed to be. I was very very frightened to come. Most of all because I do not know anybody here. It was very very lonely for me, coming here. Because I had to leave all my family and friends. I didn't know there would be any black people in Liverpool, or in England. I just thought it was going to be my dad and I.

Narrator:

Yenkin Borbin was raised in Sierra Leone and cared for and cared for by her grandmother until she became too frail. Although she had never met her father, who settled in Britain, he brought Yenkin here was she was 17.

What were some of the issues she found most difficult when she first arrived?

Yenkin Borbin:

It actually took me a while to even know other people. And I couldn't speak English very well. There's nobody here for me to speak my language to. So when I came into her, I met my family for the first time. I was very nervous. I couldn't understand what they were saying. Because I felt they were speaking so fast for me, that I couldn't understand a word they were saying. And I also find the English language, the way they were speaking was completely different to the way we were taught in Africa. I think it's the Scouse accent isn't it. It was a very funny way of speaking English to me. I usually have to tell my step sisters, you don't say I feel like a sandwich. You say I would like a sandwich. I got used to it after a while. But as you can see my accent hasn't change. It's just I got mixed with the African and the Liverpoolian together. I thought this is my opportunity to do something. Probably go into school and have an education that I always dreamt of. But it didn't happen. When I came, because of my age, apparently in England you have to stop school at the age of 16. So I couldn't go to school.

Narrator:

Unable to continue her education, and faced with language difficulties, how did Yenkin cope with the problems she encountered?

Yenkin Borbin:

It wasn't easy. I did want to go back to school, but I struggled a lot. I learnt as much as I can by myself. Watching the telly and getting experience with children programmes. The way I made friends was working at the Adelphi Hotel. I met a girlfriend. I explained to her the problems I was having at home, with my dad and my step mum. And I explained to her why I couldn't cope with the way things were any more. But I had nowhere to go. And she then offered a place in her house.

I always in my life wanted to be a nurse. But I felt because of my qualification I couldn't actually achieve that. I went into the care work, care for elderly people. And I worked in nursing home before I actually got a job in the hospital where I am now.

have got my own family now. I met a man who is from Ghana. He is a school teacher here. And I've got my own children. We are very education and are doing very well. I always push them to learn and tell them how important education is. Because I didn't have that opportunity. But my children have. And I do push my children to get the education that I didn't have in Liverpool.

Narrator:

Having lived in the UK for many years, what was it like to re-visit her native Sierra Leone? Did it feel instinctively like home?

Yenkin Borbin:

I've been back to Sierra Leone once since I came to this country, in 1982. I've never been back since. I didn't know where I was. I was actually completely lost. This is my home. I've been in England longer than I have been in Africa. But I still do remember the people there. The life that I had, while I was there, it doesn't mean because I'm in England I should forget. I never forget.

Narrator:

Yenkin has been actively involved with Sierra Leonian networks in Liverpool. How did she begin forming associations?

Yenkin Borbin:

I actually met a Sierra Leonian, who then had a birthday party, and invited me to go. That was the best thing she ever did for me. Because there were quite a lot of Sierra Leonian's that were there, which I never knew existed in Liverpool. In Freetown we all get together when there is a birth, or birthdays, things like that. And then decided we should do something by forming our own organisation. Which we then started. Spoke to many members and they all wanted to get involved. I am one of the Committee Members. And my role is going around visiting elderly people, who can't come to the meetings. It's a Sierra Leone member association, for most Sierra Leonians that are in Liverpool. But we're not just doing it for Sierra Leonians in Liverpool. We also involved Sierra Leonians from Manchester, who also have got their own organisation. And trying to get involved with us here. And we also sort of team together. We are not only trying to have black Sierra Leonians, but anybody who wants to join is welcome to join. As long as we're all together, as a party, able to look after one another. Every Sierra Leonean have got their own little projects, which they do. And it may be selfish, but at the moment, for our families only.

I do send money home for my mum every month, if I can afford it. To help to pay for her rent and also medical fee. Because my sister wasn't well recently.

Narrator:

Clearly there are strong ties with Sierra Leone for Yenkin. But would she like to settle there one day?

