

THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER
REALITIES IN AN IGBO SOCIETY: NNORT CASE STUDY

BY

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I examine the politics of sex and gender in the social and cultural systems of an Igbo community (Nnobi) at three historical periods.

Even though sexual dualism was pervasive of indigenous institutions, the separation of the sexes was mediated by the flexible gender system of the traditional language and culture. Sex did not always correspond to gender, and women could, therefore, play roles usually monopolized by men, or be classified as 'males' in terms of power and authority over others. This was possible because such roles were not rigidly masculinized or feminized, and there was therefore no stigma attached to the breaking of gender rules. Furthermore, the presence of a matriarchal ideology embedded in a goddess-focused religion, favoured and encouraged the acceptance of women in central positions of authority.

In contrast to the traditional culture, I show how Western culture, religion and education attendant on colonialism, introduced a rigid gender system which strictly masculinized and feminized roles. Traditional women's power was, therefore, eroded.

The post-independence period, on the other hand, saw the revival of traditional culture, co-existing with Western cultures and institutions. There were, however, in that traditional culture, enough contradictions which local men could manipulate, in order to marginalize the position of their womenfolk in the political structures of the contemporary society.

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INTRODUCTION

The Case for Feminist Anthropology

Sexual politics, as old as history itself, took vigorous and diverse forms in the 1970s, when women from all walks of life in the Western world joined the debate and struggle against social inequalities and oppression based on sexual discrimination. The forms this struggle took in the academic field, especially in the social sciences, included the questioning of existing theoretical models. (See Critique of Anthropology - Women's Issue - 9 & 10 Vol.3 1977.) Androcentricity, a lack of interest in women, and the astounding deficiency of its methods, were pointed out in unambiguous terms and substantiated in the field of social anthropology, (E. Ardener 1972, 1975; Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974). Maurice Godelier, for example, suggests that there could be as many as 10,000 societies on the globe, of which anthropologists have studied only between 700 and 800. It is even more shocking to learn that 'fewer than fifty serious monographs have been specifically devoted to the relations between men and women' (Godelier 1981). This monograph on an Igbo society can be seen as one attempt in the current movement in Women's Studies to correct this imbalance.

The subject of this thesis is the politics of gender. The theoretical approach is that put forward in two studies, namely, that gender is a cultural construct (S. Ardener ed. 1978), and that the categorical imperatives of gender are as different in one society

as between societies (Bujra 1978). We may thus find women being regarded as males or some men being regarded as females; hence the need to distinguish between biological sex and ideological gender.

A gender perspective, or even a class position, should not undermine a basic feminist interest in women as possessors of a common denominator, namely, some biological organic facts, changes through their life-cycle, and the cultural valuation of them. As Levi-Strauss (1963) points out, in the definition of nature, all women are alike. Only in the definitions of culture are they differentiated. The biological facts thought common to all women are virginity, menstruation, reproduction and menopause. These shared biological 'facts' alone have sometimes acted as a basis for solidarity between women. Women have sometimes appealed to the oneness of sex in their efforts to organize for various interests. (See Caplan and Bujra ed. 1978.) In order to raise these 'facts' above misleading analysis based on biological differences alone, Callaway (1978) shows how rituals intrude on female biological events, investing them with social significance. What seems natural is, in fact, ideologically controlled by various rules of pollution and taboo. Using La Fontaine's (1972) study of women's life crises in Bugisu, Callaway points out that, for example, menstruation, loss of virginity and childbirth all involve the loss of blood. This notion is used by the Gisu to compare childbirth with circumcision. Male circumcision becomes 'a symbolic creation in men of the inherent physical

reproductive power of women' (1978: 175). Thus socially controlled bleeding comes to symbolize and create superior social power (ibid). The immature are made into full adults. Women produce the immature, men the socially mature. This is what Gisu dominant male ideology claims irrespective of empirical facts. Bugisu is, of course, as Callaway points out, 'a society glorifying male ancestors, the superiority of living men and sons yet unborn. Its rituals celebrating the bodily changes of Gisu women bring the natural procreative powers of women under the social control of men. The practices of childbirth thus serve to perpetuate the male-dominated "world-structure" of this society' (ibid: 176).

The various taboo and pollution notions mystifying menstruation, intercourse and childbirth serve to maintain the ascendancy of dominant ideologies, whether by some men over some women, or older women over younger ones. There is a strong case for Feminist Anthropology, even if it succeeds only in demystifying some of these anti-female notions and practices.

A feminist perspective therefore claims a specific focus on sex and gender in social and cultural systems. A feminist stance implies making a political issue of being a woman in society, and questioning the social and cultural significance or values made of it. Feminism will, therefore, embody various degrees of interests and politics. On the question of the relevance of feminist studies to African societies, the

simple answer is that feminism as a political stance or consciousness is not a Western invention or monopoly. As will be seen from the Igbo data supplied in this thesis, militant feminism, a constant reality in indigenous Igbo societies, can be said to be a comparatively new phenomenon in the Western world. However, it must be admitted that while African women have been involved in practical daily power struggles, Western feminists have made considerable headway in theoretical formulations in Women's Studies. In view of cultural differences, it is not unkind to stress the importance of understanding indigenous African gender systems in the formulation of generalized theories. This is more true in view of accusations and criticisms of ethnocentricity levied at Western pioneers of social anthropology itself. (Leach 1961; Needham ed. 1971.)

Women in Igbo Studies

The weaknesses in Igbo studies from a feminist perspective are multiple. Not only do the published materials share the general problem of inadequate constructive anthropological tools of analysis and theory in relation to women in society and culture; they also lack detailed empirical data about women in particular communities, from which theories may be formulated.

For a long time, the political, religious and cultural diversity of Igbo societies was undermined in favour of more general studies dating back to the 1930s and 1940s. It was as a result of the Igbo women's war of 1929 against British colonial rule, its system of local administration based on the use of warrant chiefs and the consequent collapse of that system, that the colonial government sent colonial officials and ethnographers into the field to study indigenous Igbo political systems. Among the resulting publications was C.K. Meek's Land and Authority in a Nigerian Tribe (1937), which dealt with Igbo societies in general. G.T. Basden had published Among the Ibos of Nigeria (1921) and later, with some anthropological training and more time spent in Igboland, he narrowed his area of interest to the northern Igbo people. The result was Niger Ibos (1938), a general account of life among Igbo peoples east and west of the River Niger. Another general study by D. Forde and G.I. Jones, The Ibo and Ibibio-Speaking Peoples of South-Eastern Nigeria (1950), remains a standard brief account.

As a result of the shock felt by the colonial government following the war made on them by Igbo women in 1929, especially in the southern provinces, two British women were sent to conduct studies in these areas. Unfortunately, Mrs. S. Leith-Ross, whose subject matter was solely women, had no social scientific training. The result of her experiences and impressions in a limited Igbo area was published under the very ambitious and broad title, African Women (1939). Again, Miss M. Green's study of a very small Igbo village of 360 inhabitants,⁽¹⁾ was published under the general title Igbo Village Affairs (1947).

More recently a few more studies, including those by Igbo anthropologists, have been added to the list, but still none has women as the specific interest. V. Uchendu's The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria (1965) is really a general account of a small Igbo village. Studies by G.I. Jones in various publications from the 1940s to the 1960s on many aspects of Igbo societies including social organizations, age organizations, land tenure, ecology, agriculture, village planning etc., only add to the list of papers, articles and essays on aspects of Igbo systems. The same can be said of papers and monographs published by S. Ottenberg and P.W. Ottenberg between 1953 and 1968 on the Afikpo village groups in the southern Igbo areas.

Those studies whose importance lies in their contribution to information on the diversity of Igbo political systems by locating centralized state systems in Igbo societies east and west of the Niger, include

I. Nzimiro's Studies in Ibo Political Systems (1972), a comparative study of chieftaincy and politics in four Niger states: Onitsha, Abo, Oguta and Osomari.

R.N. Henderson's The King in Every Man (1972), dealing with Onitsha kingship institutions, society and culture, remains the most detailed structural study of a particular Igbo society. In addition to publications by M.D.W. Jeffreys from 1935 to 1956 and the archaeologist T. Shaw from 1960 to 1970 on the divine kings of Nri, the anthropologist M.A. Onwuejeogwu has published several papers on the same subject. These can be found in Odinani (a journal of Edinani Museum, Nri). After years of extensive investigations in the areas, Onwuejeogwu's book An Igbo Civilization - Nri Kingdom and Hegemony (1981) was finally published. The importance of E. Isichei's History of the Igbo People (1976) lies in the fact that it is the first attempt at a comprehensive historical account of the Igbo.

We can see from this list, therefore, that the subject interest of the bulk of Igbo studies has not been a concern with feminist issues or the politics of sex and gender. However, directly relevant to this thesis from feminist and gender perspectives are K. Okonjo's paper entitled 'The Dual-Sex Political System in Operation: Igbo Women and Community Politics in Midwestern Nigeria' in Nancy J. Hafkin and Edna G. Bay (ed) Women in Africa (1976), and P.O. Nsugbe's Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo People (1976).

Gender and the Diversity of Igbo Political Systems

It is the contention of this thesis that emphasis on principles of succession and inheritance based on descent has been inadequate for the presentation or understanding of gender relations in the social processes of Igbo communities. This is especially true with regard to the traditional economy, where women have been dominant.

A very interesting phenomenon in the pre-colonial history of Igbo people, lies in the coexistence of village or town distinctiveness, and subcultures with elements of more generally shared cultures. (See Onwuejeogwu 1981: 8-14.) The numerous village-groups were autonomous with their own territories and distinctive names. Some, however, were interrelated through trade, marriage, common descent, conquest and ritual activities. Most of them were within the areas of influence of ancient Igbo and non-Igbo kingdoms and civilizations such as Nri, Igala, Benin and Arochukwu. (See Henderson 1972: 37-75.) It is, therefore, not surprising that there was a great variety of cultural forms and political systems. Forde and Jones (1950: 10) divide the Igbo into five cultural groups: Northern or Onitsha Igbo, Southern or Owerri Igbo, Western Igbo, Eastern or Cross River Igbo, and North-Eastern Igbo. This has been the standard division used by academics until the recent redivision into permanent Igbo settlements within six ecological areas by

Onwuejeogwu, who suggests some connection between ecology and the diversities and variations in Igbo culture (1981: 10, 14).

However, whether by Forde and Jones or Onwuejeogwu's classification, most Igbo areas have been presented as basically patrilineal. Basden (1938: 268) had referred to the presence of matriliney in Ohaffia as 'an isolated example'. For Forde and Jones (1950: 52), the system was in fact 'non-Ibo'. It is now an established fact that the matrilineal element is strong, and predominant among the Cross River Igbo (Nsugbe 1976). Ohaffia, whether by the classification of Forde and Jones or Onwuejeogwu, belongs to the Cross River Igbo category. Yet, in spite of Dr. Nsugbe's convincing arguments establishing the predominance of matriliney in Ohaffia, Professor Onwuejeogwu lumps Ohaffia in with others, such as the Afikpo Igbo, who share cultural features such as a 'double unilineal system of inheritance' (ibid: 13).

The earlier concentration on the principles of patriliney in Igbo studies had not only led to the lack of theories on Igbo gender ideologies, it also led to the false general impression of the Igbo as a people with 'segmentary societies' and decentralized government systems based on lineage and age-grade organizations. Authority was in the hands of male lineage heads who depended on the co-operation of families, age-sets, councils and associations. Descent and filiation determined social positions and roles for

individuals. Ritual symbols defined and sanctioned the main positions in the system. The lineage was the corporate and also the primary political unit. Law and order was maintained by the balance of power between lineages and thus an 'equalitarian', 'stateless society' was maintained (Meek 1937, Basden 1938, Green 1947, Uchendu 1965, Forde and Jones 1950, Fortes and Evans-Pritchard 1940, etc.).

The aim of Nzimiro's (1972) thesis was to correct this false general impression of Igbo societies. He therefore pointed out the presence of kingship systems and 'class' structures among many Riverain Igbo societies. Contrary to Fortes and Evans, Pritchard's (1940) division of African political systems into the simple dichotomies of 'state' and 'stateless', corresponding to 'centralized' and 'segmentary' types, both Nzimiro (1972) and Henderson (1972) show the co-existence of segmentary structures and state systems. Above the political organization of the unilineal descent groups was the state system consisting of the king and chiefs. Ritual and myth credited these kings with divinity, and they were the secular heads of the societies. The kings and their chiefs administered law and justice, including the defence of the state. The kings as the symbols of their states were the focus of political unity. While Henderson points out social inequality between social or political groups, Nzimiro sees inequality in these Igbo societies in terms of class (ibid: 24). His Marxist interpretation has been challenged by Onwuejeogwu, who insists on

the use of the term 'political grouping' instead of 'political class', as membership to the qualifying titles is open to all free-born of the particular towns (Odinani, No. 2. Sept. 1977). Onwuejeogwu has, of course, not thought of women in making his statement, as the titles involved are gender linked: they are, mainly, exclusively male titles. The standard Igbo-bought title, which conferred on the holder political or ritual leadership, is the ozo title. Only men took, and still take, that title in Igbo societies. Some communities, however, as will be shown later, had other titles for women, or some categories of woman.

It is in terms of the gender ideologies manipulated by interest groups in the course of social relations, and especially in relation to social resources, that one would have hoped for the examination of the structural position of women in Igbo societies. Nzimiro's broad categories of citizenship (free-born) and non-citizenship (slaves and foreigners) in describing Onitsha social and ideological framework (1972: 23-55), does not permit a more detailed analysis of various levels of social and ideological divisions in Onitsha society, nor does it expose the notions of inclusion and exclusion manipulated to maintain these boundaries in the course of social relations. Even among the supposed free-born, other dichotomies and oppositions emerge and the principle of non-citizenship can apply, depending on the level

of analysis. This is best revealed in the social and ideological classification of categories of woman. A general Igbo principle in gender relations is the fact that a woman as a daughter has the status of citizen - an acknowledged member of her natal lineage; but, as a wife, she is treated as a non-citizen of her marital lineage. This was given symbolic expression in burial practices, whereby the corpse of a wife was returned to her natal lineage for burial, and the mortuary rite of seclusion associated with the widow pending the definition of her new status after the death of a husband (Henderson 1972: 229-30, Basden 1938: 278-9, 291).

The duality of the status of Igbo women is best revealed in the rules of exogamy of some Igbo societies, and the indigenous women's organizations of most Igbo societies. From Green's (1947) data, for example, the stranger or outsider classification of women as wives is more obvious in the southern Igbo areas of Owerri province, where the rules of exogamy applied at village level. The resulting effect was the concentration of wives in individual villages and the dispersal of daughters all over the villages (ibid: 149-157). The stranger status of wives, for example, becomes clear from the fact that the village men could apply 'aggressive medicine' or 'magic' used against strangers against the wives as well (ibid: 80-81). On the other hand, the spacial separation of wives and daughters appears to have minimized conflicts

between both interest groups, or the manipulation of them against each other by lineage men. This has not been the case in the northern Igbo provinces, where village or town endogamy was preferred. Onitsha, for example, preferred town endogamy (Henderson 1972: 196-9, 243) to such an extent that there seems to have been a modified rule, or a compromise solution, for those in incestuous or taboo relationships to be able to marry under specified conditions (ibid: 197).

The preference for village endogamy in these northern Igbo communities encouraged the proximity of daughters to their natal homes, where they had very important ritual and political roles to fulfill, whether in the family, or formally, through their very powerful organisations of lineage daughters. (See Henderson 1972: 153-6, Basden 1938: 225-7, Okonjo 1976: 52.) In the valuation of daughters and wives, all the writers attest to the superior status which Igbo communities have accorded their daughters in relation to their wives. They also point out the association of daughters with male roles and status in relation to wives. The daughters of a patrilineage are, for example, addressed as 'husbands' by the wives of the patrilineage. This, among other practices, negates any assumption of a rigidity in the association of gender to sex in Igbo culture in general.

It is to some degree in the context of the flexibility of Igbo gender constructions and ideologies, that the widely acclaimed militancy and

aggressiveness of their women, whether in economic or political pursuits, can best be presented, analysed or theorized.

It is from this perspective that Nsugbe's (1976) approach to the study of the matrilineal Igbo people of Ohaffia has been most disappointing. His sole concern with principles of descent, succession and inheritance, at the expense of other dynamics of gender ideologies in the social processes of Ohaffia, leaves a lot to be desired in a work which gives a partial impression of a very prominent position of women vis-a-vis men in this Igbo community. There is no account of the relationships between categories of woman, whether as daughters, wives or mothers. We have no account of the cultural valuation made of female biological changes through a woman's life-course, such as virginity or menstrual blood. In this strongly female-oriented society, one would have expected detailed accounts of both women's biological and social activities, and a structural analysis of beliefs associated with them. Nsugbe's data shows that, although there was a very high valuation of the female gender, which was reflected in the ritual position of the matrilineage female head, secular affairs in the matrilineage and the wider public sector of the village appear to have been controlled and run exclusively by men through their various age-sets (ibid: 58-67). It is also in connection only with the male secular office of village head,

that wealth, achievement and bought titles are mentioned (ibid: 95, 98 and footnote 7).

However, a dual-sex political system appears to have been in operation in matrilineal Ohaffia, whereby the autonomous non-lineage based village Women's Association which dealt exclusively with the affairs of the adult women, in some ways copied its equivalent Men's Association (ibid: 67). The leader of the Women's Association was known as Eze Nwanyi (female king), and held both secular and ritual office within the female sphere. She presided over the women's meetings and acted as the spokeswoman of the Association. During planting season, she ritually declared farming open for the women (ibid: 68). Unlike the more powerful male government association, which depended on a junior age-set for the execution and enforcement of its rulings, the Women's Association executed its own rulings. In addition, it could effectively oppose unwelcomed actions or decisions of the men, as it had the power to call out mass female non-co-operation and boycott of the village (ibid).

Rights to patrilineal building land were patrilineally inherited. Land immediately beyond and adjoining these building lands were owned by the matrilineage. All the lands beyond these, including frontier lands, also belonged to the matrilineage. Most lands, therefore, belonged to the matrilineage (ibid: 86-88). Although residence in Ohaffia is

said to have been patrilocal, according to Nsugbe the patrilineage was an endogamous unit, and as he writes, 'marriage of patrilineage relatives even as close as half-siblings which will be an abomination among patrilineal Igbo is permitted in Ohaffia' (ibid: 78). Again, Nsugbe quotes the Ohaffia themselves as saying, 'we take in marriage whom we bear, for amity' (ibid: 79). The matrilineage, on the other hand, is said to have followed the rule of marriage exogamy and to have been named after their ancestresses (ibid: 73). It is on this basis that Nsugbe would not classify the Ohaffia system as double descent, even though residential land followed the rule of patrilineal inheritance, and much of the immovable property could be inherited either way (ibid: 119-122).

A phenomenon in Ohaffia, which is absent in accounts of patrilineal Igbo areas, is the ritual superiority of the female in the matrilineage. The Ohaffia matrilineage recognized two heads, a male and a female one. The male head took care of secular duties involving the general management of property, its allocation and exploitation, and the settlement of disputes. An adult female could play this male role when no male was available (ibid: 93). The sacred duties of the female matrilineage head, also called 'female king', as was the head of the village Women's Association, involved the performance of

sacrifices to the sacred pots representing the ancestresses of the matrilineage. This role could never be performed by a male (ibid). The female head was therefore completely in charge of the ancestral cult of the matrilineage: the sacred pots themselves were located inside her bedroom! (ibid: 190). These female ancestral pots were moved as female elders succeeded female heads of the matrilineages. Stressing the importance of these women, Nsugbe writes 'The living female elder is the spiritual focus of all the living members, males and females alike, of an Ohaffia matrilineage. She is the visible ancestress of them all. It is to her that they bring both their spiritual and their worldly tribulations, and expect succor. It is near her hearth and in her bedroom that the pots of their line of ancestresses find warmth, care and devotion' (ibid: III). As a result of this very strong matrifocality in the Ohaffia cultural system, matrilineage pots are said to have been better cared for and to 'evoke stronger and deeper emotions of loyalty even today than their male counterparts do' (ibid).

Making a distinction between the patrilineage and the matrilineage, Ohaffia is said to state the gender aspect of its culture thus: 'a man's worst enemy is his patrikin' (ibid: 94), implying the presence of continuous struggle, rivalry and competition within the patrilineage, as that constituted the residential group and owned residential land which would suffer most from population pressure.

But of the matrilineage they said, 'father's penis scatters, mother's womb gathers' (ibid). Here, I believe that what they may be associating with the male role is the tendency towards irresponsibility and lack of accountability for personal action. The penis plants its seed in the womb, perhaps in many wombs, and moves on doing the same elsewhere. Ohaffia men were traditionally head-hunters and warriors employed as mercenaries by other Igbo groups (Nsugbe 1976: 21, 25-31, Isichei 1976: 81-7, Henderson 1972: 499-501). Most social and domestic responsibilities therefore fell to the womenfolk. Nsugbe, for example, writes, 'Ohaffia women are considered by other Ibo groups to be the hardest-worked on the farm of any Ibo womenfolk, just as the men are regarded as being among the hardiest travellers' (ibid: 21). The material experience of an Ohaffia, the primary identification with and centrality of the female in reproduction, production, property and status inheritance, was thus given cultural expression in a strong, matrifocal ideology.

Strong matrifocality is also present in the ideological concepts of patrilineal Igbo communities, but has, so far, been undermined in favour of formal rules and patrilineal concepts. The centrality of the female role in reproduction and the primary identification of children with their mother is widely spread among all Igbo communities. It is manifested both in their kinship terminology and the domestic

structure, irrespective of their classifications, on the basis of patrilineality or matrilineality. The primary kinship unit recognized by the Igbo, is the matricentric unit of a mother and her children.

This is the Igbo umunne otu afo, children of one womb. This is both a farming and eating unit, which sees itself as those who eat of the same pot. (See Nsugbe 1976: 94, Henderson 1972: 169.) The strongest kinship ties and sentiment are expressed within this group and other, wider relationships, real or fictitious, traced through a womb connection. Of the matrilineal Ohaffia, for example, Nsugbe writes, 'An Ohaffia person makes a great deal of fuss about "those with whom I share the same womb"... The people are open about their strong bias towards their mothers and mother's own kin group' (ibid: 93-4). Of the same sentiments among the patrilineal Owerri Igbo, M. Green, assuming a uniform system for the Igbo, writes, 'clearly matrilineity plays a considerable part in Ibo society. Descent and succession are patrilineal, marriage is patrilocal and a man inherits from his father. But the matrilineal principle is there asserting itself both legally and emotionally' (1947: 161). This sentiment is epitomized in the special status and privileges given to children of daughters and their mediatory role in linking lineages or villages (ibid: 152, 160).

Similar sentiments have also been recorded among other patrilineal northern Igbo communities, especially

where daughters have structural political and ritual roles in their patrilineages, as, for example, Onitsha society. (See Henderson 1972: 140-1, 153-5.) Here, too, motherhood has been canonized. Daughters erected personal shrines called 'the mothers', as they were dedicated to series of dead mothers. As daughters got married, they took these shrines to their marital homes (ibid: 169). About these shrines, Henderson writes, 'Intimately associated with the personal god of every woman is the spirit called Oma, objectified in the form of a small rounded conical clay mound set against the wall on the floor of the woman's kitchen called "the mothers", this symbol represents maternity as a perpetual force which acts upon all descendants of a woman' (ibid: 193). A woman is said to sit before the shrine to beg the dead in the same way as the patrilineage priest did before the shrine of lineage male ancestors. The only difference was the fact that the woman would not use the ofo, symbol of authority, and therefore, according to Henderson, 'the normative component of righteous power associated with males is absent in such ritual communication; instead, the worship of Oma evokes associations of maternal indulgence and loving filial dependence' (ibid). Yet, Henderson himself writes, 'It is believed that through Oma a mother's spiritual power can make her children sick, barren or impotent' (ibid: 194). This punishment would result from any neglect of filial duties (ibid: 195). The wrath of Oma, it seems to me, was therefore more powerful

in the course of the social processes of Onitsha people as it governed daily sentiments, emotions and actions of everyone, every minute, than the sanctions of ancestors used by a few males in key positions in the society.

The strong sibling emotional tie is further stressed by Henderson, who writes, 'Children born of one mother are expected to behave maternally towards one another as the children of one father are not' (ibid). Their relationship of 'mutual nurturance and mutual dependence' on the Oma shrine, is what Henderson terms 'being in Oma'. This condition of 'being in Oma' to a mother is said to last beyond the woman's lifetime and is thus part of a descent relationship (ibid). After the funeral of a mother, it was up to her eldest daughter to make her an ancestress by bringing her mother into her kitchen (ibid), as it was the duty of the eldest son to bring his father into the obi⁽²⁾ (ibid: 113).

The spiritual force of the original mother remained strong, affecting both male and female descendants despite the multiplicity of mounds dedicated to subsequent mothers. As the tie to a shrine gave the participants the status of common motherhood, they remained an exogamous unit (ibid). Henderson therefore accepts the ideology of Oma as 'matrilineal', since it is a relationship traced through a 'descending line of mothers' (ibid: 195).

This would refute Nsugbe's claim, misinformed by Meek (1937: 62), that female ancestors were not represented among the patrilineal Igbo, while the Ohaffia represented both male and female ancestors (1976: 102). Green (1947) also makes reference to villages in the southern Igbo areas of Owerri which, in spite of the general rule of village exogamy, could not intermarry as they were in Umunne, the bond of common motherhood relationship. Here, in fact, the villages involved had common ancestral symbols known as Umunne (ibid: 153, 155).

Similarly, in Nri society, typified by its divine kingship system and patrilineal system of descent and inheritance (Onwuejeogwu 1981), the bond of common motherhood known as Ibenne was ritualized and symbolized in a cult object. (See Akunne 1977.) This was in the form of an earthenware bowl, which contained sacred sticks thought of as males and females and tied together to signify the unity of those involved. During this sacrifice, as during any ritual sacrifice, kola-nuts, wine and hens were used. The blood of the hen was sprinkled over the bowl and its contents. This ritual bowl was given a significant place at the ancestral altar of every family and other, wider, lineage organizations (ibid: 60-61).

It appears that in this culture, Ibenne, described as 'the true spirit of unity which binds persons through common motherhood' (ibid: 60), was

manipulated at other, higher, levels of lineage organization, where trust, unity and solidarity were sought. Even in the contemporary society, in the face of change, this moral force is still effectively applied in certain social and economic sectors, even by non-related individuals. As Akunne put it, 'Christianity has reduced the people's ritual consciousness of Ibenne, but the corporate ideology of lineage morality remains. Ibenne is still influential in commerce: individuals pool their capital to launch an urban business after taking their Ibenne oath, in their rural home, not to cheat one another. Ibenne is the foundation for trust and confidence - a ritual agreement with a ritual sanction' (ibid: 63).

It seems, therefore, that contrary to general impressions given of Igbo societies, maternal ancestresses or relationships traced matrilineally were ritualized and symbolized in cult objects in most Igbo societies, whether classified as matrilineal or patrilineal. More importantly, they played very significant roles in governing kinship relationships in traditional Igbo systems. It thus follows that strong emphasis on principles of patriliney and systems of descent and inheritance, could only have distorted or presented partially, traditional Igbo social and cultural gender dialectics.

The presentation of Igbo land tenure systems and the allocation of economic resources from theories of patrilineal principles of unilineal succession and

inheritance does not expose the relationship of Igbo women to land and subsistence economy. It did not, for example, explain to Green (1947) and Leith-Ross (1939), why women in the communities they were studying constantly made reference to lands which they claimed belonged to them. Leith-Ross consequently stated the contradiction between social norm and social fact when she wrote, 'One is constantly being told a woman has no property yet one is equally constantly being shown "my" farm or hearing of a woman who has gone to court about "her" oil palms or "her" share of a dowry' (ibid: 102).

Nor does the position taken by some Western feminists, of the universality of female subordination (Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974; Friedl 1975; Young, Wolkowitz and McCullagh 1981), take account of the diversity of the structural position of women in different Igbo societies. Such a position also ignores the different social and cultural significance made of different categories of woman in different roles and status in the same society. The ethnography of the Afikpo⁽³⁾ Igbo, as presented by S. Ottenberg (1968) and P. Ottenberg (1959), for example, gives one the impression of a complete lack of power for Afikpo women, both in their traditional society and the contemporary rural economic sector.

In the traditional Afikpo setting, unlike other Igbo societies, women seem to have lacked a strong economic and organizational base⁽⁴⁾. With a double

descent system of inheritance, about 85 per cent of the farmland was under the control of the matrilineage⁽⁵⁾. Population density was relatively low. Land was fertile and therefore provided all that was required for subsistence. Men were therefore fully involved in farm-work, monopolizing farming of the prestige and subsistence crop, yam⁽⁶⁾. Men produced enough yam for subsistence, ritual and ceremonial requirements and still had enough surplus to sell for cash, unlike other Igbo areas of poor soil, where the women's crops such as cocoyam and later, cassava, made up and still make up for insufficient yam supply. In some areas, they have become the main staple, hence the dependency on the women in the subsistence economic sector, and the power the women derive from this fact.

The fact that women in traditional Afikpo society were neither incorporated into the lineages of their husbands nor into their own matrilineages meant that they were in a continuous state of status ambiguity⁽⁷⁾. Their usefulness as daughters to their matrilineage was in terms of the number of children they could produce. Their usefulness as wives to their husbands was in terms of the lands the men could acquire through marrying them. A man received farmland from his own matrilineage, his patrilineage, and from both his father's and his wives' matrilineages⁽⁸⁾. The wives, on the other hand, received small portions of land from their husbands for the planting of subsidiary crops and vegetables⁽⁹⁾. Women did not, therefore, get huge surplus yields from subsistence agriculture

to sell in the market and build up trading capital, as happened among Central Igbo women, who basically controlled the subsistence economy.

Afikpo women, therefore, tended to be economically dependent on their husbands. The women also appear to have been excluded in ritual affairs as well as matrilineal and clan affairs⁽¹⁰⁾. Those of the major patrilineages were in the hands of male elders and priests of the major shrines, who, in collaboration with the village Men's Society, concerned themselves with the task of ritual control and subjugation of their women⁽¹¹⁾. Women lacking equivalent formal organizations, had neither the economic nor the organizational base from which to negotiate or contradict the normative gender relationships. Not even in the face of colonialism and the subsequent growth of petty commodity trade, did this sexual imbalance change for Afikpo, who remained immobile, unorganized and under the firm control of their menfolk. As P. Ottenberg writes, 'Long-distance trade in pots, fish, and yam from the Afikpo area and European goods from the seaports and other cities of eastern Nigeria is the exclusive province of men. Afikpo women are discouraged from engaging in this trade, and the few who have attempted it have stopped after a short time. This seems to be associated with women's lack of wealth for trading capital, the restrictions placed on their mobility by their household economic responsibilities and the control exerted over them by the men of Afikpo' (1959: 207).

From Green's (1947) data on the Agbaja Igbo with a patrilineal descent system of inheritance and succession, in the formal representation, one does not get the impression of a powerful structural position of women, whether in their status as wives or daughters. Wives were basically seen as strangers, and daughters, who were scattered in other villages, did not seem to have had indigenous formal organizations typical of some northern Igbo communities. It appears that it was, in fact, as a result of colonial presence and Christian influence that an organization of daughters emerged (ibid: 217). Even then, they were not all single sex, as some of the organizations also admitted some lineage men. These organizations were on a voluntary basis and not part of the structural political groupings as were such organizations in the northern Igbo societies. There also did not appear to have been a strong presence of titled women incorporated into the political elite core of these southern Igbo communities as in, for example, Onitsha Igbo society. Even though reference is made to the suggestion, untrue of any other Igbo societies, that women as well as men took Ozo title (Green 1947: 214-15; Leith-Ross 1939: 159-60), both writers point out the fact that such titled women were called Lolo. It is, therefore, incorrect to say that the women took Ozo title, especially as Green observes that the women's title was taken in a different way from the men's (ibid: 215). She also points out that a man's first wife was referred to as his Lolo (ibid). The idea

of titled women and their relationship to the political structure is an important topic not pursued by either Leith-Ross or Green. Green did not see the titled women as politically important, but only in terms of prestige or honour, as the holding of the female title did not seem to confer on the holder leadership over the village women. This is in spite of the fact that the tiny village studied by Green had only one such titled woman, who had not yet completed the taking of the title (ibid). Nor had Green studied the relationship of the female title to its male equivalent. Leith-Ross, however, points out the economic aspect of the title system, whereby cash paid by new members was shared by the existing title holders (ibid: 160), but no structural analysis was pursued.

However, from Green's data we have an example of how women who, as wives, were complete strangers in their husband's villages, could combine power derived from their control of subsistence farming and family sustenance, as they were the food producers and crop owners (ibid: 172), with their organizational ability, for effective mass action against a particular village or all the village group, until their demands were met (ibid: 211-14). Their strong economic position made up for their lack of formal political authority. This is also manifested in the general belief that, even though women did not have the real symbol of authority in the form of an Ofo,

their mere gesture of protest, either by knocking the pestle used for pounding food, or their hands, on the ground, could be very effective in causing sickness in the village (ibid: 175, 209). Women's anger was, therefore, feared. Other factors which safeguarded the unity of the women were their custom of swearing their loyalty and solidarity before village shrines for the sake of unity (ibid: 209) and in a common enterprise (ibid: 221), and their effective sanction against any deviating or disobedient members (ibid: 196, 201-4).

As Green's approach did not incorporate a study of the socio-cultural relationship of gender ideologies, she is unable, in her conclusion, to relate the supposed ideal female pacific roles, whether as sisters in relation to their brothers, or wives to husbands (ibid: 256), or female medicine to male medicine (ibid: 255), to other instances or occasions when the 'ideal' gender relations were reversed and women performed 'ideal' male roles. A good example of this is her own description of the mass walk-out by the women of the village-group during the course of a strike action which lasted for a period of one month (ibid: 213). From Green's description of what took place, the men were completely passive in comparison to the women, who even performed such ritual acts normally forbidden women, as the killing of a fowl (ibid). There had been an unusually high rate

of female mortality, and the women suspected and blamed the menfolk for it (ibid). The grievance of the women was resolved only by mass swearing by the men. The date of this event was put at the period just before the 1919 influenza epidemic. The women had insisted that the men should come to the central market place and swear before the Earth Spirit Aia. As Green describes what took place,

'The wives of each village collected together the men of that village and they came in turn to Oriekpa, the senior village coming first. The swearing took eight days... the women dug a hole in the ground... and poured into it water collected from the shrines of two of the most powerful Agbaja deities and made a kind of soup and put it in. And they killed a fowl and poured its blood into the hole... They also made fufu of pounded plantain and rolled it into small balls. The main body of women then stood back and the principal ones stood near the hole. And the men came up one by one and had to dip their hands in the hole and wash their faces in the liquid. Each man had then to eat a ball of the... fufu... and swear on pain of death that he neither had killed nor would kill people or pregnant women or children. Nor had he stolen' (ibid).

This ceremony, according to Green's informants, had not been repeated since the advent of Christianity in their villages, but they felt that they could revive it at any time, if they had to (ibid: 214).

Other situations described and witnessed by Green, indicate the strong aggressiveness of the village women, especially during all-female ceremonies or occasions, which tended quickly to turn into rituals of rebellion. The occasion of the women's annual religious rites for the feminine aspect of the male-female guardian spirit of the village, for example, is typified by its bawdiness and the unrestrained wildness of the women. Their dancing with knives, which they clash (ibid: 193), shows aggressiveness and militancy. Their songs are rebellious in rejecting standard female roles. This can be seen from Green's statement, 'Snatches of their songs - is it any shame if we do not marry? - Is it any shame if we will not lie with a man? - Is it any shame if we wish to marry a young man? - gave one the impression of a definitely feminist flavour, which was enhanced by the fact that during the whole day hardly a man was to be seen. The women were left in undisputed possession of the village' (ibid). Not only did the women possess the village, men, who customarily did not cook in Igbo society and culture, were expected to cook for the village women on this women's day (ibid: 197).

As Green had not concerned herself with distinguishing sex from gender, she fell into the trap of mixing up sex and gender ideology, and thereby confusing analysis. Thus, the women's day, which showed a remarkable degree of sex-role inversion, Green calls 'feminine' (ibid), whereas what she meant was that

the day was female in the sense of the sheer prominence of women and the exclusive nature of their activities, as compared to village public activities, where women were present but men were predominant. The separation of sex and gender in analysis helps to highlight occasions or situations of 'masculine' or 'male' tendencies in women, and vice-versa. This would entail an investigation into gender constructions in this society, and the relationship of gender to power, which Green has not done. This is surprising, considering that it was as a result of the war the women of this area made against the British colonial agents, that Green was sent into the field to study indigenous or traditional Igbo political systems (ibid: xiii). During this war, Igbo women's aggressiveness and militancy had been thought masculine and unfeminine, as a result of the imposition of Western gender norms on Igbo culture.

The 'abnormality' of Igbo sex and gender associations from a Western perspective, is brought out clearly from the statements and attitudes of Mrs. Leith-Ross (1939). Her book on Igbo women of the Owerri province is neither objective nor theoretical. It reads more like the diary of a privileged, inquisitive colonial wife, who describes herself as 'having more experience of the native than scientific training' (ibid: 44). Thus, between lines of blatantly racist remarks, a few observed impressions are stated. As a result of her knowledge of the women's war and her experience of the militancy of Igbo women, her

statement directed to the colonial government reads, 'The Ibo women in particular, by their number, their industry, their ambitions, their independence, are bound to play a leading part in the development of their country. Their co-operation will be as valuable as their enmity would be disastrous' (ibid: 19-20).

Still Leith-Ross was unable, in the face of Igbo women's feminism and ambition for power, to make a distinction between sex and gender. She had, for example, observed that in the concept of reincarnation in one of the villages, a woman might be reincarnated as a man, but not vice-versa (ibid: 101). A middle-aged woman had remarked that it would be foolish for a man to wish to become a woman and some of the women present during the said conversation had declared that they would like to become men (ibid). These statements of obvious identification with authority, privilege and power were completely misunderstood by Mrs. Leith-Ross, who was socialized in rigid Victorian gender ideologies. Gender as separate from sex, and the flexibility of Igbo gender constructions or sex and gender associations, was therefore beyond her imagination. As a result of this, we have such ethnocentric remarks as: 'I had occasionally caught glimpses of some peculiar conception of sex or of a thread of bisexuality running through everything (yet I think hermaphrodites are 'abomination') - or of a lack of differentiation between the sexes - or of an acceptance of the possibility of the transposition of sex - which it would have been interesting to study' (ibid).

The flexibility of Igbo gender ideology in sex linked roles and the political manipulation of gender appear more institutionalized in the northern Igbo communities, where daughters enjoyed a great deal of ascribed ritual and political authority. In the supposed 'patrilineal' Onitsha society, for example, with a centralized state system based on a sacred kingship, it became necessary to define daughters as quasi-males. This was in order to enable head senior daughters, in their ritual and political roles, to be able to hold ofo objects of authority associated with paternal ancestors, who were believed to 'abhor menstrual blood and the touch of women' (Henderson 1972: 140). Consequently, only post-menopausal women could hold the position of senior head daughter (ibid: 155). The ritual object of authority held by a head senior daughter had power over the whole patrilineage, but was particularly important in directing the collective activities of the daughters' (ibid). Daughters were, therefore, organized in hierarchical roles parallel to those of the patrilineage priests (ibid). By the same token, daughters, like the men of the patrilineage, also had a parallel formal organization (ibid: 155). Daughters were thus incorporated into both the political and ritual structures of the descent level of social organization.

