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INTERVIEW WITH ABU AISHA

KANO, NIGERIA

FEBRUARY 14, 2019

1. On Muhammad Ali's Life: - Can't say about all the places he lived in while in Sudan, but he did study with some of bin Laden's top students. For certain, he met bin Laden's right-hand men like Sheikh Abdallah, Abu Yahya al-Libi and met with Sheikh Faris al-Odeih(?). Some of them are dead now, but they were very close with bin Laden. He learnt "Fiqhul Jihad" from them and it was there (in Sudan) that he got trained on using arms at a camp that bin Laden established and brought militants from all over. He established the camp there before moving to Afghanistan.

One other thing I forgot to mention during our earlier interview was that there was another reason for Mohammed Ali going to Sudan to study. There was an African president who was deposed at the time and he ran to Nigeria. ***(He mentioned Mauritania, but couldn't verify that. Ould Taya did stay briefly in Niger when he was deposed while attending King Fahd's funeral in Saudi Arabia. I asked if it was Siad Barre of Somalia, but he wasn't sure).*** Senior clerics and other preachers here felt his ouster was a fight against Islam. There were preaching in mosques that the youth should go and learn how to protect Islam. Several went to Sudan. One of them was Abdul Ganiyu, a Yoruba guy from Lagos who came to study at the University of Maiduguri. I have not heard anything about him for some years, but he was with Muhammad Ali in Sudan, and he sent money, a lot of money to members of his ethnic group who joined them. One of those was Baba Femi (?) who 4/5 years ago was captured and sent to the US (?) He (Abdul ganiyu) moved to Yemen.

2. What Did Muhammad Ali Say Happened in Sudan? He was naturally a very quite individual, introverted. He did train students in old and modern warfare tactics. Some of us did ask questions, but he never said I was taught this or that. Only a handful of us even knew he was in Sudan before Kanamba.
3. Was He in Afghanistan? He never said he was and none of us could say for sure he was. We did know that some of the people among us were in Afghanistan, like Mohammed Ashafa, Aramaya'u from Bauchi, Abdullahi, these were the ones we were sure of. 8 of them. From there, they went to Algeria before coming back. They all stayed with him and helped out, but he never told any of us that he was there, and not even his closest associates have ever told any of us that he was there.
4. Foreigners @ Kanamba? There were none at Kanamba, only the Kanuri, the people from Kano, hadejia etc, but there was nobody from another country. Indeed, from among the people who came from Maiduguri, there were people like Chadians who had been living and studying in Maiduguri. Take for example people like Mamman Nur, his mother was Chadian. He spent all his

- youth in Chad. People like Abu Awwal, his mother and father were all Chadians. His father was a former rebel leader who ran away to Nigeria and he became an armed robber. His son, Abu Awwal, followed on his footsteps and became a robber too, but he later took up Daawah, Abu Awwal proved to be a great warrior. After we were pushed out of Kanamba, things changed. When we captured the government house in Damaturu, we started getting people from Mali and Niger who felt that we were strong enough at the time to carry out a Jihad. These were people who had trained in Algeria and have been laying low, waiting for the right time.
5. Why the Name Taliban? At the time it was an honor on all jihadi minded people to be associated with the Taliban. The Us had launched attacks on the group. And we were dressing up like the Taliban.
 6. Kanamba Funding? I forgot to mention this during our last conversation, but after Muhammad Ali's return from Sudan, bin Laden did send him some money through other clerics. Bin Laden and his people were convinced that Muhammad Ali was the one who showed the most commitment to jihad. The money was to be used in recruiting youths and to buy arms before bin Laden could find a way of sending arms directly. The money caused divisions and infighting among the clerics. One of them took majority of the money and slipped out to Saudi Arabia and refused to come back. The money never made it to Muhammad Ali.
 7. Other Sources of Funding @ Kanamba? There were, because the security agencies were lax in realizing that many of the wealthy individuals in the area were giving money to the group. To be clear, those wealthy people never knew it would be used in any form of armed struggle. They thought it was just about preaching. Also, every Friday, all members are required to make a minimum donation of either 1 or 5 Naira, and they could give as much as they could afford. That was before we moved to Kanamba.
 8. What happened after Kanamba? Did Some Ran Away From Nigeria? Absolutely, many left Nigeria. A lot I will say. Some went to Mali, some to Algeria while some went to Mauritania. For example, there was Malam Mudassir, there was Faruk, there was Khaled al Barnawi who is now in the hands of the security agencies. When we were dispersed he moved to Algeria. There were many of them. There was Bulama, who at the time was like Muhammad Ali's deputy. He acted as Khalifa when Muhammad Ali went somewhere. But, even at that time there were strong suspicions that he was working secretly for the security agencies. In fact, everything that happened to the camp was blamed on him, He was accused of divulging all our secrets. Later in 2010, a member followed him all the way to Kano and shot him. What happened was at our last camp in Sindiya. (WHERE'S THAT AT?) It is between Maiduguri and Damboa, on the highway to Biu. After we left Gwoza and camped there, at Sindiya, that's where Muhammad Ali was killed. Some of us were not inside the compound given to us there at the time, but Bulama and many others including Mudassir, Faruk, Malam Rabi'u who was from Kano, Adam who was from Jos, a lot of them who escaped were of the opinion that Bulama should have been inside the when the viewing center given to us

