



Journal of International Women's Studies

Volume 22 | Issue 5

Article 8

June 2021

The Gender Question and the Involvement of Women in Pre-Colonial Igbo Warfare in Equiano's Interesting Narratives

Uche Uwaezuoke Okonkwo

Follow this and additional works at: <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws>

 Part of the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Okonkwo, Uche Uwaezuoke (2021). The Gender Question and the Involvement of Women in Pre-Colonial Igbo Warfare in Equiano's Interesting Narratives. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 22(5), 116-127.

Available at: <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol22/iss5/8>

This item is available as part of Virtual Commons, the open-access institutional repository of Bridgewater State University, Bridgewater, Massachusetts.

The Gender Question and the Involvement of Women in Pre-Colonial Igbo Warfare in Equiano's Interesting Narratives

By Uche Uwaezuoke Okonkwo¹

Abstract

On the 2nd of November 2018, an unusual gathering took place at the Theatre Hall of the Faculty of Arts at the University of Nigeria in Nsukka where Paul Lovejoy, a Professor of History at York University in Canada, was hosted as the guest lecturer. His lecture dwelt on *Gustavus Vassa (Olaudah Equiano) and the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade: Representation, Identity and Reality*. The curiosity of faculty members and students at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka around the thought process of this leading Africanist Historian made for a very fruitful event. The various debates raised by the iconoclastic scholar tampered with my sense of judgment as the convener; thus, I was convinced to re-evaluate Equiano's narratives, particularly focusing on its gender dimension as well as its exploration of women's involvement in pre-colonial Igbo warfare. This paper examines the views of academics on Equiano's narratives on warfare, especially Equiano's various enigmatic assumptions he raises. In lieu of this, the thesis of this paper is that contemporary Igbo studies have a lot to gain from Equiano's narratives in the reconstruction of the historiography of pre-colonial Igbo warfare, especially regarding the neglected role that women have played, as this is a fact not readily accepted by many professional Igbo historians. Furthermore, using Equiano's narratives, this paper concludes that women were relegated in traditional Igbo settings, and the claim that Igbo society was democratic and republican was over exaggerated by nationalist historians.

Keywords: Equiano, Women, Pre-colonial, Warfare, Slave Narratives, Igbo, Nigeria

Introduction

By the 1780s, at the height of the African Slave Trade, when more than eighty-eight thousand Africans were brought annually to the New World every year, the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade was a well-established mercantile system connecting Africa, Europe, and the Americas. In 1789, an autobiography was published, titled *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, The African, Written by Himself*. In this book, Equiano presented himself not only as a victim of slavery, but more importantly, he gave the first ever account of slavery from the point of view of a Black, African ex-slave. The book was an instant bestseller and established Equiano as a great literary icon for it was written in a manner that appealed to all segments of the society. Ever since, Equiano's identity has been presented and represented by scholars, several of whom questioned his identity as an African and Igbo of Southeast or West Niger origin.

¹ Uche Uwaezuoke Okonkwo holds a PhD in History and Strategic Studies of the University of Lagos, Nigeria. He teaches Social History with an emphasis on Women and Gender Studies in the Department of History and International Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. He is currently co-editing a book titled *He Fought Babylon With His Lyrics: Life and Times of Ras Kimono 1958-2018*.

During the colloquium held at Nsukka, Paul Lovejoy raised fundamental questions bothering on Equiano's origin and identity. These can be summarized as follows:

- i. Gustavus Vassa explained the meaning of Olaudah as vicissitude or fortunate, and as one who is favoured and has a loud voice and is well spoken. However, he did not explain the meaning of Equiano.
- ii. Why did Equiano prefer to be called Gustavus Vassa instead of Equiano?
- iii. His use of Equiano on the cover of his book is proof that he was born in Africa, and this debunks Vincent Carretta's claim that he was born in South Carolina.
- iv. On arrival to the New World, Equiano speaks the Eboe African language and no other language.
- v. Why did he drop the name Equiano and use Gustavus Vassa instead?
- vi. What are the meanings of the following words in Igbo language as used by Equiano: Ah-affoe-way-cah, Emberenchi, and Oye-Eboe?
- vii. Where exactly is Olaudah Essaka's village?
- viii. The chronology of events about Equiano's life suggests that: in 1742/1743 he was born in Essaka; 1753 he was enslaved; 1754 made a slave of Capt. Micheal Paschal; 1759 baptized in London in St. Margaret's Church and bought his freedom in 1776. This implies that if he was 12 or 13 when he was enslaved, then he remembered more.
- ix. Equiano's life as a slave suggests that he never worked in plantations like other slaves or was severely beaten, but rather he had the opportunity to be educated and to work by virtue of which he bought his freedom.

