

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

**SITE: NIGERIA**

**Transcript of Bolanle Awe  
Interviewer: Ronke Olawale**

**Location: Ibadan, Nigeria  
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**Dr. Bolanle Awe** A distinguished scholar, feminist, and educator, Bolanle Awe attended St. Anne's School, high school in Ibadan, and completed the Advanced Level program at the Perse School for Girls in Cambridge. Dr. Awe graduated with an MA(Honors) in history from St. Andrews University, Scotland in 1958 and a DPhil in history from the University of Oxford, England in 1964. She joined the Department of History, University of Ibadan (UI) on October 1, 1960--the date of Nigeria's independence--and became a full professor in 1976. The same year, she became a Senior Research Fellow in the Institute of African Studies at UI, and she later served as the first female director of the Institute (1983 to 1991). During this period she focused on women's history. One of her most important contributions to feminism and scholarship is the Women's Research and Documentation Centre (WORDOC), which she founded in 1985. For this accomplishment, she is referred to as the matriarch of feminist history in Nigeria. WORDOC continues to serve as a resource center for the study of women. Among others, she was the founding chair of the Nigerian National Commission for Women (1990-1992) (which later became the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development), secretary of the National Council of Women's Societies, Western Region Branch (1971-1973), and a member of the founding committee of the International Federation for Research in Women's History. She spent many years working on the development of higher education in Nigerian universities and went on to serve as the Prof-Chancellor at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN).

**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 I think we are on now. Good morning, Ma**

Bolanle Awe: Morning

**RO: My Name is Ronke. Thank you for accepting to participate in this project. I wanted to start out by asking you to introduce yourself. Tell me your name, and how you would like to be addressed. But first, as you tell me your name, I will also appreciate it if you could spell it so that we don't make any mistake.**

BA: Well, my name is Bolanle Awe. My surname is Awe. My first name is Bolanle and normally I like to be addressed like that: Mrs. Awe or Professor Awe, whatever you like. Doesn't really matter much.

**RO: Okay, can you spell your name like: your first name, then your last name?**

BA: Yes; my first name is Bolanle and it's B, O, L, A, N, L, E.

**RO: And your last name?**

BA: Awe. A,W,E. Very simple.

**RO: All right; thank you so much. So we are going to spend about an hour or less on this conversation and I would just like to start with, if you could tell me a little about your background. Thank you.**

BA: Well, I was born and bred in this part of the country. Actually I was born in a place called Ilesa<sup>1</sup> but my father comes from this town: Ibadan.<sup>2</sup> My mother came from Ilesa and that was where I went to school. I went to primary school there. When they decided to move to Ibadan I also moved to Ibadan, and I finished my primary school here in Ibadan and the school is called St James's School Oke-Bola.<sup>3</sup> It still exists and it's a big school and that's where from there I went on to undertake my secondary education in Lagos.<sup>4</sup> I went to a school called CMS Girl's School Lagos and I am proud to say that that school is 150

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<sup>1</sup> The city of Ilesa is in southwest Nigeria's Osun State. ("Ilesa." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ilesa>, 5/31/20).

<sup>2</sup> Ibadan is the capital of Oyo State and one of the most populous cities in Nigeria. ("Ibadan." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ibadan>, 5/31/20).

<sup>3</sup> The Cathedral of St. James, Oke-Bola is an Anglican church in Ibadan. ("Home." The Cathedral of St. James the Great. <http://cathedralofstjames.org/>, 6/6/20).

<sup>4</sup> Lagos is the largest city in Nigeria, located on the country's southern coast. ("Lagos." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lagos>, 5/10/20).

years old.<sup>5</sup> It is the oldest girl's school in Nigeria, and after some time it was moved from Lagos to Ibadan and I joined another school here called Kudeti Girl's School, which is a smaller school and the school then became known as the St. Anne's School Ibadan. And St Anne's has been on since then. But not quite a month, not quite a week ago, we celebrated the 150th anniversary for not only those from Ibadan but also those who came from Lagos; and it was a big affair. We had a big service in the church. People came from all over Nigeria, but also some of the old girls came from other parts of the world. Some came from the US, some came from England, and all sorts of places; and it was a big big celebration and it was fun to be part of it.

**RO: Wow.**

BA: It was really really big and we were all so proud and happy about it because, as I said, we were one of the first sets of girls to have the sort of secondary education that we had. We were the very first set to have what we called the school leaving certificate and from there, we went abroad. I went abroad with a number of my schoolmates-- some of them are still around. There's Professor Olurin who is an ophthalmologist, and umm who are the other people?<sup>6</sup> And I'm there, and a number of us all went to secondary schools in Britain to do our A-levels, and from there we went on to the university.<sup>7</sup> I was in the secondary school in a school in Cambridge called The Perse School for Girls in Cambridge.<sup>8</sup> That was where I did my A-level. And from there I went on to St Andrews University in Scotland.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> In 1869, the Church Missionary Society (CMS, now the Anglican Church) created St. Anne's Secondary School (previously known as Kudeti Girls School) in Ibadan. The school was later merged with the Girls' School in Lagos and became known as St. Anne's in 1950. (Aladeojebi, Gbade. (2016). "History of Yoruba Land." Partridge Publishing.

<https://books.google.com/books?id=jbBODQAAQBAJ&pg=PT141&lpg=PT141&dq=cms+girls+school+lagos&source=bl&ots=I-0lsMbxu2&sig=ACfU3U23CHdA9WjWRPKn2Z9LUY6cOmygdw&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjI28ikx97pAhXaVs0KHWWMAGIQ6AEwDnoECBsQAQ#v=onepage&q=cms%20girls%20school%20lagos&f=false>, 5/31/20).

<sup>6</sup> Professor Oyinade Olurin is the first female Professor of Medicine in Nigeria. See: Oderinlo, O., Hassan, A. O., & Bognunjo, T. (2019). The History of Modern Ophthalmology in Nigeria: A Synopsis of Institutions, Events and Personalities. *Ophthalmology Research: An International Journal*, 1-8.

(<http://journalor.com/index.php/OR/article/view/30135>); <http://dawncommission.org/professor-oyinade-olurin/>

<sup>7</sup> "A Level" is an abbreviation for "Advanced Level" and refers to a qualification of the General Certificate of Education that secondary or pre-university students complete in countries including England and Wales. ("GCE Advanced Level." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GCE\\_Advanced\\_Level](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GCE_Advanced_Level), 5/31/20). Generally, Nigeria has abolished this system but it is still being used by private high schools to prepare students for studies in Britain.