- as shelter was attacked, but he wasn't. I was much younger at the time and was not known as an associate of the group outside of it, me and others like me were able to escape and blend in with society until things cool down. Those who were able to escape and leave the country, Bulama was the one responsible for their escape, he devised means of communications for them to bypass security agencies. When they were coming back to the country, he was the only one who knew they were coming back. He was the only one they told about what kind of money and arms they were coming with. He met them in Kano, took them to a place to stay where they showed him all the arms they brought. They said some should be taken to Bauchi, some to Maiduguri, while the rest should be left in Kano. He insisted that all the returnees should head to Maiduguri so they could see their brothers and say hello to them, despite demands that they split and go separately to their destinations. So, all the returnees and the arms were taken to the bus station where they boarded a bus, but all of a sudden. They found themselves surrounded by security forces, and Bulama was nowhere to be found. That's when they became convinced that Bulama was working for the security agencies and decided to take him down, especially Mudassir who was from Kano and knew Bulama in and out. Before they were able to kill him in 2010 or 2011, they had attacked him about 4 times. In one attack, he was shot in the neck, but survived. In another, he was tricked into riding on a motorcycle with a would-be assassin, Mudassir, who took him outside of Kano, shot him and shoved him into a ditch. But some passersby who took him to a hospital thinking he was attacked by armed robbers saved him. He went into hiding after Mudassir incidence, but they were able to kill him later.
9. Risala Article On AQAP Funding? They did send money, even after Muhammad Ali's death, during Muhammad Yusuf and during Shekau. I am sure they are still helping with money, even though I don't have a contact with them now to know what's happening. But the way I know the group, the way I know how they have been coordinating things, I am convinced that they are still sending money every chance they get. Every time anyone goes there for training, he always comes back with not less than 10 million Naira when converted into Nigerian currency. (That's more than \$50 thousand at the exchange rate prior to 2016.) I know many of the "jihadists" who returned with money and, instead of going back to the group, decided to set up their own businesses with the money. I know somebody who opened a car dealership. They were not actually into the creed. I know a time when Muhammad Yusuf refused money from al-Qaeda when they offered it, but with the condition that he follow their own jihadi model. He refused, saying he would use the model he understood from the Quran and Sunnah for his own jihad.
 10. Abul Barra al-Dourawi? Definitely, he had a trusted teacher called Abul Barra, to whom he sought help and knowledge whenever he came across something that he couldn't interpret. He trusted Abul Barra so much. But, when he was given the money to give to Muhammad Ali, he became tempted and ran away with it. I am not sure of his origin, but he was a constant figure at the camp.

He was well known in the camp, but I didn't know where he was from and I never asked.

