Refugees and War-Time Economic Activities, a Revisit to Biafra

By

Ethel Innocent Amadi Ph.D
Departmen of Political Science, Faculty of Social Sciences
Rivers State University, PMB 5060, Port Harcourt, Nigeria
Email : ethelinnocent.amadi@ust.edu.ng

Abstract

Engagement in various interwoven economic and productive relationships is common among groups, even in war situation. The paper investigated the topic, 'Refugees and War-Time Economic Activities, a Revisit to Biafra'. This centres around the economic experiences of Biafran refugees during Nigeria's civil war. Reflecting individual and social actions, it examined patterned economic activities undertaken by women and children, interrogating the nature of Biafran economy, how it sustained refugees through the 30 months of Nigerian civil war, it assessed women's contributions toward the feeding of both civilians and soldiers. Though writing from a woman's stand point, the paper adopted the Political Economy theoretical framework, with historical descriptive research design. Utilizing both primary and secondary sources of data and content analysis. Much of the facts from the findings, exposed economic hardships as the propeller of people's ingenuity displayed at an unusual time. Women and children participated actively in many businesses including fatiguing, while saving many lives in the process. In the light of this revelation, the paper concluded that with endowed capacity to save lives, women can no more be looked at as victims of war, but as contributors to survival of families. The paper recommends that Nigerian government should acknowledge the positive and life saving contributions made by women and children during Nigerian civil war. Non-state actors in war zones should leverage and harness these female survival traits, to reduce the number of casualties due to hunger and starvation in various refugee camps.

Key Words: Refugees; Women Economic Activities; Water Business; Fatigue; Conflict.

Introduction

With upsurge of conflicts, the 21st century has seen escalation of wars, violence and insecurity challenges and refugee crisis in various parts of the world. In Somalia, Rwanda, Liberia, in ldlib Syria, Libya, Yemen, Democratic African Republic, Afghanistan, Myanmar(Rohingya), Ukraine, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Northern Sudan, then the October 7th 2023 Hamas invasion of Israel and the retaliatory attacks that has left over 38,000 residents of Gaza homeless (Al Jazeera, 2023), and mass exodus of refugees to Egypt. These escalating violence around the world, with its attendant insecurities has been spewing out refugees in their thousands, made up of professionals, businessmen and women, artisans, school children and babies. Oftentimes most of the population are partially dislodged, while at other times an entire population within the conflict zone are uprooted, especially the epicentre of the crisis, to sometimes a better place, or a not so better and stable neighbouring town, state, or country. In other words, conflicts usually come with floods of challenges, displacing persons and destroying livelihoods. Families are forced to search for alternate safe and peaceful environment, and a haven to settle. These challenges escalate refugee issues, giving rise to massive migration. According to Al Jazeera News of 30th December, 2022, Africa's estimates of lnternally Displaced Persons (lDPs), due to conflicts in 2022, is well over 30 million. In the past, refugee issues were part of challenges of development in less developed countries, especially in those prone to conflicts, but the problem has now become a global issue. Spreading to many parts of the world, even where there were no crisis before, its impact has spilled over to many European countries.

Biafra's secession bid in 1967 was unprecedented in the history of Nigeria, the crisis resulted in the 30 months civil war that engulfed the entire Eastern region. In the past fifty four years, every January 15th, Nigerian government celebrates the exploits of her gallant soldiers. For bloody civilians, especially women, nothing much is mentioned nor remembered about their efforts and contributions. The war got most men occupied at the war front, others went into hiding for fear of forceful conscription into the Biafran army. Women were not given a chance to actively contribute to the peace building process at the heat of the civil war. United Nations Resolution 1325 addressed the impact of conflict on women, and their role in peace building. Although officially, women were relegated to the background in the peace process, yet, at the heat of the war, inside Biafra they were drafted to

participate at different levels of human security. Some women and girls served in Red Cross unit, medical units and acted as Caregivers to wounded soldiers, others were trained in Militia, in Civil Defence Corp, and were used for intelligence and infiltration purposes, known as Biafra Secret Agents for spying enemy base. At the home front, women were heads of households, children, and young girls took over the position of providing for their families and to a large extent sustained many lives during this period.

