Mamady Doumbouya

Interview date: February 1, 2001
Location of interview: Interviewee's home in Mount Airy
Country of origin: Guinea
Ethnic group/language group: Mende
Religion: Muslim
Profession: Runs a transportation company in Guinea with his brother
Level of education: GED/ special program at the Wharton School of Business, UPenn
Location of residence in Philadelphia: Mount Airy

Mr. Doumbouya came to Philadelphia in December 1964, on an immigrant visa. He stayed with an American friend who had served in the Peace Corps in Guinea. He worked for a few months, then was classified as A-1 during the Vietnam War. He was drafted in March, 1965, and served in the Air Force for 4 years.

Mr Doumbouya is the former president of the Guinean Association. He has created an Nko website for the Mandingo alphabet. He travels back and forth to Guinea frequently, as he runs a business there with his brother.

Interviewer: Leigh Swigart (LS)

Interviewee: Mamady Doumbouya (MD)

[START SIDE 1, TAPE 1]

LS: Your name? Just so it's on the tape.

MD: Ah, okay! Mamady Doumbouya.

LS: And you are from?

MD: Guinea, West Africa.

LS: And your ethnic group is?

MD: Mandinka, Mende.

LS: And your native language is?

MD: Mende.

LS: What other languages do you speak?

MD: I speak English, of course. I speak French and half Japanese.

LS: That's right. You were in Japan?

MD: Mmm-hmm.

LS: You don't speak any Susu?

MD: No, I don't.

LS: Did you grow up in Conakry?

MD: No. Mostly, I would say I grew up in all over. And I spent most time in Kankan, which is second city in Guinea. In the highland of Guinea, between Conakry and Bamako.

LS: I've never been to Guinea, but I always hear the north of Guinea is so beautiful. It is the most beautiful spot in West Africa. So maybe one day.

MD: Mmm.

LS: And how long have you been in the Philadelphia area?

MD: Well, I've been in Philadelphia since 1965.

LS: So you're in the highlands of New Guinea. How do you get to the United ---

MD: Not New Guinea.

LS: I mean, not New Guinea. [both laugh] Guinea.

MD: Republic of Guinea.

LS: Yeah. How did you come to Philadelphia? How did that work?

MD: Well, that really was a story by itself. After the Guinea independence, I was assigned as one of the representative of Guinea Airlines, Guinea Airlines in Liberia. At that time, I was actually living with my brother, who was a sculptor for the president there, you know, President

Tubman. And when the Guinea Airlines came --- when the independence, independence, you know, took place --- and Guinea ---

LS: That was in '60?

MD: In '58.

LS: In '58.

MD: In '58. The Guineans needed somebody who was fluent in English. At that time, I was already fluent in English, and also in French, to mind the new airlines' --- called Guinea Airlines --- umm, agency in Liberia. So I was recruited by my uncle that was, at that time, Consul General at the Guinea Embassy in Monrovia. Incidentally, that uncle is Camara Laye.

LS: Oh, okay.

MD: Which is one of the African, prolific African writers.

LS: Yes.

MD: And so he suggested that I take the position with Guinea Airlines.

LS: If we can back up, how was it that you were already fluent in English? What was your background so that you were fluent in English?

MD: I was living in Liberia for awhile.

LS: As a child or ---

MD: No, I think I probably came to Liberia when I was probably around nineteen or something, eighteen or nineteen.

LS: So you went to primary and high school in Guinea?

MD: In Guinea and in Mali.

LS: So your family moved around? Or you just moved around?

MD: Right, right.

LS: And when you get out of high school or get your bacc or whatever it is you did, then you went to Liberia for awhile?

MD: Yes. Because the reason for me to be there is that our family, I, how do you call, you know, metalworkers, so that we have our own shop. And my brother had opened one of our shops in Monrovia, so he asked me to join him there in Liberia. That's how I got there.

LS: So you're from the group of metalworkers. When you had a workshop, was it still kind of traditional metalwork?

MD: Basically, the metalworking part has been sort of really disappearing with the new era. Mostly, are sculptures. Like wood sculpturing, ivory, in those days when ivory was, uhh --- And I think, matter of fact, one of the thing that I look back on, we were very instrumental in starting the ivory work, ivory carving in West Africa. As a matter of fact, most of the ivory sculptures and wood sculptures that you see in French-speaking West Africa, majority of them were from, from --- designed by my brother. The one that actually made in Liberia were for his drawings, even today.

LS: So, just because I think the whole social structure in Senegal and in Guinea is pretty much similar because they got all that caste system from the Mandings ---

MD: Mmm-hmm.

LS: So this is the caste *forgeron* [French]?

MD: *Forgeron*, right.

LS: But they also do the wood work?

MD: Well, I think is you have to go a little bit back, because, umm, the, umm --- ask the question again. I think I missed the question.

LS: In Senegal, there are two distinct groups that do metal work and that do wood work. That there are two different castes. And you were just saying that when your family stopped doing metal work, they did wood sculpture. So the same family did both kinds of work? That's my question.

MD: Well, I think that probably is misunderstanding of the situation. Because the origin of the wood working was actually came from the metal shops. You understand what I am saying?

LS: Yes.

MD: Because people that are doing --- how do you call the sculpture in Subudian(?) market, north of ( ) ---

LS: Yeah, yeah.

MD: Got their origin from the metal workers. And if you can look around and check very closely, you will find that most of the artists today in the radio stations, have been mixed up with the new twentieth century technology. But at the beginning, most of the artists, you know, people in the newspapers came from the Griots. You will find a lot of Griots(?) in that group.

LS: Yes.

MD: So these things just emerge, emerge, you know, from this what you call caste ---which I personally don't ---

LS: You don't like that. I know, that's just a term people use.

MD: --- don't take that. You know what I mean? And emerged from this whole family structure to become the new modern structure that we have today.

LS: Right. Did your family do jewelry at all?

MD: Yes.

LS: Okay.

MD: Let me tell you a story. The promotion of a metal worker is --- I went through this myself. The first thing you have to do a --- what we call in French, your ( ) [French] is those that work with the iron. Those ( ) you make knives, make hoes --- how do you call it?

LS: Yeah, hoes.

MD: You make hoes and you emerge from there. That's the first stage of the formations. You spend most of your time, when you first start working, with that. Then from there, you become, what we call them "numu"(?). From the numu(?) level, then you become what we call a "siaki"(?). Siaki is those who deal with the gold. So. And so far and so on.

LS: So the more finesse you have, the more you do finer work?

MD: Exactly. Right. Then later on, these siakis(?) actually move from doing jewelries, you know, merge into the wood working and ivory carving. So actually the same person you see doing, today is not true, in the old days.

LS: In the old days.

MD: In the old days, the same people that you see that are actually doing the sculpture right now were at one time numus(?) in the shop.

LS: So when you were a child, you were going to school but at the same time you would learn some of these skills from your family?

MD: Exactly, exactly.

LS: So you were a busy kid.

MD: Absolutely, absolutely. So consequently --- so other people took different line. Those that didn't go into the jewelry went to mechanics. I myself, I repaired bicycle for two or three years, you know what I mean? Before actually going into the sculpturing.

LS: So, when you were growing up, the expectation was that this family skill --- that this is something you are going to practice? That was the expectation?

MD: Yes.

LS: And then you went instead to work for Guinea Airways?

MD: I mean, I was already around twenty-some when --- but then I was actually doing the sculpturing. I was actually doing the sculpturing and some of the things that I did, you know, that maybe were noteworthy, I was the --- how do you call? --- the sculptor for President Tubman of Liberia. Okay? And also his vice president became president, President Tolbert, also. My brother was the sculptor for President Tubman. When he left, I took his place and when President Tubman died, I became again sculptor for the President of Liberia at that time, became Tolbert. So, consequently, that was a promotion from my background, you know. I was a numu(?) and moving away from there to become all the other things. At the same time, while I was in Liberia I started going to school, you know, high school there.

LS: And so you went to high school in Liberia?

MD: I took some high school courses in Liberia.

LS: I see. So where did you actually finish high school?

MD: Well ---

LS: Did you finish? You didn't finish?

MD: That's a story by itself. We have to get back to it later on. [both laugh]

LS: Okay.

MD: 'Cause that's a long story.

LS: But you go and work for Guinea Airways and then what happens?

MD: As I worked for Guinea Airways, and I saw one of the best investment America ever made in Africa was the Peace Corps. Personal, that my personal feeling. Because two things the Peace Corps did and I saw. They gave us a realistic look of what Americans are, because we expected --- the Americans that we were used to are either diplomats, teachers, or high business people. When the Peace Corps came in we were surprised to see an American person actually taking one of those little buses on the street. So real, realistically ---

LS: And this is in Liberia you saw this first ---

MD: This is in Liberia.

LS: In Liberia.

MD: While I was assistant manager of the Guinea Airline agency there, a young man came one day, which is an African American Peace Corps volunteer, came to my ---wanted to buy a ticket from me. So, as I was working on his ticket, we became very, very interested and good friends. So he is one of those person who --- how do I say it? That actually grows on you very quickly. He was doing African Study before he came into the Peace Corps ---

LS: And this is in nineteen-sixty-what?

MD: In 1963.

LS: So he must have been in the first wave of the Peace Corps.

MD: First wave of Peace Corps. So, consequently, we became good friends. His name at that time was Vallo(?) John(?). If this ever come up, he gonna kill me. I just know that ( ).

LS: What's his name now?

MD: Vaflai(?) Diallo(?). He came to see me and he was interested in going to Kankan, which was where I was from. Because of his high interest in Africa, and very unusual American at

that time, when I know him, umm, umm, and ( ) later of the relationship, I was getting ready to go to France to go study. To continue my studies in French.

LS: At what level?

MD: College. And so he said to me, "Mamady." I say, "Yes." "Don't be like everybody else." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Well, all you French-speaking African want to go to France. Why don't you be different?" I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Why don't you go to America?" I said, "What the heck am I going to do in that place? It is too far from here." You know what I mean? And another Peace Corps volunteer by the name of Kay Harris(?) which was a very good friend of mine, a good friend of Val(?), you know, also, convinced me that because I speak fluently in English, it was to my --- I would do better in America than going like everybody else to France. So they convinced me and, as a matter of fact, as a matter of fact, three months after that discussion, I came to the United States and ---

LS: Well, how did you --- First of all, after independence, I know that Guinea had a kind of rift with France, because they said, "Get out of here." So there still continued to be a lot of Guineans going to France for ---

MD: Oh, yes. Absolutely.

LS: For university?

MD: Absolutely. Because at the beginning there were some rift at the high political level between Sékou Touré and de Gaulle at that time. But the ---

LS: Hadn't filtered down yet.

MD: Hadn't filtered down yet. The animosity had gone yet.

LS: Okay. How did you get a visa to come here? How did you know where to come?

