

GHOSTLY NARRATIVES: A CASE STUDY ON THE
EXPERIENCES AND ROLES OF BIAFRAN WOMEN DURING
THE NIGERIA-BIAFRA WAR

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Ghostly Narratives: A Case Study on the Experiences and Roles of Biafran Women

During the Nigeria-Biafra War

By

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ABSTRACT

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Since the end of the Nigeria-Biafra war in 1970, political and social theorists, journalists, and scholars have discussed the significance of the war and the major players. Yet one perspective is often omitted, and that is the experiences of women and the roles they played during the war. This thesis begins to unearth some of those hidden narratives through the use of in-depth interviews with seven Biafran women who lived during and survived the Nigeria-Biafra war. Their stories about the importance of their ethnic and religious identities, their roles and experiences during the war, their encounters with death and refugees, and their discussions of a generational shift are important parts of some of the unearthed narratives.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Having ardently discussed the powerful, political, and prophetic nature of writing throughout this thesis, ironically, I find that my words fail to express my deepest and most heartfelt gratitude to those who contributed to the completion of this thesis. So, I reference a Malayan proverb which expresses that “one can pay back the loan of gold, but one dies forever in debt to those who are kind.” To all those kind souls that helped me start to uncover the buried and long forgotten narratives of Biafran women, I can only say *thank you*.

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Finally, and most importantly, to my conversational partners who lived through and survived the war, Mrs. Eze, Mrs. Maduka, Mrs. Okafor, Mrs. Asonye, Mrs. Chikwendu, Mrs. Adichie, and Mrs. Amobi, your continued strength is nothing short of inspirational. Thank you so much for allowing me to share your stories. To all those who died during the war, having never shared their personal narratives with the world, the process of unearthing them is just beginning.

DEDICATION

*To Mama whose Biafran narrative I never got to hear
& to her daughter, Mommy, the queen of my life, there is no one like you.*

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INTRODUCTION

“In the beginning was the word” – John 1:1

The Art of Writing

The art of writing is an aspect of life that is either adored or abhorred by those participating in it. Depending on how talented or committed the writer is, writing can flow freely like a meandering river, or it could be a rather forced and unnatural experience, much like a dam, where the author is pushed or blocked by structures, requirements, and expectations. Regardless of the perceived fluidity or cumbersome nature of the writing process, it can culminate in a written work that is intrinsically significant and laden with meaning. It can then be argued that the art of writing, in and of itself, is an incredibly *powerful*, *political*, and *prophetic* act. I claim that writing is inherently powerful, because by writing, the author claims, and is occasionally granted, *authority* on the subject being discussed; without this sense of authority, the author could not and most likely would not write on that particular topic. Even the etymology of the word *author* further illustrates this point because the original root *autor* (circa 1300) was used when describing an “enlarger, founder, master, leader,” or similarly, “one who causes to grow” (Harper, 2008). So although the word author is now synonymous with an individual who writes a literary work (such as a poem, essay, letter, article, book, etc.) the original meaning, of leading others or spurring growth, is inferred in this new interpretation. Thus, an author, through the act of writing, enacts his or her power by leading the reader through a specific narrative or argument.

In addition to being a powerful act that asserts one’s authority on a subject and causes the reader to grow, writing is also a political act, for by writing on a particular topic, the author deems his or her views as important, impressive, and insightful enough to be dispensed and

shared. By arguing that writing is a political act, I am not necessarily suggesting that each written work is laced with political rhetoric or pertains to established governing relations; rather, I am arguing that by writing, an author fundamentally believes that his or her interpretation, stance, or thoughts on a topic are worthy of being heard and read by others and should ultimately contribute to the body of literature on that subject. This need to preserve their interpretation, stance, or thoughts in a fairly permanent form is political because not only does it become “an essential part of the infrastructure of a given society,” it also bears great implications because “what passes for writing at a given time [can] aid a particular group to survive, develop, and/or maintain a dominant position” in society (Gaur, p. 1). This notion that writing is, at its core, an inherently political act is illustrated by the fact that writing *does* currently constitute a fairly significant portion of societal interactions, and undoubtedly influences the roles in which individuals play in society.

So while writing is a powerful and political act, it is also prophetic, for by writing, the author either explicitly or implicitly hopes to influence his or her audience. Regardless of the purpose of writing, whether it is to entertain, inform, or persuade, all writing is prophetic because when the author sits down to pen a work (anything ranging from a mundane to-do list or journal entry to a memoir or theoretical masterpiece) the overall intent is to elicit some reaction from the reader. I describe this inherently influential nature of writing as prophetic not for the whimsically linguistic reason of ensuring alliteration and parallelism, but because I fundamentally believe that by writing, an author embodies many prophetic qualities, most notably, their position as an intermediary between the subject matter and the reader. While the topic being written on may not necessarily dwell on the spiritual or the divine, every writer (quite like a prophet) writes with the intent that their message will be read and heard by others and with the hope that their words will elicit some reaction. So keeping this argument in mind

and applying it to the aforementioned examples, the author of a mundane to-do list intends for those chores to be completed just as the author of a personal journal intends to read the entries at a later date as a personal reminder of his or her past thoughts and feelings.

Furthermore, the author of a memoir intends that readers will read the work and understand the reasoning behind the author's actions; finally, the author of a theoretical masterpiece expects that the reader will use those theoretical tools as a way to better understand, explain, or predict an event or phenomenon. This powerful, political, and prophetic nature of writing has been illustrated in various historical contexts and continues to be proven in contemporary times. I use this prolix and prolonged discussion on the powerful, political, and prophetic nature of writing for it has key implications when applied to certain historical events.

Writing has Changed the World

With the understanding that such a seemingly simple process as writing can be interpreted as such a complex, multifaceted act, laden with powerful, political, and prophetic implications, it becomes easier to see how writing has played such a formative and influential role throughout human history. In fact, "one has only to consider how profoundly our understanding of human history has been changed during the last few centuries by the discovery and decipherment of hitherto unknown scripts, which served quite different, highly sophisticated, but now extinct civilizations" (Gaur, 2003, p. 1). For instance, looking at the remnants of an extinct civilization such as that of Ancient Egypt, prior to the discovery of the Rosetta Stone, much of "what was known about Egypt was erroneous, with scholars laboring under the misconception that everything to do with the country was a lost, impenetrable mystery" (Ray, 2007, p. 7). But the discovery and eventual decipherment of the Rosetta Stone "brought about a revolution in our knowledge of how writing works, and its origins" (Ray,

2007, p. 7). Once the engraved text on the stone was cracked, it provided the key to our understanding of the complex writing system known as Egyptian hieroglyphics. To be clear, the Rosetta Stone is a fragment of Ancient Egyptian rock engraved in the three different scripts of Egyptian hieroglyphics, Egyptian demotic script, and Ancient Greek, with a decree by a Pharaoh, and was to be placed in every sizeable temple; its purpose was to become proof of the “Pharaoh’s benevolence towards his people and his piety towards the gods” and was the “sort of thing that a good king was expected to do, and to go on doing” (Ray, 2007, p. 1). So although it bears great symbolism and is of grave importance in contemporary times, drawing thousands of visitors to the British museum where it is housed, the Rosetta Stone was not held in the same regard by the Ancient Egyptians (Ray, 2007). Furthermore, it helps illustrate the powerful, political, and powerful nature of writing, for without it, we could not have discovered and uncovered some of the secrets of the Ancient past.

The notion that writing has changed the world is not a discussion that should be conducted solely in the past tense, because writings such as the Declaration of Independence, Constitution of the United States, the Bill of Rights, and the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights are all works that continue to shape the world in which we live. These works are inherently powerful, political, and prophetic because they were written by people or institutions in positions of authority; they shape our current governing structures, and they influence, and at times even restrict, our actions. While it may be easy to see how these works are inherently powerful, political, and prophetic without a lengthy exegesis, the same argument can be made for religious texts such as the Bible, Hadith, Qur’an, or Torah. In spite of the at times vast and divergent differences between these religious texts, there are myriads of explanations that illustrate how these works embody the three characteristics. The Christian Bible, Islamic Hadith and Qur’an, and Jewish Torah are all religious works yet they traverse

cultural, geographic, ethnic, and racial differences and provide the foundation for how *billions* of individuals live their daily lives and interact with one another. These texts (along with numerous others) are powerful, political, and prophetic because they are considered sacred by so many individuals, who believe that the authors were divinely inspired to write these texts which “contain teaching with instructions on how to attain salvation, articulate godly plans for humanity, or because they are perceived as positive theophanies that embody and mediate divine presences” (Myrvold, 2010, pp. 3-4). These written works undoubtedly bear great significance in modern time even though they were written centuries and millennia ago.

Writing in the Nigerian Context

Based on the argument that writing is an inherently powerful, political, and prophetic act, as illustrated by the aforementioned substantive texts, the inverse can also be true. Therefore, if writing is an important act laden with powerful, political, and prophetic meaning, then what is omitted or not written about is of equal importance. I argue that by writing, the author asserts his or her *authority*, deems his or her views as insightful enough to be dispensed, and ultimately hopes to influence the audience in some way. These three aspects of writing are inherently reflexive acts for the intentions and attached meanings are generally internalized by the author. An author does not necessarily vocalize his or her claims to be an *authority* on the subject, nor do they announce their subjective opinion that their views are impressive, insightful, and important enough to be published and shared. In the same vein, an author may not necessarily declare that their intent is prophetic in that they wish to influence their audience to laughter, in an entertainment piece; move them to tears, in a prose piece; or inspire them to action in an informative or persuasive piece. But while the author’s intentions may not be vocalized, the effects of their writing have very real consequences. Just as an author decides

how to write, what to write on, and who to write for, the decision of how, what, and who the work is written on, about, or for is just as powerful, political, and prophetic. When an author claims to be an authority on a subject, their arguments generally bear more weight and are considered more valuable than those of the laity. Likewise, if an author deems his or her views on a specific subject as important enough to share, but *omits* a portion of the narrative, then he or she is making a determination that what is omitted was not as important as what was introduced. While this discourse may seem unimportant or even banal, like the Rosetta Stone, it holds great historical and contemporary significance for there is an established hierarchy among authors, in which a preferential position is generally accorded to works written by certain individuals, on certain topics (LaCapra, 1985).

If all authors are not considered equal, then it is highly plausible that certain works are more powerful, political, and prophetic, and thus play a larger role in shaping our analysis of historical and contemporary events; this is why it is important to understand that what is omitted is just as significant as what is actually written about. When introducing the variable of gender into this complex system, it becomes clear that a discrepancy exists between what is written (and just as importantly what is omitted) and who writes the work. Briefly looking at the history of writing and written works, it is safe to argue that the majority of the great and influential works was written by men. Referring back to the example of Ancient Egypt, despite being renowned for having female rulers such as Cleopatra and Nefertiti, there remained a gender disparity when it came to written works, for “countless scenes show male scribes at work, [yet] there are no depictions at any period of working female scribes” (Robins, 1993, p. 113). Continuing with the illustrative example of the Declaration of Independence, not one signature on that historic document belongs to a woman because at that time they were “excluded from office holding, [so] women were not among the signers of petitions to

England that effected the Revolution” (Zaeske, 2003, p. 16). Finally, using the example of the Bible as an important religious text, “the Bible mentions a woman’s writing only twice: in 1 Kings 21.8, where we read that Queen Jezebel writes letters in the name of Ahab; and in Esther 9.29, where Esther writes a letter together with Mordecai about the institution of the Purim festival” (Brennar & Van Dijk-Hemmes, 1996, 18). While these examples allude to the gender disparity and inequality, I introduce them as a way to illustrate the importance of what is written, what is omitted, and who is writing these works.

Based on this argument that what is omitted is just as vital as what is included, then LaCapra’s (1985) suggestion that “the historical imagination is limited to plausibly filling gaps in the record, and ‘throwing new light’ on a phenomenon requires the discovery of hitherto unknown information” is quite profound (p. 18). This notion that gaps in literary works *should be filled*, and can only be done through the discovery of unknown or omitted information will be illustrated through this case study on the experiences and roles of women during the Nigeria-Biafran war. The Nigeria-Biafra war was a three year, 30 month civil war, spurred by the attempted secession of the separatist region *Biafra* from the rest of the country (Uwechue 2004). While the historic details of the war will be briefly discussed in following section, this case study is used as a way to further explore the nuances of gender in the powerful, political, and prophetic nature of writing. As argued, there has been a historic disparity in who writes, who the work is written for, and what the work is about. The body of literature that focuses on the Nigeria-Biafra war is no exception, for the majority of what is written about the war is written by men, for men, and about men. That emphatic statement is an incredibly powerful, political, and prophetic declaration to make, since the majority of the notable non-fiction works on the war are by men (Amadi, 1973; Ekwe-Ekwe, 1990; Obiozor, 1993; Uwechue, 2004). Not only was the war narrated by men, but it was written for an audience of men and

about men since most of the prominent figures in Nigeria, both during and following the war, were men. This begs the question; why bother writing about women? The response to this question harks back to LaCapra's (1985) argument that since there is "an explicit or implicit hierarchy among sources whereby a preferential position is accorded" to certain works, it is important to realize that there are no omniscient narratives that encompass all the experiences of individuals that lived through the war or died as a result of it (p. 18). Just as in the context of the Nigeria-Biafra war, there is no omniscient narrative for the war – it just does not reflect the reality of life – which is that individuals had different experiences during the war and therefore played different roles. If only one group is charged with providing the majority of the written works about such an epochal event in the nation's history, there are bound to be omitted narratives and historical narrations should be a continuous dialogue not a stagnant monologue.

It is difficult to believe that the majority of individuals who were affected by the Nigeria-Biafra were men. During a war, the clear demarcation line, for who is exempt from suffering, who is considered innocent, or who the participants are, gets erased. According to Nnaemeka (1998), "for women – from the gun-toting insurgents to the civilian victims of/warriors against hunger, indiscriminant air-raids, rape and other forms of sexual exploitation – the war front was everywhere" (p. 186). Following this argument, the war front does not necessarily mean armed combat and one does not need to don a military uniform to become involved; for when their homes were bombarded by air raids, when their children died from starvation, when they were raped, women experienced the war and played a role in it. This point leads to the overarching research questions that guide this study – namely, *what were the experiences of Biafran women during the Nigeria-Biafra war* and *what was the nature of the roles of Biafran women during the Nigeria-Biafra war?* I pose these questions with the reflexive

understanding that there will not and cannot be an omniscient narrative of the experiences of Biafran women during the war. Furthermore, I write on this topic as a way to not only explore the experiences and roles of Biafran women during the war, but also to illustrate the powerful, political, and prophetic nature of writing; for in writing this thesis, I am asserting that not only will I use my position of *authority* to contribute a different perspective to the existing narrative, but I deem my views and thoughts to be just as important as those of my male predecessors, and ultimately hope that this work will inspire my audience to understand that all narratives are important and should be shared.

LITERATURE REVIEW

“If we listen carefully... we will hear not only ‘their’ story, the old story of the past, but how we are in this story, even now, even if we do not want to be” (Gordon, 1997, p. 190)

Understanding Biafra

Biafra – that word alone has the power to evoke numerous emotions within an individual, spark highly contentious debate among the politically minded, and trigger devastating memories for those that survived her horrors. A general search of “Biafra” on Google brings up more than fifteen million results, which illustrates that this is a subject that is not only topical but very relevant and pertinent despite the fact that the Nigerian civil war occurred nearly forty years ago. When compared to the long ongoing conflicts in locales such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Sudan (particularly the Darfur region), or the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the 30 month-long Nigeria-Biafra war may seem to pale in comparison, but the devastation enacted on both the secessionist region of Biafra, the nation of Nigeria, and her inhabitants are undeniably grand in scope.

The Nigeria-Biafra war is not a conflict that can be easily narrated as a tale of villains and heroes. Despite numerous attempts by political leaders, scholars, social scientists, and journalists to simplify the conflict into a narrative comprised of protagonists and antagonists (Forsyth, 1968; Ojukwu, 1969, 1989), these oversimplifications fail to acknowledge the intricacies of the war as well as the effect it had on the individuals that lived through it and died as a result of it. Rather than contributing to the growing body of literature (Aneke, 2007; Falola & Heaton, 2008; Uzokwe, 2003) that theorizes about the causes of the war or analyzes the actions, importance, or significance of certain historical figures, a brief review of the war timeline will be provided as a means for eventually understanding what the experiences and

roles of Biafran women were during this epochal period in Nigerian history. Even this simple categorization or labeling of a subset of women as *Biafran* illustrates how complex and intricate the Nigeria-Biafra war was, because Biafra was viewed by some as solely a political entity yet by others as an ideological identity.

To understand these nuances, one needs to first understand the composition of the Nigerian ethnic landscape. As a nation, Nigeria is composed of over 200 ethnic groups, with three main groups comprising the majority of the population. The Hausa-Fulani predominately reside in the North and account for 21 percent of the population, while the Yoruba are generally located in the Southwestern region of the country and make up 20 percent of the population; the Igbo are the third largest ethnic group, and they are situated in the Southeastern part of the country and comprise 17 percent of the population (Falola & Heaton, 2008, p. 4). While Biafra has become synonymous with the Igbo ethnic group, it is important to note that not all Biafrans were Igbos, just as the inverse, not all Igbos considered themselves Biafran, is equally accurate. Although this might seem counterintuitive and unnecessarily complex, a brief discussion of Nigeria's history helps clarify how and why Biafra came to be a secessionist state.

At the time of Nigeria's independence from her British colonial ruler in 1960, the nation was composed of a myriad of ethnic groups, residing in different regions of the country, speaking over 250 indigenous languages, coalesced into a brand new nation under an arbitrarily drawn national border (Falola & Heaton, 2008). In spite of their numerous regional, ethnic, and religious differences, and in their haste to gain independence from the British, Nigerians (as they would be called) brushed aside concerns of how this newly formed nation would be governed. Within only six years of obtaining independence, Nigeria witnessed a series of coup d'états that eventually led to pogroms that saw tens of thousands of Igbos killed

in the Northern region. With those events serving as a backdrop, Colonel Ojukwu, a prominent Igbo military leader, declared secession through a radio announcement, broadcast on June 30, 1967 that stated:

Fellow countrymen, proud and courageous Biafrans, this is your moment. When we go to war, it will be a war against Nigeria for it is Nigeria that has vowed that we shall not exist. With God on our side, we shall vanquish. (Falola, 1999).

With that declaration, the nation was thrust into a 30 month-long conflict that culminated with Biafra's surrender on January 12, 1970. Figure 1 illustrates the Republic of Biafra at the onset of the war in May 1967 contrasted with the Biafran-controlled territory at the time of surrender. This war saw compatriots quickly become enemies, the cleavages of religion and ethnicity become politicized, and children and elders become victims when starvation was implemented as a weapon of war. With the end of the war, came the demand for justifications that explained the atrocities witnessed and enacted by both parties (Falola, 1999).

In the introduction, I argued that what is omitted is at times just as powerful, political, and prophetic as what is written. What I find puzzling yet simultaneously bothersome is that in such a widely discussed subject as the Nigeria-Biafra war, there exists a hierarchy of discussed topics, often resulting with the blind or blatant omission of women's perspective and narrative. This demoted status of women's narratives is so widespread that even conducting a similar rudimentary search of 'Biafra' on Google with the inclusion of the term 'women' significantly limits the potential sources to just above two hundred thousand results. Does this omission mean that women were not really a part of the war or are there other possible explanations for why half the population is consistently omitted from a majority of the historical narrative? A few female authors have attempted to draw attention to this void through short stories and fictional works that focus on women, with the most notable and widely read including Flora

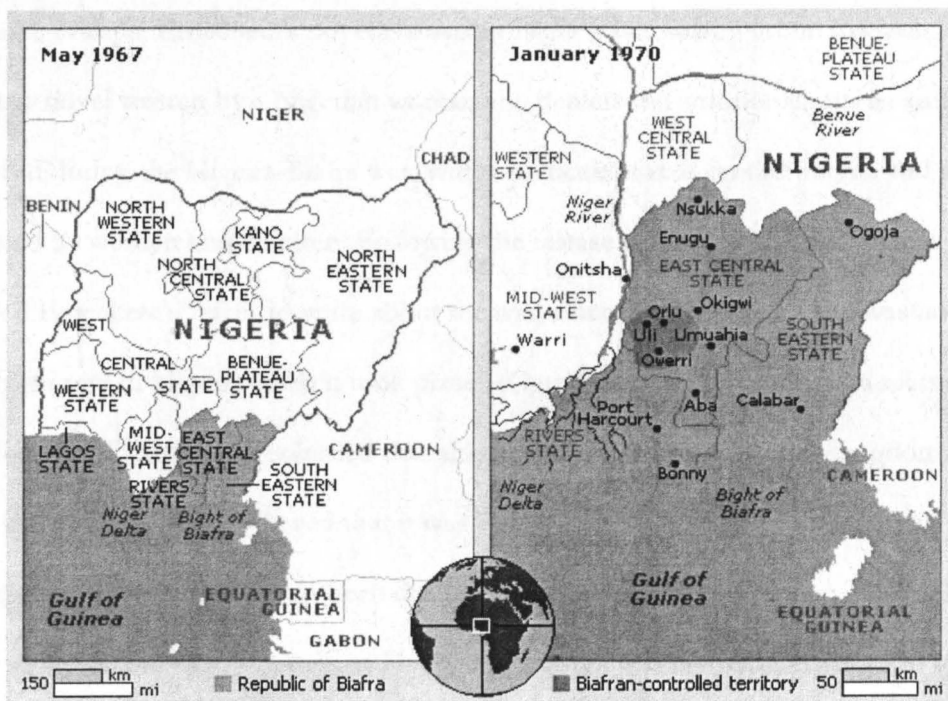


Figure 1: Map of the Republic of Biafra in May 1967 and Biafran-controlled territory in January 1970 (Cahoon, 2000).

