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# Chris Mkpayah oral history interview by S. Elizabeth Bird and Fraser Ottanelli, December 10, 2009

Chris Mkpayah (Interviewee)

S. Elizabeth Bird (Interviewer)

Fraser M. Ottanelli (Interviewer)

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**S. Elizabeth Bird:** We're ready to start?

**Chris Mkpayah:** Yes, please.

EB: Okay, this is just an informal announcement. This is Elizabeth Bird, I'm in Lagos, it's the tenth of December 2009, and I am interviewing Mr. Chris Mkpayah—Mkpayo—

CM: Mkpayah.

EB: (laughs) Okay. Well, as I said, we just want to have a conversation about what happened all those years ago and your personal experiences. And we wanted to start with—just, if you could talk a little bit about your situation at the time just before, before what happened in Asaba: your family, who you were with, who was there, and what life was like before.

CM: Before August 8, 1967, as far as I can remember, we were in secondary school there.

EB: I'm sorry?

CM: I was in the secondary school when the Biafran troops came in. It was when they came in that, you know, we closed the school. So, everybody has to go home. So we

went home. And we knew nothing, at that time in September; by October, October 6—because Biafrans came in between that period. They came in.

EB: What was it like when the Biafrans were there? Were people happy, or what was the situation?

CM: When they came in, because it was an overnight thing, we all woke up in the morning and then we saw them. We were calm then, and we thought they were on their way to Lagos, the ones we conversed with. There was peace, nothing happened. It was after some months—that was within the October period now—when they started withdrawing. They started withdrawing back. So, I can remember it was sixth of October, they now went back to the East, they crossed the River Niger. So by night they cross the River Niger, they blew the bridge—the River Niger, they blew the bridge. So after blowing the bridge, we heard then that federal troops, they are coming. They were shelling—you know, bombing, throwing bombs—and we are hearing gunshots at the outskirts of Asaba, around that SPC [St. Patrick's College]. Meanwhile, they're now coming to the main town.

EB: So the Biafran troops that blew the bridge—

CM: They blew the bridge—

EB: On their way back.

CM: On their way back, when they were retreating.

EB: So, how were people feeling when this was happening? Were people afraid about the troops coming in, or—how was it?

CM: Nobody—we weren't afraid because most of our fathers and our grandfathers, they fought the World Wars and everything, so they thought that we shouldn't run; that soldiers don't shoot, you know, somebody that is not carrying arms. They cannot just shoot the civilians. So that's why most of us stayed behind. We are not all that—we are not panicking.

EB: Who were the members of your family at that time?

CM: Most of my family's somewhere in Enugu. So when they bombarded Enugu, they now came back to Asaba. So I have my senior brother, Sylvester Mkpayah; I have another senior one, Dennis Mkpayah; I have another one, Odi Mkpayah; I have Efine Mkpayah, Eke Mkpayah, and others I cannot remember now.

EB: Were both your parents there? Your father and mother?

CM: My father was killed when the—1966, in Jos. He was killed during the first coup. So he never came back. So we were thinking, "He will come back, he will come back," until the end of the war, when I discovered that he was killed there.

EB: Did you know he was killed there, at the time?

CM: No, nobody knew, they didn't know that. When it started, you know, they all went into the bush, finding ways back to Asaba. By the end of the day, and after sleeping overnight, some people say they didn't see anything. So they don't know whether—they said that some soldiers were (inaudible), but they wanted to go back home, go back to that place, or where you came from.

EB: So that was when—did you live in Asaba all your life?

CM: I was in Asaba at that time, because we were on holidays, and they had to close the school because of the entrance of the Biafran troops.

EB: Which school were you at?

CM: SPC, Asaba. St. Patrick's College, Asaba.

EB: St. Patrick's, yeah. So, we were at October 6. The Biafrans have left, and then—

CM: Yes, the federal troops.

EB: Could you describe, then, what happened on October 7? What happened?

