

# KAMANGA Wa Kamanga - INTERVIEW

## Speaker key

IR Interviewer  
IE Interviewee

Speaker	Transcription
IR	Good morning Mr Kamanga wa Kamanga.
IE	Good morning.
IR	<p>Thank you for your time.</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. We are all Volunteers from Community Active Support (CAS). My name is Leon and I am being assisted by Theresia and Gracia.</p> <p>Can you Please introduce yourself to our listeners?</p>
IE	<p>Ok. My name I is Kamanga wa Kamanga. I was born in Kinshasa and originated from Kamina, a town in rich mineral province of Katanga, North east of DR of Congo. I am a journalist by profession. I now live in the UK and has made it my home for many years now and I am currently unemployed for health reasons. I have 3 children who are presently in DR Congo and currently live on my own.</p>
IR	Can you tell us about your experience of coming to the UK please?
IE	<p>I come from the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest country in Africa, with multiple tribes and ethnic groups. More than 250 languages are spoken there including French. Yet to find myself in a foreign land, speaking not English language at all. It was a nightmare.</p> <p>My profession has taken me to nice different places, learned a lot and I was exposed to meet different people, different cultures and way of life.</p> <p>Speaking all 4 mains languages of DR Congo, including other dialects and French Made me able to navigate all over the country, many others Sub Saharan countries. But England was completely another experience, different language, weather, food and driving codes constituted the biggest barriers for integration. And not being a competitive person has really played against me mentally and psychologically.</p>



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	Loneliness in itself is already a barrier. And I should highlight at this point that, for someone who comes here for what I can call sensitive reasons, I mean not as a tourist and not being able to fully express themselves is a real barrier for them to regularise their immigration status. And it causes a lot of stress to those who end up being rejected as a result. Some have even been deported or removed from the country, even though many of them had perfectly founded reasons to be here.
IR	Did you just sat back doing nothing?
IE	Oh no. I didn't have any other choice than to enrol to English classes to improve the language
IR	Do you have a family here?
IE	No, I came alone, and I am still living alone after all these years. It has not been easy but I have managed.
IR	How easy was it for you to navigate the system without a valid stay?
IE	You need a valid to do or access anything. But everything is in English and nevertheless your good reasons to be here, but if you can't read and write a language, you will not be able to put your case forward effectively and defend yourself. Even if you have someone who can speak on your behalf or interpret for you, it will never be the same and you have no way of knowing if what is being said accurately represents what you wanted to say. And this can cause you enormous prejudice and end up working against you, and can happen to anyone. That way you see people staying in a limbo for years without proper documentations.
IR	Why did you choose the UK?
IE	It was not entirely my choice but I found myself to be here. I never plan for it. What I wanted is just my protection.
IR	How did you adapt?
IE	Oh, my God! I didn't have choice, did I? (laugh). I really had to adapt because, after you've reached a certain age, you'll certainly know nutritional values of your home food, food from your home land, and, honestly, there is no comparison. It really took me years to accept and adapt. I'm not saying I had to accept things I didn't know, because we had the usual, chicken, meat vegetable, etc. back home, but it's honestly not the same at all (laugh). Nowadays everyone is talking about organic food, but that's essentially what we used to eat back home, fresh and



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	original food. And when you arrive here and try to compare you will see that the gap is too wide. In fact, people who go around various ethnic shops to find ethnic food, even though they are often more expensive, are certainly right to do so.
IR	Do you still eat the same food traditional Congo foods or you have changed?
IE	No, I am not a strong conservative person. I believe we all have to learn new things, there's always something to learn. Just consider the country where we came from, the Congo. There is a panoply, a huge variety of food. I am an opened minded person and do try other culture's food. There is always room for learning. I encourage people to Just taste and appreciate. There's nothing wrong with that.
IR	You said life was tough, why didn't you decide to go back to your home country ever since?
IE	It is very tough yet I decided to stay despite troubles. I have no other choice, I can't stop now. I must flourish, communicate with others, adapt and, there are many opportunities opening up through the government, like language schools, specifically the ones teaching "English for Foreigners", as opposed to ESOLs which are for people who speak another language, because a child born, but who is originally from my country for example, or came here very young adapts very quickly and much easily, and many even end up losing their language of origin or its accent. And if parents aren't attentive that child would stop communicating with them in their language of origin and only speak with them in English. So, in short, I have to adapt because I am in another environment, I have to communicate, I have to live my life, live a normal life.
IR	English courses have always been available. Why didn't you take advantage of it?
IE	Yes, I studied ESOL, but I regret for not having gone with it as far as I could because it opens more opportunities. I still have that very alive in my head, I now have to assume.
IR	How do you face loneliness?
IE	Yes, that's one of the social and sociological realities many of us Africans live with here in Europe. We came from countries where, culturally and socially, everyone is in contact with everyone else, without inserting themselves in other people's lives. Let me give you an example. If you are in Kinshasa and you happen to get into a bus and you have a sad face or look distressed, people will ask you what's wrong or if they can help, they will talk to you to cheer you up or try to help. And if you answer them they'll engage with you, try to assist or give you advice in the best



