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*So this is Lwam Tesfay, interviewing Vasant Karia, on Wednesday seventeenth of April, two thousand and thirteen (2013). Er, Vasant, can I ask you to start off by spelling me your full name, and your [loud music/ringtone?] date of birth?*

Vasa xxxx, V A S A N T, K A R I A. nineteen ten, nineteen thirty four (1934). [music continues to play].

*Ok. Can I ask you, um, where were you born?*

I was born in Karachi. It was then India. And um, and then I left as, as a refugee in nineteen forty seven (1947), to India. Other part of India. Yeah, and tell me what else?

*Yeah, and um, when you left er, Karachi…*

Karachi, nineteen forty seven (1947). It was the partition of, of er, India, India was divided in to two part. So one became Pakistan, and one became India. So I, I moved to India side. In nineteen forty seven (1947).

*Um, and do you have a large family?*

I, my own family, me, my, my mother. We the only two. But my mother’s side, we had a big family. My side nobody, my father died when I was um, one, thirteen months old.

*Ok. And when you first came to Uganda, where did you stay?*

I, from India, I came to Tanzania, landed in Mombassa. Moved to Nairobi for a few months, and then I moved to Kampala. Which is Uganda.

*Yeah.*

In nineteen fifty four (1954). On the ninth of March. And then, I got married, settled there. And lived there. Until nineteen seventy two (1972).

*What was er, Mombassa like when you were there?*

I just stayed there for three, four days, on my transit. And then from there to Nairobi, where I worked for about six month. And then I moved to Kampala.

*What were you doing, for work?*

In Kampala I started working with, with er, an English company, in, for few months. And then I worked for a company called Krup, German Company for about a year. And then I started my own business.

*Those, those two jobs you were doing before you started your business…*

Yeah.

*What kind of um, xxxx.*

Job was selling.

*Sell.*

Selling machinery and machinery parts.

*Ok. And when you set up your own business, how did you manage to do that?*

I started the business with electric toothbrush. Selling toothbrush.

*Ok.*

And from there, gradually I built it up, er, in to Chemical xxxx I don’t know how, but I did.

*Did you have friends that you started the business with, or did you do it alone?*

Hmmm?

*When you were starting the business, did you start the business alone or with some of your friends…?*

Alone. I was alone [coughs]. Alone I started it, alone at the age of twenty one. And um, I was importing, marketing, selling everything by myself. And my wife was helping me.

*And before Idi, Idi Amin left er, made the announcement, you left in nineteen seventy (1970)?*

In nineteen seventy (1970), the government of Uganda declared, a sixty forty. It means, you keep sixty and forty person in Africans. Or the government. So I thought, it’s no use staying in the country, the government interfere with the business. So I came to London, I left my family here, bought a house. A small house in Wembley. And then back to Uganda to, to my business. And, and…

*How many children…*

I was travelling, two and four a week, every couple of months.

*When, what year was that sixty, forty policy?*

Sixty, forty policy came in nineteen sixty nine, nineteen seventy (1969, 1970).

*Hmm. And why do you think that the government introduced these kind of er, policies?*

They wanted um, you see, so it happened that Indian were controlling the ninety eight percent of the economy.

*Hmmm.*

And government of Uganda at that time wanted local, indigenous people to do some business. So they thought this could be a good idea to take forty percent, and then give their own people in the business. But that didn’t work. That never worked. So, by that time, Obote was overthrown. Idi Amin came in to power. And um, within two years he decided to expel Indians. Because he realised, that Indian would not give up easily. And he [coughs], and he was right probably, I think he was right. I personally think. Hmm. You was asking, it was the question, indirectly to Indian community. They give about two percent to five percent share to our, your, your staff. And teach them business. But, so it happened that, xxxx ok, because there was no proper communication between two community. The government and the Indian community.

*What was the relationship like between the, the Indian and, and the government?*

Initially the, the relationship with Indian was very good. Very friendly. And he, used to talk with Indians, used to love Indian community. But then, what he wanted, Indians were not willing to give. He wanted Africans to be xxxx, or you can say, Africans to get in to business. Which Indian community, at that time, had no reason xxxx. You know, er, they all xxxx business people, small business people, some big ones. Very big, xxxx small business, because they didn’t want to give up xxxx, any business xxxx. Mr Amin became xxxx I think.

*And what was the relation like between the Ugandan Africans and the Ugandan Asians?*

Ugandan Asians, very healthy. Um, healthy means, they were employed by Indians, um,,,Africans were happy living Indian um, control of the economy. But they wanted something in their hands, they want it. So, when Idi Amin came in to power and he started talking about the elected, of course they like.

*Do you remember when he made the announcement?*

It was I think, er…was it August? I think it was May, April, May…April or May, nineteen seventy two (1972).

*Yeah.*

I’m not really sure about the dates.

*Xxxx June, July, because most of them left by October…*

No, August.

*August, yeah.*

Last, last xxxx.

*So March, April…*

By September, yeah. He, initially, he call a meeting in I think, March, April. About xxxx Indian people in. All, industrialists and business people. And he requested, here again, that do what I am saying, make African your partners, give them little business, I’m not trying to give them everything, but give something. He did that request, but it didn’t work. Again. So…

*Why do you think that was?*

Greed. It’s always money that xxxx. And there was no reason, that today, if I go back to Uganda, I make sure in any African country, I, I want to be, I change my opinion. I’ll make African my partner, anyone. A local person. A local indigenous people. But that time, we didn’t have the reason. We didn’t far, see far. But what happened is, for good because, I think, this my thinking, that all Indian who came here, regain, what they did was support children, um, also gradually we re-establish ourselves very good here. And now when the good days came back to Uganda, some people went back, and re-building in Uganda again. And today, the Indian community has made a good progress in Uganda. Same Indian people who were already deported, a few they went back, and they made a fortune over there. And now, in the meantime, Africans are well established, so they are happy. The local Ugandans are very well established now in Uganda. They control the majority of business.

*So when er, I’m just taking you back to after the announcement, announcement was made…*

Hmmm.

*And your family were still in Kampala…?*

No, my family was here, xxxx my own family, my wife and my children are here.

