

10-13-2009

## Honorable Emmanuel Okocha oral history interview by Dr. S. Elizabeth Bird, October 13, 2009

Emma Okocha (Interviewee)

S. Elizabeth Bird (Interviewer)

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### Scholar Commons Citation

Okocha, Emma (Interviewee) and Bird, S. Elizabeth (Interviewer), "Honorable Emmanuel Okocha oral history interview by Dr. S. Elizabeth Bird, October 13, 2009" (2009). *Digital Collection - Holocaust & Genocide Studies Center Oral Histories*. Paper 6.  
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Asaba Memorial Oral History Project  
Oral History Program  
Florida Studies Center  
University of South Florida, Tampa Library

Digital Object Identifier: A34-00006  
Interviewee: Honorable Emmanuel Okocha (EO)  
Interviewer: Dr. S. Elizabeth Bird (EB)  
Interview date: October 13, 2009  
Interview location: USF Tampa Library  
Transcribed by: Mary Beth Isaacson, MLS  
Transcription date: November 2, 2009 – November 6, 2009  
Audit Edit by: Elizabeth Tucker  
Audit Edit date: November 24, 2009  
Final Edit by: Catherine Cottle  
Final Edit date: November 30, 2009

**Dr. Elizabeth Bird:** Good afternoon. This is Elizabeth Bird. Today is October 13, 2009. I am at the University of South Florida Tampa Campus Library, conducting an oral history with Emma Okocha for the Asaba Memorial Project.

If we could start, please, if you could state your name, spell your name, tell us where you were born, and the date of your birth.

**Hon. Emmanuel Okocha:** My name is Emmanuel Okocha, O-k-o-c-h-a, and I was born in Asaba on a very dicey date. Sometimes I put 22 June 1962. My mother documents that on record because my father's house, all family house was born to the (inaudible). It has always been not so good an experience not to know exactly when you were born. And I wasn't the only one. There are lots of orphans that came back after the war and cannot say exactly when they were born. But I know that occasionally—because I never saw my daddy; I was a toddler—but a little kid in war grows faster than the normal rate. So, my official date is 22 June 1961.

EB: So, when the events in Asaba happened, you would be about six years old?

EO: No, I was a toddler. I was on my mother's back. I came back from the Civil War very grown up. I was still a little kid. My other brothers were not big enough to enter the army, except my big older brother.

EB: But if you were born in 1961 and the massacre happened in 1967, you were six years old.

EO: I don't think so. But because of many things, you have to put a date for you to enter secondary school. My elder brother was still in primary school when I went to the secondary school; that was middle school. You can't go and say, "This is my age. Can I enter this class?" I was going to school, in a way, during the war. I was going to school with all the big guys so I decided, "This is the class I'm going to enter." My immediately elder brother was still in primary school when I entered secondary school. So, I don't run away from saying this is my age, but I know that I was a toddler. My mother would put me on her back and run away. I never knew my father that much. Even if I were six, I would know him.

EB: So, probably you weren't born in 1961; you were probably born later.

EO: I would imagine that. But because I wanted to be in the senior class, I had to say that age.

EB: Okay. Well, thank you. (laughs) That's helped. So, you don't really have any recollection of events before the war?

EO: I am here to live the life and say the story of those who saw the war, more than any other human being in Asaba, because I was one. I was the one that was called mad, because I went asking about my father. I was highly curious. My inquiry started when I saw other kids going for their father. I didn't even know he died. So, when they told me what happened, I decided to go house to house to be comparing. I was lucky to come across these files. There was a man that kept files; there was a man that kept correspondence. Every other thing got burned except a few of those documents. So, I kept them. I said, "Looke." My other brother didn't think it was important. He forgot like what we were seeing. There was a lot of inertia, you know. So, I decided probably that I would keep doing documents, and from there I got to know what really happened before he died.

EB: So, just to back up for a moment; we'll come back to the documents. How many children were in your family?

EO: We are seven. Two were lost. As I say, my eldest brother Patrick Okocha was a soldier; he got killed. And the other one, nobody found him, Ebenezer Okocha. Nobody found him. But the others managed to come back.

EB: Patrick was a soldier in the Biafran war?

