

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

**SITE: NIGERIA**

**Transcript of Dr. Abiola Akiyode-  
Afolabi  
Interviewer: Ronke Olawale**

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**University of Michigan  
Institute for Research on Women and Gender  
1136 Lane Hall Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1290  
Tel: (734) 764-9537**

**E-mail: [um.gfp@umich.edu](mailto:um.gfp@umich.edu)  
Website: <http://www.umich.edu/~glblfem>**

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**Dr. Abiola Akiyode-Afolabi** studied law at the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife. She received an LLM from the Notre Dame School of Law in the US and a PhD from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) at the University of London where she specialized in women's peace and security studies. In 2002 she established the Women Advocates Research and Documentation Center (WARDC) a not-for-profit organization focused on maternal and reproductive health advocacy, gender-based violence, and social justice. She is on the board of West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) and the Nigerian Women's Trust Fund. WANEP is a regional peacebuilding organization established in 1998 in response to civil wars in West Africa, while Women's Trust Fund was founded to address the problem of underrepresentation of women in governance and gender inequality, more generally. Dr. Akiyode-Afolabi also teaches International Humanitarian Law at the University of Lagos.

**Ronke Olawale** is a PhD Candidate in Social Work and Anthropology at the University of Michigan. Broadly speaking she is interested in culture, care, and infectious disease; death and dying, and meaning-making; kinship and child welfare/wellbeing; and intergenerational care. Her dissertation explores the social and cultural context in which the 2013-2016 Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) epidemic occurred in Liberia.

**Ronke Olawale: Okay, let's start now. Good morning Doctor. I want to appreciate you for participating in this project and also to begin by introducing myself. My name is Ronke Olawale. I'm at the finishing point of my PhD at the University of Michigan and I'm studying social work and medical anthropology, specifically working on how Ebola impacted social life in Liberia. Please let's start by you introducing yourself and telling me how you would like to be addressed but once you mention your name I would also like you to spell it so that there is no misrepresentation. Thank you.**

Dr. Abiola Akiyode-Afolabi: I'm Dr. Abiola Akiyode-Afolabi. I'm a lecturer at the University of Lagos, I'm also a founding director of the women advocates research and documentation center.

**RO: Thank you, but how would you like to be addressed?**

AA: Dr. Abiola Akiyode-Afolabi.

**RO: Alright, thank you so much. Okay, so this interview is starting right now. Today is Monday, November the 4th, 2019 and I'm right here with Dr. Abiola Akiyode-Afolabi for the Global Feminisms Project. This interview is part of the Global Feminisms Project, a multi-site international project sponsored by the University of Michigan. Our goal in undertaking these oral histories is to create and preserve conversations with women whose scholarships and activism has contributed to women's rights activism as that is broadly conceived or with women whose scholarship or activism has contributed in critical ways that are important to issues that affect women. So today we'll be spending approximately one hour or more as much as we can get or as long as we can go on broad topics about this project. Let me thank you for accepting to participate, we'll start out by asking you to introduce yourself, tell me your name, please do spell it because I don't want to misrepresent your name, and also how you would like to be addressed. Thank you.**

AA: Thank you very much. I'm Dr. Abiola Akiyode-Afolabi (spells it). I'm the founding director of the Women Advocates Research and Documentation center (WARDC) and I'm also a lecturer at the University of Lagos.

**RO: Thank you so much, but how would you like to be addressed?**

AA: I would like to be addressed as Dr. Abiola Akiyode-Afolabi.

**RO: Thank you so much. Let me just start out by asking you to give me a background about your life. So, as you think about where you are today, how you would depict the journey that brought you to this desk.**

AA: Well it's really a very long journey and just like the life of every woman so it could also be a very thoughtful journey where you have to pick up lessons as you grow up and lessons define your life and your attitude to what you see around you and help in terms of building instincts to be able to respond to issues that are fundamental to you and also fundamental to other people around you. I grew up from an average Nigerian family. My father was an engineer with the old national electrical power authority called NEPA and so meaning that we had to travel to so many places because he was being transferred from the north to the south so we had a blend of living almost all over the country because we had to move with him to all the places that he had to go to. My mom happens to be a trader, so meaning that she had to change her space of business every time that we had to move. So, along the line, I was born in Kwara state<sup>1</sup>, which is Ilorin<sup>2</sup>; My mom is from Edo state<sup>3</sup>, from Benin<sup>4</sup>, while my father comes from Abeokuta<sup>5</sup> in Ogun state<sup>6</sup>. But I was born in Kwara State, in Ilorin. So, which, to a large extent, shows that the blend in Nigeria that has given me a root from the northern part of Nigeria, from the south-south part of Nigeria and from the southwest. I think also my life went in that direction. We were initially living in Ilorin, then we moved from Ilorin to Osogbo<sup>7</sup>. My father then moved to Kaduna<sup>8</sup> and other places. But while we were growing up there are a lot of things I can remember, one of the things was also the fact that was at the time that Nigeria was trying to liberate itself from anti-corruption practices. The one I can remember clearly was when I was around six years old, when Muritala Muhammed<sup>9</sup> was the President of the country and his fight was seriously against anti-corruption and I remember my father used to tell me that as we were growing up, we must know that we have a duty to make Nigeria a better place. I saw him raising voices

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<sup>1</sup> Kwara is a state in Western Nigeria. The Yoruba tribe is its primary ethnic group, but there are significant populations of Nupe, Bariba, and Fulani. ("Kwara." Britannica. Accessed May 21, 2020. <https://www-britannica-com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/place/Kwara>)

<sup>2</sup> Ilorin is the capital of Kwara State (Ibid.)

<sup>3</sup> Edo State is a state in Nigeria, east of Lagos. It is made up of four major ethnic groups: the Bini, Esan, Owan, and Estako. ("Edo State." Wikipedia. Accessed May 21, 2020. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edo\\_State](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edo_State))

<sup>4</sup> Benin is the capital of the Edo state. (Ibid.)

<sup>5</sup> Abeokuta is the capital and largest city in the Ogun State. ("Ogun State." Wikipedia. Accessed May 21, 2020. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ogun\\_State](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ogun_State))

<sup>6</sup> Ogun State is a state in southwestern Nigeria. (Ibid.)

<sup>7</sup> Osogbo is a city in Nigeria and the capital of the Ogun State ("Osogobo." Wikipedia. Accessed May 21, 2020. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Osogbo>)

<sup>8</sup> Kaduna is the capital of Kaduna State in north-western Nigeria, on the Kaduna River. ("Kaduna." Wikipedia. Accessed May 21, 2020. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kaduna>)

<sup>9</sup> Murtala Muhammed was a Nigerian Army General turned Head of State of Nigeria from 1965 until his assassination in 1976. ("Murtala Muhammed." Wikipedia. Accessed May 21, 2020. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Murtala\\_Mohammed](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Murtala_Mohammed))

against anti-corruption practices and I think for me that's where I drew my human rights inkling from, seeing what my father was doing at that time, going to speak out where other people chose not to say anything when they see things being done in a very wrong manner. It could also be because he was at Ibadan Poly and<sup>10</sup> he was a Student Union president, so maybe that contributed to his interests in fighting for justice. And I think for me that's where I picked my own lifestyle from. As a kid, I was very active, and I was always very interested in leading. I remember that I was into a lot of sporting activities as a young girl. It's like when you go for an Inter-House Sports and a particular name just kept ringing: 100 meters, 200 meters, 400 meters, so my name just kept coming up. I was also interested in things like debate, quiz competition, so I was one of the very few young girls at that time who had the opportunity to begin to speak above a whisper while growing up. So, by the time I got to secondary school, that characteristic became much more prominent in my life and I started asking questions from my teachers and being very inquisitive about the way things were happening around me. So when I was in form 3 which was the 3rd year in the secondary school, we had some youth corps who were posted to the school to support the teachers and I realized that once in a while they would take some grown up girls in class and they would just take them away and ask us to go cut grass outside and all of that. On a particular day, I mobilized my entire mates to say "No, we are not clear about what this is all about, why should they be taking about 5 girls away every time when we have classes and all of that?" And while mobilizing them I climbed a class desk trying to talk to them, probably I did that because of what I have seen in movies or dramas but for whatever reason, I climbed the table and for me that was like a stage, and as if I had a microphone in front of me, as if I was mobilizing people to take action. So, I was telling them "No, we cannot tolerate this anymore. We need to stop this conduct, it is not right for the youth corps who are our teachers to keep going away every week with our classmates, we don't know what they're taking them for. We need to tell the school; we need to tell the school authorities." I think in that euphoria, the students were banging their desks, everyone was saying "yes, yes!" As if it was a campaign. It became like a large group of people making noise, so then the principal of the school stepped into the classroom. Then they found me, caught me in action, standing on top of the desk and addressing my mates. They asked me to step down and follow him to his office. Now when I got to his office, he gave me a suspension for misconduct. He didn't allow me to explain why, he didn't allow me to explain what I was trying to pass across. So, I left to go home and when I got to my parents, my father asked what happened and I explained to them what happened. They said, "climbing on your desk was wrong, but did your principal allow you to explain the reason why you did what you did?" and I said "no" so he said "okay, in the morning we need to go

