



Compte rendu d'entretien
Nairobi – Kenya

PORTRAIT : JOY
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My name is Joy, I'm a teacher of French, I am also the vice president of our association of teachers of French in Kenya, I am also the vice president of the Committee permanent de la francophonie here in Nairobi, I'm 39 and I work as a teacher in a secondary school, that is not a national school but is a provincial level of school, is a much smaller school and it has some students coming from the surroundings area, which is not an area where live rich people, some of students come from slums and other come from very rich families. So I have a very mixed group to deal with. I am a mother of two children biologically but I also have many children that I live with because I have lost a brother and his wife is dead too, so I do have another four children to take charge of. So sometimes I have nine children around the house. I live in Nairobi but I was born in the Western part of Kenya, in Bognori, it is a beautiful place but I don't live there anymore. I am married, my husband works, he doesn't live in Nairobi unfortunately he has to live in Mombasa and I have to live in Nairobi which is like 5000 Km apart. He comes soon enough but during the holidays sometimes I go down to visit him.

What is your husband's job?

My husband does a consultancy work. He was before the director at the SOS children villages, he was in charge of the Mombasa one but he left it to start consultancy work.

Can you tell us something about your childhood?

I am the second last-born child of eight children. At first my father worked for the colonial government, my mother too worked with the children's department. But later they retrained and my father now became a pastor and my mother was doing catering before she also became a pastor. I grew up in a family like that, where many of us were always together but now lots of members of my family moved out the country to look for another job and to try to earn money to support the family. So one of my brothers now lives in the United States, one of my sisters has to live in UK. The other live here, one of my brothers is a pharmacist, the other one works in the security and before he was in the armed forces. The sisters one was a teacher but now works in the administration in a University and then the last one is still studying at the University.

How did your parents manage with all those children?

I think it was a lot of sacrifices and then there was a lot of loans. Sometimes one child went to school and the others remained to wait for one to finish. As soon as you



finished school you had no time to go away, to take a break. It was already time to take responsibility for the other of us younger. I've been left with the responsibility of my late brother child. I had to take on the responsibility and I can't push it to any other people. Sometimes it was a very hard job. You have to collaborate with yours parents and to help them.

Did you live in a village or did you live in a town?

As I told you before my place of birth is a village and it is called Bugnori. First I went to school down in the village then later because of brothers/sisters taking responsibility of each other I moved out to a town in the Western part of the Rift Valley, where I did a part of my primary education. As soon as I passed my exams I attended the secondary school in a school where go students who have the best marks. After that I was in Nairobi at the Kenyatta University for my first degree and then I did a distance study with the University de Rouen for my maîtrise and now I continue studying for French, I am now preparing my level C2, which is the higher standard framework, which is the level you are supposed to have if you are like a native french speaker.

Where do you live right now?

For many years when I worked in my previous station I lived within the school. So the school gave us very big houses, lovely compounds, we had a garden. We had lots of places compared to everybody else. Now I just moved to a new school and that's mean that I had to move to a new place. Now, from the school where I was which was Lenana School I had moved to a place called Ruruta Seatlight. That one has got much small units and it very difficult to find a house just for its own. So I live in a compound which originally was somebody else's propriety and then when he decided to buy a better house elsewhere he divided the house in four different houses so we live in a compound but is for different families. So I live downstairs and another family lives upstairs and then in front of us there is another house and there is still another one.

What is the jobs of the people who live in the same compound of you?

One of them ids also a teacher, the other one works as a workman in the workshop of the owner of the building and for the other one I'm not sure. So it is possible that because we have a better job we are able to live in a compound with fewer people. The houses available in most of those places some times have communal toilets, a communal bathroom, may be a communal place for washing.

How much do you pay for your place?

Our place is the only we can afford. It costs 8000 Ksh, and my salary is 13000 Ksh, so I'm spending about $\frac{3}{4}$ of my salary just to pay the house.

How do you manage?



I just have to. After my job occasionally I have to take in students to give them extra lessons, may be get a little money and many times I have to call for help from the members of my family. If I am lucky they give me money. You just have to adjust. If, par exemple, the meal before was a little bit more elaborated we have to change. Now is not possible anymore to eat fruits or vegetables at every meal.

Why is it possible before and is not anymore possible now?

