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Oral history has long been a valuable tool to analyze the causes, consequences, and role of public memory in mass violence. Within the broader context of decolonization and the early years of independence, ethnographers and historians have particularly focused on the violence of apartheid in southern Africa. In the last decade, researchers have increasingly examined other cases of mass violence in independent African states. At the same time, the failed Biafran secession from Nigeria and the subsequent Nigerian civil war from 1966 to 1970 have attracted a rapidly growing number of researchers. *The Asaba Massacre* is not only a significant contribution to the scholarship on the short-lived Republic of Biafra and Nigeria, but also a well written study that lends itself to use in undergraduate and graduate courses on oral history and violence writ large.

Nigerian government troops killed at least several hundred civilians in the small town of Asaba, located just outside the border of Biafran rebels' frontline, in October 1967. The local government of Asaba actually was loyal to the Nigeran state. Its population largely identified themselves as Igbo, the dominant ethnic group in Biafra, but many informants interviewed by the authors considered themselves to be a separate community from the rebels and, as such, not part of the Biafran secession. During the civil war, Asaba briefly fell into Biafran hands, but Nigerian government forces soon recaptured it. These government forces, however, mistakenly considered Asaba civilians to be rebel sympathizers. The military organized a rally in Asaba ironically celebrating Nigerian unity, and soldiers then slaughtered civilians unfortunate enough to have agreed to attend. The Nigerian military and its major Western ally, Great Britain, denied a massacre took place. In their book, S. Elizabeth Bird and Fraser Ottanelli convincingly demonstrate how the massacre galvanized Biafran rebels' intransigence. At the same time, they discuss how the Nigerian and United Kingdom's efforts turned foreign attention to the Republic of Biafra itself rather than to the slaughter in Asaba.

Effectively drawing insights from broader work on public memory and mass violence, the authors trace how different constituencies represented and recalled the event. These groups include survivors, family members of victims, local educators,and participants in online discussions. The authors could have discussed in more detail how subsequent military regimes in Nigeria sought to silence narratives about the massacre between 1967 and the late 1990s. However, Bird and Ottanelli effectively analyze how the return of democracy to Nigeria opened up new space for commemorating and representing the massacre. The advent of social media and the Internet further widened debates and discussions about Asaba, from denouncing individual military leaders to critiquing the Biafran revolt for setting off the war that led to so many civilian casualties.

This book's succinctness should not mislead readers from recognizing its strengths. The authors have a keen grasp of the complexities of oral historical methodology and are explicit about how they conducted their research. Like many others dealing with mass violence, they ran across well-honed narratives regarding the unfolding of the massacre itself. Rather than simply focusing on this dominant set of stories, the authors sought out other informants who spoke of other examples of violence against civilians that took place before and after the major events of October 6, 1967. The authors also employed a range of primary written sources as well as interviews to reveal how expatriates living in Nigeria, military officials, and British diplomats all helped to quiet local and international discussions of the massacre initially. Bird and Ottanelli participated in online forums and set up a Wikipedia page to examine how the Internet provided a space to construct memories about Asaba. They also placed their work within the broader project of reconsiderations of the Biafran revolt in Nigerian popular culture and literature in the early twenty-first century. The wounds of the 1967-70 civil war are hardly healed, as shown by the fact that two groups harassed the authors online. Proponents of Biafra, who consider Asaba as proof of Nigerian culpability,believed Bird and Ottanelli had not been

vocal enough in condemning Nigeria. Defenders of Nigerian unity also became displeased with the authors, since they argued Asaba was an inevitable consequence of the Biafran government's decision to launch a war of independence.

The Asaba Massacre is written in a refreshingly clear and well-organized way. This is not a coded way of saying the book lacks theoretical rigor; rather, the straightforward prose allows readers not well-versed in either oral history methodology or the Nigerian civil war to grasp the main points of the book easily. In some ways, it is reminiscent of Tom Lodge's study of the pivotal police killings of protestors at Sharpeville in 1960 (*Sharpeville: A Massacre and Its Consequences* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2011]) in its commitment to analyzing the context, the violence itself, and memories of its aftermath. It certainly merits being awarded the 2018 Oral History Association's Book Award. *The Asaba Massacre* would work quite well in the classroom. It requires no previous background in the Nigerian civil war or oral methodology to comprehend the main arguments. In short, *The Asaba Massacre* is a work that resonates far beyond just the confines of African history.