CM: So on that October 7, in the morning—in fact, I went to morning mass that day. So when I came back from morning mass, I now went to my grandmother's place, to lunch. So there were, you know, gunshots, you know. We were hearing bullets everywhere. Then along the line, I said, "Let me go and check one of my friends around there, Mr.—" he's a classmate of mine. Molokwu, Joseph Molokwu. That's his name. So when I got there, just in front of their house, I now saw—his body was just lying there. They shot him. So that's when—that means the soldiers have come into the town. So, I left. Then I went to another friend in the area, the Nwanukus. One is Donald Nwanuku, the other one is Obi Nwanuku. So when I got there, their parents now told me that the soldiers have come in, and they've hid them. They don't want anybody to even see them, so they didn't allow me to see them.

So, I now went back home. Immediately, I went back home; after some time, started hearing dancing in group. "One Nigeria, One Nigeria, One Nigeria, One Nigeria." So, before we knew it, (inaudible) we are in the house, and some people were running into the house. They are coming from another village, that is, relations. They now rushed into the house, males and females and children. When they came to the house, they now told us that they have started killing people at the outskirts, and this dancing group that are coming, you should go and join them. That the soldiers said that they would not come down to welcome (inaudible) federal troops now and they entered Asaba.

Along the line, I said, "Let us go, myself and my cousin, P.C." He is at Asaba now. So as we are coming out towards the road, the Nnebesi [Road] and King Street, at that time, the group, the dancing group of (inaudible). Then soldiers surrounded them, were guiding them—that is, Nigerian soldiers, who were carrying guns. As they were coming, they wanted to stop me, but I rushed into the crowd; the same thing with my cousin. Then we all raised up our hands and were shouting, "One Nigeria, One Nigeria," and we continued.

So as we are going, we moved up to (inaudible). When we got there, they said that we should come back. Then we started coming back again. Then, as we are coming back, we now came in front of the—Mr. Asiche's house. He's one of our lecturers in SPC there. So we're in front of his house, it's a big compound. One of the sons—we call him Osi Asiche—he was coming out from the compound. As he was coming out, just in front of the gate, he was shot. One of the soldiers shot him. He fell down. Then, as we are mov—you know, they were guiding us, said we should continue moving. So as we are moving, they were picking people in the midst and just shoot them. They would fall aside.

We continued moving. When we got to Umuezei, that place, there is one (inaudible) chief that lives there; they call him (inaudible). He has all these trees around the front of

the compound; we call it (inaudible) trees. It was just like a fence. So when we got nearer to that place, we now saw dead bodies surrounding—they have shot all those people. They were all lying down. We now passed, they keep on moving on; they said we should continue. We said, “Okay, where are we going to do?” They said they are taking us to—we have to go to SPC and work from there. So we continued. When we got at Umuezei—that’s his place there—they now sat everybody down. While we sat on the—you know, they said we should all wait. There were now some other—they were now going—some soldiers were going to the town and bringing people. They keep on bringing more people, bringing them there. The population now increased, both men and women.

EB: How many people do you think was in that?

CM: As of that time, we are sitting down, we’re over—we’re over 600 there, sitting down there, while they continue bringing in people. In fact, in our midst, there was one chief, (inaudible) of Asaba, he was there. So at this stage we now saw his car, ’cause the soldiers have taken his car. So he noticed, “This is my car.” One of the soldiers had (inaudible). A Nigerian officer, that is, driving that car. He now told him to stand up. So where he stood, he stood up. They started dragging him, they was going to shoot him. So we all started begging, started begging. At this stage, they now hit him with the butt of the gun [and said] “You sit down there.” He now sat down.

So after some time, we are now thinking we should stand up, we should move. When we moved, now we came into the major [road] of Asaba, Nnebisi Road, and we continued. We passed St. Joseph’s Church, Asaba, continued moving. So when we got to Nnebisi—I mean King Street; again, that was the beginning of King Street.

