



Dr Ekua Agha Oral History Transcript for IROKO 'Home from Home' project 2022 – 2024 (Part 3)

00:00:01 **Tholani Alli**

Okay, thank you everyone. This is the third and final part, in which me, Tholani, Ali, and I'm here with Dr. Akua Agar, who is now going to continue and tell us about the Nigerian -Brazilian Public History Project, and just continue how long she's been going on that for. Over to you.

00:00:20 **Dr Ekua Agha**

Yes, thank you very much, Tholani. By the time I completed my doctoral thesis, I already had a project at hand. And yes, one of the ways of aligning yourself with academia is also looking at because if you've got a project and you really want to be able to promote it in a way you also have to be affiliated with organizations that will also invite you because that's where I also can have public space, you know, to what's the word, network, as well, because the network and find out people who are also working on themes related to my own work, and especially with Nigerian or West African academics, where it's very important, especially when we're working on Lagos, for all kinds reasons.

00:01:26 **Dr Ekua Agha**

I want to give a talk or I have to go to Lagos and I need space. Who do I go to? So, I am a member of the Senior Research Fellow of the Institute of French Research in Africa called IFRA. And I'm also a member of the ACT, which is the African Centre for Transregional studies, which is out of the University of Freiburg in Germany. So, because they do transregional studies. So, my work across West Africa into Brazil is transregional. I fitted into that category. So, it's great to be part of conversation with fellow researchers on areas regarding in migration, because that's also where migration, immigration comes into play. And, or the South -South conversations as well, South America, India, and Africa as well. So you also have people working on those areas. So the Nigerian Visiting Public History Project fits into that conversation. and I've been fortunate enough or to have been because of the website and working with so many people who have now put me in contact with PhD students who are now working on projects

00:03:12 Dr Ekua Agha

Regarding Lagos where we are now sort of supporting them with our own research as well and us pointing them in the direction of who they can go in Lagos or who they can go to in Nigeria based on my own contacts as well and based on the work we do. So, and that to me is something that I am very excited about because I have my work in London. I do a lot of work. Unfortunately, I can't really speak too much about it with the Ministry of Justice, where we work in education. And it's a lot of data. That's why you can't get a hold of me on the phone. But I do a lot of work as trauma-informed schools UK and working and also to still to do with my doctoral thesis in terms of education as well because I'm an educator first and foremost and I'm going to teach across all sectors so we do a lot of work we get called to work in very sort of sensitive areas as well still kind of educating marginalized or young boys, girls, women, you know, men, all manners of people.

00:04:47 Dr Ekua Agha

And I think it's a concept. We also want to give them a voice and say, all is not lost. So that's what I do in London. Because of the nature of the job, I cannot take my work home. And I spend a lot of my weekends working on my project as well because then that way I'm still focused. I tend to also, yeah, so that's the legacy. Because when I kind of look at it, I smile and say, well, my mother was a teacher. I mean, she's still very much alive. And she actually taught me. And when I say I sat in her classroom, I don't know how many people would say they were actually taught by their mothers. And I mean, like, she was my teacher at school. A mother at home, but a teacher, my teacher at school. And my grandmother, who I knew as a child, she passed away when I was in my 20s. So I have really fond memories of her. And I say mid -20s, so I have very fond memory, was also a teacher. So, as I say, the apple does not fall far from

00:06:15 Tholani Alli

Yeah Yeah

00:06:15 Dr Ekua Agha

the tree. So I'm third generation, and it's always just sort of a pleasure to be able to go into my classroom and I don't you know the subjects I teach across the humanities and social sciences are quite vast because I still have to support students in different subjects as well. We tend to try to gear them towards teaching and you So, I mean, I think like it's a vocation, it's not something you wake up and say, I want to do, you have to be sort of obviously passionate about it. There's always obviously been also negative press about teachers pay. And I think, well, I'd say, you know what, they don't want you in the classroom, so they're going to say everything about, you know, and I think, especially as, and this is very serious because people of colour, you know, are not represented in classrooms. And I always say to people, so who is teaching your child? And why would you complain that an African play is not being in the curriculum? I mean, I don't get it, you know. I'm not German. If

00:07:48 Dr Ekua Agha

I went to work in Germany, I'm not going to be thinking, oh, I've got to put a German text in my, you know. I mean, it's not to say that, you know, I mean, I mean, we, literature, it's obviously representative, you know, if you want to give examples of maybe a downtrodden person, you know, or somebody, I'm not saying that the

person is not teaching the job. I mean, they're gonna look for a book that's close to that and say, look, here's an example of a rebellion. Here's an example of a woman who had actually worked hard and came out at the end. And, you know, single parenting is not only a black issue. So if I'm giving somebody a book about like a writer, a white woman who is written a memoir as a single woman, it still fits into the curriculum because you have actually talked about adversity, you know. So, and because those are the books that are going to be close to them, you know. So if you're not influencing the curriculum by being in front of the class, how do you really think we're going to get access to that?

00:09:04 Dr Ekua Agha

You know, I had access to literature, African writers, because I grew up in Nigeria, and that was the reason why I was able to do the work. When I came to England, my curriculum changed, but I still held on to what I'd known in Nigeria. I was reading Jane Austen. I was reading Milton, reading, you know, Flaubert. I mean, I didn't have literature, African literature in my curriculum, because my teachers were not African, and that did not mean that they were terrible teachers. You know, they read what they knew. They're not going to start reading Chinua Achebe and start pronouncing Okonkwo. Why would they want to do that, you know? Why would they even want to get their heads around Abia or Enugu and, you know, Brighton and Sussex? It's sort of in their, you know, in their lived experiences. So, you know, but we can, we can influence, but we're not doing it and we wonder why the curriculum is, why, you know, why we're not, why we don't have access or why our own children are still not being denied in the schools.

