**Catherine Igbeka**

**Asaba Memorial Project**

**I: interviewer (Elizabeth Bird)**

**P: participant (Catherine Igbeka)**

**Oct. 14, 2014, Wallington, near London, UK**

I: This is Elizabeth Bird, conducting this interview in Wallington, near London, UK. It is October the 10th, 2014. I’m here with Fraser Ottanelli and we are interviewing, if you could say your full name again:

P: Catherine Nkendelim Igbeka.

I: So what we wanted to do, we’re talking to people who experienced the events in the civil war and we want to talk to a range of people, today we talked to a lot of older gentlemen who were adults at the time, so it’s nice to talk to you as a younger person.

P: I was nine at the time.

I: So, could you tell me, so you say you were born in Kaduna

P: Yeah, I was born in Kaduna, yeah

I: And you went back to Asaba because of the…

P: My very early recollection from my childhood was when we were living in Kaduna with my mom. Patricia is my sister, we lived in Kaduna with my mom and my grandmother. And not too long after that, my dad wanted us to go back to join his family in Kano. They made several visits, and a lot of discussion about it, and it came to materialize that we had to go to my dad’s so that we could bond properly, he wanted us so that we could have a full family love. With his new family. My father is married to an Asaba lady called Bessie, who is from Ugomanta in Asaba. My mother is not from Asaba but, yeah, I can’t tell you the full details of that area I will just give that for now. So now this arrangement for us to join our family, have a full love family with my dad came true. So Patricia, my sister and I, we went on a very long drive to Kano, and my mother visit us often. And we started school in Kano*.*

Not quite long, we tried to understand the Asaba community, we never used to speak Asaba, we speak Okwani, my mom’s dialect. And not long after that, there was a lot of trouble. From my childhood memory, a lot of trouble in the north. We used to listen and hear my parents talk about it and talk about it until it came to a point where we had to go to Asaba. At the time we left for Asaba it was a rushed thing, it wasn’t like a planned journey. I remember we went in a big truck, and then come on the train sometimes, and then off the train onto another big truck, it went on for days and eventually we arrived in Asaba. We were excited, but very sad because my mom now was in Kaduna . But we now lived in Asaba, it was chaotic, and my dad had this little house he was trying to put up, and because we had to come back in a rush, we stayed with different families until eventually, because it wasn’t convenient, he had not made it up properly, not in a very nice way, and then we stayed in our house.

The war went on, they were talking about war events, it is only my understanding now that I’m an adult, that I can piece together what they were talking about. But it was all about war, so many things going on, Ojukwu has said we should be in, have Biafra State, and the war started. We were at school, primary school, and eventually comes this day there were a lot of military appearances around. First of all, the Biafran troops, quite a lot of them are walking around, I know, and people are walking up to them and saying “is everything alright?” And they were saying, “Yeah, everything is fine, we are getting control of the federal troops”. But it was unusual, because even though we knew there was war, we never saw a lot of them walking around the place. Moving back their missionaries bag, so as a child we said “oh, something is happening”, I see the worry, big worry on the elders, parents’ faces, that something drastic is happening.

So they didn’t alarm us that it was serious, they were just saying, “oh it’s in order, we’ve been able to handle it”. Until, what we thought was further away, it was now coming closer. Shots of bullets, different sounds. Different shelling sounds, you can just hear them very loud (makes sounds). You could just hear more of firing, bullets flying around everywhere, so now we were a little bit more worried. My father was going around the village asking, what do we do. Which a lot of the parents were asking, what is the situation, what’s going on, what…the sound of the bullets and the firing, was not permitting a lot of people to go out, so now most people were going indoors or moving to various places. It was really not organized at all, we didn’t know what was going on, and then, it came to that that waymore. You hear, suddenly, people scream out in the dark, very scary. So we were in doors a lot…you could tell that there were different people in the town, not what we’re used to, from the noise and the sounds going out. And the morning came. So they’re banging all the doors, “Come out! Ceasefire!” We had big fear, a lot of things had happened, houses destroyed, you could see a lot of dead people around, very traumatic.

