

Yetunde Makinde Oral History Interview

August 19, 2024

Interviewee: Yetunde Makinde

Interviewer: Diamond Abiakalam Chinagorom

Location of Interview: WhatsApp Voice Call

Biographical Note

Yetunde Makinde is a businesswoman and former banker from Ogun State. A graduate of the University of Ibadan with a master's degree from Ogun State University, she worked in the banking sector for fifteen years before establishing her own business. In this interview, she reflects on growing up during military rule, her experiences as a student at the University of Ibadan during the June 12 crisis, student activism, and Nigeria's transition from military government to democratic rule.

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Technical Note

This interview was conducted remotely via WhatsApp Voice Call, recorded in digital audio format, and later transcribed. The transcript is a condensed and lightly reformatted version of the original oral recording, preserving meaning while improving clarity and readability.

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Diamond Abiakalam Chinagorom: Okay. I'll start by introducing myself. So, hello. My name is Diamond Abiakalam Chinagorom and I'm conducting an oral history interview for the Nigerian Stories Archive. Today is 19th August, 2024. And I am with...

Yetunde Makinde: Okay, Yetunde Makinde

DAC: Yetunde Makinde I would like to start by thanking you for joining me. We are going to begin by talking a little about your background. So, could you tell me if it's about like your family, your education, etc?

YM: So, like I said, my name is Yetunde Makinde. I'm 52 years old, and I'm born, bred in Nigeria, the southern part of Nigeria. I think I've lived most of my life in Ogun state, Abeokuta to be precise. So, my parents, also, they are both Yorubas, we grew up in Ogun state, basically. So, I had my education, went to the University of Ibadan, then got a master's from Ogun State University, worked in the bank for like 15 years, and now I'm on my own, running my own business.

DAC: Wow.

YM: That's basically it, yes.

DAC: Thank you for sharing this information. So, based on the age you gave, you experienced Nigeria during military rule. And my first question is like, what was it like growing up in Nigeria during this period, where we were under military rule?

YM: Well, military rule, I remember, you know, I think my first introduction was, you just put on the radio and then you hear martial music, then I think I asked my parents. I can't remember the first one now, I really do. I'm not good with dates. But I remember asking my parents that, "What's going on?" That everywhere there is just martial music. They said, "Oh, the military has taken over." You know, and I didn't really know what that meant. And then one next thing is, we have a military administrator, all the politicians had to leave, you know. So, for me, I think that, and I'm sure it's not politically correct to say this, but sometimes you actually wish that we could have some of what was going on then. Because democracy is good, but number one, it's expensive, and sometimes it's almost as if we do not get anything done. You know, everything was just by fiat, you know, the governor says this and it's done. Somebody says this and it's done. So, nobody is saying the House of Assembly has to sit to ratify, what is ratify anything? Because what the military administrator would do as he or she pleases. So, that's my recollection.

Now, my father was in government, you know, as a civil servant, and I remember that after one of those coups, he was appointed a sole administrator. So, now what you do is, you know, normally you would have local government chairmen.

DAC: Yes.

YM: So, the military administrator would have sole administrators. So, just appointed. So, it doesn't matter that you are not from that area, somebody just says, "Look, you can go to this particular local government and go and run, you know, go and run it." So, again, I think that one of the advantages then was that they weren't really incumbered, you know, it's not like somebody is my father, the king is my sponsor, you know.

There's a lot that goes on in politics in Nigeria. So, that was after they could actually just get there and get the job done, you know. But the truth again is that, I mean, you were not elected really. So, why are you running? So, the balance may be a bit tricky, you know, but that's what I remember that things were like moving really, really fast, you know. Things seemed to be working because because somebody would just give the order and you had to match your base.

DAC: You had to do it. So, like what age were you during military rule? Were you like a teenager? Were you already in university? I mean, military rule happened for a very long time.

YM: Yes, I at the point, I must have been, maybe secondary school. And then even when I was in the university, and then the university one stands out particularly because my, I had an uncle who was a military administrator.

DAC: Oh wow.

YM: So, and he was actually a military administrator for Oyo state and I was in University of Ibadan at that time, you know. So, I was kind of in the system a little bit. But again, it was easy. It wasn't social media. So, nobody is attacking your uncle on social media. He was just doing his work basically. So, you know, we could go to the government house, we could, you know, a bit see him, you know, like that. But again, it was okay.

DAC: Yeah. Thank you for sharing. So, my next question is like, I know military rule happened and then in 1993, there was the possibility of Nigeria going back to democracy. mSo, during that period, did you think that Nigeria would actually go back to democracy rule? Or did you think it would always remain under military?

YM: Because it was like something, it was like an idea that just like took on a life of its own. And everywhere was Hope '93, Hope '93 and it became very like a very, very big movement. So, it was actually hope, you know, that you would see that now there's a hope that something different is coming. And something that is going to be better for us. So, yes, I actually believed that it was going to happen.

