

# Francophone African Oral History

**Interviewer:** Hello! Can you introduce yourself?

**Interviewee:** Hello, my name is Aristi Manunu, my date of birth is 10<sup>th</sup> May 1997 and I'm currently living in Birmingham. I'm a Congolese born in Kinshasa.

**Interviewer:** What do you remember from the place you were born?

**Interviewee:** My family home was a big house of seven bedrooms, rich family, rich dad and rich mom and I was brought up like that. I studied in a very good school until the age of 7 years old; that is when I came for a holiday to England and had decided to stay in England to study.

**Interviewer:** Did you start school in England or back home?

**Interviewee:** I had started my school back home, my nursery year 1 to 3, that's when I moved to Birmingham.

**Interviewer:** Can you describe your school in Birmingham?

**Interviewee:** My first school in Birmingham was Bentley school, located in Walsall; that's where I started my year 2, after a couple months we got moved to Birmingham central because I was an asylum seeker, my school then would be Benson school and after that I had moved to St Francis school, that's where I did my year 4 to year 6 then I went to secondary school.

**Interviewer:** Have you lately been to your old school?

**Interviewee:** No, I'm not actually been to my primary school.

**Interviewer:** Where did you do your secondary education?

**Interviewee:** My secondary education in year 7, I was at Four Dwellings and my year 8 to 9 I did it at Heartlands then my year 10 I did it at Hodge School then I had moved to South and City College.

**Interviewer:** What did you do at the College?

**Interviewee:** At the College I was studying Enterprise; first, and after my level two, I would work for work experience at a Bank then came back to do Business Management.

**Interviewer:** Why did you choose to do Business?

**Interviewee:** I wanted to do Business because I always have ambitions to set up my own Business; I wanted to know what exactly happen in the industry of Business. Because I was 16 years old, they could not allow me do Business, they put me into Enterprise course, which linked to Business, from there that's where I have got quite experience in Business.

**Interviewee:** Did you do your GCSC?

**Interviewee:** Yes, I did it at years 7 to 11, that's where you get prepared for GCSC, I got B for Math, B for English, C for Science, B for History and I got B for my Chemistry as well. When I had moved to college, any of the courses was not what I wanted to do, all I wanted was business but because I was 16 years old and got B in Math and English, I could not progress to level 3 in Business, I had to do the level 2 in Enterprise which teach you how to run a company; it's quite different to running a Business, that's where I have got proper skills to progress into my Business.

**Interviewer:** What about the A level?

**Interviewee:** A level is the equivalent to level 3 in Business, you go to A level only if you get A or A\* in Math and English; it's like function skills Math and English which is equivalent to GCSC.

**Interviewer:** When you started school in Birmingham, where you discriminated?

**Interviewee:** Yes, a lot because I was chubby, freshly and could not speak English properly, to be honest, I was crying a lot at school when I was at year 2, I would feel like I was not really fitting in. Every time I would try to speak, other kids would make fun of me, they all would laugh at me because my English was not correct, so it kind of put my confident down; I thought that was it because of my colour? Or the way I looked and had impression like my friends did not like me, but my teacher liked me.

**Interviewer:** You had suffered from that?

**Interviewee:** Yes, I was crying a lot; sometimes I did not want to go to school because I was not feeling like I was loved. And if anything happened in the class as I was one of the Black chubby guy, for example if someone got bullied or anything got missing, the first person they would look at was me and after they would find out that it was not me at all, I guess, because I was a typical black guy.

**Interviewer:** Can you describe your typical school day?

**Interviewee:** In Christmas day! Before Christmas day, like 22<sup>nd</sup> of December, since preparing for Christmas; I would wake up and take my breakfast then my mom would walk me to school, I think I was in year 3 back then in Walsall.

Each day before the 25<sup>th</sup> in the morning, a teacher would pick up one child to rip up a chocolate jar and eat chocolate, from the 1<sup>st</sup> of December to 22<sup>nd</sup>. I had to move from Walsall to Birmingham but until then, I was not chosen to open the chocolate jar.

I came one day in class, no one had open the chocolate and had told my friends that we should open the chocolate but I'm not going to do it because I was leaving the school, but I would come back for the Christmas party, so I left school then I came back after two days for the party and everyone was **blaming me** of opening the chocolate!

