



MOYO

An audio documentary by Omara Poppe

English Transcript

[00:00:26] Father

Mí sédrou ló
édrou néva

I'm going to tell a story, you can listen to the story?. The story may come, they answer.

When we were, I was young.

[00:00:40] Omara

Somewhere in the seventies in Togo. My father and his friends are listening to the radio.

[00:00:46] Father

On the radio, every Saturday, a story was broadcasted, told.

[00:00:52] Omara

A story. A story about a rabbit, a cunning spider, or a mosquito in your ear.

[00:00:56] Father

And everyone gathers around the radio, and that lasts for two hours.

[00:01:02] Omara

In the evening, in bed, they tell the stories to each other again. They keep on telling them and telling them.

[00:01:13] Father

They come, and they tell, and you live it like as if it were a film, fantastic.

[00:01:18] Omara

The stories explain mysteries, people, and the land. History and knowledge are passed on.

[00:01:27] Father

In the beginning, they say, mí sédrou ló, édrou néva

[00:01:30] Omara

They start with mí sédrou ló, édrou néva

[00:01:36] Father

I'm going to tell a story.

[00:01:40] Omara

The story may come.

[00:01:41] Father

édrou zón ka ka ka va dzé.

Omara

The story runs and runs and runs.

Father

To present the characters. Yes, that story runs and runs and runs. Until. But it also tells the direction that ka ka ka va dzé.

[00:01:59] Omara

The story runs from you to me. Or from me to you.

[00:02:06] Father

mí sédrou ló, édrou néva. And then they start telling.

Man in the background whistling

[00:02:24] Omara

I'm leaving by plane to Lomé, the capital of Togo, West Africa. My eyes sting from nerves. I'm on my way to Togo to visit my father. He decided two years ago to give up his job as a truck mechanic. He left Belgium to start a brewery in his homeland. My mother, my sister, and I had no idea when we would see him again.

For hours, I try to avoid my leg touching the leg of the man next to me. Five failures, I know it, and so does he.

The worst part of the trip is the 3 hour long layover in Casablanca.

The line at customs winds. I wait along with a hundred others and two parakeets in a cage behind me. I know little about my father, where he grew up, when he decided to leave everything and travel to Europe. My father mostly remained silent. He was quiet. The stories he used to tell his friends, I never heard. I never heard his story.

The couple next to me eats peanuts and a banana. 'La meilleure combinaison'. I also get a banana and peanuts, and for the rest of the flight, I worry about the banana smell. Where do I throw my banana peel? I find a plastic bag, throw the peel in it, and tie it up.

After years of guessing at a history and hidden stories, I decided to follow him and ask him.

Ask if he would tell me his story.

To understand why he made certain choices in his life and why he decided to leave once again and leave everything behind.

[00:04:20] Omara

It's night-time. The airport is sticky and warm. I'm wearing two jumpers and long black jeans. With my three suitcases, I step outside and sit under a giant Togolese flag. And I wait. Due to a mistake with the time difference, I'm picked up an hour later.

[00:04:41] Father

That was a bit stressful for me too. I mean, I know what I need to do. But when you're coming, yeah, what will you eat? This and that and that, where will you sleep? But for me, you're coming home, right? You're coming home, you're coming to your dad's home. Yeah, where your dad sleeps, you should sleep too. I'm not going to rent a hotel for you. It's your home too. I was happy because, yeah, I sometimes feel lonely there.

[00:05:09] Omara

I took a good look at him, saw his hair, with a few half-done dreadlocks still hidden in it, some longer than others. A large cap to hide the increasing number of white curls. He seemed smaller than two years ago. Maybe it was his posture, hunched over the steering wheel. He wore torn jeans and an old polo shirt.

[00:05:34] Father

Yeah, I saw you all bloom and I thought, wow, they've become ladies. Yes. Oh yes, you've become more grownup right in front of my eyes. Then I realize, I'm getting old too. Oh yes. Twenty years ago, you were so small, but now I see you all grown-up. I thought, okay, yes, I'm at that stage now too.

[00:05:59] Omara

During my journey, I try to imagine how my father once made the reverse journey. A question I asked for years without an answer. But I came here to finally get answers, and a few days later, he gives them to me.