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<sup>10</sup> The Polytechnic, Ibadan, is an institution dedicated to higher learning in Ibadan in Oyo State, Nigeria. It was founded in 1970 and aims to provide its students with an alternative higher education to universities—one that emphasizes the acquisition of technical skill. ("The Polytechnic, Ibadan." Wikipedia. Accessed May 21, 2020. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Polytechnic\\_Ibadan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Polytechnic_Ibadan))

back to him, we need to explain to him that the suspension is probably not the response to what you did.” So, I went back, and the principal said, “Oh we didn’t know that that was what happened.” He then allowed me back to school the second day, they then set up a panel of inquiry into what happened. They were able to find out that the youth corps members were actually taking the older girls in class out for some sexual misconduct and all of that. So, they punished the NYSC,<sup>11</sup> and I think they actually removed them from the school. And for me that really helped in terms of creating me, making me understand that you don’t have to keep quiet when you see things wrong, that you can actually fight for justice and win. Also, that in a bid to fight for justice you have to use the appropriate method. The method that I used could’ve jeopardized the intention. So, I learned about that at age 13, but the good thing about that was the fact that in a school where there’s a culture of silence, in a way, I was able to use that to break the silence. So, people also know that when things happen, they can either talk about it and that the principal would also be there to be able to respond to them. So, I started getting within the school, when there were things that were not going well, people felt confident to walk to me and say “do you notice this?”, you know, as a kid, because I also got the voice--the ears--of the principal. So, I would quickly go and tell him, you know, “the toilets have been in a state” and all of that. So, I became like a small Gani Fawehinmi <sup>12</sup> campus and by the time I got to the next year, I became the school debater just because of being able to find my voice. So I was being recommended to do debates for school and all of that and I remember that we were actually at that time not talking only about issues that are not real, we’re talking about issues of yellow journalism; we’re talking about issues of apartheid in Africa, we’re talking about issues of capital punishment, we’re talking about sex education in schools and those issues were then contemporary. They were issues that were very strong for a young 14 year old to deal with, but we were reading and our teachers were helping us, we were going for those debates and I remember that one day then old Oyo State debate and I was the lead debater at that level and for me, having that experience gave me stronger interest in wanting to contribute to society. Leaving the secondary school, I became a school prefect, and while being a school perfect I brought into the school a lot of innovation and I remember it was when we wanted to be elected, normally what they do in school is to just appoint, maybe the best students and all of that. I went to meet the principal and insisted that instead we should have an election. So, for the first time we had an election in that secondary school, which was then Osogbo Grammar School. So, by the time I got to the university, I was already cut out to continue doing what I was doing at that time. So, when

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<sup>11</sup> The National Youth Service Corps was set up by the Nigerian government to involve Nigerian graduates in nation building and development. (“National Youth Service Corps.” Wikipedia. Accessed May 21, 2020. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National\\_Youth\\_Service\\_Corps](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Youth_Service_Corps))

<sup>12</sup> Gani Fawehinmi was a Nigerian author, publisher, philanthropist, social critic, experienced human and civil rights lawyer, politician, and Senior Advocate of Nigeria. (“Gani Fawehinmi.” Wikipedia. Accessed May 21, 2020. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gani\\_Fawehinmi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gani_Fawehinmi))

I got to the university, one of the things I saw on the first day, or the second day, the first week I entered Obafemi Awolowo University--Great Ife, was that there was a student union election. So, we were all there, JAMB-ites<sup>13</sup> walking around and I got to the faculty of education and I realized that they were voting. So, we were watching, just observing their votes because we didn't have the right to vote because we just came in by a week. So, the next thing we saw was some students just came in and they carried the ballot box, threw it, scattered it everywhere, they ran off the place. I was like "What is happening here?" So I went back to my room in annoyance because I had a great dream picking Obafemi Awolowo University because it was one of the best universities at that time, they used to call it Great Ife, so I went back to my room I picked up my pen, as a JAMB-ite having spent just one week in school, I wrote an article "The Great Ife that I Used to Know." And in that article, I depicted my dream about the University and came up with the conclusion that what I saw was disappointing and that it shouldn't be done in any society that is ideal. People have a right to vote and nobody has a right to destruct the voting processes. So, I posted it. I think it was a page document and I pasted it around the campus by myself. So, people started reading it in the morning and they were wondering "Who is this?" and I wrote that I'm a JAMB-ite. They were like, "Who is this JAMB-ite? Why should you be interested in school politics?" So, because of that, I got a lot of people try to find me and came to my room to invite me to join Progressive School Association. I decided to join the then Marxist group, which was called the Liberal Militants. The Marxist group was basically looking at how to respond to a lot of issues on campus. It was a students' movement that had a whole lot of people who, like Femi Falana<sup>14</sup> and all of those who had passed through the process before. So, I joined them, and I started talking to them about how to make the University a better place and I remember that, within the period of I think a year, I became the Secretary General of the movement. One of the good things I can remember about that movement is that the movement allows us to read a lot about a whole lot of things from the Marxist perspective about the state of capital, how the economy of the society will grow, and why capitalism is not supporting the groups of Nigeria as a country and the fact that capitalism is a doomed process that's actually going to make life more difficult for the poor. It's going to enrich the few people who are in a position of power and that the best way to resolve issues around economic growth is to bring the economy in the hands of the people, so that people are the ones managing it. And I found that theory very interesting. I got involved in that theory, and we talk about it and try to get as many students as possible to join the movement. My third year, we were supposed to run for elections and the

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<sup>13</sup> JAMB-ite is an acronym given to students seeking admission into a tertiary-level institution. The name comes from the Joint Admissions and Matriculations Board (JAMB), which is a Nigerian entrance examination for further higher education. ("Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board." Wikipedia. Accessed May 21, 2020. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joint\\_Admissions\\_and\\_Matriculation\\_Board](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joint_Admissions_and_Matriculation_Board))

<sup>14</sup> Femi Falana is a Nigerian lawyer and human rights activist. ("Femi Falana." Wikipedia. Accessed May 21, 2020. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Femi\\_Falana](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Femi_Falana))

movement then decided that I should run and I said “No I would just like to-” because if you meet me on the way you’re not likely to think I’m an activist because my look does not depict somebody who is confrontational or who is an activist. I had a little bit of a gentle mien and so I was really not interested., I was not comfortable being in the ideological background, rather than being the face of the movement. They said “No,” and I said “Why?” They said “because there has never been a woman who has run for that position before,” and they thought that I had enough pedigree to be able to run for that position as a Public Relations officer of the Students’ Union because at that time that was like the mouthpiece and at that point in time the Students’ Union was the backbone of some of the movements that we used to see in Nigeria at that time. So, meaning that as a Public Relations Officer of Obafemi Awolowo University, you’ll be speaking with a lot of media, you’ll be the one to be the voice of the students. So, I was a little bit reluctant, but the movement rule was that when you have been asked to do something you don’t say no. It was a collective decision so you can only do what the movement asked you to do. So, I started campaigning and I remember that because I was a woman, and I think that’s where my consciousness about the difference of being a man and a woman actually developed from. I thought I had all the capacity to engage, but there was something missing. I realized that people were looking at me, still yet, as a woman. Now the movement was trying to address that patriarchal thinking by saying you put yourself out, let us let people know that we also have women who have a voice, who are intelligent, who can do better than men in that position. But, you know, dealing with society they really found me very different. So, I started with a slogan and I think it was Leon Trotsky<sup>15</sup> who said, “Where tradition is lacking, a striking example becomes necessary.” So, I put that up in a poster that in this campus, there is a tradition that’s lacking, and that tradition is that you don’t ever find women in that kind of position. They only find women in the Vice Presidency and Treasurer, that I want to break that tradition so we need a striking example and that I’ll be the example to show that it’s not about being a man to take up that position and interestingly, that rose a lot of interest among students. So, there were a lot of questions, you know on my posters you see, “can a woman do it?” “Who says a woman can be the PRO?” and “Will you not run away when the police come with guns and all of that?” “Are you sure that you will not disappoint us when we need you most?” and all of that, so a lot of writings and all of that. So, meaning that, for me, unlike other people--they would probably campaign for like 3 days, I have to campaign for a longer period. So, I campaigned, and I was really shocked on the day that we normally do a debate before the election, so they would bring all the candidates on debates and talk to students. As I stood up to talk, I saw that the entire auditorium of about 10,000 students stood up in solidarity with me and by the time I got to the rostrum to talk, they were just shouting, “You are winning, you are winning, you are winning, you don’t need to answer

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<sup>15</sup> Leon Trotsky was a Soviet revolutionary and Marxist theorist. (“Leon Trotsky.” Wikipedia. Accessed May 21, 2020. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leon\\_Trotsky](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leon_Trotsky))

any questions.” And I stood up there and I think for me that was a moment in my life that I cannot forget where it shows a lot of acceptance by your peers and the school. So, I then tried to persuade the crowd to calm down and I said to them that I would like to say a few words. “Yes, I agree, and I accept the fact that they didn’t want me to say anything, that they have accepted that I am going to win the election, but I would like to say a few words.” So, I spoke to them, appreciating them, and also promising them that I will try as much as possible not to disappoint the students who had given me the votes. So, we went on the election day, very competitive, interestingly. Despite that, I think I won by eleven votes, so meaning that there was a lot of competition. After that, I had to do a lot of things and for me the gender questions also came in different times. For example, the assumption is that any student in that position - past student leaders in that position - there is an expectation that you’re supposed to smoke, that you were supposed to drink. So, I got a lot of people coming up to tell me that. “Oh, the guys who were in this position before, they smoke, they drink, they do this, they do that, and that you are also expected to do that. So, you can’t say no-” and I told them to say, and I had to deal with that, to say that “I have to be myself,” even despite all that pressure]. I had situations whereby I think there was a particular day when a particular side of the University was burning, there was a fire disaster and we were expected to go there as leaders of the campus. So, I didn’t know, I was sleeping, and before I knew it all the guys were inside my hostel which was wrong because it was a female hostel. And it was a time when the ladies were out to have their bath and all of that, so I just had a lot of people screaming. So, they just took advantage of the fact that they had a female student leader in the hostel and they just came and started banging on my door, “You have to come out, that’s why we don’t want a woman!” So, my point is that for every aspect of my work, my gender was a question. And for me, it made me understand the fact that there are strong patriarchal norms in the society. That even when you appear to be the best woman for the job, there’s always a question about your capacity to be able to deliver. And I think the highest point was when some cult guys entered the campus and they started shooting everywhere and students were afraid, and I realized on that day that nobody else was around except me. So, I thought to my mind that maybe the guys knew that these guys were coming but they didn’t let me know. So, I was then left to confront the issue as the only student union leader that was on campus on that day and I remember I had to, despite the gunshot and the fact that students were running helter-skelter, I had to move from one hostel to another to try to calm the students down. To say that “We’re trying to get across to the security to address the matter” and I remember that when I got to the particular hall, which is a very known hall, which is called Awolowo hall, the most vibrant hall in the University, they felt that what I was saying was a sign of weakness. That I was not expected to tell the students that, that what I should have been telling the students is to come out en masse to fight against the cultists. That was not my opinion because I thought that it would mean having a lot of students die that night because it was already like seven in the evening. But by the time I got to Awolowo Hall, the number of students I