MD: That is also another story. [LS laughs] I went to the, umm --- because I had these two American friends, they actually told me what I needed to do and I went to the American Embassy. And they asked me, you know, said, "Well, if you go to the United States, what are you going to do?" I made a comment then, if you said the same thing today at an embassy in Africa, you will never get to America. I said, "I am going to go to America to work and go to school." Then the young lady look at me and start smiling. I understand now what she was smiling about. Because I was so --- you know, because --- I mean, those days, coming to the US, a French-speaking African, there were so few us of here.

LS: They probably thought it was great.

MD: It was a great idea. But he said to me that, well, "Mamady, in order for you to go there, you need at least a thousand dollars and your air transportation." And with thousand dollars, at that point ---

LS: That was a huge amount.

MD: Yeah, that was a huge amount in 1964.

LS: It is like saying ten thousand dollars.

MD: But for me it was not a big deal. I had just finished a commission from the president of Liberia to sculpture an ivory sculpture of the ---for the vice president then, Tolbert, to sculpture a picture of the president standing. There used to be a statue in Monrovia with Tubman standing over a bunch of stick tied together, all in his hand. You can probably find those pictures in somewhere.

LS: It has been destroyed now?

MD: I do not know whether it's there or not, it may still there. And a bunch of stick tied together on his hand, symbolizing the unity. So he wanted me to make that. So I was commissioned to do that for him and for the senator of Liberia. So once I did that, I created that

for him, after I finished that, coincidentally, the Liberia government paid me a thousand dollars. I remember the thousand dollars because the vice president gave me a thousand-dollar bill.

LS: Liberian dollars or American dollars?

MD: No, American dollars. There was no Liberian dollars then.

LS: Is there now? Is that what's it called?

MD: Yeah, is Liberian dollar now. Those days were actual American dollars. So he paid me a thousand dollars. One thousand bill. I took a picture of it a long time ago, but I think I lost it. I have never seen a thousand-dollar bill from then on. So I had that thousand dollars. And I also needed to solve my transportation. I borrowed three hundred dollars from Kay Harris(?).

LS: And it was only three hundred dollars to get here?

MD: It was somewhere around that. It was a little more than that. Because I worked for the --- I had also saved, all the savings that I had. With that, I used that money to get to the United States.

LS: So where did you come?

MD: I came and lived a family --- Val's family.

LS: And there were in?

MD: In Philadelphia.

LS: Okay.

MD: And, matter of fact, at that time they lived in --- they live on 52nd Street.

LS: 52nd at --- in West Philly?

MD: 52nd and Springfield, West Philadelphia. So that's where I lived.

LS: So this is in 1965, is that what you said?

MD: It was ‘65 by then. I came here in ‘64. What I am talking about happened in ‘65.

LS: So you came here and what did you do? You looked around for a school? You --- ?

MD: First, I looked for a job first, since I needed to pay for my tuition.

LS: And you had a visa that allowed you to work?

MD: Oh, yeah. As a matter of fact, once I presented thousand dollars and the ticket, I was issued an immigrant visa.

LS: You know, it’s amazing how different it is. A friend, a man I worked with who has been a professor for a long time at the University of Wisconsin, he was a Senegalese and was in Nigeria and got a one-year teaching position at Wisconsin in the 1960s. And he went to get a visa and he said, “I only need it for a year,” and they said, “Oh, we’ll just give it for five years, you might want to say.” So they are the ones who suggested that he should stay, get a longer visa. It is so different now.

MD: It is really different. My brother that came here to study, he went back. And when he was in Cameroon, trying to come here, most of Guineans usually don’t go anywhere to stay. We wind up staying, but they don’t go --- they usually are short, especially Mandingos, also Guineans, and Mandingos don’t like to --- when they go somewhere, they always want to just find what they want and return. So usual until now, we very seldom, we didn’t buy a house, because we always wanted to go back. And the lady at the embassy, you know, asked my brother, “Well, how long you gonna be there?” He said, “Well, I’ll probably be there for a year or so.” And she said, “Well, why don’t I give you an immigrant visa?” and my brother said, “No, I’m not gonna stay that long.” Then the consul at embassy said, “This mistake, you gonna live to regret this.”

LS: And he did?

MD: He sure did.

LS: So now he is in Guinea?

MD: Yeah, he is in Guinea. You know, so, they go back and come back and forth. But he's --- for him it's not a big deal, but he wished he had taken that immigrant ---

LS: He had the possibility of ---

MD: Yes, because it was actually offered to him, but he said, "Well, I'm not going to be there that long."

LS: What was West Philadelphia like in the 1960s, compared to now?

MD: Very different, very different.

LS: In what way?

MD: Well, West Philadelphia then has an ambiance. Ambiance meaning that, uhh, [pause] doesn't seem to have all the problems that currently happening.

LS: Was it less run down than it is now?

MD: Oh, absolutely. I would say West Philadelphia then was like Mt. Airy is today.

LS: I haven't been in Philadelphia very long and I wondered when --- because obviously they have beautiful old houses there. And I didn't know at what point things started to break down. So in the '60s, it was still --- well, it still is very middle-class, especially compared to certain parts of North Philadelphia.

MD: Right, right, right.

LS: But middle class, but still with the environment's a little bit --- been deteriorated.

MD: Right, right. Because where I lived in 52nd and Springfield, that was really the middle-class people.

LS: Yeah, and Springfield's all got all those beautiful houses.

MD: All those areas --- that is between 52nd Street and Springfield. And Springfield and Baltimore, you know, right in that area. And so that place was very good. And one of my friend, God bless his soul, he's had a big moving storage business, Upper(?) Storage, and I was there for many years. Was a good friend of theirs, the wife and the husband. So it was very nice place. It's still nice, but not compared to ( ). Ambience, we have --- there used to be a club around 52nd and Baltimore Avenue, we used to call it the Cosmopolitan. That's where we young guys used to go, used to be membership only at that time. My friend and I belonged to that, we used to go there. I mean, it was really a fun place.

LS: Did your Peace Corps friend eventually come back home then?

MD: Yes, yes. Matter of fact, he came before me.

LS: Before?

MD: Before me.

LS: Oh, that was a nice way to come into the United States.

MD: Right. And when I came back, he came before me, and Kay also came before me. And they were both teaching at that time. I'll tell you a real sad story about him. Have you heard of OIC, OIC?

LS: OIC International, yeah.

MD: He is the guy who founded OIC International.

LS: Is that right?

MD: Yes.

LS: So what's the sad part?

MD: Well, the story of him, you know, him that, uhh --- when he came here, he stayed for a little while. He was so much into Africa. After founding OIC International, he stayed there for

awhile and decided that he really wanted to live in Africa. So he went back to Africa. The time that I have spent here, he spent the same time in Africa.

LS: In Guinea?

MD: In Zambia.

LS: In Zambia?

MD: Zambia, South Africa. He has businesses in Zambia and South Africa.

LS: So he is still there?

MD: He's still there. Matter of fact, his kids comes in, and get educated here, and the funny thing about it is that there his kids today and my kids, my daughter went to the same school, Lincoln University. His kids speak with an accent and mine don't.

LS: And he has a Zambian wife?

MD: Now he does.

LS: What was it like coming here in the 1960s, when the whole awareness of Africa was just coming to be a really big important part of black American identity? Were you welcomed with open arms? Was it that kind of situation?

MD: No, I think as far as the black African community in the United States, I find no problem, no contradiction. I have found no difference of leaving Guinea and coming to the United States in 1960s, than leaving Guinea and going to Mali. I really did not find no difference.

LS: Not even culturally?

MD: Well, I mean, I mean, if I leave Guinea and go to Senegal, there are some cultural difference there. But, well, I'm comparing --- maybe this will look a little bit strange, leaving here and go to France. You know what I'm saying?

LS: That would have been a bigger ---

MD: There is a cultural difference there.

LS: Is that because of ---

MD: Even though they all speak French there.

LS: Is that because of the white society ---

MD: Yes.

LS: --- or because of the colonial relationship or ---

MD: I think it is both, both at that time. You know what I'm saying? And when I came here, I just --- it was just like going to a different African, African countries. And I didn't --- I personally didn't find --- That may be because Liberia is so closely related.

LS: To the United States?

MD: To the United States. That my transition was not as somebody who may have left Dakar and come down to the US at that time.

LS: What about your relations --- because you were living in a primarily black neighborhood --- what about if you had come to a white section of Philadelphia? Would that have been different? Or was it more than Americans in general did not seem to be that big of a jump from Guinea?

MD: I think it probably that way because I came to a black community. I have, you know --- all the Guineans that came here that live in a white neighborhood. They may have their different issues involved there and I really didn't see much different because I was actually involved in this family. Everything I had to do with these family.

LS: What about being a Muslim? How did that fit in to being --- was there a mosque here or were you practicing at that time?

MD: Oh, no at that time there wasn't really a mosque. And the mosque that were here were actually black Muslim mosques. You know what I mean? I, uhh, there was, uhh --- there was a Sunni mosque, I think it may still be there, around Lancaster Avenue. Because two of my children were --- how do you call it? --- naming ceremony took place at that mosque.

LS: Are your children Muslim?

MD: Yes.

LS: And I saw that your son --- it's Moussa, right?

MD: Let's say I think they are. [LS laughs]

LS: You intended for them to be.

MD: Yes.

LS: But your wife is not?

MD: Mmm?

LS: But your wife is not, is not Muslim?

MD: No, she's not. She is Baptist. So, actually, there is little more freedom than most my children have had in term of what they want to do with their life in our case, you know, than it is most Muslim households.

LS: But Philadelphia must feel different now. There's lot more Muslims than there was in the 1960s?

MD: Yes, yes, absolutely.

LS: And is that a welcome change for you, to have more Muslims around?

MD: I think it is, because being a Muslim is no longer ---

LS: An odd thing.

MD: An odd thing, yeah. When you see a Muslim, you say, "Oh, yeah. Hmm Muslim, what's Muslim?" Unless you say, "I'm a black Muslim" and being a black Muslim had a nationhood(?) and a connotation to it.

LS: A political connotation.

MD: A political connotation, which was not exactly the same as it is right now. Today being a Muslim is more religion than a political connotation.

LS: What percentage of American Muslims do you think have that political orientation?

MD: American Muslims?

LS: Yes.

MD: Aaah, what percentage? I really don't know. I really don't know, because I don't think, especially in the Sunni Muslim situations, they may have people there political in the religion. You may have political situations, but I mean, for the sake of actually having a political goal, everywhere I've been I have not seen it. ( ) have continued to two or three different mosques when I'm here.

LS: Does the Nation of Islam have its own mosques?

MD: Yes, Nation --- Well, let me not get too far there too far, because I am not real familiar.

LS: Okay, yeah.

MD: Because right now it seems like there is two different ---

[END OF SIDE 1, TAPE 1]

[START OF SIDE 2, TAPE 1]

MD: It's appeared to me, that there are two different group. One is Farrakhan mosques and --- what's the other one? ---the other one is the son of Elijah Mohammed, different Muslim group. These are things that's from hearsay. I have no in-depth knowledge of that situation.

