

Dr. Ajibola Abdulrahman Oral History Interview

May 4th, 2024

Interviewee: Dr. Ajibola Abdulrahman

Interviewer: Diamond Abiakalam Chinagorom

Location of Interview: Zoom

Biographical Note

Dr. Ajibola Abdulrahman is Assistant Professor of Africana Studies at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. His research focuses on slavery and abolition, childhood and youth, labor, and social change in Nigeria and West Africa. His scholarship examines the experiences of formerly enslaved children in colonial Nigeria and explores broader questions of identity, citizenship, and historical memory. He received his BA from the University of Ilorin and his PhD from the University of Mississippi.

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Technical Note

This interview was conducted remotely using Zoom and recorded in digital audio format. The recording was subsequently transcribed and lightly edited for readability. This transcript preserves the content and meaning of the original interview while correcting obvious transcription errors and formatting inconsistencies.

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Diamond Abiakalam Chinagorom: My name is Diamond Abiakalam Chinagorom. And today I would be interviewing Professor Ajibola Abdulrahman. And today's date is Saturday, May 4th, 2024. So I'll first start with background information from you, Professor Ajibola, just to give

some context to our interview. So my first question would be, what parts of Nigeria are you from?

Ajibola Abdulrahman: All right, thank you, Professor Ajibola Abdulrahman. I teach African history at Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, Massachusetts. I am from Nigeria, southwest and north-central, combined together. So I'm in north-central, not north-central per se, and not southwest per se, but on the borderline. So politically, or geo-politically, I would say I'm from the north-central. But culturally, I would say I'm from southwest Nigeria. So I'm Yoruba by culture, but by geography, I find myself in north-central Nigeria. So I'm from Kwara state and history plays a lot in my identity. And I'll be talking about some of them in the course of our interview. Thank you.

DAC: Thank you. So are your parents also from Kwara state?

AA: Yes, they are.

DAC: Okay. And did you grow up in Nigeria and in Kwara state?

AA: Yeah, I grew up in every part of Nigeria. I was born and raised in Kwara State. So I've lived in Lagos, I've lived in Abuja. So I did my National Youth Service in Edo State. So I've been to Eastern Nigeria many times. I've been to Enugu, Abia state. I've been to Imo state. And I think the only place I've not been to in Southeast Nigeria is Ebonyi State. So apart from that, I've been to almost every part of Eastern Nigeria, and I've been to Delta. I've been to Bayelsa. I lived in Edo for a year. So I've also been to many parts of Northern Nigeria, like Kano, Kaduna. So I can say I'm a pan-Nigerian. So my experience spread across every geopolitical zone in Nigeria.

DAC: Yeah. That's amazing.

AA: Thank you.

DAC: So you've already shared what you do for work. So my next question would just be, are there any integral parts of your identity that you think could be important in this interview that you want to share?

AA: Okay. So my thing is I'm going to approach this interview from my identity, which is not limited to my culture. My profession, my discipline, and my training is also considered in front of my identity. So my response will be based basically on my background, as well as my profession, which is history, which deals with analyzing the past to help us better understand the present.

DAC: Yeah. Thank you. This interview would be looking at Nigeria's transition from military to democracy rule. So I'll be asking some questions to help us understand this part of Nigeria's history from your perspective. So the first question would be, in your childhood, what system of government did you grow up under?

AA: All right. Thank you. I grew up under military rules. But I was born during the military era. That explains Nigerian history. At some points, military rule in Nigeria even outlived democratic civilian rule in Nigeria. So I grew up during the military rule. I was born there until 1999 when the country transitioned back to the civilian government. So I was so young, but I think I can still remember some of the stuff during the military regime, and how people, especially around being understood what it meant to live under a military regime in Nigeria.

So I grew up during military rule. And I can say that there are some differences between democratic dispensation and military rule in Nigeria. And I'm going to stress that as we continue the interview, but to answer the question straight. So I grew up under military rule. And that's when I was born.

