

THOMSON interview

Speaker key

IR Interviewer
IE Interviewee

Speaker	Transcription
IR	<p>Thank you for your time Mr Thomson.</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. My name is Leon and I am being assisted by Elodie and Bianca. We are all Volunteers from Community Active Support (CAS)</p> <p>Can you Please introduce yourself to our listeners?</p>
IE	<p>Thank you very for the opportunity. My name, the name I'm know by, is Thomson Dikebi. Some people call me Thomas Dikebi, but my real name is Thomson Dikebi. When you mention the name Thomson some people associate it to the well-known fish Thomson (nick name of a popular fish in Congo), but it's my real name, the one I was born with since the 60's.</p> <p>I arrived in this country, in the same way as many other people came. I came with my two daughters. My wife stayed behind in Kinshasa, but she joined us later on. After a while my other child (who also stayed behind) followed, and the family was again reunited. We since then have three more children. So, I now have in total five daughters here.</p>
IR	<p>Ok, I'll let you continue, but for now, if you can tell us who you are, what do you do, etc., or, in other words, present yourself that would be great.</p>
IE	<p>Good. I said I am Thomson Dikebi. I am one of the few Congolese who are progressing in the field of charitable organisations. I started in an organisation called Congolese Family Centre, which is now closed. Later, in 2012, I participated in a research lead by two big organisations, Confident Change and International Alert. This research was about finding out what's the diaspora's contribution. It included all the various diaspora groups like Somalians, Sri Lankans, Pakistanis, etc. It was about their experiences as well as the various problems happening in their respective countries. This research was published in the British parliament on 29/11/2012. If you search in the parliament archive you'll find it. It was called Voice Cross Border, euh... I think that was the name. It was called Diaspora in the UK working... euh..., euh..., if the name comes back I'll tell you, but I forgot it as it's</p>

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been some time. From that research came the idea of a new organisation which we then created and for which I am the chairman. It's called Global Connection Builder Vision, and I am its chairman. It is all about finding out ways to work, here and in our country, to bring about peace and development. It meant that we had to make a trip to Congo to see how we can link our experience from here to peace and development in our country. I think that's it.

So, this organisation is now working on a number of issues. One of the things we've been looking at is a common denominator (common goal) between the Congolese diaspora in Britain to work together to influence British policy and decision makers. We then agreed with all the other Congolese to frame that common denominator and called it "Heritage History Link Between the Congo and Britain" and agreed that this should be the basis of our work, in other words, what's the historical patrimony that could be seen as connecting us to Britain. And this is what was agreed as our common denominator. From there, we started developing projects, the type of projects that are looking into historical sources linking us to this country, to create or build up an interest on the part of Congolese and British people and create an environment that could be beneficial for both countries.

Many people seem to forget that Congo is not Belgium, Congo is Great Britain. Congo is a fruit of two British newspapers: Daily Mirror and Washington Times, if I'm not mistaken. But these two newspapers were both English. At the time, it was their boss who sent Stanley to go and search for Livingstone. And that's how Congo got to be known. Now, if we start promoting and valuing this historical link with Britain it will allow us to do a lot of things together.

In 2016 I went to Kinshasa to work with Stanley's family. I brought and put back Stanley's statue which Mobutu removed in 1974 I believe. That was a huge achievement accomplished by our organisation. Many other organisations tried it before but never succeeded. At the 50th anniversary of Congo's independence there was a governor, ... euh..., his name was ... euh..., I think he became an ambassador in Brazzaville, ... euh..., who was it again... euh... oh, yes, Muzungu, Christoph Muzungu. He tried several times to get that same statue restored. Even the British High Commission in Kinshasa also tried to have that monument restored, but it backfired because of a huge protest here in Britain as well as in Congo, many people and newspapers criticised the attempt to restore such a monument using tax payer's money, especially as Stanley is often associated with King Leopold II atrocities in Congo. But we did not agree with this because it would be like removing a page of our history book. We believe our collective memory is very important. Our past should not be seen as our rival. Everyone's past is a mirror. I once intervened at a conference where the issue was being discussed and asked those who were against the restoration of the Stanley's monument in Congo, arguing that he had blood on his hands, why don't they also protest to take

