

Lambert Egbue Oral History Interview

February 8th, 2025

Interviewee: Lambert Egbue

Interviewer: Chinaza Asiegbu

Location of Interview: Video Call

Biographical Note

Engr. Lambert N. Egbue is an engineer and business consultant who also served as a soldier during the Nigerian-Biafran Civil War. In this interview, he reflects on his early life in rural Eastern Nigeria, pre-colonial and colonial-era customs, his educational journey, and his lived experiences during the Civil War. He also discusses post-war reconstruction, professional life in engineering consulting, and cultural traditions among the Igbo, including marriage practices, governance systems, and age-grade structures.

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Technical Note

This interview was conducted remotely using video call and recorded in 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 February 8th, 2025 and I'm with Lambert Egbue. This is Chinaza.

Lambert Egbue: Good evening now.

CA: Well, good evening. Good evening. Good evening, sir. I wanted to ask you some just questions about how you grew up. I also need to probably ask just for you to give a formal introduction, like your name, your age, your date of birth, or your date of birth, the year you were born, just to give context. And then I can begin to ask different questions about just the different parts of history that you lived through.

LE: Okay, I'll say that I was born on January 4th, 1942. That was in a rural village called Nnobi. Present day Nnobi, Idemili local government. Formerly, before we used to answer Eastern Nigeria, but with the creation of the states we are now in what we call the Anambra state. Yes, and Nnobi from what I have seen, we belong to the same local government, you know, we belong to the same Idemili local government.

When we were born, we were not told that we were born in a rustic village. You know, people were not all that educated as we are now. You can hand-pick people who were educated then. In fact, if you see anybody who passed what we call the then standard six, You count that person as a well-educated person. And those people were the people recruited to be teachers in schools. Yes, then religion had a role. Those schools were set up by religious bodies. Yeah, then communities, quite rural. We were tap-borne water was not available. People fetched water from streams, you know, and they trekked all the way because the roads were very narrow. Mode of travelling then was on foot, you know. Yeah, so that's what one can really say about life, when one was born, before we started going to school. By the way, I attended the same secondary school with Chuke.

CA: Oh, okay.

LE: We were classmates, we were classmates really, in the Christ the King College, that's what they call it, and we were all classmates together.

CA: Wow, that's wonderful.

LE: And we are friends then, and we are still friends. The school, I did my primary and secondary education, at Onitsha. Yes, primary and then. From there we never looked back. After high school, we moved into university. I attended the University of Nigeria, but initially I attended the Lagos University, but because of the war, civil war, I relocated to the then Eastern Region, to complete my university education. By the way, Chuke and I, we were all temporarily undergraduates together in Lagos University, before he traveled to New Zealand, and I stayed in Nigeria.

Well, while in university the war started, the war started, lasted for three years. That war really had a lot of drawback, you know, in the sense that other Nigerians were going to school, we

were not going to school, because you've got Biafra was attacked from all corners. But luckily, I would say, the war ended after three years, in 1970. Yeah, and then we regrouped. I started from where we stopped. Graduated in the University of Nigeria, which happened to be the first indigenous university in Nigeria.

CA: Oh, the first indigenous university?

LE: In Nigeria, yes.

CA: So what did that mean?

LE: Let me correct the impression, you had the University of Ibadan, but it wasn't an autonomous university in Britain. But the University of Nigeria became an autonomous university by itself. That's why I would refer to it as the first indigenous university established by Nnamdi Azikiwe. You know? So we stayed there. And when the war broke out, like I said, everyone went back to trenches. And it was no easy task, during the war. Because then they bombed. And all was not... Every compound, we would have what we call a bunker, where everybody would run to go. Well, when the siren sounds, you know, there was something like a yard to hide ourselves under the bunker. So, that's really, I don't know, whether I have really covered the areas that may interest you. So, it's up to you now to ask your questions.

CA: Yes, absolutely. Well, I wanted to start by asking about, so what year was it that you started at in Lagos at university before the war?

LE: No, I didn't finish. We transferred, I had to transfer. I was studying Mechanical Engineering. When the war started, I had to transfer to UNN, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

CA: Was the war something that you kind of foresaw happening when you had first gone? Were people talking about the possibility of that happening?

LE: Let me tell you nobody, nobody expected that the war would last so long. We thought that with Aburi. You know before the war, they went on Aburi conference, that's General Ojukwu and General Gowon. General Ojukwu led Biafrans and General Gowon led Nigerians. They had a conference in a town called Aburi in Ghana. They had some agreements. Then when they came back, now, I don't know whether I'm appearing to be partial, Gowon didn't keep to the agreements. That was why we always say Ojukwu said then that Aburi will stand. But he didn't fulfill his own side of the bargain, and that was how the war really started.

CA: And what was the climate like on campus when that happened? Like, how did it feel on a college campus and university?

LE: Yeah, no, when the war started, everybody passed to their various villages and some of us got recruited in the army. In fact, many of our undergraduates were involved in fighting. That's

why we lost a lot of youth, undergraduates. I myself, I was even involved in the fighting. Yes, I was located in Nnewi.

CA: Was this was this something that you and your friends? Was everyone a part of that effort to fight? Was there like a feeling of wanting to join or was it duty?

LE: You know, youthful exuberance. All volunteers, nobody was even forced, yes, nobody was forced. Because we thought the war would end in a few months, but when the war didn't end now, people became a bit reluctant in joining the soldiers. So, that was when we normally go for recruitment. They went and recruited, forced people to join the army. That's when the contraband entered the city. That is, when you receive pay, young man, during the day, you go and hide in the city. For fear of being recruited into the army. They were recruited into the army. Forced into the army. That was when the women took over looking after the men in what you call, attacks on women and the enemy felt they were more harmless. They would allow them to cross the border, buy things and come and sell. So the men, especially the youth went into hiding. So what they what they used to do at night, you know, in order to lure people out, they line up and started singing, singing, singing. If one is foolish enough to come and see for himself what was happening, the person would be caught and then recruited into the army. So, what that means, initially it was voluntary, and that later it became really, well, that reluctance to join the army and people became aware that they may lose their lives and the rest of them.