In terms of authority, daughters were defined as males, like their patrilineage men, in relation to wives married into the patrilineage. They would, therefore, refer to the in-coming women as "wives",

who, in turn, would refer to the daughters as "husbands" (ibid: 215). Consequently, wives were expected to 'bow their heads' both to their husband and to his patrilineage daughters, who, in turn, had the right to fine wives for disobedience or rudeness (ibid: 216). As with other lineage categories, wives had their level of formal organization (ibid: 217), with the higher level organization of village wives placed 'under the power of a lineage daughter's ofo' (ibid: 218). Thus, in the various organizations of members of the patrilineage, roles and duties were shared out to members.

The single-sex composition of these socio-political lineage organizations is what makes Okonjo (1976) describe the political system as 'dual-sex'. According to Okonjo, 'A number of West African traditional societies have political systems in which the major interest groups are defined and represented by sex. We can label such systems of organization "dual-sex" systems, for within them each sex manages its own affairs, and women's interests are represented at all levels' (ibid: 45). Here, we see that Okonjo has fallen into the trap of classifying women into a single category, in spite of her own data (ibid: 52), which shows a contrast between the interest of daughters and that of wives. By the mere fact of daughters' acting in collaboration with their patrilineage men in the interests of their patrilineage, whether as a police force against the wives or as ritual specialists dealing with confessions

of infidelity or adultery by wives, and cleansing the patrilineage of pollutions and abominations, one cannot talk of common women's interests represented at all levels.

Okonjo further states, 'Dual-sex organization contrasts with the "single-sex" system that obtains in most of the Western World, where political status-bearing roles are predominantly the preserve of men. In the single-sex system, women can achieve distinction and recognition only by taking on the roles of men in public life and performing them well' (ibid: 45). Again, Okonjo's theory fails as a result of the limitations imposed by the use of sex as a tool of analysis in this context. In the Onitsha political system, we see that women as daughters also played male roles in ritual matters or in positions of authority over wives. Yet Okonjo does not define Onitsha's political system as a single-sex one.

I believe that what Okonjo is dealing with, is the socio-cultural dynamism of gender. From a feminist perspective, instead of Okonjo's term "single-sex", it would be more appropriate to describe the systems of the West as characterized by a rigidity of gender ideology, where gender does not mediate sexual dualism. Hence the tendency for women wielding power in such systems, to be thought of, reclassified, or to present themselves as "manly" or "man-like".⁽¹²⁾ In contrast, I would modify Okonjo's theory by adding that the traditional Igbo dual-sex social systems were mediated by the flexibility

of gender constructions in the Igbo language and culture. The conceptualization of daughters as males in ritual matters and politically in relation to wives, is a good example of this flexibility of gender and did not imply that daughters should be seen as "man-like". Another example of the looseness of gender association is the fact that in Igbo grammatical construction of gender, a neuter particle is used in Igbo subject or object pronouns, so that no gender distinction is made in reference to males and females in writing or in speech. There is, therefore, no language or mental adjustment or confusion when referring to a woman in a typical male role.

A concern with the dynamism of gender does not preclude the incorporation of a class analysis. This can best be demonstrated by a look at the structural position of the Onitsha female monarch, Omu, and her council, from data supplied by Basden (1938: 210, 335), Henderson (1972: 309 14) and Okonjo (1976: 47-51). Basically, Okonjo sees the role of the Omu as fulfilling the dual-sex nature of the political system typical of the western and riverine Igbo monarchies. Thus, the Omu and her councillors concerned themselves with the female section of the community (ibid: 47). From Henderson's data, however, we see that the Omu and her councillors, who were known in office as the Queen's Council or the Women's Trade Organization, were the major organized elite

core of wealthy women. They were over and above a larger organization called "women of Onitsha", which included all the married women (ibid: 309-10). We learn that members of the Queen's Council were patrilineal and clan daughters, while the queen herself 'should be head daughter of her segment of the royal clan, and her titled councillors should be head daughters of their clan or village units. Thus they are tied to the ascriptive base of descent group membership. The queen is handed her ofo omu⁽¹³⁾ by the king of Onitsha, and the titled councillors receive their own head daughter's ofo from their hidden kings' (ibid: 312).

The relationship of the queen and her councillors to the women of Onitsha was therefore an extension of the relationship of daughters to wives at the extra-descent level of political organization. As those who had undergone rituals of purification like Ozo titled men, the bodies of the queen and her councillors were also considered holy (ibid). Therefore, in their ritual duties of performing market sacrifices and other acts of town cleansing rituals (ibid: 310, 313), they were classed as males, like daughters in the patrilineage.⁽¹⁴⁾

However, despite the distinguishing and divisive factors of gender and class, the idea of oneness of gender in terms of sex was manipulated by the queen and her councillors in the management of market affairs and the mass of Onitsha women.⁽¹⁵⁾ The market square and other geographical areas controlled by women were, for example, defined by the queen and her

councillors as female zones, to the exclusion of men. All these areas were associated with powerful female medicines, and shrines served by women (ibid: 310-11). The places were, therefore, avoided by Onitsha men, as a result of their fear of the female medicines and the women themselves as witches (ibid: 311). Thus, there was a contradiction in the image of the queen and her councillors as prophets of the community, taking care of sacrifice and driving away evil from the town (ibid), for, at the same time, the same women were seen as the witches of the society, who traded by day and practised witchcraft by night (ibid).

These women, however, had both an economic and an organizational base from which to participate in the ideology-making process. For example, they generated favourable gender rules and beliefs associated with their control of the market. Henderson, for example, writes, 'The connection of men with market trade comes mainly through their individual sponsorship of their wives or daughters as traders. Symbolically, the marketplace is defined as outside the sphere of assertion by males, whether human or animal; any cock that crows there during trading hours must become the property of the Queen' (ibid). The Queen's Council also had a strong representation in the king's court, so that no trade legislation or transactions were made without their knowledge and consent (ibid: 313). The queen's power was enhanced by the fact that she was in a position to mobilize the power of Onitsha women (ibid). She also appears to have been independent of the king, as we

learn that, even though she and her councillors paid annual tribute to the king (*ibid*), she was not ritually subservient to him, but to the divine king of Nri, whose female dwarfs crowned succeeding Onitsha queens (*ibid*: 314).

The flexibility of gender in this political and cultural system thus favours the presence of women in the highest elite core of the society, whether it be in the status acquired through titles, or the position of the kingship itself. This conclusion was also reached by Henderson. According to him, there is 'the tendency for prominent women to accumulate male symbols of prestige. Indeed, the queen has at times so extensively emulated the king that she has threatened his position' (*ibid*: 376). The fact that the queen was not the king's wife, but had to be 'genealogically distant from him' (*ibid*: 310) and the separateness of her palace and her council, were all factors which added to her autonomy.

From data scattered here and there, we have seen contrasts in the structural position of women in diverse indigenous Igbo political systems. The contrast ranges from near total exclusion of women from the key positions of power (e.g. Afikpo), to partial (e.g. Ohaffia)⁽¹⁶⁾ and total (e.g. Onitsha)⁽¹⁷⁾ inclusion of categories of woman, however rudimentary or hierarchical the political stratification. However, from a feminist perspective, we see some common factors in all Igbo emic classificatory systems,

for women were classified and valued in different roles and statuses as daughters, wives and mothers. These values reflect or embody cultural gender ideologies, as can be seen in the higher valuation of daughters in relation to wives, and the male status granted to daughters in ritual or in the wielding of political authority. Thus we see the mediatory role of gender in the face of sexual polarizations, whether in social organizations or cultural constructions. Consequently, there was some sharing of key social and political roles normally occupied by men, with some categories of woman.

It is these revealing conclusions, drawn from limited and haphazard data on Igbo women, which inspired detailed research into the socio-cultural construction of gender realities in a particular Igbo society, in the only Igbo area where no particular community or town has been studied by any social scientist, let alone anthropologist, or written about from a lay point of view. These are towns in the Idemili local government area in the Anambra state of Nigeria. (18)

The Idemili Local Government Area and Nri Connection

The towns in the Idemili local government area, with the populations for some of them in 1953, are: Abatete (6,631), Abacha, Eziowelle, Ogidi (11,231), Umudioka, Umunachi, Akwu-Ukwu, Oba (9,128), Obosi (7,624), Ojoto (5,112), Nkpor, Uke, Umuoji (8,357), Alor (6,552), Awka-Etiti, Ideani, Nnobi (6,978), Nnokwa, and Oraukwa (5,596).⁽¹⁹⁾ It is to Nri that they owe cultural and political influence, and they fall under Forde and Jones's (1950) group of northern Igbo. This area of Igbo settlement has also been described ecologically by Onwuejeogwu as the scarp-lands of south-eastern Nigeria, where the population density ranges from 450-1,000 persons to a square mile (1981: 11). The constant theme of famine in their oral tradition, reflects centuries of natural disasters caused by the erosion and leaching of the soil. The cultural features of this area include well developed title systems, Mmuo ("spirits of the incarnate ancestors") societies, well remembered genealogies of the depth of eight to ten generations, ancestral shrines, and shrines to other supernatural spirits known as Alusi (ibid). As Onwuejeogwu put it, 'It is this ecological area that nurtured the cultures that "produced" and used the Igbo-Ukwu and the Ezira bronze objects' (ibid).

Onwuejeogwu goes on to postulate that Nri hegemony may have arisen as a result of the development of a

highly ritualized and symbolic culture in response 'to the disaster of soil erosion and the resultant low productivity of the soil' (ibid). Nri people thus became experts in ritual, and traders. Awka and Agbaja people became smiths, and Umudioka people specialized in crafts (ibid), and while Nri town was the spiritual metropolis of the Nri theocratic empire, Awka was the commercial centre (Okoye 1975: 73).

It is in the ritualization of the political system and domestic economy, that Nri hegemony and state system were based. As Onwuejeogwu observed, Nri political elites, that is, the ozo titled men, 'travelled generally unmolested from one Igbo settlement to another as agents of Eze Nri to perform political and ritual functions associated with the removing of abomination, the dissolving of the codes of abomination and the enacting of new codes, the ordaining of ritual and political officials, the crowning of chiefs, the making of peace and the creating of markets and shrines. In the performance of these activities Nri people spread into different parts of Igbo land and Eze Nri held some degree of control over the external and internal politics of the older Igbo settlements' (ibid). (See also Okoye 1975: 73; Nwabara 1977: 17; Isichei 1976: 10.)

According to these writers, Nri civilization flourished about the tenth century A.D. and reached its zenith about the thirteenth century, when most of Igboland east and west of the Niger came under Nri hegemony in a culture based on divine kingship.⁽²⁰⁾ By the

eighteenth century, when the transatlantic trade was at its height, the Nri empire had declined, with the emergence of the Aro trade organization.

However, of all Igbo settlements, far and near, it is only Nnobi people who claim that they do not pay ritual homage, ibu ihu,⁽²¹⁾ to Nri. They also claim that they are the only other people who perform the ikwu ahu, or odinke, festival performed by the Nri people (Obiefuna 1976). In Nnobi, this is a festival where a cow is slaughtered by rich men and women for the goddess Idemili.⁽²²⁾ If anything, Nnobi themselves claim a ritual dependency of Nri kings. This is implied in the Nnobi saying: Nshi wukaa, oja ejelili Nnobi (Obiefuna 1976) - 'No matter what his fame, an Nri must make a spiritual trip to Nnobi'. In support of this, Nnobi is named by Henderson as one of the towns on the path through which candidates for kingship travelled on their ritual journey to the throne: The king would end the ritual journey with a sacrifice to the river Niger in Onitsha (1972: 64). Nnobi oral traditions, and recent history, claim that Nri kings worshipped at the Idemili shrine before proceeding to the Niger.⁽²³⁾

There are strong indications, therefore, that Nnobi was an independent ritual centre, and the seat of the Idemili cult - the worship of the goddess Idemili, a religion superior to the cult of ancestors and common to all the towns along the flow of the

Idemili river. There is strong evidence too, that Nnobi was a matriarchal settlement later encroached upon by patriarchal Nri people. The contradictions and co-existence of gender notions derived from these principles will be seen in Nnobi social organizations and cultural ideologies.

Nnobi Case Study

Nnobi, where fieldwork was conducted for a period of seven months in 1980, and again for three months in 1981-2, became one of the towns in the Idemili local government area in the Anambra state of Nigeria. This was a result of the 1976 local government reform, by the then military government, which divided Nigeria into nineteen states and two hundred and ninety-nine local governments. This split the bulk of Igbo people into two states, with the southern Igbo people in Imo state, and the northern Igbo people in Anambra state. The 1963 population census had put the total number of Igbo people then in the East-Central state of Nigeria at 7,209,716. As there has been no subsequent population count, in order to estimate further, a compound rate of growth of 2.5 per cent per annum was assumed over the years.⁽²³⁾ The 1963 census gives a figure of 109,094 and a projected population of 150,388 for 1976 for the whole Idemili local government area of 278 square kilometres.⁽²⁴⁾

Nnobi can be said to be a town only in terms of the size of its population. The 1953 figure of 6,978 was thought to have been a gross underestimate, since more than half the population, who lived abroad, were not counted. However, by 1963 the population of Nnobi had doubled to 13,445 within the same area of nineteen square kilometres, and the projected

population for 1976 was put at 18,522. This would give a population density of about 1,000 people per square kilometre. If the population had doubled in the ten years between 1953 and 1963, one would expect the figure for 1973 to be twice that of 1963, as there are no government-enforced population control measures in Nigeria. However, in 1982, Nnobi people estimated their population at well over 20,000: Igbo families, lineages and towns keep membership registers and therefore know their numbers. The number of taxable adult males alone in Nnobi was put at 6,000 in September 1976. (See Abalukwu, Sept. 1977 Vol. 6 p.29.)

In every other sense, Nnobi remains a rural town. The administrative reforms of 1976, which instituted in the rural areas a local government separate from the state and federal governments, finally brought government to the inhabitants of the rural areas, and the 'principle of participatory democracy' was put into practice, when citizens of eighteen years and above were allowed to vote in local government elections.⁽²⁵⁾ Nnobi was, therefore, also guaranteed full participation in modern politics through local and federal elections. Although there are no large industries, Nnobi participates in the modern economy through trade and commerce, and the activities of its urban based wage earners. Its major commercial centre, Afo Nnobi, the central market-place, is basically controlled

by marketing women and is thought to occupy an area of about 5.4 hectares (Ezeani 1980). Apart from the exclusively female central section of the market, the peripheral areas of the market space, especially the major roads, are marked by open stalls and lock-up shops run by both men and women. In 1980, the daily sales of the market were estimated at 6,000 Naira⁽²⁶⁾ (ibid).

From south to north, Igboland can be divided into five climatic regions, ranging from pure equatorial rain forest with 60 millimetres of rainfall in its driest month, monsoon type, to tropical forest (Ofomata 1975). Nnobi comes under the tropical forest zone. The irony of the Igbo situation is that the important food-producing areas are among the less densely populated areas of Igboland. The most densely populated areas, on the other hand, have the least fertile soil (ibid: 55), including ferrallitic soils which are described as deep, porous, red soils and referred to as red earths or acid sands (ibid: 41). Though the fertility of such soils is low, they are supposed to be easier to manage through the traditional method of rotational bush fallow, using simple tools such as hoes (ibid). Nnobi is in this area of dense population and very poor soil. These are also the areas which suffer from the greatest threat of soil erosion. In Ofomata's maps, Nnobi appears only on a map showing types of erosion, and is shown to be in the areas of both active and advanced gully erosion (ibid: 44).

As agricultural production has not proved profitable in these areas, its people have developed a high sense of commerce and trade, including monopoly over certain commercial items. Thus Nnewi, a town genealogically and culturally related to Nnobi, has a trade monopoly on certain items, including motor parts. Awka-Etiti, a migrant settlement from Nnobi, monopolizes trade in bicycle parts, tyres, Vono beds, etc. At one time, in the 1960's, wealthy traders and businessmen and women in these areas, formed an association known as Okaa Social Club, members of which took on titles or nicknames derived from the commodities they individually controlled or traded in. These commodity-based names were prefixed by the word okaa, those who sold Vono beds or bicycles, for example, calling themselves Okaa-Vono or Okaa-Bicycle etc. The Igbo word ika means "to surpass", hence the inferred meaning of one who surpasses or declares a surplus in the commodity prefixed with the word okaa. Nnobi, the mother town, remains the most conservative of all its related off-shoots, comparatively resistant to change and perhaps monopolizing ome-na-ani, that which is traditionally done in the land, or, in brief, the custom of the land.

As a result of the low productivity of the soil, population pressure and the scarcity of land, an economic system whereby women did most of the farm-work and men became ritual specialists, dibia, evolved. Even though the patrilineal system of inheritance and succession prescribed that males allocate and own land, women controlled the subsistence

economy. They were, and still are, involved in local and external trade, since the farm does not meet all their subsistence needs. There was, therefore, a clear sexual division of labour, and an associated gender division of crops.

Similar sexual and gender divisions are reproduced at other cultural levels. In religion, for example, there was an all embracing goddess religion above the cult of ancestors. Female-orientated and matri-focal notions associated with the goddess were part of social and cultural practices. In the social organization, matricentric units were to some degree autonomous. The general belief embedded in Nnobi myths of origin, associated hard work with the female gender, and hence praise of women depended and still depends on their industriousness and economic achievements. The culture thus highly valued female industriousness, and rewarded it in the form of a unique female title. Again, in the political institutions, there is a sexual and gender division of interest groups. Roles, rights and interests were maintained and safeguarded by men and women in culturally constructed categories, which sometimes meant that sex did not correspond to gender.

Nnobi thus affords ample material for the examination of variables relating to the socio-cultural dynamism of the ideology of gender.

Time and Method

The method employed in this thesis is both synchronic and dichronic. The material is, therefore, divided into three periods, namely, the pre-colonial period, when the traditional systems operated, the colonial period, when the British ruled Nigeria, and, finally, the post-colonial period, when Nigeria became an independent nation.

The pre-colonial period, pre-1900, is considered by the Igbo of today as the "olden days", when traditional customs were "pure and unspoilt". In contrast, post-1900, including both colonial and post-colonial times, is considered the modern period. This division does not imply that in the "olden days" there was no contact or change. Exchange would have been gradual and negotiated, so that change was neither sudden nor immediately apparent. British colonial rule followed a violent invasion: change was imposed and supervised, and many indigenous practices and values became punishable under imposed British laws which were foreign to the people being ruled. The question of legitimacy was therefore at issue, but who had the might claimed legal power.

The colonial invasion was a milestone in the history of the Igbo people. From that period, the hitherto autonomous groups came to be grouped together as Igbo. Their history now became a common one, whether in their participation in national

Nigerian politics, or the experience of the Nigeria-Biafra war (1967-70), when the Igbo-dominated Eastern Nigeria attempted to secede from the rest of Nigeria. Culturally, the modern period is marked by the co-existence of indigenous and European-borrowed cultures. The post-colonial period, especially in more recent years, is characterized by an ever-increasing and intensive cultural renaissance.

My account of the traditional system is largely a reconstruction of what took place in the past, based on Nnobi people's own accounts. This is substantiated with corroborative evidence drawn from written and published materials, and from still existing evidence of cultural continuity witnessed during fieldwork. In the absence of written accounts, the relevance and reliability of oral accounts and traditions in Igbo studies has been pointed out and used by established academics, whether they be historians, such as Afigbo (1972), Nwabara (1977) and Isichei (1976), or anthropologists, such as Onwujeogwu (1981), or Henderson, who discusses these problems in detail (1972: 29-35).

The framework used for this thesis is the basic paradigm of social anthropology. Thus, gender is related to the economic, political, kinship and ritual, or the cultural systems. Various methods of analysis are applied. The use of Levi-Strauss's (1963) nature/culture isomorphism, for example, makes it possible to differentiate between natural categories like sex, and constructed categories, like gender. Thus, emic categories of men and women, and the relationships

between them are examined and placed in the context of social and ideological factors. Both culture-specific and cross-cultural general comparisons are made between systems and cultures over historical time in order to reveal the effect of change. Finally, functionalist analysis is used in this thesis, as it deals with ideology and mystification; in other words, the politics of meaning.

Outline of the Thesis

This thesis examines the place of gender in the social and cultural systems of Nnobi during the pre-colonial period. It then looks at the new gender realities resulting from the colonial experience and its effect on the structural position of women in contemporary Nnobi society. The material is therefore presented in three parts.

Part One, which consists of four chapters, looks at the indigenous society. In Chapter One, I examine the structure of the indigenous economy, the gender rules and ideologies which governed the distribution of economic resources and the relations of production. Women's economic activities are recorded in detail and compared with those of men. I then look at the material conditions and gender rules which determined individual access to achievement-based statuses and roles which brought prestige, wealth and power. Two case studies, of two prominent "family houses" in the nineteenth century, are presented to show the processes by which men and women acquired their wealth and the patterns of gender relationships.

In Chapter Two, I examine the gender rules and ideologies behind the overall political administration. I show how rules and beliefs embodied in a religion based on the worship of a female deity, provided the general social code of conduct, and point out the

consequent advantages for certain elite categories of woman incorporated into the central political system. At the same time, the apparent dual-sex nature of the political system is examined in relation to the gender status of political groupings, their interests and alliances. This is in order to confirm the thesis that in this culture, sex does not always correspond to gender.

In Chapter Three, I look at women in the life course to determine the social and cultural significance made of their status and roles as daughters, wives and mothers, in relation to marriage, birth and death. I examine what role women played in the ideology-making processes, especially through their control of such media of communication as songs and folktales.

Chapter Four examines Nnobi systems of gender ideology, in the language, the concept of space, in general beliefs about the sexes and in the socialization process. It seeks to show how gender ideals were reproduced in ritual, in spite of contradictions in the material experience of social actors.

Part Two, which consists of two chapters, covers the colonial period. In Chapter Five, I look at the effect of colonialism on practices and institutions which, in the indigenous society, gave women enormous economic and social power. I show the disadvantaged economic position of women as a result of changes

brought about by Western economy and culture. Then, in Chapter Six, I trace the process by which women's power was drastically eroded under colonial administration, and I look at the new gender realities which have led to the birth of a new era and form of male dominance.

Part Three looks at the post-independence period up to 1982. In Chapter Seven, I examine the process by which men have succeeded in monopolizing the decision-making processes in Nnobi local politics to the exclusion of their women. In Chapter Eight, a theme which emerges from the preceding chapters is examined. It is the old and new politics of wealth, titles and motherhood. I examine to what extent identification with these factors guarantees social reward in the form of political offices in the contemporary society.

The Conclusion gives a summary of points made in the preceding chapters. It examines the extent to which issues raised in the introductory section are confirmed by this case study. The relevance of this thesis to Igbo studies and women's studies in general, is pointed out, and at the same time, some themes for further research are suggested. Finally, I include a section of practical considerations, without which I do not feel that this type of research in Nnobi, by an Nnobi daughter, would be justified.

INTRODUCTION: Notes

1. Green 1947: 14
2. Ancestral house
3. The population of Afikpo in 1953 was 26,305
(S. Ottenburg 1968: 13, 15).
4. Ibid: 73-4
5. Ibid: 103
6. Ibid: 15
7. Ibid: 225, 227
8. Ibid: 180-1
9. Ibid: 62
10. Ibid: 97
11. Ibid: 76-8
12. This point is also made by Silvia Rogers (1981).
She shows how women Members of Parliament who step
into the British House of Commons, essentially a
"Men's House", are acknowledged only as "men" or
derided if they remain "female". Acceptance in a
man's world involves a "re-classification" for women.
This includes a "re-classification" of Mrs. M. Thatcher,
the present Prime Minister, the "Iron Lady" of the
Soviets and other "fantastic" descriptions by herself,
her colleagues and the press (ibid: 67). In addition,
I would like to point to the tailored suits worn
by these women as part of their need to manipulate
male symbols for power. In view of the manliness of
women in power, Silvia Rogers concludes that having
a woman Prime Minister has not changed the essential

nature of the House as a "Men's House" (ibid).

13. Omu symbol of authority

14. It is significant that it was under colonial rule and the influence of Western culture that the queen and her councillors thought it necessary to wear male clothes in the bid to identify themselves with the new symbols of power, which were solely male. This was observed by Basden, who wrote, 'In this custom also changes have been introduced. The crown is no longer in the traditional fashion: sad to state, quite probably a man's hat becomes the crown of office ... In one instance observed, the women were dressed as men. They wore men's hats, and some had coats. Their breasts were bound close to their bodies by cross-over straps and each woman brandished a cutlass. They looked a fearsome crowd. This procedure seemed contrary to general custom which dictates that a woman should not degrade herself by wearing men's apparel' (1938: 210). The traditional Igbo male attire was a loin-cloth, described by Basden as 'a piece of tightly rolled cloth passed around the waist and between the legs, the sole bit of covering on an otherwise naked body' (ibid: 348). Women, on the other hand, wore a wrapper or a kilt.

15. Powerful women were not, therefore, ultimately divorced or alienated from "fellow" women. In using "fellow" here, I have suffered a momentary mental strain, as "fellow" popularly means "man" as well. This would not happen in Igbo, since a genderless particle, ibe, would be used. For the life and history of

a powerful Igbo woman, a particular Omu in the context of Onitsha society and relationship with Europeans, see Felicia Ekejiuba's study of Omu Okwei (1872-1943), the Merchant Queen of Ossomari, in Nigeria magazine No. 90, September 1966.

16. Nsugbe estimated the population of Ohaffiá for the 1960s to be over 65,000 (1976: 10).

17. In the 1953 census, the population of Onitsha was 76,921 (Ofomata 1975: 141).

18. See Map 2.

19. Ofomata 1975: 141

20. See Map 1. Towns in the Igbo culture area (copied from M.A. Onwuejeogwu 1981: 1).

21. See chapter four.

22. Ibid

23. See Appendix 1. This is a transcript from a tape-recorded interview with the traditional ruler, Igwe Eze Okoli II of Nnobi, which took place in August 1980. In response to my question, 'What is Nnobi?', the Igwe read me a document left by an anthropologist in the care of his late father, Chief Solomon Eze Okoli Igwe I. The anthropologist may have been C.K. Meek, who is said to have visited Nnobi on the 17th of February, 1931, as a government anthropological officer (see Abalukwu Dec. 1975 Vol. 2 p. 31). G.T. Basden also collected material in most of the northern Igbo communities. The first Igwe himself was also a keen scholar, who sought knowledge everywhere (see chapter six). The massive number of wide-ranging documents he left attests to

this. As the present Igwe jealously guards all the important documents in his care, and would not even lend them out to researchers, but must read some of them out himself, I was not able to establish who wrote what. In transcription, I may even have got some names wrong, such as Dr. Achukoson, which sounds neither Igbo nor European to me. The relevance of this document, however, is its concern with the origin of Nnobi, its ritual and political status in relation to Nri and other neighbouring towns, as this is a constant topic discussed by Nnobi intellectuals and ordinary citizens. I expect that this will be a very fertile ground for future research, especially in view of an increasing focus on Nri in Igbo studies.

23. Statistical Digest 1973, East-Central State of Nigeria, Edition 4 p.2

24. See Map 3

25. See Adamolekun and Rowland ed. 1979

26. Nigeria used pounds until 1973, when it changed to the decimal currency unit of the Naira. In June 1980, the official exchange rate of the Naira was £0.7868, i.e. £1 = 1.27 Naira.

PART ONE: NINETEENTH CENTURY (I)

CHAPTER ONE: GENDER AND THE ECONOMY

The Igbo in general and Nnobi people in particular, traced the gender ideologies behind their sexual division of labour and those governing the relations of production, to their myths of origin. In this chapter, I look at Nri and Nnobi myths of origin, and show the relationship between ecological factors, sexual division of labour and gender ideology. As a result of ecological factors, we find that agricultural production was not profitable in Nnobi, hence the development of a sexual division of labour and gender ideology which gave women a central place in the subsistence economy, while men sought authority through ritual specialization and ritual control.

The gender ideology governing economic production was that of female industriousness. Idi uchu, perseverance and industriousness, and ite uba, the pot of prosperity, were gifts which women were said to have inherited from the goddess Idemili. Associated with this were strong matrifocality and female-orientation in this, supposedly, "patrilineal" society. The supernatural - the goddess Idemili - is female. The culture prescribing industriousness is derived from the female. The name of the town itself reflects matrifocality in Nnobi culture or a matricentric principle in household organization; mothers and children formed distinct, economically self-sufficient

sub-compound units. These were classified as female in relation to the male front section of the compound complex.

There was, therefore, a dual-sex organizational principle behind the structure of the economy, which was supported by various gender ideologies. These principles and ideologies governed the economic activities of men and women. They also governed access to wealth and achievement-based statuses and roles, such as titles and the accumulation of wives, which, in the indigenous society, brought power and prestige and more wealth.

Myths of Origin and Gender Ideologies

Nri

According to Nri myth of origin, recorded in Henderson (1972: 58-65), Eri, the man sent down from the sky by Chukwu, the Great God, found himself surrounded by the Anambra River. He therefore called to the Great God, who sent down a blacksmith to produce fire and dry the ground. This blacksmith became the ancestor of the Awka Igbo and from him they inherited the secret of blacksmithing, and specialized in it (ibid: 60).

Eri is said to have had two wives, by one of whom he had five sons, Nri, Agulu, Amanuke, Onogu and Ududu. These were the founders of neighbouring settlements. The other wife had a son who was the father of Onojo Oboli, said to be a six-toed and six-fingered giant warrior, who aspired to become the Ata of Idah. On failing, he is said to have settled in Ogrugu on the upper Anambra River in southeastern Igala country, near the Igbo frontier. There, it is thought that he may have founded a state, whose influence spread through the areas between the Anambra and the Niger rivers. He is said to have been both a slave and an elephant hunter, and able to help aspirants to the Eze ⁽²⁾ title to go to Igala country to receive the regalia of "royalty" (ibid: 58-59).

Onojo Oboli's half-brother, Nri, had come to settle among Igbo people, who were hunting and gathering

communities, lacking kingship systems and the knowledge of farming. Nri therefore became very hungry, and appealed to the Great God, who ordered him to cut off and plant the heads of his son and daughter (ibid: 60). From the head of the daughter sprang cocoyam, a subsidiary crop managed by women. Nri had been ordered to mark the foreheads of his children with marks of ritual purification, Ichi,⁽³⁾ before planting them.

From the scarification of his children, Nri gained certain ritual prerogatives. Nri held the secret of Ogwu-ji, yam medicine, so that Igbo communities went to Nri to obtain this medicine, and paid annual tribute for it. Yam, which is what sprang from the head of the son, was the Igbo staple, and is still the most valued crop used in rituals and ceremonials. Men had come to monopolize the planting and distribution of this highly prized crop. Penalty for the stealing of yam could be death. (see Nwabara 1977: 29-32). From the scarification of his children, Nri became a ritual centre which conferred emblems of ritual purification and her ritual experts bestowed the ritual requirements of the Ozo title. From Nri's ritual relationship with the land as well, Nri ritual specialists gained the right to travel to other Igbo communities, to cleanse their towns of sins committed against the land. (Henderson 1972: 60-61).

Nnobi

Two versions of Nnobi myths of origin appear in Abalukwu magazine. One account is by the present Igwe of Nnobi, and appears in the first volume of Abalukwu published in September 1975, under the title, 'What manner of men?' by His Royal Highness Ezeokoli II - The Igwe of Nnobi. He takes the coming of the white man and Christianity to Nnobi as the dividing line between ancient days and modern times.

According to his account, the first man at Nnobi was Aho or Aro; the first at Abatete was called Omaliko; the first at Nnewi was Ezemewi; and the first at Ichida was Otoo-Ogwe. They were all hunters. The one at Nnobi, known as Aho-bi-na-agu, Aho who lives in the wild -(nature)- suddenly met a miraculous woman called Idemili -(supernatural)- near the Oji Iyi stream in Nnobi. They got married and bore a daughter called Edo. As she was very beautiful and highly industrious -(culture)- other hunters began to contest for her as a wife. As Ezemewi was the most handsome, he won her love and married her. The influence of Idemili, a woman, was higher than that of her husband Aho, and so she spread her idols everywhere. Then, as her daughter set off to Nnewi to join her husband, Idemili took her idol and gave it to her and blessed her. As she loved this daughter very much, she also gave her ite uba, the pot of prosperity, and told her that she had taken back the pot of medicine, ite ogwu, which she had given to her. So when Edo got to

Nnewi, her popularity and influence, like that of her mother, spread in no time. While Idemili established her shrines and influence all over the land of Idemili, her daughter Edo established hers all over the land of Edo, called Nnewi. It is thus that Nnewi inherited hard work from Nnobi, and both share a common history and culture.

In Nnobi belief systems, the stream is the place of divinity, as it is the abode of the goddess Idemili. This stream starts at Nnobi and ends at Idemili Obosi. All the communities along the flow of this stream have Idemili shrines, and constituted the Idemili administrative area. To these communities, the python called Eke Idemili, or Eke Edo, remains a totemic symbol and therefore a taboo, not to be killed or eaten. This taboo includes fish from the stream.

As we have seen, the female gender had the more prominent place in myth, indigenous religious and cultural concepts. There was a strong female-orientation. The supernatural, a goddess, is female. The stream, Iyi Idemili, is the source of divinity. The cultural result of the mediation of the natural, (Aho, the hunter from the wild) and the supernatural, (the goddess Idemili from the sacred stream) Edo, is a hard-working woman. Thus, both Nnobi and Nnewi inherit industriousness from females. The most praised person in Nnobi is a hard-working woman.

Nnobi traces its matrifocal concepts to another myth of origin. In Obiefuna (1976), Aho's wife is called Agbala, an Igbo word for female deity. Their

first son was called Obi, so Agbala was referred to as Nne Obi, mother of Obi, after Igbo custom of calling mothers by reference to their first children. In Igbo, when going to visit someone, people say they are going to the place of that person. The Igbo expression for going to visit Obi's mother would be going to the place of the mother, Nne, of Obi, hence the origin of reference to the geographical location; the place of Nne Obi came to be known as Nnobi, since Nne Obi was the mother of the founding son of Nnobi, and Obi was her first child.

Ecology, Production and Gender Ideology

Both Nnobi and Nri men have manipulated certain gender ideologies in their effort to deal with the constraints imposed on them by ecological factors. Nri communities are also in the Igbo areas of poor soil, land erosion and heavy population density. Hunger features in the Nri myth. Soil is poor, and therefore it is necessary to enforce fertility: hence the control of ritual knowledge, which is derived from the supernatural. In the explanation of the invention of agriculture and the sexual division of labour, yam, the prestige crop which requires expert knowledge for its production, both in the ritual and technical senses, sprang from the male head. It is, therefore, the crop grown and distributed by men. Only ritual heads and male heads of families distribute yam medicine, the ritual which permits the eating of yam.

In reality, the role played by men in yam production in the lesser food producing Igbo areas is minimal. Their contribution is in the making of the huge yam mounds, which need "superior man-power". Women and children usually do the rest of the work, planting yam seedlings and tending the farm till harvest time, when youths help women and children in harvesting. Most often, in fact, women hire outside labour to dig up the yam mounds, and rely on their sons to help in the harvesting. Indeed,

the tools used tell the tale of production, for in the areas where farm-work is mostly women's work, the hoes are smaller and easier for women to carry and handle. In those areas where men are fully involved in farm-work, hoes are bigger, heavier and obviously a man's tool.

Cocoyam, according to the Nri myth, grew out of the female head. This crop is grown by women, and in comparison to yam, requires less specialized knowledge for its production. It does not need huge mounds and excess energy, and therefore no special ritual secrets are associated with it. Again, cassava, when introduced into Igboland, was regarded as an inferior crop, grown by women. Although it demands a lot of time and hard labour to harvest and process for food, it requires even less specialized knowledge for the actual production, and is the poorest in food content. It even grows wild. In areas of poor soil and low yield in yam, cassava has become the main staple, while the small quantity of yam harvested is monopolized by men for ritual payments and other ceremonial exchanges. Still, yam is regarded as the male, prestige crop, and guarded jealously with ruthless ritual sanctions.

These areas of poor soil have had to make up for poor yields in agricultural production with trade and craft production. As will be recalled from the Nri myth of origin, the gift and secret of blacksmithing, (a male sphere), derives from the supernatural, (male). It is jealously guarded by men in these areas. In the Nnobi myth of origin,

Edo inherits industriousness from her mother, the goddess Idemili. Here, female crops such as cocoyam and plantain grown in rubbish heaps, and also cassava, heavily make up for the shortage in yam for staple food. Nnobi depends very heavily on female labour in agriculture. As already mentioned, the most praised person in this culture is a hard-working woman. I would expect women in Nnobi to derive power from their control and organization around this economy.

Nri, on the other hand, supplemented agricultural production with craft production, a male sphere. The cultural emphasis is, therefore, on male monopoly of ritual knowledge and craft specialization, and external relations. This could explain the ritual link between the Omu, queen of Onitsha women and head of the Association of Women Traders, and Nri, mentioned in the introduction to this thesis. For a fuller understanding of the economic background of these areas of Igboland, I quote Henderson in detail,

'The upland Ibo traditionally raised a variety of root crops and livestock, but those occupying the leached white lands of the Awka-Orlu area have long suffered chronic food shortages. The soil has in many places undergone such extensive deterioration that it cannot support the dense population, and in these areas textile weaving, oil palm tending and processing of palm produce, blacksmithing, and other specialized economic activities such as slave trading traditionally supplemented farming. In contrast, the lowland-

dwelling Ibo have always been able to produce a surplus of yams and to collect enough fish and other river animals for an abundance of protein, but they lack iron, cotton, palm produce, and proper surroundings for livestock raising.

Out of such ecological and economic differences developed a trade between these two populations in prehistoric times, and Onitsha has long been a prominent site of exchange in this trade'

(1972: 36).

Wealth and Gender

Those men who were considered wealthy in traditional Nnobi society, were those who had lots of wives, land, food and cash-crop trees, livestock such as cows, goats, sheep and fowl. One who built a zinc-roofed house was considered a government of his own, and seen to be above everyone else. Material wealth was converted into prestige and power through title-taking, the acquisition of more wives and more labour power and more material wealth. Social wealth was redistributed through commensality and exchange associated with life-cycle ceremonies such as child-naming, marriage and funeral ceremonies. Inter-lineage exchanges were based on relationships traced through women as daughters, wives or mothers. Religious festivals and title-taking ceremonies were also occasions for the redistribution of goods.

Symbols of wealth for men were the possession of houses, lots of wives and daughters, who would bring in-laws, livestock, voluntary titles and other involuntary titles for men, yam and cocoyam farms and a huge oba ji, yam store, an extensive ani Obi, ancestral compound, with surrounding lands, and osisi uzo, food and cash-crop trees.

Symbols of wealth for women included livestock, fowls, dogs, rich yields in farm and garden crops, lots of daughters, who would bring in in-laws and presents, lots of wealthy and influential sons,

Ogbuefi title, the only voluntary title shared by men and women who have killed a cow for the goddess Idemili, and other involuntary titles taken only by women, possession of wives by "male daughters", first daughters, barren women, rich widows, wives of rich men and successful female farmers and traders.

Economic Resources

Economic resources include material and non-material things considered scarce in society, and therefore involve the principles of control, ownership and sometimes exchange. In Nnobi, immovable property included land and food trees. Movable property consisted of domestic animals and food, agricultural produce, textiles, household goods and utensils, human labour, especially women's productive and reproductive powers and including their sexual service. Ritual knowledge and titles were also bought.

Nnobi people were, traditionally, subsistence farmers and traders. Land was therefore a major economic resource. There was both communal and individual ownership of land. Mythological and genealogical charters were used both for the acquisition and structural distribution of land. As a clan, Nnobi considered itself a territorial unit occupying the original lands of its founding ancestors. Each sub-division, down to the minor patrilineage, was a sub-territorial unit in collective ownership of the space occupied. Minor patrilineage land was then distributed to component ancestral compounds, obi(s). Following in this way the principle of unilineal descent in inheritance and succession, land dwindled, until virgin forest land collectively owned by patrilineages was shared

out to sub-lineages and their component ancestral compounds which, as their sub-divisions multiplied further, shared out land to its extended families, which redistributed land, where available, to its family units. The principle of individual ownership of land applied in the family as long as the owner was alive and had male descendants or "male daughters" to inherit the land. Where there was no-one to inherit land, right of ownership returned to the extended family, the deceased man's brothers.

