



Ruky Euba Oral History Transcript for IROKO 'Home from Home' project 2022 – 2024



Introduction

My name is Ruky Euba. My full name is Babarukeme Amurun Euba. I was born in Lagos; Nigeria. I would describe my background as a Black British. I have been in the United Kingdom for close to 30 years. So, I would describe myself as Black British.

Childhood memories

My childhood has been very interesting because I lived in Lagos where I was born and that's where I had my primary school, (Command Children School), which was a military school. I also continued my primary school education in the northern part of Nigeria as well, which is known as Kaduna. In Kaduna I did part of my primary but also started my secondary school, in the Government Girls Secondary School in Kawo. From there I came back again to Lagos, because there I was living with my Guardian, my uncle was a military man. He was a major in the army and so they tend to transfer in the army as most people will know, they don't stay long in places. So, I came back when he had finished his term in Kaduna back to Lagos and started living with my parents again. I finished my secondary school in another part of Lagos called Ikorodu. There the school is called Oriwu College, Ikorodu, that was a mixed school which was a new experience for me coming from a girl's only school. It was quite interesting. I will credit myself that I'm flexible and adapt easily because I became Head Girl in my time. That was in the year 82/83.

from there I started getting used to public speaking because I was also the head of the literary and debating society in my time. I appeared on television a few times before I left Kaduna, I don't know what it was about me, but I always got the role of Mary when it came to the nativity play in school and in church. Having had the opportunity to feature on television as Mary in Kaduna, I think from there I started getting bold, you know I had the courage to face people. It does not matter if I have met them before or not. I feel comfortable, I like meeting people.

Love of performance

Yes, being in the debating society and also acting from a very early age from my primary school and in church, kind of boosted my confidence. It also helped me because when I became the head girl, I had to always face the school in the assembly. I was always made to speak in assembly to the whole school. That kind of you know helped me. Also, I love music, dancing and drama. I like all that so, from my primary school to my secondary school, I was acting but I never thought I would be a performer. I just enjoyed it so any time we are going to have any kind of occasion in school, people always called me, we know Ruky would want to do this. You know it was fun. But what actually led me into performing, is that I did not like mathematics. My Mum asked me what would I actually like to do? I said I am not sure. But you know what, anything that doesn't involve me doing mathematics, I would want to do it.

So later, when I finished my secondary school, I had an uncle who told my Mum about a new programme in the University of Ibadan, which is the first university in the whole of West Africa. It was the first time they were having preliminary arts, which means that you don't have to have gone through A levels before you can be taken. And my Mum said sure I think Ruky would like that. And I said yes. I said does it involve mathematics, and they all laughed at me. They said no, maybe a bit not in the big sense of it, so I said "okay".

Getting into University and pursuing theatre arts

So, I started. I took the exam and when my results came. They said yes. I qualified to do that and that's how I got into performing arts in the university. From there, you know as students we are always looking to get extra money, you know it is never enough. So, every now and then, I would have friends who would say, oh there is actually a role going somewhere. so, it was for a short visit, and they would call me. We would go and do it and then the money was actually a big deal for hungry students. It was good because it helped me also to perform better in the university when I was doing practical exams, the extra theatre work I was doing pp, taking roles outside the university.

So, I would say that my childhood has been quite interesting. Also, I'm blessed with parents, I would say are quite dramatic. And especially when you know that most Nigerians, I won't say all, I won't stereotype, but when things happen, they are always acting larger than life. So, you know when my Mum tells me about anything that happens, she will actually dramatize it. It wasn't enough just talking to me. She will actually stand up and move around and say 'can you imagine, the woman did this', and she will actually stand up and move around and everything. It was quite interesting. And my Mum loves singing. When she is happy, she sings. When she is not, she sings. There is always a song for every mood and I kind of got used to it. When I was living away from her in Kaduna, most times I remember that about my Mum. Some of her songs would console me, depending on what was going on at

that time. So yes, I think my Mum was a great influence in my childhood because of the way she was. She was a very dramatic woman.

So, I was happy to be a performer, and my Mum was the one who encouraged me, and she was quite spiritual. And she said 'Oh somebody did tell her that they had a vision of me performing and she believes it, so she thinks that was what I was meant to do, that was my destiny. So, I went ahead with that, and my dad couldn't say much. Being an only child for my Mum. She had a great influence, and she said if that was what my daughter is happy to do. Let her do it. I want her to be happy. So, I just got away with it.