I: That must have been, for you as a child, that must have been terrifying.

P: Very terrifying.

I: How old were you?

P: Nine years old.

I: So, you were in a house with your father, his wife…

P: I was in the house with my father, my sister Patricia, my father’s children, and my father’s wife. So we all came out, and we were heading to, the bridge head side, Umuezi side, like heading to the bridge. And we had to stop at Umuezi at one of the houses where we stayed the night, and it was quite a lot of shots and in the morning when we came out, it was different than what happened in Asaba. There was a lot of federal troops, and we came back to our house in Umuagu, do you have your bearings about places?

I: We know they’re different

P: So we moved back to where our house is, and we stayed in our house, and then that was how we came out to sing One Nigeria, it was the place where my father had the youngest sibling on his shoulders, we danced One Nigeria, it was very frightening, people were separated and moved around and took to different places, and we went back home. They said come back again to dance One Nigeria. We didn’t go back. I think at that time, I didn’t know where my dad went to. So we stayed at home, and there was uproar in the country, dead bodies, they said, “Oh the people went the second time to dance One Nigeria, but they killed them on the open field” and there were patches of places where they were killing people, graves, dead bodies everywhere, really, and the soldiers were looting, what they could loot, and they were not friendly at all, yeah. It wasn’t a nice experience.

I: How did the soldiers look to you? I mean, what was your impression of them?

P: Very scary and deadly, yeah. And after that event in 1967, things settled down. My father started putting us together again. My father survived 1967 massacre.

I: Was he there?

P: He went to the Bush, yeah. He fled to the Bush and other places and eventually came back to us. He survived that bit, and we were living. Things were hard, no money, his account was in the North and we can’t get ahold of the money but we survived. At this time I didn’t know whether my mom made it back home to Onitshakwari where my mom was or resisted in the north or was she alive or not. So we were living now. My sister was now in AGGS [Asaba Girls Grammar School] in Asaba. I was in primary school, St. Joseph’s in Asaba and that was how we were living, things were hard, people were helping out each other a lot.

I: And when all those things were happening, were you with your sister?

P: I was with my sister in my father’s house, my stepmother and the children.

I: During the march, who did you hold on to, do you remember? Was it your sister?

P: During the dancing of One Nigeria, yeah. I held onto my sister, my other sibling, yeah. We were together as family, yeah.

I: Your sister was how old? How old was your sister at that time?

P: My sister was two years older than me.

I: So she was only 11.

P: 11, yeah. She only just left primary school to secondary.

I: So, can you talk about what happened next, when you were…

P: Yeah. The worst thing that happened to us came in 1968 after thinking now my father has survived the whole event, even though there was hardship at least we had our lives and a lot of people were killed. Very sad. Come 1968 now, my sister went to school, she was in first year secondary school in AGGS Asaba and I was in primary school. April 17, 1968, the second shooting started. When the second shooting started, similar to the same thing that happened in October 1967, we thought everything is now a little bit in control, the federal troops have moved on to Biafra, across the bridge and the war continued, and a lot of hardship, people were helping each other out. Now we decided to stay in our house. There was now another shooting. It started again similar to the same event again. They started shooting. Everybody was now in .. my father got angry, I saw him moving around and he went to the village, he came back he told my stepmother that they said we can’t go to the bush now because everybody knows the bush but we don’t know what’s going on. The Biafran troops moving the federal troops back. This dialogue was going on because nobody knew what was happening but this was now another front line war again. By evening time a lot of other people came into our house, the other families. So they all stood in our house exchanging ideas on what to do, or what is going on. We couldn’t put the radio on because sometimes you can’t get reception because it suddenly gives some news, propaganda. When we were in the house on April 17th, coming up to the morning hours, I heard a lady shouting, screaming, she was saying in Asaba language that the children that are eating, the federal troops have now fired two of them, they were just eating and innocent children were now fired, two of them and she was just screaming and loud crying it was very close to our house and I thought “oh my god, they’re so close to our house and they are killing children now”. We couldn’t go out, we didn’t know what was going on. We were inside the room, you know we have rooms and then we have a sitting area that we call parlor. So we are sitting and my dad said okay I will go down to the door, because you could hear the firing, you could hear that there was a group of men walking around the place and coming close to our house. So my father said bravely, maybe he could talk to them. So he walked towards the door in the room. Dead silent. The next thing we heard was they were firing into our house when he opened the door. My dad was just silently assassinated. (She pauses).

