

11/07/2005

Interviewer: Daniel Koumou-nete

Interviewee: Mr. Andre Teko

Interview date: 10/30/05

In front of me, I have Mr. Andre Teko, my name is Daniel Koumou-nete. Today is October 30th, 2005. (003)

Mr. Teko, I have few questions to ask you.

Q: How was your life before the United States?

A: My life before the United States, do you mean, before I moved to the United States? It was difficult, complicate, and full of risk. It was not easy because, it was nice at one side and hard on other side. I was a teacher at the University of Benin; I was participating someway to the development of my country, at the creation of ideas. I thought that the principal factor for the development of ideas, structures and the country; the indispensable factor and the democratic. I have paid the heaviest price to that condition for supporting the idea of democracy during a public conference at the University. I had endured the thunderbolt of the military regime. How dared I to support the idea of democracy under a military regime? It might be foolish. I had suffer the consequences but when the wind of renewal went by in the years 1990-1991, I had found myself one more time next to the citizen to support the creation, to support the establishment of the multy-partism of the democracy in Togo. I was myself with thousands other people creator of the party CAR (Committee to Act for the Renewal). Ma life was very active, within the party, I was not the head of the party, who was Agboyibo, but I was one the ideologues that were participating at the construction of programs for the party, ideas, and promotions. (045) I had participated to intense campaign through out the country, from the south to the mid. It had come that my life happened to be in danger. I escaped few attempt of kidnapping and assassinate. Finally I had to flee the country that was mine to find refuge just like others thousands Togolese in Benin, at Kome in the bush. It was loaded with snakes around me. I had to kill I don't know how many. I love telling this story, this part of the story where I had to kill snake. I love telling this part of my life to the youth Americans who love these kinds of story and find my life attractive. They like to live things that will make them jump, but no me; it was not easy at the time to risk to put ma feet on a snake outside or to find myself with a snake in my room. But today I am a refugee in the United States to try to start a new life. I think often with regret to my country where massifs assassinate continue in the.. different and general in the International community but what you expect? I can't redo the world. The world is what it is. I am almost sixty today, I think more to prepare my future rather than an ideological fight. Others already restart the torch of the day since I was gone and I expect one day the democracy will triumph in Togo. Did I respond to your question?

Yes

Q: I have few questions to ask you about your life as a refugee in Benin and as a student. Do you offer me the permission to ask these questions?

A: Yes, I am listening

Q: I want to know if you think there was a way to bring democracy in Togo without the military intervention.

A: yes, it was my idea, I thought that by doing the protesting walk supported by the majority of the population, by a permanent constant dialogue with the military regime, and with the benefice and support of the international communities, I would have brought the democracy in Togo without military intervention. After the long experience I have been through, see the indifference of the international community toward Africa in general and Togo particularly, when it comes to democracy, I am telling myself somehow the population will have to pay for the conquest of democracy by its blood.

Q: How was the welcome in Benin?

A: Oh, I met some formidable people, they were not rich, but soon I arrived to Benin, there was a house in the middle of the bush, with no doors, with no.., well there was windows, however not the doors to all rooms. But I was offered that freely at the time but complications happened. You know, nothing is all white in the dark. Everything is white in the dark, we can say gray, and there goes life. I have adapted to the condition in Benin. My principal mind when I was in Benin finally was my children who were growing up and I was asking myself what they would become when the last cars from Togo came back searching to kidnap me in Benin.

Q: How did they know you were in Benin?

A: I do not know how, I was not even in Cotonou, I was in Kome. They came close to thirty meter from my house looking for me. They contacted people with whom I had relations to find out where I was living since I was living in the bush, and my friends alerted me that such person presenting under such name was looking for me. I told them I did not know that person. Well I called few army friends that was in exile too, I alerted the police, we investigated and when these people that were looking for me under false name probably going by captain euh, my friends would remember, would remember if I call them. When he found out that was turning around him and looking to find out who he was, he escaped. He thought that we will kidnap him in return. He would have spent a bad half-hour if we had him. He was not the only one, there were others that made the line from kome to Lokossa, from Hilla Kondi I mean to Lokossa, well and was doing, and it was a general panic on the line. It was at that time we wrote a letter to the U.S Embassy in Nairobi to ask for admission in the United States as refugees, then people from the U.S security force came to interview us in Kome and in Cotonou many times and finally we had the agreement of the U.S authorities to come refuge in the United States (168). There we are, we are adapting, and the problems are different, euh principally the culture. My culture, I am fifty eight years old today and prior to my arrival