[00:06:20] Father:

It was in September. There was also a bit of drizzle, like rain and such. So sad. Yeah, I saw no life, no life. The weather is so sad. No one outside, like we were always here. I thought when I arrived, it'd be lively? You know, full of energy and such. I thought, hey, what is this?

[00:06:41] Omara

September 1993, in the north of Germany. Hamburg. A young man from Togo confidently steps o\ the plane. He looks up. The sky is grey. Clouds. It's drizzling. His clothes are getting wet.

[00:06:57] Father

Because they told me. You must be well-dressed. Not too much luggage. Yeah, and your papers, money, everything must be in your pocket, like you're coming as a businessman. There's no visa.

But what are you coming to do? African model clothes and such. Good quality fabric, right? Expensive fabric, they call it basin. It's white. The buttons are gold and so on. Really beautiful. I arrived at the airport, boom. Everyone is looking at me. Honestly. Shit, man. I was wearing real, beautiful presidential shoes and so on. Yes. My watch, 'hmwa' chain. Yes, damn. If you saw me, you'd think, yes! He's not a migrant, he's a businessman.

[00:07:47] Omara

He waits. A car drives past. A passer-by. In the background, airplane engines. It's cold.

Winter is coming.

[00:07:57] Father

And my friend? The one who said I should come to him. He wasn't there. I get out. I don't know where to go.

[00:08:06] Omara

He waits. Another passer-by. Head down. Quick pace. No "hello." He walks on. Footsteps hesitant on the ground.

[00:08:17] Father

Fuck, I hate that day, the day I got to know Europe. Honestly. What kind of land is this? Yeah, is this what they always told us, that Europe is paradise. Or that it is beautiful? What we always see in films, is that it? Africa is better. I immediately said to myself, yeah. I said: we had nothing in Africa. But Africa is better than this.

[00:08:48] [Conversation in Ewe.]

[00:09:01] Omara

It's been a long time since I've smelled this. It's as if there's fire in the air. The smell of Togo drifts in through the car window. A friend drives us towards Agbodrafo, where my father's brewery is. Half asleep, I listen to them speaking in Ewe.

[00:09:22] [Conversation in Ewe.]

[00:09:36] Fathers friend

It's the Harmattan, eh, it's like winter, right? The winter of tropical countries. Do you recognize this place?

Omara:

Not at all.

[00:09:50] Father

Agbodrafo, it's on the coast. About 35-40 kilometers from Lomé. Agbodrafo is an old slave town. So, the old houses, those vestiges, I should say, they're still there. From the Portuguese and such.

[00:10:09] Omara

You follow the old road to Benin. The street seems endlessly twisted by bends that make motorcyclists swerve. He lives somewhere in the middle. Past the white hotel, at the first Moyo Brasserie sign, you turn left. Then into a small lane, right past the old lady who always sits outside.

[00:10:33] Father

You see the coconut trees and such. You see the sea. You come inside and the only thing, the first thing you'll notice is the large, thatched roof in the middle. The roofs are made of straw. To the left and right, there are a few banana plants there, and behind the thatched roof, there's the brewery and the house. Chickens welcoming you with their noise and so on. And yes, Moyo, the dog, is there too. A real German shepherd, one of my best friends. Yes.

[00:11:14] Omara

In the light of the rising sun, we step inside the gate. An overhead, thatched roof made of straw. Underneath it, a large bar, a few tables and chairs, and a hammock surrounded by citronella plants. To the right, small palm trees, a banana plant, and a small guardhouse. To the left, a chicken coop. At the back, a grey concrete house with a large brown gate.

Moyo, a young German shepherd, hides behind the thatched roof. From under a car, a black cat curiously peeks out.

Between late November and mid-March, a cool, dry wind blows from the Sahara. It's called Harmattan. Sand and dust are carried kilometers away, all the way to West Africa. If it blows hard enough, dust storms can occur, transforming the entire landscape. The dust covers the buildings and limits visibility like fog. Hot. Even though I can hardly see the sun, the first days are incredibly hot. I need to get used to the temperature, and I mainly want to get moving quickly. Visiting places, discovering, seeing people, and driving around. But Togo has a different rhythm.