Few papers discussed at the symposium have made the attempt to engage some of these contestations. Firstly, the Igbo believe in predestination, and Equiano's case demonstrates this belief. This is because Equiano's life suggests that people are born equal but die unequal because of divine intervention or hard work. The best way to study slavery is to look at people who suffered through it and hence, the fundamental ethnographic issues raised by Equiano need to be revisited in Igbo parameters.

In this paper, we shall re-examine the possibility of using Equiano's account to understand the historiography of pre-colonial Igbo warfare. First, it was established that the use of guns as part of warfare in eighteenth century Igbo society, in the context of Equiano's narrative, is not fallacious at all. Although sophisticated machine guns or Schneider rifles were most likely not used because it had not been introduced in the Igbo society by that period; however, pre-colonial Igbo warfare started as far back as the 1650's. This claim is validated by Ukpabi's position wherein he admits that:

It would appear that the major periods of constant warfare were the sixteenth century up to about 1650 and the nineteenth century. After 1500, many Igbo groups, for various reasons, migrated from one part of Igbo land to another. Some of these groups were victims of the expansion of the Benin Kingdom to the West bank of the Niger. Others were compelled to move following the ravages of Igala forces in Nsukka and in the chain reaction which followed in the wake of this event (Ukpabi,1986:13-14).

Therefore, what can be gleaned from above is that it will be ahistorical to maintain a position that wars fought in the Igbo land between 1650-1800 were fought without guns and were

all inclusive male affairs. Rather, one can argue that wars were fought without machine guns and had active participation from women. Available records from numerous scholars express the view of the influx of guns into Africa at the wake of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. Equiano mentioned "firing of a gun at night by the enemy camp" (Equiano, 1968:77) in his account, thus validating the use of guns in wars during his time. In such harsh realities of life, women rose to defend their fatherland.

Involvement of Women in Pre-Colonial Igbo Warfare

In his interesting narrative, Olaudah Equiano, an Igbo ex-slave, mentioned the various war equipment in the eighteenth-century Igbo land (Essaka) which included firearms, bows and arrows, broad two-edged swords, javelin, and shields (Gates Jr., 1987, 18-19). He maintains a position that military training in Essaka was gender inclusive:

All are taught the use of these weapons; even our women are warriors and march boldly out to fight along with the men. Our whole district is a kind of militia. On a certain signal given, such as the firing of a gun at night, they all rise in arms and rush upon their enemy. It is perhaps, something remarkable, that when our people march in the field, a red flag or banner is borne before them. I was once a witness to a battle on our common. We had all been at work in it one day, as usual, when our people were suddenly attacked. I climbed a tree at some distance, from which I beheld the fight. There were many women, as well as men, on both sides; among others my mother was there and armed with a broad sword (Gates Jr., 1987, 18-19).

Olaudah Equiano painted this picture to represent eighteenth-century warfare in his own area of Igbo land, but, unfortunately, some of the characteristics of pre-colonial Igbo warfare, like the use of medicine men or charms, were not mentioned in his narratives. Secondly, Equiano's claim to the involvement of women in warfare as well as the use of guns and the cause of the war constitute most of the arguments raised in this section of the paper. Many authors who write on Igbo warfare seem to be particularly interested in the nineteenth-century era. Hence, their counterview about women's involvement in pre-colonial Igbo warfare may be based on false chronological assumptions since they have little or no in-depth knowledge of warfare in the latter century. Emezue recalls that among the *Nawfia people*, the middle-aged women were deployed to the battlefield to hold ground while the men took their meals. According to him, the women performed this function by deceiving them into believing that the men were still around and ready to fight them. This they achieved by fixing dummies of black clay pots resembling human heads upon long sticks and moving them along and behind defensive walls. The enemy usually mistook these to be heads of human beings moving along the battle lines and so they refrained from attacking them. Also mentioned in Isuikwuato and Afikpo, oral traditions are the famous heroines; *Nne Njoku of Acha* in *Isuikwuato*, *Oriente Imome* and *Nne Ogeri Egbe* of *Afikpo* respectively were involved in pre-colonial warfare and fought alongside their men (Emezue, 2005: 36). Afikpo admits that:

