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## Dioup, Mouhamadou

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Interviewee: **Mouhammadou Diop**

Interviewer: **Karima Zuru**

Date:

Karima Zuru (KZ): Spell us your name?

**Mouhammadou Diop (MD): M-O-U-H-A-M-M-A-D-O-U D-I-O-P**

KZ: What is your day of birth?

**MD: I was born on July 6, 1980**

KZ: Tell us about your family in Senegal, where they lived, and where you went to school?

**MD: I was born in Dakar and grown up in Dakar particularly in Liberticis. I have two brothers and three sisters. My father is a doctor, my mother is a business owner and both are still living in Dakar. One of my brothers is in France.**

KZ: Is your family Christian, Muslim or different religion?

**MD: All of them are Muslims**

KZ: When you come to USA, did you have any family member living in United States?

**MD: I have members of my family living in USA but in other states, it is not New York.**

KZ: How old were you when you moved to USA?

**MD: I was twenty years when I came to United States**

KZ: Were you living in Dakar when you were in Senegal? Liberticis is it in Dakar?

**MD: In fact, I was living in Dakar but we lived in Liberticis which is another town of Senegal before we moved to Dakar when I was fourteen years old.**

KZ: When did you start interesting in Music?

**MD: I will say at my young age I started interesting in music, especially when I was six to seven years old.**

KZ: what was your favorite music when you were six to seven years old?

**MD: First of all I started listening to Yusu N'dour, then Micheal Jackson and Bob Marley. Incontestably, Bob Marley had a great influence on us.**

KZ: Is Yusu N'dour, the Micheal Jackson of Senegal? Does his music is dance music or also slow jam music? Did you listen to American Hip hop at all when you were growing up?

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**MD: I will say that I was influenced by American music in general the RAP music at the age of fifteen and eighteen years old. Later, I started interesting in Reggae and Rap music.**

KZ: What are your favors RAP Singers?

**MD: All of them, I began by Naughty by Nature but before that liked the RAP when I was young with my great passion for African RAP through the African Babanta, and later Cares One, Tupac, BIG.**

KZ: Have you ever tried to Rap or do you always DJ?

**MD: My first steps in music were through rap.**

KZ: Do you still do RAP?

**MD: No, I am playing guitar as well as reggae now**

KZ: When you DJ, do play more reggae dance fall?

**MD: No and no. When I am DJ I am playing for others and in this case it is another story because in this situation I am playing all music but when I am on my own I am playing reggae.**

KZ: Did you start playing guitar in Senegal or in United States?

**MD: I learned to play guitar since I was back in Senegal at eighteen years old**

KZ: when did you get your first music instruments?

**MD: When I was fourteen years old, i t was a gift from my uncle that was also a DJ and he was the one who gave me the training**

KZ: When you were DJ in Dakar, do you do it mostly in clubs, houses parties or schools?

**MD: At the my beginning I DJ during houses parties and at age of seventeen I had a first contract in a club, then I also DJ in schools during the cultural schools' events that were held for one week during the academic year.**

KZ: As a DJ do you produce your own mixtapes or you are just doing an animation?

**MD: I am doing only an animation for clubs as well as an entertainment parties. I am not doing my own mixtapes.**

KZ: Now did you always dream of coming to USA or it is something you want to do when you were young?

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**MD: In fact, I like United States of America as well as the American style before I came to U.S. Of course I was doing my best to acquire the style before I came here. But saying that it was my dream to come here, I will say it was not like a dream to be here. Finally when I obtained my high school diploma at twenty years I had an offer from my parent to choose between USA and France. I did not intend to go to France.**

KZ: I think most of Senegalese go to France than come to USA?

**MD: I think this is true that most of Senegalese and also most of people from French speaking countries prefer France but now things are changing and people choose now USA. I think at the beginning most of Senegalese as well as other people from francophone Africa, everybody goes where is language is spoken which is the French. But when you see the visas issues, the high unemployment rate, and the discrimination in France, the other open option is to choose the USA as a place of destination.**

KZ: is there more discrimination in France than in USA?