I did not even open the chocolate because it was not my day but even the teacher believed that I had opened the chocolate and I had felt really offended by it and had reported it to the head teacher.

Why would I getting blamed of opening the chocolate only because I did not come to school for two days. I finally realised that you cannot argue with the teacher, what the teacher says! That's the way it would be.

I had cried that day as well and even wanted to go back to Africa. That's one of my experiences in the school day.

**Interviewer:** Can you describe how you were spending your holidays here in Birmingham?

**Interviewee:** Christmas holiday 2012, just normal holiday, you would stay at home and have to wear new clothes. Figure out what presence you going to get from your sisters and brothers; even if you do not have money but you would have to go ask for money and buy presence for your sisters and brothers which I find it ridiculous now, you would buy cards from Poundlands and write them down for your neighbours, had Christmas dinner.

**Interviewer:** You said that every Christmas, you have to wear new clothes. Can you tell me if you had miss new clothes in some occasions?

**Interviewee:** That was the African mind set that I was brought up to, while in Congo, every Christmas day or New Year, I would have to wear new clothes and that was the rhythm that my mom brought me into until now; I spend my Christmas with my pyjamas and do not even go out.

**Interviewer:** How many children are there in your family?

**Interviewee:** I came from a family of 11 children from my mom and two other wives. My mom gave birth to 4 children, who I'm, the last one. My first Step mom gave birth to 4 children and my second step mom gave birth to 3 children.

My dad was very rich powerful man and my mom was also very rich, so I came from a good family, good background if I can say so, until my dad passed away in 2007 and things got turned around.

**Interviewer:** What was your dad occupation?

**Interviewee:** My dad was a private investor in the government; he would invest his money for the development of the country and expecting to get profit from it. He was also working in Currency money exchange and was really an influence in the Currency rates.

Because He had lot money in his hands, he would sometimes finance certain banks also borrow from them as well.

**Interviewer:** What kind of relationship do you have with everybody in your family?

**Interviewee:** At the moment, I'm in good relationship with all the children from my mom. From my dad's second wife, the communication is not good at the moment because of certain raisons, I do not know why. From my dad's third wife, the communication is also tie because our dad is not with us; he is the one that used to keep us all together.

**Interviewer:** What are you doing at the moment?

**Interviewee:** After I have finished my studies as I said before, I'm running my own business; I have invested in the Disc Jockey company which I'm the director and the founder. Apart from that I have invested in property development back home. I'm also the CEO of Youth Charity based in Birmingham.

**Interviewer:** What of duty do you have to do everyday in your Business?

**Interviewee:** Everyday I have to drive, make phone calls because of the DJ Business that I do, I do not have an office that people can come in, the only way to contact me is through my phone; If someone call me, we would discuss the price, the location and instruments that I have to bring which require more driving.

For my charity Business, I also communicate with my partners through the phone and emails; if I have to come to the office to fill up any form, I would drive to the office. So, it's involved a lot of driving and phone calls in the daily basis.

**Interviewer:** What kind of events do you cover?

**Interviewee:** I cover birthday parties, first communion, baptise, church events, weddings and private parties for clubbing.

**Interviewer:** That's only in Birmingham or also outside Birmingham as well.

**Interviewee:** At the moment, I'm based in Birmingham, but I had some occasions playing in Leeds, Coventry and Milton Keynes.

**Interviewer:** What do you like about Birmingham?

**Interviewee:** Birmingham is calm and there are a lot of opportunities for young people

**Interviewer:** Such as?

**Interviewee:** Such as study support, life commitment, apprenticeship support, job vacation support, youth clubs and churches. It's a lot services for young people in Birmingham compare to London; I got friends who live in London, over there is more of busy life.

**Interviewer:** But they say that Birmingham is the second city in the UK in term of the economy, is it not busy as well?

**Interviewee:** I would not compare the London to Birmingham in term of busy; for example, in the West Midlands, the majority of transport finishes at 12 O'clock while in London it's 24/7.

If you are looking for an accommodation, you have 85% of finding accommodation here than you would have in London, that's shows how the population is.

**Interviewer:** In your job as a DJ, do you DJ for people of different culture or only Africans?

**Interviewee:** I prefer to work with African people simply because as a DJ, you have to be the best in selecting songs for your clients. I listen to African music a lot than English or other music, I'm more confident in African music.