EB: Kilt?

CM: King Street.

EB: King Street.

CM: Asaba, yeah. When we got there, I said, “Let’s take that road now.” They said, “No, we can’t take that route, we should continue that way we are going.” Then we continued past the market—we call it Ogbogonogo Market [Center]. We passed it. So when we passed it, there’s another road that began from Ogbolie [Market Center]; we call that place Ogbolie. If we take that route, we now go back into the town. I wanted to take

that, but they said, “No, we should continue that Nnebisi Road,” and I continued. So when we got to Ogbeosowa Junction, then I said we should go in there.

So as we walked in there, I now saw so many soldiers, sitting down somewhere, cleaning their rifles and (inaudible). They moved us, they said, “Continue moving.” So by the time we got to this, uh—the man—the person that owned the place is (inaudible). There’s a slab there. So when we got there, they said we should now stop. We stopped there. As we stopped there, they now surrounded us, sat us all down. They whip, they start whipping us at the same time. So when they whip, we scatter. They whip us again, we come together. They continued doing this thing for some minutes. Even at this stage, they were whipping me and so I refused to go in. That was when I saw—when I turned, I saw my brother. So they were saying I should come inside (inaudible). I said no. They continued whipping me with this (inaudible).

So just after some time, one officer came in: he has marks, like this. So when he came in—before then, there was some young officer that came in, then it was him who asked, “Who lives here? They should come out.” So they were trying to bring us to this, before this officer came and said we should all go back into the midst, so we now came to the midst. So after some time, the next thing we saw, the officer now sit. And then he spoke it in Hausa—because I was born in North, so I heard what he said. He said (speaking in Hausa). He said they should take us ten, ten, and start firing us. So when he said that, I said, “We are finished.” Some people said, “No, they are just trying to threaten us,” that they would not kill. The soldiers cannot kill like that. Meanwhile, we have seen the ones they killed, as we are in that position.

So we—just after some minutes, that officer now picked out somebody from the midst, shot him, picked out another person, shot him, picked out—they were just picking like that. So suddenly, something powerful just fell down on that spot. It was a very big pyramid of bodies. So when they fell like that, the next thing is, then people who were praying—some people were praying, “Father, forgive them, they don’t know what they did. Father, forgive them.” Before we know it—they just kept going, they didn’t shoot. They were dead. After, we kept quiet. There was silence. The next thing is, they started shooting. There were machine guns and they just ran across; they were shooting at the men. This thing continued for some hours.

And it was getting to—we started this position in the morning, then this time should be around 4:00 or 5:00 PM. So they now started shooting and shooting. After some time, they stopped. When they stopped, some people would now shout, “Kill me, kill me, I never die.” They announced that the person should raise his hand up. If he raised his hand up, they would shoot. They just shoot, you know, right on that spot. So this thing continued until sometime—around that time, the sun had just fell. They now left.



So when they now left, after some time, somebody now—even myself, I didn’t know I was still alive. There was a person under me. So after some time, somebody now said, “Ah, they are gone, they have gone.” So the person now jumped out from the midst into the bush—there is a bush by the side of where they did that thing, where they killed all the men, all of our people. And that midst was professionals, students, men—and before they did that—I forgot. They removed—they asked all the women to leave; they took away all the women and children. And we don’t know—up till now, don’t know what happened to them. They took them away. So it’s only men, young men, you know, they killed us, started shooting.

At the end of the day—so, we all—we started jumping out. And it was already dark. So, the bush where I entered—while we are there sitting down at night, and we’re talking and talking. Suddenly, the senior brother to Gabriel Uraih<sup>1</sup>, he now heard my voice. So, when he heard my voice, he called my name. (inaudible) He says, “Wait in that place.” So I started calling his name and moving until I got to him. We were just sitting by a tree. He now asked me, did they shoot me? I said, “I don’t know.” He said, “I’ll show —” bring my hand, and I brought my hand. He now put—took his hand to the back (inaudible). And I now felt a wet, something wet. I said, “Ah!” He said they shot him. So the two of us now sat in there.