EO: The Biafran war. He was like many Asaba youth, who got very mad. Initially, they were there to work. He escaped the killing. Each time any of the youth, any of the young men escaped, they would end up in the Biafran army.

EB: So, he was not in the army at the time of the massacre?

EO: He was. He was like a system (inaudible) or whatever.

EB: And you said there was another—your other brother. What was he doing?

EO: Yeah, Ebenezer Frederick Okocha. We never knew what happened to him.

EB: How old was he at the time of the massacre?

EO: He was like twenty-one, twenty-two.

EB: From what you've heard, was he in the massacre? He was killed at the massacre?

EO: No. He was probably a kid. He was not killed at Asaba.

EB: Oh.

EO: The only person killed in my family at Asaba was my father, because he was busy taking notes, going from worrying about what happened to the Biafran army—if they were defeated in Asaba, they should cross over and leave the place in peace. It was in these little notes, written like—in my book, I say it was like a correspondence. It was very curious. What was the community's stance? Are they going to support the federal government troops? Are they going to come through? Because Asaba had some sympathy for the Biafrans, especially after the pogrom of sixty-six [1966]. But he was looking at the reality of the military impact of the federal government when they take the town. So, he was worrying whether they would leave, so that the civilians wouldn't come under

crossfire. And he was also worried about his other extended family, who came in all the way from Kaduna and Benin, and they were staying with him.

EB: So, he was writing a kind of diary—

EO: Yes.

EB: —of events up until—when is the last time that he wrote in this document, wrote in his diary?

EO: What he wrote was not—he wasn't writing specifically on the military, because nobody knew the information that was coming. He was writing about the family, and probably where his properties [were], and whatever. They were not particularly on the situation—sitrep, what the military calls sitrep, a situation report. It was written about in case this happened, this is where you go. It was like—I think he had the foreboding that something would happen. Then he advised—according to those notes, he advised my mother to take us down across the river, but he was going to stay in case something—and somebody has to be there in the house to make sure that there won't be any pillaging or robbery or something. That was what he was talking about.

EB: So, that was just before the day, October 7?

EO: During the—we are talking about—at this stage, there was a stampede in town. Probably the soldiers are coming, from the nature of what he was writing. He was talking about a stampede all over the place. But the community has to decide who to back. They have to have a meeting. The community never had a meeting to show where to go, to decide their fate. Political leaders on both sides, some people around protected their friends; others were ready to stay and wait on the federal troops.

EB: So, this was just a few days—just when the federal troops were advancing into Asaba?

EO: Yes. And most of—there are stories that were given to me by my mother later on.

EB: The committee you're talking about, which committee is this? Can you—you said the committee couldn't decide which—

EO: The community. I didn't say committee.

EB: Oh, the community! I'm sorry. The community.

EO: That's all right. They were divided. The issue—it was not the whole of Asaba that welcomed the return of federal troops. There were others who experienced the pogrom in the North, the killing of the Igbos, who thought that these troops would behave like those that committed the pogrom in the North against Igbos. They asserted their own Igbo heritage, and thought that the best thing was to escape the coming federal troops. They knew that there would be killing. They said, "These people don't take you as anything except Igbos." So, that group left.

The other group that probably more suffered the victimization were those who believed they were Nigerians, and they stayed behind to dance. Then, my father was probably, from the stories and the diaries, belonged to the group that wanted the community to sit down and think about it before they made a decision. So, he was busy, according to my mother, who was alive after the killings, running around trying to organize meetings. And he was not in the village; he wasn't, like, in the city there they call Cable Point.

EB: Could you tell us a bit more about what your father did? Who was your father? What was his position?

EO: Okay. I go back to those diaries and conduct my own research later on in life. My father was the fourth—he was the eldest of—the own family of three boys and two women. The fourth daughter of his father—that's my grandfather—was the Asaba and the only African—the first African that married the British officer for the Asaba Capital Territory, Mr. Palmer, who was a Didoya Royal Niger comprador trader. So, he was the district officer for that Niger Delta charter group where Asaba was the capital, like I mentioned in the book.