If you put me into an African event I would perform very well, and I can guaranty to my client that people would have a great time but if it's other culture, I would not perform as good as at African party and it's the other way around if you get an English DJ to play for at African party.

For example, DJ Westwood who works for the BBC, he plays for African events as well, but he would not play as well as I would.

I do not know if it's a background thing.

**Interviewer:** What are your expectations?

**Interviewee:** I would like to move from just playing music to renting music and instruments, getting African musicians from Africa and perform over here in Europe. That's my ambitions so far, from DJ to a music Producer.

**Interviewer:** Do you think if you become a producer, you will be successful?

**Interviewee:** Yes, I do, I love music and first thing I would have to do is to gather up young people from the UK listen to African music, give them the opportunity to see other artists and enjoy live music, have fun; also make money as business man.

**Interviewer:** Can you describe a typical Congolese event that you have played for?

**Interviewee:** For a wedding event, I come 2 hours earlier before the event, I do my sounds check, make sure that microphone is working properly because Congolese or African people like the **shout outs** where you would have to sing or say their names loud; it's like praising them.

I would always start with slow music, follow by old music (nostalgic music) then open the dance floor. The owner of the party has to open the dance floor; if think it's a tradition, the mom and the dad would have to open the dance floor for the child, once they opened it.

I would expect people to join in and encourage the couple with the money, from there I would play the right music, I have to get into their minds and figure out what sort of music is right for my clients at this present time and I'm very good at that.

I would play the right music and they would dance and I would put good comments that they want to listen to, through the microphone. I would make them forget about all their stress, think just about the party and have fun.

Once I start saying their names, giving them shout out, they feel happy therefore, they would give me also more money by encouraging for taking their stress away. That's what I do.

**Interviewer:** How would you know that this music is right for the party?

**Interviewee:** Because myself, I'm a party man. I love party a lot and I know that if you are in the party, drinking or not drinking. I know exactly what kind of music to play.

I can separate the old people and the young people; I know how I can mix tunes, what music to play for the old people that young people would also like, even from the beat alone and they would come to me and ask the name of the song. I would do the same for the young, play Faly Ipupa and old people would like as well.

You have to see me in action for you to understand.

**Interviewer:** How do you know old music?

**Interviewee:** I had worked with a DJ who is an old guy, he's the one that taught me a lot of old music cause I'm young and only born in 1997; his name is DJ Kilimandjaro,

he's on his late 40s now. I have worked in partnership with him including other younger DJs as well.

**Interviewee:** How many parties do you cover in the month?

**Interviewee:** In the month, I cannot really say how many because in some months, you would have kind of a dry month with no event at all for instance in January and February which are not good months but in the year let say from May to September, I'm fully booked

**Interviewer:** Why is that?

**Interviewee:** Because we are getting into summer, hot temperature brings parties and events. I would be booked from Fridays to Sundays. Some people would like to have their party on Saturday but because I'm booked they would have to move their party to Sunday just because they want me to play for them.

**Interviewer:** You have to be that Good!

**Interviewee:** You have to see me in action

**Interviewer:** Anything you miss from back home

**Interviewee:** Yes, I miss my grandma, the life style, my house, and my family. Even though I got family here, but family back home will always be part of the family.

Friends that you grew up with, there is different affection you have for them, you have the same background as well; my dad was rich, their dads were rich, they have different understanding that people I have met over the UK.

**Interviewer:** How do you keep in contact with people back home?

**Interviewee:** Through social network, such Facebook, Instagram, and Snap Chart. We always share pictures and make calls. If they come to the UK, they would come visit me and when I'm in Congo, first, I go see them.

People are friendly as well. I was in Africa three months ago, I went to my village in Muanda where my grandparent come from, I have never been there; it's not my Ant or my Uncle that took me there, it's my friend's parent who took me there for a week. They did not even call my mom and ask permission, they have just brought me ticket then we went to Muanda. They feed me; they took me as their son.

I do not think that a person of my family here in the UK would take me to Paris for one week and pay for my ticket; they would tell me that they have bills to pay.

**Interviewer:** What do you like about the UK?

**Interviewee:** I find in the UK, life is easy, not easy but manageable than it is in other places. I have been to many countries; been in Belgium, Paris, Turkey, Libya, Ethiopia, and Congo Brazzaville.