CA: And I was kind of curious what you were saying about the women who went to go and sell things.

LE: Yeah, they sell things. They became traders. They became traders, you know, trading. Some of them made it, you know, they became tycoons. You know, even though that, even though after the war, even if you had one million in the bank, they reduced it to 20 pounds. No amount of money you have in the Biafran bank, you'd be giving 20 pounds.

So we more or less started from the scratch after the war. Because everybody leveled, no matter the amount of money you had in the bank then. So that's why at times Nigerians are annoyed that in spite of all that happened to us, we still managed to rear our heads and try to challenge them again in the business and all the other sectors.

CA: I was curious to know in the east were there differences between how different people kind of experienced the war like different regions in the east?

LE: When the war started, like I said, we had unison, there was that unanimous voice. But after a time, then that tribal sentiment crept in, you know. An Ijaw person started looking at an Igbo man as if the Igbo man was his enemy. And that was the beginning of dichotomy in war affairs. That brought about real disunity, more or less. Yes, and even at that, some Igbo elites, who were not enjoying life again, because everybody was reduced almost to the same level, you

know, were not enjoying life, so they started grumbling, started grumbling. You know, some of them, if you send them, if you give them money to go and buy arms, They convert the money to their private use...

CA: Wow.

LE: And will not return to Biafra again. Some of them even built estates in America and the rest of them. Oh yes, that was really the beginning of the fall of Biafra.

CA: So some wealthier people might just not participate at all?

LE: Well, if you look at it that way, they were not happy, even though they enjoy their wealth. But when you have money but you are afraid for your life, everything may seem to be worthless. But people really enjoy life the way they can. Because in the evenings, when they are stopped, there have been no air raids. The people will come out and then enjoy themselves by drinking palm wine and all sorts of things. The people who use their snuff will start snuffing their noses with snuff, tobacco. Some people really enjoyed life o. And these are the people we call war-continues, that's what we call them, war-continues, people who really enjoyed their lives during the war. Because they won't like the war to end, because they are comfortable. While people who are suffering will yearn for the war to end. So, yeah, those people who are enjoying because the war continues, to them, they make more money, especially the women who were traders then.

CA: Was it safe for women to be trading like that, crossing the border?

LE: Yes, but I told you, women were considered safe. They felt that women are not threats, I mean the soldiers, they felt that women are not threats, in fact they even helped women to go across, oh yes. And then some of them really ended up marrying some of the soldiers from Nigeria, thereby enhancing their status. Because as a wife of a soldier, you now go across the border without being harassed.

CA: Do you have any experiences you remember? Like, when you were fighting for Biafra, were you fighting with your age mates from back home, or where were you situated?

LE: You see, the thing was that after you trained, you can't choose where you fight. Where you fight is determined by where the pressure is, where the enemy is attacking. And then the people will be shifted. And when we talk of training, training may be only about one or two weeks. And they felt that you have trained enough and they will use a truckload of people and go and dump them there. But they say we are well armed. Yeah, well, in fact, we saw some of, in some locations, we saw colleagues, people who were in the same secondary school with us, and some undergraduates. We enjoyed by exchanging pleasantries, knowing fully well that we were leaving

for the day. When you go to war front, you are not sure of coming back, so you enjoy the much as you can before you move to war front.

CA: Did you make any new friends during this time?

LE: Well, I would say yes. Even though after the war, most of us started moving back to our various locations. You know, like I told you, war leveled everybody. After the war, then people sought their own levels once more. Lecturers became lecturers once again. A man who thought he was on the same social level, he's a lecturer now. He happened to be a lecturer. But because of the war, you wouldn't even know. He was carrying a gun like you. After the war everybody reverted to... We went back to the universities, the people who are going back to their children. Yeah, we made friends. We made friends. Oh yeah. We made friends.

CA: I'm interested to know if there are any things, any information about that period of time that people don't often know or like things people don't really discuss about what happened during the war, like any facts or information that you remember that hasn't been passed?

LE: Let me tell you, what we knew, you may not even know that people didn't know them. What was a common thing within a locality, may be hidden to others, without our knowing. I can't really remember what I, I'm thinking of, okay, what sort of situation are you thinking about? You know, talking about something that happened that people didn't know of. Yeah.

CA: So example, one thing that my father told me was that they started shutting down some of the departments of the schools like the chemistry department and things like that during the war to prevent some of the technological developments in the Biafran side.

LE: The thing is that during the war, only a few secondary schools were in session. That was it. People who were lucky to be in areas where war hadn't reached, they managed to be schooling. But all the other institutions were all closed because like Nsukka, Nsukka was the first place to fall, you know.

Well, I don't know. I don't know. Schooling, schooling, schooling wasn't a common place. But secondary school, yes. Primary school, yes. In areas war hadn't affected, you know.. Refugees, you have the refugee camp here and there, and they only landed, they only landed at night to discharge for fear of being attacked by Nigerian troops, that was one. Taken outside to other countries, they placed community and became a government. You had refugee camps and the people depended mainly on aids from outside. And these aids were supplied nocturnally via planes and those planes would supply and then fly out again at night for fear of being attacked by Nigerian air force. That was one of the things that didn't even reach to many quarters. Because you have people who suffer from Kwashiorko. You have a small boy of about 10 years getting grey hair. And that's because of Kwashiorko, lack of nutrition. Some people with distended

tummies and springy limbs with big tummy. So, it wasn't... I don't normally like to talk about that period in time.