DAC: Yeah. Thank you so much for sharing this. So my next question would be, did you have an idea of the government and like its structure when you were growing up as a child? I know like in Nigerian schools, you learned like types of government. So when you were growing up under military rule, did you know who was the head of state then and were you aware of like the structure?

AA: Yes, I wouldn't say I was totally aware of the structure and I would say that I know who the military head of state was because by nature, I later on learned the structure of the government, especially during my elementary school days. I was able to understand that's how the government, military regime work, because everything is centralization. It's because of the structure. So it's easier for everyone to understand who was in charge at that point in time. And when we were talking about the period of General Sani Abacha, He was the head of state and he was popular. I mean, for various reasons, he was popular. What I mean, popular, I mean, it could be positive or negative, depending on how one was to look at it.

In terms of, yeah, so in terms of repression, in terms of brutality, in terms of dictatorship, so he's popular. He took dictatorship to another level. So people, obey him and if any child looks stubborn or looks very hard, so they call him Abacha. Like, okay, "Why do you look like Abacha?" I mean, because he has a tough face, he was believed to not laugh.

So it's easier for me to understand who was the president at that time, at the Head of State, I mean, but not totally understand, I did not totally understand the structure at that point in time. But I knew if there's anything to learn from it, I only learned that the over centralization, over concentration of power in the hand of a single person, which was the Head of State at that time, and that differentiates the military with its unitary attributes from democratic dispensation that tends to be federal in a way, and also the structure that make people not even bother about who the president might be or not. But in terms of military rule, we found that everyone knows who was Abacha, and that's because of the nature or the structure of the administration at that point in time.

DAC: Yeah. Thank you so much for sharing that. So before we want to, before we go on, I just want to like state that I'm conducting this like oral history interview for the Nigerian Stories Archive. And my next question would be when you were, like during your childhood in military rule in Nigeria, did you ever think that Nigeria would go back to democracy? Because, I mean, across the continent, there were other countries who were also under military rule. I think even Ghana had a period where they were under military rule. So did you think that Nigeria would go back to democracy? Or did you just think it would be military rule from then on forward?

AA: Okay. So my perspective then as a child, yeah, I did not understand how I did not understand the difference between military rule and the democratic dispensation because I never witnessed democratic civilian rule at that point in time. But because I was so used to military rule, so I only knew what the structure of government is. And you know, as a child, in many, I did go to one of the government schools and you know these schools were under military rule. And so they don't really speak about or speak against the government. And they don't want to touch on any topic that would look like they do. So to answer the question straight, I will say I understood that there are some movements, especially going by what happened in 1993 with the annulment of the election.

So we found that people were mobilizing, people were organizing, they were resisting military government. So I had the sense that, well, something would be different from military rule, which is democratic dispensation. So it was popular every child to follow the situation then, especially when the Yorubas were complaining that they denied them the opportunity to produce the president, especially when the results of the election indicated. So those are the periods I grew up of activism when people would demonstrate on the streets, they will burn tires on the roads, and they are mentioning June 12th, June 12th election. So that's what it was meant to do election for the first time. So I was able to connect it, not the way I would be able to connect it right now, but I knew something was going on then. And it was because of the

election that was annulled, and you know. And there are some poets, activists, who would be on the radio stations, who record poems to challenge the military government of Abacha, and listening to that, I was able to get some feel of, that change was coming, that even if I wasn't sure when it would come, I knew people were challenging the government, they were challenging the present situation. Even if I did not fully understand what the situation was, how it affected people, but I knew people were protesting and they were became a movement. So it was always the military coming to the streets or to repress the movement, the protest by throwing tear gas and all stuff. So I knew all those stuff and I knew for people to be challenging the military, then it's likely to come to an end, but I wasn't sure when and how, but I knew people were really making governance uncomfortable for the head of state at that time, that's General Abacha.

DA: Yeah. So after like the death of General Sani Abacha like in 1998, at this point, were you like still a very young child, were you like a teenager or a young adult?

