

**GLOBAL FEMINISMS  
COMPARATIVE CASE STUDIES OF  
WOMEN'S ACTIVISM AND SCHOLARSHIP**

**SITE: NIGERIA**

**Transcript of Malama Binta  
Abdulkarim  
Interviewer: Elisha Renne**

**Location: Zaria, Nigeria  
Date: 2nd of February, 2020**

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**Malama Binta Abdulkarim** was born on February 10, 1956 in Anchau, a town east of Zaria, in Kaduna State, northern Nigeria. She is the Coordinator of Gender Studies, at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, and is also Director of Girl Child Education there. She received her degree in Geography from Ahmadu Bello University and along with her leadership role in Gender Studies at ABU which began in 2003, she teaches courses in the Department of Geography and in the Faculty of Science Education. Her special interest in the education and well-being of women at ABU has led to her participation in ASUU (the Academic Staff Union of Universities) as financial secretary, in the National Association of University Women (Nigeria), and in the federal Anti-Corruption Unit, as the university representative who oversees sexual harassment cases at Ahmadu Bello University. She is also an active participant in the World Association of Victimology and has attended association meetings in Nairobi, Amsterdam, and Nigeria, where she contributed to discussions of the victims of weather extremes and the after-effects of war.

**Elisha P. Renne** is Professor Emerita in the Departments of Anthropology and of Afroamerican and African Studies, University of Michigan-Ann Arbor. She has conducted ethnographic research in Nigeria, Ghana, and the US. Her interests include African ethnology and infectious disease; gender and reproductive health; and religion and the anthropology of textiles. She is the author of *Cloth That Does Not Die* (1995); *Population and Progress in a Yoruba Town* (2003); *The Politics of Polio in Northern Nigeria* (2010); and *Veils, Turbans, and Islamic Reform in Northern Nigeria* (2018). She has also edited the volume, *Veiling in Africa* (2013), has co-edited the volume, *Textile Ascendancies: Aesthetics, Production, and Trade in Northern Nigeria* (2020) and has published in the journals *Africa*, *American Anthropologist*, *CSSH*, *Islamic Africa*, *JRAI*, *RES*, and *Textile History*. Her recent study, *Death and the Textile Industry in Nigeria, of the consequences of textile mill closures in Kaduna, Northern Nigeria*, included interviews with 105 widows and will be published in November 2020.

**Elisha Renne: So, this is interview number five for the Global Feminisms Project. Today is the second of February, 2020. And we're about to interview Professor Binta Abdulkarim. So, the first question I would like to ask is how would you like me to address you?**

Malama Binta Abdulkarim: Okay. Just call me Malama. And 'malama'<sup>1</sup> is a general word for teacher.

**ER: In Hausa<sup>2</sup>?**

MBA: Yes.

**ER: That's perfect, that's great. The light is very good. So, we can begin now. First of all, I would like you to tell me a bit about your background. Where were you born, and what is the date of your birth?**

MBA: I was born in Anchau. Anchau is a town in Kubau Local Government Area<sup>3</sup>. It used to be located in the greater Ikara Local Government Area<sup>4</sup> before it was split to Kubau Local Government. In the late fifties, so I'm a baby boomer. I was born in 1956.

**ER: What was the exact date?**

MBA: Tenth of February, 1956.

**ER: Anchau? You know we know Anchau. When I first came to Zaria<sup>5</sup>, I was staying in the city. One of the families in the house where I was staying, their family was from Anchau.**

MBA: Was it the Millers? Or Abdul?

**ER: I don't remember Aisha's last name... We went to Anchau.**

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<sup>1</sup> *Malama* refers to a female teacher, scholar, or educator ("educator." English to Hausa Meaning. <https://hausa.english-dictionary.help/?q=educator>. Accessed September 20, 2020.)

<sup>2</sup> Hausa is an Afroasian language spoken by the largest sub-Saharan ethnic group in Africa, the Hausa people. ("Hausa language." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hausa\\_language](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hausa_language). Accessed September 9, 2020.)

<sup>3</sup> Anchau is a town in Kaduna state in northern Nigeria that serves as the headquarters of Kubau Local Government Area. ("Kubau." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kubau>. Accessed October 13, 2020.)

<sup>4</sup> Ikara is a town and the headquarters of Ikara Local Government, located in northern Nigeria in Kaduna State. ("Ikara." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ikara>. Accessed September 9, 2020.)

<sup>5</sup> Zaria is a large city of northern Nigeria, located in Kaduna State. ("Zaria." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zaria>. Accessed September 9, 2020.)

MBA: It could be our family members, because we're spread everywhere. We have relatives in Zaria City, Wusasa<sup>6</sup>, Kano<sup>7</sup>. You know the first vice chancellor<sup>8</sup> is from our family?

**ER: Of ABU?**

MBA: Yes. Professor Ishaya Audu<sup>9</sup>. So, it may be the Aisha I know.

**ER: We went there. I think her children are still living there. The husband was from Anchau and two of the daughters were staying... Anyway, that was a long time ago. That was '95/96.**

MBA: 95? I should know her. Because we know each other. We know ourselves.

**ER: It's extended families.**

MBA: Yes, it is. But it could be Aisha from... Was she bright complexioned?

**ER: She wasn't really educated, so I don't know...**

MBA: No problem.

**ER: So, you're from Anchau. Did you go to primary school in Anchau? What was your background like?**

MBA: Yes, I did. But you see, I had a very interesting childhood. When I was growing up, as far as I can remember, when I was just five years old, my dad taught me how to read and write but I wasn't going to school. At that time, kids had to be seven years before we get into primary school. But because the family is made up of diverse people from different parts of Nigeria and it was the epicenter of the colonial legacy, I grew up with people coming in and out. So, it was more like my first school. Because I could relate with the white people, other Africans, other Nigerians, as well as my family members. So that was my first school. But

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<sup>6</sup> Wusasa is located slightly outside of Zaria city in northern Nigeria in Kaduna State. ("Wusasa." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wusasa>. Accessed September 10, 2020.)

<sup>7</sup> Kano is the second largest city in Nigeria, located in Northwest, and is the capital of Kano State. (Kano." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kano>. Accessed September 10, 2020.)

<sup>8</sup> The director or head executive of a university. ("Chancellor (Education)." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chancellor\\_\(education\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chancellor_(education)). Accessed September 10, 2020.)

<sup>9</sup> Ishaya Sha'aibu Audu (1927 – 2005), served as the Minister of External Affairs of Nigeria (1979 – 1983). He was a well-known politician of the National Party of Nigeria, a doctor at the University of Ibadan (1951), and the first indigenous Vice Chancellor of the Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Zaria (1966-1975). ("Admin. *AUDU, Prof Ishaya Sha'aibu*. 14 Feb. 2019." Biographical Legacy and Research Foundation Nigeria. [blerf.org/index.php/biography/audu-prof-ishaya-shaaibu/](http://blerf.org/index.php/biography/audu-prof-ishaya-shaaibu/). Accessed September 10, 2020.)

really, I didn't attend primary school in Anchau. I was in Kaduna<sup>10</sup>. Kaduna Baptist School<sup>11</sup>. And that was in 1965.

**ER: And then you continued your secondary schooling in Kaduna?**

MBA: No. I got admitted to Soba<sup>12</sup>; Government Girls Secondary School in Soba<sup>13</sup>. I was the first student to step my foot in the school. Because at that time... even now, Anchau is very close to Soba because after I completed my primary school in Anchau, we moved to Soba. I moved back because I was raised by an aunty of mine. You know, as of that time, kids are not being raised by their immediate parents. There is this issue of kunya<sup>14</sup>, the modesty. I didn't even know who my mother was, nor my dad, because my aunty took over, with her husband, as my own parents. So, I didn't know until I went back home because the difference in life in the city and the village was so remarkably different. I was a tomboy, virtually, in the town, but when I went to Anchau, I had to mellow down and learn all over again. And you know, as God would have it, I was hoping to be somewhere in Kaduna for my secondary school, then I got admitted to read at the GGSS<sup>15</sup>, Soba. So that's how I became the first student there. Because it was so close. I left home at nine, and some minutes after ten, there I was. That was it.