Then we now started planning how we’re going in the night. I said, “Okay, let’s go to your house.” Then I thought, “Ah, the soldiers are taking over their house.” So I said, “Okay, let’s go to our own house.” Then we started crawling in the night, crossing, crossing, one village to the other until we got to a place where we now saw the Nigerian soldiers. We just saw them, so when we saw them, we now had to duck and stayed in the place for some time. They now passed. So when they passed, we now started finding a way. By the time we got to my own house, we now saw soldiers again there, on the back: they’ve taken over that house. We now started going—we now went to Grandmother’s place in the night. When we got there—it was on the outskirts; they didn’t even know they’ve killed our people, some of them. So we went to them and said that they’ve killed our people. They say we are—so they said okay, we should sleep there. I said, “We can’t sleep here,” that this people would eventually come into that area. We now took off in the night. I now started carrying my brother, ’cause he couldn’t walk and stop and walk—and blood is gushing out from there.

EB: This is your brother?

CM: His own brother. The senior one, yeah.

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<sup>1</sup>Chris Mkpayah is referring to Ify Uraih’s brother, Medua Chuma Uraih, who was also interviewed for the Asaba Memorial History Project. The DOI for his interview is A34-00022.

EB: Dr. [Ify] Uraih.<sup>2</sup>

CM: Uh-huh. So after that, I carried him, and we continued walking up to—we don't even know the path we are taking. We continued until we passed a swampy river, then we crossed it; then, to the other side. We now know that we've come into Ibusa, another town, just a neighboring town. They were now searching for our people. We're just sitting there. They left when they heard the gunshot; they now left it in Asaba to the other side. They were all just like refugees there, cooking some—we got there early in the morning. It's from there we now started, you know, looking for where to go and stay.

EB: Were you hurt yourself?

CM: No, I wasn't hurt. I wasn't hurt.

EB: And what about all your brothers and people? Were they with you?

CM: No, they left.

EB: They left.

CM: Yes, they left. Some crossed it early, before they blew that bridge. Some crossed over to the other side.

EB: So were any of your brothers or relatives killed in this?

CM: Uh, yes, the ones that—my cousins were killed, like Simon (inaudible). In fact, he came from Ibadan. We were all together that day, before we joined the procession. There was supposed to be a reverend to do (inaudible) in the Catholic church. He was killed.

**Fraser Ottanelli:** How old were you?

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<sup>2</sup>Ify Uraih was also interviewed for the Asaba Memorial Oral History Project. The DOI for his interview is A34-00003.

CM: That's at that time?

EB: Uh-huh.

CM: I was nineteen. Nineteen years, yeah.

EB: Nineteen.

CM: Yeah, nineteen.

EB: Do you have any idea yourself why this—why the troops did this? Do you think—was there some reason why they decided to shoot people or any—?

CM: The thing is, by the time we eventually came back, when we came back—in fact, before we came back, he was the one with the mother. His mother had to come and look for us in the farm. In fact, he did the same thing. He now got us in the farm where we were; from there, we came back. By that time, you know, there was peaceful—there was peace, (inaudible) peace. And then there was a captain that at least controlled the whole thing. Meanwhile, it was when we came back that we now started asking questions. His father was killed; his two—four brothers were killed there. There was even his mother that buried them.

But the thing is, when we now started (inaudible) because at that time, we can talk with some of them. Some were saying that, why they did that? They had to kill us all? They thought that [Patrick Chukwuma Kaduna] Nzeogwu, the person that started the coup, he's from Asaba, or he's from a neighboring city. That's why they had to do it. Because at that time, some of them—I think they're envious of Asaba people (inaudible). So they now took that opportunity. They're thinking, "Let's deal with these people, and reduce them, especially professionals." That's part of it, part of it.