AA: Teenager. I was less than 10 when Abacha died. So I mean I was less than 10 when Abacha died. So not so young, I would say because I knew all these, I mean that's why, I mean as a child, I could not know what was going on, I could not fully make sense of it. But because of my discipline, later I was able to connect and that's why my response as a child would be different from my response now. If I was, if I'm talking from the perspective of a child, so there are many things I would not fully understand, I'll just say the way it was, but now I can connect that these are reasons why some of the things happened but I was less than 10 years then.

DA: Okay. Wow. Thank you. And like do you remember having any strong feelings about the transition? So when they announced that like elections will happen after his death, do you remember having any feelings towards that?

AA: Okay. I mean personally, right?

DA: Yeah.

AA: Personally like I said, I didn't know the difference. My response was influenced by happiness around me, by what was going on then. People were jubilating on the announcement of the death of General Abacha. And as a child, I joined them, if I can remember, jubilating that for people to be rejoicing that someone died, it means it's a good thing. It means, I mean, I wouldn't know whether it's a good thing or not then. Right now, I might approach it in a different way, but then I found a lot of people, almost everyone, I could remember jumping the street and rejoicing singing like, "This guy has finally gone." Like, "God has got rid of him for them."

And you know, like everyone else at that age, that probably don't have, I wouldn't say I didn't have agency, but then, you know, influence of parents, influence of environments, I was old enough to have my own thinking then. It might be possible to think the same way when I was old, but if I was older than that, but then it was, I would say I did it on my own, but based on what was happening around me, like people were, and I would throw an instance for you. During Atlanta '96, when Nigeria won Olympic game in the USA, here. I played that match to my students last week, during my class on sports and music topicals.

So I played it to them, but when Nigeria won the match in 1996, I was barely five, six, maybe seven year. I saw people jubilating on the street and I was so happy as well. I didn't know if, who played what then. So I just felt like everybody was happy that Nigeria won. So Nigeria then, whereas a child, you know, tend to be kind of nationalistic in a way that, okay, people are talking about Nigeria, Nigeria. Like, I was so interested that whatever happened to Nigeria, if it is a good thing.

Yeah, so that's the same way I approach the death of Sani Abacha. So I felt it was something that is nationalistic, that it's in the national interest, like people, just like the way Nigeria won the Olympic. So my thinking then was like it was positive development based on the influence of my surrounding environment, like the positive development and perhaps things would be better, maybe things were costly then.

And I was not buying anything myself, because I was not working right? So I wouldn't say I felt it directly. So I was eating, I was doing stuff. Maybe my parents will really feel it, but because I felt people were rejoicing, so I felt it's possible that things will be better. So that's the feel at that time. And that influenced me to also feel the same that things would be better.

DA: Yeah. Yeah, that actually perfectly goes on to my next question. So I was just going to ask, like, you mentioned you were 10, so obviously you are not directly involved in like the political changes at that time. I'm sure you are not able to protest or like demonstrate.

AA: Yes.

DA: But did you, I don't know if you remember like the demographics of the people protesting, was it mainly young people or like, was it like different people from different like generations just protesting against military rule in Nigeria?

AA: Yeah, thank you. I know you asked if I was involved, like directly I would say I was not involved. But indirectly I can say that I was, I was involved in a way and I mean,

I can say it from my own perspective because like I said, I know what was going on around me.

Politically, I have an uncle who was a political leader at that time who had people around him who you know Nigerian politics, people in the communities, community by community. So because our house then was like a center of political activities. So I saw people coming and if I can remember anything, it could be something that relates to, that I can right now say I want to food buying. So because then I saw them sharing money, I saw them like, I don't know what the money was for, but I saw them sharing money for people. I couldn't vote then, so I didn't get any money. Of course, if I was able to vote, of course, I would have paid me that time, maybe my perspective. Right now, of course, there's no amount of money that can buy me, but then, I saw a lot of people.

So after that, during the election, but before then, so I would say the demographic of those who protested were youths and it's the one that are agile. They are the restless one. They protest for different reasons because they are the one that are likely to be marginalized in the scheme of things. Like I briefly mentioned, when it was time for transition, they were sharing money. You see, the elderly people would be in charge of sharing the money. So it's easier for the elders to integrate themselves into the system, whether political, whether democratic or military rule. So they benefited one way or the other. So the marginalized and those who were sought out of power were just the youths and they were the ones who felt the hardship. So they were likely and more that they are kind of energetic as well, makes it possible. So I would say more than 70, 80 percent of time, it's usually the youths and the demographic, the age would be between 16 to 30 to me.