**ER: Well, so after you finished your secondary school, then how did you proceed from there?**

MBA: From Soba, I went straight to what was then called the Nigerian College of Arts, Science and Technology<sup>16</sup>. You know, things were a bit different because you cannot just transit from secondary school to university. We had the A-Levels then. The A-Levels schools then, you

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<sup>10</sup> Kaduna is the capital of Kaduna State located in north-western Nigeria. ("Kaduna." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kaduna>. Accessed September 10, 2020.)

<sup>11</sup> Kaduna Baptist School was a primary school, started in 1952. ("Nigerian Baptist Convention." Nigerian Baptist. <https://www.nigerianbaptist.org/about-us/highlights-on-history/>. Accessed September 26, 2020.)

<sup>12</sup> Soba is one of Nigeria's 774 local government areas, located in Kaduna State, Nigeria. ("Soba, Kaduna." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soba\\_Kaduna](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soba_Kaduna). Accessed September 11, 2020.)

<sup>13</sup> Government Girls Secondary School is a public secondary school for girls in Soba, in Kaduna State founded in 1969. ("Old Government Girls Secondary School Soba." Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1417619725122249/>. Accessed September 26, 2020.)

<sup>14</sup> *Kunya* refers to shame and disgrace ("kunya." Wikipedia. <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/kunya>. Accessed September 26, 2020.)

<sup>15</sup> GGSS refers to Government Girls Secondary School, Soba (1969 – Present)

<sup>16</sup> The Nigerian College of Arts, Science and Technology at Samaru, just outside Zaria, was established by the Nigerian Government in 1958. The University of Northern Nigeria absorbed the Nigerian College of Arts, Science and Technology in 1961. ("Ahmadu Bello University." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ahmadu\\_Bello\\_University](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ahmadu_Bello_University). Accessed September 12, 2020.)

either do the London GCE A-Level<sup>17</sup> or you write IJMB<sup>18</sup>. IJMB means Interim Joint Matriculation Board Exams. It was set by the then Northern Nigerian government, being supervised by the Ahmadu Bello University<sup>19</sup>. So most of us that had just completed secondary school at the time had automatically got to be there. At that time, cast was born. We used to call it \_\_. There were three. One in the north-east, another in Kano, and then, that of Zaria. So, it was just a transition. A very easy transition. I spent just about six days from the last time I sat my WAEC<sup>20</sup> time, to the time I was admitted to read my A-Levels because we had that privilege of not having to wait for your WAEC to come before we got there. Because we were admitted on the assumption that we would make it. And we did! In 1974. I was there up till 1976. When I got admitted into the university to read Geography. And I've been a geographer all the while.

**ER: Okay. I remember seeing that in some of your background information. The geography aspect of it.**

MBA: Yes, I am.

**ER: I'm just curious; how does geography... Does it fit in with your interest in gender studies?**

MBA: Yes, it did. Incidentally, my coming to gender studies, I can say is coincidental. Probably, what I can call 'system analogy' because the setup of the university was that once someone picks you up as someone who could do something, meaning either administration, thinks you can do something, irrespective of your background, you've got to be there. So, even when the vice chancellor sought my advice, if I could be in the gender unit, or head the gender unit, I said, "Okay, look. This will be my biggest crusade because it is more like writing an exam all over." Because all the while, I've not known anything... I'd heard of the word 'gender,' I'd been in feminist movements, I'm an activist. But gender? Woah. You mean there's gender? What is gender? I said, let me try. So, that's why I transitioned from being a geographer to being a gender studies fellow. But I'm still loyal to my geography, because

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<sup>17</sup> The General Certificate of Education Advanced Level (GCE A Level), introduced in 1951, is a qualification for leaving secondary school, further education colleges, and/or sixth form college in the United Kingdom. ("A Guide to the GCE A Level. 16 Apr. 2019." World Education News and Reviews. [wenr.wes.org/2014/02/a-guide-to-the-gce-a-level](http://wenr.wes.org/2014/02/a-guide-to-the-gce-a-level). Accessed September 12, 2020.)

<sup>18</sup> The Interim Joint Matriculation Board (IJMB) is a nine-month Advanced Level program moderated by Ahmadu Bello University that guarantees admission into 200 level in various tertiary institutions in Nigeria. ("WHAT IS IJMB." IJMBe. [www.ijmbe.org/](http://www.ijmbe.org/). Accessed September 12, 2020.)

<sup>19</sup> Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) is public research university founded by the federal government on October 4, 1962, and located in Zaria, Kaduna State. ("History of Ahmadu Bello University." Ahmadu Bello University. [www.abu.edu.ng/history/](http://www.abu.edu.ng/history/). Accessed September 13, 2020.)

<sup>20</sup> The West African Examinations Council (WAEC) is an examining board, established in 1952, that provides educational assessment in English-speaking West African countries. ("Council, The West African Examinations." The West African Examinations Council. [www.waecnigeria.org/AboutUs/AboutWAEC.aspx](http://www.waecnigeria.org/AboutUs/AboutWAEC.aspx). Accessed September 14, 2020.)

that's what made me what I am today. But the interesting question you asked about whether my geography has helped in the study of gender, I would say yes. Because geography deals with location, with people, interconnectivity, and outcomes. The gender aspect of it is what I am dealing with, that is the outcome, because the interaction between locations and people's movements--migration, the interface between the environment and what people are makes geography central.

**ER: You're right.**

MBA: So, in that case, I am not losing anything either way. And more to say, the gender aspect of it has even made me a better geographer. It does. Because I could see the interlink between the dichotomy of human dynamics in terms of population, the dichotomy and also the adaptations of women and men having to adapt into an environment, which may be either benign or too critical for their survival. So, you can see. We can judge from the way somebody behaves if the temperature changes, and someone behaves in a bizarre way, we could know as geographers. We don't have to be psychologists to understand human behavior. Because we already know what is called Seasonal Affective Syndrome<sup>21</sup>. You know a person is affected by seasons. We also have to understand. I also understand that you don't have to stay in a place that you cannot survive, you can always move. So, the issue of migration or population transition is nothing new. If I find females moving from Sabon Gari<sup>22</sup>, maybe, to my village, I won't be surprised because maybe they found acacia trees<sup>23</sup> or baobab trees<sup>24</sup> which may be part of their survival, meaning it could be a source of their livelihood, so why don't they move from Sabon Gari to my village? And then, it's of course, it's an issue of survival within an environment you can't control at one end, and survival within an environment you could wish to control at a certain level. So, that's the beauty of the geography. The historic aspect of it... there are two, because we have to go into archival records to see how cities evolve, how people came to be what they are. You know, I cannot talk much about history because I'm not a historian.

**ER: But you can talk about geography and the relationship with gender and women's activities. I think that's a really good observation. When you first came to ABU to begin**

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<sup>21</sup> Seasonal Affective Syndrome (SAD) is depression that changes with the seasons and is typically more prominent in the winter months. ("Seasonal Affective Disorder." *National Institute of Mental Health*, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, [www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/seasonal-affective-disorder/index.shtml](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/seasonal-affective-disorder/index.shtml). Accessed September 15, 2020.)

<sup>22</sup> Sabon Gari is an area covering a number of cities in northern Nigeria, northern Cameroon, and south-central Niger, largely populated by individuals who are not indigenous Hausa. ("Sabon Gari." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sabon\\_Gari](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sabon_Gari). Accessed September 15, 2020.)

<sup>23</sup> A tree in the pea family Fabaceae, native to Africa and Australia. ("Acacia." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acacia>. Accessed September 16, 2020.)

<sup>24</sup> Boab trees are deciduous trees native to Africa, Madagascar, and Australia. The baobab tree is present in many African remedies and folklore. ("Adansonia." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adansonia>. Accessed September 16, 2020.)

## teaching, you were teaching in the Geography department? Or you came directly to Gender Studies?

MBA: Yes. The national policy on education mandated that after graduating from college or university, you have to do NYSC<sup>25</sup>. So, I was among the few that was lucky to be retained at the College of Advanced Studies<sup>26</sup>. I taught Geography, specifically on this issue of landforms, climatology, mapping, soil geography... All those I taught. Then, there was the need then for the department of science education to have a geographer, and there was none. That is, the Department of Science Education at Ahmadu Bello University.