Nwapa's *Never Again* (1975) and *Wives at War and Other Stories* (1980), Buchi Emecheta's *Destination Biafra* (1982), and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's acclaimed *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2007). In her work *Never Again*, Nwapa's (1975) discourse is based on her experience in Biafra and constitutes the "first war narrative written by an African woman" but "since a woman authored the war novella, it is not surprising that Nwapa is hardly mentioned when critics deal with Nigerian war fiction" (Ogunyemi, 1996, p. 164). *Never Again* is a fictional narrative piece that focuses on the tension experienced by the main character who is grappling with her conflicting beliefs in an independent Biafran state on one hand and her personal belief that Biafra's defeat is inevitable; she ultimately feels pressure to repress these feelings for fear of being labeled a traitor to the Biafran cause (Ogunyemi, 1996).

Like Nwapa, Emecheta's novel *Destination Biafra* was similarly groundbreaking as the second war novel written by a Nigerian woman and depicts the emotional trauma and violence experienced during the Nigeria-Biafra war, with a particular focus on the trauma and violence experienced by women and children. Following the release of *Destination Biafra*, critics questioned Emecheta's "right to write about the war, since, unlike Nwapa, she was not physically present in Nigeria when it took place" (Ogunyemi, 1996, p. 262). In a message in the book's Forward, Emecheta prophesied that although she was in the United Kingdom during the war, she fundamentally believed that it was a story that "simply had to be written" because these important narratives had not been discussed enough (Machiko, 2008, p. 61). Unlike her predecessors, Adichie's 2007 release of *Half of a Yellow Sun* was favorably received in spite of the fact that she was not yet born during the war. Her novel focused on three survivors of the war: Ugwu, a thirteen-year-old houseboy that is full of Biafran pride and zeal; Olanna, a privileged Igbo woman who relocates from Lagos to the dusty university town to be with her partner; and Richard, a white British expatriate who is as in love with Olanna's twin sister as he is with Nigeria (Adichie, 2007). Through these fictional pieces, these three authors were able to enact the powerful, political, and prophetic nature of writing by using this genre as a podium from which to present a counter discourse to the already established war narrative.

While these fictional works have been helpful in magnifying the current vacuum and overall silencing that exists, scholars have likewise contributed to this effort. In her article chronicling the Biafra war, Nnaemeka (1998) dispels the pervasive perception that women did not participate in the war, and thus were not as affected by it as their male counterparts. Nnaemeka (1998) presents the compelling argument that "for women – from the gun-toting insurgents to the civilian victims of/warriors against hunger, indiscriminate air-raids, rape and other forms of sexual exploitation – the war was everywhere" (p. 236). This novel argument

provides an interesting perspective to the commonly iterated claim that women did not experience the full horrors of the war because they were not on the battle grounds or the war fronts. The fact is, during a war, there is no clear demarcation line that separates the battle front from the door step. That line that dictates what falls within the realms of combat is inevitably blurred as violence becomes an everyday occurrence witnessed and experienced by women who lost husbands and sons, sisters and daughters, before eventually picking up the guns themselves (Nnaemeka, 1998). That line becomes blurred by the daily air raids and bombings over homes and communities. That line becomes blurred with the use of rape and sexual assault as often enacted wartime atrocities, or the desperate scrimmage for food as starvation became a weapon of war. It is undeniable that the war affected women, and they were intrinsically involved. While these books are helpful in addressing the involvement of women, they do not convey the whole story. What becomes problematic is not only uncovering what roles they played or their experiences during the war, but *why* these powerful narratives have been buried for so long.

Women at War

When asking *why* these powerful narratives have been largely omitted or buried from the historical palimpsest¹, one could superficially argue that maybe women simply did not play such an integral or important role during the war and thus explains why their experiences are not largely documented. This response hopefully sounds ludicrous because we know that cannot possibly be the truth; the reality of war is not the often illustrated image of men fighting as victorious champions while women longingly await their heroes to arrive home.

¹ A palimpsest is a parchment, tablet, or manuscript used multiple times with earlier writings and texts being erased or scraped off before being reused.

No, we now understand that “women are everywhere and have always been at least half of humankind,” and as a result, “it is inconceivable that their actions and thoughts were inconsequential in the shaping of historical events, yet women have been presented as though they had no history worth recording” (Lerner, 1997, p. 205). When the experiences of women are given a demoted position in the historical palimpsest, the underlying message is that women have not made contributions that are *worthy* of being recorded. Yet the promulgation of this view has been disproven time and time again by stories from various wars.

It has been argued that at times of war “women often find themselves carried along in waves of a situation which they neither understand, nor agree with. In the heat of these crisis situations, the warring factions are deaf to all entreaties,” and it is only once they have exhausted and burnt themselves out “that women sometimes get to be listened to” (Nzomo, 2002, p. 9). While this argument may be the reality in some situations, it reflects the gendered perception of women by disregarding the myriad of pivotal roles that women have played in various conflicts over time, for “women have been actively involved as fighters in African countries as diverse as Angola, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Liberia, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Uganda, and Zimbabwe” (Coulter, Persson, & Utas, 2008, p. 8). For instance, during the Rwandan genocide, women were known to have participated in the slaughter of the Tutsi; in Zimbabwe, they partook in the liberation movements; in Northern Uganda, women and girls were also represented in the rebel movement, the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA); and in Eritrea’s struggle for independence, female fighters represented approximately 25-30% of the total forces during the war (Coulter, Persson, & Utas, 2008). These examples illustrate that despite being largely “presented as though they had no history worth recording” the actions and thoughts of women were consequential in the shaping of historical events (Lerner, 1997, p. 205).

The mention of these conflicts is not to aver that women are inherently violent and as capable of mass destruction as men. Rather, I include those citations as a way to illustrate the complexity and multifaceted nature of the roles that women have played in conflicts. For in contrast to those aforementioned examples of women fighting, there are tales of women such as those in Somalia who formed NGOs to organize peace education activities; women in Sierra Leone who formed the Women Organized for a Morally Enlightened Nation (WOMEN) movement that seeks to uplift Sierra Leone; or women leading post conflict reconciliation in Angola, Mozambique, or Zimbabwe (Nzomo, 2002). While these examples illustrate that women have participated in wars and conflicts in the past, occupying varying integral roles, it still does not fully address the reason why their stories and narratives largely remain buried.

The Silencing of Women

When trying to uncover the elided or buried narratives of Biafran women during the Nigeria-Biafra war, it is imperative that one not only ask what these narrations are, but also *why* these stories are absent in the first place. Dorothy Smith (1980), a renowned sociologist and influential feminist, argues that in order to “address the problem of a sociology written from the standpoint of men” one needs to understand that “as women we had been living in an intellectual, cultural, and political world, from whose making we had been almost entirely excluded and in which we had been recognized as no more than marginal voices” (Smith, 1987, p. 1). If this thesis seeks to unearth and uncover the omitted narratives of women during the Nigeria-Biafra war, then as a researcher, I must be aware and conscious of the social relations and structures that contributed to the original and continued burial of these narratives. While Smith’s argument of the exclusion of women was originally crafted in 1972,

the applications and implications it has when applied to the context of the Nigeria-Biafra war are nothing short of prophetic. The fact that Smith conceived of and wrote these words as their effects were being experienced half way around the world by women dealing with the numerous reverberations of a post war society, illustrates the reality that texts and writing are political, powerful, and prophetic.

A study which attempts to give women (particularly those who have been largely silenced from contributing to the historical palimpsest) a chance to recount their personal narratives would be ill equipped to do so without mentioning the authority inherent in a male voice. This point is often taken for granted, not only by men who are privileged by this construct, but by women who are continuously and systematically silenced as a result of it. With this innate privilege and authority bestowed upon men, they are endowed and entrusted with the power to create and shape what becomes the culture, norms, history, or any pillar of society, essentially leaving women (the excluded and silenced parties) to grapple with the consequences of their absence and silence. Smith goes on to argue that “the institutionalized practices of excluding women from the ideological work of society are the reason we have a history constructed largely from the perspective of men, and largely about men” (Smith, 1987, p. 135). Even when analyzing the available war narrative, this statement explains how Nigerian history is written from the perspective of men, and why women are then forced to create a space within this palimpsest, that was originally written with their exclusion.

Like Smith, Patricia Hill Collins (1990, 1998, 2011) also contributes to our understanding of the silencing of women, but frames her discourse in the context of black feminism by arguing that “by placing black women’s experiences at the center of the analysis offers fresh insights on the prevailing concepts, paradigms, and epistemologies of this worldview and on its feminist and Afrocentric critiques” (Collins, 1990, p. 536). While Collins’

work focuses on the experiences of African American women in the United States, like Smith, her arguments also shed light on the experiences of Biafran women, for they both argue that including the narratives and experiences of women in the palimpsest can actually provide an important perspective because of their *standpoint* outside the established *ruling relations*. This statement actually addresses some of the integral concepts raised by Smith, namely those of the standpoint of women in the everyday world and the ruling relations. This complex concept of standpoint is important because as “the fulcrum of a sociology for women is the standpoint of the subject,” the principles of standpoint do not “transform subjects into the objects of study” but rather argue that the knower and carrier of knowledge is “she whose grasp of the world *from where she stands...*” is “situated in the actualities of [her] everyday worlds” (Smith, 1987, pp. 105-106). This view suggests that a subject, who is situated in the reality and lived experiences of her everyday world, can offer an understanding of the organizations and structural relations of those worlds far better because of her standpoint within it. While a standpoint might seem similar to a general perspective or worldview, in actuality, they are not synonymous because, as a method, the standpoint of women “creates the space for an absent subject, and an absent experience that is to be filled with the presence and spoken experience of actual women speaking of and in the actualities of their everyday worlds” (Smith, 1987, p. 107).

It is within these absences that the concept of ruling relations is best explained. Smith argues that ruling relations is “a concept that grasps power, organization, direction, and regulation as more pervasively structured than can be expressed in traditional concepts provided by the discourses of power” (Smith, 1987, p. 3). While this definition may seem quite complex and intricate, it should rightly be so, because ruling relations are not necessarily visible structures, yet they materialize and are witnessed in their very real effects on the individual.

Just as the term *ruling* implies, “we are ruled by forms of organization vested in and mediated by texts and documents. . . . The practice of ruling involves the ongoing representation of the local actualities of our worlds in the standardized and general forms of knowledge that enter them into the relations of ruling” (Smith, 1987, p. 3). The involvement, construction and creation of the world as text, provide a site of action where these ruling relations are enacted. Since texts have been described as inherently powerful, political, and prophetic, then Smith’s argument is that ruling relations, which can be viewed as the organizational and structural practices as well as the discourses in texts, play a role in the silencing of women.

Collins implicitly incorporates these concepts of standpoint and ruling relations through her discourse on the omission of the black narrative. She argues that placing African American women or other excluded or marginalized groups in the center of analysis, alters the ruling relations into a system where groups possess varying amounts of privilege and penalty, for the current *matrix of domination* is experienced on the three levels of personal biography, the group or community, and the systemic level of social institutions (Collins, 1990). Since all three levels have been and still remain sites of domination, it is important to understand that “dominant groups aim to replace subjugated knowledge with their own specialized thought because they realize that gaining control over the dimensions of subordinate groups’ lives simplifies control” (Collins, 1990, 540). This domination can be applied to the Biafran context when looking at the silencing of women and omission of their experiences in the national and historic palimpsest, for it replaces their individual and personal knowledge with the specialized thought of the dominant group.

When utilizing Collins’ theory of the matrix of domination, it is important to avoid falling prey to the common “additive analyses of oppression” for “they depend on either/or, dichotomous thinking” (Collins, 2011, p. 762). In this argument, Collins is suggesting that in

order to truly understand the experiences of another, we need to transcend this additive or dichotomous approach for it disregards the fact that “everyone has a race/gender/class specific identity,” and their experiences are shaped and influenced by those identities, for each individual is located at their unique race/gender/class intersection (Collins, 2011, p. 762). Rather than using the salience of identities to create a hierarchy of oppression or privilege, we should focus on understanding the interconnected nature of identities, for it is at those intersections that individuals reside and their experiences are best understood.

Under Western Eyes

Trying to locate the standpoint of Biafran women within the established societal structures and ruling relations generates a new set of questions, for it is not only important to understand why their narratives have been elided and buried, but how I, as the researcher, am situated within these complex and dynamic structures and equipped to unearth these narratives. In her book *Feminism without Borders*, Chandra Mohanty argues that when writing about women, one needs to have “a clear understanding that being a woman has political consequences in the world we live in” (Mohanty, 2003, p. 3). Although seemingly simple and straightforward, this is an important point to raise because while the purpose of my research is to unearth and explore the experiences of Biafran women during the war, that is an extremely political and potentially empowering act. If the mere act of being a woman has political consequences, then it is entirely feasible that discussing the omitted experiences of women during such an epochal event could likewise have political consequences. This point echoes back to the argument posited by Smith which suggested that women reside in these social, political, cultural, and intellectual realms but have been and still are almost entirely excluded

from contributing to them. Thus this exclusion of *women* because they *are women* has political consequences as Mohanty suggested (Smith, 1987, p. 1).

Another key point that needs to be addressed when situating myself within this study is the notion of “Western feminism,” a term used by Mohanty to “draw attention to the similar effects of various textual strategies used by writers that codify others as non-Western and hence themselves as (implicitly) Western” (Mohanty, 2003, p. 18). While it is important to note Western feminism is not homogenous in its goals, methods, interests, or modes of analyses, there has been a tendency for Western feminists to “write about their rural or working-class sisters and assume their own middle-class cultures at the norm and codify working class histories and cultures as other” (Mohanty, 2003, p. 18). This tendency to codify those individuals involved in a study as the other can be constrained through adequate self-consciousness and reflexivity. Yet one can never be self-conscious or reflexive if they are unaware of the underlying assumptions of their privilege. Mohanty goes on to argue that “Western feminist scholarship cannot avoid the challenge of situating itself and examining its role in such a global economic and political framework” for to do any less would mean ignoring “the complex interconnections between First and Third World economies and the profound effect of this on the lives of women in all countries” (Mohanty, 2003, p. 20). By her use of the terms First and Third World, Mohanty offers a critique of “Eurocentrism and of Western developmentalist discourses of modernity, especially through the lens of the racial, sexual, and class-based assumptions of Western feminist scholarship” (Mohanty, 2003, p. 10). This critique suggests that as the twentieth century saw the end of the colonial era, the decolonization of the Third World former colonies, and the recolonization of the globe through First World capitalism, feminism must likewise be decolonized, for the current standpoint is situated within a Western economic and political framework, a standpoint that

cannot be ignored. This call to reflexivity was driven by what Mohanty viewed as a “consensual homogeneity of women” which ultimately resulted in an assumption of women as already comprising of or constituting a group, a group that has been labeled as victims, exploited, weak, sexually violated, and powerless (Mohanty, 2003, p. 23). Furthermore, the manner in which women have been defined has not only been in terms of comprising a homogenous group, but as passive victims of male violence, the colonial process, religious ideologies, and economic development.

Mohanty’s criticism of Western feminism challenge both Western and Third World scholars to be conscious of their objectification (regardless of if motivated by naivety or benevolence) of Third World women, for conducting research without reflexivity or self-consciousness only perpetuates the portrayal of women as politically, socially, and culturally immature and weak. So when trying to situate myself in the study or locate my standpoint as both a scholar and an author, it is undeniable that my numerous and at times conflicting identities would play a role in my analysis. The fact that I am an Igbo woman explains my fascination with understanding the personal narratives and experiences of Biafran women during the war; just as my Nigerian identity serves as motivation for understanding the ruling relations within the country that excluded a portion of its constituents from equally contributing to the national narrative. But what must not be disregarded or treated lightly is the fact that I have been educated in the west and am writing about women in the ‘Third World,’ and must be wary of falling into the Western feminist tendency of arguing that “they cannot represent themselves; they must be represented” (Mohanty, 2003, p. 18). While heeding Mohanty’s criticisms encourages and demands reflexivity and an austere level of self-consciousness, I would argue that it is *because* of my identities and my unique standpoint that I am equipped to uncover these hidden narratives. Because I am an Igbo woman, I am able to

more sincerely approach this sensitive topic; because I am a Nigerian, I can be far more critical yet simultaneously understanding of the ruling relations; because I am an American educated in the West, I have the privilege to speak about these haunting matters.

Ghostly Matters

When trying to locate one's standpoint, not only from a theoretical framework but within the ruling relations to be studied, it becomes clear that "life is complicated" (Gordon, 1997, p. 3). While this satori might seem unimaginative or even silly, Gordon argues that this seemingly banal expression has yet to be fully grasped in its full and true significance, for it has two dimensions: first, "the power relations that characterize any historically embedded society are never as transparently clear as the names we give to them imply" and second, "all people...remember and forget, are beset by contradiction, and recognize and misrecognize themselves and others" (Gordon, 1997, pp. 3-4). These dimensions provide a glimpse into the complexity of life and the arduous and intricate path that lies ahead for those who work to uncover the hidden meanings and ghostly narratives of the past. In using this analogy of ghosts and hauntings, Gordon explains that

"Ghostly Matters" is about haunting, a paradigmatic way in which life is more complicated than those of us who study it have usually granted. Haunting is a constituent element of modern social life. It is neither premodern superstition nor individual psychosis; it is a generalizable social phenomenon of great import. To study social life one must confront ghostly aspects of it. (Gordon, 1997, p. 7)

Life is complicated because it inherently includes both the seen and unseen, the obvious and elusive, the invisible and shockingly visible while forcing us to grapple with the ghosts,

hauntings, and the *sedimented conditions* that constitute what we experience on a daily basis.

Through this work, Gordon provides a means and a language for identifying the hauntings present around us. The ghosts or ghostly hauntings are not simply those that have died or missing persons, it is a way of conceptualizing the complicated world in which we live and interact. While the names we give these social constructs - such as race, gender, class, ethnicity, etc - help us identify them, they fail to adequately explain their invisible yet hauntingly powerful nature. *Ghostly Matters* argues that in order to study social life, and to study it *well*, we must then learn to identify and confront the frightening, painful, unsettling, and unnerving parts of life, namely the ghosts and hauntings. For in doing this, we are then able to explore what the alternative stories are, and what they teach us about the “relationship among power, knowledge, and experience” (Gordon, 1997, pg. 23). But while Gordon provides an impetus for understanding the complexity of life through confronting the ghosts and hauntings of life, she demands ethnographic authenticity and “a reflexive concern not only with the objects of our investigations but also with the ones who investigate” for “we are part of the story, for better or worse” (Gordon, 1997, p. 24).

As scholars, authors, researchers, we truly do become a part of the story despite our best, and at times valiant, attempts to remain objective or unattached. There is no clear demarcation line that separates our personal lives from our work. Just as the Biafran women learnt that the war was everywhere with no demarcation line that separated the war front from their door steps –as researchers, we must realize that we too are truly a part of the story, for better or for worse. So, when trying to describe the *experiences of Biafran women during the Nigeria-Biafra war* as well as understand *the nature of the roles of Biafran women during the war*, the discussed theories serve as a lifeline that help me uncover these ghostly narratives, yet situate or ground me in the process. Smith’s discourse on the silencing of women provides a contextualization

of the overall system of ruling relations, while Collins contributes to this argument in her discussion of the *matrix of domination*. Furthermore, Mohanty's critiques on Western feminism, coupled with Gordon's concept of ghosts and hauntings, remind me of the complexity and difficulty inherent in uncovering omitted and forgotten narratives, as well as my current position in the established ruling relations, for as a Western educated Igbo woman writing about these ghostly narratives, I must remain reflexive throughout this process, because this act of writing and exposing their narratives is powerful, political, and prophetic.

METHODOLOGY

“What does the ghost say as it speaks, barely, in the interstices of the visible and the invisible? ... What methods and forms of writing can foreground the conditions under which the facts and real stories are produced?”
(Gordon, 1997, p. 24).