[00:13:19] Omara

We're sitting together in the brewery. Two boxes full of beer bottles are on the table. We're cleaning them and stamping them. The label on the beer reads Moyo Blonde Beer with a large baobab tree underneath.

[00:13:36] Father

You must help too, you know? There's a lot to do, cleaning and then putting the stamp here.

[00:13:47] Omara

The first days, I followed him. Repairing cars, getting petrol, buying food, checking houses of Togolese people living abroad, lots of little jobs at the brewery, and it's slower than I would like.

[00:14:00] Omara

Is there a plan for tomorrow?

[00:14:09] Father

Tomorrow, I want to sleep.

[00:14:12] Father

Don't rush me, okay? Look at the people, how they move so slowly here. Everything is so slow, and you're the only one going, whoosh. And you come and add to it. Getting up, and then, okay, we're going here, we're going there, we're going there. Hmm? I know you don't come often, but when you do, everyone has to fly. That makes me a bit afraid to go back. I can't handle that pace anymore, I can't handle it anymore. I will try to give you everything you want. You came here with a purpose.

Yes, I also came here with a purpose.

[00:15:04] Omara

I see the beer bottles for which he left two years ago, for six months, and now he's still here.

[00:15:11] Father

The emotions I have built here, I've built this myself. They're heavy. In the beginning, when I first came here, it wasn't easy for me to reach this level. I came for six months, but look at me here, two years later. Two years and still nothing has been done here. Nothing's been done. I'm the brewer here. I'm the mechanic, the salesman. I'm the cook here, I'm everything here. The cleaner, I'm everything here. Don't you realize what I'm feeling? The bond between me and this place, do you know how heavy that is? Come on... No!

[00:15:58] Omara

I find it hard to understand the connection between him and this place and how heavy that is. I take my cloth and a beer bottle and wipe the sand and dust o\ it.

[00:16:22] Father

I warn you, you'll come across many things in my story that you'll need to be strong for, emotionally strong. There are many things that you don't know. A lot.

[00:16:39] Omara

It's evening. The sun has set, and the air feels cooler. We go through a stack of old photos of my father and pause at a picture from Germany in 1993.

[00:16:54] Father

Before I came to Belgium, I was in Germany. You didn't know that did you?

[00:16:56] Omara

No.

[00:16:57] Father

I've never talked about it.

[00:17:01] Omara

In the photo, he's standing with another man leaning against a green car.

[00:17:05] Father

That's the Golf 1, I think, Golf 1, automatic.

[00:17:08] Omara

He's wearing a nice hat and a denim jacket.

[00:17:11] Father

That was the time when we were, well, you know, into fashion and all that.

[00:17:16] Omara

And how long were you in Germany?

[00:17:18] Father

Three years.

[00:17:19] Omara

Three years?

[00:17:22] Father

Yes. From '94? No, from '93 to '96. That's another, another part of my life story that I just kept hidden, that, I kept that a secret.

Omara

Why?

Father

Just to protect you, that's all. As a child, if you're confronted with something like that too early, it'll destabilize you. You understand? That's why I just kept it hidden.

[00:18:01] Omara

I remember as a child asking about his youth, just sitting at the kitchen table. I didn't get any answers then. Now I do. For the first time, my father and I sit across from each other, and he gives me those answers. Just like that, at the table.

[00:18:22] Father

Back then, Germany was tough. The racism in Germany, you could see it plain as day. We were one of the first to arrive, and then they looked at us as if we came from the moon. It was so hard.

[00:18:36] Omara

One evening, he talks about his youth in Togo, his brothers and sister, about his absent mother and their difficult relationship. Another evening, he tells me about the heart attack his father had. And the impact it had on him.

[00:18:53] Father

That was just last week. I passed by the place where he died. Every time I pass by there, the memories, they just flood my mind.

[00:19:02] Omara

We talk about his years in boarding school and the university he never finished.

[00:19:07] Father

Our dad was our support. Dad passed away. It was over. I had no support from anywhere. I remember having to work every weekend in the port to earn money, and then back to school on Monday. Then I went to university. But it was so expensive, so expensive, and I said, hey, I can't do it. I just can't do it.