Things of course are changed. When I lived in the school it costed me about 3500 Ksh for the house. Now I pay 8000 Ksh and it is a immense change. Before I didn't use transports to go to school because I lived in school, now I have to take two buses.

How much does it cost you?

It costs me roughly 150 Ksh par day.

How much is more or less your extra earnings?

May be 10000, you know because sometimes students are not constant, they come and they stop just when they feel like, may be you aspect them coming for a lesson and they don't come. They simple change their minds. Once in a while also, when I am lucky, I do get interpret in the conferences but is not easy to penetrate the network because not many people know that a teacher of language knows that amount of french. So they think that may be you are not able to communicate in both languages. If you break the network some people invite you. But sometimes you are invited and you are also supposed to have classes so you can't get permission from work to go and to do the conference just like that.

And your husband, how much does he earn?

When he was working and he was having a steady job he earn the same amount of money than me. But right now, you now, consultancy sometimes you get the money sometimes you have to wait and sometimes is no money absolutely and you must keep doing the work. So he doesn't have a stable income par month. Sometimes is a lot sometimes is nothing.

How do you place yourself in the Kenyan society? Do you feel lucky or unlucky?

There are all those mixed feelings. I have two degrees and sometimes I think to deserve a better work. But is not automatic, sometimes you don't get a good work only because you are qualified, many times the thing that really worth is who you know. At that time I am enjoying teaching and I wish to have a best salary. Because the salary that I have now is totally negligible. But I know also that there are people under me who have absolutely nothing so I start from there and I think that I am lucky, I am extremely lucky to be having a job which gives me a salary every month, whatever is the case, even if the government goes bankrupt for some reasons I will have something. They can delay it, they can talk about it but in the end they will give



it to me. This is something I count myself lucky for. There is a time when I look around me and I see people with even more qualifications than I do and they don't even have a job, they don't know from where the next meal will come from.

Is the recent economic recession affecting you?

Yes, it is affecting me strongly. Now the fuel price is up and it means that you need more money to buy the same amount of fuel to cook the same food. My family also has grown: if before we used to be only me my husband and my two children now the number of the members of my family is doubled or tripled. This means that if before it took me two weeks to finish a packet of flour now I finish the same packet of flour in one day. And this same packet of flour that before costed 40 Ksh now costs 120 Ksh, so as you can see the price is almost tripled. You need flour to prepare ugali that is the basic food here. Before you cooked vegetables and meat and sometimes fish now you can't afford it anymore. Now the meals are changed. The prices are increased but salaries are always the same. You go with 20000 Ksh at the supermarket and the amount of things you can buy is not much.

When did it changed?

I think that since the elections everything became unstable, one thing is affordable one day and may is not more affordable the day after. I think that thing began to change about one or two years ago when the fuel price also started to go up and down. When the fuel price goes up globally it goes up in Kenya too. But when the fuel price goes down globally it stays up in Kenya. If I look at my salary now I earn more than when I started teaching but because of the inflation now I'm much lower than when I began. Even if I earn 4000 Ksh more than before, now those 4000 Ksh are the equivalent of 400 Ksh because of the inflation.

In your opinion what kind of jobs do people who belong to your same social group?

You have teachers and you have executive accountants. Most of the civil servants belong to my same social group. People who have at least one degree. But the problem is that now people when finish university are obliged to get a job that is lower than the job they studied for. Is very difficult to find a good job now. Now middle class are going down, many of them live in places where before used to live poor people, in places where there is one room and you have shared toilets, shared bathrooms. The middle class is going lower. They are not staying in the same places where they are used to stay before. The middle class people before could build the own houses now that is much more difficult, it's a lot more difficult. It is easy to buy with loans, you take lots of loans and you pay it slowly. But to build your own house is becoming more and more like a dream .

What do you do in your spare time?

