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Amosso, Agossou and Comlanvi Bamezon

Amosso, Agossou and Comlanvi Bamezon. Bronx African American History Project
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Interviewees: Agossou Amossou, Bamezon Comlanvi
Interviewer: Dr. Jane K. Edwards

Transcriber: Mary Maxwell
Date: August 12, 2008

Dr. Jane K. Edwards (JE): My name is Dr. Jane K. Edwards and I am a senior interviewer and researcher on African immigration, Department of African and African-American Histories, Fordham University. Today is August 12, 2008, I am conducting oral history interview, with two individuals from Togo. The interview will last for about one to two hours, and is taking place at the Bronx Museum of the Arts, media room. So to start, I just want to ask you to introduce yourselves. Like, I can start with you, introduce yourself, your name, where you come from, and your residence in the Bronx.

Agossou Amossou (AA): My name is Agossou Amossou, I'm from Togo, West Africa. I've been living Bronx since 2004. Not far from here, 152nd Street.

JE: And when did you come from Togo to the Bronx?

AA: I came to the United States, December 2004, from Gadan. So I spent ten years in Gadan before coming here. Basically, I'm here, this will be my fourth years, this is my fourth years in the United States.

JE: The fourth year, okay. Before we move on, we can move to our next participant, could you introduce yourself?

Bamezon Comlanvi (BC): My name is Bamezon Comlanvi, I'm from Togo too, West Africa and I live in the Bronx. I came in the United States August 31, 2002. I was [inaudible] before I came here.

JE: If you can tell me something about your, like you came here in 2004, and you came here in 2002, so why did you decide to come to the United States?

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AA: It's a long story. After my education and at the end of the education, I started have problem, political problem in my country. So I have to move. So since then I got an appointment in Gadan, was looking for a French teacher so they hired me and I moved to Gadan. So I stayed there, I stayed there almost ten years and you know the last year--. The job was, it was a good job at, political problem, I got the same problem over there so I decide to move to other country. At that time I had a chance to go to France, because I had both visa, so I decide to come here and I come here with my wife, we came together. Because for us, United States, safe place for us, since we are here, we don't have problem. Political problem. We are here--.

JE: So when did you, when did you leave to go to Gadan?

AA: Early, I went to Gadan in 1996, September of 1996.

JE: Then you stayed from 1996--?

AA: Until 2004.

JE: So you got the visa--?

AA: From Togo, the visitor. I was allowed to visit the country and at the same time--.

Before I apply I send my application to Minister of Education.

JE: In Gadan?

AA: I received a letter that I was hired as French teacher. So I decided to teach over there.

JE: Okay, the ten years that you stayed in Gadan, you teach French?

AA: Yes.

JE: Then when you're coming from Gadan to the U.S., did you apply for a refugee status?

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AA: No. You can't do that like that over there. You can't tell them that you came here to be a refugee. But you have everything together and you have, when we came here we show everything to immigration, that, our problem, and they check everything. And they come to the asylum.

JE: So that means when you're coming from Gadan, you're granted a visa to visit the United States.

AA: To visit United States.

JE: Then after the visa, they decided to apply for asylum?

AA: Yes, for asylum. Yes.

JE: Can you tell us your story?

BC: Yes. I came, like I said I came in August 2002. And I was student, I finish, I was in sociology department and I finished four years

JE: You mean here in the U.S.?

BC: No, in my country Togo.

JE: In Togo, okay.

BC: And I finished, because of like he said political problem. I was in the [inaudible] movement, in Togo. You have many problem with the government, with the soldier. I decide to move, to go to another country and I applied for immediate visa, as a student and they gave me the visa.

JE: When did you get the visa? Exactly?

BC: I got the visa--.

JE: 2002?

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BC: Yes, 2002 and I came in, like I think it's 25th of July, when I came. I left the country, and when I came here I applied for asylum and I was granted, 2003.

[Crosstalk]

JE: So you mentioned that you were given two visas, one for the U.S. and one to France.

AA: To France, yes.

JE: Why don't you want to go to France instead, you decided to come to the United States?

AA: Because in my plan, I know that I was going there to apply for a refugee. To become refugee status, but I noticed that you had for to at least to get this status in France. But United States, it could happen through work so that's why I came here. I chose to come to United States instead of France.

JE: And now that both of you came from Togo, I'd be happy to hear about a brief background about your country. What kind of language they speak there, what kind of religion, different kind of art and music, if you can just--?

AA: Back from Togo?

JE: Yes.

AA: You know official language is French, but everybody can speak French in my country. If you've never been to school you can speak French. We have different languages. You have what we call dialects, so south, north, there's many languages in Africa. But everybody, people who live in the capital, Lome, can understand Mina, it's the language. M-i-n-a, Mina that's the language everybody speaks in the capital, and in the south. So everybody can understand Mina in the capital. But the religion, there are

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different religions. Muslim, from central to north you can say, yes Muslim. But 85% is Christian. Yes.

JE: So the number of Muslim is less than the Christians?

AA: Yes.

JE: What about the kind of food that is common in Togo for example, like--?