EB: So that was part of the reason, you think—

CM: Yes.

EB: —because they were professionals.

CM: Yes, and all those kind of things.

EB: Yeah.

CM: It's part of the reason.

EB: When you were being—when the crowd of you were being taken around on this parade with the soldiers, what did you think? Did you think they were going to shoot?

CM: As of that time, you know—before then, we have not seen—I didn't see any dead body around. Based on what our grandfathers told us, soldiers don't kill—I mean, they don't kill—they don't shoot somebody without arms. I felt this, maybe, when I have left before that time, when they told us, "Don't go," that they will not kill us. So I felt they're not going to do it. Not until I saw them pick somebody as we were in the procession, shot, and I felt, "These people are going—they have something in mind."

EB: So they would just pick people one at a time as you were moving?

CM: One at a time, as we were moving, yes.

EB: Yeah.

CM: Before we got to that—where they now—

EB: That must have been terrifying.

CM: Very, very. Very, very. It's not easy to erase from the memory.

EB: So after this was over, you went in hiding, but when did you come back to town?

CM: To Asaba?

EB: Yeah.

CM: In that time, peace has returned (inaudible). As I told you, we, you know—after that time (inaudible) we now got in touch with my (inaudible), the other cousin, called P.C. Ojobu. He was from there, and he decided to come and look for us. Because they were asking my mother, was I dead at Asaba? He didn't go anywhere. He was worried about me. He doesn't know the dress I put on, so they were asking the other cousin; he now described it. At the end of the day, he came to collect us from that place. And even then, we refused. "We are not coming, we are not coming back to Asaba. The soldiers are still there, they can still kill." His mother eventually came, so he now convinced her that peace has returned and we should come back. That was her I followed, when I returned.

EB: How long after the—a few days, a week, before you came back?

CM: It's up to a month.

EB: A month, okay.

CM: It's up to a month.

EB: What was—when you were back, when people were back, people were realizing how many people had died, what had happened. What kind of effect did all of this have on the community? How did the community start to recover, or get back together?

CM: It took a long time before they—they were still afraid of the soldiers. That's when they found out that peace has returned and the soldiers, they didn't touch anybody. We were afraid. Why some kill, you know? (inaudible). But along the line, things started changing again. That was second operation. They did another second one. That should be sixty-eight [1968].

EB: When the soldiers were back?

CM: They were still there. So, along the line, after the first—I call this one—that's October 7—I call it first operation.

EB: Okay.

CM: That is when they killed and killed and killed, uh-huh. But this second one, they now started—you know, first of all, they started bombarding. They started burning houses. So that second one, I didn't wait. I didn't wait. I knew I have to leave Asaba.

EB: So that was the next year, 1968?

CM: Nineteen sixty-eight.

EB: When in 1968?

CM: It should be around November.

EB: So the soldiers have been there all the time.

CM: They've been there.

EB: But they haven't—they've been quiet.

CM: Yeah, they were quiet. But suddenly, they started that one; they say the Biafrans, you know, shooting in the night, they were coming. They used guerillas and (inaudible). We are the people telling them their locations and (inaudible) when they fire, they get them. (inaudible) So some people left beforehand that time, because that one—they were burning houses; they threw (inaudible) on the houses.

EB: For what reason? People they thought were Biafran?

CM: Uh-huh, we are no longer friends again (inaudible). Some people didn't want to take time—just like the first one, when we believed that they will not kill, they will not kill. And eventually, they killed. So this second one, most of us left. Immediately started bombardment, shooting, and all those things, and killing people as they escaped.

EB: So people were killed again in 1968?

CM: Yeah, they were killed again, and houses were burnt. Houses were burnt here, more than the first one. They burnt houses and killed, killed so many people.

EB: But you left in—

CM: I left during that second one. I have to.

EB: When did you come back after that?

CM: I came back in seventy-one [1971]—seventy [1970], seventy [1970]. I came back in seventy [1970]. I crossed over to the other side.

