

Unfinished Conversations – Liverpool

Interviewee: Daniel Sebuyange (Blue Saint)

Interviewer: Maxine Brown

Director of Photography: Darren Brady

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Location of interview: Pier Head, Liverpool, Merseyside L3 1HT

Total length of recording: 29 minutes 29 seconds

(Not included in the video: Maxine Brown - Can you tell us what your name is?)

00:00:01 Daniel Sebuyange (Blue Saint)

Hello, my name is Daniel Sebuyange. I'm also known as Blue Saint or as many people know me, Blue for short.

(Not included in the video: Maxine Brown - Where do you live?)

00:00:09 Daniel Sebuyange (Blue Saint)

I live in Liverpool, specifically the Wavertree area where I grew up. Most of my life I grew up around the Toxteth area.

00:00:16 Daniel Sebuyange (Blue Saint)

(Not included in the video: Maxine Brown Can you tell us a bit about yourself and your life?)

Yeah, a little bit about me and my life. I'm originally from Congo. I was born in Congo, raised in Congo till about five. Then I moved to Liverpool just before I turned six and I got really into the creative arts. So me and my family would go to a lot of youth centres and be involved in loads of different projects, community projects. And so I've got to look for the community and I love for music and just the creative world.

(Not included in the video: Maxine Brown - Can you tell us a bit about your school and life growing up in Liverpool?)

00:00:45 Daniel Sebuyange (Blue Saint)

My school life growing up in Liverpool was an interesting thing because when me and my family moved to Liverpool, we would move to so many different places. We always moved around. So I never stayed in the school for a long amount of time.

I went to maybe five or six different primary schools. And then secondary school, I went to a school in Garston.

And yeah, so I just that most of my secondary school was in Garston, which was more of a predominantly white area. But yeah, it was all right.

(Not included in the video: Maxine Brown - What was it like just growing up in Liverpool?)

00:01:23 Daniel Sebuyange (Blue Saint)

You know, growing up in Liverpool was a mix of different things. They had so many great things about growing up in Liverpool, the many friends that I met and people that I saw. But then there was downsides to it as well. Sometimes me and my family, especially when I was dead young, me and my family would get racism depending on the areas that we were in. The worst part of that was when we moved to Anfield, we basically got really heavily racially attacked. My house was like people threw stones and that, our house and stuff. But then they also...I had amazing times in Liverpool too. Like I say, I went to different community centres where I got into the arts, got into writing music and performing, opening up for many big artists, being involved with so many organisations like Writing on the Wall and so many others 20 Stories High.

There's not too many for me to remember from the top of my head, the name. I feel as if I'll probably be missing one. But yeah, so it was highs and lows. But I really overall, though, I really love Liverpool. I think it's like it's a really friendly city and yeah, I'm a scouser. You know what I mean. I'm proud of being that.

(Not included in the video: Maxine Brown - So you mentioned it more about the, OK, from Congo. Can you tell us a bit more about your family background and connection to Congo?)

00:02:43 Daniel Sebuyange (Blue Saint)

My family heritage, like I say, is I'm a Congolese and a proud Congolese. And so like while growing up in Liverpool, I'd be out and experience being a Liverpoolian, come back home and still got out, you know, Congolese music playing and Congolese food. So I got to experience, you know, and still experience both sides. But yeah, like in terms of like a lot of my heritage means so much to me. And like I know a lot about the history of my heritage of Congo, of what it went through. And, you know, we had to escape because of the war.

And before that, like there was a lot of, you know, before the 1960s, there was colonialism that occurred. That happened when King Leopold came to Congo. And, you know, he was a monstrous man. And, you know, it got a lot of people killed, dismembered. There was a lot of atrocities that happened in Congo back then. That kind of led to instability in Congo that would later lead into like the wars that later occurred in Congo years later. But yeah, but then there's got highs to Congo as well. You know, the music, the food, you know, my heritage, my blood. So, yeah.

00:04:20 Daniel Sebuyange (Blue Saint)

In terms of in terms of like going all the way back to like my family tree. And there's a there's only so much that I know because I was so young when I moved from... from Congo. I was like I said, I was around five and a lot has kind of been lost in history as well. But the beautiful thing, a lot of crazy stuff happened in 2020, obviously. But the beautiful thing that came out 2020 is I got to reconnect with a lot of my extended family. We did like a whole zoom and I got I got to talk and... and we can start to piece them together more of our history. And like learning about my great grandfather and how the Sebeyanga name got passed down. And yes, it only made me have a deeper appreciation for... for, you know, for my my history and my identity.

