Egodi Uchendu Oral History Interview

March 21, 2024

Interviewee: Egodi Uchendu
Interviewer: Chinaza Asiegbu
Location of Interview: Zoom

Biographical Note

Egodi Uchendu is Professor of History and International Studies at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. A social historian, her research focuses on gender, conflict, masculinities, African historiography, and Islam in Eastern Nigeria. Her scholarship examines topics ranging from women's experiences during the Nigerian Civil War to religious and social change in contemporary Nigeria. She earned her BA, MA, and PhD in History from the University of Nigeria and has held research fellowships and appointments across Africa, Europe, and the United States since 2001.

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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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Chinaza Asiegbu: Hello, my name is Chinaza Asiegbu, and I'm conducting an oral history interview for the Nigerian Stories Archive. Today, the date is March 21st, 2024, and I am with

Professor Egodi Uchendu. I would like to start by thanking you so much for joining me, Professor. And we're going to begin today just talking a little bit about your background. Could you tell me a little bit about where you grew up and what it was like growing up?

Egodi Uchendu: Yeah, that's an interesting question, where I grew up. Number one, I was born in Aba, and I was born on the 2nd of March 1967. That's instructive because that's just roughly three months before the Civil War, less than three months, actually, before the war broke out. I don't remember much about what happened in those days and years. My earliest recollection was in 1970 after the Civil War. And this time we have moved from, I understand we criss-crossed a lot of places, towns, villages, communities in the course of the Civil War until the war ended. My father happened to be a medical doctor, so he was very much involved with the war at that level. So my earliest recollection, like I said, was after that war, 1970. And the first month, I remember seriously things happening around me was May. Because that was when my second younger brother was born. I remember that very well. I remember some things about his babyhood, if I can say that, his infancy. So I grew up in Enugu. I was in Enugu, did my primary school, secondary school. I left Enugu for Nsukka for my university education. And then on finishing that, I got married and remained in Nsukka. So that's it. My father also went to the University of Nigeria in Nsukka. But that was interesting.

CA: . My father also went to the University of Nigeria in Nsukka. But that was interesting, you said that your earliest memories were the babyhood of your brother. Could you speak more about that, where you were involved in helping raise him? How many siblings did you have growing up?

EU: Okay, my mom had—I'm the second child of my mom. And after me, there were five others. So you know, she gave birth to seven. What I remember about my baby brother was kind of trying, you know, either he was crawling and I was trying to catch him. It was easy, but I remember that the earliest thing I can recall as a human being. You know, was what happened then. But there was something that happened. By this time, I was in secondary school. There was a season. Yeah, in secondary school, like in class three. That was before they started having junior secondary, senior secondary. So I didn't go through the JSSS, whatever, that was before then. So this could be happening like 1980, 1981. And I recall having a nightmare. And it was all about wartime scenarios. So I was with my grandmum. And I couldn't deal with it. I mean, I was unnerved by that experience was even my grandmum that was saying, oh, she was remembering the civil war. But I don't recall anything that happened during the civil war. That's interesting. I don't recall. I can't tell you that I ever remember hearing a bomb or anything at all. Some stories my mom would tell us. Well, they were just like stories, but I can't actually relate with them. So the earliest I recall was 1970. I remember and it was after May. Yes, that's it.

CA: What were some of the stories either your mother would tell you or that if you remember any of them or that your father would tell you as a physician during the war.

EU: My father didn't tell me much actually. My mom did. My mom used to tell us how they navigated from place to place, you know, my father being a medical doctor. And I was told that he was him. He was a top personnel in the Biafran military setup. I didn't ask him that, he's late now. I didn't ask him. I didn't. But of course, I know that because after the civil war, he will be the chief health consultant for Enugu state and Anambra state before he retired. So for him to jump on those positions shortly after the civil war would have actually told that he was really a senior, very senior personnel there. But my mom would tell us how they navigated the civil war scenarios moving from place to place. My father's position gave him access, you know, access. He could move freely. And they had their vehicle. It was not taken away from them because he needed that to for, to be able to to attend to the people in need and stuff like that. So, and yeah, about the Red Cross bringing relief and you know, all those things. So we are going on like very, very serious and stories fleshed out stories. So, you know, these tid-bits that comes up once in a while as they're just chatting about other things.

CA: Well, tell me more about your childhood and growing up in Enugu.

