

Translation of Oral History Interview with Abou Mamadou Ba

QUESTION: [00:01:12] Our society is full of blemishes. But, before we start, I'd like to know if you're okay with our interview being filmed? [00:01:22]

BA: [00:01:23] First, I tell you assalamalekoum warahmatoullah. I greet you all and I say welcome to you. You are at home here; I am happy to receive you and we confide in our prophet. [00:01:51]

QUESTION: [00:01:52] I would like to ask you your name, your age, the name of your village, as well as your profession? Then I will ask you for your paternal and maternal genealogy? [00:02:23]

BA: [00:02:24] My name is Abou Mamadou Ba. That's my name or Abou Toulla. I am better known by the latter name. I was born in Ndouloumadji, Ndouloumadji Founébé, yes. [00:02:35]

QUESTION: [00:02:38] ??? [00:02:39]

BA: [00:02:39] I was born in 1949 yes 1949. I am currently 70 years old or a little more, yes 70 years old. I am from Ndouloumadji and when I was born I was put into teaching, yes. [00:03:08]

QUESTION: [00:03:09] Your maternal and paternal genealogy? [00:03:16]

BA: [00:03:18] The genealogy of my parents: that of my father Mamadou, his name is Mamadou Mariata and he is from the village of Bokki Jaloubé, yes. He came to live in Ndouloumadji because he had a lot of cattle. He followed his cattle to this place where he settled. In truth, it was in Ndouloumadji that he settled permanently. I started to learn the Koran, then he entrusted me to his sister in Horkodiéré, that is the reason why I came here. On my mother's side, her name is Toulla, it is the diminutive of Ramata Toullaye and she is from Goudoudi Diobé. Her family specializes in breeding, yes. [00:04:23]

QUESTION: [00:04:24] What could you tell us about these two families in which you grew up, from your childhood, I apologize for the term? [00:04:36]

BA: [00:04:37] Do you want to know my experience in these families? [00:04:43]

QUESTION: [00:04:44] Yes, tell us everything. [00:04:47]

BA: [00:04:48] When I was 7, I was put into learning the Koran. My father taught me for 2 years, before he passed away and my big brothers stopped teaching to start breeding. I have been breeding for 4 years. After that, I fled to continue my teaching of the Koran. I went everywhere to study in Fouta. The last place was Hounaré. I was under the tutelage of my big brother (half brother). When he took me with him, it was in Boumba that we went to a neighborhood called Darto-Andallah. When we left this place, we went to Sinthiane Padalal. Then we went to Wawndé. Then we went to Niembé very close to Fallémé (Mali). We left there to go to the village of Semmé. Then we went to Sélibaby in Mauritania. All of these trips were while

learning the Koran. Then, we returned to the marabout Mamadou Dioddo in Hounaré in the district of Hayré (hill). It was there that I finished the Koran and the marabout sent me to Mali to learn Muslim law from the marabout Mamadou Ngijilone. When I finished there, I was sent back to the marabout Mamadou Dioddo in Hounaré again. And the latter advised me to go and settle here in Horkodiéré with a marabout named Modi Aissé who is Thierno Sidi's father. It was this last marabout who gave me a daughter in marriage. And since then, I have lived there. Since then, I have only made one trip to the Ivory Coast. I went to see the marabout Saidou Diako in Bamako and the latter advised me to return to Horkodiéré and to settle there to teach the Koran and not to travel any more. To stay here and help the other marabouts with the teaching of the Koran and since then I have been there. And besides, I can't say how long I stayed in each place, what is for sure, I am currently 70 years old.[00:07:22]

QUESTON: [00:07:28] ??? [00:07:33]

BA: [00:07:34] I didn't discuss this with them. [00:07:36]

QUESTION: [00:07:37] Can you tell us about your father, as well as your paternal grandfather? [00:07:58]

BA: [00:07:59] I have never seen my paternal grandparents, however, I know their names. My grandfather on my father's side is called Samba Ndiaye, he is the father of my father. On my mother's side, her mother's name is Koumba. I know this far, but the rest I don't know. [00:08:35]

QUESTION: [00:08:38] These families you grew up in are slave families, what do you have to tell us about this? [00:09:10]

