

Langa Fabrice - INTERVIEW

Speaker key

IR Interviewer

IE Interviewee

Speaker	Transcription
IR	<p>Good afternoon Mr Langa</p> <p>Thank you for making time to speak to me today finally.</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 Joel and I am being assisted by Blandine and Grace.</p>
IE	<p>Afternoon everyone.</p>
IR	<p>Mr Langa, can you please tell us about yourself?</p>
IE	<p>My name is Langa Fabrice, I was born in Mbandaka a City in the Equateur Province northern of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DR Congo) where my father originated. And my mother is from Brazza Ville, Republic of Congo, the other Congo across the river colonised by France. Also known as France Congo whereas DR Congo is Belgium Congo. I am married with children and work as a Mental Health Assistant. I like my job. It pays my bills.</p>
IR	<p>Tell me a bit about where you grow and your education as a child?</p>
IE	<p>I cannot remember much about Mbandaka city where I was born. However, I have a clear picture of my first day in School at the Nursery. I was three years old. I did my primary and secondary schools at Institut Boboto, a well know and reputable school in the Gombe/Kinshasa. I have been in that School throughout all my primary and secondary education. The School was run by Catholic priests and I believe it is still run by them till today. Teachings were amongst the best in the town. You know Nuns, monks and priests have earned a good reputation in Education, alike here in England. Catholic or Church of England Schools are among good Schools in the country. I had finished my High School and awarded a state diplomat in Literature (diplome d'etat, section Literaire)</p>
IR	<p>How was it like growing up those days?</p>



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IE	<p>Best for my generation. I had many school friends, we use to be together, however, it was quite difficult during holidays as everyone kept to himself. You needed to have a valid reason for going out of the compound. I could not meet my classmates during holidays or school terms as my parents were very strict. Unless we meet in the street corner shop, super market or in church, there were no other ways to meeting my school friends. Today, I look back and said to myself: We must have missed a lot as kids. But thanks God that is how parents wanted us to grow up, maybe it has prevented us from getting in trouble.</p>
IR	<p>Did you have siblings? If yes, please describe the relationships you had with them your parent?</p>
IE	<p>We are 4 boys and 2 girls; I am 5th and have a little sister who is our last born. We have a sister as our first born. My father has a second wife with whom he had 4 other children. He was a military man who used to travel around a lot and stayed there for sometimes before coming back home. I think that justifies why he had more than one wife. He maintained a very close relationship with all his children. He was a hard and authoritarian man and used that power to control his family. A very nice man, a good and Special father. I have a very good relationship with all my siblings and my parents.</p>
IR	<p>Who did you dream to become?</p>
IE	<p>I wanted to become a Lawyer and that was my father's wish as well. But later, I became much attracted to what my elderly was doing: Fashion, dress cutting and making. My sister specialised in fashion and graduated from fashion university. She went to UZAM and was creating her own styles; she used to get me as her assistant when I was a little boy, working with her, motivated me to get into fashion. She took it from my mother who is a dress maker on her own right. I think it is a family thing. It runs in our DNA. We had a Workshop with all the equipment at home, I self-trained at home and was getting better and better. Until people started advising me and encouraging me to do what I love in life rather than just doing what my Dad wanted me to become. Finally, I decided to follow my career in Fashion. I spoke to Daddy, who was upset at first then later supported my choice. This was a woman thing. I think, I was able to get away with it because he wasn't around. Otherwise, would he had been around, I don't think I would had reached near my mother workshop and started sewing. I am happy and I loved it.</p>
IR	<p>How did you pursue your dream?</p>
IE	<p>I didn't actually. I had to leave the Country.</p>



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IR	Why?
IE	It is like it happened yesterday and I don't really want to go into details as it does really traumatise me. I never had a chance to open up and I never mention it to my children. Please, do excuse. Maybe another time.
IR	Of course another time. How did you arrive in the UK?
IE	I travelled via South Africa. My cousin arranged for me to stay at his a little while but it did not work out well. I decided to go China at my big cousin's place. I had stayed a while, and had a chance to travel around Asia; when I left Asia, I came to Europe, in Belgium at my other relative. I did not feel free and independent at my brothers', there were controlling me a lot. They turned me into their house helper, just because I wasn't yet doing anything. I was the one doing their Children's school runs, shopping and cooking for their children while they were busy working. Not having much to do, one of my sisters in law suggested me to come with her to England and see if I would love it. I used to borrow people's ID to travel and I never measured the risk involved. That is how I ended up in United Kingdom (UK).
IR	How did enter the UK?
IE	We boarded a night bus in France and we had travelled through the night. We went through control, where we have to get off the Bus and arrived in UK around 6 am, I guess. I did regret at first. When I walked around a bit to discover the neighbourhood where we were saying, looked at how things are different here, few high rises, all houses looked alike and I said to myself: not here. I should have stayed in Belgium that travel the sea and stay here.
IR	What city was that?
IE	Upton Park in East London.
IR	Do you regret coming to England?
IE	I might have regretted it when I came. I have a mixed feeling to this question.
IR	What happened next?
IE	I was shown how to go to the Home Office and follow the immigration procedures. I was really shaking as I didn't know how it will end up. I could have been arrested and deported back to DR Congo then Zaire. This is something I couldn't have wished for, It is like going back to square one where I started and definitely end up being arrested. Every one immigration story is a personal matter and confidential.