*Ok.*

My children went to school, we had a house. Um, but I was there. Xxxx panic.

*Hmmm.*

A lot of panic. First thirty days all, first, xxxx people thought it a joke. So nobody took seriously. When they started counting days, Idi Amin, then people become serious and it was too much hanging around, er, Indian government refused to take Indians.

*Why?*

Because they didn’t want to take liability. They don’t take.

*I guess it was a shock for them as well?*

It was a shock for them, probably. And the government at that time, was not really taking Indian xxxx whole colony. They say anybody with Indian passport can come. But people with British passport, is not our responsibility. And we all had a British passport. British and Ugandan passport. So, luckily British government took us, and we came here.

*What was the, the atmosphere like in the city, in Kampala when er…*

In earlier time?

*After the announcement, yeah.*

Very comfortable, very, very peaceful in place, very peaceful.

*And after, after the announcement?*

After the announcement, it was a lot, lot of um, hated xxxx started. Er, local people, local Ugandan opportunist, thought that when Indian leave we can take the business, we can take the things. So there was, little bit of um, xxxx put up with it, I don’t know. Er, it was um, there was no give and take. They just wanted to take everything. Xxxx

[lady - hi]

*Hi, how are you?*

You want stop it?

*No it’s ok, no problem, nice to meet you.*

[lady - nice to meet you]

*My name’s Lwam.*

[lady - xxxx]

*I’m just interviewing, want us to carry on…*

[lady -yeah, yeah, yeah].

We are talking about Uganda.

*[laughs]*

Yeah.

[lady - yeah, yeah.]

You need me now?

[lady - no um, xxxx xxxx]

XXXx, coming.

[lady - yeah]

Ok

[lady - whats the time?]

[coughs] Ten to twelve.

[lady - oh]

Xxxx

[lady - you want anything?]

*No, I’m ok, I’ve got coffee.*

[lady - sure?]

*Yeah.*

[lady - any cookies or something?]

[coughs]

*No, no I’m fine. Thank you very much.*

[lady - ok.]

*So what were we saying…*

Hmmm.

*So, so the, the Africans, some of them started taking advantage of what was happening?*

Yeah, they realised that they are going to get everything free.

*Hmmm.*

Indian people wanted to sell their own belongings and, all the shops xxxx for stocks. Like in my company, I had a huge stock of fertilizer. And other chemicals, was about um, half a million dollar maybe. And nobody want to buy, because they knew it was going to come free. After ninety days, if you go. They can have it. And they did.

*Hmmm, so nobody would buy it?*

Nobody would buy.

*‘Cause they would get it for free?*

Yeah. So everybody xxxx just leave. Lock with the lock and leave.

*And, and you had, you still had a house in Kampala?*

I had my own house in Kampala, yeah, I was just building a new house. I was living in a, an apartment like this, big apartment like this. Er, building house, which was nearly ready. We had furnished it, but we never lived there.

*And was this a part of Kampala where the other er, kind of like, upper class, middle class er, Asians were living as well?*

Yeah [music starts playing] they were, that time there were many area where, it, mostly city centrals, was totally xxxx and Europeans. Africans, Ugandan African were living outside the area. Except the servants, and working class. Er, but now, you see, now everybody lives together.

*In the city…?*

Everybody. Have you been there?

*No. Not yet.*

You should go and interview few people there!

*[laughs] Yeah, if I can get a ticket it’d be quite nice! So when er, when the Ugandan, the Ugandan Asians started to come in nineteen seventy two (1972) you were already, you came back with them, even though you were settled, you had a British passport?*

Yeah. Yeah, so many people got in to here, but I had a British passport. And er, luck, luckily I had a British passport. ‘Cause my father was born in Karachi, in the British Raj, so I had my British passport.

*And what was your role in helping some of the Ugandan Asian community members?*

Where, when they came here?

*Yeah.*

We er, had a refugee camp here, they putting them in a camp. Government has appointed Praful Patel, myself and um, Xxxx Sahir,xxxx the ward. And um, they given us money to make sure they would be get settled. We have settled many families, church had given us houses, flats, on a low rent. Which we had relocated to people. We made sure they settled. We helped them to raise loan from the bank, but xxxx network bank, it was very helpful. I think we, we all, about, twenty hundred families who started business here.

*Um, how did you get involved with the resettlement board? Were you already established with Praful or…*

No, Praful, no. Government are, had approached Praful Patel to start that. But Praful were, already um.

*How did you, how did you know him?*

I know him from Uganda because he’s from Jinja, and I am from Kampala. My wife and he was studying in the same school. So I know him since nineteen, early fifties (1950s). And he has been a great social worker. Helped the Indian community. Unfortunately he left for India, otherwise he would have become a minister I think.

*[laughs]*

He’s a very powerful man, you’ve met him, no?

*No, no, not yet, I haven’t met him.*

He’s amazing. Very reasonable man, xxxx xxxx. He, he stood as a MP but he, he lost it. And then he went to India, since last twenty years he lives near Bombay.

*Hmmm. So were the resettlement board…*

Then it was wounded up. Once we settled everybody, many was dispersed, and we xxxx.

*And how was the, the relations with the, the British government and, and the people working on the resettlement board?*

Very, very helpful. Every ministry, they come and mostly they were very helpful. They, they are. They, they really went out of the way. Even lot of local people in various part of England, er, approach us Uganda resettlement board, they sent some people to all, would help them.

*And what was the feeling amongst the, er, the Ugandan refugees, I guess when they came here, because…*

It was a mix feeling. Like Leicester was against, Leicester, Birmingham, those places were against Indian moving there. But many other parts, Surrey, Sussex, many church, other, they helped us to settle people.

*And how do you think those, those er, Ugandan Asian refugees, when they came here, having to um, accept some of the, the…*

Oh sorry…

*Oh that’s ok, no problem.*

I xxxx xxxx motorbility…

*[laughs]*

No. xxxx first time xxxx. I have a twitching. You know twitching?

*Twitching, yeah.*

My twitch eye, and I just took in, just about three months ago, the botox.

*Hmmm.*

And I was fine, but last two days. I think it’s coming back again.

*Yeah, you should go to the doctor…*

I shall xxxx botox, yeah.

*‘Cause sometimes it takes a little bit, a while er, the effects will come back after.*

Yeah. And I was told everything, three, four months take again, and now it’s already three, four months.

*Yeah. Ok. So you’re due to go back?*

I, I think I have to!

*[laughs]*

I was trying to avoid, ‘cause I don’t like to take it, chemical injections.

*Yeah.*

But, for injection here.

*You must be an expert in chemicals! [laughs]*

Hmmm?

*I said you must be an expert in chemicals.*

Yeah. Right. Um, what were you asking me?

*The, the resettlement board.*

Yeah, the resettlement board was, once everybody got settled, and camp became empty, we wound it up.

*Where were the camps?*

Er, there were many camps. Um, I don’t remember all the names, now.

*I know that one was in um, Greenham?*

We used to go there, we used to go there. Newbury, we used to go to European camps in er, Sweden, in Norway…

*You went to Sweden?*

The some, some people were there, so you just went to see them. So of the Ugandan people went, from Uganda to Sweden and Norway. So I, I just went to see them, to, they’re there to settle.

*So you went there to see how they were doing…*

Yeah.

*And support them?*

Yeah. And there are many, many Ugandans that settled in Sweden and Norway, and Finland.

*And how did they respond to you, in, as a, you know, individually when they see another Ugandan being able to help…*

They were nervous. They were very nervous, without money. But er, struggling to survive. But, Ugandan Asian community has made it, lucky, luckily. Maybe time was right, to come here you know.

*Hmmm. So would the, resettlement board…*

[coughs]

*Um, did you, how long did you continue to be involved? Until, until the end of the year or…?*

Ninety, no it was to er, nineteen…seventy three (1973), by the March, April, is, activity was going down. And I think we wound it up by the end of the year.

*And what kind of other things did you do to, to, did you continue to play a role in the community?*

Yes, xxxx, um, is Indian community has got many different divisions. So, within my community, I’m xxxx work, yes. Um, in particularly we have er, um, lot of activities going on between women’s side and men’s side, yeah, a lot of activities. We have, we meet here every month, every week, twice. In social club. All, over sixty five. And er, we enjoy, the meeting, and discussing and what not.

*Hmmm. What was your observation, when, after the, they were in the camps and they came out, the first couple of years of settlement, what, how was your observation of the Ugandan Asian community?*

Ugandan Asian community made up their mind that they are to, they realised that er, it’s not going to be as easy as Uganda. It’s going to be difficult. So, they started looking for, good jobs and gradually started buying small shops. Come to us for a loan arrangement and we help them. With, through Natwest bank. That, xxxx xxxx helping the people to get a loan, house loan, business loan, went up to nineteen seventy four (1974), seventy five (1975). We kept on helping them. Where will they put us, we took them back and teached them. Showed the bank that they would pay back. And er, thank God, everybody paid the bank back. Only one default. Because people worked sixteen hours, eighteen hours a day. And made the, made their future.

*How, how many people do you think you helped er, open businesses?*

How many people we must have helped?

*Or maybe even at that time.*

Initially, we must have helped thousands of people. But xxxx xxxx about this, but thousands. Family wise, we can say about…three to four hundred families, and we most of settled in business, in business. Helping them to buy small shops, small business. Start something.

*Is that tradition of helping one another…*

In, that was until recent in Uganda, and xxxx African there. All, every body would help everybody.

*Where did that value come from?*

I don’t know!

*[laughs]*

The community, I won’t be able to, because I was very young when I went to Africa. It was no, never there in India. But this practice was there in Africa. Er, maybe because, Indian moved to Africa a hundred year ago. So they, there was a, such a thing in Africa, you won’t believe it. If I’m short of money, I can, er, make one phone call, and money goes in. You don’t have to go to bank. Everybody helped everybody. And people pay back.

*But it wasn’t like that in er, in India or Pakistan?*

No, no never. Never. Because only in East Africa, even in Kenya. I don’t know about any other part of Africa. In Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, it was a great thing. People helped people. Bank was even sometimes surprise at how this community is managing, it’s like Jewish community. Jews, England, when they came here, even now they help each other.

*Very close, very tightknit…*

Very tight, very tight, control. Er, that quality, we have lost here now. Nobody helps nobody now.

*Hmmm, do you think the older generation still have that tradition and it’s just lost in the second generation, or…?*

Lost, they’re lost. I think only older generation are like this, even I helped so many people here, but I don’t think anybody would help anybody now.

*Hmmm.*

That culture is gone. And Idi Amin was saying that to us. That if you people want to go to England, go. He was saying, openly, he said publicly to us, that if you people want to leave, England go, you can go, go to Britain, go to India, and you lose your culture. You’ll lose your…you’ll lose your family. And I think today many Indian family, have gained education, money maybe, yes. Good established businesses. Er, maybe a few member of parliament, maybe a few lord, but what we have lost is, a culture.

*Hmmm.*

And we are losing more and more every day. That’s the regret.

*So in a way he was a little bit right, when he said if you go somewhere else you’ll lose that..*

Yeah, yeah, he was right. I think he was right. He, Idi Amin, I think he was something, but I, I don’t put it down if you can, ‘cause I’m telling you…

*Yeah.*

Put it down in such a way.

*Yeah.*

Idi Amin was a, he came from a town, from that town there was a girl who use to work for me. So he used to come to my office twice a week, three times a week, when he was army man, he was not a president. He used to pass through my office and drop in to see the girl, not me.

*[laughs].*

Because it was, she was from his town.

*So this was an Asian girl, or Ugandan African?*

She was a mixture.

*Ok.*

Er, Congolese and something. I don’t know what type they call. And she was working there and he used to come and see her. Er, hello, and give her some, some drink for her or something, and then started saying something to me, sometime, hello Mazay, Mazay means old man, how are you. I as young but he used to call me Mazay!

*[laughs].*

So he used to pass, never used to talk to me much, just like this. And um, he used to take some fertilizer, some chemicals from our office, for his farm in, his swimming pool. And he used to be, he never ask for anything for free. Never. After month or two, he would come back and say how much money I owe you, and bring the order. And Amin used to pay us. So he never, he, he was not trying to grab anything. And he was, he was really a very jovious, humorous man. He used to joke with us, in the office, used to come, with my staff. Because I had all African staff, so he used to joke with them. And I used to see from my cabin, where, I never realised he would become president of Uganda.

*Yeah.*

He was a small army man. From there he rank and he rank and he went up, so he used to come to our office for, for, three, four years regularly. Every week, every month, five, six times. Just stop it, stop the car, come in see the girl, he was very fond of women so…

*[laughs]*

[laughs] He was very fond of her.

*I heard he’s got like er, something like fifteen, twenty wives or something like that!*

He was very fond of girls, and the girls, and this girl was very beautiful.

*Hmmm.*

She used to be one of our, er, junior typists in the office, in there xxxx very qualified Indian secretary, and then under her, she used to work. So, er, I knew him quite, fairly well. That, that way.

*Yeah.*

I think, I don’t know. It could have worked, but I think this has worked better because, I’m very, I personally very xxxx Ugandan Asian, Ugandan Indian, Indian African, helped gain the business knowledge, and they are in the business now. And let us spread it right over Africa. In Kenya was the same situation. But then, Asian or Kenya changed their mind, and they started taking African as partner, and today the both communities work together. I think similarly we could have worked together, but we didn’t.

*Hmm. I as er, I’ve heard a lot of the, a lot of the Asians when they were in Uganda, they used to invest a lot in where they were, so if they were in Uganda, they would invest in Uganda?*

Yeah. We had a lot of xxxx, I never had any investment outside Uganda. Except when, when in nineteen seventy (1970) I bought a house here, for a few thousand pound. I put thousand pound deposit and I bought a house. That was my xxxx.

*Was there, any, any particular reason why you thought you’d buy a house in England before?*

Because I want to bring my wife and children here for education.

*Ok. So you were planning to send them anyway?*

So, I, I had made up my mind that instead of sending four children on their own, and the situation I thought something is coming. So nineteen seventy (1970) we decided to move. Make a move at least. Run a business there but make a move, gradually wind it up. But er, that time never came to wind up.

*Hmmm. Yeah, imagine if you’d stayed in Uganda until nineteen seventy two (1972) you’d be in a, in a different position.*

Xxxx xxxx.

*Perhaps if you didn’t buy that property in Wembley…*

Hmmm.

*You’d be in a different position, if you didn’t invest, even small, small investment in to the, in to England.*

Yes, I could have been living in, xxxx I would have stayed in camp.

*Hmmm.*

And move, moved to a charity house or something.

*Yeah.*

But luckily that was not my case. For many Indian people had houses here, a lot of people came, to the airport, we picked them up, we gave them lift and took them to their own houses. Er, so there were many people who had a property here, many, many Ugandan Asians. It’s not that everybody came as a penniless.

*Yeah.*

But many, you can say, actually about thirty, forty thousand people, means about, twelve thousand family, [music] I think, eight thousand family were very hard in finance. Three, four thousand family had a money, some money. [music continues].

*Hmmm.*

Somebody had a million and somebody had a few thousand. But they had money. [music continues]

*And in terms of like, like um, of culture and identity, how did, did the Asian community here keep their, their culture, were they still very closely connected to, to India or Uganda, or, what?*

There’s not much connection to Uganda. Except people who are doing business with Uganda. Few people, who ex-Ugandan, they go there. And otherwise there’s not much connection now. But er, with India, nature is our mother, mother country so, we have a, um, we visit the Guajarati festival.

*And when people started to have families and you know, raise their children, even for you personally, did you used to tell your children a lot about your experiences in Uganda, did you tell your children a lot about…?*

Yeah we talk, yeah, we talked about it. Even my son he’s now thinking, my eldest son is now thinking to go back to Uganda. And do some business there. Just, doing the business, doing the business in Malawi and Zambia and everywhere. Nairobi also, he’s doing business. So he’s thinking about Uganda.

*Hmmm.*

[coughs].

*So for you, where, when you think of home, which you know, which place do you think of? Do you think of, of er…*

I don’t think of Uganda.

*You don’t think of Uganda?*

I do think of it.

*Oh you do think of Uganda?*

I think of it, because, I built up my business from there. I learned my business from there. Er, I got married there. My four children are born there. So Uganda is, was my home, and er, if um, if I had choice I would have gone back. But I had no choice.

*And what was it like the first time you went back?*

First time when? After?

*Have you been back to Uganda, yeah?*

Yeah, I’ve been back er, when Obote came back to power, I went back. I was the first Asian to go back, first Asian.

*Really?*

Yeah. Because um, I was very close to er, xxxx xxxx Obote.

*How, how did you know him?*

I was xxxx working department [music]. Xxxx.

*What does EPC stand for?*

[music continues] UPC, Uganda People Congress.

*Ok.*

Yeah [coughs], xxxx wife to.

*Yeah.*

[coughs] Um, I went back in nineteen eighty two (1982) when Idi Amin, er, Obote came back to power. I and one of my friend we were first Indian to land, before even he came, he was flying from Zambia, and er, I was asked by high commissioner here to go there. So I, I flew from here, and I was there, that time condition was very bad. Oh my God! Hotel rooms are rubbish. We used to eat er, just, er, a bowl of potatoes, only, we, for a few weeks. There was no greens available, nothing available. Well, Idi Amin was thrown out, situation was really bad.

*Hmmm. And what happened to the businesses that, the Asians left there xxxx….*

All the businesses there broke, how do you say, they were taken over by local Africans, but they are located to, to, Idi Amin, through the military, allocated businesses to all the relations and families.

*Of his, his family?*

Offer, this your business, this your business, this your property, that your property. In my house, which I built and never lived, there were eight family living there when I went back in eighty two (1982). In six bedroom home, in a nice, small part. There were eight family were living in the whole, whole thing.

*This is in central Kampala?*

Yeah. Yeah.