BA: 00:09:11] You ask me if it is in these families that I grew up, yes, and I will always remain attached to these families. This family status of the descendant of a slave is what I inherited from my parents and I am proud of it. I tell you that this status, I will not change it for the world and I will not lower it. Moreover, if we refer to religion, we are all equal before God. In the Koran, we are all slaves of God, but you want to ask how did we come to take ourselves as slaves between ourselves? [00:10:03]

QUESTION: [00:10:04] This is a delicate subject, which is why we have come to you, so that you tell us what you have been through or what you have been told about it? [00:10:31]

BA: [00:10:32] For my part, I am not for this kind of division between us. However, I cannot say where they came from and I never agreed to go through it. I saw it once with my own eyes and I fought it. If you hit someone just for being a slave and if I run into this kind of situation, I can fight for justice. And that's how. But maybe you want to know how it came to be that people were reduced to slaves and how they were sold and brought to America when they came from our society? They were no differences, they are from here, how did we come to divide us? Do you want to know the difference between these two types of slavery and what are their origins? I do not know. [00:11:55]

QUESTION: [00:11:56] You said right away, that you once witnessed an injustice inflicted on a person for being a slave, do you want to tell us this story and it was in what context? [00:12:12]

BA: [00:12:13] It was gratuitous violence inflicted on a person. This had happened in Ndouloumadji during the period of farming the fields. It was the story of a man who said he was the master of a young woman with whom he had slept at home, and the woman gave birth to a baby. One day after the birth of the child, he tells the young woman to come with him to the field, and the latter comes with her child. She put the child under a tree and began to farm. When the child started to cry, she stopped work to pick up the child, and the teacher stopped her from going. There were ants stinging the child and the child continued to cry louder. When the master walks away, the young woman walks over to the child and begins to rid him of the ants, and she offered her breast to calm him down. The master suddenly returns and finds the young girl sitting, he tore the child out and dug a hole with his daba, put the child in it and buried it up to the neck. He slapped the girl and then resumed his daba. I got there, took an ax lying around there and told the master if he starts hitting the girl again, I'm going to kill him, and I took the child back. This is the only time that I have experienced this and it is the only time that I have understood what slavery means. [00:14:03]

QUESTION: [00:14:04] What year was it? [00:14:06]

BA: [00:14:06] No, I couldn't say what year it was. [00:14:07]

QUESTION: [00:14:08] Were you young at that time? [00:14:10]

BA: [00:14:11] I was maybe 17 or 18 years old. Back in the day, if I heard someone stigmatize someone for being a slave or hitting them because they were just stronger than the other, I didn't hesitate to intervene. [00:14:35]

QUESTION: [00:14:40] You were born before the independence of Mauritania and Senegal. At the time of independence, you were 11 years old. What can you tell us about this period and what can you tell us about the colonizers? [00:15:06]

BA: [00:15:07] No, I don't know anything about this period and I can't say anything about it. [00:15:10]

QUESTION: [00:15:17] The example you related earlier is an example you were an eyewitness to. This is a great injustice. Other than that, what are some of the slave stigma terms you hear in the village that you don't like? [00:16:04]

BA: [00:16:05] As for the fight, it was the only time, as I told you. Since then, even to stigmatize, people are careful to do it in my presence. To put someone down, they avoid doing it in front of me. Even if the one you want to put down is not my relative, I can answer, and I was known for that. So, people are careful to want to criticize someone just for being a slave to me. This is something that I had never accepted, that I do not accept and that I will never accept. [00:16:51]

QUESTION: [00:17:03] I would like to ask you the following question: what do you mean by freedom, equality and human rights? What do these terms mean to you? [00:17:31]

BA: [00:17:33] I can't respond to that. [00:17:39]

QUESTION: [00:17:40] What meaning do you give to these terms? Since then, we were only talking about the defects of our society and now we are asking you the meaning of freedom, equality and human rights? [00:17:58]

BA: [00:17:59] On the fact that we are not equal between us, I do not know the causes. Why did the others accept this situation? I don't know either. I have never asked myself these kinds of questions. If, on the other hand, I see what is contrary to divine law, I refuse. Yes, if I refuse and you push me into a fight, we're going to fight. [00:18:34]