The conflicts and adjustments in the rules of inheritance which arise as a result of the co-existence of principles of individual ownership and collective ownership of land is illustrated by the case of Nwajiuba Ojukwu, the seventy-year-old "male daughter" who is the present head of the first obi in Nnobi, which is in the minor patrilineage of Umu Okpala in Umuona ward. (See App. 2, fig. 2.)

Nwajiuba's father was Ojukwu Isi Ana, priest of the Land Spirit, who occupied the "first son" position in the whole of Nnobi. He therefore held a very important office, which was more ritual than political. Although Ojukwu was a very wealthy man, as he was also a dibia⁽⁴⁾ and a successful farmer who cultivated the very large type of yam, he was poor in people, as he had no sisters, and his only brother died without issue. According to Nwajiuba, because of this lack of close relatives, when her father became ill he decided to recall her from her marital home and allow her to remain in his house as a male. She would thus

have the status of a son, and be able therefore to inherit her father's property. This practice was known as nhayikwa or nhanye, a kind of replacement, in Nnobi custom. Nwajiuba said that she was a mere child, and did not like her marital home, and had therefore gone home to complain that she wished to return to her father's house. Her father recalled her, and returned the marriage payment to her husband. According to Nwajiuba, her father had said that he and another man named Aghaji had decided to put girls in their obi, as they believed that one's obi should not be lost because one did not have a son.

One day, after Nwajiuba's father had died, his first daughter went to cut a bunch of plantains from her father's compound. Patrilineage men saw her, and asked her why she was doing so: as they did not recognise females as having any rights to their father's property, this became a court case. Nwajiuba recounted what took place in court:

'On the day of the court hearing, the igwe⁽⁵⁾ asked them if they were aware of the fact that his father's mother and my father's mother were sisters. He asked them whether they did not see that Ojukwu's wife was pregnant and whether they were able to see what was in her womb before going to usurp what was in Ojukwu's compound. He then ruled that I should remain in my father's house. He told them that they should only look after the place, since a woman does not become a shrine priest.⁽⁶⁾ He ruled that as soon as a man was found in Ojukwu's house,

he should take over. That was how that case was settled.'

I asked Nwajiuba whether her father had invited members of his patrilineage to announce his decision officially, after he had stated to her sister's husband his intention to make her "male". Nwajiuba said that her father was not able to do so before he died. Had he called members of his patrilineage and given them palm-wine, the matter would have been settled. Aghaji, in his own case, approached his lineage members, but died before he could finish the required ceremony. His pregnant widow then bore a son, and so the girl who was going to be left at home, got married instead.

The case of Nwajiuba set a precedent, as she was the first female to be left in an obi following a court ruling rather than the traditional ceremony. However, according to Nwajiuba, most of her father's property had already been shared out by members of his patrilineage and, after the case, only the immovable property, such as land and trees, were returned.

As the position occupied by Nwajiuba's father was a very important one, men who held that office were usually fortified with powerful medicines and were therefore dibia in their own right. Most powerful men in those days were called names descriptive of their deeds and achievements. Nwajiuba's father, for example, was called Ogbunikpo, meaning, perhaps, one who kills his enemies in masses or by the score. It is in this context that one can

understand Nwajiuba's account of "strange" activities, real or imaginary, against her mother, herself and the sons she bore. The conversation with Nwajiuba is reported here in full, not only because it contains material on the interpretation of misfortune or cause and effect, but also because it shows the unease and anxiety of women occupying positions very much sought after and normally filled by men.

- Who remained in the house with you?
- N. I remained in the obi with my mother, and she was there when I had my first child. I lost two children, each of them died after the outing ceremony. They were both males. When the child who survived was born, his outing ceremony was not done and the child did not die. Lineage men did not name him, as there was no outing. The child was simply called Okonkwo. This child later became a member of the Salvation Army, where he was named Francis. He later became a Catholic before he got married. He is dead now, but his wife and children are all Catholics.
- How did you and your mother manage your subsistence?
- N. When I lived with my mother, we co-operated economically to survive. She did not grow old before she died. It was from someone's doing. She died as a result of some illness. In fact, I would also have died, because I was also ill. It was all because of that case. They had prepared something and left it here. When I des-

- cribed my symptoms, out of ignorance it was not realized that it was as a result of somebody's doing. My whole body was swollen like an over-ripened fruit, and squashed when pressed or squeezed. I am now suffering from all that they did at that time. We did not know then that we should have gone to a dibia. We did not know of a dibia to go to. Had it been now that our eyes are open, we would have known what to do.
- Since your father was a great dibia, why did your mother not know that she should have gone to diviners to find the cause of your illness?
 - N. Wicked people know how to get about things. They made her not to know what to do, they blinded her. My father was such a great dibia that any ailment he could not deal with was considered hopeless. Imagine a man who could tell ideyi (flowing wet sand, like a river) to stop for him to cross and then order the sand to flow again!
 - What made you decide not to perform the outing ceremony for your third child?
 - N. When I got pregnant the third time, my mother's first daughter and her husband went to a dibia and were told that, left to the designs of other people, I would not even have got pregnant with this child, that it was only through superhuman means that I did get pregnant. They said that I should therefore not remain in this obi to have the child. As you know, there

were no hospitals then. With the other children, after having them and burying the afterbirth in the ground, the child died. In the case of this child which survived, I went to my sister's at Amadunu to have the baby. It was after seven market weeks that I brought him home.

- You told me that you paid tax when taxation was introduced and when women did not pay tax?
- N. Yes, I paid tax about four times. I paid tax because I was told that I was in my father's house and living off my father's wealth. Others paid four shillings, but other Umuona men and myself paid double that amount because we were told that we were few in number.

Land Tenure and Women

In relation to land, I find the anthropological method of describing the supposed patrilineal systems of land tenure deficient, as it does not look into the relation of women to land. The formalist approach to the patrilineal system of inheritance is that sons inherit their father's land, daughters do not, and therefore women do not own land. The theory stresses the ideal of male ownership, and as the land changes hands, leaves women invisible. In the social process, gaining access to land, or the right of use of land, may prove more important than actual ownership. This was the case with Nnobi wives and land.

Nnobi was, and still is, in the area which has been said to contain 'over-enlarged village communities in the most over-populated area of Negro Africa' (Jones 1949: 150). Over-population led to a shortage of land, and what available land existed suffered from over-cropping and erosion. This resulted in soil infertility and poor agricultural out-put, which invariably led to less interest in agriculture by the menfolk and a high outward migration of young men. It is therefore not surprising that women, as wives and mothers, organized in matricentric units, controlled subsistence farming and economy.

Land, the most scarce visible resource for

subsistence farmers, was owned by men but worked by women, who also managed most of the produce. Women ideally did not inherit or own land. They had access to land only as wives or sometimes as daughters especially favoured by a father or brother, as, for example, Ochom, the female founding ancestress of the minor lineage of Umu Ochom in Amadunu ward, represented in the structural genealogical chart⁽⁷⁾. In rare cases, they owned land as "male daughters" when they had been accorded full male status in the absence of a son in order to safeguard their father's obi and line of descent and the property associated with it, as, for example, in the case of Nwajiuba, cited above.

Following the unilineal descent principle of succession and inheritance, the first son replaced his father in the obi. The section of immovable property associated with the obi, called "obi land", and the house in it should never be sub-divided. It was automatically inherited by di-Okpala, first son, and became the ancestral home to all those who trace descent to that obi. The rest of the land and trees were usually divided among the sons through their mothers, with the first son also getting a share. Normally, the father would have distributed land as he married wives, since access to farmland was essential to the role played by women as wives.

Women had access to two types of land; garden land, which was usually at the back of each matri-centric compound section, and farmland, which may

be near the compound, or at the outskirts of lineage or village territory. On the death of a husband, a wife's continued access to farmland depended on her having a son, or a "male daughter". On the death of a woman as wife and mother, the continuation of her mkpuke or onu uzo, gate, (a word derived from the description of the entrance in the wall leading into each matricentric household), depended on the woman's son, or a "male daughter", or respected ada, first daughter, marrying a woman to take the place of the dead wife. In this way, the wife of a son took over farmland from the wife of the son's father. In Nnobi classificatory kinship terminology, mothers were wives to their sons. However, women used the expression "husband" affectionately when addressing their sons more easily than sons did when addressing their mothers as wives, except perhaps when addressing their mother's co-wives. Thus one wife replaced another as women continued to manage the land.

There were two ways in which family land might be shared out. Land was either divided equally among the wives, regardless of how many sons each wife had, or it might be shared equally between the sons, so that a wife with more sons would have more land. In the former case, wives with more sons would later be pressed for land, as the sons acquired wives and redistributed the land. In cases where land was plentiful, wives could be given their own portion of farmland, and as sons reached maturity,

they too would be apportioned land on which to build their own homes. If any were to die childless, the land would revert back to the original obi. This was also the case with monogamous households, where the sons might decide to stay in one obi, and receive portions of land as they married. Either way, land was forever a cause for dispute, murder, treachery and intrigue in Nnobi. There was a chronic shortage of land for younger sons, who were therefore encouraged to move out and acquire land elsewhere and found their own obi, but they remained ritually and politically subordinate to the original obi, even when they had changed their family names. In the ranking order, they would be junior to the original obi. In many cases where there was no available land for subdivision, as the sons matured, they built their houses in their mother's sub-compound units in the original compound. Their wives would, therefore, help their husband's mother on the farm.

Men owned both types of land; compound land for building houses and gardens, and farmland. Gardens, where the subsidiary crops were grown, were exclusively a female domain, worked, and the produce controlled by wives. Farmland, where major crops were grown, was worked by both men and women. Men were involved mostly during the initial planting and later for harvesting, but the daily job of tending was done by wives. The produce from this farm was shared by husband and wife, with men controlling the distribution of yam. A man's wife was later

replaced by her son's wife on the farm.

Redistribution of Other Family Wealth

The principle of equality did not exist in the sharing of wealth, whether among brothers or among brothers and sisters. Consequently, first sons started life more advantaged than junior brothers, and brothers started life more advantaged than sisters. Embodied in the principle of sexual division of labour, was the gender division of economic and social wealth. Sons, as males, and "male daughters", inherited certain property, such as land and some fruit trees, such as kola-nut and palm-trees. Daughters, as females, inherited woven cloth, some fruit trees, and their mother's household utensils.

The mourning period following the death of a father lasted for one year, after which his wealth was shared among his children. Male members of his minor patrilineage were usually present and acted as witnesses. First son, as onye isi, head, received what was called ihe isi, headship share, before the division of wealth. Four things were usually put aside for him, for example, one kola-nut tree and three palm-trees, or two palm-trees and two kola-nut trees. In addition to these, he would select other food trees, such as Igbo pear, coconut, orange, breadfruit etc., and money, since, as first son, he would have spent more money than others on the funeral. In fact, what a first son got depended on how greedy and powerful he was, and it was, therefore, not uncommon for first sons to claim all their

father's wealth. The rest of the food trees and livestock were shared among the younger sons. Most often, the principle of picking and sharing, aghota eke, was applied as food trees were immovable property. Each son usually took whatever share he received back to his mother. Daughters inherited their father's cloth. Married daughters would take the cloth presented by their husbands at the funeral, while unmarried daughters inherited their father's cloth.

Individual ownership of property was associated with the principle of ilu aka, pointing at a thing. This suggests that it was recognized that any head of a family had the right to dispose of family land to members of the family. The usual method for the distribution or the giving away of land was to go to the spot and point at the land involved. For this reason, any tree planted by a son was never divided at the death of his father, for his father would have pointed out the spot on which he planted the tree. The same principle of individual ownership applied to land pointed out to a son or daughter, or to fruit trees so pointed out, especially nkwu ana, palm-tree, pointed out to a daughter by a father as a wedding present. Some maintained that only first daughters got palm-trees as a wedding present, while others maintained that any daughter could get it. The idea behind the gift was supposed to be the need and desire for daughters to visit their father's obi regularly after they had left it to settle in their marital homes.

Women's Economic Activities

The sexual inequality entailed in the patrilineal principle of inheritance with regard to access to economic resources for daughters, was quickly offset by women at marriage. This was usually achieved through their economic resourcefulness, supported by Nnobi matrifocal principles in domestic organization and encouraged by the ideology of female industriousness.

In the household, a wife's domain was a matri-centric unit, consisting of a mother and her children. This was a farming unit, with a specific farm. It was also an eating unit; all the children of one woman ate out of their mother's pot - from one ekwu. This was the unit bound by the closest and strongest sentimental sibling tie, nwanne. The survival of this unit depended on the resourcefulness of the mother, and the loyalty and gratitude of these children was expected in return.

At marriage, a girl's father would take yam and cocoyam seedlings from the stacks, arrange them on sticks, as was customary, and give them to his daughter. This was her farming capital. If she was an ada, first daughter, or a favourite daughter, he would point out her nkwu ana, marriage present palm-tree. The girl's mother, for her part, would give her her livestock capital - a she-goat and hens. She would also give her spices and vegetable seeds for her garden, a basket of seasoning ingredients for cooking,

ngiga, a soup ladle and a few pots and pans. The goat given to the girl at her marriage was her ritual goat, eghu chi. This goat would multiply and produce her first cash capital, and when this mother-goat died, only the woman to whom it was given might eat it.

Male and female roles were given ritual expression at birth. Eight days after a baby was born, its hair was completely shaved off. The hair of a baby boy was buried in the roots of a kola-nut tree, and that of a girl was buried under a palm-tree. One of the principal things which an adult male heading a household hoped to inherit or possess was a kola-nut tree, as kola was very important to his role. The rules governing the breaking and sharing of kola symbolized authority, status and gender differentiation in Nnobi (see Chapter Four). The palm tree under which the hair of a baby girl was buried was called nkwu ana. This was the tree which a father would point out to his first daughter, or a favourite daughter, at her marriage. From then onwards, she would periodically visit her father's compound to collect the palm-fruits from the tree. As long as that palm-tree stood, and there was someone alive to recognize it as her palm-tree, marriage might not take place between descendants of that woman and those from her father's obi. A palm-tree was one of the most invaluable resources to a woman in her household. Every part of it served an important economic function.

Palm-Tree

The sap from the palm-tree is palm-wine, which is controlled and distributed by men. A man would therefore climb his palm-tree once or twice every day to extract palm-wine, some of which he would sell for cash, but he would usually leave a pot for himself and his visitors. If he felt particularly generous, he might share some with his wives, who should kneel down to accept and drink their palm-wine. Except for "male daughters", women's access to alcohol was what they were given by men. Since only men might climb trees, it was a man's job to cut down igu nkwu, palm-fronds, and akwu, ripe palm-fruits. His wife and children would then carry in the palm-fronds to the goats, which ate the leaves. Women would then collect the palm-fronds, and cut out the side branches to make brooms. The poles, ogwugwu, were then used as building material, or to support climbing plants, especially yam, or as fuel for cooking.

Palm-Fruit

The sale of palm-oil was a major source of cash. The main role played by men in this important economic activity was the climbing, and cutting down of the fruit. The rest of the job was done by his wife and children. They would separate the fruits from the stalks, and boil them. Any adult sons would help their mother to pound the fruits to separate the juice from the fibre and nuts. The nuts would then

be put aside for other uses, and the juice squeezed out from the fibre and cooked to extract the palm-oil, which was then stored in pots. Oil for food was put aside, and during periods of hunger, the rest of the palm-oil was sold for cash. If the palm-fruit was cut from the wife's tree, she would keep the money, but if the tree belonged to her husband, she would sell the oil and give the money to him. During periods of hunger, this money was intended to be used to buy food, but once the money had been given to the men, both men and women agreed that it was difficult to get it back. Women were expected to use their own money for subsistence.

Another product of the palm-tree, izuke, which grows in bunches, was used by women to make torches. They would put palm-oil in a piece of broken pot and heat it on the fire to thin the oil. One piece of izuke at a time was picked and soaked in the oil. The tip of it was then lit, and it served as an oil torch. The fibre, or chaff, extracted during the processing of the oil was used for making soap, ncha ngo. Women would burn the chaff, put water in it, drain it and cook it in palm-oil. It then thickened into a ball and was used as soap. It was also said to be medicinal.

Aku, palm-kernel, was another main source of cash for women. The nuts of the palm-fruit were left to dry, and after they had been cracked, some were eaten with other food items, such as fried breadfruit seeds or roast corn. The rest of the

nuts were processed for kernel oil, which was used traditionally for oiling the skin, or medicinally. Palm-kernels and palm-oil were traditional cash crops which were also exported. Women shared the profits from the sale of palm-oil with men, but kept the profits from the sale of palm-kernels. Ichere aku, the shell of the kernel, was used for fuel, as it produced a very strong flame. Women extracted rope from the skin or bark of the palm-poles, and used it for weaving various items such as sieves, long baskets for drying foodstuffs in the sun, carrying and storage baskets. They also wove floor and sleeping mats.

Staples

According to an Nnobi saying, 'a woman answers her husband's call sharply or rudely when she knows there is no yam left in the yam store.'⁽⁹⁾

Although both men and women farmed yam, those cultivated by women did not compare in size and quantity with those produced by men, for a husband also enlisted the labour of his wives to cultivate his yam. By far the greatest portion of his farm was used for yam production, as this was the prestige crop, monopolized by men and guarded with ritual secrecy and sanctions. The theft of yam was punishable by death, and the go-ahead for the eating of new yam, ikpo ji, was the prerogative of the man who held the title of Eze Ani Nnobi, the priest of the Land or Earth Spirit of Nnobi. He also held the

yam medicine, without which new yam could not be eaten. He was always the head of the first and most senior obi in Nnobi. The last man to hold this title was the father of Nwajiuba, the "male daughter" mentioned earlier in this chapter.

In the household, yam medicine was held by the head of the household. After harvesting, yam and cocoyam were stored in the obi, the male section of the compound, which held the huge family yam stores. Successful women farmers and other wealthy women also had yam stores in the female section of the compound at the back of their units, but could not eat yam from them until the ritual for eating new yam had been performed by their husband. Men, therefore, supervised and controlled the use of yam from the family store. After harvesting, once the eating of yam had been generally declared open, the male head of the household would buy a cockerel and perform the yam eating ritual for his family. He and his sons would kill the cockerel, and pound the yam medicine, ogwu ji. He would then put the medicine in a little gourd, and give some to his wife and daughters to lick before they ate their own yam. He and his sons would then eat the chicken, which would not be shared by the females. After this ritual, yam might be eaten from the stores or dug up from the farms and eaten. The man's contribution to household subsistence was mainly the daily supply of yam, referred to as itu ji abani, which he would hand over to his children to take to their mothers.

When husbands were away, wives were expected to use yam from their own yam stores. The smaller species of yam require up to six months in the ground to mature, while the larger species require up to ten months. Poor output owing to poor soil and over-cropping and poor storage, meant that yam served as a staple for a very short period of the year, after which everyone turned to the women's crops; cassava, cocoyam, plantain, maize and melons. These were secondary staples only in terms of prestige and in so far as they were female crops.

Food Processing

All food processing was done by women, who were the best storers of food. As some of the yams decayed in the yam stores, women cut them and dried them in the sun, after which they would pound or grate them into flour for food. Cocoyam, grown by women, quickly met the shortage of yam. Women grew various species of cocoyam, some of which were like miniature yam and were eaten like yam; boiled, roast or cooked and pounded into a dough which was eaten with sauce. Others were used for thickening sauces. Bananas and plantains, grown in rubbish heaps and scattered all over the compounds, were handy during the hunger season. Men would cut theirs down and give them to their wives to sell for them, and they were believed to use the money to buy palm-wine instead of food for the household! Breadfruit trees were usually inherited and belonged to men, but were

processed for food by women. They would leave the huge pods to decay, extract the seeds and feed the chaff to the goats. The seeds would then be skinned, washed and cooked or fried.

Cassava, akpu, is a tuber which grows all the year round with the minimum care, even in poor soil. It was considered a female crop and was therefore cultivated mainly by women, and in many ways had come to replace yam as a staple and as the tuber pounded for food during ceremonies. There were many ways of processing cassava, but all were time consuming, as is all manual food processing. Cassava could be fermented and cooked as pounded food. The tuber was skinned, washed and soaked in water in pots, and left for several days to ferment. It was then pounded and sifted, put into a bag and compressed to extract the water. It was then stored in baskets or bags, to be used as required. The cooking and pounding of food was also time and energy consuming, and was all women's work. Fresh cassava could also be dried in the sun and stored for the hunger period, which was a testing time for a woman's resourcefulness and economic ingenuity. During this period, the dried cassava was pounded into flour, mashed in water, cooked, and pounded for food.

During discussions with the present traditional ruler, the Igwe, describing the indigenous economy, he said,

'In the olden days, men cultivated yam, and women also cultivated yam. But it was the job

of the women to tend the yam plants, ilu ji.

It was the job of the women to plant maize, bitter-leaf and various other plants in the yam plot.

Women cultivated cocoyam. It was also their job to dig out the cocoyam. Marketing - buying and selling, selling and buying - was a woman's job. Women played a vital part in the production of foodstuff. As for men, once they'd cleared the bush and planted the yam, the rest of the job was left to their wives. Women then did the rest of the job. It was then the job of the women to go to the market, produce food and feed their husbands. Women played the lion's part in the economy of the town even up till the present century. The cultivation of cassava is completely done by women, Men don't cultivate cassava. They only grow yam.'

During my period of fieldwork in Nnobi, both in 1980 and 1982, the general accounts of the traditional economic activities of women had not changed, as the traditional ruler himself observed. The basic difference is probably in the introduction of machines for food processing, but from my observation, most women thought it expensive, and still used their traditional implements, such as mortars and grinding stones. Another area of difference is in the change of diet. From Nwajiuba's account of the economy and diet of the olden days, we see that the diet was more vegetarian, owing to the scarcity of meat. The very poor could hardly afford even fish. As Nwajiuba

was born at the beginning of this century, she witnessed the economic activities of her mother, which derived from the nineteenth century, and has herself lived through the colonial period to the present day. She was therefore able to give me accurate descriptions of traditional women's economic activities, which were corroborated by the accounts of other Nnobi elders.

- What do you remember about your mother and her trading activities, and the type of trade of those days?
- N. They cooked ogili.^{*} You know that trade in those days was not the same as today. Marketing those days included the selling of baskets of processed cassava, ngwugwu akpu. One method of preparing cassava for food was to peel off the skin, cook and then slice it. It was then soaked in water and eaten. Sliced cassava is known as abacha. The other method of processing is to ferment the cassava, sift it and then pound it. In those days, one did not sift cassava. What they used to do was to pull out the tendrils after the cassava had fermented. It was then mashed by hand and put in a pot, from which it was taken as required to be cooked and pounded. It was later that the idea of sifting cassava was introduced. Since they started to sift cassava, lots of diseases have appeared. In those days when one did not sift cassava, some cassava used to be peeled, cut into chunks, and then dried in the sun. Some

^{*}fermented seed used for flavouring sauce

of the dried cassava was then pounded into powder and mixed with the fermented cassava and then cooked and pounded. This used to kill and check worms (okpo) in the stomach. Dried cassava was called ibube. During the period of hunger, some of the dried cassava was pounded into powder, then mashed with water and cooked and pounded like the fermented cassava. Another way of eating the dried cassava was to wash it, cook it with ukwa (seeds of the breadfruit), then mix it with palm-oil and spices. It could also be cooked with okwe (a type of nut), and mixed in oil. Another foodstuff which helped during the time of hunger was achicha. This was green banana, which had been cooked and dried for preservation. A type of cocoyam known as okpo ede was cooked, dried and preserved in the same way. These were used for food by cooking them and then mixing them with vegetables and palm-oil. The common vegetables at that time were spinach, greens and leaves of the garden-egg plant. The indigenous Nnobi sauce was cooked with bitter leaf. It was cooked very thick. The common people used one shilling's worth of dried fish for cooking this sauce. Rich people used two shillings' worth of fish. As you know, what was used then was ego ayolo, cowrie shells. (She got up to get some cowrie shells.) Six cowrie shells was one shilling, ofu ego. Poor people divided one shilling's

worth of fish into two, and used half. During the period of very acute hunger, the skin of banana or plantain was sliced, dried and later cooked for food. Those who were very choosy went hungry rather than eat this! All these things were done by women. All these things were also sold in the market, because people's eyes had not been opened at that time.

- What did your mother trade in?
- N. Ogili and processed cassava. You know that palm-oil processed by machine, did not exist at that time. She sold only the oil she cooked, pounded and pressed by herself at home. She also sold palm-kernel nuts. What made one rich in those days was the raising and selling of livestock, like goats, fowls and dogs. Those who could used to go to Onitsha to buy fish for sale. Some took kernels to Onitsha, sold them, and bought other things which they brought back and sold here. The kinds of thing they bought were fish, yam, or the seeds from which ogili was made. Palm-oil was also sold in Onitsha.

Women, Marketing and Cash

Cowrie-shell was the most common currency used, and was referred to as ego, money. Most items brought in money. Marriage payments for daughters brought in money. Livestock was sold for money, as were fruit trees, tubers, grains, vegetables and spices. Palm-fruit was the main cash crop. Both the palm-wine and palm-oil extracted from the tree were sold for money. Except for the sale by men of palm-wine and yam, most marketing was done by women, so that most of the cash passed through female hands either from sale of their own goods, or from the sale of their husband's goods. Following the principle of sexual division of labour and gender division of crops, women kept what was considered theirs, and their profit, apart. Nothing considered female and belonging to women was sold by men. Most of what was considered male and belonging to men was marketed for them by women, who kept some of the profit after sale. The control of goods and cash by women was a result of their monopolization of market space. This was favoured by Nnobi ideology of female industriousness, economic self-help, and self-sufficiency of the matricentric unit. It was also supported and reinforced by the gender ideology which demarcated male and female space.

The sale of livestock and fowl was the quickest way of raising money for capital. Women tended and

helped sell their husband's animals. When handing over the money to their husbands, it was up to them to say for how much a goat or hen was sold. On the other hand, they might increase the agreed sale price and keep the profit. This was also the case with the sale of palm-oil, yam, plantain, banana and other fruits, as most immovable property belonged to husbands, but were looked after and marketed by their wives. Money derived from any food trees planted by a wife belonged to her, as did money from the fruits of the palm-tree pointed out to a daughter by her father, or to a wife by her husband.

The surplus of all food items, processed or raw, was sold by women in the markets. A woman's garden was a regular supplier of petty foodstuffs, vegetables and spices used in the household or sold in the markets. Women's involvement in agricultural production and their control of subsistence economy gave them strong access to markets and cash. Whereas most of the cash turnover from women's marketing was put back into the subsistence needs, men's profits were used mainly for personal uses, such as marrying additional wives, or taking titles for themselves or their sons. Their main means of getting large sums quickly, was through marriage payments received for their daughters, or the sale of livestock such as a he-goat, castrated and fattened to fetch a large sum of money.

As a result of the redirection of money back into subsistence and household needs, a woman had to be

extremely successful economically, and have a large labour force, to be able to save enough money to enable her to participate in achievement-based title-taking open to women as well as men, such as the ogbu efi, one who killed a cow for the goddess Idemili. The incidence of women's title-taking was therefore lower than that of men. The tendency was for women to take the Ekwe title, which was involuntary, and analysed through divination. Though based on the idea of social recognition of hard work, candidature was controlled through ritual, and thus only a limited number of women were chosen.

Ekwe (10) Title

This was a title taken only by women, and was associated with the goddess Idemili. From all descriptions of the title, it was believed to be based on involuntary possession, but, in reality, had a strong association with a woman's economic abilities and charismatic attributes, real or potential. The taking of the title, for example, marked the climax of economic success, but the general claim by Nnobi people was that it was the goddess herself possessing the woman, who would give her the money or wealth with which to take the title. Nwajiuba, for example, said, 'If Ekwe is coming to you, it shows you the sign and throws in money for you.' (Her illustration of this throwing in of money was as if someone would throw in baskets of money from outside the compound wall.) 'People go and work for the woman who would take the title. She also practised what was called igba Ọhu, buying a woman. She would go to another town and buy a woman, who she could then give to a husband somewhere else and remain as her mother, but claim their services. The bought woman could on the other hand stay as her wife, bearing children for her.' They were, therefore, wealthy women, who could afford to play the role of "female husband" and, through control of the services of others, create more wealth.

The signs of possession of the Ekwe title were

well known. It was like possessing green fingers, or hands of gold. Whatever such a woman touched yielded multiple profits. All her crops increased in large quantities. Her domestic animals were said to reproduce prolifically and would not be killed off by diseases. Her chicks would not be carried off by hawks. These signs were reported to the messenger of the goddess Idemili, who would then, through divination, tell the woman that it was the goddess Idemili knocking at her door. This meant that she had been favoured and chosen by the goddess to take her title of Ekwe. Eze Agba, the present priest of the Idemili shrine and the messenger of the goddess, described the Ekwe phenomenon thus,

'Idemili has a title called Agba Ekwe. Anyone who will take the title will be possessed by Idemili. The woman's goat will reproduce in multiples. She will reap so much from the yam she cultivates as to make people wonder, and so also with the cocoyam she grows. Her hens, when they have chicks, they will not be carried away by birds nor killed by disease. This means that Idemili is calling her for the Ekwe title. Since it is Idemili who is telling her to do this thing for her, she'll go to the messenger of Idemili, who will tell her what is required for the taking of the Ekwe title.'

Another elder's description of the phenomenon shows its economic base. People were quick to notice thrift, industriousness, money making ability and

leadership qualities in a woman. They would then begin to point her out as a potential candidate for the Ekwe title. This may even begin to manifest itself in a young girl, who was thenceforth encouraged and urged on in her economic ventures. As Eze Enyinwa's account shows, a potential Ekwe candidate had to have the material or practical support of her co-wives at all levels of social organization, from the extended family to the major patrilineage.

'The taking of the Ekwe title na awa awa (is involuntary). One who is being called to take the title, if she goes to the market and buys ten chicks, all of them will survive. If she plants things, they'll stand out from those of other people. Her goats will bear triplets. Such a woman would have been notified by a diviner, so she would start trying her hand to find out whether it is true. For the actual taking of the title, she would invite her inyom di (her co-lineage wives) and tell them that she wished to take the Ekwe title. They agree on a day when they will come and work for her weekly. They usually work for her for about six months before she announces to her quarter or village her intention to take the title.'

After the announcement, it took another nine months before the whole of Nnobi was informed. As soon as such news reached the whole town, it was said that everyone began to go to the woman's house for a feast.

The payment for this ceremony was said to be as

much as one cow, seven goats and seven hens. These were given to those who would sanctify and validate the title, that is, the messenger of Idemili and the existing Ekwe titled women. Describing the abundance of food during this ceremony, Eze Enyinwa said, 'Ogili is heaped like a huge anthill. One woman's share is enough to fill a mortar. She will in turn take it home to share with her co-wives. The same is true of pounded cocoyam.' This pounded cocoyam was called nni ocha, white pounded food. Members of the woman's minor patrilineage and her patrilineage co-wives would have gone to her home on the eve of the ceremony to cook till dawn.

For the ceremony, a very tall pole called agba would be stuck into the pounded food. Then strong young men would begin to pile layers and layers of pounded food round the pole, from the base to the tip, till it looked like a small white hill. Titled Ekwe women would then take doughs of pounded food from this food tree and distribute them to the guests. When all the food on it had been removed, the messenger of Idemili would give the woman a long pointed stick, known as mgba Ekwe, the Ekwe staff of authority. The messenger of the goddess then named her whatever name or epithet she might have chosen to be known by. The names chosen testify to the sense of achievement associated with this title, for example, Ome Nyili, the undaunted one; Agba Ekwe, the chief Ekwe woman; Ekwe Nyili, she who has vanquished, that is, achieved, the Ekwe title; Chinyelu Ekwe, one to

whom her god has given the Ekwe title, etc.

After taking the title, the woman would wear a string anklet, njada ukwu, like all titled men. As Eze Agba, priest of Idemili, said, 'That woman who has taken the Ekwe title will not lift things on her head. She will comb out her hair, just like this woman's'. (He showed me his wife's hairstyle, which was not plaited, but combed out into a neat "afro". She was working in the garden when he called her name. She came, greeted everyone, and stood quietly, not knowing why she was called. After finishing his illustration, he told her to go, and she repeated her greetings and left.) The newly titled woman was expected to buy a towel, in which she would stick a small knife called nma eneke. She would then sling this towel on her shoulder. With her hair combed out and carrying the long pointed staff, she was expected to walk in a most dignified manner.

Six months after the ceremony, her co-wives in the lineage were expected each to take a tin containing about four gallons of palm-oil, and donate it to her in order to show their respect and give her prestige and honour, iko ugwu. Through the ceremony of crawling, one after another, between her legs, while she sat with legs astride, the co-wives accepted her superiority and authority. Without this acknowledgement by her co-wives in the lineage, her title was said to be a failure. This ceremony, which entailed the donation of a very important cash crop, was said to be repeated periodically.

All the Ekwe titled women formed an exclusive club, and shared the money, livestock and food paid by the new initiates each time the title was taken. Their leader, and also the leader of all Nnobi women, was always the longest standing Ekwe title holder. She was the one known as Agba Ekwe, chief Ekwe woman. The ritual and political significance of the Ekwe title will be discussed in the next chapter.

Involuntary Male Titles

There were a few involuntary male titles which, like the Ekwe, were associated with a strong economic base, and the symptoms of their possession were similar to those of the Ekwe. While candidature to the Ekwe title was open to all the women of Nnobi, the involuntary male titles were specific to certain lineages, and only one man held each title at a time. These male titles were referred to as oke ozo, high ozo titles, as they were superior to the voluntary, bought, normal ozo titles. In Nnobi, ozo is synonymous with eze, kingly, a prefix which ozo titled men attach to their names or epithets. This ambition of, and possibility for, every Igbo man who becomes wealthy, is what made R.N. Henderson (1972) title his book, The King in Every Man. The high ozo titles which Nnobi had were ozo aho (which will be described and discussed in detail in Chapter Four); dunu; dim; eze ana, who was usually the priest of the Land Spirit; and dunu n'ebo.

The very knowledgeable Nnobi elder, Eze Enyinwa, described to me the symptoms which preceded the taking of the involuntary male titles, and the predicament which followed for those who dared to ignore the call to the titles.

'They have the same symptoms as Ekwe. If you plant one yam and get four out of it, then there is something behind it. Did you not hear about

Dunu Akoliam, whose father was Dunu Nna Emeko, and whose father's father was Dunu Ezenabo?⁽¹¹⁾ He planted yam, and when he dug up the yam, it was wearing ona, (red iron worn around the ankle by titled people), so he went to a diviner, who took him to the Dunu shrine, where it was revealed to him that he would take the Dunu title. After this, Dunu gave him money. Goats and fowl were in abundance.⁽¹²⁾ But he did not use the money to take the title, but instead married Agaji, a sister to Eke Aho, who is a brother of Eze Agba, the oldest man today in your Umunshim lineage. Soon the woman died, so he got the message and quickly took the title. His title is Dunu Etigbuhu, meaning that the spirit which was inviting him did not tigbue, beat him to death. This type of symptom is still present today. Simon Ibeeto, for example, is today possessed by Dunu n'ebo. He has done all that is required except the final ceremony, but there is no high ozo titled man alive to sanctify his title. He now has a mental problem. Sajim Nwankwo was the last Ozo Aho. He died in 1956'.

The structural significance of these titles in relation to the female Ekwe title will be examined in the next chapter.

Two Prominent Obi(s) in Nineteenth Century Nnobi Society

I shall now present two case studies, in which I describe the economic activities of individuals in two prominent ancestral compounds in Nnobi society of the last century. I hope to demonstrate the degree of affluence and aristocratic life-style in the traditional society, and the means by which men and women accumulated wealth. As will be seen, women benefitted from the accumulation of wives in the same way as men did. I also hope to demonstrate the rivalry between wealthy women and their husbands. Extremely powerful and assertive women were able to dominate their husbands and not be stigmatized for it.

The "Big Man", Eze Okigbo

Eze Okigbo was the "big man" in Nnobi at the time of the British military expeditions into the Igbo hinterland from 1901-1919. Nnobi falls into the area of the Onitsha-Awka axis, which came under attack between 1904 and 1905. (The expeditions in this area are described in Nwabara 1977: 132-3.) Eze Okigbo probably died in 1905, as a result of humiliations suffered at the hands of British military officers. (See Chapter Six.) Eze Okigbo was said to have been in his declining years during this period, which suggests that his period of influence must have been during the second half of the nineteenth century.

Eze Okigbo was the seventh in a succession of generations of Ozo titled men to have wielded power in this particular obi. The most influential and powerful of all, who is still remembered and respected in Nnobi today, was Ezike, the direct father of Eze Okigbo. He was the "big man" during the first half of the nineteenth century. This was a period of inter-village wars, raids for slaves and slave trading. As Igbo names throw light on the history of the bearers, his name, Eze Ike, indicates strength and power. Similarly, the name of his father indicates the affluence of this obi much earlier than the nineteenth century. He was called Eze Eziafuluaku, which, when translated, means a titled man from a

compound where there is wealth.

Vivid accounts, from oral traditions and eye witnesses, of daily life in the obi of Eze Okigbo, reveal the degree of aristocratic life in this hitherto assumed egalitarian society. John Eze Akigbo, born in 1928, and who himself holds a chieftaincy title, is the great grandson of Eze Okigbo and the present head and occupant of this obi. His claims and stories were verified by a much older man, Johnson Ume, whom I interviewed independently. Johnson was born in 1909, and his mother was the favourite daughter of Eze Okigbo, named Egoeme. She was an ogbuefi titled woman, as she had killed a cow. She wore an ivory anklet and bracelet. These ornaments were described by Basden as very costly and highly prized. 'They are worn by few women and are associated with the aristocracy' (Basden 1938: 207). Egoeme died in 1948. Johnson, in his position as a nwadiana (see Chapter Two) in the obi of Eze Okigbo, was always a privileged and welcome visitor there. According to him, whenever he was scolded by his mother, Egoeme, he used to run off crying to the obi of Eze Okigbo, where one of the women would put him on her back and rock him as she walked about. Johnson is very proud of his "child of a daughter" status in the obi of Eze Okigbo. Consequently, he told me that he has authorized his bank, on his death, to release six hundred naira, which is equivalent to about five hundred pounds sterling, for the purchase of a cow for his maternal

obi. I accompanied him to meet John Okigbo, who confirmed that Johnson had taken him to the bank manager and pledged the sum of £500 to the obi of Eze Okigbo. As described in Chapter Three, this payment should be paid by Johnson's sons to Johnson's mother's obi at his death. The usual payment is normally a goat, but Johnson explained that this was a great obi which deserved no less than a cow, and as he did not wish to take the chance of being let down by his sons, he made provision for the payment.

Eze Okigbo is said to have had about thirteen wives, a few of whom were inherited from his father, Ezike. As was the custom with "big men" who collected many wives, only his favourite wife cooked the food he ate, and no-one else was allowed to touch his drinking cup. Basden attributes this general practice among Igbo men, especially those with several wives, to fear of poisoning (1938: 157). In the case of Eze Okigbo, according to John Okigbo, when his favourite wife did not cook his food, his favourite daughter did so instead. Only one particular man tapped the palm-wine he drank. Although each of his wives had her own piece of land, and he himself had a great deal of land, he did not eat food grown on his land, as this was how rich and powerful men were poisoned and removed in those days. Similar precautionary measures were observed by rulers of other Igbo societies which had a divine kingship system. For example, it was said of Eze Nri that 'No-one

may see the king eat and no boy above the age of puberty may cook for the king, nor any woman' (Nwabara 1977: 25). In fact, according to Johnson Ume, a man much older than John Akigbo, Eze Okigbo did not eat food cooked by his wives, only that cooked by his daughter. His special plate was made out of the skull of an elephant.