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	I would not be exposing myself here. The truth is that I feared persecution in Zaire at the time, now DR Congo.
IR	Can you share your current immigration status with us?
IE	Yes, it took me almost 20 years to be granted a leave to remain in the UK on humanitarian and exceptional grounds. I had to make a fresh claim before being considered for leave. It is very stressful, some have even developed mental health and end up in unwanted relationship. And have even children out of it. Can you imagine!
IR	Did you face any discriminations in the UK?
IE	English Language was the main one. Back then in the Congo some people were able to speak English, as were my brothers and one of my Sisters. They went to nice schools and English was a compulsory subject for all. I was the only one that did not want to learn English, I would run away from English lessons, I couldn't see any benefit of learning English, I would make excuses during extra learning classes at home just to avoid learning English. Nevertheless, I had picked up few words and have a little conversation. I could remember few English Lyrics. When I arrived in South Africa, I wanted to improve my English, unfortunately, it didn't last longer before I decided to travel to the West. When I came here, I had to adapt both with the way of life and hoe people treat you. Today, I am surprised that I am the only one who has decided to settle in an English country. My siblings and I often laugh about it. We ever know where live would ever take us.
IR	How did you integrate in the UK society?
IE	I can't explain it. It is a bizarre feeling. In my opinion, I had noticed that people here keep to themselves, the relationship with British people was not easy at all. I felt that they take a lot of time to accept foreigner, and it was difficult to be accepted. Often, they offer to help, but you could still feel that they are reserved. That sort of atmosphere stops you from moving on and aspiring for great things. Their behaviours will stop you move even closer to them.
IR	Do you feel that British public has accepted people like you?
IE	Somehow yes, 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 and go back home; I wanted to hand myself to the immigration service, the UK Boarder Force and tell them to send me back to my country, but my friends advise me against that. It made me far more resilient and here we are many years later!



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IR	Do you consider yourself part of British society now?
IE	More or less yeah. I would say 50% - 50% to be honest not totally yet. There is a line that says, "You are only better off at home" your country will always be your home. You may feel part of British society, but you will always be considered as a foreigner and it does hurt. You end up confused, very confused
IR	What do you miss?
IE	<p>As I said earlier that it feels strange being in a Foreign land. "You only feel comfortable at home". We have issue with the weather while back home in Africa, we were used to hot weather, which is different to western weather.</p> <p>Also, when it comes to food, language and life style; it's not easy for us to be fully integrated.</p> <p>Socially, we have lots challenges as well, for instance; once my friend shouted at their neighbours' boys because he was throwing stones into their windows and their neighbour had to call the police on him and it couldn't have been a different story back home; you are allowed to discipline your neighbours' child and it will not cause any confrontation.</p> <p>We miss our culture in all aspect of life and if we had a choice, many would pack their suitcase and return back home.</p>
IR	What do you do for living?
IE	Currently I work as a Mental Health Assistant. I have developed a medical condition that prevent me from working fulltime. I work mainly weekends
IR	What do you do on your spare time?
IE	Reading, walking. I like shopping
IR	How do you compare Britain to your home country?
IE	I am sorry there no comparison. I do regret DR Congo when it comes to culture. Western people lack moral; I would say. Their culture is flouted compare to ours, how it uses to be back then; even now our own culture is also a disgrace. You cannot discipline your own child in Europe, you are not allowed to yell at your children or punish them, while in Congo, when I was growing up, a neighbour could



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	<p>punish your child, for miss behaving in public or anywhere. it's normal. It's like seeing the police presence everywhere. It does act as a deterrent to crime.</p> <p>In England parents cannot punish their own child; you are told, "That's the Child's Rights" that's what put our community in confusion. Children could curse, drink or play fool in front of their parent and it's all normal. The boy would bring his girlfriend at home, which is something that cannot be allowed back then in Congo or in Africa. In Congo, it's all about respect and obedience. A 25 years or 30 years old man would ask permission to go out from his parent. If you see your dad on the street, you would run away in the fear to be seen and get into trouble but here it's not the case here. We, parents are really stragglng to getting the balance right. Because, it is a new concept to us.</p>
IR	How do value your customs and traditions?
IE	<p>I very much value my customs and traditions. It really means a lot to me. I keep in touch with my family and friends from Africa, talking with them help me keep my language and culture alive. I keep what is good and drop what is bad. Like what we have just said about educating children.</p> <p>I miss my tribe's favourite cuisine or dish: roasted fish foiled in a bowl. We have so many diversities. It can be eaten with plantain or cooked cassava powder.</p>
IR	Looking back everything, you went through, would you have wished to stay in Congo or come to UK?
IE	<p>If I had a choice and the fact that I have children over here makes me chose staying 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's education and well-being.</p> <p>Also, I had started a new life here; my life in Africa is my past but right now, this is my present and future that count. I'm trying my best, day in and day out to make this country my home like everybody else</p>
IR	Do you keep in touch with the community?
IE	<p>Yes, I do. We have a good and active community, there is love within the community despite being very loud and the community is not well organised. There are still some disgraceful behaviours sometimes which pushes our community backward. We do start good projects but never finish them; it's sad and I always wonder. We have educated people but lead by creed. I think it's the</p>



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	same with every other community group in England.
IR	We are getting to end. Do you have anything to add?
IE	I would encourage and fully support what you do. I think it's very important for future generations. Sorry for not agreeing to talk on camera. I found it very intimidating. I hope I have answered your questions.
IR	I would like to thank you for your time.
IE	Thank you very much to you too.

[01.01.02]

[End of Audio]

Duration 61 minutes and 02 seconds



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