DAC: Yeah. Thank you. And when this, like when the military government finally succumbed and they decided to announce elections during that period. Like, do you remember how you felt? Like, I mean, you mentioned things about hope. Was there any like apprehension? Were you nervous that you would call it off? Were you just hopeful that finally Nigeria is moving towards democracy?

YM: Okay. So, now I'll say this and I know that people probably will not be popular opinion. You see, I was excited about, I was excited about the democracy, but I wasn't excited about it, about the candidates. And that's very strange because a lot of people seemed to believe in Abiola. Do you understand? And they could do with MKO, would you? But I just never believed it. I felt that he was, he was just, he was like the others. But now in a more fitting, do you understand that? He was no different from all these other people. That was what I felt. So, a part of me also felt that he was kind of going to deal with him. I don't know why, why I had that impression. Okay, so I said, I wasn't sure that anything was going to happen. Yes. So, well, that's it.

DAC: Okay. So, my next question, thank you for sharing that here. Actually the first person to mention that you weren't like, you weren't supportive of Abiola, which is a nice perspective to know. So, did you believe that the military government to like peacefully hand over to the democratic successor before everything happened with his arrest? Did you believe that the military government actually peacefully hand it over and that would be the end of it?

YM: Well, I do, I, I, I felt that it could. You know, especially because at a point, there was a lot of international pressure, you know, like, so I kind of felt that they would have no choice now. There's a lot of noise. You know, in international space and all that. So, they may have no choice than to bow to you know, all that pressure. Which was kind of what happened eventually. You know, the military government and all that, it still kind of, it still kind of happened. But I guess it was also the candidate for them. I don't know why. Maybe the fact that powers also didn't want him. You know, so that was why it was totally scuttled.

DAC: Yes. That makes sense. Thank you. And were you likee, I mean, do you remember June of 1993? Were you, where were you during that period? Were you still in university?

JM: Yes, I was in the university and it was very, very, it was very, it was a very difficult time because you know that students will always react. You know, so I remember the protests. It was a time of major, major unrest, you know, protests everywhere, burning things. You know, you know how it can be when people arrive. So it's really bad. And of course the University of Ibadan is like a whole city on its own. I think at the time, we were like, maybe, 17,000 students.

DAC: Wow

YM: That much. So imagine that number going on rampage. And they actually went on rampage. Like, “No o, we want Abiola” So it was days and days of endless riots and unrest. And I think eventually, I was able to sneak out of the hostel or school and I ran home for my dear life.

DAC: I was going to ask, I was even going to ask if you participated in any of the protests or riots?

YM: You know, you know the funny thing about protests is that it's almost like there's a spirit. So you already know that look protests are dangerous, protests can lead to a lot of things. So you're not going to join. And these students, come. And you know all these student union people their mouth is sweet. By the time they say, “Aluta, Greatest kiniko, that we must do this. It is our future” Eventually you are with them, you are with them, you are singing along, you are dancing along. So I actually joined, you know. And then I was like, I am like, “What are you doing? You are your father’s only daughter, you better go back home.” But at a point I had to say, “No, no no, this can’t be the way.” because of course when you start that, you start peacefully, you be singing, holding leaves and all that. And then all of a sudden, everybody's running, somebody is down. All sorts, tear gas, a building is being burnt and I’m like, “Ah, I actually didn’t sign up for this” you know. So that was it.

DAC: Yes. I understand. That was how I felt about End Sars. You’re in the spirit and then like, it just goes downhill from there. So when you heard that General Babangida annulled the presidential elections, how did you feel about it?

YM: I mean, even though I didn't like Abiola, I felt really bad. Because as I said, he was in fact a popular candidate. My sentiments aside now, he was in fact, the people really accepted him. You know, he was huge. So I actually felt that ah ah that one person would just look at all of us and rubbish. So I say to everybody who voted that nothing you can do to me if they have not given this to you. So of course, I also felt that this is just too much that how do we get out from these people? That speaks to all this military, like I said, somebody will just come and give one order and that’s it.

DAC: So when you eventually heard of his death, did you still feel hopeful about Nigeria getting a democracy? Or are you, what did you feel like this, this is the end. We are going to be in military till God knows how long.

YM: Okay. So when, you see, when I heard of his death, I kind of felt that things are going to change. You know, I didn't see that as the end of the road for democracy. I kind of felt that now they would not have a choice. Like I said, I kind of always felt that it was about the candidate. In that sense that there were a lot of powers that just didn't want him. So I thought that, okay so now that you eliminated him, you are going to want somebody else, you get it? So I didn't see it as democracy was going to end. I just kind of saw it as well this has to be a new beginning. Something like that for democracy. These guys cannot, they can't stay perpetually in power.