Still in keeping with the protocol observed by indigenous Igbo aristocrats, Eze Okigbo did not come out of his private chambers in the afternoons. In the mornings, he would sit in his inner obi and his wives would come and call him by his titles and praise-names. They would bring food to distribute to his servants and workers. Typical of "big men" of his day, Eze Okigbo had two obi(s). One was in the compound, and it was there that he would go when he emerged from his bed-chamber. Another obi was located outside the compound walls, and this was where he received outside visitors and all Nnobi. (I have drawn a sketch of the plan of the obi of Eze Okigbo.⁽¹³⁾ When I visited the place in January 1982, some of the old walls were still standing, but most of it had been knocked down. The foundations were still visible.)

How Eze Okigbo Became Very Wealthy

Eze Okigbo did not become wealthy simply by the fact that his father was wealthy and that, as a first son, he would have inherited a substantial portion of his father's wealth. The position of heir had its dangers and disadvantages. The jealousies between co-wives, the dangers surrounding an heir, and the harrassment of one man by 'a horde of children all claiming paternal benefits' is well described by Basden in his attempt at some comparisons between polygamous and monogamous households (1938: 236-9). The wealth of Eze Okigbo seems to have derived from funeral gifts from his maternal relatives. According to my informants, Eze Okigbo was the only child of Ezike by his own mother. When Ezike died, all his sons decided that each person should keep whatever funeral gifts he received for himself. In this way, they hoped to incapacitate Eze Okigbo, who was the first son and the only child of his mother. Through these gifts, he would have obtained his immediate liquid capital to enable him to establish himself firmly in the place of his father, with all the expensive titles his father must have had. When Okigbo learned of this plot, he quickly travelled to Nnewi lchi, to his mother's patrilineage. He told them that his father had died, and that his brothers had decided that funeral gifts would not be shared. When the members of his mother's patri-

lineage heard this, they quickly called a meeting of members of their obi to discuss how to come to the rescue of their daughter's child. Consequently, as the story goes, when they came to mourn the dead, they brought Okigbo many cows, uncountable cowries and goats etc. As John Okigbo said to me, "that was how Eze Okigbo became rich and repeated his father's fame," and he went on to say, "We are not going to hide anything. Slave trade was a normal practice of the time. Human beings were bought in the same way as goats and fowls were bought. He also bought people who worked for him."

How the Wives of Eze Okigbo Became Wealthy

As men increased their labour force, wealth and prestige through the accumulation of wives, so also did women through the institution of "female-husbands". When a man paid money to acquire a woman, that woman was called his wife. When a woman paid money to acquire another woman, it was referred to as buying a slave, igba ohu, but the bought woman had the status and customary rights of a wife with respect to the woman who bought her. The woman who bought her was referred to as her husband. The "female-husband" had the same rights as a man over his wife. I therefore translate ohu, in the context of woman to woman marriage, as wife. It was through this practice of marrying other women that the richest of Eze Okigbo's wives obtained their wealth.

Among the names remembered of the wives of Eze Okigbo, was that of Nwambata aku, who was supposed to have been his favourite. He had inherited her from his father, Ezike, so that economically she had a head start over the other women, having been the wife of a "big man". She is said to have had about twenty-four wives. Among the qualities attributed to her, were hard work and perseverance. She was described as a clever woman, who knew how to utilize her money. As well as having her wives trade for her, she herself sold kola-nuts. She would buy pots of palm-oil during the times of plenty

and sell them at a high price when oil was scarce. She lent money on credit and, due to the influence of her husband, Eze Okigbo, those to whom she lent money always paid it back. She also left animals to be tended by other people, who shared the profit with her. As ima isi mkpo was the hair fashion in those days, some of her wives are said to have been involved in hairdressing as well, and would hand over money received to Nwambata, their sponsor. Indigenous Igbo hairdressing is described very vividly by Basden (1938: 210-11, 224). He describes the coiffure as 'a very elaborate affair, and requires great patience and skill to arrange' (ibid: 224). A very elaborate hairstyle, especially for a big occasion, such as a wedding, could take a whole day to plait and arrange. As well as making money for their husband, the wives of Nwambata also made money for themselves through the palm-kernel trade. They would buy kernels in bulk from neighbouring towns and retail them. When Nwambata died, she is supposed to have left her wealth to her daughter, Nnuaka, which means countless wealth, Igbo names, as usual, giving an insight into a person's history or background. The bulk of Eze Okigbo's capital had come from funeral gifts. Nwambata, on the other hand, got her trading capital from her marriage gifts.

In those days, it seems it was not enough for a woman to be merely wealthy. She had to be known for something else as well, such as the number of sons she bore, or the number of wives she married.

hence the prejudice of my elderly male informants against one of Eze Okigbo's very wealthy wives, Nwaoye Ojeka. It is said that she was very rich, and that she did not bear any children at her husband's home, yet she was talked about a great deal. According to the elderly Johnson Ume, 'Nwaoye Ojeka was mentioned in the sense that she got wealthy, but I did not hear that she gave birth to anyone. Nwambata, for example, was also wealthy, but she married wives and was therefore known for that. As for Nwaoye Ojeka, I do not know why she should have been popular, as she had no children: perhaps others know why'.

Another well-remembered wife was Iheuwa. In her case, she had no children, but married a woman called Onudiulu, who bore her three sons. Another wife, Ochiekwe, was the reincarnation of an Ekwe titled woman by the same name. She had children and wealth. Her name was sufficient incentive to become wealthy.

As well as being remembered for economic and social achievements, a number of the wives were remembered for their beauty and their roles as symbols of prestige and wealth, as their names indicate. The names, when translated, range from descriptions of facial and physical beauty, to a reflection of a father's or a husband's wealth. Nwambata Aku, for example, suggests a child born into wealth. Onu Aku indicates beauty of the neck and the presence of wealth or fortune. Ihuaku

Enyo Nma, on the other hand, indicates the presence of fortune and the face in which beauty is mirrored. Okwuaku means the word of fortune, or the prediction of it. Mgboli means a very beautiful girl, and Odikanekwu means beauty that compels remarks. Kwelie Aku Na Obi is, in fact, an appeal to her to enjoy the wealth in the obi. Those young women known for their beauty were referred to as agbogho ofe, maidens of the bed-chamber, and they are said to have paraded mostly in the bed-chamber compound. It is therefore possible to postulate that, with accumulation of wealth and increased social stratification, as well as certain women sharing in the glory of wealth and power, other, less glorious, roles were found for females as objects of prestige and pleasure.

A popular story told in the obi of Eze Okigbo attests to the economic mobility of women in the nineteenth century, as well as rivalry between wealthy women and their husbands. This story is about the counting of property between Eze Okigbo and his favourite wife, Nwambata. It appears that Nwambata had become so wealthy, that she was beginning to overshadow her husband, and wished either to show off her wealth, or reduce it. However, according to the story, after Nwambata had become very rich, she said that she wished to share her wealth with Eze Okigbo, so he invited the whole of Nnobi to divide the wealth between them. They therefore divided the property in half. Then Eze

Okigbo, being man, was asked to take the first share, so he picked Nwambata herself, and consequently told Nnobi to stop calling him Eze Okigbo Nwambata, as he now owned Nwambata and, therefore, all her property. (14)

His objection seems to have been the object relationship in terms of reference. The impression I got during fieldwork was that this appears to have been a common practice in the past. Very wealthy women soon overshadowed their husbands so much that the men were no longer known by their names, but by reference to their roles as husbands. Ideally in this culture, wives should be in object relationship to their husbands, not husbands to wives. I suspect that this mode of address would also cause embarrassment in English gender relationships. A wife is addressed as Mrs., and her husband's name, and a man is addressed as Mr. and his own name, and not in terms of his role as husband.

The Dominant Wife, Ifeyinwa 'Olinke'

Ifeyinwa Olinke, a very wealthy woman who died in the first decade of this century, is an example of a wife who became so rich and popular that she completely overshadowed her husband. She is said to have had nine wives and, in fact, her epithet referred to the fact that she was a woman who had nine wives. Ifeyinwa was the mother of the father of Johnson Ume, one of my authorities on Eze Okigbo. Ifeyinwa was supposed to have died carrying Johnson in her arms, and since Johnson was born in 1909, she must have died about that period.

As Ifeyinwa's praise name was Ifeyinwa Olinke di ya, Ifeyinwa who enjoys her husband's wealth, I asked Johnson whether she became rich through her husband, or whether her husband was wealthy. His reply shows that Ifeyinwa had overshadowed her husband so much that not much is remembered about him. Johnson said, 'It was not really said of her husband whether he was rich or not. What I do know is that she was wealthier than her husband'. When asked why she was called "one who enjoys her husband's wealth" if she was richer than her husband, Johnson's reply was still that she was wealthier than her husband. In this case, it might be more accurate to translate her praise name as "one who has full control over her husband's property".

Ifeyinwa also overshadowed her co-wife, Akueshiudu,

who was a senior wife to Ifeyinwa and should, therefore, have been superior in status. The story of Akueshiudu shows that in those days, being the wife of a rich man, or the co-wife of a wealthy woman, was no guarantee of wealth for oneself. It was important for a woman to be industrious and self-sufficient.

According to Johnson Ume's account of the story of Akueshiudu, 'Anozie had two wives, Akueshiudu and Ifeyinwa, and a brother, Ezeana. One day, Ezeana was supposed to have been visiting his brother Anozie. As they were sitting in the obi, Akueshiudu went past to go and pick vegetables from her garden for the evening meal. She filled the basket with vegetables, and went back inside. As Akueshiudu was well known as a lazy woman, Ezeana asked Anozie if Akueshiudu kept anything at home with which she was going to cook the vegetables. Anozie replied that he usually gave her what she was to cook, that is, meat, fish or yam. Ezeana asked his brother not to give her anything, so that they might see what she would do. It used to be said of one who is not hard-working, especially a woman, oha agho ohu.⁽¹⁵⁾ As her husband did not give her anything, Akueshiudu cooked the vegetables and ate them, and did not give her husband a meal. In the morning, her husband asked her what was the cause of their quarrel, that she had not given him any supper. Her reply was to ask how she was supposed to know that he would eat akwukwo ukpum, which was just vegetables cooked with plantain or banana, without

the addition of water. Though very tasty, it was a supplementary dish and regarded as a diet of the poor, as it contained no meat or fish. Ofe ukpum was similar, but thickened with cocoyam and cooked without salt. Anozie then asked her, "Did you give it to me and I refuse?" Johnson, who has himself had four wives, went on to comment that Akueshiudu was a lazy woman. Here, he used another expression, aha acho ndu, literally, one who does not try to survive, which in fact means one who is not industrious. He also used the expression idi uchu, persevering and hard-working. The firm judgment passed by this elder on Akueshiudu was, that there is nothing as bad as one who never has her own.

In this chapter, I have tried to trace the possible origins of the central position which Nnobi women have had in the traditional economy. I have described a sexual division of labour, which is directly related to ecological factors. As women took control of the subsistence economy, men sought authority through the control of ritual specialization. Various patriarchal and matriarchal ideologies embedded in myths of origin, were used to justify this sexual division of labour. At the same time, the presence of strong matrifocality and female-orientation in the culture gave women in general a favourable position both in the domestic and public sectors of the traditional society. Female industriousness was, for example, rewarded with both prestigious and political titles. But, more importantly, we find that a flexible gender ideology encouraged the institutions of "female husband" and "male daughter". This meant that certain women could occupy roles and positions usually monopolized by men, and thereby exercise considerable power and authority.

CHAPTER ONE: Notes

1. Most of the data used in this part of the thesis was collected in 1980. My first approach involved visits to the oldest people in Nnobi, and asking them questions about indigenous customs and traditions. This did not prove very satisfactory, as I discovered that age did not necessarily guarantee knowledge, or the ability to communicate information. I soon discovered that some middle-aged and even some younger people were much more articulate and knowledgeable than their elders. Some, as boys, had carried the bags of particular elderly male relatives, which meant that the boy was constantly in the company of his elders and therefore listened to and was familiar with their discussions. The data reported in Part One of this thesis, is the result of a joint effort by all Nnobi people, through my translations, interpretation and arrangement. It is therefore important to say that, although I am an Nnobi daughter, I was not brought up in Nnobi, but despite having been born and brought up in Hausaland in Northern Nigeria, I have been familiar with and close to Nnobi traditions and culture from childhood, through my father and his relatives, and I have a good command of the Igbo language and Nnobi dialect. At the same time, my having studied in Britain for over ten years, and having taken a BA Honours degree in Social Anthropology and the Hausa language, must have given

me some measure of distance from which to view Nnobi society and culture.

2. Eze, kingly
3. Recent archaeological excavations at Igbo-Ukwu, only nine miles from Nri, have revealed the burial chamber of an ancient Nri king and material culture, dating from the ninth century. The findings include a roped bronze vase, which tradition associates with the migration of a section of Nri to Ozeri, where a rival ritual centre was set up (E. Isichei 1976: 10). The portrait of a human face discovered in the Igbo-Ukwu excavation and dating from the ninth century, reveals ichi, ritual facial markings of purification. It is reproduced in Isichei (1976: 112). Ozo titled men in some Igbo areas still have to have the same markings today.
4. Dibia: the terms ritual specialists, ritual experts or native doctors, do not give full insight into the nature of the profession of those involved in this career. The diversity of their practices and involvements is such that they are best described as men of knowledge, who become extremely important and powerful in social systems where knowledge is a very scarce commodity, shrouded in secrecy and jealously guarded by powerful elders. Oral rather than written traditions and an open literary system make this monopoly most effective. Thus, the dibia as a herbalist, dibia mgbologwu na mkpa akwukwo, is a scientist involved in experimental, curative and destructive medicine and chemistry. They often act

as midwives, too.

The dibia as a diviner, dibia afa, helps analyse misfortunes and social abnormalities. Basden mentions some of the titles by which a dibia is saluted, as, for example, Agbaso aka (able adviser), or Okwuka-Ojelu (one who is able to explain by divination), (1938: 51).

Possession by the spirit Agwu is followed by misfortunes which indicate that such a person is being claimed by Agwu to become a dibia. It is believed that failure to heed Agwu's call results in insanity. The dibia profession is a strongly guarded "closed shop", shrouded in mystery and secrecy. The office is hereditary, but it is believed that a boy who picks the divining seed, mkpulu afa, is also invited to be a dibia. In pre-colonial times, these dibia practitioners, being great travellers, were also conversant with other branches of knowledge which, in modern terms, would include history, geography, astrology, biology and zoology etc. Perhaps their area of greatest specialization is in psychology and the mystics. Having explained briefly the diversity of their careers, I feel that the terms "ritual specialists" or "experts" are not adequate translations, but can be used only for convenience. It is better, therefore, to retain the Igbo term dibia.

5. This was Chief Solomon Eze Okoli (see Chapter Six).

6. The Igbo expression which Nwajiuba used was nwanyi aha ebu isi nmuo.

7. See Appendix 2.

8. Traditional domestic chores and food processing were described to me very vividly and expertly by my aunt, Mrs. Eliza Agu, aged about sixty-eight years.

9. The Igbo saying is nwanyi n'aza oku n'ike na omalu na ji agwu n'oba.

10. Ekwe was a wooden gong used in traditional Igbo societies for public summons or announcements. As will be seen, the women so titled had rights of veto in village constitutional assemblies, and can be said to have been the mouthpiece of the villages and town.

11. Dunu Ezenabo is said to have been kidnapped by Nnokwa, a neighbouring town. Ebenesi village had offered two people in exchange, but Nnokwa refused. Nnobi then devised another plan of rescue, which involved the sending of a dibia called Ojekadibia. This dibia then took food to the kidnapped Dunu. After giving him food, he is said to have left him some snuff and instructions on how to use it. When the time came, the kidnapped Dunu poured the medicine on the fire, and this is supposed to have sent the guards to sleep. He then jumped the wall and escaped. He went to the house of a man called Ododo, who quickly went to report that Dunu was back. Immediately, ogbadike, the strong men of Ebenesi, began to shoot guns in welcome and celebration.

12. The Igbo expression used was bulu atutaba, in such abundance and there for the picking.

13. See Appendix 3.

14. Nwambata may have been much older than Eze Okigbo, as he had inherited her from his father, Ezeike. She may therefore have dominated him as a much older woman.

15. This refers to the movement of the bottom, ohu, but it means one who did not move fast; in short, a woman who is not smart or quick at her work.

CHAPTER TWO: GENDER AND POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

The most striking feature of indigenous Nnobi political systems, like those of other Igbo societies, is their dual-sex political organization. But just as with the sexual division of labour in the economy, in the political system there was a flexibility in gender classification which allowed the incorporation of certain categories of woman into positions of authority in the power structure. Daughters, for example, were conceived of as males in relation to wives, so that sex, in this context, did not correspond to gender. Favourable female notions and ideologies associated with the goddess Idemili, worshipped by all Nnobi, meant that a woman held the most honoured and respected political position in Nnobi, in the person of the Agba Ekwe, chief Ekwe titled woman.

Descent Structure

Nnobi presents itself as a clan with a charter of descent based on the genealogical structure of founding ancestors. Nnobi genealogical tree therefore provides a geographical map of the town, as descent coincides with settlement, which was patrilineal (see Appendix 2, Figure 1). All Nnobi shared a common ancestry. The people themselves said that three hands, aka n'ato, make up Nnobi. They were usually referred to as villages. The three villages which make up Nnobi shared the same structure. The sub-divisions into territorial units followed a system of ranking based on the principle of social and ritual seniority of first sons. The taking of shares and the right to initiate or terminate rituals and ceremonies followed the ranking order.

Ebenesi was the largest village⁽¹⁾ and also the most senior, since it was founded by the first son. The second in seniority was Ngo, which was founded by the second son, and the last was Awuda, founded by the third son.⁽²⁾ Following the ranking order, Ebenesi would always take first share, followed by Ngo before Awuda. By the same rules, the most senior male in the most senior patrilineage had the right to initiate or terminate ceremonies involving the whole of Nnobi. In each patrilineage, the most senior of the component obi(s) had this right. In each obi, the right belonged to the most

senior male.

Each village was divided into village wards bearing the names of founding ancestors, following the principle of succession of father by first son. Thus, Ebenesi was divided into six wards which, according to their order of seniority, were: Umuona, Umuhu, Umuafo, Ubaha, Amadunu and Ifite, which was the most junior since it was founded by the last son (see Appendix 2, Figures 1 & 3). Umuona was therefore the first ward in all Nnobi. Its most senior minor patrilineage would contain the most senior obi in all Nnobi. This obi always produced the priest of the Land Spirit, who could hold the title Ezeana, the last of whom was the father of Nwajiuba, the "male daughter" mentioned in Chapter One. As Nwajiuba is now the most senior "male" in this obi, she is the most senior ranking person in all Nnobi. (See Appendix 2, Figure 2.)

The ward sub-divisions were made up of corporate patrilineages, each defined and integrated by patrilineage ancestral cults and spirits. A patrilineage group was said to constitute a town of its own, thus emphasizing its autonomy. The patrilineage ancestral cults were ranked in a hierarchical order which coincided with the hierarchical order of the descent structure. In the same way, social representation and political administration were embedded in the descent system, forming a hierarchy of descent and kinship based political organizations, with men dealing with male affairs and women dealing

with female affairs. Ofo, the symbol of authority, was held by Di-Okpala, first son, and Ada, first daughter, who were considered male and female heads in the family and patrilineages, in the same hierarchical order of the descent structure. I use Amadunu ward as an example, since I have a more detailed genealogy of their group. Amadunu⁽³⁾ was divided into seven minor patrilineages in order of seniority. These were Umu-Dunnebo, Umu-Nshim, Umu-Nnameliwu, Umu-Oshuga, Umu-Uhunyaluagu, Umu-Ezeobi and, lastly, Umu-Ochom, founded by an ancestress. (See Appendix 2, Figure 3.) Amadunu, as a major patrilineage group made up of these seven minor patrilineages, would have its original ancestral home and shrine in the oldest obi of Umu-Dunnebo. Following Nnobi principle of unilineal succession, founding ancestors were usually male, including "male daughters", but Umu-Ochom, the most junior minor lineage in Amadunu, was founded by a woman, who was Oshuga's sister.⁽⁴⁾ This is an example of a daughter who was allowed to remain at home and have children by informal lovers. Each minor patrilineage in turn had its own original ancestral home and shrine, but Umu-Ochom, which was founded by a female, would not have an ancestral shrine, as Ochom was not officially declared male, but her descendants would pay ritual homage to the ancestral shrine of Umu-Oshuga, the brother of Ochom.

Political Administration

As political administration was embedded in the religious structure, we find both patriarchal and matriarchal ideologies juxtaposed in the indigenous political structure of Nnobi. At the descent level, where the defining and integrating force was the cult of ancestral spirits, we find that the ritual elites who constituted the ultimate political groups in the patrilineages, were guided by rules derived from a patriarchal ideology. These ritual elites were first sons and first daughters, following the hierarchy of the descent structure right up to the patrilineage head priest and head daughter. These held symbols of authority by which they derived sanction and authority from ancestral spirits. The maleness of patrilineage ancestral spirits and patriarchal ideology surrounding their worship, meant that head daughters, being women, had to undergo a ritual of purification before handling ancestral symbols of authority, as menstrual blood was feared and tabooed. Ordinary men who took the ozo title also had to go through a ritual of purification which would bring them closer in identification to the ancestral spirits, just as patrilineage priests were. For this reason, ozo titled men were regarded as holy and just. They therefore acted in a judicial capacity in their patrilineages and, when necessary, in the wider society. Authority

and ritual sanction at the descent level was therefore bound in with the status of maleness, embedded in patriarchal notions. This was not so at the extra-descent level of political administration, where the cult of the goddess Idemili was the all-binding force.

At the extra-descent level of political administration, again, ritual elites such as members of title societies, priests and prophets, constituted the ultimate political organization deriving sanction and authority from the goddess Idemili and the hierarchy of lesser deities. The cult of the goddess provided an integrated administrative and judicial system, which extended from Nnobi to all the communities along the Oji Iyi Idemili stream, which flows from Nnobi to Idemili Obosi. Ukozala titled men, referred to as prophets, since their nomination was as a result of involuntary spirit possession, acted as the police in charge of the maintenance of law and order. As in other Igbo societies, the crime of theft was punished very severely. Ukozala prophets were said to have executed those guilty of theft, by parading them round the town before taking them to the central market place, where they were executed. As the present traditional ruler of Nnobi put it, 'Those who were Idemili's Ukozala were messengers as well as police, so that those who committed the crime of theft in those days, were arrested and hanged by them.'

As the goddess was a water spirit, her shrine

was located by the stream and was considered holy; hence, not everyone had the right to enter it or consult her directly. The only people who could consult the goddess directly were her shrine priest, called her messenger, a hereditary office, and the senior Ekwe titled woman, called Agba Ekwe, who was considered second in rank to the goddess. The shrine priest carried out the act of divination in consultation with the Agba Ekwe titled woman. They would then relay the wishes of the goddess to the Ukozala prophets, who acted as executives. Not even Agba Ekwe woman may enter the forbidden ground called Ogunzu Idemili. According to myth, Idemili was supposed to have grown so important and influential that no-one dared enter her shrine any more, except her shrine priest - a "female man" in the sense that he had to tie his wrapper like a woman and not wear it in loincloth fashion, like men.

The shrine of the goddess became a sanctuary for social offenders, such as thieves, adulterers, debtors and those sent there as gifts to the goddess. Anyone else who entered there, except the priest, became an osu, a social out-cast or cult-slave dedicated to the shrine and the goddess. As the stream was considered sacred, all animals in it were also considered sacred and taboo by the community. The python was personally associated with the goddess and was taboo among the communities settled along the flow of the holy stream. It was a totemic symbol

and referred to as mother in the same way as the maternal role of the goddess was stressed. One who killed a python, if he was lucky enough to escape death, was expected to mourn its death for a year.

As well as stressing the maternal role of the goddess, peaceful qualities were also attributed to her. She was said to believe in peace and to forbid bloodshed, human sacrifice, witchcraft and conquest. Those in the community who violated any of these, were ostracized. Internal wars were therefore fought with stones, clubs and sorcery. As she was said to believe in peace, her shrine was demarcated by the ogilisi tree, the holy tree. This notion of holiness was extended to her shrine priest and the Agba Ekwe titled woman. In the ritual greeting of the goddess through the throwing of nzu, white clay, before entering any of her shrines, three things were stressed; they were peace, love and justice.

As the goddess owned all Nnobi, the markets belonged to her. She therefore had a shrine in the market, called Chi Idemili. This was the market spirit in the main or central market. The markets were organized round a four day cycle, eke, oye, nkwo and afo serving as the main market day and central market. The eke market day was divided into eke ukpolo, ordinary eke day, and eke okwu, holy eke, which occurred every eight days and served as a Sunday - Idemili's day, when there should be no fighting, no oath-taking, no life-cycle ceremonies and no sexual intercourse. There

was a ritual of cleanliness required of those caught having sex on the holy Eke day.

The Idemili cult was an integrating force which bound all Nnobi under one law. The various village Idemili shrines and the Chi Idemili shrine in the central market-place and their priests, were subordinate to the central shrine occupied by Oke Nwanyi, the Great Woman, whose epithet included "one who seals her roof with zinc", in contrast to everyone else living under thatched roof.

In the power structure, therefore, in the household and patrilineage, di-okpala, first son, had hereditary rights in the obi and held the symbol of authority, the ofo. Ada, first daughter, had special rights, including mediatory and vetoing rights in all matters of wrong-doing. They were therefore not treated harshly. Lineage priests, who might or might not also be lineage heads, also held ofo of the particular spirit they tended. At the descent and extra-descent levels, other people who held ofo and exercised considerable power and influence, were achievement-based title holders, such as ozo men and ogbuefi men and women. Others who held symbols of authority were holders of involuntary titles tied in with religion and ritual cults, such as Ukozala prophets, shrine priests of Idemili, Ekwe titled women, the high priest of Aho, and aho titled men, (5) the priest of the land spirit isi ana, and dibia professionals.

But by far the most honoured of titles was the

Agba Ekwe woman, who symbolized Nnobi concepts of womanhood derived from the worship of the goddess. Structural or formal power was, therefore, allowed women. Idemili's shrine was the one worshipped by all Nnobi, and not that of "her husband",⁽⁶⁾ Aho. Idemili's daughter, Edo, was the one worshipped in Nnewi, and not her husband, Ezemewi. In the names of these goddesses, oaths were taken and offenders sentenced to death. The influence of the goddess thus elevated ichi Ekwe, the taking of the Ekwe title, after which the most senior Ekwe woman became something like a queen.

The Agba Ekwe titled woman became something like a queen as she had the most central political position in all Nnobi - she held the vetoing right in the village and general town assemblies. Other, male, titles, voluntary or involuntary, were either hereditary or lineage specific and were associated with ritual prerogatives. The Ozo titled men and their kingly prefixed names, can to some extent be compared with the Ekwe titled women, as they sometimes wielded considerable power at the extra-descent level. This can be seen from the case study of the obi of Eze Okigbo cited in the previous chapter.

"Big Men"

Nnobi did not have kings in the sense of a centralized system under a monarch. She had Ekwe titled women at each wider level of political organization who ruled over women, while ozo titled men with eze, kingly, prefixed names, played the role of "big men". Sometimes, these men wielded power only in their own villages. At other times, depending on the needs of the time, their power was felt in the whole of the town. Sometimes, a succession of powerful men would appear in an obi, bringing that obi to prominence, and then the obi would decline after the death of a particular powerful man. In some other cases, certain obi(s) seem to have produced successive generations of "big men" in their histories, right up until the colonial conquest and after. An example of such an obi that came into focus during my research in Nnobi was the obi from which Eze Okigbo originated. Most of the information on the history of this obi is based on interviews and discussions in 1980 and again in 1982 with living members of the obi, especially John Okigbo, the present head of the obi, and Mr. R.O. Madueme, aged seventy-three, who is married to a daughter of Eze Okigbo's daughter. Madueme was an old school teacher who is known to be very knowledgeable on Nnobi history.

The obi of Eze Okigbo is in Umudinya, one of

the junior minor lineages in Awuda, which is itself the most junior village or quarter in Nnobi. Both John Eze Okigbo and Johnson Ume, whose mother was a daughter of Eze Okigbo, gave me a genealogy of this obi, which had a depth of ten generations of titled men. According to John Okigbo, the first person who lived in the obi was Eze Umeagha Ukwu (a name which suggests an association with a great war). He sired Eze Ochiagha (another war associated name). (He in turn sired Eze Dimopuna II.) He then sired Eze Eziafuluaku (a name associated with great wealth), who sired Eze ike (this name suggests strength and power), and Eze ike sired Eze Okigbo who sired Okanume who sired Anadi and Anadi sired John Okigbo, my informant. Johnson Ume's list differed in the first three names. According to his version, the first man in the obi was Abadaba, who sired Onyedule, who sired Akaonu, who then sired Eziafuluaku. From Eze Eziafuluaku his list corresponds with that given by John Okigbo.

Such powerful men in the uncentralized Igbo communities during the indigenous period have been described by Meek (1937: III, 335); Stevenson (1968: 199). Both used the term "big men" to describe such powerful men. Isichei (1976), however, refers to such men as the "New Men", as she places their emergence in the nineteenth century. About these men she writes, 'Outside the inherited structures of Igbo political life, they seize eminence and authority, either in consequence of their wealth,

or sometimes in consequence of their military exploits and bravado. It is difficult to know to what extent this is truly a nineteenth-century phenomenon - the result of circumstances such as the insecurity bred by the slave trade, and the increasing circulation of wealth in the society - and to what extent it had existed earlier in the past? (1976: 104).

The history of the obi of Eze Okigbo indicates that "big men" had existed in Nnobi as far back as the sixteenth century at least.

Nnobi, in fact, appears to have been centralized during the period of Eze ike (roughly during the first half of the nineteenth century) as Nnobi was said to have been called Nnobi-Ezike during that period. According to oral history, this was the period when Nnewi was harrassing Nnobi by stealing and seizing their livestock. Then Ezike, who was the richest and most powerful man in Nnobi at that time, bought a gun. He gave the gun to the young men so that when Nnewi people came to raid they were shot at, and consequently ran back. Nnobi people were so amazed that they went to Ezike and told him that he owned them. As a result of this, they began to call themselves Nnobi-Ezike. This description of Eze ike and the history given to me of this obi is very similar to the description of indigenous Igbo "big man" reported in Stevenson (1968). Stevenson, following Meek, writes, "Such a person obtained his position for "obvious reasons". As he was able to purchase firearms and powder, he

was not only able to protect his own lineage segment but others, as well. He had the power to decide whether to go to war or not, for only he could provide the necessary means for waging war successfully. This placed the younger age sets under his control. By supplying financial aid he constantly added to his freeborn followers, and by effectively claiming a major portion of the captives (in compensation for his outlay on arms) he constantly added to the number of his slaves. Such men tended to become principal judges and centres of authority in their localities; and their families tended to become hereditary rulers, unless their wealth subsequently diminished to the point where they could no longer act effectively in this role' (1968: 199).

With ozo titled men who came to prominence in the history of Nnobi, it was as a result of might, prowess, wealth and power. This was not so with the guaranteed, honoured and respected central political position of the chief Ekwe titled woman. The revelation that there had always existed powerful and very politically ambitious men in indigenous Nnobi society, and the fact that they had never attempted to usurp or ban the position of the chief Ekwe titled woman, shows even more the reverence in which that position was held, as it was embedded in the religion of the people.

Traditional Political Organizations:

Gender Status, Interests and Rights

I have chosen the word traditional instead of indigenous in describing the political groupings in Nnobi, as these organizations are not only true of pre-nineteenth century Nnobi society, but still function today. Their interest and rights in life-cycle ceremonies of their members remain the same. The only difference is that a lot of their indigenous rituals have been replaced by Christian ceremonies. Many of their judicial roles have also been taken over by law courts. But the ranking order of seniority governing inter-lineage relationships and relationships within the patrilineage remains the same. This is also true of the gender status of these political groupings which is associated with their status of authority vis-a-vis other groups. Here we again see the mediating role of a flexible gender system in the face of sexual polarization.

The traditional political organization, at the descent level, was the Umunna, the organization of patrilineage members, sons and daughters alike. But following the rule of sexual dualism, patrilineage daughters formed a separate organization known as Umu-Okpu, while their brothers and fathers held their separate meeting, known as Umunna, even though, in principle, daughters were also understood to belong to their meeting. Patrilineage wives, on

the other hand, formed a separate organization known as Inyom-di. But the oneness of blood of daughters, brothers and fathers meant that daughters were conceived of as "males" in relation to wives, and therefore superior to them in authority. Separate from, and above descent based organization of patrilineage wives, was the organization which controlled all Nnobi women. This was the Women's Council, Inyom Nnobi, which was headed and controlled by titled women and elderly matrons.

In their separate organizations, the daily affairs of Nnobi society were conducted, with men, which sometimes included certain categories of woman, e.g. daughters, taking care of male affairs, while women took care of female affairs. This way, interests were negotiated, defined and safeguarded.

Organization of Patrilineage Men

Umu-nna means children descended from one father. They all shared a common blood and were bound by the same rules and taboos symbolized by a common shrine containing ancestral spirits and other lineage spirits. There was always a recognized lineage head, at whose residence lineage meetings were held. He may or may not also be the lineage shrine priest. Both men and women born in a patrilineage were regarded as sharing the same blood and were equally subject to the rules and taboos associated with patrilineage spirits, even though men and women held separate meetings. Together, they were the "we" social group to "other" similar patrilineage groups. Only women crossed these lineage boundaries, as daughter from a "we" group to wife in "other" group. Wives were therefore outsiders in a "we" group and held separate meetings. Social functions and roles in the patrilineage were shared out to members in their different official organizations as lineage men, lineage daughters and lineage wives.

There were two levels of patrilineage organizations, the major patrilineage level and the minor patrilineage level. All everyday life-cycle ceremonies and rituals involving birth, marriage and death were performed at the minor lineage level. Other yearly ceremonies and festivals, for example, the

Eating of New Yam, were organized at the major patrilineage level. The eldest was always the recognized head of a lineage group, and was called "our father", nna anyi, since he was regarded as the father of all the members of the group. Meetings were held at his place. But the first son in the most senior obi in the patrilineage tended the patrilineage ancestral shrine.

The most important function the patrilineage group performed was judging land cases. With the multiplication of extended families in the patrilineage, communal lands were sub-divided. Most of the land was therefore owned by individual obi(s). Land, being the most scarce resource in Nnobi, was, by all indications, always a cause for quarrels between patrilineage members and even siblings. For this reason, very strong sanctions and taboos were associated with land theft, or false claim on someone else's land. I was told that, during pre-colonial times, if, for example, two people claimed the same land, it was the duty of the patrilineage men to investigate and find the rightful owner. Usually, the man who made the complaint was asked to buy them a hen. They would then go to the lineage ancestral shrine, where they would sit down in a circle. The hen was then passed round their backs before its legs were broken. Then they would cook the hen there and share it among themselves. After eating the hen they would disperse. On the appointed day of that land case,

they appeared, and pronounced the name of the rightful owner of the piece of land in dispute. It was believed that, if they told a lie by mentioning a wrongful owner, their lineage land spirit would break their legs, just as the elders broke the legs of the hen. They would all slump to the ground and never walk again. It was believed that a dibia could not cure this ailment. For this reason, all lineage groups had ancestral shrines, which they feared and respected. The ancestral shrine contained several figurines representing both the goddess Idemili and other lineage spirits, including the spirits of the ancestors.

Other duties of the lineage group involved the life-cycle ceremonies. The lineage group named each child born into the patrilineage, and performed the naming ceremony. Any member who failed to perform the naming ceremony for his child was fined. The fine increased as long as that member failed to invite his lineage for the ceremony. If a man went to get a wife and was not accompanied by his patrilineage group, the marriage was not recognized. Similarly, if a man married off his daughter without performing the "carrying of palm wine", ibu nkwu, ceremony for his lineage group, the man would be stricken off the group. This ceremony was sometimes called "carrying palm-wine for the patrilineage", ibu nkwu umunna. It was the duty of lineage men to erect shades under which people would sit, during ceremonies. They helped by contributing wine and

kola-nuts. If a woman came to her husband's house and became troublesome, it was the duty of the lineage men to return her to her father's house, or to say what was to be done to her. If husband and wife were caught fighting, they were fined by the organization of lineage men. They would bury their dead together and stay by the bereaved. If a man died while his son was absent from home and unable to return quickly to bury his father, the lineage group took over the responsibility and buried the person.

As the organization of lineage men was duty bound to help members, so also were members individually bound by certain codes of conduct in order to remain members of the group. The minor patrilineage, as a kindred group, was bound by the taboo of incest. As a kindred group, they were expected to be guided by Umunne principles, the spirit of common motherhood, which compelled love and trust. No-one should take another's wife, at least, not while he was still alive.⁽⁷⁾ There should be no scandal-mongering, no theft, no treachery and no lies against one another. Murder should not be committed within the patrilineage. In short, they should not wrong one another.

If any of the members was in need, he turned to his patrilineage members, who would donate or contribute money to help him. Everyone was expected to participate in the activities of the others. Any one of them who suffered a mental breakdown would be assisted by the others through the contri-

bution of money towards medical care. They also contributed money to help very poor members towards building a house. Those who were not able to afford expenses for marriage also got assistance from their patrilineage group. A patrilineage was said to be a little town of its own, governed by its own rules. They kept peace in the lineage, and built foot-paths in their locality. Such prestige-conferring ceremonies and rituals as the taking of ozo titles and the ogbuefi title for those who had killed a cow, were undertaken only with the support of one's lineage group. During any social disorder, the lineage group collectively consulted a diviner. It was also their duty to visit rainmakers, to suspend rain before any ceremony in the lineage.

They punished anyone who was defiant of his lineage group through the levying of fines. Those who refused punishment were ostracized. This was supposed to be the greatest misfortune that a man could bring upon himself, for it was said that, if a man did not have either power or a say in his lineage group, he could not have it in the town. He was said to be better off dead than alive. That person's crime was called "crime against the land", nso ani. When such a man died, no-one bothered about him. He died like a dog, and to die like a dog was a term of abuse and a curse in Nnobi. (8)

To have an honourable burial was a strong sanction that bound members to the rules of their groups. As we shall see, patrilineage daughters derived

a lot of power from their control of the funerals
of patrilineage members.

Organization of Patrilineage Daughters

Umu Okpu - the original ancestral home of a minor patrilineage was called ani okpu or obi okpu. Daughters born into the original obi were called umu okpu, children originating from okpu. Okpu can be interpreted to mean core or nucleus. The organization of lineage daughters was formal, and consisted of both married and unmarried daughters of the patrilineage group. Like the organization of patrilineage men, leadership in the organization of patrilineage daughters was based on seniority in age. The oldest daughter, married or unmarried, was usually the leader. Meetings where strategies were planned and fines levied were held in her home. She always presented kola-nuts and food to the others. But in return for this, she was exempt from contributions, and was highly respected by the others.

