

Lilembi Buatshia - INTERVIEW

Speaker key

IR Interviewer
IE Interviewee

Speaker	Transcription
IR	Good afternoon Mrs Lilembi Buatshia
IE	Good afternoon
IR	<p>On behalf of Community Active Support (CAS), I would like to thank you for your time. My name is Jean Marie and I am a Volunteers from Community Active Support (CAS)</p> <p>This interview is about Bridging Cultures. A heritage project funded by Heritage Fund to collect stories of Congolese who migrated in East London.</p> <p>Can you please introduce yourself to our listeners?</p>
IE	<p>My name is Mrs Lilembi Buatshia, I was born in 1961 in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo formerly Zaire. My parents originated from Musamba, a village in Kwango Province, one of the now divided Bandundu province, Southern of the Democratic Republic of Congo. I was born in a big family. My father has 4 wives and 36 children. Oh yes, it looks strange to you, especially some of you that are born here in the West. It was normal during our time and it still happening now. I had a very nice childhood and always wished than I can go back to that period. When I go through challenges and I always wish for my father to be there. He is a superman to me. It's silly, isn't it?</p>
IR	Tell us about your education
IE	<p>I had a mix school education public and government. I started my nursery age 4 at a Public school called "Les Bambous" then went to "Lycee Bosangani-Sacre Coeur", for my primary School, but I did not finish the term due to strikes, I had to leave and went to another public school near home; then I had left there and enrolled to another private school. I did many of them. It shows that I had a lot of energy when growing up. From Nursery, primary and secondary education, I went from one Public school to another. I wasn't like others children who attend one single school throughout different levels. I wish I could have done that. Likely, I was able to finish my secondary education and graduated with a state diploma in Fashion design.</p>



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IR	You were a very energetic child? Did you have friends?
IE	Yes, I had had many friends, we use to be together during school terms. But it was quite difficult during holidays because in children were not allowed to go out very often; I could not meet my classmates during holidays at the young age but I could see my friends when I was in college but it was not that easy as parent were very strict. Every parent protects his/her child, always accuse someone else child to be the bad one, even though I was among the leader and pulling crowd.
IR	How did you get on with your siblings and your parent?
IE	We all get on fine despite being from multiple mothers. My father had 4 wives officially, a higher in the Force (Zairean Army force). He worked and travelled a lot and held responsibilities and duties throughout the country. We always suspect that he must had had more children that those we know. He is a very special Dad to I have a strong relationship with my father and strong bond with all my mothers and siblings. We are very closed all of us and keep in touch strong like rock.
IR	What did you study?
IE	I studied Fashion Design
IR	What motivated you into Fashion?
IE	One of my siblings studied and graduated in "Cutting and Sewing" at University. She was very stylish and was creating and designing her own clothes. I think was envious of her, not in a wrong way though. Let say I was very admiring her and very proud of her. She used me as her mannequin when I was a little girl, working with her, motivated me to get into fashion. My mother did also "Cutting and Sewing", she had Sewing machines at home which I would practice with and improved my sewing techniques. I had loved it.
IR	What happened next?
IE	I graduated from the Fashion School and thought of starting my own business. But finally decided to travel
IR	Why did you suddenly decide to abandon and leave the country?



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IE	<p>Things happen too fast and I never thought that I will ever leave my Country. I cannot really remember the exact date I am so bad in keeping dates. It was just after the sudden death of Laurent Desire Kabila, Congolese former president that the family saw things becoming uncontrollable that my parent decided to arrange for all of us to leave.</p> <p>I never thought of leaving Congo growing up and I can assure that I love the Congo and still miss it daily. It was not my will to leave my country; it was just circumstances that made us leave Congo, we left Congo rushing and fearing from our lives.</p>
IR	Did you arrive in the UK directly from DR Congo?
IE	<p>No, there is no direct flight from Congo to the UK. We first travelled to Johannesburg in South Africa, we were meant to stay there for a while at our cousin's home but it did not work out well. We were each given a lump sum of money and each and everyone went it separate way, except younger children who were cared by our mothers. We were a united family, used of doing everything together and found ourselves in a Foreign land and forced to separate. Its one of our worse experiences we have never lived. Thanks God that despite the struggle and the fact that we are scatted here and there, we finally found safety.</p>
IR	How did you travel to the UK?
IE	<p>I came by car through Dover. My agent had borrowed a French ID of a lady who resembled me a bit. All 4 passengers had fake Ids and we managed to catch our ferry from Calais to Dover. We went through passport control, the officer just looked at our Ids and wished us a safe journey. And as soon as we left the boat, the agent told us: welcome to London! No one could ever believe him that until we asked us to look at cars driving direction to realise that we are in a different country. It was a mix reaction of joy and pains. Thinking of others and what they could be going through now.</p>
IR	Where did you arrive to?
IE	Stratford in East London
IR	How did you feel when you reached safety?
IE	It was that new and different world to me.