### **ER: We saw. It's across from Industrial Design.**

MBA: Yes. So, they scouted around and I was then transferred to the Ministry of Education<sup>27</sup> as an inspector, and I was also the director of schools. So, one of my colleagues asked whether or not I would wish to move to the university to teach. Then I said, well, okay, since I was forced into education... It was never my wish to read education but you know the exigencies of northern Nigeria was that there were very few women in civil service, at all levels. I was even denied scholarship to read geology. Then I said, I would adapt. Because my granddad told me, he emphasized that whatever I do, I just have to adapt. At that time, it just flicked unto my mind and I said, "Binta<sup>28</sup>, remember what your granddaddy said: adapt." So, I did adapt. I said, I would come to the university and do my best even though I never attended any teachers' colleges. But the very limited education I learned from the university came into being within me, it was awoken. So, when I came, I was able to do both. But, the structure of science education in Ahmadu Bello University was that, we would teach the methodology; we would teach science methods but then the actual curriculum, the content of the geography, is being taught in the Faculty of Physical Sciences. So, I do shuttle between Faculty of Education, teaching science methods, to the Department of Geography, teaching environmental management, GIS<sup>29</sup> and remote sensing, and then climate change. That's what I do. But then, what about the Gender Studies? You know, gender comes indirectly when staff come to me to solve problems, then I say, "oh, let me take it. Why don't you do this or that?"

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<sup>25</sup> The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) is a required Nigerian government program that incorporates Nigerian university graduates in various aspects of the ongoing developments in the country. ("National Youth Service Corps." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National\\_Youth\\_Service\\_Corps](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Youth_Service_Corps). Accessed September 16, 2020.)

<sup>26</sup> A school within Ahmadu Bello University. ("About." ASICAS. <http://www.asicas.edu.ng/about.html>. Accessed September 26, 2020.)

<sup>27</sup> The Federal Ministry of Education is an office within the Nigerian government dedicated to organizing and maintaining the national public education system, located in the Nigeria's capital, Abuja. ("Our Mandate." *FEDERAL MINISTRY OF EDUCATION*. [education.gov.ng/our-mandate/](http://education.gov.ng/our-mandate/). Accessed September 16, 2020.)

<sup>28</sup> A West African female name meaning *with God*. ("Book of African Names." Duke Library. [https://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/snccdigitalgateway/DS\\_BookofAfricanNames.pdf](https://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/snccdigitalgateway/DS_BookofAfricanNames.pdf). Accessed September 26, 2020.)

<sup>29</sup> GIS (Geographic Information System) is a computer system that collects and manages geographic data. One example of a use of GIS is map-making. ("GIS (Geographic Information System)." National Geographic Society. [www.nationalgeographic.org/encyclopedia/geographic-information-system-gis/](http://www.nationalgeographic.org/encyclopedia/geographic-information-system-gis/). Accessed September 16, 2020.)

So, I normally emphasize in my class that whatever you learn, put gender into perspective because there is no way we could achieve what we wish to achieve, no matter how scientific one wants to be, or no matter how artistic one wants to be. They have to take the two sexes along and that's why since I became the coordinator, I've been shuttling from one department to another, hoping to get to see the relevance of my subject area and this unit. I'm sure we're coming to that. But this is it so far. I've embraced sociologists, historians, those in languages, medics, veterinarians, even public admin. We all get along and if you see us, you wouldn't imagine I read geography, because I've blended already.

**ER: Just a quick question. When did this unit, the Gender Studies program here, begin?**

MBA: That was in 2003. It evolved as a result of the need to assist indigent<sup>30</sup> students because at that time the university had funding from the Rockefeller Foundation<sup>31</sup>, Carnegie<sup>32</sup>, MacArthur<sup>33</sup>, Ford Foundation<sup>34</sup>, I don't know. But Carnegie was specific on women and more so, most of those that came from the countryside didn't have much to sustain themselves in the university; so, the vice chancellor at that time, Professor Abdullahi Mahadi<sup>35</sup>... I think they had an MOU<sup>36</sup> with the Carnegie Foundation<sup>37</sup>. That way, the gender unit came into existence directly under his office and the function was nothing but to disburse money to women or girls or students that couldn't sustain themselves. That's the genesis of it. But when Carnegie subsequently rounded up its assistance, then the university became helpless because it was too much for ABU to handle both scholarship for males and females. I can call that period between 2003 and 2015 a period of silence, in quotes, meaning

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<sup>30</sup> Poor; needy; impoverished ("indigent." Merriam-Webster. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/indigent>. Accessed September 26, 2020.)

<sup>31</sup> The Rockefeller Foundation is a private foundation established by John D. Rockefeller. The foundation was ranked the 39<sup>th</sup> largest United States private charity organization by total giving in 2015. ("Rockefeller Foundation." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rockefeller\\_Foundation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rockefeller_Foundation). Accessed September 16, 2020.)

<sup>32</sup> Andrew Carnegie (1835 – 1919) was a philanthropist and industrialist, and was one of the richest Americans in history. ("Andrew Carnegie" Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrew\\_Carnegie](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrew_Carnegie). Accessed September 16, 2020.)

<sup>33</sup> The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, established in 1978, has focused its philanthropic mission on in Nigeria on reducing corruption and has donated grants totaling more than \$6.8 billion in the United States and over 40 other countries. ("Our History." RSS. [www.macfound.org/about/our-history/](http://www.macfound.org/about/our-history/). Accessed September 16, 2020.)

<sup>34</sup> The Ford Foundation is a private foundation established in 1936 by Edsel Ford – son of Henry Ford, the founder of Ford Motor Company. The foundation seeks to reduce poverty and injustice, strengthen democratic values, promote international cooperation, and advance human achievement. ("About Ford." Ford Foundation. [www.fordfoundation.org/about/about-ford/](http://www.fordfoundation.org/about/about-ford/). Accessed September 16, 2020.)

<sup>35</sup> Abdullahi Mahadi is an established professor of History and advocate for environmental protections and management in Nigeria. He was the Vice-Chancellor of Ahmadu Bello University Zaria (1999 – 2004), in 2004, he became the founding Vice Chancellor of Gombe State University, and founder of the Mahadi Foundation, which won the Second Prize in the Best Private Sector Practice Category at the 7<sup>th</sup> Islamic Conference of Environment Ministers. See Muslihu Aminu Pindiga, Gombe. ("Mahadi Foundation: Recognition beyond Nigeria's Shores." Daily Trust. [dailytrust.com/mahadi-foundation-recognition-beyond-nigeria-s-shores](http://dailytrust.com/mahadi-foundation-recognition-beyond-nigeria-s-shores). Accessed September 16, 2020.)

<sup>36</sup> A memorandum of understanding (MoU) is an agreement between two or more parties outlined in a formal document and is not legally binding. ("Memorandum of Understanding." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Memorandum\\_of\\_understanding](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Memorandum_of_understanding). Accessed September 16, 2020.)

<sup>37</sup> The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching provides resources and programs to support their mission of promoting better education outcomes. ("About Us." Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. <https://www.carnegiefoundation.org/about-us/>. Accessed September 20, 2020.)

it was a period that really really got students in a quagmire<sup>38</sup> because they could neither get to the vice chancellor's office to say, "Look, we need this and that," nor could they get to the lecturers and say, "Look, help us with money to sustain ourselves." So, they had to struggle within whatever they could get, either from their homes, or from relatives, to make it go. Because sometimes, also, the scholarships from the federal and state governments come in very late and when they finally arrive, it was too meager to sustain them. So, within that period of "rest" I can say--even though it wasn't really a resting period, students really didn't get it easy.

**ER: Do you think it was harder for girl students or...?**

MBA: For both. It was hard for both. But it was...

**ER: Because I'm thinking maybe the parents or relatives of some of the girl students would say, "Okay, we tried to promote your education to university, but now it's so difficult, maybe you should just marry and we won't worry about..."**

MBA: Yes, but the beauty about it is that some of these girls hustle: they plait<sup>39</sup> hair, they could do small little things to keep themselves going in the hostels. But the boys could not do that. So, it's not really easy to gauge as to who really gets the hammer. The sledge hammer was on both of them because they had to survive.

**ER: That's really interesting. I mean, I was coming there. I didn't really know about the Gender Studies program. I was mostly working in textiles, and also polio.**

MBA: You're in the medics?

