

Learning by Ear 2012

Series: Everyone's Different - Respect for Minorities

Episode 9: The World of Aminata, A Widow in Senegal

Author: Babou Diallo

Editor: Friederike Müller / Yann Durand

Characters:

- **Aminata, a widow (f, 25), French**
Pronunciation: as written
- **Mamadou Dabo, a teacher (m, 35), French**
Pronunciation (german): [Mamadù Dabò]
- **Hélène, a married woman, Aminata's neighbour (f, about 30), Wolof**
Pronunciation (german): [E-lään]
- **Idrissa Konaté, Islamic scholar (m, 41), French**
Pronunciation: as written
- **Aliou Fofana, sociologist (m, 37), French**
Pronunciation (german): [Ali-u Fofanà]

Pronunciation: Oumar: [Umar]
Babou Diallo: [Babu Diallo]

**Learning by Ear 2012 – Minorities
Episode 09 - Widows**

INTRO:

Welcome to Learning by Ear and a new episode in our current series, 'Everyone's Different - Respect for Minorities'. Today we're going to be talking about widows in Africa, particularly in Senegal.

Widows are another minority who often have to face life alone. In Senegal, as everywhere in Africa, their lives are usually difficult. Managing their children's education, making sure they have food and lodging - these are just some of the many problems they're confronted with every day. It's not unusual for their own family, the family of their late husband, and even society itself to refuse to give them any support at all. This is what has happened to Aminata, who lost her husband just two years ago. Her testimony illustrates just how precarious life is for the majority of widows in Senegal.

1. ATMO: room interior

2. NARRATOR:

A frail young woman, dark-skinned and wearing a large wax print kaftan, sits on the sofa with the telephone pressed to her ear and her eyes glued to the television. This is how Aminata begins her evening.

It's six pm, and it's a little chilly. Aminata looks like a woman in her prime. Yet she is raising her three children - two girls aged 10 and 8 and a boy of 6 - on her own, here in Niarry Tally, a densely populated district of Dakar.

3. CLIP AMINATA (French)

Since I lost my husband, I've been looked after by the company he used to work for. I receive his salary at the end of each month, because he died before reaching retirement. This is the money I get by on, that I use to pay the rent, the water bills, the electricity, and to support the children.

4. NARRATOR:

75,000 CFA francs - that's around 115 euros. This is all the small pension amounts to. And yet Aminata is one of the lucky ones. Many other widows would like to be in her situation. The wives of employees who die are not always provided with this kind of financial support. And even if they are, in most African countries it's a tiny pension, paid three times a year, of between 30,000 and 45,000 CFA francs - just 50 to 70 euros.

Aminata used to have a rosy outlook on life. Her husband did everything he could to make sure she lived very well. He would give her presents, like beautiful bazin and wax print cloths, for example. She still remembers what that was like. Just as she remembers the day her husband disappeared: Oumar died in a traffic accident on his way home from work. He was 28. Despite her sorrow, Aminata never gave up:

KW begins

5. CLIP AMINATA (French)

*I have a good head on my shoulders. I just concentrate on my children.
Because he left me with small children. And so all I'm doing for now is looking
after my children.*

6. CLIP AMINATA (French)

*When I am faced with life's difficulties, I ask God for help and take my
courage in both hands. I also react by weighing up the pros and cons.*

KW ends

7. SENEGALESE RAP

(Note to the editor: NB - only 10 seconds, then fade under text)

8. NARRATOR:

Every time she hears this rap by Maxi Crazy, it gives her courage. The Senegalese rapper's message is simple: life is a battle, you must never give up. Many widows know what that means. They are often abandoned by the family of their late husband and lack any means of support, and this makes them vulnerable. They have to cope with daily life, feed and clothe themselves, care for themselves, look after the children, and so on. In a situation like this they need to be well organized - like Aminata. She advises other widows to follow her example:

9. CLIP AMINATA (French)

I tell them what I did to get out of it. They often ask me how I manage, whether I have the support of my in-laws. I say no. I get by with the salary my husband left us. I support the children and everything on this income. But I also use a bit of it to make money. And I keep the profits. So I don't waste money, because I have little children I have to bring up. I must take their father's place. This is the kind of advice I give to my widowed friends. There are some who follow it.

KW begins

10. NARRATOR:

Aminata has started a little business. A corner of her living room serves as a shop for selling her merchandise, because she doesn't own a business.

11. CLIP AMINATA (French)

So: here, I buy shoes that I sell to people on credit. Apart from that, I do other little things that bring in money: I sell spicy fritters called accra and pancakes, which the children like a lot. And at the end of the day, I calculate to see how much I've made that I can put aside.