EU: I don't know what exactly you want to know, but growing up. Immediately after the war, like I said, what ended in 1970 January and my earliest recollections like I said was from May after my brother was born. It may not necessarily be May because my brother had already started trying to crawl by this time. But I know he was born in May. So that's why I pegged it anytime from that time. We stayed, we lived in in Coal Camp where my father had a house. Two houses in Enugu by this time, but this was where we were. From there, we moved to GRA. So we were there until I finished my secondary school. Started tertiary education. Before my father retired, we moved back again to another of his houses in Enugu this time, New Haven. So I was there, got married and then relocated to Nsukka. Enugu was a pleasant place. The only main city I have known. I did primary school there at a Ekulu primary school there in GRA. In fact, at the time I was in school. The administrator for Enugu, the child was also in school. We were not friends, but I knew that she was in school. When we moved to GRA, by this time we had not moved to GRA. When eventually we moved to GRA, it's funny that the official residence was behind our house. So nothing spectacular about that. I never entered the house. I never went to that compound. That was a very serene environment, very cool, very quiet. And that somehow defined the way I grew up. Everywhere I lived, my father loved serene environments, very quiet environments. And I got acclimatized to such environments. So I'm used to very quiet, peaceful places, not the hustling and bustling type. That's it. In fact, I wasn't the outgoing type. Because I remember that in my final year in secondary school, that was 1983. One day my mother called me and said, do you have a friend? I said, can you go and visit your friend?

Because once I come home, I don't go anywhere. I was a boarder. I went to Queens school and I was a boarder all through.

CA: Queens school in Enugu?

EU: Yes.

CA: My mother went to Queen's school. She's a Queenite as well.

EU: Okay, that's beautiful. So all my interactions were with people in the classroom. And then in the boarding house. But I was pretty much a person of myself, alone on my own. I loved quiet, serene places. I loved to read. And my father was good in supplying me with all these historical novels. I wouldn't say that, of course, made me to read history. The love for history was already there in my primary school. And as early as possible, I could tell that I had this desire to know about the past. So my reading history was more out of that desire to know the past. Somehow it gave me stability. When you know the past, I'm more confident of the present and I can look forward to the future. So that's it.

CA: And do you think that what was going on in Nigeria politically at the time had anything to do with your interest in history? Or do you think it was more about feeling?

EU: No, it had nothing to do at all. I was in another world. I didn't even care about what was going on in Nigeria. You see, it's now that one may want to care, and things have gotten so bad that children are bothered about politics. Don't forget, my generation was a generation where there was no TV. You know, we could count how many people who had TVs in our street. When I was growing up in the 70s in my primary school, and the TV programs, they were not like what you had now, almost 24-7. Then there were specific times for TV programs to run. There was a time from 6 o'clock to like 10 o'clock, and the regime in my family was once it's 6 o'clock, children under 10 would go to bed. Yes, that was the regime I grew up with. Those above 10 would be awake for another one hour, and then before there is light, we would observe lights out in my house. I didn't learn it in the secondary school, I learnt it in my father's house. The TV programs that we watched, they were like entertainment programs, the masquerade that was the main thing. We didn't have, but then the cinemas were on, and occasionally we would go to the cinemas, yes. Because I was a child, I didn't have much of a say on what we went to see at the cinemas. I recall one incident we went, and not with my parents anyway, but with the approval of my parents, we went, and after watching this horrifying film that kept me sleepless for many nights.

CA: Was it a Nigerian film?

EU: Was it what?

CA: A Nigerian film.

EU: No, no, no, no. It wasn't. No, I think it's more of an Indian something, but it was all about snakes and snakes. A woman giving birth to a snake. It was so horrifying. So that was that, but there were some cool movies there. That was my bad experience with the movie angle. I also recall, I think, when Murtala Muhammed was assassinated, they kept playing it on the TV. Oh, that put a bad taste to my interest in TV. It was so horrifying too. Those days, they were not my neighbors. I'm saying these things to let you know that it could not have been politics that drove me to history. The politics of Nigeria would have set me far away from history because the things I saw in experience, they were not exciting, not gratifying, not endearing for a child. No, not at all.

CA: So you were talking about in the cinemas, so it wasn't often Nigerian movies that they would be playing at the cinema. It would just be movies.

EU: They played different movies. It depends on what you signed up for, or what you wanted to watch. You choose. So in this one, my older stepbrothers had chosen this film for all of us to watch, and we didn't find them. I didn't. I didn't find that film interesting. It wasn't meant for a child. Yeah.

CA: Well, I was curious to know that you mentioned that now politics have gotten so bad. Did you feel like it has been on a downward trend since post civil war? How has that been the progression of the state, the political state, has it gotten more?