QUESTION: [00:18:35] Now, compared to the Islamic religion, how do you see the racism concerning Black skin? What do you think of Black slavery in relation to religion or are Black people only slaves because they have Black skin? [00:19:10]

BA: [00:19:11] For white people, all Black people, whatever their situation, they consider them as slaves. All white people think so. Where I have been I have always noticed that Black people are taken like slaves. In reality, they all think like this, but I don't know the causes. I went to the Moors in Mauritania, all Black people are considered slaves. I went to Medinatoul-mounawara (Saudi Arabia), all Black people are taken as slaves. I went to Mecca, all Black people are taken like slaves. Whatever your situation, Black people are still taken as a slave in all these places. [00:20:08]

QUESTION: [00:20:09] Did you experience this in the places you visited, or did you hear about it? [00:20:11]

BA: [00:20:12] I've heard of it. [00:20:14]

QUESTION: [00:20:15] This association which is called Endam Bilali of which you are a part took over the name of Bilali who was close to the prophet of Islam, why did you choose this name of Bilali? And why the kinship of Bilali? [00:20:52]

BA: [00:20:54] Could I ask Thierno Ablaye to answer this question? [00:21:04]

QUESTION: [00:21:16] Do you want the answer to this question to be provided by Thierno Ablaye? [00:21:23]

BA: [00:21:24] Yes, he will be more precise than me. [00:21:28]

QUESTION: [00:21:29] Okay, let's continue and he will come to complete this topic in a little while. [00:21:39]

[MISSING DIALOGUE]

BA: [00:21:56] Ok, Bilali was a slave and his master was called Abdoullahi Ben Diadane. The latter had on his own what they call in Arabic miyata-mamloukan, that is to say a hundred slaves. When the prophet appeared, he left to entrust them all elsewhere except Bilali. He entrusted Bilali with his cattle, as a breeder. Where Bilali took his cattle is the place where the Prophet and Aboubakri used to go to pray. The place where they prayed is called Yandjilou, this is where they hid to pray. When Bilali arrived in this place with his cattle, the prophet called him. They greeted each other and the prophet asked him if he had any milk to offer them. He replied that he has only one goat that has milk. Thierno Ablaye listen to me carefully. The prophet prayed and the goat was filled with milk. The prophet collected the milk and he drank, he started again and gave to Aboubakri and he collected the milk again and gave it to Bilali. And on the third day, the prophet asked him: do you want to convert to Islam? Bilali responded positively, it is there that crossed the path of the prophet, before he repressed it. There was someone named Abu Diahli who said to the master of Bilali: your cattle have prospered in three days and you have started to have milk and in addition they have grown fat, prevent your slave from going to this place, because surely, he crossed the path of the son of Abou Kabchine (the son of the sheep), it was the nickname they gave to the prophet. His master accepted the offer and forbade Bilali to go to that place. Bilali got angry and walked towards the Kaba, while the princes of Mecca at the time sat above the Kaba, swinging their feet? He quietly entered the Kaba and inside there were two large idols named Laat and Uzza. He says the one who bows down before is a disbeliever and he spits on them. He continued to do the same maneuver, as those above the Kaba heard him and they started to descend and Bilali fled and entered the house of Abdoullahi Ben Diada. They pursued him to the latter's house and speaking to Bilali's master, they told him Abdoullahi you became a revolutionary and you embraced Islam. You have become a revolutionary. Abdoullahi replies what's going on? They said: we caught your Black slave blaspheming our idols Laata and Uzza. The master of Bilali says just for the word accusing me of being in revolt against our idols, I redeem myself by offering 100 camels, plus 100 goats, 100 kilos of gold. Take Bilali with you and do what you want with him, this is the cause of Bilali's torture. They took him and they left with him. When they left with Bilali, they covered him with iron clothes, they tied him up and they heated some water and they started pouring on him, that was the start of his torture. Then they took ropes and tied them to his feet and asked the children to come and pull him under the fiery sand of the Macque. After this ordeal, they took away one of their smaller idols named Hubal and they asked him to bow down to this idol, he refused and said: Allahu akbar, God is greater, Allahu akbar, God is greater. Aboubakri had been there, he heard it Ahad, the Unique, Ahad, the Unique and he understood that Bilali is saying the Koran. He then says, sell this one before bad luck happens to you? They answered him what are you doing with this slave who is useless and they started to discredit Bilali, and Aboubakri answers: I want him with all his faults. At the time Aboubakri had a slave well known in Mecca for the fact that the latter was a master silversmith and who daily achieve much in his favor. They told him we can exchange Bilali for your slave goldsmith, Aboubakri says if you accept, I accept. They laughed at him adding we also want the silversmith with his wife and children? He replies: I accept. They laughed at him again. Did they say you give us a hundred kilograms of gold? He says: I accept. They started laughing at him. They continued like this, until they received good fortune, still making fun of him. At the end, Aboubakri said: "antum latahchimou" (you have no dignity). How can you deny the words you say? An Arab never wants to be humiliated, they said give us