<sup>8</sup> The Perse School for Girls was a public day school founded in 1881. In 2010, the school opened a co-educational Pre-Prep program. The Sixth Form College is also co-educational. (Kendall, Bridget. "130 years of Perse Girls: A history in 10 objects." Stephen Perse Foundation.

<https://www.stephenperse.com/attachments/download.asp?file=283&type=pdf>, 5/31/20).

<sup>9</sup> The University of St. Andrews, founded in 1413, is one of the oldest public universities in Scotland. It is located in the town of St. Andrews in Fife. ("University of St Andrews." Wikipedia.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University\\_of\\_St\\_Andrews](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_St_Andrews), 5/31/20).

The Perse was a very, very highly competitive school and to get into the Perse itself was tough now to get from there to the university was even tougher and there were only, I think, about two women's colleges in the whole of the University of Cambridge.<sup>10</sup> And it was really tough to get in and a number of us just decided there was no point trying so some went to London, but I decided I didn't like London. I decided to go to Scotland which I really liked. I was in Scotland for four years; that was where I did my first degree. I read History and I really enjoyed being in Scotland. It was always a very nice place, very friendly, and the university was also very sociable, very friendly.

And after that I decided that the best thing for me was to try and do postgraduate level. I did my undergraduate level. I got my first degree in Scotland at St Andrews. Fortunately, my two professors in St Andrews were from Oxford and we got on very well and they said "look, for post graduate work you have to go on to Oxford" so I went on to Oxford. I went to Somerville College in Oxford.<sup>11</sup> There are five colleges, women's colleges, in Oxford and Somerville, I think, is the oldest of the lot. And when I got there I had to be interviewed by the history don--the woman who is in charge of history, and I told her I wanted to do African history and she just said "nonsense" that there's nothing like African history. And I said there is something like African history, and we argued about it for quite a while, and she said all she knew is that there's the history of Europeans in Africa, which is different from African history.

But fortunately for me before I came to Oxford, I had read two books by two Nigerians, Professor Kenneth Dike who wrote on the Niger Delta<sup>12</sup> and Professor Saburi Biobaku who wrote on the Egba.<sup>13</sup> These were the first two Nigerians to write on African history and I

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<sup>10</sup> The University of Cambridge, founded in 1209, is a research university in Cambridge, United Kingdom. Currently, only the Murray Edwards, Newnham, and Lucy Cavendish colleges at the University of Cambridge are female-only. Twenty-one of the university's colleges admit both male and female students. ("University of Cambridge." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University\\_of\\_Cambridge](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_Cambridge), 5/31/20; "Colleges of the University of Cambridge." Wikipedia.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colleges\\_of\\_the\\_University\\_of\\_Cambridge](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colleges_of_the_University_of_Cambridge), 5/31/20).

<sup>11</sup> Somerville College in the University of Oxford, founded in 1879, was one of the university's first all-female colleges. The college now admits both men and women. ("Somerville College, Oxford." Wikipedia.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Somerville\\_College,\\_Oxford](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Somerville_College,_Oxford), 5/31/20).

<sup>12</sup> Kenneth Onwuka Dike (1917 – 1983) was an Igbo Nigerian historian credited with playing an integral role in the non-colonial interpretation of the country's history. He also served as the first Nigerian Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ibadan. His book *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta 1830 – 1885* focused on 19<sup>th</sup>-century economics, politics, and anti-imperialist actions in the region. ("Kenneth Dike." Wikipedia.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kenneth\\_Dike](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kenneth_Dike), 5/31/20).

<sup>13</sup> Saburi Oladeni Biobaku (1918 – 2001) was a Yoruba Nigerian academic, historian, and politician. He served as Vice Chancellor of the University of Lagos as well as pro-chancellor of the Obafemi Awolowo University. His 1957 book *The Egba's and Their Neighbours* is centered around the Egba's (an ethnic subgroup of the Yoruba people) history in the context of political changes in Yorubaland and the 19<sup>th</sup>-century arrival of

was so excited that I actually wrote to the editor of the paper which reviewed their books, that I wanted to reach them, and he introduced me to Profesor Biobaku and Biobaku invited me to lunch, and we talked, and I said how did you go about doing what you are doing. He told me how he did it and he said, "look you too can do African history now. We have done the Egbas, you also can do on the Ibadans." And that was how I got to do on the Ibadans and when I got to Oxford, my history don just thought I was wasting my time; and she said "look we can't take you. If you say you want to do the history, colonial history, that is the history of Europeans in Africa, we'll be prepared to take you but not the history of Africans in Africa." And she said sorry and dismissed me, but I was quite sure there was something like African history after those two men. So I just went out, but a day or two after that, the principals of the college sent for me and said they wanted to see me. I got there and he looked at me and said "look Miss. Fajembola, well we have decided to give you a chance, we're going to admit you into this college" and I was surprised. But your history don just told me that there's no room for somebody like me. So he said yes I agree with her but we liked the way you stood your ground; I think that was my hallmark then. They said they were surprised that I was able to stand my ground even though I hadn't done any African history so he said what they had decided was to give me a chance and that I have to prove to them there's something like African history.

And so that was how I started African history in Oxford and I was fortunate to have as my supervisor a lady called Margery Perham.<sup>14</sup> You might have heard of Margery Perham; Margery Perham was the lady who actually gave Nigeria its name. And she was a very fierce, impressive woman. She knew so much about the history of Africa and so on. And she was a consultant to the colonial office<sup>15</sup>; and all the people who were going to be working in the colonial office in one form or another, even including people like Tom Mboya,<sup>16</sup> Tafawa Balewa,<sup>17</sup> and so on: they used to come to her college in Oxford, Nuffield College,<sup>18</sup> for

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Christian missionaries. ("Saburi Biobaku." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saburi\\_Biobaku](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saburi_Biobaku), 5/31/20; "Egba people." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egba\\_people](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egba_people), 5/31/20).

<sup>14</sup> Margery Perham (1895 – 1982) was a British historian and scholar who studied and wrote about Africa. She is specifically known for her support of British decolonization of Africa in the 1950s and 1960s.

("Margery Perham." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Margery\\_Perham](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Margery_Perham), 5/31/20).

