

# Francophone African Oral History

**Interviewer:** It's 14:10 pm; I'm going to interview you in the relation to our Francophone African Oral History in Birmingham.

My name is Ferdinand, Hello!

**Interviewee:** Hello!

**Interviewer:** Can you tell me your name and your place of birth?

**Interviewee:** My name is Mira Dikuta, I was born in Congo formerly Zaire, Kinshasa on 11<sup>th</sup> December 1979, in Ngaliema Clinic.

**Interviewer:** Where about in Kinshasa you had lived?

**Interviewee:** I had lived in the borough of Ngaliema-Macampagne, Ambassadeurs neighborhood, 54 Mbenseke Street.

**Interviewer:** Where and when did you start your primary school?

**Interviewee:** First, I started my nursery school at a private Belgium school called "Les Bambous" at Ipen area; then I went to a French private School called "Ribambelles", which was then renamed "Nyota".

After that, I went to "Lycee Bosangani-Sacre Coeur", where I had had my primary School, but I did not finish the term due to strikes, I had to leave and went to another private school called "Kama" still in Macampagne near home; then I had left there and enroled to another private school "Bolamu" in Jamaïque area, just around my neighborhood. I had left "Bolamu" to "Bamoyo" near by "Etat Major Generale" and opposite to Jean 23, which is where I had finished my College studies in Fashion "Cutting and Sewing".

**Interviewer:** Were there "State Exam" in "Cutting and Sewing"?

**Interviewee:** Yes it was.

**Interviewer:** How was it like growing up? You had friends?

**Interviewee:** Yes, I had had a lot of friends, we use to be together, but it was quite difficult during holidays because in my family we did not use to go out very often; I could not meet my classmates during holidays at the young age but I could see my friends when I was in college but it was not that easy as parent were very strict.

**Interviewer:** How many children are in you family? And describe is your relationships with your siblings and your parent.

**Interviewee:** We are 7 children, 3 boys and 4 girls; my bother's first child is a girl; after her, a boy, a girl (unfortunately she had passed away), a boy, myself as a girl and the last one is a girl. My dad had had many children; my dad was a military officer in Zaire era, "Mobutu regime". My dad had worked a lot in the different area in Congo. I have a good relationship with all my siblings and my parent; we call one another very often.

**Interviewer:** What had influenced you to do study Fashion? "Cutting and Sewing".

**Interviewee:** My sister that had passed away did "Cutting and Sewing", She went to UZAM and was creating her own styles; she used to get me as her assistant when I was a little girl, working with her, motivated me to get into fashion. My mother did also "Cutting and Sewing", she had Sewing machines at home which I would practice with and improved my sewing techniques. I had loved it.

**Interviewer:** When you had finished your studies in "Cutting and Sewing" Did you directly get into work?

**Interviewee:** I did not get into work straight away because while waiting the "State Exam" results, I had to leave Congo.

**Interviewer:** When and why you left Congo?

**Interviewee:** I cannot really remember the exact date I had left Congo, I have a little confusion on dates; it was just after the death of former Congo president "Laurent Desire Kabila". I did not think of leaving Congo growing up, I still love Congo, it was not my will to leave my country; it was just circumstances that made us leave Congo, we left Congo an a rush.

**Interviewer:** Did you came directly to United Kingdom or you had travelled other places before arriving in the UK.

**Interviewee:** No, I did not directly travel to the UK, first I had travelled to South Africa, I supposed to stay there for a while at my cousin's home but it did not work out well. As I had my visas allowing me to travel anywhere, I went to China at my big sister's place. I had stayed for a very long time in China and had travelled the whole Asia; when I left Asia, I came to Europe, in Belgium at my big brothers'. I did not feel free and independent at my brothers', there were controlling me a lot. One of my sisters in law had told me to come with her in England where I would feel comfortable. That is how I came in England.

**Interviewer:** The surveillance or controlling from your brothers that you have talked about, wasn't it for your good?

**Interviewee:** Not at all, it was in the good will, they wanted to guide me, but I had found it a little bit harsh and hard to take on because I was already an adult myself, I did not need that much of guidance, that's what pushed me to come in England.