CA: Yeah, I'm so, I'm so, yeah, there's so much, yeah, I'm so sorry that, that that period of time as I experienced it. No.

LE: No, but the thing is that you ask anything you want to ask, don't mind the time. I can, I can give you the time to where you get what you want?

CA: Yeah, I'm especially curious to know what things that you'd want to pass on. Like what, even lessons from the war or that period of time that you wish people would know or could realize.

LE: During the war, we learned to eat, not on a daily basis, But we have to curtail what we eat so that we have enough to eat the next day. So we don't eat to fill our bellies. We just eat to keep our tummies quiet. From grumbling that there was no food. Yes. And like I said, most of the things came from outside, because the people were not farming again. For fear of being bombed during air raids. So people lost their lives on the farm, because they went to farm. And then when they sighted them, maybe they mistook them for soldiers and started slashing them with bullets and they died. Well.

CA: Um, yeah, wow.

LE: War, war. That's why when people talk of war, I say when you see war you will not be asking for war again. We preach peace because you don't want to experience a second time. experience during the war. Lack of food, lack of many things, many things, you know, is it, mobility? You are, you are, you are held in, no movement. Youth are not free to move around for fear of being conscripted into the army. Well food, no food, that's one thing, and then mode of dressing, tattered, if you have a dress to put on, you are lucky. Then maybe you have someone who is abroad and then sending you to make you dress well. Otherwise, more people would appear in tattered dresses. It's something that we wouldn't like to experience a second time in a lifetime. It was very tough... In fact, I remember now that when we had a shortage of salt, we discovered that there was a tree in Ihiala. And the leaves were used as an alternative to salt, the leaves.

CA: Wow.

LE: And even the, yes, the leaves. And when they plucked the leaves from where the thing just went on far away. And even for making stew, you know, they used pawpaw, ripe pawpaw. To make stew. During the war? Yes! To make, yeah. pawpaw, you know Pawpaw. We use pawpaw.

CA: Wow.

LE: You know, Carica papaya as we call it in biology to make that is in lieu of tomatoes use pawpaw. You are laughing. You are laughing. It wasn't funny at that time. You see elderly men with a catapult chasing lizards for meat. You know, when a man kills a lizard like this, the man will jump up as if he killed an elephant. Just a lizard, for the family to have meat. It was terrible then. But we thank God we survived to tell these stories. Some of us didn't.

CA: I'm curious if you had any friends that you knew of who didn't survive the war, who didn't make it?

LE: Friends? Yes. One... In fact, he was in his cabin. Not even in war front. He's a soldier, but he was on leave and was preparing to travel to his village. There was an air-raid and he was killed. There are quite a lot. You have one who happened to be, we were all schoolmates during high school in CKC then. He lost his life, quite a lot of people did, but quite a lot of people survived, right? Quite a lot of people survived.

There was a case of a man who wrote his people that he was coming home on leave to spend spend the time with them. Unfortunately, the day the man was killed, a day before he travelled, and when we carried the corpse home, the people cooked food, waiting for him to come, only to see the corpse. It was a very sad, you can imagine the trauma the family went through. You know, it's all terrible, it's all terrible. Those of them who didn't experience war, shout war, war, war, but those of us will not like a repeat of it?

CA: What was your strongest memory, like your most vivid memory from that time period?

LE: It's a funny incident, I'll tell you about that. That's why I said, when one is confronted with dangerous situations, one is conscious of the one that is nearest. There was a time when we were in what you call a canteen, having meals. Suddenly, there was a side plane. I don't know that we heard that the enemy plane was on top. So everybody, we ran to go and enter the bunker. So the first person who entered the bunker rushed out again and started shooting into the bush. We were wondering, so when each person will enter and then rush out again without talking, it was the last person who see a dangerous fire. When there was an air raid, all of us rushed to enter the bunker, only to discover that the first person entered and ran out again. The second person ran out again. Then everybody Instead of trying to run in, everyone started running into the bush. Later on, when the air raid was over, we went over to the bunker to see for ourselves what really happened. We saw a very dangerous snake inside there.

CA: Oh!

LE: So, that was why, you know, we were laughing over it. It wasn't the laughing matter then.

CA: Yes.

LE: It wasn't a laughing matter then, you know, so we had to kill the snake so as to be on the safer side.

CA: Yes.

LE: Well, another sharp I had was an air raid again. There was a place that I used to buy some cheap things. That day, I decided to go, so somebody used to buy for me. So, when I was going to the news stands when I heard boom! I looked at the direction of the thing, smoke rising, I then rushed back. Only to discover I was lucky to have moved. Because if I had stayed in that place where I used to stay, I would have died. The door was shattered from the blast where I used to stay.

I said, I thanked my stars that said, it wasn't yet time, that I still have to live long. I don't have to go and buy news newspaper in Umuahia. I have to go and buy my own one during the war. Because my late brother then happened to be a legal adviser to the Ojukwu, the Biafran warlord. But my brother is late now, but like they say, he is of a blessed memory..

CA: May he rest in peace. So. He was a special assistant back then to Ojukwu.

LE: Yeah, legal advisor.

CA: Oh, okay. So he was a lawyer?

LE: Yeah, he's a lawyer. He retired later as a high court judge before his demise.

CA: So even back then in Biafra they had legal affairs as well.

LE: Yes, we lived a normal life. There wasn't anything like jungle justice. We had policemen. We live a normal life, only that you are not sure of when the life will air out of a person via air or anything like that, a stray bullet. You know, we have a police force, we have everything that enforces law and order in a place. Yes, but many people turned out to be drunkards, trying to drink away their anxiety.

CA: That's a lot of governance though to be created in just three years, a whole nother society that was built.