The National Youth Service

After university I was lucky, my youth service, which was something that was compulsory for any graduate in Nigeria. You have to go for National Youth Service, which means you have to serve and do something for your community and country, and they post you anywhere, regardless of what you study. But luckily for me for that one year. I was posted to Lagos in the National Arts Theatre. So that was good. I had opportunity even though I was there in the admin section, I got wind of plays, and I was able to take part in stage productions. And also, through that because a lot of artists would come there, I was also able to get into some roles on television as well.

When I finished, I had friends that we were together in the university, who had finished ahead of me, my seniors, and one of them, she actually influenced me. She said look I didn't wait to find employment, I actually looked and got employment myself. So, I said 'how did you do that? And she said, 'I targeted the private schools, and I go there to teach either drama or dance. And I said that sounds interesting. So, I followed suit. I looked at schools in the posh areas. And private schools because there are private schools and private schools. I targeted the ones with more international students. I had 5 of them and I was going there to either do storytelling or teach them dance. And I did something interesting. Because the only form of ballet I knew was from the university, but I told them I could teach ballet, and I coined it and said it was Afro ballet, so I got away with doing my own type of ballet dancing. Acting on stage and Nollywood

I have always been working as a performer on stage, on television and I did one or two things, then it was the beginning of Nollywood. It hadn't really started fully. There wasn't as much money in it. I think if it had been, I probably might not have come. I might have just carried on. But then it was just a little better that acting on stage. I have never really worked outside entertainment, performing, never! I did that all my life for close to ten years, before coming over to the United Kingdom. Because my husband and his siblings were born here. It was a natural transition.

Arriving in the UK – Bringing the culture.

When I got here, I realised that as opposed to in Nigeria, whereby it's important to do things in more of a western way, that appealed more. I got more money that way. Here it's more of the culture that gets more attention. So, I started to get involved in plays and also going to schools to project the rich African culture. And when I am not doing that. I get involved in helping people because in Nigeria we have, depending on the tribe. We have a way of doing our marriages. I host marriages that are traditional marriages. Acting as a go between, between the in laws. It is a form of art. There is a lot of oral poetry. You have to honour and understand what part of Nigeria they are from and things like that.

That's what I do here. Mainly brining our traditional culture and way of doing things. Even in my church, sometimes when we are having occasions or harvest. They call on me to teach the children. Because most of the children unfortunately, they were born here. Some have never been to Nigeria so only when we have a bit of drama. I am able to teach them and show how they do it in Nigeria. For instance, when we are going to the market. Well in Nigeria, you don't just sit in shops alone. Young people they help their parents, they will put stuff on their heads and things like that. You don't just put things on their head and walk around and think you will be noticed. No. You have to say it in a particular way. It always makes them laugh. You have to imagine you are carrying water. You have to say 'Oh buy your pure water. You know this water is very clean. Is very hygienic. It is gotten from a whatever source. They say you have to say that. I say yes you have to say that. And if it is bread, you have to say. This bread. It goes well with butter. And even if you don't have butter. Even if you have just ordinary water, it is so nice. So tasty and that the butter that has put in the making of the bread, will make you feel that you are actually putting butter on top of it. They always laugh and they enjoy and practise it. I still meet a child that something we did 10 years ago and that is telling me 'Eh Aunty buy your bread, you don't need to have butter' and first I am thinking what is she talking about and then I remember. And we both start laughing.

Working with Iroko Theatre - Teaching in the community

Yes, it's been fun, in every part of my life. In the church, even when I'm not working with Iroko Theatre Company, I sometimes work in the nursery. They always like getting me involved in the things they do. They will say come, come, come and add a bit of fun to it. Now that we're going to have Father's Day in the nursery, they have already started asking me 'what do you think we can do to make it different to the things we do? So everywhere we go I always find....