Yenkin Borbin:

I would like to return, but whether to settle would be very difficult. It would be a bit strange. But I am sure, it wouldn't take very long to settle back.

Narrator:

Yenkin's struggle to negotiate her identity as a Sierra Leonian and build a new life for herself in England. How does her experience contrast with others in a similar situation? Doctor Henrietta Collier, of Liverpool John Moore's University, came to England over 30 years ago.

Doctor Henrietta Collier:

I left Freetown, Sierra Leone in 1969 aged 19 years, just after taking my 'A' Levels. And the main reason for leaving for educational. Because I came to London to study nursing. At that time there wasn't a School of Nursing in Sierra Leone. So it was a good opportunity for me to come to England.

Narrator:

Regarding England as a good educational opportunity and coming with positive expectations of life here, what was it like in reality?

Doctor Henrietta Collier:

I thought England would be a very welcoming place. I sort of expected in a way the same sort of friendly family atmosphere that I had grown up in, and that I was leaving behind. And I certainly expected it to be a land of opportunities.

When I came, it was quite different. It was a completely different culture. The first few months were quite hard. Because I found the isolation difficult at that time. I am one of seven children. And it was the first time I sort of lived on my own. I suppose that the culture and the society that you've left is very different. And it's not just being on your own. It's just sort of missing

that open door policy really. I think that's perhaps at the very core of the loneliness that you feel.

Narrator:

Having left a large family behind, how easy was it to build up relationships with other Sierra Leonians, during those early years?

Doctor Henrietta Collier:

I did have some contact with other people from Sierra Leone in the early days. Particularly in the summer. We would get invited to weddings and functions of other Sierra Leonians. So I did meet quite a few other people. So the summer was good. But the winter was cold and lonely.

I have got other family in the UK now. My mother joined me about 8 years ago. Particularly because of the civil unrest in Sierra Leone. She didn't really mean to stay when she first came. But I think so many things have been destroyed for her. Memories and things like that. And mine as well. My younger sister who came to England probably 14 years ago, she came over to study. But has since settled down with a partner and they're living here.

And I have also got my two children. My daughter is aged 15. She is finishing her final year at Southbank University. My son, Dionne is the younger. He's studied Civil Engineering.

Narrator:

With the new generation of Sierra Leonians, those who've been born here. Is there an issue of cultural identity?

Doctor Henrietta Collier:

My son went through a phase when I think he was quite confused. In his mid teen years. Because of course he didn't really know what he was, identity wise. At the moment he's., I think he sees himself as an Africa, in the UK. Even though he spent most of his life in the UK. He wants to go back to west Africa at some point. And he's got this burning desire to contribute to some form of development. Which is one of the reasons why he chose to study engineering.

My daughter, on the other hand, has never been bothered really. I think she perhaps like me, in many ways, would fit into wherever she is. And they do have a lot of contact with the family back home. They're still very close. There's a lot of contact my phone. We do video various occasions. Sort of weddings, Christmas, family occasions. So there's a lot of exchange of videos. So there's a considerable level of contact.

Narrator:

What about more practical involvement with her former country? What cultural traditions form part of her life in England?

Doctor Henrietta Collier:

It's a certain amount of traditional and cultural aspects of Sierra Leone that perhaps we are bringing back here. You always helping the family in Sierra Leone. That I'm sending some money for a cousin. And it just seems so alien to others to understand why I'm doing that. Or if my cousin's roof was leaking, after the last civil unrest, because she had some bullets go through her roof. And obviously it make holes in it. And they're saying how come you're involved in that. But it's not the sort of thing I can turn my back on. I cannot. And none of those are things that I have to do, within this sort of British cultural context. And it's not just a one way thing. I know that if at any time, either myself or my children or some other member of the extended family needs help, there would be somebody else there to give that help.

Narrator:

Whilst strong family associations clearly exist, how does Henrietta involve herself with the wider Sierra Leonian community in the UK?

Doctor Henrietta Collier:

At the moment I am involved in a relatively new organisation. The Sierra Leona Association of Merseyside. We would like it to be a first point of contact for the Sierra Leonians who come to Merseyside. We also envision it as a sort of home from home type of association. Where if at all possible, whenever we can, we will respond to needs in Sierra Leone.