11. Mullah/Abu Umar? As I told you earlier, he was one of the bravest warriors the group had. He knew how to fight, he never turned his back. He gave the security agencies a very hard time. In fact, Abu Umar sometime spent a whole month locked up in his room devising how to approach a particular battle. But he wasn't a religious scholar, because he hadn't read much. What he lacked in education, he made up in bravery because even during the first attack on Kanamba, when there were no arms, he bravely approached security forces with his stick, and they were able to snatch some guns away from them. It was Abu Umar and another guy, whose name I forgot but he was like a godson to governor Bukar Abba Ibrahim of Yobe, who led the way into the government house in Damaturu after Kanamba. I don't know where Abu Umar was from, but his physical features look like a Chadian.
12. Muhammad Yusuf a secret leader while Muhammad Ali was alive? It was a question of differences between the two on when and how to start a jihad. Muhammad Ali was more educated than Muhammad Yusuf, but Yusuf was wiser and more organized. Most of the youth in the group aligned with Yusuf. If he was the one who had called for a jihad at the time Ali did, it would have happened because the youth would follow him. Also, Yusuf was more known among the clerics and the wealthy people of Maiduguri, they regard him the face of the group. So, because of Yusuf's perceived advantage, Ali allowed him to take the lead in almost everything, only asking that he sought his (Ali's) permission before taking any important step. Ali had a very close confidant, Malam Musa, who was one of my best friends in the camp. We slept in the same room. So, whenever something big happened, he would tell me, if there are people around, we would go into the bush, climb a tree or a rock and talk.
13. Al Muntada al Islami? I don't remember anybody with that name in the camp, maybe I may have known him with another name.
14. Did Sheikh Jaafar Had Any Connection To The Camp? He didn't have any direct connection. The thing is most of the people there were his students, they listened to him, they accepted his Fatwas. And about the African head of state who was deposed, the one I told you earlier, scholars like Sheikh Jaafar (he was the only one I can mention now because the others are alive); played a very instrumental role in convincing the youth that it was time to stand and fight Jihad, saying that what was happening was a plot to undermine Islam. He planted the seed of Jihad in their minds, but later on came out against it. That's the cause of friction between them and Jaafar. After Kanamba, there were some members who were arrested and taken to Damaturu, where they said he was their teacher. But when the security agencies brought him, he disowned them saying he didn't know any of them. They were very mad, and decided that he was a Murtadi, vowing to kill him. 50:55
15. Did Datti, Kafanchan, Izala etc have any role or otherwise in establishing Kanamba? It was both I'd say because we were all living in our own houses, before they started telling us that this or that must be done to protect Islam. They spurred us into action. Then when we took up what they were telling

us, when they realized we were serious, they suddenly got cold feet, saying its not the right time, we would just cause harm to the ummah. But we were emboldened. They later switched to the government side urging it to crush us. I remember specifically Sheikh Jaafar was on radio saying that the government should take action against us.