LS: This new mosque in North Philadelphia, it's only a couple of months old?

MD: That's right.

LS: What mosque did you go to before that was there?

MD: I went to --- I forgot the Arabic name, the mosque at Ogontz Avenue.

LS: The one that's for the Middle Eastern community? Al-Asqa(?)?

MD: No, this is African American mosque. Is on Ogontz Avenue, Masjid Ullah, that's where I went to.

LS: I know there's also an Arab mosque that's up in North Philadelphia at some place, Al-Asqa(?) or something like that.

MD: No, I've never been to that place.

LS: But I can get back to that; I don't really want to get off into another thing. So you come here in 1965 and you work a little bit, you're with your friends, and then you decide to go to university?

MD: That came in later.

LS: That came later.

MD: That came later. In April --- I came here in December, 1964, around the end of December, 1964. And I stayed here and in January, around April, let me see, around March, let's say

around March, 1964, in the middle of the Vietnam War, because I came here as an immigrant, I was classified A1 for military service.

LS: Seriously?

MD: Yes.

LS: I had no idea they did that. So that was one of the things you had to do as an immigrant was to be willing to go for the draft?

MD: Right. Because as an immigrant --- the responsibility of an immigrant is almost exactly as a citizen, except the opportunity and the responsibility to vote.

LS: So you can get drafted but can't vote? That doesn't seem quite ---

MD: Yes. So I was called in to the selective services in April --- I mean, in March. That's three months after I got here. And they talk to me and they say, "Well, Mr. Doumbouya," the lady said, "We call you because you have been classified A1 for ---by the selective service system." And I asked what that was. And when I saw what that was, she said that is --- he said --- I don't remember exactly how the thing went, but she said to me that they have a choice going to be, uhh, either to enlist or you're going to be drafted. I say, "Well, when can I enlist?" I thought it was a job. I actually thought it was a job, they were offering me a job. And when they said that, I said "Well, where can I go?" He said, "Well, you can go into the Navy, you can go into the Air Force, you can go to the Marines or the Army." Since I had worked for Guinea Airline, when they said "Air Force," my thought was, the Air Force were like Guinea Airline. So I say, "Well, okay, then I will take the Air Force." And, umm, then the lady look at me. She knew that I didn't understand what they were saying. Then she said to me, she said, "Well, Mr. Doumbouya, you don't understand. You are about to be drafted into the military." You know what I mean? When the thought became clear to me, it evoke, ahh, ahh, how do you call those? Not a souvenir, because "souvenir" is good.

LS: Memory?

MD: Yeah, memory of my uncle that was drafted while I was a young man in Guinea to go to the Vietnam when it was ---

LS: To go to Vietnam when it was a French protectorate?

MD: What the French --- you call it --- what was the name at that time? IndoChina. IndoChina War. So my uncle was drafted. And I remember my mother then crying and all that stuff, so I didn't really ---

LS: So did he come back from IndoChina?

MD: Yes, he did come back. And, so I did not really, ahh, so I really --- that memory was not a good one. You know what I'm saying? So I said, "Well, this I have to think about it." They said, "Well, Mr. Doumbouya, you've been classified as A1. You know what I mean? That means that your chances of being drafted within the next month or so is very good. So you have to do any action ( ).

LS: What are the advantages of enlisting over being drafted? Because then you get a choice?

MD: You get a choice to what, what ( ) you gonna go in.

LS: Otherwise, they just say "you're going to be in this"?

MD: Yes. And at that time --- oh, usually if you get drafted, you usually get sent into the Army. All the others ( ) because the issue is if you don't go to this one, we'll send you to the other one. Which is not very good. So I came back and talked to Val and Val counseled me that I really don't have to do this, because I am not a citizen. You know what I'm saying?

LS: And he had never ---

MD: Well, he had already serve. He had already served in the Air Force. He explained to me what the Air Force does and what he had done, he explained that to me. And so consequently,

well, he said, "Well, Mamady, you really don't have to do this. You can still, you can still decide to leave, because you're not an American citizen. You don't have a responsibility to do this."

LS: Well, it's interesting they would ask immigrants to do it, because that sense of allegiance that you want in soldiers presumably wouldn't be there. So it doesn't seem like a very good choice.

MD: That's another story. [both laugh] I was a problem for my commanders, you know. In the military. So that's another story. So, anyway, I remember saying to Val Adosey(?), and I say, "Look, I came to this country and America has opened their door for me." I said --- I remember I said something like that, "Only a coward will run away from his host when the host's house is burning." That's the way I perceive Vietnam to be at that time. So I made a comment to Val, so I said this is my responsibility, I am going to go. I won't go to the Army, but I will go to the Air Force because I am familiar with the air situations. So that's how I got into the Air Force.

LS: How long were you in the Air Force?

MD: Four years. One of those dilemma --- after coming to the United State, I never seen the snow. My first assignment was in South Dakota. So anyway --- lot of stories.

LS: How did you get along with other enlisted men? They probably weren't used to having Africans ---

MD: Africans, oh, absolutely.

LS: Especially not in the Air Force.

MD: No, I really did not have no problem. I only recall one incident there. It was not a big incident. Because, matter of fact, I was supported by the commanders in that incident. That the other person that was involved in the incident --- So it was a very, very normal.

LS: Did you go to Vietnam?

MD: Only for twenty-four hours. But I did participate --- how do you call it? As part of the Air Commando Wings in Thailand in the Mekong Delta, which is where most of the war took place. We were in the Thailand border. You know, like right across into Canada, supporting Vietnam operations. I do have a Vietnam service medal, so ---

LS: So when you came back, they owed you some college?

MD: Some college education. Yeah, that's where the college come in. Yeah. [both laugh] That's where I'm getting the college ---

LS: And so how did that work? How did you get into school?

MD: Basically, since I was not --- in order for me to go into, to get into a program, you know, I was counseled to go take a test. It's called the GED. So I went and took that test, in Pennsylvania here, Pennsylvania GED, and I received that. And uhh, and so, uhh, since Val worked for OIC, OIC had a program to prepare people to go into college and I work --- umm, I went through OIC, Opportunities Industrialization Center. I went through there and they train us first to work at the Highway Department. Pennsylvania Highway Department. And I worked there at the Accident Investigation Department, in the Highway Department. And it was from there that I, you know --- they had a program at Wharton at that time. They call it CWP. Wharton educational program because at that time they was not enough blacks into Wharton School.

LS: There still isn't.

MD: Ahh? Yeah, well, that's true, absolutely. Compared to those days. [both laugh]

LS: It's all relative.

MD: You gotta understand my frame of reference is way back, a little longer than yours is. So, anyway, I went through, my wife and I, you know, got into the CWP program. And from the CW program, I went to ( ) Wharton, start my studies at the University of Pennsylvania.

LS: You were already married by now? By this time?

MD: Ahhh, yes, yes, I was. I was married by that time.

LS: After you came out of the military?

MD: Yeah, after I came out of military.

LS: Now you didn't feel any compulsion to go home and marry someone from Guinea or someone from your ethnic group or your cross-cousin, your first cross-cousin that your family was saving for you or anything like that?

MD: You are going into a lot detail here. [both laugh] That's always the case, especially ( ).

LS: That's why I wondered.

MD: ( ) I'll make it that short, 'cause I don't know how my wife is going to think about that part, you know [LS laughs], but I had somebody already selected, being a member of my family group, elder in the group. I had already some. There was a woman already selected for me.

LS: And you knew her? Had you grown up with her?

MD: I don't know her, but everybody in my family knew her. My brothers who wrote about me, send my, I think, some pictures, I don't remember again. All I know right now is she's currently a doctor now in Guinea. And her father and my father agreed that we gonna be married, you know, when we were younger. So when the time came, when that time came, I went back, but for some reason we couldn't, we couldn't, you know, agree on things.

LS: You didn't want to get married. [both laugh]

MD: No, at that time, because my wife and I had already met. You know what I mean? She was, she was very understanding person. Because I had to ---

LS: So felt like you had to go back and at least got through the motions?

MD: No, not the motion, but I had a responsibility. I had a family responsibility, which is very difficult for an American to understand because it really doesn't ---

LS: There's no parallel.

MD: No, because I sometimes said that those kind of parallels in Africa, you gotta be in very, very high American structure. You know what I'm saying? Because like the Kennedy's, some of their marriages, I don't know ---

LS: Those are orchestrated.

MD: Orchestrated. ( ) I don't know, maybe this is some ( ) on my part. I just don't believe that Julia Eisenhower just happen to marry Nixon's son. That that just happened.

LS: Exactly. No ---

MD: Coming from that kind of thing ---

LS: But you are right, it's only at a very high level that anybody sees any interest in people marrying between dynasties. Not your average person.

MD: Right. So most American do not have a good frame of reference about that part. I am not talking about you, because of your background, but ---

LS: That must have ---

MD: So I had to --- I had to go.

LS: That must have been hard to explain to your wife. [LS laughs]

MD: Well, she wasn't my wife then.

LS: Well, your girlfriend or whatever ---

MD: My girlfriend. Right. I had to do that.

LS: S you had to go and at least meet this woman and have a discussion?

MD: Yes. Because the chances were that I could have married before I come back.

LS: But did she want to get married or was she also sort of not ---

MD: Well, nothing has been said about that time.

LS: And she was young? Younger than you?

MD: Yes, yes. She's younger than me. So, I mean, she --- she --- I mean, if I had got married, it would not --- I don't know. I don't know. Those are things that, you know ---

LS: They didn't happen, so.

MD: It didn't happen.

LS: So you came back and --- Now, your wife's not from Philadelphia?

MD: She's from in Chicago.

LS: How did you meet? Did you meet in Philadelphia?

MD: Matter of fact, we met in that program, the OIC program.

LS: Oh, I see.

MD: I don't even know if I'm supposed to say this. This is getting a little personal now here. ( )

LS: You don't have to. This is not --- [MD laughs] I'm not --- People just say ---

MD: Yeah, yeah, sure. [LS laughs]

LS: You can get to the level of personal that you want. So, your only experience of immigration is in the United State? You didn't go to another country? Well, you went to Liberia, but you had never been to another country outside of Africa besides the US before you immigrated?

MD: Well, I was in Japan in two years.

LS: That's right. What did you do in Japan?

MD: I was part of the US Air Force.

LS: And what was your --- I know you were part of the Air Force, so you were probably in kind of structure. But what was your experience there compared to here?

MD: The experience in Japan --- you see, it's a little different because --- may have been different for you, but usually when you are part of the US government and you go overseas, you actually take the US in a warship. See what I'm saying?

LS: You have your own little piece of America there.

MD: Exactly. You have your own little piece of America there. Even embassies have the same kind of situation in there, which is not available to ordinary. If I had gone as an ordinary person, although I was there and I had friends from Africa that lived there, that may have other things, you know, like I had some friends of mine that were also at the Embassy of Ghana, that were ( ) for quite a long time. And so in Japan, I, uhh, I think in the US, it's easier to get involved in the US than it is in Japan. I felt more of a foreigner there, than in the United States.