I have been to many countries, but UK is where I feel comfortable; I know how to get my way out.

To see a young of my age, in other countries, they are struggling. Studies wise as well as business wise or working wise, they find it difficult to cope than it is here in Birmingham.

**Interviewer:** What is the most important thing for you here in Birmingham?

Is it your job?

Is it family?

Is it studies?

**Interviewee:** It's my Business; it's what keeping me here the most, because I'm in the age where family is a priority and family is not a priority no more. I'm thinking about how to have my own family as well.

4 years ago, if you have asked me this question, straight away I would have answered you "my mom"; I would not even think twice but now it's because of my business, working as a DJ.

At the moment if I find somewhere else that life would be a lot easier, I would leave without looking back.

**Interviewer:** What have been changed in Birmingham since you had moved in?

**Interviewee:** I have seen the economy growing.

There are more colleges, more businesses, more towers compare to when I was about 9 years old growing up.

I would tell you that Bourneville college, two years ago was very small college but they have invested more than three million pounds and now it's a big college, which means the economy is growing in the country; even if they are having some problem for investing so much money and now they are having problems with items but you can still see how much it has changed.

The same with South and City College, now they are working in the partnership with UCB (University College Birmingham); if you want to enrol at UCB and there is no space, you can do your course at South and City College, which before it was not the case.

Young people in our age, own their own companies, they own their clothing lines; which when growing up, I would not see young people at 19 years old to maybe 23 years old owning businesses, they would always work at the warehouses but today, young people own their clothing lines.

Doing their own DJs, have the opportunity to be the CEO of a charity and travelling. You can see that, there is a way to cop; I have seen a 16 years old working as a nurse, even if it's apprenticeship but it's still within the industry, which I do not see in Belgium or Paris.

Let's talk about the crime, the crime scene has actually decreased, the way the crime was in 2006-2008, it's not the same as now, we would have mostly a once in the month. Where I was growing up, someone would be stabbed or shot.

In 2008 there were kind of a beef between Asian and Black people because there was an Asian woman that was rapped in an Asian shop in Perry Bar and after a Black lady was rapped then became a serious beef; it needed to have the mayor of Birmingham to go to BBC to talk about it.

We do not have that no more at the moment, now young people are more focus in business or themselves in our generation.

**Interviewer:** There was a report that, there is more segregation between communities. Do you agree?

**Interviewee:** Yes, it is true, black people are living by themselves and Asian people living by themselves as well, but I would like if you ask me, if it is a good idea or a bad idea.

**Interviewer:** before we get to that, do you have friends outside African community?

**Interviewee:** Yes, but we do not get along in the way I get along with my black brothers.

**Interviewer:** Why is that?

**Interviewee:** Because, he might like me as a friend but his mom not going to like me. I had a lot of Muslims friends; I was working at PPI, the director was Asian, the assistant manager was Asian, everyone I was working with was Asian, there was only two black people, me and one girl. Her job was making tea, getting documents from cupboard passing them to director or to any of us.

And my role was a possessor, I do not know, in just two months I got promoted as a team leader and all the Asians that I was working with were against me, they had told the manager that "why he got me promoted as a team leader while he has Asian people around?" then I had started having problems in my work place and my manager told me "you have to understand because you are black".

Asian people do not like black people.

The same thing I would say, black people do not like Asian people.

If the Asian people are doing well on their side and Black people are doing well on their side, I cannot complain about that, I think it's good.

**Interviewer:** So, you think segregation is a good thing?

**Interviewee:** No, we are not really living in segregation, if you look at it very well, the economy in Birmingham is growing because of Asian people. They are the ones that running more businesses, paying tax. That is what makes England economy grow.

So technically white people still go to shop at Asian shops to buy groceries.

We are still communicating.

We still go to same schools and still study in the same place.

I'm sure where you live; you may have at least one white neighbour.

I have one white neighbour and four Asians neighbours in my flat.

So, we are still together, even if we are not widely together, it's just the way of life.

There is Christianity and there is Islam.

You cannot tell an Asian to become a Rasta man, they would tell you "No, that's for Jamaicans" I guess that's the way it.