16. Did Mohammed Nazifi Inuwa sent students to Mauritania with money from Bello Damagum? I think you may be talking about Dr. Nazifi from Jos? The one from al-Fayad academy? We were in prison at the same time, I was released a year before him. I am not aware if he was involved at all in our struggle. As I told you earlier, Damagum definitely helped during Muhammad Yusuf's time, but it was out of ignorance of what our movement was all about. He gave Yusuf a bus and also his sons to study under Yusuf, but when he realized where we were headed, he withdrew his sons and took away his bus. He wasn't the only one, there were many like him. I will give you an example of an Assistant Commissioner of Police who regularly came into my cell in prison or had me taken to his office. He never told me his name, but he was Kanuri. He was trying to comfort me, by the said that they had helped our struggle, that they had sponsored some of us to go for training outside Nigeria, but that the time is not yet ripe.
17. More About Khaled al-Barnawi? He's from Maiduguri, I know his mother and I know their family house. I don't know about his father though. He was young at the time. It was Muhammad Yusuf who sent him outside of Nigeria for training. Some went out through Bulama, some through Abdul Ganiyu and many others. But it was Yusuf who sent him to Algeria and Mauritania, although he spent most of his time outside of Nigeria in Mali. He specialize in kidnapping Europeans and had the ability to hide a person for years until he gets what he wants, or otherwise kill the kidnapped person. He knows so much about weapon handling. If you take out Muhammad Ali, Khaled al barnawi was the most well-known of our folks among the Algerians and al Qaeda. He was so well known there that he became the personal driver of the overall Amir there, the one-eyed guy killed recently. **Belmokhtar?** Yes, Belmokhtar. He drove him for 5-7 years to attacks and wherever he was going. Infact, after the death of Muhammad Yusuf, the al Qaeda group in Algeria sent us money in US Dollars worth about 50 million naira at the then exchange rate, through Khaled al Barnawi. After the group escaped from a French hostage-taking event in Algeria, they decided to send the weapons they went there with to us in Nigeria through him.
18. Abu Muhammad? He was from Bauchi. He wasn't at Kanamba, but most of his friends he fought alongside with were there. He was a little kid at the time of Kanamba. I knew him before he joined our group because I had a friend who married his sister, we used to go to their house all the time before the wedding. He was very bright and got a good foundation of education at home. He was heavily built. It was Muhammad Yusuf who made him his top commander, putting every armed man in the group under him (Abu Muhammad). He was still the commander about 1 and a half to two years into Shekau's tenure as leader of the group. It was the money that Khaled al

- Barnawi brought and Shekau's antics that split them and the group. I think, but I am not absolutely sure, that there was a time I overheard Abu Muhammad telling Yassir that he was related to Kafanchan either through his mother or through the father, but I never asked him about that myself. (ABU AISHA SAID HE COULD FIND OUT IF THERE'S ANY RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TWO BECAUSE HE SPEAKS, AND IS KNOWN, TO ABU MUHAMMAD'S PARENTS WHO ARE STILL ALIVE). After the split, Abu Muhammad went to Algeria and it was the Algerians who gave his new group the name Ansaru which he became the leader of. The Algerians started funneling money and logistics to Abu Muhammad's new group. The fighters who went there to train were told to return to Abu Muhammad and not Shekau when they finished. In fact, if Abu Muhammad had lived longer, he would have taken out Shekau, the animosity was that great, especially when Shekau started targeting civilians. The others prevailed upon him not to do so. I remembered a Shura council we had to discuss 11 issues that came up one time, and it took us the whole night. It was then that we realized Shekau had changed. It was that night that Shekau told us that whoever disagreed with him, his blood would be shed, starting with us. Abu Muhammad then asked him what if he decided to go to Somalia or Algeria to fight with fellow Jihadists there? Shekau told him that he would fight him (Abu Muhammad) because he had disobeyed leadership. Abu Muhammad told us (later?) that we either remove this guy or he would kill all of us and if he did he'd be free to kill anybody. And that's what happened. Shekau had killed over 40 commanders. Even people who moved to Shekau's side would last only a day because he would have them killed the next day or even that day, saying they were spies or they would have been with him from the beginning.
19. Was that what brought about the new Ansaru faction? Definitely. There were 3 or 4 reasons that brought Ansaru. Firstly, Shekau said all Nigerians were unbelievers, he and those under him were the only true Muslims, so he would wage war on everybody until they follow him. Secondly, Shekau believed that it is okay to strap a woman or a child with a bomb to kill unbelievers, but those who later formed Ansaru believed it was wrong, countering that the main purpose of Jihad was to save "women and children" from oppression, and making them to commit suicide runs contrary to that. Thirdly, in Shekau's eyes, there's no excuse for anybody to commit anything contrary to the teachings of Islam, even by mistake or unwittingly. If you commit anything, even mistakenly, you'd have to pay the price, even if it is a death sentence. Fourthly, it dawned on all of us that Shekau has this lust for beautiful women. Commanders with beautiful wives, when they get caught in battle, were left to be killed, even when there were opportunities to rescue or to pay for their release, so that when they get killed, he would marry their wives. Sometimes he even sends rescue teams with instructions to kill the commanders during the rescue mission.
20. What can you say about Mohammed Awwal Ibrahim Gombe and/or Mohammed Awwal Nuhu, are they one and same? I know and have lived