What a woman will not do and cannot do is to sally forth from the home, armed to the teeth, to meet enemy warriors, but he notes that women of Uturu clan whose profession is weaving of mats constantly went beyond the frontiers of their clan in search of raw materials for their craft. As they sallied out, each of them would carry

a club, some five or six feet long. If they ran into an attack, say by a headhunter or by kidnappers, they would promptly throw their loads on the ground, form a circle round the loads on the ground and face the attackers squarely (Afigbo, 2011, 98).

An eminent Professor of Military History, S.C Ukpabi, says that there is no doubt that women were involved in Igbo warfare, though mostly indirectly. According to him, Equiano wrote his narrative to impress the British audience by equating Igbo women with Dahomean women and some other groups in Africa. He concurs that women could hold briefly for their husbands in war fronts while they observed their meals, but he dismissed the incorporation of women in warfare, in the context of Equiano's account, as being rare and mostly unrealistic (Ukpabi, Oral Interview with the author, 11 December 2009). The view that women in the Igbo land were not involved in pre-colonial Igbo warfare has been buttressed by many academics in a context that is opposite to what Equiano has presented. G.I Jones recalls that among Isuama Igbo village groups, women were encouraged to fight alongside men in defense of their farmlands. Nevertheless, in his attempt to revisit Equiano's account, he earlier on admits that:

The reference to women taking an active part in fighting is surprising. The traditional role of Ibo women was that of oppression to fighting; and indeed, owing to rules of exogamy and patrilocal residence, many women would be unable to take an active part in local fighting, as their husbands' enemies might well be their own fathers and brothers (Jones, 1968:66)

Hence, Afigbo raises a litany of serious questions by referring to sufficient documentary and oral records in Igbo warfare in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but he argues that neither have any reference to women taking an active part in bloody wars (Afigbo, 1981:157). Furthermore, he notes that Equiano's narratives pertaining to warfare may simply be a referral to the menace of slave raids and headhunters in the eighteenth century and to fracas over land (Afigbo, 1981:159). Most apparently, Igbo academics, namely Afigbo, Ukpabi, and Anyanwu, seem to maintain a common stance that there is a misconception of what connotes warfare among the Igbo. These authors place the blame on transliteral inadequacies and thus arrive at the conclusion that makes our comprehension about Equiano's account more convincing. According to Afigbo (1981:159):

One key to the problem may well lie in the fact that the Igbo word *ogu*, usually translated as war, is a vague term indeed covering many shades of hostile encounters. There is for instance what the Igbo know as *ogu okpiri*, which refers to a war fought with sticks only. This type usually obtained amongst people who were related in one way or the other and between drawing of blood, let alone the taking of life, was prohibited. In such, *ogu* women and children freely took part. But beyond that was *ogu egbe na nma* (literally the war of knives and guns). The shade of war was usually less frequent than the first and could only be obtained amongst enemies who were not related by blood. In this category of war, women and children had no direct part.

In a similar view, S.C. Ukpabi informs us that Igbo people might simply use the word *ogu* to refer to a war between two towns (or mini states) and would expect another Igbo to understand that he meant *ogu egbe na nma* (Ukpab, 1986:14). To an outsider, these subtle differences were either not

understood or ignored. But, since wars between kinsmen were generally not expected to record deaths, the death tolls in most cases were inevitable as cleansing rituals were expected from soldiers who killed their fellow kinsmen in war. In his study on “Kingship and Warfare in Igbo Society”, Anyanwu draws our attention to the instruments and to the nature of wars between people of the same kinship. According to him, weapons of warfare of the same kinship include stones, sticks, and bows and arrows, which were used to injure or incapacitate opponents, not to kill them (Anyanwu,1992:163). Considering that Igbo warfare has been categorized, a simple responsibility that befalls this work is to situate the type of warfare Equiano narrates in his book. Equiano must have emphasized the *ogu egbe na nma* (war of guns and knives) as his narratives on Igbo warfare have been associated with post-1893 warfare, among Edda, Aguleri, Ezza, Izzi, and Ikwo, where the enemy's skull was a kind of trophy or victory from war (Anyanwu,1992:163). Equiano recalls that:

After fighting for a considerable time with great fury, when many had been killed, our people obtained the victory and took their enemy's chief prisoner. He was carried off in great triumph and though he offered a ransom for his life, he was put to death (Falola,1991:133).

