

## Citita Fecouchy- INTERVIEW

### Speaker key

IR Interviewer  
IE Interviewee

Speaker	Transcription
IR	Good morning Mrs Citita
IE	Good morning brother Brandon
IR	Thank you for giving us this opportunity to talk to you about our oral history project. I will start by asking you to introduce yourself?
IE	<p>My name is Citita Fecouchy, mother and professional. I am involved in community works, Human right advocacy and I have great interest in Congolese Politics.</p> <p>Within the United Kingdom, we organised seminars, lobby to the government and everyone with stakes in Congo to ensure the implementation of Democracy, Human rights and development.</p> <p>I work with communities to its integration, social inclusion and access to available services</p> <p>Also, I am an insurance Protection advisor and I am proud to say that, today, many Congolese people in this country are now signing up to all sort of insurance policies, life insurance, sickness insurance, etc. This is what I do for living, and beside that I also do interpreting and translation work.</p>
IR	Can you allow us to explore your immigration journey and your stay in the UK. Please give us a short brief of your own trajectory, a story of your journey and resettlement experiences from Congo to the UK, realities you found when you arrived, any difficulties you faced? Please tell us in brief your own story.
IE	Thank you for your question my brother. For personal reasons, please forgive me, there's a part of it that I cannot talk about. I would therefore prefer to start from the time I arrived here, not what happened to me before I reached here. There are far too many things that I would like to



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	keep for myself, and maybe for my direct family only. But I'm ready to talk to you about my stay here, and how my journey was.
IR	That's precisely my question. I am asking you what difficulties, challenges you faced from the time you arrived in England. This was for you a foreign country you came to. You arrived, and what happened next?
IE	<p>As such, my arrival wasn't very challenging for me because I was met by my family who were already here. Due to what had happened back home, which I do not want to talk about, my family, my wife and my children, had already come over when I arrived. So, they received me, and at the time it was the custom that you'd come into the country first and then present yourself to relevant authorities and tell them why you've come to this country. And that's what happened in my case. I came into the country first, and the next day went to the Home Office where I was interviewed. But the next stage was quite challenging because, you know, you came from a position of high level of responsibilities and, all of sudden, you find yourself in this country where you become like a small child and have to learn English. And when you look around you, or you look at other people who are also learning the language with you, you ask yourself "why on earth have I reduced myself to this?" But that's life (life is what it is). When I was assessed, I was fortunate to be helped by this woman, who enrolled me in an ESOL programme. This was really hard for me because I became everyone's laughingstock. In the class I was in, there were young men and women who could speak English fluently. And there I was, not even able to speak it at a beginner's level. I asked this lady to take me back down to the beginner's level because I didn't think I could cope. But she refused because she believed in me. She insisted I remained at the level she put me and said she knows why she's done it. And what happened next was exactly what she predicted. At the end of that school year I was the first of my class. I then understood that, although most of my class mates spoke fluent English, couldn't write properly. It encouraged me a lot, and from that point I started believing that I could do well in this country. The following year I went up to level 2, and when I finished I started doing interpreting work. Luckily for me, at that time you could still work, even if your immigration status wasn't yet sorted out, and I was in that category, without immigration status. So, I started interpreting for solicitors' firms, and that helped a lot to cheer me up. However, I shouldn't forget the hard time I went through while studying. I had to do some small jobs here and there in order to survive. I can still recall my very first of those small jobs and I will never forget it for</p>



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	<p>the rest of my life. From being a director back home to shifting boxes. And I am not ashamed to say it, so please record it well so that generations to come can learn something about me and my life. This is a lesson of perseverance. You come, from being a director somewhere in your country, to shifting boxes in Europe. I did it, and I repeat, with no shame. But, thank God, lifting boxes meant that I had to make even more effort to continue learning the language in order to move on and make progress.</p> <p>Later, I started running an after school club on Saturdays, with about 20 children, then 30 and finally some 50 children. After doing for more than 15 years with my age advancing and it was becoming harder for me to keep up with giving up my Saturday mornings. So, I needed to give it up, although those kids really missed it, missed those Math, French and Culture classes they enjoyed so much. But I carried on doing a number of other activities in the name of the charity, such as cultural events, a project to accompany kids to schools, dealt with tensions between parents, their kids and schools, we had a group of young people we were sending into those schools to try and resolve some of the issues, etc., which gained us recognition and caused us to be well known in schools around East London.</p> <p>Then, I felt the need to resume my studies, especially given the uncertainty and unreliability of funding for charities. Given the experience I had already built up working with children in the charity sector, I felt it was necessary to switch from my previous background in Business Administration to studying and qualifying in Psychology and Politics, so that I can work better and manage human beings, where I felt my passion was. So, I ended up with a degree in Psychology and Politics, a qualification that has helped me to continue doing my work in the community until now.</p>
IR	<p>So, you have a rich career or an interesting profession, but we will come back to that later. But for now let's focus on you as an individual who recently arrived in a foreign country, what happened when you arrived. Here you are in a foreign land, you weren't used to food here for example. What happened? How did you cope? How did you manage to sort out issues like health care? Please tell us about all these things.</p>
IE	<p>Thanks for that. So many questions. But I will try to answer based on what I think I understood. From the moment I arrived in this country I</p>