Willingly or unwillingly, women and girls provided some psychological and sexual satisfaction for Biafran and Nigerian soldiers. That notwithstanding, only few literature has been written on these category of civilians that sustained combatants and non-combatants in Biafra. Notwithstanding the circumstances surrounding Biafran enclave, and with its challenging environment, women's sacrifices cannot be downplayed nor be forgotten. Though thousands fell to the flying bullets and the strangulation of economic blockade, but there were survivors who overcame the brutal show of power by the waring parties. Hobsbawm (2007), wrote that in contemporary conflicts "the burden of war shifted increasingly from armed forces to civilians" who invariably end up as victims. The fierce bombardment of civilian safe haven was not only aimed at tightening the noose around Ojukwu's government, but most of all these attacks in the market places, were meant to crumble and cripple civilian economic power. On a daily basis, people trapped in war-torn enclaves not only contend with the stack reality of air raids, they are in addition confronted with war-made poverty, exposing them to continued threats from hunger and diseases. With disruption in the sources of livelihood, and in most instances destruction of life and confusion in terms of how to source for food for loved ones. Hunger breed desperation, leading to new wave of economic activities for women and children. With air strikes in refugee camps, market places, and hospitals (Achebe, 2012, Forsyth, 1973), nobody was safe to embark on any meaningful economic activity.

So, what kind of productive activity can anyone embark on under such unpredictable war-torn environment? Civilians exposed to sad realities of the brutality of a civil war, desperation forced them to venture into business of smuggling, or black marketeering, only the lion hearted refugees engage in these illegal businesses, though supported by soldiers sometimes. Ordinary folks

managed petty trading, selling of water, fatiguing, mending clothes, clearing farm weeds for indigenous people, etcetera. Some joined the Red Cross Society to run errand as cooks, those in medical profession joined the medical team. Most of whom rose up to the challenges of survival, as they came face to face with the stake reality of hunger and starvation. They valiantly waded through it all. With the burden of nothingness, hard pressed families could not be helped. African socialism that took care of the weak and vulnerable members ceased to operate as It was a matter of self first, before group preservation in refugee camps. Food was weaponized by federal government economic blockade policy against Biafra, affecting combatants, non-combatants, women, children and babies, the old and the young. On a daily basis, the wretchedness of war-made poverty, made survival very difficult for many families, especially in the area of meeting essential aspects of human need. It got to a point where food became a precious luxury. Hence the tremendous increase in the level of wretchedness, anxiety, desperation and aggravated anger in Biafran enclave.

This paper centres around economic experiences of refugees during Nigeria's civil war. The work reflect both individual and social action, especially that of women and children. This social action and interwoven patterns of productive relationship engaged by individual and groups within the society, but with special attention to those in various refugee camps. Women who stood for their children, husbands, parents and siblings, toiled night and day, laboured against all odds, functioned as bread winners, food scavengers and farm hands. The period revealed the people's doggedness in trying to overcome deprivation and degradation of the human person. Expressing their tenacity and audacity to survive in the face of economic blockade and its subsequent hardship. One of the principal virtue associated with any group desperately in need, is the survival instinct that usually gives an inner strength, compelling people to embrace any work, no matter how menial. Apart from conscription into the military service, there was hardly any employment opportunity for refugees. Interestingly, economic activities in the area of production of goods and services went on in various form and shades, though very restricted and at subsistence level. Outside relief materials from Non-Governmental Organisations like the Red Cross, and black market trades, or smuggling of food items, has anybody asked how civilians survived economic blockade and food war? What was it that sustained the

refugees through the 30 months of economic blockade? How did some civilians, soldiers and refugees in secessionist territory survive the food crisis ?

Objectives of the Study

This paper is guided by the following objectives, to ;

i. Investigate the economic activities that sustained the refugees through the months of the civil war in Biafra.
ii. Examine the contributions of women and children to the feeding of both civilians and soldiers inside Biafran.
iii. Assess the nature of socio-economic relationship between civilians and soldiers in fatigue business Biafra.

Research Questions

i. What economic activities sustained the refugees through the months of the civil war in Biafra ?
ii. What contributions did women and children make toward the feeding of both civilians and soldiers inside Biafra?
iii. What was the nature of socio-economic relationship between civilians and soldiers in the fatigue business ?

Theoretical Framework

The paper adopted political economy framework, its nature of analysis follows a historical part in tracing the social relationship by groups to a given political phenomena. Often utilized as a tool for explaining and understanding social realities. The approach was popularized by the writings of German philosopher, Karl Marx (1818-1884). While contributing to the discourse on political economy, Ekekwe(2009), maintains that the approach emphasizes social actions over those of individuals, the social actions are derived from the complex pattern of productive activity into which individuals entered with others". This is talking about social production. In order to survive, man must reproduce himself through engagement in productive activities, that is what political economy postulates. "The truth that for man to satisfy his basic needs of food, shelter and clothing necessary for his social existence, he must engage in productive activities with others (Ake, 1981; Ekekwe, 2009). This analogy was glaringly visible even in war torn Biafra. Individual social relationship to the means of production, required

that in the cause of production, he links first with fellow human beings to produce, but beyond the social relations of production, when they produce they relate either as owners or non-owners, workers or employers. The worker produce over and above what he/she was paid in order to survive. The employer exploits the workers or labourers so as to make profits and gains. In this case, it was the soldiers exploiting the women.