When I initially decided to focus my thesis discourse on the experiences and roles of Biafran women during the Nigerian civil war, I was lauded for picking an *interesting* topic and lens from which to analyze the war; but inevitably the praise would transition into an austere recommendation to try and talk to the important generals that led the troops to combat, and to certainly interview some men as a way of ensuring a more balanced research project. Based on the surprisingly and strikingly consistent recommendations this topic has generated (by both men and women alike), Lemert’s (2004) claim that “communication is not so much the words but the consciousness from which thoughts arise” rings true in this case (p. 11). I often find myself pondering why it is acceptable for women to be largely omitted from the palimpsest and overall narrative of the Nigerian civil war, but when trying to address this void by solely focusing on their narratives and understanding their subjugated knowledges, then I am repeatedly recommended and advised to also include the perspective of men. This belief that a story is never complete without the inclusion of a man’s perspective further solidifies Collins’ (1990) argument of a matrix of domination as well as Smith’s (1987) claims of the power of ruling relations influencing not only our experiences, but how we have come to think. I find comfort and justification for my reluctance to include the narrative of men, in Lemert’s (2004) claim that “whenever there is strong resistance, one is getting close to something deeply felt” (p. 208). The aforementioned feminist theories discussed in the Literature Review (Smith, 1987; Collins, 1990; Mohanty, 2003; Gordon, 1997) delve into the difficulty of uncovering and addressing the importance of women’s narratives. Having

addressed the inherent powerful, political, and prophetic nature of writing and its impact on ruling relations and the ghostly narratives of the Nigeria-Biafra war, the questions that arise are what were the experiences of Biafran women, what was the nature of their roles, and *how* then does one unearth and uncover those omitted narratives on the historical palimpsest? This study attempts to do just that, by using a case study approach coupled with a brief content analysis.

Rationale for a Case Study

It has already been discussed and iterated on multiple occasions that writing is an inherently powerful, political, and prophetic act. Based on these assumptions, this thesis will then be used as a powerful, political, and prophetic tool to unearth the buried and ghostly narratives of Biafran women as told *by a woman* about the experiences *of women* during the war. The topic of Biafra was chosen, not because this is the sole arena in which the experiences and narratives of women are largely excluded or omitted, but because the Nigeria-Biafra war is arguably the most epochal event in Nigerian history, and likewise one of the most significant events in African history. Furthermore, this exegesis on the war and the exploration of the experiences and roles of Biafran women during the war can provide additional insight to how individuals, in completely different contexts, cope with systemic and structural collapse for neither race nor sex nor gender nor class nor postcolonial position is one [experience]. Even those who are not prominently touched or marked by a history of exclusion, by a line drawn through one or more of these personal histories, understand them, often against their deepest wishes (Lemert, 2004, p. 211).

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So while the writing this thesis is a powerful, political, and prophetic act in and of itself, it also addresses the universally experienced phenomenon of exclusion, and the impact it has on the subjugated parties as well as those perpetrating the exclusion.

In his work, *Sociology after the Crisis*, Lemert (2004) spends a considerable amount of time discussing how individuals measure themselves in the absence of a strongly structured world. This notion of “measured selves in weak worlds” has implications in the Biafran context for it begs the questions of how Biafran women measured themselves during the war, especially considering that wars are arguably the worst manmade occurrences of societal destabilization (Lemert, 2004, p. 91). Furthermore, if Lemert’s suggestion that the self is the “moral element of the modern individual” is applied, then what role does this measured self play during wartime? (Lemert, 2004, p. 100). These questions ultimately lead to the overarching research questions which ask *what were the experiences of Biafran women during the Nigeria-Biafra war* and *what was the nature of the roles of Biafran women during the Nigeria-Biafra war?* How then does a researcher generate answers to these seemingly simple yet innately complex questions? As Gordon (1997) argued through her equally simple yet innately complex expression that “life is complicated,” one can start to uncover answers to these questions once there is a firm understanding that the “power relations that characterize any historically embedded society are never as transparently clear as the names we give to them imply” (p. 3). While this statement may seem to confuse rather than clarify, it actually explains the methodology that is required to unearth these elided narratives by demanding that the researcher (who inevitably writes from a place of authority and power) must maintain a firm sense of reflexivity when approaching the topic at hand. If the ruling relations (or power relations as Gordon refers to them) have resulted in the experiences of the Biafran women generally being omitted from the historical palimpsest, then the methods used to uncover

these forgotten narratives must not contribute to that established and systemic matrix of domination. By this, I refer not only to Mohanty's argument "that being a woman has political consequences in the world we live in" but her warning that when trying to discuss the narratives of others, we must not resort to thinking that "they cannot represent themselves; they must be represented" (Mohanty, 2003, pp. 3 & 18).

This is one of the reasons why the research design was conducted in a qualitative manner because the qualitative research design is predominately focused on understanding the meaning for participants in the study, of their experiences and roles, understanding the particular context within which the participants act, identifying unanticipated phenomena and influences, understanding the process by which events and actions took place, and developing causal explanations (Maxwell, 2005). Within the field of qualitative research methods, there are several designs and methodologies that can be implemented such as grounded theory, ethnographies, in-depth interviewing, participant observations, or case studies. The key factor in deciding what design or method to use is the overall purpose of the study, namely the conjecture the researcher would like to make when the study culminates. Since the purpose of this study is to contribute to the palimpsest of the Nigeria-Biafra war by focusing on the experiences and roles of Biafran women during the war, a case study utilizing in-depth interviewing and a content analysis was implemented for it was a way to combine existing materials on women's experiences along with extensive and in-depth descriptions of the narratives of participants, most importantly, *in their own words*.

While my previous arguments - that women have not shared equal weight in the war discourse as men - may suggest the sole use of a content analysis as the preferred method, incorporating a content analysis in the overall case study that also utilized in-depth interviewing is actually more fitting, for it acknowledges the powerful, political, and prophetic

nature of those existing works while simultaneously contributing more to the historical palimpsest. According to Krippendorff (2004), a content analysis allows the researcher to view data “as representations not of physical events but of texts, images, and expressions that are created to be seen, read, interpreted, and acted on for their meanings, and must therefore be analyzed with such uses in mind” (p. xiii). He goes on to argue that methods of inquiry in the social sciences prevents researchers from “addressing what matters most in everyday social life: human communication, how people coordinate their lives, the commitments they make to each other and to the conceptions of society they aspire to, what they know, and why they act” (Krippendorff, 2004, p. xiii). Krippendorff (2004) further explains that while content analysis is generally considered a “shallow counting game, motivated by a journalistic fascination with numbers and a narrow conception of science in which quantitative measurement provides the only evidence that counts,” content analysis has progressed and is also used as a method of better understanding social phenomena through texts by exploring social interactions through texts, messages, and written matter (p. xiii). Granted, the method of content analysis is indeed a powerful tool, but its predictive and inferential nature are often cited as shortcomings, for although it affords researchers exploratory flexibility in the analysis process, the powerful, political, and prophetic nature of written works often allows for different representations of the work. This is why I will be using a content analysis that is largely guided and framed by Gordon’s approach of uncovering the complexity of life through the use of ghostly narratives.

As a result of these shortcomings, I chose to supplement my examination and analysis of written works that describe the experiences of Biafran women with in-depth interviews to provide a well rounded case study. According to Dan Silverman (2010) there are three types of case studies: *the intrinsic case study* where the case is of interest for its distinctiveness, and no attempts will be made to generalize; the *instrumental case study*, where a case is examined mainly

to provide insight into an issue or to revise a generalization; and finally the *collective case study* where a number of case studies are conducted in order to investigate and understand some phenomenon (p. 139). Since the purpose of this project is to understand and describe the experiences of Biafran women as well as the roles they played, the *instrumental case study* was implemented, for the study ultimately included a content analysis of written works as a way of framing the narratives of several participants for the purpose of providing insight to their experiences and roles during the war.

Research Design

Having identified that I used an instrumental case study (which included a content analysis and in-depth interviewing) as my desired method, the next task was to design the case study. Unfortunately, the development of this particular research design was the difficult part of conducting case studies because “unlike other research methods, a comprehensive ‘catalog’ of research designs for case studies has yet to be developed” (Yin, 2009, p. 25). In addition to this fact, the reason why some researchers chose to use case studies is because their cases are unique and particular, so a prescribed and dictated protocol for conducting case studies may not be as beneficial as the “catalogs of research designs” in other fields (Yin, 2009, p. 25). The criteria that I chose to use when I created my research design was based on Maxwell’s interactive approach where he used the five components of *research goals*, *conceptual framework*, *research questions*, *methods*, and *validity* (Maxwell, 2005, p. 5). As the first component, the *research goals* address why the study is worth doing, the *conceptual framework* focuses on the researcher’s perceptions on what is going on (which is generally based on theory and prior research findings), the *research questions* are determined based on what the researcher intends to understand by conducting the study, the *methods* dictate what will actually be done when

conducting the study, and finally *validity* analyze the possibility of the results and conclusions being erroneous (Maxwell, 2005, p. 4). While these seem like a linear process, Maxwell stresses that when conducting research, it should be an interactive and dynamic process because each component inherently influences other parts of the research design. While Maxwell's approach may seem incongruous because it stresses the issue of validity, it is important to note that with this particular study, validity is not being measured based on whether or not the results seem erroneous. Rather, validity is being measured by what my conversational partners have to say about their roles and experiences, for the narratives they choose to share are inherently valid because they reflect their personal experiences. So having determined my goals and overarching research questions of understanding the experiences and roles of Biafran women during the Nigeria-Biafra war, and having done a thorough conceptual framework through my exegesis on the feminist theories of Smith (1987), Collins (1990), Mohanty (2003), and Gordon (1997) in the Literature Review, I will focus on the methods that were implemented in this case study.

As previously stated, one of the difficulties of conducting case studies is that there is no prescription or established recipe for the methods. Furthermore, since this was a qualitative study, the data generated will not be presented in the form of numbers or statistics but remains infinitely rich because there is "no such thing as 'inadmissible evidence' in trying to understand the issues or situations" that I focused on (Maxwell, 2005, p. 79). As the researcher, I became the instrument and my eyes and, most importantly, my ears became the tools that helped me uncover those ghostly narratives. Since one important issue in designing a qualitative study, particularly a case study, is the extent to which I decide my methods in advance, I used an unstructured approach as a way to remain flexible. While the structured approach can "help to ensure the comparability of data across individuals, times, settings, and researchers," I chose to

use the unstructured approach because it allowed me to “focus on the *particular* phenomena being studied, which may differ from others and require individual tailored methods” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 79). Given that my main focus was to try and understand the personal narratives of my conversational partners, my goal was never to ensure the generalizability of the data because I understood that the experiences and roles that Biafran women had during the war differed from individual to individual. With this structure (or in this case unstructure) in mind, I conducted a *purposeful sample* because the only people versed and knowledgeable enough to answer my research questions were women who lived through and personally experienced the Nigerian civil war. Furthermore, because the case study included 7 participants, and the data were gathered through *in-depth interviews*, their experiences are obviously not purported to be representative of what all Biafran women experienced during the war. Once I arrived in Nigeria, I used the *snowball* method to find participants. I inquired around and acquired the contact information for my conversational partners from family and friends who knew someone that would be interested in sharing their stories. By including multiple participants, I still maintained the depth associated with a qualitative case study, yet had more breadth than if I had only conducted one interview.

The majority of the data was derived from oral in-depth interviews with the participants that were recorded and eventually transcribed. In order to gain as much rich data, I used a semi-structured interview schedule with initial, intermediate, and concluding open-ended questions. I describe the interview schedule as semi-structured because although all the topics were covered, the order and flow of the interview varied depending on the participant and the conversation we had. The settings of the interviews were determined by the participants, to increase their feelings of comfort and ease during the interview sessions. The interview schedule is included in the Appendix, and it is important to note that although they

seem rigid and structured, in actuality, they were used as a guide to create a conversational flow to the interview.

Interview Procedure

The purpose of this research project was to provide a narrative to the experiences of Biafran women during the Nigerian civil war, as well as the roles they played during the war. This goal was motivated by personal, practical, and intellectual reasons, for as a Nigerian-American woman, I am personally interested in these forgotten and largely omitted narratives, yet the subject matter is intellectually stimulating for the practical purpose of completing my master's thesis. Since the research question is the methodological foundation for conducting my research, my research questions are "*What were the experiences of Biafran women during the Nigeria-Biafra war?*" and "*what was the nature of the roles played by Biafran women during the Nigeria-Biafra war?*" While these questions seem broad, they must remain so, because they can only be answered by the personal narratives of my conversational partners, with their responses not being generalized to all Biafran women. These questions are reasonable questions for they focus on a specific population of individuals that experienced the war yet are still diffuse enough to incorporate their individual experiences and narratives.

As discussed earlier, the interviews took place in the South Eastern region of Nigeria as well as in the metropolitan city of Lagos. I arrived in Nigeria on December 3rd and left the country on January 2nd. Since I was using the snowball sampling method and my visit coincided with Christmas holiday where people typically stay in Lagos or visit their villages, the exact locations of the interviews were not predetermined because my primary concern when it came to selecting a location was to ensure that my conversational partners felt comfortable. Prior to each interview (excluding the interview with Mrs. Eze), I spoke with each participant

and arranged the location, time, and date of the interviews for a period that was mutually convenient. During the interviews, I used an audio recorder to document the conversation, and also personal field notes on the surroundings, observations, and the ongoing interviews. On average, the interviews spanned approximately one and a half hours with the longest interview lasting nearly three hours. The variance in interview length was determined by the responses I got from my conversational partners, their willingness to talk, the extent of their experiences during the war, how open they were about sharing their experiences, and the direction they pushed the interview. Although I offered them the opportunity to break up the interviews into smaller sessions, none of the participants chose this offer, for once we began the interviews, each participants spoke freely and earnestly, at times oblivious to how much time had passed. Another important point to note is the fact that one of the interview sessions included three participants who requested to conduct the interview together. Since they felt more comfortable this way, I gladly obliged because my aim was to make the experience as pleasant as possible. This particular interview differed from the others not only because it was structured more like a focus group, but because the three individuals only spoke Igbo. While I can understand the Igbo language and understood their responses to the questions, a translator was used to ask the questions because I wanted no errors when asking for information. Although a translator was used in this particular interview, all three participants willfully consented to this addition for they seemed eager to share their wartime experiences.

As evident from the interview questions listed in the Appendix, my intent was to actively listen to the narratives of my conversational partners as they described their experiences during the war as well as any roles they played. These questions spurred memories from the war, and I honestly believe that the interviews were an empowering and positive experience for not only my conversational partners but, surprisingly for me as well. Despite

my innocuous intentions when constructing the questions and eventually when asking them, the act of remembering proved to be an emotional experience that was neither entirely positive nor negative. I often reminded my conversational partners of their right to withdraw their participation if they felt overwhelmed at any point during the interview. The fact that all seven women ended the interviews by *thanking me* for inquiring about their experiences illustrates that there truly is power in the sharing of one's narrative.

Remembering

In the previous section, I briefly mentioned that the interview questions spurred memories from the war, and that the act of remembering and talking about their experiences was empowering and positive for my conversational partners. Although I honestly believe that the act of remembering was positive in this instance, the problem that often arises when asking others to recall significant memories is one that is faced by social researchers who study the past or historical events; and that is the reality that recalling history is a non-linear phenomenon. In his work *Illuminations*, Benjamin (1986) claims that “the past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again” (p. 255). He goes on to argue that articulating or recalling “the past historically does not mean to recognize it ‘the way it really was.’ It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment” (Benjamin, 1986, p. 255). This argument that the memories of the past are not as straight forward or linear as one would expect is not an argument in support of discounting personal memories. Rather, it serves as an urgent call to capture those intangible and fleeting memories before they disappear forever.

I once heard a journalist discuss hauntings and ghosts on the radio; during the program, she argued that “the peskiest ghosts, the kind that do the most haunting are the ones

that left this world so abruptly or so violently that the specter is confused...and figuring out what to make of this experience usually takes several years” (Rochlin, 1996). Surprisingly, this description actually bolsters Benjamin’s point, for in a way he argues that *memories are like ghosts*; they flash up at an instant, disappear before we can completely understand them, and have the power to haunt the living until we find a way to understand them. By recalling memories - particularly the peskiest ones, the ones that yearn to be retold yet are simultaneously hard to tell, the ones that do the most haunting – we are able to analyze and better understand that experience instead of discrediting it as simply a vaporous memory. It is in the retelling of memories that lived experiences once again become powerful, political, and prophetic.

By utilizing in-depth interviewing in this case study, my conversational partners were able and willing to face those “pesky ghosts” by remembering and retelling what they experienced during the war. As discussed, this process of remembering as a way to improve our understanding of the experiences of Biafran women during the Nigerian civil war has powerful, political, and prophetic implications for the historical understanding of the war. I find that I am not alone in this pursuit of focusing on individual narratives as a way to uncover the omitted and ghostly narratives of some groups for

in the last decade or so, historians have turned or returned to the question of experience, particularly with respect to nondominant groups and such problems as memory in its relation to history. The experiential turn has led to an increased interest in oral history and its role in recapturing the voices and experience of subordinate groups that may not have left sufficient traces in official documents and histories (LaCapra, 2004, pp. 2-3).

While LaCapra (2004) shares the belief that the remembering and retelling of epochal events in one’s life is important in solidifying the faint traces of subordinate groups in the historical

palimpsest, it also forces us to recognize that like memory, history is not as linear, straightforward, or objective as we would like to believe, for it is comprised of the retold memories of various individuals and groups.

Testimonio

Before diving into narrating the stories of the women I interviewed, it is important to understand how their stories will be told, for the manner in which these stories are presented is just as significant as the methods used to gather those narratives. Since these women were brave enough to face those haunting ghosts and memories from the war, the narration will reflect their valiance, which is why it will be presented in the form of *testimonio*. *Testimonio* is a narrative

told in the first person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist or witness of the events she or he recounts. Its unit of narration is usually a 'life' or a significant life experience. Because in many cases the direct narrator is someone who is either functionally illiterate or if literate, not a professional writer, the production of a *testimonio* generally involves the tape recording and then the transcription and editing of an oral account by an interlocutor (Beverly, 2008, p. 258).

Unlike ethnographies or autobiographies, *testimonio* is not intended to fulfill an anthropological function, "it is rather a *narración de urgencia* – an 'emergency' narrative – involving a problem of repression, poverty, marginality, exploitation, or simply survival that is implicated in the act of narration itself" (Beverly, 2008, p. 258). What is perhaps the most attractive and appealing aspect of *testimonio* is the fact that it is "an affirmation of the authority of personal experience" for it "does not require or establish a hierarchy of narrative authority" rather "it implies that

any life so narrated can have a symbolic and cognitive value. Each individual *testimonio* evokes an absent polyphony of other voices, other possible lives and experiences” (Beverly, 2008, p. 259).

The use of *testimonio* is particularly fitting in this study for it not only allows the reader to experience the actual voice of a real participant or witness of the war, but by presenting their personal narratives in their own words it also addresses Smith’s (1987) concerns of the silencing of women as well as Mohanty’s (2003) argument against writing as though “they cannot represent themselves; they must be represented” (p. 18). Furthermore *testimonio* reflects the deeper meaning of Benjamin’s aphorism that “even the dead will not be safe” for it acknowledges that “even the historical memory of the past is conjectural, relative, perishable. *Testimonio* is both an art and a strategy of subaltern memory” (Benjamin, 1986, p. 255 & Beverly, 2008, p. 265). By narrating their stories in the form of *testimonio*, it becomes a tool used to fill the void left in the historical palimpsest of the war, a palimpsest that has largely excluded this perspective in the wake of the Nigeria-Biafra war.

Since *testimonio* “is an affirmation of the authority of personal experience,” it is important to become acquainted with the women testifying about their roles and experiences during the war, as well as understand the context in which these interviews were conducted. My sample consisted of 7 self-identified Biafran women – six Igbo and one Yoruba. In an attempt to keep their identities private, their names and the names of cities, towns, and villages that could easily lend to their identification will be substituted with pseudonyms of real and existing locations in the same region. My first participant was a 77 year old Yoruba woman, married to an Igbo man, and mother of one son. Throughout this discussion, she will be referred to as *Mrs. Eze* for although she is ethnically Yoruba by birth, that pseudonym is a common Igbo surname comparable to one that she inherited through marriage. *Mrs. Eze* was

born in Western Nigeria, in a rural environment, and raised in an Anglican home, and is currently retired from her position as a librarian in a Nigerian university. One of my uncles worked with Mrs. Eze during the war, and was planning on visiting her and her husband on the afternoon of December 12th, so I followed along hoping to ask her about her experiences during the war. Since it was a Sunday afternoon, and I had worn traditional attire to church earlier that day, I also wore the same garment during the interview process. Although the interview was not planned or scheduled, she was extremely gracious in sharing her stories with a then complete stranger; even obliging to my request to leave her guests and go upstairs where it would be quiet enough to record the interview.

The day after my interview with Mrs. Eze, I had a conversation with *Mrs. Maduka* an 80 year old Igbo woman who was born in the Northern region of the country. Interestingly, of all my conversational partners, Mrs. Eze and Mrs. Maduka were the only individuals born outside of what would have been considered Biafran territory (refer to Figure 1 on page 13). Mrs. Maduka is a soft spoken and incredibly kind individual who was willing to recall her wartime experiences even though she was grieving the death of her older sister. The interview took place at the home of her sister's son, for the funeral was held in his compound. During our conversation she shared stories of what she witnessed, the experiences she had, the roles she played, and the losses she bore. I was also dressed in traditional attire for the entirety of this interview.