Furthermore, Equiano made an enigmatic statement that: “A virgin of note among our enemies had been slain in the battle and her arm was exposed in our marketplace where our trophies were always exhibited” (Gates, 1987:19). In his view, it is highly incomprehensible that women killed in war in the pre-colonial Igbo society were not celebrated. Alternatively, this view expresses the fact that it was war fought by people of different kinship groups. Against this background, Afigbo asserts that even an ‘Abam’ headhunter would not take a woman's head for that would win him no social uplift at home (Afigbo, 2011:97). As such, the head hunting in Ohafia resulted in two social stratifications: namely the *Ufiem* (the warriors) and *Ujo* (the cowards). The *Ufiem* is characterized by men who distinguished themselves by procuring the heads of their enemies, while the *Ujos* are cowards who were humiliated for not being brave like the *Ufiem* (Njoku,2000: 64). As a result of this development, there were recorded cases where wives of the *Ujo* group, who could not bear the shame of living with cowards, distinguished themselves by taking up their husband's cause and actually went to wars to procure heads on their husband's behalf (Njoku,2000: 64).

The Use of Guns in Pre-Colonial Igbo Warfare

One of the problems posed by Equiano's account on Igbo warfare regards the inadequacy of a chronological order of the use, source, and external influences of the supply of various Igbo war implements in pre-colonial times. Nevertheless, Equiano, to some extent, accounted for the supply of firearms, gunpowder, hats, beads, and dried fish by a group he referred to as Oye-Eboe (mahogany-coloured men from the south west of his community); he concluded that Oye-Eboe meant red men living at a distance (Azonye, 2002:430). The literal meaning of Oye Eboe could mean Onye Oyibo which means white men, but Olaudah Equiano's case study is that of red men. Put the other way around, his referral to mahogany men could also mean Black men who applied special features like the local *uhie* to appear red. The Aro of Southeastern Nigeria, reputable for trade all over the Igbo land and beyond, could also disguise themselves to ensure an exchange of

foreign goods for slaves from the hinterland. Be that as it may, Equiano admits that all war implements were not prepared in his community.

In his study of *Pre-Colonial Warfare in Obowo Imo State*, Anyanwu (1988) categorizes war equipment to include ones manufactured from indigenous manufacturers as well as those introduced from elsewhere. The indigenous war implements in Obowo include: Okpiri(clubs), Uta na Oku (bows and arrows), Ota abo (shield), Okpu agha (war cap), Opi (horn), Ikorodrum), Nkweke etc., while the war implements manufactured outside Obowo include: Mma (knife), Aro (spear), Egbe (gun), and spikes (Anyanwu,1988:5). More so, the Obowo people got their pre-colonial war instruments from Awka, Arondizuogu, Afikpo,Nkwerre, and Uzuakoli. Also excluded in Equiano's narratives is the numerical strength of his village, Essaka, in sustaining wars with firearms. This is vital because demography has a lot to do with warfare (Anyanwu,1988:5). Equiano further admits that the use of guns was a pivotal part of eighteenth-century Igbo warfare, but he could not specifically furnish us with information on the type of guns, whether they be flint, cap, dane, or machine guns. Against this backdrop, Isichei posits that:

A key question in the history of Igbo warfare concerns the role of firearms. When were they introduced, how effective were they and when did various Igbo groups develop techniques to repair and maintain them? Furthermore, she notes that it was not until the eighteenth century that the European traders began the systematic import of arms and ammunition to the Delta (Isichei,1976:75).