Biafra was a state under siege, and so was not in a position to meet the material needs of members in terms of productive and distributive capacity. The government was too distracted to do much. From all indications, whether in peace time or in war time, importance of productive activity cannot be ignored. The relationship individuals enter into in the process of production, that is the social relationship was evidently unequal. One party was in control of instrument of coercion, while the other party had only their labour power which the soldiers easily exploited, backed by the state power. For bloody civilians and refugees, the labour power needed for productive activities was the physical strength, while soldiers had their military training and skills, with technical know-how. Means of production was owned by the natives in each community, some abandoned their farmland and fled because of the conflict. Soldiers had unrestricted access to farmlands, which was one of the means of labour. Mini-factories were set up at various locations, where women and children voluntarily join others to eke out a living, dispensing their labour power in exchange for food. Means of labour, matchet/cutlass, hoes and basins were owned by the women, who utilised their labour power to harvest and process the cassava tubers into garri or foofoo. In the sharing, they were given one third (1/3), while the soldiers took two third 2/3) of what was produced. Although, social relation in war torn Biafra constituted a class relation characterized by subordination and subjugation, yet it is not a relationship between those who own the means of production and non-owners, but between those who use their access to instrument of coercion to control the means of production and dominate those whose labour power they exploited. Viewed from this angle, female refugees and their children represented the exploited toiling masses.

In relating this to the situation in Biafra, and the effort made by some citizens whose labour power was exploited and harnessed so as to feed others, we came to

realize that the socio-economic dynamics in war-time Biafra made the mass of the refugees to fall into category of the "dominated class of non-owners of the means of production, compelled to exchange their labour power so as to live. Women laboured directly or indirectly, and rescued many from starvation. "Since the people are the main productive force, it follows that their role in any social activity cannot be undervalued. No individual who may be adjudged outstanding would have achieved much without the possibilities created, and active support given, by others in their societies"(Ekekwe, 2009). Proving that emphasis could be shifted from individual action to social actions and vice versa. In an unusual time and unusual circumstances, a period of war and uncertainty, the survival instincts in human suggest that social action be put to use, for the survival of an endangered group. Seen in this light, Ekekwe further explained that "the political economy method not only accord heroic individuals whose actions affected social change their proper places in history, it also brings into that history in quite a vivid fashion the roles of the unsung heroes-the broad masses without whom social production would have been impossible". We cannot rule out the contributions made by ordinary folks, towards sustaining many lives in the new state, especially refugees who through doggedness contributed in no small measure to the feeding of Biafrans.

Methodology

The paper employed historical descriptive research design, using both secondary and primary sources of data. Secondary data was derived from textbooks, Journal articles and published materials from websites. Data from primary sources was derived from experiential stories of family members, interviews with some refugees, victims as well as survivors of the civil war. Content method was used in analysing the data.

Conceptual Review

Refugees

Refugees are defined by the 1951 Geneva Convention as "those who have well founded fear of being persecuted for reason of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion...(also included are) victims of war or external aggression"(Black, 2008,). United Nations High Commission for Refugees also identified refugees as "people who flee their

homeland because of fear of political, religious, or ethnic prosecution of war". Those who moved out of their homes, communities and countries due to internal crisis or conflict or an impending danger to their lives. These sets of "displaced people who at least initially, hope to return to their own homeland"(Kane, Brown and Roodman,1994), as soon as situations improved. Based on that United Nations recognized the need for governments to respect refugee status as groups that deserves help. This status does not only "confers the rights to protection, but also to assistance"(Shacknove,1985). In other word, refugees are entitled to certain legal rights such as conferred on them by UN pact on the status of refugees, they are entitled to benefits of employment opportunities, rights to protection, as much as rights to assistance in the country where they take refuge. Deng (1998), affirmed that refugees, whose movement across national borders provides them with special status in international law, with rights specific to their situation.

Every one who left his town or community and moved to another was clamped down as refugee. Meaning that after escaping from discomfort zone, non-Igbos from Port Harcourt and environs, who fled to lgboland, were classified generally as refugees. These men, women, children and babies crammed and confined within Biafra controlled areas, desperately needed every form of protection and assistance, as most of them lacked the basic necessities of life. Biafran propagandist on radio tried to convince the people that they can only be safe within Biafra, as the rest of the country was at war with them. Claiming that the federal government had blocked all avenues for their escape. Besides, Cameroonian border which would have been a major outlet was closed following the pact the Gowon's government entered with Cameroon, not to allow any movement of goods and persons through their common borderline.