[00:19:32] Omara

Eventually, he started working as a dock worker. Later, he sold cars.

[00:19:36] Father

I met someone from Germany who sold cars. He brought used cars to the port. I helped him find customers. I sold the car. If I sold a car, I got a commission. I earned a lot of money there. I'm someone who doesn't sit still. I try everything. In our youth slang, we say a *hustler*, you know what a hustler is? A hustler is someone who always tries everything. I want to succeed, I want to succeed. Someone who, someone who is thirsty for success. Thirsty for success and all that. That's it.

[00:20:19] Omara

Around the same time that my father had to quit university and started working in the port, the country's economy began to decline.

[00:20:27] Father

But the system started to break down from as early as 1990.

[00:20:32] Omara

On 13 January 1963, the first president of Togo, Olympio, was shot by a general. Étienne Eyadéma. He became president five years later and established a one-party system. There were a few stable years, but in the 1980s, the country's economy began to decline.

[00:20:53] Father

Nothing was working anymore. The port was closed, people went on strike. The economy was flat. I lived on my savings for more than a year. And people started asking themselves questions. What are we doing in this country?

[00:21:08] Omara

Discontent among the population grew and escalated in the early 1990s. Students rose up, and various protests were organized.

[00:21:18] Father

The whole country was protesting, everyone.

[00:21:23] Omara

In September 1992, the army attempted a failed coup, and after the murder of several civilians, more than 200,000 people fled.

[00:21:34] Father

Bam! That was the spark, the match that ignited the fire. Because people had endured a lot from that government for years. Protests everywhere. Cars were burned, people were killed on the streets, civilians against the military. It was a real carnage. When the soldiers started shooting people, or whatever you call it, then people started fleeing. Some people went to Ghana, some to Côte d'Ivoire, some began going to Europe and so on.

[00:22:20] Omara

We stand on the shore of Lake Togo, a large lake in the south of the country. I see people crossing the lake in small boats. In 1991, 28 bodies were found here as a result of the military repression. When it was no longer safe in Lomé, my father fled to Kpalimé, a village on the road to the north. But after a while, he'd had enough. After much hesitation, he sold one of his two taxis, packed a suitcase with two T-shirts and a pair of jeans, and boarded a plane to Hamburg. Because why not?

[00:23:01] Father

At that moment, it was just for a better life, like the Europeans went to America for El Dorado and so on. We took a risk, just looking for somewhere better. The problem in Africa is no jobs, no work. That's the big problem in Africa. You're young, you're growing up, you have no prospects, nothing. So it's sad. You're fifteen years old, twenty years old, and you don't know what to do.

[00:23:35] Omara

It's the afternoon, and the hazy sun has already started to set. Just like every day, there's mist in the air, but today the sun shines just a bit more through the layer of sand.

Is it difficult for you to tell me about this?

[00:23:51] Father

I was doubting. I was doubting, but on the other hand, I thought. I've thought. You've made the effort to come here. Then it would be crazy for you not to get the most out of me because this is the moment, right? This is the moment. I appreciate the step you took. That's why I'm going to tell you as much as possible. For me, it's like everything I've been holding inside, and I... Ah, I've been through a lot in my life. Sometimes I wonder, what on earth have I done? But you're my daughter; you need to know this.

[00:25:15] Omara

Sometimes you can smell that it's going to rain. When you feel something change in the air, and soon you'll feel the drops. It's the dry season, and normally it doesn't rain. Yet I felt it today. In the distance, I hear the first thunderclap. Moyo, the dog, nervously hides under the table. The cat restlessly walks through the sand.

[00:25:48] Father

They hate you everywhere, everywhere you go, you hear: “*Scheisse Schwarze, raus.*” Everywhere you hear that, on the train, people will just shout that at you. “*Zum A3e.*” A3e is monkey. Eh, what didn't we hear over there? You go to the discotheque. You're not allowed in; you go to the café for a drink, you're not allowed in.

[00:26:11] Omara

Did you know that beforehand?