If the periodization given by Isichei is accurate, then Olaudah Equiano might not be wrong after all in his claims about the use of guns in pre-colonial Igbo warfare. In their account, Roland Oliver and J.D. Fage in *A Short History of Africa* record that gun availability was synonymous with the slave trade. According to them:

The early slave trade was largely a catch-as-catch-can affair. But after c.1650, as the demand for slaves increased, and as Europeans provided increasing quantities of firearms in exchange, it became a big business organized in their own interest (Oliver and Fage, 1962,121).

Emezue outlined various acronyms given to guns in Igbo parlance. They include *Egbe Cham*, *Adaka*, *Erefere*, *Egbe Okwa*, *Nwandu*, *Kurutu*, and *Ozegirigiri*. He went further, "In the eighteenth century, a flintlock and a small keg of gun powder were exchanged for as many as thirty slaves in the interior of the Bight of Biafra, to which area Igboland belonged (Emezue,2007:20).

However, Robert Smith's *Warfare and Diplomacy in Pre-Colonial West Africa* outlined the various categories of guns in West Africa to include matchlock, the wheel-lock, and flint guns which were imported into West Africa from 1635. He further maintains that the use of machine guns was not a part of pre-colonial West African warfare until the 1879-1883 Kalahari Civil War and the Kiriji wars of the 1880's. The reasons given to this late arrival of machine guns in pre-colonial West African warfare were prohibitive prices and limited supplies (Smith,1976, 112-113). Anyanwu and several other authors maintain that:

By the 1890's, Schneider rifles and revolvers were in use. They came mainly from European firms and their agents. It should however be noted that the spread of guns was limited. Guns were expensive and so only those who had means could buy

them. Thus, though an increasing number of people continued to own guns as the nineteenth century progressed, machetes and other weapons were still the predominant ones in Igbo warfare throughout the century (Anyanwu, 1991:133).

Largely, this best explains why the Igbo people gave way to superior weaponry after a serious resistance to British invaders at the end of the nineteenth and the early twentieth century. The arrival of guns into Calabar ports also had a significant impact in diagnosing the use of guns in Igbo warfare. However, it has been buttressed that firearms in the Igbo land by the nineteenth century were generally defective as European traders keyed in on the ignorance of Africans to sell them guns of very poor quality. As such, traditional weapons dominated warfare in pre-colonial Igboland. Latham wrote that, by 1767, guns were a standard article of trade at Calabar (Latham, 1973: 24). According to him, the reports of Barbot and William Snel Grave of 1713 show that weapons of war found in Calabar were bows and arrows. Professor Apollos Nwauwa dismissed Barbor and Latham's claims while insisting that both scholars failed to understand that, by the middle of the eighteenth century, firearms were not a legal article of trade. Furthermore, he noted that guns were probably not imported in large quantities into Calabar before 1713. He also said that it would be rash to assume that between 1660 and 1713, an era of intensive trade on the Calabar coast, that a few guns had not landed in the hands of leading African traders (Nwuawa, 1990:234).

To this end, the entrance of guns into Calabar ports re-shaped the history of warfare in the Igbo land; firearms replaced moribund war implements in many areas. The rise of the Aro chiefdom, an alliance of the Igbo, the Ibibio, and the Akpa, has a lot to do with the entrance of guns into Calabar coasts (Nwuawa, 1992,381). The foundation of the Aro chiefdom, traced to between 1690-1720, is interrelated with the import of the first guns in Calabar; hence, firearms were heavily used in the war, and this ultimately resulted in the foundation of Aro chiefdom (Nwuawa,1991:297). More so, the rise of Aro's influence to Niger Benue and Cross River areas elicited a lot of scholarly inquiry, thus leading Professor Robert A. Sargent to conclude that ecological factors could be responsible for the Aro influence into the Benue river region. According to him:

Until recently, the Aro evidence from Cross River in Southeastern Nigeria could not be tied to the Benue Basin reconstruction. Previously, events dated to the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries could not be related to droughts from 1720-1750 or from 1780-1810. Any reference in the Aro reconstruction to an eighteenth-century drought might be either of these (Sargent, 1999:21).

Consequently, the import of guns to Calabar coasts created new developments. This is because warfare increasingly became a profession involving warriors who allied either with the ruling elite or with Aro traders to recruit slaves. Due to the introduction of new military technologies and to the mundane interests of warriors, which at times led to conquests, wars were intensified in the Igbo hinterland (Oriji,1992: 178). From this, it can be sustained that apart from ecological and climatic factors, population increase as well as the socio-economic needs of the people caused the intensity of pre-colonial Igbo warfare. Additionally, readily available guns made these wars inevitable.