Lineage daughters had strong powers where they were born. Townsfolk gave them special prestige and respect, for this reason, no matter how difficult a case was, they were believed to be able to solve it, whether in the lineage at home or abroad. It was their duty to ensure that their father's household was strong and at peace. If there was a quarrel in the lineage, they were called in to settle it. If the quarrel was among lineage wives, they were called in and, after settling the dispute, the married

daughters would leave and go back to their respective marital homes. If one of their wives had maltreated her husband, lineage daughters as a group would sanction her and lay down laws for her. If that woman became stubborn, it was up to patrilineage daughters to decide how to deal with her.⁽⁹⁾ Their options included physical violence. But if their brother was in the wrong, they would scold him. The men had the highest respect for them. If the quarrel was among lineage men, lineage daughters were usually able to get the men to resolve their differences by threatening a boycott of their funerals if they died. There was no funeral if lineage daughters were not present.

Although lineage daughters had specific duties in the patrilineage, they were most important during funerals, when they were called sisters of the corpse, umunne ozu. They washed the corpse of a lineage member, decorated it and guarded it through the night till it was buried. They then slept with the bereaved for a number of nights. If a lineage daughter died or suffered bereavement, they slept there for four days, but if another male lineage member died they slept there for three days. Throughout the day and at night, lineage daughters would sing and dance. In return, they would be given fish, wine, yam, cocoyam and various food-stuffs. As they sang, those people who arrived for the funeral usually gave them salt, pepper, fish, yam, money and so on. The rump of any cow or goat

killed during the funeral belonged to them alone. They sang annoying songs to those who gave them nothing. It was said of lineage daughters that they only ran errands where profit was to be got. It was believed that this was the reason behind the rule made by daughters that they must always be given a very important position at the funeral ceremony of very elderly, or titled, people. Both funerals involved mainly feasting and giving of gifts. Lineage daughters would spend several nights at such funerals, singing different songs, especially ridiculous ones at night. For this, again they would get presents, including food, meat and wine. They were noted for their greed, and never considered anything given to them to be enough. They were said to be never satisfied or overwhelmed or grateful, hence the saying, "as greedy as lineage daughters". If they were not treated well at a funeral, they could refuse presents given to them and thus bring disgrace to that funeral. On the other hand, those who gave them money during a funeral were blessed by the head daughter with her ofo symbol of authority.

When a lineage daughter died as wife elsewhere, the others went to bring back her corpse or her ngiga⁽¹⁰⁾ to her natal home, where she would be buried. Their song, as they returned with the corpse of a sister, was authoritative and demanded that everyone should get out of their way as they were on a mission. Lineage daughters were also responsible for carrying out investigations into the cause of

her death. If that woman had been maltreated in her husband's home, they would refuse to take her corpse back, and her husband and his lineage would be left with a decomposing corpse in a tropical climate, since they had no right to bury that woman. This situation usually led to war. It was lineage daughters who usually brought back the goat given by in-laws as the returning soul of the deceased woman to her lineage. (See Chapter Three.)

All members of the organization of lineage daughters were bound by the same rules. Any lineage daughter who did not attend a funeral was fined. Those who fought, gossiped or were caught stealing were fined. Those who arrived late for meetings or ceremonies were fined. If the treasurer embezzled money she was ostracized. The younger ones should respect the older ones. No member should be ill-treated. All lineage daughters had to return home when a lineage member died. They had to provide music when a lineage member died. All money collected should be shared out among themselves or whatever was bought with the money should be distributed among themselves.

From all accounts, it was believed that, when patrilineage daughters made up their minds to be troublesome, no-one could deal with them. They were as capable of causing havoc as they were of making peace. Their power and importance in their patrilineage was so secure, that a woman's husband could not tell her not to participate in her lineage

activities. In relation to lineage men, their role was mediatory. Their relation to lineage wives was that of authority and sanction. In Nnobi classificatory kinship terms, they were also husbands to lineage wives, and were addressed as such. They could overrule any decision made by lineage wives. When a daughter and a wife were together, a daughter, not a wife, should break kola, but she might touch the kola and hand it over to a wife, thereby giving her authority to break it.

To the question, "Why are patrilineage daughters given so much power?" the answer given to me by an Nnobi elder, Eze Enyinwa, was,

'Because, had they been men, they would have had the same power as lineage men. This is the reason they are given more power than patrilineage wives. For this reason, lineage wives will bow down their heads to lineage daughters. If the daughters tell them to leave, they'll pack their things and go. Was Ochom not left at home by her father? She did not get married, so her father gave her the right to remain at home. She then left her father's compound and founded a home. It was thus that she founded the lineage of Umu Ochom.'

To show how very little the rules governing traditional roles and statuses in the lineage had changed since the indigenous pre-colonial society of the nineteenth century, I shall describe here a first-hand experience of the power conflict between

patrilineage daughters and their wives during my fieldwork in Nnobi in 1980. This was at the funeral of a male member of a patrilineage.

At funerals, wives in the patrilineage where death had occurred usually cooked, while lineage daughters of the deceased supplied entertainment, singing and dancing. But this division of role did not prevent lineage daughters from watching carefully to see what food was being cooked and distributed, and who was getting what. In the household, such sweet things as biscuits, cakes, coconuts or groundnuts, were usually distributed to the children by the adults. During ceremonies, lineage daughters usually used this principle to claim most of the snacks supplied, since wives were also their mothers! At this particular funeral, lineage daughters had been singing and dancing continuously for two days, taking turns to snatch some sleep at night. By the third day, they had become tired, restless and bad tempered. They had started to accuse lineage wives of cooking and eating the best part of the food and feeding lineage daughters rubbish. This was not correct, since I personally sat watch over additional food brought for lineage daughters each day in turns by wives of the deceased's closer relatives.

It then followed that, when a plate of coconut was given to lineage wives, the oldest lineage daughter, who was also the oldest member of the minor patrilineage of the deceased, a woman of over eighty

years, a little bent with age but still very dignified, feared and highly respected, quickly got up and ordered lineage wives not to share out the coconut among themselves. She told them that, if they did, they would be fined for it. The lineage wives only laughed at her and thought she was not in earnest, but just being difficult and seeking attention as usual. So they went ahead and ate the coconut. This head daughter quickly called the attention of everyone⁽¹¹⁾ and ordered lineage wives to pay a fine of one kola-nut each. Those who did not have any kola had to put money in the plate. Lineage wives dared not disobey her. Soon the plate was full of kola and money. She then asked one of the older daughters to count the money. When this was done, she gave some of the kola to the men, some to the daughters, and then took very little out of the money and actually threw the rest back at the wives. Immediately, the place was in uproar. Everyone clapped, laughed and praised her. Even lineage wives called her praise names, such as Great Daughter, Oke Ada. Thus this ancient woman reminded everyone of the superiority of daughters to wives.

Soon after this incident, one of the wives got drunk and decided to harrass and cause lineage daughters some embarrassment. This woman was not from Nnobi, but from a neighbouring village. She had been a child-bride, married to another woman. This woman's praise name carried the meaning implied

in a similar expression, Oli aku, applied to a man's wife, one who enjoyed wealth. In the case of this particular woman, she was said to enjoy the wealth of the woman who was her husband. This woman was later inherited by her female husband's first son, who died a few years ago. She was therefore a widow, and had not been inherited by anyone. At this funeral, the lineage daughters were her husbands. She was one of the wives who had cooked privately and brought food to the lineage daughters. She got drunk, and decided to accuse lineage daughters of failing in their conjugal and sexual responsibilities to her as a wife. She became extremely "vulgar", and claimed that she had not had any sexual intercourse for years, and that her vagina was therefore getting rusty, that she was hungry for sex! The unmarried daughters hid their faces for shame and disappeared from the scene. As unmarried women, they were expected to be virgins and should therefore be ignorant about sexual matters and not speak of such things. This woman's dead husband's sister, also a widow in her late sixties, about the same age as the woman who was drunk, took on the challenge and confronted her. She went to her and, looking very concerned, but all in jest, patted her on the shoulder and asked her to be patient, that she was going to visit her that night. This brought uproar among the women, and they all laughed and joked about it. Embarrassed, the younger girls accused the older women of vulgarity. Thus in matters of sexuality or fertility

wives proved their superiority over daughters.

Kinship Morality and Gender

Nnobi kinship morality is expressed in the notions of umunne, imenne and ibenne. The smallest and closest kinship group are siblings in the matricentric unit, umunne otu afo, children of one womb. Their closeness and solidarity can best be understood in the context of polygyny, in the alliances and intrigues embodied in that system. This primary group to whom the term umunne is applied, should be distinguished from the kindred group to whom the same term is also applied. In the case of the kindred group, the term is qualificatory and applies to the expected relationship between members of the minor patrilineage which is the kindred group and are said to belong to one imenne, inner-mother circle, and are therefore umunne to one another, that is, bound in the spirit of common motherhood. Both the primary umunne unit and the kindred umunne unit are bound by the taboo of incest.

Ibenne is the supernatural sanction applied to the relationship among siblings and other blood relations right up to the whole imenne groups in the minor lineage, to ensure continued intimacy and relationship of trust among members. Ibenne is referred to as a deity, though it has no shrine, still it is said to be very powerful. It is said to strike when brothers or close blood relatives betray one another, steal from one another or kill

one another in order to usurp land or commit incest. It is said to kill outright and to be deaf to any pleas for mercy. Ibenne ada anu biko ghaluba, ibenne does not listen to "please forgive".

Umunne, imenne and ibenne are all suffixed by the Igbo word for mother - nne. The sentiments expressed in them, fit in with other female gender ideologies and notions of motherhood in this culture. In contrast to this, dealings among umunna - suffixed by the word for father, nna - is associated with distrust, suspicion, greed, jealousy, envy, witch-hunting and sorcery. It is in the umunna group that status is reckoned. In contrast also to the relationship with one's father's group, the umunna group, is the relationship associated with one's matrilineage, ikwunne. This is the daughter's child and members of the mother's patrilineage categories bound by the relationship of indulgence and respect.

Daughter's Child, "Nwadiana" Category

The honour, respect and indulgence of the daughter by her patrilineage extended to her children.

This was symbolized in the very important social category in Nnobi known as the nwadiana. This term cannot easily be translated into English. I shall therefore explain who is referred to by this term and retain the Igbo term, but when convenient use the expression "child of a daughter".

All children of daughters of a minor patrilineage born into other patrilineages were each one of them a nwadiana to all the members of their mother's patrilineage. They were collectively referred to by the plural umudiana. Male members of the mother's patrilineage, in turn, collectively formed a category referred to as ndi nna ochie, ancient or grandfathers to the children of daughters, while the female members were referred to as ndi nne ochie, ancient or grandmothers to the same children. As grandparents may be misleading, I shall use ancient-parents in referring to these classificatory terms. Certain rules and regulations guided relationship between these two categories. They were also bound by the taboo of incest.

Umudiana (plural) were given certain powers in their mother's lineage. Their role, like that of lineage daughters, was mediatory. They arbitrated during quarrels. Through them, inter-town or inter-

lineage quarrels were settled. They were the most indulged people in Nnobi, and of them it was said, agha aha eli nwadiana, they were never lost in war, for they were never killed, taken captive or sold. One was forbidden to draw blood from a nwadiana. They should never be wronged, because they were said to be holy. When they visited their mother's patrilineage, whatever they requested was given to them. Such trifles as fried cakes, akara, fruits and coconuts were given to them. They were free to drink any wine they might find in gourds on the palm-trees. If they happened to be around when an animal was being killed, they would be given meat bones, such as the tail or the head of the animal.

Umudiana, for their part, were expected to respect their classificatory ancient-parents, members of their mother's patrilineage. The behaviour expected of them by their ancient-parents was in the expression ikpa nku, picking wood. Each time they visited their ancient-parents they should bring them firewood, carried on their heads. They should show respect and sing the praises of their ancient-parents. They should kneel down to greet them and bow their heads when addressing them. They should carry palm-wine to them during any ceremonies. They were expected to work on their farms during planting and harvesting, after which, they would be given fruits. When praising their ancient-parents by saying their titles or praise names, they would say, 'ochie, ancient one, I kneel

down.' Then ochie would reply, 'I acknowledge it. Rise my child. Good boy or good girl.' The idea was to be as patronizing as possible to a nwadiana who should be modest and humble to his ancient-parents. Adult umudiana were expected to buy tobacco for their ancient-parents when they met in the street or market-place. Ancient-parents, on the other hand, were expected to buy them biscuits, cakes etc.

If one was on the run, one ran to his ikwunne, his mother's patrilineage. There, he was sure to find help and shelter. There should never be a quarrel between these two categories.

Organization of Patrilineage Wives

Inyom di, married women, was the traditional organization of patrilineage wives. Leadership was not based on age, but on seniority as wife in the patrilineage, that is, the woman who was first married into the patrilineage was considered the leader of the organization. This usually proved to be an elderly woman. Meetings were held periodically at her place to discuss lineage problems. Since most of the work during ceremonies was done by them, they also discussed and planned their duties at the meetings. Like other lineage organizations, definite duties were assigned to wives, and members were bound by strict rules and regulations. As a body, too, the organization of lineage wives claimed certain rights.

During any ceremony, it was the job of lineage wives to sweep the compound and make seating arrangements for the visitors, fetch water and cook food. It was their duty to carry pots of palm-wine and gifts to be presented by the patrilineage. The method of carrying was by head-loading. Head-loading was according to how long a woman had been a wife in the lineage. The new arrivals head-loaded first, and only when they could not carry all the stuff did the older wives lift things onto their heads. Titled women should never lift things on their heads. Older wives dominated the younger ones and it was

their duty to see to the smooth outcome of the ceremonies. They were, therefore, usually vigilant and firm, giving strict advice and orders to the younger wives.

Lineage wives were most important during marriages and child-naming ceremonies. As initiators and custodians of the fertility cult, payments were made to them during ceremonies concerning marriage and childbirth. Only they had the right to remove the young bride from the state of sexual taboo by untying her waist charm and initiating her into the fertility cult. (See Chapter Three.) Later, through the fertility ritual, upiti dance, they introduced the bride and groom to the act of sexual intercourse and wished them procreation from it. For these, they received payment in the form of yam, palm oil, salt, pepper and palm-wine. During the naming ceremony, when a child was formally introduced to the rest of the patrilineage members, lineage wives also received yam and palm-oil. These items were not distributed according to age, but according to the seniority of the obi(s) into which the women were married. Thus, wives of older obi(s) got shares, before those married into more recent ones. It was also this organization which levied a fine on any groom who made his bride pregnant before the marriage ceremonies had been completed.

It was the duty of lineage wives to bring back a new bride and break her in. Rules and regulations guiding the conduct of wives were explained

to her. When a husband wished to take an additional wife, he sought the support of his wives, who would then carry pots of wine to him as their contribution to the marriage requirements. It was up to them to liven up the marriage ceremony. To show their approval of a marriage, co-wives had to go personally to bring back the bride who would be their co-wife. Lineage wives dealt with marital quarrels. If the wife was guilty, she was advised to buy kola, or a cock, or even a goat, depending on the gravity of her offence and the status of the man, and beg her husband for forgiveness. The penalty for offending a titled man was more severe. If the husband was found guilty, they sanctioned him through the lineage head or reported him to his sisters. All failing, they would take the matter to the Women's Council.

If a death occurred in the patrilineage, lineage wives would immediately go to the bereaved compound, sweep the place up, arrange seats and share out the responsibility of providing food and water. None of them must go to the market to sell, or go to work on the farm that day. If any member lost her husband, they were supposed to stay by her and comfort her and try to make her eat some food.

Patrilineage wives were also responsible for the general cleanliness of the areas occupied by the patrilineage. It was their duty to see that footpaths, areas surrounding their compounds, shrines and village squares were kept clean. If lineage men

wished to build a meeting place, like a hall, they asked lineage wives to carry sand and fetch water. It was up to each organization of lineage wives to see that the section of the market-place was kept clean. Women sat in the market according to their marital lineages. Market space was divided on the basis of patrilineage.

As with any formal organization, there were penalties for breaking their rules. Those who broke any rules were fined. If one refused to pay a fine, she was ostracized. At funerals, those who refused to carry chairs or sweep or cook, were fined. Those who fought or exchanged abusive words in public were fined. Laws set down by this organization and accepted by the whole of Nnobi, demanded that a bride's mother should buy lineage wives yam and palm-oil in order for them to initiate her daughter into the fertility cult. Also, when one of their members had a child, lineage wives were invited to pray for and bless the child in order to show their joy.

Since most of their duties involved working - cleaning, cooking or head-loading - wives emphasized the importance of co-operation and solidarity among women. They had rotatory loan schemes, whereby money was lent to members in rotation, according to how their names were entered in the register as they arrived at the lineage and became members. Those lent money, were required to pay a little interest on the loan. Most of the money lent was used as

trade capital, or to purchase items for the farm. As the women co-operated to carry out their duties so also were they able to co-operate to make their demands heard by their menfolk. Their demands on the men usually included the repair of dangerous roads, sanctions on men who maltreated their wives, sanctions on youths who harrassed young girls along village paths or on the roads. At the worst, if lineage men proved stubborn, wives went on strike, in which case, they would refuse to cook or have sexual intercourse with their husbands. In this culture, men did not cook, control of food was therefore a political asset for the women. In sexuality, too, gender realities were such that it was believed that females provided sexual service, hence the political use of the threat of collective withdrawal of sexual service by women.

Organization of Nnobi Women

Inyom Nnobi, Women of Nnobi - this was the Women's Council which represented the whole of Nnobi women. Representatives to it were drawn at ward level, that is, at major patrilineage level. Each ward, for example, provided about five representatives drawn from the component minor patrilineages to the meeting. These representatives were not necessarily the most senior wives in the patrilineage. They were women of strong character and charisma, articulate women who could speak without fear on behalf of the women they represented, so that leadership was based on achievement and charisma. For this was said to be more like a magistrate's court than an ordinary meeting. Above all the women, were those who took the title of Ekwe. This institution, with its own rules and regulations, dealt exclusively with matters concerning women, and the policing of Nnobi markets. Representatives to the Council acted as police women in their wards, watching out for offenders and, when a Council was called, they judged the cases and took the decisions of the meetings back to the lineage level organizations.

This institution was responsible for the general welfare of Nnobi women. No decisions about women could be made without the knowledge and consent of this organization. It was their duty to review the amount demanded for bride-price from time to time.

If the men demanded too much money for their daughters, the Women's Council said so and lowered the amount. To ensure the good behaviour of women in general, they fined those who fought in public. Women were fined for stealing, gossiping, scandal-mongering, treachery, indulging in bad sorcery, igwo ajo ogwu, or any bad characteristics which were demeaning to women and gave them a bad name. It was also their duty to see that rules which safeguarded or protected women against physical abuse were kept, for example, the ban on sexual intercourse with a nursing mother, and the two year's child spacing.

Not only did the women monopolize market space, they also monopolized the cleaning and policing of it. Their representatives at the lineage level were responsible for their own sections of the market. It was therefore their duty to select those who would go to sweep it. Those who fought in the market were fined. The first to hit the other with a chair, for example, paid double the amount fined. Biting another woman during a fight attracted a double fine, too. Those who urinated in the market were fined. Anyone who left her goat to wander into another woman's garden to do damage, paid a double fine. Those who fought by the spring were fined. Women were also concerned with the welfare of the town. Decisions to contribute money for public works and repairs or to other services were also taken at their meetings. In times of epidemics or great unrest, women consulted diviners for the well-being of Nnobi.

If the dry season got too dry, hot and unbearable, the Women's Council would meet and contribute money for visiting the rain-makers. Decisions for contribution of money by Nnobi women were usually passed on to the Women's Council, where representatives from the various wards saw to it that the money was collected. Even if contribution of money was demanded from the whole town, it was the Women's Council that would be informed. Representatives in turn would take the word round, for they had full representation.

The women were aware of their strong communications network and took full advantage of it, and were feared and respected for it by the menfolk. Traditional leaders dared not meet to discuss matters concerning women without representatives of the womenfolk being present at the meeting. But the Women's Council was held in private. Great secrecy surrounded their meetings. No representative was supposed to expose what transpired at their meetings, or else she would be ostracized by the women. The menfolk were said to be uneasy every time a Women's Council was called, since they were not aware of what would be discussed, or what the women might decide to do. Indeed, the rest of the women were said to search their conscience and worry in case they were going to be judged at the Council. What the menfolk feared most was their power of strike action.

The strongest weapon the Council had and used

against the menfolk was the right to order mass strikes and demonstrations by all the women. When this happened, women refused duties and roles expected of them. When ordered to strike, women refused to perform all domestic, sexual and maternal services. They would leave the town en mass, carrying only suckling babies. If aggravated enough, they were known to attack any men they met on their way, or who stood in their path. Nothing short of the fulfilment of their demands would bring them back; but, by all indications, their demands were never unreasonable. They attacked viciously any decision or law which denied them of, or interfered with, their means of livelihood, or the means by which they supported their children. Inter-town or inter-village wars might, for example, necessitate a temporary closure of some or all markets, or they may render all market routes unsafe. Sexual harassment of young girls by young men may also make bush paths to markets unsafe. Disrespect by the menfolk, such as making laws binding to women, or deciding levies for the whole town without the knowledge and consent of the women, were all matters dealt with by the Women's Council.

The Women's Council does not appear to have been answerable to anyone, for at the head was the highest Ekwe titled woman, the Agba Ekwe titled woman, the most honoured title in Nnobi. She carried her Agba Ekwe staff of authority and had the last say in public gatherings and assemblies. She was

the favoured one of the goddess Idemili and her earthly manifestation. If a quarrel arose in the town, and a deadlock was reached whereby not even ozo titled men could settle the quarrel, the Women's Council was invited to settle it. The chief Ekwe woman had the last word when she stuck her long pointed staff in the ground. Only as a last resort were women called in by men to settle disputes. It was generally claimed that ozo titled men, or high ozo titled men were usually able to settle quarrels. They were thought perhaps to be the only people who would have been able to check any excesses of the Women's Council, since the Council was an autonomous organization.

Thus, even though there was a unifying organization which saw to the safeguarding of women's interests, female solidarity was neutralized, to some extent, through the division of women on the basis of gender; daughters were seen as males in relation to wives and superior in authority to wives. This meant that sex, in this context, did not correspond to gender. Daughters, in alliance with their fathers and brothers, identified themselves with male interests. Nevertheless, this flexibility of gender allowed women in typical male roles, thereby giving them authority. Favourable matriarchal ideologies, on the other hand, guaranteed an important position for women in the central political structure.

CHAPTER TWO: Notes

1. In 1980, Ebenesi was thought to contain about 10,000 people. This would be about half the population of Nnobi.
2. Ngo and Awuda shared a population of 10,000 people between them.
3. Its population in 1980 was about 1,700 people.
4. Some said that Ochom was Oshuga's sister, others believed that Oshuga was the father of Ochom. Either way, she was in the same classificatory kinship category with either father or brother, since they all belonged to the same patrilineage in the sense of oneness of blood.
5. See Chapter Four.
6. This is discussed in detail in Chapter Four.
7. Levirate was practised.
8. The carcasses of dogs were left in the streets or bushes to be devoured by vultures or to rot and decay. They were not buried.
9. The expression used with regard to the consequences for a wife who proved stubborn to patrilineage daughters was, 'the woman would see with her naked eyes how the python basked in the sun': iji anyá fu ka eke si anya anwu. This implies being exposed to the danger from a python out in the sun. The python is known to loathe the sun, consequently it usually lies in shade in the bushes, under trees or in caves. Only as a result of acute hunger does

the python appear in the sun. When it does, it appears in full rage, tangles up, suffocates and swallows anything within sight, human or animal. It then crawls back slowly to a shade and lies there lazily for months, digesting its victim. During this period it is the most harmless creature in the world! The implication, therefore, is that a wife who proved stubborn risked seeing patrilineage daughters in full rage!

10. A basket of food and seasoning ingredients which every woman kept hanging over her fireplace in her kitchen.

11. In Nnobi, even today, these traditional groups maintained separate sitting positions. Patrilineage wives sat apart, patrilineage daughters sat apart, patrilineage men sat apart, with elders, titled men and those whose ceremonies were being attended sitting at the head table. Other visitors kept separate sitting positions in their contingents, with men sitting separately from women. They all faced a central space where gifts were displayed and received.

CHAPTER THREE: WOMEN IN THE LIFE COURSE

Although this section deals with the indigenous period, a lot of cultural beliefs and practices surrounding women and their role in the life course remained unchanged in modern Nnobi society. Even though people went to the church for baptism, marriage and funeral services, traditional ceremonies were also performed in their homes. In the course of this chapter, I shall include traditional songs still used during life-cycle ceremonies, to illustrate the extent of cultural continuity. Since these contain beliefs and customs which are orally transmitted in a community, one should be able to see in them the people's own traditional gender ideas. The women have always monopolized singing and dancing during most ceremonies. Sometimes, their songs contained statements from dominant Nnobi models which they shared with the men, at other times, they contained ideas generated by the women as commentaries on dominant ideas or as statements of facts from the women's point of view. Nnobi women were not, and are still not, tongue-tied. According to a popular Nnobi saying, 'The mouth of women opens at random or pops like the pod of the oil-bean tree'.⁽¹⁾

In Nnobi society, whether in the past or today, women are essentially seen as producers, be it in the management of subsistence production or in biological production. In this culture, women were

supposed to have inherited the gift of hard work and ite uba, the pot of prosperity, from their goddess Idemili. (See Chapter One.) In Nnobi, when a woman has a miscarriage, it is said, 'the water spilled but the pot was not broken'.⁽²⁾ When a woman, as wife, had served her period of productivity and reproductivity in her marital home, and died, she became a daughter again and her corpse was sent back to her natal home for burial. In death, she was no longer useful in the marital home, as she was not worshipped as an ancestor. To be remembered is different from being worshipped.

Since women were basically seen as producers, the principles of control and protection applied to them throughout their productive period, whether as daughters, wives or mothers. It is said that, when a woman outgrows the age of the question, 'whose daughter is she?', one then asks, 'whose wife is she?' Only as matrons were women no longer valued in their sexual and reproductive capacity. Matrons were, therefore, beyond control. A woman may then begin to reap the profits of the years of labour. An Nnobi saying describing an old woman goes like this: onabu ekilibi onu agadi nwanyi, odi k'obu na osoro n̄u ala, 'looking at the lips of an old woman, it is as if she too did not suck the breast'.⁽³⁾ Thus, the sexual unattractiveness of the old woman was stressed by focusing on her wrinkled, toothless mouth, most likely stained with tobacco. This mouth usually produced uncompromising statements

and commanded respect and insisted on it. A woman at this stage of her life no longer sought to be sexually attractive to men. She was no longer in sexual competition with other women. Matrons, in order to succeed economically and wield power, had to free themselves of "messy" and "demeaning" female domestic services⁽⁴⁾ which also included sexual service. This was achieved through woman-to-woman marriage. The younger wife would then take over the domestic duties.

Chapter Two revealed major Nnobi emic classifications of women, namely, daughters, wives/mothers and matrons. As these correspond to stages in the life course of a woman - maidenhood/virginity, wifehood/maternity and matronhood/post-menopausal, this chapter examines the socio-cultural significance made of these stages, and relates them to the formal and informal power structure.

In order to present women as social subjects and actors, I examine the political use of culture by Nnobi women in their formal organizations around social roles in which they were cast as daughters, wives and mothers. From Chapter Two, we have seen that daughters organized themselves around the control of funeral ceremonies, while wives and mothers organized themselves around fertility - birth and marriage. Through the involvement of these women and their prominence in public rituals and ceremonies, they had access to the medium of communication and were, therefore, involved in the ideology-making

processes and the management of meaning.

Marriage

Nnobi choice of marriage settlement was the patrilocal system, whereby patrilineage men remained on the patrilineage land and guarded patrilineage property. They then sent off daughters to serve as wives elsewhere, while they brought in non-lineage women for the purpose of procreation, domestic and economic labour. Thus, lineages were not economically or socially isolated. Women linked lineages in in-law relationships forged through them. Circulation of goods during marriage and funeral ceremonies were through relationships traced through women. Daughters, as virgins, were under the control and protection of their lineage men against non-lineage men with whom the rules of incest did not forbid sexual intercourse. Through marriage exchange, daughters stepped into wifhood and motherhood, and control over them passed from their natal lineage men to their marital lineage men. The significance made of maidenhood centred round guarding the virginity and fertility of the young daughters and preparing them for their future roles as wives and mothers.

Nnobi had strong preference for village endogamy; the closer the marriage in terms of geographical space, the better, as they did not like to send their daughters to distant places. This was because daughters still retained important ritual and pol-

itical roles in their natal homes and patrilineages after marriage. The minor lineage, as a kindred group, was the only exogamous unit. Marriage was allowed between minor lineages which belonged to the same major lineage. Apart from the minor lineage, the other category of people under the taboo of incest was the nwadiana, any child of a lineage daughter, who may not marry anyone from his or her mother's minor patrilineage - his classificatory ancient-parents. Before such a marriage would take place, a ritual called igba udu oma had to be performed to separate blood tie and ward off the taboo of incest. This idea was expressed in the saying, 'after three generations, from the fourth one, one may go ahead with marriage, but when desired at the third generation, one must perform the ritual to separate blood relationship'.⁽⁵⁾⁽⁶⁾

The related couple intending to be married should not be together before the performance of this ritual. The man should stay with his parents and the woman with her parents. On the appointed day, both of them were expected to arrive at the outskirts of the town. If the intended marriage was between two neighbouring towns or villages, the couple should meet at the boundary of their towns. Other male relations and their lineage daughters should also assemble there. A fowl was slaughtered and cooked with food. The food and wine should be eaten there and the left-overs, including vessels used for cooking, should be buried on the spot.

The bride and groom were expected to arrive naked. They were then separated by flogging. This flogging, which was done by a ritual specialist or the eldest male in the groom's minor patrilineage, should cause each of them to run back to his or her parent's home, wailing. The elder would then declare that they had been separated forever as blood relations. A day after the ritual, the groom was free to carry palm-wine to the bride's lineage members and take his wife home. (7)

A man married to a non-Nnobi woman was not looked upon with approval. When a man expressed the wish to marry "a foreigner", onye mba, his lineage group usually tried their best to prevent such a union. Sanctions used included outright threats of ostracism, withdrawal of material and moral support, and boycott of the marriage ceremonies. In rare cases, the patrilineage head, or a man's eldest brother, may demonstrate his final refusal by pointing his penis to the ground and touching the soil with the tip of it. Thus he would swear refusal with his penis. When that happened, his word was final and the matter was closed.

In Nnobi, to have the support of one's lineage was to have power. For women, it was the support of their brothers which was important. At marriage, a woman's husband's lineage acquired rights over her sexual service, her reproductive and labour powers. Even though power of control over her passed from her lineage men to both men and women of her husband's

lineage, her own patrilineage did not give up the right to protect their daughter.

The minor lineage was the group concerned with marriage of lineage members. It was through the exchange of daughters that lineages were linked together in in-law relationships. Client/patrón relationships were also formed through marriage. A man who owned a lot of land needed a large labour force. He was able to recruit more labour through the practice of polygyny and by marrying off his daughters to potential workers, who would remain grateful and loyal to him. For wife-givers were superior to wife-takers, in the sense that one should be grateful to one who gave him his daughter. Wealthy ozo titled men usually procured the same title for their first sons, who would succeed them in the obi. Since one had to be married to be able to take the title, when a man could not afford the cost of full marriage ceremonies, or in cases where little boys took the title, marriage ceremonies were performed on their behalf. In this case, a poor man was able to gain a rich in-law by marrying off a baby daughter, thus forming a client/patron relationship. Only very little money would be received through the marriage itself. The prestige gained by being able to sit and be seen in the company of titled men as in-laws during ceremonial occasions was enough inducement for poor people to marry off their baby daughters. Most such marriages were only nominal. The child continued to live with its

parents and, when she grew up, a potential suitor was able to pay back the little money which had been paid for the first marriage.

Rich women or powerful women were also able to form client/patron relationships or master/servant relationships by undertaking to pay bride wealth for a man's marriage. In this case, the man and his potential family would remain obliged to her. This way, women were able to recruit a large labour force and strong clientage. A barren woman was also able to gain the favour of her husband through woman to woman marriage. Rich and powerful women too were able to free themselves from domestic responsibilities through woman to woman marriages. First daughters especially had this privilege of woman to woman marriage, especially when there were no males in their natal homes. Men and women were therefore involved in the practice of marriage exchange.

Marriage was not regarded as a personal affair between one man and one woman. It involved the whole minor lineage. The detective work carried out before consent for marriage was given was done by both lineages. The girl's lineage sought to establish that their potential in-law was not an osu, a ritual outcast or cult slave, dedicated to a shrine and therefore should not intermarry with the rest of the society. They also looked into the history of the lineage, to make sure they were not thieves, murderers or traitors. It was also important to know that the particular lineage did not have the

reputation of maltreating wives. Similarly, the man's lineage, having established that the girl was not a ritual outcast, made enquiries about things like fertility and industriousness of women born in the girl's lineage. The girl's mother's lineage was also investigated. Women played a very important role in this detective work, through their strong communications network. They were more mobile than men, and moved easily between lineages as daughters, wives and mothers. They also met one another in the markets. If no evil traits were revealed during these investigations, then marriage might take place. With regard to marriage, it was said that if a road proved good, it was travelled again. In other words, if a wife proved to be fruitful in a biological and economic sense, more wives would be sought from her patrilineage. Similarly, if the wife-taking lineage proved to be good to the woman, more women would be allowed to go to that lineage.

The initiative in marriage was never taken by a girl's family. When a girl's family heard rumours of questions being asked about their daughter, they usually waited for the man's family to make the first move. A man should never approach his potential in-laws on his own. He and his father must be taken there by a third party, who would act as a go-between, nwanduzo. For this first approach, referred to as "knocking on the door", they would take palm-wine and kola with them. On arrival, the girl's father, who would have heard of the visit from the go-between,

would offer kola to his visitors. After his kola had been broken and eaten, his potential in-laws would present their own kola and palm wine, and say that they came with good intentions and hoped that their visit would be fruitful. Then food would be given to them, after which they would say that they came to seek a wife. If the parents did not show any signs of objection, wife-seekers asked to see the girl they wished to marry in order to size her up. The man would then summon his daughter and her mother, who would already be aware of the visit. He would ask his daughter if she wished to marry the man. She usually said yes. The consent of marriage by a man and woman was expressed by both of them sipping out of the same cup of palm-wine. In the presence of her family, the girl would kneel down to sip the wine, then she would offer the cup to her future husband.

The next stage was the negotiation of marriage payment, ikwu ngo. It was the duty of the girl's father to inform his lineage of the consent to marriage. They would then arrange the date for the negotiation of payment, again through the go-between. The go-between served both as a public relations man and a witness. He was the link between both families and it was his duty to see to the success of uniting the two families. For the marriage payment negotiations, men of the girl's minor patrilineage would be present. They would support the girl's father by donating kola-nuts, which he would offer to the

visitors. The girl's mother and sisters would also be present, but must only listen and not speak. The wife-givers would present kola, which the most senior lineage man present would break. Wife-takers would then present their kola and palm-wine. The amount of money involved was said to have been low in the olden days, ⁽⁸⁾ but the rule was that there had to be bargaining and that a price must not be agreed on by both parties. The idea was to make things very difficult for wife-takers, showing a reluctance on the part of wife-givers to part with their daughter. For example, if wife-givers asked wife-takers to bring £20, wife-takers would say that they would bring £15. Wife-givers would then ask for £18, and wife-takers would reply that they would rather go home and think about it and decide whether or not they would bring £18. Wife-givers too, would say that they would retire to consider whether to accept £15. Thus, without reaching a decision, they would disperse. Women were supposed to feel very humiliated during this haggling. They were teased about it by their brothers. Sharp-tongued girls present were reminded that one day it would be their turn. They were therefore told to temper their tongues and be more submissive, so that they would be treated kindly when their turn came.

Lineage men did not find themselves in a situation where they accepted a price for their daughter publicly, since no price was agreed on by both parties. It was the go-between who took word

of acceptance of price back to wife-takers. After two market weeks, eight days, wife-takers would go by night to the go-between and say that they had agreed to pay £18 and that a day of payment should be arranged. The go-between would then be given the money to take to the girl's father by night. When the money had been paid, a man might take his wife home, but must not consummate the marriage, since the marriage ceremony would not have been completed. If the girl was found to be pregnant before the final marriage ceremony, the man would have to double his costs. This fine was usually levied by the organization of lineage wives. When the man reached a decision to take his wife away, he and his lineage were told in very strong language by the girl's father to take good care of his daughter and not to maltreat her.

The final ceremony which would give wife-takers complete right over a woman did not take place until wife-givers had gone to know their daughter's new home and seen how she was being treated, bia malu ani. This delay also gave wife-takers time to assess the girl's worth before the final commitment. This visit marked the beginning of in-law relationship, which involved material exchange between lineages through marriage. The success of this visit gave prestige to wife-givers. The girl's father would therefore recruit members of his minor lineage, especially titled men, to accompany him. He would invite his wealthy friends, town notables and his

in-laws to form a very impressive contingent. The success of this visit would also boost the status of the wife-giving lineage in the eyes of townsfolk, and also give their daughter prestige and confidence in her new settlement. It would show that she had powerful people behind her, who would support or protect her.

During this visit, wife-givers looked forward to getting presents and not to giving. Only the girl's mother would take salt and tobacco to give to her daughter's husband's father. The girl's father may take a small bottle of spirit and kola-nuts donated by his lineage men. When wife-givers arrived and were seated, they were given kola-nuts as guests. After this exchange of greetings, visitors were served food and palm-wine. Then presents were displayed and handed out. The girl's father got a piece of cloth. Later, when the helmet was introduced during the colonial period, it became a big thing for the girl's father to get a helmet called ogom aba, my in-law has become rich! He also received a big gown. The girl's mother got a piece of cloth. The girl's immediate siblings also received pieces of cloth. The girl's classificatory ancient-parents got yam. Her mother's father got a pot of wine. Her mother's mother got a piece of cloth. Her mother's sisters received pieces of cloth. These presents were bought by the girl's husband with the support of his father and contributions from his lineage members. When this was over, wife-givers presented one jar of palm-wine and eight kola-nuts to thank

wife-takers for their generosity. Then ofò was said, invoking blessing on gods and ancestors and pleading for good health and prosperity, through the breaking of kola-nut. Wife-givers then carried home their presents in jubilation, singing and dancing.

Ibu nkwu nwanyi, or nkwu nkpòlu nwanyi, carrying a woman's palm-wine ceremony, arranged by wife-takers, was the final ceremony which gave a husband full rights over his wife. Carrying palm-wine, ibu nkwu, was the term commonly used for marriage. Lineage men recognized lineage daughters as married when they had drunk their palm-wine. Marriage payment gave a man legal right only over a child born by the woman on whom he had deposited money. Only when he had carried her palm-wine was she recognized as his wife. If she was known to be pregnant before marriage payment was made, payment required of him was doubled. In such cases some lineages, depending on the status of their daughter or shortage of people, might refuse to accept marriage payment, in which case the child would legally belong to its mother's patrilineage. There was, therefore, no status of illegitimacy. Again, even after marriage payment had been made and a girl was found to be pregnant before her palm-wine had been carried, the costs involved in the palm-wine ceremony were doubled.

The expression, carrying or drinking a woman's palm-wine, was always a cause for quarrel between lineage daughters and men. Lineage daughters looked at them as greedy old men who always thirsted after

palm-wine and would give away a baby girl for the chance to drink palm-wine. The men, on the other hand, teased or humiliated daughters by reminding them that soon their palm-wine would be drunk and they and their "bad" (sharp) tongues would be got rid of.

This occasion, when wife-takers brought palm-wine, again provided an arena for oratory, competition and display. The idea was for wife-takers to try to flood greedy, arrogant and hard to please wife-givers with the best palm-wine available. Their aim was to get them drunk so that they would start singing praises of the wife-takers. Women also got drunk during this occasion.