with Mohammed Awwal Gombe. He was young, energetic and very intelligent. In fact, when Muhammad Yusuf was alive, Mohammed Awwal Gombe was the only one who could sit for him where the Malam was teaching Sahihul Bukhari. He was the first student of Yusuf who could recite the whole book of Bukhari from memory. Remember, even Yusuf would open the book to read, but Awwal would recite it from memory. He was that gifted. He studied Quran with Malam Isa Ali Pantami. When Yusuf was killed (in 2009), Mohammed Awwal was the most qualified to become leader, but ethnicity crept in and the Kanuri said since the struggle began with them, only a Kanuri can become the leader, that's why they chose Shekau. And that's why Abu Muhammad used to tell them that they were not interested in establishing an Islamic, but a Kanuri caliphate. I know Mohammed Awwal Gombe very well, I have travelled and studied together with him. At first, he wasn't even in support of the struggle until after what happened in Bauchi and Maiduguri in 2009, when Yusuf was killed. Even after that, he wasn't in support of either the Shekau or Abu Muhammad factions, saying that they were all corrupted. The main reason why he broke away and said he would have no hand in the struggle was when it was opined that banks could be broken into and the money used for struggle. He was the only one who kicked against it, saying it was wrong to take people's money and use it for jihad. Later when Abu Muhammad broke away from JASLID and became the leader of Ansaru, he brought back Mohammed Awwal Gombe and many of the others who broke away into his fold. Shekau was the one who sent some of his boys to go and kill Mohammed Awwal. One of my boys (MAY BE A REAL SON OF ABU AISHA?) was telling me how it was done because at the time he was studying under Mohammed Awwal Gombe. He told me a lot about how Awwal was targeted and killed and other things I didn't even know.

21. Mamman Nur? Like I said earlier, he's related to Chad. His uncles and family were all Chadians. He was also an accomplished learner, who had learned the Quran well. He was one of Yusuf's right hand men and was second only after Shekau in deputizing for Yusuf during his absence. He was also one of those theorized to become leaders after the death of Yusuf, but it was understood that he had some weaknesses, one of which was fear. He wasn't brave. 3 days before the 2009 crisis, Mamman Nur, Awwal Mubi, Abdullahi Banki and many others fled, and they were not seen until after a year. He stayed in Chad during that time with his students. Until when Shekau announced his caliphate, that's when he came back into the struggle with his hardened students from Chad. They know how to handle arms very easily. His disagreements with Shekau had its roots way back when then people from Kanamba joined the struggle and started going against scholars like Jaafar, Nazifi and Yahaya and many other big scholars of Izala. When Jaafar was killed, Yusuf was in prison in Abuja at the time and Shekau was the Amir deputizing for him at the time. So, we had a Shura meeting on whether to send a condolence delegation which Shekau opposed, but Mamman Nur insisted that we must go. It degenerated into a physical altercation, fisticuffs,