So, with that exposure, my auntie Miss Christie Okocha was able to able to [be] involved in Niger trade. She had a lot of canoes, involved people in fishing. She was the elite woman there, because she got married—that never happened—to a white district officer. So, under her arms my father grew up, was able to go to school, and secured a civil service job like (inaudible) I believe I said on Friday and Saturday during the symposium.

So, he was a civil servant. My father had an accountancy; he was an accountant with Federal Minister of Health. He was a civil servant, well read. On his own, he studied

European history. He was a philosopher. He tried to be a journalist. In that house, in that compound where the sister was, they were able to send people abroad to do further courses. So, there was a lot of influence she wielded, not only because she was very rich. She had the power to get people into jobs, European jobs, because of the husband, even though my people were not so happy with that. She was against the nationalist (inaudible) at that period. So, my father was—I see that with every—both of us. Some of our people were sympathetic to the federal government. But at the same time, during the killings in the North, they didn't like what happened to the Igbos.

He worked last in the East at the Uzuakoli leper colony, somewhere where there was a leper colony; he was the chief accountant there. So, that's where he retired. When coming home after retirement, he didn't believe that retired pensioners should be target to any military operation. He was looking at Asaba war as the Second World War, where soldiers fight against soldiers and where the general convention is applicable. So, that was his feeling. As the war came near Asaba, my mother, and probably the other inquiries I made after her, showed that he was very active in trying to galvanize the community to make a stand, make some quick decisions whether to support the Nigerians who were coming in or to advise the Biafrans to strategically move away, because the fighting that took place in Asaba before the soldiers came into town was one of the main reasons that led to this genocide.

The Biafrans thought that losing Asaba may be probably the end of the war, because Asaba was strategically placed. It led to the commercial service center of Onitsha. Anybody that took Asaba eventually may take Onitsha. So, they gave the federal forces very tough resistance that led to a lot of officers dying on both sides. Apart from other—there were many reasons given by the testimonies we heard over the weekend, I still believe that's the main reason why there's not more people aware of it.<sup>1</sup> They lost a lot of the officers coming to town, and they were very mad and they descended on these Igbos, who may be Biafrans in their own mind.

EB: How long had your father and your family been living in Asaba then, before this?

EO: Not—he just came by. It was like fifty-nine [1959], going to sixty [1960]. He was not that—he just retired from three years.

EB: What was your father's name?

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<sup>1</sup>Asaba Memorial Project Inaugural Symposium held on October 9-10, 2009 at the University of South Florida Libraries, Tampa Campus, in Tampa, Florida.

EO: Benedict Okocha. Benedict Ikean Okocha.

EB: Now, obviously you didn't witness the massacre yourself. What did you hear later about what happened to your father? Were there any eyewitnesses, or anybody who saw him or anything?

EO: Yes. So, during the war I was with my mother looking for food. So nobody—if they discussed about the war, probably I may not even have understood. But when I came back, having seen the war, no matter how small I am, I have grown up. What attracted my attention was that other kids were running to their mother or—you know, there's a father figure, probably. I didn't see my own father. Nobody told me he died. So, when I asked my mom, "Where is my father?" that was when we started hearing what happened. My mother was shocked. Apparently she was not told. Then it became an open discussion. At that stage in my life, I could put things together.

Then, when eventually I was taken from my mother by an Irish reverend sister, because I was very small. So, I went to the orphanage. My mother was alive, but I was taken as an orphan because my mother could not take it that my father died. So, I went to the orphanage, where the Catholic orphanage was. She brought me up, Sister Mildred. She brought me up that first year, second year. I decided I'm not going to go to the elementary school; I'm going to Sacred [Heart] College. My own brother, who was my elder brother, direct elder brother, was still in the elementary school. When I went to college, I told them I'm going to start with Class Four.

So, that was how I started. Then, when eventually I finished secondary school, I'm going to the university. My brother, elder brother, even my sister, they're all below me. Those are my seniors. They were still in secondary school when I went to the university. After my university courses, that was when the Angolan Civil War started. I got attracted with the Angolan Civil War, the partisan conflicts, MPLA [Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola]. There was the UNITA [National Union for the Total Independence of Angola] group, and then the intervention of South Africa and Cuba. That was my thesis when I went to the master's level. It was very plain with what they were telling me about the Nigerian Civil War.