[00:26:12] Father

Oh, no, no, we knew nothing. All we knew about Europe was that Europeans are good. They are good people, a good land, and so on. We only knew the positive because when white men come here, they behave like they're good people. Well, yes, they are people who came here with the Bible; they act like they care about the poor people and so on. They only show the good side. Yeah, you would be shocked. Well, yes, it's hard to experience that; it's hard.

[00:26:47] Omara

The first three days, he sleeps on the floor of two friends' rooms, on his jeans, with his suitcase as a pillow.

[00:26:55] Father

I had a good life, what am I doing here? That's, that's the shocking thing about Europe. Everyone who goes there, they didn't know what they were going to face. Because those who went before, they don't tell the truth. Everyone is fighting to go there. You're lucky to go, you come back, and you say it's not good. Well, yes, it's just that you've fallen into the trap; you've fallen into the trap. They all lie that they're living well there, Europe is paradise, blah blah blah, and that makes everyone want to go. Once you get there, you'll say *ooh*. It's all shocking and so on. Really. I just want to go back. Yeah, straight back, because it's not too late.

[00:27:40] Omara

After three days of doubting, he is convinced and decides to stay.

[00:27:44] Father

And then, yes, they said to me: *mon frère, you've come, right? You can't go back anymore because if you go back, people will laugh at you. They'll say, "He's already back. He's useless."* Europe, where everyone goes and comes back with a big head, lots of money. You go, and you say it's not nice. Do you understand the antagonism there?

[00:28:06] Omara

Even though you could just board a plane to go abroad, staying there was something else.

[00:28:13] Father

I said, what is that now, applying for asylum? What kind of nonsense is that, applying for asylum? Yes, you must apply for asylum, like a refugee. Refugee? I'm not a refugee! Yes, now you're a refugee. Then we must write a story, write a scenario. Why did I come? Yes, it must seem like it really happened and so on. Man, man, man, for the full three days, I was busy. I'd write something, have it reviewed. No, it's not good. Back to another one, back to another. Three times. And you write it, and then you must memorize it. Think about how you can stay and rebuild your life here.

[00:29:06] Omara

Do you regret that decision?

[00:29:08] Father

Sometimes, yes. Sometimes, yes, and sometimes I say, okay. If I hadn't decided to stay in Germany, if I had stayed in Togo, what would I have become? I don't know. Maybe I'm already dead; maybe I'm already richer. Maybe I'm... well, yes. I don't know what would happen, but is it like that? I could have said at that moment, forget it, I'm not staying here. I just take my courage, I get back on the plane. I return to Togo.

[00:29:44] Omara

Normally, it doesn't start raining for another three months, but I see the rain clouds coming closer and closer. The sun disappears, making way for a grey shadow. The sound of the thunder gets louder and louder.

We continue flipping through his old photos from Germany.

[00:30:21] Father

When I see those photos, I was just an alcoholic here. Really an alcoholic.

[00:30:30] Omara

Wait, show me the photo?

[00:30:34] Father

Do you see my face there? It looks like someone who just has problems, doesn't it? Don't you see that?

[00:30:45] Omara

No, not immediately.

[00:30:47] Father

I was really thinking. Thinking. Thinking. I was no longer myself in that photo. And we smoked a lot too, eh. I was rolling my joint here. We'd smoke, smoke, smoke to death. Every day, I come from work completely exhausted. Then I had to roll one to be able to sleep. Because the pressure, poof, the work rhythm. Boy, boy, boy, it's not doable. You come, you're exhausted, and sometimes you can't even fall asleep. You're so tired, but you don't fall asleep. Come on, man.

[00:31:34] Omara

For three years, he builds a life in Germany.

[00:31:37] Father

We'd pool our money together, and then we'd go to the supermarket. Buy drinks, and then, yes, we'd just throw a party.

[00:31:43] Omara

He makes friends, works in the kitchen of a restaurant, and learns the language.

[00:31:48] Father

I had a bit of money in my pocket. I bought a dictionary. German, French. French, German.

[00:31:55] Omara

But eventually, his application was denied. He had to leave and boarded the train to Brussels, where everything started all over again.