My third, fourth, and fifth conversational partners were born in small villages in close proximity to each other. Although my third narrator, who will be referred to as *Mrs. Okafor* was not sure of her age, she suggested that she would be approximately 95 years old. Her friends *Mrs. Asonye* and *Mrs. Chikwendu* were a little younger than she was, having lived for approximately 75 and 70 years respectively. I went to Mrs. Okafor's house on the afternoon of

Wednesday December 15th with my maternal aunt and first cousin to see if she would be willing to participate in the interview. Since Mrs. Okafor did not speak any English, my aunt volunteered to translate my questions into Igbo so that she would be able to understand what I was asking. Upon explaining this to her, Mrs. Okafor insisted that we wait while she summoned her friends so that they could also be interviewed in case she forgot anything important. We waited for approximately fifteen minutes until Mrs. Asonye arrived, with Mrs. Chikwendu arriving shortly after. During the interview we were all dressed in traditional attire and the conversation took place outside in her compound. The structure of this interview was slightly different, for I asked the question in English, my aunt translated it into Igbo, and Mrs. Okafor, Mrs. Asonye, or Mrs. Chikwendu would respond. Although this may seem like a more structured interview, it maintained an informal and conversational flow with each conversational partner responding to each question when they wanted to, at times having different recollections of similar events or experiences. At one point during the interview, I inquired about what they remember most about the war, and Mrs. Okafor described the dropping of bombs. Mrs. Asonye interjected that she recalled that the helicopters dropped the bombs while Mrs. Chikwendu explained that the bombs were from the *ogbunigwe*². This interview was the only one transcribed in Igbo and English, for although my questions were posed in English, the translated questions and responses were all in Igbo.

The last two conversational partners were not only related by marriage but were close in age and actually referred to each other during their individual interviews. *Mrs. Adichie* grew up in what will be referred to as *Udi* city and is currently 69 years old, while *Mrs. Amobi* was

² *Ogbunigwe* was a Biafran engineered weapon of destruction that could be used as a land mine or ground projectile from which to fire bombs. It is often touted as a prime example of Biafra's resourcefulness or ingenuity during the war effort.

raised in *Nkwele*, a small village in Eastern Nigeria and is 64 years old. I interviewed Mrs. Adichie in her daughter's house in Lagos on December 20th. For this interview, I was not dressed in traditional attire but wore a simple sundress. Mrs. Adichie is currently retired from her profession as a school teacher and lives with her husband in *Udi*. The interview was conducted in Lagos because Mrs. Adichie was in town to perform *omugwo*, a traditional Igbo custom where a mother takes care of her daughter and her newly born grandchild for an unspecified amount of time, soon after the baby is born. Since Mrs. Adichie's daughter had recently had a baby boy, she was still in Lagos for her *omugwo*, which is why the interview was conducted at the home of her daughter.

Mrs. Amobi's interview was also conducted in Lagos, and took place in her house. For this interview, I was also not dressed in traditional attire but wore a simple skirt and tee combination. Since we had not set a definite time, I arrived during the early afternoon on December 28th, and waited for her since she was on her way back from a wedding. Once she arrived, we went upstairs to conduct the interview, so she was still dressed in her traditional attire throughout the interview. Mrs. Amobi is also currently retired from her profession as a school teacher and lives in Lagos with her husband and daughter. She is a very regal and well-spoken individual with the ability to tell absolutely captivating and transfixing stories, which explains how this was the longest interview conducted.

Having sat down to interview (but more importantly listen) to these seven women, I was captivated by their ability and willingness to candidly speak about their wartime experiences. In choosing in-depth interviewing as part of my case study methodology, I was guided by the assumption that the best way to uncover what Biafran women experienced during the war was to simply *ask them*. Researchers and scholars have analyzed the events leading up to the Nigeria-Biafra war, they have theorized about the causes of the war, and

described the effects of the war following Biafra's surrender. The following section will examine the theories and tales that those scholars have told, or failed to tell, and using *testimonio*, will narrate the experiences of the seven women I interviewed.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

‘To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it ‘the way it really was.’ It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger’ (Benjamin, 1968, p. 255).

I started this thesis by explaining the powerful, political, and prophetic nature of writing. This initial claim transitioned into a discussion on how the *absence* of certain perspectives, stories, or narratives in written works is equally just as powerful, political, and prophetic, for it illustrates a systemic silencing of certain groups. Analyzing this argument within the context of the Nigeria-Biafra war, it becomes clear that although there have been and continue to be written works charged with examining and explaining the war, what is often omitted, rarely addressed, or given a demoted status in those works, is the role that women played and the experiences that they had during the war. This widespread omission of women from the historical palimpsest inspired this research project, which seeks to identify what their experiences were as well as the roles they played during the war through a case study utilizing in-depth interviewing framed by a content analysis of some existing works.

The literature review briefly discussed some key characteristics of Nigeria as a nation as well as chronicled significant historical events from her colonial past to the end of the Nigeria-Biafra war. The introduction of this information was integral in ensuring an understanding of the established ruling relations within Nigerian society, particularly as it relates to ethnicity, religion, and gendered roles and experiences. Smith’s concept of the silencing of women addressed this issue of ruling relations as it relates to the omission of Biafran women in the post war narrative by arguing that “the institutionalized practices of excluding women from the ideological work of society are the reason we have a history constructed largely from the perspective of men, and largely about men” (Smith, 1987, p. 135). While Collins utilized the

concepts of standpoint and ruling relations, she argued that by continuing to view identities in an additive or dichotomous way, we are unable to truly understand the experiences of others for their experiences are shaped by their standpoint at the intersection of their various identities. This concept of intersectionality was a theme that arose in the interviews, for my conversational partners discussed their varying ethnic and religious identities and the impact those identities had on their wartime experiences.

By presenting my findings in the form of *testimonio*, the large void in the historical palimpsest is starting to be filled “with the presence and spoken experience of actual women speaking of and in the actualities of their everyday worlds” (Smith, 1987, p. 107). By primarily introducing the results of the case study in the words of my conversational partners, I was not only able to better understand the complex and complicated nature of life during the war, but was also able to heed Mohanty’s warnings against writing from a position of authority with the assumption that “they cannot represent themselves” and thus “must be represented” (Mohanty, 2003, p. 18). Finally, Gordon’s argument that in order to study social life, and to study it *well*, one must identify and confront the frightening, painful, unsettling, and unnerving parts of life, namely the ghosts and hauntings, was illustrated in the experiences faced and narrated by my conversational partners. This chapter begins by exploring the standpoint of my conversational partners at the intersection of *religion* and *ethnicity*. From there, I introduce the *roles* and *experiences* of my conversational partners during the war, with particular focus on *the dead* and *refugees*, culminating with the theme of *generational shifts* and their grappling with what it means to have survived such a horrendous war.

Religion – *This I Believe*

Due to its diversity and heterogeneity, Nigeria is a country overflowing with dichotomies: the North-South dichotomy, the East-West dichotomy, the Muslim-Christian dichotomy, the military-civilian dichotomy, and the ethnicity-religion dichotomy³, just to name a few. The fact that these various dichotomies have not all lead to conflict implies that dichotomies are not all equally salient and there is ultimately a hierarchy of cleavages. This hierarchy is dynamic and changes depending on the situation, the actors involved, and the potential or expected consequences. What is particularly unique about the Nigerian case is that these dichotomies are not mutually exclusive, and in some instances overlap. For example, the North-South dichotomy is often interwoven or connected with the Muslim-Christian and ethnicity-religion dichotomy, for the North is predominately Islamic and Hausa while the South (specifically the Southeast) largely remains Christian and Igbo. Seeing that the Nigeria-Biafra war is usually described as a North-South issue, ethnicity-religion dichotomy is at times included as a theorized cause of the war (Ojukwu, 1989).

In fact, some sources narrate a slightly different tale about the 1966 pogroms, casting them in a more religious light by arguing that

Three massacres in a year (1966) – provided a complete extermination of the Igbos residing in Northern Nigeria, and this gave rise to the Biafran desire for regional autonomy and independence. The Islamic North was not satisfied with the ethnic cleansing in the North at the time. It strongly desired to extend an Islamic conquest into the Atlantic Ocean (Anwunah, 2007, p. 7).

³ While ethnicity and religion may not appear to be dichotomous, they are usually presented as the presumed causes of the war and often discussed in a binary (either-or) manner as dichotomous and competing identities.

This quotation as well as the overlapping and interconnected dichotomies illustrates Collins' argument of the intersectionality of identities. It is impossible to purport with absolute certainty that one identity was more salient than another, or to completely discredit the importance of religion in support of ethnicity. Collins' argument that "we must shift our discourse away from additive analyses of oppression...for they depend on either/or, dichotomous thinking" explains that our goals must not be to establish a hierarchy; rather, we should focus on understanding the interconnected nature of identities, for it is at those intersections that individuals reside and their experiences lie (Collins, 2011, p. 762).

Furthermore, she argues that "everyone has a race/gender/class specific identity" which cannot be quantified. In the Nigerian context, each individual has an ethnic/gender/class/religious/regional specific identity, which is important and salient to them for they lie at the intersection of those identities and their experiences are shaped by their location (Collins, 2011, p. 762).

Collins' argument that individuals each have an array of identities which cannot be analyzed in an additive manner is echoed by the responses of my conversational partners. During the initial portion of the interview, I inquired about their life and early childhood and interestingly, religion played a prominent role in their adolescent formation and family life, with some participants introducing the role of polygamy.

Mrs. Eze: I had a sister and I have a brother. I was in the middle. 3 children, monogamous family, my mother is. My mother and father were monogamous, but they came from polygamous families. They were Christians, but polygamy was not discouraged. I presume because they were already married before they brought this new thing into town. And they were so useful for the missionaries that I guess that they didn't try to bother them, to disrupt their normal life.

While Mrs. Eze raises the issue of polygamy in the context of utility and the introduction of Christianity during her grandparent's era, Mrs. Adichie and Mrs.

Amobi describe how their fathers had more than one wife. In Mrs. Amobi's case, she explains the circumstances around her father's second marriage.

Mrs. Adichie: Then my dad remarried, married two more women and was living with them. But I refused to live with any of them throughout.

Mrs. Amobi: Oh yes. You know papa, papa, the first wife, when he married the first wife, they wedded in the church, in the Catholic Church. But because the wife didn't have any child, that was what made him go for a second marriage. Even without a child, he loved her so much. We learnt, I don't know whether it was papa or mama that told us, that ordinarily, papa would not have gone for a second wife, but it was the woman...it was the woman that then started telling papa that the whole world knew that she was a woman, after all, she had already had her own children, that the problem was from papa. You see, not many men can take that. So papa decided to marry a second wife.

Mrs. Amobi goes on to frame this decision to marry a second wife within a societal and cultural context for at that time, Christianity was already established in her village.

Mrs. Amobi: So what I am telling you is that papa married in the Catholic Church, but then, if you marry in the Church, the Catholic Church forbids second wives. And papa thought over that seriously, but decided, took a decision, said that he would marry. But then his elder brother was a teacher in the Catholic school, and they were living in the same house, he was living in the elder brother's house. When he took this decision, to marry a second wife, he said he would build his own house. He would move out of the brother's house to live in his own house, so that the action he was going to take would not jeopardize the brother's work. And that was exactly what he did, that was when he built his own house, and moved into his own house. To tell everybody that it was an *independent* decision that he took... so he lived there and married mama, and according to the Catholic Church, if you marry a second wife, you are no longer a good Catholic, and because of that, papa soft pedaled in going to the church.

Not only did Mrs. Amobi's father's decision to have a second wife influence his relationship with his brother, but this decision ultimately affected Mrs. Amobi and her siblings for they were not allowed to be baptized in the church as infants, and had to wait until they were old enough to attend catechism courses. Yet, she narrates these memories with a fond recollection, ending with her older brother's ordination as a Catholic priest.

Mrs. Amobi: Because you are a child of second marriage. And we did all those things very religiously. And we completed everything. And to show the mercy of God, you know that it is one of the children of that second marriage that was the first reverend father in the whole of Nkwele? You see the faithfulness of God? Uncle Chikwendu that's one of the children of the second marriage. Yes!

Polygamy was not the only aspect of religion that influenced or affected the lives of my conversational partners. They discussed the role of Christianity in their daily lives prior to the war.

Mrs. Maduka: We go to church then every Sunday. And then, when we were old enough to be able to walk to the church for catechism classes, they sent us there. And we were baptized when we were babies. When sister was old enough to receive Holy Communion, she did hers and I did mine too, in the North.

This quotation not only affirms Collins' argument that individuals lie or reside at the intersections of their identities, but it also corrects the common misconception that the dichotomies of North-South, Muslim-Christian, or ethnicity-religion are mutually exclusive. Mrs. Maduka explains that despite growing up in the North, her Igbo family still practiced their Roman Catholic faith in a region that is generally characterized as predominately Hausa and Islamic. While Mrs. Maduka practiced her faith in the North, Mrs. Amobi narrated the role and significance of religion in her daily life in Southeast Nigeria.

Mrs. Amobi: I remember we would pray in the morning, he [*her father*] would wake us up, we would pray. In the night, before we go to bed we would pray. And there was nothing we hated as that one, because in the morning, he would come and wake you up, and you would be praying, and you'll be doing like this [*nods head sleepily*]. In the night, no matter how tired, you come out for prayers. And you know, when we were doing it, we didn't know what it was doing for us, because that is what is guiding us today. That is what is guiding us today, there is nothing like prayers. If we had not formed that habit then, the...problems of life that one normally faces would have made you know some people to go either left or right. But now, because we were introduced into prayer, you know, saying our daily prayer, it is no problem. Everything, we take it to God in prayers. So religion was part and parcel of our upbringing.

If religion plays such a critical or significant role in the daily lives of individuals, it can be conjectured that it would likewise play a similarly influential role during times of war, at times serving as impetus for participating or even starting a war. In fact, “surveys of participants in combat in the twentieth century show that religion is an important force keeping many soldiers going in the trauma of combat” (Goldstein, 2001, p. 257). In contrast to Goldstein’s conjecture, Mrs. Amobi’s decisions during the war serve as further evidence that religion played a critical role in the lives of Biafran women, for it actually influenced her decision to *flee* from her assignment in the war. During the war, Mrs. Amobi and a friend were assigned to go to *Udi* a city that had recently fallen to serve as paramedical staff providing support for wounded soldiers. She then narrates what framed their decision to secretly run away from that assignment and return home.

Mrs. Amobi: We decided we won’t go, because Udi had already fallen, and it was a pure war front. And these are people [*she and her friend*] who had never left their village environment. And we were brought up in the tenets of Catholic culture. We don’t know any other way. And if you have to survive, in a war environment, you have to, aaah!

Their decision to flee from the war front for fear that they may be forced to witness or perhaps perform something that was in opposition to their religious beliefs or forbidden by their faith answers the question Lemert (2004) initially raised about how individuals measure themselves in weak worlds. If the self is “the moral element of the modern individual,” the self is then “moral by virtue of its attempts to measure its relations between whoever it is and the structured worlds against and in which it does this work” (Lemert, 2004, p. 100). Mrs. Amobi’s narration of her and her companions’ decision to escape home illustrates that in that instance, her religious identity was how she measured herself in the midst of her weak and warring world.

While religion served as the basis by which Mrs. Amobi measured herself, resulting in her decision to escape from her paramedical unit, Mrs. Adichie describes that even during the heart of the war, religion maintained a structured and continuous role for they continued to attend weekly liturgy.

Mrs. Adichie: We attend masses too. We attend masses. The reverend fathers, there were few. They were giving masses for us every Sunday and sometimes during the day, the weekdays in the mornings. But, uhh yes, in our parish, in our parish, that time we were really going down to Amobia, Amobia parish. That's where we were having morning masses. But on Sundays they would come to celebrate mass for us.

Each woman interviewed explained the role of religion in their life. Although they were raised in different villages, towns, and regions, they each described their Christian upbringing in some fashion. While polygamy was a general and significant theme in some of their responses, they all addressed religious practices such as getting baptized and going to catechism classes. The significant role of religion did not stop at the onset of the war, rather it continued to influence the decisions some of the narrators made on whether to partake in the war, or the amount of access they had to liturgical service. This influential role of religion will be illustrated later in the final theme, for my conversational partners described their overall views on Nigeria and the trajectory of the country with religious allusions.

Ethnicity – Biafran Identification

Ethnicity and religion are often viewed as dichotomous identities in Nigeria, and in the case of the civil war, they are often touted as the causes of the war. As Collins (2011) argued, the additive or dichotomous approach to analyzing identities and oppression are often misleading for they not only steer us further away from the actual and lived reality, but they prevent further understanding and hinder progressive discourse on how to help those in need.

While religion was an important and significant identity for my conversational partners prior to and during the war, their ethnic and cultural identity was equally salient. In order to understand how these seemingly dichotomous identities coexisted, we need to not only keep in mind Collins' argument on intersectionality, but also understand the role and position of ethnicity in Nigeria.

The argument expressing the salience and importance of ethnicity is not an argument in favor of denouncing the importance of religion. In fact, understanding the nature of ethnicity can likewise help in explaining the salience of religion. Ethnicity is intricately tied to cultural identity or culture which "shapes the perception of Self and the interaction between people and their environment. It explains habits such as why people respect old age, have many children, take care of their children, work hard, take to polygyny, and support male dominance" (Falola, 2008, p. 50). Since ethnicity is so integral to many important aspects of human existence, it is understandable that people could and do fight and at times die on the basis of their ethnicity. Ironically, wars that are formed or framed along ethnic cleavages actually have the effect of deepening those very cleavages. The Nigeria-Biafra war was no different, for it ultimately crystallized the Igbo identity as elaborated by Chinua Achebe when he stated that:

The duration of awareness of consciousness of an identity, has really very little to do with how deep it is. You can suddenly become aware of an identity which you have been suffering from for a long time without knowing. For instance, take the Igbo people. In my area, historically, they did not see themselves as Igbo. They saw themselves as people from this village or that village. In fact in some place "Igbo" was a word of abuse; they were the 'other' people, down in the bush. And yet, after the experience of the Biafran War,

during a period of two years, it became a very powerful consciousness. But it was *real* all the time. They all spoke the same language, called “Igbo,” even though they were not using that identity in any way. But the moment came when this identity became very very powerful. . .and over a very short period (Appiah, 1992, p. 177).

Achebe’s comments explain how the Igbo identity was not originally a salient or significant identity prior to the pogroms, but the killing of individuals based on their Igbo ethnicity quickly crystallized that identity.

In a way, Ojukwu (1969) supports Achebe’s claims of events that spurred the salience of certain identities for he argued that “self-preservation is probably the strongest human instinct, and it is this that has compelled the harassed and persecuted people of Eastern Nigeria to seek refuge in their own home and among their kindred. As a proverb of one of our Biafran languages has it, ‘a man who is rejected by others cannot reject himself’” (p. 7). To be clear, the pogroms of 1966 did *not* create the identities in Nigeria; those primordial distinctions existed long before the prelude to the civil war. The effect the pogroms had was to deepen those existing cleavages by quickly turning them hostile. This transformation further illustrates the complexity inherent in human self identification, for like many other aspects or facets of human nature and the human experience, it is a non-linear phenomenon.

Once again, Lemert (2004) raises a poignant and fitting question by asking “if things social are different, then who am I?” (p. 232). He goes on to elaborate that “if the social differences are soft, then one can always trust in the network to eventually allow him in. But if the differences are hard, then people must measure their social worth in the hard terms of their exclusion” (Lemert, 2004, p. 232). If “hard differences arise at real social distances, ones that cannot be distanced or networked,” then a civil war framed along ethnic cleavages is

certainly cause for the crystallization and hardening of social differences. This argument of the transformation, hardening, and crystallization of ethnicity following the pogroms was candidly addressed during the interview process, for all conversational partners talked about the role of ethnicity prior to the war as well as their views on it during and after the war.

Mrs. Eze's experiences at university prior to the war illustrate that although ethnicity was present, Nigeria was not completely segregated along ethnic lines, and those differences had not yet hardened.

Mrs. Eze: Before the war, [chuckles], University of Nigeria was a uniting force. All the tribes were there, except Northerners. We didn't have Northern students nor lecturers at University of Nigeria Nguru at the beginning, because there were very few of them and there was enough opportunity for them, north of the Niger, so they really did not have to come to any of these new places. But the Westerners were there. People that they now call South-South, South-East, South-West, and the Yoruba's speaking Kogi state, they were all at the University of Nigeria Nguru. There was no discrimination at all. They came from all over the country

Unlike Mrs. Eze, Mrs. Amobi did not have the opportunity to meet or interact with many individuals from other ethnic groups during her childhood, for she grew up in a small village in the heart of Igboland. She recounts her first encounter with a man from the Hausa ethnic group from Northern Nigeria.