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	<p>down Jules Caesar's monument. Does he also have blood on his hands or is it milk that he has? He did many horrible things but his monument is left there to teach future generations what actually happened, so that history is never forgotten.</p> <p>Weren't we taught that people who do not remember their past are due to repeat it? If we do not want to repeat our history we should restore all those monuments, otherwise we will create ignorance of our past and therefore most likely repeat it. I said at that conference that if Stanley's monument isn't restored, I'll pick up a hammer and go and take down the one of Jules Caesar. And I will argue that I have done so because he had blood on his hands.</p> <p>That's how we got involved and made our case. In 2016 I worked with the director of the National Museum, Professor Ibongo, using funding from here to restore the monument. I'll give you a video clip of the restoration ceremony, if you want to see it. You'll see by yourself how we restored that monument.</p>
IR	Ok, now you came here with your family, and then what?
IE	<p>Yes, we came here and since we've been working, mainly towards participating to the development of Congo. Here in Britain, our main concern is about our children and how are they going to learn about their history. That's why we are trying to often bring the community together, insisting that parents come along with their children.</p> <p>But I will go back a little bit, to answer your questions about how I came here, and my progress in the UK.</p>
IR	Great. You've talked about your family, how your children have progressed, etc. What about your own experience since you arrived in this country. What happened then? Can you please elaborate.
IE	<p>It was quite hard when I arrived. Imagine going to a new country where you don't even speak the language. Although I had been to Nigeria a few times before, I still couldn't speak English properly, except some few very basic sentences learnt at school. So, it was very difficult to communicate. English language was our biggest barrier in many respects, and prevented us from doing so many things.</p> <p>So, we went to colleges to learn English, and then started studying or training on these subjects. I ended up doing a course on Human Rights Advocacy and got an under graduate qualification. This gave me the confidence to stand up in leadership roles in the community, fill the gap and speak up on its behalf as necessary. And this brought to me the idea of setting up community organisations.</p> <p>The very first organisation I created, which became the cause for a nick name I was</p>

	<p>later given here in London, was “Cocorico”. We wanted the Congolese community in London to wake up and bring people together. I realised that many things we used to do or share within the community were only at events such funerals, wakes or parties, or places like at hair dressers. We had no formal platforms to meet up and share our experiences, so that other people could also benefit from them. That was the reason why we created Cocorico, to try to bring people together and give the community a structured way to meet up, discuss and share experiences. And also, to talk and discuss issues related to our country back home and see if/how we could be of any help possible. We then started calling people from year 2000.</p>
IR	<p>So, that became your actions. But, when you came and went through the difficult time you mentioned, did your studies and got your qualification, etc. you were still a foreigner in a foreign country, weren't you?</p>
IE	<p>Yes, I was.</p>
IR	<p>And so, how were your immigration issues, how did you resolve them?</p>
IE	<p>My immigration issues were difficult. I came here first, and my family came to join me. However, their immigration status was resolved well before my own. I waited up to 10 years before I was allowed to remain in the country, and so, allowing me to move around and travel. But even before I got my Leave to Remain, I was already able to work and was courageous enough to be able to approach some big organisations such as the Metropolitan Police, Child Protection Command, etc. to collaborate or work with them on a variety of issues.</p> <p>In 2003, while I was still waiting for my immigration issue to be resolved, when I became aware of a number of issues affecting our communities, such as accusations of witch craft, accusing children of being witches, leading to families breaking down, I stood up and went to work with those organisations. I was concerned and worried for the community. I soon realised that my courage common. So, I decided to create an organisation to help my fellow citizens who have to integrate, provide interpreting services to those with language difficulties, and for issues we were unable to help we would signpost so people could always find the help they needed.</p>
IR	<p>Sounds like you're someone who knows very well how those things are done and are able to help others finding their ways. You came here and faced those very same difficulties and went on to learn the language. But the point is that you came to foreign country and were confronted with those difficulties and had to think about what you needed to do to overcome them. But those people with language difficulties you're referring to, why did they choose this country, knowing they couldn't speak the language?</p>