in the United States, my French-African culture was already made, but today in the United States, I am finding my in another, euh another road cross. I will have to a French-African-America, I mean to integrate the American culture to my culture baggage, which is not easy because certain principals, certain rules of the American culture, certain customs are in contradiction with my conditions at the educational level for example, Well, euh, about the relations with our children. There are certain affirmations of equality of rights to which our children believe, which permit them not give their parents the place they deserve in the case of the African culture for example. You know, the father is placed at a certain level in the African culture, and when you see the Americans, the way they talk to their parents, the relations are not the same. And, it is a problem to be solved, it is not easy, it is a permanent challenge, well the kids, they adapt easily but for us that cross the age of fifty, the change and the adaptation to a different culture are not easy. We can live on the side of this culture, accept it by certain measure, well, avoid the conflicts as much as possible with this culture. But we can not in principle learn to live differently than we lived since we were born to fifty years old. It is the difficult part (206). I can say that the United States still difficult, it is, when you arrived to the United States, you will need to start everything from zero, learn English and speak the American English as it is spoke by the Americans, not the English that we learned in college, not the English from London, but an English with idioms, what is not easy. You have to adapt to a sample of life that is not easy, I mean, it is, a stressful sample of life, you have to adapt to a rhythm of work.

You know, in Togo, we work, we go to work at 7 am, we get out at 12 pm, we have time to relax from 12pm to 2:30pm then we go back to work and get out at 5:30 pm. We come home less tired, rather than working eight hours straight a day and sometimes to twelve hour shift a day; we usually not use to drive more than 15 min to go to work. We drive from 10 to 15 min max to get to work in Togo. But here in the United States, I drive me in particular an hour to get to work, and doing my school. It is physically, to demanding, it is horrible, I suffer when I get home every night, I am tired, very tired. It is not easy but I don't have a choice (240).

Q: What do you think about the life here in the U.S? Do you prefer the life in the U.S or the life in Africa?

A: Oh, I think the life in Africa is more relax, we take time to live. Here we never had time. We take time to live, time for individual relation, and personal more important. Us also want money in Africa, we have big project, build a house, buy a car, we have all that but still; euh, the humans relations are more important I believe. Here, everybody take its own road. Each takes care of itself, euh, first then the community after. That is the life in the U.S rather than Africa, the community with respect before then we try to live its life. It is not the same principle, the same social rules. It is not the same options, conception. Everything is different.

Q: What do you think about the U.S economy compare to the African's Economy?

A: We can't talk about African's economy, you know, there is nothing but dictators disturbances. Is there even a plan economic in Africa? Most of Africans countries, I

believe, with the stage politic economic, the deficit of objectives and ways, do we have ways for our politics? There are a lot of factors that we don't understand that determine our life politic in Africa. I believe I end up by telling by myself a lot, there isn't a politic at all, we live on guts, the biggest one as said, and part of them there is the United States, very well developed technically. It is a very big country, it is an admirable country at some points but everything is not well done (285). There are social difficulties, the problem with the black. All that are not erased yet, it has not disappear. Let's say that today their racisms are more reduce to the level to give space to the hypocrisy. I am real; I will tell this to an American. There are a lot of Americans that believe that they are not racist however a big portion of them are racist. The sad part is that less people are aware of their racisms; a lot of them say that they are not, but when they are exposing to the test, the acceptance of others is not easy. There is always the walk other to others. That is the individualism. If there was community here, maybe the integration to the community would be easier. But the individualism wins; there is more position, person to person than acceptance (314). You see, then individualism as is a factor favorable to the racism outside economics factors, prejudices there is just philosophy of individualist is a factor favorable to racism. The United States is a good country if you are well armed, when you come young, when you can adapt to the mentality and the structure of the country, it gives a chance to develop the rest lateral, rather material than spiritual. But the optics even when I use spiritual, it is the optic fluently admit. The comparison appears difficult. Let's say that United States is a different country, it is totally different to Africa, it's different to Europe, and it's different to the Asia. It is a country that has its own personality that has its own way to be. You have to know to accept it. And yes, we can not condemned everything about the U.S, just know how to accept the United States as is.

Q: What steps should Africa takes to be comparable to the United States?

A: Oh my God, don't make such a comparison between the United States and Africa. We could of from the beginning, think about the PanAfricanism to start. If we wanted to resemble a little bit to the United States, we would have to think about PanAfricanism with a federation of Africans countries. That will be a good beginning. There should be also the democracy. The democracy and allowing all socials parties to express themselves, not to cause the mess, and the discordance, but to propose and build an unity homogenous, respecting the particulars differences (367). Globally homogenous but respecting individuals, the individuals' cultures. That is what I want to say. There are different types of cultures in Africa. There should also have more severity in the management of the plan economic. The severity in planning, severity in execution of the plans, severity in the follow up. There should be a lot of things. Africa, I ask myself sometimes sometime why can't we? At the time in which all countries in the world are racing to the development, isn't it Africa trying to back off? When we consider things that are happening in Ivory Coast, in Togo, in Congo, in Gabon, in Cameroon, in Tchad, in Niger, you know it is painful. The human agents should find ways to bring end to African's dictators, to support all regimes democratic in Africa. It will be a good beginning to rebuild of Africa, if not I think Africa will be going, degrade and will dive deep and deep toward failure. These are briefly my ideas. (404).

