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In 1967, during the first months of Nigeria's civil war, when the predominantly Igbo-speaking southeastern region attempted to secede and become the independent state of Biafra, between 700 and 800 people were killed in the town of Asaba. Ironically, Asaba was politically neutral. Before the massacre, most residents favoured Nigerian unity. However, the people of the town were Igbo-speaking and so, in the heat of warfare, many non-Igbo Nigerian federal forces took them to be Biafran allies and vented their anti-Igbo sentiments in a co-ordinated blood bath.

Elizabeth Bird and Fraser Ottanelli's carefully crafted and well-written *The Asaba Massacre* argues that not only did the slaughter have significant consequences for the progression of the larger conflict, but also that its memories are alive, fifty years later, as salient vehicles through which the survivors and their descendants interpret contemporary politics and perceive ongoing injustices in Nigeria.

Through a combination of oral history interviews and archival research, the authors meticulously trace and analyse the causes and consequences of a piece of history that was largely lost to all but its victims. Great Britain supported Nigeria, and the authors contend that the British government, interested in stability and the flow of crude oil, was complicit in enabling the massacre by turning a blind eye to evidence of Nigerian troops' earlier human rights abuses, thereby fuelling a sense of impunity on the Nigerian side. Bird and Ottanelli further suggest that the British exacerbated the massacre's consequences by keeping what they knew about the atrocity from gaining significant international media attention. The book raises a number of intriguing, plausible, but ultimately unverifiable 'what ifs' about the massacre and its aftermath. For example, the authors contend that the killings contributed to prolonging the war, primarily by providing fodder for the narrative of the Biafrans' leader Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu that they risked genocidal retribution if they capitulated to Nigeria. While the authors conclude that the Nigerian state and its leader, General Gowon, did not have a genocidal agenda, they suggest that the extension of the war by two years (and the resulting famine, which further encouraged claims and debates about genocide) was a direct consequence of the Asaba massacre and its cover-up.

In addition to its argument about the historical significance of the atrocity for the progression of the war itself, *The Asaba Massacre* makes a number of other important contributions that do not require imagining 'what if'. Among the most salient examples are the effects that the massacre had on the political structure and family support systems in the town and on gender roles. The targeting of men, and particularly senior men, left this patrilineal, patriarchal community without male leaders, simultaneously forcing women into family and community leadership roles and robbing a whole generation of the older male kin on whom they could have counted to support their life projects. Characteristic of its balanced, nuanced treatment of complex issues, the book deftly examines the multi-stranded and sometimes contradictory effects of the massacre's consequences for women, including the traumatic and unequivocally negative legacy of wartime rape.

Two other interconnected features of the volume are among its most valuable contributions: a focus on memory and a candid documentation and reflexive analysis of a research process that exemplifies community partnership at its finest. Far more than most anthropology or history texts, *The Asaba Massacre* lays bare not only the research process, but also the benefits and challenges of engaging a community so directly in a scholarly endeavour.

The intertwining of a theoretical interest in memory (individual, collective, and cultural) with the community-partnership dimension of the authors' research process poignantly reveals the political nature of memories and 'memory work'. This becomes starkly evident as Bird and Ottanelli navigate their interest in the role of new

social media in shaping contemporary understandings of the Asaba massacre as it intersects with their efforts to assist the community in using modern media to memorialize their trauma. Politically polarizing issues in contemporary Nigeria – for example, whether former head of state Murtala Muhammed, implicated by the authors in the massacre when he was an officer in the Nigerian army during the civil war but who was later assassinated, should be remembered as a hero or a villain; or whether Asaba people are Igbo or not – can be traced back to the massacre. In their treatment of history, but also in their attention to the politics of representation as scholars seeking to work collaboratively with the people they study, Bird and Ottanelli are laudably sensitive, candid, and insightful. I recommend this fine book not only to all students and scholars interested in Nigeria, but also to anyone considering – or just curious about – a collaborative approach to community-based research.