Gender Discourse in Olaudah Equiano's Essaka Village

The term gender refers to socially assigned roles based on cultural notions of masculinity and femininity, as well as non-binary genders. This apt definition would be employed in the analysis of Olaudah's accounts on issues of marriages, adultery, and patriarchy. It is important to note at this juncture that the intention of this work as social history is to relate it to contemporary discourse.

Marriage as a union of a man and a woman constitutes one of the several important accounts of Olaudah Equiano. He accounts that parties to a marriage are usually betrothed as young individuals by their parents. Afigbo views this practice as child marriage. He asserts:

This practice persisted in most of Igboland until about the forties of this century. In the Nsukka area, it still exists though it is now very much on the wane, or at least so the elite who now look on it as disgraceful say. This practice made courtship very little known in traditional Igbo society. It gave protection and a sense of social purpose in early life to girls. Not every child betrothal led to marriage, but most did. And according to our elders, marriages in those days were in spite of that much more stable than these days when most people choose their spouses on attaining maturity (Afigbo,1981:176-177).

The concept of marriage among the Igbo is not built on love; love has no place in Igbo marriages. A man capable of marrying a woman was measured by physical strength and his achievements in agriculture and in the society. Works of Chinua Achebe, Flora Nwapa, and Elechi Amadi, just to mention a few, attest to this objective. Achebe describes the character of Unoka as follows: "He was poor and his wife and children had barely enough to eat. People laughed at him because he was a loafer and they swore never to lend him money because he never pays back" (Achebe,1958:4). Unoka was ridiculed in Achebe's tale because he was monogamous in an age when marrying several wives was equated with being successful and wealthy. This suggests that the success of Igbo marriages is measured by men's capability to take care of women. Therefore, the betrothal exercise affords a period of assessment not necessarily in regard to the show of love. According to Basden, love has no part to play in native courtship, but a substitute for it may exist through the affection shown to the woman by her husband. However, after marriage, the woman is ranked with other properties of the husband and becomes little greater than cows and goats (Basden, 2006:59).

Next to marriage in Olaudah's account is adultery. According to him, adultery can be punished by slavery or death (Equiano,1968:71). Unfortunately, adultery, when committed by the woman spouse, receives a harsher punishment. In contemporary times, unlike Olaudah's, it is difficult to establish adultery in court. Okpara was optimistic in his view that the meaning of this word (adultery) is well understood, but in a divorce petition, an allegation of adultery must be strictly proven. E.I. Nwogugu insists that "Adultery may be defined as voluntary sexual intercourse between a spouse and a third party of the opposite sex, not being the husband or wife, during the subsistence or marriage." (Nwogugu,1974:159). In cases of an insane party, under the influence of alcohol, and with evidence of lack of consent, adultery is not established. Furthermore, to establish adultery, the intercourse needs not be complete in the sense that it could result in the consummation of marriage. However, there must be some penetration of the female organ by the male (Nwogugu,1974:159).

This law makes it difficult to establish adultery, unlike in the case of Olaudah's Essaka village. Unfortunately, in Olaudah's Essaka, women seem to suffer more on issues regarding adultery as he opines that: "The men, however, do not preserve the same constancy to their wives which they expect from them; for they indulge in a plurality, though seldom in more than two (Equiano,1968:71)." This view was nevertheless frowned upon by Justice Akinsanya: "So, it is the culture of male chauvinism; when a man commits adultery that he is considered as having fun but when the woman is only suspected to be committing adultery, the heavens are set ablaze and it is considered a sacrilege" (Akinsanya,1997: 220).

Adultery, under Olaudah's Essaka, was easily detected, but in recent times, especially under the statutory act, this work interrogates the possibility of testifying to it or to the evidence of penetration of the male organ into the female organ. Although scholars have debunked Olaudah's account on the death penalty of an adulterer, the lesson of history is that Essaka village should serve as a yardstick of moralization in marriages. Many of the failed marriages today are established on the premises of adultery. Yet, Ifemesia demonstrates how traditional Igbo settings make adultery mild when it comes to the issue of impotency. He posits that:

As for the man, in intractable situations, his impotency could eventually lead to divorce. But quite often, arrangements would be made by his parents (or, in their absence, by another responsible member of the lineage) to provide the woman with a robust, reliable, and reputable friend outside her own and her husband's patrilineages. And the whole affair would be conducted with such decency and privacy that the man's self-esteem was carefully preserved (Ifemesia, 1979:61).