LE: We had law and order. And when the war ended in 1972, we all went back to the... the library was...books burnt. And the campus was taken over by small snakes. So we were advised to be putting on cover shoes in order prevent us being bitten by dangerous snakes. These are tiny snakes, about 150 mm in length or 6 inches in length, but very, very deadly.

CA: What?

LE: Very deadly. In Nsukka then. It was a tough, it was a tough lot living there as an undergraduate, but we survived.

CA: And you said something about burning books?

LE: Yeah, that's by soldiers. Nigerian soldiers vandalized all the books in the library. That's the University of Nigeria library. They vandalized the books.

CA: Why?

LE: Pardon?

CA: I'm trying to understand why. Why burn the books?

LE: Because they want to make sure that they reduce everything to nothing. It's like an army of occupation entering a town and burning houses and all the rest of it. Will you ask them why are they burning houses? They were looting. They were looting. The ones they couldn't loot, they destroyed.

CA: And so, coming out of the war, how did people then begin to pick up their lives again? And you returned to school.

LE: Yeah, I returned to school. Yes, I returned to school with all my contemporaries. Oh yes, we returned to school. We returned to school. What else can you do? We hadn't any other thing to do than to go back to school. But some didn't go back to school because their parents could not pay their fees anymore. So some of them went back to do petty, petty business and the rest of them, yeah.

It was really a tough time, a tough time for people. Very tough time. I managed to go back because my two brothers were all civil servants and they could afford to pay my fees, yes. My dad, all his assets in Onitsha, all destroyed.

CA: I wanted to ask you, what business was your father involved in? And how many siblings did you have? I want to know more about your family.

LE: In Nigeria today, they say traders. In my dad's time, they were regarded as merchants. They were all merchants. Because they were trading directly with foreigners, Europeans. And they were selling shoes, selling umbrellas. My dad was noted for selling bridal things, if you want to marry or wed, sorry, and you have not bought anything from my dad's store, then you have not started. Oh, yes. This is a man who will dress up in his, he will put on his tie and will go to his shop. Oh, yes. The shop was at 42, sorry 22 Bright Street Onitsha. People about my age and a bit older knew that place very well. Oh yes.

CA: You're saying that back then in those times people were primarily kind of importing goods from like Europe to sell?

LE: Most people do import, yes, most people, yes. That's the literate ones, the ones that are not literate, buying and selling foodstuff. But all the same, they all want to sell imported things like tomatoes and the rest of it. Because in those days you don't have any manufacturing industry. Nigeria was only supplying raw materials to Britain. Then they manufactured and took it back. Yes, but it happened. I will tell another thing, I had an application from my eldest brother to be admitted in London School of Economics. economics. Wow. You know.

CA: Yes. Yes.

LE: It was all, he was that literate. You know, when you now, you can, if you are trading with foreigners, Europeans, if you are not literate, you can't communicate. Yes. Oh yes. And those, those days, you bring catalogs and you will be choosing the ones you order and the ones you do not order. And then you place order. And by then there was no difference between the British currency and Nigerian currency. They are just the same. You know, not until, I think it was 1878 that they set up what they call the British Bank for West Africa, which continued transforming until it started answering First Bank in Nigeria today. That's why it called itself the First Bank, you know? Yeah.

CA: I want to know more about how business and trade happened like in the colonial times, pre-independence.

LE: In pre-colonial times, it was trade by barter. I have, maybe then I want yam and also things that I have. Then we agree on the quantity. That's trade by barter, but that's pre-colonial. Before they introduced the shell. Then after shell, they started using coins, you know? But it took a long time for these transformations took place, you know, because trade by barter was the in thing and it took a long time...Britain came and introduced shell and all the rest of them...Cowries. Cowries we called it cowries in those days, we called them cowries then from Cowries we moved over to coins that's from coins and then the rest is history.

CA: And who were the people who primarily did the trading? Were there different groups of people who were trading?

LE: Let me tell you, let me tell you something, you know, I didn't want to involve slavery, because it wasn't common on our own side, but if you move outside, then if you move beyond the Igbo land. That's where you hear of a long issue of Arochukwu. These were where people are sold to Europeans and transported to places like America, West Indies and Britain. You know, that was pre-colonial time before they really established. You know, they came into Nigeria as a trading company before they asked the trading company to become a government. And before the amalgamation of the North and South in 1914.

You know, each tribe had its own mode of trading. But I must tell you that for slavery, not that it wasn't common in, it wasn't done in Igbo land, but they sold only people they considered as

ruffians. Thieves. Never do well. You know, they even say it now that if it were during the old days, I would have sold you. You are just a useless person.

CA: As in?

LE: Precolonial, you have a lot of things. No shoes, you know, very few people wear shoes, you know, you trek, no cars. This thing happened to be the mode of this thing, it happened to be a bicycle. You must be a very rich person to own a bicycle. You must be a very, very rich person to own a bicycle. You know, from owning a bicycle, then you can transform into a motorcycle. These are transformations my dad went through. First of all, he rode a bike, then transformed into a motorbike, double silencer in those days, before he owned a car. You know, so he was, by all considerations, a well-to-do man.

CA: Were there any traditions that you remember your parents or grandparents telling you about that don't exist anymore?

LE: You know, in those days. Quite a lot. Idol worship. Idol worship. Not that idol worship does not exist anymore. But because of Christianity, it's now being relegated to the background. But you still find people who practice, you have people with dual loyalty, in the morning they are idol worshippers, no, sorry, in the morning they are Christians, but at night they are idol worshippers. You know, so you cannot say that idol worship has been abolished completely, no, it's still within Igbo land, you know, but it's no more pronounced. In fact, if you see anybody who happens to say, I worship, I'm a traditionalist, people will turn like this and then avoid that person.