00:05:14 Daniel Sebuyange (Blue Saint)

It's a bit of a long story about how the name got passed down. But from what I remember I don't even want to butcher it. So I'm a bit of being I don't want to say I can then be missing, like give the wrong confirmation. But from where I remember one of our great grandfathers was called Sebeyanga. And from what I also know is that years ago in Congo, people didn't really have surnames. You'd go by like a first name. And so that name was... was most likely a first name. And then in order to let that name live on, it got passed down and then eventually became the second name that I have.

(Not included in the video: Maxine Brown - What was your family's connection to Liverpool?)

00:05:51 Daniel Sebuyange (Blue Saint)

In terms of my family's connection to Liverpool, I don't really think we had like a being before we came to Liverpool. Well, I don't think we had any we don't have we didn't have any family living in Liverpool. It's just that, you know, having escaped the war, there was, you know, the reason why we had to leave Congo in the first place because they had a really horrible war there was occurring. And when we came to England, one of my mum's relatives or friends mentioned Liverpool being a good place to come from what I remember. And so that's how that's what eventually led us to come into Liverpool.

(Not included in the video: Maxine Brown – A bit about transatlantic slavery. OK, so how do you think that transatlantic slavery has impacted your family's life?)

00:06:31 Daniel Sebuyange (Blue Saint)

I think that the transatlantic slave trade has impacted my life or my family's life in that in that the slave trade, you know, brought about what we what we still face to this day, which is racism and stereotypes.

And also, specifically with Congo as well, as I say, there was a there was the transatlantic slave trade that came into... into Congo and also there was an Arab slave trade that happened in Congo as well. That and the impacts of those things have trickled down to create, you know, from the exploitation that came from... from slavery. many minerals. Congo is one of the richest, has one of the richest minerals in the world. Things like your phone, the coltan that you find on your phone, you find that only in Congo. So there's a lot of exploitation, exploitation that happened in Congo that has led to like economic instability that that then wouldn't that had that what would then lead to, like I say, the sorts of, you know, the sorts of things that led to the things like the war and having us have to move out. And like I say, things like racism and stereotypes and not what it came through because of things like the transatlantic slavery.

00:08:10 Daniel Sebuyange (Blue Saint)

Where I learned about slavery was, was actually probably in school. That's probably my earliest, my earliest memory of learning about specifically the transatlantic slavery. I remember watching Roots in school.

But then also I started doing my own research as well around that age too. And like, thankfully, because of the communities I was a part of, like, you know, in L8. Like I say, I used to go to community centers, they had loads of different projects that would talk about things like the civil rights movement and that would talk about people like Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, more in depth. And then I just started doing my own research around that time too.

But yeah, my earliest memory would be probably in school, watching Roots in school. Yeah.

(Not included in the video: Maxine Brown - What do you think of the key legacies of transatlantic slavery and how do you think they've shaped the whole world today?)

00:09:04 Daniel Sebuyange (Blue Saint)

What I think of some of the key legacies that comes from the transatlantic slavery and how it shaped the world today. I've touched on it a little bit, but what slavery brought about was this sort of hierarchy and superior and inferiority complex that's still around to this day. And thankfully, the beautiful thing is that more people are more open and wanting to make a change and so many great things have happened, but it still does exist. The likes of treating somebody like they're not human, because of their skin color, that wasn't really occurring to the degree that you would see with the transatlantic slavery where people would be treated like they were just they weren't human, like they would just chattel properties. And so that's what brought in a lot of the racism that we still see to this day. And then also, when you look at the wealth that came in European countries that helped build some of the buildings that we see around, that what it came through because of the atrocities that happened in the transatlantic slavery. And then the poverty that you then see in these countries and the African diasporic and Africa itself and those and other people connected to Africa with like the Caribbean.

That's all because of the atrocities that happened back then with the transatlantic slavery. So those are some of the key legacies that are being built. But like I say, at the same time, due to the resilience and the unification that people had in wanting to combat such evil, the likes of abolitionists and civil rights people within the civil rights movement and people just opening their eyes and realizing that treating somebody like they shouldn't exist. The great thing is that one of the positives is that many people banded together against it. And so there's a hope that that just keeps spreading. But yeah, that's what I would say.