EU: You know, in those days, in the 70s and 80s, I would say that the world was better. Let me talk about the 70s especially. The world, Nigeria, was lots better. I recall when my father was going to work on Saturdays. Before now, they made Saturday a public holiday. It was not always a public holiday, but it worked half day. I recall all the disciplines. In those days, everywhere was neat. I remember weekends would come out, you know, clean up the streets, your gutters. Everywhere was neat, and orderly. I remember all those. I also remember the Second Republic, so to say, when Mr. Jim Nwobodo became our governor, that was another exciting time for us in Enugu. There were a lot of infrastructural developments. The federal government was building roads everywhere. Communities were getting pipe-borne water, electricity and stuff like in the villages around. I also remember, like accompanying, we'll accompany my father when they went with the governor to open up some of the, to commission some of those projects. So it was exciting. It was fascinating. Even before the express roads came up, the roads were good. I still remember a trip from Enugu in secondary school. Yeah, now this will be happening like 1980, 1980. Yeah, I remember. In 1979, 1980, we had traveled from Enugu to Nsukka, to this UNN. I know I made that trip with my, from school, you know, between school students, where there was something we came for, a dancing thing. I was in the dancing club that is Egwu

touch. Ask your mum about it. So we got invited to a lot of events and they invited us to the university then to perform. I was there. What I'm trying to say is even though the express road was not there then, we used the village roads, you know, but they were in good condition. Yeah, they were in good condition. You can't say that now. Now we don't have the express roads. We don't have the side roads. Ah, I think it has been a terrible downward trend. It's like development ceased at that period for Enugu State, precisely. We've not really had much improvement. Things may be happening, but not much improvement to, to better the lives of the people, you know, to upgrade the living standard of the people. It's been depreciating since then. It was like the last major infrastructure development that happened in that part of Nigeria. Then it was not even Enugu per se. It was Enugu, but the state was Anambra State, which encompassed Enugu Anambra. It was like the major infrastructure development that happened in that part of Nigeria after the Civil War, happened around that 1979-80 period. And it ceased, those roads that are still there. They are death traps, they are unpassable. So if you travel through anywhere, through the villages, between Nsukka and Enugu, oh my God, you will regret your life.

CA: And that was still, was that the 79-80 period? Was that during still military government, or was it?

EU: The military had given, given over power. I called it the Second Republic. That was when Shehu Shagari came up as president. He was the president at the federal level. And Mr. Jim Nwobodo was the governor of Anambra State. It was during that period, yes. After that, we would not have any major, any serious infrastructure development. They are building houses, you know, but then to take care of the roads and all what not. We did have a little of it about, precisely 10 to 12 years ago, when Barrister Sullivan Chime was the governor of Enugu State. He tried, he tried to, beef up infrastructure, he tried to build new roads. The road that we are using in Nsukka to connect Enugu, he built that road. You now have a lot of potholes on it because I plied that road three days ago, you know, coming back from Ghana. The potholes began to manifest about a year plus before the last governor Ugwuanyi left office. But he didn't think that he should fill them. They have gotten worse between last year's renaissance and now. The current governor has not seen the need to do anything. And this is the only connecting road between coming from the north through Nsukka to Enugu. There's no other road you can use. All the others have long been abandoned and unpassable, yeah.

CA: And do you think, because I know that there was a lot of wealth in terms of oil and things like that, that was also happening in that 70s and 80s period. So do you think that that was also a part of the prosperity that was happening in Nigeria at the time, or do you think it was also other things?

EU: We have always relied on this oil. I will say that in the days of Shehu Shagari and Jim Nwobodo, they could manage the resources from oil better. Over the years, our politicians have gotten, have become more ravenous, very, very greedy. It's not that the oil is not there, but what they do with the resources beats my imagination because you're not seeing anything showing that we even have any income from anywhere. Yet, every year you hear outlandish amounts of money being voted for budget for this year, budget for that year, and you just cannot see how this budgeting affects the lives of people. We are getting poorer and poorer and poorer. We are always on the losing side. It's like they want to make everybody dry. They want until the last drop on anybody's life is drained, you know, before they can say they have stolen enough or they have taken more than is expected or required of them. So I see that level of, I see an amazing and disturbing level of greed in the people that are ruling us. I don't believe that we don't have that money. Just last year, they began to say that no subsidy, no subsidy. In fact, I don't understand all the politics. They understand they should know. So the oil has been there. How the sources of income and what they generate from tax, what they generate from a lot of other things are there. But where do this money go to? We don't see them. We don't see them. We don't see them translate into a better living standard for us. We cannot see roads to ply, you know, food continues to be exorbitant. Light, electricity is not there, even when we are exporting electricity to some countries. I mean, it's unimaginable. You are giving other nations surrounding Nigeria electricity, but you don't have electricity. We don't have railroads down to the east, but we are building railroads across the Sahara to other countries. These are ironies that I don't understand. And sometimes I begin to wonder, is Nigeria indeed a nation? The people that are ruling us, do they understand what it means? What this word, nation, means? So these are my thoughts on the politics of Nigeria.