what you bet and take it with you. Aboubakri takes Bilali home and offers him a shower and some food. After that, Bilali gets up and tries to work in the house, because he only knows work. Aboubakri told him rest, I will give you a job later. He leads Bilali to the Prophet of Islam and tells him the whole story of the abuse Bilali suffered and how much fortune it cost him. The prophet put his hand in his pocket and wanted to pay him back his money. He said: no, that is not necessary, because Bilali and I and all of my fortune belong to you. The prophet then said to him: "ana anta wa anta ana" (I am you and you are me). The one who had mistreated her was named Soumaya and continued to want to continue despite this ordeal. While Bilali still lived with the prophet, one day a battle between Muslims and disbelievers. The prophet gave him positions to occupy but it was related to the guarding of his home. But Bilali offered to go into battle, because he was a brave person. So, while they were on their horses, Bilali saw Soumaya and he said: "an Soumaya?" (is that you Soumaya?). The latter looks at him and replies: "anta Bilali?" (is it you Bilali)? Bilali responds positively and says, "nadiawta fala nadiawta" (one of us, will not be coming home today). They attacked each other, they fell to the ground, Bilali cut his throat and he climbs back onto his opponent's horse. Everyone begins to cry: "aich Bilali, aich Bilali" (long live Bilali, long live Bilali). I'm going to stop there and ask Cernno Ablaye to come and fill in on anything I forgot to say because he's my teacher. [00:31:26]

QUESTION: [00:32:17] How can a Muslim take another Muslim as a slave? [00:32:21]

BA: [00:32:22] He who is not a Muslim can be converted, if he does not accept he is stigmatized, if he does not accept we try to deceive him, if he does not accept he is killed. [00:32:37]

QUESTION: [00:32:38] ??? [00:32:39]

[SECTION CUT OUT]

BA: [00:33:05] I don't know anything about Toumbouktou. Even in Mali my visit was limited to a few places beyond that, I don't know anything. Even to go immigrate when the marabout advised me to return to Fouta, I still live in the village. [00:33:27]

QUESTION: [00:33:28] When you went on the pilgrimage to Mecca did you encounter racism or anything like that? [00:33:39]

BA: [00:33:40] I did experience racism there. Where the tomb of the prophet is located is surrounded by fencing as well as windows and books of the Koran, all this is under the supervision of the guards. Police officers are also paid to help them watch the tomb. The place to pray to the prophet is covered with solid gold. Someone from Dakar advised me to buy a cell phone, I bought it. He told me to follow this, follow that. He told me this is the place to pray to the prophet, it faces a door that leads directly to heaven and the place was well air conditioned. He encouraged me to go and stand there. At the time of the pilgrimage, they usually put something that gathers wood around so that the Black people do not enter the place. When he gave me this information, I stomped on the wood and the guards said, "haram" (it is forbidden). Ignoring their warning, I prayed two rakaat and opened a Koran book to read. As I start to feel cold from the air conditioner, the policeman tells me: you have finished praying to give your place to some other kind of slave. I replied in Arabic: We are both the same. I was accompanied