**ER: I'm an anthropologist. Anthropology, you know it?**

MBA: Yes, I know, it's very dynamic. You could get anthropology to go into geology because there's what we call paleontology. It goes through quaternary age<sup>40</sup> and looks at how settlements evolved and so on.

**ER: So, I want to shift the subject a bit. How do you understand the term 'feminism'? How would you define it?**

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<sup>38</sup> An awkward or hazardous situation ("quagmire." Merriam-Webster. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/quagmire> . Accessed September 20,, 2020.)

<sup>39</sup> To interweave the strands of locks of; braid ("plait." Merriam-Webster. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/plait>. Accessed September 26, 2020.)

<sup>40</sup> Quaternary age is the most recent period of the Cenozoic Era in the geologic time scale and includes the present. ("Quaternary" Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quaternary>. Accessed September 17, 2020.)

MBA: Hmn. If you are to judge me, I would fail. But I will attempt. Maybe I'll get a C+.

**ER: There are many definitions. You don't have to feel like there's one proper answer.**

MBA: Okay, can I then attempt? I think that feminism is an attempt for the female gender to get the best out of herself.

**ER: Could you give me an example then, of how feminism could support women getting the best out of themselves?**

MBA: Okay. You wouldn't know you have potentials until you get into... either you're being cornered, or you're given an assignment. At most times, women may not know their potentials, but here we are, sharing the world with men. They need our space. They have their own space, but they want to cross over to our space. But we said no. So, by the time the woman said, "Look, you have your own space, use your own space, don't use mine," then the inherent struggle to have that space makes one to react. So, feminism is a reaction to the usage of space.

**ER: That's a great definition actually.**

MBA: Space, okay? Identity. Because, we aren't males. And neither could a male try to be a female. Even with the transgender, you know? LGBTQ<sup>41</sup> and the rest, I know that. But then, it has to come with a cost. Feminism doesn't have to come with a cost. Because if you have the structures in place. We make the structures. We say, "Look, this is what we want. We need to go into a trajectory and if you cross over, then it becomes something else." So, the need to have your space, to have an identity, makes up feminism because the women and the girls want to have an identity. Because we need an imprint. The imprint can be anything, it could be intellectual, it could be social, it could be within the family, it could also be global. It can be anything because each time I teach climate change to my students, I say, "Look, some years back, thirty years back, what we experienced is what is going on now, so don't tell us climate is changing--climate has changed, but the status quo remains. All you should look at are the variations in extremes. The weather pattern has gotten extreme, so also has the human behavior. So also, is the level of feminism. But you see, feminism is gradually becoming archaic as far as I'm concerned. Feminism is being swallowed by gender studies now. And you cannot have... there isn't much dichotomy between feminism and activism and gender relations. They are all the same, they are mutually inclusive. But if you want to really

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<sup>41</sup> Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (LGBTQ), may also include intersex, and asexual or allied, among other identities (LGBTQIA+) ("LGBTQIA+ Terminology." University of Illinois Springfield. <https://www.uis.edu/gendersexualitystudentservices/about/lgbtqaterminology/>. Accessed September 26, 2020.)

catch, in quote, one aspect, without getting along with the other, you may not get much. But the main thing is to understand who you are as a female, then move ahead.

**ER: Can you give me some examples, then, of some activities you would say promote this sort of feminist perspective. From identity, or being who you want to be in your space.**

MBA: Oh, so many.

**ER: Please give me some examples because people would like to know some concrete...**

MBA: In the university, there are staff. Male and female. Intellectually, we've been taught virtually almost the same thing. We have been made to go through similar curricula, similar training; we are given, maybe what I can call 'blueprint' to teach. Those are fundamentals. Now, the difference is, when it comes to space, by the time a male lecturer thinks that his teaching methodology is the best; and you as a woman, must be construed into his own planet. That's the first thing. Because if you look at the way we women teach, we teach students with a passion. We see the students as our own kids. We see them as babies. The male lecturers, even with their fineness of teaching methodology see them as youngsters that need to be disciplined first, in some cases, bullied. Because there is bullying between male lecturers and students. Most of the bullying is done by male lecturers. So, the psychology of understanding between the male lecturer and the female lecturer is different. So, what happens when there are crises in the university, if students say, "look, enough is enough." Because we had crises. The first person the students come to are the female lecturers because they need to have a sense of belonging. So that is when our adaptation will come. How do we now make the students adapt to this type of threshold for them? And that is how you find that male students get closer to female lecturers. But there is another dimension to it; that's just the preliminary. The higher level of adaptation within the university is that when it comes to roles, you as a lecturer, or I as a lecturer, am teaching and getting the best out of students, and get along with students, then jealousy comes in. The issue of "who is she?" comes in. Leadership tussle comes in. Because most of the departments or sub-units are being run by men. As it is, that lady or, we, the women in the university, have to find a way of survival. And that is when adaptation comes. That is our biggest problem even up till now. We aren't interested in you being the director or dean or head of department, we are interested in you giving us our space whereby we can work and get outcome. But by the time you say even our own space, you come in, and won't adapt within the artificial space you create for us, then trouble begins. But as it is also, the situation in the university is not too bad, though it is true, most of the faculties and departments are headed by men. We have just one female dean and two female heads of departments. One female dean out of thirteen faculties. Two, no, three female heads of departments out of 47 departments. One

coordinator out of 17 directorates. It's only me. The only female coordinator. They don't even call me director; they call me coordinator. So, these are some of the dynamics you can see.

**ER: Do you know what the proportion of male to female faculty is, approximately, in ABU?**

MBA: I do. Very abysmal. It's 3:1. If arithmetically I am right, it might even be worse than that. Because I made the graph. It's sad, very sad. And it's even worse in the sciences.

**ER: I think that's true, actually, in the US though. There's been a real effort to get female students into sciences and engineering courses.**

MBA: We have STEM<sup>42</sup>. Because I have to develop STEM here. I'm rigorously pushing it because I have to make all the female science teachers and some students register for Nigerian Women in STEM.

**ER: That's great. Some of these problems are global problems.**

MBA: Yes, they are.

**ER: I'm just wondering, is part of it... I think what you're saying is it's partly men wanting to maintain their space, and maybe edge over into other spaces. Is it partly that the girl students don't continue at the same rate as male students? In enrollment for students in ABU, for example?**

MBA: We can only generalize what we can see. At the time students got admitted, we tried to maintain--the vice chancellor tries to maintain a fair ratio of male and female. But even that, there are some courses females don't even come into. But the real thing is when they finally get registered in their different faculties, you find that the females are timid. They get very timid, they are not proactive. Class representatives: male. Class supervisors: male. Everything: male. You just wonder, what went wrong, what is the problem? Just as you said, most of my female students are brilliant, but they wait on the males to do most of the talking, most of the answering questions.

**ER: That's so interesting because I remember when I was in university, I was always watching: how many times do the males raise their hands in class, than the females? Even, there's this idea that you should be modest as a female. Kunya? I think it's probably socialization. Gender socialization.**

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<sup>42</sup> Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM)

MBA: From the home. It's a dilemma. You're being pulled between two worlds. You trying to be yourself, and others trying to say, [inaudible] to follow your religious guides... Now, the *kunya* issue--that's the modesty--is a cultural issue, but then, the issue of Islam also comes. But then, Islam doesn't say, "You as a female should be complacent; you should sit down for the male to do the thinking." Rise up! God gave you the intellect, do it! And you see, what happens as time goes by in northern Nigeria--I can talk for northern Nigeria, far north, not even central Nigeria--by the time you speak out, you make your point, they say, this lady is going out of her way, no more *kunya*, no more this or that. Sometime, they even question your belief: is she really a Christian? Is she really a Muslim? But that doesn't really matter. Humans are humans. Modesty is modesty. It cuts across all beliefs. And then, when you have to bring a change, positive change is good irrespective of religion. But I don't know why this level of attachment or rather, blind attachment--I can say--to some cultural issues are still with us. Because they are retrogressive. We need the best from the world, but why don't we do something also? Why don't you do the little best you can, and leave others to continue? But instead, you move into your cocoon, you get marooned within yourself, saying because males are supposed to take care of females, then you kill your innate potential and you become virtually useless. Because as far as I'm concerned, if I stay with anybody who doesn't bring change into my life positively, that person can just move and let someone else come into my life. And that's exactly what some of these students don't really understand, and by the time you get to tell them, "stand up, do something," the same male lecturers will pull you down, the same religious persons will amass--I'm sorry to say--and pull you down, because the woman is always at the bottom, and let her remain at the bottom. I don't know where they got that notion of Islam, this is not religion. Maybe it's male dominance; the tendency to dominate everything. They will think for us, they will do everything for us. This is exactly what is going on even in the university. You see an engineer graduating, she cannot work. A medical graduate with MABS<sup>43</sup>...