<sup>15</sup> The Colonial Office was a British government department tasked with overseeing several of the country's colonies. The Colonial Office was established in 1854 and re-merged with the Commonwealth Relations Office in 1966, forming the Commonwealth Office. In 1968, the Commonwealth Office was merged with the Foreign Office to create the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. ("Colonial Office." [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colonial\\_Office](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colonial_Office), 5/31/20).

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Joseph Odhiambo Mboya (1930 – 1969) was a Kenyan author, politician, and activist for trade unions, Pan Africanism, and Kenyan independence from Britain. Mboya is regarded as one of the founding fathers of the Republic of Kenya. He served as the country's Cabinet Minister, aided in the creation of the Kenya African National Union, and served as the party's first Secretary-General. ("Tom Mboya." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tom\\_Mboya](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tom_Mboya), 5/31/20).

<sup>17</sup> Abubakar Tafawa Balewa (1912 – 1966) was the first Prime Minister of Nigeria when the country gained independence from Britain in 1960. He was murdered and his administration was overthrown by a military

consultation and she said that she was going to have a number of us as her students--her research students--and that was how I got to be Ms. Perham's student. It was not easy because there were about 8 or 9 of us who were her students, and she was so busy and she was writing the history, the biography, of Lord Lugard at the time she was supervising us, and whenever we came for supervision, she'd give us a chapter and say "look, go and read that chapter and give me your comments."<sup>19</sup> And that was all the supervision we got. So some of her colleagues then started talking to me and said well how are you getting on with Ms. Perham, so I told them I'm not getting along with Ms. Perham; all I'm doing is reading the chapters on Lord Lugard, so she heard about and she said "look I hear you've been talking about me and you told the people I'm not supervising you I'm just giving you chapters from Lugard's book" but I said Ms. Perham that's the truth. She said you are very naughty but now we are going to start working.

And we started working and she was extremely nice and she used to—she had a sister who had lived in East Africa who was extremely nice, so anytime I came for supervision, I would first have breakfast with them before the supervision.<sup>20</sup> And after some time Ms. Perham thought I was getting too relaxed and she told me that she was going to send me away. That normally. students who come for supervision come in the academic gowns. And that the next time I came without my next academic gown she was not going to supervise me. So thereafter I started, and we became very good friends, and she was very relaxed and very nice though not everybody in Oxford was like that.

We had a group of us who were supposed to be learning West African history, and some of our professors didn't believe that those of us who were there supposed to be doing African history, they felt we were just wasting our time. They were not interested in us and the most terrible one was somebody called Professor Harlow.<sup>21</sup> He was the overall boss, and he would give you a paper to read and you would read the paper and then he would comment on it, and everybody else would comment. And there was this day when one of our

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coup in January of 1966. ("Abubakar Tafawa Balewa." Wikipedia.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abubakar\\_Tafawa\\_Balewa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abubakar_Tafawa_Balewa), 5/31/20).

<sup>18</sup> Nuffield College is a small social sciences graduate college at the University of Oxford, established in 1937.

("About the College." Nuffield College, University of Oxford. <https://www.nuffield.ox.ac.uk/the-college/about-the-college/>, 5/31/20).

<sup>19</sup> *Lugard: The Years of Adventure, 1858-1898* and *Lugard: The Years of Authority 1898-1945* by Margery Perham follow the life of British soldier and colonial authority Frederick Lugard. ("Frederick Lugard, 1st Baron Lugard." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frederick\\_Lugard,\\_1st\\_Baron\\_Lugard](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frederick_Lugard,_1st_Baron_Lugard), 5/31/20).

<sup>20</sup> Margery Perham's sister, Ethel, was married to a District Commissioner in Somaliland. ("Chronology of Margery Perham's life." *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 19(3), 229. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03086539108582857>, 5/31/20).

<sup>21</sup> Vincent Harlow (1898 – 1961) was a historian and scholar of British imperial history at the University of Oxford. He is most famous for his book *The Founding of the Second British Empire, 1763-1793*, published in 1952. ("Vincent T. Harlow." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vincent\\_T.\\_Harlow](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vincent_T._Harlow), 5/31/20).



colleagues from Ghana, a brilliant boy, very brilliant, Isaac Tuffour.<sup>22</sup> He got a first class in Legon before coming to Oxford.<sup>23</sup> He gave his paper and Professor Harlow was supposed to make his comments. He refused to make any comments, just kept quiet. We were all waiting, waiting for Professor Harlow; and his colleagues who were relatively junior also couldn't say anything. After some time, he turned to all of his colleagues and said "well what was the paper for next week?" Which means that the paper for this week is a non-starter. And that almost destroyed Isaac Tuffour because we all thought he was a brilliant, brilliant person. And in fact most of the Ghanaians were very very upset that this should happened to Isaac. But at that time there was a lot of prejudice. Trevor-Roper was another professor of history and he gave an interview on television and he said that there's nothing like African history, that perhaps in the future there might be African history but at the moment there's no African history.<sup>24</sup> There's nothing like African history, and he dismissed the idea of African history on television and that became known almost all over!

**RO: Wow.**

BA: People were quoting it and quoting it, but anyhow we struggled on and struggled on until we were able to- there was a library in Oxford, Rhodes House,<sup>25</sup> which is Rhodes House Library, where a number of our African students used to consult the books there and so on and we had quite a group of us who used to go around together. And we had a wonderful time there; there was a professor of social anthropology who we thought was very good, in the sense that, at least he taught about the anthropology of Africa and made us realize that it does exist. Well, there were a number of them like that made life interesting for us and some of our co-students were very fortunate.

One of them unfortunately is gone now: Professor Antonio. He was one of the most brilliant. He had a scholarship from one of the universities and he had a very generous grant, so he used to take us along and we would follow Tunji all over the place. There was a pub not too far from Rhodes House and not too far from my college either; and this pub, he would take us all there and you would choose your drinks and choose whatever you want. And he would pay for it and take us back to the library. And I remember I had the privilege of being taken by him to the Union--the Oxford University Union--which at that time as a

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<sup>23</sup> The University of Ghana is located in the town of Legon. The university is often referred to by the town name. ("Legon." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legon>, 6/1/20).

<sup>24</sup> Hugh Trevor-Roper (1914 – 2003) was a British historian and professor at the University of Oxford. He specialized in the history of early modern Britain and Nazi Germany. ("Hugh Trevor-Roper." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hugh\\_Trevor-Roper](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hugh_Trevor-Roper), 6/1/20).