by our Imam and the one telling me do you want to see the prophet and if so, do you dare approach the white cloth that was spread out in front of us? I answered positively, because he had visited the place before. Where he was pointing me was not surrounded by wire mesh, while on the other side all the wire mesh was surrounded by solid gold. Everyone was sitting across from the white cloth, instead of circling around to get to the place, I stepped over everyone. They all started to say: haram, haram (it's forbidden, it's forbidden). So, I pretended not to understand what they were saying. Once there, I put my hands on the fence. There was a small path near the tomb. Someone was sitting there, I said pass me a Koran book? He answers: you? I said yes, me, the Black man. When he handed me the book, I handed it to a Black man who was sitting behind me and asked him again to hand me another book. He casually handed me another book. I refused to take, telling him: hand me the book properly. They do this to demean Black people. I was sitting near a window and opened my book. All of the policemen who were are educated people in reading the Koran. They started calling each other and they walked over to me to listen to my reading. When I looked to the right, I saw policemen around me and to the left it was still them too. The people who were with me were starting to worry about me, I read 20 chapters of the Koran in front of them and after that it was time for prayer. When, I finished, an old man came out of a door very close to the tomb, he had a bottle of perfume with him, he pours on me on that side and then that side, on my chest and on my head. He said: Bismillah (in the name of God), they parted and each of them stood up for prayer, leaving me in the place where I was. For eight days, every time I arrive, they give me my place. I experienced this inside Mecca itself. On the second day, I recited ten chapters from "Min ma qalaqa till Birbinnas". That day, a child dressed in all white came out of the tomb and poured a whole bottle of perfume on me, when he returns to the tomb, I can no longer see him. Every seven days the same scenario repeated itself and I saw no black people near the tomb. Have I seen a gentleman who is from the country where Ayatoullah Khoumeini is president? [00:38:59]

QUESTION: [00:38:59] Iran. [00:39:00]

BA: [00:39:00] Yes, someone from there, when I finished reading ten chapters of the Koran, I took out a rosary from my pocket and seeing that, he rushed towards me, because he was afraid that by seeing the rosary, that the police do not hit me or tear off my rosary. I started to recite my rosary, it leans over my ear and says: are you Tidiani? And, he continues, are you Moroccan? I replied: no. He tells me which country you are from? I said Senegal. He says where is Senegal? I responded in the Magreb. He tells me you are very brave. I asked him why do you say that? He answers me by saying: will you give me your rosary? I told him, I could get you one, but I can't give you this one. He says that he himself is of the Tidianiya path. Afterwards, he smiled, saying it's only you who dare to do that here. I replied: he who is in this tomb is there for all of us. It is thanks to him that everything in our world was created. I leaned into his ear, telling him: that the prophet had come to earth for all of us: for those who are from Mecca and for those who come and elsewhere. He laughs and says to me: so give your phone number, will I come to the Magreb? I refused. So, when it was prayer time, we prayed and they closed the place, because after each prayer, they close the place. We got out and headed for a place called Baqiya, where at the entrance there was a board on which it was written that prostrating on a dead man's tomb was haram (forbidden). This inscription was inscribed at the entrance to the tomb of the only son of the prophet named Ibrahim and that of Ousmane (the third Khalif of Islam). While reading the inscription, I turned to the caretaker and asked him: who wrote this painting? One of the guards