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IE	<p>Based on my own experience, and having lived in France before coming here, many people chose this country because they wanted to be somewhere somehow different to countries they (Congolese people) used to go to, like France, Belgium and other European French speaking countries. They wanted to try somewhere else which is different to other countries they knew. And this is also true for myself. And I was right, because, as soon as I arrived, I realised this was a country of greater opportunities. And, just based on my own experience again, I can confirm that opportunities you have in this country, you will never find them in France, Belgium, Germany or Switzerland. I lived or passed through all those countries, so I know this to be true. I always remind people that this country welcomed us much better than any other European country. And even when we were still struggling with the language, we were still tolerated and encouraged. This doesn't happen in France or Belgium. And that aspect of the English culture really pleases me, makes me really happy. They always ask "how can I help you?" It does make you understand that it isn't up to the stranger to bring you solutions to your problems. They always start by asking you how they can help. When I think about it I realise why the English people have always been a great nation. And one more thing about this country, a person isn't only valued based on the number of his/her university qualifications. People are valued and measured based on what they are capable of doing. Whereas for us back home, you first have to have kilometres of diplomas, be referred to as doctor of this, doctor of that, and it's only then that you can be valued or considered. English people aren't like that, and they don't talk too much. They are people of actions. They are pragmatic. That's why I feel privileged to live in England.</p>
IR	<p>If you're that happy living in England, I assume you're not regretting having come here or missing your home country?</p>
IE	<p>I would say this is my second home, my second country. But, as they say, there's no better place than home. In spite of all the positive things I find or see here, there's no better feeling than that I have when I am back home. That's why there are people who will go and spend up to a full one year in Kinshasa. I once spent six months there. I would happily walk from Kintambo to Bandal, where my home now, although I grew up in Ndjili.</p>
IR	<p>So, when you go and happily spend so much time there, does that mean you miss home so much and somehow regret having migrated here?</p>
IE	<p>No, not at all. The ideal for me would be about taking back home as much as I can of whatever I learn from my experience here and share that with my fellow citizens there. I always look at how things are done here and think of how can similar things be achieved back home, and then happily live there. White people went to Africa in the 1800s, but you will not find white people's families that have</p>



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	<p>remained in Africa for 200 years. They always come back.</p> <p>But when I consider the weather in this country, I sometime ask myself what did they do to God to deserve this. Their weather is always cold and unpredictable. But, in contrast, what a wonderful climate we have back home! Never mind the variety of food growing with no particular effort. You have mango trees everywhere, but we do not have mango juice at home. How do we explain that? I went there once with an English guy who was amazed to see a big mango tree in front of the hotel we stayed in. You'll find animals in zoos here that are everywhere in the wild in our country. Just the thought of that country and its enormous potential gives me great joy in my heart. That country is a real paradise. That's why I want our children, the children of all Congolese people living here to be taught about our country/their country and its potential. They can be here, but they should still keep alive a thought about their home country.</p>
IR	<p>What about children born here? Particularly those who have never been there? And how about yourself? Do you see yourself as more Congolese or British?</p>
IE	<p>No, I cannot see myself as more British than Congolese, never. I will always be Congolese. Yes, I came here, but I was born there. And my children, including those born here, are Congolese first.</p>
IR	<p>But that's only what you want, it's how you want it to be, not them.</p>
IE	<p>That's how it should be. Even in nature, that's how it is. Please consider this: if you were given British citizenship and you subsequently commit a certain type of criminal offence, that citizenship can be taken away from you. Now you tell me, if a queen's son or daughter commits a similar crime, would his/her citizen be taken away? How would such law even be applied to an ordinary native of this country? Why would they take away your citizenship, but not that of a native of this country? That alone shows that you do not enjoy exactly the same rights as a native citizen. The recent wind-rush scandal is another example which illustrates it, and it should teach us all a lesson. As they say in French, doesn't nature teach you anything? Many of those we refer to as wind-rush generation were brought here or encouraged to come here to work and rebuild this country after the second world war. Recently, an older man, in his 80s, from that same wind-rush generation, was finally recognised British and given British citizenship, but that was three days before he died. Having seen and witnessed this scandal, how can I tell my children this land is theirs? I will always tell them to leave here peacefully and respect the law of the land, because if they don't they can always be sent back somehow, even if they were born here. We need to learn from the experience of others, realise and understand that this isn't really our land, our country. Always think of, and about your home country, and never cut ties, otherwise you might regret it.</p>

