

Nekendelim Maduemezia

Asaba Memorial Project

Interviewer: Elizabeth Bird (EB)

Interview date: June 23, 2010, Asaba, Nigeria

NM: My name is Nekendelim Maduemezia. Born on 27th of July 1955.

EB: Thank You. Now, as we explained we are interested in the personal experiences and remembrances of people who lived through the events of 1967 so, we might...

NM: During the war though, I was little, but with my, my—young age, I can recollect some loved ones who were killed during the war. I was with my mother in the kitchen, when we heard the shots of guns. The first time they came...they, they used bomb. If you go to the house against us, it was destroyed. Then, after some months, or thereabout, we heard guns. When we heard my mother had to carry me on her back to run to get to Onitsha. As it is, from Onitsha, we heard that the bridge was broken. So they took us to Ogidi. From Ogidi, you know, everywhere was —with my years I was the last one of the family. Even my mother died during the war. And, uh, my uncle was killed. In this Asaba there were families that the whole family was destroyed. So since then—when I came back...Do I continue? Do I go through my experience in the east?

EB: Yes

NM: Okay, while we were there, children were having kwashiorkor, no food, no clothes, no clothing—nothing. We were left with nothing. When our mother killed she went to the market. My senior brother and sister were not too big to be able to take care of us. We were living from hand to hand. So fortunately, we came back. When we came back to Onitsha, where the market is now was mass grave. The killing was so much, and here in Asaba, there was no house, nobody was not killed. Like my uncle, he was killed, with the sister, with the brother, um, what do they call him? Um, Okoba was killed, in my village, almost every family got the brunt. Since then, we've not come back from that incident to date, after almost fifty years of, uh, from the war we've not recovered. We are still crying for help. I was not able to finish my education because there was no one to train me. My sister, we were not able to finish our education because there was no one to train us. You can look at—this is my father's house. You can look at—look at the surroundings. There is nothing to talk about. People will come and say they will help—people, there was nothing. With all the military regime there was nothing done. So...

EB: So, the effect on your family, the immediate family, then, was quite profound.

NM: Very, very. When my mother, I was little when my mother was killed.

EB: So your father, your father was killed in the mass killing?

NM: The mass killing, ah, mass killing—in Nigeria, there was mass killing. But I can still, but we can still recollect. There was mass killing.

EB: Do you remember what happened on—you, were you here in Asaba on the seventh of October when the people went to the square were killed, the men and boys?

NM: No. When they were dancing?

EB: Yes

NM: No I wasn't.

EB: So do you remember when you left Asaba and you ran to go to Onitsha, do you know when that was exactly?

NM: I don't remember, I will not tell you, I can't remember that.

EB: Was it before the Federal troops entered Asaba?

NM: We heard the sound of guns. They thought that they were coming. But I remember after the day we left Asaba they broke the Niger bridge and they crossed over to Onitsha.

EB: Did people know something bad was going to happen? If you said you heard the sounds of the guns, you knew the soldiers were coming, were people afraid of what would happen when the federal troops came?

NM: People were afraid that was why all of us ran.

EB: Mhmm

NM: If we were not afraid we would wait for them but we were afraid.

EB: Mhmm

NM: No help, nobody. We go this way nobody. We go this way no help. This way no help. So we had to run for our dear lives.

EB: So you, how long were you, you went to Onitsha first..

NM: From Onitsha to Ogidi to Umunya, from Umunya to Umuahia, so many—to here. So many towns. That I cannot remember.

EB: Kind of from place to place...

NM: ... And so we move so many, because maybe we will come here today, tomorrow there would be more shots, we would run to the next place. There was no food, no water, we had to start drinking this type of water (*points to something in the distance*). So...

EB: And this was you and your mother and also your brothers...

NM: And my brothers. My mother was killed then, though.

EB: Your mother, when did your mother die?

NM: That was, uh, um, 1968 or 69.

EB: So by then it was just you and your...

NM: No its not, well [my mother] she went to the market, at Umuahia, it was hit by two bombs. Air raid.

EB: Air raid, yes. So when did you come back?

NM: We came back, uh 69.

EB: What did you find when you came back?