AA: Basically our food is based on maize. African food, maize, yams, you know yam cassava, basically.

AA: And rice.

AA: Rice, is now, you can see rice in the house. It's like, on holy day, especially Gadan, rice come from outside. So that's maize, maize, yam, cassava, yes.

JE: Okay, and when you move to the U.S. do you still continue eating the same food that you eat in Togo.

AA: Yes, there are many African markets in New York, so that's easy. You don't have problem to find the food. Many, many African markets here but they're expensive, they're not, but you can't end it.

JE: Do you want to add something?

BC: Like he said, I'm Catholic. Like he said, we have many dialects in our country, I think it's like 54 dialects in our country. And in the south, like in the capital, they speak Mina or Eowe, Eowe and Mina are two--.

JE: Okay, this is one ethnic group speaking that kind of language. Like in Esupe for example they have this Hattic, so it's spoken by so many people in the city.

BC: In the city yes. And the food as he said.

JE: What about music, what kind of music, people listen to? The artwork that people do?

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AA: Well the music, the music. You have traditional music from our country but many many music from Africa or Europe or America, we listen to it.

BC: Now people copy from outside. Like American R&B, or Europe--.

AA: Right so--.

BC: We have African music like Aboya.

JE: What is that Aboya? Can you explain?

AA: No, it's the name of the music, yes.

JE: Okay, and I think you mentioned about your education and background. Both of you studied school in Togo and then, and then you finished it there.

AA: I finished there.

JE: What about you?

BC: I finished there.

JE: You finished there. Okay, what about here in the U.S., when you arrived here what kind of experience did you went through like, getting to go to school for example or getting a job in the United States?

BC: The first time is not easy.

AA: It's true. [Inaudible] for Africans today is meat and it's not what we are taught when we are at home. It's very very difficult when you come here. If I was here by myself, after a full week I would go back to Gadan. But you spent a lot of money to come here for you and your wife. How can you go back? You sign a letter to your supervisor that you resign, how can you go back, you give up your apartment, so it's very very hard. There's nobody to help you. Especially for the language. Luckily, you noticed that we don't have a good English. We come from French speaking country, we learn English here. The English, we

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have learned the English at school, but we forgot it because we don't speak English. But you come here, the language, the first difficulty is the language, if you don't speak English, nobody can help you. And that's the kind of people, we don't help each other, yes we don't help each other. It's not like Spanish people, like they're doing, no. Everybody do this. So the beginning was difficult for me, but I've been in another country and I know how to handle, how to survive, so when I apply refugee, when I was granted I went to Comba--.

JE: What is that?

AA: Comba is in Brooklyn, he help refugee. So I went there and they helped me to find, first job.

JE: So Comba is like, it's different, that help immigrants?

AA: Immigrants, especially people who is granted asylum, refugee, yes.

JE: So what do they do? What do they help, they help you write the visas?

AA: They help you, for [inaudible] they can give you 150 every month.

JE: 150, U.S. dollars?

AA: Yes, yes, every month. For 12 month and besides everything, they help you to find the first job. And if you don't speak English, they have a program that you can learn English free, a second language free. But I didn't do it because it's very, it far, also it was important for me to find a job to take care of my family. But he helped me I find my first job in Queens.

JE: When did you find that job? Like a specific date.

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AA: I think 2 or 3 weeks after I get my work authorization. In September 2005. Because August 5th I get the, I was granted asylum status, and September I get my first job, so I start over there.

JE: So what--?

AA: It was a General Electric, this warehouse, they sell electronic stuff there. We start at 9 o'clock, we done at 6 p.m., it's hard but I plan to go back to teaching, so I have to go to school. There, they don't like that, you can't talk about school over there, so you have to clear the job. That's why I decide to move to change the job, the only job here that which can help you to go to school is a security job.

JE: So after that job, then you got the security job.

AA: Security job, I went to Conni Security, a friend of mine had managed to go to Conni Security, I went there--.

JE: Where is that?

AA: The address is 45 East 28th Street--.

JE: In the Bronx?

AA: No, it's in Manhattan, it's on 28th Street. And I went there and they send me to Bronx Museum here as security. I was here since September 2006, and the supervisor liked me and I pursued my job and the museum hired me now, so I work for--.

JE: So you're hired to work in the museum?

AA: In the museum. Before, Conni Security has a contract with the museum, Conni sent a security guard here, but the museum decided to hire their own security, so they hire me I work for the museum as security, I have night shift, so it can help me. That shift helped me to go to school, so from September 2007 I start school in Lehman College, my major

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French, a major in French and minor education. And I'm almost at the end, so by September I will graduate--.

JE: So September 2008, you'll be graduated?

AA: Yes. I'll graduate, I finish and but I plan to, I'll take U.S. teacher certification exam to go to teaching.

JE: So what is the process to get that certification from New York?

AA: Well they don't recognize my bachelor because they say, back there a bachelor from our country is after three years of studies but here it's four years. So they say, it is not equal, so they give me credit, I have two credit.

JE: So you have to take a course?