[00:32:04] Father

Time is our enemy. Time keeps running, running, running, running, and I'm just sitting there dreaming. I'm just fighting to get that piece of paper, to stay. Because without that paper, you can't do anything, you can't rent, you can't work, you can't go to a hospital. Yes, so, the European system is well designed to just break you down when you enter as a migrant. They break you down.

[00:32:40] Omara

I wonder, in what way did your character change when you went from Togo to Europe?

[00:32:51] Father

My character changed when I lost my father. That, yes. That was the first event in my life that really broke me, and then I was just someone else. That was the first. And then the second shock was in Germany. That was a big shock, but I was strong in Togo, but not like that. I was more jovial in Togo than in Europe.

[00:33:30] Omara

The first raindrops fall, and soon the rain pours from the sky. I sit under the shelter and watch. I see how the water carves a path through the sand and quickly forms a mud pool.

[00:34:25] Omara

It's 35 degrees, one of the hottest days today. When it gets too hot, Moyo the dog hides as far away as possible. Together with the cat, they fight for the best spot of shade.

[00:34:50] Father

The procedure is simply to remove the sugar from the grain. The starch turns into sugar, but in different stages. At first, I started with 50 degrees Celsius, now it's 63 degrees. Then I stop for half an hour. After that, I turn the heat back on. Yes.

[00:35:12] Omara

In the brewery, there's a large pot of boiling water on the stove. My father adds grains to convert the starch into sugars that eventually become alcohol. He increases the temperature in various stages.

[00:35:25] Father

And then it's left for half an hour. Here's my clock, what do you call it, an egg timer. For half an hour, when the time is up, I turn the heat back on to reach the next temperature.

[00:35:45] Omara

And do you still enjoy it? You started as a hobby, but do you still enjoy brewing now?

[00:35:50] Father

Of course. Of course, no one can take that away from me. Really. The worst thing is to do a job you don't like. You just do it to survive, for a salary. For a long time, I've just done jobs I didn't like. I work here every day, I do something to live, because I have no salary, nothing. But I live; if I have nothing to do, I look for someone's car to repair and earn money. If no one buys a bottle of beer here for a month, I sell nothing. Sometimes it's even two months

with no sales. But I have to live. So, I live as a mechanic. And when you pass by, people think, 'Ah, he came from Europe and brought a lot of money,' what money? It's just hard work.

Well, now I'm going to peel my papaya. Melon and then mix it. In the blender, I put it in the fridge and I'll drink it. Alright?

[00:37:00] Omara

Yes.

[00:37:02] Father

Juicy papaya, you don't find that in Belgium. Papaya. Or you have to go to the supermarket for a silly papaya, a small papaya that you buy for €20? Here, papaya is juicy, papaya is the best.

[00:37:19] Father

What I've experienced in the garage sector, I can't even tell you. Sometimes you go to help someone, and they expect a white person to show up, and then they get a black person. First, they're shocked, but they don't react. You haven't done anything wrong, and then they just call and say that they don't want that black person to come to them again, and you hear that, it's hurtful. You must perform well so they can accept you. If you don't perform well, then you're bad.

[00:37:53] Omara

When he arrived in Belgium, he started a training as a truck mechanic while waiting for his papers. A job that initially excited him, but soon became very tough.

[00:38:05] Father

Every day when I get up, I have to fight against the ignorance of people, of colleagues, of everyone. Your work, it's break time, you wash your hands. There's always someone ignorant who will say to you, "Why are you washing your hands? They're not dirty." No one sees that they're dirty. You know? Once, okay, but you hear it every day. If you protest, they say it's just for laughs and so on.

The only solution is just to swallow it and try to always strengthen yourself. That's how we do it. Just comforting yourself. That's why sometimes you see me on the computer for hours, just to be in a place where I can be myself. What have I been through? I can't keep experiencing this because one day you'll see me out naked on the street because the depression is deep enough. I was already depressed at home, and sometimes you ask me a small question and I explode. You don't know why Dad explodes. You say, "Yes Dad, if we ask something of Dad, nowadays he explodes." Yes, there's a reason for that. There's a reason. But you don't realize what I go through every day. Yes, young people come from school. You train them, and then they're given a high position. And I stay in the same place. What kind of society is this? If we're black, we can't get anything in life. Or no, no, no, no, no, no, no. Well, if you can work so hard and so well, why don't you just start your own business?