met there, and it was obvious that they were waiting for me to say the same thing, then probably I would be mobbed and all of that. So, by the time I got there, I realized that the crowd was not going to listen to that sermon that I was passing from one hostel to another. So, I decided, because that looks to me that was what they wanted from me and I had no option then to just say what they wanted. So, I remember I said "Greatest Ife, this is not University of Ibadan. Great Ife is not the University of Benin. It is not a place where we allow cultism to be the culture of the students. In this University today, we will resist every attempt-" so I changed my voice. So, I started talking about resisting the attempt. Now, by calling for resistance, what it then means is that we were going to march from there to go and fight and battle with the cultists who were already on campus. So, I led them from that hostel, through the den of the cultists. Of course, it became like a whole lot of issues. Students they fought against themselves, some got wounded, and they arrested some students that were cultist members. So, they brought them to Awolowo hall, that same hall where they think they have all the power. So, they brought them to the hall, they locked them up, they were being maltreated and I was screaming and saying "No, this is not right, we can't continue beating people!" and all of that. And I could see a lot of things that happened on that day which I was not happy with. So, the school later on came in because I think even then, there was a particular student who was related to the Vice Chancellor, I think his son was one of those that was arrested. Most of the people that were arrested were also students, lecturer's students, and all of that. So, it became like a big issue and later on, the school had to wade into the matter. But for me, in terms of remembering - because I know that later on there was a big panel some of the cultists were expelled and I had a lot of backlash, having led that. There were times when I'd get to my hostel and have to meet the head of a goat blood, saying "Count your days" and all of that. So, as a young girl, because then I was also just like 19 or 20, it got back to me and I became afraid on campus. I could not let anybody... I didn't have the capacity to tell anyone the way I was feeling. I'd be walking, I'd be looking around myself, people at times come behind me and tell me "We told you not to do it, you've done it, we'll make sure...." So, there were a lot of threats around, but because the system did also not allow it, for me to show my fears. So rather, I kept my fears to myself, I learned how to move from my room. I was on the third floor, but I could move from the third floor, from my 310 to 305. I could skip from my room when I hear people around my door to the next one until 305 where I had a friend, then I would come back through the back door. You know, it was quite risky because I could have fell down from the third floor and all of that, but I learned to do that as a way of saving myself, but I didn't have the capacity to tell anybody what I was feeling and the fact that I was afraid, the fact that my life was under threat and all of that. So that's why I said that's one experience that I can remember. Then before graduating, I had a lot of threats from also lecturers who felt that I was--even the Vice Chancellor at that time--felt that I was too radical and that I think they had to negotiate whether they wanted me to remain on campus

or to leave. And I think that they picked the option of “let her go so that we can have some kind of peace on campus.” And that was how I left the University.

**RO: Wow. Interesting. Yeah, you said a lot of things and I actually have been taking notes. I’m just wondering, what early did you see as dynamism of gender in the different parts of the country where you lived and grew up?**

AA: Well, for example, I know that although I grew up aside from north-central, Kwara State. Kwara State is, up to today, a highly multiethnic state, where you have Yoruba, you have Hausa, and other tribes. But the dominant people there is the Yoruba, Hausa and the Fulani and I think they call them ‘Gambari’ in that state. So, meaning that there are different attitudes to the gender issue in that state because it’s not only cultural but it’s also religious. So, a typical young girl is expected to have the veil on to be able to be accepted in that society. And of course, in that society also I saw while growing up, you have a lot of young girls, who were my friends, got married early. There were a lot of things around the celebration of young wives at that time. In Osun State,<sup>16</sup> it was quite a little bit different from Kwara State. Osun State was more cultural, but you didn’t see that strong religious affiliation at that time. And also I noticed that while growing up of course there were also a lot of issues I knew about, talk around sexual abuse, about rape, as early as maybe as when I was like six or seven, because there were talks about my friends having been raped by somebody and all of that. So, there were a lot of those social problems happening at that time. Although the difference between then and now is that those conversations were not conversations that you can be free to talk about in school or that your parents feel free to talk about to you. So more or less, I think for those two states there were a lot of traditional issues, cultural issues that affect the growth of women and girls. You can see that even in school, the way a lot of my friends that had to drop because then, we were paying for school fees and all of that, and their parents cannot pay. And I think also in a class, we had half of the students were students who were with their foster parents, so they were more like house-girls because I went to a public school, there were house girls, some of them came late to school and all of that. So those issues were some of the issues that I saw growing up. So, you then see we had more boys that were brilliant because they had opportunities, because they come to school early, they can also leave at their own time, but the girls were not as brilliant as boys at that time because they were not given opportunities to concentrate on their studies, particularly those in public school than the boys.

**RO: Do you think that has changed over the years?**

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<sup>16</sup> Osun is an inland state in south-western Nigeria whose capital is Osogbo. It is bordered by Kwara State in the North. (“Osun State.” Wikipedia. Accessed May 21, 2020. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Osun\\_State](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Osun_State))

AA: Well, if I look at, sitting here as a lecturer of the University of Lagos, the faculty of Law in particular, and looking at my students I think there's a high number of young girls. I think it's even higher than the number of boys that I see in class. So, meaning that maybe in the southwest part of the country because I don't think that is general, because I am aware that the data that is coming from the northeast of Nigeria, we still have about 70% of women are illiterate in that area. And I am still aware that child marriage is still very common in that area. So, there might have been some kind of little tilts and it could also be that is peculiar to Law, because it might not be that same with engineering or medicine, but I know that over time there has been a slight improvement in the number of girls in school.

**RO: Okay, thank you. So, very quickly, I just need one or two pieces to add to that. So, that's your journey through life. What would you say your central commitments in life have been?**

AA: Well, I think my whole life is about justice, and I think that's a priority issue to me and now it's about more of gender justice because I realized over time that women are in a particular position in this society, and maybe generally in all society, where society is programmed in a manner against them. There's an exclusion, irrespective of who you are, even if you are a professor it doesn't really matter. In the work that I do, we have seen a situation whereby a husband of a professor died, and they sent a fax message that she's going to be taken over by the brother of the husband. So, my point is that all of the things I've seen is that the injustice against women is located within the patriarchal norm and there is a conspiracy around the norm to the extent that it has become a web. And it's very difficult for women to be able to break the web and to see themselves as a group of people in a society that is free from any form of injustice. So, the injustice is so historical in the lives of women that there's a need to gather the storm to be able to address the problem. So, we need a very strong wave and that is the cause of life I have taken. How do we begin to build that wave? And that wave is not a wave can be done in isolation, it's not a wave that can be done alone, it cannot be in a loner way, but rather it's a wave where we have to build solidarity with other women, with other girls to be able to liberate women from the very terrible patriarchal norms that have been defining their lives, that have been pushing women through the course that they know nothing about, but they just have to continue to answer a question which they didn't originate. And for me that's a cause of life that I have taken to see what we can do. And I do that in different ways. I mobilize, I build solidarity, I invest in networking, and we also use the law as a way because we have also realized in some places one of the easiest ways to liberate women is also to come up with legal jurisprudence that can help in promoting the rights of women.

**RO: Great, thank you so much. So finally, on that segment, what therefore would you say is your most significant achievement, professionally?**

AA: Well for me, I think there are several. One of the things that I've done as head of the organization in terms of building solidarity is to set up a grassroots network because I also realize that one of the things that would continue to affect building a feminist society is if we don't connect with the bulk of the people. So we have worked and we now have about sixty communities across Nigeria from the south and the north where we have built a feminist paralegal system where people in communities, both men and women, are committed to ensuring that there's gender justice for women folk, to also ensure that the society is held accountable for whatever happens to the women. Secondly, we've also built that same community of young girls in about 10 states, so like a total of about 45 universities across Nigeria, and polytechnics, where we work with young girls to find their voice, also to have an understanding of feminism, and also support and promote feminist behavior and develop a feminist community. Thirdly, it's on the issue of the legal space. We have taken up some cases on citizenship. We've also taken up cases on maternal health in Nigeria. We are aware that Nigeria has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world, so we have actually taken the government to court. We have taken actions where the government had to close down the blood bank when we realized that the blood bank was contributing to maternal death. We had a situation whereby health facilities that were contributing to maternal death have been closed down due to our work in terms of holding the government accountable. Of recent, we have also gone into the "Me Too" case. We had contributed to the first classical case where a professor of a University who was accused of sexual harassment was convicted. We had supported the student in ensuring that the appropriate evidence was put before the court and that was the first case in Nigeria where a professor was convicted for sexual-harassment and I think it was for like two years imprisonment. So, in terms of building the movement, we have a very strong voice in building the women's movement. We will not achieve anything as a group of women if we don't have a strong movement. Within the political space, there is a need to build a movement that can hold political parties accountable. The women's movement, for us to be able to address five major issues which we have found as our priority issues in Nigeria. One is the women in politics. If you look at the number of women in politics in Nigeria, as of this last year, it is not up to 6% at the National Assembly. So generally, there's a serious downturn in terms of the number of women in politics. So, we've taken that as a priority for cause and the theory is that if women participate in decision making, it's going to be able to change the lives of women and girls in the country, there is empirical evidence to support that. Our second issue is the issue of violence against women and girls. Our theory is that if we do not address the issue of violence against women and girls, the old conversation about sustainable development goals will be a mirage. So, there's a need for us to contribute in lawmaking and policy intervention and institution building. Awareness