Mrs. Amobi: I was born in the village, brought up in the village, my primary school was in the village Nkwele, my secondary school was at Amobia, a neighboring village. So I didn't have the opportunity of meeting people of other ethnic groups. Yes. The first time, in fact I will tell you that I was already a very big girl; I was already in secondary school when I saw the first Hausa man. You know, he was a driver and um, he brought um, goods down to Nkwele for a townsman who was living in Isoko in those days. So when we saw this Hausa man, we were all... I said, this man is a Hausa man, we had never seen them before. I had never seen a Yoruba before. Yes! I had never seen a Yoruba; I had never seen a Hausa. It was just Igbos

Mrs. Amobi's story helps explain Chinua Achebe's argument that identities may lie dormant until certain experiences resurrect them. In Mrs. Amobi's case, it was her first encounter with

someone from another ethnic group that allowed her to see and witness firsthand the ethnic diversity of Nigeria. She went on to discuss that while there were a multitude of ethnic groups, diversity was not enough to cause any national problems, for those differences had yet to become hardened.

Mrs. Amobi: We didn't have...there was no problem. Because you remember, then we had three regions: the northern region, the western region, the eastern region. And each was somehow autonomous, developing - each of the regions was developing on its own. There was no hard feeling at all. There was no hard feeling at all.

But things started to fall apart after the pogroms and it was at this point that the Biafran identity became salient. To clarify, I say Biafran identity as opposed to Igbo identity because there were individuals from other ethnic groups that identified *with Biafra* as a worthy cause during the war or self identified *as Biafran*. Mrs. Eze is a prime example of this for she belongs to the Yoruba ethnic group, married an Igbo man, and resided in Biafran territory at the onset and during the heat of the war. She explained the added burdens she faced as a non-Igbo Biafran, for she constantly worried about meeting her family and being forced to consider them an enemy during the war.

Mrs. Eze: I had this burden of and praying that my own family of the Nigerians never ever show up in Biafra, where he or she had been caught as war weapon. Because at the end of the war, I learned that one or two of my cousins were in the Nigerian army, just as we lost one or two in the war, on the Biafran side. So that, I simply said "Lord, don't let me be confronted with my own blood being called an enemy." And I *would* regard him as an enemy if we meet on opposing sides. So thank God nothing like that ever happened throughout the war.

It was not only non-Igbo Biafrans that had to measure themselves in the weak world by deciding whether their allegiance was with the newly formed secessionist state. Mrs. Adichie recounts initially hearing about the pogroms in the North and her consequential identification as a Biafran woman.

Mrs. Adichie: What I remember really was that when, about the pogrom, we were hearing about it, we didn't see, we were hearing, and um, we were told that there was going to be a war. Because of the type of training, or they were giving us, telling us of how our people were being maltreated in the North, and that the best thing is to secede. So we all believed; we really believed in the war. We all wanted to fight in the war.

Me: Did you consider yourself Biafran?

Of course! I was really Biafran, and we believed in Biafra. We were chanting war songs that we really wanted to fight and be on our own. Get independence and be on our own.

Mrs. Maduka expressed a similar sentiment explaining the powerful imagery and ultimate impact of the pogrom in her self identification as Biafran.

Mrs. Maduka: Well, I thought it was a well deserved name because in the North, there was this pogrom that killed so many Igbo people. They even went, they had an effrontery of, the insolence of beheading one man, and throwing the body in the train that was coming in the East to show us that they were just desperate not to have anything to do with the Igbos anymore

Understandably, it was not just men and women (both Igbo and non-Igbo alike) who were forced to accept or deny this newly salient Biafran identity. Mrs. Eze narrated an incident where her young son self identified as Biafran.

Mrs. Eze: Well, in actual fact, [*chuckles*] we were given the wrong impression that, um, Biafra was a strong new nation born out of Nigeria, which had *killed* millions of the Igbos. And, since there was no room for all of us to live together amicably; we were just too happy to be out of the stifling, murdering, environment that was called Nigeria. And I remember my son who was...in 1967, after the war had broken out [*chuckles*] five years old. And another child, rushed inside this compound incidentally, because we had all fled out of Nguru into our various enclaves. And another child must have called him Nigerian, and they were, he was already boxing the other person. And I said, what is the matter, and he said "He called me Nigerian!" [*laughs*]

Me: Really? At five!

Mrs. Eze: [*laughs*]. It was that bad even with children. Even children. The whole idea that before the war broke out in July, we were all Nigerians and then, a few months because of the 1966 pogroms, nobody on the East side of the Niger wanted to be called a Nigerian. It was that bad. It was that bad

That story illustrates Achebe's point that "the duration of awareness of consciousness of an identity, has really very little to do with how deep it is. You can suddenly become aware of an identity which you have been suffering from for a long time without knowing" (Appiah, 1992,

p. 177). Surprisingly, once that identity becomes salient and one identifies with it, it then becomes very powerful and significant. At the end of the war, after Biafra surrendered and rejoined the country making Nigeria one nation once again, those identities did not disappear, but remain a significant part of Igbo identification. This reality bolsters Lemert's (2004) point that once differences become hardened, "then people must measure their social worth in the hard terms of their exclusion" for at three completely different interviews, Mrs. Eze, Mrs. Adichie, and Mrs. Maduka each described how they self identify and measure their social worth (p. 232).

Mrs. Eze: I think we all felt...we all felt badly used by Nigerians. We were outraged by the Nigerian who could just wake up one morning and start *backing* to pieces people who had lived among them without any problem. Some had intermarriage with them, without any problem. And they simply went haywire, and were behaving like animals, against their yesterday neighbors. That was very traumatic for us to understand, both men and women.

Me: Do you still consider yourself Biafran?

Mrs. Adichie: Well, [*chuckles*] I would like to [*hearty laugh*]. I'm an Igbo, I'm a Biafran. Yes. I'm Biafran, but I believe in one Nigeria.

Me: Do you still consider yourself Biafran?

Mrs. Maduka: Ummm...no, not in that sense. If things work out well, we are better as Nigerians. Let us keep together. But, the Igbos are still being marginalized.

Furthermore, these feelings of victimization and marginalization of the Igbo people have lingered long after the war ended and appeared as a common theme in nearly all the interviews conducted. Most of the women felt that the Igbo people have been demoted to a lower status in Nigerian society following the war.

Mrs. Maduka: It was all because of the war...it was all because of the war. The Hausas now wanted to laud it over the Igbos. They accept other nationalities better than the Igbos.

Mrs. Maduka's sentiments were shared by many of the other women.

Mrs. Adichie: My overall feelings...is that really, it's not that we fought the war, but we are really suffering for fighting that war. The Igbos are really suffering

in Nigeria for fighting that war in so many aspects. You know that after the war, some areas like eh, Port Harcourt, that area, they had to confiscate whatever the Igbos had in their area, they called it, they say it's abandoned property. That we abandoned whatever we had. So they couldn't give us back whatever we had then. My uncle had to lose everything! He nearly lost his life, when he wanted to go back to claim his house. They nearly killed him then. So, [*clicks tongue*] such things, if you remember them... if you want to build a house somewhere here in Nigeria, now like say Abuja or Lagos, sometimes you have to think twice, but after thinking twice, there's nothing you can do. You start building, but you don't know what will happen the next day. We are really being marginalized. The Igbos, and eh, we are praying to God, and maybe one day things will change.

Mrs. Amobi: It pains me so much that we lost so much ground. It is so painful to me. And um, sometimes, I doubt this wisdom we arrogate to ourselves. Because 40 years is long enough for people to have everything. I think it is time for us to do a self analysis of where we came from, and where we are now. We should not stay where Nigerians want us to stay. If we are really smart, we should be able to sit down and do an analysis and know what to do in order to come back. We have the energy, we have the stamina, we have the brain, we can make it. But what happens is the politics in Nigeria.

This expression of their feelings of being marginalized illustrates not only the continuous consequences of war, but further illustrates Collin's points on intersectionality, Achebe's discourse on the sudden salience of identities, and Lemert's explanation of hard differences causing people to "measure their social worth in the hard terms of their exclusion" (Lemert, 2004, p. 232). Unfortunately, when those crystallized identities become salient – as through a war – they are not only important to those who self identify, but to others who do not adhere to that identity. If the Biafran identity was spurred by the pogroms of 1966 and ultimately led to the failed fight for secession, both Biafran advocates and those in opposition to the cause are then forced to grapple with this newly salient identity in the wake of the fighting. It is in this process and following stages that another form or venue for oppression and privilege can become established.

Role – Because I was Involved

As the last two sections discussed, the identities of religion and ethnicity were integral in the way that women measured themselves in their weak and warring world. Continuing with Lemert's suggestion that the self is the "moral element of the modern individual," it then leads one to ask what role does this measured self play during times of war? (Lemert, 2004, p. 100). This inquiry returns to the initial research questions which asked *what were the experiences of Biafran women during the Nigeria-Biafra war* and *what was the nature of the roles of Biafran women during the Nigeria-Biafra war*? Ironically, the answer to these questions are best framed in Gordon's (1997) explanation of how "life is complicated," and how this complex nature of life ultimately reflects the reality that the "power relations that characterize any historically embedded society are never as transparently clear as the names we give to them imply" (p. 3). This quotation is fitting for it articulates why women have not been central figures and features in the existing war narrative. This is not to suggest that women are not mentioned *at all* in the war effort; rather, their few and far between mentions are generally written by men and framed around their relation to men. I am arguing that the best way to understand what role they played during the war is to hear it directly from them, in their own words. Failure to position women as the central figure denigrates those important roles and experiences, thus labeling them as unimportant and secondary.

In a recent article that focused on Igbo women during the war, Christie Achebe (2010) concludes that

Women's role and contribution in the Nigerian-Biafran Civil war of 1967-1970 war varied and can be summarized as follows: their literary contribution through the genre of short story writing, depicting how women navigated the war; their role in the economic mobilization of the war effort, especially through affia attack, cross-border farming and trading, and women's

cooperatives; their role in BOFF and more so in its RAP sector, their contribution to children's education and to the evacuation of children to safety; their contribution to keeping the markets open; and their contribution to creative nutrition (Achebe, 2010, p. 803).

All these integral and vital roles are in a sense demoted to minor achievements in post war discourses because "women were not represented in the political structure of government, and their once representative voice in politics paled in the face of other pressing matters and the constraints of the war" (Achebe, 2010, p. 793). Despite their ghostly or invisible nature in the political realm, the roles that women occupied during the war were actually essential in sustaining the war effort. By presenting their stories in the form of *testimonio*, it allows women to become the authorities on their experiences. The *testimonio* delivered by my conversational partners about their roles during the war also reflect Gordon's point that "life is complicated" for their vivid stories narrate the complexity of their lives at that point in time.

Prior to the war, all my conversational partners were living an established and stable life focused on either work or school. Mrs. Eze was working as a university librarian, Mrs. Maduka was teaching at the primary and secondary level, Mrs. Okafor, Mrs. Asonye, and Mrs. Chikwendu were farming and trading their produce in the nearby markets, while Mrs. Adichie and Mrs. Amobi were enrolled in teaching and secondary school, respectively. As expected, once the war erupted, those routines quickly changed. Mrs. Eze describes how she became involved in the war effort, leaving her post as librarian at the University of Nigeria, Nguru.

Mrs. Eze: So at first, I was helping with working with civilian distributing aids from outside, food aid, from outside, to the communities. I was at the refugee office at Oraeri. We had a refugee office at Oraeri and I was working from there as a refugee officer. And then later, Professor Odunukwe, who was more

into food security, with shrinking land mass, with no access to the outside world, depending only on food drops from relief agencies, food drops was never going to be enough, Professor Odunukwe, Land Army it was called, Land Army it was called - Food Emergency program. He would probably remember whatever the proper name was. He was the coordinator of it, and our business was to plant up every inch of cultivable land area, and we did. All football fields became corn fields, yam fields, roadside yam heaps, corn fields. So I was one of the provincial coordinators of the Land Army, under Professor Odunukwe. Ire province was my own area, which covered quite a lot of land. And it was my business to go out and encourage all the - either the indigenes or the refugees who are finding solace in this strange land to plant every inch of land. Yam, cassava, maize, we did not go into luxury food. I mean, really essential, really essential. And the people really rallied around, and they would then donate food stuff, those who still had land and were cultivating, they would donate food to our men who are in the battle front fighting in the trenches. So [*laughs*] that was my work, my war work.

The importance of this role should not be overlooked for Ojukwu himself spoke about the immeasurable weight and significance of the Land Army.

We cannot sit back and expect the relief organizations to feed us. What can they bring in? A plane brings in ten tons, and at the most you get twenty planes a night – that is, two hundred tons. This is like a drop in the ocean. We cannot rely on this supply alone. Our survival cannot depend on it. The best way to look at relief is purely as a bonus. The day we took the decision to move out and establish our own separate existence we know from then that we had to do everything on our own (Ojukwu, 1969, p. 67).

Mrs. Eze's role was incredibly important for, as previously stated, starvation was used as a weapon of war. Regardless of whether it is a legitimate weapon, the reality faced by hundreds of thousands was that children, women, men, and the elderly were all victims to hunger and kwashiorkor⁴. In addition to describing her individual leadership role as Coordinator in the

⁴ Kwashiorkor is a severe form of malnutrition caused by a chronic deficiency of protein in the diet that leaves infants with stomachs swollen and protruding from excess body fluids. Other symptoms include

Land Army, Mrs. Eze also referenced the work done by other women. Both accounts indirectly reflect Achebe's point that since women traditionally occupied the roles of nurturer, trader, and peacemaker in society "the shrinking of food sources during the war was a direct assault on the capability of the women to successfully carry out what they perceived as their traditional role" (Achebe, 2011, p. 794).

Mrs. Eze: And we transported our military men, equipment, little food that was still being distributed, and the economists, the women economists, were making cassava chips, yam chips, that could be preserved in the war front. There's no luxury food. No luxury food. But they were making packs out of what was available, and packing them to feed the soldiers at the warfront. You couldn't be looking for *eba* and *amala* and *okro* and *ewedu*⁵ at the warfront. I mean, dry pack and they made things out of what they did not think they could have made before. Dry packs out of all the things that we normally eat, and make *yanga* out of. So, that kept our soldiers well fed, moderately fed, not luxuriously fed at the war front.

Like Mrs. Eze, Mrs. Maduka narrated what she did during the war and how she became involved in that particular effort.

Mrs. Maduka: That was during the war. Because you had to be doing something, so that you continued to get your pay. So I enlisted with the Red Cross. And umm, I was running a kitchen for the wounded soldiers.

Me: How did you originally get that post or get to be in that position?

Mrs. Maduka: There was a friend who was a judge. So she took me into that, and while we were then working the new... they then channeled my own area towards running the kitchen for these wounded soldiers and taking care of the hospital, though I was a teacher, and I'm still a teacher, I was still taking care of them. Like those who had the shell disturbance, who were very unruly, they would go out of the hospital doing things. And uh, once I was told, I would move with my car. There was one who would keep hopping, and hopping, and hopping, and as soon as the sun would set, would ask what do you want? "Now hop and get into the car, and let's go back to the hospital, I have food

decreased muscle mass, change in skin pigment, diarrhea, stunted growth, hair loss, changing of hair color, and rashes.

⁵ *eba* and *amala* and *okro* and *ewedu* are traditional and staple Nigerian cuisine. For instance, *eba* is made from cassava flour, mixed with water and eaten with an accompanying soup. Like *eba*, *amala* is also cooked and eaten the same way, except it is made from yam; both dishes can be eaten with *okro* soup.

ready for you, so go on let's go to feed you." So he would get into the car and I would drive him back to the hospital, and see to it that he was comfortable and fed. And then they would, the nurses would give him their drugs.

But I was very kind to the wounded soldiers, hoping that something would happen, so that anybody who saw my own brother somewhere would be able to help, but my brother did not get the help. The hospital nearby at Okrika, had already evacuated the nurses and doctors, they were no longer there. So my brother, my precious brother just lived for barely 3 hours before he died. [*Long pause*].

Mrs. Maduka's narration reflects the reality of how some women found employment during this epoch, what their roles were, why they maintained those positions, and the influence of personal relationships on how they carried out their responsibilities. Although Achebe (2010) averred that the roles women took on was a response to the shrinking food source being a direct attack to their perceived societal gendered roles, Mrs. Maduka's story illustrates that some of her actions were not a socially conscious response to the "direct assault on the capability of the women to successfully carry out what they perceived as their traditional role" (Achebe, 2010, p. 794). Instead she describes that her nurturing care of the wounded soldiers was driven by the thought that someone, somewhere, could be providing the same care to her brother who was a Biafran soldier.

At the onset of the war, Mrs. Eze and Mrs. Maduka were already professionals in the workforce. In contrast, Mrs. Adichie and Mrs. Amobi were still students in school, with Mrs. Adichie attending a local teacher's training college, while Mrs. Amobi was finishing up her secondary education. Mrs. Adichie explains how once the war started, the training transitioned from teaching the youth to administering medical aid to the wounded soldiers.

Mrs. Adichie: So they came into the school, I don't know who, but they told us that we women should be recruited, volunteer if we want. So I really volunteered to go into the Auxiliary arm of the Biafran forces. So, we were still in school, normally, they'd come to school in the morning to come and take us

and give us training. So we started the training at Aba. Eh heh!⁶ We were being trained.

They were training us as auxiliary medical personnel to go to the war and treat the wounded soldiers. So at a point in time, we were then asked to go home; to go home. To leave the school and go home. So when we got home, they told, we were told to go to Okrika for the training again, to finish our training. So we left. I left with my sister-in-law to Okrika there. We were given the training. We were then under the Biafran Forces Auxiliary Unit at Okrika, so we were given military training and medical training too; how to treat the wounded soldiers and all that. So every morning we wake up, go to the field, were trained, then we go into the class, were given lectures on names of drugs, how to treat the wounds, how to treat wounded soldiers, so we continued, and until we passed out.

Me: So when they were training you, were you also still learning about teaching?

Mrs. Adichie: No! We had forgotten everything about teaching! We were still in Teacher's Training College. So when we came back home, we were not teaching, so immediately we came back they took us, all of us to Okrika and started giving us that military training and...so when we finish the training, we were sent to Ozubulu front. We were quartered at Ihiala. In a school at Ihiala, that's where we were staying. So in the morning, they would come to take some of us that were on duty. I think I went to the war front only about two times. You see the soldiers who were in makeshift hospitals, go there treat their wounds, give them drugs, and then console them, and all that.

Similar to Mrs. Adichie's experience of being forced to forgo education to focus on the war effort, Mrs. Amobi shared a similar experience for she started working for the Red Cross once school was canceled.

Mrs. Amobi: So after a few months, we decided to join the Red Cross. So we joined the Red Cross and were preparing food for the refugees. Because when the schools were closed, when there was no schooling again, the schools were used as refugee camps. The schools were used as refugee camps, and um, the Red Cross was very active, and Caritas too. Caritas was very active. Caritas, that is the Catholic humanitarian organization; it was very very active, and was working very hard. So, when we joined the Red Cross, we were going to prepare meals for refugees. The meals that the Red Cross brought and Caritas too, and um, at time, there was a time I was assigned, a group of us were assigned to Ozubulu, then Ozubulu had been deserted. We were going to prepare food again for soldiers, yes, for soldiers; we were preparing food for soldiers. Villagers would contribute whatever food items they had. *Ogo* leaves, yams, whatever they had. They were contributing it, and after the contribution,

⁶ Eh heh is a common exclamation similar to Ah Hah!

those food items would be carried down to various locations, and we as Red Cross members were going to prepare those meals for the soldiers. Then, at a point, we were told, it was one of the Red Cross meetings that we were told, that a new organization was going to be formed. Because Red Cross was not competent, it was not going to the war front. We were told that a new organization was going to be formed, and the name was Biafran Forces Auxiliary Unit. That was what they called it, and they called for volunteers, people who would like to serve. And I was one of those that volunteered to serve.

I was one of those. We were four from my village, Mrs. Adichie was there, my classmate in the secondary school, her name was Ngozi, and then my cousin, Sarah. One of my cousins, the father is Peter Adichie. Sarah was about my age, but she is now dead, she is now deceased. We went, there was an interview that was set up, we went to Okoh, the interview was held at Okoh. And you know in those days there was no vehicle, wherever you wanted to go, there was trekking, so we trekked to that place. We attended the interview, and we were accepted. We didn't even know where we were going to [chuckles], and they gave us a date to come out, we came out, and they carried us in a lorry, it was a lorry they used to carry us [laughs]. We didn't know where we were going to, and, but God is wonderful.