**ER: She can't find work, or the husband won't allow it?**

MBA: The husband won't allow it, all because of the socialization they get from home. And parents are also responsible.

**ER: Yeah, that's what I was just going to ask you because we heard an example. We were talking to one woman who's a school administrator. This is in Kano. She was saying that sometimes, even the father--it was an extended family--was telling her that**

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<sup>43</sup> Man and the Biosphere Program (MAB) of UNESCO is an intergovernmental scientific program that uses natural and social sciences to approach economic development in a way that is sustainable, and particular to each community. The MAB program originated in Paris at the 1968 Biosphere Conference and was formally launched in 1970 by UNESCO. ("About MAB." United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. [en.unesco.org/mab/about](http://en.unesco.org/mab/about). Accessed September 17, 2020.)

**the daughter was being withdrawn from the school because, not him, but his older brother who was senior to him and therefore had authority, said he wanted her to marry and she had one year remaining. So, this woman, she said, I pleaded with him and he was crying, that he couldn't do anything.**

MBA: And you can now then imagine, why? Because it's absurd. Because it's education. Even with the Quran<sup>44</sup>, the first thing Islam says is read! Then how can you even do your best in religion without knowing how to... Sorry, I cut you short.

**ER: No, it was just such a striking example because the father wanted her to continue, but the older brother... I think they took him to the district head and presented the case that she should remain in school. But the district head said, "Sorry, we can't do anything, it's a family matter."**

MBA: It is, it is. And you see the family structure, there are role dynamics, if it's not the grandmother, it's the mother-in-law, or someone senior within a household. All the time, that hierarchy is there, you cannot break it. And because everybody has his right within the family, the police, the court, cannot interfere and they become helpless and that's why the status quo still remains.

**ER: This is a follow-up question, indirectly. You describe yourself as an activist, so what are some of the activist activities you're involved in, say, with female students, for example?**

MBA: See, with female students, I'm guilty because I don't do much. But within the general activities of activism, I'm a forerunner, because I belong to a very strong union, that is, the Academic Staff Union of Universities<sup>45</sup>. ASUU. I've been a financial secretary; I'm a member; I'm an adviser, and I'm still a very active member of that association. Why? And there is also what we call NAWACS<sup>46</sup>: National Association of Women in Academics. We call it NAWACS. What ASUU does is... It's not that we just look for salary, no. We study situations in the country. Then we box, classify, each: the quality, the security, the education and then the social structures. When these three conflicts with education, that's when ASUU rises up. Why I became an activist in ASUU was automatic because the injustice we see around us, no normal teacher--that's why they call me Malama, no normal lecturer can see it and keep

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<sup>44</sup> The Quran is the main Islamic religious text. ("Quran." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quran>. Accessed September 17, 2020.)

<sup>45</sup> The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), founded in 1978, is a union of university staff in Nigeria. ("Academic Staff Union of Universities." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Academic\\_Staff\\_Union\\_of\\_Universities](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Academic_Staff_Union_of_Universities). Accessed September 17, 2020.)

<sup>46</sup> The National Association of Women Academics (NAWACS) is a non-religious and apolitical association Nigerian university women. ("Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Nigeria." Abrose Alli University. [www.aaukpoma.edu.ng/index.php?option=com\\_content](http://www.aaukpoma.edu.ng/index.php?option=com_content). Accessed September 17, 2020.)

quiet. No. 1 - the discipline of students. We at the moment have what is called ASUU Anti-Corruption Unit, whereby any staff or student that misbehaves, is brought to justice.

Secondly, out there in the public, you misuse our money in billions of dollars, take it to Swiss banks, take it to France, then we as academicians, we keep quiet, we close our eyes simply because we want to follow you as leaders? No way. So, that's another crisis. So, in most cases you'll see ASUU at loggerheads with the polity because we want to know why our money is stolen, why won't the universities be funded, why won't the primary schools be funded, secondary schools. Why won't you find avenues of employment for the youths? Why won't you make women live a comfortable life? They are the mothers of your kids. If you subjugate them, if you really compromise fifty percent of your population, and think that only fifty percent will carry the mantle, then you are in trouble. That's why within the ASUU structure, there are many females and males. That's how I became one, because automatically, if you are a university lecturer, you are one, except you don't want to. And I've found it very rewarding. When our salaries get stopped, or when we are threatened with police imprisonment, that builds our resilience. At least we know we are doing something for the helpless, not for ourselves. I could leave this country and get a job somewhere. But what about the young ones coming? What about the status quo? They need to change. So, that's how I became an activist. Not like I am confronting what exists, but it's a voice. To being the best.

**ER: I know you raised this issue, and it's a bit embarrassing, but could you say something about some of the issues of anti-corruption unit activities that are involved with students or lecturers?**

MBA: There is a dual job, or dual function that I undertake in the gender unit now. There we are, as teachers, mixing with students. There is the vice chancellor expecting the best from us, then problems arise. The relationship between male and female students, one. Harassment, relationship between female students and their male lecturers: problem. There is also a problem between female-female students, especially maybe friendship and the rest, but the worst of it is the relationship between male lecturers and female students. As a gender coordinator, we are supposed to see a balance, but as an activist and part of ASUU, we are supposed to see working relationships. Sexual harassment is something we cannot condone. Any lecturer found doing that has nothing to blame but him or herself. But there are times when the female students give themselves onto the male, they force themselves on to the male lecturers for grades, and for a weak lecturer, he goes. And if care is not taken, there are times when these female students really tape, they record, and get the males in trouble. The university had to dismiss about seven male lecturers for that. The exam office...

**ER: I think I read something about that recently.**

MBA: And that's why we have to have that anti-corruption unit in ASUU because trouble for the academics is not just for funding, but to have a very sane relationship, conducive for excellence. We are supposed to train youths that will be useful, not youths that will crumble every structure that's been built by our predecessors. So, to maintain that status quo, we have to fight within. It's not just fighting outside, we have to fight within.

**ER: You know, it's so interesting to me that some of the issues you are raising to me are problems even in my university. So, they even recently put on our website that if you have any problem with any kind of sexual harassment, report it to... and it gives the contact information. So, you see?**

MBA: Yes, and the vice president of the country has just launched a sexual harassment database and I think it is a link. We were sworn in, and I am representing academia, so what we did is we went back to our universities and started what we call a hotline. These hotlines are meant for staff and students. If anything goes like that, it is reported straight into the agency.

**ER: So, you went to Abuja and they had representatives from all the universities, or how did that...?**

MBA: Yes, four universities. Two from the south, two in northern Nigeria.

**ER: What were the four universities?**

MBA: There was Lagos<sup>47</sup>, Nsukka<sup>48</sup>, Maiduguri<sup>49</sup>, then Ahmadu Bello University. Very soon, there is someone from Jos<sup>50</sup> that will be co-opted, making five. But four of us have been consistently at the meeting. There are other agencies, like the police, the civil defense, the army, ICPC<sup>51</sup>, EFCC<sup>52</sup>... we all are in it.

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<sup>47</sup> Lagos, a city in Nigeria, is the most populous on the African continent and the major financial and economic hub in Lagos State with the fourth-highest GDP in Africa. ("Lagos." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lagos>. Accessed September 17, 2020.)

<sup>48</sup> Nsukka is a university town and the name of a local government area in Enugu State that is located in southeast Nigeria. ("Nsukka" <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nsukka>. Accessed September 17, 2020.)

<sup>49</sup> Maiduguri is the largest city and capital of Borno State in northeastern Nigeria. ("Maiduguri" <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maiduguri>. Accessed September 17, 2020.)

<sup>50</sup> Jos is the largest city and capital of Plateau State in the Middle Belt area of Nigeria, ("Jos" <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jos>. Accessed September 17, 2020.)