Biafran Refugees and Survival

United Nations Council of Refugee claims that over 50 million men, women and children have been displaced over the years as a result of poverty and conflicts. Of all the conflict and civil wars none has had greater impact on women, children and babies like the Nigerian civil war. This produced millions of refugees, crammed and confined within the epi-centre of the war. According to Waltz, (1951), "Common to the desires of all states is the wish for survival". In war ravaged states, survival is a matter of daily struggle, it is not anchored on mere wishes, people

made efforts and paid sacrifices to attain it. Whether it is an individual, group, or state, survival is very cardinal at every given point. Refugees belong to a group whom the most important human need is just to survive. One of the principal virtue associated with any group or persons desperately in need, is the survival instinct. It is when challenges comes that the best In people comes out. Daunting situations usually gives individuals some inner strength to embrace the never-give-up spirit, irrespective of the challenging environment and the circumstances surrounding the state of Biafra. In a world marred by multi-faceted challenges, the resiliency and urge for self preservation is uppermost in the heart of men and women in any refugee camps, whether in Syria, Libya, Sudan, Somalia, Congo, or even in Gaza, these all lived in an entirely different world, outside the normal and the usual. Refugees can be identified anywhere as displaced persons and groups whom the most important human need is survival.

The Nigerian civil war, 1967-1970, was confronted with different grades of refugees that fled their homes. Each category passed through various stages of hardship in a bid to find a place of rest and safety. Starting with a period of homelessness, helplessness, hopelessness and desperation. Those that moved out casually with the thought that the crisis will soon be over, got the rude shock. With empty pockets, not sure of the next meal or where to lay down the weary heads. They were compelled to keep on moving until they found a haven of rest and an unstable peace. Those from other parts of the country and because of the pogrom in the North, lost their businesses, life investments, and returned empty. Many of them came back devastated, traumatized and wretched by their experiences. Next are the ones we refer to as executive refugees, those that still enjoy some luxuries, except the sudden relocation from their comfort zone. Their main challenge was the vehicular movement away from enemy targets. Most of them fled with their families in their car, they could afford to buy fuel for their cars, buy other necessities of life, such as food and clothing from black markets. They could rent apartments, travel in and out of the enclave unrestricted (Achebe, 2012). For the elites, they did not loose their sleep over food, shelter and clothing, except over their safety, they are the lucky few. The third category were the local people who moved out of their communities as a result of federal control, such as those that fled from Onitsha, Enugu, Aba, and Owerri. Next are local traders and peasant

farmers, cut off from the land and from their sources of livelihood, stranded, frustrated and angry with the whole situation.

Finally the non-Igbos, they fled from Port Harcourt, Eleme, Kalabari, Okrika, Calabar, Uyo, Ogoni, Andoni, Ahoada, and ljaws. The displacement of a greater number of people from these axis, into a not so friendly environment in Igbo hinterland was very remarkable. The mass movement of thousands of refugees came with it enormous challenges and confrontation with nature, lacking access to essentials of life, food, shelter, safety and appropriate healthcare. In the process, human security was seriously threatened. Achebe (2012), asserts that it was not easy "tackling the herculean task of settling refugees who were pouring into the East in their thousands". In confirming this he quoted the report made by a Director Commission on lnternational Affairs, Phil Baum of American Jewish Congress, in 1968, that "the East now had a million refugees displaced from other parts of Nigeria".

Gender and Economic Role Swapping

In the words of Cockburn, (2004), traditional gender roles may be reinforced or challenged during conflict, impacting the roles and responsibilities assigned to women and men. At the height of the war, there was reversal of gender role. Motherhood was expressed more than fatherhood. Why do l say so? It is because motherhood was not restricted as fatherhood. Male refugees were hushed into silence, emasculated of the power of expression and the ability to exercise the role of providing and protecting their wives and children. if they were not in the battle fields fighting, they were put on standby in the military barracks. The fear of arrest and forceful conscription into Biafran army forced a good number of refugees to hide in the bush as the war threatened their peace and safety. Some were always on the run, meaning that the day time was spent in hiding. Others feign sickness and rubbed charcoal on their faces to evade conscription. Some pretended to have hearing impairment, hence they acted deaf and dumb claiming that the shelling had damaged their ear drums.

ln Biafra the war actually created new forays of economic activities for women. This inadvertently transferred the burden to provide for the family from the fathers to the mothers. Incidentally the role of bread winners swapped from men

to women. Most of the time it was the women protecting and providing for their families. In some worse cases children performed these fatherly duties. Twelve year old Abu goes for fatigue, one third of his own share is taken to the camp, after the meals has been prepared, he carries the food from Mgburichi to Ngugo to feed his father who has been on the hide out, trying to avoid forceful conscription. Women and children became the life-wire and support of many, including soldiers. Their effort subsequently contributed in no small way in strengthening Biafran resistance,, by beating the scourge of starvation due to economic blockade.