and sensitization for people to be able to have access to the institution, free for survivors to be able to support their education of violence against women and girls in Nigeria. The third issue is the issue of women in the economy. As we speak today, women represent the highest number of poor people in this country. They are poor because of their unpaid care work; they are poor because society has not seen women in any area of development as a critical segment. And if you look at, in the real sense, the small, older women farmers who are the people helping in terms of food security for us as a country. Women represent about 70% of that and that's a bulk so they cannot talk about poverty or food security without... So, when the society is in that regard and they do not see the relevance of women in terms of the economy. I think it's mad economics if you exclude 50% of your population in terms of development. So that's an area in which we also look at. The other area is women in peace and security. If you go to the IDPs<sup>17</sup> in this country, particularly in the northeast, which is also an area where we work, tomorrow I'm going to Adamawa State<sup>18</sup> so it's a place where we work, and we know. We have talked and consulted with the women. The women still represent the largest number of people in those IDP camps, internally displaced person camps. If you look at the huge millions of people that have been subjected and put into the IDP camps in Nigeria, there are over like five million people across the country. And if you look at the kind of life that they're subjected to for an offence that they know nothing about as a group of people. If we don't address the issue of conflict, life will not be better off for women. So, it is critical that we address the issue of peace and security. It is critical that while addressing it, the indigenous knowledge is very important. And when you talk about indigenous knowledge, the women play a very critical role in producing that indigenous knowledge and if the government does not see that role that women play in terms of decision making and peace and security, then there is a problem. So the last issue is the issue of sexual and reproductive rights, which is very fundamental, which is very critical. The right to a woman's bodily integrity is not a compromise. It's a right that should be given because if you look at the population of the country, if in the last 10 years we used to say that there's 1 million people in this country, but today there are 200 million. And this is a result of the fact that women who are supposed to make a choice, in terms of the population, are not given that opportunity to be able to make that choice, whether to have an abortion, whether to have a child, or whether not to have a child. So if we don't address that, the population will keep getting bigger because women lack the voice to be able to make a decision in terms of their sexual and reproductive rights, in terms of their bodily integrity. So, for me, those are five areas, and which is the reason why we

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<sup>17</sup> IDP is an acronym for Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps. The UNHCR defines this group as refugees who have not crossed a border to find safety and remain under the protection of their government, even if that government is the reason for their displacement. ("Internally Displaced People." UNHCR. Accessed May 20, 2020. <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/internally-displaced-people.html>)

<sup>18</sup> Adamawa is a state in northeastern Nigeria, whose capital and largest city is Yola. ("Adamawa State." Wikipedia. Accessed May 21, 2020. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adamawa\\_State](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adamawa_State))

are mobilizing women to have a conversation. There's a need for us to discuss in terms of "What is the Nigeria we want, as women in Nigeria?" So, there's a movement that is gradually building towards a national conversation. There is a need for women in Nigeria to have a national dialogue, to be able to come together and define the kind of Nigeria that we want. The current Nigeria and the current system is not in any way feminist, it's not in any way considerate to gender equality, and what it has been doing is to further strengthen the institution that weakens the women's movement and gender justice.

**RO: Thank you so much, you know, you've actually begun to address other questions that might've come up separately, but then I will just ask this briefly, so how would you say your involvement and your work have been shaped by your experiences over the years?**

AA: Well I believe that, I know I said to one of the media that everyone has a story to tell about what happens when you're growing up. I grew up also in a context of the work that I do. My mom was one of those who suffered some violence, like any other woman, which is a common thing in Africa and probably all over the world. And it took her a long time to find that voice, so I am working an experience that I've gone through, as a child when I see my parents fighting and I run away, hide somewhere, being afraid maybe something would happen to them, maybe they'll kill themselves, and all of that. So, I can understand the trauma, that even when you're not an active participant in the battle in the home, as a child you can feel something. And I grew up to say, "I don't want to experience this kind of thing." So, meaning that it has to do with the kind of choices that I make in my life, and I really want to help my friends, I want to help other people in the world not to experience this kind of violence that my mother experienced. I think at the age of 35 she already had high blood pressure, at the age of 45-47 she had done heart surgery to get a stent in angioplasty and all of that. And I knew that all this happened because of some of the pressure that she had growing up in an abusive family and relationship. And we saw it as a child and so for me, I'm not speaking as an outsider. I'm speaking as somebody who had experienced it, who saw it, who knew the implication. So, for me, when you're telling me that "violence against women is a health issue," I understood that very well. My mom is 78 years old, I take her health much more seriously than any other thing, because I knew what she has gone through. My father is late so I can understand the health aspect of it. The economy aspect of it, I grew up as a child and I saw my father destroy our entire economy. I saw him drive his car to break her bottles that she had put together in a place that she wanted to sell, and I saw her rolling on the floor, crying, "when would I be able to get this thing together again?" So, I understood when they say it's an economic issue because I know several other women who go through this, who have to lose their work, their job, because they have to come late to work because they have been beaten in the morning. They don't want to show the black eye to their people in the office or they had to go to the hospital for

what happened. So I know that it could be an economic issue and I also know that it's a political matter because I have also engaged a lot of policy, a lot of people in policy and decision making, we have engaged them in a bid to pass a Violence Against Women Act in different states. And we have seen the resistance by some of the men not to allow the bill to prevent violence against women to pass, so I understand that it's political. I understand for every man who is sitting on the chair who violates his wife because it's not general, not all of them do. It feels when you speak about women, you are speaking about his conduct to his wife or to his girl, but to the girls and not to his daughter or to any woman that he violates. So, I can understand a political nature of violence against women. So, I sit here, and I speak from a lot of experience that I have seen. Even as a lecturer in the University that students confide in, they come to me to talk to me about some of the things happening to them, the kind of rape that they suffer in the system, the violence that they suffer, the harassment that they suffer. So, I am not speaking, and that's why I say I speak confidently as a participant. So, I understand violence against women, I understand the issue around women political participation and the fact that if we don't have our voices there, you know, nothing will happen. So, my experience in life, the people I've worked with, the things that I have done, has also made me understand... I just remembered--One of the things that I think we have also done in this organization is also to support lawmaking in Nigeria, is it lawmaking, to support the passage of gender-based violence prohibition laws, I think in about 3 or 4 states we have pushed that law successfully and the law has been passed in Ogun state, in Ekiti state<sup>19</sup>, and in Maiduguri<sup>20</sup>, we're working on the law at the national level--we contributed to the passage of the law and in some other states that I cannot remember, I think Benue state, we had also participated in the process of ensuring that the state passed it. Also, my point is that I'm speaking from the experience of having had to negotiate, to lobby the policymakers who are majorly men, to be able to pass these laws. So, I'm not in any way disconnected from what I stand for. So, I stand for it because I know that it is needed, I know that it's a priority, and I know that the liberation of women is not a compromise. It's not something I want to compromise, it's not something that we want to negotiate in this country. For Nigeria to be better, for Nigeria to be able to get its place in the world, Nigeria must address the gender question. If we don't, we'll remain where we are.

**RO: So whatever happened to the girl child's bill about girls child marriage, that was thrown out of the House a couple of years ago when that - was he a Senator? - married the little girl?**

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<sup>19</sup> Ekiti State is in south-western Nigeria. ("Ekiti State." Wikipedia. Accessed May 21, 2020. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ekiti\\_State](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ekiti_State))

<sup>20</sup> Maiduguri is the capital and largest city of Borno State in north-eastern Nigeria. ("Maiduguri." Wikipedia. Accessed May 21, 2020. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maiduguri>)

AA: I remember I was an active participant in that process too. I was a coordinator of gender and constitutional reform network in Nigeria. And it was at a point when the reform of the constitution was going on and one of the areas that we are trying to push for was the area of addressing Section 29.4, subsection B of 4B of the Nigerian 1999 Constitution. So, we're trying to push for the amendment because in a way the law defines the age of majority as 18 and goes further to say that any woman who is married is deemed to be an adult. Now while that law was talking in the context of citizenship and registration, but in a way, it can also affirm the lack of uniformity in what we called the age of majority in Nigeria by saying that any woman who is married, especially in a country where you know that there are a lot of instances where nine-year-old, ten, seven-year-old girls are being married off. Nigeria is one of the countries where early child marriage is very prevalent. To now have something in the constitution that says where a child is married, where a woman is married, what that has done is to use marriage to determine the age of majority. And so, we tried, we lobbied, got a lot of senators on our side then we were being led by Senator Al-Hassan who later on became the Minister of Women's Affairs years back. And I remember with FIDA<sup>21</sup>, Hauwa Shekarau<sup>22</sup> who was then the President of FIDA, we had worked overnight with the then Senator Al-Hassan to work out something that would be pushed forward to the Senate on that day. So, we were actually right there at the gallery when the whole thing happened. So she had agreed to push, but by the time she got to the House, it was a different story and we also saw right there where, the fact that she didn't have the capacity to, because of the pressure she lost the capacity to help us to lobby effectively, to be able to push because the voices of the men were higher than hers. And that raises the question of even when women really want to make change happen, if there are very few, it might also become a great challenge.