Of course, it's possible to have people above 30, 40, but they are in the minority. So those I can see people below the age of 16 also, but to me, there would be very few. Like me, I couldn't do anything at the age of 10, like I was, I couldn't go anywhere. But if just going, joining people when they were on the street, I wouldn't go past that, I was singing, then I joined them, I sang.

So if that counted as a participation but, I did not really involve in protest. I was young to do that. I couldn't do that. So I knew those who were able to do that were between the age of 16 and 30. From my own, I don't have any evidence to back that up because I don't know their age, but from my own, the way I understood it then. Like I said, it's possible also that there are some stubborn, younger people maybe below the age of 16 who also joined them. And there are some people who are older than 40, but they will be in minority. So like 80% of people who protest there will be between the age of 16 and 30. Yeah.

DA: Yeah. Thank you. And you mentioned that like, then when the transition was happening, you were just thinking that like your life would probably get better. So I just wanted to ask what,

what's like, could you just reiterate your opinions on democracy in Nigeria? Then like, how did you feel towards it? And how has it changed over time? If it has changed?

AA: Okay. Now I'm going to go into details. This is why my discipline will come in a little bit, not my discipline as I've tried now, but then what one can benefit from other sources like music, like poem, like preaching sermons.

So then I listened to, not on my own, no, I've been listening to different kinds of music. I listen to music in my class as well. Yeah. Fela, then listen to Barista, Yoruba, musician, then listen to other people sing in literally their language. So through the songs, I could understand that people feel like if governments, if it comes to democracy, things will be better. In fact, some people are exaggerating that if Abiola, you know, Abiola then was very popular because it was said to gain support if Obi had won, it could be something like Obi because Abiola was also popular that time.

And it was more or less spread across the nation. So the only difference that would be between Abiola and Obi there was that the North did not really give Obi support, unlike the, so in the case of Abiola, he got the support almost everywhere deeply. So for the military to now deny him that mandate, so it was. But in terms of popularity, they have the same popularity, you know, the way youths are energetic about it.

If you mention Obi, they don't even believe anyone is the president. It's the same. Even though by looking at this sort of election, it is not possible for anyone. No, even, okay, let me say without proof. As a youth, okay, what I'm saying is as a youth, if we youths don't have proof that Obi actually won the election, they see it feel like he won the election, right? Because they love him so much. So that tells you the popularity of Obi and that tells you the popularity of Abiola then. Now that the results show that Abiola won the election, so you know Obi, it's not because she'll maybe they manipulated, maybe they didn't manipulate. No, that's the difference to him.

But in the case of Abiola, the election result has shown that he has won. Imagine the case of Obi, if the election results show that he won the election and we have said they are not giving it to him. There would have been riots, protests everywhere. Nigeria would have been on fire by now. You understand? Yeah. Right now, people are still resisting. So that's the same thing that happened during Abiola's time and you know, it became a national issue that everybody was talking about it music. I didn't know what was going on, but I knew a particular musician who believed that they should allow Abiola to rule. Everything would be better, things would be less costly, Nigeria will move forward and as a child you internalize all the stuff

because that's what you hear and that's what your parents listen to. So that's what everybody says around you.

So I was made to believe that things would be better for sure that it's military rule that is causing and because of the fact that it was based on maintained by violence, it's what it is. So nobody liked violence. So I saw, I associated violence with military rule and I tell that if anything I thought did not change, at least that violence aspect of it would change because it was almost roadblock every day. See military police on the street, throwing tear gas. I mean, I lived that period that I saw tear gas thrown on the streets. You will be in your house and you see tear gas, people trying to use wipes to clean their face and everything. So I had the sense, whether convincingly or not, there are things will get better when the country returns to civilian rule.