**MD: Regarding to what is going on in France, incontestably I will say it is difficult to live there when you are undocumented. In contrast, it is easy to live here even though you are undocumented. Undocumented people get the way to live in France. No way out if you are illegal in France.**

KZ: Is it easier here to fit in the cracks?

**MD: You can make money under the table, you can make some cash, find solutions to your problems and nobody is not over you all times in order to find out if you have paper or not.**

KZ: Did they stop you in France when you stepped in the street? Who stops you in France in the street?

**MD: The policemen**

KZ: The police stopped people in December, especially the African Algerians and asked them where is your paper?

**MD: Yes, the police**

KZ: The police? That is everywhere in France?

**MD: Yes but mostly in Paris**

KZ: Here the normal policemen don't get involved in the people status except the INS but in France the normal policemen are always ask people let me see your paper, your ID?

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**MD: Yes**

**KZ:** Did you know people in Paris housing project when the policemen were in operations there? In other words, when the police operations happened in the projects, did you know people that were living there?

**MD: really no. I did not know someone that was in that situation during the police operation in housing projects. The people I knew in France at that time were the relatives, people that lived there for long and had even got French citizenship. Once again, I didn't know someone that lived in the project during the police operations**

**KZ:** Did you move when you came to the US? Or did you come firstly to NY or did you visit relatives in other part of USA?

**MD: I came directly from Dakar to New York**

**KZ:** how did you do that? Did you know someone in New York?

**MD: I didn't know someone as family member in York. Indeed, even though I didn't have a relative in New York I had at that time friends that are from Senegal and also my aunt that was in NY and with I got later in touch after four months that I had been in New York.**

**KZ:** so how did you find the place to live?

**MD: A friend of mine welcomed me. We lived together almost for three months until I can get back on my feet in New York**

**KZ:** Where did your friend live? What borough?

**MD: He was lived in the Bronx**

**KZ:** What street?

**MD: In182 Street**

**KZ:** Do the people in Senegal know about the Bronx as oppose to NY City? There is any sense that the Bronx is a place where most Africans went to?

**MD: Personally when I came here I didn't know that. It was later almost a year that I noticed that there is more African community in the Bronx**

**KZ:** What are your first impressions of Bronx when you moved here?

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**MD: I will say the impression that I had of USA is funny because when I got off of the plane at JFK my friend and me took a taxi and after ten minutes of ride I asked my friend if New York is so far that did we need to travel for long more before we go to New York, in order words will we take a plane again to go to New York? I asked these question not because NY seems far away from where we were but for reason that as soon as I landed at JFK airport, I realized that what I was imagined of New York First of all, it was discouraging and after being more in contact with the city as well as with its people, it was not what I was expected. I didn't have a choice than to accommodate myself to the New York standard of life.**

KZ: What did you expected?

**MD: The way people talked about United States in Senegal add to the way the people that have immigrated to United states before us talked about this country as the most greatest place in the world. With many procedures that it takes to come here, when you arrive here you realize it is not as people have being talking about United States aboard and surprisingly United States is not respond to your expectancies.**

KZ: How did you find a job when you first came here?

**MD: Very hard because at the beginning I didn't have a paper so I worked long hours from 9 am to 7 pm in a small store, six days a week with only 250 dollars a week.**

KZ: What kind of store?

**MD: It was in the clothing store. I was doing a stocking in that store where ther are containers with almost six hundreds boxes per day.**

KZ: This is in Manhattan?

**MD: it was in Manhattan on 35<sup>th</sup> between 5 and 6 avenues**

KZ: Did you get a job because you know somebody there? How did you find a job? Did you know other Senegalese people working for them?

**MD: No, I just woke up one day early in the morning and I asked questions about how to get a job. Then they told me that I should go to downtown in order to look for a job. When I get off of the train in downtown I start working around and I realized that I ended on 25W on 36st. I came across one store and stepped in search for job.**

KZ: And you got hire, how soon?