I decided to do my own victims' testimonial. And from there, it became part of my life, because if I tell you I'm not a witness, I don't see anybody who survived the war that is more of a witness than me, because I went to the whole—I talked to more people who were there, who were victims, who were mothers who buried their sons. I talked to more people who buried their husbands. I talked to more people who buried their cousins. So, that's why I decided that maybe I can be a credible witness, even though I was not a witness on that day.

EB: Okay. If we could go back to October 7, you must assume that your father died sometime around that time. You were with your mother and other siblings. Where were you at the time when the massacre happened?

EO: We were really close. My mother said she took us—and then the last time they saw him [father], he was bent on staying in the house. So when we came back, the house was burned down. Nobody knew exactly how he died. But later on when I did my own inquiries, I found out that they were not going to tell how. The people that told me what happened to my father, after they knew that I would interview others and had more gruesome stories, they thought it was time to tell me what happened to him.

He was shot into the River Niger. He had already escaped them initially. He went beside the Niger, the Cable Point area, and was hiding in that area, had brought in these boats for two nights when the fourth killing was over. What had happened before they descended to Cable Point, what happened was that probably you could have (inaudible) all the same. But his name came up on the list, the master list that was drawn up in Benin. Not in the North, not in Lagos. The Benin political crisis with our own people with the other minorities in Mid-West resulted in the master list being prepared by these minorities, who were Christians, who were Southerners, but didn't like the dominance of the civil service and broadcasted by the Asaba people against them. You remember, Benin was the capital of Mid-West, where Asaba had the premier, the (inaudible), the head of the Health Services. There were seven doctors at the general hospital; Asaba had like six. There was this envy.

So, they wrote the names of the Asaba elite politicians, civil servants, and the military. My father's name—he was no longer working, but he was the one they knew. He had a brother who was a Permanent Secretary of Social Services, who went to London School of Economics. His name is—he's still living; he is the one who gave me the listing of those who were killed. He was the only educated man left after the killing, so he has the records to give. His name is Sylvester Okocha, but they don't know him in Asaba. My father they know, because of my—that's the auntie that got married to Palmer, who took my father all over the place. So, when the soldiers came and said they were looking for Okocha, then they pointed to my father, and that was why he was shot this time, into the river, because the men killing don't (inaudible), and the people who had been (inaudible) and buried. Sylvester Okocha came out later, because he ran away. He was to go to Ogbesowa for something—it was not clear to him where they were going, and he didn't like the maneuvers of the soldiers, so he ran for his life into the bush.

But anyway, the soldiers were going from house to house, checking out the master list. So where they saw Okocha, they didn't even look at the initials, whether it's SO or BIO. The

people around say, “This is the Okocha compound, this is the Okocha house, the man is there.” So they [the soldiers] started looking for him, and caught him when he was coming—because usually he come in the evening to come and eat. In the morning and the afternoon he goes back there to hide in the boat, according to the story. So when he was coming in, they caught him and he was shot into the Niger.

EB: Was Sylvester Okocha a relative of yours?

EO: That’s what I’m saying. He is the younger brother of my father.

EB: So he was your—

EO: His name was on the lists, the master lists in Benin, as a top bureaucrat, Permanent Secretary of Social Development. Because a lot of educated people had been massacred, he now was the one who—he saw the compilation of the names. He gave it to me.

EB: So, he compiled the names of people he knew were dead?

EO: Yes. He went with the Red Cross after the first killings, and the Red Cross gave him the first [list]. So if he come, he say your name, the name of your brother or your father, they are dead. If it’s a woman, he say the name of your husband that died or was killed. That’s how we got that list. And the list is not exhaustive. It’s not exhaustive. We don’t know. That list is hundreds of people dead, from village to village. But what we are seeing from the testimonies we are talking about, if you move left, somebody died; if you go right, somebody died. Over one thousand people dead.

EB: Who told you what happened to your father?

EO: It was one of my relations, a woman in the North, in the hospital, when she later learned that (inaudible) the family with other stories. She never told my mother, but my mother—they told my mother that her husband was dead, but they didn’t tell the details. I was told the details about how my father even spoke Hausa to them, because he was Northern Nigeria, he knows the language. He spoke their language (inaudible). And then, he was telling them that he was not a soldier, yet they would not listen. They were full of frenzy. They were killing anyone who was there. They had already made up their mind. Blood-shot eyes, they would smoke the lot of—what do you call it? We call it [in] Igbo *njenja*.