Although Olaudah painted adultery as a grievous offence, its punishment may not be as capital as he made it out to be. Yet the guilty party might be ridiculed by co-women in groups or expelled from their husband's kindred through horrible means, as is the case with the utilization of masquerades (Achebe,1958: 14-15). Masquerades were a form of community policing in the precolonial Igbo land. People guilty of various offences were punished through the masquerade cults. P.K. Uchendu recalls that among the Ngwa Igbo sub-culture, women had considerable independence when it came to their relationships, including those with other men. He mentioned *Iko Mbara*, which is a male friend granted to women with their husband's knowledge and approval (Uchendu, 1993: 52). This implies that adultery was not always a punishable offence.

The domination by men was extremely visible in many respects in Equiano's narratives, as he posited that the head of the family usually ate alone; his wives and slaves also had separate tables which showed the status of women at home. Furthermore, Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* shows that women do not sit down to drink with men; wives take drinks according to their hierarchy and status (Equiano,1968:79-80). In Essaka, menstruating women were not to be in the dwelling-house or to touch any person or food (Equiano,1968:73). Despite the patriarchal structure of Essaka, women complimented the efforts of the men in many instances. Where women were not employed with the men in tillage, they involved themselves in spinning and weaving cotton, which they dyed and turned into garments. They manufactured earthen vessels; thus, it can be evinced that women, according to Olaudah's account, complimented the efforts of their men even in the face of traditional patriarchy (Equiano,1968:97).

Finally, Olaudah's account of his voyage through trans-Atlantic slavery demonstrates that the institution of slavery accommodated both men and women. This is evidenced by his meeting with his sister in a slave route. Of course, Olaudah accounted that, in a slave merchant's yard,

slaves were confined and chained together like sheep in a fold, without regard to sex or age (Equiano,1968:73). Yet, in historical scholarship, especially in West Africa, little has been done to showcase women's contribution to European plantations. Nevertheless, some of L.C. Mair's work on "Women Field Workers in Jamaica during Slavery" shows that:

Women were even more multi-functional, for of course, they could also replenish the labour supply as long as the most technically backward but versatile section of the labour force, viz, slave women, serviced the plantation in large and growing numbers (Mair, 1986:6).

Conclusion

Most fortunately, the Igbo aphorism that *Nwoke luchaa Ogu Nwanyi enwere akuko* (Whereas men fight wars women relish in telling stories of the men's exploits) did not apply in all circumstances. First, the view that women were not involved in pre-colonial Igbo warfare is not entirely true. Second, the present writer insists that Igbo people, unlike many other Nigerian groups, have no standing army. Thus, in cases of emergency, women were incorporated for the defence of their fatherland or their marital homes, thus, justifying Robert Smith's view that the pre-colonial Igbo warfare has no tactics (Smith,1976:174).

Thirdly, the various causes of Igbo warfare, notwithstanding these, include land disputes', desecration of shrines, disagreements in marriages, slave raids, etc. However, the narratives of Olaudah Equiano did not mention these causes of war apart from the "firing of a gun at night by the enemy camp" mentioned in his account. This position makes it difficult for us to comprehend the actual causes of warfare in Equiano's birthplace. However, notwithstanding the fact that war caused demographic and severe economic losses, it did not affect the political and economic stability of the people for a long time. This study insists that the parochial and doctored perception of women in pre-colonial African warfare, especially the Igbo case study, should be reviewed and authenticated in the spirit of revisionist scholarship.