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	<p>way they can. But these are things that do not exist here. Here if you try to speak to someone who doesn't know you it's an intrusion. This is a very different social reality. Go in a bus, any public place or use any public transport you will notice that people are all quiet. If you are in the tube you'll see that everyone is quiet, reading, etc., but not talking. There's never an attempt to get to know each other. It is not natural for someone to even speak to you. It is a different social reality. Whereas back home, everyone speaks to everyone else, and it is easily done. The system here leads people into loneliness and isolation. It is not that you want to be isolated, but that's how society is set up. It's a way of life. People are confined within their very small squares of relationships and contacts. You simply don't step out and start talking to anyone, not even your neighbours or someone you happen to see regularly. It is a different way of life. And I think it is one of the causes of drama. In human relations, if you're lacking warm relationships, people you are close to, you will eventually become depressed. But where we come from that is often not an issue. There will always be people to comfort and cheer you up, even someone you don't really know. Someone who will boost your moral, help you one way or another. In this regard, the society here is very different.</p>
IR	<p>Do you regret coming here?</p>
IE	<p>Yes. There's no better place than home. I have had enough time to appreciate where I come from, and can confirm that no one is better than home. I'll understand someone who knows nowhere else to compare home with denying this fact. And this isn't only about only material stuff. It's a combination of a number of things. No, there's no better place than home, I really don't think so. As far as I am concerned, as an African and Congolese person, my socio-cultural reality is very different from that of the West. And once you've lived it, outside the euh..., (unfinished sentence). I always like to compare it to lark mirrors, because when we're far from home we often think this is heaven we needed to reach. I know this to be true because we often talk about it, we have families back home who consistently refuse to accept any not so positive things we tell them, and often come up with stuff like "you say that that because you do not want me to come there too". So, it is about the experience. As long as you haven't experienced it yet, you will never know. And above it all, you have the weather, which is a massive difference. In spite of a country like ours, and I was fortunate enough to have had the opportunity to visit every corner of it because of my job, there are some parts of the country where the weather all year around is like summer time here. Go to the North East of my country, go along the whole of its Eastern side, you'll find a totally different climate. I remember having travelled with someone in Katanga for the first time, who found it very cold compared to Kinshasa where he had always lived. He simply couldn't accept or understand that little difference. Now you try to compare that to here where you can have up to 20+ degrees during</p>



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	the day and 4 degrees in the evening. For someone arriving here for the first time, they'll think they've jumped into the void.
IR	What would you say to millions who are trying to come here?
IE	I would rather say something to my people, DR Congo, my families and friends, things are not what we think there are. Although you keep asking me to pack my things and return if things are though the way I claim there are.
IR	Where do you see yourself in the next 10 years
IE	My biggest wish is to go back home, my ardent wish is to be useful, to be useful at home. I consider my presence here as a school. It's worth the trouble. It's always good to go elsewhere to learn, and in fact, you should never stop learning in my opinion. Never stop learning. There's so much to learn. When we pay attention around us, what do we think we know? Almost nothing. There is so much to learn, so much we can learn and make others benefit from. That's how I perceive things. And there's, I would say, a technical reality, or the knowledge, the known how of organisations that isn't everywhere (obscure meaning), and what I can I make my country of origin benefit from. And that is my wish.
IR	How will you do that?
IE	Obviously, by going back after I have learned, acquired the necessary knowledge and able to put it into practice.
IR	You have lived both World. Can you make a comparison between what you see here and what you saw back home?
IE	I can talk for years to answer. What really saddens me the most is what I see in the media where they express the fragility of a child's environment, and even in conversations with people, euh..., especially when it comes to the culture, I see an African kid here, a European kid, a kid from euh..., we are in a cosmopolitan country, where there are people from all origins, especially in London where you see people from everywhere, comparatively you see kids following, if I can say, euh..., and it is noticeable, they are steeped in their culture, where as some appear less so, and ... when you read newspapers exploring issues of crime, for example, of the level of youth crime, etc., and if you ask yourself why, because we've always thought that in developed countries, children's supervision is often well taken care of, where everything is followed up, where crime, as we see it today, should only be something exceptional, but ... And I remember not long ago I was reading an article in a newspaper which said that the biggest scourge here is homicide, you