IR	That was about children. What about the culture in general, the food, etc.?
IE	<p>For me, my first two children know our culture and are used to it. My second daughter became Miss Congo in 2013 here in the UK, at one of the events our brother Frank Savana used to organise with The Voice of Congo. Since then she's always wanted to go back regularly. In fact, in 2010 she came with me at my dad's funeral, and now she goes there every year to teach English in orphanages. She is very attached to Congo. Only my last two daughters have not been yet. But the other three have already been there and they all manifest their desire to go again.</p> <p>As for food, again, my children aren't stranger to it. They have always been exposed to it as in my house, we never lack most of the popular Congolese food like "pondu". But, as you well know, with our children in this country, we often have a culture clash with them. When they go to school, they are exposed to a culture different to the one they have at home. Sometime they only prefer food they have at school, in which case you'll see them content with just a cup of tea before rushing to school in the morning. They are happy to eat there, but no much at home. They therefore get used to food they have at school, and that becomes part of their culture. In most homes I know of, kids only want to eat stuff like chicken and chips. Rare are kids who like to eat pondu for example. But there are still some families where kids very much like our food, including "kwanga" and "ntaba". And it gives me pleasure to see kids enjoying our food. As for our music, many kids here love it. Unfortunately, many of our musician brothers do promote anti-values in their music. I don't really understand this, especially when it's done by people who are over 30 years old. Tabu Ley said in one of his songs that real maturity starts at the age of 30. Everyone over 30 should already be mature and act as such. I often say it when I look back at our fathers' experiences. My dad didn't go to school, he couldn't write. But, in spite of my education, I don't come anywhere close to my dad's personality, responsibility and respect. Today, you'll see many people with big titles, even TV celebrities, but if you look close at their lives and environments, they don't come any closer to what my dad was. So, how do we transmit or share our culture with our children through music that promotes anti – values? It is rather sad. It really saddens me.</p>
IR	Therefore, which one is that so-called tradition that most people keep on defending? Is it what Africa used to be, or what it is now, or is it some kind of new culture emerging within the African communities in Europe? Because some of the things you're defending here, even in Africa, they almost do not exist anymore.
IE	All those things are due to poverty. Poverty is the real cause of all that. They are the sequels of poverty. We are talking about our real culture, the one we want to give to our children so that they can learn about their history and where they come from.

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IR	But history will also be taught through that very same music. At some point, Kofi and all the other current musicians will also form part of that very same history, won't they?
IE	I am actually in the planning to launch a series of campaigning events about our various traditions. I will involve people from all the different traditions, the Mongo, the Buza, the Bakongo, the Baluba, etc. We will ask them to bring their traditional music, we will search for elderly people from each group so that they can come and hold talks, and if at all possible, in their own languages. We will keep on repeating regularly this kind of events, record and film them. We will also involve as many children as possible so that they also witness those events. And every talk done in other languages than English will be interpreted in English so that all children present can understand what is being said. We will do festivals of traditional music. These sort of events might help us keep and protect our culture and traditions for generations to come, and correct whatever needs correction. And now that we have a new head of state back home, this could be an opportunity for us to lobby for anti – values to be removed from our music. But one person alone cannot do all this. We will need the contribution and participation of many. This isn't a subject for competition, but a matter requiring collaboration and participation of all.
IR	Now, going back to kids, our kids here have a somehow different culture, different way of doing things, different eating habits, and sometime they are facing a real conflict of generations with their parents, etc. But, is there anything positive from them that parents can also look at and appreciate? Something they can admit kids of today have got it better than they did?
IE	Yes, of course there are. And I often say it to many people. For example, if I pick up the phone to speak to a white person in an office somewhere, that white person will know immediately that he/she is talking to a foreigner black person. And that phone call is likely to have a different outcome than if it was made by my son or daughter, especially if they only give their first name. Our children have a real advantage over us, they speak a language that we don't. The language is a "force of communication". Another real difference comes from the way we grew up. Back home boys achieve more, and so, are leading. Here it is the opposite. Girls achieve more, and sometimes a lot more than boys. And I think this is due to the way we treat girls back home. We concentrate our efforts to only prepare them for household, housekeeping responsibilities rather than their careers. Their outings are a lot more controlled than those of boys. And we now see the consequences of this here more than back home. Our boys are now developing a gang culture and dying of stab wounds. Something that was, and still is extremely rare back home. And it hurts. But, on 4 th January 2020, we celebrated 60 th birthday of Martin ... (the rest of the name incomprehensible). I asked people to come with their children, of any age, those of school age, college or university, so