**RO: So, number matters.**

AA: So, the number also matters. So, it was the number that didn't help, so what the number did was to kill the drive by Senator Al-Hassan. On that day, she could not say anything, she had to sit there and allow Senator Yerima to lead the conversation on the need for why they should retain that. And so that was where we missed that opportunity, but you see we participated in the Child Rights Act which was passed in 2003 and has been domesticated in about 26 states in Nigeria. The Child Rights Act also speaks to the issue of the definition of who is a child and ordinarily should affect the issue of the right of the child and should

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<sup>21</sup> FIDA is the acronym for the Spanish organization "Federación Internacional de Abogadas." The group has been replicated in Nigeria under the name "International Federation of Women Lawyers." ("International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA) Nigeria." Devex. Accessed May 20, 2020.

<https://www.devex.com/organizations/international-federation-of-women-lawyers-fida-nigeria-112900>  
<sup>22</sup> Hauwa Shekarau is a lawyer, women's rights activist, SRHR specialist, and human rights activist based in Abuja, Nigeria. ("Hauwa Shekarau." Twitter. Accessed May 21, 2020.  
<https://twitter.com/hauwashekarau?lang=en>)

be able to address the issue of child marriage. But, unfortunately about 24 states have signed on to that law, the 10 states that have not signed onto that law are the states that are really those top states who are really violating the right of the child. And they're in the northeastern part of the country, in the northeast, the northwest, and some of them in the north central. So, it's unfortunate that those are the places where child marriage is very prevalent, but they are the ones who had refused, based on religion, based on culture, based on tradition to allow their young children to grow. And those are the states that I think that we need to do more work to ensure that we liberate the girl child and that's why you see the insurgency goes into Chibok<sup>23</sup> and carries all the girls and the girls came back with about 50-60% of them, of the ones who came back, had to be repaired because they were violated, they were sexually abused. And that's why the state has a role to play because some of the things that the state accepts during peacetime can have a very huge implication in war time. If you allow people to marry kids at 8, 9, 10 years old, in wartime people will see it as normal and they will just do what they are doing in peacetime. This is empirical, it's evidence that we see in all the war places from Sierra Leone to Liberia to where we are in Nigeria.

**RO: I imagine, I can't imagine how these things happen and continually get perpetuated without questioning. So, I just wonder how, your engagements for instance, might have impacted your feminist academic work or activism?**

AA: Well, in a lot of ways. Before I joined academia, I had been writing a lot and it was even interesting, on the day I went for my interview, that the people who were interviewing said to me that they had read a lot of my books, particularly on women's rights and what have you. So for me, coming into this system, I know a lot of people had asked me, "Do you want to be a Constitutional lawyer or you want to be Gender and the Law?" and I said "It doesn't make me a lesser person, the fact that you specialize in tax law and you think tax is a stronger... is a hard law and you think gender is-" and I said to me, "Gender is a harder law than even the tax law." So what this has helped me to do is also to further strengthen my work, most of the writings that I do, they are either on women in political participation, decision making, climate change as it relates to gender, the issue of conflict, how does it relate with gender? How does it intersect with the issue of climate, migration, trafficking, and all of that? So, joining this area had helped me to be able to connect those issues that I would probably have taken alone where I've created a very intersection for why we need to do more work to ensure that there is gender justice in the society. So I teach Gender and the Law, and it's one of the courses that I try to encourage as many students as possible to attend, to do, because I feel that one of the things that we need to do is to treat issues of

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<sup>23</sup> Chibok is a local government area of Borno State. ("Chibok Schoolgirls Kidnapping." Wikipedia. Accessed May 21, 2020. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chibok\\_schoolgirls\\_kidnapping](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chibok_schoolgirls_kidnapping))

gender equality from school so that people who are passing through the University so we are not hearing about gender equality or women's rights for the first time when you are a policy maker, but you have had the opportunity of discussing it in class, you have had the opportunity of researching in that area. So, I also teach them human rights law and one of the areas of human rights law, which seems to have a lot of students wanting to do it, so we have gender, women's rights, rights of women as one of the topics in the curriculum. So, meaning that we also have the opportunity of speaking to more students in that regard. So, I think, by and large, this has helped in my writings and I've done a lot in terms of ensuring that the conversation on gender equality is put on the table, particularly in Nigeria. And I'm also a member of the Global Alliance, Feminist Alliance for Rights, which is being coordinated by the Center for Women and Law in University in New Jersey, in Rutgers University. So, I also belong to the African Feminist Forum and also the Nigerian Feminist Forum, and I also convene in one of the most vibrant feminist platforms in Nigeria where we have all feminists collectively come into it. From that platform, we've done a lot of things in terms of addressing the issue and we have not only feminists within, but we have feminists in diaspora. And what we have used that to do is to put together the collective voices of women who believe in a feminist world to try to intervene, and we have intervened in several issues to the extent that because of the work we do the Punch Newspaper had to pull down their editorial because we wrote a protest to say what you have put forward in Punch Newspaper is discriminatory. As we speak the Guardian Newspaper is pulling down an editorial they wrote about the BBC documentary and their own analysis of what the BBC didn't do right and where we noticed that their analysis is not in favor of gender equality or women who have been harassed by their lecturers, we wrote to them and they're asking us - they did a rejoinder - and they're asking us for a conversation. So, we've had situations where we jointly address issues of women in politics. A woman had run for Speakership of the House, we had given her through that platform the solidarity that she desires. Recently, about nine women had been appointed to become commissioners in Kwara State, which was the first time we're having 56% of the nominees of any government in this country to be women and there was a lot of backlash, so we stood for the women, we worked with them all through their...

**RO: Campaign?**

AA: No, no, with their interviews with the House of Assembly. And today, those women will be the first set of 56% women nominees that we have ever had in the country. So, we had also given support to the he-for-she Governor who had nominated the women. So, by and large, it has been like a collective voice and it's the same group that is convening the national conversation to define the lives of women in Nigeria. We intend to have a

communiqué<sup>24</sup> on the third day, and submit that communiqué to the House of Assembly, National Assembly on what the Nigerian women want, so for us, in a way, it's more or less like women calling for a revolution that will better the lives of women, that will liberate the lives of women. We're tired of lamentations, we're tired of promises that are never kept by the government of the day, we're tired of the lives of women, the deaths of women for offences that they don't commit, and we don't want to pretend as if we are not feeling this from them. We want to confront the government about it, we want to insist that the rights of women must be properly protected in this country and that's why we think that that conversation is important. So, we're working towards a national conversation and also building a women's movement in this country. Good enough, the UN women are also falling in line in that regard with the spotlight initiative that has been launched globally. So, Nigeria is supporting a process where building becomes very critical. I think all over the world we have realized that if there are no alliances by women across country, intra-country, will not be able to achieve a society that is free from any form of discrimination against women. So Nigerian women are also moving in that regard, we have a very vibrant group of women in Nigeria Association who understand the issue. We have vibrant individuals who are committed to ensuring that women's issues are at the front burner of the things that we do in the country. So, what we then need to do is to bring all these voices together as one voice. We have a huge history of Aba Women<sup>25</sup> riots, we have a huge history of what Madam Tinubu<sup>26</sup> did on tax issue, we have a huge history of the Pelewuras<sup>27</sup>, we

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<sup>24</sup> A communiqué is an official announcement or statement, usually one made to the media. ("Communiqué." Merriam-Webster. Accessed May 20, 2020. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/communique%C3%A9>)

<sup>25</sup> The Aba Women's Riots, also known as the Women's War, was a period of unrest in British Nigeria in November of 1929. It was caused by a combination of factors: the protest against the Warrant Chiefs, the introduction of new taxes, and increasingly lower prices of agricultural products. The women rioted for an end of the warrant chief system and an appointment of indigenous leaders as clan heads as opposed to British figure heads. The revolt resulted in the resignation of several Warrant Chiefs and the appointment of women to serve on Native Courts. Perhaps most significantly, the riots are widely regarded as the start of the emergence of pan-African anti-colonial nationalism. ("Women's War." Wikipedia. Accessed May 21, 2020. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women's\\_War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women's_War))

<sup>26</sup> Madam Tinubu, born Efunporoye Osuntinubu Olumosa, was a politically significant figure in Nigerian history due to her role as a powerful aristocrat, business tycoon, and slave trader in Nigeria—both before and after colonialism. She was shrewd, ambitious, widely respected, and held enormous economic power across Western Africa. She was born in 1805 and died in 1887. (Foster, Hannah. "Madam Efunroye Tinubu (CA. 1805-1887)." BlackPast. Accessed May 21, 2020. <https://www.blackpast.org/global-african-history/tinubu-madam-efunroye-ca-1805-1887/>)

<sup>27</sup> Alimotu Pelewura was a Chief and Nigerian trader who led the Market Women's Association, an advocacy group for market women. She was also one of Herbert Macaulay's most vital political allies. For context, Macaulay was a male politician widely considered the founder of Nigerian nationalism. She was born in 1865 and died in 1951. ("Alimotu Pelewura." Wikipedia. Accessed May 21, 2020. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alimotu\\_Pelewura](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alimotu_Pelewura))

have a huge history of Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti.<sup>28</sup> So we are not--Hajia Sawaba,<sup>29</sup> the Queen Aminas--, so it is not new, women organizing is a part of the history of Nigeria. So it is not a new thing and that's why we have a strong Market Women Association, if any market women association says that a particular governor will not become a governor it is something that they] can do. So that we then want to do is to strengthen those groupings across the country to be able to negotiate for the rights of women. So that we moved from lamentation and begging to asserting and affirming our presence as women in Nigeria, our presence as women who can shift the culture because I think one of the greatest things that we can do is to achieve the culture shift from where we are to where we want to be as a group of women in Nigeria. And there's a lot of work going on in that regard and I think the work is easy because there's a lot of organizing around. Recently, I think a woman passed on in Maiduguri and this was a woman who thought that her husband was wrongly accused of being part of the insurgency. And there were about like 1500 people that were wrongly picked for that and what she did was to build a movement of women to insist and to fight, to say some of our children don't know anything about it, they were just being arrested by soldiers for offences that they didn't- so my point is that the spirit and conviction and commitment of Nigerian women to organize is really very strong. We have the Umu Ada in the southeast, it's a grouping of women that has been there from time immemorial. So what we're going to do is explore all these groupings and associations to form a formidable force of Nigerian women to be able to define the kind of elections that we have, who we want to be in that election, to find the kind of country that we want, who we want to rule us to have a better Nigeria that we pray and hope for.