AA: A 58 that's a requirement, so I don't remember, I have now 119, so it's you get a bachelor after 120, I have now 119, so I need one credit so that is by September, I will done bachelor. Now I start on my minor. You have to take six courses before the Lehman College recommends you to bar of education, to guide the certification, to be certified, so after that you take a New York City, New York City Teacher's Exam, something like that. And you can--.

JE: Then after that you can go and apply for teaching job in the school?

AA: Yes, there are many positions. They are looking for foreign language teachers, but so--.

JE: And you mentioned that you have your family here, how many kids do you have?

AA: I have only daughter, 15 years old, so yes.

JE: So now can you tell us about your experience, your educational experience, and your work experience, especially here in the United States.

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BC: When I was [inaudible], I went to Catholic Charities, they help refugee. And I went there to see someone, his name [inaudible] and he send me to many places.

JE: So they Catholic Charities is based in the Bronx or somewhere?

BC: In Manhattan, Manhattan. They send me, they give me letter and they send me to different places and I went somewhere, I didn't tell you. But they told me my English is not [inaudible] and they cannot hire me. And they send me somewhere too, and it's the same thing and I decide to look for a job, I talk to my friend--.

JE: So are your friends Africans or people from this country, like African-Americans?

BC: From Africa, from Africa if you hear someone wants someone to work come here and I give my number. And one day someone called, one day and I start in the liquor store.

JE: Here in the Bronx or somewhere else?

BC: In Harlem, 125th, in Harlem.

JE: So how long have you been in the liquor store?

BC: Almost a year, one year, after that--.

JE: That was 2003?

BC: 2003, 2004, yes. After that I took two easy courses for home attendance--. I change my job to home attendance.

JE: So what is home attendance? Can you explain?

BC: Home attendance, they call home care or home attendance, they send you to the senior home, to help the senior like a sick person or an old person, a old man or old woman to help them. And I did that job almost a year and a half.

JE: That's like from 2004?

BC: 2004 to 2005. Yes.

JE: Did you have a training to do that job?

BC: Yes, I had the training in the company. Alliance for Health. Two weeks training and they send me.

JE: So after that job what did you do?

BC: After I change, the job too because I wanted to go to school. But the skill that I had over there does not conform school schedule so I decide to change my job and I went to apply for a security. My company is FDC, and I apply and they hire me and I work night shift. And that allowed me to start school at Lehman College.

JE: So what are you doing in Lehman College, what are you studying?

BC: When I first start Lehman College, I went to accounting product, for one semester to see how it's different. I don't like it too much. I went back to, a social work program, that actually is a little conform to what I did in my country, I was in sociology department. And I start with social work program.

JE: So when did you start at Lehman College?

BC: 2006, 2006 yes. When I start, they accept me in the program.

JE: Social work?

BC: Social work program. It was very difficult because of the English too, you have to have a lot of writing and after that, they send me a letter and the letter say I cannot continue in the program because they already accepted my bachelor from back home. They told me sociology and social work is the same thing, I cannot be in the same thing-.

JE: So it's like repeating the same thing?

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BC: Yes, and I changed to French. To education, to teach French and I know him. The same time you discuss about school and he told if I came in, he was going to school too. And from that I went to have the information about the French, I said let me do something different and I came back to that.

JE: So how long are you going to be in that program? When are you finishing your program?

BC: 2009, if every semester I have, full-time, how do you say, like if I'm a full-time student I finish yes. I finish 2009 with the education program.

JE: Are you doing part-time or full-time student.

BC: Full-time.

JE: So you work at night?

BC: Yes.

JE: And you study?

BC: In the daytime. And it always at 10 o'clock, 11 o'clock, a 1 o'clock class. I finish at 8 o'clock in the morning come home, rest like for 1 hour--.

JE: And then you get to work. So how long do you work? I'm just confused, like you start work at what time?

AA: 12.

JE: Midnight?

AA: Yes.

BC: Until 8 in the morning.

JE: Then you go home and sleep one hour and then you go to school.

AA: From the job, I have one class that start 9 o'clock. I don't have time to come home.

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JE: So go direct from work to school.

AA: You need that job. Who's gonna pay your rent? Your family.

BC: And like I said I have family too, I have one daughter, 18 months.

JE: And your wife also is here.

BC: Yes.

JE: So where do they go to school? Like your kids, where do they go to schools here?

AA: My daughter is in Christoph Colombo High School and she next semester will be in 10th grade.

JE: And what about your wives? They stay home or they--?

AA: No my wife's working. I used to work in general electronics, so my wife is now, we have all benefits--. It's hard but I have no choice, she have to work to help me, so she's there but you know. Her problem is the language, she doesn't speak good English so that--.

JE: I don't know in the U.S., in Canada like when you come as a refugee, they have these classes, English as a Second Language and you can enroll in any class, free. Do they do that, can you enroll in a class free, you don't have to pay anything?

AA: Yes, yes they have, African Service in Manhattan, they have it. I think Cambo also has it, they have it many places here, even library, some library they have it. But it depends, you don't have a good schedule, if you don't have time, you work, some libraries from 8 to evening or 6 evening. You have to come back home.