The whole minor lineages of both sides gathered for this occasion, including their in-laws and friends. Members of the wife's mother's patrilineage were also present. The girl would have returned to her natal home to help the women in cooking and the general preparations for receiving the in-laws. When in-laws arrived, the girl's father produced eight kola-nuts for welcoming his guests. He or the most senior male or a titled man in his lineage pronounced invocations and blessings and broke the kola. Then in-laws produced their palm-wine and began to distribute it. (9) Wife-takers would produce one bottle of spirit, jars of palm-wine and a plate of kola-nuts and place them on the table. This was used for opening talks about acquiring their wife. While lineage wives of wife-givers counted and distributed yam and palm-

oil, lineage men drank and shared out palm-wine.

A huge pot would be brought out and wine poured into it for the wife-giving lineage, who would then select a man to taste it. If the wine was not exceptionally good, he would say that two pots of wine were needed to give it taste. When this had been done, the men would then drink out of the pot. Wife-takers would then produce wine to be distributed to the ancestral compounds of the wife-giving lineage. Each compound in turn would drink its wine with friends and neighbours. The major lineage would get one jar of palm-wine and the minor lineage would get one jar.

Much earlier in the day, in preparation for the major event, more closely related male relatives of the bride's family would start drinking from about ten o'clock in the morning, when they would share a jar of palm wine, called nkwu nwunne. They were supposed to stand up and drink this wine very quickly. Then, at about one o'clock in the afternoon, when other lineage men would arrive, they would be given jars of palm-wine called nkwu uchichi, night palm-wine, and a small amount of money, which they would share out. Lineage wives would get one jar of palm-wine, called nkwu ezi, this was for the early morning ritual by which wives tried to find out whether the bride was pregnant or not. If the girl was not pregnant, wives then removed the iyi, "don't touch", condition of the bride. One jar of palm-wine called nkwu ekete would be given to the bride's female relative who would perform this ceremony. One

jar of palm-wine called nkwu upiti for the fertility dance was also given to the bride's patrilineage wives. They would also be given a young hen, one pot of palm-oil and a small amount of money for buying ji ezi, again for finding out the sexual condition of the bride. Lineage daughters also received some jars of palm-wine and a small amount of food. The girl's mother's patrilineage would also be given one jar of palm-wine.

Young men of the bride's patrilineage were given one jar of palm-wine called asha asha ashaghi asha, or okwu itiji okpili, meaning that whether or not they drank the wine, if they had to, they would still fight those who gave them the wine. This drink, as the name suggests, was regarded as a bribe to get the consent of the youths to part with their sisters, for they were regarded as the protectors of the girls. They would do the fighting on their behalf when ordered to do so. They therefore usually behaved in a very aggressive manner in the presence of wife-takers, generally causing trouble and making their presence and strength felt. By so doing, they showed reluctance to part with their sister, and also disassociated themselves from the "old men", lineage elders, who had accepted money for their sisters.

The money given to lineage men when they got "night drink" was taken out of the marriage payment. The money for yam and palm-oil to be shared among lineage wives was taken out of the marriage payment.

The money for the food cooked for this occasion was also taken out of the marriage payment. In a sense, therefore, it can be said that marriage payment was used to meet the costs of a marriage, and therefore not for buying a woman. If the girl given to wife-takers was already pregnant, everything done during this occasion was doubled. This was called ima upo.

At the end of the ceremony, wife-takers would be given one goat roasted or alive. Some maintained that this goat was always given roasted. Wife-takers would again distribute wine to wife-givers, one gallon⁽¹⁰⁾ each or two gallons each to the ancestral compounds. The ceremony was then closed by the upiti, "mud dance". Lineage wives would pour a jar of palm-wine on the ground at the back of the girl's mother's house. The girl and her husband would then be made to dance on the wet ground, stepping on the mud, while the women danced with them, wishing them a lot of children. At the end of the dance, an empty palm-wine pot would be placed on the head of the new wife by her co-lineage wives, wives of her husband's lineage, who would then lead her, singing and dancing, to her new home. If she was to be an additional wife to her husband, her family would not let her husband take her home if her co-wives did not accompany other lineage wives to come and fetch her.

At a later date, the girl's husband, now an accepted in-law, would accompany his wife to visit her natal home. This time, they would receive and

not give. Neighbours and friends who had participated in the wine drinking ceremony would give them presents of yam, money and palm-wine. The girl's father would take yam and cocoyam seedlings from the stacks, arrange them on sticks as was customary, and give them to his daughter. This would be her farming capital. He would then point out her nkwu ana, marriage present palm-tree. The girl's mother, on her part, would give her her livestock capital, a she-goat, referred to as "fortune" or "capital" goat, eghu aku, and a hen, known as okuko isi aku, fowl, the principal capital. She would also give her daughter vegetable seeds for the garden, a basket of seasoning ingredients for cooking, ngiga, a soup ladle and a few pots and pans. At the death of a wife this basket of seasoning ingredients, which was very personal to a woman, was returned to her natal home. The goat given to her at marriage later became her ritual goat, eghu chi, at her death it was returned to her patrilineage.

Marriage Songs and Gender Roles

At no other time were wifehood and motherhood more stressed than during marriage ceremonies, especially during the "carrying palm wine" ceremony, after which a husband gained full rights over his wife. During this ceremony, wives as initiates and custodians of the fertility cult reigned supreme. Two lots of payment were made to the lineage wives of the girl who was getting married. First, they were paid to remove the taboo waist charm on the girl. Then they were paid again to initiate her into the fertility cult, the climax of which was the ritual dance performed by the new bride and her husband to the tune of the women. The women voiced the dominant ideology which gave women honour in wifehood. They sang,

"Be you as beautiful as a mermaid, the beauty of a woman is to have a husband.

Be you one who has been to the land of white people, the beauty of a woman is to have a husband.

If a woman does not marry, her beauty declines.

One who is beautiful is best to be in her husband's house.

When you get to your husband's house, have a baby.

After looking after the child, the child will look after you."

The end of the marriage ceremony was symbolized by the upiti, fertility "mud dance", when women poured palm-wine on the ground and sang to the newly married couple who danced on the mud. This was an exclusively female affair, performed behind the bride's mother's house. Some maintained that, although a lot of youths join in this dance today, in the olden days the only male present was the groom. During this occasion, wives as seasoned women and non-virgins sang lewd songs reproducing the sound and rhythm of copulation. Wine was poured on the ground to produce sticky mud. The stepping of feet on the mud made it even stickier, while the women sang,

*Ana nwa-oo (twice)

Udegwurude-e-e

Biam biam ka m n'ebe-e-e (twice)

Biam biam kanma n'ute

Abiachaa ya, ka - a bialu nwa-o-o

Biam biam ka nma n'ute (twice)"

The cry was for a child, and biam biam being in imitation of the act of copulation, the women sang that they cry biam biam. The verb ibia means stuffing up or pressing down. So the women sang that, after pressing down, or copulation, to be blunt, may a child be got out of it. They sang that biam biam was better done on the mat!

While producing sticky mud with their feet in rhythmic dancing, they sang,

"Upiti upiti upiti nwa-o-o (twice)

Onye muta ibe ya muta-o-o

Upiti upiti upiti nwa-o-o

Ka anyi zolu nwa n'okpa

Zolu, zolu, nzolu, nwa n'okpa."

They sang about the mud associated with the desire for a baby and the principle of having a baby and hoping that others have, too. Again they sang about the mud,

"Oh mud, oh mud, baby mud.

May we catch a baby in our feet.

Catch, catch, catch a baby in my feet.

Let me not be denied a child in this world
and the next.

Catch, catch, catch a baby in my feet."

Thus the marriage between a man and a woman was sealed by the women when they gave the couple licence to copulate and wished them conception through the act.

Two groups of women exercised power during marriage ceremonies. One group was the wives of the bride's patrilineage, the other was the wives of the husband's patrilineage. The girl's patrilineage wives, after the fertility dance, would hand her over to the wives of her husband's patrilineage, her new co-wives, who, after lifting an empty pot of palm-oil onto her head, led her home. As they led her home the songs changed, and these other women reassured her of a better home. They sang that beauty was off to a better town, that she was going home to her husband's home and that her husband's town was a better town. As she approached her new

home, the women would sing,

"She has arrived.

If you look in the street you'll behold a
beautiful one."

The women then declared their goodwill and support,
welcoming the new member as they sang,

"Umu nwanyi anyi ji obi ocha,

Obi salasala obi sam

Umu nwanyi anyi jikwanu obi ocha,

Obi salasala obi sam."

As the lead woman declared that the hearts of their
women were clean, the others replied that their hearts
were as clean as clean could be. Thus they accepted
one more member into their own group of patrilineage
wives.

Nnobi men called wives oli aku, one who enjoys
wealth. Lots of women were known to grumble or
retort sharply when addressed by this term, for their
material situation or experience of strife denied
such a claim. The term was perhaps true of the first
few months of marriage during the olden days, when
young brides went through elaborate fertility rituals,
after which the young bride untied her elaborate,
high-pointing hairstyle. She was then considered
nne nwanyi, a fully fledged woman, with a household
to cater for. She was therefore expected to begin
the business of selling and buying and buying and
selling, itu mgbele, like other wives. She also
got her own portion of farm land from her husband,
which she was expected to farm for subsistence.

Birth

From the day of the "carrying of palm wine" ceremony to the birth of a woman's first child, in the olden days, she went through various rituals of fertility associated with sexuality and childbirth. The sequence of some of these rituals are no longer clear in the minds of Nnobi people who know about them, as most of them, except the "mud dance", are no longer practised. However, most of the rituals appear to have centred around a custom referred to as ima ogodo, whose literal translation means tying wrapper, but this could be understood to mean the process of becoming a woman or a mother. Detailed data on this was given to me by Nwajiuba, who has already been acknowledged several times in this thesis. Abalukwu magazine, September 1978, Vol. 8, also carried an article titled, "The ima ogodo ceremony in Nnobi" by E.J. Uzuagu.

From Nwajiuba and other women's accounts, most of the rituals involved in this ceremony were performed at a new bride's mother's home as soon as the first signs of pregnancy began to show. Uzuagu, however, reports that these rituals took place before pregnancy.

Two main people performed these initiations into motherhood. They were a female dibia and a woman referred to as onyo ekete, one who would tie a black string round the waist of the bride. The

ritual of tying the string was called iwoyi ekete or itunye ashi. This was done with prayers and the pouring of libation and was attended by relatives and friends. The importance of the woman who conducted this ritual was signified by the fact that she received a jar of palm-wine during the "carrying of palm-wine" ceremony. This same woman, who appears to have the status of "mother of maternity", would also be given the "gift to the mother of maternity", ibu nne amu, when the first child of the bride would be born. This gift comprised yam, cocoyam, banana, plantain and hen. It was not clear who exactly performed this role but, clearly, she was a maternal relative of the bride. Those suggested were the eldest sister of the bride's mother, or the oldest woman in the bride's matrilineage. If there was no-one to receive it, it was said that it was offered to the sun.

When the newly married girl became pregnant and her belly swelled with child, the preparation for the ima ogodo ceremony began with an elaborate plaiting of the girl's hair. This was followed by beautifying her body in fanciful tattoos, egbugbu, from her throat to her waist.⁽¹¹⁾ In Uzuagu's account, this was done at the husband's home; but according to the women, it was done at the young bride's mother's. During the tattooing, the girl's husband would meet all the expenses for a goat and the delicious dishes which the girl would feed on to help her endure the pain from the cuts, until

the scars healed.

Then ima nsi, the ritual which symbolized nodality of a man and a woman in procreation and training in motherhood, was performed. One double-seeded palm-nut, aku nkpi, and fish were provided. A female dibia would then ask the couple to interlock their fingers while the kernel of the palm-nut and the fish were broken in two and shared between them. This symbolized their unity, regardless of what the future might hold for them. The female dibia would then pray for good health, long life and prosperous children.

Next, the female dibia would either make or buy a wooden doll and paint it with red paint, ushe. This doll was put in a straw basket and given to the bride to care for as if it were her child. A token payment of eight yams and eight cowries, ego n'asato, was made to the dibia.

Next was the ritual for warding off evil spirits, referred to as aja uke. On the eve of this ritual, a bride was not supposed to sleep with her husband, nor in her father's home. She should stay with a male relative of her husband, who should be a bachelor. On the day of this ritual, a dibia would wake the girl before the first cock crow, and take her to the evil forest, ajo ofia. There, he would prepare a concoction which the bride would throw into the evil forest. She would then walk to her husband's home without looking back. She was expected to wash her hands with potash, ngu, before entering

her marital home.

From the ceremonial return to her marital home, the young bride would be treated like a full adult woman and dressed as such. This was symbolized by the tying of wrapper. She was expected to hang the little bag containing the painted doll on her wrist. She would take this little bag with her wherever she went and even when going to the market. On her way to the market, other women would see the bag and ask her to show them her baby. She would then bring out the doll and give it to them. The women would take the doll and rub off some of the red paint onto their own bellies, while they told the young wife how pretty her baby was, after which they would give the doll back to her with some money for the baby, ego nwa. This went on until the young wife would have a real baby and begin to pet it rather than the doll. She would then take off the doll from her wrist. Some women were believed to have kept the doll till they had had three or four children. Then it was believed that the doll disappeared by itself. Ima ogodo ceremony was said to end when the child was presented in the central market. During this ceremony, relatives and friends made merry and donated gifts to the child. The husband would buy his wife a nice piece of wrapper. On the day of the outing, the woman was dressed up by her mother's relatives. She was bought an umbrella to shield her from the sun. Relatives from both sides would then lead the young wife and her

husband to the market, accompanied by a young boy and girl carrying the chairs on which they would sit. They would stop at each stall, sit on the chairs and be given presents, including money and palm-wine, by well-wishers.

The Post-Natal Confinement, "Ino Ngwuo"

It was generally claimed that, in the olden days, when a woman gave birth, a hole in which she would urinate was dug at the back of her house. It was also in this hole that the after-birth, akpa nwa, was buried. For the first child, they would take a banana leaf and put it on the ground in front of the woman's house and place her child on it. Even if the woman went to a midwife to have the baby, the child was still washed and placed on a banana leaf. Then the wooden door was removed and taken indoors and the child was placed on it. A pestle was then hit on the wood four times, to make the child get used to shock and prevent it from starting at unexpected sounds. Palm-nut or coconut was chewed and rubbed on the breasts of the woman for four days to help the breasts ripen. The child would then begin to drink its mother's breast milk. Before then, when the breasts were still hard, a nursing mother in the neighbourhood was said to feed the baby till its mother's breasts were ripe enough for the baby to suck.

Only a woman's husband was allowed in on the first day of birth. When giving birth, men were not allowed in, although there were male dibia(s) who acted as midwives. Immediately after giving birth, if the woman's mother lived close by, she would visit her daughter daily to help her. After

twelve days, the mother was expected to move into her daughter's home to fulfil the post-natal services required of her, as it was taboo for a new mother to work. She was supposed to stay in bed, and washed there. The mother's visit, ine ngwuo, was institutionalized and followed prescribed rules. As she was going to take over duties normally performed by her daughter, especially cooking, she would take with her, sauce seasoning ingredients and dried fish. She would also take with her herbs and spices specially used in preparing soup for a woman who has just given birth and was lactating. Wife's mother must be treated with respect by her daughter's husband, who was expected to provide his wife with enough yam and meat for the period when his wife's mother was visiting. This visit, at the minimum, lasted for seven market weeks, twenty-eight days. At the end of the visit, wife's mother would be given presents by her son-in-law and her daughter. A clever daughter usually assessed her mother's material needs and used this opportunity to procure them for her. These normally included pieces of cloth for wrapper, jewellery and cooking utensils. Her husband provided or contributed money for their purchase. He also gave his mother-in-law food items, such as yam and palm-oil.

The post-natal confinement in bed was also called inu nmli oku, drinking hot water, because of the very pepperish thin soup prepared with smoked fish, and medicinal herbs. It was believed to help clean out the womb, enrich the blood and restore energy

quickly. The mother at the same time pressed her daughter's womb and vagina morning and evening with very hot water, to ease aches and bruises. The womb was tied very tightly with dry bark from the banana stem to help the falling of the womb. Some believed that it was the girl's mother who breast-fed the baby for the first few days before the milk began to flow from her daughter's breasts. The drinking of palm-wine was also supposed to help the milk flow.

During the period of post-natal confinement a woman was in a state of sexual taboo.⁽¹²⁾ She was restricted to the female section of the compound while her mother took over both her household duties and farm-work. Women visitors would invoke blessings on the new-born baby with presents. A popular Nnobi saying especially used by women was that one did not visit a newly born baby empty handed. Women would make white chalk marks on their faces to indicate that they had been to see a newly born baby. This was supposed to bring good luck. Generally, contact with a new baby was greatly desired and cherished. Women said that it brought good luck when a baby urinated or excreted on someone. Infertile women pressed a new baby to their wombs and silently prayed for a child.

Circumcision took place after eight days, and the baby's hair was also shaved. If a female, its first hair was buried in the roots of a palm tree. The first hair of a boy was buried in the roots of

a kola nut-tree. Nnobi circumcised both sexes in the olden days.⁽¹³⁾ After circumcision, it was believed that a baby should be nursed and touched only by its mother for the wound to heal. If someone else were to touch the baby, the wound would linger on. The ceremony called ime mputa, coming out, was performed after twenty-eight days. The child was brought out to the obi to be introduced to its lineage group, and named. If a female, hen was used for the ceremony and, if a male, cock was used. The chicken was cooked and spiced in palm-oil and used for eating boiled yam. During this ceremony, lineage wives shared out cooked yam and palm-oil among themselves. Lineage men shared kola-nuts and wine. These things were distributed according to the seniority of the component obi in the lineage. The child was named by its father. After this ceremony, the woman's mother may then go home, but if her daughter was still weak or ill, she may postpone her departure.

An effective sanction used by mothers against their daughters was the refusal to make the post-natal visit. If that happened, the woman would be left at the mercy of co-wives, who were not to be trusted, or mothers-in-law or husband's sisters, who might dislike the woman and wish to get rid of her. They were not really duty bound to help her, but may do so on goodwill. In this culture, with a strong belief in sorcery, only one's immediate sibling or mother was to be trusted, not even fathers,

who might prefer one wife and her children to another. As one Nnobi saying, used mainly by women, put it, 'a man's hatred for a wife affects her children.'⁽¹⁴⁾ Scape-goating in Nnobi was through the accusation of sorcery, not witchcraft.

After a few months, the new mother and her baby would be dressed up and accompanied to the market. Women dressed in their best clothes for this occasion. They sang songs of the joys, pains and rewards of motherhood. At the market, the new mother and her baby would be given presents. After this, the woman would go back to her farming, selling and buying routine, while carrying her baby on her back, tied with a piece of wrapper.

Maternity Songs and Gender Roles

When a child was born, statements about its future role with regard to its sex were made through songs. Thus, a male child was referred to as a taxi, that is, a regular means of income.⁽¹⁵⁾ Nnobi say that first, parents look after the children, later the children look after their parents. Males were regarded as the ones who would remain in the natal home and later inherit the responsibilities of their parents. For male children, the women sang that having a boy was very good, because it was men who owned profit, or fortune, "obu nwoke nwe ulu". They added that their sons would build storied houses and buy cars.

When a female child was born, she was referred to as a bag of money. The song goes like this,

"One has given birth to a bag of money.

Thanks be to God.

This cloth I wear is money.

This meat I eat is money.

This fish I eat is money.

This child I have is money."

Thus the importance of women in terms of exchange was stressed. Women also sang that they have given birth to a daughter who would cook for them and who would marry a good husband.

Women also sang about the reality of their situation. Both power and security for women as

wives, was tied to their ability to give birth and their role as mothers. For this reason, at the birth of a first child, the women sang that a child had been born, one may enjoy wealth and fortune and that the mind was now at rest. They sang,

"If not for the power of giving birth, who will give me?

Buy white fowl, who will give me?

Bring white palm-wine, who will give me?

If not for the power of giving birth, who will give me?"

"O bughi ma nwa-o-o, onye ga enye m

Gota okuko ocha-a-a, onye ga enye m

Bute nkwu ocha-a-a, onye ga enye m

O bughi ma nwa-a-a, onye ga enye m."

Usually the atmosphere was highly charged emotionally when women sang and danced to such songs. Barren women could break down and weep. Those maltreated by their husbands in spite of having had many children could become uncontrollably violent. The happy ones became radiant and some, with tears in their eyes, sang to their fellow women to remain in their marital homes for the benefits of childbirth. The song went like this,

"We have come here because of the birth of a child.

Spectators, it is for the sake of a child that we have come here showing our happiness.

The mother who has given birth to this child, stay in your husband's house and look upon what is good.

Chika's mum, remain in your husband's house
and behold what is good".

They did not fail to offer some advice to the baby
and also make a statement about sleepless nights
mothers have for the sake of crying babies! And
so they sang to the baby,

"Listen to what your mother tells you,
Listen to what your father tells you,
Keep awake during the day
But sleep during the night".

As the culture stressed and glorified maternity,
so did the women stress their power and importance
as the bearers of children. They claimed that they
were principal, for without them children would not
be born. They sang,

"Nwanyi bu isi okwu ... bu isi okwu,
Ogbughi nwanyi kedu ka aga esi muta nwa
Kedu ka aga esi muta nwa."

"Woman is principal ... is principal,
Without a woman, how can a child be born?
How can a child be born?"

Death

At funerals, as in marriage, the circulation of goods and the involvement of non-lineage members was traced through women. At marriage, daughter's mother gave her a goat. At her death as a mother, the goat was returned to her patrilineage.

A first son was duty bound to provide a goat for the funeral ceremony of his mother. For the funeral of either father or mother, the husband of a first daughter was also expected to provide a goat. A goat was always returned to where a movement had taken place, that is, to those who gave away a woman to another lineage where she produced a child. A goat was therefore always given to the dead person's mother's patrilineage, who would be the classificatory ancient-parents of the deceased.

When a father died, one movement was traced; that made by his mother. His mother's patrilineage would be given a goat. But when a mother died, two movements were traced. One movement was that made by the dead woman, her patrilineage would get a goat, which would cancel out the original

goat given to her at marriage. The second movement was that made by the mother of the dead woman. A goat would also be given to that patrilineage from which the mother originated. A goat was always returned to the owners of, or the lineage of, isi nmili, the source of the spring - the mother. This was compulsory, regardless of whether the parents of the deceased were alive or not. The ancient-parents category were usually considerate and would

accept whatever was available, but could not be deceived or cheated. If they were offered what was below the status of their daughter, they could refuse it and, if they did, nothing could be done about it. Their quick eyes would assess what was generally available, and accept what was best. In most cases they would get a goat. But with high status funerals they would be given no less than a cow. Whatever animal was given to them, symbolized the returned soul of their daughter. When given this animal, they would go home pretending they were going back with their daughter.

The ancient-parent category, though very lenient to offspring of their daughters, could be difficult to please during funerals. The gift exchange involving these categories was always the most dramatic part of a funeral. This can be seen from the account of the funeral of a seventy-nine year old man, which I attended in 1980. This account will also show how very little customary procedures during life-cycle ceremonies have changed since the nineteenth century. At this funeral, the deceased man's mother's patri-lineage had refused the goat offered to them and nearly brought the funeral ceremony to a halt. The husband of the deceased man's first daughter had presented a cow, which was displayed in front of the compound. The dead man's sons, who were mostly traders, had, on the other hand, provided four goats for the funeral. As with most ceremonies in Nnobi, display was an essential part of the event. Each

group of people bringing presents moved in processions, displaying what they had brought for all to see, so that everyone knew what had been presented. In fact, a man was usually assigned to announce the groups as they arrived and shout out what presents they brought. Thus, everyone knew what in-laws, relatives and friends had brought. During this funeral, the dead man's classificatory ancient-parents had seen the cow displayed outside the compound, and assumed that it would be offered to them. But the sons had planned to sell the cow to offset some of the expenses of the funeral. They therefore offered a goat instead.

The goat they offered was the smallest of the four goats. This enraged the deceased's ancient-parents, who were squatting on the ground in anticipation, man and woman. Their response was to treat the dead man's sons with contempt by pretending not to notice them, and continuing to chat to each other. The sons quickly assessed the situation, and called their father's brother to plead with his ancient-parents, as they expected them to be more lenient to him. As the dead man's brother approached, he was told to kneel down and take off his hat and bow down his head while he spoke. This was the uncompromised customary way in which he was expected to address his ancient-parents. He relayed to them the excuse given by the deceased man's sons, that they were short of money and that their father had not left them enough cash for his funeral. The goat was still refused, and a huge crowd was beginning to gather,

and the rumour would soon spread that the ancient-parents had refused their present. This would bring shame on the dead man's sons.

The sons quickly sent back their uncle to offer two goats, which were still refused. Their uncle was now on his knees, pleading. Then a question was put to the sons. They were asked to say whether or not their daughter had not produced a child worth a cow. That is, was their father not worth a cow? To this question, there was no reply. The cow was right before the eyes of the ancient-parents, yet the sons had dared to offer them the skinniest of the goats. All the while, people standing by made comments, like, 'They've seen the cow, they'll not accept anything less.' Others said that the sons were insolent by daring to offer a small goat to their father's ikwunne, his mother's patrilineage, when in-laws had presented no less than a cow. People were commenting that there should have been two cows. They said that the sons should be ashamed of themselves, since they would have buried their father, a man of such high status, without a cow. Had he not lived to old age? Did he not have two wives who had produced many sons? Had in-laws not provided a cow? In the end, the classificatory ancient-parents of the deceased took the cow home in jubilation.

The more married daughters one had, the grander one's funeral in terms of the number of goats, pieces of cloth and presents to be presented. The married

daughters whose husbands brought pieces of cloth, took them back when they left after the funeral. Money, wine, white cloth and live animals presented at the funeral were for the sons to dispose of. In-laws who brought presents took home presents. Classificatory ancient-parents, as well as being given presents, also brought presents, such as pound notes stuck on long sticks for all to see, wine and kola-nuts. The white cloth brought by them was put in for the dead and buried with the dead. As presents and people were mobilized for funerals through married daughters, so were they mobilized through marrying many wives. Each wife's patrilineage was an in-law group and classificatory ancient-parents to her children, and would take presents to support these children at any funerals affecting them. They alone shared presents brought by their ancient-parents. Any of the sons who was married, would take what was brought by his in-laws. Daughters would take what their husbands would bring, or their nwanne afo, siblings, and share it with them. Any of the sons in an organization would take what that organization would bring. Those who would take what was brought by any specific group were the only ones who would buy presents required to support the specific group when they in turn would suffer a bereavement. Their family or lineage members would only accompany them. What was left after each group had gone off with its return presents was sold to meet the cost of the funeral. The sons shared the

money according to how much they individually contributed to the cost of the funeral.

All those who should bring things to a funeral were involved in relationships traced through the female sex. They were in-laws of the deceased; the dead person's mother's patrilineage; in the case of a woman, her own patrilineage too; the lineages of the mothers of the dead person's children; and the children of the deceased person's daughters. All these categories received presents in return. The all-important category of patrilineage daughters of the deceased, brought no presents, but took presents home.

The display of presents and the wrangling over who got what, took the grief out of a funeral. While lineage daughters sat around watching carefully to see when an animal would be killed, so that they would claim the rump of the animal, the dead person's mother's lineage waited to claim the best animal available.

Mourning

In the indigenous society, as in the present day, there were hardly any taboos surrounding a man's mourning of his wife. He was said to have feared only possible accusations of maltreatment or murder, founded or unfounded, by his deceased wife's group of patrilineage daughters and her patrilineage as a whole. They owned the corpse, they lost a member, therefore they were expected to arrive at the funeral suspicious and angry. If they found out that their daughter had died as a result of maltreatment, they should refuse to take the corpse back until compensation was paid. As a wife's marital lineage did not have the right to bury her, a situation of refusal to bury a woman usually led to war. A man was said to be free to remarry soon after he had buried his wife. After thirty-six days from burying his wife, he would shave his hair and go about his business. This was not the case with a woman mourning the death of her husband. Women who recounted the indigenous mourning rituals said that women in mourning their husbands in those days, went through hell-fire, oku nmuo. When they cried and feared the death of a husband, it was not so much out of loss, but the dread of the punishment in store for them.

In the olden days, when a woman lost her husband, on the day of his death she would undo and scatter her hair and begin to look sorrowful and miserable

as she began to be in a state of ritual taboo, which lasted for a period of one year, ino na ijita.

During this period, she was expected always to hold a kitchen knife. She would not socialize with other people. Titled men would not eat food cooked by her or speak to her or respond to her greetings.

If she had not been living in peace with her husband, she would begin to "buy", that is, bribe the ukozala titled men who acted as the police (see Chapter Two) to permit her to shave her hair. If she in any way broke the rule of mourning, it would be revealed to these same titled men, and she would then have to negotiate with them. For two consecutive nights before talking of cutting her hair, she would perform the ceremony known as ibo ihe nze, paying the titled men their due. This involved giving them two she-goats. She was then allowed to scrape her hair completely.

Then she would be built a small hut, and a black neck band put on her neck. She had to tie a black cloth made of bark, aji. She was then isolated in the little hut. She should never wash her hands before eating food. One who cooked her food would stay at a safe distance to pass the food to her. After the ritual of shaving her hair, she was not allowed to wash her hands with water for three market weeks, twelve days, then the ritual of hand washing was performed, ikwo aka ito. At the same time, the ceremony called ikpo ntu ito, clearing the ash of three market weeks, twelve days, was

performed. All the rubbish was swept and put in the bad bush. The woman was then allowed to wash her hands before and after eating her meal. It was onye nke ya, her own person - her child or her sister - who would feed her. After seven market weeks, twenty-eight days, she performed another cleansing ritual known as ikpo ntu isa, clearing the ash of seven market weeks. She would then come out of the little hut. While she was still in the little hut, those who were not present during the ceremony when her head was shaved, when they came to visit, had to rub money over their eyes and then throw it to her.

On the day of coming out of the little hut, she would invite lineage daughters of her marital lineage and present food to them, itukwu ha ashi, in the same manner in which her husband used to give her foodstuff. She would take a small flat basket and arrange yam, cocoyam and plantain in it for them. The lineage daughters would then cook the yam for breakfast, mix the cocoyam and plantain with palm-oil and spice, and eat. A female dibia would then shave her hair and release her from the little hut. This was, in fact, the day she would put a black neckband on her neck. For this ritual, the female dibia was given pounded food and wine and additional pounded food to take home. All the clothes used by the woman while she was in the little hut, were disposed of in the bad bush.

After three market weeks, twelve days, she

performed the ceremony known as izu afia uchichi, selling in the market at night. She would take her trading basket, and another woman would accompany her to the market to go and trade by night. After this, she would perform yet another trading ceremony called izu ahia mbu ego, by which she learnt to trade for cash or money again. A woman would accompany her to the market and, at the market, she would give this other woman some cowrie shells and ask her to go and buy her some snuff, after which they would go home. She may then begin to trade again on market days. She was compelled to tie black cloth till she had completed one year's period of mourning.

When I asked the elderly woman, Nwajiuba, what happened to a woman when a husband with whom she was known not to be living in harmony, died, Nwajiuba, who clearly considered the mourning ritual to be a punishment, replied,

'Her punishment was not greater. She went through the same ritual, except that her father's lineage daughters might fine her if they so wished. Witch-hunting after a death has always gone on. Someone may go and tell lineage daughters that a woman died from ill-treatment by her children, quarrels might result from this and fines levied. This in fact happened when my mother died. She told my older sister to go and call Egoeme, who belonged to the same organization of patrilineage daughters as herself, and another woman at Ezenabo's, called

Ochaekwe. These women were summoned but I did not know why they were sent for. My mother's elder sister did not visit during my mother's illness. My mother therefore told these women that she knew that, when she died, her elder sister might tell them that it was Nwajiuba, her daughter, who ill-treated her. She told them that this would be incorrect.'

A widow, ajadu, was still legally tied to her husband's patrilineage. After a year, she was ritually cleansed and accepted back in society. The widow, especially if she was still of child-bearing age, was inherited by her husband's brother. This was called nkuchi nwanyi, levirate. Since women had access to land only as wives, the death of a husband placed a woman in a state of great insecurity. As an Nnobi saying put it, 'the woman whose husband died was crying, saying that while there was discussion about who should bury her husband, one should also discuss who should inherit her.'⁽¹⁶⁾ Though there was the notion of group marriage, group consummation was not practised. When a woman was inherited by her husband's brother, marriage ceremony was not repeated, for she was the collective wife of the group. All the man would do would be to give her a kitchen knife, nma ekwu. Thus he would symbolically welcome her into his particular household.

The legal right on the fertility of a wife was so strong that if a widow produced a child by any man other than her husband's lineage men, the

child would still belong to her husband's lineage. For this reason, there was a very male saying that, 'if a woman refused her husband her vagina, it would not deny him the child from it'.⁽¹⁷⁾ It was no surprise then that, in this culture, in the absence of father's brothers, an adult stepson might inherit his stepmother. (See Chapter Five.) This was usually an adult son, who would replace his father in the obi. A son who would succeed his father in the obi need not allow his own mother to be inherited by other lineage men if she did not wish it, for he would be in a powerful position to protect her and obi property.

Funeral Songs and Gender Roles

During birth and marriage, women as wives and mothers controlled the medium of communication through song and dance. They stressed the importance of wifeness and motherhood. At death, it was lineage daughters of the deceased who transmitted cultural norms through songs and dance. Qualities and roles ascribed to males and females were echoed in their songs. A dead man was, for example, referred to as a leopard, a much feared carnivorous animal. His lineage daughters sang that no-one should touch a leopard, agu, on its tail, whether it was alive or dead; that no-one should poke his finger into the eye of the baby of a leopard, whether it was alive or dead. They thus perpetuated the fearful, punitive and protective image of the male. Those men who lived up to the ideal image of a full male when they died would be expected to leave behind property and family. It was therefore important to warn off would be usurpers. In perpetuation of the forceful and courageous male image, the dead man was also referred to as ebunu ji isi eje ogu, ram who fights with his head, that is, one who meets danger or takes on a fight head-on like a bull.

In this culture, the death or loss of a mother was the most painful experience, since motherhood was glorified. When a fellow woman died, other women, especially those close to the deceased, expressed

their grief freely in uncontrolled shrieking, weeping or throwing themselves on the ground, and generally being in a state of disarray. In this culture, even though it was not a manly thing to cry, people spoke kindly of a man who cried at the death of his mother. Women especially spoke of how impossible it was to exercise self-control on issues affecting one's mother. At no other funeral did lineage daughters sing their hearts out as during the funeral of a sister who had died as a wife elsewhere. The grief was usually so much that they opened their songs with statements of disbelief such as, "our sister who came here on marriage journey, we heard she is dead, so we have come to find out if it is true." Having thus established death as a fact, they would accuse death of theft, "Death is a thief, yes. Death, I say you are a thief. You carry things and run away with them."

Another, very moving, song when a woman died before old age was this, "Do you know that hot pepper has gone into our eyes. Since she died suddenly, we will mourn her or cry her death heatedly with all our emotions." "Onwulu n'ike n'ike, anyi ga akwa ya n'ike n'ike." In another song, they sang praises of the dead woman as having fulfilled all that was expected of her as a woman - economic resourcefulness and motherhood. But they regretted that she did not stay to enjoy the fruits of her labour.

"This woman has goats,

She has left food.

This woman has dogs,

She has left food.

This woman has brought up children

And has not reaped the reward,

May God accept your soul."

Folktales and Gender Roles

As with songs, women also transmitted cultural ideas and their own comments on them through stories. Men told stories as well, but children spent most of their time with the women, so that the most common stories repeated by the children were those told by women. Men told stories about wars, travels, adventures with spirits. These were very male tales told to boys. But what was common to most of the stories, whether told by men or women, was the fact that the heroes and heroines were motherless children, orphans or paupers, who always vanquished the more privileged by miraculous or magical means. Motherhood was glorified by showing the suffering and loneliness of those children who had no mother. Usually their mothers reappeared to kill off their foes. One did not suffer so much through the loss of one's father as through the loss of a mother. Step-mothers were always the villains. Favouritism by fathers was common.

As each wife's dwelling was autonomous, that is, demarcated and independent from those of the other wives, when a wife died, if her children were still young, it was not possible for them to fend for themselves. They usually moved into the abode of one of their father's wives. If their mother was an only wife, their father quickly remarried, or the children were sent to live with the wife of any of their

relations. They may even be sent to their mother's lineage, to be raised there and returned later. Orphans, in any case, usually found themselves living as servants with relatives or strangers. As folk-tales showed, orphans suffered, since they had no-one to protect them.

Orphans ran endless errands in the home. After cooking, they were not given food, or got just enough in their hands, while the other children got their food on plates. Orphans swept the compound, while other children played. For the slightest mistakes they got a severe beating. Other children made him a scapegoat. If he denied the accusation he was lashed like a bought slave. His mistress or step-mother would not caution her children when she saw them beating the orphan, because it was not her child. Any job that needed doing was given to him, whether he was capable of doing it or not. If he became stubborn, he might even be sold, for there was no-one to rescue him. No-one cut his hair or looked after it while the other children were well looked after. No new clothes were bought for him. He might inherit the rags from the other children. He always sat apart, not sure what to do in case he would be beaten or scolded. He slept on the bare floor or on a tattered mat.

On afo, market day, other children would get market food, but the orphan wouldn't. He even got such punishment as being told to sleep outside, even in the rain. Other children might have body

decorations, igbu uli, or wear jigida, waist beads, but not this child. On the market day, when all the idols were displayed in the market, he was not allowed to go and look at the idols like other children, but was told to stay and guard the compound. He was not allowed to go out and play with the other children, but had to stay at home to cook for them, to fetch water and cut wood. He was always accused of any theft. If he got sick he was not treated, but was said to pretend so as not to do any work. The orphan was always unhappy because of his maltreatment, and cried a lot to his dead mother and his God. And God always helped him, for they were most often the rich people in Nnobi. As an Nnobi saying put it, inu onye na emegbu ogbenye cheta echi, maka na onwero onye ma echi, 'anyone maltreating an orphan should think of tomorrow, for no-one knows what the future will bring'.

One of the stories about a child maltreated by his father's wife went like this. A woman died after giving birth to one child, and her husband remarried. The new wife began to ill-treat the motherless child. Soon the new wife had a child. After cooking, she would put food for the motherless child high up out of reach and that of her own child on the ground within reach. The motherless child cried and sang and mourned the death of its own mother, and begged her to appear. Only when the step-mother returned home did she bring down the food for the child to eat.

Then one day when the child was crying as usual on her mother's grave, spirits appeared and asked her what was troubling her. She told them, and they said to her to have patience, that her mother was on her way to her. Soon her mother appeared, and she recounted to her all her troubles. Her mother told her to go home, that she would look into the matter. Again the step-mother cooked and left the child's food high up and the child began to cry again. Her mother appeared immediately and beat the other woman to death.

The most popular of these stories known by any Nnobi child, or any Igbo child for that matter, is the udala story. Udala is a fruit-tree under which children played and picked its fruits to eat to fill their stomachs in-between meals or while their mothers were away. According to this story, a child's father's wife, its step-mother, bought udala from the market and gave only to her own children and none to the motherless child. The other children tantalized the motherless child with their own udala. After the children ate the udala and spat out the seeds, the motherless child picked up a seed and planted it, and wet it with its tears while singing to it in grief,

"Oh my udala grow,

Grow, grow, grow,

My father's wife bought udala from the market,

gave only her children and did not give this

motherless one.

This world is a visiting place,

We stay and depart."

As she sang, the seed germinated, grew into a plant which produced fruits. The other children, out of greed, quickly climbed on the tree. The child sang again and the tree grew very high and the children stayed up there and died.

According to one other story, the father gave yam to his wife to cook for all the children. Step-mother cheated and gave the motherless child the tail end, which is always bitter. The child expressed its grief in song, thus,

"King Ndumuche when going to cultivate yam,
Gave yam to his children, but gave the tail
end to an orphan.