EB: Were some of your family still in Asaba then?

CM: In Asaba?

EB: Yeah.

CM: Yes, some were still in Asaba.

FO: Liz, I have a question, if you don't mind.

EB: Yeah, go ahead.

FO: The question is—I've sequenced what you've described, but could you go back to—we started in August of sixty-seven [1967]. Could you go back to before then? Could you describe your family, your family life, what normal was for you and your family before these events take place?

CM: Yes. Everything was normal. There was no problem before that time.

FO: Could you describe your—

CM: Everybody—

FO: How many members in your family, where you lived, how—you know, kind of give us a sense of—

EB: Who was in your house at that time, before they—?

CM: Before this. As of that time, my father had been killed.

EB: Yes.

CM: My mother was still in Asaba. I was still in Asaba. And my other four brothers, one in Lagos; the other two were in the other side, as of that time.

EB: On the other side?

CM: That is the Eastern side. They were at Enugu there. They were doing their own business there. See, but me, my mother, and then other cousins, we are in Asaba.

EB: And your grandmother?

CM: With my mother.

EB: Your father had been killed in Jos?

CM: In Jos, yeah.

EB: What did he do? What was his profession?

CM: He was an accountant of foreign mines.



EB: So he was killed when many Igbo people were killed in the North?

CM: In the North, yeah. That's sixty-six [1966], after the coup.

EB: Uh-huh. A lot of people have been talking about, you know, that it would be a good thing to memorialize what happened, to have some kind of permanent remembrance. Do you think that's a good idea? And if so, what kind of thing should be done, do you think, to memorialize what happened?

CM: Like I told my brother, I said, "All this while, I've been thinking, and I've been jotting down whatever I remember. I jot it down. I will then try to publish something so that my people will know. The future generation will know that something like this happened." So, I want something documentary to be done with it, a book, so that we know at least—because as of now, during the time they did this operation, [Yakubu] Gowon was the president of the country. But the person that led the operation in Asaba, you know, we are told, is Murtala Mohammed; he is late [dead] now. So when you look at it, even when he was alive, once he mentioned this Asaba thing waiting (inaudible) Murtala (inaudible). What happened in Asaba? He didn't [answer]. So, we still continue to have that mind of not forgetting. I don't think that anybody will forget that.

EB: Who do you hold responsible for what happened?

CM: I hold the president, President Gowon. He was in charge. I hold him responsible.

EB: (to FO) Other questions?

FO: No.

EB: Is there anything else you would like to say to either elaborate on what you said, or to tell us more—something we didn't ask that is important for you to say?

CM: What I will say is this: What happened in Asaba, there are so many other places, recently, that all those kind of thing happened. And they were being compensated and all those kind of thing. Every day, you hear people talking about, like Odi, where the

soldiers went and destroyed.<sup>3</sup> But this particular one, we don't hear about it. Nobody has said anything about it. Even the book they wrote about it, it was called the Biafran War—the Nigerian Civil War. There was one written by former head of state, Obasanjo<sup>4</sup>; if you would read, you would see that there is nothing about Asaba. There is another one. That is the only one I can see telling about what happened—the killing was not mentioned there. There is one by [Frederick] Forsyth<sup>5</sup>.

EB: Yes.

CM: Uh-huh. That one, he mentions how the soldiers, the movement and everything, but the killing in Asaba was not mentioned. So, people don't even remember. Like that place now. If I would have the power to excavate that place, you will see a lot of things. You see bones and the dead; the skulls would be there. So that people will really know something—there was something there.

EB: So you think it's important to excavate the—

CM: Yes.

EB: And to see—

CM: It is important.

EB: And then do what? What should people do after that?

CM: Yes. It is important.

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<sup>3</sup>The Odi Massacre, November 20, 1999. Nigerian soldiers attacked the town of Odi after twelve policemen were killed there, shooting an unknown number of civilians and burning most of the buildings.