As a mother I put a lots of work in to bringing up the children. I consider myself lucky to be teaching and finding some time to be bringing up the children. I have a very



little free time because I teach during the normal class time and sometimes the schools demands that you stay for what that they call extra curricula activities like drama, music and all that. So I write plays, the most part of the times I write them in French. Sunday I go church in the morning, I go to the Baptist church in Nairobi. Once in a while I also go to the Pentecostal Church, I've gone there for many years when I used to live in the school, I used to pray also with the students within the compound. Once in a while, but very rarely, I take also my children swimming. Since my husband lives in Mombasa is much easier for us, because he lives in a house, which is pretty near the beach, then when we go there we really like fishing and we swim a lot, we walk around and my children could see the things they are studying. Before we can take a all month but now schools have also holidays teaching, which means that my free time is less than before. I think that we, the middle class people, are the group who works all the time. I have the feeling that we don't have even time for holidays, we don't afford holidays anymore. Once we used to meet with all the family for Christmas or for the other holidays but now in Africa also we are losing the communal life, family is disintegrating even if more slowly than in Europe.

From what you say, it seems that you are between tradition and modernity. How do you manage with it?

Is very difficult to drop a line and distinguish tradition from modernity, the two are mixed. Culture is very dynamic. Even with the languages I have this feeling: we have a language called sheng and it is not kiswaili nor french but actually there are some words which derive both from kiswaili and french. I can't say that I feel scared of modernity, life just moves on. If you take for example a funeral service, there are things that will be done according to total tradition, there pas example, dances and songs in mother tongue and there are other elements which are related with modernity.

Are you involved in politics?

To a very small extent. Because I think that sometimes you need to completely detach yourself from what you are doing. May be one I am gonna rule this country. Like a teacher I know that I can influence opinions, so I have to be careful because also when I work with children I don't want totally push them in one direction, because may be their parents are on the other.

Do you to manifestations or to national speeches?

Once in a while yes. My husband has been to a lots of political settings, he can go there and he organises groups but you know sometimes it's dangerous.

Do you think that it could be dangerous?

Yes, many times it can be dangerous when you are identified. That sometimes can make you a target. So I prefer to be a little be more neutral and keep most of those political things a little bit more individual. But it's clear that when is time to vote you vote, when is time to get out and listen to a speaker you do that.



Do you have a health insurance?

Whatever is called our health cover is totally negligible. I had a very bad accident, I had to be for a long-time in a hospital in Nairobi and the bill was very very high. I still don't have a proper comprehensive cover and it's not included in my workplace. We have the national hospital insurance but it's not comprehensive of everything and sometimes we have to pay from the pockets. The assurance I have does not cover basic medicines you buy for the flu or whatever. Sometimes may be when you are supposed to be covered they decided that this is not covered.

When you go to the doctor how much does it costs to you?

If you go to the doctor it can costs you from between 500 Ksh to up about 5000 Ksh and that would be a very basic thing. The medical expenses are too high so when you go to the public hospital you find that there is no medicines or the doctor is no there because he is gone to a private clinic, because his salary too is not enough and he has to go around and around in many hospitals. There is like Kenyatta national hospital but it is a referral hospital so it means that you have to go to another smaller hospital and to be referred there. So it costs you 200 Ksh for the card and then there are the medicines but is a very crowed hospital. So you can die waiting. That's way I would have to go to a private doctor. Whatever I do that is the most practical to solve the problem.

Have you ever think about emigrating abroad?

I think I am really Kenyan in the blood. I am proud to be Kenyan and may be if sometimes I complain about my country and its problems finally home is good. If I get an offer that enables me to live a better life and to give more opportunities to my children I would accept it and I would leave home. For the present time my husband works well for both of us and so I don't need to go abroad to find another job. But it's true that sometimes going abroad is extremely tempting, especially for a foreign language teacher, I mean that I know French and I can work in many more countries in the world.

Can you tell us something about your children?

I have two daughters: one is 18 and the other is 10. The first is called Michelle, she comes to the Alliance Française, she's taking French lessons for the moment we have no enough money to offer her University but we are working on it. The other is called Nicole, she is still oscillating between what she likes to be, between a politicians or a scientist. She changes her minds every day.

How many people you support with your salary?

It's hard to tell, may be more than 20. Right now we are about six in the house but is because some of them are in boarding schools, as my husband is the eldest of his family for a long time I have grown up my brother in love and my sister in love, now they have theirs own careers but they are grown up in my home.



Does your husband from Mombasa send you money monthly?

Sometimes he sends me money but is not a monthly basis because of what he does. He doesn't have the same income every month, sometimes he earns a lot and sometimes nothing, but yes, he gives his support. But for the most part of time it's me that support the family.