CA: Well, thank you so much. My next question is related to how you've experienced education as you've gone through. I know you've received a lot of it. And the period of time when you started education post Civil War is of interest to me because I know that the government was also in the process of taking over a lot of missionary schools after the Civil War around that time. And so now I'm kind of wondering, I know you went to Queen's School, but I'm not sure when you began going to Queen's School and if you were going to other schooling in between that, or was it Queen's School until you went and took off for university?

EU: Okay, yeah. I started primary school in 1972. I remember that. I remember that. Before then, I done like kingergarten. Well, I don't count that. I remember going out of the house to go and play somewhere, you know, and there were teachers there and I would come back home. So even when I proceeded from that level to primary school, I can't really tell you, but my certificate tells me that the primary school started in 1972. Okay, so I went to primary school from 1972 to 1977. In '77-'78, I went to, I moved to Queen's School, did my secondary education. I finished in '83. I did get admission that '83, but there was what I call a conflict of

interest between what I wanted and what my father wanted. So my father had wanted me to read law and I wanted to read history. I did get admission into history, but not to law. So my father advised that I should retake JAMB and for that law. Interestingly, even when I did retake JAMB, I didn't still fill in law. Anyway, within the time I waited, I did one year of A levels at IMT and eventually I still, I was allowed with intervention of my mom to go and read history. So I came into UNN for that in 1985.

There was something interesting I learned as an undergraduate. In my own family, there was no segregation between being a boy, being a girl. We did stuff together. We all cooked together. In fact, my mom produced a roster and we took turns cooking. This was from senior secondary school level. I would cook like my brothers. We were paired up. Two sisters will cook, two brothers will cook. And it was such a big competition for us who will out cook the others. The guys gave us a tough time, even though they were young guys. I can just imagine this. My brother, I talked about, who was born in 1970. How will squat down to prepare, to prepare chicken, you know, all those things. So we grew up that way.

Now when I entered the university, I was surprised that there were a few girls in the classroom. I mean, there were many boys, many male students, more than the girls. In fact, they even told us that my year was the first year they were having such an explosion of girls. We were just like only seven girls, and it was an explosion. They never had more than two before in the previous years. It was in our second year. That was a surprising thing for me. The experience I want to talk about now. In the second year, you know, school has resumed and I came back to school and my friends were not back. My female friends were not back. Like they came back much later. Like two, about close to, yeah, close to a month after the school had resumed. And I recall talking to one of them that I was but clearly close. What happened? Where were you? And she told me that she was struggling to gather money to come back to school. What I mean is what I had taken for granted, going to school as a woman and I had taken it for granted. We all went to school. My father's children, boy or girl, we all went to school. I never knew that there were people who didn't see life that way. So this very friend of mine, what was she doing? She would go to farm for people. This is a woman like myself, a young girl like myself. She would go to farm for people to raise money to come back to school. So that was a big eye opener for me. And I began to, I realized how privileged I was, you know, and also realized how unbalanced life was for women. So that's one unique thing I would say that happened, that struck me very much. And this will cumulatively inform my becoming interested in social history. The arm of history that permits me to, at that time, to consider the issues of the voiceless. What issues about children, people without a voice, women and things like that can be explored, studied, and given a voice, yeah.

CA: Yes. And did you find that you were supported in these interests? So when you told, when you were telling people, perhaps maybe in your PhD program, or trying to gain support to how to study social history for marginalized voices, were you experiencing support in your department, were people trying to redirect you somewhere that was more popular or more supported?