These are some, okay, there are other things, like, you have what we call, I don't know what you call it, in Igbo, they call it Igbo Ichi. There's a type of thing they use and mark one's face in lines to show that one has taken Ozo title. It's not done again because one, it is very painful. And two, you know, they carve the person's face, so that when you see the person, you know that he has taken on Ozo title. Yes. Then some of the ceremonies involved in taking Ozo title. Some of them our grandfathers did. You know, like first of all, you go to a forest and stay for some days. Then you come out. You go to peace. So many processes before you take an Ozo title. And that's why in those days, as an Ozo man, as an Ozo titled man, if you say yes, they say your yes is your yes, if you say no, they say your no is your no, and a titled man like in those never lied.

That's one of the things we lost now because of westernization. Now you see people who will put on red cap chiefs, but they will lie through their noses. I think I've been a victim of that. A man came in with a red cap. I thought I was dealing with an old Ozo title person until he dealt with me. Since that day, anybody who comes to my office and says, I say, no, keep your red cap first. This is business. Yes, don't you go there and tell me your red cap, leave your red cap, leave

your red cap, this is business, let us, it's called business. You think you're titled? But in those days, a titled man will tell you the truth, and nothing but the truth. But not anymore. These are part of the things that... There are some things that are even disappearing. We don't have thatched roofs anymore. We are now replacing, okay, we started with corrugated iron sheets. Now, iron sheets are being replaced by aluminum sheets. These are stages. But before, you used a straw.

CA: Straw?

LE: No, this time we used palm fronts, palm leaves, you know, before we used palm fronts for roofs.

CA: Okay.

LE: Then, from there we migrated to using corrugated iron and these are part of the things that we say disappeared.

CA: Wow.

LE: Our mode of building houses have also been changed, like before it was mud houses, very thick, and if you enter they are very cool, but not well lit, but very cool because of thickness of the wall, the heat will not take over, they have tiny openings that serve as windows, oh yes, those walls have now given way to block work, you know, and so many other things. There are a lot of things that, quite a lot. What again, can I mention?

Okay, you are a woman. You dare not shake hands with me as a woman, especially if I'm a titled man. But these days, what they do in those days is, as a woman, you just stoop a bit, the man will pat you on your back. But these days, those things have gone. If you see a woman who says, ah, how are you, how are you? And you will be shaking hands. Not understanding that you're a titled man or not you're a titled man. This is why it was almost a taboo in those days. It was a taboo, not even almost, it was a taboo for a woman to shake a titled man. No, no, no, it's never done. Ah, it's never done. It's never done. You're laughing? Now you're enjoying the modern era.

CA: It's important because I want to know all of the different traditions that we had and also why we had them. Because I think that now, with urbanization and westernization...

LE: Have you forgotten about Beijing conference. The Beijing conference told that they were as good as the male folk. So why should they now stoop low for men to pat them on their back? No. But when you come to Igbo land, some people still maintain that culture without knowing. The younger ones don't, but the elderly ones do. No matter how elderly, they just stoop low without realising. It has been ingrained in them. Not the younger folks, who will tell you what's up, man, what's up, man? You know, as in the people who are here. They didn't know. If you tell

about tradition, they are like, man, grow up. We are now in the 21st century. But it's true now. It's true. Oh yes, it's true.

CA: It is.

LE: Some of these things. And there is one other thing that even though people never really thought of it, as an Ozo titled man, your wife will always be on your left, but on your right. Really? As an Ozo titled man. Yes. Always on your left, not on your right. Oh yes. If you watch closely, for these days, because of, we say we are modern, we are modern. Women can sit on any side of the man's this thing, but if you travel to the village and you observe, they still observe it. A woman will always sit on the left of a titled man. Oh yes.

Still, but it's gradually disappearing. These days, now, all these what's up or they call it equality. In Nigeria now they say they can sit anywhere and damn the consequences. Nonsense, what are you talking about? I can sit anywhere I want. And you can't do anything because it's the old generation. They weren't brought up to observe local traditions. Oh, yes.

CA: When you were growing up, did you see people trying to preserve local traditions and then other generations resisting it?

LE: Yeah, there are people who try to preserve, but you know, another thing that really affected our tradition is religion. Religion eroded. They believe that people who practice traditional ways are evil, or they worship Satan. And nobody wants to be regarded as worshipping Satan. So everybody now pretends to be a Christian. Oh, yes. That's why some of the things, our culture, especially the Igboland. Our culture is dying, seriously dying. And those of us who saw it dying are even crying. But those of the Gen Z generation would say nonsense. Don't mind them. Old school. They are old school. You know, that's the normal slang they use for old people in Nigeria. they say old school. And once you say it, they say old school. And it's finished. You have been relegated to more or less to the dustbin. Yes. But then they don't know that the old school will also rise once again when the chips are down.

CA: Well that's partially why i'm here to try to learn from what they call old school and actually kind of try to preserve some of these traditions seriously because I think it's really important to know to how we used to do things and also to know why. Because I think a lot of people...

LE: Yes, even weddings. Weddings are being corroded, they are now shortening it. Because in the olden days, you have what you call Iku Aka, the declaration of intent. Then you have Ime Ego, before you do the actual wine carrying. You have these three stages. But these days, nobody cares. Either the daughter will be hurrying, Daddy let them come and do the thing. They are eager to go and be a wife and a mother.

While the parents, if you insist so much, they say you don't want to release your daughter to get married. They will emotionally blackmail and you will be forced to forego all those processes and combine them in one.

That's why Nigeria today, you only have two major ones, two, one, then the others are combined under one. For example, you have the declaration of intent, the Iku Aka. Then the Ime Ego and wine carrying are combined together. That's why when people are congregated, then kinsmen from both sides, from both families, we go and discuss the bride price, not dowry, bride price. Because in Britain and foreign, maybe in America, I don't know whether have a dowry, but I know in Britain they have dowry, but in Nigeria they have bride price.

CA: What's the difference?

LE: They discuss the bride price.

CA: The difference between dowry and bride price, what's the difference?

LE: Dowry is that the parents of the girl who will pay, the man to come and marry their daughter. But bride price, the man will have to pay. That's why at times, I know a family in Britain in those days, the parents are not well enough and they were advising the girl to elope with her boyfriend. So that they will not bear the brunt of paying the dowry. So the daughter refused, and she didn't want the shame.

CA: Wait, was this a Nigerian family in Britain, or a British family in Britain? No, no.

LE: No, no. It was a British family. It was a British family.

CA: So, they were telling the daughter..

LE: No, Nigeria. Nigeria, no matter how long Nigeria lives, they still refer to bride price. It's the man who will bring the money to do all the things and he's the man who will foot the bill for wine carrying. You know, you pay the price and then they bring money for all the expenses for the wine, what we call a traditional wedding.

Before you talk of white wedding, because the tradition concerns itself with traditional things, declaration of incense, Iku Aka. And then you have Ime Ego, and then the wine carrying itself. But Ime Ego. But you tell me more about it, after all you have gone through the process, haven't you, have you? Or you are intending to? Which one?

CA: Maybe soon.

LE: Well, you'll be more interested in this part. You know what happens.. Well, you know abroad they abridge everything these days. The abridged version, they're like in some parts of, in some ceremonies I've attended, they do, with the traditional and white wedding, traditional

wedding and white wedding the same day. They go and marry in the church, And then they go to the girl's family to do the wine carrying, to save time, save money. And I don't know whatever they are saving. I don't know whatever they are saving, I wouldn't know. Yes.

These are some of the things that are gradually disappearing. They are gradually, you know, they are gradually disappearing, you know, all these stages. These are things that really make a marriage exciting for people. They are coming to do a Iku Aka today. When are they going to do Ime Ego? They say, well, they fix it to be next month. And the girl will be looking towards next month and counting the hours and days and minutes. A day to the time, you go to the nearest place to do a hairdo very, very well. I don't know what to say, I don't know what to say. And the Ozo title, they are also modifying everything. I don't know.

Like I said, religion is dealing with our culture. Like, we don't have masquerades anymore. Because they are regarded as evil masquerades. But in China you have masquerades. In Asia you have their own masquerades. Why should our own die a natural death? When we were young, what we do for us, especially during burials, to go and watch masquerades that will appear, or even Christmas and New Year celebrations. We will watch out for masquerades, various types, but not these days. Not these days. These are things that are disappearing from my culture, masquerades. You can keep on counting, you know. You can keep on counting things that are disappearing from our culture, you know. I don't know.

CA: How about the kola nut? The kola nut.

LE: The kola nut? Well, we are still there. That one won't disappear. Because they believe that in any serious gathering or situation that if kola nut is not there, you have not started.

But there's one other thing that there's something people fail to understand. You know, in Igbo land, you have the broom.

CA: Hmm?

LE: You have a broom. A broom for sweeping. If somebody is coming to your house, and you don't want him or her to enter your place, you start sweeping, you start sweeping, you don't even have to talk, the person will just turn and go back, because you have shown the person that you don't welcome him or her to your place. These are part of the culture that has disappeared.

CA: Really?

LE: So these are part of the things that, you know, somebody is going to a house and you are sweeping, they just skip over the broom and enter your place, you know. Not minding, they say Daalu, I na za ulo? Greet you and enter your house.

But in those, it was taken as a very serious thing. Yes. We have very little, little things that are disappearing. But, um... I can't tell what. little things that are disappearing from our culture. You have the masquerade, you have the mode of worship. That one is nearly, almost killed, the traditional mode of worshipping. Because they say if you do the traditional way, you are worshipping the devil. Oh yes, that's why people run away. You know, like, you get a kola nut, you call up all your ancestors, you call this, call that. Come and eat kola. Your ancestors, you call all of them to come and eat kola. Then take a little bit and throw it on the floor. Then the other ones will be eaten by people. Kola nut plays an important role in Igbo traditions, whether wedding, whatever. If there is no kola, then that thing is not, it's a no-go area.

Only where kola will not appear, kola knot will not appear, is when you go on condolence visit. That's when somebody dies and you go up on a condolence visit, no, no, no, no kola. These are things we tell people don't do that, don't do that, yes. But besides this one, all others will require kola nut.

CA: And I'm wondering what other things that what other things were not allowed then that are now okay. Or I said yeah like...

LE: Things that were not okay?

CA: What things were then not allowed and now we allow them like additional things?

LE: Which reminds me, remember, a woman will not break kola in Igbo land. A woman will not break kola in Igbo land, it's a taboo. That is very very important. But I've been to a wedding where a woman broke kola. Till today I have not forgotten that incident.

In fact, I refused to eat the kola.

CA: Wow.

LE: You are laughing? I refused to eat the kola. A woman breaking kola in an occasion, wedding reception for that matter, they called the woman to come and break kola. So I said I will not eat to let them eat, but I will not eat. It's unusual for a woman to come and break kola. Men, we are present. Women can break kola among themselves, no problems. But if there is a man, no matter how small. Once he can talk, and even if he's age 20, and the other women are 50 and the rest of them, they'll cajole him to come and break kola if he's amongst them. But if they're all women, they can break kola amongst themselves. Nobody, nobody cares, you know, you know. Beijing conference notwithstanding.

CA: And were there any coming of age ceremonies? I was going to ask, anything coming of age? Any kind of coming of age ceremonies?