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IR	Tell me about your settlement experience in the UK.
IE	<p>The next morning, we were taken to the “Home Office”; we were already briefed on the procedures, you have to presence yourself to the immigration in any country once arrived in the foreign country. I will not go into more details. If you may excuse me. I had applied for asylum and it was a long process, I was refused and had appealed against the Home Office decision.</p> <p>it took years of waiting; I use to cry every day, I could not cope to the way of life I had got myself into, I did not know what to do, it was very difficult for me because if I remember the life I was living in Kinshasa, back home; I had a good life, everything was made for me and given to me by my parent but over here I had to fight by myself. In here, everybody is equal but in Congo there is a visible social ranking, everyone is respected according to their rank in the society, and whenever I am in town, everyone knows that he or she is a son or daughter of so and so. However, you would not get that kind of consideration and respect you deserve in England unless you are a star. It was hard for me.</p>
IR	Have you experienced any discrimination?
IE	<p>Yes. Language was one of the biggest barriers one will ever experience. You are left to yourself. You cannot do anything unless with the help of interpreter. She/he will have to hear everything of you, every little secret you may have. You cannot express what you feel, as it has to go pass somebody.</p> <p>Claiming for asylum is also a form of discrimination. As you seen and treated seen as poorer and miserable and people expect you behave a certain way because they believe that you are lucky to be rescued and alive as many of us are dead or hell.</p>
IR	What is your opinion of British people?
IE	I had noticed that they kept themselves to themselves, the relationship with British people was not easy at all, they take a lot of time to accept foreigner, and it was difficult to be accepted. Even when you need help, they would help but you could still feel that they are reserved. That sort of atmosphere puts barriers on your way and stops you to move on.



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IR	Where you affected by anything you experience in the UK?
IE	Yes of course, it did affect me very much at the beginning; I cannot deny it, I could not cope with it. I remember willing to pack my bags three times and go back home; in many occasions, I wanted to hand myself in to the immigration, UK Border force to be sent back to my country, but my friends would stop me each time I wanted to do so. But I gave myself a chance to be patient and here we are!
IR	Do you feel part British society?
IE	Very much so. I am a law obedient citizen and appreciate what UK has given me. My skin is my trade mark and I wouldn't trade it in for anything. I will always be seen as black and considered as a foreigner. That's the truth and I live with it.
IR	What do you do for leaving?
IE	I used to work in the hotel and restaurant industry until COVID. We are furloughed. Until things go back to normality.
IR	Do you like it?
IE	Yes, I do
IR	What do you do on your spare time?
IE	My Child is the World to me, looking after my child's education is the most important to me. I am busy helping him do his work online. It is a new thing but keeps us busy during lockdowns. Thanks God we keeping safe.
IR	What's happened to your African culture since you in the UK?
IE	I do regret Congo when it comes to culture. In my view, people in West lack moral; I would say. Their culture is flouted compare to ours, especially when it comes to children. You cannot discipline your own child in Europe, you are not allowed to yell at your child or punish them, while in Congo (formerly Zaire) when I was growing up, a neighbour or grown up could punish any child she/he found behaving bad. Some Neighbours would rather report it direct to your parents and they would take immediate actions against you. This used to scare every one,



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	<p>knowingly that they are being watched everywhere by everyone.</p> <p>In England parent cannot punish their own child; you are told, "That's the Child's Rights" that's what put our community in confusion. Teenagers would bring their male or female friends at home for sleep over, that's unacceptable back then in Congo. That's the culture we were brought to observe.</p>
IR	How do you keep up to your African culture?
IE	Keeping in touch with my family and friends from Africa, talking with them help me keep my culture. I keep what is good and drop what is bad. I do have friends from different backgrounds, Africans, Caribbean and Asian and Whites friends and we share our dishes and specialities and they like the food.
IR	Do you regret leaving Congo?
IE	Yes, I do regret a little bit.
IR	If you had a choice, you would have stayed in Congo?
IE	If I had a choice; I would have stayed or go back but unfortunately having children over here makes me stayed in England for their education; also, nowadays there are a lot of trouble going on in Africa, war all the time. There is peace in Europe, that what makes people stay to follow up their children education and well-being. I miss our culture, I miss the way we grew up, that way of life; I miss my family and siblings. I do miss that love and care for one another.
IR	How many languages can you speak?
IE	Some 4 languages I guess. French, English, Kikongo and Lingala
IR	Do you have anything else to say?
IE	Not at all. It has been a long conversation. Hope you are satisfied with my answers and I have told you what you needed to know.
IR	<p>Yes indeed, a long one. There is no wright or wrong answer. It is your story and it is up to you to tell it the how you want.</p> <p>We have reached the end and I would like to thank you for your time</p>



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IE	Thank you to you.
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[01.00.14]

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