As a teacher I find that the younger they are, they tend to appreciate the culture more. I have learned to always put it to them in a fun way. And that makes it appealing to them. And even sometimes when I don't mean to be funny, they make me laugh because they find it funny, and I say that is the way it is. Because everything to them is like a pantomime. Sometimes when I'm talking to them, I imagine how will my Mum say this. And I think that if I actually do it the way my Mum would do it, they will think I am exaggerating. But that is the way it is.... I find that as a teacher, the younger they are, they are more flexible and adaptable and they take in more and they are open. But the older the children they kind of get self-conscious, sometimes they are shy. But not all of them I find that my daughter tends to have more Caribbean friends than African, and I have discovered that most of the times when they come to the house, I don't have peace because they want me to tell them about how it is in Africa. And actually, demonstrate to them. And they say, 'my daughter's name is Sayo. 'Oh, Shayo has told us about so and so ...Aunty is it true? And some call me Mummy, because that is the culture in Nigeria. We say it takes a village, a community to train a child. So, I have a lot of children who are not my biological children. So, they will go Mummy is it true in Africa they will do this they will do that. Is it true. I will say yes, it is true. So yes, going into schools, going into communities, the younger ones are more receptive but, in my church, and in my home when my children's friends visit. Even though most of them I call them young adults. They are willing to know. They find it

interesting. It is very few that are shy about their background. I will say 80 % are proud to know about their roots.

Being proud of roots

There are a lot of things I am proud of. Firstly, I am proudly African and proudly Nigerian. I really love my culture. Most times when I don't get work in theatre or in schools. I work part time as a bank staff in a nursery setting. They always say you always seem to be happy. You always seem to be dancing. And yes. One of the things that I like about my culture to propagate is that we are happy people. No matter what the challenges are. We always find something to make us laugh in that situation. Even when someone dies, what some people count as a calamity, you will be surprised that we always find a wise saying that there is light at the end of the tunnel. So, one thing I pride myself for, wherever I am I try to enthuse joy. I try to look for ways of making light of a situation. Through my culture and sometimes just looking for something I can do and try to explain to them that if this situation was in Africa or Nigeria, specially, this is how we will deal with it or this is what we will do.

Being Black British

As a British or I will say Black British or African British, I see myself as having the best of both worlds. I have a good background, a well-balanced background because I am bringing the warmth, I am bringing the sunshine into the United Kingdom. I am using our sunshine to illuminate United Kingdom. So anywhere I go, I look for an opportunity to show my culture in terms of my dressing. Even if I'm wearing European dressing. I will look for, what can I add to this dressing that will show that I am proud of my African heritage. For me there is always something that I can add in the nursery or anywhere I go to showcase African culture, I am always bringing things like maybe carvings, maybe a material that can lighten up the place. And when they walk in, they say, Oh it's got to be me, and I say yes. The other time, a child was crying, and I just started singing one of the songs in my language. And everybody was asking, what does that mean? And the child stopped. Probably out of surprise, I don't know what you are saying, but whatever it is, it sounds good. The next thing everybody wants to learn the song. So, I like the balance, bringing warmth to the coldness.

The future for Entertainment Industry

In the next few years in the future. I believe that because of performers like me. African performers in the United Kingdom, I believe that we are leaving a legacy and a good one. Making the future Black British especially African parentage to be proud. To be proud of their background. Everywhere in the world, for them to know that we have the good, the bad and ugly. The fact that it exists in Africa does not make us bad people. It is just the way it is in life. In every society, in every community, we always have the good, the bad and ugly. So, we are leaving a good legacy for them to be proud of their background, in spite of all odds, in spite of challenges, they need to be proud that they are from African parentage. Especially now, those in the music industry, a few times when I was going on holiday, I went to Egypt the other day and I was surprised at the airport when I was hearing Afrobeats. And I was saying to my children wow! I was dancing and I saw quite a few Europeans also dancing to it. Not just dancing to it. They sang, songs.

And like wow! You know this Afrobeats. And they said we know it. So for me that is a good thing for the future Black British in the United Kingdom.

The music industry, the entertainment industry, the Nollywood. My son hasn't been to Nigeria for over 20 years and yet I walked in the other day, and he was there watching Nollywood with his friends. I was happy. Even though he was saying to me what are they saying, what does that mean. Yet I was happy. Because I have not watched it myself and yet my children are watching not just watching but encouraging their friends who are not African to watch. So I feel that the future for our children and children's children is positive. There are things incorporated in the music, in the decorations, showing the African culture and making them proud. Especially our clothes. My daughter, when she graduated in October, last year, she was like, Mum I want my dress made from Nigeria and she chose a style and everything. I was happy because everyone around liked it. They are still raving about it, and I think it is positive.

I think everyone in any artform that is propagating the African culture, I think should continue because that way it will never die, just as we say the Iroko Tree never dies.