

Learning by Ear 2012

'Everyone's Different – Respect for Minorities'

Episode 07

The Pygmies of the Democratic Republic of Congo

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Characters

<i>Narrator</i>	–	m/f, about 30, english
<i>Marie Louise</i> (Mari Luis)	–	female, 40s, Kiswahili
<i>Charlotte Souzane</i> (Scharlott Susann)	–	female, 50s, Kiswahili
<i>Kavira Manimba</i> (as written)	–	female, 30s, kiswahili
<i>Mathieu Manga</i> (Mattjö Manga)	–	male, 15, Kiswahili
<i>Kazele Soheranda</i> (Kaselé Sso-e-randa)	–	male, 30s, French

Pronunciation:

Mutubé de Masulukwedé : Mutubé de Massulukuedé

INTRO:

Hello and welcome to another episode of Learning by Ear. Our current series is called 'Everyone's Different – Respect For Minorities', and today we're taking you to visit the Pygmies in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo. The Pygmies are an indigenous minority who live in small groups in the equatorial forest that spreads across several central African countries.

Generally, the Pygmies of this region of the DRC are very short and quite light-skinned. Traditionally, they live from hunting and gathering. But because parts of the forest are disappearing, they're losing their natural environment, and are often no longer able to live in this traditional way. Consequently, many of them live on the outskirts of towns or villages where they are frequently the victims of discrimination.

Pygmies are often regarded as primitive, and as a result of this stigmatisation very few people take any interest in their culture or their situation. But in Ngite, a village in the province of North Kivu, a collective of non-governmental organisations has established a Pygmy camp. Their aim is to help the Pygmies integrate better into society.

1. SFX/ATMO: Pygmy girls singing (continues under narration)

2. NARRATOR:

Here in Ngite, in the Pygmy camp Kubetsi, a group of girls welcomes us with a song. The camp is 250 kilometres from the village, and it houses 55 Pygmies from 16 families. They receive assistance in the form of lodging provided by the church, in particular the Community of Pentecostalists of Central Africa.

Song continues, then fades out.

3. NARRATOR

The Kubetsi camp is a place which, in the past, provided shelter to the grandparents of the Pygmies living here today. Before us lie a banana plantation, a field of cassava, a vegetable garden, and a field of beans. The Pygmies in the camp also try to cultivate products consistent with their traditional food, such as yams and marrows - because in order to survive they've taken up agriculture, even though it doesn't correspond to their traditional life as hunter-gatherers, who are first and foremost people of the forest.

4. CLIP 1: MARIE-LOUISE (Kiswahili)

“In this camp we cultivate beans, rice, soya, groundnuts and eggplants. We eat the fruits of our harvest, and when the harvest hasn't been good, we make do with gathering. And everyone works in the fields, women and men together.”

5. NARRATOR:

It's hard for any people to abandon their traditions for good. So from time to time the Pygmies of Kubetsi take up their bows, arrows and spears and leave for the hunt, as they did in the past, in the surroundings of the National Park of Virunga. But this park is a nature reserve; people are not allowed in, and hunting, of course, is banned! So those who cross over the border into the park find themselves thrown out by the guards, who sometimes even threaten to kill them.

KW begins

Not all of the things the Pygmies need for their daily life can be found in the camp. For example, salt for cooking, soap, and clothes are not available here. So in order to buy them the Pygmies work for other communities: they work in or clear the

fields, or they're employed as labourers in the oil presses, or as climbers.

But the Pygmies complain that they're frequently paid in 'monkey money', as Charlotte Souzane explains. She often works in the fields belonging to the people who live in the surrounding area and who define themselves as Bantu.

6. O-TON 2: Charlotte Souzane (Kiswahili)

"When we do work for them, they don't pay us well, and we suffer as a result. We work for two days in a row and at the end of it they give us half a stem of bananas and a little portion of fufu. If only they could pay us even just ten dollars!"

KW ends

7. NARRATOR:

In building the camp, the aim was to integrate the Pygmy people into other local Congolese communities, especially the Nande and the Mbumba. But relations between Pygmies and non-Pygmies are not always good. In some areas, Pygmies are regarded by non-Pygmies as sub-human.

Previously, when Pygmies visited non-Pygmies and were given something to eat, they were often isolated and served in a different location, in dirty places, sometimes even next to the rubbish.

This practice seems to be on the wane thanks to the teachings of the pastors of the church, which all the communities attend, as Charlotte Souzane tells us:

8. CLIP 4: Charlotte Souzane (Kiswahili)

“Now they give us our food on good plates. Before they would give it to us on leaves, right next to the bin. They said they gave us our food there so they didn’t have to put up with the smell of our bodies, which they said made them feel ill. But because we were praying together in church, we started to eat together.”

9. NARRATOR:

In other spheres, the members of these different communities get along well. At school, for example, Pygmy and non-Pygmy children study and play together indiscriminately.