LS: That's certainly the reputation they have. They are very closed to outsiders, even to Koreans and other Asians.

MD: Right. Mmm-hmm.

LS: Although apparently there are more and more Africans, people from other continents, going there.

MD: Oh, yeah.

LS: And this is challenging people to open up a little bit.

MD: As a matter of fact, for Africans, especially Mandinkas, is a new place for them to go. I talked to some friend of mine from Egypt last week, that is thinking of going to Japan.

LS: What do they do there?

MD: Oh, buy stuff, trade.

LS: For export?

MD: Export, you know. But a lot of Mandinkas, you know, are almost like, in Africa, are almost like Lebanese. Is mostly in---

LS: *Commerçant.*

MD: *Commerçant.* So they are always trying, opening different frontiers.

LS: I am just amazed how I meet Africans who are these merchants, these *commerçant,* and they are going to places and they really don't read and write really well and they're going in and out of Italy and in and out of Japan and you just think, "These guys are amazing." That they --- I don't know.

MD: I hate to tell you this. This is one of the biggest strength of N'ko. Because it is difficult for these people to go back to school and to learn European languages. So now they are taking N'ko to do their business in there. You find most Mandinka business people are beginning to start writing and doing their business. Matter of fact, when I go to Kankan, most of the letters that come in are not written in French. They are in N'ko.

LS: That's very, very interesting. I worked in Adult Basic Education in the International ( ) for a little while. That's the whole issue that you are not going to teach a thirty or forty year-old to speak French so that they can learn to read and write. It does not make any sense. They don't

need to learn French; they just need to learn to read and write what they already speak. And since you already have this system, it's just --- that's why --- well, we can really talk about that. That's really interesting.

MD: When you brought up this issue ---

LS: They are doing accounting and record-keeping in N'ko.

MD: Yes, communication between business people --- they have been doing those things in N'ko right now.

LS: Obviously in Senegal and Mali, to some extent people do write their languages with the Arabic alphabet, and when the government talks about literacy, they don't count that literacy as part of the statistics. If it is not in the Roman alphabet, they do not count it, and yet there is this whole domain of, you know, tailors who take your measurements and they do it all in Arabic --- but that doesn't count. So the statistics are always skewed, since that isn't included in the Sahel region. But a lot of people have had that Arabic, that Koranic training. But that's just a Western bias, right? That if it's not in the Roman alphabet, then you're not really writing?

MD: Mmm, I mean, yeah, okay. I think that's no longer Western bias. That's the educated Africans' bias.

LS: You're right. Yeah, you're right. But UNESCO had been working on vernacular literacy for a long time and they tend to only look at the Roman alphabet.

MD: Right.

LS: And they are the ones who have been pushing this since the 1950s and yet they have a very narrow conception of what counts as literacy. So, that's fascinating.

MD: I wonder they do the same thing with Swahili in East Africa. That may be different because ---

LS: Well, but they, I think they write it in --- you mean whether they write in Arabic?

MD: I mean, when they count the educated people, I wonder if they do the same thing with the Swahili in Eastern Africa. I am not sure. It is just a question.

LS: Well, I think a lot of people are literate in Swahili because it is actually the official language of Tanzania.

MD: Ah, right, I see.

LS: And also it's the co-official language of Kenya, with English. So I think a lot of people read it and write it and I think that's counted. I think it is counted, it's just that if somebody is literate in Swahili but they use the Arabic alphabet, I am not sure if that's counted.

MD: I see. That is interesting.

LS: So writing in African language is counted, but writing using a different alphabet --- so I don't know --- in Guinea, do the official statistics cover N'ko?

MD: No, I don't think so. No, it doesn't.

LS: And that's a real misrepresentation.

MD: I mean, I think you can't blame the foreigners for that. You gotta blame the guys who are keeping the statistics.

LS: Well, I know, I know. It's all those Toubas(?) who do everything, you know.

MD: Yeah. [both laugh]

LS: So when you went through school, what did you end up --- I'm not even sure what your profession is now. I know your love is to work on N'ko, but I am not sure you are making a million dollars a year doing that.

MD: No, no, no. I am --- how you call --- umm --- Information Systems Analyst.

LS: And is that what you studied when you ---

MD: Sort of. I got into that by one of those event of life, so, you know. But before I got into computers, I was actually an accountant. I worked for CPA firm as an accountant. Because I was doing accounting in Liberia before I came here, so I just merged into that.

LS: You've done a lot of things.

MD: Mmm-hmm.

LS: Do you also have a personal business where you get things in and out of Guinea?

MD: Ah, yeah, we have a transportation company in Guinea.

LS: Transportation company. And that's no problem to do that in Guinea if you live overseas?

MD: No, because one of the things about that is that my brother that I told you about , that went to the embassy and couldn't think of immigrating. He's the guy who is running the business there right now.

LS: Is it transport for merchandise or passengers?

MD: Passenger. Inter-city transportation.

LS: In Guinea, you can have private lines?

MD: Yes. Most of the transportation is private.

LS: Is it like a *taxi-fous*(?)? I do not know what you call it. That's what you call it in Senegal. A little --- kind of like a truck that's got ---

MD: Oh, no, no. These are buses.

LS: These are real buses.

MD: Seventy-one passenger buses. Well, 71 is kids. What's that? 40, no, 40 --- let me see. I dunno, 62 or something like that. These are big buses.

LS: These are kind of a deluxe way to travel between cities?

MD: No. This is the basic flow, because we use school buses.

LS: You use school buses? So how did you get them over there? You bought them here and ---

MD: Bought them --- Matter of fact I am sending two in September. Because I am going to be going in September and I am taking two more with me.

LS: Do you buy new ones or get refurbished ones?

MD: Used ones, usually.

LS: And what happens when they need parts? You can get the parts over there?

MD: I usually send parts because it is very practical. We gave parts because --- see, one of their thinking, some, uhh --- it very practical. I think Guineans use very practical system there, because of the road and things like that. The first people who bought buses, they bought buses like SEPTA buses, ( ) buses, and took it down there. They couldn't last a day.

LS: Because of the roads?

MD: Because of the roads. And, consequently, they came to realize that the GMC buses that came here, they are one of the thing which make sense. Americans take good care of their kids. These school buses are solid. Here, in the US, because of abundance and a lot of stuff, we may say "Oh, these school buses are froze or whatever." When they get over there, they are among the top in performing cars over there. So, in Guinea, they use them now, because they are solid. They are not very comfortable.

LS: No, they're not. But most kids aren't on them for hours and hours.

MD: Right, right, right. So we use them right now. It's ( ) very good.

LS: So what do you do? You put a big luggage carrier on top and put everything on, your chickens and all that all that stuff?

MD: Yes, everything. Real African-style travel.

LS: Sounds like a good business ---

MD: Our goal is --- I was talking to the bus company yesterday, I mean the day before yesterday, we were to merge now into regular buses, because the way we going right now, the tar --- the paved road getting from Conakry to Kankan. So the regular buses that we have, you can't go there with that. We want to try one of those small buses to go to ( ) express new system, because those buses, they stop everywhere and pick up people all the way around. So we want to set up one that gonna leave here, get to Kindia, pick up, get to Kouroussa, pick up, and don't stop until it get to Kankan.

LS: How many hours is that?

MD: I think about eight hours.

LS: It is a long way.

MD: It's a long ride.

LS: And going up and down.

MD: Yes, yes. Especially when you get to Futa(?). Ooooo.

LS: That's what I have heard.

MD: ( ) section, but when you get to --- how do you call it? The high Guinea, it is all flat road, where I live, is really plains.

LS: So the Guinean government encourages expatriates --- I mean, its own expatriates, people who are outside, to invest and do things like that. You don't have to pay outrageous taxes or when your buses arrive they just tax you so that it is not even worth it?

MD: No, it's worth it because comparatively, especially for --- right now, even the transportation, in most of Guinean sectors right now, the government involvement ( ) is almost nonexistent in transportation.

LS: So they have to turn to private transport?

MD: Private. They just can't afford to do it.

LS: That happened in Senegal. The city-run buses, the state-run ones, they just felt apart and they were never replaced, so they had to end up really counting on public transport even for subsidized rides for civil servants and students because there simply weren't enough buses.

MD: Right, exactly.

LS: Which is good. Do there continue to be a lot of Guineans who come to the United States now?

MD: Yes, ( ).

LS: And since what, 1990 or what ---

MD: I would say since, yes, since the late eighties, they begin to discover US.

LS: And is the American embassy is Conakry are they just as nasty as they are in other African countries about giving people visas?

MD: Embassies are always nasty.

LS: But the American one seems to have gotten nastier in the last decade.

MD: Oh, yes, yes, they are, they are. Because --- matter of fact --- they have a lot of people. They got lines and lines. People who buy --- some people go down and go get on the line and sell their position and there are other people that want to go get visa. It becomes almost a commerce.

LS: Have you ever tried to have a family member come to visit you, and they just have not been given a visa?

MD: Sometime ( ) my biggest brother, who was my brother that's in Mali right now, he tried to come here. As ignorant as I was, I went ahead and prepared immigrant studies move, you know, to come here and when that happen, that was a bad thing because ---

LS: Because you had ---

MD: Because I'm here, because I was here, he has to get behind the list of all the people that want to immigrate to the US.

LS: Oh, so you make an application for him and then he gets in that line of people ---

MD: Line, because ---

LS: Are you a citizen?

MD: Yes, I am.

LS: So it's easier for you to get someone here than someone who is a permanent resident?

MD: The reverse.

LS: It's easier for a permanent resident to bring a family member here?

MD: Probably is. It is very hard for a citizen to bring a relative here.

LS: I didn't realize that.

MD: Because when the --- I think it was in 1980-something --- well, I thought that being a citizen I will do it very easily, which in other countries it would be. But that was pretty --- and they said that he couldn't get here until the year 2000. And that was five or six years.

LS: I have heard that if you have children or parents, it's easier but your siblings are not considered your direct family? It's much harder to get a sibling ---

MD: Yes. Right. Even if there's a wife or your ---

LS: A wife or your parents or a child, it's easier.

MD: A child.

[END OF SIDE 2, TAPE 1]

[START OF SIDE 1, TAPE 2]

MD: Usually, it is easier for you to get him here, than for me to get my brother here.

LS: Yeah, maybe. But he has never had a job.

MD: Mmm-hmm.

LS: And not for want of trying. And they are going to look at him as someone who is an economic refugee and he's not going to come back. He can say that he is coming to visit me, but he would really just want to disappear, you know.

MD: Mmm-hmm.

LS: So I understand that. Were Guineans brought in at all during the Sékou Touré regime as refugees?

MD: As refugees? No.

LS: I think up until 1980 they were no African refugees and he died in ---

MD: From Guinea, not many.