(Not included in the video: Maxine Brown - Is the legacy of slavery impact me personally?)

00:11:35 Daniel Sebuyange (Blue Saint)

Yeah, I would say the legacy is of slavery. I would say the legacy is of slavery impacted me personally due to the racial experiences, horrible racial experiences that I had growing up in certain places, growing up in Liverpool, I just think that's a no-go area. I don't want to enter there because I might get killed or I might just get beat up or whatnot and just being afraid of going to certain places and things like that. That's how I would say that that's impacted my life.

But yeah, the great thing as well is looking back some of these areas, there's more multicultural that I see in some of these areas now. But yeah, growing up, those were the same places that you just don't enter there because you know, at a certain time or even ever because you could possibly get killed if you were to enter it. So yeah, that's what I would say.

(Not included in the video: Maxine Brown - What ways do you think transatlantic slavery has shaped Liverpool?)

00:12:40 Daniel Sebuyange (Blue Saint)

The ways that I think the transatlantic slavery has shaped Liverpool as a city is, its built, a lot of Liverpool has built economically, has profited a lot from the transatlantic slavery. Like I say, the buildings that we see around, a lot of them wealth and money that came into Liverpool. With Liverpool being a port city, Liverpool played a major part in encouraging and pushing this transatlantic slavery.

(Not included in the video: Maxine Brown - What does it mean to live in a city that has been shaped by the slavery? What feelings and emotions do you get from the city that's shaped by this issue?)

00:13:15 Daniel Sebuyange (Blue Saint)

The feelings and emotions I get from the history that Liverpool has got from the transatlantic slavery is kind of like a mixed feeling. There's a tension there, like in that, you know that due to its past, what's led to the wealth and whatnot that Liverpool has. But then there's also, like I say, I like to think about hope as well and like seeing people, like the fact that I'm here right now, we're talking about slavery.

We're talking about the transatlantic slavery. We're combating and trying to help build some resilience and change., right. And so on one side there's got the past and it's good to never forget the past because that's how you're doomed to repeat history. So it's good that we talk about these things. But then there's also a lot of the story of the slave trade, something that we shouldn't forget as well is the resilience that people had and how people stood up against these evils and how people unified. And it's something that we should also focus on and look at the heroes throughout this history.

Like I mentioned before, the abolitionists, the civil rights leaders, Rosa Parks, Martin Luther, many others.

Even within the colonial legacies, like in Congo, for instance, the likes of Patrice Lumumba, who is the first president of Congo and how he stood up, stood and fought against colonialism and other forms and, you know, things like racism. In fact, Malcolm X, I remember reading Malcolm X's book and he mentioned Patrice Lumumba as well. And Malcolm X as well, another great civil rights leader. But yeah, there's a tension there in seeing the past. But also, there's also hope as well in knowing that people now know of that evil and now wish to change things.

(Not included in the video: Maxine Brown - Have you visited the International Slavery Museum in the middle of the North?)

00:15:45 Daniel Sebuyange (Blue Saint)

I've visited the International Slavery Museum and the thoughts that I have around the International Slavery Museum is that it's a very powerful place. And I mean that in both a negative and a positive light. The negative part, what I mean when I say the negative side is like, you know,

you see the way that slaves were treated, how dehumanized they were, how close they had to be in slave ships. So that can leave a powerful, negative sort of message. But then the positive of that, like I said before, it's important to look at these things, to not wash away history, even if it makes you squeamish to look at.

Because these sort of things remind us about not going down that sort of route. It reminds us about unification.

And also there's also great positive things just in general in the International Slavery Museum because it gives a history around the identities of African communities, how they were even before the slave trade came in. So yeah, if I was to sum it up as one word, I just think it's a very powerful place.

(Not included in the video: Maxine Brown - What does freedom mean to you?)

00:17:10 Daniel Sebuyange (Blue Saint)

If I was to sum up what freedom means to me, I would say the freedom just means being treated equally and being treated like a human being and doing what it is that you wish to do. Without people negatively wishing to push you down.

(Not included in the video: Maxine Brown - Are there any individuals, key roles, community that you think have been forgotten in the history of slavery? Who are they? What are their stories? Okay.)

00:17:32 Daniel Sebuyange (Blue Saint)

The heroes, communities, and people, and or people that I think that have been forgotten in the history of the story around slavery.

