

# THE AFRICANA STUDIES RESEARCH COLLOQUIUM

*presents:*



Thursday, October 30 at 4 pm  
Commons 329

## **Starvation as a War Tactic and a Political Tool: The Politics of Humanitarian Relief in the Biafra-Nigeria War**

**Dr. Gloria Chuku**, Associate Professor of Africana Studies and Affiliate Associate Professor of GWST & LLC PhD Program at UMBC

Professor Chuku will draw from a larger study on the intersection of ethnicity, gender and politics in the Biafra-Nigeria War, 1967-1970. She will discuss how the Igbo-dominated ethnicities in Eastern Nigeria were confronted by the federal military government (FMG) of Nigeria for declaring their independence as citizens of the Republic of Biafra. In the complex interplay of ethnic, economic, political, religious and diplomatic conflict, the FMG employed starvation as a war tactic through economic blockade of Biafra as the Biafran government utilized propaganda to spread rumors that Nigerian authorities were using poison and the blockade to complete their genocide against Biafrans. The result was severe scarcities, famine, starvation, malnutrition, kwashiorkor and death of many Biafrans. It was estimated that more died as a result of starvation than from weapons of warfare. The situation could have been graver but for the extensive media coverage of the conflict and its humanitarian catastrophe which provoked international outcry and subsequent intervention of international relief organizations. Thus, the war became the first postcolonial conflict in Africa to engender a transnational wave of humanitarian concern. The presentation will examine the ramifications of employing starvation as a powerful military tactic and as effective propaganda machinery; the prioritization of national security and politicization of humanitarianism; and lessons that can be drawn from the Biafra-Nigeria War.