EU: No, because my department mirrored exactly what you found in this society. In the first instance, I was not taught by a woman, you know, all my professors were men, from first degree to master's to PhD. I recall that when I came back from my master's program, I met a woman and they were talking about like engaging her to teach in the department. But almost immediately she left for somewhere else, not for, not in academia, I think she went into journalism. And that was that. So I saw a highly male dominated community in UNN, in my department, very insensitive to women. In fact, when I came on board as a staff, I had not finished my PhD at the time. That was like less, roughly less than two years before I finished my PhD. When I came on board as a staff, you know what they told me that they don't want a woman here. They want an all male crew. I was told this face to face. We don't want a woman here. Maybe I need to tell you that two lecturers, two senior lecturers fought in my presence. You can imagine you are coming in for the first time. This was the meeting where I was being received to be presented to the departmental team and to two adult men. We are fighting. Why were they fighting? Why did you allow her to come in here? Why did you?

So I was put off. But somehow that told me what to expect. I was there as the sole female lecturer for 10 years, more than 10 years. 10 years, I'll say 10 years plus, was before another lady came in. I am happy that no matter what, I did struggle to ensure that somebody else comes to join me. I remember when this younger lady was coming in and I was asked my opinion, I said by all means that I supported being there. They said something about our qualifications. She is good. I said no problem. I will coach her. I made a pledge that I will coach her. Anything they consider a deficiency that I am available to coach her. They eventually got it. My interest was let there be a woman. As long as we have another woman here. That's it.

We have improved. We have five ladies now in the department. You can say that for every five men, you have one woman. The same balance is much. They have loosened up. The hostility I experienced, I will say over the years, has died out. As these other ladies, some of them, related to staff of the university or the department, also came in. The gender progress is slow, but is getting traction. Okay. My phone is ringing somewhere. Another phone.

CA: No worries.

EU: Just go ahead.

CA: That's very interesting. I would love to hear more about your research. What have been some of the biggest revelations of your career that you have discovered and been able to develop about Nigerian history? Things that people might not know that you would want to share about the history that you have uncovered.

EU: I have served as a professional historian for about twenty six years now. I have done a lot of studies. I currently have 12 books and about three are currently under production. I have dealt with a lot of subjects. I started with women's history. I began with women west of the Niger. If you have heard about the Anioma in the Delta state, the Igbo women west of the Niger. I noticed that women east of the Niger have been documented, but not much has been written about the west of the Niger. That was why I went west of the Niger.

Again, I started by looking at their experiences during the civil war. How did the war affect them? One thing I could see is they were technically outside the war theater, but they fought this war as much as we fought the war. What happened is like the entire scenario that degenerated into the civil war was generated by personnel, military personnel from that angle. Now, when the war was to be fought, it was from the east. When the repercussions came, it descended heavily on the east. The east went to war. They were not idle. These military personnel moved down to the east. Those who couldn't move down were there, and they fought massively for Biafra. They identified with the Igbo nation.

My interest was in the women. I looked at how this uneducated women navigated the period of the civil war. You know, an uneducated woman has a slight disadvantage, especially in those days. Without being in paid employment, resources, remuneration was not so easily available. These women devised a lot of means to survive the civil war, and at the same time, to ensure that their brothers and sisters east of the Niger survived. Without them, we would not have survived the civil war, without them. They showed amazing resilience. They were able to put up with a lot of discomfort. They suffered. The Nigerian military could identify easily this support for the east. So they were terribly brutalized in their own rights, you know, because of it. But thankfully, they stood strong. It's so sad that at the end of the war, I wouldn't know what campaign went on there, you know, something like a disillusionment set in. Yeah, that disillusionment that set in. I am interpreting it to be like everybody take care of yourself now, you know, people had gone into the war with the hope that it will be successful. We're going to forge a common bond, life future. And it didn't go that way. So there was this dismemberment that occurred, a pulling away, a looking out in the other direction.

So I respect those women and I could learn from them that under very difficult situations, there is this deep capacity and desire to survive in every woman, especially. And I think this is what has helped women generally to survive. Decades of maltreatment, yeah. Decades of maltreatment.

From there, I moved into Islam in Eastern Nigeria. This was coincidental in the sense that when I came on board as a staff in the University of Nigeria history department. I was assigned to teach history of Islam in West Africa. Now, teaching that course required that I teach the history of Islam in other parts of West Africa. And I ended up teaching with the Sokoto Caliphate. In history, we talk about sequence, we talk about chronology. Okay, that was like going through the whole thing in a roundabout way. By the time I looked at the history of events that happened in relation to the development of Islam, I noticed that the Sokoto Caliphate was central. Yes, that was not the first jihad to happen. There had jihads from the 1600s, 1700s, before the Sokoto jihad. The Sokoto jihad was the first major jihad in magnitude in scope that would happen in West Africa. And it triggered so many other mega movements. So that propelled me not just redesigning the course to follow its normal sequence, but to think about what has happened within my own territory in Nigeria. So I looked into Yoruba land and I saw that somebody, Gbadamosi had started engaging the issue of the development of Islam in that area. In Igbo land, it was nothing. People were saying these people cannot be Muslims or whatnot. So in order to incorporate all the parts of Nigeria into the narrative, I decided to venture into this research on Islam in Igbo land, which went beyond Igbo land to all of Eastern Nigeria. And it has kept me busy in the last twenty years, studying Islam alongside gender and other things. I have branched out to so many things.

When I talk about gender, you know, gender is a word that incorporates feminities and masculinities. And we can study human relations, man-woman relationship from these two angles and these two lenses. It's not just only from a female lens. So in my own case, while I study feminities, I study masculinities, critical studies of men. I study men as a way to understand their own psyche, their own thinking, their own whatever propels them to deal with women the way they deal with them. So I've also delved into that and discovered a lot of things. Yes, a man may be, a man may treat a woman in a misogynistic fashion when there's no relationship, when there is no connection. But once it comes to women that are close to him, either lovers, either spouses, either children, either siblings, the attitude is different. So you can see a man that says, I don't want a woman here. It is because it is not yet his daughter. It is not yet his wife. It is not yet his lover. Once these emotionally leading relationships come into play, they tell you another story. So there are other things too we can learn about men, the way they ruled their lives, the way they see themselves.

One of the things I uncover which I love to share is the case in ancient Egypt, where one of the Visias under Pharaoh Isisi, or so, was recommending that men should be wary of women. He was trying to encourage men to not be so overtaken by women, to watch these women, these women are dangerous. Imagine how they make us lose our senses, see the power they have over us. So I find it interesting. To me, that's the first, the earliest campaign I can see in history that laid the bedrock for patriarchy. We have heard societies where men ruled before then and

even after then. At that time Egypt was so-called the patriarchal society, but women were the equals of men. Women were pharaohs, women could hold any position, they served as priestesses. Within this milieu, this man came up with this talk. It didn't catch on then, but you can see that over time men began to organize themselves. It took so many centuries. Men began to organize themselves along a certain line to push out women, to sideline women. And women no longer became the beloved, the mistresses of the house, the ones, the managers. They now began to be seen and treated as rivals. Don't give them a chance. Don't give them a place.

It was worse in Western societies than it was in Africa. But while the West tried to resuscitate Christianity, they didn't bring us Christianity in Africa. All they did was to serve as gods-owned agents to resuscitate what already had been planted there. In that cause, they also introduced their own brand of patriarchy that was very toxic, very nasty. And I'm happy that the women reacted when the Aba women's war broke out. They told them that this is not it. This is not what we are used to. So these are some of the less things I've derived in the course of my scholarship.

Like I said, I've dealt with a lot of subjects. I think the book I published two years ago was on Nigeria's 2019 Democratic election. That election was something else. That election was something else anyway. So we looked at it. Once again, last year, the book I published was on witchcraft. You may recall the witchcraft conference of 2019 if you followed the Nigerian wahala. I convened that conference and that book had been published. So that's it.

I somehow like to deal with issues that people shy away from. But issues I know that can better our lives. There was this growing fear of witchcraft everywhere, everywhere. The main mention of which sent goosepimpled down people's spines. I fully understand it myself. And I felt, can't we come as scholars to look at this subject? Can't we really interrogate this matter? What is it? What is this thing that is scaring everybody? That was it. Sadly, that some people thought otherwise. But I thank God that they were disappointed. And some people did come together and talk about it. One of the best experiences of my life from that conference was when some two men in particular with a woman came to me to say thank you. Since after that conference, I'm no longer afraid of witches. I'm no longer afraid of witchcraft. If you say that to me, Wishcraft is like any other behavioral pattern.

We see robbers there in their world. Witches are not in their own world. To me, it's an act of disobedience to God. It's a lifestyle that some people have chosen. But if you look at it critically, witchcraft is what everybody is prone to. In the sense that where you want to meet another person it's witchcraft. That is a biblical meaning. One of the biblical meanings of it. The other meaning that people are scared of is the employment of esoteric powers to harm others. But outside of that angle, witchcraft is disobedience.

CA: Okay, another question. Yeah, I guess I only have, I don't want to keep you too long. But this idea that you brought out that you said that Christianity was not brought by the West, but that there was already a founding. I'm interested in that because I honestly, I don't think I've heard of that before. What I'm used to is that Christianity was brought over by the missionaries with colonialism.

EU: Do you read the Bible yourself? Let's start from there.

CA: Yes, I'm a faithful person.

EU: Oh, you're a faithful person. All right, good. You must have read about Mark, the nephew of Peter. This was the Mark that wrote the Gospel of Mark. And then you read about the Ethiopian eunuch, the high official of Queen Candace. The North African history has preserved this fact that that same Mark ended up in North Africa. It is an indigenized story, you know, history, local history. I read about it in books, both from whites and non whites. It's a documented tale. So they credit him with bringing Christianity into Africa. Remember, yeah, it just came to mind now. Somebody's Simon of Cyrene or so. We also read from the Bible. Where is Cyrene from? Cyrene is he not from North Africa? Look at the map of Israel. If you look at the map of Israel, you will notice that Israel and Egypt are very close to each other. I recall one of the times I traveled to Egypt. I went with a Yoruba lady and she told me she was actually going to Israel through Egypt.

So that very axis, people moved in and out from one country to the other. So we had these people who were involved in the time of Christ, who were North Africans. The earliest church developed in North Africa, at least you should know that. So now, how was it oyibo that brought Christianity to us when the church developed in North Africa? Alexandria was one of the seats of ancient Christianity. So early in the 1st century, the 2nd century, the 1st century, before ever Constantine decided to make it a state religion in Rome and shifted the focus to the West. So anybody that tells you that oyibo brought us Christianity, we took the Christianity to them. They brought it back. We're taking it back again. That's it.

Even the 18th century was not the time, the first time they would try to bring back Christianity to Africa. If you're familiar with the Benin kingdom, you recall that in the 1400s, Portuguese missionaries had come. In the 1400s too, they had also visited the Congo. So meanwhile, like I was in Ethiopia in January, this is my longest stay in Ethiopia. No, not my longest stay. I think I've stayed longer in Ethiopia than I did this time, but I had more opportunity this time to revisit their archives, their museums and whatnot. They still have it on record that they and Christianity have been relating with themselves all these centuries. Through the Queen of Sheba and the Solomonic dynasty, a dynasty started, through Candace, a revival came up.

The Coptic Church is one of the oldest churches, branches of Christianity in the continent here. What Europeans did for us was that at a point, they brought Christianity to us or to revive it. But, let me tell you, in 1780, you're in Harvard, isn't it? There was a document I saw. I'm not sure if I can pull up the listing, the citation, but if I am able to, I can send it to you. It's an ancient book, it is in your library. Somebody shared it with me several years ago, it's getting to 10 years. And in that book, what I read, in fact, if you can find it and do and read it more and send me even clips, I'll be better. The one he shared with me wasn't as such an expanded version that I would have loved. So I did read from that page, he shared with me, that Biafra, the people in Biafra, I'm not saying if it is all of them, but the people that settled in Biafra had come, migrated from Israel in AD 70. During that attack that destroyed the temple, they said that was when they left and they ended up in the territory called Biafra. If you check ancient maps, you will discover that Biafra was already in the map. This territory, the Bight of Biafra, if you look at the map, you see that this territory, where Eastern Nigeria is, was titled Biafra. Somebody gave me that map in Germany in 2007, but somehow I don't know how I lost it. I don't know where I saved it, I have not found it in recent years. I've had this interaction, it's just that there is a breach in our knowledge. Sometimes we lose information, it impairs what we know of ourselves. But for me, I know that the West did not introduce Christianity. I look at what they did as reviving. It had already been planted in parts of the continent, they revived and expanded the scope.

CA: That's really helpful. And that will change the way I think about it too. And my last question is just about when you're conducting history, how do you go about it? Do you do interviews or are you talking to people, especially with the things that are more under-researched? Because I think for more popular topics, it can be fairly easier for historians to have a basis of how to approach their study. So I'd be interested to know your process in getting primary sources and things of that nature.

EU: Yeah, in getting primary sources, I try to start from the known to the unknown. So I may read around a certain subject, but it's just to know as much as it's known already about it. I have this bias that any subject I'm dealing with, I still go back to the field to search for fresh insights, fresh information. So for my works and papers, I find myself conducting a lot of ethnographic studies. I go to archives, I look at archives, I've been to so many archives.

When I was working on the, what do you call it now, on Islam in Igbo land, it led me to the Methodist archives in SOAS, University of London. I had a fellowship that gave me that access, that was just what the fellowship financed, and I went there and I went through their records. Because I was trying to follow the trend, how far back did Muslims start coming? So I was looking at missionary records, trade records. I've also been to the British Library, I've also been to the British archives. Of course, in Berlin, in Germany, they have a lot of bibliotechs and archives, so I tried to make use of the archives in my work. I tried to conduct these interviews

with people that know who, either they have received the information, or they lived out the experience, or they had people who could help, or know people who may know.