<sup>4</sup>Obasanjo, Olusegun. *My Command: An Account of the Nigerian Civil War, 1967-1970*. Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1980.

<sup>5</sup>*The Biafra Story*, first published in 1969. Forsyth was a BBC correspondent in Nigeria during the civil war.

EB: And if the excavation is done, which is possible, what should—what is the appropriate or the correct thing to do if you find the remains of people? What should be done after that?

CM: That one, I will say, will be decided by the Asaba elders, in council. It would be decided by them.

EB: Do you go back to Asaba? Do you travel back to Asaba often?

CM: Yeah, I go to Asaba. I visit my home.

EB: (inaudible).

CM: (inaudible).

EB: Well, thank you. Dr. Uraih, is there anything that you would like to—?

**Ify Uraih:** Uh, I just want to refresh his memory about the second operation. It happened—because then I was in school with him in St. Patrick's College, Asaba. It was during the first time (inaudible) that it happened. What happened was that the Biafran troops came—

EB: This is the second—

CM: The second one, yes.

IU: The second one. In 1968—it was around this time, in 1968. And the principal of the school we attended at that time was killed.

CM: Was killed, yes. Roman Wicinski.

IU: An American. An American—

CM: A Russian American.

IU: Russian American.

CM: Roman Wicinski.

IU: Uh, Polish.

CM: He's Polish, he's Polish.

EB: If I could just have you talk— just so we get this on record. So this is the second, we're talking again about the—

CM: Second operation.

EB: —second operation in 1968, which we think is around Easter time.

CM: Yes.

IU: Yes.

EB: And you were still at St. Patrick's College at that time?

CM: No. I wasn't there then.

IU: I was.

CM: He was there then.

EB: And this was the time when the principal of St. Patrick's—

CM: Was killed.

EB: —was killed. How was he killed?

CM: He was killed at Ogwashi Ukwu, but they said he was federal—they accused the federal—the federal accused the Biafrans, so we don't know. It was—they say crossfire, but who knows? We just knew that our principal had been killed.

EB: What was the principal's name?

CM: Roman Wicinski.

EB: Wicinski?

CM: Roman. Brother Roman Wicinski.

EB: Okay. So, do you have any sense of how many people died in 1968? Does anybody really know that?

CM: Dr. Uraih might remember. I don't know.

IU: The 1968 thing did not happen mostly in Asaba.

EB: (moves microphone) Let me put that back over here.

FO: Or you could just hold it.

IU: It's well documented in *Blood on the Niger*.<sup>6</sup> It didn't happen—the bulk of the operation happened in a place called Ishiagu.

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<sup>6</sup>Okocho, Emma. *Blood on the Niger: The First Black on Black Genocide*. New York: Triatlantic Books International, 2006.

EB: Ishiagu.

IU: A few kilometers from Asaba, where even the chief of the town was buried alive by the federal troops. The Biafrans came—it's by the side of the River Niger. The Biafrans came by boat, infiltrated into the federal territory. And our principal was on holiday, he was driving past when they caught him, and they said he was a mercenary. And they shot him. He was shot—

EB: The federal troops—

IU: He was shot. The principal was shot, according to the federal troops, by the Biafrans, because the Biafrans thought he was a mercenary for the federal troops. So, because of that infiltration, they now killed so many people between Ogwashi Ukwu and Ishiagu. So, what they did in Asaba: they just took the rest of us they could find, because a lot of people, including him, now escaped to Biafra when they had the option. The rest of us who didn't run away, we are taken and camped in St. Patrick's College. We are camped for about three weeks, and then we are told the operation is over. The killing at that time was minimal; it was not like the first time. People were—stray bullets killed a few people. When that was over, the town became quiet and many of us left town. I left town after that.

EB: I wanted to just—we want to try and make sure that we know all the people who remained and some of the people that died. You had mentioned that at the beginning of the October 7—that you—

FO: Liz, you do need this [the microphone].