LE: Yes, we have various age groups. Coming of age, it depends on the locality. In Igbo land, that's where circumcision comes. Then some people who wait until they come of age to do circumcision. But these days they do it at a tender age, to save the person from pains. I mean the circumcision of men. That's another thing, you know, you say how can you subject a young guy to this and that and that and that, it's not acceptable anymore. Even some hospitals don't do it anymore. But some people go privately to people who will do it on their children, you know. That's a part of the, that's part of the things that are gradually disappearing, you know. So, these, well, you asked a question, there was something you asked.

CA: Yes, the coming of age ceremonies, and you said it depended on the locality.

LE: Yeah, it depends on the localities. And that's why I said that some people, to avoid pains, they do the coming of age, they do it prematurely. Now if I may call it prematurely. . Some people used to do it when they are of age. Let's say, when they see they are men, then they do the circumcision. But what a painful exercise. Even in some parts of Nigeria, they do whipping. Whipping. Whipping. If you cry, yes, if you... That is some parts of Nigeria, not in Igbo land. not in Igbo land. It's not because of Nigeria, they do whipping. If you weep, then you are out of age. If you weep or cry, then you are out of age.

But it's not in Igbo land. It's not in Igbo land, any peculiar. But in my own town, I haven't witnessed it. Maybe not in my town, but in Onitsha. So, I do not even know. You know different societies, I said some places you have age groups. In fact, in most every town, they have age groups, you know, and these more or less like social clubs, various age groups, at times they band together to carry out developmental projects in towns, depending on the capability of that age group. Yes.

CA: What kind things do they care about?

LE: Well, they can decide to do roads, build schools, build hospitals, any developmental project that will promote good living in their towns.

CA: Hmm, that's good. And everybody had age groups.

LE: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah

CA: And you said depending on the capability, so you said, so certain age groups had different capabilities than other age groups, kind of, like the talents in the group?

LE: They have age groups. There are people who are 80 and above, they do celebration, you know. To show that they have attained the age of 80. And people in that group, you see them, doing merriment. You will think they are celebrating the Ofala. Oh, yes. You know, they decked out in their regalias, you know, some of them mostly in white, and the titled ones will come out with their ivory tusk, you know, and a red cap with a gold feather in it.

CA: Wow, this is very it's very amazing to hear all of this history sir. It really is. Because not all of these things are passed down and it's only because you've shared it. This is the only way that we will remember it.

LE: Documentation. Yes, documentation. You know you were trying to tell me, you asked about it. I still remember if you come to uh pre-colonial days, we were using clay plates. Clay.

CA: Clay plates.

LE: Clay plates and clay pots.

CA: To cook?

LE: Yes, that was what was used in those days. Clay pots and clay plates. And they were useful then, even though they are very fragile, that if you drop on the floor, then you are finished. You also will not go bunkers, but these are no more there, you know. They are no more there, they are all, I don't even know where you can get them, any archive you can get any of these things.

And then for glasses, for drinking, use a type of gourd, you know. I think produced by pumpkins or so. You know, they cut this and remove the seeds and use it for drinking water. Yes, until they came up with, you have stages, they came up with what we call a type of plate, that they call it. In Igbo, they called them tike. It's glazed iron, glazed, you know, made in China, in those days.

CA: Oh, wow.

LE: You know? Or rather, yeah, not China, Japan. If you look at them they say made in occupied Japan. You know, those plates. Before we go into breakable plates.

CA: Wow.

LE: And then, all sorts of things. So these are things, you know, it's just you are... If watch Nigerian films. When I say Nigerian films, the one that has royalty in them. Maybe, if I can download one of them, I'll send you to see what the culture is all about. Maybe you can capture some more.

CA: Yes, I would love it.

LE: All these Nigerian kings, the king and the queen and the daughters and all the rest of them.

CA: But I heard wasn't always kings and queens in Igbo culture though.

LE: Yes, and they were very powerful then. Very, very powerful. Their words were laws. If you go against them, the person will disappear. Yes, they were very powerful. You have late Igwe

Ezeko in Nnobi. You have Onyeama in Eke. You have these ruthless leaders, chiefs, you do not oppose them, the person will disappear. Yes, you have that.

But these days now, because of hunger, I think, and then government interference in chieftaincy matters. They now give the chieftaincy title to appease. It's now being watered down. But people often don't regard those chiefs as important anymore.

CA: You said the chieftaincy title is now going to who? Who is getting it?

LE: The chieftaincy title now goes to persons they feel they can control, even though they pretend. Even though they will pretend that the person is elected, it was easy to do it by election. It's not hereditary anymore. That's another thing that has disappeared in Igbo land. There's no more hereditary. Hereditary means if a man happens to be an Igwe, when he dies, the son will succeed him. It's no more like that in most Igbo towns. When an Igwe dies, there will be an election. People will elect who will be their chief, or Igwe, or whatever. That's what happens. So these are part of the things that has almost disappeared in Igbo land. Hereditary rule the Igbo land is no more there.

They now do the thing by election. Any person who wins the election would have been recognized by the government. That's why I said the Igwe-ship now goes to the highest bidder. If you have enough money to bribe all the people, give them money to vote for you, then they vote for you and you win. That's why I made the statement that he goes to the highest bidder. Not the best candidate.

CA: And that kind of reminds me of what you were saying earlier about just people who used to wear the red cap used to never tell a lie. But now, the integrity isn't the same. Do you think that there's a way to, moving forward, preserve some of the traditions? Like what are some of these traditions that have held our societies together?

LE: You know, let me liken it to something like this. You have a good in a pen. Suddenly, the good escapes. And when it escapes, it's a tough time trying to bring it back so that you'll lock the pen again.