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**MD: I went there on Monday morning and I stated from store to store searching for a job. After stepping in three stores without a success of getting job, in the next one which is the fourth one soon I entered one guy asked if I was looking for a job, I responded yes. Immediately, he told me come back the next day because his brother who is the owner of the store was absent. As early as 9 am I went there and the brother was also present and let me know that if I want to work there is a truck coming right now and you will start working soon. I was paid 250 a week for 6 days a week from 9 am to 7 pm almost 60 hours a week. I was in the above conditions from 7 to 8 months.**

**KZ: Where you expected to send money home or were you ale to keep it at all?**

**MD: No one asked me to send money him or her back home. However, due to the fact that I was raised in accordance of African values such as a traditional way that require to share what you have as well to help other family members, even though no one asked money, I often sent money back home. In addition to this I had sometimes problem with my father that is Doctor that way of life is modern because when I sent money back home to my mother, he was not happy about me but he never stopped me doing.**

**KZ: When did you start doing music in U.S.? How soon after you came?**

**MD: I started after three year to four year after I came here.**

**KZ: You have worked almost four years before you can start doing music? It is because you have to buy equipment or you need to contact with people who like music you did?**

**MD: I was preoccupied by my work and my study and I had never even thought about doing music again. Thing changed when I met a cousin that was older than me but who I knew since Dakar. The cousin told that the Senegal community is in need of DJ in New York. My response to him was that I am not doing now in U.S. and he invited me to do that at least for the Senegalese community and that was again my first involvement in music in United States of America.**

**KZ: Before you become DJ again, what you did after three years of your job? How did you paid for your school?**

**MD: During the tree years I changed work three times. My first job lasts from 7 to 8 months, the second that was also in clothing industry and I worked there for five months and half. The third one was at the State News, where I started as a stocking boy before I got a position of General Manager. In fact, State News is a big company that distributes magazines and Newspapers. I became a General Manager of the whole company.**

**KZ: You were studying at night and had you paid for your school?**

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**MD: I started going to school three years later after I came here especially when I got a promotion as General Manager of statement.**

**KZ: Is that when you start going to school at night?**

**MD: Yes in 2003 at evening classes because I worked in the morning from 7 am to 3 pm and generally I had classes from 4 pm sometimes from 5 pm to 10 pm.**

**KZ: did you felt in sleep in class?**

**MD: Of course sometimes, it was much difficult during my first year of my enrollment for associate degree diploma. I had only two hours of sleep for at least 8 months.**

**KZ: did your degree in Business or in liberal art?**

**MD: None of what you say, I hold an associate degree in Electrical engineering and communication**

**KZ: Did you get a job in that area or you are still work as manager?**

**MD: I stopped working as General Manager at State News because five months after my promotion there as manager, I got another job as supervisor at Maxcoby Inc.**

**KZ: Why did you change from one to another, is it because of the promotion?**

**MD: It was a big problem because the classes' times became conflictual with the work hours. I resigned from the job as manager and was without job for a month before I got a new one last year at Maxcoby Inc. that is a kind of job that I wanted to do in an electrical company.**

**KZ: What did you do for your paper at all that time?**

**MD: The way it happens in New York, I can get a job with my social security number**

**KZ: It is possible to enroll in school without being on student visa status?**

**MD: To enroll in school it was not an issue because I got a student visa. Indeed, I came with a visiting visa and I changed my status from visiting visa to student visa.**

**KZ: You can get a student visa?**

**MD: Yes you just to change your status and that was what I did and I got a student visa**

**KZ: When you have a student visa, then you can go to school?**

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**MD: Yes when you get a student visa you can go to school that was what I done and graduated. Even though I was graduated in telecommunication, I still like much the hospitality field. That doesn't mean that I like the telecommunication field but it is because my father likes more science field people. As the elder son it is important to go to science field in order to serve as an example for the followers in the family. After working for the electrical company for a year, I stopped and started a new career with culinary concept. That was a restaurant job and I occupied a position of a certified trainer for a time as well as a server for also part time.**

**KZ: So you were partly server and partly certified trainer?**

**MD: Yes, indeed culinary concept is a company owned by a French Jean Georges. I was working for him especially in Space market where there is a program called management in transition. That program helps newcomers to become manager by passing through the accomplishment of both, the server job and certified trainer job.**

**KZ: Where is the Space Market located?**

**MD: on 14st**

**KZ: You been doing all this and at the same time your DJ job also?**

**MD: Yes but I do the DJ often during the nights and that was not a big deal because firstly it was within the African community from 2003 to 2006. Then from 2006 I was in contact with some American friends that approached me to DJ for them too.**