[00:40:00] 'Voodoo chanting'

[00:40:11] Omara

We're in Aného during a voodoo festival. In front of me, I see a group of men dressed in skirts with a belt, a knife, and a shell. For more than an hour, they sing loudly and dance hard around a fire. One by one, they step barefoot through the hot flames.

[00:40:33] Father

There was an open day in Nieuwkerken, at the brewery, the small Brouwerij there 't Paenhuys. I spoke with that guy. He said, "Come by on a Saturday if you want to help?" That's how it starts. Then I bought the kit. €500, €600, I bought the beginner's kit. My first beer, I brewed it as badly as ever. But I was so happy that I could make my own beer, and so it is now, and then I said, "Oh no, I want to do this as a profession." I wanted to come here in 2019. Covid intervened, and in 2022 I said, "This year I have to take the step, otherwise, it will never happen."

[00:41:18] Omara

For almost ten years, he brewed beer in our kitchen. Blonde, brown, hibiscus with Belgian grains and Togolese grains. Eventually, he stepped into the fire and left.

[00:41:30] Father

You just have to do it because 'ready' was never coming, it never comes. I want to be an entrepreneur. Okay, I want to brew beer in Africa. Okay, I come to the field, experience how people will appreciate it. How it will go. Yes, it took two years. But now I'm starting to emerge a little. But the first year was misery here. There were really moments when you ask yourself, "What am I doing?" So yes, it wasn't easy. But yes, I've made it through, that's the most important thing.

[00:42:05] 'Voodoo chanting'

[00:42:22] Omara:

The men take turns stepping onto the hot coals. They stand for a moment, and while the fire burns around their legs, they sing proud. To take the step and stand on them you need courage. I also took a step into the fire.

[00:42:38] Omara

Did you not feel that you left us behind, in a way?

[00:42:40] Father

No, you think that.

[00:42:45] Omara

You never asked us about that. You never asked.

[00:42:48] Father

I understand that. But if it ever turns out well, who will benefit from it?

[00:42:57] Omara

Stepping into fire is not something you do lightly. Leaving is not something you do lightly. There's always a place you leave behind. People who are left behind. My father's departure came unexpectedly. He didn't talk about his plans, just as he didn't in 1993. I ask about leaving and see that he becomes uncomfortable, fidgeting with his T-shirt and shuffling in his seat. I see that he's tired. It's a difficult topic for both of us.

[00:43:30] Father

What do you want from me now? To go back to Belgium and stay there? To work as I always did? Tell me! Am I doing something wrong? Am I on the right track? Yes, I also need to not always feel like I've abandoned my children. If I have that feeling constantly, then I won't be able to keep going here, my perseverance, everything.

I know that maybe it's not the right moment, but when is it a good moment? Tell me, when is a good moment? I'm already worn out. I'm already late to start this. Should I wait until 2031 when I'm retired to start here? 2031, I need to work until 2031. There's not much time left. I need to be realistic, you know? Sixty. Yes, you can pray to reach seventy. Another ten years, seventy.

[00:44:45] Omara

Yes, and if it's not successful?

[00:44:49] Father

And then at least I tried? Ah yes, at least I tried. If I didn't come to Europe, will you be alive? Yes, I took my risks to see you before me.

[00:45:08] Omara

Afterwards we drive to a night market north of Aného. I need a moment to adjust to the dark, but when I get closer, I see the long row of stalls lit by oil lamps. We stop at a stall where a mother and her daughter sell a kind of corn drink. It looks like the porridge he used to make for us.

[00:45:30] Omara

And what's that?

[00:45:33] Father

That's corn bouilli.

[00:45:36] Omara

Boulli, what is that? Porridge?

[00:45:38] Father

Porridge of corn.

[00:45:40] Omara

Is that like what you used to make at home?

[00:45:43] Omara

He didn't talk much, but he often cooked Togolese dishes. When he left and I didn't know if he would come back, I wondered if I would ever taste them again.