*What were you thinking then? [laughs]*

No I went there, saw they were living there. Each room there, they were cooking and eating, and children were in my ground. Out of eight family, I think there were about thirty children were in the ground playing. And er, I told them it was my house, so they all came out and says, children were turning to their parent, the Wasungo has come, Wasungo is European. Even Afri-, young children they didn’t knew what is the difference of Indian and European. They all call Wasungo, xxxx is, foreigner.

*How do you say it?*

Wasungo.

*Wasungo?*

It means foreigner.

*Ok.*

So they, children they started the, look the foreigner has come. So when the chil-, elder people came out, I told them this is my property. They say, thank you, come in. [laughs]. They were very xxxx, come in peace, they offered me a tea and everything. When I told them, this property I built and never lived, and they say we are sorry, but we were given this room to use, and we’re using it. If you want, we’ll go out. I said, no, no, no, you stay. When xxxx.

[lady - yes]

Ok. Xxxx

[lady - yeah]

When you come back I may not be here for a little while.

[lady - xxxx xxxx]

Xxxx xxxx ok, you’re car easier xxxx.

[lady- yeah, ok, ok, bye!]

*Bye bye, nice to meet you, take care!*

Xxxx xxxx take your car.

[lady - ok yeah].

So, then I saw them, and I say no, and I never reclaim my property. I never reclaim. Because when I saw those children, and family live in each room. Cooking, living, sleeping, being everything. I said, how can I take the property back. [door slams] I, I never claim my business back, I never claim anything.

*Nothing?*

No.

*Was, do you know…*

It was the right thing, I think. Who were xxxx have been located. They have xxxx, they have taken good care for twenty, thirty years. How can I take it back. That was me, that was my thinking, many people took it back. I didn’t. My battery factory was run by a very, prominent Uganda, Ugandan African guy, who, who was small partner in my company. And he managed it, and he, he grew it up from there, he became the richest Ugandan African in Kampala. He was my two and a half percent partner. He built up Empire from there. What I laid, he got it.

*Did you meet him, when you back to Kampala?*

I met him, he still come to my house in Xxxx we used to eat together. Um, James Marona, he was the, very prominent Uganda, er Ugandan er, local borned African. Very clever boy, young boy, uneducated, much like me. He hardly had any, primary school education, as much as me I think probably, if not more than me. Something there, we both had a primary education. And he, he became two and a half percent partner of me. And he took my business away, I, in fair I left it to him, you run it. And he made it. How can I ask him to give me back.

*Yeah.*

He offer me some money, I said no, I don’t need money. [pause]

*So you left, left the business…?*

He offer me a million xxxx that time, million xxxx that time was about…even a thousand pound, about…fifty thousand dollar. I say no, I don’t need that. You keep it, keep for your family, you grow from there. You are growing. You enjoy it. And I never went back. Since that day I haven’t been.

*So you’ve only be to Uganda back er, back to Uganda once?*

Xxxx. Lot of people there are asking me to go back, a lot of Ugandan friends are asking me to come back, but I don’t want to go. Because I, if I go I leave everything, I won’t come back.

*[laughs]*

I love Africa. So if I go, I leave. I won’t, I xxxx I won’t come out.

*Hmmm. Can you see yourself going back any time soon?*

We had planned to go, to be this month, again it’s, I cancelled it.

*Yeah.*

I had planned to go this month, because one of our friend, has built a big house, and he is having a um, house warming party. In Kampala. And he wanted me and my wife to go, so we thought we’d go to Mombassa for a few days, and then go to Uganda for a few days. We are booked for nineteenth of April, and I cancelled it.

*Why did you cancel it?*

I cancelled it because er [music], um, one thing because, first, my eye problem. [music continues] I have to take this.

*No, no problem, take it, it’s fine.*

Xxxx xxxx. Xxxx. [Goes to answer phone - talks on phone for 25 seconds, then tape paused].

*Carry on recording, is that ok? So you were saying the, the high commission was full of people queuing up to get Visas?*

Yeah, every day, it was a big queue. Huge queue. And, gov-, British government had put special people there. I, I think they flew from London, some of the people, came there to help. And um, they were very, very considerate. In, very considerate, they gave a lot of people, who had Uganda passport, eru, they gave them back Brit, British passport, everything. British government was, very helpful. Very helpful. One thing is xxxx. Only my, my reservation about the whole thing is that um, we have lost, and we have gained. And we are not going to lose, what we are going to lose is our culture, and our children. Oh, I give you a funny example. I was sitting with my Grandchildren yester-, er, three days ago on Sunday, I think. Yeah Sunday, Sunday afternoon. And , they don’t know some of the name of the vegetables. They know only, everything what they seen here, because that, xxxx born here. They don’t know our culture, they don’t know, even we try to tell them, they can’t because they are learning in English in the school.

*Hmmm.*

And think what we are going to lose, the identity of um…our religion, our community. It will be big loss, we’ll gain yes, education for young children, or our first generation. My children are educated. My grand daughter is xxxx, from there on I don’t know. I don’t know. It’ll be like um…mystery community.

*Hmmm. When, when er, when you in, in Uganda, what was the sense of identity there amongst the Asians?*

Very close community.

*Yeah.*

In, we used to leave, there was no, everybody was living their own way, like Christians have their own society, Hindus have their own, Muslims have their own, they all different, very happily, and very amicably.

*Were there Asians that kind of separated within their own groups, or were they all kind of mixed together?*

Mixed together. Mixed.

*And they were all respectful to one another or…?*

Even, even um, um, better. Affluent Africans society, Ugandan society, Indians were mixing a lot. But not in business much. They grew the business together, yes, but there was no big partnership or nothing like that.

*Socially they would have, or…?*

Socially, very little. Very little. I tell you [laughs], you’ll laugh probably, the, there was a minister called, William Claimer. He was minister of commerce. Very close friend of mine, he became close to me. He was hardly about, five, seven years senior to me, maybe more, little more. I used to go to his home, quite often. And, when his first daughter was born, second daughter maybe, he asked me to become the Godfather. And my community, they were laughing at me, they, you are stupid, they say. He has asked me, what, what am I losing, I’m not losing anything. And he, his daughter used to come to our house in London, until she was married and settled back in Uganda. So, very few people used to mix socially. Even they didn’t mix, to be honest with you, they were also not for mixing. So it was not one sided, it was both sided. You had to make it.