EB: Marijuana?

EO: Yes. Not—

EB: Hashish?

EO: The bad one. Marijuana is mild. The other one. Marijuana is okay, but the harsher one.

EB: I think it's hashish.

EO: Okay, whatever it is. They were not friendly troops. So, he was appealing to them. My father died together with his other cousins who came from the North. Then, as I said, my father is like a kin leader to our people, yet they kill everybody. The Uwezis and his two kids, who were in middle school, were all shot. He died in company of people that came to him thinking that they would be safe. So, those are the little details that I got.

EB: And their bodies were never retrieved? Their bodies were never found?

EO: No, unlike those interred in the mass grave. If we go to the project we have been preparing with your colleague.<sup>2</sup> There could be hope. My own father will never be seen. He was shot, I can confirm that.

EB: When did your family come back to the house?

EO: We came back after the war.

EB: Oh, so not until the war was completely over.

EO: Yes, we came back after the war.

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<sup>2</sup>Forensic anthropologist Dr. Erin Kimmerle, assistant professor of anthropology at USF.

EB: Who came back at that time: your mother, yourself?

EO: Everybody came back. My mother, obviously, was carrying me. This time I can walk, but now I know everything, because I've seen war. Then my other brothers came back, the one that we thought was going to be—was in the army, before the one that died. There was one that went to the army, earlier than everybody else. He came back; he was safe. My mother was happy. So, we came back immediately after the war; that was 1970. That's when we came back. At that point in time, there was still a lot of silence. Nobody was ready to say anything. I imagine people were still afraid. Gradually, the seventy [1970s] decade passed; silence. People were still frightened. But when we went into the eighties [1980s], there was more confidence coming to the town. They started talking openly. But see, no major advocate to say the story of the Asaba Massacre.

EB: So, when exactly did you go to the orphanage? Was this right after you returned to Asaba?

EO: Yes. And then she took me, two days after, to my school, when I said I was not going to go to the primary school, I was not going to go to elementary school, I want to go to college.

EB: She took you, the nurse?

EO: No, Sister Mildred.

EB: Sister Mildred.

EO: She took me. I said, "I don't want to go to school in Asaba. Take me to Ogwashi-Uku," many miles away, because there was no seat. In Asaba, you sit down on a block or under a tree to read. I told her, "Please, I don't want to go there. Let me go to where there is some comfort." And then, she was surprised when I went to the school. I demanded that I should be in the class with the middle school.

EB: Did you see your mother at all, after you went to the school, to the orphanage?

EO: She was no longer—she was no longer—the Reverend Sister was my mother. She was the one teaching me. Even before I went to school, she was the one teaching me how to solve maths (inaudible). She was the one feeding me, giving me food. She's the one

that was everything to me. So, I see my mother occasionally, but she acted like she'd been—because there was nothing. There was no food, there was no—she had like six children to take care of. That was a lot.

EB: Did you see your brothers sometimes?

EO: Occasionally they'd come see me.

EB: So, you were the only one of the family that was in the orphanage.

EO: Mm-hm.

EB: Everybody else was still with your mother.

EO: My mother, yes.

EB: What do you think was the impact on your family of what happened in Asaba?

EO: Hmm. We have not recovered. My father's passing at that time affected my mother. My mother—because I said I wasn't so familiar with my dad, but I know my mother was a strong woman during the war. When there was no food, she always comes by with food, either from the church or from the community that was there giving us refuge. She would get up and go get us food. It's not easy to get food in Biafra. We're talking about food for one day. It's not like we eat dinner, lunch. No, just one day's food. We get it, and that's enough. When she came back, she was not that strong woman anymore. And then, if not for Sister Mildred—because my other brothers, they are not—it's just like what Chief [Philip] Asiodu was saying. He did very well, but his other brother didn't do that well. My brothers didn't do that much.