**KZ: Did you moved out from your friend's apartment and get your own apartment?**

**MD: Yes I moved from my friend to Walton Avenue and as I wrote my address on the paper relating to this interview I moved again to Stratford.**

**KZ: Stratford, where and what is the cross street?**

**MD: In Bronx on 172st**

**KZ: That is where you live now?**

**MD: Yes**

**KZ: When you were DJ for African community parties, where was it? It was in Bronx, in Manhattan or both?**

**MD: I will say in both but mostly in Bronx and sometimes in Harlem too.**

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KZ: Did the French speaking community organized parties together or were African Anglophone and francophone go to the same clubs?

**MD: This is a good question; in fact mostly parties I will say are within the communities. It can be Senegalese community, Malian community, or Nigerian community.**

KZ: It means that Senegalese organized parties with Senegalese and Malians with Malians?

**MD: Generally yes, however sometimes it is possible to see a Senegalese in Malian community parties or a Malian in Senegalese parties.**

KZ: One of my friends told me that he went to a club where people are from Burkina Faso. Is that they have their own club? The Senegalese have their own club and the Malians also have their club too?

**MD: This is correct because the music is different from country to another and everyone in each community wants to have a little taste of music of the country where he or her is from. In general, they organized parties every New Year eve and you can see that in the same Harlem there 3 or 4 African parties but from different groups based on the country of origin and this all happened within the whole African community.**

KZ: When you are DJ during the animation, do you talk to the crowd?

**MD: Of course, yes**

KZ: What do you say when you are DJ in animation? Make believe that we are now in the club and you play, what do you say?

**MD: It depends, seriously it depends. If I see that it is a mix group that I play music for, in order words in that group African audience is represented by multiple people such as Nigerians, Senegalese, Malians and Ghanaians, in this case I speak English. However, if the audience is composing of only of Senegalese then I speak Wolof.**

KZ: So your language is Wolof?

**MD: Yes but I do speak also French.**

KZ: If you have a Senegalese audience, will you speak Wolof and French?

**MD: Generally yes**

KZ: What did you say in Wolof to the crowd?

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**MD: I don't know what I used to say because the words I pronounced are the ones that naturally comes out. It is like everyone is there listens to be like I am talking on the radio, and I say for example something like this: This is DJ Kerekou, Ganyegolone. Something that is not planned in advance which comes naturally even sometimes when I am on radio. Some of my friends write what they need to say on the radio station on a paper. For me it comes spontaneously and I know that it is not a good habit as my friends always tell me. In addition, they urge me to prepare my emission on the radio because they will ask me questions during my emission on radio. In response I always tell them that whatever question they ask me on the radio I will give them an answer.**

KZ: Do you go back in fourth between English, Wolof and French?

**MD: Very often**

KZ: On the radio station, are your listeners most Senegalese or they are others?

**MD: Statically I will say that 85 to 90%of the listeners are Senegalese**

KZ: Is Senegalese and Malian music sounding different?

**MD: Yes**

KZ: I listen to Malian music but I have not listened to Senegalese music. If I want to get some CDs which songs do you recommend for me?

**MD: Yusu Ndour**

KZ: Do you know the guy from Normadic Max, Ben Herson who does Senegalese Rap and hip hop called African underground? Do you play his music?

**MD: No, to be sincere I said no, I never play his music**

KZ: When you are operating as DJ, as well as when you are on the radio, who is your favor artist? Will it be mostly Senegalese music or do you put on Reggae or hip hop?

**MD: Due to the fact that the emission is aired at night, in general the listeners are the car drivers and the people that work in the restaurants and those listeners are not much involved in hip hop music, they prefer the rhythm such as the Limbala, soukouss or the Dombolo,**

KZ: That is interesting that your audience is composing of taxi drivers and restaurants workers.