00:10:15 Tholani Alli

Yeah. That's a very deep point actually.

00:10:19 Dr Ekua Agha

Yeah. So, um, that's where I tend to have my, um, conversations. You know, I was fortunate that my PhD supervisor at University of London, um, was, um, from Malawi and he's PhD was on Welesho Inka. Okay. And that was why I was able to be supervised in post-colonial literature because he knew the history of colonialism and the writing to the writing of an African writer. So it was, he was able to supervise the work to the Senegalese writer, you know, looking more at the theory of colonialism and writing and the, what we call the discourse, the writing back, you know, in terms of the Africans using their own culture as a tool of challenging the dominant history. So the legacy really is to try and be, I mean, impact as many people. And of course, we've got social media and, you know, the website is a very great tool where we can, you know, upload, be in contact with people, the visuals, and just making sure that we work trans-regionally, as well.

00:11:47 Dr Ekua Agha

Because the history of Africa is also tied to the world, you know. And looking at people from the United States or researchers from across the world, and I'm always fascinated by, my God, how did you decide to write on Lagos? Yeah, and I've had people who have gone to Lagos and to do the reset, and it's important, you know, and that's great for us to know that this is taking place and that it also makes our own work relevant as well. And so when I do the work, I know that it's reaching, you know, where we wanted to go. So, the idea is to also link up with school, secondary schools, primary schools, and take it as a traveling, you know, I mean, traveling

library. You know? And just give talks as well, you know, to audiences. And I think that's the vision. Yeah.

00:13:00 Tholani Alli

Brilliant

00:13:01 Dr Ekua Agha

That's really the vision. and the legacy, yeah, but it's been a great pleasure. Thank you so much. I've also admired Iroko's theatre as well, and the work that, you know, you all do there as well. I mean, I've had, I remember doing some work with Iroko years ago, our shared heritage. Yeah, at the early stage, so that was quite, you know, grit to be associated with Iroko. But we're kind of saying, oh, you know, well, I've just been very busy, you know, with the PhD work, and I just really couldn't have the time to sort of engage.

00:13:46 Tholani Alli

But we made it work in the end, Dr. Ekua. Thank you. Thank you so much. That's a very extensive and very, very, very well said, the very well thought out stuff there. Thank you. And just finally, so for the audiences, those that want to sort of find out a little bit more about the work you do, where would you point them towards? Is it, tell us some of the sort of maybe available websites or sort of online resources where people can find out more about the work that you currently do, have done and still hope to do in the future?

00:14:17 Dr Ekua Agha

Well, I mean, the work, I mean, um, the work that I've done; People say they've Googled me and, um, that I also work, well, we, we've had women's um um worked with the organized the British organization of people of Indian origin um who also wanted to collaborate um on women's work right and I've done a lot of work because I told you with Saint Ben giving voice to African women as well so part of the work on Bopio and women's work is online um the other work I'd done was when I completed my doctoral thesis and Birkbeck, University of London, wanted me to do a reading of a chapter of my doctoral thesis called Women and African Liberation, West African Liberation, from Saint Ben's Godspeeds of Wood. You know, women have always been marginalised in terms of the history of independence, Africa, and especially Francoist Africa, and St Ben's work really put women at the forefront, you know, at that time, and I thought it was important. And when I was told to read something for International Women's Day, Women's Month, yeah, so I chose that particular piece Just sort of as a contribution of African women's contributions as well to, you know, socio-political issues, you know.

00:16:06 Dr Ekua Agha

We're always, I'm not saying we're always left out, but politics is always seen as the men's game, you know, it's sort of, and women And not, you know, as women, the scene is not political, you know, but just because we don't go into politics and run for public office does not mean that we don't actually do the work behind the scenes. You know, cultural work, keeping the histories of countries, you know, usually the women are the ones, like you told me, it was your grandmother telling you the stories. So, they are the gatekeepers of history most of the time, and the history of any culture, when you want to sort of find out about that culture, they usually point

you in the direction of a grandmother or some angel, and so for me, I maybe would like to follow in that direction as well, just preserving culture.

00:17:17 Dr Ekua Agha

I speak a lot to my own son about, you know, going up and all that. And I'm hoping that at least that will resonate with him in terms of this sort of understanding the culture of, you know, because, you know, what we do on a daily basis in life is also tied to culture as well. And yeah, so it's a combination of all of that anyway. And I'm just happy to be part of a larger community of, you know, of, of African cultural, you know, people who, how do you

00:18:06 Tholani Alli

sort of, you're happy to be part of a sort of a wider African sort of discourse, heritage, gatekeepers

00:18:11 Dr Ekua Agha

you know, and especially in, in diaspora, you know, because linking the, you know, the global to the local as well. So that way, you know, there's still that interconnection as well. And that we're not just sort of like looking at Africa from a distance. Right. Yeah. Yeah. We're actually connected as well.

00:18:37 Dr Ekua Agha

Yeah. Obviously you've been on both sides of the spectrum. It says looking from the outside in and also being inside and sort of you know So for your lived experiences there and here. So Yeah, brilliant. Thank you. Thank you so much. Dr. Ekua. It's been a privilege!

00:18:57 Dr Ekua Agha

Thank You So Much Too for indulging me

00:18:58 Tholani Alli

yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, very very well Well, I want to say the best interviews. I want to disturb and disrupt all the other participants But definitely very very revealing and very interesting. Thank you so much,

00:19:11 Dr Ekua Agha

Right; okay and please do not hesitate to contact anytime yeah yes all right then