So we came down and it was a school, we came down and we were located dormitories, and the following morning, training started. Biafran Forces Auxiliary Unit. They taught us military drill, because it's going to be a paramedical unit, Biafran Forces Auxiliary Unit, it's a paramedical unit. Our work was going to be, you know we would be going to the war front with the soldiers, but then we wouldn't go to the front, we would be in the back, and any soldier that got wounded will be brought to the back and that is where we shall be taking care of them. So we underwent the training, the military drill, and the medical aspect of it, we were taught different types of drugs and their functions. Antibiotics, in fact it helped me a lot, you know, when I go to the hospital and start discussing with doctors and asking questions, they normally ask if I went for, ummm, yes, because we learnt so much. At the end of the training, we were deployed. We were deployed. Then, Catherine was deployed to Ihiala, I and Ngozi, that my friend and classmate in secondary school, she's now a magistrate. We were deployed to Udi, they said Udi. Then Sarah, Sarah is Sarah Adichie, I don't know where she was deployed to. Catherine, because her own was Ihiala, very close to Nkwele, she went immediately.

After the training and assignment of positions, Mrs. Amobi and her friend Ngozi realized that they were to be stationed in Udi, which had already fallen to Nigerian forces. She then narrates their decision to escape, and how they managed to flee.

Mrs. Amobi: In the evening, I called Ngozi and said “come” as I was thinking, Ngozi was thinking too, and I said “where do we say we are even going?” Ngozi said “ah! I don’t think I will go!” I said “alright, let us see what we can do.” We decided we won’t go, because Udi had already fallen, and it was a pure war front. And these are people who had never left their village environment. And we were brought up in the tenets of Catholic culture. We don’t know any other way. And if you have to survive, in a war environment, you have to, aaah! So it was then that it dawned on us, that we didn’t really know what or where we were going. So we thought, and I called Ngozi and said “let’s go and survey the environment.” I said, “We are not going anywhere.” And it was the following morning that we were going to move to Udi. Then in the evening after our supper, we went and surveyed the environment. Because the gate was always kept by the soldier, the sentry, somebody must always be there. But we discovered a foot path that leads to the road without getting to the gate. There’s no way we can go through the gate without getting caught. So when we discovered this foot path that we could use, we came back and packed our things. We packed everything. Even the blanket we used to spread on the bed, we packed it. And we slept on bare bed, and we were waiting, and as soon as it was 3:00 am, and the cock had crowed, I went and called Ngozi. Ngozi got up and we carried our things, and then we tiptoed out of the dormitory and following that path, got to the express, to the road, and we started walking, walking, walking.

As discussed earlier, Mrs. Amobi described how her upbringing in a Catholic home influenced her decision to flee from her assigned duties for fear that her actions in the warfront may be in opposition to certain tenets of her Catholic faith. Upon reaching home, she narrated the story to her family and received mixed responses of her parents, for her mother supported her decision to return home, but her father was not impressed.

Mrs. Amobi: Then when I came to the house, because Papa was a very very strong man, and he loved doing strong things, very courageous, very bold, very audacious. When I came home and narrated our experiences, he was not impressed [*laughs heartily*] because he would have loved us to continue and maybe come back as an officer [*continues laughing*]. He was not impressed. So when I told Mama, you know women, she said “*nne, y me ofuma ne nnataba*” “*you have done well to come back.*” Papa turned to Mama and said “what do you expect from somebody who has run away from the war front?” [*laughs*].

Life during the war was not equally taxing or strenuous on all individuals at that time; Mrs. Amobi goes on to describe her life during the war as surprisingly *boring* following her escape

from the paramedical unit with her friend Ngozi. It was out of this boredom that relatively dangerous pursuits became seemingly enticing prospects and viable opportunities to keep occupied and potentially make money.

Mrs. Amobi: Apart from taking part in the Red Cross and this adventure into the unknown that we ran away from, I was living in the comfort of my home, my father's compound. Because there was nothing we were lacking. We were not lacking anything. They were very protective, Papa and Mama, and you know I had elder brothers and a senior sister, they were very protective and, how would I say it? There was a time it became so boring, staying without doing anything, and I and this my friend Ngozi, my classmate, we decided again to venture into business, to go into business. Because many of my friends were going, there was what was called *afia attack*. We planned, because there were some of our friends who were making good money. They would go and buy salt, because salt was a scarce commodity. They were buying from behind enemy line - that was how it was described in those days. They were going behind enemy line into where the Nigerian forces were, and that was where you could get such commodities. Salt was nowhere! So some of our friends were doing that and were making good money, so at a point, I and Ngozi said "ah ah! What are we even doing? Let us follow these people and make money." Then Ngozi said - because Ngozi lost her mother very young, it was the father that brought her up, and the step mother. Ngozi said "let me go and tell my father" and I said "I'll go and tell Mama about our plan." So Ngozi went home and I went home and told her what we wanted to embark on, Mama said "*Esther, nwa'm, I ma ife mma cho-I gwa y – what I am telling you, if there is anything you want, if there is any money you want, just tell me and I will give it to you, but for you to go and do attack [shakes head]*" Then the following morning Ngozi came down, and I said what did your father say, and she said that her father said that she "wasn't going anywhere!" I said "that is what Mama said o!" Mama said no to attack. So we continued staying, and that was how we were staying until I got married.

As is to be expected, the roles of women did not remain static during the war, for as towns and villages fell to the opposing army, as people died, as food and ingredients increased in scarcity, the responsibilities and roles women took on also changed. Mrs. Amobi's mention of *afia attack* is something that has been discussed in existing literature.

Scarcity of food in Biafra forced some of her women folk to engage in what was referred to as *afia attack*. It simply means, "trading in the war zone behind enemy lines." The women went behind enemy lines to buy needed foodstuffs

and then returned to Biafra and sold them to the starving masses. It was a very dangerous venture; some of the women never returned from the trip – some were caught in crossfire while some were maltreated by federal soldiers, raped and even killed. It was bad enough that some women had lost their husbands in the warfront and were left with no one to fend for the family. But when hunger threatened to end their lives and those of their children they now had to care for as widows, they had no choice but to venture into *afia attack* (Uzokwe, 2003, p. 58).

It is important to keep in mind that the term *afia* (at times spelt *affia* or *ahia*) means market in the Igbo language, and it was in this “formidable sacred space,” in this *afia*, in this marketplace, that women traditionally traded stories and tales as well as “peacefully exchanged life-giving properties of food and money” (Achebe, 2010, p. 794). This tactic of *afia attack* has been addressed in literary and fictional works as well. In Flora Nwapa’s *Wives at War*, she describes the role that women played in the war as they undertook the attack trade (Achebe, 2010, p. 793). While in Chimamanda Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun*, she chronicles the toll that these dangerous excursions had, not only on the women who underwent them, but on the families that anxiously awaited their return. In the novel, one of the main characters takes off for *afia attack*, and is never seen again. As her family anxiously waits, they are often told stories of other women who went and didn’t return for months because they were cut off, yet they always find their way home *somehow* for “one day you will know” (Adichie, 2007, p. 535). Yet, the waiting takes a psychological toll on the family, for in the novel, Adichie narrates how the twin sister of the missing often finds herself enraged “for not waking up early the day that Kainene left for *afia attack* and for not knowing what Kainene wore that morning and for not

going with her” with her rage worsening as she boarded buses “to go to crowded hospitals and dusty buildings to search for Kainene” never finding her (Adichie, 2007, p. 538).

Yet this experience of venturing into the unknown out of desperation does not remain in fictional narratives. These roles were actually enacted and witnessed by my conversational partners. Mrs. Okafor, Mrs. Asonye, and Mrs. Chikwendu narrated that during the war, they were all still farming and continued with their trading at that time. They would leave as early as 6 am and would trade hurriedly so that by 10 in the morning, they would quickly disperse for the Nigerian army had formed a habit of bombing any large gathering of people. Whenever they saw any planes or helicopters, they would rush into the bunkers that were set up near the market to hide until the shelling stopped and the aircrafts left. Mrs. Eze and Mrs. Maduka also described their experiences with *afia attack* and how women came to be involved in this venture or how they knew when to avoid partaking in it.

Mrs. Maduka: And sister did, there were not even having good vehicles to go in. They would climb in...what do you call this...tippers, or some of these lorries. That was what they went in to buy these things. The women did a lot of things to make sure they brought food for the people. We were all caged in, so the women played a good role in providing food. Risking their lives to get the food, to bring in the raw food

Mrs. Eze: Covering a large province, Ire province for the food program, I used to have to cross what was demarcation line between Biafra and Nigeria. Because our people were going to buy food stuffs from Nigeria, which was still not under siege, and coming to sell to us under siege. They called that *afia attack*. You’ve heard of that? *Afia attack*? And I would go with them from this side, in the lorry, the civilian lorry, because we had no access, we did not have access to the military at all. And we could simply see the blazing boom boom, fireworks from the Nigerian army, from their trenches, just a stone throw from us. Yes. But then we did discover that the war front was not really as dangerous as thought or feared. It only when the Nigerian army is on the move, when the Nigerian army is attacking, you’d better not be anywhere near the zone where bazooka can land on you. And it’s the same thing with the Biafran army. If there is hot exchange of weapons between the Biafrans and the Nigerians then you had better be out of that range, because that is the

deadly zone. But apart from that, the Nigerians and the Biafrans they were crossing and trading in this *afia attack*.

Although women died during these excursions, “as long as a few women succeeded in bringing back fresh food and other items, these risky attempts were sustained until the end of the war” (Achebe, 2010, p. 795). The end of the war did not mean an immediate return to the lives once lived and the positions or roles once occupied. Following the war, some women continued their participation and contribution in the post war effort of rehabilitating the wounded. As Mrs. Eze explained,

Mrs. Eze: And at the end of the war, I mean, I did rehabilitation work with Red Cross at Nguru, and with the Eastern Nigeria then ministry of, um, what did they call it then, Social Welfare. Because I had a workshop founded at Nguru where I was helping amputees to make bags, leather bags, oh yes. I had a workshop at Nguru for rehabilitation of the war wounded ones. And they were making luggage leather bags. I had carpenters whom I taught to make toys, left over woods they make squares, round and packaged them in small packets and sold them.

So I did rehabilitation work with Nguru area amputees with CARE. CARE was a Catholic organization at Ogbaru and they gave us equipment: carpentry equipment, sewing machines, which the amputees were using in the workshop that was set up for them at Nguru. So that way, before the war, distributing to refugees, during the war food security exercise, end of the war rehabilitation of war victims, war victims, amputees, destitute, artisans; to help them to get themselves together again. And by God’s grace a few were uplifted. There was not a government agency [*laughs*].

Despite the fact that “women were not represented in the political structure of government,” this did not leave them at times free from the post war inquisition, for at times they found that the roles they played during the war was viewed as suspicious by the newly coalesced nation during the post war reconciliation, rehabilitation, and disarmament efforts (Achebe, 2010, p. 793). Mrs. Eze’s leadership role as Coordinator of the Land Army resulted in her being questioned by the Nigerian government after Biafra’s surrender.

Mrs. Eze: Yes. Yes. I mean, in fact, it got me into trouble because Nigeria believed that food emergency program, which was called Land Army, that we were soldiers. I was queried. I mean, the Nigerian government came to ask me questions about my role in this Land Army. And I had to explain to them that I didn't even know what a gun looked like, not to talk of being a soldier. That I was cultivating the land, and maybe we should have been called Food Army instead of Land Army, so you have nothing to fear from us.

At the end of the war, everybody was queried. "What was your role? What were you doing as a Land Army?" and they probably would have liked me to say what was my title, maybe a major or general, and where were my arms and ammunition, where were my soldiers, battalion - all sorts of things. But we were food...emergency food producers. Food for the famishing people, concentrated in diminishing land mass.

Returning to Gordon's (1997) exclamation that "life is complicated," this phrase encapsulates the roles of Biafran women during the Nigeria-Biafra war for in a way it illustrates how impractical it is to deduce that every action by a Biafran woman was a response to their position in society. It is actually unfair to try and narrow the significant roles they played into one narrative, for like each woman, they are all complex and very complicated and presenting them as one experience is a way of furthering the silencing of women. As Gordon explained, "the power relations that characterize any historically embedded society are never as transparently clear as the names we give to them imply;" and in the case of Biafran women, their different roles reflect their individual interaction with the existing power relations (Gordon, 1997, p. 3). We saw how Mrs. Eze's role as Coordinator in the Land Army led to her inquisition at the end of the war. Mrs. Maduka explained how she started working at the Red Cross in an attempt to keep busy and earn some sort of wage while her nurturing acts of caring for soldiers was influenced by the thought that someone would hopefully do the same for her brother. Mrs. Okafor, Mrs. Asonye, and Mrs. Chikwendu tried their best to continue living, farming, and trading despite the numerous hurdles with which the war challenged them. Mrs. Adichie joined the Biafran Auxiliary Forces Unit, foregoing her schooling to become a

teacher while Mrs. Amobi and her friend Ngozi escaped from their posting in the warfront, only to face boredom in their village homes. These narratives and *testimonio* illustrate that life truly is complicated and to try and surmise that these women played no real role or played one collective role moved by the same influences is a disservice to all those that valiantly served, lived, survived, and died during that epoch.

War Experiences

Understanding the impact of the war is not solely about describing the various roles that people played, it is also about uncovering their experiences – what they felt, witnessed, and heard during that time. Recalling Benjamin’s (1986) claims that “the past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again” reminds us that remembering “the past historically does not mean to recognize it ‘the way it really was.’ It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment” (Benjamin, 1986, p. 255). As iterated before, this statement is not an argument in favor of discrediting the *testimonio* of my conversational partners. In actuality, it serves as an urgent call to capture those intangible and fleeting memories before they disappear forever.

One such memory is the story of how the war began. Historical sources often chronicle the initial coup d’état by young soldiers, the counter coups that followed, the consequential pogroms in the North, the fleeing of Igbo civilians down to the South, and the declaration of Biafra’s secession by Ojukwu as how the war started (Ojukwu, 1969; Uzokwe, 2003; Uwechue, 2004). Yet what is often assumed is that the political acts on the national scene signified the start of the war for each individual. By asking my conversational partners how they knew the war had actually started, it became clear that this was a varied experience that was felt on a personal and individual level.

Me: So how did you know the war had started?

Mrs. Adichie: Eh, we were told. We were told the war had started. Initially we weren't hearing the sounds of the gun and all that. It was when the war came nearer down to Ozubulu side, that we started hearing the sound of the machine guns and bomb, and the bomb. Even at a point, the thing was coming straight to our town. But we didn't run.

This theme of not running, of not having to flee from one's village, was something that was also iterated by Mrs. Okafor and Mrs. Asonye. They explained that even though "*anyi o gba-ro oso*," even though "*they didn't run*," they knew the war had started when a neighboring village fled and set up temporary shelters and camps in their area. However, it was when the shelling started, when they heard the "bwemb! Bwemb!" and saw the helicopters and planes releasing bombs whenever crowds formed, that was how they realized that the war had officially begun. Mrs. Amobi's recollection of how the war began also incorporated this notion of running as towns and villages fell victim to attack from Nigerian forces.

Mrs. Amobi: When the war started, you know Nigeria was saying it was a police action, police action, there were skirmishes here and there, but then, there was no movement again. People were no longer going to Ladega and coming back, or people from Ladega coming to the East and going back. There was that severance of communication.

And the Biafran army was formed. Initially, the battles were at the borders, Nguru, that was where Matthew was killed. Around there, but later, they moved in, and that was when people started running. Yes. People started running, you have refugees, people from Nguru area, people from Udi area, because Udi was completely taken over. You know they started moving down, as the Nigerian forces were coming in, you know people were moving from their various villages. You know we were lucky, we didn't move. But then, Ozubulu was a target because Ozubulu has been a very strategic town in Nigeria. Because it is a business, a commercial center. It was a target, and our place is only 10 miles from Ozubulu. And that bridge, the Niger bridge that links the Midwest with the...it was also strategic.

So, to forestall the federal troop coming into our own area, the bridge was broken by Biafran forces. Oh yes! They used dynamite to break it so that the Nigerian forces could not use it. And that was what saved us, because if they

had crossed, our place was very close. So now that they could not cross, they were at the Atani end shelling us, shelling. Yes! And then we were on our own side shelling them. At the beginning of the war, we had just come back from school, and in fact, why we came back from school was that the Nigerian Air Force was strafing schools and marketplaces. They were bombing schools and marketplaces. That is against the convention of UN. They should be bombing only the warfront. They would tell the world that they were bombing only the war front, but we inside Biafra knew that they were bombing schools and marketplaces. And that was why schools closed down, and students were sent home. So we went home and were doing nothing.

Mrs. Maduka narrated a similar yet personal experience of her realization that the war was in fact really happening. She explained that the significance of this fight dawned on her when she tried to find her brother, and was stopped by a soldier who died the very next day.

Mrs. Maduka: And at a point, I got into somewhere in Umuomaka, then the officer who saw me there said, “Madam where are you going to?” I said “I’m looking to see if I can find Greg.” He said “do you know you are in the war front?” “War front??” “Yes! You just have to go back!” So I went back, and the next day that officer who talked to me, Obi was his name, was killed. So I now knew that I was really... [*buckles and trails off*].

Although each woman came to understand that the war had begun through different events and experiences, once this realization was clear, they were all forced to decipher what this ultimately meant in their lives in relation to what the cultural expectations were at that time. Achebe (2010) explains that the prevailing ethos at the time “was that girls must be married in order to acquire respect and dignity in their society. However, most available bachelors had been conscripted for the war effort, had become war casualties, or were in hiding” (p. 803). Achebe goes on to explain that despite the changes and war constraints, the expectations remained for young women to get married. While most of my conversational partners bolstered this notion that ceremonies such as weddings still occurred, none of their stories referenced or supported Achebe’s further conjecture that “some women became promiscuous” trying out “a new hairstyle named *di gbakwa oku* (marriage/ husband can go to

hell)” in response to those unwavering expectations (Achebe, 2010, p. 803). By asking about the nature or occurrence of ceremonies, I wanted to get a better understanding of how the war impacted important cultural and societal staples such as weddings and funerals.

Where were there still ceremonies performed? Where were people getting married? Did you attend any weddings or funerals?

Mrs. Maduka: Of course! People were getting married. Like my younger brother that died during the war, he got married in Obosi. I sewed the wife's wedding gown, got her prepared for the wedding. But things were so rough; I didn't even attend the wedding. Well, my father did, and gave them his blessings, and I don't know how successful the blessings were because my brother now died two days after the wedding. And after the wedding, I took the wife with me to Umunze, that was where we were staying at the time, and we were still at Umunze, when the news of the death of my brother reached us.

While Mrs. Maduka narrated the wedding and subsequent death of her brother, Mrs. Adichie described the rushed wedding of one of her in-laws.

Mrs. Adichie: Ah, you had weddings. People did get married, but you do not have big ceremonies. I can remember that one of my sisters' in-law; she got married during the war. And uh, just one morning, during the morning mass, one of the relations of the husband rushed in to tell us that the lady is being married [*laughs*]. That's Maryanne, the one at Oyi. She's a little bit fat...and she rides a motorcycle now...[*trails off*]. So she just got married and uh, Eze Onyekachi was so annoyed because he was not told. There was nothing like marriage banns⁷ [*heartily laugh*]. No marriage banns, just that morning, said that the reverend father wanted to have some weddings so they just ran to the church. Eh heh. They had the wedding and Eze Onyekachi was so annoyed. He left his box in their house, because they live far inside, so he took his box to that place in case we have a need to run away. So that morning, when he heard about the wedding, he went down to their place and carried his box [*laughs*]. How can someone's daughter be wedding without your pre-knowledge? [*laughing*] They just came in “come! Come! Please we're wedding!” [*laughs*]. So, that is war. Mmm. So you don't have all those fun fare during weddings especially at the heat of the war.

After returning home with her friend Ngozi, Mrs. Amobi initially described the boredom that they experienced, especially since she and Ngozi were forbidden by their parents

⁷ Marriage banns, also referred to as Banns of Marriage are ecclesiastical announcements in Christian Parishes or Churches that include the names of couples contemplating marriage.

to partake in *afia attack*. She explains that since schools were shut down and there was no employment, it was around this time that she eventually got married.

Mrs. Amobi: Because we were waiting for the war to end. Because you know when the war started, Nigerians were calling it police action, police action. We thought it was something that would end in one month, two months, three months, four months, five months, oooh! And the thing was not ending!

I was in school, but when the war *refused* to end, when the war refused to end, I got married during the war. That was October 1969. No! October 1968! That was when we did the traditional something. Then we thought that the war was going to end soon. And when it didn't end, by May 1969, we wedded in the church. May 1969, we wedded in the church.

Me: So were the ceremonies different during the war than they were before?

Mrs. Amobi: Not different, it wasn't different. But then what people were fearing was the Nigerian plane. Because anywhere they saw gathering, they would throw their bomb, so people were always doing things under shade. Tree shade, and um, there was poverty, because people were not working. People had left their jobs, wherever they were, their businesses, their wealth, wherever they were, to converge in the villages. And many people had abandoned their homes; those that were affected by war became refugees in other peoples...yes. So there was poverty. And ceremonies that would have been very elaborate, like when we wedded, it was a big surprise that there was cake, that we were able to make cake. And it was a *big* surprise that there was beer. And those things were possible because Ichie Mmili was who he was, an engineer who was working in Research and Production, and because of the fuel and kerosene, they were able to be getting these scarce commodities. And the woman that made cake for us, one Mrs. Adanna, the husband was a justice, I think a justice at Udi, but by then Udi had fallen. They are from Okoh, it's a neighboring village. Everybody was home! Everybody that was anybody was home! It was only people like Ichie Mmili who had something to offer that moved out to this Research and Production. Every other person was around.