LS: When did he die? '85?

MD: Something around that area. I don't remember exactly.

LS: Yeah.

MD: Yeah, very few Guinean refugees.

LS: So the United States had not looked at that situation?

MD: Yeah, because actually there was no war in Guinea.

LS: Yeah, there's no war but still they were persecuted.

MD: Oh, yeah. But I didn't think, uh, somehow there is some direct relationship between Guinea and the United States for a long time.

LS: Well, Guinea had Soviet assistance, right? Wasn't that ---

MD: Yeah. You know, those days, you know, the cultural revolution here. You know what I mean? Those periods, even then, you never know that relationship. Do you know where Sékou Touré die?

LS: He died in Cincinnati, didn't he?

MD: See what I mean.

LS: Yes. I know, that was ironic, wasn't it?

MD: Yes. So, I mean ---

LS: You can have a cultural ( ) ---

MD: I think the biggest problem with Guinea and the US was France. Even still it is to some extent.

LS: Well, they had their feelings hurt, right? Because the Guineans didn't want them?

MD: Oh, yeah, right.

LS: Weren't they really insulted by that?

MD: Right, right, right.

LS: But they had the courage to kind of ---

MD: Yeah, that was quite a big blow to them.

LS: You know, it's interesting because for all the --- in Senegal --- there's somewhat of an anti-French feeling, and people now feel very rejected by the French and it's hard to get visas and a lot of people want to go to the United States, or Italy, or someplace else. But when you look at

the list of how much the French still invest in Senegal and how much aid they get from France, then you realize that France still has a really tight hold on Senegal.

MD: Absolutely.

LS: And you don't hear about it as much. You hear much more about the international NGOs, USAID, and all that stuff, but it's France. France is the primary partner in all kinds of things. And you can't get around it. So they still have that hold. Not to mention their push for Francophonie.

MD: Even doing business, I have a problem doing business because of France.

LS: Because they don't like your competition? That France wants to ---

MD: Well, because the origin --- my origin being the US, and because France really want to support French origin Guineans. So if you have American origin Guineans going to do business, most of the banks has French ties. Getting credit and all those things and push, you know, because you are American origin, what do you call them? Expatriate, you know what I mean? ( )

LS: Does the Citibank have a bank in Conakry?

MD: Not Citibank, no. I think they may have correspondents there. What's the other American bank there? I don't remember what it was. Anyway ---

LS: And then there's certain banks --- there's a Senegalese bank I know --- in fact there's these banks in West Africa, there's *Le Banque de Labite(?) de Senegal*, *Le Banque de Labite(?) du Mali*. And they have some branches in New York now, but I'm not sure in terms of credit how it works. I think its more for transferring money.

LS: How many Guineans do you think are in Philadelphia? Do you have any idea?

MD: In Philadelphia? An estimate --- [pause] Hmm.

LS: You think it's over a thousand?

MD: Hmm, no, not in Philadelphia. New York, but not in Philadelphia.

LS: Like maybe five hundred, a few hundred?

MD: I would say around two hundred or so. At most three hundred, I think. Because I have not --- Because I am not really directly into the flow.

LS: Do you tend to socialize with other Guineans?

MD: Not at this time, because I am spending so much time in Guinea right now.

LS: So you don't feel the need to socialize with Guineans?

MD: Well, also has to do with the age differences.

LS: So they're younger?

MD: They're younger Guineans.

LS: That's interesting.

MD: Those I socialize with is actually those over here during my days. Some of them are still here, in my age group.

LS: When you see young Guineans coming now, do --- can you characterize them? Are they from a particular economic class or particular region, a particular ethnic group or are they sort of across the board?

MD: Across the board.

LS: Do some of them come in on the Green Card lottery?

MD: Yes. I have seen a couple that came on Green Card lottery. Yeah, I've seen that.

LS: What about this --- is it Mamadou Bade(?) Is it the guy who is at the ---

MD: Oh, yeah, yeah, matter of fact was here yesterday.

LS: He seems to have these three very successful stores. I was in one of them. Do you have any idea how he came over? Is he someone who came in on a Green Card?

MD: No, I have no ---

LS: You have no idea?

MD: No, I have no idea.

LS: I was talking to him about the mosque, and I didn't ask him about that. But he is relatively young.

MD: Yes, yes.

LS: And he's got young kids.

MD: Guineans usually start in business very young.

LS: Yes, he's a c*ommerçant classique.*

MD: Mmm-hmm.

L: He had a very fancy store, and what was interesting is when I ---

MD: I was in there. He took me to all the stores. I didn't know he knew me a long time ago. People that know me, I don't know everybody that know me.

LS: Yeah, of course.

MD: He wanted to make sure that I see all the stores because --- and he took me to all the stores yesterday. And he was a little bit insulted when I said that I didn't remember him. ( ) But we have talk many time. Since I am not involved with the association, people call me, I talk to them on telephone, issues comes up, requests comes up, arbitration comes up, and when I talk to them they assume that I am going to remember who they are but ---

LS: Well, there are also a lot of bodies around ---

MD: Right, exactly.

LS: What language do you speak with him?

MD: Ahh, French.

LS: Okay. 'Cause I know he's a ( )[ethnic group].

MD: He speaks a little bit of Mandinka.

LS: He speaks a little bit of Mandinka?

MD: A little bit of Mandinka, yeah, so ---

LS: So I know that you said that you do some arbitration and all that. So what's your role in the Guinean community now?

MD: Well, they call me an elder only because I started the Guinea Association.

LS: And when was that?

MD: I gotta check it out. I gotta check the incorporation date. Then I have to get back to you.

LS: But like in the last decade or --- ?

MD: No, I think it was five or six years.

LS: So it is pretty recently?

MD: Mmm-hmm. Mmm-hmm.

LS: And you have these articles of incorporation? You have a non-profit status and all that?

MD: Ah yes, yes.

LS: And how did you go about forming that? You just got in touch with a lot of people you knew and asked if they wanted to have a community association?

MD: What I did is that, umm, I felt there was a need for an association.

LS: In what? What were the needs?

MD: Umm, basically, one of the biggest need that most African have is immigration issues. Because we have to have, you know, quite a bit of that.

LS: So what you mean is people who get here and then they have immigration difficulties?

MD: Difficulties.

LS: Is that because a lot of people end up being undocumented?

MD: Yes, which is --- you know, happens, and also I have seen that a lot of families are coming here. And being able to provide a way for them to contact each other. And I met a couple of Guineans in business that they did not know all the Guineans. Especially there was another Mandinka had a 7-11 not too far from here. And I'm walking to his store one day and he was talking Mende to another person here and I started talking. I started talking, he look at me, he say, "Where you from?" I say, "I am from Kankan." He was from some other part of Guinea. And those kind of things, you know. Also, from the past, when we were here we had Guinean Associations, in the '60s, in the '70s, which was very good because --- because, you know, they were able to take lawyers on our --- retainers that defend all the Guinean over here. I thought that kind of situation would be even more important to these folks out here.

LS: Would you say up until pretty recently it was mostly single men coming, so they didn't bring their families?

MD: Yes, yes.

LS: So the fact that people start coming with their families opened up a whole ---

MD: Exactly.

LS: A whole new bunch of problems?

MD: And also we are having --- also, ( ), some of us are beginning to have the second generations.

LS: Right.

MD: And creating that link between the second generation, together the second generations and also the first generations with second generations. Well, some of the motivations that I had, especially with my own kids, I wanted to be able for them to be introduced into the Guinean community.

LS: How many kids do you have?

MD: I have three.

LS: You have three?

MD: Mmm-hmm.

LS: And do they --- I think your son told me that he doesn't speak French. Is that right?

MD: Yes. Oh no, he doesn't. Well, they all took French in school and they don't even speak Mandinka. That was one of my main reason why I got involved with the N'ko to begin with.

LS: To get your kids sort of ---

MD: Yes. Something else took over but whilst(?) I got involved. But anyway, that is basically, to answer your question, was one of the reason ---

LS: What could your association do if, let's say, somebody comes to you and they came on a visitor's visa and they have overstayed and they have no documents. Given that Guineans can't ask for political asylum, because there is no problem, what can you do for them?

MD: Well, I think [pause] assist them in getting legal help.

LS: So you assist them in getting legal help?

MD: I have gone through quite a bit of assistance while I was president of Guinean Association, including --- one time, one of the young ladies that were here actually snap because of pressure of the American situations. And he was staying over with a doctor somewhere in Bucks County, and when he snapped, she took doctor's kid downtown. And when people ask him, ask her, say, well, I don't know what, somebody ask her "What are these kids?" She said, "These are my kids." You know? Which is in her understanding the way our culture is natural, for her to say "These are my kids." When she said, "That was my kid ---

LS: Were they white or something?

MD: Yeah.

LS: Okay.

MD: "These are my kid," the problem started, that she has --- how do you call it? --- kidnapping the kids. So I had to really work with the justice system to get her out and I had to talk to Assistant District Attorneys to let him, give it to, you know, give her to us, so the Association actually banded together, bought a plane ticket to send her to Guinea.

LS: So your association also, you have kind of a mutual aid ---

MD: Right. Mutual aid. ( )

LS: You have an account and so people have a funeral or ---

MD: Right, exactly. If you got problem, you know, you know. I think basically the bottom line is the mutuality, sort of mutuality of situation.

LS: I just ran into --- and I'm actually going to meet him on Monday --- I just ran into an immigration who speaks French. He was in the Peace Corps in Mali. I don't know, maybe you know who he is. His name is Daniel Anna.

MD: Daniel Anna? Ah no, I don't know him.

LS: I can give you his number and he might be a good resource if somebody needs a Francophone immigration lawyer.

MD: Absolutely, absolutely.

LS: Apparently, he does a lot of work even in other states. Probably mostly with Francophones who need someone who can speak French.

MD: Absolutely. I think that would be helpful.

LS: So remind me before I leave so that I can give you his number.

MD: I certainly will.

LS: Okay. So this association in general --- how many members --- let's say when you were president ---

MD: When I was the president, I think I would say about a hundred.

LS: That's big. Wow.

MD: It was then. I think --- what it is now --- it has, umm --- is not as active as it used to be then.

LS: That's what I have heard.

MD: Is not as active as it used to be, because, aahh, I think because his career's(?) become a little overwhelm. Most people wanted me to come back and take over again, but I am kind of a little busy right now to do that.

LS: Yes. Did you ever have any kind of ethnic conflicts in the Association that you were Manding and then thought that there should be a president from another ethnic group. Did any of that stuff ---

MD: No, really, that's one of the thing that we had. Because, what we have here --- We have a different structure in the Guinean Association. There's a regular structure, which is the

corporation status, administrative structure. There's also the Guinean structure, which is all of us are Guinea. The first conflict that we had was with the Manding Association.

LS: So there is a separate Manding association?

MD: Two, matter of fact, two. I don't remember the other name because I am in the process of bringing them here for us to start discussing the N'ko issue.