Women and Economic Activities

The civil war period revealed women's doggedness to overcome deprivation. Expressing people's tenacity and audacity to survive in the face of economic blockade and its subsequent hardship. One of the principal virtue associated with any group desperately in need is the survival instinct that usually gives them an inner strength, to embrace the virtue of hardwork. Although, economic activities in the area of production of goods and services were at subsistence level, yet productive activities went on in various forms and shades, even in the midst of bombardment by Nigerian government and their allies. Hudock, Sherman and Williamson (2016), asserts that economic life does not die out during conflict, but it does change. How is that true? In relaying women's economic activities in war-time Biafra, we examined the efforts made by some citizens whose labour power was exploited and harnessed so as to feed the hungry.

Assessing those jobs performed by women who stood for their children, husbands and fathers, in the refugee camps, they engaged in all manner of menial jobs. Teenage girls got transformed into women, and women into super human. Some toiled night and day to make sure that the lives of many were preserved. Did that which was humanly impossible, and against all odds, functioned as bread getters, bread winners and food scavengers. They laboured for the survival of their household, and indirectly rescued many souls from starving to death. sleep disappeared from the eyes of many hungry folks. Night hour was turned to day, while refugees strategize on how to get the next day's meal. Displaying people's ingenuity at an unusual time, under unusual conditions.

Water Business

Certain essentials like; water, food, shelter, clothing and security were all scarce commodities during the period in question. Water was a scarce commodity in refugee camps especially during the dry seasons. Getting drinking water was another challenge for the refugees. The most precious gifts refugees had were their legs, used daily for trekking tens of kilometres in search of food and water for their children, and their heads are for carrying loads of family property and basins of water. Engaging in water business was a venture for survival, sustaining many families. Water was sold in some places to families in exchange for food items and some essential commodities like salt, pepper, and cocoyam. Okigwe had a stream with alot of fishes, both the natives and the refugees often went there to fetch water and kill fishes, in order to supplement the meals received from the Red Cross Society. Those camping around Ngugo area, went to lyiafor stream to fetch water for drinking and a few others went to Mba river. The river was noted for its colour that is capable of staining any container used for its storage. Whereas those that camped around Mbano and Ata, Mba river supplied them with the needed water. Yet they had the challenge of carrying water and climbing the hill. Some do loose their balance, to the extent both the carrier of water and the container with its contents came crashing or tumbling down the hill.

On several occasions young children, some as young as eight years, like Chuks usually follow a particular army truck to Mba river to fetch water for soldiers. After fetching and filling the drums, the boys hung or perched on the back of the truck on the return journey. On this particular day tragedy struck, eight year old Chuks missed the truck, when it passed through his route. He shared his experience with us in an interview on 12th February, 2020;

"I later followed them through the long distance on foot. After the truck got to the stream, the boys filled the drums of water and loaded them. Some hanged by the side of the truck, while others hanged at the back. As the driver drove up hill, the truck could not gather momentum to climb the hill, so it rolled backward down the hill, and emptied its goods into the river, both the driver and the passengers, 98% of whom were boys between 8 and 13 years, all died".(Excepts from lnterview with Chuks).

Survivors of this tragedy of fetching water for Biafran soldiers, still recollect it as if it happened yesterday. The unfortunate mothers that lost their children bemoaned their fate, not knowing when the war will end, and with no consolation whatsoever from the authorities. Twelve year old Nkesi and her friends trekked for five kilometres to fetch water at Mbah river. They also engaged in doing water business with some other families, like the Madam Wotobo's who trekked to Mba river to fetch water every day with her children in exchange for cocoyam heads, which they either boil or they pound into foofoo. Some went to the streams, fetched water, went back to distribute to families in exchange for food items and some essential commodities like salt, pepper, and cocoyam. Mrs Jenny Amadi on her own part participated in the water business. Trekking to Ochicha, to fetch water, she took her children to the camps to distribute to those in need of water, in return she got cocoyam heads for her family to feed on.

Refugee Commercial Activities,

Apart from some clandestine smuggling activities coming into the enclave, there were lots of commercial activities that went on in Biafra, but they were all carried out on a low scale. Refugees embarked on the business of buying and selling petty things like personal effects like old clothes. This was very common among the refugees, most of whom did not know where they were going neither did they know how long their movement would last, and so during the early part of the war, some sold out certain of their valuables so as to travel light. Those that purchased valuables such as jeweleries of gold, bicycles, wrappers from refugees at the cheapest prices one could ever bargain during peace time, wished that the war would continue, as it was a blessing to them. When pang of hunger became so strong, wrappers with other clothing were sold at give-away prices. Buying new ones was out of the question as refugees sold off their clothes, bicycle, shoes, and anything saleable in the market just to make ends meet, and to feed their families. Pa Manunyewhor who worked with Port Harcourt Refinery Health Centre, confessed that he had to sell his white clinical uniform, so as to buy food items. Only few refugees could afford to sew new clothes and mend the torn ones, so Tailors had few customers.