I: I’m so sorry.

P: We didn’t hear him, we heard the shot into the parlor. We did not hear him. We heard just the shots ringing into the parlor. The elder, the bigger people came out. When they came out, I came out because I was the eldest child there and my sister was in the boarding house. When I came out, what I saw as I looked to the door, my dad was alive but his skull was in pieces. There were pieces of his skull all over the place. As a child what I thought was oh, he shouldn’t die. His still alive but what do we do with these pieces? They can’t stitch skull together, this is what is going through my mind, how do we get him to the hospital now?

(She is crying, apologizes)

P: Because I thought, if people had injury on their skin they could stitch it back together but oh my dad was moaning and he was dying, there was a lot of blood on the floor. When I picked up one of the pieces, big piece of skull you could see there, and I thought “oh god how do we attach this”, they pushed me into the house. My only hope, gone. (Crying). And he died … I witnessed it. He moaned until he died. No hospital. What could we do, we couldn’t take him … The only dad that thought he could help his family.

My mum wasn’t there. My sister wasn’t there. I was just the only one. He loved us, that’s why he took us from our mum. Our mum wasn’t there, a lot of things are going wrong. What could we do now? How could we save him? We couldn’t save him, he was alive, but you could see he was just going into moaning and blood everywhere. The piece of skull, you can’t stitch it, what do we do. This was going on in my head as a child.

I: So what happened to you afterward? Where did you go, or what happened next?

P: It was hard. Maybe if he had remained inside the room, possibly they would have passed by, but they came up to the front door, isn’t it?

I: You never know what might have happened.

P: Or maybe they would have assassinated a lot of us sitting there, all of us.

I: Maybe. So they went away after that?

P: Because there were a lot of people there. They went away.

I: And what did the people with you then do?

P: I was pushed into the room, the other room, because when I picked the piece of skull, look, there were little little little, lot of fragments, there was a large piece here. In my child’s mind I thought we could stick it together, then he would survive, you know?

I: Well you were in shock at that time, you don’t know

P: Because I thought in my mind, oh he’s still alive, but that he was dying, isn’t it. But I thought, if you just stick it on, just like you stitch it together.

I: Well you were a child, that’s the way you see things.

P: Very sad. Poor man. He loved us, that is why he took us from our Mom. So that he could show us a family and we would live together. But that was short lived.

I: What was your father’s name?

P: Martin Igbeka. Martin Igbeka. Not good at all. But what can you do. He can’t come back. He can’t come back. wanted to give us good life, but we never had that anymore.

I: How was your life after that? Did you continue to live with other relatives or your stepmother?

P: My stepmother wasn’t working. Yeah, my mom elsewhere doesn’t work, yeah. Because my grandmother was a trader where we lived. Yeah, my dad worked with GB Ollivant, in Kaduna,produced a lot of things, I can’t remember what it is now, but when he came back, all his money locked up, we left in a hurry. But we were hoping that when things settled down…but it never came to be.

I: So when things settled down, you stayed with your grandmother?

P: No, because that shooting, that shooting continued and my dad dead now, so much shooting everywhere and we were now crying, people couldn’t come to us. One woman came to us, we called her Angelina, she braved through the bullet and came to us, she was the one that washed my dad and clothed him. Then behind our house, they dig the grave and then they buried him because we were meant to go to SPC and we can’t leave him there, so they did a quick burial. And soon after we finished that after that, not long at all, we were rushed out of the house and we went to St. Patrick’s College.

I: That’s where they took everybody; they took you to it, too?

