

# The Power of Storytelling': A Case Study Exploring Black Studies Through Nigerian Women Writers

Researchers: Genesis Flores, English Literature, Communication; Gaetan Jean Louis, Sociology, Spanish; and Alexa Victor, Black Studies, Communication

Mentor: Dr. Olaocha Nwabara, English  
State University of New York at Geneseo  
McNair Summer 2023 Scholars

## General Overview

Our research was a collaborative effort with Dr. Olaocha Nwabara aimed to gain a deeper understanding of Black Studies as a discipline as well as the role of storytelling and semi-structured interviews in research through learning more about the Nigerian literary and publishing scene in relation to Nigerian women. The issue we were addressing is that the history of research being done the Black/African Community, has often been done without care, understanding, and transparency, especially when done by individuals outside of the community. This has caused significant harm to the Black/African population since lack of proper research directly affects people's lives. We see this with paradigms like the inferiority and cultural deficit paradigm (McDougal, 2017) in which multiple studies claim that Black/African people are genetically and culturally lesser in comparison to their white counterparts. This is the significance of our work with Dr. Nwabara; we are listening to Nigerian women create their own narratives that accurately represent their lived experiences. "What matters to us is the ability to write our own story and to cooperatively set the terms of our engagement with the larger White and often dominating-seeking world" (Asante, 2006, p.657). The best way to help the Black/African community, what matters most, is that we write our own stories, we research our own people, and we finally have the power to tell our own stories.

## The Case Study

The major goal of this research to is give voice to Nigerian women writers who are based and publish in Nigeria. These authors usually get less exposure than Nigerian writers based in the West (eg US, UK, Canada). Through the semi-structured interviews the audience is able to learn their experiences with publishing and their needs for equity. By doing this Dr. Olaocha Nwabara will then be able to use their perspectives to guide a continued project from their experience—this is preliminary research.

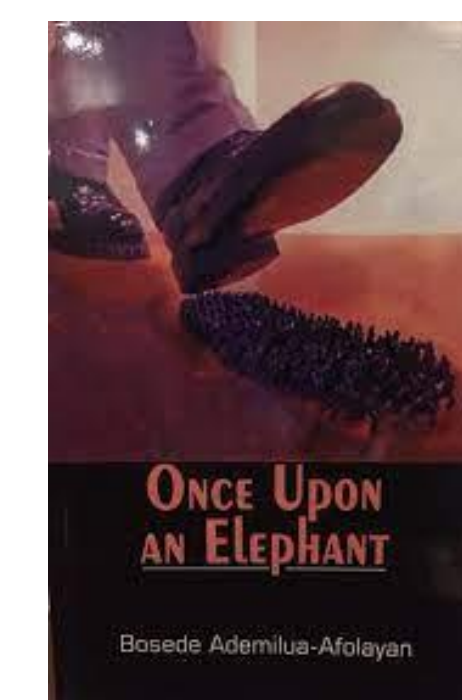
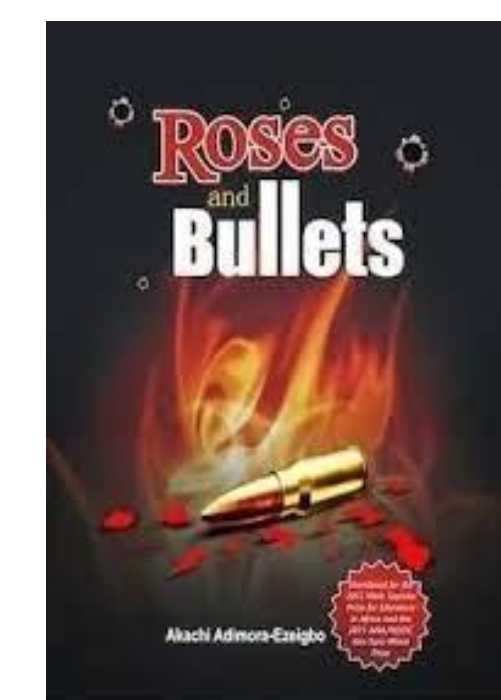
### Some Authors that were interviewed:

Akachi Ezeigbo: Children's Book writer, Novelist, Poet

Mrs. Comfort Chenge: A children's book writer, a publisher, and a community leader