<sup>25</sup> Rhodes house was constructed in 1928 in memory of the University of Oxford alum Cecil Rhodes. ("Rhodes House." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhodes\\_House](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhodes_House), 6/1/20).



woman you were not allowed into the union except you had a man to take you along.<sup>26</sup> And he took me along and I had lunch there which was a great, great thing in those days.

But we enjoyed being in Oxford and being very free and talking and having all these other students who also did postgraduate work and were all struggling to prove that you can do African history. After some time I came home for field work and then went back again and all that, so by the end of it, was great fun and the Principal of my College was extremely fond of me. And she made sure that-- I had to prove to them there was African history-- and made sure I got a grant so that I could go to the London Public Records Office to look at the records.<sup>27</sup> And she arranged a grant for me from the College to do that, and she also made it important that I met a number of other students-- especially known Africans in the College. And she would have cocktails and that was when I really decided to dislike cocktails.

**RO: \*laughs\***

BA: Because she would arrange cocktails and she would make sure that I attended the cocktail, and after I had talked to someone for about five or ten minutes she would take me away, saying "look, you've had enough discussion with that one, come and meet this one, come and meet this one." But it was fun.

**RO: Yeah, thank you! So you've said a lot of things talking about your getting into high school here, and how it was like the first girl's school, and then to continuing your graduate school, you weren't going to be accepted somewhere, and you had to go somewhere else. Would you say girls' child education was late in coming, in Nigeria?**

BA: It was a bit late in coming, but nevertheless some of the missionaries like in my school, for instance--CMS Girl's School--they had started a girl child education and they were encouraging girls to come to school but they were the first group of people to encourage girls' child education and I remember after that some of the other people in Lagos lead by Lady Abayomi,<sup>28</sup> Lady Ademola,<sup>29</sup> and so on, went to protest to the government that there

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<sup>26</sup> The Oxford University Student Union is a campus building that represents and services university students. ("Oxford University Student Union." Wikipedia.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oxford\\_University\\_Student\\_Union](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oxford_University_Student_Union), 6/1/20).

<sup>27</sup> The London Public Record Office houses the national archives for England, Wales, and the central United Kingdom government. In 2005 the Freedom of Information Act 2000 was passed in the United Kingdom, which gave the public greater access to the national archives. ("Public Record Office."

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Public\\_Record\\_Office](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Public_Record_Office), 6/2/20).

<sup>28</sup> Iyaloye Oyinkansola Abayomi (1897 – 1990) was a well-known feminist and nationalist from Lagos, Nigeria. Lady Abayomi headed the Nigerian Girl Guides movement and founded the Nigerian Women's Party. ("Oyinkansola Abayomi." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oyinkansola\\_Abayomi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oyinkansola_Abayomi), 6/2/20).

should be schools for girls; not only that but that government should be responsible for it, and there was a lot of to-do. I can't remember the full details, but I have the feeling that they also had to contribute money for that. And of course, it was not too long after that that the Methodists also started a girl's school--the Methodist Girls High School--after they had started one for the boys.<sup>30</sup> So it was a bit late coming, but it came.

**RO: So in your reflections about your work, for instance, what would you say were some central commitments to get going?**

BA: Well, My essential commitment was really to see that once I got into Cambridge at The Perse, that I got on there. And fortunately I had two teachers, two history teachers, who liked me and really encouraged me to get on, and they would ask me questions, all sorts of interesting questions: what did I think about the Queen?<sup>31</sup> is it right that the Queen should be the head of the commonwealth? and all sorts of interesting questions like that. The Principal of the school, Ms. Scott, was anxious that I should be able to speak good English. So she used to organize lessons for me just to make sure that I spoke good English and so on. Then they encouraged me to travel outside Cambridge.

Look, first of all, even to get acclimatized in Cambridge itself: cricket! I didn't know anything about cricket, but they told me that this was one of the games that they played in Cambridge and they decided to take me for cricket--I think almost every week. One of the teachers would go with me, and they would tell me all the mechanisms of playing cricket on the cricket field, and then they also encouraged me to do a little bit of work on classical music, that I should also know something about classical music. And also about European art. And one of my lecturers actually organized that I should go to Italy, and see what was going on in Italy with European art that was being displayed in Italy. I went there and she also made me write an essay on that. So there was that sort of exposure right, left, and center, just to make sure I wasn't just in Cambridge just for that purpose--that I had to learn about other people as well.

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<sup>29</sup> Oloori Kofoworola Aina Ademola was the first president of Nigeria's National Council of Women Societies as well as the co-founder of the Girls Secondary Modern School and New Era Girls' Secondary School, both in Lagos. In 1959, she became a Member of the Order of the British Empire and was also rewarded membership in the Order of the Federal Republic by Abubakar Tafawa Balewa's government. ("Kofoworola Ademola." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kofoworola\\_Ademola](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kofoworola_Ademola), 5/10/20).

<sup>30</sup> The Methodist Girls' High School in Yaba, Lagos was established in 1879 by the African Members of the Wesleyan Methodist Mission. In 1980, the Lagos State Government gained control of the school, but returned it to the Methodist Church Nigeria in 2001. ("Brief History of MGHS." Methodist Girls High School Online. <https://mghsyabalagosng.com/about-our-school/>, 6/7/20).

<sup>31</sup> She is referring to Queen Elizabeth II, the Queen of the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth states. ("Elizabeth II." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabeth\\_II#cite\\_note-constitutional-3](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabeth_II#cite_note-constitutional-3), 6/2/20).

**RO: So at the end of the day, seeing your work and those around you, what would you say are like the most significant life achievements professionally for you?**

BA: When?

**RO: Like now, professionally what would you say were some most significant achievements, now that you are retired and looking back.**

BA: Well I'm glad that I was able to be a historian and be firm about it and be proud of the fact that I'm a historian. And I could talk about it, and also that I had a lot of friends who were also historians, who were classmates. Some of them were with me at St. Andrews, some of them were in Oxford with me, and some of them actually came back to Nigeria with me and started teaching here. I had a friend Jenny Dobbin<sup>32</sup> who was- we both read history in Oxford we read history in Cambridge, and she was extremely keen on history and when she got here, she decided to go to one of the colleges here, in the University of Ibadan,<sup>33</sup> where she did more and more history until she eventually... I don't know what happened, she eventually went back. But we became very friendly and also she got to know my relations: my brother, my mother, and my other relations. Just as I also got to know her relations! Her father was a farmer and he was a huge man, and had a very generous appetite, and he would really give us big slices of meat. You know the British don't eat too much meat but he made sure that he gave us good slices of meat and all sorts, so I really enjoyed their presence.

