

Learning by Ear – Aprender de Ouvido

“Once upon a time... in Africa”

Episode 4: “TRADITIONAL RELIGIONS AND ISLAM”

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CHARACTERS:

Intro/Outro (female/male)

Scene 1:

- Grandpa (77, male)
- June (13, female)

Scene 2:

- King Bara Mendana/Dad (40, male)
- Moravi (30, male)
- Sorcerers and Priests (older than 30, male)

Scene 3:

- June (13, female)
- Grandpa (77, male)

Scene 4:

- Marabout (35, male)
- King Bara Mendana/Dad (40, male)
- Moravi (30, male)

Scene 5:

- Grandpa (77, male)
- June (13, female)

Intro:

Hello and welcome to another episode of “Once upon a time... in Africa”, the “Learning by Ear” series about African History! Today, June proudly shows grandpa a gift her friend Linda gave her: a necklace to bring her good fortune. According to Grandpa Peter, it’s an amulet. Her mum, Emily, is in Mbazi visiting June’s elder brothers who are working there. So June takes the opportunity to hear everything about amulets from Grandpa. Stay with us and find out more about traditional religions and how a long, long time ago they slowly gave way to other beliefs – Islam, for instance!

Music 1, then cross fade with SFX

First Scene: At home, late afternoon.

SFX: June and Grandpa talking and laughing. In the background: chicken, goats, birds, then fade under

1. Grandpa: Where did you get that necklace? **(amused)**
Oh, I see... A smart boy from class gave it to you, right?

2. June: **(happy)** No, Grandpa! It was Linda who gave it to me! To bring me good luck!

3. Grandpa: To bring you good luck? Let me have a look at it!

Pause

4. June: Do you like it?

5. Grandpa: **(studying the necklace)** Hummm... This is an amulet! **(pause)** A very nice amulet!

6. June: Amulet? What is that, Grandpa?

- 7. Grandpa:** An amulet, Daughter, is an object that you use to bring you good fortune, to protect you from curses or to help cure an illness... there are amulets for everything.
- 8. June:** And do they really work? Linda said mine would...
- 9. Grandpa:** Things work best when we believe in them! **(pause)** Do you see these Arabic letters engraved in the amulet? They're verses from the Qur'an! It must be a prayer! **(pause)** These kind of amulets only came with Islam. In earlier times, amulets were much simpler: they could even be a shell!
- 10. June:** Ha? Verses from the Qur'an? And shells used to bring good fortune?
- 11. Grandpa:** Before Christianity – and before even Islam – arrived in Sub-Saharan Africa, people already had their religions! As there are people who believe in religious verses, so there are also people who worship nature! And just as there are many people who believe in only one God, there are also, and have always been, they who believe in many gods.

- 12. June:** **(curious)** Really? But what are they for, so many gods?
- 13. Grandpa:** Well, depending on the region, the believers can directly approach the supreme deity, like the Abaluyia from Kenya or the Galla from Ethiopia. Or they address the supreme deity through his servants like the Igbo from Nigeria do.
- 14. June:** And how do they approach their gods, Grandpa?
- 15. Grandpa:** **(laughing)** Praying! Like you and me!
(pause) And often through rituals. Sacrificing something important to them, like food, an animal or, in ancient times, even human beings.
- 16. June:** **(shocked)** Human beings, Grandpa?!
- 17. Grandpa:** That was in early times! But of course, we can now hardly imagine how such things were possible! But it's not only gods they worshipped. They worshipped ancestors, too.
- 18. June:** **(frightened)** Huh, Grandpa! Ancestors?

19. Grandpa: **(laughing)** Daughter, there can also be some bad spirits, but in general, ancestors are the GOOD spirits – the ones who led well respected and honorable lives and who are therefore in a position to give advice and warnings. **(pause)** And also there are special people believed to have powers to help others. Like when one is ill for instance...

20. June: **(amused, doing like a ghost)** Buuuuhhhh...

21. Grandpa: **(serious)** The witch doctor is someone who is said to know how to handle herbs in order to cure ill people. But he's also believed to be good at more extensive things, like rescuing a land from drought. **(pause)** There's even a legend that goes like this: around the year of 1050, the Land of the Mandinka, in Mali, was experiencing a big drought. Imagine Dad is the King, Bara Mendana and is now talking to his counsellor...

Flashback music

Second Scene: In the King's palace in the Land of the Mandinka.

SFX: Musicians playing traditional instruments. In the background: many men praying in local dialects, birds, then fade under

22. King: (desperate) What shall I do, Moravi? Tell me!
My people are starving and me... I'm
absolutely powerless!

23. Moravi: (calming him down) There will be a solution,
Your Majesty! Rain will come now!

24. King: (desperate) My last hope lies on the
sorcerers and the priests, Moravi!

25. Moravi: Try to calm down, Your Majesty! They have
been praying for days!

SFX: Footsteps from one person going away, window being opened, then in the background: men praying in local dialects and birds get louder, then fade under

26. King: (nervous) Ah! Tell the musicians to stop that
music! I feel like my head is going to explode
at any moment!

SFX: Someone claps his hands as sign, the musicians stop playing.
In the background: men praying in local dialects, birds, then fade under

27. King: **(desperate)** That's exactly the point! If they have been praying for days and rain still doesn't come, then tell me, Moravi: why did I bother summoning all my sorcerers and priests together?

28. Moravi: **(careful)** If Your Majesty allows... but seeing you this desperate, I don't see any other alternative but to make Your Majesty a last suggestion...

29. King: **(sighing)** Say, Moravi! I will do anything in my power for rain to fall from the sky!

30. Moravi: **(clears his throat, then careful)** Hum-hum... I don't know if Your Majesty has heard about a Muslim who is in the city...