**Interviewer:** How did you travel to the UK? By Bus or you had taken a flight.

**Interviewee:** I had taken a Bus alongside my sister in law through the night, suddenly when I had woke up in the morning, I had found myself in England; I did regret at first, I walked around a bit but I did not like in here, I should have stayed, I had talked to myself.

**Interviewer:** What city was that?

**Interviewee:** In London, Stratford. I did not show my concern; I had kept it to myself.

**Interviewer:** What had made you regret coming to England?

**Interviewee:** The environment, I would say, my first impression of the area I had arrived, it was not good at all. As a new comer, what I had saw at first, did not impress me, secondly; I had felt a bit lonely because in Belgium and France I had my family around me, as a teenager it was difficult for me to be all alone but eventually I had got use to it.

**Interviewer:** Did you get a visa to get into the UK?

**Interviewee:** I had used someone else identity to come to UK, my siblings get the lady money to allow me to use her identity and I had to sent the passport back once arrived in England.

**Interviewer:** To get settled in the UK, you need to have legal documents, where did you start?

**Interviewee:** I was brought to Immigration department, the "Home Office"; I knew the procedure since back home, you have to presence yourself to the immigration department once arrived in the foreign country.

I had applied to get a status and it was a long process, I was refused and had appealed against the Home Office decision.

**Interviewer:** What years was that?

**Interviewee:** I arrived in England in 2002.

**Interviewer:** How you ended up in Birmingham?

**Interviewee:** The immigration department sent me to Birmingham, I was sent over here when waiting the first Home Office decision, it took quite a long period of time waiting; and then I was sent back to London where I did my "Fresh Claim". I was again sent back for the second time in Birmingham, then I was given a stay; I have my status now.

I had decided to stay here in Birmingham, in Warsaw instead of going back to London.

**Interviewer:** What was your first impression of Birmingham? Compare to the way your life you had before.

**Interviewee:** I use to cry everyday even when I was in London, I could not cope to the way of life I had got myself into, I did not know what to do, it was very difficult for me because if I remember the life I was living in Kinshasa, back home; I had a good life, everything was made for me by my parent but over here I had to fight by myself. In here, everybody is in the same level but in Congo there are different social background, everyone is respect according to their rank in the society, but you would not get that kind of consideration and respect you deserve in England, it was hard for me.

**Interviewer:** How did you manage yourself to learn English?

**Interviewee:** Back home, my brothers and one of my sister, could speak English, I was the only one that did not want to learn English, I would run away from English course; I did not see any interest of learning English, I would make excuses during extra learning class at home just to avoid learning English. Nevertheless, I had picked up some words and could had a little conversation, I could hear, listen through English music as well.

When I had arrived in South Africa, I did not have someone to help me improve my English, I managed by myself; I did not have difficulty learning English when I came in the UK, I had a little knowledge already, I'm a easy learner when it comes to learning languages.

**Interviewer:** When you came to England, what was your relationship with the English people?

**Interviewee:** I had noticed that they kept themselves to themselves, the relationship with British people was not easy at all, they take a lot of time to accept foreigner, and it was difficult to be accepted. Even when you need help, they would help but you could still feel that they are reserved. That sort of atmosphere puts barriers on your way and stops you to move on.

**Interviewer:** Difficulties you had come across, not being easily accepted by British people. Did that affect you mentally?

**Interviewee:** Yes of course, 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 three times and go back home; I wanted to hand myself to the immigration department and tell them to send me back to my country, but my friends would stop me each time I wanted to do so. But I gave myself a chance to be patient and here we are!

**Interviewer:** Do you feel integrated into British society?

**Interviewee:** I feel a little bit integrated, in term of percentage; I would say 60% to 70% integrated, not totally. I have limit, there is a line that says, "You are only better off at home" your country will always be your home. You may feel integrated, but you will always be considered as a foreigner and it's hurt a little bit.

**Interviewer:** What your occupation?

**Interviewee:** I used to study before then I had stated working; right now, I'm out of work but I will get back to work soon.