**RO: Okay, so let's move to your work now. What would you say kind of drew you to the kind of work you began to do as you started to teach?**

BA: I can't hear what you are sayi-

**RO: \*louder\* I said what specifically can you say drew you to the kind of work you started to do when you began to teach?**

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<sup>32</sup> Jenny Knauss (maiden name Dobbin) attended the Perse School for Girls between 1945 and 1954. She worked for the Nigerian Institute for Social and Economic Research at the University of Ibadan, the History Department at the University of Ghana in Accra, and the African Studies Program at Northwestern University. She was also involved in the formation of the Chicago Women's Liberation Union, co-directed the University of Illinois Medical School Urban Preceptorship Program, worked for the Suburban Health Systems Agency in Oak Park, and founded the Alzheimer's Spoken Here group. "Knauss, Jenny." Northwestern Archival and Manuscript Collections. [https://findingaids.library.northwestern.edu/agents/people/2237?&filter\\_fields\[\]=subjects&filter\\_values\[\]=Feminism](https://findingaids.library.northwestern.edu/agents/people/2237?&filter_fields[]=subjects&filter_values[]=Feminism), 6/3/20).

<sup>33</sup> The University of Ibadan, founded in 1948 in Ibadan, Nigeria, was originally a college within the University of London. The University of Ibadan is now an independent public research institution. ("University of Ibadan." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University\\_of\\_Ibadan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_Ibadan), 6/3/20).

BA: Well, when I began to teach there were different.... I didn't begin to teach until I came back to Nigeria, where I was in the Department of History. I must say, it was a tough assignment because even though I had done postgraduate work in History and so on, I hadn't really done much work in African History per se. But I was in this department, Department of History here, in Ibadan. Which was one of the oldest departments of History and you just had to learn to be able to know what history is all about.

And I remember--this is very interesting, --the head of the department at one point, Abdullahi Smith, was an English man, but he had done a lot of African history and so on.<sup>34</sup> Even when I was in Oxford he had shown interest in me coming to teach there. He suggested that the best thing for me would be to do a little bit more African History before starting to teach. He used to teach the most senior students in history, and he suggested to me or asked if I'd liked I could come and sit at the back of his class so that I could pick up more information, which was very nice of him. I started doing that, but of course the students thought that it was because my history was inadequate and that I wasn't really yet ready for that. I was staying in one of the halls of residence and I used to walk from the history department to the place, and some of the students would come and walk along with me. Not really because they were that chummy, but they just wanted to know how competent I was. They would ask me what are you doing? You know, trying to find out if I really knew enough history or didn't know enough history. That was an interesting period, but I also had a set of students, young students, who I was asked to teach at the very beginning and I really enjoyed that because they were all students from really first class schools in Nigeria. They came and I decided that I was going to give them something—I would like to mentor them. And when we'd sit together I'd give them an essay and they'd write it and then I'd ask them to comment. And we would all speak to it, and they enjoyed that, that I was able to, and I said "look don't be afraid, just say what you feel." They enjoyed that. I must say a number of them did well. In fact, a few of them became professors later. I think there's even one right now here in Ibadan. He's a professor, um not of History, Economics, but he started off as a professor of history but they all used to say that I was a bit hard on them, and that I was not generous with my marks and so on. But we got on extremely well, we became very good friends. And they all became--There's one of them,

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<sup>34</sup> Abdullahi Smith (1920 – 1984) was a professor of history who worked to develop the African History curriculum at the University of Ibadan. In 1955, he helped establish the Historical Society of Nigeria and served as the Society's Honorary Secretary. He also established the Zaria School of History at Ahmadu Bello University and the Centre for Documentation and Historical Studies in Kaduna, Nigeria. (Aondofa, Chila Andrew. "Prof Abdullahi Smith: The Scholar who founded the History Dept at ABU Zaria." [https://www.theabusites.com/prof-abdullahi-smith-the-renowned-scholar/#google\\_vignette](https://www.theabusites.com/prof-abdullahi-smith-the-renowned-scholar/#google_vignette), 6/3/20).

who is also in Ife<sup>35</sup>, he's a professor of history in Ife. One was in ABU<sup>36</sup> and we all got on very well.

**RO: So for instance, would you say your work is shaped by your life experiences?**

BA: Well, yes in a way, yes. My uh-

**RO: And how?**

BA: Well, as I told you earlier on the idea of even wanting to do history, that was a life experience which shaped my work. But apart from that, I had to show-- it became a mission for me to show that there's something like African history, and that we got to talk about it, we've got to make people realize that there's African history and make people appreciate it, and of course when I started doing my own postgraduate work, especially as I specialized in the history of Ibadan, and that was a very exciting thing for me because Ibadan has been one of the largest towns in Nigeria. It was a town which was able to be a defence station against other groups of people, like those in the north, who defeated part of the world we used to know as the Oyo Empire<sup>37</sup>; and destroyed them; and some of the people came down south and some of them settled in Ibadan. And in fact when there was another attempt to drive them away it was Ibadan people at Osogbo who came together and drove away the people from the north and that was a tremendous thing.<sup>38</sup> I've always been very proud of the fact that Ibadan is such a large town. A town which has achieved so much in so many ways, and I think someone was talking to me yesterday or the day before, it's one of the largest towns around here. And one is extremely proud of it, that one could live in a town like this. And that the town could develop as it has developed. Anytime I have visitors I take them to Mapo Hall<sup>39</sup> and make them go to the very top and see the whole of the town.

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<sup>35</sup> Obafemi Awolowo University (previously the University of Ife) is a government-run university in the southwestern Yoruba city of Ife, Nigeria. The university was established in 1961 and renamed in 1987 to honor the Nigerian nationalist Chief Obafemi Awolowo ("Obafemi Awolowo University." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Obafemi\\_Awolowo\\_University](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Obafemi_Awolowo_University), 6/3/20; "Ife." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ife%E1%BA%B9>, 6/3/20; "Obafemi Awolowo." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Obafemi\\_Awolowo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Obafemi_Awolowo), 6/3/20).

<sup>36</sup> Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) is a research university in Zaria, Kaduna State, Nigeria. The university was established in 1962 as the University of Northern Nigeria and was then named after Ahmadu Bello, the first premier of Northern Nigeria. ("History of Ahmadu Bello University." Ahmadu Bello University. <https://www.abu.edu.ng/history/>, 6/3/20).