DAC: And my, my next question would be so like in 1998, after the death of Abacha, and after the death of Abacha, which is popular, who is popularly known as the worst military leader Nigeria has had. Did you have, how did you feel towards like military rule? Did you think Nigeria, this is, this is the end finally. Nigeria is entering a new phase of democracy. Or did you feel like another person will just come and take his place?

YM: Well, to start with when Abacha died and it was funny because I was, I was somewhere, you know, like I was in a different place, not in my house. I mean, I just saw people screaming and all that, and I said, "Sorry what's going on?" and "Oh, Abacha is dead." And spontaneously, I remember vividly, we just formed a circle. It was a major road junction o. We just formed the circle and everybody just started dancing round. I have it in my head that, you know, I kind of didn't see, I saw it as finally this guy would have to go. Because I didn't think, in my head I just felt that Abacha didn't a natural death. I don't know. I felt that, okay, so now we're taking it back. Do you know, like that's like, okay, something is going on, but whatever it is, it is tending towards democracy now. I think that I refused to leave o we dealt with him. So now they have no choice, but to now do something reasonable. And again, I knew then that there was also a whole lot of pressure from international. You know, you know, politics, everything is interwoven. I knew that, Nigeria, those days of everybody just coming, "Fellow Nigerians, we have taken over." I knew that it was kind of ending. You know, they weren't going to have it easy. Let me put it like that. So that was it.

DAC: Yeah. And my next question is like, when we finally go to democracy, what expectations did you have? Did you have high expectations towards the Nigerian government, or like you mentioned, before you mentioned, one good thing about the military rule to you was when an order was given, it was done. Do you think that the expectations people will have of the government will be lower now that there is democracy?

YM: Okay, so, personally, it felt good that we have democracy. But I didn't have very high expectations. You know, because somehow it was just the same set of people that you just seem to hear, it was like nothing different. Do you understand in that sense. So I wasn't particularly like, "Oh, I can't wait, Nigeria is going to be just fantastic." I didn't have such

luxurious thinking. I just thought well, I mean, democracy is good. So now we're on that path. How to get to where we're going, I really don't know, you know, but at least we're on the path yet. But my expectations were just like minimal.

DAC: Yeah, I think with a lot of things that have to do with Nigeria, it's always good to err on the side of having low expectations than high expectations.

YM: Yes, low expectations. Yes, so that you won't get disappointed.

DAC: Yes, yes. And this is like, I'm grounding up now. I just want to ask, since you are a student during this time, how do you think having students, what role do you think students played? And do you think would have been able to achieve, I mean, students are in every country, but if Nigeria didn't have such a young population with so many people being students at that time, do you think would have been able to achieve a democracy as quickly as we did? Do you think students played a huge role or did, were they just in the background?

YM: Oh, definitely. I think students played a huge role, a very, very huge role. And, and it doesn't matter in that, you know, in those days, it has been difficult to actually put a figure on what the students did exactly. But I mean, if you, like you said, you just mentioned End Sars. If you see End Sars, then you will actually understand that all of these actions that we think, oh we are just doing random things, is not random. It actually applies to when you are in the right place, you know, you are pressurizing some people to do the right thing.

So there is no doubt. It was really really a lot. So I remember, students played a very, very huge role. And perhaps if they had not, you know sometimes, when you do something, and nobody is making any noise. Saying "No, no no, we no go gree, we no go gree" After a while, you have to listen now. And why are they not agreeing? What can we do exactly? So, they did play a major role.

DAC: Yeah, thank you. You're right. I think students play a huge role in a lot of protests that happen across the world. And my last question will be how do think, I know, military role, regulated the kind of songs, what was on TV, but how do you think music, films, Just arts in general, educated you more about what was going on during that time, or like, made you gingered to want democracy too and military role is not the way for Nigeria? Like how did they play a role, basically?

YM: Well, they did, you know, and, you would have to understand in those days that we didn't have access to all the music, all the films, you get it. But I mean, even the ones that we had access to, I mean you had people singing. Some of those people, they'll sing about democracy,

they'll sing about other nations that have it good, you know, how you would learn, definitely, Everybody wants, we all want peace. We want comfort, nobody wants wahala, so when you see that, you think, well, I mean, why can't Nigeria just be like, just be like other countries, you know.

So there were, it was music, it was art, it was drama, movies and all that would showcase the other parts of the world to us. But actually even told us that I mean, it's better elsewhere, so it can actually be better for you guys, you know, so yes, it did play a role.

DAC: Thank you so much. So this, we're coming to the end of this interview and I just want to thank you for answering my questions about like Nigeria's transition, almost transition from military to democracy and our final transition from military to democracy role. Thank you.

YM: You're welcome, Diamond. Thank you.

DAC: Of course. Have a good night. Alright, bye.

YM: You too. Bye.

DAC: This is a short disclosure that these recounts are people's personal experiences and are not meant to be fine tuned, particularly for historical record and to elevate division, but rather to embrace the power and strength that comes from diverse theories and the richness of our multitude of experiences. Thank you.