P: Yeah, they took us to stay there. That was the first time we went to St. Patrick’s because we didn’t go in 1967, we were in our house, and we rushed to Umuezi and came back to our house and I’m glad that we also were there. A lot of people had gone to Biafra and different places, a lot of them were dead but, we survived that, but this other one, no he died. He was killed.

I: So many people, we heard many people had to move to St. Patrick’s. And how long did you stay there?

P: For a long time. My sister wasn’t there, my sister came from school and joined us there. We were there for a long time, they would bring in some relief food, a few open containers of food, and as a child I was just wondering what is it gonna be now, because my mom is not there now. And I don’t speak Asaba language properly, I speak only Okwali language. Our Mom used to come and see us from Kadauna to Kano, but now we don’t know where she is now. Not nice at all.

I: So you were at SPC with your sister?

P: With my stepmom and the children, and then my sister joined us from AGG S because they had to bring them over.

I: What were the living arrangements like there?

P: There were no living arrangements, just open grounds.

I: So you just slept on the ground?

P: Yeah, yeah

I: And there were some blankets, did you have any things with you or…

P: Just, no we don’t have anything. We just sleep there on the open ground. Some people were in the classroom, but we were in the open ground. We don’t have winter, so we just slept there, yeah.

I: And some of the relief workers came to bring food?

P: Getting food was hard too, because the relief…you have to queue to get your own portions. If you get your own relief you give out to the other people, so that when you get your own portion you can all share…(chatter between researchers) and at the front of St. Patricks’ you would see a few times they would put a shelling machine there. Do you know shelling machine, have you seen one before?

I: No

P: That sends long reach…

I: Oh the mortar fire

P: The mortar fire, yeah. We used to go down…

I: So this is a picture, does that look like…

P: To look at them, they’d put the big mortar there

I: That must have been frightening

P: And they’re loading some of these long, long tubes, inside and they stood behind it and it sends off, you see it coming out like a big fire. Very long, all the way to Biafra.

I: Yeah, we’ve seen some pictures of the soldiers doing that. Not by St. Patrick’s…

P: They were doing it here at St. Patrick’s

I: This was a picture that we got from the Quaker relief people that was of St. Patrick’s, and I wondered if you remembered, if it reminded you of the time that you were there

P: Yeah that’s how it was, we were outside the open ground like that

I: Just like that?

P: Just like that. Where could we get blanket, nothing? Just sent out of the house in a big file, we walked from our house to St. Patrick, see. You see, they probably were waiting for relief or watching the soldiers, yeah possibly watching the soldiers trying to send missiles. You know, this is exactly what it was like. Yeah, you see the children waiting around, yeah, they’re trying to get relief, …. When you get a portion, you share, and then you borrow from them, and when you get yours, they replace. It’s a long, long queue. Also there were Catholic mission people. As a child, I didn’t know who they were.

I: I think we found those pictures in an archive of the Quakers, American Friends Relief Agency.

P: Now, when we came back from SPC, how long, what time we stayed there … they said go back to your…we went back.

I: You were there a few weeks maybe, or months?

P: Yeah, we stayed there until we were asked to go back home. They said they wanted to comb, is that it, comb? Asaba. So the civilian children…

I: Oh, comb it?

P: Combing, yeah

I: Combing, to make sure there weren’t any soldiers?

P: Yeah, soldiers.

I: Like running a comb through hair.

P: The speculation then was that the Nigeria troops were sitting somewhere and there was some group of Biafran soldiers that came and killed them so they decided to start the second operation. I don’t know, that was a child’s speculation, I don’t know

I: I think the Biafran’s had been coming through, had killed a lot of…

P: The Nigerian soldiers are relaxing, they kill some of them so they said, oh, there must be some of them still around and they started the second one again.

I: So when, finally you were allowed to leave St. Patrick’s, you were allowed to go home after that?

P: Well now to leave St. Patrick’s and when we came home, no because we didn’t have time to clean the house properly.

I: And did you get back to the house eventually?