*Hmmm.*

One has to make it, you can’t just um, ‘cause there’s no, what do they call it. Such a warmth. Business they used to do yes, because everybody want to do business together. I don’t know, I don’t know how to put it to you, but...yeah...oh xxxx xxxx, Indian community wasn’t xxxx, generally in Africa was very narrow, but since Idi did this, I think whole thing has changed. The xxxx is problem. People think now it large.

*Hmm, the Asians, the Asian community?*

Asia yeah.Xxxx In Nairobi you can see, very healthy partition between er, Kenyan and Asians. This was not there before. So I give little credit to Idi Amin that he has changed the face of Africa. East Africa at least.

*Hmmm. And when you were talking before about the Asian communities, how they were very tight knit, do you remember what celebrating religious festivals was liek in Kampala?*

Oh my God. You can see Diwali or er, Holi and Festval of Light. It was a big celebration. Which is now happening in London. In Southall, particularly. Similar to Southall. It took us year, forty years to do it. Over there we used to do it because I only moved in nineteen fifty four (1954), so I only know from there.

*Yeah.*

Big celebrations. Even now in Uganda, the Indian community is very well settled again. And prospering.

*But even when you was there in the nineteen fifties (1950s) and sixties (1960s), all the Asian groups were, were celebrating their religious...*

Yeah.

*Festivals together?*

Yeah everybody used to celebrate religion, and invite eachother, yes. Very much. But local people unfortunately, there was no, great er, um, rapport between er, Ugandan and Asian business community. It worked xxxx, we used to work together, say my office, we had er, a few Indian, couple of European, employed from England. And I had many Afri-, local Ugandan employed. From Kenya and Uganda. And they were all mixing.

*Hmmm.*

In office they would. But outside, no. In office they would sit together, have a beer together, have a lunch together. But, family wise, they were not connected much, er, funny. It was really very narrow xxxx.

*And you said some, some in Southall you see the same tradition that they keep some of them in Uganda, is being done in London.*

It’s happening here now.

*Yeah, did, did that happen um, straight away, in the beginning when, when you were part of the resettlement board, you obviously saw...*

No.

*The other Asian communities...*

No, no, no.

*Setting up slowly.*

No it was not then. Now, again is happening here. And I think um, that may be a remedying factor.

*Hmmm.*

But England is no more England now, isn’t it. England has become now, international.

*[laughs].*

Isn’t it right or wrong?

*Yeah. International.*

The way, who do you call English men here now? I mean if you, you can see...

*[laughs]*

They only in the city of London, in a bank.

*[laughs]*

Banking area.

*Yeah, you’re lucky to find them there.*

Yeah, xxxx find them here.

*If they’re not European.*

Hmmm. They all running it! [laughs].

*[laughs]*

Like it or not, England has become very like America. It’s becoming like America now. Course that means, there be no culture here. No xxxx, no xxxx civilise. And now, xxxx xxxx how long I will be I don’t know, but er, I see er, I see a lot of problems.

*In the community?*

Yeah. No doubt.

*What kind of problems?*

We’re lose identity, there be no identity, there be no community like, Patel or, these or there, at the moment we are so many thing now, it will become one. And, gradually we start losing identity. Our children will be brought up, not know. My grandfather, my grandson doesn’t know my father’s name.

*Really?*

Yeah. He don’t want to know.

*He doesn’t want to know, or he doesn’t know, do you think?*

I think they don’t care.They, from the, xxxx they have not known this. The school curriculum is so badly er, they are, they are teaching them only to be selfish.

*Hmmm.*

You study here?

*Yeah.*

So you know what I am telling you.

*[laughs]. Yeah, this is er...*

They say I love you, I love you, but that doesn’t mean anything.

*Hmm. They don’t know about their own identity you mean...*

Yeah, yeah.

*Their family, their history.*

And, they don’t, their own interest.

*Hmmm.*

I was telling one, my granddaughter, my gran, my granddaughter will be lawyer this year, she’ll be qualified lawyer next year. I was telling her, sit down with me, two hours a week, two hours a month even, and I tell you the whwole story of, where I come from, ‘cause I’m the only one, I have no brother, no sister. No uncle. Only my four children and my family, that’s my family. Whole family.

*Ok, I’ll have a look and you can tell me who they are...*

Yeah, I’ll show you. All my family. Now, I tell them, I tell you so at least you know who we are. She, they don’t want to know it. They never came back to me. They come to see me everytime, but, they never raise again. I raised it, I told them if they take an interest, I’ll give them history. But they didn’t have interest. Now I don’t blame them for that, because they have not learned this. They, they’ve not learned this.

*When you were raising your children, you, you and your wife, what kind of things did you do whilst you were raising them to keep that er, identity alive?And the values that you were raised with?Or even the story of, you know...*

You see when we came here, we came virtually, luckily I had resources, many people didn’t. But, to re-establish myself, I had to work very hard. I used to go to my office four o clock in the morning every day, in London, central London. Four o clock I used to be in the office. For good, six, seven years.

*When you, the business you had here was that a chemical business as well?*

No, here I started a very different business. Because chemical business I had a lot of um, support from big manufacturein Europe. But when I came here, they were all held their own office here.

*Hmmm.*

So they didn’t need my service. So they didn’t give me an agency of xxxx. So I enter in to business of er, er, denim wear. Jeans.

*Ok.*

Jean is a big business here, I saw a light there. And I had a business, I opened an office in Great Portland Street, with some partners. And er, I used to go to office early morning, four o clock. I used to leave my home by three thirty. I used to go early becuae to see my work, and then, after nine thirty, ten o clock, to go out to sell. And meet people. Salesman. When I do business, do the accounts, and come home every night, eight, nine o clock.

*So you were working kind of, sixteen hours...*

Six, at minimum.