**Interviewer:** What job do you do?

**Interviewee:** Care assistant.

**Interviewer:** Do you like your job?

**Interviewee:** I do like it a little bit but not totally

**Interviewer:** How?

**Interviewee:** It does not mean that it's a bad job; working as a care assistant requires certain qualities, you would have to be someone that love people, have love in your heart; I do have those qualities. I do not like it in the sense that its affect you mentally. You would have to see people in their lowest, you would see elderly people getting so weak, they cannot help themselves; you have to do everything for them, its affect you in that way; that is why I do not really like it. But the job itself is good; I like helping people.

**Interviewer:** Because you have to work in the environment like that, do you fear getting old?

**Interviewee:** Yes, I do, no one like getting old. When you are old; you are reaching the end, but we do not have any choice; all of us will go through it.

**Interviewer:** What do you do on your spare time?

**Interviewee:** Beside my job, I spend my the most of my time with my child, looking after my child education, health; I also spend my time with my friends. I do go to library to read as well.

**Interviewer:** What different would you make between Congolese culture and British culture?

**Interviewee:** I do regret Congo when it comes to culture. Western people lack moral; I would say. Their culture is flouted compare to ours, they way 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 child or punish them, while in Congo (formerly Zaire) when I was growing up, a neighbor could punish your child, it's normal.

In England parent 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 allow back then in Congo.

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.

**Interviewer:** Do you have British friends?

**Interviewee:** Yes, I do, I do have friends from different backgrounds, Africans, Caribbean and Western friends.

**Interviewer:** How do you keep your African culture?

**Interviewee:** Keeping in touch with my family and friends from Africa, talking with them help me keep my culture. I keep what is good and drop what is bad.

**Interviewer:** To hear you speak, I feel like you regret leaving Congo; is not it?

**Interviewee:** Yes, I do regret a little bit.

**Interviewer:** If you had a choice, you would have stayed in Congo?

**Interviewee:** If I had a choice; I would have stayed or go back but unfortunately having children over here makes me stayed 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 education and well-being.

**Interviewer:** Apart from Lingala, French and English, what are other languages that you can speak?

**Interviewee:** I can also speak Kikongo as I'm from Mumbunda tribe; as a reference, Mulele is our grand-grandfather.

**Interviewer:** What is your tribe's particularity, in cuisine for instance.

**Interviewee:** It is Susu ya Mukedi in Kikongo (bicarbonate chicken); in my tribe's language Kimbunda it's called, Okwese ndjo.

We have also foods like Misisli, Mikungu and Bankulu; Bankulu can be eaten raw or cooked, it's quite hard and sour, can be used as a medicine to treat a lot of illness, like diabetes; some people like it and some don't like it even within our tribe "Mumbunda".

**Interviewer:** What do you miss the most from Congo?

**Interviewee:** what I miss the most from Congo is our culture, I miss the way we grew up, that way of life; I miss my family and siblings. I do miss that love and care for one another.

**Interviewer:** What is important for you right now beside your child education?

**Interviewee:** It's my life because I came in England since 2002, I had started a new life here; my life in Congo is the past but right now, this is my present and future life. I'm trying to be integrated like everybody else.

**Interviewer:** What is your relationship with the Congolese community here in Birmingham, how would you describe your community?

**Interviewee:** We have a good community, there is love within Congolese community in Birmingham but what I don't like is "bullshit" some people have, and the community is not well organized.

There is compassion and care but still some disgraceful behaviors sometimes which makes push our community backward. We do start good projects but never finish them; it's sad. I always ask myself, why? Congolese is a nice person but; there is a big "BUT" in our community. We have smart people but why we do not go forward? What can we do?

**Interviewer:** I would have to thank you for giving your time to be interviewed, I don't know if you were prepared for this and I hope you were comfortable during the interview.

**Interviewee:** Thanks; I was a little bit prepared cause I knew that you are going to interview me, but I did not know what would be discussed. I was comfortable during the interview, you did not

put pressure on me, you gave me time to respond and I'm happy the way I have responded. I'm a human; I do make mistakes, if anyone is offended to what I have said, then I would apologize for that, I can do better in the future.

**Interviewer:** Thank you very much.