References

- Achebe, C. (1958) *Things Fall Apart*, London: Heinemann.
- Afigbo, A. (1981) *Ropes of Sand: Studies in Igbo History and Culture*, Ibadan: UPL.
- Afigbo, A.E. (2011) "Equiano in Igbo Warfare" in Carolyn A. Brown ed. *Repercussions of the Atlantic Slave Trade: The Interior of the Bight of Biafra and the African Diaspora*, Trenton: Africa World Press Inc.
- Akinsanya, D. (1997) "Divorce Litigation in Nigeria; A Judge Perspective" in Olawale Ajai and Tosin Ipaye ed. *Rights of Women and Children in Divorce*, Lagos: Frankad Publishers.
- Anyanwu, U.D (1992) "Kingship and Warfare in Igbo Society" in Toyin Falola and Robin Law ed. *Warfare and Diplomacy in Pre-Colonial Nigeria: Essays in Honor of Robert Smith*, University of Wisconsin-Madison.
- Anyanwu, U.D. (1988) "Warfare in Pre-Colonial Igbo land: The Case of the Obowo of Imo State Nigeria", *African Notes*, Vol. xii, Numbers 1 and 11.
- Azonye, C. (2002) "The Heroic Age of Ohafia Igbo: Its Evolution and Socio-Cultural Consequences", in G.E.K Ofomata ed. *A Survey of the Igbo Nation*, Onitsha: Africana First Publishers Ltd.
- Basden, G.T(2006) *Among the Ibos of Nigeria*, London, Nonsuch Publishing Ltd, First published 1921, Republished.
- Emezue, S (2005) "Not Really the Amazons": Women in Traditional Igbo Warfare," *Igbo Affairs*, Vol. 1 No. 2, December
- Equiano, O. (1968) *The Early Travels of Olaudah Equiano* in Philip D. Curtin *Africa Remembered*, The University of Wisconsin Press.
- Falola, T. (1991) *History of Nigeria 2: Nigeria in the Nineteenth Century*, Longman Nigeria PLC.
- Ifemesia, C.C (1979) *Traditional Humane Living Among the Igbo*, Enugu: Fourth Dimension.
- Isichei, E. (1976) *A History of the Igbo People*, London, Macmillan Press.
- Jones, G.I. (1968) "Olaudah Equiano of the Niger Ibo-Introduction", in Philip D. Curtin ed. *African Remembered: Narratives by West Africans from Era of the Slave trade*, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press.
- L.H. Gates Jr.L.H. (1987), *The Classic Slave Narratives* ed., U.S.A: Penguin Group.
- Latham, A.J.H. (1973) *Old Calabar 1600-1891*, Oxford, Clarendon Press.
- Mair, L.M. (1986) *Women Field Workers in Jamaica during Slavery*. The Elsa Goreia Memorial Lecture Jamaica: University of the West Indies Mona.
- Njoku, O.N. (2000) *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo Society*, Okigwe: Whytem Prints.
- Nwogugu, E.I. (1974) *Family Law in Nigeria* Revised edition, Nigeria: Heinemann Educational Books.
- Nwuawa, A. O. (1991) "Integrating Arochukwu into The Regional Structure" *History in Africa*, Vol.18.
- Nwuawa, A.O. (1990) "The Dating of The Aro Chieftdom: A Synthesis of Correlated Genealogies" *History in Africa*, Vol.17.
- Nwuawa, A.O. (1992) "On Aro Colonial Primary Source Material: A Critique of the Historiography" *History in Africa*, Vol.19.
- Oliver, R and Fage, J.D. (1962) *A Short History of Africa*, Penguin Books Ltd.
- Orijji, J. (1992) "Ethical Ideals of Peace and The Concept of War in Igbo Society" in Toyin Falola and Robin Law ed. *Warfare and Diplomacy in Pre-Colonial Nigeria: Essays in Honor of Robert Smith*, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

- Sargent, R.A. (1999) *Economics, Politics and Social Change in The Benue Basin c.1300-1700: A Regional Approach to Pre-Colonial West African History*, Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers.
- Smith, R. (1976) *Warfare and Diplomacy in Pre-Colonial West Africa*, Britain, Methuen and Co. Ltd.
- Uchendu, P.K. (1993) *The Role of Nigerian Women in Politics: Past and Present*, Enugu, Fourth Dimension Publishers Co.
- Ukpabi, S.C. (1986) *Strands in Nigerian Military History*, Zaria, Gaskiya Corporation Limited.
- Ukpabi, S.C. (2009) Oral Interview with the author, Department of History and International Relations, Ebonyi State University Abakaliki Nigeria. 11 December.