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	<p>that they can be around when we discuss. One of the children brought up something very important that we didn't even think about. And when I was talking to you yesterday, you surprisingly came up with the same thing. You said, when we came here we couldn't even speak English, compared to Nigerians and Ghanaians who already had the language. But when I look at what we've achieved here, I sometimes can't believe it. It should be celebrated. I was quite amazed when I heard it coming from you. It immediately brought back to my mind that young boy's comment on 4th January. I spoke again with the same young boy on the phone recently and he reminded me the same thing. He said we shouldn't only look at the negative side and only see the negative stuff young people in our community are doing, but also the positive side, because in fact, many of them have actually achieved quite a lot and are doing much better than young people of similar age from the Nigerian and Ghanaian communities. So, we should capitalise on that. This particular young person is very wise. He told me something else which was very interesting, and I'm going to share it with you. He said, if you open your hand you will see that your fingers are all different sizes, some longer than others. And if you join them together you'll notice gaps due to some being longer than others. Those gaps are like weaknesses. But if you fold your fingers while joined together as if you were ready to fight you will notice that they all line up. Therefore, gaps you saw are necessary when you need to use your hands to fight or defend yourself. But just think for a moment about it, this is coming from a young person. Another one is a school presentation that my daughter who became miss Congo in 2013 did. It was a monologue, making statements and counterstatements around the theme "Our parents brought us here to make us fail". She went on for a while with her various statements and counterstatements, all logical, until it became obvious that her initial statement which stated "Our parents brought us here to make us fail" was a wrong statement. She received a lot of applause, and the conclusion was that parents went through a very tough time and made a lot of sacrifice to bring them over, which created an opportunity for them, and that it was now up to them to grasp that opportunity. She concluded that parents brought their children here so that they can have a better life than their own. Therefore, any failure would be of their own making, not their parents. And the most interesting thing here is that she created this monologue on her own. And now you just think about it, these two things came from two kids.</p>
IR	<p>But you said girls in the community achieve much more than boys. You also insinuated that those children shouldn't forget our origins, where we come from. But these girls who are now achieving more than boys also know that back home it is generally boys who are more favoured than girls. How would it work if they were to go back now? After everything they now learnt from here, the culture they've been exposed to and adopted, would they accept to be treated less favourably than boys? Would they be accepted in the society back home? How would boys back home see them? Have you thought about all of these questions?</p>

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IE	<p>No my brother, I can't lie to you. I haven't yet thought about all those issues. Issues you've just highlighted are like a wakeup call for me, a real pause for thought, and I thank you for that. As for the way boys there would treat them, I think, overall it might still be ok. Our girls here will be able to find their matches there, because boys back home are more educated than our boys here, so they might find a common ground at that level. And when it comes to the situation here, it is quite the opposite. Many of our girls perform better in schools and at university, and because our boys aren't doing so well, most girls don't find their matches within the community. That's why many of our girls are getting married to boys from other communities, like Nigerians and Ghanaians. And this has consequences that may not show up immediately, but much later own. I still go back to the wind-rush generations scandal as an example of how wrong this sort of things can go. What happens in a situation where you can no longer stay here, or for whatever reason you're no longer accepted here while you've already made here your home and have children of your own? If one of our girls is married to a Nigerian man for example, and years later, they can no longer be here or, for whatever reason, are no longer accepted here and her husband decides to go back to Nigeria, where the wife knows no one and has never been, what would happen then? And what would happen to her children? Wouldn't children suffer? But I agree that there is still a number of questions needing answers, things to think about. I know that our children themselves are already thinking and discussing between themselves some of those issues. Some young people in the community have now created their own think tank and they do meet up regularly to discuss some of the issues we're talking about. This think tank is part of the organisation we created on 4th January. At our next independence celebration on 30th June, our children's achievement in this country will be one of the major themes. We will make them feel proud and recognised. We will ask parents to come with their children. We will allow young people to talk about their own experiences and successes, and we will celebrate their achievements. I have already mentioned this to a friend of mine at the BBC and asked him to make some inquiries and see if the BBC could mention this event, even if it's only for one second. We only want to hear and see it mentioned at the BBC on that day that, as part of their independence celebration, the Congolese community in the UK are also celebrating their children's achievement. When you come to think about it, in this country, we are often either ignored or misrepresented by the media. This is also one of the issues our young people think tank will be looking into. Conditions of our young people, especially girls, if they were to decide to go back home, will also be a theme for discussion in the think tank.</p>
IR	<p>Based on all these things, and having been here for so many years, is there anything you can think of, which we, as a community, have lost or are losing?</p>
IE	<p>Yes, we have lost something ...</p>