BC: The Catholic Charities too they have these programs, to help. But it's too far for me and I went to [inaudible] community college to apply and they send me letter and I test out of English classes. I start to learn--.

JE: But now you are speaking.

AA: You know it's not like, it's not like-

JE: You know, I started school in Arabic, after high school and then I learned English when I was in university and so--.

AA: Later our English will be perfect, but now, you know that we have some difficult--.

BC: In learning to write English, it take a lot like how to write, when I was in the social work program they only, they refuse I cannot be in the same program. They told me I can do masters program, but my English is no, I cannot, I know myself, I cannot be in the program. And I was in English 110, I was supposed to finish English 120 and they have a writing program too.

JE: At the university?

BC: Yes, at the Lehman College. It's [inaudible] writing, I have to finish that too, so I can be in the masters program and all that.

JE: So because of your English problem, you didn't enroll into the master's program. And now most of us who came from Africa, we came with a different perception. That the United States is a very good country, you can find everything that you want. And now you say it's not like what you thought. Now we move to another thing like the relationship between people who have been here and people who come from Africa. Like the relationship between people from Africa and African-Americans, Latinos, the white people. How do relate, for example, to the different nationalities that you came into contact with, whether in the Bronx or in the university, in the streets.

BC: In the school we have contact with everybody, in school. We meet different nationality, but in where I live, I go with people who came from my country.

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AA: To avoid problems here, you finish your jobs go home. To avoid problems here it's like that.

JE: What do you mean avoiding it? Are there so many problems that?

AA: We don't trust nobody here. I don't have problem with my neighbor. You know in Bronx, 95 or 90 percent is Latino, we don't problem where we live. But hi, hi that's it. You know. But from our country, you know African people they don't, they like to live, we don't share nothing together but some from your, your origin in your country, we have a association. We make an alliance to share, to discuss about our problems if you can help. If somebody need a job, if you hear something like that, so you have, I have a T.A.U.P, is Togolese American United for Progress is an association from our country. So we made one's--.

JE: So when did you form this association. The one with the Togolese.

AA: I think we start 2006, but one day somebody made me, you are here, why don't you come to our meetings? I said I did not hear about that, and he told me about it and I started going there. We discuss, we talk, we invite people from immigration, from different structures to talk to us. If you need help, with one problem you can, and beside that, I have a friend from back home who meet me one day.

JE: He is here also in the U.S.?

AA: Yes. He has an association, a small association for different societies from Africa and I joined this group and now I'm the president of the group.

JE: So what is the name of the group?

AA: We call it the Brother and Sister from Africa, that's what we call it.

JE: So the members are they from different African nationalities?

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AA: Yes, but most of them are French speaking countries. Ivory Coast, Gabon, yes it's many nationalities.

JE: And about this Togolese association, are there so many people from Togo here in the Bronx?

AA: Yes, many people yes. Yes, many people from the Bronx.

JE: And what activities in addition to helping people to get jobs or something, what do they do like, do they organize meetings, conferences, a special celebrations?

AA: Yes, a celebration, like at the end of this month they have picnic in the park. Like basically, every administration have a meeting once a month to discuss, you have to pay a monthly fee, like contribute, it's like that. We plan to help our schools back home. Like to build a school, to pay bench for school, to pay books, that's what you can do.

JE: Like based on my own experience, we used to have this organizations from our country like, when I was in Caro and also when I was in Canada, so I guess I want to know, are they registered for example or are they just--?

AA: Yes, [inaudible]. But our small group, that is not registered no, but the TUAP is registered.

JE: And they have a place where they--?

AA: Yes, yess.

JE: Where is it based?

AA: In Manhattan, the president right now, we meet, the address is 1311 Bonton Avenue, but now it's a New York, it's Manhattan. The problem here is it's difficult to find a place, you have to pay, sometimes [inaudible], but it's expensive, we can't afford that.

JE: So you wanted to move the--.

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AA: No, every month we change the place too for the meeting.

JE: For the meeting.

AA: You can't have the place, it's at 5th Avenue. We have how you call it I forget it, 125th and 5th Avenue, they have a place there it's free, so we have to apply long time, it take a month or two month, before you--.

JE: So if you want to have an event in that place you have to apply like two months early?

AA: Yes, so and at that time, every month we meet, so you have to apply for that place too. To get a place, because it's big, you can't but our small group we meet, we change the place. To a member apartment, to a different apartment.

JE: So you meet in your own apartments?

AA: This is why, I say, we have many members you can't use an apartment.

JE: But they have an office there, they operate for--?

AA: Yes. Right now the president has a small place in 119th Street between Lenox and 5th Avenue, something like that, yes.

JE: And what about the relationship between the people from Togo and the general people from the Francophone countries and the Anglophone Africans, especially in the Bronx?

AA: You know, Africans, well you meet somebody from a French speaking country, English speaking country, we are brothers we are sisters, there is no problem at all. But it's hard for Africans to cooperate with, but you know that this person is from Africa but if you don't share something together, like you're working the same job, you can't talk to him really. I live in Bronx, there are many Africans in my neighborhood, there are many

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Africans who are my neighbor but we don't talk. If you meet somewhere, or if I know you, hi, hi that's it.