LS: So there are two separate Manding associations?

MD: Manding associations, yeah.

LS: And are they focused on one particular region or why are there two?

MD: Well, this one that's mostly has to do with Mandings who are from Liberia. Because of their predicament, their problems there.

LS: Oh, okay, okay.

MD: They started another one there. Because the Mandingo in Liberian term are not just Mandings. They include the Fulas, you know. And Manding in Liberia means French-speaking Africans.

LS: Is that right?

MD: ( ) Mandingos there, yes. The Fulas are Manding, the people from Mali are called the Mandingos. Everybody is called Mandingos. Like in some part of Eastern Africa, everyone is called Senegalese? You follow what I'm saying?

LS: Yeah. The guys from the Sahel are considered the tall skinny guys.

MD: They call all of them ---

LS: Senegalese.

MD: The Senegalese. So there is a little bit of difference, so that Manding Association is now have been broadened, people from other countries became part of it. But the basic structure, that's the way it is.

LS: I am not even sure we have information on that in this directory ---

MD: As a matter of fact, that preceded the Guinean Association. We had a little bit of problem because they were saying, "Why do we need another organization?"

LS: Theirs ---

MD: So I had to convince them but this is not an ---

LS: An ethnic ---

MD: An ethnic association. And, uh, because this is a national association. Only Guineans are admitted. If you are Mandinka, if you're not Guinean, you can't get into the association.

LS: What language do you speak during the meetings?

MD: Meetings is usually English.

LS: Really?

MD: Right. Oh no, usually is French. In my case, when I was president, I would speak --- how do you call --- both.

LS: Yeah. And do the Guineans who come here now, do they tend to already speak English or are they sort of come here and they try to learn it?

MD: Yes, sort of.

LS: What about the educational level? Because I've run into quite a few --- not men so much, but I have run ---well, I have run into some men but especially women, the ones in braiding salons and you speak to them in English. They don't understand. And you speak in French,

they don't understand. And you realize that they either speak Wolof or Bambara or something else but ---

MD: Right.

LS: They seem to be an interesting case. I don't know how much people have looked at women's issues. But I see these women who really get into these braiding salons and they never get out and they don't really learn English because they are just with other people from their same country.

MD: Mmm-hmm. Mmm-hmm.

LS: Are there a lot of Guinean women here? I know there are a couple of braiding salons here.

MD: Yeah, they few. Not that many in the US, I mean, in Philadelphia.

LS: Not that many women?

MD: Is much more than there used to be.

LS: And they are mostly married to people here? They don't come alone?

MD: There's married and singles.

LS: Some of them come alone?

MD: Yes, some of them come here as single, but most of them came here with their husband. They may have come here with their husband and divorce and decide to stay on their own. Some of those, you know, also.

LS: That's interesting.

MD: I got some sodas ---

LS: Sure. I'll take some.

MD: And I have some Coke.

LS: Does the Guinean Association ever do any kind of summer school or language classes for second-generation children?

MD: No, we haven't. We have talk about it quite a few time. Matter of fact yesterday at the mosque we were talking about starting N'ko education at the mosque.

LS: Interesting.

MD: Interesting. Matter of fact the Imam said, "Well, when you get started, I'll be the first. I be one of your first students."

LS: Is the Imam Mandingo?

MD: Yeah, he's a Manding. Oh, coming back to an issue you brought up, ethnic strife. One thing that happens, you know, Guinea Association, the Guinea Association was started with the group --- the first group, I call the Founders, which still exist and all those, like, the people from the first time, the American liberation movement, you know what I mean? So we made sort of a promise to each other that even if there is only one person from this group is left, we going to keep the association going. Kebe is one of those group, people. And in that group, there were the Fulas from other part of --- the first vice-president was --- how do you call a Fula? What do you call that in Senegal?

LS: A Pul(?).

MD: Yes, a Pul.(?)

LS: Now what you are supposed to say now is --- the politically correct way to say that is "Haupula(?)."

MD: "Haupula(?)."

LS: "Haupula(?)." "A person who speaks Pula(?)", because that way they get the Pul(?) and the Tukolor together and so then they have a bigger mass. Sometimes you'll say, "Are you a Pul?" And they'll say, *"Je suis Haupula."* You say, "Okay, okay." [both laugh]

MD: Politics come into the play?

LS: Exactly.

MD: But in Guinea it's still Pul, also. The first vice-president was that and I was the president at that time. And the, um, ( ) secretary was from the forest(?) region and, um --- the organization was mixed. And matter of fact now is going back to that again, because the vice-president right now is also a Fula.

LS: Mmm-hmm.

MD: Used to be a different --- there was no Fula ---

LS: You mean the Mandings are always the presidents and the Fulas are ---

MD: I don't know. [both laugh] We are two presidents, you know, so. We have ( ) two presidents. And I selected Kebe because of his business background.

LS: What does he do?

MD: He has a dry cleaning project or something. I am not very sure what it is, but I have to find out ---

LS: What's his first name?

MD: Mohamed.

LS: Mohamed Kebe?

MD: Kebe.

LS: Okay. Have you ever ---

MD: I have talked to her --- talked to him about you.

LS: Oh, that would be excellent. Have you been involved in any other kinds of associations here?

MD: Nnnn, nnnn --- apart from professional associations.

LS: But no other African ---

MD: African associations, no. Not directly. The one was I was in earlier still Guinea Associations.

LS: Now I am interested about this new mosque. Who do you think --- What is the make-up of the people who come to pray at this mosque? Can you tell?

MD: Actually, it is mixed because yesterday I talked to --- the Imam is from Liberia. He is a Mandinka, but from Liberia. And you know Bari(?)? He is from Guinea, from Guinea, and two other ---

LS: Bari(?) is the one who kind of --- What he told me was he's the one who got the building and made the arrangements to actually get the premises, is that right?

MD: I didn't know that until yesterday.

LS: Well, since he has got a shop right next to it, he lives next right to it, I think he ---

MD: Yeah, yeah. That's how I found out yesterday. I didn't know that he's also ---

LS: So he must really ---

MD: So he was --- there are some issues that I have to deal with, you know, in that issue also, right now.

LS: About the --- ? Yeah.

MD: Yeah. There are some issues. I think, umm, the sort of confidential, this, uh --- we'll talk about this off, off --- To answer your first question is, Bari and I are from Guinea, the Imam was from Mali, and we had some North Africans in there.

LS: Okay, so there is ---

MD: From Morocco(?).

LS: So there is North African input into this?

MD: No, not part of --- I am talking about --- you are talking about people who are praying there, not from our association.

LS: Oh, I was thinking about the people who founded it. Okay, so there are some North Africans, there are Guineans?

MD: You know, coming --- people who pray there, a lot of them are American Muslims.

LS: A lot of American Muslims. And what about ---

MD: And a lot of people from Burkina Faso that were there also, so.

LS: And what about Malians, Senegalese, all those kind of ---

MD: Ah, there were some Malian also. I didn't see no Senegalese. They may have been there, because the mosque was full, so I didn't ---

LS: So this is Friday. And how many people do you think were there on the main prayer?

MD: I was in the front row, so --- I would say --- the mosque is small, about the size of this here. You know, very small. Umm, I really can't say --- sixty, something like that.

LS: Okay, that's ---

MD: You know, I mean, as a matter of fact the Friday before we had a speaker from Saudi Arabia who was conducting the Kutba(?)

LS: But Hutba(?) is in English, is that right?

MD: Oh yes, in English.

LS: Right.

MD: And sometime in the Guinea Association we speak --- how do you call it? You know, English. 'Specially because we have Guineans that marry to Americans and when the attendance is that way, then we will speak English. And the association members that don't speak English, we have somebody who speak that language next to them to translate to them. So what we did, instead of translating to the guest, we translate to the members that are there.

LS: Are you talking about the Hutba(?) now?

MD: No, I am talking about the Guinean Association.

LS: Okay ---

MD: I answer another question that you had.

LS: Yeah, okay.

MD: The Kutba(?) is done in English, intermixed with some Arabic, you know, but ---

LS: Of course. [pause] What was I going to ask about this mosque? Oh, Mr. Bari(?) told me that there is a Koranic school and that the --- I don't know what you call him --- the teacher is Sudanese?

MD: Sudanese?

LS: Yes. Do you know about the school?

MD: No. They did mention the day the mosque was open and that they gonna have a Koranic school ( ) there. Apparently, they have started but ---

LS: Yeah, because Bari(?) has two young sons, they were five and seven, and they were already in that school. In fact, they were the ones who said, he said, "What's the teacher's name?" And he said, "I dunno." ( ) But that's ---

MD: Matter of fact, they trying to get me on the board, but I'm resisting.

LS: Yeah, you got your ( ) ---

MD: Because this is a --- no, no, basically, this a religious --- I am not intensely religious, as like Bari(?) is. Bari(?) is devout. I am on the liberal side of it.

LS: You don't have the same look as Bari(?) with the white ---

MD: Uh-huh, yeah, right, right.

LS: He was --- It was a type I hadn't seen since I left West Africa. ( ) very serious and --- So increasingly they want to get the word out to the African community that there is this mosque.

MD: I think they have done that, really. They having people to come down and pray there like on Friday. They are a little disappointed in that especially they expect some of the leaderships to be there as often as they would like.

LS: The leaders of ---

MD: The leaders of the African Muslim community.

LS: Who are these leaders?

MD: Well, we have different associations.

LS: Religious associations?

MD: I mean different associations, Muslim country associations.

LS: Oh, I see. You mean just the leaders of different country associations of countries that are really Muslim?

MD: Muslim, you know. The thing is that some of them have already been praying for years in other mosque.

LS: Yeah, they just can't get up and walk away.

MD: Can't get up and walk away and just --- used to that mosque. There's a little conflict which I do some arbitrations in that respect.

LS: What do you think in having so many of the African leaders come? Obviously, if it's an African mosque with an African Imam, I'm sure they would like to have a lot of Africans there, but are they hoping that they can unify the community a little bit? That's why they want so many Africans. Why is this important to them?

MD: Well, it is important that if you have --- like, I am going there right now. That become a reference point for them to say, "Oh, the elder is coming in. He prays on Fridays over there." That's a very good recruiting.

LS: Yes.

MD: Recruiting tools for them. If I didn't go there, that would indicate that I don't support the mosque. Do you follow what I'm saying? Some of the leaders have not been coming. I don't think that's from any kind of animosity. I don't think that's animosity. You know what I mean? And ---

LS: Well, if you live in West Philly, it sure is easier to go to the one on Walnut.

MD: There are a lot of mosque in West Philly.

LS: And there's one that a lot of Africans go to.

MD: Go to ---

LS: On 45th and ---

MD: Yes, yes.

LS --- Walnut and Chestnut, I can't remember.

MD: Yes. I've never been there but ---

LS: It's nice on the outside, but I have seen on some of the big holidays that that's where everybody goes and prays in the morning.