I would say there's many heroes that I've already highlighted that thankfully many people know of. But even the likes of L8, you know, and like for instance, the L8 community, I know they've got a connection with what happened, we're talking about colonialism, with what happened with Nelson Mandela. There's a history there with Liverpool that hasn't discussed as much. I mean, in terms of like the Liverpool, the L8 community. I know that there's a connection with Congo as well. There was many people who were against the evil that King Leopold was, was doing that led to King Leopold being kicked out, certain abolitionists around that time and Christian missionaries that went there and exposed the, you know, took images and exposed what was going on because many people didn't know of the evil that was going on in Congo around that time that King Leopold was there. So I would say those sort of people, if any, like those are the ones that would pop in my head in terms of communities that are like not talked about as much.

(Not included in the video: Maxine Brown - Yeah. Okay. What does resistance mean to you?)

00:19:01 Daniel Sebuyange (Blue Saint)

Resistance means to me not giving in. fighting back. standing strong. having integrity. Yeah. Yeah, not giving up, not giving up. No matter how many times you try to get pushed down, you just keep fighting. You keep standing strong. And like I said, I mentioned the word integrity as well because

like, you know, even when trying, even when somebody is trying to influence you to change ways, standing on what you believe in, really, really standing on that.

And I would also say there's an aspect of community as well when it comes to resilience. Like from the history that's been talked about with the slave trade, a lot of the resilience that you see when you look at the history, it was a lot of the slaves, a lot of people banding together because we're stronger, there's one, we're stronger when it's put together. And so there's an aspect of community as well, I think, when it comes to resilience.

00:20:10 Daniel Sebuyange (Blue Saint)

The reason why I chose this location is because like when you look at the history of the slave trade, a lot of it had to do with the ships and with Liverpool being a port as well. Like I said, they contributed a lot because of that. So, you know, we're here at the pierhead, there's an anchor behind me that ties to that, the buildings that you see around as well. Like I say, a lot of the wealth and infrastructure that came into Liverpool were on the backs of slaves, of black people, of the slaves, of slavery. So that's why I chose here specifically.

(Not included in the video: Maxine Brown - Do you have any feelings or emotions about being down here on the waterfront?)

00:20:57 Daniel Sebuyange (Blue Saint)

I say that the feelings and emotions I have about being here at the waterfront by the river is similar to something I said before, which is, as I said, there's a bit of a tension in that you can see the past. But then also when you look around as well, you can see many people, multicultural around here too. So you can see the present and the future as well. So it's like I say, it's important to look back at the past and not repeat the bad that happened in the past. But it's also important to learn from it and look at the great things that came from going back to talking about resilience, from being resilient, from coming together, from fighting oppression and slavery. And that's when you get people coming together, getting multicultural and embracing our differences. So yeah, that's kind of the feeling I get, I guess.

Yeah, like, I'm looking and I'm seeing, okay, I know the history, I know what built this, but then I also know in that history there was humanity and there was a lot of people being dehumanized, but then people then recognizing that dehumanization and being human. Bringing together this beauty that we see now. (Inaudible)

(Not included in the video: Maxine Brown - Okay, so can you tell us a little bit more about you and your siblings and what you actually all do now because you're all such a very, very talented family.

Yeah, and also not just the talent, but each community, you're all very more talented as well. Let's talk a little bit about now, you and your siblings and what you're doing and what, especially about what you're doing and what you're doing now.)

00:22:19 Daniel Sebuyange (Blue Saint)

Yeah, I'm part of a big family. I'm one of six children, you know, a big love to my mum and my dad.

And yeah, we're all involved in the creative world and the community as well growing up. We were all got involved, like I said, just due to the likes of community centers we helped in bringing money to what's now FireFit. It used to be called Toxteth Sports Center. If you go to Princes Park, there's got a wood henge, a wood henge there. If you look at one of the wood pieces, you can see our names etched in there because we were also part of the project years back. We've been involved with Tiber, Tiber in Toxteth, done loads of work with Writing on the Wall, being in 20 Stories High. We're always trying to contribute to the Liverpool community and just community projects in general. But then we also are creatives. We love to make and create.