DA: Yeah, thank you so much for that and like I will repeat again, this perfectly flows into my next question. Where, like, so you spoke about your opinions, aspirations when you found out Nigeria was moving from democracy and how the similarities and differences now. And I just wanted to ask like, now that Nigeria, when Nigeria finally transitioned, like the years following when we were living in democracy rule, ike how did it influence your daily life? If you can compare it to when you were growing up under military rule?

AA: Well, I would say nothing changes much, like nothing, as a, not like, okay, if I should frame it like this, I probably will not see much changes in terms of development, in terms of the diffidence of democracy. In terms, so what concerns me as a person growing up living in Nigeria is not who ruled the states or not, as a common man. The first thing that concerns me is the provision of basic amenities, provision of basic needs, whoever was there, whoever produced what I need most. So after I've gotten all those things, that's when I can now think of who is ruling, like what type of governments, do we have freedom of speech, do we think about those are the things that will differentiate military rule from democratic rule, in terms of the freedom of press, in terms of free judiciary and electoral welfare.

So but then people will find it difficult, and that is why up to now, people really don't protest against bad governor. People don't protest against bad governor, don't protest against lack of corruption in the judiciary or legislature or if, because they have a lot of things to think about to come to protest against or protest for that they are not even doing, like many people are living more or less in poverty, not everyone, but many. If I say many, I mean, you can find like maybe 30% of people, 60% of people living very large. And I'm going to say that one of my students in my class this semester people were able to come to the U.S. So like, I mean, many many Americans, when they see some Nigerians who are here, they think everyone is poor, like.

DA: Yeah, it's not, it's not the average Nigerian.

AA: You understand, I mean, like, if the lowest people who are not that rich find themselves here, they are not the, like,

DA: They are not the poorest

AA: They are not the citizens of Nigeria, like the 50% poorest Nigeria will probably find it difficult to, so even the working class might be...So I used to say then that for people to, if one gets money for flights, like, I know some of us might be, I would say, but a lot of people really don't have access to all those things.

And my point is that they need, first of all, to confront immediate needs of survival, like how do we get money to eat, how do we get money to feed, pay school fees. So before they can not think of looking out for, like, okay, how society organized, how society operated, you know. So that's the point I'm trying to say.

You know, in the U.S, people, if one protests against what's going on in Palestine, people can protest LGBTQ rights, I mean, you have to do that. Yeah, there, people have to protest against, you know, all this abortion ban. People, you know, those things are not issue, they are issue in Nigeria.

The issue hold the government accountable for because many people don't have basic needs. So what the government who promise them in Nigeria now, Obi will not promise them that it's going to talk anything about abortion or about anything, you know, about, oe Tinubu will never talk about those policy reforms. What they will promise is we'll provide water for you, electricity, good roads, you know. All those things are the basic needs that people need to enjoy before they can now think of, who is there. And all these things, the military government can do that, the democratic government can do that. So it's the only one that will differentiate between government in terms of development. And I will tell you that many people believe that Nigeria witnessed more development under military rule than even democratic dispensation.

And that's the argument of some cutters. So I would say in terms of development, it would be difficult to differentiate people, military rule from civilian rule, because they are more or less doing the same thing they can. But in terms of the freedom of press, I can say again that there is little difference between under military rule and right now, because the press is not absolutely free right now. Like you can't just say whatever you want. They might pretend that they are not going to come after you. But if you say certain things that go against the powers that be like the president, for instance, or the others in charge of the government, so you can see how.

So what I'm saying in essence is, in terms of development, if you're asking for development, I would say that perhaps there is no difference, especially the way the government is organized in Nigeria and many African countries, it will be difficult to differentiate military from democratic rule. Yeah, I mean, I hope I'm not taking time.

DA: No, no, you're not.

AA: So If I'm deviating, call me back, so yeah, it's difficult to, they are all kind of, what do I call it, autocratic. Even the Jonathan was part of one of these, Jonathan, Yar'Adua was part of these. Obasanjo was worse. His own democratic rule is worse than military rule, because Obasanjo was really brutal. He was one of the strongest Nigerian presidents, whether as, you know, Tinubu it's not as strong as Obasanjo, very, I mean, and people like him like that, they feel like he's decisive, like he can take decision, he doesn't look at anybody's face like he, you know. Jonathan was diplomatic, you know. Jonathan was simple.