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	<p>have kids stabbing each other, it has become such a tragedy that now the government wants to do something about it. I ask myself, are children this fragile? Is it that hard to supervise children? It's true that there are many factors, and I even remember when I was still a child back home, and had relatives who came here in Europe and one of them, on their return, was saying that it wasn't a good thing to send young children to Europe. He was saying it wasn't good for children to come or grow up in Europe because there are some influences that, if exposed to them from a certain age, can no longer be readjusted.</p> <p>I remember well, our elders who came here in Europe before us thought that coming to Europe would make them accomplished people in every single way. But it was an illusion, a perfect illusion. The street doesn't educate. There's a street here, there's a street back home, there's a street everywhere. Therefore, the development, personality and integrity of a child only come from those who can reassure him or her, those who want to guaranty those things to him or her. It isn't the street, not at all. Be it here or there, if the child doesn't have the required supervision from adults around him or her, if they don't care, that child can end up becoming a gang member, be it here or there. The fact that the child has come here or anywhere else in Europe is not a guarantee of success at all, not at all. In my opinion, what they have here is advance in technology, a good sense of organisation, etc., things that we haven't been attentive about in our countries or haven't been supervising well, but (for a child) to become an accomplished human being depends on who supervises (him or her).</p>
IR	<p>You have talked about criminality, etc., but how do you link it to the culture?</p>
IE	<p>I think ..., and do you know why I say this? Because if you pay attention you will see that there are people from certain cultural origins who aren't stigmatised, if I can say so, it's too bad and it makes me sad to say it. At one point in the media in this country, they were saying that a community like ours, Congolese, hit the record of youth crime. It hurts. Why was that? Are our kids more criminal than others? We should be asking ourselves that question. It must have a fundamental reason.</p>
IR	<p>And if you were to meet a young person today, or anyone of any age for that matter, who has just come here in Great Britain for the first time, who wants to settle here, and maybe someone who came in similar conditions as your own when you arrived, what can you tell this person? What advice can you give him or her?</p>
IE	<p>I would urge them to be calm. There are many different reasons motivating different people come here. So, my advice is to be calm, to communicate with others. And I would like to highlight something else which has always been my ardent wish. We are a community without a support structure, yes, us, Congolese have no support structure here in this country. Yes, it's true that we have</p>



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	<p>individuals who can advise on various subjects, there are some offices and things like that, but as a community, we do not have a support structure where we can come into contact with someone who has just freshly arrived in the country, who doesn't speak the language, someone who can only count on their own small circle, a circle within which they've arrived. And those circles often remain closed, they aren't open, and so, the new comer may never know which are their rights, entitlements, available opportunities, etc., and all these things are very important, although not everyone fully grasps them. You know, when the language is your greatest difficulty, and that you make no effort to take advantage of what is available to you, because after all, most of those things are unknown to us. First of all, you are completely disoriented, you don't know who to contact, you don't know what to do, where to start, etc., everything becomes a word of mouth affair, because there is no structure. And this is a huge barrier.</p> <p>So, I think the person needs to keep calm and try to flourish as much as possible, although this is different from one person to another. Everything is open to learning. Learning more, learning better. And one doesn't learn only at school. Learning is also about exchanging experiences. And that can contribute a lot to anyone's blossoming.</p>
IR	As it stands, you have health issues that prevent you from working?
IE	Yes.
IR	Do you have enough information about your condition, information that could help you flourish, even though you're ill?
IE	Yes, I believe I do, because the thing that has stained me up to this point and brought me to some medical orientation, and doctors, to multiple types of medical investigations, scanners, ultra-sound, and so on, and so on, and so on. In this regard, I cannot say I did not have help. But, nevertheless, I always have to face the same problem, it frightens me, it frightens me a lot. What is the outcome? I cannot keep on going around in circles. It diminishes you, reduces your means, you can imagine. And when you're not working you live in precarious conditions than someone who is working normally, that's for sure. It is not encouraging. My biggest wish is to come out of it as soon as possible.
IR	And what do you do to come out of it?
IE	I continue to see my doctor and live to advice provided.



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IR	Any other comment?
IE	There's one experience that pleases me. It's about realising that there is a kind of friendliness from my compatriots, people from the country I come from. I don't know if it is because of euh..., but I think it isn't only because of that. I was born and grown up in a cosmopolitan city, as you know, Kinshasa is, it isn't a tribe or a small place, meaning I grew up with people from everywhere. And the area where I grew up, no one can say it's only this or that group of people living there, but everyone, from everywhere lived there, in a friendly atmosphere. And I feel the same friendliness here. So, my wish is that it continues this way, and that there is enough mutual aid, I mean those with more experience or expertise in certain things, be it in education, or anything else, to contribute by helping those who have less of such experience or expertise. There are communities that are much better at this, but ours, the Congolese one, isn't. That's my impression, and I hope this change and that we develop much more.
IR	We end the interview by this note. Thank you very much for your time
IE	You're welcome, and I thank you too.

[00.55.18]

**[End of Audio]**

**Duration 55 minutes and 18 seconds**



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