So we had cake for our wedding, and we had beer, but it was a big surprise. If you see our wedding card, our card was type written, a sheet of paper, that they typed I think in their office, the Research and Production just typed it. Yes. And what again? No wedding, my wedding gown was Mama Ebele's wedding gown, you know, Auntie Sally. I used her wedding gown. There was no wedding gown, and there was no money o! There was no money!

The war not only affected the nature of ceremonies such as weddings by limiting access to certain products and making wedding staples such as a wedding cake and drinks luxury items,

it also impacted when weddings occurred and how families were started. Mrs. Adichie explains that as a result of the war, she was unable to start bearing children early for she was separated from her husband for a long period of time during the first years of their marriage.

Mrs. Adichie: So what the war really did to me was that because of the war, I couldn't start living with my husband early enough. We had to be apart for the length of time; in short, from 1965 till 1971. I had to join him in 1971. So I didn't start early enough to bear children because of that.

She goes on to explain that her experience of not living with her husband was not an anomaly, but one face by many women in Biafra at that time. Mrs. Adichie then narrated the horrendous acts that women were subject to at that time, and all the suffering they experienced; traumatic events such as the loss of children and loved ones or rape by soldiers.

Mrs. Adichie: Of course! Women really suffered! Women really, though we were, we didn't go to war, but so many lost their loved ones! Their kids, some even lost all their boys they had! And eh, women really suffered. You know that in those days, women were really being maltreated so much, though some of them were ignorant, they didn't even know they were being maltreated; they thought that's how the world is. But eh, it's only women, you know its women that go for, what you call attack, *afia attack* [laughs]. It's mainly the women that go for *afia attack*. So, most of them die along the road too. Some pregnant women, some nursing mothers, they have their babies at the back, and go for the attack. And eh, and eh the soldiers equally, those Biafran soldiers and Nigerian soldiers, really messed some women up. Raped them... [Long melancholy pause]. They come to your house, and we were mostly afraid of what they would do to the young girls. Luckily for us at that time, we hadn't this HIV, you just suffer the trauma of rape and all that. Some of them get impregnated. The women and the young ones, and the young ones mostly suffered this... the young ones and the elderly suffered this kwashiorkor. And our men, not very young ones, even the middle aged ones, they were hiding in the houses because you were either conscripted into the force or you were conscripted to go and eh, dig bunkers for the soldiers. So, our men are mostly hiding, so the women were doing virtually everything...everything.

Mrs. Adichie further expands on the burdens that women experienced at this time.

Because the women really suffered the war. They really fought the war, though they did not go to the warfront, but everything was on their head. They are at home, looking for food for the family, all the members of the family. All these refugees that were, were moving along with their people, it's mostly the women, and the elderly, the elder men, and the very young ones. Imagine, what

age was Chima at that time? But he had to go! But the women, the women! Think about how the mother was feeling that time! And most of them are past the age of bearing children, so when their children, their loved ones are gone, they could not, there was no replacement. And most of the women now in the village, are suffering because of that. They lost their children, they really suffered that time, they lost those ones that went for war, and the one that they were carrying, the younger ones, because they were moving along with them, most of them were dying of kwashiorkor at that time. And the pregnant women, there was a lot of, there was a lot of infantile mortality and eh, miscarriages. No drugs! The whole thing was on women really. If you have somebody at home, that person would be hiding, won't even go to the farm to do anything. It's the women that were there in the farm looking for food, doing everything. The women that go to fetch water from the stream, everything was on women at that time! [*Inhales deeply*]. You fetch water, you fetch firewood, you look for food, you come back you cook the food, everything, the following day you either go to market, across, you pass the border, and go across to look for food, you come back, you do eve... oh God! Women really suffered. Men they were just in the war front, some of them died, some of them were wounded, so.

As a final thought, Mrs. Adichie added that young girls were forced to sleep in the roof at night in case any soldiers came to the compounds at night to scavenge for food.

Mrs. Adichie: You know sometimes at night, the young ladies hid in the roof, in case these armed robbers or soldiers come in. Eh-hah! So in the night, you climb and sleep in the roof, in the roof. If you have any form of money, you dig the soil outside and hide it, any precious thing [*laughs*] because if they come in, they would collect everything; they collect everything then rape the women. [*clicks*]. Odiegu⁸!

Mrs. Adichie's narration illustrates that although the women I spoke with were not armed insurgents or soldiers fighting in the warfront, the burdens they faced were just as heavy and the experiences they lived were equally traumatic. In their case, the warfront was not in the trenches fighting combatants; "the warfront was everywhere" it was in their everyday experience as a "warrior against hunger," it was in the "indiscriminate air-raids," it was in the "rape and other forms of sexual exploitation" (Nnaemeka, 1998, p. 236). Mrs. Amobi discussed similar incidents at the beginning of the war following the pogroms. She narrated

⁸ Odiegu is a commonly used Igbo exclamation that loosely translates to it's unbelievable!

how people fled with absolutely nothing, and how others were murdered and massacred at that time.

Mrs. Amobi: They were killed! They were killed! They were killed! Those that escaped ran down to the East, yes, and um, it didn't stop at killing the soldiers. They faced the Igbos in the North and massacred them! And that was what was called pogrom, the pogrom. They really massacred them; those that were not killed in the North. That were, because everybody, Ojukwu was there in the East, and he called all Igbos to start coming down in the East. Those that left their bases to come down to the East were cut up on the way. There was nothing they didn't do! Nigerians? The pogrom? Oh! They will get a woman, a pregnant woman, and cut the belly open, if it is a girl, they will throw her into the bush. If it is a boy, they will kill him again; say that "this is going to be another Ojukwu!" Because by then, Ojukwu was the rallying point, he was calling people to start coming home. Many people came home. Those that came home came home empty handed. And these were, because the North was filled with Igbos, rich, rich, rich people. The whole of the North, but they left what they had and came down.

After thirty months of fighting, starving, and dying Biafrans grew weary and tired of the war. Once again, the war's end has largely been described as a political act with the surrender of Biafra and Ojukwu's exodus from the country. Yet, what this often overshadows is the effect these acts had on individuals residing in Biafra; how did they come to know the war was over? What do Biafrans remember about those times? Mrs. Okafor explained that she knew the war had ended because on a particular day, she woke up as scheduled with the intention of bringing out her items for trading, but saw army soldiers trooping out, which was something she had never seen before. So people started asking them, "What is it? What has happened?" And they were informed that the war had ended. Mrs. Amobi narrates how she found out the war was over. By this time, she had already married her husband and was living with him.

Mrs. Amobi: Then as we were going that day, that was on the 10th of January, 1970, 10th of January 1970, you know there was a type of feeling, because many people had died, people were suffering, people were getting tired. Tired! There was a type of feeling in the air, you know, people were standing in groups discussing, discussing, discussing. We visited Uncle Sean, and then we came back to the camp where we were living. And people were saying that the

Nigerian forces have come into Biafra, and Nigerian forces are closing in, they're closing in, and there was confusion everywhere. And we said "what will we do? What will we do? What will we do?" Ichie Mmili had a car, a 404. What shall we do? What shall we do? Everybody was becoming restless. We said ok, what we will do is we packed our things into the vehicle, and we said, ok there is a village down, down, down the hill, very, very far from, because we were afraid that if we started to go to our place, that we would meet the Nigerian forces on the way and they would kill.

So we said that what we would do is that we would run away, we would run to this village. They called it Enugwu Aduleri village, which is down, down, down, when we were going, the vehicle was just going down, down. When we were going, we said we would go there and hide [*laughs*]. So we ran to that place. You know many people from that camp, the Research and Production, we gathered ourselves and went to that place. I don't even know who got that house where we stayed, we stayed there and we were not doing anything. After about two days, Ichie Mmili came and said "what are we doing here" "Would it not be better for us to go?" And I said, "I don't know, we don't know what we would meet up there." Whether we would meet these Nigerian soldiers, and if we meet them, that will be the end. At a point, he said no, that whatever would happen would happen. He said that I should pack our things, so I packed our things into the vehicle and we started moving, and moving, and moving, until we got to Nkwele. We got to Nkwele and that was it. And the news and everything, started saying that the war had ended. All the Biafran soldiers, those that were on the road, because by this time, everybody was tired. If you saw our soldiers, their condition was very pitiable; they were hungry, their dresses were tattered, some of them had skin diseases, rashes, they were anemic.

Mrs. Amobi goes on to narrate an incident that occurred after they returned home with soldiers trying to likewise make their way home after the war's end.

Mrs. Amobi: You know our house is on the road, that road is a very major road. It goes from Ozubulu to wherever, so soldiers were, there was no vehicle, and everybody was trekking, even soldiers where trekking, there was no medicine, there was nothing! And soldiers would go into people's farm, whatever they would get, they would eat. They would go pluck papaya, raw papaya that was not ripe and eat it like that! No food! There was an occasion; but Mama had everything, Mama had so much food that she was trading and a group of soldiers came into our... that was a farm, we used it as a farm. In Mama's farm you get whatever you want. You have fruit, or different types of food. A group of children came into the house and said "Mama! Mama! Mama! Come and see! These soldiers are ravaging your farm! These soldiers are ravaging your farm!" Mama came out and saw them, a group of young men in tattered uniform. They were plucking papaya, they were taking whatever. Oh! Mama looked at them and said oh, "I know that the mothers of these soldiers would be somewhere cooking and eating, without knowing that their children

are out here.” So instead of driving them, other people would drive them away and say “Go! Go! Go away!” Instead of driving them, mama went into the house and prepared boiled cocoyam and brought it out to them to eat. So this will give you an idea of what people went through. Yes. So that war, was a terrible terrible ordeal. And that was what, if not for that war.... And we call it a misadventure, it was a misadventure because you see, at a point, there was this, because Biafran forces were a force that Nigerian forces never anticipated that we would be able to resist them for the amount of time we did. But, we did, and...what was I saying?

Understanding the experiences of women during the war is imperative for it explains how those often discussed political acts of the initial coup d'état, the counter coups, the pogroms, the declaration of secession, followed by the 30 month war, and then the surrender of Biafra were played out and felt by the women in society. Through their *testimonio* my conversational partners were able to paint a clear picture of what they experienced during the war; absolute poverty and hunger for some, whereas others were lucky enough to continuing planting and trading. Mrs. Adichie explained the sexual violence enacted against women, while Mrs. Okafor explained the effect of the indiscriminate air raids on the marketplace or any large gatherings. Mrs. Maduka and Mrs. Amobi explained how the war affected significant and important ceremonies such as weddings. These stories tell us that the war affected each individual in some way, yet their experiences remained understandably varied. By seizing up those ghostly images and memories as they flashed up at the moment of recollection, these women afford us a better understanding of what the experiences of Biafran women were during the war.

The Dead

There is always a price to pay for war, and the cost is often not equally distributed among all those involved, for some ultimately lose more. In reality, this cost is not only in terms of monetary value or political clout, but can be representative of intangible and immeasurable loss. One could argue that the gravest or most taxing loss one can experience is

death, for death is a permanent loss, that can never be recalculated or regained, and has the power to sever relationships, snatching lives not fully lived and ultimately leaving those left in its wake reeling. The Nigeria-Biafra war is unfortunately an example of this, for the cost of the war cannot only be measured in the monetary value of a nation's economy at standstill, nor can it solely be measured by the political and social consequences of that civil war. In addition to these tangible costs are the intangible losses of national unity, but most importantly the actual lives lost. Some sources cite that "the monthly death toll in Biafra was exceeding 750,000 people, most of them children" with others counting upwards of a million victims (Korieh & Nwokeji, 2005, p. 164).

Yet numbers never fully express or capture the tremendous loss that is death. At some point during the interview process, each conversational partner narrated an encounter with death during the war. Mrs. Eze explained that she found out of her father's passing *a year* after he died for she was in the heart of Biafra when he passed away.

Mrs. Eze: My father died during the war. We didn't hear of it for almost one year. And we heard of it through a friend of ours who was at government college, who worked at Inisa, when my husband was working at Inisa, but who was outside the country working at United Nations library at Geneva. It was roundabout with Caritas, plane, and uh, we learnt a year later that my father had died. We didn't hear of it.

Like Mrs. Eze, Mrs. Maduka poignantly narrates the death of her brother, and how she came to hear of his passing. He died two days after his wedding, and had foregone a scholarship to Israel to complete his Ph.D. so that he could contribute to the war effort.

Mrs. Maduka: The event that struck me, one that I really remember, is the death of my brother. That was a terrible one, because I was very close to my brother. Even up till now, I still feel that he will be coming back some day from Israel. Because that was where he studied, came back, worked in Agric Engineering department at Udi. And just before the war broke out, he had had a scholarship to go back to Israel to do his doctorate degree, and the war broke out.

I was moving around with the wife, to complete the...because he gave us some errands, some things we were to do, before they would go to their rest house at Omor area, and as I was moving around with Catherine, we saw some friends of ours, and they wouldn't stop to talk to us, even those who knew Catherine, and those who were living close to me at Nguru. They were just avoiding us. It was only the next day, while I was giving my sister, my sister's baby, that is Mrs. Uzoh, she had had her first son. So I was bathing this baby, when somebody came in to see me, and, I said, "what of your, where is your husband?" I said, "Not my husband, but my brother in law." He said he wanted to talk to him. And I said, "Did I see you at Obosi?" And he said, "Yes."

But before then, my sister had had a dream, and told me everything about the dream, and I said, "No! I don't like this dream of yours! Saying that you and Catherine decided to put your husbands in, in boxes? So that you'll hide them away from people conscripting them!" But putting somebody in a box is not a good dream. So when this man came, and wanted to talk to Adam, I decided to give Clare back her baby, because I had finished bathing him and was drying him up to dress him, so she completed it.

So I went and that was...and that was when I heard Adam say "You mean Greg is dead?!" Aaah! I had a blackout. Yes. I now followed the boy; later on I was ok. I followed him and he now gave me the details. That he said he was going to defend Obosi, then came to Umunze collected the ammunition he was going to use. But Papa had told him not to carry ammunitions in his own car, because they could explode and kill whoever was carrying them. So the ammunition was following him behind. Then when he got to Alor Junction, and they were shelling, from Obosi, he now opened his car, jumped out to go and take cover, but some of the strap nails had hit him, and I was told that he only lived for 3 hours after that.

But I was very kind to the wounded soldiers, hoping that something would happen, so that anybody who saw my own brother somewhere would be able to help, but my brother did not get the help. The hospital nearby at Okrika, had already evacuated the nurses and doctors, they were no longer there. So my brother, my precious brother just lived for barely 3 hours before he died. [*long pause*].

Mrs. Maduka goes on to narrate how her father was adamant that his son be given a proper burial in his village, so the family requested for his corpse to be brought immediately so that they could have a quick burial. Once his newlywed wife saw the corpse, she understandably got very emotional.

Mrs. Maduka: So they waited for us until we came in. We now saw the corpse. And my dear brother was still bleeding. And Catherine could not leave him alone. She was kissing him all over there, even with the blood [*barely audible*], it

was so difficult to pull her out and leave him - he's already gone. It was a very bitter experience [*whispers*].

I later asked her in what ways the war affected or changed her, if at all, and she replied that the only noticeable change was with her brother's death.

Mrs. Maduka: I don't think umm...the only changes, are my feelings for my brother, because I was always thinking about him.

The ironic theme of a wedding closely followed by a burial was also present in Mrs. Amobi's discussion of her father's death. She explained how he died a few months after she got married.

Mrs. Amobi: And I tell you that when Papa was dying, I was lucky enough to be with him, I was in the hospital taking care of him when he was sick, he had gangrene, that is the intestine twisted, and it was during the war. So we had to take him to the hospital. I had just married; I had just wedded, a few months after my wedding this happened.

Mrs. Adichie also lost her father during the war, followed by her father-in-law, and was brave enough to narrate those epochal experiences.

Mrs. Adichie: In 1968, my dad became sick, very sick. And um, in fact, I was there. They didn't tell me how bad he was, until he died. [*Quietly*] So one day, one early morning they just came and took me home. They said my dad wanted to see me. I had to go. So I got home, unfortunately, he was already dead. We had to bury him. So...mhmm.

I inquired about how burial rites and ceremonies differed during the war, and she explained that the lack of resources prevented many from having a befitting and proper burial.

Furthermore, families could not hold large gatherings for fear that they might attract air raids.

This was also another reason why they could not have the customary firing of rifles as a sign of respect and reverence. As Mrs. Adichie explained,

And people died! People died! People were really dying in great numbers... from kwashiorkor. Well, if anybody dies, the family would just come together and uh, do some burial rites and bury the person. Eh, even the refugees when they died, you bury them in the burial grounds, and uh, for the, for those your own people, you bury them either in the, depending on what the family wants,

you can bury them in the compounds, or in the burial grounds, but sometimes we fear going to the burial ground because of air raid. Because whenever they see group of people, they start bombing. So most of time, you prefer to bury them in the compound.

And another thing, during the burial ceremony, there was no - we don't have gun shots. You know normally, you have gun shots, but it was banned, so no gun shots. And not only that, but you don't even have the money to buy whatever to make the gun. . . you just have a small little, little ceremony and you bury the person. Even in those days you know that when a titled man dies, you kill a ram, put it in that person's eye, and all that, but at a point, we were using just cock, ordinary cock in place of ram to bury. No gun shots. You can only have gun shots if you are lucky to have a soldier, a Biafran soldier in your compound. The person will just do about 3 or 4 gun shots and that's all.

Mrs. Adichie then narrated how her father-in-law passed away during the war.

My father in law was already dead. He died during the war, so. And they - it was really one of the horrible experiences. Because he just, after night prayers one day, we went to bed, he went to bed, and in the middle of the night, he started shouting, that his tummy, complaining that his tummy was paining him. So we all came out, ah ah! Nothing could stop the pain! So, one of the daughters was called, Auntie Esther and the husband they came and they took him that night to the hospital at Ogbunka. When they got there, they said no drugs. So he was transferred to Okpoko. Then at Okpoko, the doctors examined him, and said that he was suffering from gangrene. . . gangrene of the intestine. So, that there was nothing that could be done except operate on him. But that it was very risky, because there was no drugs [*coughs*] but if we could risk it, that they were going to operate on him. If he survives the seven days - so he was operated on, and because there was no drug, he really died on the seventh day.

Me: On the seventh day?

*Mrs. Adichie: On the seventh day! That was on the 24th of eh, September. It was a *big big* blow! A big big blow to all of us when he died. The year 19..68. He died in 1968. Oh, my dad died in 1967, and he died in 1968. [*Clears throat*]. So that really touched me. It really touched me. And he died just because there was no antibiotics to treat him. He was a lovely young man, but very unlucky. [*Clicks mouth sadly*].*

Following the end of the war, as people and soldiers made their way back home, Mrs. Okafor described that the roads were scattered with dead bodies, piles and piles of corpses. Mrs. Adichie also explained that it was then that people started mourning their losses.

Mrs. Adichie: People then started mourning for their dead. It was then, that they started to notice that some of their loved ones could not come back, survive the war. During the war, if any of the soldiers die, if the people are lucky, the corpse would be brought home. If they are not lucky, they would just be told that the person died. So, when that person is brought home, it's only then people would just gather around. Do some few burial ceremonies and bury the person.

From the narratives described, it is clear that one of the greatest and gravest losses of the Nigeria-Biafra war was the loss of life. Each conversational partner narrated the loss of someone dear to them at some point during the war, thus illustrating that this loss was widespread and without bounds. The fact that Mrs. Eze, Mrs. Adichie, and Mrs. Amobi all lost their fathers while Mrs. Maduka lost her brother and Mrs. Okafor lost her husband illustrates that women truly experienced tremendous incalculable loss during this war. With death, it is often difficult to find the words to express what the passing of an individual means, and the case of the Nigeria-Biafra war is no different. What remains clear, however, is that the experience of losing a loved one is one that does not end with the culmination of the war. Rather, it is an experience that forever lingers, for as Mrs. Maduka stated, “even up till now, I still feel that he will be coming back some day.”

Refugees

For those who survived the war, living was not an easy enterprise for many had become displaced having lost their homes along with all their possessions. The deafening barrage of bombs and mortar shells as the explosions in villages forced thousands to flee from their enclaves to other areas. Those who fled “complained that the mortar shells sometimes exploded in their villages, killing innocent civilians and damaging buildings; it was the reason why they had to pack up their belongings and leave, thereby becoming refugees in Biafra” (Uzokwe, 2003, p. 42). If Nigerian forces were bombing civilian strongholds such as schools and marketplaces (as described by my conversational partners), then it becomes

understandable how so many people became displaced refugees at this time. Furthermore, the fact that the majority of my conversational partners worked with refugees or interacted with them in some way illustrates that internal displacement was a crisis of large proportions.