P: Yeah we got back to the house we had to stay there and clean it, and stayed there.

I: Were you then able to, could you stay there until the end of the war?

P: No, I didn’t stay there until the end of the war. My father’s wife has no income, no money she doesn’t work. We had to be taken to different families who offered to help us. And then again, my sister and I were splitted, further splitted again because she went to Mrs*.* Nnduka’sfamily, Mrs. Nduka said she would look after her, one of us because my dad was very close to her, so she picked my sister, and I went to Okocaha family, where I lived.

I: Okocha family?

P: Okocha yeah. They call him *[unclear],* it is his play name. We are related, I’ll tell you how we are related in the sense that Mr .Okocha’s mum, and my father’s mom are from the Obimba family.

I: So you lived with them for a while?

P: Yeah, I’m using this name, I’m not sure whether you know them, I’m trying not to use their names whether you know them, but the Obimba family is like two sisters married to Umuagu so my grandmom is from the Obimba family. Mr. Okocha’s dad … mom is from the Obimba family.

I: We met some people from the Okocha family, we’ve met some from the Okocha family. We met the very elderly man Sylvester Okocha, is that from the same family?

P: No it’s not the same family. Did you meet Sylvester Okocha?

I: Yes

P: Sylvester Okocha, is he the bank manager?

I: No he was a civil servant, he’s very old. He was 96 when we met him.

P: No not the same Okocha, there are very many Okochas. The Okocha is from Umuagu as well, but Ne is a mom to this Okocha. she is my auntie. My auntie. She is my auntie because my father’s mum and Mr. Okocha’s mum are from the Obimba family and so they are first cousins. Mr. Okocha and my dad were first cousins. But they are from Umuagu because both of the ladies were from Umuagu but from different portion of, part of Umuagu.

I: So when did you…

P: So I lived there, I ate whatever they had.

I: When were you able to go back to school, was there a school available?

P: Well I was in primary school, St. Patrick’s was there and we used to go, the missionaries had St. Patrick’s school so we went to school. My sister couldn’t go back because after the second operation, after my dad her was killed, AGGS had to go to Emudu do you know Emodu?

I: No

P: AGGS was relocated to Emudu because I think it was not suitable

P: She couldn’t go back. No school fees.

I: Oh, so what did she do, did she just not have any more school after that?

P: She didn’t have any more school. They had a group of people who teach people how to type, typing shorthand, it’s not a school so, that’s what my auntie, Nduka could afford to put her, so she left secondary school and occasionally she goes to do typing.

I: In Asaba?

P: In Asaba, yeah, there were no schools but they would find little tents where people would learn how to type.

I: So people were really working hard to get back to normal, but not really possible.

P: So that was where she learned how to type, and over the years she improves into shorthand, because when you’re typing you get some level of job, if you can do shorthand you get more, many many years went by and she found a job with that.

I: Is she here?

P: She lives in Lagos?

I: (discussion back and forth)

P: From primary school, after it was time to go to secondary school, I enrolled and I started. When you come to school in the morning they tell you about school fees, and remind us to get school fees, it is important to get the school fees to go on. I kept on going and I knew I had no way to get money. So I told my uncle, obviously he can’t, he’s a farmer, the way we get our livelihood is to go to the farm. In the morning, when we wake up very early, about 5 am,or earlier than that, we set off to the bush path and we would go to the farm to get whatever crop we can, so that we can feed. There are some crops the owners have left, so we scouting through the bush and see the cassavas, we just get them and come back home, that was how we eat. So I knew he wouldn’t be able to pay. We do that before we go to secondary school in the morning, we go at 5am come back, have a little food, and then I go to school. But they were asking for school fees and I eventually didn’t go to school again.

I: So you just had to stop going because you had no money.

P: Yeah. When I stopped going to school in the morning the kids that could pay school fees would now continue to go to St. Bridget’s College in Asaba. So I used to stay by to see them pass and say, I cannot come anymore.

I: That must have been very sad for you.