My oldest sister, Lena, she's involved in the theatre world and then my second oldest sister, Benny, she's really into fashion design. So she's a fashion designer and actor as well. We all came through doing the similar things. So we all basically did music and acting when we were dead young. But then we are all focused on one specific path within that creative world. Benny was in fashion design, still does fashion design. But then she's also an actor now. And in fact, right now, she's in the play in the Everyman Theatre. I'm also I'm next on the line so then it's me. And I'm also involved in the theatre world in that I'm a trustee in the Unity Theatre. I work a lot with Shakespeare North Playhouse in Prescott. But yeah, I do a lot of workshop facilitation, teach people how to write poetry, and how to write music. I'm a music artist myself. I'm a poet. We're all poets because we all write poems as well. But the predominant thing I focus on is music. So in fact, tomorrow, Saturday, the 17th of May, I'll be performing for something called Liverpool Rising Against Racism as part of Writing on the Walls Festival. Skinny Man is going to be opening it.

For something with such a message, Liverpool Rising Against Racism, which again, like I said, ties back to what I said about the hope that I see in Liverpool as well. Like I was saying again, it's good to look at the past, but then the hope and the great things that we see is Liverpool does do a lot to combat racism and combat inequality. So I'm happy to be a part of that tomorrow to be performing for that.

And then below me, the person after me, my sibling after me, is Dorcas, who's an amazing actor and singer as well. And she's also, like I said, we're all poets. So she's also a poet. My two older sisters are also singers, I forgot to mention. And then after Dorcas, there's David, who again is an amazing music artist. He did Liverpool's Sound City only a few days ago.

And then the youngest baby of the family is Terry. And yeah, he does a lot of the things I've already mentioned that we do. But one of the things that he does, that he really loves creatively is he's really good with the camera. So he's like a videographer. He's been shooting for many different people. And yeah, that's basically the children.

And then my mum as well is creative in her own ways as well. She used to like, when we were dead young, design, you know, help with clothing. And she caters sometimes gets asked to go to different places to cater, bring her amazing food for this to share outside the house. So yeah, there's got, sadly, my dad passed when we were dead young due to the war. But yeah, that's basically all of us.

00:26:52 Daniel Sebuyange (Blue Saint)

Talking about like me being Congolese and being a scouser, being from Liverpool. I've got this poem of mine called Heartbeat that really talks about my identity and showcases who I am. It

shows both sides of me how my identity is a mixture of Congo and Liverpool. And it's called Heartbeat. It goes like this.

00:27:13 Daniel Sebuyange (Blue Saint)

Blue Saint – Heartbeat

You will find I am bound by a binary system,
Two hearts that b-b-b-beat, beat
in double time,
Times by the two minds that co-exist inside me,
I'm of two different identities that speak in constant conversation
Connected by kinetic rhythms,
that traverse space and time
A heartbeat that beats in double time,
Pumps blood to two bodies found within one organism
My organ's system shifts in two bloodstreams,
That makes Niles like rivers,
rivers like Niles,
rivers that delivered me to existence

My bloodstream runs through two separate homes

I was birthed by the Congo, but almost drowned in the Mersey,
Submerged by its bold, bare splendid arms, to its chest,
My head pressed against its bosom
A baby breastfed by its murky waters,
Forced to taste the bittersweet bottom of its heart,
The b-b-b-beat, beat, beat of its heart,
Immersed before being rebirthed

I coughed out Scouse and spewed a soup of words: Lingala, Français,
English,

And they dropped out my lips as thick as potatoes and beef stew,
I felt my heart throb, reboot,
My pulse beating a pulsating African sun, to become an adopted son of
Britain

Africa, Britain, bloodstream shifting between the two,
To become one... rhythm

They say home is where the heart is,
But rather home is the heartbeat

The booms, the paws
the repeating movements, the patterns that form
the fabric of time

And each fibre of mine is a tight vibrant strand like liputa, kitenge

And when my heartstrings are picked and plucked a tide of boisterous
voices is erupted,

I was converted

From bright primary colours to those more muted,

But makelele is in my makila

Makila na ngai eza makelele Noise is in my blood

And the prominent sound is ma famille, my family

Bloodstream rushing to my memory bank,

Bringing back the thoughts of a bubbling broth in pots on top of a kitchen
stove,

Okra, fufu, pondu madesu,

And as mum and us six children sat around a table,

We would relay tales of our whole day,

Break beignet and give praise to Nzambe, God, grateful for the great
food and thankful for all,

I'm thankful for all, for all my roaring bloodstream continues to see,

Home is the heartbeat and my heart beats ever so proudly

Thank you.

END OF TRANSCRIPT