MD: Even for me, Ogontz is much closer to me. You don't have to go all the way to North Philly.

LS: Well, it's interesting. I was just thinking that on Radio Tam Tam I've never heard I mean, not necessarily that mosques do advertisements --- but I never hear that mosque mentioned or anything like that.

MD: Is that right?

LS: I don't listen to this program everyday, but maybe when there was a big fundraising ---

MD: I thought when it was open.

LS: Maybe when there was the opening that they announced it. But there are probably there are a lot of people who don't know about it.

MD: That's quite true.

LS: And also I'm thinking that there is quite a few --- especially some of the people from Senegal and Mali tend to probably have a lower level of education than from some other countries. Certainly East ---

[END OF SIDE 1, TAPE TWO]

[START OF SIDE 2, TAPE 2]

LS: So you are married to an American. How do you eat? Did she learn how to cook Guinean food at all?

MD: Ahh, yes.

LS: Or do you cook Guinean food?

MD: Well, unless I don't have to eat American food. [both laugh] I very seldom cook. My wife one of those very comfortable with taking care of the family and she does that very well. So consequently, you know, this one bad thing in Mandinka habit. Mandinka men don't know how to cook.

LS: They don't how to cook? So do your Guinean friends --- 'cause you can get manioc leaves, and you can get all these --- make sosofo(?) or whatever it is you guys eat. Do you eat sosofo(?)?

MD: My problem is that I am the only African in this house. Everybody else is American.

LS: Yes, exactly.

MD: [laughs] So when I get whatchacallit I just my ask wife to cook ( ). Usually I cook peanut soup or whatever.

LS: And I can tell you listen to African music. Is that something that you do a lot?

MD: Yeah, that's basically what I listen to.

LS: That's basically what you listen to. Do you the CDs here or do you buy them when you are in Guinea?

MD: When I am in Guinea, usually.

LS: You can get things that you can't get here. Since you have three children --- and a lot of people I interview aren't old enough to have children or have older children --- I am curious about how you brought them up to have a sense of where you are from. Did you try to transmit cultural values to them? How do they see themselves with you as their father?

MD: Matter of fact, I just had some discussion with my younger son ---

LS: And how old is he?

MD: He is nineteen.

LS: Is that Moussa?

MD: No, Moussa is the oldest.

LS: He's the oldest.

MD: He's the oldest.

LS: I thought he was older than nineteen.

MD: And so they have a real good identity. By talking to them, about who they are, talking to them about Mandinka history, and also besides that we also took a trip to Africa.

LS: Where did you go?

MD: We went Mali because we couldn't go to Guinea then. Because our family is actually dispersed between Guinea and Mali. We have half of the family already there. Brothers, sisters, uncles. So they were able to mingle, you know, relationship.

LS: What was your children's reaction to Mali?

MD: Ahh, they were surprised. Because when we went there, we were in Africa for almost three or four hours. They keep asking me when we were going to get to Africa.

LS: Why is that?

MD: They expected a different kind of Africa when we get there.

LS: More rural or ---

MD: Yeah, more rural, like Tarzan type of stuff.

LS: So you arrived in Bamako, is that right?

MD: Yes.

LS: And then ---

MD: We stop first in Dakar. From Dakar, we went to Abidjan. Then we flew from there to Bamako and so, umm ---

LS: "When are we going to get to Africa?" [LS laughs]

MD: Yeah, they were waiting to get to Africa.

LS: Were they young? How old were they?

MD: They were pretty young. Siku(?) was probably about six, I think. Aisha, my daughter, she's in University of Florida right now, and she was probably around ten. Moussa was around twelve or thirteen that time. So I think --- as far as where they came from, except the fact of the language, is, umm --- they very, very grounded as to where they come from. Some of the words that they said, I insisted they be said in Mandinka. They call me father. They, uh, none of them ever call me dad.

LS: What's the word for "father"?

MD: They say "umfa"(?).

LS: "Umfa"(?)?

MD: "Umfa"(?). So those kind of things, those kind of things they have. Matter of fact, I have --- Siku(?) and I are discussing and I have to let them know that, umm --- he was talking to

somebody, and somebody ask him, "Where are you from?" He says he's from Guinea. I said, "Well, you are an American, too, you know." [LS laughs] You know what I'm saying?

LS: That could get you into trouble if you just say you're from Guinea, too.

MD: Yeah, right! [MD laughs] So you're an American, too. And my wife has said, "Don't worry about that. That, he gonna pick that up anyway." So it's more important for them to get the other side. So, anyway.

LS: Does your wife like to travel to Africa?

MD: Oh, yeah. Matter of fact, the reason why we stay here this long is because of me, not her. [both laugh] 'Cause she wanted to move to Africa long time ago. Now she's in the day care, and she's helping day care providers set up their day care.

LS: That's going to be hard to translate into a job in Africa.

MD: Right. Oh, easily! She will make more money right now in Conakry there.

LS: Why? Because people are really looking to set up day cares?

MD: An American day care center in Conakry?

LS: Oh, yeah ---

MD: You have all the, all the ---

LS The expatriates ---

MD: The expatriates and all the government kids in there. Shooooh.

LS: That's true.

MD: Because being an American is --- I mean, being an American in Guinea today is like a jewel. Being a jewel.

LS: Really?

MD: Yes. They so American-oriented today. That is why the line is getting bigger and bigger.

LS: One of the things that I wanted to ask you --- because this project will go into an exhibit. And there is going to be text and there is going to be photographs and there's also going to be some material cultural --- I don't know exactly how we are going to do but all the things that surround themselves with, or they wear, to whatever. But what's something about Guinea that you would like to see communicated through an exhibit? Something really that to you is an important part of Guinea or Mandeng culture or however you are going to define what is primordial to you?

MD: [pause] Well, the first thing is, as far as I am concerned, you ask that question at wrong time. I may have a different answer for today. I would say first right now and foremost is the language. Something that has been missing. You know what I mean?

LS: Mmm-hmm. So Mandeng language and N'ko?

MD: Mmm-hmm. Because, umm --- that may be a prejudice on my part. Prejudicial on my part.

LS: No, but like I said, I think it's an excellent --- it's something --- it would be something that to a lot of people would be unexpected.

MD: Exactly.

LS: And I think that's really important for people to know that this is happening. Because a lot of stuff, you know, if they see a bubu(?) or something, people have seen people walking down the street in a bubu(?), but this whole thing of language and how people are using it I think is really important. So I agree with that.

MD: And not just the people here. Even Mandinkas. Some Mandinkas don't know what N'ko is. I have talked to this guy --- this guy here who is --- how do you call it? --- working his PhD. You know what I'm talking, I'm talking about N'ko? They've heard it, they've heard about it.

You know, like me. But they don't know much about it. When I talked to him about it, he was so happy. When I gave him the newspaper that I had in my hand, I couldn't get it away from him. So I don't care ( ) any more. So even them, they have that kind of thing.

LS: Like I said, there's an interesting possibility to link up with the school curriculum ( ) and I can even imagine --- we can talk about this later --- but having a really short unit that a teacher could do for a day where you could actually teach the children some basic parts of N'ko writing, so that they would have an idea that this is how an African language can be represented on paper. So we should talk about that later, but I think that would be really exciting for a lot of schoolchildren. And something really --- you know, that's not what they hear about Africa. Most of the time. They don't hear that --- writing is not what they're hearing about. They hear probably something about music and all that, but I think this would be very exciting. We can talk about that more later. Anything else? Any cultural values?

MD: I think, what I think is --- well, this is not just Mandinka, but I am coming from Mandinka point of view. Sometime, I'm gonna have to do --- 'cause I promise my uncle that I am going to do it --- write that book, I call it "Mandinka Democracy." It has to do with the family structure. You know what I mean? Because most researchers in Africa do not realize, especially in the Mandinka land, that there is a structural well-defined in the Mandinka which is --- uhh, you may call it, or how do you call the --- sect- sect- --- dissect --- like a ( )[French] --- you call it ---

LS: Oh, a caste?

MD: Caste system, which is different in there. Because --- in Mandinka is a little different that, because a person --- the only caste really identify, even then is not. Because, being a Griot, you have the Stockton(?) Griots. You know what I mean? *But* there's a Doumbouya Griot. There's Okayta(?) Griot.

LS: So they're attached to particular families?

MD: Yes. Families has --- I think one of the reasons why they --- you know, like we are, we are, the Doumbouya are *forgeron* not because of the caste system. Because our ancestor was the commanding general of Sundiata's army. As a gift to them, made all metal --- anything made metal --- *domee*(?)[French?] over anything made metal. So that is why when you say that a *forgeron* is yamaka(?). You know what I'm talking about? Which I read in some of the book, even from some of the ( ) writings, is completely opposite to what is happening. So Mandinka democracy was set up, you know, part of it was done by Sundiata in what we call Kukanfuwa(?) Charter. Like they say that Caesar conquered the world? It is when Sundiata also conquered the world. So he divided the world that day into different opposition. That's where all this caste system probably comes from. Do you follow what I'm saying?

LS: Yeah, yeah.

MD: So that there are different levels. Like in Doumbouya, you have my family. Okay? You have the family group. You know what I mean? And those grouping can layer and layer and layer and layer. That's why sometimes it is difficult even for some politicians going to or minister --- do you follow what I'm saying? --- to tell them to do something, to agree with it. And he can't make decision because, at some point in time, they are going to have to be responsible to one of these groups.

LS: So these are different clans within the same family?

MD: It is not like a clan.

LS: It is not a clan?

MD: It not really a clan. Because we have --- my family --- let's see, my family is part of the Doumbouya family group. And that family group is also --- let's take Mount Airy, because in our situation, same family seem to be the same area. We can be Doumbouya family group, also be part of Mt. Airy group, which will also be meeting with the people of West Philadelphia

groups. And the problem with that is that people in West Philadelphia, all of them have the same last name.

LS: Okay.

MD: So my partner here, when I tell him I got a brother who is now on the International Court of Justice, he will say, "Why?" I say because he is a Doumbouya. Because the way we intermarried for centuries, he know that if that a guy has your last name, somewhere the bloods are related. Because we were allowed to marry only one certain segment for centuries. So if he has your last name ---

LS: I see.

MD: You know that this person has a relationship with you. So when I got down, if I got in an airplane, let's say we're flying. Which happened to me once. When my father calls us to come, you know, big meeting, because people are trying to steal our land. I left here on the --- I answered a call from the United States. One day I told my wife that I have to go because I have received a call. I went back. When I got to --- I went through France. When I left there, I was sitting next to another young lady. And young lady had also answered a call.

LS: Ahhhh!

MD: And ( ) person, my nephew was studying in Russia in those days, and he had also answered a call. I was sitting there and talking to this young lady. We started talking, you know, became a little fresh, you know what I mean? But all of a sudden I ask her, I said, "Where are you going?" She said, "I am going to the city I am going to." Immediately I ask her what her last name was and she said, "I am a Doumbouya." Immediately she called me "older brother" and I call "younger sister."