Sister took me, and taught me a lot. Some of my brothers made it. One is a medical doctor. But they are not interested in this stuff; they think I'm wasting my time. Any time I mention this, they don't want to deal with it. I have two brothers in America. They won't come here. One in Wisconsin; there's another one who is married to a lady that lost three brothers. As I said, they would not come here. They want to bottle it up. Okay? They are not against what is happening, but they like the silence. They like to cry on their own. I wish they had come here. Probably what happened to (inaudible) happened to them.

So, when I started this over the years, I do my academics. I do my sports. I still come back here. That way I have a problem with them. I said, “What about our father who died?” They don’t want to talk about it. So, the family survived, but then, I owe a lot to Sister Mildred. She didn’t talk about the war either—to me—but she did a lot of things. She taught me, she bought me books of Irish poetry, all those things, that I write fairly good (inaudible). She helped me a lot, initially, got me interested in books.

EB: Is Sister Mildred still living?

EO: Yes. She’s now retired in Ireland. She knows about this, everything I do.

EB: Where is she?

EO: She’s gone back to Ireland.

EB: Oh. How old is she?

EO: Late in life, like seventy-one, seventy-two.

EB: What does she think about this whole initiative?

EO: Before she wasn’t talking about it, but suddenly she’s very talkative.

EB: Could you talk a little bit about why you think it’s important to do this?

EO: Yes. As I said in my opening, my introduction, I am the one that is living, that is here, because the other witnesses may not have been here. I have decided to occupy the witness stand not because I was there or because I was old enough there, but because I know that after talking to all these [people], not only in Asaba. I went to Ishiagu, a village away from Asaba, where the Royal Father was buried alive, and a lot of killings took place. Compared to Asaba, they are a little village. They were almost wiped out like cattle. I went to Ogwashi-Uku, where I went to school. Even when I was in school, I was conducting my own little interviews. (laughs)

Ogwashi-Uku has the distinction, the sad distinction, of having the greatest number of siblings killed in one day. Six brothers were wiped out in one day, before their mother. They may not have a lot of people from Ogwashi-Uku getting killed by the soldiers, like Asaba or Ishiagu, but the people that were killed that day, the Oluku family, the family that lived near the post office where the federal troops encountered a Biafran ambush. Of course, the officer leading the attack was killed. That made the soldiers, again, mad, and they descended on the family that is near the post office. From the first son to the last, they were put on stakes before their mother and shot. I went to—

EB: Where is that? Where is that community, related to Asaba? How close to Asaba is it?

EO: It's like twenty-something miles. Now it's like a twenty-minute drive from Ogwashi-Uku to there. I went to St. Michael's College; that's where Sister Mildred took me. So, I started getting more interested in the story. It's not only in Asaba. It's not only my father. It's not only my family. Look at these other people. I went to another village; somewhere near Abau there is another big town of (inaudible). They didn't use bullets, they used the horsewhip. The soldiers used a horsewhip on people, and people were beaten to death. That was never recorded anywhere. This community produced a lot of tomatoes; the farmers every time bring their tomatoes. They used to farm with their men, but during the war and after it's only the women you see there. I went to different communities around.

So, in answer to your question, I say more for those witnesses who, over the years, never had the opportunity to say their stories. Now, it looks like—I was wondering whether it was that they were just frightened, because of the trauma that happened, but I found out that, apart from being frightened, there were other issues involved. Our people, especially the Asaba people, are like the Romans of the Caesar period. They like to make merry, and they don't want to be reminded of bad times. And that's why it's continuing. That took prominence over this bloody event of sixty-seven [1967]. So, it was like climbing a mountain to continue to record this event.

But our breakthrough came when this book was published after many years of painstaking effort to get all this testimony. I didn't even know I was conducting oral history, like using your register, but I was just getting a lot of passionate involvement. Each time I have a story, another story that comes in, it's more gruesome, more inhuman. So, when I decided to publish the book, I was advised not to do that. That will not only put [me] in trouble, that will probably put the town in trouble. But I did it.

And what was the reaction from the so-called federal government? The former head of state and the commander of the Nigerian armed forces came to Asaba and apologized, and mentioned specifically, "Because of the young man and the book." I didn't know

whether he was telling the truth or not, but he said it and wanted the community to understand that. From the testimonies last weekend, one can now go ahead and believe him or not, but I know that that was the reaction, the first reaction we had.