I don't just do interviews, I also do focus group discussions. Yeah, we don't do that so much in my discipline, but that is what I borrowed from the social sciences and I find it very, very useful. Especially when I'm dealing with matters where there's much haziness, or I'm trying to get to the root of something, or the truth of something. If I begin to notice discrepancies in received information through interviews, I try to conduct focus group discussions. So I bring a group of people together, and let them talk among themselves. They will both confirm themselves, and discredit themselves. So it can really tell there, you know, where the conversation is going and what is coming out. I will also make use of the open-ended questionnaires. I use all these methods, all at the same time. Open-ended questionnaires embed some measure of quantitative assessment. And then, you know, people can respond and share their feelings on matters. I find that useful because sometimes some interesting facts come out that you never imagined. Again, where people or individuals may not be so willing to open up on a matter. You know, the open-ended questionnaires is somehow impersonal. You are not there with them as they're filling the thing out, and usually I don't request for their names. I can just ask them, give me a code you want me to remember you by. Or even if you don't want no problem, I will assign codes to those. But there are basic details the person will give me, you know. At least you tell me where you are reporting from, where you are reporting on your age category, your status stuff. That one I will get. As per your name, don't worry about your name. So if the person also feels uncomfortable, like I've had to, for instance, there are some sensitive matters, someone would not want to look in the face and ask the person can put it down. So these are all the ways, some of the ways I use to gather information. I also look for private papers. It depends on what I am researching.

Let me tell you the one I did the latest. It has to do with women, gender, and Christianity in Africa, sorry. To talk about Christianity in Africa, you know, that's a huge thing. So I developed this open-ended questionnaire that I share to more than 200 people across the continent. And I was also fortunate within this period to have also traveled. When I was at Ethiopia, I met people from different parts of Africa. So within the period I could do one-on-one interviews with them. I also tried to use friends to reach out to other people. But in all the regions of the continent, at least I tried to sample not less than three or four countries. What's going on in Christianity since 2020, you know. So I did interviews for that, I did open-ended questionnaires. Of course, I looked at some official records, international records, archives, repositories, digital repositories, archives that I also visited. So that's how I crafted my story.

One may say that you can pick out everything you want to say from existing books, yes. But I like that freshness that comes as people tell their story or share their views. I learned so much. There were things I wouldn't have picked out in books and articles that came out, forcefully, as I

engaged these people one-on-one through these methods, you know. I learned a lot and I could do some comparative elements. At the same time, the person from Uganda has spoken to me. I called up the person from, no, South Africa. South Africa, this is station in Uganda. Now we're talking about the Catholic Church. How is it in your country now? The people from South Africa said, no, it is slightly different from ours. This is what is going on now. I came back to Nigeria, called the people in Nigeria. I met with them and said, look, Uganda is giving this report about Catholicism South Africa. What is it in Nigeria? So you could see, you could get different perspectives at the same time, which we're not getting. It would be difficult for you to see a book that is addressing a particular subject on Uganda and another one addressing the same subject at the same time in South Africa or in Nigeria. So that's where the richness of the field work comes in. And as much as possible, I always defer to it, I always utilize it in my studies. Yes.

CA: Oh, that's a perfect place to end the interview. And also thank you so much for your time because conversations like this, hopefully, will not only kind of hold our history and allow people to feel connected to it or relate to the stories, but also a way for possibly researchers to then come in, be inspired to study new things and learn more about where we come from. So I thank you so much, Egodi, for sitting with me during this time.

EU: Thank you. And I wish you perfect success.

CA: Yes. Thank you so God bless you for taking the time. I know you've been so busy and traveling all the time and to take out this time is really, really special. So I really appreciate it. And I'll show you when the time comes because the archive hasn't launched yet. We're still gathering initial interviews because we want to have at least 10 interviews to start.

And then when we launch it, I think we're going to open it up and try to train people on how to conduct interviews so that they can conduct interviews of family members of people in their lives that have a lot of knowledge to offer. And then hopefully we will see a lot of interviews start to come in. So hopefully it can end up being a large repository of stories, but we'll see for now. Thank you so much.That's all I can say.

EU: All right.

CA: Have a great day and the rest of your evening.

EU: Thank you. Bye.

CA: Bye. Bye.

EU: Bye.