**RO: Wonderful. And that will just take us straight into the next question, you started to talk about climate change, what is that connection between feminism, women, and climate change?**

AA: Well, climate change is defining the world, meaning that it's also defining our general existence because we are already experiencing a lot of changes in temperatures and a lot of changes in the society, which is attributed to the old conversation about carbon and all of that. Now, for us women, because our livelihoods also depend on our surrounding and our environment. A lot of women in rural communities use the firewood for food that they make and of course the trees are no longer there because of climate change and also because the society had taken over the places where we were supposed to have trees,

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<sup>28</sup> Chief Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti was a Nigerian educator, political campaigner, women's rights activist, and aristocrat. She was also the first female student to attend Abeokuta Grammar School. She was born in 1900 and died in 1978. ("Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti." Wikipedia. Accessed May 21, 2020. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Funmilayo\\_Ransome-Kuti](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Funmilayo_Ransome-Kuti))

<sup>29</sup> Gambo Sawaba was a Nigerian women's rights activist, politician, philanthropist, and elected leader of the national women's wing of the Northern Element Progressive Union. She was born in 1933 and died in 2001. ("Gambo Sawaba." Wikipedia. Accessed May 21, 2020. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gambo\\_Sawaba](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gambo_Sawaba))

greens grow, because of the bad management in the society because the system is not forward looking to be able to know that we need to preserve the greens for better sustainability. Now, within all this, women are caught in it, some uninformed about what to do, but they are quite powerful in changing, in addressing and mitigating the effect of climate change. But unfortunately, the society is not targeting this group of people to be able to address the impact of climate change. If you look at Nigeria from the Sahel,<sup>30</sup> the Lake Chad conversation about water and all of that. In all these conversations, women have a very critical role to play and that's also what leads to conversations around migration some people have to move from a place to another in search of food, in search of livelihood, in sure of even farmland that has been taken over from them. And so, there is a connection between the conversation about women's rights, gender equality, climate change, migration, conflict, so there's an intersection that connects all this conversation together. And that if we don't address the climate, if we don't look at the role of the decisions that women can make with climate, if we don't prioritize it, there's a possibility that we will not be able to address the effect of climate. If women constitute the bulk of people who manage life load and they don't have information about what to do with the climate, when there's rain, what to do with the climate, to address erosion, and all of that. Ironically, from the studies that we have had, we also know that indigenous knowledge of women can be very useful in mitigating the effects of climate change. And if we fail to tap into that knowledge of women, we might not be able to address the problem and the effect of climate change particularly in the communities.

**RO: Thank you, I think it's getting clearer now. So, next question I'd just like you to speak to this relationship between feminist scholarship and activism.**

AA: Well, feminist scholarship for me, it's also a form of activism in the sense that feminist academics have actually defined the conversations and the boundaries in feminist discussions. What feminist scholarship does is to provide the power and the theoretical base upon which feminism is viewed. What it does to fuel feminist activism in a manner that you draw your strength from, the writings of others to be able to define your intervention as an activist. So, there are feminist scholars who also derive, for example if I write from the work I do, so meaning that I write from...

**RO: Legal perspectives?**

AA: Legal perspectives, social perspectives. Meaning that, I am not a feminist scholar who sits there and does theories. I write not as a tourist, but also, it's a combination of activism,

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<sup>30</sup> The Sahel is an ecoclimatic and biogeographic zone of transition between the Sahara to the North and the Sudanian Savanna to the South. It stretches along the central latitudes of North Africa from the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea. ("Sahel." Wikipedia. Accessed May 21, 2020. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sahel>)

and we have seen quite a number of feminist scholarship writing from that angle, from not what we think, but from what we have acted and what we have seen. To say this is how - and I think that that's what we need to build more on, because before it's always been the scholars are on this side and the activists on the other side. So, the connection of both feminist scholarship and activism would give us a good blend so that we are not only speaking theory, we are also speaking reality. Because what the activists would bring in is the activism, so there's a need for connection. So even if the activist is not writing, it's important for the scholars to study the activists and see how that impacts on the scholarship. I hope that's...

**RO: So, I think it's just about the things that our eyes have seen and our hands have handled, we have**

**RO and AA: experienced it.**

AA: So, it gives a more potent reading to people that are coming behind who are reading your work. I remember that the writings of the initial feminists in the early world were based also on their experiences of maybe a report that they have seen on a particular issue. And that's why you have people like Hilary Charlesworth,<sup>31</sup> Rebecca Cook,<sup>32</sup> and a whole lot of them. And also of course from this side, and that's why it was easy when the theories from the Western world were not sounding like the African contexts, then the African feminists had come to say "No, you are not speaking for us." So that's why the experience and the activism is important to be able to view the context because yes, the background, the ideology is clear about the issues of marginalization and exclusion of women, but the context could be different, how exclusion and marginalization would manifest in the United States of America would be different from how it would manifest in the DRC, the Congo or other places, and that was why there were conversations about whether the Western conversation about feminism suits well. And so that's why there are developments around the Western feminism and the African feminism, but I think that the ideology is still remained the same, the context might be different, but the writings of

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<sup>31</sup> Hilary Charlesworth is an Australian feminist international law scholar with over 6,950 citations. ("Hilary Charlesworth." Wikipedia. Accessed May 21, 2020. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hilary\\_Charlesworth](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hilary_Charlesworth))

<sup>32</sup> Rebecca Cook is a Canadian international human rights lawyer with a specific focus in the human rights of women. ("Rebecca Cook." University of Toronto Faculty of Law. Accessed May 21, 2020) <https://www.law.utoronto.ca/faculty-staff/full-time-faculty/rebecca-cook>)

people like Sara Longwe,<sup>33</sup> people like Oyewunmi Oyeronke,<sup>34</sup> Bolanle Awe,<sup>35</sup> you can still see that there's no fundamental difference in terms of the background ideological conversation, let's take for example, Rebecca Cook writing on sexual and reproductive rights and Bolanle Awe's writing on sexual and reproductive rights. Both of them still agreed on the same issues, but the contexts might be different, a particular context might have accepted conversations around abortion, while the other context has not accepted conversations on abortion, based on tradition, religion, and what have you, but the underlining principles remain. I think that both sides have been able to learn from one another, and that can also be seen in some of the regional instruments that came out. For example, when the CEDAW<sup>36</sup> came out, the Africans said "Well, there are all the issues that the CEDAW didn't talk about, the CEDAW didn't talk about violence against women, which is very fundamental to Africans, the CEDAW forgot to talk about the issue of widows' rights, which is fundamental though the CEDAW talked about rural women, but it didn't talk about widows' rights, which is fundamental to the African people." The CEDAW did not talk about deserted women, which is a serious issue in Africa because a lot of people are abandoned, but the African Protocol<sup>37</sup> took it into cognizance all those issues that the CEDAW did not talk about. And it becomes a stronger document than the CEDAW. But the underlying principle of both the CEDAW and the African Protocol still remains the same.

**RO: I think you actually began to talk about my next question, which is really to understand African feminism. What is African feminism?**

AA: Well, African feminism is a kind of feminism that looks at women's marginalization and exclusion and discriminations that women suffer from the context of Africa, that believes that the patriarchal norms in Africa could be stronger than the norms in any other

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<sup>33</sup> Sara Longwe is a Zambian consultant on gender and development and describes herself as a radical feminist activist. She served as the chairman of FEMNET, also known as the African Women's Development and Communication Network, from 1997 to 2003. FEMNET works to aid NGOs that contribute to African gender development. She is also the author of the Longwe Framework for Gender Analysis. ("Sara Hlupekile Longwe." Wikipedia. Accessed May 21, 2020. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sara\\_Hlupekile\\_Longwe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sara_Hlupekile_Longwe))

<sup>34</sup> Oyeronke Oyewunmi is a Nigerian gender scholar and Sociology professor. Her literary work centers around the intersection between postcolonialism, gender, and non-Western cultures. ("Oyeronke Oyewumi." Wikipedia. Accessed May 21, 2020. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oyeronke\\_Oyewumi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oyeronke_Oyewumi))

<sup>35</sup> Bolanle Awe is a Nigerian oral history professor. ("Bolanle Awe." Wikipedia. Accessed May 21, 2020. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bolanle\\_Awe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bolanle_Awe)). See also her interview with the Global Feminisms Project.

<sup>36</sup> CEDAW is the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. ("Outcome of CEDAW Review of Nigeria: More Action Needed to Implement the WPS Agenda." Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. Accessed May 21, 2020. <https://www.wilpf.org/outcome-of-cedaw-review-of-nigeria-greater-action-needed-to-implement-the-wps-agenda/>)

<sup>37</sup> The African Protocol, also known as the Maputo Protocol, is an international human rights campaign established by the African Union in 2003 that went into effect in 2005. It guarantees comprehensive rights to women, including the right to vote, social and political equality with men, increased bodily autonomy, and marked an end to female genital mutilation. ("Maputo Protocol." Wikipedia. Accessed May 21, 2020. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maputo\\_Protocol](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maputo_Protocol))

place. And so feminist learning and thinking must respond to that endemic nature of the patriarchal norm. And because the patriarchal norm has manifested in different ways. So African feminism is taking this context as critical to addressing the problem of women and girls in Africa.