IR	Or in the process of losing?
IE	<p>No, it has actually been lost. You know, when we were growing up back home, we had three types of education: education from home, the one we got in the streets and the one from school. Whenever we misbehaved in the streets, it was the responsibility of any parent who happened to witness that to discipline us. It didn't have to be our own father or mother. In those days, parents were parents of all children in their community, not only of their own children. This does no longer exist. As a result, I don't feel I tell my friend's kid off, even I witness him/her totally misbehaving. And such a kid could easily challenge me for trying to tell him/her off. And even if the police were called, their first question to me will be who am I to that young person. They will most likely ask me why I am getting involved if I am not the father. And this is causing serious problems damage to our community. This is a real gap in the education of our children. And it is one of the causes for a number of kids being taken into care. Kids want freedom, we've all been there. But the freedom they are really craving for is the one that gives them wings to fly off, even though they have not yet learnt any flying techniques.</p> <p>Another thing we've lost is about our own homes. When we get married, Social Service are never there, the police is never there either. We do and organise our weddings in conformity with our culture. But when the couple have difficulties they don't refer to the culture to resolve them. Anything small, one will pick up the phone and call the police or social services. And that is always the beginning of greater difficulties leading to families breaking down. This is one of the greater things we're losing, but which is also very difficult to restore. But we forget that it's all about a system, and the best way to fight a system is to create another system, an alternative. But we are fighting a system individually. Congolese people, wherever they are, they've never created a system. But look at Jewish people, they created a system. In this country, they have their own social services. They now even have their own NHS. Maybe it's because they are financially strong. If something similar was to happen in one of their families they will never call a local social services. They will instead call their own social services who will try and deal with the issue. Even if you look at children taken into care, you will rarely find a Jewish child compared to other ethnic minorities. And it is worse when it comes to the number of black kids.</p> <p>Another thing I should mention is some sort of flash back of a number of issues back home, of what our country has been going through for a number of years now. Even if you say you don't want to think about it, you'll still not be at ease with your own conscience. I am here, doing whatever I can to survive and bring up my own children and at the same time, doing everything I can to support my own family back home, as well as that of my wife. Our mothers did not get married in Kinshasa, but came from rural small towns and villages to marry our fathers. They did not have such pressure from their families. But now, if you get married back</p>

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	<p>home and your wife comes to join you, as soon as she arrives, her telephone will start ringing with many different demands that you may not be even able to cope. This is something that even my daughter I mentioned earlier, talked about in the school monologue that she wrote. All this is a very heavy weight we carry on our shoulders at all time, and it can become at times extremely traumatic, and the stressful environment we live in doesn't help us at all. I a friend told me once, "brother, being in this country is like being in a prison where you have your own key to go out as you wish, but still come back, get in and lock the door behind you". In short, things can only improve if we can create a system for ourselves, a system that can bring some sort of balance with the one we live in.</p>
IR	<p>Yes, but what's the solution? We create a system, but which one, and how will it work? Do you have a plan or a strategy in mind or is it simply an idea you put out?</p>
IE	<p>I have a friend who used to say: "talking about a problem is already part of a solution". Although we do not yet have anything formal to put in place, but we are already talking about it and that's a good thing. It is a start. And, having created a think tank for our young people, a safe platform for them to think, discuss and exchange ideas is a positive step. We can then put together their ideas as well as our own and start effectively and efficiently address many of the issues we're talking about. After all, our youngsters have the advantage of having been brought up here, within a different culture and system, so their input and perspective could be really valuable.</p> <p>Also, in this country, we are constantly facing discrimination, and our children aren't immune to it. Ten years old children who came here with their parents for example were immediately put in year five in schools in spite the fact that they did not speak any English. Many of them got so confused and never recovered from it. I once read in a book I can't recall the title, while doing my historical research, that if you go somewhere where your mind and personality don't fit in with that environment, you do not belong there. And this is true for most of us. We do not belong here. That's why they call us "under represented communities". Most things that are important to us aren't taken into account or consideration. We simply have to be or align with whatever they decide. That's why the think tank our young people have started is very important and should be supported. I have already said that this year, 2020, is going to be a decisive one. I recently went to Gamba for a Kimbanguist pilgrimage, (Kimbanguism is a traditional religious movement started in Congo, by Simon Kimbangu). I used to laugh at kimbanguists before, long time ago. But after having been to Gamba and saw by myself how they built this place, I said wow! "Yes we can". And those who built it aren't white people. I saw massive buildings and houses, I was fed and accommodated, and I wasn't alone, but thousands of people came along, from Gabon, Cameroon and many other places. And I said to myself, we too can do something good, we can create, including a system. What was done there in Gamba shows that, if we just</p>