**Interviewer:** What sort of businesses that young people are going into in Birmingham?

**Interviewee:** Clothing, they are running their own clothing lines

If you are good artist, they would design costumes, create their name and put on the costumes, I do not know what actually they do to produce the clothes because I'm not into that industry. The only thing I know, they would produce the clothes, get models and they would put them into social network and site to promote their clothes; that's more on male side.

For the female side, they are more into hair and make up.

A lot of young females are running their own make up businesses that I can see through social network. I do not know if there are only black females who are doing that, I know also young Asian females who are doing hair and make up as well.

And the singing as well, they have started taking their music more serious.

I think we are going back to the 80s now, the young people that are singing or rapping, the literally taking it more serious and actually making more money out of it. Not only because of the music produced but more about the messages they are putting into their music, as a DJ, I see it like that.

**Interviewer:** Can you describe how Birmingham city centre was back when you arrived and how it has changed?

**Interviewee:** We have more bus stops and buses are more organised.

Earlier on, there were not couple hotels, like La Tour was not there.

There are still works going on, I even find the city centre more complicated, maybe because I have used to the old method.

But I think in the next two years to come, once the Birmingham city council finishes the jobs, because there is still a lot going on, that's why they are closing different places. They are still doing trams and other things.

In the next two years, I can actually answer your question properly.

**Interviewer:** How many best friends do you have?

**Interviewee:** I do not have best friends in Birmingham.

**Interviewer:** Why is that?

**Interviewee:** Friend is a powerful word. I had made two-three friends, the other ones, are people that I know, people that I have socialised with.

**Interviewer:** What is the difference between friendship and socialising?

**Interviewee:** Friendship is someone that we can talk about my personal stuff, someone that calls and checks on me once or twice in the month; even if I do not see them, we have something in common that I would always know what he or she is doing.

Even if we go to different country but we would still have the same ambitious in life. I have hope in my life that I will meet them somewhere, because we have same ambitions.

I have my friends in Congo and we always say that we are going to be rich people, they are studying at the University now, some of them are doing business, so I know in the future, we going to meet somewhere. I call them my friends.

Socialising, people that I occasionally meet at the party.

If there is business, we meet up together.

If there is an event, we meet up together.

If we have to go and see girls, we meet up together.

But if there were none of that, we would not meet up.

For example, I do not see their parent taking care of me for a week.

I do not see their parent spending £200 on me.

But my friends, I know their parent could spend money on me; or my friends could spend money on me.

**Interviewer:** We are reaching the end of our interview, is there anything that I could have asked you?

**Interviewee:** Yes, you should have asked me, “How do I see Birmingham in the next five years?”

**Interviewer:** How do you see Birmingham in the next five years?

**Interviewee:** I see my generation being on top in five years.  
People backgrounds will not matter.  
If you are black, it will not matter.  
If you are Asian, it will not matter.  
If you are white, it will not matter.  
In five years, I see young people taking advantage of the opportunities in front of them.  
I do not only see it in Birmingham, I see it everywhere in the world.  
I see our generation doing better than our parent’s generation.  
I do not know if it’s because of technology but I think, in the same way the technology has improved, the same way human being has improved.  
I do not know if what I am saying makes sense to you.

**Interviewer:** I do not really understand, how?

**Interviewee:** For example, when you came in England, maybe you were about 24 years old, what you did then; it’s not what we do today at 24 years old. Maybe at 24 years old, you were at University studying or you had finished your master degree.

But now, I can see your child, at 24 years old running their own clothing line company and making money out of it.

I see your child, at 24, finishing University and get a job as a manager at a Bank or in the big industry, even if they are black, which maybe in your time, that would not be possible.

Does it make sense now?

**Interviewer:** How do you keep your culture ties and identity in this diverse city of Birmingham?

**Interviewee:** By organising for example nights out, student night in clubs.  
I would produce events as a black person.  
I would do the DJ.  
I would invite University student and I would play African music.  
If I invite them for a meal, I would not take them to Nandos; I would take them to an African restaurant where they would eat fried rice, chicken and plantain.

**Interviewer:** How many languages do you speak?

**Interviewee:** I speak three languages, French, Lingala and English

**Interviewer:** Anything you want to add?

**Interviewee:** Nothing really

**Interviewer:** Thank you

**Interviewee:** Thank you