People have tasted freedom, tasted modern life. You're laughing, but it's true. So, and everybody in Nigeria or in Anambra or South East, everybody wants to be an Igwe. Oh yes. So nobody would like, for example, hereditary something to continue. They now do it by rotating from one village to another village. If a village produces an Igwe now, then it will return for another village to produce. And that doesn't mean that we won't do an election. They will do an election in that village. So they will elect a man who will be crowned the Igwe from that village. Unless the man is magnanimous with his money, that he spends money regularly on the people and the rest of them, they will say he has been elected unanimously, unopposed, letting him go be and

crowned. So there is no way now, you can say, you ask people to go back to the days where they have a hereditary rule. It's difficult.

CA: Even beyond hereditary rule, how about some of the other traditions, like age group, for example?

LE: Age group? No, age group is still there. It has not been eroded. It's still there. It has not been eroded. It's even waxing stronger, even though they are not interested, because they felt why should I come and waste time in the village, when I have all that progress I'm going to do. Never mind that part of the fewer things that have eroded besides religion, you have to have materialism. Materialism captured the mind of the Gen Z generation, that they lost patience. You know, if you are talking about any age group, they say my friend go and sit down. Why should I come to the village for anything? That's it, consistent system will finally fizzle out.

Oh yes. The masquerade one, all these things, you know, not many people would be interested in being involved with masquerade. Not very good, now, with the exposure, oh, yes. In fact, anybody getting involved must now be regarded as a riffraff. Hmm. Yes, the person will be regarded as a riffraff. That they've got to find something to do.

CA: Wow. That's unfortunate, because these are all traditions that build our society, that have sustained our society.

LE: You know, masquerades in those days, we used to bring errant members of the community to fall in line, in those days. Oh yes. Errant community members, they used them to bring them to fall in line, to be law abiding once again. Oh yes, but these days now, the problem is this, some people misuse it, as a vendetta. And the government started looking into it. That's why in places like Anambra, you have to register. Before you can come out, before any masquerade can come out, you have to register with the Anambra state government.

Just like they are now doing with native doctors. They say that native doctors should register in Anambra state. And each one should show his own speciality. Like the medicine, you see, I'm a pediatrician, I'm a gynecologist. So, the native doctors will say their own speciality, why they are in this way. So, most of them escaped to Asaba. And they are complaining. I go and ask them to come and register.

CA: That's interesting.

LE: If you have, when you have gathered all the details, if you feel like there's others elsewhere, then feel free to contact me.

CA: Yes, no, thank you so much.

LE: We can fill the gap.

CA: Yes, thank you so much because there's still so many things that we haven't even talked about. Like I don't even know what happened after you graduated college. Like, so many things.

LE: When I graduated from Christ the King College Onitsha, I taught for a few months before I entered university. I had my secondary school education and continued and did what we call a higher school certificate before we entered. That was what was the norm in our days. Not these days where you enter, once you finish your secondary, you take a JAMB and then enter a university. In her own time, she had to go to high school, so we had to qualify for direct entry.

You know, so these are, so from there, after my high school then I entered the university. From the university, I entered the Lagos University, the war broke out, we moved back to Biafra then. After the war, we moved back to University of Nigeria Nsukka, where we graduated, yes, that was in '71-'72 session. So, you see that was when we graduated and since then I've been in private practice as a consultant.

CA: Okay.

LE: Yes, I've been in private practice. I've never worked in a ministry or anywhere. You know, I've been working, I've worked with a firm called Akrench in Lagos. You know, then after some time I set up my own practice.

CA:Wow.

LE: Yes, and Dan Chuke. Engineer Chuke, gave me encouragement. Oh yes, without knowing. He gave me my first project to handle. That will tell you how far we have gone as friends. Right from secondary school days, yeah, right from secondary school days. Yes, and we are still on, oh yes. So since then, I've been in practice and I'm still practicing because some people will say, why not retire? But if you retire, then senility, dementia will start coming in. So I have to keep my brain working. I have to keep my brain working. I don't want to start telling myself stories. Why didn't you do this? Why didn't you? But let me just keep on working. I'm still as active as anything. Very active. Luckily, God managed to, by the grace of God, I'm still healthy

CA: Amen. Yes. Yeah.

LE: So, that's all about, from college to university to everywhere, till now, I've been in practice. Practice.

CA: And you're still sharp and you're still sharp and you remember so many things and I think it's a testament to all of the work that you've done and all of the service.

LE: They're all projects, they're all projects. I've been involved in civic projects, health projects, community projects like for example... Yeah which reminds me, Dan Chuke helped me and I did a package, a project, a national study in Abuja. He was the man who got me involved. That

Chuke again. Then you have a lot of projects, you know, if you come to Enugu now, you have a hospital they call Niger Foundation Hospital. They are now in hospital and I've been with them as a consultant for ages, for years now, you know. Then, Bernard Carr, Bernard Carr Civic Centre, I don't know what they call it now in Port Harcourt. I happened to be one of the consultants for the job. Then before the creation of more states by Gowon, all the Federal Government Colleges, I was one of the consultants for those Government Colleges. Enugu, Enugu, Ebonyi, and so many others. So I handled a lot of projects. Quite a lot. So.

CA: You were the one who was helping to structure those schools?

LE: No, we are consultants. That is, we do... I'm only involved in mechanical and electrical services. Okay. Consultants, that's not social or anything, anything technical. Yeah, that's where I get involved.

CA: Wow. Well, it's been so wonderful to sit with you. I've really enjoyed my time.

LE: Me too. Me too.

CA: It was really wonderful.

LE: So, you know it's mutual. When you now compile all you have gotten, if you feel there's a lacuna, like you people say, then...

CA: I will. I will. Thank you so much, sir. I really appreciate your time. God bless you.

LE: Okay, same to you. God bless you too. Bye. Have a lovely afternoon. While you say good night to me.

CA: Yes, have a good evening, sir. Thank you for staying up. It's now night. It's now really close to 10.

LE: Yeah.

CA: Okay. Daalu. Kachifo, goodnight.

LE: Bye. Daalu. Kachifo. Bye.