JE: Okay, and why do you think they don't want to talk to--?

AA: Basically, I can tell you ur education we are raised like that. Everbody's that's just our education, it's not like I said before, their language unite them. But we don't, we are not like that, everbodys like, it's a good relation if we meet through somewhere, a lot of good relations we don't have a problem but--.

JE: You need to add something if you have--.

BC: No. Yes, no we don't do any associations.

JE: What about like the Togo people from Togo they don't have any businesses, because I can see so many African markets, Ghanians and Nigerians, and the Togo--?

AA: Most of African markets is from Ghana, or Gambian or Nigeria. The Togolese are not of that, they want to keep their money in the bank, they don't invest.

[Laughter]

AA: Yes, some have like a computer center, but African market no.

JE: So many people from Togo, they have computer--?

AA: A computer center for internet.

BC: The people like he said, is the point, education you had back home, like people from Nigeria, Ghana, Gambia, they like to trade.

AA: They take risk. It's a risk, they take risk in the, to see what can happen, but the Togolese, no, no. You're money's in the bank.

Unidentified Person (UP): Aren't Togolese people more educated?

AA: Yes. Most of them. Most of Togolese you see here are, finished with university.

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BC: Actually, is bachelor of most of them.

JE: So they're educated?

AA: Yes, and they like office job. Like they don't like, business is not--.

JE: So they just want to go to school and do something like teaching in the school or have an office job, or something.

UP: So what do you think of that? The fact that, do you think they should be doing more trades?

AA: Yes, but when you come here you see that there are many opportunities, you can change it, but you don't have the--. Everything here is about money. We can decide today to do something but if you don't have money you can't do it. You can't do it.

BC: Like I said, it's education. Back in our education, your parents tell you, that go to school and you finish school you find job. But a country like Ghana, they do business long time.

JE: Togo is not a coastal country right?

AA: It's not a--?

JE: On the coast?

AA: Yes, it's not the coast.

JE: They should not trade.

AA: It trades with Muslim people from central, they are there.

BC: Central and north.

JE: And another thing I would like to explore the relations between men and women because in Africa we have different way of relating to each other and here, we're, also the system the laws and everything, so can you something about--?

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AA: What do you mean by the relation between--?

JE: Like for example here, women you can call 911 for example, among the Sudanese people are not complaining about this 911 because people call.

AA: But you know that is, I don't like that. Every problem has a solution, it's, I never heard in my country that your wife can call police for you, or go to police station because, complaining about her husband but I know. That's why many Africans here decide to leave their wife back home, because they don't want--.

JE: Even among the Togolese?

AA: Yes. Yes, many of the Togolese prefer go back every year, go there, children and wife stay there. Because of their problem.

BC: Some people have bad experience, and they advise other people, it's better to leave your wife, send money to them and your kid and some people don't want to bring their children here.

JE: Why?

BC: They say they have too much freedom here, kids can call 911 on their father you know? How about in Africa?

AA: I know I know that as Africans we don't have a good behavior related to a wife. We want to terminate our wife and at home the wife doesn't have a word. But when you come here it's not like that. But people have to change this, to change their character, their behavior, the way we treat our wife at home, is not like that here. That is still why people got problem. Okay and what else? Wife also has to know that here she has to work to help her husband. You try, you have paper, your wife have [inaudible] a job. She can't leave you, pay your every month, your apartment you pay your rent, utilities, everything,

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so she had to--. She want the money sent to here, her parents, it can't work like that, that's the problem here. Most divorce in New York, United States, is about the money. Related to Africans. From Togo, from Guinea, Ghana, there's many problems like that there. [Inaudible]. They live here, they find a girlfriend, what happens to Togolese, the men, men don't say nothing. They plan the travel for you go home, you go back home.

JE: You mean for the wife?

AA: Yes. It is the problem, between you, between Togolese women and husband yes, men say nothing. He plan travel for you, to go back home to the visit parent, when you go there, he'll say oh you stay there. Now I'm going to come over every year to see you and children, you see?

BC: For the women who, didn't have much education, but some women who have education, she gonna come back. She has paper, she has everything she's gonna come back.

JE: So she can come back.

BC: Yes. And a lot of women when they come here, they know--. They don't know first time back, when they [inaudible] for other people, they know the law. They know how law is working here, and they know they have woman, they have power.

JE: They have some rights, I know.

BC: If the man decide to control her, she say no, he cannot do these for me and that's problem again.

AA: I don't know if we have answered your question.

JE: Yes, yes. But the problem is, who advised these people that you have to leave your wife back in Togo and then you come back--?

[End of Side A]

[Beginning of Side B]

JE: People who came here earlier or how did the news spread?

CB: This is the best solution, don't nobody [inaudible]. In Togo, it's better, we stay in Africa it's better to send money. And you know, if the men work here, he send like every month at least like 200, is enough right?

JE: 200 dollars.

CB: Two hundred is enough.

AA: But now, 200 is enough for a month back home to survive with a woman and two three kids, yes.

CB: Because the rent is not expensive.