P: So a few times I come out and say hello, they pass by our house to the school, so whenever I see them I say hi, how is school, they said you’re not coming anymore? I say no. But lucky for me, after about a month or two months, they’d say, oh you’re not coming to school? I’d say no, you know I’m not coming anymore, they say that the principal, announced to them today, that if you know any of those that they killed their father, there is a fund to help them through secondary school and they can start school for now, but eventually if there fees are not paid, we will stop again. I think the missionaries gave a scholarship or something, and I was lucky.

I: So you did go back then?

P: I did go back.

I: One of the things we heard is that the women were very fearful of the soldiers attacking them, raping them, did you ever hear anything about that?

P: It was very common, yeah. So when you’re going out you have to disguise yourself and make yourself look, somehow and try not to walk through the soldiers’ part, because they were living in some peoples’ houses and they will try to pull you around, especially the big girls and say come here, yeah.

I: It must have been very scary for all the girls

P: For all the girls, yeah all families were afraid of this happening to their children

I: Is there anything that we haven’t asked, or anything you think we should know that we haven’t touched on yet?

P: Just how this whole thing changed my life. What we thought would be a good life with going back to my dad was just short lived, and it gave us a lot of psychological trouble, which I never recovered until date, because I don’t know, maybe it’s just me, to just get it out of the way, I keep thinking of all the things that have ever happened to me that are not very nice, yeah.

I: So your life would have been very, very different if this had never happened.

P: Yeah, I thought so.

I: Do you think it’s important now for people to hear these stories and hear what happened?

P: Most have heard about it, but it would be nice to hear, yeah. Because I don’t know how…my dad was not a soldier, a lot of the people were not soldiers. I don’t know how they killed children and civilians and make us feel very,very bad, where we are, just very bad.

I: (go back and forth a bit) As we’re coming here to the end this story, what you’re doing now is you’re helping life into the world as a midwife.

P: Yeah, I was so fortunate as well to be trained, after my secondary school, after the secondary school scholarship, I was working at the Federal Ministry of Establishment. Do you know the independence building?

I: In Lagos?

P: In Lagos, yeah. I used to work on the 12th floor, and beside it we have the general hospital. I don’t know, I haven’t been to that area in a long time now, but general hospital, Lagos State hospital. I couldn’t afford applying to go to university, so I didn’t try at all, because I applied to secondary school and I was only lucky to have completed it. My sister never did, my other siblings were not as fortunate as me. So I was working in the independence building, I lived in a hostel. I wanted to go to school but I couldn’t, so I used to admire this nurses, you know that the Nigerian nurses wear?

I: With the white cap?

P: Yeah and the white dress. So I used to admire them and I bonded with one of them and I would say hello, how are you and they would say oh yeah here it is again, you’re the girl that works here, I’d say yeah. One of the girls said to me, why are you working here, why don’t you want to go to school? I’d say I have no money, I can’t apply to any school anymore, I’m just so grateful that I’m working now. Then they said to me, oh but to train as a nurse, you don’t need to pay school fees. I said oh but what about my maintenance, I can’t afford it. It was the first enlightenment I got about how to get trained as a nurse then. They say, if you go to nursing school, they’ll pay you the same amount you get now, you live in a hostel and you will train to be a nurse. And in three years you become a nurse. I said you sure? They said yes. And I tried this through their help, they told me how to get my application through, applied, I went for the interview, and I was taken. And that was how I became a nurse today.

I: And how did you end up in London then?

P: In London, I trained and I was working at, uh, where is it, University of Benin Hospital. A few guests come on holiday to Britain, and they come back and I say you’ve been to Britain? They say yeah, you can go to. And I said how? And they say…you just need a passport and when you get to the border you’ll be stamped in. That’s it, are you sure about it? They said yes. I said how much money is it, they said oh the same amount of money. If you save up the money you can go. And then we started talking about, you can work in Britain, I said no, they said you can work in America, but if you do the American one you have to do some exam, but in the British one you have to do some orientation. I’ve just been fortunate.

I: You’ve worked very hard to get where you are. Do you go back home often?