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put aside the religious connotation to it, we too can be creative. Now, let's all support our young people and their think tank initiative. Let's put their thoughts and recommendations in writing and send them to our embassy so that they can be taken further. It will be a contribution from the youth diaspora in Britain, for their community here in the UK as well as towards the development of their country. And I am sure it will be successful. I trust, I believe in Congolese people. I never think negatively, I am not a defeatist. I believe in Congolese people because I know their exploits. Today we're all talking about Nelson Mandela, but we forget that his story started with two Congolese people, one aged 8 and the other 11, Nzala and Kinkasa. They both came here in 1885. They were street singers. With the help from the white guy who brought them over, they made some money and built the Congo Institute. But look at us today. With everything we've got, we aren't even able to create a social club. But, if we start learning, our pride will jump up. If our ancestors built a three storey building, we might build a six storey one. But we first need to know it. And if we don't know it, we can't do it. There is a story of a hunter who went hunting one day but found no game to hunt. He saw a few eggs somewhere and decided to take them so that his family can at least have a meal. Because his children didn't know which animal or bird made those eggs, they decided to swap one with one made by their chicken. After a while they saw a tiny coming out of one of the eggs and they concluded that eggs their dad brought home were from a wild bird. But within only a few days, that small bird became huge. They then realised that that bird was in fact an eagle. This eagle knew no other eagle like itself, but only the chickens it was born and grew up with. Whenever other eagles around tried to catch one of the chicken they always realised there was another eagle there in the group. They would always give up and fly back. Meanwhile, that eagle would always run to hide with the chickens whenever there was another eagle flying above them. It didn't know it was itself an eagle. The other eagles were starting to think that those chickens they were trying to catch are in fact baby eagles because there was an eagle amongst them. And the baby chickens were also thinking those big birds they were scared of were simply chickens like them, big like the one amongst them who is from their own family. So, that eagle ended up being and living like a chicken because it never knew its past. That's why they say a people with no history, no traditional values, will become a negligible factor in the world, and therefore, in danger of extinction. And we have to remove this danger by confronting our past, our history. We shouldn't try to hide from our history. We cannot just leave this task to our children. We are slowly passing away, dying every sing day. Mortality rate within the Congolese community is on the rise. Do we even know the number of orphans left behind by parents who pass away? Does anyone of us even think about it? The only thing on our mind is how to dress up to go to a funeral. On Friday we will all rush to a cemetery to bury one of our own, and from there, to a hall, eat and drink, and then wait for the following Friday to bury another one. We are now burying people almost every week. It's about time we pause and start thinking. How are we going to leave our children? How will they be after we're

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	gone? We do need to think about it. And it is not a task for one person, but the entire community.
IR	Can you give us a short summary, based on your years of experience of living in this country? Your own assessment on the lives of Congolese people in this country? For example, “I, as someone who came to this country as a foreigner, experienced this or that, did or achieved this or that, I saw this and that, etc.
IE	In summary, I experienced a lot of difficulties when I first came to this country, starting with the language. I did not speak English, and even today, I still cannot speak it as an English person does. But I can get by. And I get by just fine. I can go anywhere now. I can get into any office and express myself. I have worked with and for big institutions, like the Metropolitan Police, Child Protection Command, Education Departments, I have worked with many government ministers. This is the type of courage I want to give to my children. I always tell them that, if I, with my limited English, can achieve all these things, what can prevent you from achieving even greater things? I have done many, many things. Although, as they say in French, “no one is prophet at home”, which I don’t really believe, because you can’t be a prophet where no one knows you. Only those who know you can say or confirm it. Anyone who says that is lying. We must speak the truth. If you look at our community today, you’ll see that our patriotic pride shoot right up following our achievements with the work of Cocorico. That’s when real patriotism started. Cocorico isn’t, and has never been a political party. It was a simple idea which made Congolese people in the UK come together, think, talk, discuss and exchange ideas about our future in this country, that of our children, as well as about our country back home. I will take you back to the year 2000. Papa Wemba came here and had a press conference organised by Mushashino. I’m still looking for that video because I lost mine a while ago. Papa Wemba came here to laugh at us. He said: “if I ask anyone in this hall what is happening in Kosovo no one will know the answer. The only thing you know is about JB, Werason, Papa Wemba, this and that”. Was that really what he thought of us? On that day, when I heard that Papa Wemba was coming, I put on a Bob Marley t-shirt and took with me a Bob Marley book. I said to myself “this man is a con and people who are following him do not know it”. Real artists get their inspiration from real life and from things that are happening around them. Our country is in a shamble, but these people are coming here to tell us irrelevant stuff that have no bearing to what is happening in the country, stuff totally irrelevant to their own environment. I asked myself what was this all about. I stood up at that conference and addressed him. I said: “Papa Wemba, do you see how I am dressed? I am in Bob Marley t-shirt” and I waved the book I had in my hand. I added, “Papa Wemba, weren’t you born in Kinshasa? That city you were born in, at this right moment, is in the hands of rebels. I saw you in Angola as the Red Cross ambassador. How come you can’t even sing for your own country? Organise a charitable even or campaign or a concert where people can take with them stuff they don’t use any more so that