tells me, it's not your problem. I said: do you mean to bow down at the tomb of the prophet is haram (forbidden)? They said, no it's not haram. I said then why did you list that bowing down to a dead man is haram? You are bandits. One of the policemen wanted to hit me with his baton. I told him you don't dare, so at that very moment, all the black people there approached us, because the black people over there know they are victims of injustice. They started to ask me what was going on, most of them were from Nigeria. One of the Nigerians comes between me and the policeman and demands an explanation from the latter. It was racism. After that, I asked the policeman about the whereabouts of Kalif Aly and Ousmane's graves and replied that he did not know. For me, he was starting to get on my nerves, I told him, neither you nor your father would ever know. Then the Nigerians said to me: come with us, we will show you. There they have no regard for black people and it is free racism. We started from there, but before we get to Mecca, there is a place to wash and this is where we make promises not to do any more things contrary to the prescriptions of Islam. There was a row, it was each their turn. When my turn came, an Arab came and told me not to go into the shower. I didn't look at him, I took off my clothes and walked in. When I got out of the shower, I asked the question: where is the man who wanted to prevent me from going to the toilet? They replied: he went into the other toilets. I said he's lucky. We started from there, all these examples show racism against blacks. Then we went to a place called Maqam Ibrahim where each of us should perform two rakkat (prayers). When I have started my prayer, a policeman comes in front of me and says: haram. So, that he was accompanied by his parents and he wanted them to say the prayers before us. He touches my shoulder to interrupt my prayer, I took his hand and when I bow down, I make him squat with me. When I finished my prayers, I told him to give me the reasons why he told me it was haram to pray here. I wanted to hit him. Imam Samba who was with us said to me: no, don't do that. I replied, I want him to give me proof. I said we all rely on the word of God and you say it's forbidden to pray here; I want proof or I'll hit you. I grabbed the policeman's hand again and our Imam Samba scolded me. I let go of her hand and said then first forbid your parents to come and pray here. He took his elderly relative's hand, lifted it up, and stood upright. In the meantime, I refused to give way to him. This act, too, was pure racism. Finally, the place where the pilgrims are to kiss the stone is so saturated that they allow themselves to repel the blacks or else they climb on them so that they can kiss the stone. When we got to this place, I blocked the access, so that the people who were with me could access it and normally everyone should touch the stone with their hand and continue. I helped my companions touch the stone, but I could see in the faces of the others that they were not happy. I have had all of these experiences of racism in Mecca. This is black life in this place. In reality, they take all blacks like slaves. An Arab told me that you blacks were created like the coal of the Jehenna. I replied: that you fellows your skin is already an embers of the Jehenne. I told him: if we take away what is already black in you, you will have nothing left. I told her look at your hair is black, take it off and give it to me. There is a lot of racism there. Generally speaking, all white people, without exception, don't like black people. The visit to the tomb of the prophet, if you are not tough, you will not get there. Fortunately, I fought on the spot and they ended up saying that I am a mezhnoute (crazy). I replied: yes, I am crazy. I made my pilgrimage to Mecca the year there was an accident with a lot of fatalities. When we got to La Jemra it was dam after dam and at each roadblock I was removing the calluses so that I could go through. At each roadblock, I stomped and continued on my way. They said to me: why are you trampling the dam? I replied: Today all the pilgrims want to cross this place and if you put up roadblocks you will kill them. Do not do this to avoid accidents. The other said to me, leave them and let's get out of here. I said if they keep building

roadblocks, they will kill the pilgrims. If you get up there and watch how many people are down there to get to that place and see the roadblocks they are making, you tell yourself that inevitably there will be accidents. Because, once you move forward, you can hardly turn back. We who are together were obliged to hold hands, at the slightest separation, we will not be able to meet again. Three times, I trample their roadblocks. They all rushed at me and they said, you are Mejnoune (crazy). I replied not only, I am crazy, but also I am a wizard. Samba, our Imam tells me let's go, let's get out of here. We went to the Kaba. But, before we even got to the Kaba, we heard that there was an accident with many pilgrims who died. [00:47:34]

QUESTION: [00:47:35] what year was it? [00:47:36]

BA: [00:47:37] I forgot the year. [00:47:37]

QUESTION: [00:47:38] Maybe four or five years ago? [00:47:39]

BA: [00:47:40] Yes, it must be four or five years. It was the year there was a human catastrophe in Mecca. It was that year. Anything a Black man touches there, they tell you it's haram. There were guards everywhere, who were there only to prevent the Black men from making their pilgrimage properly. [00:48:11]

QUESTION: [00:48:12] ??? [00:47:19]

BA: [00:48:20] The difference between white skin and Black skin is an experience that I have had myself. [00:48:34]

QUESTION: [00:48:39] Are these experiences that you have had? [00:48:49]

BA: [00:48:50] Under certain conditions of injustice, I lose my way of reasoning. It drives me crazy. Whenever the Arab guard wants to stop me from doing something, I tell them, I have not left my country with all this long journey, so that someone can prevent me from getting closer to the prophet. No one will be able to come between me and the prophet. He said: oh well! I said yes and besides I don't care if I go to jail for that or kill myself. [00:49:23]

QUESTION: [00:49:24] We thank you very much for this interview, you have edified us on many things and we ask for your prayers so that we can carry out our work. [00:49:42]

BA: [00:49:43] Thank you. I would like Thierno Ablaye to speak with you so that he can supplement what I have said. [00:49:46]