<sup>51</sup> The Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) was established on September 29<sup>th</sup>, 2000 by Nigerian President, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo with the mission to fight against corruption under the order set out in the Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Act (2000). ("History of ICPC." ICPC. [icpc.gov.ng/icpc-history/](http://icpc.gov.ng/icpc-history/). Accessed September 17, 2020.)

<sup>52</sup> The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) was established in April 2003 by President Olusehun Obasanjo, with the intent to tackle economic and financial crimes in Nigeria, including money laundering and terrorist financing. ("Kaduna Corps Marshall Seeks Inclusion of Anti- Corruption Studies in Schools." EFCC. [efccnigeria.org/efcc/](http://efccnigeria.org/efcc/). Accessed September 17, 2020.)

**ER: Somehow, it seems like having a hotline would be more accessible to students...**

MBA: To staff and students? We've been advised to get back to our institutions and domesticate what was taught and that's what we're doing. We sometimes have to engage in discourse every week. We have a radio FM. It's a BBC<sup>53</sup> outlet called F1 Radio in the university. It's an outlet of the BBC. So, we do have discussions every week to enlighten the staff and students and sometimes the topics may depend on the significance... You know we grade. There are the medium and the long. We study issues. Like, students are coming now. So, our focus is to tell students that there are vultures and foxes waiting, so be very careful of those foxes or hyenas or vultures because they are there to grab you. So, if you do, you're on your own. So, after that, towards the middle or end of the session, we focus on exam malpractices, and so on. At each time of the students' activities, we know exactly what sledgehammer to...

**ER: Go after the problem. So, you said you were involved, or when did this program start? I haven't heard of it. The one you were talking about with Osinbanjo<sup>54</sup>.**

MBA: It began in July. We were sworn in November, 2019. It got reactivated because there's what we call the VAPP Act<sup>55</sup>, that is, Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act. That act was never signed for the country. We're still waiting on the legislators to sign but the Abuja VAPP act was signed, so the implementation is skewed. Because of that, the vice president thought, let's get a coordinated national body in a way that pressure will be mounted on the National Assembly to sign this thing so people can be accountable for the problems they are causing. But incidentally, the lawmakers are also guilty. Because they come to the university, pick beautiful women, sleep with them--I'm sorry to say that, but it's real. So, I hope lawmakers will come to their senses and realize they are messing up a generation. It's not just the present, but the generations to come.

**ER: Got it. You mentioned another organization that you were involved in, the National Association of University Women<sup>56</sup>? That's a national association? So, what kind of activities are involved?**

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<sup>53</sup> The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) is the world's oldest and largest national broadcaster. ("Learn More about What We Do - About the BBC." *BBC News*, BBC, [www.bbc.com/aboutthebbc](http://www.bbc.com/aboutthebbc). Accessed September 17, 2020.)

<sup>54</sup> Olukeyi Oluleke "Yemi" Osinbajo is the current Vice President of Nigeria, as of May 29, 2015, and an established lawyer. ("Yemi Osinbajo." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yemi\\_Osinbajo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yemi_Osinbajo). Accessed September 17, 2020.)

<sup>55</sup> The Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act was signed into law on May 25, 2015 by the former president of Nigeria, Goodluck Ebele Jonathan. The Act aims to protect individuals from public and private violence and provide amends to the victim and punishment to offenders. ("Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act." Legal Information Institute. [www.law.cornell.edu/women-and-justice/resource/violence-against-persons-\(prohibition\)-act](http://www.law.cornell.edu/women-and-justice/resource/violence-against-persons-(prohibition)-act). Accessed September 17, 2020.)

<sup>56</sup> The National Association of University Women (NAUW) was founded by Mary Church Tell, Sara Winifred Brown, Nancy Fairfax Brown, and Mary E. Cromwell in 1910. The NAUW sets out to assist young women in their professional experience

MBA: We support the main activities of ASUU. This time, we add more issues. For instance, how do women adjust to bridging the demands of the workplace and that at home? How do we adjust to raising a child to be a complete human even if it's 99.9. At least, if we get to 80%, we've passed the test. Then, how do we bring out the best of women to become leaders? How do we become the best of women, to go out there and represent Nigeria, because every time the developing countries, Nigeria... When it comes to the human development index<sup>57</sup>, Nigeria is abysmal. When it comes to this, Nigeria... So, we said, what are we doing? Because we have a stake. If we don't encourage women, even with what we inherit from our homes... made to be a bit benign in most of the national assignments. But we that are lucky should be seen to be flag bearers of a movement that should get these girls up, make them who they are so they understand their potential to be good ambassadors even when we retire. And we've achieved by doing a lot of that. But unfortunately, NAWACS was not able to scale through some of these things because the men are always there. They say, look, you chose to be in the public arena with all of us, so do it. Promotion, you need a hundred papers for publication, you also must have to give a hundred. No compromise. We said yes, no problem. But then, let it be that the timing of lectures... We can't come at six or seven o' clock, let it be at eight, then... That cat and mouse game is still there. But NAWACS is still active and we support the national body of ASUU.

**ER: This is so interesting; you're reminding me of a lot of things that are problems for university women. In the States, I think their salary is still 75% or 80% of males' salary. I think so.**

MBA: Oh really? We have the same salary structure now, no discrimination.

**ER: I'm not sure exactly how it works. Even if you have the same level--associate professor, professor, whatever--it depends on how your chairman, for example, promotes your case, and they make a suggestion on how your salary should be gauged.**

MBA: We don't have that dichotomy in Nigeria, in our universities.

**ER: Ah, so you see, Nigeria is...**

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and promote fellowship among professional women. ("History – National Association of University Women." National Association of University Women. [nauw1910.org/history/](http://nauw1910.org/history/). Accessed September 17, 2020.)

<sup>57</sup> The Human Development Index (HDI) is a summary measure of average achievement intended to expand the definition of development of a country beyond economic growth to include quality and longevity of life, knowledge, and standard of living. ("Human Development Reports." Human Development Index (HDI). [hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-index-hdi](http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-index-hdi). Accessed September 17, 2020.)

MBA: But the problem is the timing. You could see that a male may get promoted much earlier than a female counterpart who does exactly the same work.

**ER: So how does that work since they have the same number of papers?**

MBA: The same number of papers, yes, but sometimes the acceptance. You'll see the males' papers are easily accepted. And you know, we have to pay for publications. The men hustle, they could be a little more economically buoyant. They could send their papers abroad; they could send their papers to other universities.

**ER: There are some journals that you don't have to pay to publish, but they're very competitive.**

MBA: Yes, I know. And one thing that inhibits women is the information. Women have less and less information. And once the men within our university get the information, they circulate it amongst themselves. So, that's the problem. But payment is the same, there isn't any difference.

**ER: Actually, I'm not sure what the exact balance is in my university, but in the country... So, it's outside, including universities, but broader. I think it's still 75%. And that goes for a lot of different jobs.**

MBA: Did you challenge the status quo?

**ER: Me? No. [inaudible] You know why? It's so funny to me, but it's true - I don't care about money.**

MBA: But that's good, you live in peace.

**ER: I know, but the problem is it maintains the status quo.**

MBA: If money is the priority, then you have problems. Do the job first. The money becomes useful.

**ER: I enjoy anthropological research. You can ask Hassana.**

MBA: You'll eat rogo<sup>58</sup>. You'll take fura<sup>59</sup> and nunu in our villages. You speak the language...

**ER: Are you involved in any international activism or scholarship programs?**

MBA: Yes, I am. Personally, or the gender unit? Personally, I am. I'll talk on mine first, then the gender unit. I'm a member of what we call Akina Mama wa Afrika<sup>60</sup>. Akina Mama wa Afrika is a baby of the wife of the governor of Ekiti State<sup>61</sup>, Bisi Fayemi<sup>62</sup>. Then there is Amina Salihu<sup>63</sup>--that's a member. Amina Salihu works with MacArthur Foundation. She's also the mover of this sexual offender database<sup>64</sup>. At the Akina Mama wa Afrika, women from all parts of Africa come together. We discuss on feminism, on leadership, on so many issues and it becomes an umbrella of the continent. So, it becomes like we are the spokespersons of Africa. Initially, it was based in London before she got back to Nigeria. There are still some international Nigerians that are still involved. Then, the second is the World Association of Victimology<sup>65</sup>. I'm a member of the World Association of Victimology. Victimology is a very recent concept. How do people adapt? How do we rehabilitate? Let us look at victims; maybe victims of war, victims of family violence, victims of political anarchy and the rest. And each of us do what we could do. The first conference held was somewhere in Nairobi<sup>66</sup> or Amsterdam.