Those that came out with precious valuables sold them, in order to buy food and other necessities of life, including salt, which was a basic commodity but was

seriously in short supply. To meet people's need for sodium, salted stockfish was smuggled into the embattled enclave by humanitarian organizations. This stockfish was later soaked in water and the excess salt extracted from it to be used for other dishes. This stockfish was distributed as part of relief to the people. Sugar was also a scarce commodity, it was an item that enriched many smugglers. Traders claim that sugar was bought from Otuocha market. Exchange of food crops in the markets most often depended on barter trade. Whilst exchange of goods was monetized, buyers paid in cash. Due to the high inflationary trend with plenty of Biafran pounds one could buy little or nothing in the markets. In the words of Hudock, Sherman and Williamson (2016), "beyond the war itself, the dire situation inside refugee camps allowed women to develop and expand new kinds of economic activities". Some women devised a means of frying akara balls originally prepared with beans, but since beans was a very scarce commodity due to economic blockade, the women improvised akara balls from garri chaff sieved, pounded, moulded together with salt and pepper, the mixture was fried in red palm oil. It was quite a delicacy for many hungry mouths, but of very poor nutritional value. Yet it was a complete meal for many families. Some made brisk business preparing and selling this fried balls to sustain their family.

Farming and Food Production

Air strikes prevented the peasants from lunching into full scale farming activities to cushion the effects of food shortages. Moreover the bushes were not safe as federal government and Biafran soldiers exchanged fire in a battle to finish. Peasant farmers could not afford to cultivate the land, because of fear of air raids and attack from rustlers. Long distance farming was put on hold. Except the farmlands close to people's compounds in the communities, such as the Mgbalas at Ata community. The services rendered were seldom monetized, most often it depended on barter. In other words, payment for works done, such as weeding grasses for the natives, were paid not in cash, but in kind, using cocoyam heads, or cassava tubers. Land army as they were called rendered skeletal services, farming around those axis that have fertile soil, like Awara, Mgburichi, Omuoso and Egbema communities all in Ohaji area, in present day lmo state. They tilled and planted cassava, cocoyam, maize, okro and other vegetables, used for their upkeep. These food crops though not enough, but it contributed immensely in improving the nutritional content of their meals.

Refugees and Fatigue

In Biafra, fatiguing business involved using civilians to do some manual tasks under the supervision of soldiers. Fatigue is a military term for food scouting in the bushes. It is the colloquial word for scouting for food in old farms. Refugees scout for some yam tubers, cassava, cocoyam, plantain, vegetables and any edible crop. Soldiers escorted women and children on foot convoys, to some mapped out areas, mostly abandoned farms. It means they invaded people's farms, harvested their crops with all impunity. This was a daily activity as fatique operational areas were along Ohaji, Omuokanne, Obuti, Ilile, Nkarahia axis. While the western flap was around Ogida, Umuokpo, Ihie, Eelele, Umuekwune, etcetera. We must state that it was not all refugees that had the strength to venture into the bushes, neither did they have the privilege of joining the fatigue business, nor the stamina and courage for such rigorous labour. Engagement in fatigues kept participants busy and reduced idleness. Yet many were too weak and afraid to embark on such energy sapping activity. Going with the soldiers for fatiguing requires going for a full day's work, at the end, the civilians receive a daily payment not in cash, but in kind, such as cassava or cocoyam, for feeding their own families. Others process their own portion of cassava to foofoo or garri as the case may be.

Fatigue operation was not all smooth sailing, it came with its own challenges. Mrs Jenny Amadi shared one of her fatigue experiences with us in 2015, this is her story:

"In one of the trips, there was heavy down pour and we were all drenched by the rain. The foot path was flooded, visibility was so poor, l stepped on something and fell into a pit. Darkness was approaching fast. By the time l was pulled out of the pit, l had sustained a deep cut on my thigh and legs. But l have to survive, if for nothing but for my children. I struggled to carry the load to the military Camp. The painful part was that you must report back to the Army camp before going home. The soldiers still shared the cassava that l came back with, irrespective of the injury l sustained. The injury took time to heal, leaving a deep scar on my thigh. Whenever I see this scar it reminds me of the pains and sufferings in Biafra".

This scar is a reminder of the harrowing experience of loss, helplessness and pains experienced by many, both civilians and soldiers in the Biafran enclave. Ekekwe (2009) confirms that the scars of history do not heal so easily. On another occasion, Biafran soldiers escorted about thirteen women and some children from the Ata refugee camp to scout for food crops. Twelve year old Cecilia narrated her experience:

"Suddenly, it was rumoured that some Nigerian soldiers were moving close to our fatigue operational field. There was no gun shot, yet the army escorts took to their heels and fled, abandoning us. The women also left their cassava and fled away empty. In that state of panic, l tripped and fell with the load of cassava. All efforts to gather the cassava back proved abortive. l ended up with an empty basin. Walking became so difficult, l limped all the way to the army camp. The day's fatigue ended with nothing for the families and the soldiers".