31. King: And what does this Muslim have? Does he by any chance sell rain?

- 32. Moravi:** **(careful)** Well, he doesn't sell it. But maybe he will bring it...
- 33. King:** And for what reason would a Muslim bring rain after none of my sorcerers or priests did? I have been observing them. They're doing their best! And what has happened so far?
- 34. Moravi:** **(clears his throat, then careful)** Nothing. Your Majesty... it's just that he's a marabout... and I thought that... maybe we could try!
- 35. King:** **(interested)** He is a what?
- 36. Moravi:** **(clears his throat)** A marabout, Your Majesty. A sort of priest... of the Islamic religion.
- 37. King:** **(meditative, then firm)** Hummm... Moravi, for my people, I will do anything! Let that marabout come! For my people! You're my witness!

Flashback music

Third Scene: At home at the end of the afternoon.

SFX: Chicken, goats, birds, then fade under

38. June: **(confused)** I don't understand, Grandpa...
Why did the King of the Mandinka accept his counsellor's suggestion, if he believes in the gods of the traditional religion?

39. Grandpa: For many reasons. One of them is the fact that kings at that time used to protect all the religions of their people – to avoid conflicts and retain their power.

40. June: Humm... Smart kings, hein, Grandpa?

41. Grandpa: **(laughing)** They were. But that also shows that traditional religions were open to new beliefs. At that time, in the eleventh century, there were already Muslims South of the Sahara. But Islam hadn't become the official religion of those regions yet.

42. June: **(interested)** And did it become official?

43. Grandpa: Of course it did! It still is today! I've already told you about that! Islam came through trade! The desert caravans came from the Muslim North and brought not only goods for sale but also some influence, and new ideas! And soon both goods and religion were borrowed by the local merchants who wanted the same success as their Arabic colleagues had. But there were also Muslims who settled South of the Sahara. They married local women and just stayed there.

44. June: And where did all those caravans come from? **(pause, then meditative)** Hummm... Well, I know about one! The one that went to Kanem-Bornu!

45. Grandpa: You see? That was one of them, yes. It came from Burka, a region in Libya. Another one went from Kayroan, in Tunisia, to Kano in the North of Nigeria. And one linked Algeria with Mali.

46. June: **(enthusiastic)** Talking about Mali, Grandpa, tell me the rest of the legend! Did the marabout manage to bring rain?

Flashback music

Fourth Scene: In the King's palace in the Land of the Mandinka.

SFX: Musicians playing traditional instruments, door opens, footsteps approaching. In the background: birds, then fade under

47. Marabout: Your Majesty called me?

48. King: **(clears his throat)** Yes. Thank you for coming!

49. Marabout: How can I serve Your Majesty?

50. King: Well, as you probably know, my realm is suffering from the effects of a long drought. The animals are dying, and what's worse, the people, too. I've tried to bring rain through my sorcerers and priests. And nothing happened. Tell me: can you make rain fall over my realm?

51. Marabout: **(firmly)** I can, Your Majesty!

52. King: **(hopeful)** Are you serious?

53. Marabout: With one condition. That Your Majesty converts to Islam!

SFX: Musicians playing traditional instruments. In the background: birds, then fade under

54. King: **(getting choked)** Hum-hum... Moravi, stop... hum...the music!... Hum... I think my head's going to explode at any moment!

55. Moravi: Yes, Your Majesty!

SFX: Someone claps his hands as sign, musicians stop playing. In the background: birds, then fade under

56. King: What did you say?

57. Marabout: I will bring rain to this land if Your Majesty will convert to my religion... and assist me in the prayer! Your Majesty just has to say „Amen“ at the end of each verse.

58. King: **(getting choked)** Hum... Moravi, you are my witness!... Hum... For my people I will do anything! **(pause)** But now, please, let us pray!

59. Marabout: Seek forgiveness of your Lord. Lo! He is All-Forgiving. He will loosen the sky for you in plenteous rain.

60. King: Amen.

61. Marabout: Ask forgiveness of your Lord, and turn to Him. He will send you skies pouring abundant rain.

62. King: Amen.

63. Marabout: O Allah, let us be covered with thick clouds that have abundant and beneficial rain. Let the rains come down upon us and cover the land with life-giving water.

SFX: Storm building, followed by heavy rain, then fade out

Flashback music

Fifth Scene: At home in the evening.

SFX: June and Grandpa laughing, kerosene lamp. In the background: crickets then fade under

64. Grandpa: **(laughing)** So, are you happy with the end of the story?

65. June: **(laughing)** There was rain at last...

66. Grandpa: And the King of the Mandinka converted to Islam! **(pause)** Well, this is just a legend. That means that it is a story told from generation to generation and there is no proof that it really happened like that! But, if you want, I also have a real story to tell...

67. June: **(amused)** If I want? Grandpa, Mum is not at home! We have to make good use of that! Tell me more!

68. Grandpa: So, now the real story: this one happened around the thirteenth century but there is actually no exact date... A Malian Sultan called Kunburu converted to Islam at that time. And he had his palace transformed into a mosque. It must have been a very beautiful mosque, it's said! The Great Mosque of the city of Djenné! For himself, he then built another palace.

69. June: **(fascinated)** Wow! That's devotion!

70. Grandpa: Just one more thing: the story of the marabout is only a legend! So you cannot believe everything in the story. But it shows how African traditional religions have co-existed for a long time and still do with other religions like Islam or Christianity. By the way, both of them are the religions in Sub-Saharan Africa that have the most followers nowadays... But they have merged with the traditional religions. We call this syncretism, when two or more beliefs slowly merge with each other and....!

Fade out during Grandpa's explanation

Outro:

And this is the end of the fourth episode of “Once upon a time... in Africa”, the “Learning by Ear” series about African History!

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Good-bye until next time!