10. SFX 2b: Football match (continues under narration)

11. NARRATOR

Here they are, in the middle of a football match, with Pygmy and non-Pygmy pupils playing together in mixed teams. The Mutubé de Masulukwedé primary school was originally built for Pygmy children. Today it also takes children of other ethnicities. This school has more than 200 pupils, of whom 26 are Pygmy. The Pygmy children study for free, whereas the non-Pygmy children pay a small amount in school fees.

12. SFX: Pupil reciting (continues beneath narration)

The Pygmy children are well integrated, but still there are some difficulties. Kavira Manimba is the teacher of one of the primary school classes.

12. CLIP 4: Teacher Kavira (Kiswahili)

“They pay attention in class, and don’t disturb even their non-Pygmy fellow pupils. During the dry season they prefer to go hunting with their parents. At the end of this period they come back to school and study normally again. They’re intelligent, but this absenteeism creates problems for them.”

14. NARRATOR:

The young Pygmy pupil Matthieu Manga is pleased with all the things he learns in school. For him, the camp in the village is a good thing.

15. CLIP 10: PYGMY MATTHIEU MANGA (Kiswahili)

“We follow a good course of studies at school, and we’re taught very well. It’s desirable for Pygmies to live in the same village as Bantus, and for us to work in our fields which are in different parts of the village.”

16. NARRATOR

But it’s still necessary to combat discrimination against the Pygmies, because, despite the efforts of the organisations working to encourage integration, unfortunately instances of discrimination still sometimes occur at a social level - for example, where love is concerned...

KW begins

Non-Pygmies may court Pygmies, but the reverse is not possible. And it’s shocking to hear that when a young Pygmy girl falls pregnant, the non-Pygmy boy and his family often refuse to accept

responsibility for the girl in question, so it's then up to the Pygmy parents to look after her.

This behaviour is explained by the contempt with which non-Pygmies regard the Pygmies. There was recently a case of this kind in Ngite village: a young man of the Nande tribe got a young Pygmy girl pregnant, and then abandoned her. Her mother, Charlotte Souzane, tells us what happened:

17. O-TON 5: *Charlotte Souzane* (Kiswahili)

“My daughter fell pregnant, and the boy who did it doesn't seem to want to acknowledge his responsibilities. She's my eldest daughter. We want this boy to marry her, but he's already run away, no one knows where to. The boy's father says he's prepared to have him arrested when he's found, to make him answer for what he's done.”

KW ends

18. NARRATOR:

Pygmy boys who feel integrated in Congolese society are willing to marry girls from other communities. But non-Pygmy girls seldom accept them. What might the reason be for this rejection?

Kazele Soheranda is the head of local operations with the Assistance Programme for Pygmies. He knows at least part of the answer:

19. CLIP 6: Kazele (French)

“When a Pygmy man starts thinking about getting married, about courting a Bantu woman, she refuses him simply because very often the material side of things has a role to play. And as the Pygmies are mostly poor... We think that if we combat the poverty of the Pygmies it will help them to recover their dignity, and they’ll assert themselves in the community, so this question of Pygmy and non-Pygmy won’t matter any more.”

20. Musical interlude (Pygmy song - CLIP 7)

21. NARRATOR:

Zero discrimination. That’s the slogan and the objective of the numerous organisations that work on behalf of the Pygmies. But the fact that discrimination does still exist is something that gives pause for thought. What, in real terms, is being done by these NGOs? Kazele Soheranda of the Assistance Programme for Pygmies explains his work to us.

21. CLIP 8: KAZELE (French)

“In our working strategy we take into account the aspects of the integration, promotion, and dignity of the native Pygmy peoples. And in all our activities we always encourage the Pygmies to interact with the other communities. For example, where education is concerned we don't want to create special schools for Pygmies. We prefer to encourage the Pygmies to attend the other schools so that they also assert themselves alongside the other communities.

KW begins

And it's the same where healthcare is concerned: they go to the health centres like everybody else, and we speak to the health centres about refunding the Pygmies' expenses. And in other activities too the Pygmies and the other communities are always together.”

KW ends

22. NARRATOR:

For the young Pygmy Matthieu Manga, pupil at the Mutubé de Masulukwedé primary school, this collaboration and mutual respect between Pygmies and non-Pygmies is very important.

23: CLIP 9: Pygmy Matthieu (Kiswahili)

“To live better on this earth we need to get on with one another. I think we should share constructive ideas for good cohabitation. In my opinion, this practice will put an end to discrimination.”

24. SFX: Pygmy girls singing

OUTRO:

And the young Pygmy boy Mathieu Manga's recommendation to all communities, Pygmy and non-Pygmy, for putting an end to discrimination also brings us to the end of our stay with the Pygmies in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The reporter was John Kanyunyu, and this programme was part of our series 'Everyone's Different – Respect for Minorities'. To find out more about the programme Learning by Ear, or to listen again to this episode or to others in the series, please go to our website, dw.de/lbe. Until next time - goodbye.