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	<p>found out that many of my countrymen and women had no clear legal immigration status, and had been like that for several years. That situation brought about a number of problems and difficulties, such as being unable to make any plans or have defined projects in life. When you have no immigration status you don't really know what might happen to you tomorrow, so you constantly live a life of uncertainty. Such uncertainty is in itself a torture. I too found myself in that situation and so suffered from it enormously, while doing black market jobs, packing and carrying boxes. It was like living exclusively on a day to day basis, not having a faintest idea as to what might happen to you tomorrow. This was for me a terrible experience, especially given that I had left behind a very good job with high level responsibilities. Worse, I then found out that some of my countrymen and women I got to meet were in that situation for over ten years. They couldn't go anywhere or get out of the country, they couldn't have a normal regular job, they couldn't do anything. The only option we had was doing black market jobs. This is the main cause of failure for many of our brothers and sisters in this country. Many could never get back the precious time wasted waiting to regularise their immigration status. But I was lucky enough, and I call it luck because that's what it was, to have my immigration status regularised within few years of my arrival. And that allowed me to move on with my life. But just imagine some of the people I met who, after ten years in this country, were still without an immigration status. What could have been their mental state? I honestly do not have the right words to describe it. It's not surprising to find that many of those people lost it completely, some even ended up with some sort of mental health issues, relationship breakdowns, leading to separation or divorce. Some people initially came on their own hoping for their partners and children to come and join them once they've settled, but that settlement never materialised and so couldn't get their families to join them. This situation was one of the most difficult one for many of us who came to this country seeking political asylum.</p>
IR	<p>What about food, your diet?</p>
IE	<p>Oh, when it comes to food, thanks God, when I arrived I found that there was already a well-established Congolese community in this country, so I did not face any issue with regard to food. I remember the very first Congolese shop I visited was in Upton Park. It had everything I could think of. And since then, it's very rare to see me eat stuff like chicken &amp; chips, very rare indeed, maybe once every two months. This is because since I arrived I could easily find things like our style kidney beans from back</p>



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	<p>home, “pondu” (kasava leaves), “kwanga” (Kasava bread), etc. I therefore have no much to comment regarding food because I never became victim of a cultural chock when it comes to diet and food. However, when it came to my kids the impact wasn’t that positive. We had to force them many times so that they could go back to our traditional diet from time to time because they got accustomed to food here, which isn’t always very good. But just like many other kids from our community, once they grow up they start liking our food again, and now they have no problem eating it.</p>
IR	<p>What about social life? In Africa people live in social groups, often outside, in open air. Did the change affect you in any way?</p>
IE	<p>That was for me a shock at the beginning because when I arrived I thought I would be regularly meeting up with people, socialising a lot, but unfortunately this wasn’t the case at all. Of course, I was welcomed and invited for meals at many friends’ homes, but as time goes by, I soon realised that everyone had their own life, and so couldn’t just appear at someone’s home without prior notice like we used to do back home. Some people need to wake up very early in the morning to go to work, others are very busy dealing with their children’s issues, etc. So it wasn’t that simple to just appear at somebody’s house without warning. And when soon after I myself became busy with my own life and family issues, this lifestyle became normal for me too. I also became uneasy to see someone suddenly appear at my place without warning. It therefore became also natural to me that any such meetings needed to be arranged or agreed beforehand. But having said that, within our community here in the UK, we still find time to organise events and opportunities to meet up from time to time, which doesn’t seem to be the case elsewhere like in France or America, according to many people I talk to over the phone in those countries. There are always some sort of social events, at least once a month on average, when people get together or meet up. But it isn’t always that simple because some issues like child care need to be resolved first, especially for those who do not have anyone here, no parents, no other family members, etc. So, they have nowhere to leave their kids, no one to leave them with, where as back home, kids could stay home, safely playing outside and you’ll go about, doing your business without any concerns about their safety. Where as here, unless kids are at school, there’s no security if you aren’t with them at all time. However, this situation is now improving a bit because many of our kids who have grown up here are now having children of their own and can leave them with us</p>