Bose Afolayan: Author and Dramatist

Ejine Nwapa: Author/aspiring Author, Flora Nwapa's Daughter



## Findings and Future Research

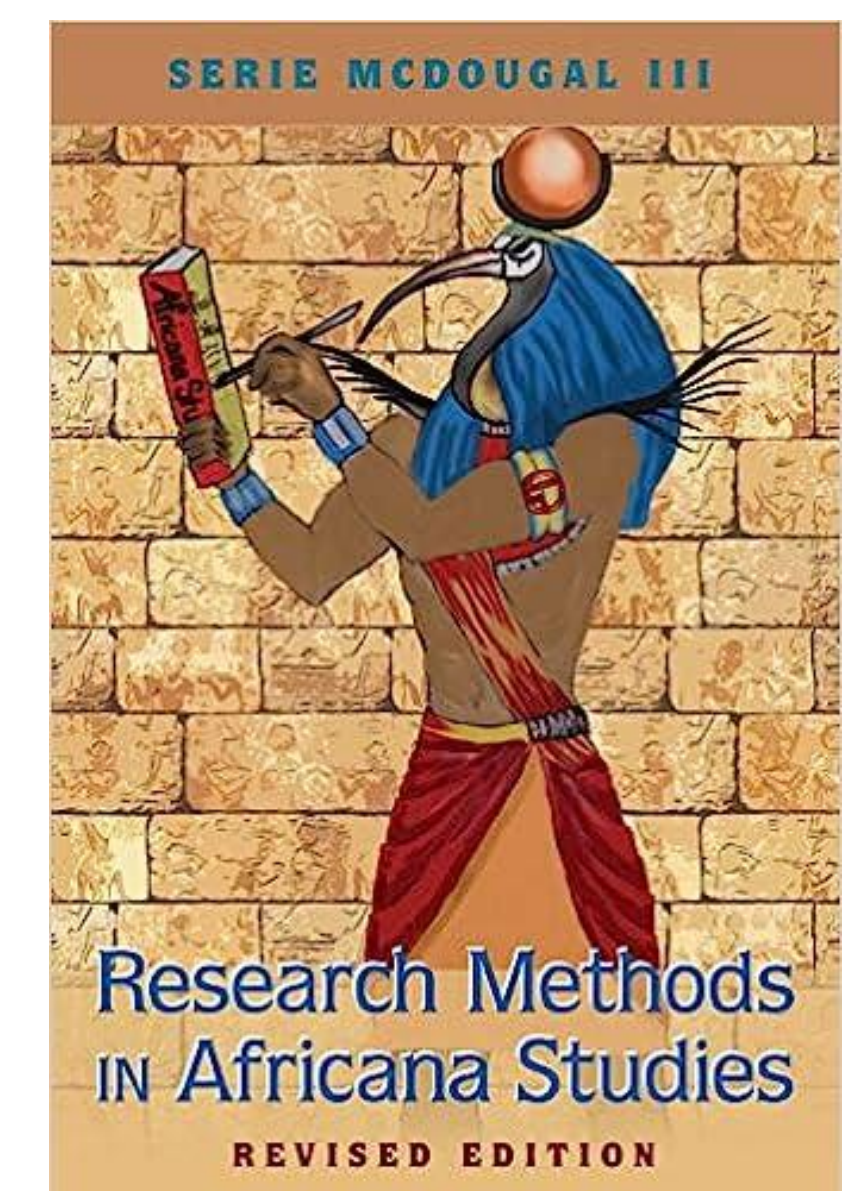
**Alexa:** My interests for future research is in community work and the aspect of rewriting history with accurate information as well as the ability to tell our own narratives. This goes well with what I learned about Black Studies as a discipline as well as the research method of semi-structured interviews which I was able to listen to directly through the transcriptions.

**Gaetan:** I am thinking of studying the effects of COVID and political instability on Voodoo in Haiti and am considering using ethnographic research for that matter because it will help me better understand and convey the experiences of the people who are involved in that way of life. Voodoo is a religion and way of life that is practiced through collective action however it faced many challenges like COVID and national lockdowns in Haiti. I would like to know about how the community faced those hardships and how they kept interacting with each other despite those challenges.

**Genesis:** I will be able to do more effective in-depth interviews in my future research because I now understand how learning from current experiences and adjusting my methods to better serve the people I interact with, along with my research is truly beneficial. I also realized the different kinds of work and research I could do to better represent and educate my community, using Black studies methods.

## Methods

Dr. Nwabara field's research consisted of doing in-person interviews in Nigeria with Nigerian women writers, publishers and book owners. The 4 main discussion areas were: Self and Identity, the author's Writing, Other African/Nigerian women writing in Nigeria and outside, and the Writing Industry. Each interview lasted at least one hour and allowed the researcher to gain a sharper perspective on the experience of her interviewees with writing and publishing in their homeland. "Research Methods in Africana Studies" is a book that heavily influenced the research methodology used by Dr. Nwabara and we are using it for our research.



## Results

The work we have been doing with Dr. Nwabara (transcribing interviews, writing reflection papers, reading *Research Methods in Africana Studies* by Serie McDougal III, and meeting bi-weekly) has taught us the importance of field research and ethnography in the realms of Humanities, especially Black Studies. Because African people from both Africa and the diaspora (Caribbean, North America, Latin America, etc.) have historically underwent scientific colonialism and cultural genocide, it is crucial for Black scholars to use field research to deconstruct the stereotypes that exist towards Black people by producing academic work that is truthful to our collective experiences, narratives, identities, and collective consciousness. Dr. Nwabara's ambitious work is one that uses case studies and Afrocentric perspective to analyze and study the experiences of Nigerian women writers in Nigeria. Her work encompasses the disciplines of Sociology, Literature, Black Studies and Ethnology. Some recurring themes we can notice in her research are bias and inequity due to gender, African women's empowerment, Black people's emancipation through literature and different forms of oppression based on gender, race, ethnicity, and language. We have numerous takeaways from her field research, but the most important one is the role semi-structured interviews play in retelling our stories, redefine who we are, and eventually, liberate ourselves (intellectually, socially, economically, and culturally).



## Acknowledgments

Asante, M. K. (2006). A Discourse on Black Studies. *Journal of Black Studies*, 36(5), 646–662.

McDougal, S. (2017). *Research methods in africana studies*. (R. Brock & G. Johnson, Eds.) (Vol. 64). Peter Lang.

Mentor: Olaocha Nwabara

Select Interviews:

Akachi Ezeigbo

Bose Afolayan

Ejine Nwapa

Comfort Chenge



**GENESEO**  
THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK