

THE ROLE OF OLOKORO WOMEN IN THE NIGERIAN CIVIL WAR, 1967-1970**Ezeogueri-Oyewole Anne Nnenna**

Department Of History and International Studies

Kogi State University, Anyigba

NIGERIA**ABSTRACT**

The Nigerian civil war (1967-1970) commonly referred to as the Nigeria – Biafra war was one of the most tragic events ever recorded in Nigerian history. It brought in its wake a wide range of untoward experiences and consequences to virtually all segments of the society in both sides of the divide. However, the monumental tragedies of the war were greatly felt in Igbo land, the central theatre of the war. Most often war is viewed as a man's theatre where he is both the actor and the recipient of the act, with the unconscious assumption that either women or children (the most vulnerable group) are usually untouched by the happenings of wars or that their stories do not constitute any direct addition to the events of wars. Yet Igbo women, like in many societies haunted by wars went through horrific experiences during and after the Nigeria - Biafra conflict. Many of them were wives, mothers, sisters, aunts, grandmothers, fiancé, or simply friends to the soldiers. They bore the scares of war long after the soldiers had departed the battle fields either in coffins or abandoned to be eaten by vultures or as battered souls who became the responsibility of these women. Yet their stories seem neglected as accounts are taken of the casualties of wars, except for a few documentations mostly carried out by female writers who must have noticed the existing lacuna. What these women faced and even their roles in the civil war have hardly been captured in existing literature on that national tragedy. The paper therefore, discusses the war and its advent to Olokoro area as well as Olokoro women's roles in it. These roles include Olokoro women's contribution to the upkeep of the Biafran soldiers, the maintenance of the war refugees in Olokoro, as red cross and caritas volunteers, at the home front, in war time trade, as farmers and also their experiences with the soldiers, both Nigerian and Biafran.

INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian civil war, popularly known all over the world as the "Biafran War", was fought from 2nd July 1967 to 15th January 1970. The war was between the then Eastern Region of Nigeria and the rest of the country. The unfortunate war largely resulted from bad leadership, which was compounded by a coup led by mostly Igbo military officers on January 15, 1966. The immediate cause of the civil war itself may be identified as the coup and the counter coup of 1966, which altered the political equation and destroyed the fragile trust existing among the major ethnic groups. There were retributive and sporadic massacres of the people of the Eastern region, especially the Igbo, and the pogrom on them was indiscriminate. As a means of holding the country together, the Federal Military Government created twelve states from the original four regions in May 1967 ¹. The former Eastern Region under Lt. Col. Ojukwu saw the creation of states by decree "without consultation" as well as the massacre of the Igbo as the last straw, and declared the Region an independent state of Biafra. The Federal Government in Lagos saw this as an act of secession and illegal. Several meetings were held to resolve the issue peacefully without success. To avoid disintegration of the country, the central government was left with only one choice of bringing back the Region to the main fold by force. The war was fought therefore to reunify the country. While the Federal side expected a quick victory, the Biafrans saw the war as that of survival and were ready to fight to the last man ². By August 1967, Biafra extended the war to the Mid -

Western Region with the aim to relief pressure on its northern front and to threaten the federal capital, Lagos. Both sides employed political, diplomatic and psychological strategies to prosecute the war. By the end of April 1969, after almost two years of bloody and destructive war, the envisioned quick victory had eluded the federal side but the rebel enclave had been drastically reduced in size though Biafra still held on. Peace conferences were held but none achieved a cease - fire and an end to the war. By the Christmas of 1969, it was obvious that the end of the civil war was near. The Head of State of Biafra, Lt. Col. Ojukwu, realizing the hopelessness of the situation fled the enclave with his immediate family members and officials on the 10th of January, 1970. The Commander of the Biafran Armed forces who took over the administration of the remaining enclave -Major Gen. Philip Effiong-surrendered to the Federal Government on 14th January 1970, bringing an end to the war and bloodshed³. The war which started gradually later engulfed other parts of the then Eastern region. Igboland was the central theatre of the war. Like other parts of Igboland, Olokoro community witnessed the heavy effects of the war. The Federal troops tried to bomb the community, like their other Ngwa, Oboro, Ibeku and Old Umuahia neighbours but were not immediately successful.

This baffled the Federal troops who entered Olokoro only at the collapse of Biafra. There was complete pandemonium everywhere due to the terrifying bursts of arms which filled the air and got people running helter-skelter for their lives. Some people even contemplated committing suicide. But two Olokoro sons, Elder Uwandu of Umudere and Mr. Paul C. Umeh of Umuajata, summoned up courage and met the invading soldiers. Within a few hours, Olokoro dramatically changed from a conflict ground to a conference ground. The sounds of various weapons gave way to the sounds of various Nigerian languages. Mr. P.C Umeh, with interpreters in various Nigerian languages negotiated peace with the troops. This risky but wise and courageous undertaking by these Olokoro sons contributed much to save many lives that would have been lost at the last minutes of the war. It was an act worthy of commendation and of historic note⁴. Following this timely intervention, the Federal troops entered Olokoro without resistance. They, therefore, neither lost a soldier nor sustained injuries nor had no cause to be unnecessarily destructive. Umeh's diplomatic speech and peace offer was instantly interpreted in many Nigerian languages. This gave the soldiers a sense of welcome as they voluntarily surrounded the interpreters that spoke in their respective languages⁵.

What, above all, won the soldiers' sympathy was their discovery in the crowd of two Hausa women married to Olokoro men. This convinced the predominantly northern soldiers beyond doubt that Olokoro was not a place to be molested. Some of the Hausa soldiers became emotional when the two women openly testified to receiving preferential treatment from Olokoro community throughout the harsh war situation. The troops found it incredible that Hausa women could be found safe in an Igbo community even in the heat of a war that had stirred up so much ethnic hatred. The Nigerian soldiers then advised that Olokoro people should surrender and shout "One Nigeria" on seeing them. This they did and Olokoro became a refugee camp for their surrounding neighbours. It is pertinent to add here that all this does not mean that Olokoro women did not feel the adverse impact of the war, like their counterparts in other eastern parts of the country⁶. Traditionally, women in the area that became Biafra engaged in a variety of occupations, including trading, pottery, fishing, and, of course, farming. These activities were seen as forms of assistance to their husbands. Often, women would rather describe themselves as 'housewives' and not as income-earners⁷ although most of them earned a lot of money from their various occupations. Thus, their being described as "housewives" does not imply that they were fully devoted to home care

alone. The events which precipitated the Nigeria-Biafra War have been exhaustively dealt with in existing literature.⁸ As indicated earlier, these events resulted in the declaration of secession by the Eastern Nigerian military governor, Col. Odemegwu Ojukwu, on the 30th of May, 1967. Biafra was a nation with great potentials but with little resources to support a war. Thus, everyone was called upon to participate actively in the war effort. Though the average Biafran woman was unprepared for war, like the men, she responded with commitment and enthusiasm. These responses were in services which ranged from the respectable to the 'ignoble'. Indeed, they were not only called on to participate but they were actually direly needed⁹. There was a whole variety of experiences of the war which were peculiar to women. Many of these resulted from traditional female roles as 'housewives' and mothers, while some resulted from the fact that many women became *de facto* household heads and income-earners ('breadwinners,' as the common parlance is) as a result of the war. Women also contributed considerably to the effort to win the war, while their sex exposed them to peculiar risks and temptations during and immediately after the war¹⁰.

The War brought with it so many problems that demanded urgent attention. Hunger increased because "men could not move about freely" seeing that those (men) who came outdoors were conscripted into the army. There was also acute shortage of food in Biafra due to the economic blockade by Nigeria.¹¹ This resulted in rampant malnutrition among Biafrans, especially children and pregnant women. Amidst all these problems, Olokoro women's reaction was similar to the account given by Emerah Obiageri about Ukpoko women who did not fold their hands and went to sleep but rather took up the challenges of the hard times. Though they were not involved in physical or armed combat in the effort to help Biafra win the war, they contributed to civil war efforts in a variety of ways.¹²

The Home Front

Prior to the Nigerian civil war, it was unusual in Olokoro for a married woman to take major decisions in the family. The husband remained the head of the family while the wife acted as a help mate whose opinion was not sought before certain decisions were taken by the husband. She remained obedient to the husband always. The husband was the breadwinner of the family. It was his duty to provide food, shelter, clothing, protection and other things the wife and children needed. He decided on any case that arose in his family and his judgement was final. He decided on whom the children married, especially the daughters even against their wish. He played a leading role and set good examples for his children especially the sons to emulate. The more efficient a man was able to play these roles, the greater was his respect in his family and in his community. Thus, the people saw the fulfillment of these roles as what made men 'real' men.

With the outbreak of the war came a change of traditional roles. As their husbands were conscripted into or voluntarily joined the Biafran army, the women were left to take major decisions and assume "male responsibilities" in their families. Some eventually became both mothers and heads of their families and took decisions in their homes. Major decisions like giving out their daughters in marriages were taken by them and any available male members of the family. Marriage could and did take place with or without the consent of the bride's father.¹³ For example if the father of the bride was at the war front or dead, any of the male relatives together with her mother could and did give her out in marriage. As wives, women faced tremendous challenges and problems as a result of the war. For some women, the problems of the war began with the massacre of Easterners in other parts of Nigeria between 1966 and 1967. Many families lost their heads, who were the 'breadwinners'. Women in such

families were forced to play the husband's role without adequate preparation and little means to do so. Many of the affected women had only managed to flee before the killings with as little of their family property and money as could be gathered in such a dire situation¹⁴. Other problems included how to escape from the massacres, getting remaining members of family back home in Igboland and seeking for protection. Some of these women were able to solve these problems by engaging in trade, especially the *ahia attack* which was the most profitable economic engagement at the time. Others sold their wares or engaged in trade by barter. Yet others were involved in prostitution, begging, farming and 'bush combing'. 'Bush combing' was a process where the women looked for any edible food, vegetable, bush meat or whatever they could find in the bush. Wives, as well as mothers of able-bodied men who were dodging conscription lived through moments of high tension during the war. Whenever they left home and never came back when expected (and without any confirmation of their whereabouts) the conclusion was either that such a person had been conscripted, or captured by the enemy or killed in an air raid by the Nigerian pilots. In such a situation, the burden of taking care of the family fell on the women¹⁵.

The outbreak of the war for many women marked the beginning of almost endless problems. These included, among other things, how and where to continue the upkeep of the family from, how to ensure the survival of the rest of the family members. For some, trouble began when their husbands voluntarily joined in the defence of the fatherland or were forced to do so through conscription. The problems and anxieties of the soldiers' wives have been summed up thus: There wasn't much they did other than gather their children around and stay on in very deep anxiety. This was because they knew that not all of the men that went to the war would come back alive. There was no orderly manner of notifying families of a dead soldier. They rather depended on the stories of others coming back from the war front on routine visit or discharged for reasons of ill-health. Such unverified news led to some people being declared dead (and their funerals being held) who later came back alive and some being reported as being alive who had long been dead¹⁶.

Enlistment into the Biafran army was voluntary in the early days of the war. Men not enlisted therefore continued to move around freely and to fulfill their obligations to their families within the limits of the circumstances of the time. But for those women that lost their husbands during the massacres of the Igbo in the North and the wives of enlisted men, it was a different story. For such women, support structures such as the extended family system and arrangements like drawing of their husbands or brothers' allotments helped to hold fort for their serving husbands and brothers. However, as the war progressed, many women began to assume increasingly the role of 'breadwinners'¹⁷. Some engaged in trading while others combed bushes for wild edible leaves, mushrooms, tortoises, snails and rodents which became important food items. Olokoro people built huts in Okata (bush) where they resorted to for safety during the war. New food items like *koroto koroto* (a specie of yam), wallgaco and lizards were introduced into Olokoro's food menu by the refugees during the war. These food items were eaten and used as coping strategies by Olokoro people during the war.

Olokoro Women and War-Time Trade

Olokoro women did not fold their hands and watch their children and other relative's die of hunger while their husbands were away either in battle fields, in hiding or dead. To ensure that their dependants did not die of hunger, they engaged in trading. Two types of trade can be distinguished: the internal trade within Biafra and trade in Nigerian-held Biafran territory

or with Nigeria proper, referred to as *ahia attack* (attack trade),¹⁸ conducted across the frontlines. The internal trade was carried on within Olokoro markets or its environs like Ahia-ukwu, Afor- Ibeji, Ahia-ama, Ndioru, Ariam Usaka, Umuodochie, Oriemgbala, Ntigha, Amaoji, Nnenu, Nkwo Egbe, Isiogu and Ahia Mkpuke. The main articles traded were food items produced in either Olokoro or its environs for which there was dire need in other parts. These included such staples as garri, yam, fermented cassava as well as palm oil. As Biafra continually contracted territorially, due mainly to military reverses, food supplies became increasingly short. The problem was compounded by acute shortage of transport vehicles, most of which had been mobilized for military or other essential services. As a result, traders had to depend on head portorage to move their goods from one place to the other. So daring and strong were some of the women that they literally circumnavigated the country Biafra, avoiding military zones, in order to obtain supplies. It was a common sight to see the women traders carrying their young babies on their backs. In their bid to survive the hard times, the women exposed themselves to several dangers such as being killed by bombs¹⁹.

“*Ahia attack*” denoted trade in areas of active military engagement. It was a trade where traders and goods crossed frontlines. Because of these circumstances under which attack traders operated, bulky foodstuffs like rice and beans could not have featured significantly in the trade. *Ahia attack* was not an all-female affair; some men were involved in it too, although women formed the large majority of the traders²⁰.

So important was “*ahia attack*” to Biafra's survival that high government officials either directly encouraged or, at least, tolerated it. P.C. Amadi, Commander of 11 Division, Biafran Army, encouraged the trade both directly and indirectly. Directly, he gave special passes to the traders for easy identification and monitoring. Indirectly, he ensured that Nigerian forces at the Onitsha Sector never linked up with those coming from Enugu towards Onitsha. This would have been military as well as economic blow for Biafra. Militarily, it would have enabled a unified Nigerian force to capture Nnewi (Ojukwu's hometown) and therefrom move on to Uli, the site of Biafra's only link with the outside world. This was because of the airport there through which Biafra imported arms and had contact with the outside world. It would also have meant a closure of the small land corridor separating the Onitsha from the Enugu sector of the war. This small strip of territory linked 'Biafra One' (the Onitsha sector of the main Biafran-held territory) with 'Biafra Two' (the agriculturally rich area of Otuocha, Anarn, Adani and Nsukka. This area could be reached by crossing the small land corridor separating the Onitsha and the Enugu sectors of war). It was the most popular route used by 'attack traders'. Biafra would have come to an economic standstill if the corridor was ever closed for more than a few days²¹.

The economy of “*ahia attack*” was based on Nigerian coins which was unaffected with her currency change in 1967. This lapse played an important part in prolonging Biafra's existence. Nigerian coins continued to circulate unofficially in Biafra throughout the war. Exchange of Nigerian coins for Biafran notes became a booming business in Biafra for most of the war. This was because Nigerian coins commanded higher exchange value than the Biafran notes because Biafra had not been recognized as an independent Republic then by Nigeria and most other countries. As the supply of the coins diminished, so did their value increase. At the peak of the business in 1969 one shilling coin fetched as much as two Biafran pounds, representing a ratio of 40: 1. Lower denominations (i.e. one, three and six pence coins) attracted less favourable exchange rates because they were bulky and difficult to carry. The coins were the major medium of exchange in the attack trade²². Attack traders sometimes took with them to Nigeria valuable personal effects such as gold trinkets,

expensive lace materials, wrappers, dresses bought in Biafra. Traders bartered their wares²³. Biafra depended very largely on Nigerian sources for most of her manufactured goods. Perhaps the most important of these was salt. Almost all the salt consumed in Biafra between its scarcity and 1968 when relief materials became generally available came via “ahia attack”. In fact, even after the international relief agencies started relief operations, Biafra still depended on Nigeria for most of her salt needs. Salt supplied by relief agencies had proved quite inadequate to meet the demands for the commodity. Besides, relief salt had other problems. People complained that the grains were too big and so did not dissolve quickly, especially if added after food had been cooked - a ploy generally employed by Biafran women to conserve salt. Mainly as a result of this, those who could afford it depended almost completely on 'attack' salt rather than the relief type. The former type also attracted higher prices than the latter²⁴. Apart from buying salt from the attack market, the *attack traders* also smuggled in other items in hot demand such as tobacco, cigarettes, bathing soap and matches. The scarcity of these commodities made them exorbitantly priced. As a result of this, the women made huge profits from them²⁵.

“*Ahia attack*” was full of hazards both for its practitioners and the public at large. For the traders, there was an ever-present threat to their lives. Border crossing happened in 'active' military zones where safety was never guaranteed. Biafran soldiers frequently relieved traders of their wares and cash, branding them saboteurs. The fact that they usually carried large sums of Nigerian money and 'contraband' served as an excuse for tampering with their money and wares. This normally led to execution either by burying the trader alive or shooting her. “*Ahia attack*” carried very high 'moral risk' too because the traders, most of them women, were often indecently assaulted by soldiers. It was partly as a result of this that the trade was associated with a high level of immorality by many people²⁶. Some women traders got richer than their husbands and lost the respect they hitherto accorded their husbands. Some abandoned their husbands for Nigerian soldiers because the Nigerian soldiers were seen as wealthy. Such women were rejected by their husbands at the end of the war.²⁷

Olokoro Women’s Experiences with the Soldiers

Olokoro women went through highly ambivalent experiences in their relationships with soldiers on both sides of the war front. In Biafra, relationships with soldiers sometimes attracted high prestige because it was a thing of pride to be identified as a soldier's 'wife or mistress. Such women were treated with respect, for it was feared that any impropriety against them could incur the wrath not only of their husbands and lovers but also that of any soldier around. In a sense the power of soldiers was believed to have been transferred to their wives²⁸. Besides this psychological advantage there were real economic benefits in being a soldier's wife. For some time into the war, the Biafran government paid 'allotments' to soldiers on active service. This was meant to help in the upkeep of their dependants. It was specifically for this reason that payments were made to either the soldier's wife or his parents. Though the sums involved were relatively small, for the dependants they occasionally meant the difference between survival and starvation.²⁹ Military Officers carried a special attraction on account of the relative affluence or comfort in which they lived as well as the awe which an officer's uniform generated. They had at their disposal a lot of food, meat, eggs, drinks, and imported relief materials, which were out of the reach of ordinary civilians. They also had cash. Girls on both sides of the war front sometimes got married to soldiers as a way of helping their families. This was often the case with senior officers who either had access to scarce essential commodities or could help their spouses' families in other ways, for example, by ensuring the non-conscription of family members or through the protection of family

assets. In fact, once a family member got 'married' to a soldier, the family became immune to molestation by other soldiers. Among the soldiers there would seem to have existed an unspoken *esprit de corps* in this regard. Any soldier that broke the norm was severely disciplined. Mainly on account of this and other benefits derivable from contact with soldiers, many Olokoro girls willingly married Nigerian soldiers³⁰ after Umuahia had fallen to the federal troops. Relationships between soldiers and their Olokoro wives did not always last very long. Death or the exigencies of military service in war time often intervened. The death of a young woman's husband exposed her to hardship because the sad event marked the cessation of her drawing of allotments. Terminal benefits remained unpaid for widows with children and the nightmare was almost unbearable. The situation was even worse if the husband was a Nigerian soldier who had other wives officially recognized by the army³¹. There was, as has already been indicated, widespread belief that the war had led to some economic empowerment of women, due to their increased role in trade, especially the attack trade. Thus, women became easy targets of molestation by soldiers. Farms and goods displayed for sale in markets were freely confiscated by soldiers. Stories of intimidation and theft by soldiers are common among the females interviewed. Soldiers suffering from 'shell shock' popularly called 'artillery', who could not be held responsible for their behaviour, were often seen as culprits³².

Sexual violence on women by soldiers was widespread during the war. Overall, evidence from those interviewed suggests that the Federal troops were much more into indecently assaulting women than the Biafran soldiers. Biafran soldiers' relations with the women varied. In areas where these were cordial, the soldiers tended to treat the women decently. Where these were strained, the reverse was the case³³. The attitude of Biafran troops to women in a particular area often depended to an extent on the political and military situation in the area, and this was subject to change over time. Soldiers tended to be humane when things were quiet and stable and there was no strain in their relationship with the people. The reverse tended to become the case when either they began to suspect the loyalty of the local population or were being pushed back by the enemy³⁴. One of the reasons why Biafran troops tended to treat civilians (especially women) better than their Nigerian counterparts had to do with the knowledge that both were on the receiving end of Nigeria's war against Biafra. Again, both shared the same aspiration of the birth of a new nation. Biafran soldiers easily maintained contact with their wives and girlfriends. Typically, the Biafran soldier did not see himself as part of a conquering army or army of occupation. However, these perceptions were only sustained in areas where the soldiers believed that the local people were pulling in the same direction with Biafra. Where this was not the case, Biafran troops (especially the Igbo among them) sometimes behaved like occupation soldiers³⁵.

The fear of rape by soldiers forced some young women in Olokoro to spend most of the war days in hiding. Soldiers bent on catching women for their comfort were not discouraged by their going underground but caught many of them during sudden, unannounced raids of homes and other possible hiding places³⁶. Nigerian soldiers freely took away young women who became their 'wives' instantly. A woman approached by a soldier for a relationship scarcely had a choice. Husbands and parents of abducted women hardly protested openly. Those who did protest paid dearly for their dissent. An example was Mr Alikirija who was killed for protesting openly against the soldiers. To avoid being abducted, women adopted various disguises that made them look unattractive to the soldiers. This sometimes involved painting themselves with charcoal or soot taken from cooking pots which a typical returning refugee family carried. They also wore ragged dresses and walked with a stoop or limp to make them look like old women. Some tied wads of cloth on their stomach to make them

appear pregnant. Some carried tender babies to disguise themselves as nursing mothers, a ploy that saved the lives of some babies abandoned at the heat of the flight.³⁷ Not all the women who married Nigerian soldiers were forced into it; quite a good number of them did so voluntarily. Some even enticed soldiers to marry them. Some of the women who went into this kind of union were forced into it by the prevailing hardship. In effect, this was an aspect of their survival strategies. On the other hand, some women entered into such relationship mainly to share in the good life which the typical Nigerian soldier was seen as enjoying. It was on account of these interests that the relationships between Nigerian soldiers and ex-Biafran women were ridiculed as 'tomapep' marriages and the soldiers referred sarcastically to as *ndi ogo* ('in-laws')³⁸. The long term stability of these relationships is contentious. Many of the soldiers later took steps to formalize the marriages by performing the necessary traditional marriage requirements. A conspicuous case is that of the then military commander and Lt. Col. Olusegun Obasanjo, who took an Igbo woman as wife³⁹.

The Women as Farmers

Farming has always been an important pursuit of Igbo women. In pre-war years, Olokoru women planted crops like cocoyam, maize, melon and vegetables in their homestead gardens and farms. With the outbreak of the war, however, farming became intensified because of the gross shortage of food in Biafra. Women cleared the bushes and planted the seeds and seedlings with the aid of their children who were not up to the age of conscription.⁴⁰ Sometimes, they hired war refugees and in return gave them food items or second hand clothes.⁴¹ Cassava became a very important crop and was converted to various uses. This was because it was labour saving as compared to the cultivation of yam. It was also a supplement to yam and was regarded as a woman's crop. There were no taboos attached to it, as was the case with respect to yam and oil palm. With some of the men not available to help the women in cultivation because they were either at the war fronts, in hiding, dead or maimed, the women cultivated this crop. Again, it was available all year round unlike yam that was only available from about August to May. What is more, cassava was put to various uses. The leaves were used to prepare soup. From the tubers was produced *Abacha* (African salad) which became a very important food. This was because when dried, it could store for months and as well it served as both snack and food. Garri is the chief produce from cassava⁴².

Cassava tubers had been used to produce garri long before the war in Olokoru. However, the war situation induced a new production strategy. Cassava was harvested and converted to garri within two days instead of three to four days which had been the norm. After harvesting the cassava tubers, they were peeled and washed, and then grated with locally made grater. The mashed cassava was put into an *akpa aji* or a baft bag (a special sack with tiny perforations made of cords) and tied on four wooden frames to drain the liquid. Two wooden frames were placed on the bag on top of another two frames and it took a day or two to drain the liquid off the pulp. This was to remove the prussic acid from it. The dried pulp was sieved to remove impurities or fibers before frying. The end product is garri. It was during the war that a type of cassava disease known as *Ota-Akpu* (cassava eater) was known. This was the disease which destroyed the cassava tubers and did not allow it to produce very well. This in fact affected yield. In order to prevent their crops from being destroyed by this disease, the women resorted to harvesting their cassava even when it was not yet mature. Fear of their crops being stolen coupled with hunger also made the women harvest their crops prematurely. Farm work was done early in the morning and evening for fear of being caught or killed by the Nigerian soldiers⁴³. The women and their children hid to farm at these

periods because of fear of being seen by the soldiers on both sides. With the food blockade by the Federal Government there was food scarcity. Farming became an alternative to feeding their families. These women risked their lives in doing so because if they were caught by the soldiers, they risked either being raped or forcefully married by these soldiers. From the foregoing, it is clear that Olokoru women made invaluable contributions, including sacrifices to Biafra's war effort. Some of them went through very rough experiences with both Biafran and Nigerian soldiers. A good number of the female interviewees remember with anguish the war-time experiences. It is still a wonder to many of them that they were able to stand the strains of war. They stressed that the war forced them to discharge responsibilities and face challenges they thought they were not capable of standing up to. Against the backdrop of their harrowing war experiences, the women were unanimous in wishing that the nation does not go through a similar situation anymore. On the positive side, however, their war-time experiences have taught many women to be independent and to stand tall as *okpata aku* ('wealth bringers'), rather than acquiesce to the normative status of *ori aku* ('wealth eaters')⁴⁴.

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21. A.H. Sievers, J.O. Ahazuem and S. Emezue, *A Social History of the Nigerian Civil War: Perspectives from Below*,---p. 145.
22. A.H. Sievers, J.O. Ahazuem and S. Emezue, *A Social History of the Nigerian Civil War: Perspectives from Below*,---p. 145.
23. Mrs Ngozi Ogbonna, 50 years, trader, interviewed at Okwu Olokoru Umuahia on the 25/2/2013.
24. Mrs Grace Ogboso, 65years, housewife, interviewed at Umuoparaozara Olokoru Umuahia on 26/2/2013.
25. Mrs Oluchi Ibe, 66years, housewife, interviewed at Amakama Olokoru Umuahia on 27/2/2013.
26. A.H. Sievers, J.O. Ahazuem and S. Emezue, *A Social History of the Nigerian Civil War: Perspectives from Below*,---p. 146.
27. Obiageri Emerah, "Ukpo Women During the Nigerian Civil War",---p.29, Lady Emily Ogbonna, 66years, Chairlady Women's Association, Amizi Autonomous Community, interviewed at Amizi Olokoru Umuahia on 17/2/2013.
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29. A.H. Sievers, J.O. Ahazuem and S. Emezue, *A Social History of the Nigerian Civil War: Perspectives from Below*,---p. 148.
30. Mrs Cecilia Amajo, trader, 68years, interviewed at Amakama Olokoru Umuahia on 26/2/2013.
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32. Mrs Agnes Okorie, housewife, 63years, interviewed at Umuoparaozara Olokoru Umuahia on 27/2/2013.
33. Obiageri Emerah, "Ukpo Women During the Nigerian Civil War",---p.29.
34. Obiageri Emerah, "Ukpo Women During the Nigerian Civil War",---p.29.
35. Obiageri Emerah, "Ukpo Women During the Nigerian Civil War",---p.29.
36. Mrs Aina Ogueri, housewife and farmer, interviewed at Umuajata Olokoru Umuahia on 20/2/2013.
37. Mrs Comfort Onyegbule, trader, interviewed at Amizi Olokoru Umuahia on 18/2/2013 .
38. Mrs Cecilia Ekweronu, housewife and trader, interviewed at Umuajata Olokoru Umuahia on 20/2/2013.
39. A.H. Sievers, J.O. Ahazuem and S. Emezue, *A Social History of the Nigerian Civil War: Perspectives from Below*,---p. 155.
40. A.H. Sievers, J.O. Ahazuem and S. Emezue, *A Social History of the Nigerian Civil War: Perspectives from Below*,---p. 156.
41. Grace Ibe, housewife and trader, interviewed at Okwu Olokoru Umuahia on 20/2/2013.
42. Mr Vincent Onyegbule, trader, interviewed at Amizi Olokoru Umuahia on 26/2/2013.
43. Mr Ike Odumuko, trader, interviewed at Amizi Olokoru Umuahia on 28/2/2013.
44. Obiageri Emerah, "Ukpo Women During the Nigerian Civil War",---p.29.