EB: Right. (laughs)

EB: You had mentioned that, at the beginning of October 7, that you had gone looking for your friend, Joseph?

CM: Joseph Molokwu.

EB: Could you just spell his name? Joseph I can do, but—

CM: Okay, Molokwu, M-o-l-o-k-w-u.

EB: And he was a student also with you at—

CM: Was a student, yes.

EB: —St. Patrick's. So you went looking for him and you found him dead—

CM: Yes—

EB: —by his house.

CM: In front of the house, yes.

EB: Nobody else there?

CM: Outside of that, just another one, Michael. I think it's Kpalobi or something, Michael, Michael. That one was shot before I went in the house. And it's a cousin to this very one.

EB: Michael, and what was his last name?

CM: Michael Kpalobi.

EB: B?

CM: Kpalobi. K—

EB: K?

CM: K-p-a-l-o-b-i.

EB: B-I?

CM: B-i.

EB: Michael Kpalobi.

CM: Kpalobi.

EB: So he was killed at around the same time as—

CM: Around the same time, uh-huh. When I went to—the same day.

EB: So they—

CM: Then the Nwanukus. I mentioned Donald.

EB: Donald?

CM: Nwanuku.

EB: Can you spell that?

CM: N-w-a-n-u-k-u, Nwanuku.

EB: And he—?

CM: And his brother—there were two. Obi.

EB: Obi? O-b-i?



CM: O-b-i, uh-huh, the same, Nwanuku.

EB: And they were killed, again, before the main—were they killed?

CM: It was after the Joseph killing that they killed those ones.

EB: So things were just—troops were probably just going around?

CM: They were going around the corner, killing people, killing.

FO: Were these targeted? Do you think they knew who they were killing, or just because they looked the right age?

CM: Um, I don't know—maybe some are just—maybe they took it upon themselves to be killing, you know, and going into the places to kill. That's before they now—we started a procession. That's when they were doing all this.

EB: So, it didn't seem as if there was a single person giving orders? It seemed like the soldiers were just doing what they wanted?

CM: Uh, yes, soldiers were doing what—at that time, they're shooting individuals. Even at that time we are in that procession, I don't think anybody gave them order. They shoot at us. They took it upon themselves to, you know. That means they have, you know, a hidden agenda within them. Because after that killing, we now saw some of the officers who were even—why, they didn't know something like this happened somewhere. And it's not only there; there are some other villages with other people killed. They keep on going from one place to the other. So, it happened like that. Nobody—I don't think—they took it upon themselves.

EB: Did people—I mean, people knew that some individuals had been killed in these ways, and yet people still joined this procession. What were people thinking was happening? Were people afraid? Did they feel obliged to join the procession? How did that happen?

CM: What happened was, the information they give us, we should go and welcome them; that after the welcome, they would now receive us. We feel, okay, nothing more will

happen. So that's why people were joining. Thinking we are even going to that very—where they—I think it's SPC where they—all of them, you know, they had us; we call it the attack they put us on, or something like that. So that is—everybody—that's why people were joining. At least when you get there, you come by them, you know (inaudible). They have welcomed them.

EB: So they thought that was a way to calm, get everything calm.

CM: Uh-huh. Not knowing it will lead to killing.

EB: Yeah. Do you have any—in your own estimate, how many people do you think died around October 7? Do you have any idea?

CM: As a whole?

EB: Everybody there, people who were killed before.

CM: More than two thousand.

EB: You think?

CM: Uh-huh, because [in] that heap were many. That heap was more than seven hundred. And if you now—those were the ones we see. And the ones we didn't even see. It would be up to two thousand.

EB: Well, thank you very much.

(to FO) Do you have anything more? No?

(to CM) Thank you. I know this must be very hard, but we very much appreciate you doing this, and we hope that we'll be able to piece together the whole story and hopefully do something with it.

CM: Thank you very much.

EB: Thank you.

CM: Thanks.

*End of interview*