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**MD: Yes very interesting but there is also a group of young people. I have an audience too in France and in Canada that listen to my show through internet. The audience in above countries is a group of young people that I met some already. In addition, there are also some young people in New York that listen to my radio show too.**

**KZ: Is it possible to listen to the station on internet? What is the name of the station when you want to get on the internet?**

**MD: You just need to go to Xalima.com**

**KZ: Do you ever go to DJ in Canadian cities?**

**MD: I didn't have a chance to go outside of United States to DJ but I often go to DJ in others states within the United States.**

**KZ: where is the larger concentration of the Senegalese outside of NYC?**

**MD: After NYC, I will point out Atlanta, Houston, and Cincinnati in Ohio.**

**KZ: Most of New Yorkers 15 years ago, we think of Senegalese in term of streets vendors. Did the streets vendors moved to other occupations like taxi drivers and restaurants workers?**

**MD: Incontestably, before 1990 this was the situation even when people come to Dakar from abroad and you ask them what they are doing there, they always respond that they are vendors in the streets. But later from 1998 to now there is change of mentality, clearly most people to have a small job that will at the same time allow them to go to school, to finish their study and of course get a good job.**

**KZ: So now people have a strategy to get educated and moved up into higher position?**

**MD: exactly it is a personality problem. I take myself as an example because I don't know how other people do it. I began to work with Culinary Concept for five or six months ago. I started with them in June, before that I got others positions. I went to others companies where I met people that have being for almost 20 years but they still in the positions. The thing is that for whenever I see someone that occupied a higher position or the person that is at the top level of the company, I am always convince that the person that occupied that post is not better than me. Then I conclude that if the person was able to reach that higher position level, of course I can do it too.**

**KZ: Do you see yourself opening your own restaurant eventually?**

**MD: probably in 5 years. At the beginning I didn't know how the fine dining are working, but now I have that knowledge that you need to learn the history of wine, the culinary as**

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**well as cooking. I have being learned a lot of things there as a server that just finished the sale as well as the marketing classes. When I finish acquiring what is really required as knowledge in management, I would like to open something like Space Market. That is a good business because the space Market is making enormously money approximately from 65 to 80 thousand dollars on only one Saturday night. If I can open something like that, it will not be bad at all because we are struggling for something better tomorrow.**

KZ: there is any good African restaurant in the Bronx that you found?

**MD: Yes, there is one on 184st and Jerome Avenue. Another one is on Jerome Avenue and Walton on 183st.**

KZ: Really, this is near Fordham? What is the name of the restaurant that is 184st? Is it a Senegalese restaurant or other?

**MD: No, the one on Jerome is Ghanaian restaurant and there is also Ivorian restaurant on 183st between Jerome and Walton. The Guinean restaurant is on Westchester Avenue near Stratford. These are the restaurants that I know and that are the good one too.**

KZ: Is it Ivory Coast a Francophone country?

**MD: Yes**

KZ: If you want to guess, how many Senegalese live in NYC? Do you think 10 thousands?

**MD: I will say a million of them. There are more Senegalese in New York even if we take only on 116st they are almost 10 thousands of them there.**

KZ: Do you see yourself staying in NYC or moving back to Senegal or in another city?

**MD: I used already to life in New York, I would like to return to Senegal but it seems that things have changed and there is interpersonal fear to not really be part of the community no more. There is difference in mentality even though when someone comes from Dakar to New York for visit, that difference is vividly noticed. Indeed, I can predict what tomorrow will be perfectly, but by now I am here.**

KZ: Do you have other friends or relatives from Senegal who were about to come to United States or is it harder to move here now than it was when you came?

**MD: Buy now I know it is difficult to come here. But my parents come once or twice every year to visit me. I have also my friends that also come for vacation from Dakar and France that return after their vacation times.**

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KZ: What about the ones come to live? Is it harder now? Can they come and stay now?

**MD: It is not only harder now to come and stay but also it is even harder to come. But some of my friends have done it especially the ones that are living in France now because France is much easier than coming to United States.**

KZ: Have you ever discriminated against because you are Muslim?

**MD: I don't think so, it never happened. It cannot be because I don't expose myself much as Muslim. I am Muslim, I pray but I am not my religious belief outside especially to work. More people do not think that I am Muslim due to the fact that not only I drink but also I don't perfectly practiced Islam. Even at work people always ask me if I am a Muslim.**

KZ: Is your relative a famous historian named Diop?