AA: Because you don't rent, you don't rent.

JE: So you have your own house?

AA: Yes, you have your own house. I know it's not the best solution, but you know, it's not the best solution, but if there's problem. You know for woman it's very very hard, she discover here, she if she decide to move, she can move.

JE: Out of the house.

AA: Yes, out of the house, so you don't want that. You don't want that. Your new husband you don't want that. So you have to find solution. The best solution for you is to help, you ask her to go back home with the children. Sometimes have many problems, to raise our children here.

JE: What kind of problem? Can you explain that, like--?

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AA: We have only daughter 15 years old, but sometimes it's hard for me to, she copies her friends at school. Sometimes, back home, I'm Togolese, I'm African, I have my education, children do not talk in front of parents. When I ask my daughter to, I ask her to do this, she say no. Why are your telling me to do this, why, why, why? You know, [inaudible], she said what? She saw at school. You can't change it there, it's education, you're sending her to school, she learn that at school. But you know, you have to change, everyday you learn, everyday you learn, you know it's hard, it's hard, it's very very hard to raise our children here. It's not only relation between the wife and husband, the children. Before the problem between husband and wife, comes from children. Sometimes, your wife approve of what children are doing at home, but you say no you don't want to see that in your apartment, but your wife say no. Like the way they dress here, like last Sunday, last Sunday, we went to Orchard Beach. My daughter ask me, she want to use, how you call shirt?

JE: Swimsuit.

AA: I give her money to go, and what she bought, it's very, very tiny. I said you can't wear this. She said no daddy that is what I want to wear, so you can wear that you see? You many times I plan to send her back, but this is the only child I have, sending her back there, she [inaudible] condition. That is a, many time I had plan to send her back, but--. Such is the country.

JE: That is difficult.

AA: Yes, difficult for us.

JE: And you mentioned something about sending money home, like so many Africans they send money to relatives, I don't know if the people from Togo send--.

AA: Yes, yes.

BC: I know, 2007 last year or 2006, Western Union said Togo is the first country, like, Togo sent a lot a month. Between North African countries, Togo was first.

JE: So here in the U.S.?

BC: In the U.S.

AA: The problem is, the political problem. Our country now is very, very hard. Not in the, you know the capital, a former prisoner died, his son is [inaudible]. So all family who has a relative outside, so we have to help them to send--. My wife was still there, my mother is still there, so I send money every month.

JE: To help her.

AA: To help her, yes. So that is why we are doing it. Even if you don't have a lot home, you have to send.

BC: A lot of people think, when we come here, like it's easy to get money.

AA: Like you walk on dollar. Dollar is on the floor, you walk on the dollar.

BC: And every time you call to say hi to them, they're gonna tell you all the problems they have, and sometimes you cannot--, you feel.

AA: You feel bad.

BC: Yes, and if you have some problem, you cannot say no, I cannot send money. They tell you your aunt, your uncle, your brother, sick, you have to.

JE: So both of you do you send money every month?

BC: Me? I can no every month, I don't have my father either my mother. Both died. I have my brother and one sister. And my sister she's married, I have some cousins, I help them sometimes.

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AA: And because of, Western Union fees, I decide to send every two months. So she live by herself so it's--.

JE: Your mother?

AA: Yes, so every two month that's it. My mother-in-law live in my house so every month we send for her. She's old now. Here we pay utility bills over there. Telephone you have to pay, in your house they use electricity you pay the bill, telephone you pay the bill, if you don't pay they're gonna call you.

JE: So you're paying for, you pay here for yourselves and there for your relatives?

AA: You have to do it.

JE: So I just want to go back to Lehman College. Do you pay tuition fees and how did you get that, if you're paying--?

AA: No, you have a financial aid, I think, this is my fourth semester, almost two years now but I don't pay, never paid. I have an [inaudible].

JE: From the college?

AA: From the college so I don't pay.

BC: Me. No this year, I'm a second English student, second English students don't get financial aid. Because they gave me ninety credit, and they say I'm a second English student and I borrow money from--.

AA: You get loan.

JE: So you take student loans?

AA: Sometimes, even I get financial aid, I take loan too. Sometimes you need money to buy something, you need.

BC: [inaudible]

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JE: So what is the conditions for getting that financial aid from the university, do you fill out some papers?

BC: Fill out the part, in New York, you have to be at least one year New York resident.

AA: New York resident and full-time, at least 6 credits, and full-time and your GPA is supposed to be based on--.

BC: 2.9.

AA: They see your income, to--.

BC: How much can I give you? If you have you child or you have kids sometimes, I remember they give me TAP.

JE: What is that?

BC: It's money to help.

AA: Tuition--.

UP: Tuition Assistance Program.

BC: Yes. They give me 600 a semester.

JE: A semester.

BC: When I had my daughter, now it's 1,800.

AA: Every year I get at least 1400, every year so. Every semester, you know split in fourth, no summer.

JE: And then for this immigration issue, are there so many Togolese who are illegal here, they don't have papers, or most of them have papers?

AA: No, no many are here.

BC: You know a lot of people came with nothing. The Togolese, a lot of people came from Togo came with little. But I have some people legal.