When roasted, it is bitter;

When cooked in a pot, it is bitter;

If this is wrong, may it rain all day."

Immediately, it started to rain. This continued for countless days and disturbed the farming. Soon someone went to tell the king the cause of it all.

From that day onwards, the child got yam like the other children.

Step-mothers were more cruel to male children, especially if the child was the first son, who would inherit his father's position. They may even give the child poison in food. They were not so wicked to female children, for Nnobi say that nwanyi bu aku, woman is wealth. After bringing the girl up, she was married off, and through her the step-mother

would get in-laws, and all the benefits that that entailed. The state of being motherless, ogbenye nne, was considered a terrible thing. Ogbenye is, in fact, the word for a poor person.

In the very male stories, orphans or paupers through their modesty were usually aided by supernatural powers to show such gallantry in war that they were usually made kings after rescuing their towns from enemies. Sometimes the king showed his gratitude by giving them their daughters in marriage. The greed and arrogance of the more privileged children were usually rewarded with punishment in these stories. All the children, for example, could be lost in the wild and come to a cross-road where each road promised something. The privileged, "spoilt" children usually followed the road which promised the richest reward, only to meet seven-headed devils at the end of the road, who would beat them to death. The pauper was usually modest, and accepted little, only to meet with the greatest reward at the end of the road. In the women's stories, the step-mother's greedy children were usually punished with death, too.

What I have tried to demonstrate in this chapter is that Nnobi women have never been tongue-tied. Nor have they been mere objects circulated or acted upon by their menfolk. On the contrary, Nnobi women made political use of the roles in which they were cast as daughters, wives and mothers. While daughters sought and exercised power through the control of the funerals of patrilineage members,

wives and mothers exercised power too, through the control of fertility ceremonies during marriage and childbirth. Through songs dealing with these life-cycle rituals and ceremonies, women generated favourable gender ideologies and stressed the social importance of their various roles and duties.

CHAPTER THREE: Notes

1. Onu umu nwanyi n'agba ka ukpaka.

2. Nmili rufulu mana ite awaro

3. Onabu ekiliba onu agadi nwanyi, odi k'obu' na osoro nu ala.

4. Rosaldo 1974; Chodorow 1974.

5. Igba udu oma is not easily rendered into English. ^{used as a musical instrument}
Igba means to *dance*, udu is a kind of pot, ibi oma means to embrace. This could therefore be translated as a "ritual_A of embrace". As this does not indicate the purpose of the ritual, I have used the expression "a ritual to separate blood relationship". I have found conveying meaning, instead of word by word translations, more useful when direct translations have had no meaning in the English language.

6. Ndudugandu si na nke ito pua na ino, si mebe, mana oto na nke ito, a'gba udu oma. Similar compromise solution by the Onitsha Igbo to allow marriage between certain people in incestuous relationships was recorded by Henderson (1972: 197) and already cited in the introduction to this thesis.

7. This, compared to the normal marriage custom, appears to be a cheaper and quicker marriage.

8. During fieldwork in 1982, money for marriage payment ranged from 1,000 naira on average, to between 2,000 and 3,000 naira for graduate girls.

9. Opinion varied widely on the amount of money or number of jars of palm-wine used during the

olden days, but it was generally agreed that on average, at least sixteen pots or jars of palm-wine would be distributed today.

10. One jar was equivalent to the measurement of a gallon.

11. An illustration of a tattooed woman is reproduced in Basden 1938, between pages 336 and 337.

12. A man was forbidden to have sexual intercourse with his wife from the time of giving birth and throughout the period of lactation, which was prescribed to last for at least two years.

13. Female circumcision in these northern Igbo areas is described in detail by Basden (1938; 176-8). During fieldwork in Nnobi, I found no evidence to show that it is still in practice. On the contrary, this was one of the old customs which Nnobi women spoke about with bitterness. The last women who were circumcised must be over sixty years of age. This was therefore one of the Church regulations which was welcomed by the local people. As Basden writes, 'it is interesting to note that this prohibition was enacted by the native members independently of the Europeans' (p.178).

14. Asi nna kpolu nne n'efe umu.

15. Taxi may also have been used in the true meaning of the word, that is, something which carries passengers, in which case, the women may be acknowledging the position of authority of the male as someone who would have dependants, like wife and children.

16. Nwanyi di ya nwulu n'ebezi akwa si, ana agbakwa

izu onye g'eni di ya, si na agbakwa izu onye ga ekuchi ya. I am grateful to Professor John Umeh,

a fanatical Nnobi traditionalist, for this information.

17. Ilopulum otu, oya apum nwa. This saying was

also given and explained to me by Professor John

Umeh.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE IDEOLOGY OF GENDER

From the preceding chapters, we see a system of social organization in indigenous Nnobi society, based on strict sexual dualism, whereby women's economic and political organizations were separate from those of men. But we also see how, through the manipulation of gender concepts and flexible gender construction in language, the dual-sex barrier is broken or mediated. Thus, categories of woman, as for example daughters defined or classified as "males", or wealthy women, gained access to positions of authority in the power structure. The aim of this chapter is to look at the contradictions and inconsistencies in the cultural system of Nnobi which made this gender system possible.

Language and Gender

It is my thesis that the Igbo non-distinctive subject pronoun allows a more flexible semantic system, in which it is possible for men and women to share attributes. This system of few linguistic distinctions between male and female gender also makes it possible for men and women to play some social roles which, in some other cultures, especially those of the Western world, carry rigid sex and gender association.

There is a biological gender distinction of male and female of any species in Igbo terminology. Oke means male, and nyi means female. The terms for man and woman are nwoke and nwanyi. These are contracted forms of two words, nwa, child, and the respective gender words, oke, male, and nyi, female, hence the distinction, male child and female child. But in subject pronoun, no distinction is made between male and female. The third person singular, O, stands for both male and female, unlike the English gender construction, which distinguishes between "he" and "she". As a result of this, one finds that many Igbo people when speaking in English, interchange he and she, his and her. In Igbo, the third person singular of the possessive pronoun ya stands for his and hers. There is, therefore, no constant reminder in speech to distinguish between the sexes. It is therefore possible to claim that

the Igbo language, in comparison with English, for example, has not built up rigid associations between certain adjectives or attributes and gender subjects, nor certain objects and gender possessive pronouns. The genderless word mmadu, humankind, applies to both sexes. There is no such usage as in English, whereby the word man represents both sexes. Nor is there the cumbersome option of saying he or she, his or her, him or her, which perhaps makes people simply use the male pronoun to represent both sexes in the English language. In Igbo, o stands for he, she and even it, and a stands for the impersonal one, and nya for the imperative, let him or her.

This system of few linguistic gender distinctions makes it possible to see certain social roles as separate from sex and gender, hence the possibility for either sex to fill in the roles. This of course does not rule out the presence of competition between the sexes, and situations whereby a particular sex tends to monopolize roles and positions, generating and stressing anti-opposite sex gender ideologies in order to maintain its interests.

Two examples of situations in which women played roles ideally or normally occupied by men, that is, what I have called male roles, in indigenous Nnobi society, (see Chapter One), were as "male daughters" and "female husbands". In either role, women acted as family heads. The Igbo word for family head is the genderless expression di-bu-no. The genderless di is a prefix word which means specialist in or

expert at or master of something.⁽¹⁾ Therefore, dibuno means one in a master relationship to a household and those who live in the house. As this word is genderless, a woman in this position is referred to as dibuno in the same term as a man in this position would be called. A husband was simply di, that is, one in a master relationship to others, whether it be a man or a woman in master relationship to others. Whereas, in English, because of its rigid gender construction, a female head would be referred to as mistress and a male head as master. In indigenous Nnobi society and culture, there was one head or master of a household at a time, and "male daughters" and "female husbands" were called by the same term, whose English translation would be master. Some women were therefore masters to other people, who included men and women.

The reverse applied to those in wife relationship to others. The Igbo word for wife, onye be, is a genderless expression meaning a person who belongs to the home of the one who is the master of the home. The other words for wife, nwunye or nwanyị, female or woman, also denotes one in a subordinate, service or domestic relationship to one in a master position.⁽²⁾ It was therefore possible for some men to be addressed by the term wife, as they were in service or domestic relationship to a master. An example of this was the hereditary title known as Nwunye nonu, wife nonu, as the holder of this title was in domestic relationship to the man who

held the title known as ozo Aho.⁽³⁾ There is a series of contradictions here, for on the one hand, there is a suggestion of gender asymmetry and not a sexual one. There were, for example, women in master or husband roles and men in wifely or domestic roles. On the other hand, even though domestic roles embodied a classification into a subordinate female gender, apart from "male daughters", the master or husband role did not necessitate a male classification. "Female husbands" were not males in the way that daughters were. In spite of these contradictions in gender statuses and roles, in general, men were husbands, women wives.

The term for family, ndi be, which means people of one's home or household, is usually used in relation to the head of the family, who is, ideally, a man. This expression indicates the subjection or subordination of all other members of the family to the family head. This is indicated in the terms of address and greetings. To a family head, the question which is usually asked in greeting is, 'how are the people of your family?' kedu maka ndi be gi? Of a wife, it would be asked, 'how are the children?' umuaka kwanu?

Thus, terms of relationships state the ideal, while in daily speech describing social actions or processes, the ideal is contradicted when language states the factual. People, for example, say that they are going to visit sections of the family compound by name. If they are going to the female

section, they name the woman by her name or by reference to her first child, and thus use the expression 'the place of the mother of so-and-so'. If they are going to the male section, then they use the expression 'the place of so-and-so', using the name of the male head of the family. The flow of people was more to the female section, as visits were more frequently made by women and children constantly borrowing things and transmitting messages. Households were therefore better known in social process by the names of wives and children. Ideally, family compounds were understood to be the obi of the male master of the compound, yet the expression for natal home is ebe nne nolu mua onye, the place where one was borne by one's mother. But, collectively, everyone was of the male master's compound, ndi be so-and-so, the people of such-and-such a man's compound.

Thus, terms of subjection were contradicted in social process by facts of female autonomy, whether in the family structure or the relations of production. As the contradiction in gender relations in indigenous Nnobi society was between subjection and autonomy, subordination of the female did not necessarily result in subjugation. As was shown in Chapter Three, males and females made political use of the roles in which they were defined. According to an Igbo saying, 'When a man begins to ill-treat his wife, his world becomes confusing, and when a woman begins to ill-treat her husband,

her vagina becomes dry.' Weapons of war, in this context, are food, rationed by women, and sex, rationed by men. Men showed grief, hurt and resentment by refusing to eat the food cooked by an offending wife. Similarly, a hurt wife would refuse her husband sexual compliance.

Sexual Division of Space

The terms of ideal relations of gender which defined males as being in authority over females, also claimed the superiority of males over females. To ensure this pattern of authority, there was a physical and ideological distancing of males and females. Familiarity, they say, breeds contempt.

In the indigenous architecture,^{*} the family compound was always divided into two; women and little children lived at the back section, adult men lived in the front section. There was a wall to mark this physical and ideological division. The front section was male, the back section was female. From the entrance gate, the first house at the very front of the compound was the obi, which served as a reception. This was exclusively male. There, the master of the family received his guests and held meetings and discussions. Women and small children did not go into the obi except when sent for. Little children carried messages between the two sections of the compound. It was at the obi that the master's food was served. There too, he would arrange for sexual visits to his bed-chamber, ofe, by his wives. Just behind the obi was the house that served as the master's bed-chamber. It was very personal to him, and not even adult sons were allowed in there. The wife whose turn it was to mate with him, sneaked in and out by night.

*See Appendix 3

The first wife's sub-compound unit was usually closest to the master's bed-chamber house, followed by that of the second wife, etc. In the co-wife situation, physical or romantic show of love was not public.

A man, ideally, should never eat in the women's quarters. One who did so was ridiculed in public and called unbecoming names. He was said to crawl on hands and knees into his wife's house. Occasions when this rule was overlooked were in situations of crisis, like sickness or death, or when a ritual needed to be performed. Adult sons were not so rigidly bound, and did go to their mothers, either to seek advice or to help with the more strenuous household duties, like chopping fire-wood.

The family compound was conceived of and planned as private to the outside. There was a compound wall and an entrance gate to mark this division. Within the compound, the front section can be said to be public in comparison to the rest. It was there that all the prestigious activities such as naming ceremonies, marriages, lineage meetings etc., took place. The women's section was, on the other hand, physically and ideologically linked to the backyard. The expression for going to the toilet was 'going to the back of the house'. Defecation was done in the gardens or bushes at the back of the compound. Everyday rubbish was also thrown there. These were the gardens where women spent a lot of their time. Females were therefore physically and ideologically

closer to areas associated with and seen as messy and dirty. Women's daily chores in their compound units were also quite messy.

The sexual division of space between men and women was so strong that not even "male daughters" might break the rule. A "male daughter", when remaining in her father's compound, lived in her mother's nkpuke, wife's sub-compound unit which was a matricentric household, or in her own unit in the female section. It was hoped that she would produce a male issue, a son who would occupy the obi. Not even "male daughters" might tend patrilineage or family ancestral spirits and shrines. These resided in the obi. The sight of them should bring awe to women. Women's menstrual blood was believed to be polluting to ancestral spirits and men. For this reason, a woman in her menses was forbidden sexual intercourse with her husband and banned from the obi areas altogether. Ino na ezi, or ino n'iba, or ino na nso, in a state of taboo, was the expression for being in menses. ⁽⁴⁾ These expressions were, perhaps, derived from the custom of isolating women in menses in a little hut at the back of the compound, where they were supposed to remain squatted till the menstrual flow ceased, after which a chick would be killed and the ritual of cleansing performed before she was allowed back into society. The penalty for a woman who broke the rule of trespass or sexual taboo while in her menses, was severe. The fine was even more severe if her husband was an ozo titled man - a purified

or holy man.

If the man was not economically master of the household, ⁽⁵⁾ ritually he was master of the family. This was ensured through his control of the yam medicine for the annual ritual which permitted the eating of new yam. ⁽⁶⁾ Even if women kept their own shrines, once a year the male head of the obi, usually their husband or his son or his brother, would go and consecrate the shrine of the women. ⁽⁷⁾

Socialization and Gender

First, I shall describe what were said to have been the traditional daily duties of men and women in indigenous Nnobi society. I shall then reproduce the general beliefs held about men and women which supported the sexual division of labour, before looking at the socialization into gender roles.

Daily Routine

As children grew older, they were trained to undertake duties suitable for their sexes so that, by the time they became adults, their daily duties came as a habit.

When a boy woke up in the morning, his first duty after greeting his father, then his mother, was to break firewood for the day's cooking. If there was wood already, he might help to sweep the compound or do some work on the farm, before going back to his mother to ask for food. After eating his breakfast, if there were any jobs which involved cutting a tree, climbing a tree, building or repairing a damaged roof or house, he was told about it by his mother. It was men's work to build houses, cut down ripe palm-fruit from the tree and cut the fruits from the stalk, cut down palm branches and carry them for the goats to eat. If the palm-fruits had already been boiled and were ready for pounding, it was men's job to pound it. Men did not cook. After helping his mother with the more "masculine" domestic chores, the boy would instruct his mother to make sure there was food to eat when he came back from farmwork or from his outing with other youths. After he had done whatever duties were allocated to him for the day, he was free to go off with his friends, and no-one asked him where he was going or where he had been, because he was a man. A man

was free to go and come as he pleased.

The daily round of the master of a household was similar to that of his adult sons. When the master woke up he would go to his obi to say the daily prayer to the gods and ancestors, itunzu. After this, he would sit down to sniff his tobacco before taking his climbing gadgets, agbu, to go and tap the morning palm-wine. When he came back home, his breakfast would have been served. After eating, he would put aside some palm-wine for drinking and take the rest to the market for sale. If it was during the planting or harvesting season, after breakfast he would take his knife and hoe to do some farmwork. But before leaving, he would instruct his wife to make sure there was food ready for when he got back. He would also give her his own contribution of food to be cooked. This could be yam or money with which to buy yam and meat. At lunchtime, he would go home and wash himself and eat his meal, after which he would rest in his obi, drink his palm-wine and leave some for the evening. After resting, he would go out to tap afternoon palm-wine and then go off again for evening work on the farm. Next he would go back to his obi and put away his working tools for the day. He then settled down to drink the left-over palm-wine from the morning. This he would drink with any friends who might come round for a chat. The adult sons might also join them. At nightfall, they would all say goodnight and go off to their homes for supper, kept ready for them by wives and mothers.

For women, unlike men, work was not separate from leisure. A man could finish a particular job and return to his obi to rest. By dusk, he would have done the day's work and was able to spend the rest of the day at leisure, chatting and drinking or visiting with his friends. Women's involvement with work stretched round the clock. When the cock crew, the woman woke up to start cooking breakfast. She first swept out the ashes from the previous day's cooking before making the fire. Then she swept the compound. But if she had grown-up children, it was their job to sweep, collect firewood and wash plates. When she finished making the fire, she warmed any left-over food from the previous day and dished out food for her husband and children. She herself would take her husband's food to the obi and leave him water to wash his hands and for drinking. She would later send her children to collect the plates or take them herself for washing.

The first person taken care of was the master of the house, after which she washed her children and fed them. But if she had grown-up daughters, they took care of their younger brothers and sisters. The woman then ate her breakfast before going to work on the farm. She would get most of the ingredients she needed for the day's food from the farm, and any surplus was sold in the market. She then got ready to go to the market to sell and buy or buy and sell. Before leaving, she would share out the jobs of preparing ingredients for cooking to her daughters.

This was so that they should not remain idle at home or wander off from the compound. She also let them take care of the smaller children. If she had no grown-up children, she would tie her baby on her back and go to wherever she had to go. Women carrying babies up to two years old, and foodstuff twice the weight of the baby on their heads, were generally agreed to have always been a common sight.

At noon, those women who did not have grown-up daughters reloaded unsold goods on their heads and went back to cook the afternoon meal. Those who had to attend long-distance markets prepared the afternoon food and told the children where to find their food and their father's before leaving home.

Again in the afternoon, the man's food was served. Water for washing his hands and for drinking was brought there for him, after which water was also left at the back of the house for washing his body. When all would have eaten, the man began to rest, the woman quickly ate her lunch and returned to the market or the farm or remained at home to prepare ingredients for the evening meal.

Women did not remain completely idle to relax. They either had a baby in their arms or were doing one thing or another like shelling nuts, slicing or grating cassava, pounding nuts or pepper, washing bitterleaf, making rope or brooms, making soap, palm-oil, kernel-oil, etc., etc.

When the sun went down again they would go back to the farm to do some work and then collect firewood for cooking the evening meal.⁽⁸⁾ The man was again served his evening meal. If his wife had anything to discuss with him, she would do so while he ate his supper. She would then clear the plates after the meal. Then she fed her children and ate her own food in the kitchen or in her house. By the time she had finished clearing up and washing up, it would be time for bed. Again she would lay out her husband's mats for sleeping on and bid him goodnight and return to her quarters where she slept with her children.

Just before bed was usually story telling time, when a woman would sit with her children. With oil light, they would shell nuts or do some light-duty job while they told stories till the small children fell asleep and were put to bed before their mother would retire for the day. Her night's rest depended on how the children slept, whether they were still suckling, teething or ill. A man slept in a separate quarter, far away from it all.

General Beliefs About Men and Women

Men and women were talked about or judged according to the roles expected of them as full social adults, that is, from their statuses as fathers and mothers.

What was stressed about men was their duty to provide for and protect their families. This culture did not stereotype a bad man. No tales were told about men who were immodest about their physical beauty. This was not so with women. Everyone knew the attributes of one considered a bad woman. The expression ajo nwanyi, bad woman, immediately brought a picture to mind, which contrasted with the impressions one had when the term ezigbo nwanyi, good woman, was used.

Women who were considered to be bad were those who were lacking in wifely and maternal duties and sentiments. A bad woman was one who did not look after her husband, one who was bad-tempered. She usually ate up the food without giving any to her husband. It was said about her that she hated her husband just as a dog hated goat's food.⁽⁹⁾ When her husband uttered one word, she uttered ten. She always fought her husband as if they were age-mates or equals. She always did what her husband told her not to do. She would never heed his presence. If her husband spoke out loud, she would scold him as if she was scolding a child. If her husband gave

her money to go to the market to purchase food, she would refuse to go. If any of her children cried for food, she would beat him and send him outside. She would not sweep the compound. She cooked tasteless food, either putting too much salt in the sauce or not squeezing out the bitterness from bitterleaf before putting it in the sauce. She was always scolding and never got on with neighbours. She was envious of her neighbours and would kill their fowl when they trespassed. If she had the chance to steal, she would do so. 'Always her mind burned her like pepper'. She always caused townsfolk to point their lips at her with distaste or in contempt. She gossiped, was abusive and adulterous. She indulged in ikpa nsi, outright poisoning or killing of people through sorcery. In short, a bad woman was one who enjoyed wrongdoing and her aim was always to break up her husband's household.

An equally much talked about woman was the mythical very beautiful woman, whose narcissism usually made her reject numerous suitors, only to end up choosing a demon or monster in the disguise of a wealthy man. It was stressed that a woman's beauty was not just physical, but must also be seen in her mind, good character and hard work. One typical story about the predicaments of a vain, beautiful woman, went like this;

There was once a very beautiful woman called Enenebe ejeghi olu, one to be beheld and not to work. She did nothing and touched nothing.

She would take her bath and her servants would serve her food. When suitors came, she would say she would only marry a rich man. She thus refused many suitors. Then one day, a handsome rich man came and she agreed to marry him, not knowing that he was not a real human being. After the marriage ceremony, she went off with him. After two days at the man's house, the woman discovered that her husband was not a human being, but a monster. That same night, the man killed her.

In contrast to all these bad women was the good woman, who was usually a good daughter, wife and mother. She looked after her husband, never refused him food and made sure that things worked out well in the household. She looked after her children, fed them, kept them clean and gave them good home training. She usually helped her husband financially through her own efforts. If her husband was unable to provide money for food, she was able to support the household through farming, marketing and trading. She was not quarrelsome, and always protected her children against any form of danger. She would even protect them from or defend them against their father if she had to. A woman's self-denial in relation to her children was expressed in the belief that mothers starved first before their children. She did not eat before her children had done so.

Industriousness, which is what was meant by

good character, was inculcated in a woman right from her father's house. As Nnobi saying has it, 'It was with the firewood a woman gathered during the dry season in her father's house that she was going to light her fire during the rainy season in her husband's house.' This means that she was carrying over whatever character she developed at her father's house to her husband's house. Industriousness acquired at her father's house would pay dividends in her husband's house. As for her female children, it was her duty to teach them not to copy all that men did, because a woman was like a breakable plate, nwanyi bu efele owuwa. A woman in her maidenhood should exercise self-control so as not to fall into the hands of men.

Coming Into Manhood, "Igba Ikolobia"

The likening of a woman to a breakable plate reflects indigenous ideas about male and female sexuality, which supported the socio-cultural significance made of the female biological process. It is basically saying that, because of biological differences, a woman is sexually more vulnerable than a man. A woman gets pregnant, a man does not. Since this culture stigmatized pregnancy before marriage,⁽¹⁰⁾ the stress in the socialization of girls was on sexual restraint and the preparation for future roles as wives and mothers. The stress in the socialization into manhood, on the other hand, was on masculinity, equated with virility, violence, valour and authority.

In the traditional society, sexual differentiation was not insisted upon in early childhood. All little children ran about naked. Little boys participated in what were regarded as female duties. Boys washed their smaller sisters and brothers, helped feed the babies and helped their mothers with the cooking. Marked differences in socialization began in later childhood, when boys began to gang together and wander away from their sisters and the home. This was the beginning of three socialization processes into manhood and the qualities and attributes of masculinity. These processes and stages of male development were vividly remembered by Nnobi

elders and middle-aged men, as most of the activities they described continued well into the first half of the twentieth century. The male activities encouraged in youths were wrestling, hunting and masquerading. (11)

Formal wrestling took place in the village squares, and was therefore a public activity where the "strong" were praised and the "weak" laughed at. During wrestling, boys, young men and even the elderly paired up with their age-mates. (12) Hunting was another sport performed in age-sets. What was hunted ranged from small animals to dangerous animals according to the age-sets. Small boys hunted lizards, rats and small birds, while older men hunted squirrels, civet, large birds, rabbits, bush pigs, hares and other dangerous animals. While boys used stones and catapults, men used guns and bows and arrows.

After the hunting stage, it was time to be initiated into a masquerade group, ikpu mmanwu. In these masquerades, (13) dead ancestors and spirits were incarnated and used as a law enforcement authority. In the beliefs surrounding initiation into a masquerade group, it was therefore claimed that one had to travel to the land of the dead and come face to face with spirits before becoming a member of these groups. Women and little boys were made to believe that the masquerades themselves were actual spirits which came out of ant holes etc. Their fear of these masqueraders was therefore real and the masqueraders in turn terrorized women in particular.

If a youth or man did not join a masquerade group, during masquerading he would stand with women and run away from the masqueraders with them. He would therefore not be considered male. The masqueraders would endlessly pursue, whip and humiliate him. Only those who belonged to a masquerade group were able to stand out boldly and shake hands with them as they went past, for they would also know their passwords. The younger age-sets recognized and gave way to the masquerades of the older age-sets.

What finally differentiated boys or youths from men, the ordinary from the gallant, were the dance societies in celebration of courage, valour and masculinity. These were not considered to have been secret societies, even though they had their own rules and membership to them was through initiations whereby initiates were tested.

Igbenu-oba was, for example, described as a war dance of seasoned men such as brave elders, hunters and hard labourers; men considered to have done violent deeds or deeds of valour, ife sili ike. This was different from other forms of dance in the sense that it was considered a dangerous dance as it was performed in warlike fashion. Its dance formations were in lines like the positions taken in real war. No-one must break the line formation and this was stressed in their song, which threatened anyone who stood in their way with hanging. It was danced with knives and guns and other weapons of war, and the men dressed as if they were going to war, while

they carried live guns. From the description given of the performance, the men stood in two lines and each man in turn fired his gun, gave way and then the next man fired his. They then formed a circle before getting into line formation again. A man might even fire the gun on the foot of the man on the opposite line.

This dance, like many others in the same group, was performed at the funeral of a "big man". The "big man" in most cases was usually a member of the exclusive dance society, or else a member would invite the group to the man's funeral. When such a dance group arrived at a funeral, all other groups of entertainers gave way to them. At the end of the performance, they would be given presents.

Igbenu-oba dance was a very vigorous dance which left those who performed it completely saturated with perspiration. Uninitiated men dared not join in the dance, let alone women. As with such war dances, their symbols of fierceness later won them the disapproval of the new churches, hence their discontinuation. The men were expected to look very fierce. To help achieve this appearance, they put white chalk marks on their faces and around their eyes. ⁽¹⁴⁾ Some carried human skulls and those of the wild animals they had killed, while they danced.

Okpanga was another dance said to have been danced only by those who had done courageous deeds, like killing a man in battle. This dance was performed at the funeral of such men. Abia was also a dance

performed for those who had performed acts of valour, such as those who killed a man during a war and brought back his head, or those who killed a leopard. For this reason, the words abia and dike, which means strong, were said to go together. In this dance, men carried human heads. As an Nnobi elder said to me, 'Only men who had killed a man took part in this dance. What you should know is that, in those days, it was an act of valour to bring back a human head from war. It was not considered a sin. Human heads and skulls were usually displayed in great obi(s). Anyone who came back with a human head was met and welcomed with the abia dance. This was how he was congratulated. A male sheep would be killed and the blood spilled on the man's hand. These men were distinguished by the red feather they wore on their heads.' To the question of ordinary men joining in this dance, the elder's reply was, 'He would be disgraced and removed immediately. He would not even dare to go near the place. There was discipline in those days, you know. People knew what they were supposed to do and what they were not supposed to do.'

An event which appears to have been an open general initiation into manhood and a general celebration of masculinity, was what was called igba ikolo. The word ikolo, war drum, suggests that the Igbo word for manhood, ikolobia, is derived from or associated with this igba ikolo event. This event, like the war dances, was an open arena where men

who had proved their masculinity through violent acts, boasted of their exploits and displayed their treasures, which included human heads, animal heads, tiger and leopard skins, fangs etc. In order to qualify for participation, youths were encouraged to express their masculinity through violent and courageous ventures, such as killing wild beasts, or bringing back the head of a victim of war. After this, they were allowed and encouraged to boast of their exploits in no modest language.

An open space arena was provided for this ceremony, in the middle of which stood the ikolo, war drum. The sound of this drum was associated with tough and fearless masculinity. It was during this ceremony that one was supposed to know "the man who was a man". Therefore, only the proven brave participated in the ceremony. Nnobi say that 'if a youth who is not yet a man dares to tie cloth, the strong wind will carry him away together with the cloth'.⁽¹⁵⁾ During the dance involved, the brave wore loin cloths and showed off their guns. Those among them who had taken the ozo title, put on a hat decorated with eagle feathers. Others decorated theirs with parrot feathers or the feathers of a red bird. Those who had killed a man, carried the heads in their hands while they danced. Any ordinary man who dared participate in the dance was ridiculed and disgraced by being made to carry a pot of palm-oil on his head, while the other men dipped their roast yam in the oil and ate from his head!

Apart from social celebration of coming into manhood, a man was also allowed the assertion of independence from the domination of a father. Once a man felt that he had come of age and wished to be independent of his father, he had the right to leave home and set up his own home. This was known as ipu obi. His father would then give him a machete and, depending on his means, a piece of land and the expenses for a wife.

Coming Into Womanhood, "Igba Agboghobia"

In contrast to the boys, when a girl showed signs of womanhood - menstruation and the growing of breasts - her movements were curtailed and she was watched very closely. She could no longer wander off into the forest to pick nuts and berries with other children. Her life was no longer the colourful picture Nwajiuba painted of a free and careless girlhood. Remembering her very early childhood, she said,

'We used to play in the moonlight (egwu onwa) outside the compound walls, in the village paths nearby with other kids. We played there because there were udala trees there, so that we could pick the fruit from the ground and eat in between meals. When it was time to find food for the goats, we would go and get it. At that time, if you dared go home without getting some goat food, you were caned. If the firewood or twigs you picked were not enough, you were caned. When the time for agugu or otite⁽¹⁶⁾ came round, we knew it was time for outing. You therefore worked hard and felt very excited. Your mother would then decorate your body in beautiful designs with black dye. This was called igbu uli. You would then carry food to the festival centre, which was usually the market place or village squares. Mats

were placed on the ground, and we children would sit on them and eat our food. As you know, children went about naked in those days, but when a girl was old enough to go to the stream and fetch water, if her mother was rich, she would buy her various waist beads known as akpuluka, aku nwaibeke and onokpo isi ahuhu.⁽¹⁷⁾

These were the first waist beads a little girl wore before she would start wearing jigida,⁽¹⁸⁾ another type of waist beads.'

Mothers had an ambivalent attitude towards the physical maturity of their daughters. On the one hand, they were pleased about it, for soon their daughter would be married and have children with all the material benefits derived from in-law relationships. (See Chapter Three.) On the other hand, the period in-between maturity and marriage was a time of great anxiety for mothers. They worried in case their daughters had any sexual relationship with men, or conceived before marriage, as it was a shameful thing for a young girl to get pregnant when the marriage payment had not been made. Her mother was usually blamed for it. It was her duty to warn her daughter against men. Since there was no contraception in those days, other methods of effecting sexual abstinence were devised. There were not only individual men like wolves laying traps for young girls, there were also gangs of young men roaming the wild, who could trap girls in the forest and rape them. These dangers were stressed and exaggerated.

Punishment for a girl suspected of indulging in sexual intercourse before she was married was very severe. It ranged from severe beating, to red-hot pepper being put in her vagina. Girls were therefore taught to understand that sexual virility and promiscuity brought shame and punishment to females.

In the attempt to prevent pre-marital pregnancy, there were also various taboos and rituals surrounding a girl in her maidenhood. Apart from the waist-beads which grew in layers as the girl grew older, as she matured, a waist-charm was added to the beads. The expression used for the waist-charm was ido iyi, placing someone or something under a state of prohibition or taboo. In the case of a girl, this meant forbidding anyone sexual intercourse with her. This waist-charm would later be removed by her patrilineage wives during her marriage ceremony.⁽¹⁹⁾ Only when she became a wife did she qualify to tie wrapper.

The first sign of breast formation on a girl was not looked on with encouragement. The mothers called this ala uto, growing up breasts, and were able to arrest this development and get the chest flat again. This they did by hitting the breasts with the pounding end of a pestle. No doubt it was a very confusing and painful experience for a young girl. Some were punished by severe beating and accused of having indulged in physical relations with a man. It was believed that sexual or physical relations with a man precipitated female physical development. If boys pressed the breasts, they

grew big earlier than they would have. A girl's first menstruation was also treated with apprehension by her mother. The girl was often beaten and made to squat at the back of her mother's house, isolated from everyone else. Some were again beaten for this involuntary biological process and accused of having had sexual relations with a man. In addition, the girl was teased and laughed at by her lineage wives. She was generally made to feel embarrassed and ashamed of herself. Then the endless exaggerated warnings against sexual relations with men were emphasized. She was told that even if a man touched her hand or clothes she would get pregnant! She would get pregnant without the penis penetrating the vagina. Just the mere sight of it was enough to land her in trouble! The conversation held with Nwajiuba in January 1982 and her wife, who was nine months pregnant and a few days overdue at the time, demonstrates the traditional attitude towards female maturity.

- Mama, tell me about the development of a young girl, what happened when she began to grow breasts?
- N. At the first sign of the formation of breasts, they used to use the head of a broom or pestle to break it up and press it back (sokasia ya), to make it disappear.
- Make it disappear? Why do this?
- N. To confirm that the girl had not been with a man. In those days, as a little girl grew,

her mother observed her very closely. In any case, a little girl did not tie wrapper. She went about naked. If a girl had not been with a man and her breasts began to grow, she usually went to her mother crying and saying that she did not know what was happening to her. Other women on noticing the breasts would ask the girl's mother whether she had been observing her daughter closely. This was in case the mother had not noticed and the girl had said nothing. If the girl was not pregnant, it was possible to make the breasts disappear by hard pressing.

- Tell me about menstruation.
- N. Once a girl goes to a man, she begins to menstruate. But if a girl does not have sex, her breasts will grow but she will not menstruate.
- When a girl noticed the blood, did she go and tell her mother?
- N. There was no way she did not have to tell her mother. She had to tell her mother, who would beat her and accuse her of having been with a man. It was just a few drops.
- A few drops?
- N. Yes, just a few drops of blood. One could count it during our own time. It did not flow much. In my own case, one could tell what was happening to me because I started itching all over. I itched and itched and cried till my eyes were swollen. When I said what was happening to me, I was told that my breast seeds

(nkpulu ala) were breaking through. Then the breasts receded, showing that I had not slept with a man. I did not menstruate. If I had done, there was no way I could deny that I had not known a man.

- Do you mean to say that a woman can never menstruate unless she sleeps with a man?
- N. No. If she does, then it must be as a result of having had sex with other children as a child.
- Mama, going back to our discussion on menstruation, I do not agree with you that a woman will not menstruate as long as she is a virgin. (Addressing Nwajiuba's wife) Do you agree with what Mama said?
- N's Wife. Mama, I do not agree with that because I had not been with a man before I started to menstruate.
- I too did not sleep with a man before I started to menstruate.
- N. You must both have done something as children, just like those children I caught doing it in the garden the other day. If the thing is not broken, how will blood flow out? (20)

When the initial shock of maturity was over, mother and daughter readjusted to the new situation. The mother would then try to beautify her daughter, in order for her to catch the eye of a suitor as quickly as possible. Some Nnobi people maintained that, at this stage, a girl did not have to go through any more ceremonies until she got married. She simply

beautified herself, especially during village festivals, and hoped to catch a suitor there. Others maintained that Nnobi, like southern Igbo people, used to put girls in fattening rooms, ihu mgbede, in ancient times. This was the process used to precipitate the development of what were considered feminine qualities, roundness and smoothness. The girl soon developed curves and silky skin through overeating and putting on weight. She was restricted to her mother's quarters. This restriction began at the opening of the planting season and ended at the beginning of the harvesting season, when ritual festivals and ceremonies took place so that the girl would have a better chance of being seen dressed up. During the period of confinement, the girl was given a whole goat to eat by herself. Fish was provided for her. All the bones from the meat and fish which she had eaten were collected in a basket and displayed for all to see at the end of the period of confinement. This was also a brief experience of the status of wifhood, oliaku, "one who enjoys wealth", that she was being prepared for. It seemed like a promise of a bed of roses. The girl, now rounded and feminine but still wearing her waist-charm, was allowed to accompany older women to fetch wood and water, with the hope that she would very quickly catch the eye of a suitor.

Daughters were trained for marriage from a very early age. As soon as they were able to walk and stand firmly on their feet and understand ins-

tructions, they were made to participate in household chores according to their ability. They may be sent to pick up little pieces of firewood. As they were being made to participate in housework, they were constantly reminded that one day they would have a home of their own to look after. They were therefore encouraged to copy their mothers and behave like little women or mothers, cooking with toy clay pots, lifting little babies and trying to breastfeed them with their own flat nipples. They would sing to crying babies, cooing and rocking them till they fell asleep on their backs or on their laps. Five year olds should be able to tie little babies with a piece of cloth quite comfortably on their backs. At about the age of ten, a girl was able to prepare meals as instructed by her mother. Mothers depended very much on daughters to carry out household duties while they were away doing farmwork or marketing.

The desire to break away from the natal home came as soon as the girl was able to run her mother's household confidently. She usually found that she was constantly being nagged and overworked by her mother. She dared not be caught sitting down doing nothing, for there should always be some work to be done, even if it was shelling nuts or grating cassava or pounding pepper or washing the bitterness out of bitterleaf, used for preparing sauce. A woman sitting idly, ino nkiti, was looked on with disfavour. This constant nagging and being told what to do - 'do this or do that' - was usually a cause for

disaffection in mother/daughter relationships. Girls therefore welcomed marriage at the earliest opportunity, for this meant the beginning of the right to possess things and have a home they could manage on their own.

For a male, full adult maturing meant self-assertion, adventurousness and self-sufficiency. He proved his masculinity when he participated in the war dances to display his treasures of war or from hunting wild beasts and boasted of his strength and courage and wrestled with other brave warriors. He also proved his masculinity when he showed signs of fending for himself.

For a female, on the other hand, full adult maturity meant self-restraint in sexual matters, and less adventurousness in the pursuit of pleasure. Self-sufficiency for her came only with marriage. With marriage, too, independence, aggressiveness and thrift were encouraged in economic matters. Aggression and self-denial were also encouraged in the protection of her children.

Ideas about the separate roles designed for males and females featured in songs about young men and those about young girls. Young men ate and used up their energy in fighting. According to their songs, feasting was usually followed by fighting, and their songs are full of boasting, challenges to other men for show of force. Young men sang about daring confrontations with powerful spirits, fighting, wrestling, wooing young maidens, feasting, drinking

and war. Sometimes they did not fail to ridicule old men, as can be seen from this song,

"If young men don't go to war

Who will go to war - war!

Old man who remains in the house,

Bring money - war!

To be a young man is to be fearless.

If young men don't go to war

Who will go to war - war!"

The ideas stressed in songs about young girls were simple and straight to the point. When the female child was born, the women sang that a bag of money had been born.⁽²¹⁾ When she came of age, the song said simply,

"Bag of money has grown,

She has grown.

What is left?

Nothing is left but to sell her,"

meaning that there was nothing left but to marry her off!