- between Shekau and Mamman Nur, right from the living room of Malam Yusuf all the way into the compound. They tore their clothes in the process. It took us a lot of effort and time to separate the two. Mamman Nur vowed to go, which we did. This incident points to a lot about their relationship. They started boycotting each other's Tafsir, until Yusuf was released whereby he tried and reconciled them. When Mamman Nur returned to the fold after the caliphate, some of Shekau's people started becoming more and more aligned with Mamman Nur while Nur's students all stayed with him. This started bringing out the old animosity between the two as Mamman Nur's popularity grew. Especially when Nur started pointing out that there are things that shouldn't be done, like the quickness in killing people for minor things, which he said was a mistake. Shekau decided to kill Mamman Nur and intimidated that to some of his top lieutenants. Mamman Nur heard about it. He decided to leave Shekau and the Gwoza area and move to the Lake Chad area with his followers. They took either one or two vehicles and some arms and went and set up their own camp, saying they would wait for Shekau there if he dared attack them.
22. Abu Fatima and Man Chari? I heard the audio of Abu Fatima when they broke away from Shekau with Mamman Nur, and tried to remember who it was, but couldn't, so I don't know or remember him. There were two Man Charis I knew of. There was one who was killed in the first attack against us, then there was another one who was slightly built like Mamman Nur, who was captured by security forces. I don't know of any other Man Chari.
23. Have you ever heard of Adam Kambar? Did you mean Abubakar Kambar? Abubakar Kambar was among those who went to Algeria for training later on and was among those who were given money on their return to go and reconcile Abu Muhammad with Shekau. Upon his return with the money, he decided to just pull his own boys and they started robbing people and stealing cars. They would go and rob stores saying they needed the money to perform "God's work" and so on and so on. He became like a mob figure, when he needed something stolen or robbed, he would call one of the boys and give him a gun to go and do it. Remember there was much hunger and nothing to do at the time. That's what I know about this Abubakar Kambar.
24. Mohammed Ashafa? There were two of them, but I forgot the other one. He had been to Algeria, and also went all the way to Afghanistan and participated in the struggle there. I heard he had been released because he was rearrested while I was in prison. He was with the struggle from the very beginning, but he was ill-fortuned to have suffered so much in the hands of security agencies that he wasn't even considered as part of the struggle.
25. Shekau at Kanamba? No he wasn't
26. How did he rise to the top? He was learned even before he joined the group. He was a GARDI (people like Almajiris who move from village to village learning the Quran). And he could argue over issues. When Yusuf realized Shekau was a fast learner and could easily commit a book they read together to memory, he drew him close to him. Secondly, at that particular time, Shekau was a very trustworthy person. If you tell somebody who knew

Shekau then about what Shekau is doing now, they would never believe you. Muhammad Yusuf went to the extent of saying at the time that if he could get 40 pious and trustworthy individuals like Shekau, there would be nothing to stop him from waging jihad in Nigeria. He compared Shekau's qualities to the 10 qualities of righteous Khilafa. He added him to the Shura council. As time goes on, he would be asked to deputize for Yusuf when he goes away. That was in matters related to Daawah. When it comes to actual struggle and arms related issues, Shekau didn't have a clue, it was always Abu Muhammad and others like Abu Umar, myself, Khaled al Barnawi and Mudassir.

27. ABU AISHA? I think it was 1994. I studied Islamic history and wars in Islam. I was more inclined to listen to a scholar preaching about Jihad at that time. A friend of mine gave me some cassette recordings of Muhammad Ali's preaching and I was immediately captivated by it, feeling like I did now want to listen to anybody in the world but him. My friend told me he would be going home to Biu and I decided to follow him, from there we went to Maiduguri and we were lucky Sheikh Ali was going to preach that day. I introduced myself and told him I came all the way to Maiduguri after hearing his recording. He was happy and asked me to stay with him. After two days I told him I'd go back, he gave me some money, paid for my transportation and promised that every time he did new recordings he would send them to me. I gave him my address and that's what happened. They used to bring it all the way to my shop. That's how I met and became close to Muhammad Yusuf too. He used to confide in me, and whatever he said, he would never hear it from another person. He trusted me so much. Sometimes he would tell me something and then adds "its not confidential, you can discuss it with anybody." That's because he understood I always keep my mouth shut.
28. Were You At Kanamba from the beginning? No, I followed later. I was there a short time before the camp was attacked and dispersed. It was easy at the time for me to hide in plain sight because not many can associate me with the group. We came out with many and I separated them into groups so that people can go about their business without been harassed, until we could regroup. When Muhammad Yusuf assumed leadership, he specifically asked that those of us who were at Kanamba not come close to him so as not to attract undue attention to him. He didn't want the security agencies and people like Bello Damagum to associate him with Muhammad Ali's rebellion at the time. I remember whenever he heard so and so from Kanamba was in town, he would visit him at night and ask that he never attend his school, mosque or sermon because of this or that. When things came to a head, he was the one who called upon all Kanamba veterans to show up. But for people like me, who were not known by the security agencies at the time, we were able to be with Yusuf all the time without a red flag. END