[00:45:55] Father

Yes, I wasn't perfect because I also struggled with my problems. But I did my best. But look, one thing you need to know: you can't give what you haven't received yourself. Did I have a mother to know how to care for a child? I didn't receive affection from anyone, from anyone! If I was sad, no one held me and said, "Oh, come here." No one! That's why I also try to get things right here, so that tomorrow you will have something too. I also try to do something for you in my way. I've always loved you. Yes.

[00:47:04] Father

It's so beautiful to see, isn't it? That feels good.

[00:47:16] Omara

300 meters from the brewery is the Atlantic Ocean. The surf is dangerous with an undertow that can pull you under. Still, a few brave souls face the water. Every afternoon, the fishermen bring their nets ashore. Long lines of people work together from the sea to the beach. To the rhythm of their calls, they pull in the catch together. We watch it, the water reflecting the blue sky. We feel the hot sun on our skin.

[00:47:53] Father

Every person on earth, wherever you are, you always have a connection with where you were born. I've built that. It's mine. Even if I'm hungry or have nothing left, I just feel good, without stress. It's my, my, my, my paradise. If the chickens aren't noisy, and the dogs aren't barking, then you hear the sea, the waves of the sea. Often, a woman selling cooked corn, fresh corn, passes by the street, and she says '*blifa zogbe*'. That means fresh, warm corn. When I hear that, I open my door. I buy corn. I just feel good. If I get tired of home, I go to the beach and lie down in my hammock. It's like a different world. Yes. Peace. Peace. Peace. Peace. Period.

[00:49:00] Omara

At some point, it's enough. Yes, at some point, you find yourself, well, it's enough. Yes, I just want to come here, in my old age, just to be calm, to do business here. Because I have a strong dislike for being used by someone.

[00:49:25] Omara

I came to Togo to understand him better. And as the mist clears for the thunderstorm and the rain and the fire that is hot but also bright, I see him here under the pagoda by the sea, between his dog, his cat, his chickens, and his beer.

[00:49:53] Father

People come to visit. Sometimes the whole week. Sometimes twice a day. People just come to visit. Really, pff.

[00:50:05] Omara

Yes, you I see, you look happy.

[00:50:07] Father

Yes, when I do it, I'm just... damn.

[00:50:15] Father

You just sometimes smell a floral, a floral scent, little flowers, and... A beer that you've brewed, you see it bubbling, and you come in, the smell. You know, "Ah, that's far along, this one has just started." You know all the scents of the beer. From the beginning of fermentation to the end, the smell that comes out. I know all that. That makes me feel good.

That moment when I say, oh I don't feel well, immediately, I go to brew, yes, I go inside, and I start brewing. I do it with passion. I love it. I feel that when I'm busy, I am myself.

[00:50:59] Omara

I see him between the lake and the sea and life that keeps moving forward. We face each other, and he tells his story. The story that continues, knowledge that is passed on, and mysteries that are explained. About sadness and happiness, success and failure.

[00:51:23] Omara

What does succeeding mean to you?

[00:51:12] Father

Achieving success in life, you see. Yes. Achieving success in life. That one day, when someone drinks my beer, they say, "Moyo beer." Ah, the founder is him.

[00:51:42] Omara

About searching for a home or leaving one behind.

[00:51:45] Father

I feel at home here. Anything can happen. I feel good here. I feel good here.

[00:52:00] [Airport]

[00:52:06] Omara

Because he has some matters to sort out, we're heading back to Belgium together. We have a coffee together and I ask him how a Togolese story ends.

[00:52:15] Father

Shall we go for a coffee somewhere?

[00:52:20] Father

Some can end in tragedy or something. Some can end in a good way, but most always it's a beautiful ending, with a lesson attached.

[00:52:35] Omara

The story he told me in Togo. I wonder what the moral of it would be.

[00:52:41] Father

Every decision you make has an impact on your own life. Those who don't take risks end up with nothing. Don't always think that the grass is greener on the other side. Always believe in your dreams. How long did I

dream of having my own brewery? Really. When I first started brewing beer in the kitchen, I visited many breweries. When I came back to Togo, I set everything up and looked and said, “Wow, yes, I did it.”

But I didn’t realize that I had done it, that’s how it is. Anything can happen. I won’t give up, never.

[00:53:38] Omara

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