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you can take them home like you did in Angola and distribute them to our brothers and sisters who are suffering back home, especially in areas where there are wars”? He avoided my question, failed to give any answer and started talking about other stuff. Another guy who was there stepped in and asked why he didn’t address points made by the man in Bob Marley t-shirt. He asked him to please the question. He (Papa Wemba) did not realise that at that point we had already started wakening a real patriotism feeling in Congolese people in this country. And do you know who was next to Papa Wemba at that press conference? The now Kimbangu, who was at the time was called Matone Israel. He was the one in charge of Papa Wemba’s security. All those people finally came to join us years later, when they realised that Congolese people were finally waking up. That’s how we came to create all those institutions, based on CCUK or Cocorico, especially when many Congolese people were being regularly deported back to Congo or removed from this country. We said we needed to quickly create an organisation to help people in that situation, and call our embassy for any assistance they could give. And I would want to pay my tribute here to our brother Tedy who passed away recently. He and another brother, Bona, were both deported to Kinshasa, but returned back here soon after. We moved heaven and earth, leaving no stone unturned to try and stop that deportation order, but did not succeed. We continued even after they were deported and a decision was finally made to bring them back. That was another Cocorico’s achievement.

Cocorico started as CORU (Congolais du Royaume Uni), but was not really successful under that name. But from there, CCUK, or Cocorico, was born. We made it very clear from the start, that Cocorico is not a political party, but it surpassed by far all political parties when it comes to its capability to mobilise people. In 2003, even our ambassador was amazed at the even we organised to celebrate our independence at Selby Centre. Even our big brother, Tabu Ley was also present at that event. We had a brief chat with him there. He told us he was also present, there in the room when we were being given our independence, and that he was only 17 at the time. What we did was to start something that people can unite around. Unfortunately, some people, once they realised CCUK’s mobilisation power, they started to make it sound evil. They were saying that it was a deal between myself and the ambassador, etc. So, from CCUK people created something else, strangely called CCU. Just imagine, CCUK to CCU. And obviously, this new organisation had no other objectives or reasons to be than to criticise and attack CCUK. We were accused of doing deals with the ambassador, etc. They started to create confusion, saying lies and putting doubt in people’s mind. As I am talking to you now, I defy anyone to come and have an honest debate with me. I am confident that I will be able to demonstrate that everything that was being said about CCUK has no foundation. In this whole state of confusion, even our pastors got involved. They also ended up creating their own organisation called CORU, I believe. But we managed to stop them when when joined effort with the Metropolitan Police who were already investing allegations

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	<p>of child abuse and children in the community being accused of witch craft. All those organisations were then ordered to come together so that those responsible could be easily identified, because, not every single pastor is bad. We ended up working with some of them, like Pastor Jean-Bosco Kanamesha. I pulled him out of that group and he came to join me on a panel with the Metropolitan Police, the Child Protection Command and the Education Minister at time, who was called Tim something. We were in Parliament, at the ministry of education and so on until our pastors were ordered to sign up to the child protection policy. These are some of tangible things Cocorico achieved. It was from Cocorico and its various event that the “Combatants” movement was born. Many of those people we call “combatants” today are in fact Cocorico’s grandchildren. We did good work. At that time, whenever Congolese officials came to London we will speak to our embassy and request that they have an interview with us in the presence of members of the community. And they did. Vital Kamere, the current Head of President Felix Tshisekedi’s office, came here with Kikaya Benkalu, we organised a programme and invited people from the community but none of the “combatants” came. And on that day, in the room, things we said in the past in Cocoroco came to light, like prophecies. That’s why those who know the past also know signs of time. In 2003 Vital Kamere and Kikaya Benkalu, as someone in the room revealed, adding that, things you guys are doing back home, if you continue we will stop you from ever putting your feet in Tottenham ... (this bit sounds like lacking logic as the speaker moves from one thing to another without finishing his sentences). I knew this about Kamere, but I never revealed it. Someone else did, there and then. It was quite unusual for someone to embarrass a politician that way. One must be very courageous to do that. We have video clips to prove it.</p> <p>In short, we brought to the community something else, different to the usual talk and discussions about music. We awakened people’s patriotism, conscience about their country and their community here.</p>
IR	This interview is getting to an end, do you have anything to add to what has been said?
IE	No, I don’t have anything else to add, except to acknowledge the importance and necessity of the work you’re doing. I will give you other people’s names and recommand you to go and speak to them too. I’m sure they will be able to tell their own stories, which I believe will be of great interest to you and your research.
IR	Thank you once again.
IE	Thank you very much



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Duration 63 minutes and 01 seconds



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