The statement in Lamentation 5 verse 9; 'We risk our lives to gather food in the bandit-infested desert'(MSB). Presently Nigerians living in the north east, north west, and north central states daily risk their lives producing food, because of the activities of Fulanl herders and bandits prowling around the country-side, making the farms unsafe for the farmers.

Discussion of Findings

i. What sustained the refugees through the months of the civil war ?

Apart from relief materials smuggled into the enclave and intermittent food shared by Red Cross Society and Caritas lnternational, although the sharing did not get to many, especially those living outside the camps, but their effort helped reduced the number of persons that would have starved to death. The issue of food procurement inside Biafra was a difficult one. Some relief materials were commandeered by soldiers leading to clashes with humanitarian organisations and Red Cross chief. To confirm this story, Forsyth (1976) writes that Dr Lindt a Red Cross Chief "made bitter enemies in Nigeria. Refusing to tolerate the misappropriation of relief stores by private racketeers, the commandeering of relief transport of all kinds for military use, Dr Lindt cut out the rake-off specialists and the bribery boys, ensuring that the absolute minimum of relief food got through to the hungry children and refugees on the Nigerian side of the line". If

this is the case, what happened on the Biafran side of the line could best be imagined, it was a field day for 'rake-off specialists', private racketeers, and relief material commandeers.

Refugees played some key role to avert death from the food war. Many did all kinds of business to put body and soul together. Some embarked on anti-social activities by stealing from the farms and gardens of the natives. Others went to the streams, fetched water, and distributed to families in other camps and surrounding villages, in exchange for essential foods like cocoyam heads (coco lndia specie). These are boiled and eaten with palm oil, while others are pounded into foofoo to be eaten with soup. Somebody like Mama Chile from Rumuobiakani traded in salted stockfish, she bought from fellow refugees, and resold it at the local markets. The proceeds were used to buy necessary foodstuffs. In confirmation, Hudock, Sherman and Williamson (2016) attest that "when men take up arms, women fill the economies that are otherwise unavailable to them. In some cases women engage more deeply in informal income generating activities, either in arenas that existed before the war or in new forays created by the violence". It was an issue of personal survival not the group. If you must survive you have to help yourself, especially with federal government economic blockade and restrictions on the volume of relief materials available in the war enclave. There was limitation to the sources of help that individuals or families could get, including the options available to them.

ii. What contributions did women and children make towards the feeding of both civilians and soldiers inside Biafra?

In Biafra, military authorities supplemented the land army's efforts by arranging with civilians, mostly women and children, for fatigue business. These civilians were most often refugees, who daily accompanied soldiers for fatigue. Babies, toddlers, and sometimes children and husbands were left in refugee camps for an interval of one or two weeks, while the mothers and daughters as well as the boys that are between ages 8 to 12 years, accompanied soldiers to old farms abandoned by the original owners due to the fightings. The fatique entourage scout for anything edible. Whatever they got was shared into three portions, soldiers took two parts, while the refugees that participated in the fatigue took one part. At Ihie

and Ogida army camps, some refugees went there to process cassava into garri. A portion of the cassava tubers was peeled and grated, the grating business was very tedious, done manually. Participants were left with bruised and blistered fingers, bloodied by the hand-made crude graters. After which they tied the grated cassava in sacks that night, and the following morning, they fry it into garri. The rest of the cassava tubers were soaked in water and processed into cassava flour to be pounded into foofoo. Those that processed the cassava into garri were also given one third of what they fried.

Nine year old Adanne from Rumuomasi, was one of those under-aged refugees whose labour power was exploited so as to keep her family and Biafran soldiers going. According to Lamentation 5 Verse 13b,...and the children stagger under heavy loads of wood". Adanne is now 64 years, here is an except from her narrative during an interview on 12th March, 2019;

"ln one of the numerous trips to the bush, we decided to carry more cassava so that after sharing we could go back to the camp with a reasonable quantity. Unfortunately the weight of the load was too heavy. l could hardly walk, others walked passed me and l was left behind. The entire weight put unbearable pressure on my neck, I felt like fainting and could not hold back the tears. Two young men noticed my wobbling legs and volunteered to help me put the load down, so l could stretch my neck and rest for a while. When l got to Omuokanne military camp, the cassava was divided into three portions, two for the soldiers and one portion for me".

This also confirmed that soldiers fed from the portions shared after the fatigues. Women and children continued with the fatigue business until they had gathered enough, two thirds of the proceeds are surrendered to soldiers, while one third was sent to their husbands and children at various refugee camps, so that their families could have something to eat. These women who incidentally assumed the position of food-getters, after they had exhausted the food stuffs, returns back to the barracks so as to rejoin the fatigue entourage. Participants in fatigue jobs were resilient in their push, from the level of chronic vulnerability to hunger, to a level of sustainable economic and market production. As the natives usually went to the camps to buy garri from those involved in the fatiguing business.

iii. What was the nature of socio-economic relationship between civilians and soldiers in the fatigue business ?