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<sup>58</sup> Cassava, also known as "Rogo" in Hausa, is a starchy root of a tropical tree and is present in popular cuisine among Southern Kaduna people in Nigeria. ("Cassava." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cassava>. Accessed September 17, 2020.)

<sup>59</sup> Fura are balls of millet dough commonly eaten in Nigeria, Ghana and Niger. Nunu means milk, commonly drank with fura. ("Fura (food)." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fura\\_\(food\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fura_(food)). Accessed September 17, 2020.)

<sup>60</sup> Akina Mama wa Afrika (AMWA) was founded by Wanjiru Kihoro in 1985 in the United Kingdom and later relocated to Ghana. AmWA is a feminist-Pan-African leadership development organization guided by the Charter of Feminist Principles for African Feminists that seek to strengthen African women's social, political, and economic autonomy. ("AMwa at a Glance." Akina Mama Wa Afrika. [www.akinamamawaafrika.org/amwa-at-a-glance/](http://www.akinamamawaafrika.org/amwa-at-a-glance/). Accessed September 17, 2020.)

<sup>61</sup> Ekiti State is located in the southwestern region of Nigeria. ("About Ekiti." *Ekiti State Website*, [ekitistate.gov.ng/about-ekiti/](http://ekitistate.gov.ng/about-ekiti/). Accessed September 17, 2020.)

<sup>62</sup> Bisi Adeleye-Fayemi is a Feminist activist who served as the director of Akina Mama wa Afrika (AMWA) from 1991-2001. She is the founder of the African Women's Leadership Institute as well as one of three co-founders of the African Women's Development Fund (AWDF) where she served as the first executive direction from 2001-2010. She is also a founder of the African Feminist Forum (AFF), serving on the Working Group there from 2006-2016. ("Bisi Adeleye-Fayemi." The African Women's Development Fund (AWDF). [awdf.org/bisi-adeleye-fayemi/](http://awdf.org/bisi-adeleye-fayemi/). Accessed September 17, 2020.)

<sup>63</sup> Amina Salihu is a political scientist, international consultant, feminist and farmer. Salihu is the current Senior Program Officer of the MacArthur Foundation. She is the Chair of the Board of Directors of the Kaduna State Rehabilitation Board (KSRB) and co-Chair of the Board of Directors of the Nigerian Women's Trust Fund. ("Amina Salihu: University of Abuja, Nigeria.") Academia. [uniabuja.academia.edu/AminaSalihu/CurriculumVitae](http://uniabuja.academia.edu/AminaSalihu/CurriculumVitae). Accessed September 17, 2020.)

<sup>64</sup> The National Sexual Offender Database (NSOD) launched in Nigeria on November 25, 2019 to help members of security agencies and the public conduct background checks and identify sexual offenders. The register contains sexual assault and harassment or intimidation cases. ("NIGERIA SEXUAL OFFENDER & SERVICE PROVIDER DATABASE." Nigeria Sexual Offenders Registers. [nsod.naptip.gov.ng/view\\_cases.php](http://nsod.naptip.gov.ng/view_cases.php). Accessed September 17, 2020.)

<sup>65</sup> The World Society of Victimology, founded in 1979, is an international, not-for-profit, non-governmental organization that advances victimological research and practices, encourages interdisciplinary research in the field. ("Welcome." WSV. [www.worldsocietyofvictimology.org/welcome/](http://www.worldsocietyofvictimology.org/welcome/). Accessed September 17, 2020.)

<sup>66</sup> Nairobi, Kenya, is the nation's largest city and capital. ("Nairobi." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nairobi>. Accessed September 17, 2020.)

**ER: What year?**

MBA: It was in 2017.

**ER: So, recently.**

MBA: Yes. So, that was the first conference. The second conference was held in 2018 in Nigeria at Covenant University<sup>67</sup>. At that time, we were able to look at global gender issues. Even the wife of the president of Sri Lanka was around. The president was there too; he's from the Netherlands. There were so many. Some from the States, some from Mexico, some from Australia. They all came. We really saw victims in reality. Not that we saw them in physically, but we felt what such victims are going through. Their full cases, the Syrian war<sup>68</sup>, family breakdowns and there was an issue which I was really hammering on. There was nobody who could say where this was. And that was: what happens to the victims of hurricanes? Victims of weather extremes? Victims of ecological imbalances, especially when war ends. You know, when war ends, there are dynamites, the soil becomes barren, the land is messed up, the trees are gone, everything is gone. So, I came up. That's when my geography came in. I said, when victims of such circumstance come, let's look at the processes first, then decide on the global orientation, meaning if the global problem is that of war and the bastardization of our biodiversity, let the country being messed up look to its neighboring country for assistance. Probably they may have the same ecological... So, what stops the people from the messed-up area from getting resources from the neighboring countries? Because you don't have to move from, maybe, Nigeria to Japan to get fish. If you get mackerel in Nigerian waters, you don't need to eat tuna, it's the same thing. Local or immediate adaptations, I gave that proposal. If it is global, like the change in climate--or what people say is change in climate, which I refer to as extreme weather pattern changes, you cannot stop the sea from rising. You can't stop the temperatures in the sea from cooling. The best we could do is: Let's go back to treaties. The north-south Atlantic treaty<sup>69</sup>, these trading organizations, and adjust our trading patterns. If there are excess resources where there are warm waters, bring it to where cold-water zones are needed, or vice versa. If Japan has problems with pollution... You know there are islands in the pacific which are as big as your

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<sup>67</sup> Covenant University in Ogun State is a private Christian university. ("About Us." Covenant University. [covenantuniversity.edu.ng/About-Us](http://covenantuniversity.edu.ng/About-Us). Accessed September 17, 2020.)

<sup>68</sup> The ongoing Syrian Civil War began after the Arab Spring of 2011, in which a wave of political protests for human rights swept across the Arab world. The divide is rooted in religious practices, the ruling family being Alawite Islam while most Syria's population is Sunni Muslim. The main domestic actors in the conflict include the Syrian Arab Army, ISIS, the Syrian Rebel Army, and the Kurdish Resistance. ("Civil War in Syria." Global Conflict Tracker. [www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/civil-war-syria](http://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/civil-war-syria). Accessed September 17, 2020.)

<sup>69</sup> There are many trade agreements and treaties globally and among African countries, which are listed and described in the source listed below. ("International trade in goods and services in Nigeria: Overview." Thomson Reuters Practical Law. [https://uk.practicallaw.thomsonreuters.com/w-016-4262?transitionType=Default&contextData=\(sc.Default\)&firstPage=true#co\\_anchor\\_a488942](https://uk.practicallaw.thomsonreuters.com/w-016-4262?transitionType=Default&contextData=(sc.Default)&firstPage=true#co_anchor_a488942). Accessed September 26, 2020.)

state. If the problem is sea pollution and there is water everywhere, but it's polluted, go to Greenland, sign a pact with maybe Canada, transport the ice back to Japan, melt it and you get your fresh water. So, that's how it is. Victims do not have to be victims of human interplay, but they could also be victims of natural disasters. So that's why I'm relevant there. But then, the gender comes in when victims of home and family violence are being talked upon. This is something that this department of gender also looks into it. That's why, when I came into being, when I started work as a gender coordinator, we looked at research-- what are those researches that will be meaningful for solving current issues? How do we empower the vulnerable? Where do we get resources for them? And then, how do we train the trainers in case we aren't in the forefront? This is how I'm relevant in the World Victimology Association. We have to also meet every year. This year we met in Nairobi; and the issue of Nairobi is farming activities, then security whereby you find among the Maasai<sup>70</sup>, donkeys are being eaten. The Chinese come, and pack the donkeys.

**ER: The donkey problem is also in Nigeria as well.**

MBA: Especially in Jigawa<sup>71</sup> state. There is a market where you find them... just before you get to Maigatari<sup>72</sup>, donkeys are shipped into the east.

**ER: It's the skin that they want, not the meat.**

MBA: Yes, it's the skin. So, we talked about fundamental human and animal rights in the Nairobi conference. We talked about rehabilitation of the displaced. We also talked about the need to get good transport and water. So, all those areas, we dealt with. The beauty of it is that a lady from New Jersey is now the head of the World Center of Victimology. She's called Jenny... I'll give you her full name. A very active lady.