**RO: Do you see any, because you mentioned the word ideology, do you see any ideological differences between western feminism perceptions and African feminism perspectives?**

AA: I think in terms of ideology, I think the underlining factor is marginalization, exclusion, discrimination. And if those are the three key words that run to affirm the feminist ideology, I really don't see any difference between what a Rebecca Cook would say and what I would say, or what Radhika Coomaraswamy<sup>38</sup> will say or what I will say. But I think what will be different is the context within which I would say it. There are a lot of manifestations of discrimination in Africa that might be different from what happens in the western world. There are a lot of manifestations of exclusion that when you describe it to a western feminist, might think "Oh we've passed that level." So, the contexts are different and there are some that they will say, and we will say, "Are you guys still dealing with that?" So, my point is that the danger of that dichotomy is having a "we and them." And a "we and them" would likely not be ideological but it would be contextual.

**RO: So next, where do you see the point that your work intersects with the women's movement? For instance, maybe you want to look at your work in this country and then globally?**

AA: For example, I was recently appointed to the Global Feminist Movement as the representative of Africa and we had a meeting in Addis, about 2 weeks ago, and when I spoke, I noticed that one of them said "Oh, you were very deep in your conversation." And I thought in my mind that probably what I was talking about --we were talking about women in conflict settings--and I was talking about the issues of migration and climate change as I said earlier and they were finding that connection quite interesting, it was a connection that was not made initially when there were conversations about sexual and reproductive rights, but the connection I arose as a result of our work in Africa. So, there are areas that, for example, areas of conflict where the African feminists might have a broader knowledge because they feel it, because they can see it and they can understand different manifestations of it than the Western feminists. But there's always a place of convergence, so from the work I do, filling in that information becomes very critical and

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<sup>38</sup> Radhika Coomaraswamy is a Sri Lankan lawyer, diplomat, and human rights advocate who served as the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict in the United Nations. ("Radhika Coomaraswamy." Wikipedia. Accessed May 21, 2020. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Radhika\\_Coomaraswamy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Radhika_Coomaraswamy))

very important. We're going for the ICPD 25<sup>39</sup> very soon and so what we're trying to do is convene a global conversation between African, Asian, the Americans, and the western world to see what lessons we can learn and I think that's what we need to do more so that we can understand how our work connects, the interconnectivity of the work that we do here and the learnings that we can get to strengthen the ideology to understand more about the different shades of feminism that we are seeing as time goes on.

**RO: And then maybe one of the last questions, what has been, for instance, the progression of the feminist movement in Nigeria in the last 3-4 decades?**

AA: Well, I think a lot has been done by the women's movement in the last 3-4 years. One of the successes has been the passage of the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act, which was the first time in 2015 when the government of Nigeria signed a law that prohibits violence against women and girls in the country. There has also been the National Gender Policy,<sup>40</sup> which was signed onto in 2007, but became obsolete in 2015. We have also been able to come up with the sex offenders register, which was not there, where you people can begin to double-check when they want to employ people whether the person's name had appeared as having committed any sexual offences before. There has also been a lot in terms of women intervening around electoral law, the INEC<sup>41</sup> in 2015 had signed on to a gender policy which is supporting women participation within INEC itself. The women's movement has also worked to ensure that institutions now have gender policy. There has been a lot of collaboration and alliance building between women's movement and the private sector to the extent that there are a lot of activities that the private sectors are now putting in place that are responding to issues around gender equality. There has also been a lot of change in terms of media writings with respect to gender equality issues, I'm aware that the EFCC<sup>42</sup> has a gender policy likewise so some of the anti-corruption agencies have also had one form of gender policy or the other. Most schools now, unlike in

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<sup>39</sup> The ICDP +25 is the International Conference on Population and Development. The most recent conference focused on sexual and reproductive health and rights for women and girls globally. ("International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD+25)." World Health Organization. Accessed May 21, 2020. [https://www.who.int/news-room/events/detail/2019/11/12/default-calendar/international-conference-on-population-and-development-\(icpd-25\)](https://www.who.int/news-room/events/detail/2019/11/12/default-calendar/international-conference-on-population-and-development-(icpd-25)))

<sup>40</sup> Nigeria's National Gender Policy aimed to end discrimination, ensure fundamental human rights to all people regardless of gender and circumstance, and protect the health, socio-economic, and political well-being of all citizens. ("National Gender Policy." NCAA. Accessed May 20, 2020. [http://www.aacoalition.org/national\\_policy\\_women.htm](http://www.aacoalition.org/national_policy_women.htm))

<sup>41</sup> INEC is the Independent National Electoral Commission in Nigeria and was formed as the electoral body that oversees elections. ("Independent National Electoral Commission." Wikipedia. Accessed May 21, 2020. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Independent\\_National\\_Electoral\\_Commission](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Independent_National_Electoral_Commission))

<sup>42</sup> The EFCC is the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, a Nigerian law enforcement agency whose duties include investigating financial crimes and corruption. ("Economic and Financial Crimes Commission." Wikipedia. Accessed May 21, 2020. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economic\\_and\\_Financial\\_Crimes\\_Commission](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economic_and_Financial_Crimes_Commission))

5 years ago, now have the sexual harassment policies, some of them now had created the Center for Gender Studies, which we didn't use to have in this country before. So, by and large, a lot of progress has been made. And if you look at between like 1999 when Nigeria entered into this civilian space and now, there's been quite a number of laws, particularly at the state levels, maybe very few at the national, but at the state levels there has been a whole lot of new laws. In my last count, there were about 35 different laws that have been passed at one time or the other. So, it looks like lawmaking has become one of the avenues that Nigeria as a country is using to address gender equality. Now what we then need to work more on is how to make those laws effective so that it can really define and change the lives of women.

**RO: Okay, I think that's a very great evaluation of how things have been in the last few decades, but then what would be your evaluation of the development of feminism in general in Nigeria?**

AA: Well, I think one of the challenges that we're having as a country is that I think the feminist grouping that we have is not very effective. We have a Nigerian Feminist Forum, but the Forum has not been very effective and I think it's due to lack of proper understanding also by the group who is the Secretariat of the Forum, because we are accused that we cannot achieve a feminist community when we don't open the doors of feminism to allow as many people as possible to be able to enter, learning the ideologies. There must be some minimum standard, but we cannot close the doors of ideology. People read, even becoming feminists by reading and understanding and thinking that "Oh I think this is an idea that I want to be part of." You can also become a feminist ideologue<sup>43</sup> by what you do and someone noticing what you do and saying that you need to be part of the feminist movement and all of that. So, I think we have done, a whole lot of years back, "we and them" we had invested too much time in saying "this is a group of women's rights" "this is a group of feminists." So, I think there's a need for us to close that gap. We cannot achieve a feminist world if we don't get as many people as possible to understand, we cannot be speaking to ourselves. If we continue speaking to ourselves, we will not have a feminist community. A 'community' is a community who is ready to confront people with the ideologies and win the people over. The more feminists we get, the likelihood of having a feminist society, the likelihood of having people in leadership who believe in feminist ideology. So, I think the problem that we are having is a country is that we don't want to open up feminism to others. We believe that some people know about this and we also don't want to tolerate people's weaknesses in understanding. Let me give an example of

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<sup>43</sup> An ideologue is a strong advocate of a specific ideology ("Ideologue." Merriam-Webster. Accessed May 20, 2020. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ideologue>)

what I'm trying to say. The feminist platform has had conversations on, for example, LGBTQ. And you get a lot of people come to say, "We should not be discussing that, I don't think it's a feminist discussion." Now for me, I will not shut down such a person but rather I will put an argument on "Why do you think we should not discuss it?" and proffer a greater argument on why we should discuss it. If I am able to convince the person I have won one more vote for the feminist movement but if I'm not able to tolerate the person that I have lost maybe a potential feminist. So, the argument has always been that everybody must be at the same level and I feel that you cannot subject your own consciousness to the consciousness of other people. The process of feminism is a process of learning, nobody was born a feminist, people grew up to learn feminism. So, we must open up to allow people to learn and unlearn feminism. So that's my own ideology, so I will not condemn anybody who claims to be a feminist but who is not clear about the ideology, but rather I would say "do you want to read a book on that subject matter that we are discussing? Maybe when you read it, we can come back for further discussion," but I will not say "Because you didn't meet me at my point of knowledge, that makes you a lesser person." Feminism should also allow people to make choices on areas they think they believe in while we try as much as possible to convince them on those other areas that we think are non-negotiable in conversations of feminism. People's belief and conversation can be influenced by a whole lot of things, what they see, what they hear, where they're coming from, where they live, and as feminists we must recognize that. That women are not homogeneous that we also are different and that is why we see people speak of different strands of feminism. What that means in particular is that there's really no general agreement. People have a different opinion, but we all have those three underlining ideological understandings. So, I would ask if you say you are a feminist, I will ask you what is your understanding of discrimination against women, what is your understanding of marginalization and exclusion of women, do you think abortion excludes the rights of women? So that's the kind of conversation I want to have with you and I would rather be interested more in bringing you to our side than in losing you to the other side because I think we really have a whole lot of people on the other side that what we need to do is to bring them to this side. Or else, it would just be having a feminist conversation will just be: Oh, we won't be able to get women in decision making on the basis of not being able to get them to agree on the theory. Now if you look at South Africa, for example, South African Parliament is one of the parliaments that people call a feminist parliament, but still yet, they are not all feminists. But why do they call them a feminist parliament? Some of them might not even call themselves a feminist. It is because of the kind of decision that the women in that parliament has been able to make in terms of addressing exclusion, marginalization, and discrimination. So, my point is that in a country like Nigeria how do we get to that level if we have a lot of assumptions and biases and we exclude women to have a feel and an understanding of the ideology. We are not opening up conversation,

calling a symposium and directing the symposium<sup>44</sup> to be able to get somebody to say “Oh, today I realize that this is the way this conversation is made.” Then for us to keep shutting people out because they are not well grounded with the ideology. So I belong to that school of thought, that if your ideology is good, if your ideology is convincing, throw it out there, let it be debated and if you debate and your conversation won the debate, it further affirmed the fact that your ideology is clear and is correct.