I'm going somewhere. So Jonathan lost the election. If Jonathan was like Obasanjo, he wouldn't have lost the election. Yeah, he would have won the election because he would have done it do or die affair. Like no matter what you do, I'm going to win this election. You get it. But it was, he was a gentle man, like he was one of the best presidents there. Of course, there are many issue which was beyond him and that speak to Nigerian structure because there was a lot of corruption and a lot of mismanagement, misgovernance, which was beyond him because he was handicapped and well, he's going to get the blame for it because if the government succeeded, it would.

So then the Jonathan administration was simple, right? He allowed people to talk about him. In fact, he was one of the most ridiculed presidents online. You know, and the current thing of ridiculing presidents started with Jonathan that people were like, and there are some memes that time Facebook would be like, oh, Jonathan is the most. And so if Jonathan was considered as the most, he even has some autocratic tendency, that's what I'm trying to let you know, like as simple and as polite and democratic as Jonathan was, he asked some aspects of him that were autocratic.

And why am I saying that? Is that no matter how simple a president in Nigeria or some African countries would be, there will still be some tendency of autocracy, dictatorship. And now if we say Jonathan, that is the most humble, can have some traits of dictatorship. Now imagine Buhari who was indeed a military president. So you can see that Buhari will be very, very brutal. And some of these decisions, so it would be difficult.

Even Tinubu is not as cruel as he might be, Tinubu might be, I don't know the word to use for it. You know, somebody that is not straightforward, like he is very smart. That is the most. So it's not only smart, he's very, not dubious. I don't want to use that word. I'm thinking of the right word to use, somebody that can pretend and get what he wants and.

DA: Like cunning?

AA: Yeah, cunning. Certainly I can use the word cunning. Like cunning. And it's strategic as well, political. So he could, I mean, he doesn't have to openly talk about people, be surprised that there are some people that will be talking against him, that he will look for a way to bring them down. So what I'm saying, comparing them, based on their own antecedents, Jonathan so far is the one that can be said to be the most democratic of the Nigerian presidents so far. And yet he has some autocratic tendencies in him. So that tells you that any other person that is not as democratic as Jonathan would definitely be autocratic. And that is why one scholar considers Nigerian democracy as hybrid democracy.

They call it hybrid. Hybrid is the sense that it's partly democratic and partly military or autocratic. So if you, something that is not neither there and not not here. So even though they're wearing native civilian wear, non-military camouflage uniforms anymore, but some of their, some of their policy rules, still spills of autocracy, you see that there will be court judgment or court rulings. The government will not abide by it. And that's an autocratic tendency. There will be impeachment. There will be, so those are the things that will, and you know, it's, so it's difficult, but people cannot protest against that. People cannot say, or like they can shout online a little bit, but we cannot go on the street for that. Unless something that really touches on their daily life, like the End SARS protests, which boils down to, I mean, no, people don't have anywhere to hide again. They are becoming common targets. Lack of employment opportunities. And then the police are killing people again. So more or less like what happened in the 90s when people were protesting military dictatorship.

So Nigeria then, especially with the police institution, was becoming a military state where a policeman can just, so in, apart from that, Tinubu, I would not be surprised if during the election, next election, he still gets some support because unless the hardship continues and people, people tend to see hardship with government. So if this hardship, let's say like last year or early this year, election took place, you know, he would have surely lost the election, even if they brought a goat to contest election against him.

Yeah, he would have lost elections. If this was, yeah. And that's why Buhari won the election against Jonathan then. Buhari was not really, Buhari was not supposed to win the election that time. But because of Jonathan's administration, people have associated with bad luck. As a

matter of fact, there is this man, Fr. Mbaka, I have forgotten where Reverend Fr. Mbaka, I mean, you can look him up. So he preached a sermon during New Year of 2014 or 15 then, before, before election. And so from "good luck to bad luck". And he detailed some of the, so people as they love Jonathan, they, they tend because of Chibok issue, you know, things becoming hard, no salaries, you know, the government could not pay salary for like many months then. So it was under that, that situation that Buhari came and people saw Buhari as messiah.