P: I guess I’m not interested, because of the trauma I had during the war, when I left Asaba, secondary school I never went there again.

I: You never went back

P: I never went back, not until 2011 was the first time I went back.

I: Well I can understand why, those are very traumatic memories.

P: Yeah 2011 was the first time I went back.

(move around, change the camera to behind her…looking at photo)

Yeah, you see, when we opened our door after the big shooting, we see all these fierce looking men like this, going around…how did you get these pictures though?

I: …Could you describe that picture again but without turning around, what you remember what they make you remember?

P: Fierce looking men, as soon as you open your door after that shooting, very very fierce looking men and the Asaba I knew one day ago when the doors were closed, as soon as you open the door, it was totally destroyed, all we see is, what? Just couldn’t believe it.

I: So this was a familiar scene to you

P: Very familiar, I still remember this

I: What about the SPC?

P: Yeah, I still remember this is the SPC picture. I think they are probably waiting, or playing or waiting for food, we just hang around like that. And you relive. So it was a catholic mission that was bringing relief to us. Because it is difficult to process pictures, so how did you get these pictures?

(discussing pictures back and forth)

(video cuts back to interview-style footage)

P. Everywhere totally destroyed. You never know that you will recover at all from these things. I never knew at all … it was a very bad time …

P: I was a very good child, I’d tidy the house, go and fetch water, you know I’d fetch water from the public taps, we had public taps, we’d go and fill the big drum up, we never lived in a modern house with a kitche … In my quiet time I’d sit and cry. I’d cry because I thought, my dad is not here, his head splitted, I could not see my mom anymore. When will I ever see her? Is she alive or dead? I didn’t know then. So one of the days I was playing outside, when I raise my head up I said, that’s my mom! She came to look for us.

I: She found you in Asaba?

P: Yeah she came to Asaba to look for us. Oh I ran to my mom I said yeah, this is my mom, I ran to my uncle’s house I said, this is my mom this is my mom! He doesn’t know my mom at all, you know. So she said, oh this is your mom, I said remembered my mum very well, and wanted to catch up with events and said, she’s going to go back with me to Onitshakwali. They said no, said no I wanted to go, and they said no you can’t go. She asked why, that she’s the mother of the children, she’s gonna take us back to Onitshakwali. Because my father is dead now, why live with other families when she is alive. But they refused they said because Martin Igweka brought these children to them, they cannot give us away, that is what the tradition said, that we cannot go back to her. But we are free to go on holidays if we want to go. So on holidays when I went back to secondary school, I went to my mum’s village, Onitshakwali, it is a very, very small village. It’s not far, if you set off your journey now, if you left Asaba early in the morning, even though it’s not very far, you will arrive at midnight the same day. Because you have to go on farm days, when there are vehicles passing by taking to the market place. On any day that is not market day, day there are no vehicles no transport going to that area, only bicycles.

So I went on holiday when I arrived there, it was a very remote place, more than Asaba, no tar-roads. Asaba had how many tar-roads? Nnebisi Road, and you could also walk your way through. All they had there was bicycle. And now I was also on a scholarship I was going to secondary school. So when I went there to see my mom, my mother said to me you’re not going anywhere, you’re not going back. But the problem is that how we go back, they said now we have no money to give you to go back, because they did not want me to go back. I cried, because I have only just been lucky to get a place in the school, where I went to the boarding school and I was in secondary school. If I leave secondary school, and stay in this village, what hope do I have? Do you see why I left my mum again and why it was very painful? Otherwise my grandmother was very very willing to keep me in that village. But I think from a young age I thought, I must fight this and get something good for myself, otherwise it’s quite very easier, very tempting to just stay in the village without going back to the boarding school in Asaba. I said to my grandmother I have scholarship, they’re paying for me there, my grandmother said yeah we don’t have money but you have to stay with your mum and your family. It was very sad, I had to go.

I: It’s a rough choice

P: If I stayed in that village I would, I don’t know, possibly…it’s a very very remote village

(end of interview)