*Yeah.*

At minimum I used to put in sixteen hours. And also on Sunday, xxxx xxxx. Saturday sixteen hours. Sixteen, seventeen hours. And sometime, travel, three country in one day, like go from here, got o Brussel. Brussel, do the work, fly to Rotterdam, or take a train to Rotterdam. Rotterdam, at night got to Hamburg and stay in Hamburg. And come back next day. To do business, to sell the jeans.

*What was driving you, what was keeping you xxxx....?*

Because I need to try, I need to...give you typical example, when I land in Uganda, I had no money. I made my money there. I used to travel economy class, then gradually business class, and then first class. From first class, I became again, economy class. So I wanted again to rebuild my empire. Rebuild and see, make sure the children got good education. Private education. And then go, brought up my son, brought up my daughter. My, three of my children, and all my grandchildren, have studied in private school. I haven’t send them to any public government school. Why, I tell you. Because I have never paid a tax here before, so I take, why should I take advantage of free service.

*Hmmm.*

I have taken social security, never. My mother died at the age of eighty eight, I never took her pension. Never. No. Only I take now, my pension, little bit pension because I worked here, I paid my taxes, so I take.

*I found that when I’ve been interviewing other, other interviewees, they say they never liked to take...*

No.

*Anything.*

Even in the, I never took a free TV licence when my mother need, my mother was over seventy five, never. Because where you have not paid tax in the country, how can you get, try to take money out xxxx.

*Hmmm.*

Out of security. Social security. That was the Uganda culture, that was the east, Uganda and Asian culture. Never take for nothing. Always give and take. That was the Indian culture in Uganda, that is what we are losing here now. That is my, my biggest regret in my life. Personally for me.

*Hmmm.*

I don’t know about others. Others are all, maybe, mainly are they, money, making money, money, money, money.

*And your, your children, and, are they very much familiar with your, with their history?*

Hmm.

*Your children?*

Hmmm.

*You, your er...*

My two sons and my daughter in law, yeah.

*Yeah. And well you were saying, your gran, your granddaughter wasn’t very enthusiastic to learn about, did you tell your children when they were growing up, all the time er, instilling in them the same values...?*

I had a very little time to tell these, but they know, they know because from my life, and my mother. You know, I used to, used to tell them all. Xxxx sixteen hour work...

*You was working a lot, yeah.*

I started because we had office in Nigeria, office in er, um, Dubai. So I used to travel a lot.

*So do you think that cul-, that culture that you were talking about that’s been lost, has been lost from the second generation?*

Xxxx, slowly slowly lost, and I think third generation, really have no culture left, no culture at all. My, my, my first generation no, second generation no half the way, and there, next generation they will be zero. They will know nothing. They be lost xxxx.

*And, and this is because er, being brought up in somewhere diverse like Britain?*

Yeah. And I don’t blame, anybody. I don’t blame them, er, the country or I don’t blame my children for this, or grandchildren for that. But that’s the way. So, what you leave behind, you leave behind.

*Hmmm. In xxxx, a funny story of one of your time in Uganda?*

Hmmm, funny story, you want to know?

*Hmmm.*

Well, ok. When I was walking, I got married, and my first child was being born. My wife was taken to hospital...and um, I had no money to pay. I was short of money, I give a funny example.

*[laughs].*

Clearly you laugh.

*Is this before you, before you had your empire?*

Before I had that, this very first, in nineteen fifty six, fifty seven (1956, 1957). And er, they was one European gynaecologist, who was, who delivered my first son. I told him, I said look, I don’t have money, what can I do? I can’t pay to hospital bill, I can’t pay your bill. He said, your xxx, my bill you can pay anytime, but hospital I can’t help you. I said fine, so I decided how to do it. I went to the hospital, I, I took my baby in my hand, and xxxx xxxx. That nobody saw it, and my wife also walked out. Without paying bill. And we went home, and then I went back to hospital, and I told them, I said look, I’m sorry. But I have done this.

*[laughs].*

But I will pay you when I earn. And I get my salary, I, I’ll pay by installment. And I paid. But that was the funniest part, I had to suffer in to that. I was, in that level, from that level, I built up.

*So you made sure you never took anything for free?*

My father never left any me, anything to me. Nobody has given me er, er, one single time in my life. I’ve never taken for anything. I’ve given to people, I’ve never taken.

*What, does that, does that value exist now, not, not with this generation, but even amongst your peers?*

Mmmm...my...

*In what way has it changed, living in Britain for you?*

No, most of the Indian family, have, they have it behind them, they xxxx.

*Hmmm.*

My father died in Karachi in nine, when I was nineteen days old, nineteen, er, thirteen months of age. I moved to India as a refugee. We cam to Uganda, I came penniless. And I made my own money, my own way. So I built my family. But many people, them not. Xxxx xxxx, they did that.

*Hmmm.*

I don’t know how people mess it up, but I did this [claps].

*And now it’s been, I think it’s forty one years now, since the expulsion, nineteen...*

How many years?

*Forty one, this year?*

Yeah, forty one, forty years.

*How do you think it should be remembered?*

By whom?

*By, um, well, by the, the, by yourself, by the Ugandan Asian community, you know? The experience of Ugandan Asians.*

Uganda Asian? Well, only one way, what we’re done here is, we have contributed, er, hard work. Even, Royal Family has acknowledged, that this community, coming from east Africa, Uganda mainly, have given us some different reason. Looking after parents, I looked after my mother. What will happen to me, I don’t know. What’ll happen to my son I don’t know. But I did look after my mother, until she died on the last day. Er, so we, we, do that. We don’t take undue advantage of any benefits, they still Uganda Asians contribution. And hard work as well. I don’t know what else, you can think. If somebody may have told you, I don’t know.

*No, that’s pretty much what xxxx xxxx contribution...*

Hard work mainly. We have contribute, and...if I’m not wrong, today the, quite a large percentage of er, revenue, taxes paid by immigration. I, I hear it’s seven percent, I like to xxxx some of our institution was talking about it, I’m not sure. You can look it up, if you want.

*Oh it sounds, um, it sounds believable! [laughs].*

Lot of, lot of Ugandan Asian help built up the empire here again, from nothing.