<sup>37</sup> The Oyo Empire existed in modern-day Benin and Western Nigeria in the mid-7<sup>th</sup> to late 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. It was one of the most powerful empires of its time due to its cavalry and trade relations. ("Oyo Empire." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oyo\\_Empire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oyo_Empire), 6/7/20).

<sup>38</sup> The city of Osogbo is the capital of Osun State in southwestern Nigeria. ("Osogbo." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Osogbo>, 6/3/20).

<sup>39</sup> Mapo Hall is Ibadan's City Hall, located on Mapo Hill. ("Mapo Hall." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mapo\\_Hall](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mapo_Hall), 6/5/20).

Sometimes I go to Bower's Tower<sup>40</sup> which is even higher up, to let people see just how big Ibadan is. Then we drive around, especially the old part of Ibadan. It's impressive when you drive around the old part. If you come down from Mapo Hol and you're doing down, on the right, you'll be amazed about the size of the town. The houses, the villages, and so on. You'll just be amazed that there's so much. Then on the left, you will see all kinds of traditions and things. There's a place when they make the asude; what do you call the people who make the asude?<sup>41</sup> the people who help to, they do all sorts of things with... well I can't remember, But the Asudes are very important for Ibadans. As warriors, they provided all of the war implements. There's a place as you go towards Bower's Tower, on the left, you see this place where the Asudes are. They make all the war implements that one could possibly want.

**RO: Wow that's very interesting. So, you are called the doyen of feminism in Nigeria.<sup>42</sup> I'm just wondering how that relates with you standing your ground in regard to African history as well as being called "very naughty" in terms of what you wanted to do. What's the connection between your work, and these previous observations about you.**

BA: Well, it's interesting that you're asking that question, For me, I didn't really think too much about it. I really didn't think too much about it. But I knew that all that came from my background. My mother was a teacher, and she was one of the very first set of teachers in this part of the country. The United Missionary College--she was one of the very first set to be teachers there.<sup>43</sup> So I was always proud of the fact that I had a mother who was well-versed and she was very encouraging. She made sure that we went to the right schools and so on. For instance, she was the one who took me to see this Girls School. I remember the very first day I went, she took me there to the boarding house and my mother was so

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<sup>40</sup> Bower's Tower is located on top of Oke-Are ("The Army Chief's Hill") in Ibadan. Constructed in 1836, the tower is named after Captain Robert Lister Bower, a British colonial officer and the first British resident of Ibadan. ("Bowers Memorial Tower." Nigeria Galleria. <https://www.nigeriagalleria.com/Nigeria/States/Nigeria/Oyo/Bower-Memorial-Tower-Oke-Aare.html>, 6/5/20).

<sup>41</sup> Yoruba metalsmiths are often referred to by their lineage names. "Asude" is the name used in Ibadan and Ilorin. (Oyewùmí, O. (2012). Beyond gendercentric models: Restoring motherhood to Yoruba discourses of art and aesthetics. In N. M. Creary (Ed.) *African intellectuals and decolonization* (p. 167). Ohio University Press. <https://books.google.com/books?id=OINMpWx4eCEC&pg=PA167&lpg=PA167&dq=asude+metal&source=bl&ots=1LT6n9veEn&sig=ACfU3U1ejo7zVkJSaySZGAKQsyx-v6FHM3A&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKewiK f-OsevpAhWFVc0KHchBBX0Q6AEwBHoECAkQAQ#v=onepage&q&f=false>, 6/5/20).

<sup>42</sup> The term "doyen" refers to the eldest, most skilled, or most knowledgeable member of a group of people. ("Doyen." Merriam-Webster. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/doyen>, 6/5/20).

<sup>43</sup> The United Missionary Comprehensive College (UMCC), established in 1995, is a girls' boarding school in Ibadan. UMCC is the product of the consolidation of the United Missionary Church and the Grade Two Teacher College. ("Short History About UMCC." United Missionary Comprehensive College. <https://umcc.org.ng/about-us/>, 6/5/20).



anxious she helped me to make my bed and people were looking at me like this girl must be a little bit spoiled. So, when the holidays were coming, I knew she would also try to come. So I told my Principal, please can you send a telegram to my mother to the effect: “mother not needed I can cope”. When Ms. Webb--she was an English woman--saw it she laughed and said “mother not needed, I can cope” and sent it like that to my mother. That my mother did not have to come to Lagos, that I can cope, I can get from Lagos to Ibadan. It wasn't difficult because there were other people going to Ibadan and were going to the railway station at Iddo, and there were a lot of school children and we had wonderful times together.<sup>44</sup> And some of us as we grew then we were having boyfriends, some of the boyfriends would offer to take your luggage for you. And to be naughty, just to try them out, you'd make sure that the luggage is so heavy so that they start regretting offering to take your luggage for you, but there's nothing they could do because you can't--at that point they can't say they can't take it because it means that they are weak! So we would go to the Iddo Railway Station and from there I would go to Ibadan.

**RO: So, talking about your work: how would you kind of capture your engagement in feminist academic work and activism in Nigeria?**

BA: Well, it's amazing how one, it's almost as if one drifted into it. For one I was lucky that I went to those colleges. Especially the Oxford ones; there's no doubt it: they were female colleges, and they made sure that you did well. And of course being taught by Ms. Perham was another plus. So that right there from the very beginning I knew that I was going to try and be something like a feminist. And of course at the first school for girls in Cambridge, the two teachers who taught me were also very much feminists. They wanted to know, they wanted to encourage me in that field. When one went to St. Andrews, there was no discrimination; the two professors, although they were from Oxford, they were very generous and very liberal and we used to chat with them and so on and so forth. And as I told you, they also encouraged me to go to Oxford, that there's no point in staying on at St. Andrews if I wanted to do postgraduate work in the field in which I wanted to do postgraduate work. And of course once one got to Oxford it's a very different story, because apart from—as I told you—the Rhodes House Library—so it's a mixed library; all of us were there together. And we were all competing. And then we had the Social Anthropology school there. And we also—many African students who had been taught social anthropology: that also helped us. And there was another College nearby where we were taught African history. But what I thought was important was the fact that one was able to assert that learning is not just about men; it's about men and women, and we also can do as well as the men. And that there should be no reason why we should be afraid of projecting

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<sup>44</sup> Iddo Island, a district of Lagos, houses the Lagos Terminus. (“Iddo Island.” Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iddo\\_Island](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iddo_Island), 6/5/20).



oneself and speaking out at the right time. And all the time I was at St. Andrews, fortunately I had professors who encouraged you to speak out. They would call you sometimes and say Ms. Fajimbola, you are the one to give the vote of thanks, or I want you to comment on x and y. So that by then you got confident that there's no big deal about being a woman or being a man. And as I said when I was thinking of doing postgraduate work, my two professors said—I was going to a teacher's college in Cambridge and they said, Absolute nonsense! You are going to a postgraduate college, and both of them wrote references for me.