**ER: I can get it from the website.**

MBA: She's very proactive. So, next year, I don't know whether it'll be somewhere in Europe, or South Africa or Malaysia. I don't know.

**ER: That would be interesting. So, do you have any questions or comments for me before we close?**

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<sup>70</sup> The Maasai are an ethnic people of East Africa, located in southern Kenya and northern Tanzania. ("Maasai People, Kenya, [www.maasai-association.org/maasai.html](http://www.maasai-association.org/maasai.html). Accessed September 17, 2020.)

<sup>71</sup> Jigawa is a state in northwestern Nigeria. ("Jigawa State." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jigawa\\_State](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jigawa_State). Accessed September 17, 2020.)

<sup>72</sup> Maigatari is a Local Government Area in northern Jigawa State, Nigeria. ("Maigatari." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maigatari>. Accessed September 17, 2020.)

MBA: Yes, I do. You see, I'm in a dilemma. I don't know what to call myself. Am I an activist? Am I a feminist? Am I a scientist? If I say all, I pass the test. But if I say I'm a feminist, there are issues in feminism I may not understand. If I say I'm an activist, there's a limit to how much I can go out there and make noise. But if I say, I'm a teacher, yes, a hundred percent because I make my living as a teacher and I see the product of being a teacher. So many ministers were my students. I have sitting vice chancellors that were my students. I have so many that are deans of departments. I have some that are governors. So, you see, that has given me fulfillment. That's why I can say, yes, I'm a teacher. That's why I said call me malama. But then, for the scientist, yes, I belong to all these associations, which we have to, but my question is: where do we draw the line? It's not easy. So, I want to ask you, please, where do you belong? Since I have this dilemma, do you share this dilemma with me?

**ER: I'm an indirect activist, and I'm interested in women's issues, and I publish on women's issues and women's roles. For example, we have a project in northeastern Ghana<sup>73</sup>. You know they were doing small scale gold mining in that area and one of the things is they were using mercury which is very detrimental to people's health, including women's health.**

MBA: Especially lead.

**ER: So, we started a group to--it's called Nabdam Neem Company<sup>74</sup>. I don't know if you know about neem<sup>75</sup> trees, but they were planted all over West Africa by the British.**

MBA: Yes, neem trees are an invasive species.

**ER: Of course, but it has benefits and people here don't quite appreciate how many because you can use the seeds to make oil and that oil has great medicinal properties. So, that's what we started and they're now selling neem oil in the markets and people really like it.**

MBA: In Ghana or Nigeria?

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<sup>73</sup> The Republic of Ghana is a country in West Africa. ("Ghana." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ghana>. Accessed September 17, 2020.)

<sup>74</sup> The Nabdam Neem Company produces cold pressed organic neem oil and neem oil products, located in Nangodi, Ghana. ("Nabdam Neem Company Ltd." Facebook. [www.facebook.com/pg/Nabdam-Neem-Company-Ltd-108618473815609/about/?ref=page\\_internal](http://www.facebook.com/pg/Nabdam-Neem-Company-Ltd-108618473815609/about/?ref=page_internal). Accessed September 17, 2020.)

<sup>75</sup> *Azadirachta indica*, or neem, is a tree in the mahogany family, native to the Indian subcontinent. Its fruits and seeds are the source of neem oil. ("*Azadirachta indica*." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Azadirachta\\_indica](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Azadirachta_indica). Accessed September 17, 2020.)

**ER: In Ghana. I think NARICT<sup>76</sup> has a neem project, but I don't think... This is specifically focused on women. The women that were doing the mining, we wanted to give them an alternative livelihood.**

MBA: Just like we do in GGW<sup>77</sup>-- Great Green Wall. We have a platform for alternative livelihood. Yes, sorry--go ahead.

**ER: I would call that an aspect of feminism because I'm interested in supporting women's rights and women's activities. I'm not a political feminist, I don't go and march but I'm really supportive of anything that will support women.**

MBA: Okay, in that case, we're in the same club. In fact, 100%.

**ER: I think so.**

MBA: But are you an activist?

**ER: If you consider who writes about women's rights, I think so.**

MBA: Well, the other aspect we know, because you are also an academician because you have brought up students, you've molded youths that would be proud of you.

**ER: Actually, this is funny, I have two--how many are they--four of the graduate students that I helped advise, they are now professors. They both asked me to do chapters, edited volumes that they are putting together. So, we help each other.**

MBA: That's good. One thing I forgot to also ask, the issue of youths and roles in the family. The boys play soccer, they go mess up, the girls stay at home, they do knitting, they do the cooking. Does that operate in your area?

**ER: There are more girls in sports now.**

MBA: Basketball?

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<sup>76</sup> The National Research Institute for Chemical Technology (NARICT), founded in 1976, leads research on Chemical Technology in Nigeria. ("THE DIRECTOR GENERAL/CEO WELCOMES YOU." *NARICT*, narict.gov.ng//pages/welcome.php. Accessed September 17, 2020.)

<sup>77</sup> The Great Green Wall Programme is a Pan-African Initiative that seeks to improve food security and reduce exploitation of land leading to desertification and degradation in North Africa. ("National Agency For The Great Green Wall – Just Another WordPress Site." National Agency For The Great Green Wall. ggwnigeria.gov.ng/. Accessed September 17, 2020.)

**ER: Basketball. Soccer. Baseball. But you know, it's true, it's not the same as for boys. That's one issue that has been constant. Girls have been asking for more support in universities for women's sports events. That all the money shouldn't just be going for men's sports events, but for girls as well. In terms of cooking, I think there are many men now who are actually involved in cooking.**

MBA: Incidentally, there was a cooking competition and a male student topped the class in the university. My last question... I'm glad you're an anthropologist because for whatever actions, there are reactions. Now, within the family structure, the relationship between the husband and wife, and if they have kids, the roles they play. In northern Nigeria, the man gives the command and it's done. The woman is to obey. But here is the situation, the woman goes to work, the man also goes to work. The lady of the house, that's the wife...

**ER: She has domestic...?**

MBA: Yawa. But as the kids are growing up, the males are made to cook, sweep the house, clean, wash clothes, then the females do the gardening, the hoeing, and then they delve into courses that are male-dominated. The reaction is always a negative one. What can such a woman do? When the husband agrees, the husband is okay. In fact, the husband washes the diapers for the younger ones, and he helps sometimes when she's sick, he brings her breakfast. Now, within the northern Nigeria set-up, it's a taboo, it's something you can't hear of. If a situation like that comes and the woman is seen to be the dominant one--she dominates the husband. They say, she's everything! Even her female kids are now studying male courses. You go to the house, her male children are the ones doing the cooking. If you find a lady like that in northern Nigeria going through that, what advice can you give to such a family? Because it becomes an issue of adaptation. [inaudible about the coughing]

**ER: It's just a difficult problem. It relates to the issue of early marriage for girls, it relates to parents wanting to take their daughters from school. I think it's partly a matter of time. I mean, you're giving me an extreme example. But little by little, especially if the husbands are showing a model to their sons, in subsequent years, those male children will be having similar ideas that you don't have to be following the rigid structure of society. People think now, you know we're in a modern era, so things are changing in northern Nigeria. I know it seems slow and difficult, but little by little, honestly, I really think that things will be changing.**

MBA: You know why I asked? This is me. You've answered my problem. This is what I'm going through. She knows. When you were just a little baby, your husband and yourself were moving on fine, isn't it? I was there as a lecturer. My husband gave me all the support. He took care of them. My daughter is a geologist, the other one is a plant scientist. The first one

is the pilot, the second one is in Germany. Number 5 is in the Netherlands. He's doing robotics, with drones. Mariam is in Canada. She's the plant geneticist. This is my problem. That I have dominated my husband more than he did. So, I'm always at loggerheads with people. Sometimes, I get isolated, psychologically. But it's somebody like her husband that understands me. You've answered my question. I pray that sometime there will be that change. I just hope so.

**ER: As you said, you're a frontrunner. It's true. So on that note, I'd like to thank you very much for taking the time to speak with us. Thank you for global feminist perspectives.**

MBA: I hope to see more of you in the future.