*Hmmm.*

From nothing. I know a family, who was a very small, small, shop keeper, in Uganda. Er, can’t even think of name for them.They are the biggest wine merchant, the wine and liquor merchant in England. In England, in second biggest in the world. They are based in Xxxx. If you see their xxxx, there’s xxxx of it. And they had a small shop, in Jinja. Not even in Kampala. Small shop. And the four children now xxxx house, each are worth fifteen million dollar, xxx pound. They drive car like, ten car in the basement. Other family er, the father was, how do you say it, he was going round with er, snacks and sell the snacks shop to shop and house to house. And today, they are the richest builder Indian family in London. Er, xxxx, have you heard of Xxxx.

*No.*

You should interview them.

*Yeah.*

They had no money to pay for education of children, the father. The children are very fortunate here. They are, they are one of the billionaire family, Ugandan billionaire family, yeah. They live in a, er, palace here in in, Denham.

*What I find really interesting is, when you were telling me yeah, you used to work eighteen hours a day, you used to get to your office for four o clock in the morning...*

Hmm.

*With the, the majority of the Asian, Ugandan Asians that have worked very hard to achieve this really high, high level of success...*

They, most of them, yes.

*Yeah. What, what is like the main components of that...?*

The main thing is er, we believe in serving, we don’t waste money, we don’t overspend. Er, we spend within limitation. And um, hard work. So when you work twice of everybody else.

*Hmm.*

You can make it. It’s simple, theory. Even I tell my grandchildren, even now, that when you are studying at college, at school, get up in the morning at four o clock, and start doing your study, you will be ahead of anybody else.

*Because what’s, the most, the thing that comes out the most of the Ugandan Asian project er, stories, is that this is seen as a role model, for refugees to...*

Yeah.

*To work hard and to you know, there’s er, there xxxx xxxx....*

This, this is what Jewish community when they came here...but unfortunately, now we’re coming here, are going to social security and claiming money. All the new people, Polish and this, Romanian, Albanian and who ever. Er, somebody is anybody who is coming, they just coming here, for what? NHS? Social security? And housing? You get shelter, you get money to xxxx, why they don’t come? We, in Uganda Asians, we never took any advantage, never. No. Not the one family, I don’t remember one family claiming any money coming here.

*Hmmm.*

They always so proud to work. My sister, my cousins sister, my, my mothers brothers daughter, they were very wealthy in Uganda, she used to work in Dunlop factory on a factory floor. And today, she died in cancer, her two sons are multi-millionaire. So they lost in Uganda, she again worked here in a, seeing her husband, the both used to work in Dunlop factory in Burnley, every morning they used to work, six o clock, and come back at, they used to some time, two shift. [music plays]. My cousins sister.

*No problem. [music continues].*

[music plays again] Hello? [Leaves room talks on phone for 1min45 seconds, then returns]. My wife is late, so they are phoning me xxxx [laughs].

*Oh! [laughs].*

[laughs] You want to use bathroom or anything?

*No I’m ok...*

Feel free, if you want more drink or anything?

*No, I’m fine thank you!*

Ok.

*Thank you.*

Tell me, what else do you want to know?

*Hmmm, so do you, you feel more Ugandan than you feel British?*

Um...how can I say to you? [silence] I am British citizen, so I can’t say I’m not British, but, at heart yes, I am...even an Indian.

*Hmmm. And your children?How do you think they see themselves?*

Mmm...one of my son will say, yes, he is Indian from Uganda. Other one will say I am, I am not interested!

*[laughs].*

And I don’t know what two daughters. Of course they want you to see their, their, um, their um, birth place. So we can, when did we go? Yeah we went for a day. In ninteen...

*Eighty two (1982)?*

No, in eighty two (1982) I went for a business.

*Ok.*

But there after, I was in Nairobi, so I took them by er, small plane for five, four, five hours, it was just to, show them the birthplace, it was in nineteen eighty, eighty five (1985). Yeah, eighty five (1985). I took all my four children, to Kampala, just to see, where they were born.

*Hmmm. Who, who’s er, request was that? Did you want to show them?*

It was their, they want to see, they want to see where they are born. And I just took them, to see there, this is Kampala. There after they will not talk about it.

*Really?*

No. Because...my youngest daughter once she came here, she was one and a half year old.

*Hmm.*

She was in, baby cot.

*Yeah.*

Virtually. Nineteen seventy (1970) they came here. So, they been to Kenya three or four times thereafter.

*Do, do you still have family living in Kenya?*

Yeah my, my daughter in law comes from Kenya. My eldest son, married a girl in Kenya. So, we go there, when occasions, are there. So I was xxx now, going to go now, and go to Mombassa with them. And then we go to Kampala. But um, I didn’t, I really didn’t go because I though I won’t be er, happy to see...you, you want go, you want to remember the happy memories.

*Hmmm.*

You don’t want to, just go there and forget it at once. That’s why I’m not going to be honest with you.Sometime I feel that I wish I had gone back...but then, I could have lost xxxx family.

*Hmmm.*

My whole family, my, my mother’s side family is here. I’ve been born in my mothers side family, because my father died, so they took me. They looked after me and my mother. My mothers side family. So somebody connected to me, my mothers side family, and my mothers side family is very large, and they are all here.

*All of them?*

Yeah. We meet every week, all cousins we meet every week. Ever week. Xxxx In every way xxxx from. That is our generation.

*You’re very close?*

But our children, they meet once in a three month.

*[laughs].*

Maybe, maybe. They used to meet, usually once a month, once a week, once a month. Gradually one in two, three months, and now maybe twice a year. Because they are married, they have their own life connections, and this connections and so on.

*Yeah.*

It’s the same, but what is happening?

*Do you think, do you think that’s the biggest loss of the...?*

Yeah. Xxxx is going, definitely, there is no question about it.

*What about the ethic of hard work?*

Hmm?

*The ethic of working hard...?*

Xxxx.

*Business.*

Is going also, for next generation, they don’t, they are more er, they talk about more holidays, more fun. Why would you work? [1:10:19.6]

**Interview details**

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**Project: Ugandan Asians**

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