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AA: If you come here and you don't know how the law work here, you don't know for that the asylum, you have to apply before one year, so after year, you cancel you become illegal. So it's hard for you even get job, you are not comfortable there, you have to stay there, because if you change your job you don't know if you're gonna find another one. There are, many are here who don't have papers.

JE: And is there any legal office, like established by the people from Togo who are helping this?

AA: No.

JE: Because I saw so many African legal funds, that help--.

BC: They still go, they go to the like some institution like African--.

AA: African Services in Manhattan help with many problems. If I seek--.

BC: [Inaudible] America, even if you don't have paper they help you. I know someone, it's a woman, she has two kid, but they told me what the [inaudible] help her, they came to get, and they help them.

AA: Another question?

JE: Do you have anything that would like to share with us in anything related to African immigration and African immigrants, in general in the Bronx?

AA: Africans in the Bronx? No. People, some people are happy they think that they can go back to Africa. But me I know that if today, today in Africa, I'd be happy to be in the United States, because it's hard here. One bedroom apartment you pay 950, you have your house over there. And most of them who are here, they don't have a plan. We have money in our country, but because of political problem we remove right here. Today we need to work together to plan how to go back, how to have something back home. If you

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don't have something that you can't go. So that is why we have to work together to plan, little by little how--.

JE: So you mean work together like all Africans? Or people from one country?

AA: [Inaudible]. You have many origins in our country, but Ghanians, Ghanians, many 99 cent here in New York City belong to Ghanians, but why I [inaudible] can do it. That is the only thing we have to do. We have to do now.

JE: So are you planning to go back to Africa one day?

AA: Yes, generally I'm going back for first time to visit my family. June, next July.

JE: So are you going to visit or are you going to stay?

AA: No, I'm going to visit. I'm going to visit.

BC: A lot of people say, do you want to go back? Nobody go and stay.

AA: I'm not ready yet to go back.

BC: No one is going to stay, you see. America is hard, but it's better than our country. Because of the political situation. It's better.

JE: So you keep on repeating about this political situation in Togo. For us in Sudan we have the war before, and now there's war in western Sudan, so I don't know in Togo, what particular political problem is facing the country?

UP: Can you hold on this is the end of this tape. So let me just change tapes.

JE: Okay, we were talking about this political problems in Togo, could you explain a little bit more?

AA: It's you know, Togo get it's independence in 1960, early 1960, the first president was killed by a military [inaudible], 1963, after three years. From 1963, he ruled the country until 2005, almost 39 years. And when he died, his son took power. So 37 year

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old now, his son is 37 years old. He's the power before the army. So 99 percent of [inaudible] student, unemployment, so if you have--. Assume that you have ten kids, all of them are Gargili, don't have job, they're at home. How're you gonna survive with 10, children all at home, don't have--. That's our problem. And they don't want to lift the power, so our country's now down. So anything we can do is to improve the country, to move toward our country, to see if we can find better opportunities. That is why I say we leave our country we came here, but it is hard for us to survive. And nothing back home is good now, it's safe to go back now, so that's why we mention the political problem, political problem.

BC: We don't have work. But the way they rule the country, the first reason, if his minister, the way they rule the country, they rule the country, like their own property. Everybody steal money, they send the money to Europe, they have accounts in Europe, [inaudible] the country.

JE: And the rest are suffering, people are suffering.

BC: Now it's worse. If you call the same, nothing, it's just bad.

JE: To answer her questions, she's asking about if there are any churches right?

UP: Yes. Do you live in the same neighborhood, do all the Africans live in the same neighborhood and if there were like churches and stuff like that here.

JE: In the Bronx.

AA: In the Bronx there are many churches, Ghanaian, Nigerian, you have churches like here closer to, you have many churches here Ghanaian--.

[Crosstalk]

JE: What about Togo? They have their own church here?

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AA: No, no they don't have their own. These people no they don't. The only thing is to make their money and save in bank.

BC: But I go to Catholic--.

JE: So most of the people from Togo are Catholics?

BC: Catholics, some believe, and Muslim, who are Muslim they go to the mosque.

JE: Do they have a mosque here like African mosques or something?

AA: No not African mosque, no general mosque.

BC: Yes, it's for all. But the mosque they have in the Bronx, most Africans will go to.

JE: Because there is another mosque--.

AA: It's here right at 167--.

JE: 168th, there's one 168th.

AA: Yes, Jerome Avenue, so they have one over there. It's for African I think that's for Ghanaian.

BC: Everybody can go pray. I know.

JE: Because I read. I was checking the internet and I found so many Nigerian based mosque actually.

BC: Mosques for Nigerians?

JE: Yes, like established ones for Nigerians. But anybody can go and pray there.

AA: But most of Nigeria, in [inaudible], is Christian. But they have--.

BC: Inaudible.

AA: Another question?

UP: What neighborhoods do Africans live in?

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JE: Like where can we find most Africans in the Bronx? Where do they concentrate, in which areas?

AA: In the Bronx, most Africans, they are here. 167th. Most of Africans, a lot of them is Jamaican and African. Jerome Avenue is for African. And you go to Fulton Street also is African over there.