Just like people saw Obi now, like come to think of it, four or five years ago, nobody was thinking of Obi, right? Nobody was thinking of Obi. But when Buhari came, came with calamity, people now saw, okay, Tinubu is not different. Atiku is not going to be different, right? I think it was not going to be different from Buhari. Obi is the one that looks from all, like look like a lesser devil. Like Obi can never be a saint and can never be angel, but people feel like no matter what, even if it's not the angel, even if it's not the saint, we prefer him to all these established candidates who have a strong history of ruling Nigeria. Like Tinubu was considered as a godfather, who more or less installed Buhari, Atiku has been there for.....So Obi is the only one that there that people saw like, okay, Obi is going to be different. Like we want change. We don't even want Tinubu anymore. And who spearheaded these? Youths between the age of 16 up till, let's say, 30, 35. So, and that's the demographic that voted for Obi

The only thing is that the culture is different from North, and Northern youths were more or less excluded from many of this activism in the South. So if Northern youths were part of the, so Obi would have won the election, if Northern youths, like the youth in the South, teamed up together. But because the youth in the North saw what if it was happening as Southern affairs. And I'll give you an example. During the End SARS, if you look at all those people who supported End SARS, celebrities you will see that.....

DA: It was mainly people in the South. I remember.

AA: In the south. So the End SARS, Obi movement was more or less like a continuation of End SARS. As far as I'm concerned, that's my personal opinion. So people are just looking for who will lead the movement, who will lead the change. People want to change the End SARS, and that's when Obi became popular. You know Obi contested with Atiku last time. People like Obi, he was charismatic, but was now associated with change that people wanted, like. We want change.

And coupled with the fact that the Igbo region has been marginalized politically for a while, and it gave a strong reason for many people who believe that, well, Igbo should be allowed to produce a president this time. Yoruba has done it, Southwest, for instance, has done it for eight

years, during Obasanjo's rule. So if someone from South-South, Jonathan, even though he didn't use eight years, he was able to use five years. Then it's gone back to the North again, Buhari eight years. So it is only good that, as of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria, Yoruba done it three times, two times. Hausa have done it almost two times, plus Yaradua's time making three. So it's only right to go back to the East, and that's the justification of many Yoruba people who supported the move, that apart from the fact that they wanted End SARS. But I can say, few people actually, you know, politically, it's so, but few people actually think like, okay, it's the injustice against the one, if they are looking at equity, like, okay, so it's only good to soon. And I'll give you an example again, and I'm going to, I don't know how many minutes we have more.

DA: We have like five to ten minutes more.

AA: Okay, so like in 1999, because Abiola won the election, so they just more or less gave the power to Yoruba land on the platter of gold. Everybody concluded that Yoruba land, we denied them in 1993, so let's sow it's all the party, major parties then sown the position to Yoruba land, like you have to produce the president. So we therefore want it. So what they could have done then is APC should have sown it to the South East, they let them take any candidate they like. So people will now vote for whoever they want then. So we know that whoever wins the election is from the South East.

So and that's the people's opinion that Obi, should come, if Obi is the most popular in the South East at that time, so it will be the one that people support. And a lot of people supported End SARS then, they saw the way this present government, Buhari's government, with the alliance of Tinubu kind of repel people protesting. You know how they killed people, toll gate Lekki or Lekki toll gate. So all those things make youths determined not to, yeah, so that's the point. I know I have deviated, but so I would just allow you to go.

DA: That's fine. Thank you for like the context and you know, from the historian's point of view, because I don't think I've been able to do all this. And I mean, I wasn't even alive from some of these events, but yeah, thank you.

AA: Understandable.