Within Port Harcourt and Ahoada provinces, before the arrival of Federal forces, Biafran soldiers adopted various strategies in order to feed their men and officers. In confirmation, Amadi (1973), attests that "to sustain the war efforts peasants were asked to contribute food items. Civil defence leaders systematically collected bags of garri, yams and other items of food and grew rich on the proceeds". It did not end there at Aluu, "every Wednesday morning all the women were called out for prayer and compulsorily were made to contribute two shillings per head. This was in addition to weekly contribution of garri and yarns"(Amadi,1973). Many farmers grudgingly complied as it turned out to be an avenue for extortion. While those who objected to extortion were called sabotuers. The repercussion for being branded a saboteur was very grave. Saboteurs were tagged enemies of Biafra and treated accordingly. This was the civilian experience in Aluu, in other communities different methods were devised to intimidate and extort both food items and money from the civilians.

The business between the soldiers, the women and children involved in the fatique activities was an exploitative as well as symbiotic relationship. Calling fatigue economic system exploitative is an understatement. It was exploitative because child labour was extensively involved. Under rain or sun the services of under-age children were openly exploited and harnessed in sustaining refuge families and Biafran soldiers. The military made use of the energies of women and under-age children to do fatigue jobs, whether this policy was officially approved or not we do not know, but all we know is that the policy of harnessing the depleted energies of refugees was openly executed. They also made use of the strength of the youths and under-age boys to back up the efforts of women. It was partially symbiotic because both parties benefited from the proceeds though on an unequal basis. The sharing was done with an unequal ratio, out of the three portions shared out, two portions went to the soldiers, and one for those refugees involved in the fatigue business. Soldiers at the war fronts and those in the barracks were fed from the two portions derived from the sharing of the outcome of the fatigue.

Some persons may say that the relationship between Biafran soldiers and the refugees in the aspect of fatigue operation was mutually beneficial to an extent, but also exploitative to a greater extent because, further observation of the number of under age children involved in this hard labour, was very remarkable. In the words of Gayathri and Sreekumar (2008), in some "countries today almost any kind of work for children under the age of 16 years is often considered exploitation and childhood is considered a time when children should be protected and shielded from the harshness of the working world". Yet due to the confusion of war they were exposed to the period's harshness. Although going to fatigue with soldiers was voluntary but families had no other option to survive but to join Biafran soldiers on this exploitative and hazardous mission.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Despite the economic blockade slammed down on the state of Biafra, the air of uncertainty compounded by unpredictable security situations, women exhibited certain degrees of bravery. Some could venture out at any time of the day or night, for the purpose of protecting and providing for their loved ones. Although this was done at the risk of losing their lives due to an attack or rape. Women were not only seen as victims, but they were courageous and endowed with survival traits and skills utilized to keep hope alive, as well as keep the stomach warmth. it is a fact that majority of Biafran victims lacked access to, nutritional foods, portable water, good healthcare facilities, among others. The social welfare services was at zero level, many were stricken with diseases, with no medical help in sight. Irrespective of the fact that there were changes in the material conditions of the social formation called Biafra, some women took advantage of opportunities in prevailing war-time market system, and participated actively to ensure the survival of many. The Biafran situation made us to understand that where there is a will there will always be a way to survive.

In crisis situation, the potentials of females could be harnessed, as these women, both natives and refugees exhibited enterprising abilities. They actively participated in many war-time economic activities, such as trading, cassava processing and garri production. Soldiers exploited their labour power during fatigues. Taking a look at the various economic activities engaged by refugees in order to survive the hardship that loomed over the enclave, the existential socio-

economic predicament in the midst of desperation, these stimulated diverse economic activities. Building people's capacity and resilience to withstand challenges of economic blockade. The paper concluded that women cannot only be seen as victims of war, but as contributors to the survival of many. Endowed with uncommon capacity and traits to preserve many lives. Refugees in crisis zones and camps can look around for something to do, services to render, or errands to run in exchange for food for their family. Based on this disclosure, the paper recommends that;

1. The creativity in both males and females in terms of fending for food should be put to gainful use even in conflict zones.
2. Women and children's contributions during the civil war should be acknowledged and appreciated by the Nigerian government.
3. Non-state actors in war zones should leverage on these female survival traits and positively engage them, to reduce the number of casualties due to hunger and food insecurity during conflicts.
4. In the process of peace building, more females should be incorporated to harness their innate capacity to preserve life, rather than destroy lives.
5. Women should no longer be seen as just victims of war, but as contributors to the survival of many in war zones.

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