BC: Little Africa, a lot of people want to live in. They trust--. Are looking for the room and they help you to get room near, by where they live. Like the Hispanic people.

AA: Nigerian, and many Ghanaian over there. Jerome Avenue, 167th, many Ghanaian over there.

JE: And what about the Togolese?

AA: No, Togolese, everywhere in the Bronx.

JE: And the other thing I'm really interested in the committee of the [inaudible] that you have. Like if I want to meet if Benita--.

AA: Benita, yes, I can give you only his number and he'll be very, very happy to discuss about you or yes and have a--. Kumar, call him now, he can meet you, and he's been here for long time so.

BC: They have meetings, to go to see our--.

AA: To go to see our, yes-. Okay.

JE: Maybe you introduce me to him, that's the best way. Coming from somebody that he knows.

AA: Okay.

JE: And do they have like, the Togolese women they have their organizations as women as organization, or do they--.

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AA: No, Togolese women, no. They don't have it.

JE: Why, because so many other Africans have their women organizations, why the Togolese doesn't have their women organization?

BC: Maybe they have, in my knowledge I don't know any, but maybe they have.

AA: Togolese women, no, I don't think so.

UP: Are there women in the organization you have? Yes, but half the women here, you can see Ghanaian and Nigerian, but Senegalese also.

BC: But they have I heard, no in the Bronx, or nearby, other state, they have it.

JE: Other state, no I just mean in the Bronx.

AA: In the Bronx, no, Togolese women no. Even if they have their husband would say no. Because they learn how to say no to the husband at home.

JE: So basically, you're afraid that, you're afraid that when women organize, they'll say no to you.

BC: Yes, most of the time. Most of the time, when they have these organizations they go from there, they learn, they talk to each other, and they advise each other--.

AA: I can say 80 percent of Togolese are not educated.

JE: You mean the women or--?

AA: Women, women, so it's easy to spoil an educated woman. So, she can copy, say your husband do this for you everyday? No, don't accept that, tell her 911, and then she will call 911, so the husband he said no, you're not gonna go there, that is why I say Togolese women no. Maybe this kind of community association, they can go together--?

JE: With the husband?

AA: Yes, husband.

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BC: They like to talk about some things that doesn't concern them.

AA: Yes.

JE: Like what for example, could you give an example like, what kind of things they want to talk about?

BC: Like I have problem with my wife and she goes and tell her friend this problem happen--.

AA: And the Togolese women, the women right now they will discuss about--. That's just the way they are so--.

BC: And little problems are gonna get like--.

AA: Big problems.

BC: They like to talk, African women--.

JE: Yes, we talk.

BC: They talk a lot, they talk a lot.

UP: So what are these women calling 911 for, you didn't really explain what the purpose was of that.

BC: Like any problem at home.

UP: Because I don't think women here usually call 911 on someone, except someone abusing them physically, I don't think--.

AA: At least physically you are right. Back home, it isn't for the husband to slap a wife. We do every time. And you can do that, the wife will cry all to her parents and they'll be calling you both and discuss what happened, okay. But here, the day you do that, she can call 911 for you and she say you abuse her. That is the problem, all, you know polygamy is in our culture. You and your husband, you have an affair in front of the lady and your

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wife knows that she can, she said no I don't want that. But back home she can't say I don't want that, it's part of our culture. But here she say no I don't want that.

BC: So men have one woman here and one in Africa. So and if the man start send money, she gonna be jealous. And she say, your money is your money, my money is my money and she doesn't want to help me, then the problems start.

AA: Problems start. Call 911, the day you beat her.

BC: We brought our culture, a lot of things here and you wanna live like the way you live in Africa.

JE: And the situation here is different.

AA: Yes, it's different.

BC: but people who have, educated people, they live, they don't have problem with their family or with the woman. The woman she's educated woman, the man too and any problems they discuss and they find a solution.

AA: Now, when you abuse her physically she can call 911 yes.

UP: Yes, but over here she can't do the other thing which is that to go call the parents. Over here, since she doesn't have anybody there.

BC: Only protection is 911.

AA: But when 911 come, sometime when they come, what she can do, is do everything to separate you, well you say, we find now an apartment for the wife, so now the [inaudible] also come. That's why the husband can accept that, it's not like Africa, family can come and discuss the issue, no.

UP: Well maybe the man should give up slapping her around.

AA: Stop the slapping, don't touch it don't slap here.

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JE: Maybe they need to change?

AA: Yes, we change.

BC: They both need to change, man and woman.

JE: So you want to add anything? We're winding down our interview, if you have to add anything that we should know, or something.

BC: No, we've said everything this morning so--.

JE: Said everything?

BC: Yes.

AA: Yes.

BC: But only when you can achieve in school, in America. You have a better future in school. Can find a good job. I have my doctor, he always tell me I start school, and when I come to see him a long, you enjoy your life later.

JE: Okay, thank you guys for accepting to come and to be interviewed and it was a very interesting interview, so if you have anything you can just write me and email or yes.

[End of Side B; End of Interview]