LS: This redefined your relationship immediately---

MD: Exactly, immediately. [both laugh] See what I'm saying? Which is little different than the European society, where the name --- maybe one of your old names may still have that kind of structure.

LS: That is a very interesting thing to communicate and which I've heard some African that I have talked to say, about this idea that all over the word that people have feelers out and they can still get everybody back for an important thing. Even though people are kind of in diaspora, that they still have a way of calling everybody together for something that's back in a very local place.

MD: Exactly.

LS: And I think that is very interesting.

MD: Yes, sure. This the kind of structure that usually researchers don't get there, because my uncle had a lot of problem for that book that I tell you, "The Dark Child," he had a lot of problem with that. Because he said some things in there that were at that time considered to be secret, family secret.

LS: Oh, 'cause he talks about --- yeah, right.

MD: You know what I mean?

LS: Mmm-hmm.

MD: He said some things in there, like the jo(?), some of the forest issues, some of the classified forest situations, he said some things about it. I am pretty sure a European may read it now and understand it. The other Mandinka read it, would be pretty upset about it. He had one of the tribulations, those days.

LS: He is not alive anymore?

MD: No, he died in Senegal. He had a lot of conflict with Sékou Touré. That's why he was in Senegal.

LS: When did he die?

MD: He died, I think, uhh, he died before Sékou Touré. I think around the eighties. Around the eighties.

LS: How do you think that immigration has changed you? Do you have any idea of how you would be different if you'd never left Guinea?

MD: If I had never left Guinea?

LS: Yes.

MD: I would be a Guinean. [both laugh] That's a short answer, but I think it changed the relationship between other Guineans with me, even my own brothers. Even my own brothers. Because, even as an elder, which is --- how do you call it? --- a family right to be the elder, in this case, they communicated with me like a quasi-foreigner. My brother who is next to me, they seem to look at him when they request something and they know very well that he cannot approve it.

LS: Because he is not the oldest?

MD: He is not.

LS: But people sometimes think that you are out of the system?

MD: I'm out of the loop.

LS: Yeah, you are out of the loop.

MD: I think that's the biggest change that I have.

LS: Is that hard for you to accept?

MD: Not for me. I think of other people that I know. And the --- especially my friend that went to the University of Pennsylvania with me. He take it very hard. He is from ( ). Matter of fact, he's a Fula and he's taking it very hard because they more, more ethnocentric than the Mandinkas are. A little bit more.

LS: Yeah, they are.

MD: So consequently ---

LS: They are.

MD: So for me, it is not that difficult because my brother and I get along well. Because, before I left, I told him to assume this position. And he did that. That was one of the reasons why he never left Kankan.

LS: Right, because he has that responsibility.

MD: That responsibility, you know, for me ---

LS: But would he prefer to be in the United States and have you be back there with that responsibility?

MD: Well, I think in hindsight, I'm not sure whether or not he thought he got the best deal.

LS: Do you think that there is some envy on the part of people you've left behind in Guinea?

MD: Oh yeah, especially the government structure. That's where the most envy come in. Because even when you go down and sometime in discussions with the officials, they sometimes tend to push the envelope when they are talking to you.

LS: Because they feel like they're kind of trapped and they ---

MD: Mostly, they assume that you look down upon them, because you have been overseas. A very big conflict. ( ) to the executives.

LS: Have you ever felt that people want to sabotage your company there because you're from outside?

MD: Today, not really, because one of the thing make Guinea different, most --- not big industry, larger industries, ( ) big industries, not like other countries like in Senegal where you have very foreign control, in Guinea, that is not the case. Most of the stores are Guineans. Majority. You're gonna find very few Lebanese.

LS: Did Sékou Touré push out the Lebanese?

MD: Sékou Touré push out everybody out.

LS: Well, I know. But he did make the Lebanese leave?

MD: Not necessarily.

LS: He didn't. Okay.

MD: In his case, I mean, the revolution and business don't work too well.

LS: Yeah, things sounded pretty awful.

MD: And he had a lot of --- he is a Mandinka, but his relationship with Kankan --- where I am from, is the centre of the Mandinka culture, Mandinka culture in Guinea --- he'd never get along. Never get along. Because the elders usually look --- I don't care how high you are in the European government, the way you said Tubab --- see, that's another thing that people don't realize. There are actually two society in every African country.

LS: There are the black Tubabs and --- [LS laughs]

MD: No, not really. There is the European government, we look at it as the Tubabs. I may be in there, when I am sitting in that chair, I am acting like a European.

LS: Oh, I see what you are saying. So within one person, you can have ---

MD: Delineating ( ) --- I am acting like a European. I may even do something and people just ignore what I am doing, as far as the rest of the situation is concerned.

LS: It's like you have two domains.

MD: Exactly, exactly. You know, like a vehicle to do business with the foreigners. So unless you are aware of this thing --- well, you probably know by now, once you speaking the Wolof. You know the information that is said ---

LS: Is very different.

MD: --- in French is different than what is said in Wolof

LS: Yeah, I've had that issue when some people come and they were doing research in Senegal, and they go, "I don't think I need to speak Wolof because everybody here speaks French." And I knew someone who was working with the marabouts in Touba, the Mourides, and they said, "But these guys speak French, so we don't need to speak Wolof." And I thought that these researchers are going to get a completely different thing. Because especially when you are talking about religion --- because you don't talk, I mean --- French --- as somebody said to me once, a linguist, he said, "Islam in Africa and French are psychologically incompatible." In other words, people don't really talk about Islam in French. They don't use it at the mosque. That's when they pray. They don't pray in French, they pray in Arabic. When they are doing their suay(?), they do it in their own language, but you just don't do it in French. And these people are doing all this work with these Mourides, these marabouts, and they say, "Oh, but they speak French. We can get the information in French." And I'm thinking, "Yeah, but it's not the same information."

MD: Oh, yeah, yeah.

LS: It is not the same information and they're not going to figure it out.

MD: Where are you going to get it? Are you going to get it from the Mamadys? You know? And they are going to be telling you what you know already.

LS: Yeah, well --- I mean, but what are you going to say? I have one more question and that is: what is it that you miss most about Guinea?

MD: [pause] I think that family structure, because when I am there in the extended family situation, I feel safe. I feel that my childrens are safe, my wife is safe. You know what I'm saying? And overseas, I don't have that kind of --- I feel comfortable ( ). Whether I'm there or not, my kids are going to be taken care of. Not financially, even then, even financially, but basically that the extended family structure ---

LS: People care about them?

MD: Yes. That extended family, that's definitely what I miss the most.

LS: And what do you like best about the US? If somebody was going to say, in Guinea said, "I have a chance to immigrate to the US. Should I come?" what would you say?

MD: Well --- [pause]

LS: And I bet people have asked you to *help* ---

MD: Well, I try to --- I really don't encourage people to come to the US.

LS: And why is that?

MD: Because I tell them --- matter of fact, there's two kids --- I said that if you want to go the US to be educated, you can't go no better place. But if you want to go to the US to make money, stay right here.

LS: Because you think that's a myth that people have?

MD: Yes.

LS: Some people do make money, but some people don't make money.

MD: Nobody makes money.

LS: You don't think anyone makes money?

MD: No. You know what I'm saying? The only people that make money here are those come here, seasonally, purpose of making certain amount of money and once they get that money they take it back and go and invest it in Africa.

LS: That's what they should do, you think?

MD: You know what I'm talking about?

LS: Yeah.

MD: They will be okay. But person who come back here and stay here with the --- a person who has a goal, come to the United States, "I want to do this" --- definite goal --- and not like most of the people that come here, ( ) stragglers. Bad business(?). I have seen --- I have helped Africans sitting on the grate in downtown Philadelphia. Have you seen them? Have you run into that?

LS: I don't think that I have seen Africans. But they are living in the street?

MD: Street persons. I have to literally go back and get them and bring them, give them places here to stay, reconnect them back into the neighborhood, from New York or whatever.

LS: And you think that they came here and they thought that somehow they would be taken care of or that something would work out, and then they just and got kind of caught?

MD: Let's see. Well, I think what's happening is this. When I went to Africa, I was talking to one of my relatives. He came back and asked him to lend him some money. And I said, "Well, I don't have money." She look at me --- he said ---

LS: "What do you mean you don't have any money?"

MD: "What you mean you don't have any?" He said, "Oh, don't you insult --- " She literally said, "Don't you insult my intelligence. If you don't want to give it to me, say you don't want to give me. Don't tell me you don't have." So I always --- I don't care what you tell me, I'm going to ask you why. I say, "Why did you say that?" She said, "Well, the money you spend to go from the United States to here, by airplane, is more than my capital that I use, my capital here to work with. Now you come back and tell me you don't have no money. You can say you're not gonna give it to me. But don't say you don't have money. Because you insult my intelligence."

LS: So how did you respond to that?

MD: Hmm?

LS: How did you respond to her?

MD: Well, I really didn't respond to it. I really didn't respond to it. Because if I --- the response that I thought was appropriate at that point in time were not appropriate.

LS: [LS laughs] Yeah, I see. I hear you.

MD: So I respond to her by silence.

LS: I understand their point in a sense that --- in an absolute sense, you have a lot more money than them, just what you would make. But people don't understand what kind of expenses there are here and how the whole society is organized so that you don't keep all that money.

MD: Exactly.

LS: And I think the other thing that I always try to tell people is they don't understand what they would give up. You can go get a job at a 7-11 and make more money than you ever dreamed of, but by the time you pay your bills and your rent, send some money home, you have

nothing and, on top of that, you have no social life. I mean, you give up the whole social aspect of your life.

MD: Exactly.

LS: And I think that's what people don't know how to calculate. They don't know, they don't understand. Because I think a lot of people seem very socially isolated.

MD: I think that's one of the issue I wanna talk ( ). If somebody tell me, "I wanna go to US. I wanna go to school," I would help that person very, very well because could not go to a better place. Personally, comparing myself to those people that I left home, I think is they better of than I am, personally. Because when I went back, you know, some of the guys, and the guy who is prime minister of Guinea today, he and I went to the elementary school together.

LS: Is that right? What's his name?

MD: Sidime.

LS: Yep, Sidime, okay.

MD: And his brother, matter of fact, is a good friend, comes, you know --- and my other friends that went to --- that used to run around with --- it was four of us. ( ) Mamady ( ). And the other one is the president of the Bank of Mali. When I go down there, I talk to one of my old teachers, he asked me, "What have you done ( )?" These teachers, they are something. "What have you done since you been to America?" I start talking about degrees. He look at me and said, "What have you done since you have been to the United States?" Now I begin to understand what he's saying. In term of the position, what they own in Guinea, in relation to what I own in the United State --- you know what I mean? --- there's quite a bit of differences.

LS: Well, they've become big men(?) ---

MD: I think one of the difference in my case --- my case is different also, in that because, I think that the single thing that made

[END OF SIDE 2, TAPE 2]