**RO: So what I hear you saying is that when given the opportunity, women can do it.**

BA: Oh yes! Why not?!

**RO: Okay, because it's coming out very clearly from your responses. So I'm wondering what your focus has been in terms of your engagements as a historian.**

BA: Well, as I said, as a historian I was very interested in the history not only of Ibadan but the history of women and I have written a few things about...but apart from that, one of my favorite women is Iyalode Efunsetan.<sup>45</sup> She was a fierce, tough woman. The 'iyalode' was the leader of the women.<sup>46</sup> And she was extremely hard-working, very wealthy, and very fierce. And the men didn't really like her too much. But she didn't seem to mind unduly, and when it looked as if they were trying to undermine her she stood up—the head of the town, Aare Latosa—he was the head of Ibadan—he was a very powerful soldier, very well known. But he wanted everything to be done his own way. But Efunsetan felt it was getting too much, that there was too much warfare, that they should step it down a little bit. But he refused. So there was a time—she was very wealthy, and she would lend them soldiers to go to war. And the soldiers would come back with boots and all that, but after some time, when she felt they were not listening, she refused to allow them to take her soldiers to war. And of course there was real trouble after that. She was attacked, she was called all sorts of names, and there was a time when it was alleged that she was the one causing a lot of the trouble in Ibadan. And they tried to push her away, and they said that—she didn't have a child—and they said that because she didn't have a child she was always a nice woman particularly to her female servants. And it was alleged that one of them died, and that she herself had a hand in it, which I don't think she did. So they attacked her and virtually mobbed her house, and virtually destroyed her house. Iyalode Efunsetan, for a long time

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<sup>45</sup> Chief Efunsetan Aniwura was Ibadan's second Iyalode from 1867 to 1874. She is known as one of the most powerful and affluent Yoruba women to date. ("Efunsetan Aniwura." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Efunsetan\\_Aniwura](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Efunsetan_Aniwura), 6/5/20).

<sup>46</sup> "Iyalode" is a title for prominent female Yoruba chieftains. ("Iyalode (title)." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iyalode\\_\(title\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iyalode_(title)), 6/5/20).

stood her ground. Her house in Ibadan still exists, if you go to Mapo now, very near the Olubadan's present house, and also near the mosque and the place where the chief who installs the people give them the traditional thing to make them chiefs—the house where that chief lives is next door to Efunsetan's house.<sup>47</sup> And Efunsetan still has a big garden and a place where her people live and she's still very well-known. But she was always my favorite because of the way she stood up. Aare Latosa really wanted to finish her, but regardless of the fact that he wanted to finish her, she still stood up, she stood her ground, she maintained her reputation within the town of Ibadan. Even up till today.

**RO: You said you almost stumbled into feminist work. But what do you understand by feminism?**

BA: Well, that's a tough one. I almost also stumbled into it. I knew it was important to emphasize the fact that women also had a contribution to our history. I think this is extremely important. And I think this really hit me hard when we went for the conference in—there were two conferences. There was a big one and then there was a small one. And I went with the MacArthur Foundation.<sup>48</sup> And it was there that one got to know about the importance of feminism, and that women also have to stand up for themselves. We just had to stand up for ourselves. And there was this woman—I think from—she came from one of these islands, I remember my husband went there; there are two photographs in our sitting room that he brought back. But the women—he got very impressed by the women there. And of course I must say: when I went to Cuba and I saw that in Cuba it is true that there were many more men but it didn't prevent the women from coming up on their own too and speaking for themselves. And I remember they invited me to—NIPS—I don't know if you've heard of NIPS. It's a group, selected by the government, civil servants and so on—and they go around the whole country, not only in the country but all over the world. And I got friendly with the Cuban Ambassador here and he encouraged me—you can go to Cuba, they speak English, and so I found my way there. And then I found this group of Nigerians and we started talking together and in the end they said why don't you join us because I was alone. And the government was very generous with them, they treated them very liberally. I was just a poor relation. But they invited me to join them and I joined them and we started talking about Cuba, what one could achieve in Cuba, and found that in fact Cuba was a very important place. Though not as important as people thought because the President of Cuba then had just come on, and whoever was there was not as strong. I remember I was going to go back to the US, and I had to go through Haiti, and I stopped in

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<sup>47</sup> "Olubadan" (Yoruba for "Lord of Ibadan") is the title given to the king of Ibadan. ("Olubadan." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olubadan>, 6/5/20).

<sup>48</sup> The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, founded in 1970, creates grants and impact investments to assist non-profit organizations. ("MacArthur Foundation." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MacArthur\\_Foundation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MacArthur_Foundation), 6/5/20).

Haiti and that was where I bought this. It was difficult. First of all they were not too keen that I, a woman, should be doing all this traveling by herself. And I said look, it's my business and I'm here. So I went through Haiti and went on to the US and I felt there was no big deal traveling anywhere. I can move to anyplace that I wanted to. And the universities were open, and they were friendly.

**RO: You did say that your husband was impressed that the women had the freedom to relate and do what they wanted to do. Just thinking about that: being married to him. This talk about African feminism. What's your take on African feminism?**

BA: Well, fortunately, my husband was as open as I was. He went to Government College, which is one of the oldest colleges here, whereas I was at St. Anne's.<sup>49</sup> Those of us from St. Anne's had no fear of any man, or any male student, or anything. We used to have debates with them, interviews with them, and we would sometimes even floor them. And then when I got to St. Andrews I met a number of his schoolmates, like Victor Omololu Olunloyo,<sup>50</sup> and late Professor Oladapo,<sup>51</sup> and we were all there, all in the university together. They were from Government College and I was from CMS Girls School, but we related without—there was no feeling that one was—that he's a man and I'm a woman and all that. And I remember Professor Oladapo was the one who introduced me to my husband, and he—Oladapo was a very good friend of mine. He was in St. Andrews and he was going back to St. Andrews; he still had a year more. So I said let me see you off at the railway station at King's Cross.<sup>52</sup> So I went to see him and lo and behold my husband was also there to see him off. So he introduced us and that was how it started, and my husband had a car—a small car, called Anike? Which he said he bought from his supervisor for 25 pounds. And he gave me a lift, in Anike, to the hostel where I was staying and from there he used to come and see us and be friends with us, and that was how it started. And he was at Cambridge; I was at Oxford; and we used to meet in London. And they were more lively than the rest of us.