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	while they go to work or do other things. This could help them do better than we did.
IR	You were already of a certain age when you came here, an adult. You certainly have or know people who have children born here and slowly becoming themselves adults. Can you possibly draw a comparison between yourselves when you first came here and those kids (now young adults) to see if we can predict what might be lying ahead for them? Do you see any differences between these two experiences?
IE	Sorry, can you please clarify? Are you talking about today's kids or adults who came with kids?
IR	Adults who come before had their difficulties, challenges and opportunities. Some came with small children, others had children here and some had both. Many of those children are now grown up and become young adults. This means we are really talking about two different cultures here.
IE	I think I already partially addressed that. These kids have succeeded to do what I call a cultural crossover. They live between two cultures, or they have successfully created a mixture of two cultures by adapting the positive side of each culture. To give you one simple example, we've been making a lot of effort to convince our kids to take out of their mind the idea that witchcraft exists or influences their lives in anyway, but it's only with this third generation of kids that our message has finally gotten through. Of course, some of our religious leaders and pastors were fully responsible for this phenomenon, but it became quite hard to get it out of our children's mind until recently with the third generation. It had become quite common within the community to blame witchcraft for every single problem or challenge people were facing. And many of our pastors were responsible. They started by indoctrinating parents who in turn passed onto their first and second generation kids those believes. But today, within Congolese kids of the third generation, it's almost impossible to find anyone who believes in it. And this is essentially because they've come to realise, with our help, that these believes have no rational or scientific basis, and they've done so without the need to reject everything else from their culture. So, they rejected what is negative while embracing the positive. These kids are therefore very comfortable living between two cultures. Another example of their cultural flexibility, when I first came to this country we were invited once in a pub for a birthday party by



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	<p>a non Congolese family. It is chocking to find out that everyone has to pays for their own food and drinks and was very embarrassed as I had no money with me whatsoever. A Nigerian friend had to pay for me. But our kids today have found a genius way to deal with that with no problem at all. When people organise parties, they do like we do it in our community. They don't ask their guests to pay for anything. They only invite numbers they can afford to feed. But when they go to their friends' parties who aren't part of our communities, they are always prepared to pay for themselves. And in fact, many of their friends are now doing the same because they find that our kids way of organising these parties is the best one.</p>
IR	<p>Was it a good or bad thing for you to have immigrated to this country?</p>
IE	<p>There is good and bad in everything, but overall, I thank God because, first of all, I succeeded to educate my children, I myself got good education from back home, and secondly, a very good healthcare that keeps us well and fit so far, although tomorrow belongs to God, no one knows the future. But for now, I thank God. Thirdly, I, once again, benefited of good education, and free of charge, although I am paying back slowly, but when I got it was free. Finally, I live in a sane environment. For all the above I can only say thanks God.</p> <p>But having said that, the time I have spent away from home blocked some of the many ambitions I had. And I really had many ambitions for my country, like my inner desire to be part of a positive change for that country. But, in my own way, I still feel I participated, although from a distance, to the change that is currently happening. I, together with some friends, organised marches and protests, etc. I would very much have liked to be there in action in the country, but it couldn't be helped. That's in brief what I can say.</p>
IR	<p>What would you say to a person who has recently arrived in this country?</p>
IE	<p>When I came I had nobody to show me the way. I was practically on my own. I looked left and right and tried to find my way. But today, if I meet somebody who has just arrived, the first think I'll do is to encourage him/her. Many of our countrymen and women who come to this country are, or at least the vast majority, at an age where it is still possible for them to study. Especially when we're talking about a country like this one where opportunities are given to everybody. Even someone who didn't reach A Level equivalent can still go back to school, g,et their A Level and</p>



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	<p>even go to university. There's only the UK that gives people such an opportunity. So, if I was to meet someone from Congo who has just arrived here my first advice would be: Get yourself registered in a college or other forms of educational studies or professional training. Studying isn't necessarily for someone to become a government minister or a company chief executive. You study primarily to qualify for a specific career or profession, get a decent job and build up slowly from there. Whatever your job is, if you have a qualification you stand a good chance to get promoted. We've all witnessed this many times. We've all seen or heard about people working part time in supermarkets like Tesco for example, stacking items on shelves while studying or doing some other training for the rest of their time. Once they finish their studies or training they apply for a different job within the same company, and within a relatively short period of time they become supervisors and even managers. This is what I will tell any new comer. I know that many people missed out opportunities because they had no one to advise or show them the way and they can therefore be forgiven. But not those who come now, when we already have many role models within the community. You only have to follow or listen to them and you cannot go wrong.</p>
IR	We are getting to the end. Is there anything you want to add Mrs Citita?
IE	Thank so much for giving me the opportunity to share my experiences.
IR	Thank you to you Mrs Citita.

[00.50.52]

**[End of Audio]**

**Duration 58 minutes and 52 seconds**



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