

INTERVIEW WITH MAYMOUNA DIENG FROM SENEGAL IN JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA, DECEMBER 17 - 2016

Djalma Fonseca



Mounass is an African stylist, from Senegal, she creates, designs and produces her African clothes, with very special fabrics from a region in Senegal, Western Africa. She sells them at the Rosebank Sunday Market, an open market with many interesting items, very rich in the Southern African culture, and she offers some options in the West African style and fabrics.

Mounass was one of the first people we had the opportunity to know and become friends with down here in South Africa. She and her family have been good friends, new friends with old sentiments. Since they are also foreigners, they are a good laboratory to help us understand the African culture as a whole, as well as the Southern African culture. In this way we have been witnesses of *Teranga*, which you will learn about shortly.

Here follows a brief interview where she shares her experiences and understanding of things.

Could you describe Senegalese culture to our readers?

Our culture is very different, we have many languages, my language is Wolof, the most popular in Senegal. The most widely spoken language is French (as a second language) and then Wolof, which is a big ethnic group. Some other ethnic groups and their languages are: Jola-Fonyi, Mandinka, Mandjak, Mankanya, Noon (Serer-Noon), Pulaar, Serer, Soninke, and Wolof.



There are some basic principles in Senegalese or Wolof culture specifically, for example, there is a common attitude held towards people in general, specially foreigners or newcomers, or people from other groups, it is called *Teranga*. Either in or outside your house you should discover what their needs are and try to help them with what they need, or with whatever you can, it is common to provide accommodation and food. This cultural trend is changing now, it used to be much stronger, but this is what they call the Senegal Power, the strength of the group, of mutual collaboration.

What made you move from your country? Why did you come to South Africa?

I never thought of leaving my country and in my first year, I did not realize I was leaving my country, I still thought it would be something temporary. I've got married and my husband was and still is working here in South Africa, that was the reason we came down here.

So what are the differences and similarities that you see between Senegalese and South African culture?

Teranga is different, don't get me wrong, they have a culture, I like their culture, but the problem is, sometimes, you live in a place, but you don't even know your neighbor, and you try to approach them, some will be open to you, some will not be open to you. I can understand, people are more distant probably because of crime.

Here, in South Africa, to get married you need to pay a dowry, Lobolo, very specifically for the bride, they negotiate the payment, in general, in cash.

In my country, we are Muslims, we do not have dowries. So, depending on the amount you have available it will make a difference to the bride you can get down here to South Africa, I think this is common in other parts of Africa as well.

Also, they do not wear a lot of African clothing, I want my kids to wear more African clothes. If we want Africa to be big we need to use African products. We wear African clothes in Senegal, and the first time I wore those down here, they thought I was from Nigeria, people here think only Nigerians wear African clothes, but they are mistaken, African clothes are worn all over Africa. As I can see, nowadays, the African style is becoming fashionable all over the world, everybody is wearing more African fabrics as well.

How did you adapt to South Africa? It was your first time outside your country.

It was hard, I did not have any friends, I didn't speak English, people here did not speak French. You see your husband go to work and you are alone, and you can't understand anything even on the TV, now it is better, the work in the market (Rosebank Sunday African Market) has helped me a lot because I need to communicate and they help you, they are very kind, they try to understand you and you start to learn how to speak to better serve your customers.



How did you start in the styling area?

It was before my marriage, over 20 years ago. Actually I wanted to work with hair styling, but my mother saw potential in me, saw that I probably had skill in the clothing design area, my older sister was as a clothing designer already and it could have help me to get into the scene. So, my mother recognized my skill even before I did.

So after all, what do you think it is important in life, in order to be happy?

If you are healthy, you can do whatever, whatever comes to you. You don't have to wait for money to be happy, I think what makes one happy continuously, is fraternal love, if you have this kind of love you are happy no matter what.

If you could send a message to every person in the world what would you say to them?

Just like brothers and sisters, if we love each other the world would be different, but if you think you are better than the other or the other is better than you, it is not possible.

Final words.

Well I am really very happy here in South Africa, even though I had some difficulties to adapt in the beginning, I am very happy now, and very grateful for everything and everyone, especially my husband.

Interviewer. Djalma Fonseca. Entrepreneur, IT specialist, former Brazilian Air Force officer. Conscientiology volunteer since 1989, teacher since 1990 and Penta practitioner since 1989.

Revised by Jeffrey Lloyd.