**RO: Thank you. I hope you will permit me to ask more questions, this should have been the last question, but then another one came up so I will ask the one that came up within your response. So, religion is a big thing in Nigeria and there are more women participants, both in the two major religions, Islam and Christianity. So, would you say that religion has helped the cause of feminism, gender, participation in Nigeria?**

AA: In Nigeria, religion has not helped feminism at all, rather it has drawn back the ideology. But women within religion, we have the feminist Muslimah who are mostly women who are feminists and what they try to do is to read the Koran in a manner that changes the opinion for feminist conversation. I know that organizations like WRAPA<sup>45</sup> has done a lot in that regard. BAOBAB<sup>46</sup> for women’s human rights has done a whole lot of conversation on how Koran reflects feminist principles. In the Christian world too, the Catholics for example. I have a lot of feminist sisters who have also tried as much as possible to read the Bible in a manner that would espouse feminist principles. But still yet that seems to be like a major area and what we try to also tell feminists who are within those religions is to ensure that we also have a good understanding of the religion and read it in a manner that can better suit feminist discourse. But in Nigeria the religion has been a major conversation and has constituted major backlash for feminists. I remember that there was a day that I was on air to speak about abortion and before I got back, I started getting calls from Catholics and all that to say “What do you think you are talking about? Is this what your feminism is all about?” and all of that, so it’s a major issue. I remember that there was a newspaper article that picked me up and said. on the front page, that I said, “I believe in abortion” and they put my name on it. And I was going to the church in the

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<sup>44</sup> A symposium is a social gathering in which ideas are freely exchanged (“Symposium.” Merriam-Webster. Accessed May 20, 2020. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/symposium>)

<sup>45</sup> WRAPA is the Women’s Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative based in Abuja, Nigeria. It is a female-focused NGO whose mission it is to actualize the legal rights of women in public and private spaces. It was recently awarded a MacArthur Award for Creative & Effective Intuitions for its anti-corruption efforts. (“Women’s Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative.” MacArthur Foundation. Accessed May 20, 2020. <https://www.macfound.org/grantees/885/>)

<sup>46</sup> BAOBAB is an organization headed by female lawyers and legal activists whose specialty lies in Nigerian Islamic law. (“Muslim Women’s Rights in Northern Nigeria.” Wilson Center. Accessed May 21, 2020. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/publication/Muslim%20Women%27s%20Rights%20Northern%20Nigeria%20-%20FINAL.pdf>)

morning and I found all the elders in the church were waiting for me to ask me whether I really said that and when I was ready to do a rejoinder. I said to them that I wasn't going to do a rejoinder. I said everything that was quoted, that they should go and read the full document to understand the context that that was said, but I will not do a rejoinder. If you don't want me to enter the church, fortunately there was another church next-door. I'll be willing to go to church next-door, what was important for me was to be able] to come to church for that morning. So, my point is that religion is a major thing. A lot of feminists sit in the church and they get very annoyed and the religion is also very, Christianity for example and Muslim religion, we still have very few women who stand at the rostrum, who talk about some of these issues so, you still get to hear this old conversation. But there has been a lot of discussions, conversations. There is a side by side movement that is bringing men who are in religious circles with women to talk about some of these issues around the religion. And gradually, we are also getting some pastors who are changing and who are also leading feminist conversations.

**RO: Okay, great. So, this will be really the final, final question, maybe it might have a little part. But I will ask you a big question, you started already, even from the outset, to talk about connections of the work on feminism, activism, and gender issues in Nigeria and at the global level. How did these connections come about and then, what do they mean for your work? And then, have you been able to make a sense out of the differences and similarities in the kinds of issues raised on approaches taken by activists, scholars, and organizations in resolving the issues?**

AA: Well, there are issues that come up in the work we do, for example we have lost like two grants because of our stand on sexual and reproductive rights. And unfortunately, those grants are very huge grants that help to pay about 50% of the salaries of staff of the organization. Where we are accused of working with the Center for Reproductive Rights, which is not an accusation, we do. Which they feel are on the extreme with issues of sexual reproductive rights and we were asked to write a letter to denounce our affiliation with organizations working in reproductive rights which she refused. So, we had to lose the grants. The global gag rule<sup>47</sup> affected us as an organization. Some of the groups that supported reproductive rights have changed to corruption and anticorruption and a whole lot of other things. So, we look at what's the effect of that to the future of the whole conversation of women's rights. It's like leaving the issue because I don't know what else I can speak about women's rights if we don't speak about their sexual and reproductive rights because it's one major actual life thing for women, the right to be able to make a

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<sup>47</sup> The Global Gag Rule, also known as the Mexico City policy, is a United States government policy that blocks U.S. federal funding for NGOs that advocate for the decriminalization of abortion or the expansion of abortion services or provide abortion counseling or referrals. ("Mexico City Policy." Wikipedia. Accessed May 20, 2020. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mexico\\_City\\_policy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mexico_City_policy))

choice of their bodily integrity. So in our work we had to lose our funders because of our stand, but because we are committed to what we are doing, we believe that being consistent about our work, and being known for what we do, and what we stand for, it's critical to any other thing. So that is why I would agree that yes, this whole thing has affected the work we do, and I can also imagine in the work that a lot of people do. For example, the global gag rule has affected more organizations, has stifled organizations' ability to be able to get support from the US and from donor agencies that work with them. And by implication meaning that women in Uganda, women in Nigeria who access groups like Marie Stopes<sup>48</sup>... Marie Stopes was closed down here, it was closed down in Nigeria and Uganda and some other places. So what it means is that if they take such steps that will have affect women who used to have access to abortion, that means they won't be able to have anyone to go to, anywhere to go to and by implication, more women will die because they would have to go to those who are not well trained to do the abortion and all that. So for me I think that it shows that the society, because if that is happening now, it shows that the society is not moving in the right progression to support the rights of women and that's why it's important that we need to build a movement and there should be some more alliance building to be able to address this globally. The bigger organizations should be ready to support the smaller organizations. There will continue to be more organization support in the women because we have such a huge population and our issues have not been addressed enough by the existing organization. So, there's a need for young people, as they are also growing up faster than some of us with the technology and a whole lot of other things. So, they might actually have more opportunity to do the things that we didn't do to get across to as many people as possible, more than we can. So, meaning that there is a need for that intergenerational discussion, feminist discussion so that we have more people, we build more people that will continue with the agenda so that they can achieve their agenda faster than we can imagine.

**RO: So, what I hear you say is that you find solidarity in the work that you do and other organizations on the global context. So, the fact that this clamp down on funding is happening here, you also have connections with organizations abroad that might be experiencing the same.**

AA: Yes, so the global gag rule is not only, the clamp down is not only against us, we also know that there are several organizations, particularly those organizations who work on core women's bodily integrity issues who defines issue of sexual and reproductive rights, who thinks that women should have right to abortion, who canvass for the issue of women's bodily integrity. So the clamp down is global, it might be felt more in Africa

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<sup>48</sup> Marie Stopes was a British author, paleobotanist and ardent support of eugenics and women's rights. She is known for her work on birth control access. ("Marie Stopes." Wikipedia. Accessed May 20, 2020. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marie\\_Stopes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marie_Stopes))

because we have very few funds and very few supporters but what I think also needs to be done is also that the bigger organization should lend support to the small organizations as they experience the clamp down. And I think I am not seeing enough of that, it looks like everybody's scampering to get their own support so where a smaller organization in Africa, where they lose their funding in that regard, finding a place then might become like a big problem. So, meaning that could intimidate others and that could shut down the voices of others. For us it was difficult, but I think we are pushing through with new innovations and with new funding coming. While they say no, we also see the UN support initiative saying yes to issues of sexual reproductive rights. We are also seeing other organizations saying yes, like the Ford Foundation,<sup>49</sup> to issues of sexual and reproductive rights. So what we do is also look and shop around to those who can support our belief, rather than us compromising our beliefs because we know if we compromise it's going to affect the majority of women in Nigeria, in Africa, and we have an effect on the global movement for solidarity and liberation of women from the hands of gender inequality and injustice that we have suffered all the years.

**RO: Alright, so final, final now, things that I haven't asked that you just want to speak about? Final notes.**

AA: Well, I think that alliance building is important for the feminist movement to grow and I think also that there must be minimum standards of defining who we want to bring to the fold, but we must also be very open to debates. That might be uncomfortable to us, to confrontations that we don't expect from some angles, but we must just be consistent and committed and I think within a short period of time the reality of life would make people to understand that feminist solidarity is important, it's key and it's a solution to the global problem.

**RO: All right, thank you so much!**

AA: You're welcome.

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<sup>49</sup> The Ford Foundation is an American private foundation whose mission is to advance the state of human rights and welfare. ("Ford Foundation." Wikipedia. Accessed May 20, 2020. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ford\\_Foundation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ford_Foundation))