**MD: Actually, he is a very direct relative. He is like Ladior Diop of Senegal who is a direct cousin of my grandfather.**

KZ: Did you see yourself staying here, moving up to the restaurant trade and continuing your DJ work or did you want to go back to school?

**MD: Concerning the study, I don't really know. For sure I don't know by now. Associate degree, the next step is to organize my life through effective achievements. However, I will not guarantee that I will stay forever in the United States. My priority is to have or build something important that will permit me to ensure a better future for me and eventually for my family.**

KZ: did the place you planned to open will be in Manhattan or you think you might pput it in the Bronx?

**MD: In Manhattan because this is the place where there is money. I do not have something against the Bronx.**

KZ: Do you have others friends who will work with you when you open the restaurant? How you will do that or do you need to have investors or partners to open a restaurant?

**MD: Honestly, it will be a good idea to do it alone. However, after having the idea 6 years ago and with the impossibility saving condition that I faced since I had in mind the project of opening a restaurant, I do not make my mind yet if I will look for investors or some partners. I will not hesitate to do so if the situation requires such investors or partners.**

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KZ: That is exiting and very impressive, there is another thing you have accomplished and you to say about your experience in USA and especially about the Bronx that you have not say yet? Is anything you left out that is important?

**MD: I think I do cover already everything, everything has been said. What I know is that I receive here a strong training in USA, I need to honest as well as realistic that United states made me what I am today, a mature person because not only I was a young boy when I left Dakar but also I was living with my parents. I started living y myself out of my parents' eyes during my time in United States. So there is a big difference between my life in Dakar and my life when I moved to United States.**

KZ: Thank you very much, this was wonderful first part of our first French interview, so as African living in USA, what is it mean to have Barack Obama elected President?

**MD: It is the same like to have Georges Bush or bill Clinton as President. Seriously and truly speaking I don't think in term of race or color. Of course there is an hope that Barack Obama is elected so things will changed positively. Indeed, that does not mean that people should lie to themselves. As the President Kennedy has stated people do not need to worry about what the country can do for them but about what they can do for the country rather. If there is a change the citizens are ones that should the lead and not the President. It is not appropriate to say that Barack Obama, a black elected President will easily change things and so let everyone put pressure on him in order to make it done. I am saying that because of my experience as activist in Dakar that witnessed a kind of situation of change of government after election.**

KZ: Tell us about that point of activism?

**MD: When I left the country in 2000 I had issues with the government before I came here. What is really the problem? Abdou Diouf, President of Senegal lost during presidential election and left the power on March 13, 2000 and became his successor. Soon when he came to the power people thought things will be fine with the President Wade new government. Unfortunately, look where Senegalese are now, things are even worsen that what it was because instead of working harder, the Senegalese taught the government change will make things better by improving their life standard. Unfortunately, the way people talk about Barack Obama I have a fear that Barack will face the same situation as the Ex-President Wade of Senegal. So this is the reason that for me I just keep in mind that Barack is the USA President but that will not stop me to continue to work hard as always.**

KZ: Where you involved in demonstration in Senegal?

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**MD: I was involved in demonstration when I was n Senegal. I was among the leaders that are in frontline of demonstrations calling for strike in high schools. Sometimes I am always saying what I am not allow to say during public meetings and they have not leave me alone after saying that.**

KZ: Did the police follow you?

**MD: No, often there are within the audience the government' secret agents that are present during the public meeting. Some of us were arrested.**

KZ: So, you get arrested too?

**MD: Yes**

KZ: How long were you in jail?

**MD: By the week**

KZ: Did your parents want you to leave in order to get out of trouble? Will they support you coming here?

**MD: This is another thing too; my parents didn't know what I was doing until I was 19 years old. I was doing that since I was 14 years old. It was at 19 years old that I stated to have problem with the police, it was at the same time that my parents were aware.**

KZ: Is it the reason that the sent you to the USA?

**MD: Probably**

KZ: Did they think you can get less trouble here than there?

**MD: Yes because they knew that when I am going to be aboard without my parents being close to me, it will be little change in my behaviors. So I do notice that it was a big change for me.**

KZ: Thank you very much.