NM: Oh, it was horrible. Even this compound (*pointing*) every compound. It was even like here, they just started renovating this one. Everywhere was graveyard. Everybody was—there was no family that did not experience killing. There was nothing to write home about. It was like a desert. So, you know? You imagine you are left to war. This was a war zone.

EB: It is hard to imagine.

NM: You can't imagine it. You can't know what we experienced.

EB: Could you pan the camera around to show? Perhaps as he's filming that can you just tell that these buildings were damaged in war?

NM: Okay, if we had money we would have developed them. After the war when they killed our parents, they killed our uncles, nobody to help. We were struggling now. We were just babies. Our senior brothers, they were just trying to train us—my seniorest brothers trying to train us. To become somebody. It is now we are trying to (*shrugs*), after that long. No help has come to Asaba. Nothing. We ask the state capital for—nothing. No improvement no development—nothing. And we are marginalized. So.

EB: How—could you imagine how your life would have been different?

NM: Ah!

EB: If the war...

NM: If my parents were alive? Ha-hey! Look at this family. We-our family, we are not, my father was not a poor person, neither was my mother. If my mother was still alive I wouldn't be here. I wouldn't have been in my father's house. I must have been a different place. But, uh, no motherly advice. Nobody help us. In fact, everything was, I don't know. (*begins to cry*) Um, with my mother. With my mother I would have been better. I would have been better.

EB: We talked about all the things that Asaba needs, and we can't offer very much. All we can offer is a chance to tell the story.

NM: About the war...

EB: Do you think this is a good thing to do? I mean, do you think...what should we do to try to get the truth to the world? What would be your advice?

NM: To tell the world so that they will help us. That somebody should tell them that we are still as we were before and after. There is no change. Nothing. And we have been living in these type of developments. In your place in America—do you have these type of shanty places? You don't have. This one they just renovated (*points*) this very one—they just built it because everything was leveled. Even this compound had—you can imagine. Look at all these ones (*points*). You understand? We are not happy. Who is happy in a shanty place? If I had money if I had my mother if I had the opportunity it wouldn't be the same. So (*shakes her head*).

EB: One of the things we heard from many people was that young women and girls suffered particularly badly during the war. There had been attacks by soldiers and rapes.

NM: Oh, yeah. There were rapes. I know I came by enough girls that were forcibly married by soldiers. I have an auntie who was forcibly married by a soldier. After he left the woman with the children. We can't even be able to trace the family of the man. They raped them, no regard. Children were raped. And also, even old women were raped, too. Eh, they treated us like, I don't know. They treated us like animals. You know when you come to a place where you don't have regard, you know how you treat them, that is just how they were, we were being treated. Even when we came back, it was terrible, because they were treating us, I don't understand, everything is still—today too, we have not seen any improvement. But, no jobs, nothing. Eh?

EB: Why do you think the soldiers treated people like this? Why did they come to Asaba with such violence?

NM: I don't know. Just, maybe hatred. Out of hatred. Because the Asaba that I know cared. I was little but I was told. I know we are peace loving people. We don't like—oh, see, I don't know, they have that hatred that maybe—intimidation we call that one—to suppress us—you cannot suppress our town we are God-blessed. Even today, till now, I'm telling you, you can see for yourself, you, where they have houses, for the politicians, from another, not from Asaba, the only good houses are here. But we, the Asaba indigenes, we, we are not—look at us look at where we are. And look at where I am. They are not good for us. When you don't have a—we just pray to God one day God will send a miracle. We are living—one day God will send a miracle for us.

EB: Is there anything else that you can tell us, anything you'd like to tell us that we haven't asked or that...

NM: Like, help? We want you people to come to our rescue. We are dying silently. We cannot do much. You know, because, (*laughs*) I don't know. Any how you want to come and help my people it would be nice, because there is a situation when you cannot openly demand. And when you talk, you will not be listened to. Nobody listens to you. But it is, I ask for my own. You ask for your own. And if you don't have anybody up there, who will help you? Nobody. Eh.

EB: Fraser? (pause) We thank you. Thank you very much.

NM: My pleasure.
End of Interview.