Then, after publishing the book—in Nigeria, when you publish a book, you don't depend on sales alone. You have to launch the book. Who couldn't like the book? "I don't like the book! If we launch it, nobody will show up!" "Who are going to show up and then will join the military?" We launched the book, people showed up, and we had enough money to reprint. It became a bestseller. It was realized in *Vanguard*; that was what made *Vanguard* become the number one paper. So this time, we do something that ostensibly would give us trouble. We find out that even the other side have some tears to shed. They still want to ameliorate the situation. That's what we discovered.

Then, of course, there was the Oputa Panel Tribunal, just like the South African Truth and Justice Tribunal that took place. We are the one that started on the African dimension for the fourth time. Usually in the African conflicts and situations in Angola, Congo—it is continuous—Ethiopia, Algeria, whatever. We have not seen any justice come, a tribunal like that taking place, trying to find out what happened and make amends or reviews. Nigeria was the fourth country to have a justice and truth commission, headed by a retired circuit court judge. As usual, nobody told me. I don't know how I got the message.

I decided to go and organize our own victims and witnesses for the tribunal. As soon as I went to the palace, I went to all the elites. They said, "Don't go anywhere. If you go there, there will be killing." I went ahead. I didn't have money. I got to the city. Dr. Uraih, at that time, was the marketing manager for the Nigerian (inaudible) company. Then I met with a constitutional lawyer, Olisa Chukwu, who lost his family there. I met with a medical doctor, who was a witness, and I signed the book. Very soon, I had enough witnesses to go to the tribunal.

The first question directed to me by the chief justice was, "Where is the book *Blood on the Niger*? I've never even read the book." That was the book they used in the major testimonial for the whole write-up, and the book written by a French author, [John] de St. Jorre.<sup>3</sup>

EB: St. Jorre, yes.

EO: I'm probably not pronouncing that well.

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<sup>3</sup>*The Brothers' War: Biafra and Nigeria*, written by John de St. Jorre and published in 1972.

EB: He's English, I think.

EO: (laughs) So, that was it, and I was asked to sit down. It was Dr. [Ifeanyi] Uraih who put everybody to tears, just like he put the people here to tears. He was the star of the whole deposition. So, each time a major step is taken, despite the ambivalence or the disbelief, we will come out with something very progressive. And then, it is not true that the federal government is against what we're doing. We haven't seen evidence. No, there is no scientific evidence so far in the steps we are taking to show that they are on the other side. Probably we will not know until you finish your trip to Nigeria.

So, I still believe that we burnt our (inaudible) early in life. After going through, after seeing, after questioning, after the inquiries over the years, what happened to our people? Why was Asaba killed with such violence, with such frenzy, such mindlessness? And then, to say it was it was (inaudible). And then, why are we, those who survived, the victims? We owe an obligation to the dead to find out what happened; and then, possibly, such massacre, whether it's genocide or massacre, should not happen again. And we suspect that the inability of the government—because after the Oputa Panel, the white paper was never published. Unlike the South African Justice Tribunal, ours was not published.

Then, what we are saying and who we are suspecting, it seems to me that the calculated plan or whatever to keep this massacre under the carpet has affected the subsequent genocide that happened in Rwanda as well. Because in Asaba, men were separated from their womenfolk. In Rwanda, everybody was massacred, including the children. In Darfur, not all the people are being massacred. People are physically being moved away from their homesteads to the desert. Supposing they had brought the Asaba genocide or massacre episode to the (inaudible), probably this couldn't have happened.

So, we are still interested in bringing the event to the public discourse, and we are happy that if the environment in Nigeria is suspect to getting the story out, if we try to do that through publishing the story. We are not even supported by the victims. People that got their daddies, their mothers, their uncles, and their cousins killed don't even want to talk about it.

Then people come to America for liberty, for freedom. I came here, and I thought that America would give us some help. I'm surprised, I'm glad, by the intense collaboration from USF. I know that eventually America will be the place to get the story out, and that's why I went back on it many years ago. We bought our book, so, swimming or sinking, we are selling it.

EB: Okay. Thank you. I think we're done, then.

*End of interview*