**RO: That's very interesting, especially because these days there is a lot of stigma about matchmaking. Would you say that was matchmaking?**

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<sup>49</sup> Government College Ibadan, established in 1929, is an all-male secondary school. ("Government College, Ibadan." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Government\\_College,\\_Ibadan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Government_College,_Ibadan), 6/5/20).

<sup>50</sup> Victor Omololu Olunloyo is a mathematician and prominent member of the People's Democratic Party in Nigeria. He briefly served as governor of Oyo State prior to Muhammadu Buhari's military coup. ("Victor Omololu Olunloyo." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victor\\_Omololu\\_Olunloyo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victor_Omololu_Olunloyo), 6/5/20).

<sup>51</sup> Ifedayo Oladapo (1932 – 2010) was a scholar and Civil Engineering professor at the University of Lagos. He graduated from the University of St. Andrews in 1959. ("Ifedayo Oladapo." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ifedayo\\_Oladapo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ifedayo_Oladapo), 6/5/20).

<sup>52</sup> King's Cross passenger railway station is located in Central London, United Kingdom. ("London King's Cross railway station." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/London\\_King%27s\\_Cross\\_railway\\_station](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/London_King%27s_Cross_railway_station), 6/5/20).

BA: No. I don't think it was.

**RO: Is there anything bad about a friend introducing you to your spouse?**

BA: I don't think it was matchmaking, but it may be that Oladapo was trying to be a matchmaker. [text deleted per interviewee's request] I just felt that Oladapo was my friend and therefore decided to go see him off, just for fun. Especially as we were both from St. Andrews. But I don't think—I'm not sure he knew much more about it thereafter.

**RO: Next, he saw the relationship had...?**

BA: Well, we kept on meeting in London. People would have parties in London and this and that and we kept on meeting there. And thereafter there was a time when my husband said he had a few friends, that I must meet them, and they are all in London. So I went to meet them. And well, Oladapo was one of them and Wole Soyinka was one of them.<sup>53</sup> There were a few of them he introduced me to. Akinkugbe said if you are going to be anything to me, these are my friends.<sup>54</sup> And I went to meet them, we chatted, and that was it.

**RO: It looks like you had a lot more male friends there, than even female friends.**

BA: Well I had a lot of female friends too! I mean somebody like Professor Olorin, Mrs. Sanu. They were very good friends—and there were quite a number of other friends. I can't remember their names now.

**RO: How do you perceive the relationship between feminist scholarship and activism?**

BA: As far as I am concerned I think they should go together. And that...I didn't see any big deal in female scholarship and activism at all. I think that if you have the ability, use it wherever you can use it, and that well, I don't know.

**RO: How would you define African feminism? What is African feminism?**

BA: Well, a few people have been making so much about African feminism. It's a tough thing—one thing. Like, from the very beginning, one could even see that our women had in their own way been feminist. They had their own views. They knew their mind. They knew

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<sup>53</sup> Wole Soyinka is a Yoruba writer, professor, and activist. He received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1986. ("Wole Soyinka." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wole\\_Soyinka](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wole_Soyinka), 6/5/20).

how to express themselves. They were not prepared to be pushed aside by anyone. And so we've always felt we can also do it. That whatever any man can do a woman too—if she tries hard enough—can do it. There's no big deal about it.

**RO: What would you say is the intersection between your work and with the women's movement globally?**

BA: Well, I don't know about globally but I know that we were interested in women's research and documentation center, and that was one of the areas in which I had a push-- I was interested in and one felt -- and we had contacts with people not only in Nigeria or even Africa, but outside—people we can talk to, we can discuss with. And who also feel that we have something to offer. So that's

**RO: So how would you describe the progression of women movements in the past 2-3-4 decades in Nigeria, for instance?**

BA: Well, there's been a lot of progress; there certainly has been a lot of progress. That's why, for instance, we encourage all sorts of projects/programs like what WORDOC undertakes, and other institutions like that, not only WORDOC but other institutions undertake programs which show that we feel that—there's still a lot of work to be done. And people should still be encouraged to interact with other people, not only within Nigeria or Africa, but outside to find out what exactly, what is happening and whether we are making any progress or we are standing still, and what we can do. And that was part of the interest of WORDOC to start with. When we started we got interested in a number of institutions outside Africa, for instance in Canada. What is the name of the... CIDA?<sup>55</sup> They encouraged us, they made sure we got the right books, and encouraged us also to—some of our people went abroad to Canada to see what they're doing there, and we also encouraged them to see what we're doing here.

**RO: I promise this will be my very last question: Can you give me a sense of your vision for the Women's Research and Documentation Center? And what do you think that global climate change has to do with feminism, for instance.**

BA: The global climate change and?

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<sup>55</sup> The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) was a federal agency formed in 1968. CIDA ran the majority of Canada's programs for sustainable development and poverty reduction in developing countries. CIDA has since been incorporated into the Global Affairs Canada department. (Meehan, Susan Taylor. "Canadian International Development Agency." The Canadian Encyclopedia. <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/canadian-international-development-agency>, 6/6/20).

**RO: and feminist movement.**

BA: Well, that's a tough one. I thought the global climate change is a serious matter, and it goes beyond feminism. It touches almost all of us in the world. And I'm not sure that women have a particular stand that they are taking over it, except that—I suppose that if people are already beginning to think about the climate, and the effect of the climate on people, whether the climate affects only the women or whether it affects everybody, and how we respond to that climate change. On the other hand I think you're right in the sense that there are certain aspects of the climate which affects the women--And perhaps we should start thinking in terms of it, but at the moment it doesn't look as if we are doing much in that respect.

**RO: Thank you very much for participating in this interview. We are very grateful; we appreciate you and this interview has taken place on this last day of October 31, 2019. I wish you all the best, I wish you well, and I appreciate you.**

BA: I wish you the very best and I thank you for inviting me to be part of your project and program. I'm sure it will be quite interesting and I hope you will let WORDOC know what your findings are ultimately and also in what way we can participate in the development.

**RO: Thank you.**