DA: And like you kept mentioning like your parents listening to music and poetry. And I think most of the time when we're thinking of historical events in Nigeria, we don't necessarily remember that art and music lead a big role in helping to shape this event, even if you look at End SARS, like the music that was coming out during those times, during the time the arts that people were producing. And I just wanted to ask, like was art and music very like at the time

reflective of the changes happening during the transition from military to democracy rule in Nigeria in 1998?

AA: Yes, it did. Actually, it did. And I mentioned that briefly. Music was part of the movement against military rule. And you can remember, I always play Fela is one of my favorite musicians and activists. Fela is one of my, in Nigeria, up till 1998, I think he died in 1996 or 1997. People believe that Obasanjo was lucky that he died in 1990s, because as a military government, Fela made life difficult for even Obsanjo. Then now that he became civilian president. So it was easier for Fela to make life. So basically it was part of it. And basically, So like I said, people use poems, people use music to demonstrate the need for change. And when the change came, you can see people now say that, okay, now that we have, and I'll mention one. Like King Wasiu Ayinde, one of the most popular, he's the most popular Fuji musician now. He mentioned that Obasanjo said they should give Baba a chance now to rule the country because we are now in civilian governments and things will be better. So what people felt then was like things would be better, like things, but after like five years or so, that things remain the same for most of the time.

So you can see musicians now kind of like what's the essence? There is nothing. Yeah, so I mean, I'm just going to limit it to this one because I know you don't have time, but music was part of it, art was part of it. In fact, movies were part of it. Like people were, so it was things that introduced everyone to the situation at that time. It's So no matter what if one is a child then it's what if you listen to music you will see. Like for instance, Fela was singing, no lights, no water, no oil, so yeah.

DA: Yeah, my last question would be like, in general, how do you think people felt about the transition. I mean, you mentioned there was celebration, which is something my parents also talk about that like people were celebrating all across the country.

AA: Yes, people celebrated when Abacha died, but truly, when two, three years after Obasanjo's regime, everywhere, people started complaining again. That Okay, for instance, the Northern parts of Nigeria, and this is another story entirely, the Northern part of Nigeria, said they had been marginalized now that Obasanjo is there, so they didn't get what they were meant to get, like they are underdeveloped. They have not seen the dividends of democracy. Even the Yoruba people, that Obasanjo came from that people think would benefit from it. So they complained the most, that's nothing. Obasanjo did not do anything for them, that it was trying to compensate and pacify the Northern Nigeria, so people couldn't complain because things became more expensive, you understand, so things became more expensive, and there was a time that Obasanjo promised that that's 2022, no 2002, maybe two years after

he emerged, so he promised that there would be 24 hours electricity. And what it meant was that for like a month, there would be a blackout, so people should endure a month, and after a month there would be constant power supply, but people endure that month. Of course not for one straight month, but maybe in the day there will be a trust, or if I am, it depends on the area, I know that's needed the electricity that is needed, but for a major part of the Nigeria, but after a month came and gone, well, so things became the same, food became scarce, salaries, people complained, almost passed, so people did not see the change that they expected, so it was more or less in terms of development, in terms of making access to the people you don't see in this, especially if it's not really bringing food to their table.

So people associate access to basic needs like food, shelter, good roads, as the yard sticks to measure good demand. Yes, so in the absence of that, yeah, so yeah I mean I don't waste your time.

DA: So thank you, so thank you so much for taking out the time to you know be a part of this interview, and just tell your stories like the Nigerian Stories Archive. We aim at preserving Nigeria's history through like storytelling, so hearing people's experiences in like “significance or insignificant”, in quotation marks, part of Nigerian history. So I just wanted to like just leave a disclaimer just in case for the people who listen to this recording that like these recounts are your experiences, your personal experiences and they're not meant to be fined tuned, particularly for historical record and to like elevate the vision, but rather it be embraced to the power and the strength that comes from like the diversities and the richness of our multitude of experiences as Nigerians,

AA: Yes, yes.

DA: So thank you very much.

AA: Thank you, so if you have time next time I can also grant another interview, thank you so much.

DA: Yes thank you so much, I'll be ending the recording right now.

AA: All right, bye.