KW ends

12. ATMO: in the courtyard of the house

13. NARRATOR:

In the courtyard of the house, Aminata's children are playing with those of her neighbour, Héléne. Héléne lives on the same floor as Aminata. And although she's in her thirties, married, and the mother of two children, she says she's worried about her widowed sisters and the lives they lead. She's not in a position to offer practical help, so she tries to support them with advice, and by being there for them.

14. ATMO: Atmo including the sound of *mbalax*, Senegalese music

15. CLIP Hélène (Wolof)

I think it's our duty to come to the assistance of these women. If I had the means I would help them. And it's not just widows; we mustn't forget the women who've been abandoned by their husbands, as well.

16. NARRATOR:

She's not the only one to take this view.

17. ATMO: in the street

18. NARRATOR:

Mamadou Dabo is a teacher. He lives in the same part of town as Aminata. He too is calling for much greater solidarity and consideration for widows. He has a lot of sympathy for these women.

19. CLIP MAMADOU DABO (French)

There should be a law voted in by the National Assembly to rule on the situation of these women, who are often neglected.

20. NARRATOR:

Unfortunately, not all men share this opinion. Widows are often stigmatized and suffer from discrimination. Some men believe that they brought their husbands bad luck. This is why it's very difficult for a widow to marry again. Senegal is 95% Muslim. Does this kind of stigmatization have something to do with religion?

Idrissa Konaté is a scholar of Islam. According to him, there is absolutely no reason to reject such a marriage. The proof is that the Prophet Mohammed - the key point of reference for Muslims - was married to a widow.

21. CLIP IDRISSA KONATE (French)

I cannot use the Prophet Mohammed as my point of reference and then refuse to marry a widow. No. But there are some people who think like that.

22. NARRATOR:

According to Idrissa Konaté, these men believe that if the first, second, or even third husband of a woman has died, the next husband will die too. Being rejected by men simply because one is a widow is a form of discrimination. But so is its opposite. There are men who see widows as sexual prey. Aliou Fofana, a sociologist who specializes in working with the family, tells us of the example of a young widow who was the victim of sexual harassment from certain men she had gone to for help.

29. CLIP ALIOU FOFANA (French)

In order to feed her children she was obliged to rely on people's goodwill.

Some people understood this and helped her, whereas others, seeing the situation she was in, took advantage of her.

30. NARRATOR:

Aminata's story confirms the truth of this. "Men like to pick up young widows," she tells us. "And if you let them do it, they'll end up exploiting you."

In Africa, widows enjoy no social protection whatsoever. Even today there are very few organizations created specifically to help this minority of the population. And there are no laws providing for their protection.

Added to this, unfortunately, they are often abandoned by those close to them. Relations between Aminata and her in-laws were never particularly good, as is apparent from the fact that, after her husband died, she moved out without telling them. When he was alive they all lived in his family's house.

31. CLIP AMINATA (French)

When he was single he used to help his family. But when we got married he wasn't able to any more, because he had to look after his own family, the children and me. And his family didn't look favourably on that, saying that he gave me everything. Even before that they didn't like me. While he was alive they pretended to like me, but when he died they showed me their true face: they only accepted me because of their brother. So I took my courage in both hands.

32. NARRATOR:

In situations like this, the question of inheritance is bound to be a tricky one. Widows are often done out of what is theirs - simply because they don't know how to take possession of it. Aminata is no exception.

33. CLIP AMINATA (French):

Yes, he left a few things for the children. But there are other things he left that we had to divide up, that is: between his family and me. And to this day I haven't received what belongs to me, because his brothers and sisters and his mother won't authorize it.

34. NARRATOR:

The administrative and legal procedures for obtaining her part of the inheritance are long and complex - all the more so because lawyers' fees are very expensive, and most widows can't afford to pay them. Most of the time they have no choice but to give up what is rightfully theirs.

35. MUSIC: Senegalese rap

36. NARRATOR:

There's still a lot to be done to put an end to discrimination against widows. But Aminata wants to help get things moving. Her dearest wish is one day to set up an association of young Senegalese widows. "This organization," she says, with a distant look in her eyes, "will be the Wailing Wall of every widow in the country."

**Learning by Ear 2012 – Minorities
Episode 09 - Widows**

OUTRO:

And with that dream of the young widow Aminata we end this episode of Learning by Ear. The report was by Babou Diallo, and it was part of our series 'Respect for Minorities'. To listen again to this episode, or to another in the series, click on dw.de/lbe, or join our discussion on Facebook. Thanks for listening - until next time!