Mrs. Eze explained how she initially worked with refugees once she witnessed the trains coming down from the North with mutilated corpses on board. From that instance, she started working towards helping the destitute and refugee populations, not knowing that she too would eventually become a refugee.

Mrs. Eze: And um, when the pogrom started, Mrs. Nwokedi was the regional director of the National Archives at Udi while I was at the University library at Nguru. The husband was the University librarian. And when this... were bringing in corpses, half mutilated human beings from the North, she and I decided that we would collect clothings, and distribute to the refugees that were coming into Udi. We did not know that we ourselves were going to become refugees before the war would end. We were still in our various places. Udi hadn't fallen, Nguru had not fallen. We did a lot of collections of clothings for the refugees that were arriving at Udi then. And it really, it was a clear, clean cut up – mentally, physically, spiritually. For us who were Nigerians before we saw the corpses of our fellow Nigerians being brought back from their neighbors, their friends, places they lived for years. It was clean cut for us we thought, because here we are, back in Nigeria, yes. So, that was in 1967.

During their initial departure from Nguru, Mrs. Adichie and her family took very little possessions for they believed that they would be returning in a short while thinking that university towns and campuses were surely not a military target.

And at first, when we left Nguru, we left with nothing, because we were told Nigerians would never enter the university town. And we simply left, putting things on the bed thinking “oh, if a rocket booms, maybe it will [*laughs*] shake the mattress.” So we really simply left. Some people actually left in the, their cloth they were tying in the university town, because we were given the impression that the Biafran government was in total control, and they were going to wipe out the enemy, and we were just to come out of the university, so that when they finish with the enemy, we would just walk back home. And of course we never walked back home for *2 and a half years* after. So, we left with nothing. But it is good, probably it was very good to remind us of what the Bible says, what the word of God says “we come into the world with nothing, and we are going to take nothing out.” So I felt happy that we had given to the needy when we were not even threatened. So now that we were

with nothing, then we felt at par [*laughs*] with the people we were helping before.

Mrs. Maduka shared a similar experience of leaving with very little and having to basically start over with nothing.

And I lost almost everything. I had to start afresh. Because when I left my house at Nsukka, I just left, even the sewing machine I was using at the time, I was making my sister's wedding gown. All I did was lock up the machine, pushed it into my wardrobe and went out. My box, because my certificate and things were there, then I took them home. So my chairs, furniture, other things, every other thing, my cooking utensils, everything in the kitchen, nothing was removed, and we didn't come back to see anything again. So, I was affected because I had to start afresh with everything.

While Mrs. Eze and Mrs. Maduka narrated their experiences of having to flee with practically nothing, Mrs. Adichie described her experiences and interactions with refugees during the war.

Mrs. Adichie: Well, during the war, just so pathetic. The whole story is just so pathetic. If you go to the refugee camps, you see how people, how people are suffering. A whole family would just get, just a space where they can keep just their mat! And then, pack whatever they were able to carry and just eh, by the side of their mats. When the food is cooked, the food we were getting relief from different places, I don't know where then. I think most of them were from Israel. So we were getting this relief, and when you get them, semo... either semolina or semovita, then you get milk, powdered milk in big bags, like cement bags, then you have some tinned ones.

But the most pathetic thing was if you see the type of food that these refugees eat, there were no vegetables, because the soldiers were moving around, if they come and see anyplace that anything is planted, if they see any vegetables, and form of... they would collect everything. So we were using cassava leaves to make soup for these refugees. Cassava leaf, we would just get it, cut it, put hot water in it, and wash it well before we use it for the soup. If you see the type of soup, it's so - we used just craw fish to make the soup. But we were all eating it. Both the refugees and those people in the Sick Bay. We were looking after them with the little drugs that came from the Red Cross; we used it on those people in the Sick Bay. And when the food is prepared, these refugees would come out and line up with their plates, then you start giving them food... and those people with kids, you give them milk, milk, and they take. And people died! People died! People were really dying in great numbers... from kwashiorkor.

She went on to narrate one particular incident when she saw a wandering young girl and brought her home to live with her mother-in-law until they could locate her parents.

Mrs. Adichie: And really, during the war, if you see the refugees, you would cry, you would weep. Because they were going with whatever they were able to carry on their head, no vehicle, they would have their little ones walking with them. Along the road, they would become so tired, that they would just sit at a place, so if you come out and see them, if you have anything, you give them and eat, and they continue. Or they could come to your house, if you are good enough to harbor them, they stay in your house, then the following day or whatever, they continue moving, or you take them to the refugee camp in your place if you have. They stay there. Sometimes you see stray children moving around without anybody. They don't, they've lost their parents...they lost their parents. In fact, it was immediately after the war, that I saw one girl, and collected her...and brought her home. She lived with my mother in law and others, until luckily for the girl, after some months, eh, we were able to locate the parents from another town. So they took her.

For those who survived the war, survival was not nearly as easy as it sounds. Many were forced to flee from their homes during the raids with nothing more than the clothes on their back and the few possessions they could physically carry. Mrs. Eze narrated her experiences working with refugees following the pogroms and as the war initially began, only to later become a refugee herself, losing all her possessions after they fled their own town. Mrs. Maduka described a similar story of having to leave rather quickly without much time to collect all her possessions. Mrs. Adichie provided the poignant descriptions of what life was like for refugees from her experience working at the Sick Bay and later at the refugee camps. These rich stories illustrate just how much the war affected individuals, for some went from rich to pauper in an instance, being forced to decide whether to desert their homes and flee or remain and potentially die.

Generational Shift – *What does it mean to survive?*

There is an old Ashanti proverb which cautions that when one follows in the path of one's father, you learn to walk like him. The proverb can be interpreted as a warning against repeating the same mistakes of your fathers by making the same decisions they made despite

having the precedence to learn from. Gerda Lerner (1997) in a way affirms this proverb through her argument that

We can learn from history how past generations thought and acted, how they responded to the demands of their time and how they solved their problems.

We can learn by analogy, not by example, for our circumstances will always be different than theirs were. The main thing history can teach us is that human actions have consequences and that certain choices, once made, cannot be undone. They foreclose the possibility of making other choices and thus they determine future events (p. 205).

Although Lerner goes on to explain this quotation in relation to the curbing of the freedom of speech in Virginia for all those in support of terminating the well-established slave system, this quotation is equally applicable to the Nigeria-Biafra war. For those who did not live through the war, yet live in her wake and are bound by her consequences, it is often easy to fantasize that the mistakes of history can be corrected if certain events were to be repeated under current circumstances or conditions. The Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) is a relatively young pseudo-militant group based in the regions of former Biafra in the Igbo dominated areas of South Eastern Nigeria. The founder, Ralph Uwazurike, “maintains that the Igbos are now no longer talking about their marginalization for the past 30 years or about addressing the injustice, but outright demanding a sovereign state of Biafra” and this pursuit was fanned by the “sight of his five-year-old sister dying in the general pogrom of 1967 when he was aged nine” (Agbu, 2004, p. 20). The formation of this organization which seeks a sovereign state of Biafra exemplifies Lerner’s argument that human actions do indeed have consequences and that certain choices, such as the original secession bid and the consequential war cannot be undone. Through the 30 month war, those

experiences and actions foreclose the possibility of making other choices and thus determine future events.

Lerner goes on to conjecture that part of this problem of following in the path of one's father is due in part to the "selective memory on the part of men who recorded and interpreted human history" for it has had a "devastating impact on women" (Lerner, 1997, p. 205). Having looked at the experiences of women during the Nigeria-Biafra war as well as the roles they played at that time, it is clear that the war undoubtedly had a "devastating impact on women" (Lerner, 1997, p. 205). Yet the women I spoke with were adamant about not letting those mistakes be repeated by men with selective memory of the past, for they each explained that having survived such an atrocious and devastating event in Nigerian history, they are determined to not let their sons learn to walk like their fathers.

Mrs. Eze described a conversation she had with a non-Igbo cousin about the positions vacated by Biafrans once they fled during the war as well as the current status of Nigerian affairs.

Mrs. Eze: I remember a cousin of mine, engineer, head of Engineering at University of Ladega, and I was talking to him about Biafrans who had fled, and they said "They can't trust us to come back to the jobs we had before we had fled, because they do not know when we will rebel again!" You're wasting your time because we who suffered your atrocities are not in a hurry to return to the trenches! We, who suffered your atrocities against us, are not in a hurry to return to any trenches whatsoever! And that's why till today, we feel sorry when children were not born when we had to fight each other talk about enmity and they are going to teach themselves. And I say these children do not understand what they are talking about. If they knew, if they went through the trauma of the horrible war, senseless, wastage of men, women, children, they would never talk of war for any reason whatsoever. Because they would know as we know that it was not worth it. It was not worth it at all. It was not worth it at all.

I think anybody who is talking of Biafra, because there's something called MASSOB, we think that they are not reasoning properly. We don't think there's any need whatsoever for anybody to be wanting to break up this

country. It's counterproductive. It's a needless useless exercise. And of course, the Igbo says "*ndji ko oka*" there's strength in unity than in fissiparous tendencies. Breaking into bits and pieces, that is destructive. We are determined that there shall be no more wars in this country, so help us God. No national wars [*laughs*] because there are plenty of wars going on. In Jos, Fulanis are fighting the Hausas, when I remember in the Psalm somewhere, the Psalm is talking about when the Lord will make plowshares of swords, and there will be no war, and I ask "Lord, when will that be?" But there is nothing impossible for God. Except that it has not yet happened. Northeast Nigeria, some Islamic sects that simply say Western education is not acceptable, is anti-God, anti-Islam, and they must do what they can to destroy and disrupt anything that has to do with western education. And the Fulanis will wake up and burn up and slaughter the non Fulanis. The settlers and indigenes in Plateau. And we keep wondering what is the problem? And of course, kidnapping for nothing. Money. Commercialization of catching a human being for *money*, for money. And one knows that there's problem, manmade, not God made, but Nigeria is in trouble. Man made, not God made
So, uh...the, the question of doing a Biafra again, does not arise in my mind at all. And definitely I do not pray that there be any, any war ever again in my life time. And I certainly do not want it in my children's life time either. War is dangerous, useless, game.

This impassioned response illustrates the problems Lerner addresses, for it is easier for those who lived through those historic events to learn from their circumstances and experiences. Yet it is often harder for those who did not live those experiences to learn by analogy, and as a result, they are often quick to follow in the path of their fathers and are often eager to learn to walk like their fathers. Similar sentiments were also expressed by both Mrs. Okafor and Mrs. Adichie during their respective interviews.

Mrs. Okafor: That it is a terrible thing that nobody should wish for war anywhere! Anywhere again!

God forbid. That is, Nigeria of today that is better. I don't want to hear it. If Biafra is war, then I don't want to hear it again!

Mrs. Okafor: Nobody wants to experience war again. There was so much insecurity. There was no peace anywhere. Once you hear the bomb, take refuge!

Mrs. Adichie: Well, nobody who experienced that war should think about going to war again. Nobody! It's only the young ones who did not experience

it, if they hear the history, they will say, that thing we said that time. “Ojukwu give us gun and knife, let us go and kill these people!” Ah-hah! That’s what we were saying that time. And it’s only these young ones that could say such a thing now. But for anybody who really experienced the war, we wouldn’t want such a thing again, but, in our, in my heart of hearts, if we could be Biafra, I would love it! *[laughs]*. Let us be on our own! But once it is not possible, then we have to go on with one Nigeria, but we are appealing to them, let them give us a chance!

Mrs. Adichie’s statement reflects the irony inherent in the situation. The current marginalization of the Igbo that many of my conversational partners addressed is a result of a confluence of events that can be traced back to the British colonial rule, the haste to gain independence, the series of coup d’états and counter coups, the pogroms in the North, and Biafra’s secession bid during the Nigeria-Biafra war. Yet it is this current marginalization that is spurring movements such as MASSOB to once again try and create a sovereign state of Biafra. It seems that the warnings in the Ashanti proverb of following in the path of one’s father as well as Lerner’s cautions of not understanding the historical consequences of certain choices are falling on deaf ears, for it is often difficult to distance oneself from the current path you’re walking on. In a way, the question of ‘what does it mean to survive?’ is one that requires a melancholy yet realistic response. In this case, surviving the Nigeria-Biafra war means living with the traumatic experiences; yet those wounds are further worsened by the younger generation’s eagerness to follow the downtrodden path of the past.

Conclusion

This section began with a quotation from a radio show where a journalist explained that “the peskiest ghosts, the kind that do the most haunting are the ones that left this world so abruptly or so violently that the specter is confused. . .and figuring out what to make of this experience usually takes several years” (Rochlin, 1996). This quotation affirms Benjamin’s argument that “the past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it

can be recognized and is never seen again” (p. 255). For in a way *memories are like ghosts*, they flash up at an instant, disappear before we can completely understand them, and have the power to haunt the living by making past mistakes seem more alluring under current circumstances. By recalling memories - particularly the peskiest ones, the disturbing and visceral ones of the worst experiences during the war, my conversational partners were able to allow those lived experiences to once again become powerful, political, and prophetic. Through their discussions on the salience of religion and ethnicity, through their narration of the roles they played as well as the experiences they remembered, my conversational partners faced those pesky ghosts in the telling of their *testimonio*. In their poignant discussion on the destitution faced by refugees, the deadly cost of war, and the generational shift they are currently witnessing, they warned and cautioned about repeating the mistakes of the past.

CONCLUSION

‘The value system by which they judged the ‘historical significance’ valued the activities of men over those of women. Warfare and the distribution of wealth were considered more important than child-rearing and the building of communities. By attempting such criteria of selection, historians committed the basic error of seeing the half as the whole, remembering one half and forgetting the other. Selective memory deprived both men and women of the ability to construct a truthful picture of the past (Lerner, 1997, p. 205-206)

In the process of writing this thesis, my maternal grandmother passed away. Although I had not initially planned on interviewing her as a participant, her untimely passing robbed me, and the world, of hearing her speak about her experiences during the war and the role she played at that important time in Nigerian history. During her funeral, numerous stories were lovingly told in her memory; stories about her strong personality, stories of her favorite memories, stories about specific significant moments during her lifetime. It was with her passing that I heard stories of how Mama fled the North with nothing but the clothes on her back and her two young daughters during the pogroms. When her older sons did not return as planned, she valiantly returned to the North to look for them. Upon her return, her Hausa neighbor and the accompanying mob ransacked her house looking for her and her sons, and she was forced to hide in the bathroom, crouched in the corner, with her eyes shut tight (lest they see the white in her eyes in the complete darkness) and the door slightly ajar so as not to draw attention to her location, as she fearfully prayed for her life. It was with her passing that I heard stories of her being shot by a stray bullet in the heat of the war, and since there was no hospital, clinic, or even medication, she had to endure the excruciating pain of her siblings pulling the exposed flesh together and stitching the wound with nothing but needle and thread. It was with her passing that I heard stories of how as a young widow, she joined the *afia attack* effort as a way to feed her children. It was with her passing that I heard stories of how she lost a younger brother and a son (both were Biafran soldiers), and trekked for days

into the warfront to bring one of her remaining sons food and clothing, for she was determined to not lose another loved one to the war.

Ironically, all these adoring, amorous, and moving stories told during the mourning process only left Benjamin's ominous words of "even the dead will not be safe" resounding in my head for despite the best of intentions, in death, Mama's life, her personal narrative, her *testimonio*, is not safe from being tarnished, from being deified, from being misrepresented, or worse, from being forgotten and in time, turned into a ghostly vaporous narrative (Benjamin, 1968, p. 255). Benjamin claims that "the past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again" reminds us that recalling "the past historically does not mean to recognize it 'the way it really was.' It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment" (Benjamin, 1986, p. 255). I had argued that this claim was not an argument in favor of discrediting the memories of individuals. Rather, it serves as an urgent call to capture those intangible and fleeting memories before they disappear forever. I recount the story of Mama's death for unfortunately, it encapsulates what this thesis is about; namely, ensuring that the experiences of Biafran women during the war do not meet the same fate of so many of their predecessors. By writing about their experiences and the roles they played, we are not only averring that their experiences were indeed significant and their roles important; through the art of writing, we are asserting that those experiences and roles are just as powerful, political, and prophetic as the others that have been chronicled.

In a passage from her book *Why History Matters*, Lerner (1997) poignantly addresses the important points raised in this thesis; namely, how the silencing of women renders their narratives and experiences as nothing more than ghostly or vaporous memories not important enough to be historically preserved.

Women are everywhere and have always been at least half of humankind. It is inconceivable that their actions and thoughts were inconsequential in the shaping of historical events, yet women have been presented as though they had no history worth recording. The only women to have entered the historical record are those who were 'stand-ins' for absent husbands or brothers, women who did what men did, rulers, queens. In effect, this process of selective remembering has taught both men and women that women did not contribute to the making of civilization in their own right. Thus, women have been taught to think of themselves as persons who cannot make significant contributions to society in the public realm. This massive distortion of the true record could happen because those who did the selecting were ignorant and contemptuous of the activities of women. The value system by which they judged the 'historical significance' valued the activities of men over those of women. Warfare and the distribution of wealth were considered more important than child-rearing and the building of communities. By attempting such criteria of selection, historians committed the basic error of seeing the half as the whole, remembering one half and forgetting the other. Selective memory deprived both men and women of the ability to construct a truthful picture of the past (Lerner, 1997, p. 205-206)

This apposite passage encapsulates what I have argued throughout this thesis. By being largely excluded from the historical palimpsest of the war narrative, the experiences and roles of Biafran women during the war have been denigrated and demoted as insignificant; their vast contributions to society as illustrated by the political, powerful, and prophetic *testimonio* of my conversational partners have become the ghostly narratives of the war, stories that are in dire

jeopardy of becoming vaporous memories and being lost forever. Unfortunately, this silencing of women and the widespread burial of their experiences is not only destructive in that it commits the error of “seeing the half as the whole;” this destructive tendency of omitting the ghostly narratives of Biafran women is compounded when future generations follow in their father’s path and learn to walk like their fathers, by seeing this half tale as the complete story (Lerner, 1997, p. 206).

By incorporating Gordon’s language of ghostly narratives, I sought to extend her theory as a way to start the process of uncovering these narratives by exploring how powerful the act of silencing is. The problem with the silencing of women and the ghostly hauntings is that these are areas that are incredibly difficult to discuss or even notice. The fact that the narratives of women have largely been omitted, has largely distorted the historical palimpsest of this war, preventing us from seeing that their stories are indeed there, that their experiences and roles are equally important. The irony inherent in this situation is that acknowledging the complexity and reality of women’s existence, experiences, and roles during the war does not deny the existence, experiences, and roles of other groups; the remembering and preservation of history as well as the ability to contribute one’s *testimonio* to the historical palimpsest need not be a zero sum game where each group vies for supreme historical significance. Through this thesis, I have started the process of including the experiences and roles of women in the historical palimpsest. However, this is simply the beginning. Not only will I provide my conversational partners with the opportunity to view the work that they contributed to, I plan on expanding this study to include more women who lived through and survived the war as a way of further sharing their ghostly narratives.

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APPENDIX

Interview Schedule

- **Personal Background:**

- When and where were you born?
- Tell me a little about your life and early childhood?
 - What was your family like?
 - How many siblings did you have?
 - Tell me the role religion played in your household?
 - What did your parents do for a living?
 - What was your community like?
- What was your daily schedule or regiment prior to the war?
 - Where did you work?
 - Where did you go to school?
- How often did you interact with other ethnic groups?
- What were your feelings about Nigeria in 1960?
- What were your feelings about Nigeria in 1967?

- **War Experience:**

- How old were you in 1967?
- Where were you in 1967?
- What do you remember most from that year?
 - Are there any other events from that year that still stand out to you?
- How did you know the war had started?
- What was a daily schedule or regiment like during the war?
 - What changed most as a result of the war?
- Did you consider yourself Biafran?
 - Do you still consider yourself Biafran?
- Were you involved in the war?
 - If so
 - How were you involved?
 - How did you become involved?
 - Why did you become involved?
 - If not
 - Why didn't you get involved?
 - Did you know any women who were involved?
- Can you tell me about an experience during the war that most stands out to you?

- Do any other experiences during the war stand out to you?
- Did you feel any burdens during the war?
 - How did you handle them?
- Did you experience hunger?
 - If so, please describe how you coped with it
- How did you experience the war as a woman?

- **Life Since the War:**

- How did you know the war ended?
- Did the war change you?
 - If so, how did it change you?
- Do you read about the history of the war?
 - If so, how accurate do you think the depictions are?
 - Have you read much about the experiences of women in the war?
- Do you currently talk to anybody about your experiences during the war?
 - If so
 - Who?
 - When were you able to start speaking about your experiences?
 - Why did you begin speaking about the war?
 - If no
 - Why?
 - Why did you begin speaking about the war?
- Having talked about your experiences during the war, what are your overall feelings?
- What do you think of Biafra today?
- How do you feel about Nigeria today?

- **Final Questions:**

- What do you think is the most important message I should take away from this interview?
- Do you have any questions for me?
- Do you know any other women who might want to speak with me about their experiences in the war?
- Is there anything else you would like to share that I did not cover?