Ritual and Gender

The contradictions in Nnobi gender ideologies are reflected in ritual beliefs and practices. There was, on the one hand, a body of beliefs and practices embedded in a matriarchal ideology derived from the worship of the goddess Idemili. This generated and supported favourable female ideas and strong matrifocality in Nnobi culture. On the other hand, there were also beliefs and practices derived from a patriarchal ideology and expressed in the ancestor cult. This generated and legitimized anti-female beliefs and practices. Nnobi ancestors and ancestresses may have given birth to Nnobi people, but Nnobi people seem to have created their own gods and goddesses in their own terms of gender relations. Thus, the all-powerful goddess Idemili was domesticated and made the wife of a less powerful god, Aho. I shall describe the worship of both these deities and show how the terms of relationship by which they are described reflect the terms of relationship in the family, and Nnobi ideology of gender. I shall then describe other ritual practices which supported the subordination of the female to the male, contrary to social facts.

The Goddess Idemili

The domestication or subordination of the goddess Idemili is implied in all the myths about her origin. In the myths recounted in Chapter One, for example, a hunter from the wild called Aho married her and they had children. According to another myth, recounted to me by the present priest of the Idemili shrine, Eze Agba, Idemili requested her own domestication:

'What we heard from our fore-fathers, going back to beyond eight generations, is that the idol called Idemili Nneogwu lived in water. One day, some master hunters took their dog and went hunting. When they got to the stream, they tied the dog to a tree in the bush in the water so that it would chase out an animal for them to kill, when Idemili suddenly appeared and looked like a human being in the shape of a mermaid. The dog barked at her three times, fell down and died. The hunter took his gun, and went to find out why his dog should bark and fall down and die. When he saw what it was, he stood staring. Then she told him to come to her, that she was a woman and had something to say to him. The hunter ran off, called the other hunters and told them about his experience, how the thing he saw said that she brought gain and not punishment. So the whole lot who went

hunting went back to the water with him, where the thing in the water repeated herself and then said to them to report to the elders in their place that they saw something in the water; that what they saw claimed that she brought benefit and not punishment; that they should come to her so that she would tell them what to do in order to be able to take her home with them. So, they went and reported what happened to the elders. The elders in turn went to find out what it was all about. When they got there, she welcomed them and repeated the fact that she brought benefit and not punishment. She told them to bring her seven white hens, seven white cocks and one female cow and take her home with them. The elders went home and held a meeting at the end of which they shared out a levy, but anyone who was asked for contribution refused to pay.

The hunter who discovered her therefore went home and asked his first wife for help, but she said she had nothing and was therefore not able to help. So he spoke to his junior wife, who promised to help. She made a condition that if she on her own were able to provide all that was demanded, when this thing came home, it would be in her possession. She then told her husband that she would summon her own people⁽²⁰⁾ to bear witness while she met the requirement; that she was ready to bear whatever consequences

ensued; that if it was going to bring any benefits, then they would be hers. And so everything was done and she was brought out of water.

When she was brought home, everything that was demanded was again done, involving cow, goat and fowls, and a house was built for her in the compound of this junior wife. This is why the shrine of Idemili is in Ifite. The obi of the junior son of Ifite provides the priest or messenger of the goddess. The main shrine of Idemili of Nnobi is in the stream, for she is a water spirit. She dwells in water. She also dwells on land, where market is held in her name. She also lives in the village sections where she is fed. She also has other idols under her. There is Chi Idemili at Afo central market-place. There is Ogwugwu Idemili in Ebenesi. There is her Nkwo Ekwe in Umu Awuda and her Ana Eke in Umu Awuda. There is her Akata Akagwalu in Umu Awuda. In the water, she is called Nwangele Idemili and also Ojiyi Idemili.'

The list of subordinate spirits and shrines associated with the goddess Idemili is endless. The important point here is that shrines dedicated to this goddess pervaded the whole of Nnobi. In accordance with her myth of origin, the main and most important shrine of the goddess is in Ifite, (23) the most junior major patrilineage or ward in Ebenesi village. The second in importance is that in Ngo

village called Idemili-Nwa-Onye-Ushi, followed by that in Awuda village called Idemili-Oli-Ewu. Their order of importance was indicated in the different rules which governed their veneration. In the more junior shrines, she was approached with at least hens and at most goats, while she was approached at the main shrine with at least goats for less important rituals and cows for more important ceremonies. Her importance was also indicated by the epithets applied to her. She was addressed as:

Oke Nwanyi - the great lady

Eze Nwanyi - female king

Idemili Ogalanya Ngada - Idemili with huge baskets of riches

Nwanyi Odu Opka - a woman wearing ivory anklets. (24)

One who roofs her house with zinc, so that nothing can destroy her.

Ono na mba, mba n'akwalu akwa - one who is worshipped abroad

Eze Onyili Mba - the unconquerable one

Agadi nwanyi, nmuo nwelu okwu na ano na mpata - old woman! Deity who has a shrine!

Woman who sits on a special stool for ozo titled men!

The great respect in which Idemili was held extended to her priest and his wife. In the daily worship and "feeding" of the goddess, until the present day, every morning, the priest sounds a horn-bell and runs to the shrine. There, he throws the symbolic white clay and breaks kola. He eats

his own piece of kola and throws Idemili her own, after which he goes back the way he came. On her special holy day, Eke Okwu, the ritual of worship is more elaborate. The priest throws the symbolic white clay in the veneration of the goddess, her associated female spirit Ogwugwu and her ikenga.⁽²⁵⁾ He then goes to her obi,⁽²⁶⁾ sits down and breaks kola while saying incantations and asking for life and good health.

In the performance of his duty, the priest of Idemili was expected to abide by certain rules. He should not climb a palm-tree.⁽²⁷⁾ He should not wear a loin cloth but must tie a wrapper like a woman. His wife, on the other hand, followed some of the rules observed by an Ekwe titled woman. She should not plait her hair like other women, or tie headcloth on her head. She should not carry anything on her head. She should always carry and dress herself gracefully. A priest of Idemili should observe all the taboos associated with the goddess. He should give her all the gifts presented to her by Nnobi people to keep her happy. It was his duty to approach her on behalf of others. In requesting things, conditional promises were made to the goddess. People promised her a goat or a cow on condition that she fulfilled their requests.

Most of the activities which marked the traditional calendar were ritual ceremonies and festivals of thanksgiving to the goddess Idemili. One gets the impression of a society and culture completely

coloured by the veneration of this goddess rather than the ancestors. In the yearly calendar for example, only one general activity was associated with the ancestor cult. This was the ritual of remembrance of the ancestors, ilo nmuo. Every other activity was in one way or another associated with the goddess Idemili.

The annual season for ritual activities and festivals was usually declared open in the sixth month of the traditional calendar, when the priest of Idemili performed the ritual called olulu. This marked the day on which the goddess ate new yam and indicated that it was time for the eating of new yam and general religious worship. Idemili therefore ate new yam before everyone else. The day on which Idemili ate new yam was ritually commemorated by the priest of Idemili in conjunction with Umuona ward. This was most likely with the priest of the Land Spirit in Umuona, who was the custodian of the yam medicine, without which one did not eat new yam. The priest of Idemili, who for this occasion was referred to as the king of olulu, Eze Onye Olulu, would display new yam first in his compound, then in the market, to indicate that it was time for the eating of new yam. (28) Once new yam had been eaten, the various villages and major patrilineages took it in turns to perform their religious worship and the market outing of their idols, afia nkwu.

For the outing of the idols, women and children

decorated their bodies in fanciful designs in black vegetable dye. The idols were also decorated and dressed according to their appropriate sex. While children danced for money at the central market-place, girls were expected to attract suitors. The igba ota festival performed in the ninth month, again provided a happy occasion, when villages went in turn to the central market-place and then to Idemili market. While women and children danced and ate cooked food, men shot guns in general thanksgiving to the goddess for good health and prosperity, and to plead for things in the future. Etedenaghu was again another yearly ceremony which provided an occasion for the exchange of food by in-laws. This ceremony was really performed by women, as it involved the giving of gifts to a woman by the husbands of her daughters. The gift comprised a sampling of farm products, especially tubers such as yam and cocoyam. The man was later invited to take part in eating what he had given. He in turn would be given pounded food and sauce to share with his neighbours. This gift was also given to a child who acted as a baby nurse. In her own case, the gift would be given to her mother. Onu⁽²⁹⁾ was the annual harvest festival performed for the goddess.

By far the most important ceremony performed for the goddess Idemili, which Nnobi people are still proud of and have revived in a modern form, is what is called ikwu ahu or odinke festival. This was performed by men every seven years and by

women every nine years. This was the occasion when Nnobi displayed cows.

To mark the beginning of this festival, priests of the three Idemili shrines performed a ritual known as igbunye aka afo ogwe, that is, to stop the normal hand of the clock and introduce the hand of the deities or spirits; replacing normal human time for ordinary activities with holy period for religious activities. The metaphor used is sticking a knife into the stem of a tree. For this ritual, the three villages of Nnobi would approach the priests of the three Idemili shrines to introduce the holy period. Only the main Idemili in Ifite would be approached with a she-goat. Others would be approached with hens. The priests would then pour libation and say that there would be no deaths and no sickness; may people's fowls and goats conceive and reproduce; those who have kola-nut trees, may the seeds be plentiful that they may be able to get the money with which to buy a cow to kill for the goddess Idemili. Thus they would declare the festival open. Once the holy period was declared, funeral ceremonies were discontinued for the period of one year, at the end of which Idemili would be approached with a hen to remove the hand of the deities, iho aka afo ogwe, and restore normality.

As a preliminary to the festival, the priest of the main Idemili shrine would go to Afo central market and perform a dance known as okpokolo or oke opi. Others may then perform the dance. By this

dance, one declared the intention of buying a cow to kill for the goddess. Anyone who performed this dance and failed to kill a cow was considered to have insulted the whole of Nnobi. He or she was punished by being made to perform the ritual of appeasement referred to as asaa n'abo for all the spirits and deities in Nnobi. This involved the buying of two sheep for each of them, and a cow for Idemili. The person was also required to pay some money, referred to as asaa sa.

After the exhibition of one's cow in the marketplace, the cow was taken home and killed for mass feasting. By this ceremony, the rich in return for titles fed the masses. Meat and yam were cooked in drums and people sat in a circle and ate meat to their hearts' content.⁽³⁰⁾ At the end of this festival, those who had killed a cow were given the title ogbuefi, cow killer. They were distinguished by the cow's tail they carried and a special fan made of cowhide. During special occasions, only such titled people may participate in the oke opi dance with other titled men and women.

This periodic festival whereby cows were killed for the goddess was linked to her maternal and peaceful attributes, such as her supposed abhorrence of bloodshed among her worshippers. For this reason, a cow was sacrificed instead of a human being. Today, what is emphasized in what now can be considered legends, are her maternal role and its associated protectiveness. During the second World War, before

the departure of some Nnobi people who took part in that war, the goddess is generally reputed to have demanded a rowing boat, ugbo amala, for taking her children across the sea. This demand was met and, as the story goes, after that war, those who participated in it came back and recounted their experiences. Their claims included seeing the python lying beside them in their dreams; this meant that Idemili was guiding them. For this reason, they all took an animal to the goddess and thanked her for her protection. Similar stories were reported in connection with the Biafran war, when it was believed that Idemili protected Nnobi. According to popular belief, this is why Nnobi was not invaded, evacuated or occupied. During this war, the goddess was also believed to have turned into an old woman who wore ivory anklets. Thus she appeared in different towns, saving Nnobi people and bringing them back by miraculous means.⁽³¹⁾ In this protective maternal role of the goddess, the epithet applied to her was nku di na mba n'eghelu mba nni, firewood in a land and still able to cook the food of those who are not of that land.⁽³²⁾ She is in Nnobi and still worshipped by surrounding towns. The implication is that she guards and aids her subjects, far and near.

While the annual ritual of remembrance of the ancestors appears to have been basically a male affair, the annual worship of the goddess Idemili was an essentially female affair. In these two different patterns of worship, gender roles were

symbolized. Symbols of worship also indicated gender and role differentiation. While male symbols were phallic in shape, female ones were rounded. The male crop, yam, is phallic, while the female crop, cocoyam, is round.

Apart from the sticks and wooden figurines representing various deities and spirits in the ancestral shrine, a man also had a personal deity which was symbolized or represented by a tree called oha chi. To prepare this shrine, a long pole was painted white, the man would get some leaves of the oha tree, some pods of the oil-bean tree, white kola-nuts and a piece of white cloth. He would then stick the white pole under the oha tree and place all the other things there. Finally, he would kill a fowl there. One had to be possessed or called by the spirits to erect the shrine to a personal deity.⁽³³⁾ This usually happened when one found a household and became independent. A woman's personal shrine erected for the same reason as that of a man, was symbolized by a small pot.

Women's religious worship was called ilo chi, remembering the deity. Instead of "god", I have deliberately chosen the genderless English word, deity, to translate chi, as the Igbo word chi is genderless and is used for male or female deity. In this case, the deity that the women remembered was Idemili. The women's religious worship commenced with their private worship, which was performed at their personal shrines in the sub-compound units.

This was followed by their group worship, referred to as ilo chi Idemili, remembering the goddess Idemili. The ritual involved was described to me by Nwajiuba in January 1982, a few days after she had completed her own private worship.

Women's religious worship began with a ceremony called ibu chi, gifts for the ceremony. By this ceremony, a woman's sons-in-law would bring her yam and cocoyam. Her husband would also give her the same. If she had grown up sons, they too were obliged to give her gifts. Those who did not have these food items were allowed to give her money instead. These items were placed on the ground where the woman would perform her sacrifice. The woman herself would pound cocoyam and cook the great sauce containing everything, oke ofe. She would buy four fish, but if she had many in-laws, she would buy twice that amount. The Agba Ekwe titled woman usually bought eight fish, that is, double the normal requirement. The woman would take out one fish for paying ritual homage. It appears that in this instance, she did not pay homage to her husband, but to her father. She would pound white cocoyam and cook the great sauce, put one fish in it and take it to her father's home as a sign of homage. The husband of her first daughter would take one fish and other friends and relatives would come round for bits and pieces.

For the ritual itself, a woman would put four pieces of stick and one wine jar in her market basket.

She would dress up in her best, that is, her fashion for going to the market. She would then take these things to her personal shrine, okwu chi, on the right hand side of her compound gate where, as Nwajiuba said, it protected her against evil spirits and wicked people. She would first place some food in the bowl on the shrine, and her children would be eating the food as she put it in the bowl. The rest of the food would then be shared by everyone, in-laws and all, at the end of which the food utensils were left on the shrine.

Next was the ritual in which wine was poured on the ground. Everyone present would drink the wine in the jar till a little of it was left. The woman would then place her hands on the mouth of the jar, while the others placed their hands on hers. Together they would perform the ritual called itu ya izu n'ato, pouring the wine on the ground three times. At the fourth count, the jar was turned face down. The wine then all poured out and the jar was filled with water. The ritual was repeated and then at the fourth go, when the jar was turned face down, it was left that way. All the food utensils and gifts were usually left on the shrine until the following day.

Here again, as with marriage and funeral gifts, we see the circulation of gifts through relationships forged through women. For the ceremony of a woman's religious worship, her daughter's husband may buy her a she-goat, or she may use a hen for

the sacrifice. The first daughter of the in-law who bought her the goat would take the female issue of that goat. The goat's male issue would be sacrificed at the woman's personal shrine the following year. In her prayers, a woman simply said that one desired wealth and prosperity, good health and no deaths.

The public group worship of the goddess was performed at her shrine in Afo central market-place called chi Idemili. For this ritual, women would take goat to this shrine. The role of cooking and feeding the family performed by mothers during the private worship was performed by the wife of the priest of the main shrine. She would pound cocoyam and cook the great sauce for the shrine priest and the men. Other women would take their own food to the shrine and eat it there. In this worship, therefore, men acted as guests or participated in the sense of accompanying their wives to the shrine. They too offered what they could to the goddess and offered individual prayers.

Ekwe titled women, because of their unique status and their special relationship with the goddess had an exclusive day of worship. On their day of worship, no-one else might go to the shrine. After worshipping Idemili, each Ekwe titled woman performed a private ritual of remembrance associated with her title known as ilo Ekwe. This was done at her private shrine, which would have been erected as a result of her possession by the spirit of the goddess.

The supremacy of the goddess Idemili, whether in her elaborate rituals of worship, her acknowledged status, her all-embracing administrative laws, cannot be denied or underestimated. Neither can the identification of Nnobi women with her be underestimated. For this reason, during fieldwork, I asked the priest of Idemili, Eze Agba, whether the goddess religion had any taboos against a menstruating woman, since the goddess herself is a woman. His reply was positive. It is important to note that Eze Agba, though the priest of Idemili, tended the ancestral shrines of his obi. It is therefore difficult to separate the beliefs rooted in the ancestral cult from those derived from the goddess religion. His specification of this taboo was, for example, related to ancestral cult associated rules and sanctions governing gender relationships in the family and the patrilineage. According to Eze Agba, 'A man who is head of the family, an ozo titled man, a man who has killed a cow, a woman who is in her menses will not go to him. In the olden days, (not now, when things are done backwards), a woman who was in a state of prohibition, at the end of her menses when she may go again to her husband, she would buy a young chick which was used for cleansing her house. She would then wash her house with water before she would be allowed to go to her husband. This banning of a menstruating woman from the obi applied to wives or daughters.'

As ilo chi, remembrance of the goddess, was female, so was ilo nmuo, remembrance of the ancestors, male. ⁽³⁴⁾ It was usually referred to as igo nmuo. Women's involvement in the annual ritual and ceremony centred around the general cleaning and decorating of houses, the cooking and exchange of food. Married daughters would take palm-wine, nkwu nmuo, to their natal homes. Children of daughters would also take palm-wine to their mother's natal home. While women cooked and served food to visitors, children visited relatives and friends. Girls danced and boys wrestled, challenging one another to fight.

For the men who were the central figures in this ceremony, this was the occasion for the general annual reaffirmation of statuses and roles through the paying of ritual homage in the families and patrilineages. Social juniors paid ritual homage to social superiors. During this occasion, even though a husband performed the ritual of general cleansing of abominations and evils in the family, a wife usually contributed a hen as homage payment to her husband. He would kill the hen in the obi section of the compound and sprinkle its blood in all sections of the compound, including the women's sub-compound unit. Thus his authority over her and over her shrine was symbolized and reaffirmed. We shall see a parallel assertion and affirmation of male authority in the annual ritual festival associated with the hunter/father founder of Nnobi, Aho.

The Hunter/Deity, Aho

The conceptualization of Aho as the husband of the goddess Idemili, reflects the contradiction in Nnobi gender ideology which ideally placed males in authority over females. The goddess is by all indications superior to Aho but, because she is female, Aho has to affirm some form of authority over her regardless of her relative autonomy, just like males and females or husbands and wives in the family.

The goddess Idemili was acknowledged and worshipped by the whole of Nnobi and several other surrounding towns and villages, especially those along the Idemili river.⁽³⁵⁾ In recognition of Nnobi as the original home of the goddess, these other settlements were said to have been ritually subservient to Nnobi. In the words of Eze Agba, the priest of Idemili,

'She is amazingly great! It is this Idemili who owns the one in Obosi and the one in Ezi Agulu. Agulu brings ihu to Nnobi. Uke, Abatete, Nnewi, Ogidi are all under this Idemili. As Edo of Nnewi is the first daughter of Idemili, if she is offended by Nnewi and she runs back home, Nnewi people have to bring cloth, hen and cow to come and fetch her back.'

Her supremacy over other deities and spirits, including the ancestors, is again stressed by the present traditional ruler of Nnobi, Igwe Eze Okoli II,

'Each individual in each village was subject to the orders of their own Idemili shrine, whereas there was one supreme central government and that was the goddess Idemili. Ancestral worship was the worship of Idemili. Just as we go to church and call on the name of Christ, ancestor worship was one system of worshipping Idemili. Say, for example, as my father is dead, I should place his shrines in the obi and worship his idols. When I die and establish my own idols, my children will come to my own obi and worship. The idols worshipped originated from Idemili herself. It is from her that they had their power. Say, for example, when I wish to take the ozo title, I go and get the ofo, symbol of authority, from the rightful person who gives it and keep it in my house. When I then wish to perform the yam-eating ceremony, I'll use it, kill a fowl and do what I know I should do. The same thing was true of my great great grandfather. Before taking the ozo title, they would have given the priest of Idemili all his dues. The holy man who held the ozo symbol knew where it originated. It originated from that shrine. He will give you that symbol of power which you in turn will then keep in your house. This is why when a titled man commits an offence, it is the holy men who first come and condemn him, so that he will first appease them, then go to Idemili and appease her and

then go back to the holy men, ndi nze, and begin to cleanse himself before the symbol of power is given back to him. When I first took the chieftaincy title, I was a boy. My father made us all chiefs; because of Christianity, we gave up the titles. After my father died, I was refused the right to take the chieftaincy title on the grounds that I had not taken the ozo title. I had to start all over again to do the cleansing ritual. All the ancient rituals were performed before I took the igwe title. Then they accepted that I was an nze. This is how I knew that all these idols were linked to Idemili.'

In comparison to Idemili, Aho is recognized by all Nnobi as a hunter who was said to have emerged from the wild, Aho-bi-na-agu, and married Idemili. He was not considered a deity by all Nnobi and was therefore not worshipped by the whole of Nnobi. Only Umuona major patrilineage considered Aho a deity and therefore worshipped him.

I refer to the diagram of the genealogical structure of Nnobi (see Appendix 2, Figure I). Succession in the obi followed the principle of unilineal descent, whereby first son replaced his father, hence Ebenesi is the most senior village in Nnobi. In its sub-division into patrilineages, Umuona is the most senior major patrilineage in Nnobi and is said to have been the original site of the founding ancestor of Nnobi, hence the shrine to the Earth or Land Spirit of Nnobi was in Umuona and was

tended by the person who held the first son position in the first or most senior obi in the most senior minor patrilineage in Umuona. This was considered the first obi in Nnobi, (see Chapter Two). The shrine to Aho was located in Umuona. Only Umuona performed the annual festival for Aho called ikpu okwa. This was in commemoration of his original emergence from the wild. Thus, every year, during this festival, the priest of Aho who carried the main okwa mask, would re-enact the original emergence from the wild, go round the whole of Nnobi and cleanse it of abominations. At the end of this festival, the priest of Aho would go to the shrine of the goddess Idemili and symbolically "undress" her by removing the palm fronds with which her shrine was covered, itopu omu or iwapu ogodo. I see this as a symbolic expression of male authority. This ritual marked the end of the period of religious festivals, just as the tying of the fronds round the shrine of the goddess marked the beginning of it.

'Tkpu Okwa' Festival and Patriarchal Ideology

The last time this festival was performed was in 1948. Most elderly Nnobi people therefore had a clear recollection of the activities and beliefs associated with the festival. Indeed, one of those interviewed, an elder called Ezudona, had himself gone through some of the rituals required for the taking of the ozo Aho title associated with this festival. Ezudona has also never been a Christian and still worships the goddess Idemili. Two other men whose vivid accounts are reported here, were Nnajide and Eze Enyinwa, neither of whom has ever stepped into a church or been a Christian. They also worship the goddess. I shall first describe the festival and then show its relationship to the goddess Idemili and the ideology of male dominance.

The central figures in this festival were the men with the title ozo Aho, associated with the spirit of Aho. It is one of the high ozo titles described in Chapter One. Like the Ekwe title, it was involuntary, but unlike the Ekwe title, which may be taken by any Nnobi woman possessed by the spirit of the goddess, only men from certain patrilineages in Umuona took the ozo Aho title. A possible candidate would consult the priest of Aho as soon as he experienced signs of possession, which may begin even in childhood. Through divination, the man would be told that Aho wished

him to take his title. Only those who had taken the title and those in the process of taking the title carried the okwa masks during the festival. There were many taboos surrounding one who had taken the title. For example, when he was eating, he was not allowed to mention the names of certain birds, like egbe, utugbe and ugene oma.⁽³⁶⁾ One was forbidden to mention the word Nnokwa⁽³⁷⁾ or to talk about the ushie dance.⁽³⁸⁾ In this, he was no different from the titled elites of the time and the protocol surrounding them.

The ikpu okwa festival took place in the tenth month of the traditional calendar and lasted for one month. It began with the roasting of yam, a very male thing. As with most Nnobi religious activities, ritual homage was paid. In this case, the head of yam was circulated. Each male head of a household would send yam to his immediate social superior. Next was the looting ritual, when Umuona would invite all Nnobi major lineages in turn to eat roasted cocoyam. While a lineage group would be in Umuona eating cocoyam, the whole of Umuona, including women and children, would take to their heels and go rampaging in the compounds and gardens of their guests. This was called the gladness or joy of okwa, onu okwa. What Umuona aimed at getting were the things needed for the festival such as young yellow palm leaves, omu, from which the layers of raffia-like skirts which the masqueraders wore were brushed out. They also looted other petty foodstuffs such as coconuts,

garden eggs and vegetables. They may drink any palm-wine left on the trees but may not loot any major economic item such as yam, cocoyam or live-stock. The guests at Umuona in turn may do a bit of looting on their way home. This would go on until Umuona would have exchanged looting with all the other major patrilineages in Nnobi.

Next was the wrestling ceremony, whereby Umuona invited the different major patrilineages in turn for a wrestling bout⁽³⁹⁾ and which was performed before the okwa masks would be carried on the head.⁽⁴⁰⁾ The decoration of the masks was done in secret. This was the responsibility of a particular patrilineage in Umuona where the title nwunye nonu, wife nonu, was taken. Even though this title was held by a man, he was referred to as wife here in the sense of being in a domestic or service relationship to those holding the ozo Aho title. He and his patrilineage were responsible for preparing the ukpe dye which was rubbed on the masks. He was also responsible for decorating the body of the priest of Aho who carried the main mask with camwood dye, ushie. Several days before the emergence of the masqueraders, those who would perform the masquerade would spend each night performing a ritual called iti nkpu Aho, the night call to Aho to emerge from the wild.

Fully decorated in dyes and young yellow palm fronds, the masquerade, led by the priest of Aho, retraced the primordial route of Aho. They would emerge from a piece of forest in Umuona called

Agbo Aho, go to the shrine of the Earth Spirit of Nnobi again in Umuona, and then proceed along the route to the shrine of Udide.⁽⁴¹⁾ From there, they would visit patrilineage shrines in the ancestral obi of each minor patrilineage in Nnobi to perform the ritual called igwo ngwolo, the sitting position of the lame. At each shrine, the priest of Aho would sit in this position while yam, cocoyam and money and kola-nuts were filed out for him in eights. He would then invoke blessing on that shrine, purifying it and warding off evil spirits. He would continue thus till he had visited all the lineage shrines in the whole of Nnobi. He would then proceed to Aho's open space and the shrine, where the wrestling competition involving the whole town would be performed.

For this town competition, the titled men and women of all the different villages and patrilineages would gather in Aho square. These titled people would take their individual chairs with them, with the ozo titled men wearing their eagle plumes. They usually sat in a circle, apart from other common spectators. The main masquerader, the priest of Aho known as isi Aho, and other masqueraders known as the children of Aho, umu Aho, would place themselves in the centre of the circle formed by the titled. The priest of Aho would again take the sitting position of the lame in the centre of the circle, hitting his hands and feet on the ground and boasting of his powers. As he would be doing this,

people would strain forward to see what he was doing, while they would be whipped indiscriminately by the children of Aho. Then a ritual involving the cutting of ritual marks on the chest, igbuchi obi, would be performed by fearless young men. They would go in front of the priest of Aho and lie down. The priest would then cut them twice on their chests with a knife and rub medicine on the cuts. This indicated that from henceforth, Aho would protect them.

Then the priest of Aho, carrying the main okwa mask, would engage in ritual embrace with his wife in a dance exclusive to ozo titled men, ushie, for the whole okwa performance was exclusively male. For this reason, the priest's wife would have gone through a ritual which would give her male status so that she could participate in this dance with her husband. She would therefore wear a string anklet, like ozo titled men. After the priest had embraced his wife four times, he would stand in the middle of the open space with his legs astride. All pregnant women present would then crawl on hands and knees in between his legs to pick yellow palm leaf, ikpa omu. Each woman would hold one strand from behind and one from the front and break out tiny pieces. The women would then take them home to cook in sauce and eat. They were not expected to touch any other medicine till their babies were born.

Just like the deity Aho who punished by whipping, okwa masqueraders carried whips with which they whipped spectators indiscriminately but gently. After the

performance at the open space in front of the Aho shrine, the whole masquerade would then pass through Nnokwa to Agu Ukwu Nri and retrace their steps back to Nnobi and go to the Afo central market-place, where the masqueraders continued their indiscriminate whipping. During this occasion, old women would go to be whipped, in the belief that by so doing, Aho took away any illness in their bodies. Finally, the priest would go back to the shrine of Aho. He would shake his body vigorously and shed the beautiful palm fronds on his body onto the ground. This was described as a very beautiful and amazing sight. He would then disappear into the virgin forest of Aho - into the wild.

The okwa masquerade was extremely male, both in its composition, outlook and rituals. It is because of the very maleness of this ritual symbolism that the titled man who had to perform typical female domestic duty of preparing dyes and colourful decorations had to be called a wife. The mask itself was carved from strong heavy wood in the shape of a mortar for pounding, hence its name okwa. The assertion of patriarchy and male dominance are symbolized in three rituals, in particular, the visiting of village and patrilineage shrines to sanctify them, the crawling of pregnant women between the legs of the priest of Aho to pick young palm leaves, and the final ritual of undressing the goddess.

I was given two explanations as to why pregnant

women had to crawl on hands and knees under the towering body of the masquerader of Aho to pick pieces of palm-leaf which they were supposed to cook and eat. According to one explanation, this was done to avoid having a baby who would sway its head from left to right or rock its head like the ókwa mask carriers.⁽⁴²⁾ The very heavy weight of the mask made those carrying it sway their heads from side to side. Ezudona, who had spent most of his life and wealth taking the ozo Aho title, was more secretive and evasive about the reason why women picked and ate the palm-leaves. According to him, no-one knew the reason, it was the custom, but, perhaps, it was done to avoid difficulty in childbirth. Apart from the assertion of male dominance, Aho might also be claiming the power of procreation. He publicly embraces his wife four times - a gesture never done in public under normal circumstances - and pregnant women crawl in-between his legs. These all have sexual connotations.

Patriarchy Versus Matriarchy?

At the beginning of the season of ritual festivals, omu, young yellow palm leaves were decorated round the shrine of the goddess Idemili. This was done by the priest of Idemili shrine in conjunction with Umuona. At the end of the festival for Aho, which took place at the end of the period of religious activities, the priest of Aho would go to Idemili shrine to untie the palm leaves with which her shrine had been decorated. As Aho priest arrived for this ritual, spectators would laugh and tease the goddess, singing that her husband had arrived. This ritual was called ito omu, untying young yellow palm leaves or ito ogodo, to untie a woman's wrapper or undress her.

There were two reasons given by Umuona people for the performance of this ritual. One was that Umuona was the head of Nnobi, the ancestral home of all Nnobi, and therefore had ritual prerogative. The second reason was that Aho was Idemili's husband and, as such, first protected his wife from public view at the beginning of the season of festivities by covering her, and at the end, I suppose as a husband would say in English, 'the party is over, time to undress', he equally "undressed" her.

At the beginning of the okwa festival, before the commencement of the yam roasting ritual, the priest of Aho would take yam to Idemili as night food,

itu nni anyasi. A husband customarily gave his wife yam as his contribution to the daily food in the household. Some saw this as a bribe or payment for a wife's sexual service and associated the expression "night food" with the fact that sexual intercourse usually took place at night. The Nnobi saying which claims that a wife answers her husband's call reluctantly or sharply when she knows there is no yam left in the yam stack, may support this claim. However, it is also possible to see the giving of yam to Idemili in the context of the paying of ritual homage which was done in Umuona at the beginning of the okwa festival. In this case, Umuona would not only be acknowledging the ritual seniority of the goddess, but also the antiquity of the goddess with its embodied matriarchy. Umuona would also be acknowledging the male status of the goddess since, like a fully fledged independent male, she had an obi and an ikenga, as was mentioned by her priest, Eze Agba, earlier in this chapter. The whole Aho cult may therefore symbolize the incursion of a patriarchal people on an indigenous matriarchal society. (43)

It is interesting that, even though Aho is seen as the husband of Idemili, and their relationship conceived of in terms of that of husband and wife in the household, Aho is not seen as a superior or more powerful deity than Idemili, not even by Umuona people who, alone, worship him. Instead, Aho is seen as a man struggling to maintain a male authority

over a very wealthy, independent and extremely popular woman. This idea is expressed in another myth which claimed that Aho was the husband of Idemili. Idemili, being very industrious, soon became a great woman; rich, powerful and much more popular than her husband, Aho. There is the belief that the way to humble an arrogant woman is to marry a second wife. So, Aho married Afo. Idemili, in her anger, closed all the other rivers, including that of Aho and Afo, and said that only her own river would continue to run. Aho, in male indignation, ruled that thenceforth, all important activities in Nnobi would be performed at Afo's place. Afo is one of the days of the week, the main market day and the name of the central market-place. Indeed, most festivals and activities take place there.

When I put it to the present priest of Idemili that it is said that Aho is Idemili's husband, he got angry and indignant. This is what he had to say.

'No, he is not! Who was there when he went and took her for wife? You should ask them to say who witnessed the day that Aho took palm-wine to go and get Idemili. Who was there when alusi nmuo⁽⁴⁴⁾ originated? All I know is that my own fathers did not tell me this. Umuona is just boasting. It is only people who claim that Aho is Idemili's husband. These are things which people came to the world and began to say. Have you ever seen where people accompanied deities to go and get other deities for marriage?

It is when talking about customs that people
tell these stories.'

In reply to the denial of marriage by the priest of
Idemili, Umuona people maintained that Aho gives
yam to Idemili and that, in the household, yam is
given to a wife by a husband!

Spirit Possession and Gender Ideals

Ideal gender roles were not only conceptualized in the relationships between the deities, but in possession by the spirit of various deities and the associated titles for the possessed. As possession by the goddess Idemili symbolized the climax of economic success, so did possession by a lesser goddess Ogwugwu ⁽⁴⁵⁾ symbolize female disorder and failure. Ogwugwu title was therefore the antithesis of the Ekwe title. For men, it was possession by the spirit of Agwu which symbolized male failure.

It was as wives that women had access to economic assets from which they would eventually build up wealth and power. It was therefore as wives that they were possessed by Idemili to take the Ekwe title. Ogwugwu on the other hand, possessed daughters. The signs were usually the opposite manifestation of possession by the spirit of the goddess Idemili. The signs of possession by the spirit of Ogwugwu were usually seen from girlhood and became conspicuous at marriage. A girl or woman possessed by Ogwugwu usually experienced total failure in anything she did. Her crops would fail, fowls would die, hawks would make away with her chicks. She might fail to conceive or suffer high infant mortality. Her household was usually in disarray. If these signs began to show, as they invariably did, in girlhood before marriage, nothing would be done about it, as a girl

before marriage was considered a traveller who did not know her destination. She would therefore appeal to Ogwugwu to have patience, saying that she was still on the road and could not erect her shrine on the road. She would promise that as soon as she reached her destination - got married - she would then have her own home and be able to build a shrine in it.

Possession by Ogwugwu can therefore be seen as a control mechanism in the socialization of girls and their training for the ideals of womanhood, wifehood and motherhood. If the signs of possession continued to manifest themselves in a woman after marriage, her husband would accompany her back to her natal home, where the ritual of appeasement would be performed. She would then return to her marital home and erect a personal shrine to the goddess Ogwugwu. Like Ekwe titled women, Ogwugwu initiates entitled daughters of Ogwugwu, Ada Ogwugwu, belonged to an exclusive society and shared payments made by new initiates. Their title was, however, not political but carried great prestige. Like other men and women compelled to erect personal shrines as a result of spirit possession, Ogwugwu titled women also worshipped at these shrines during the period of annual religious remembrance and worship of the goddess Idemili.

The male synonym was possession by Agwu. Like Ogwugwu, the spirits of Agwu were associated with patrilineages. Possession by the spirit of Agwu not only served as a check against social deviation

in men, but also ensured succession to certain hereditary positions and professions in the patri-lineage. First sons were, for example, more prone to possession by Agwu; so also were those in line to succeed fathers or other relatives in the dibia profession. Most men in important social positions would have appeased the spirit of Agwu either in childhood or later in life. They would therefore have an Agwu shrine. Possession by the spirit of Agwu was symbolized by personal disorder, signs of mental imbalance or breakdown, and general tendencies towards irresponsibility. Such a man basically fell short of "manliness". Early appeasement could check this tendency, but in hopeless cases, possession by Agwu excused social deviation in men. Such a man, though treated with contempt, was pitied and excused. Still, in most cases, it was believed that the "madness" would disappear as soon as the man took on whatever responsibility he was running away from.

Ritual Homage

The paying of ritual homage, ibu ihu, was the traditional practice of acknowledging both age and social seniority in the family and the patrilineage through the circulation of certain items. Between towns, what was acknowledged was either ritual superiority or political domination. Associated with this practice, was the idea of male superiority, for this homage was never paid to a woman, except when she had officially been accorded a male status.

Homage practice was basically who received what when an animal was killed. Men killed and dissected the animals, women carried the parts to the appropriate recipients. As the purpose of this gift was to acknowledge both age and social seniority, a man's children, male or female, took homage gifts to him. A wife was also expected to take this gift to her husband whenever she killed a fowl in her marital home. If, for some reason, she had to have an animal killed in her natal home, she was expected to give a homage gift from this animal to her father. In a polygynous family, the oldest male from each wife received this gift from his siblings in acknowledgement of age seniority. In the acknowledgement of social seniority, if their father was still alive, all the first sons of each wife would take homage gifts to their father. If their father was dead, then the first son of the first wife, who

would have replaced his father in the obi, received the gift. He in turn would take his gift to whoever was in first son position among his father's brothers. The same procedure would be repeated among father's brothers in this order of ascendancy, till the patrilineage head received the last gift. He himself did not give homage to anyone, but would first offer his meat to the sun before eating it.

When a goat was killed, what one took as the homage gift was the kidney, the head of the liver, a rib and the hand. The recipient would then give a small piece of meat to the wife who brought the gift from her husband. The recipient would also cut a piece of the rib received and return it to the giver. If it was a fowl that was killed, one would give the wing, the giblets, the neck and the posterior. Again, the recipient would give back the neck to the giver's wife as payment for carrying the message. To the giver, too, he would return a gift of yam in acknowledgement of homage received. One who did not have an animal for the purpose of this gift, was allowed to give one head of tobacco and some kola-nuts. In this gesture of "respect" shown to social "superiors", first fruits or seeds of any tree planted were also given as homage gifts. Even children had early education in the giving of this gift. They were instructed to send the first spring water they fetched to the person to whom they should pay homage. In addition to the water, they should also give four seeds of palm-fruit or the kernel.

This general description of what was entailed in the homage practice was confirmed by the account of the priest of Idemili, who is the gift recipient in his patrilineage. According to Eze Agba,

' In the family, the younger brothers give ihu to the older ones. But, between obi(s) which are related, junior obi sends ihu to the senior obi. This does not follow age, as in the family, but follows the order of seniority. In my own case, for example, Steven Ezeonu, the oldest among us, brings me ihu. Then, in the obi from which we all originated, it is I who will kill an animal and eat it, since all the obi(s) tracing descent from this original obi bring ihu to me. It is not from the same meat with which their younger brothers sent them ihu that they will cut and send to me, for one does not send ihu from meat which has already been cut. The head of each obi kills a fresh animal from which he sends me ihu. When they bring me the ihu I then go to where we refer to as obi ideke okpu⁽⁴⁶⁾ and offer the meat to the sun before I go home and eat the meat. I, as one in the most senior position, although not the oldest person, do not send ihu to anyone. When I die, the privilege of eating from the sun goes back to the next person in seniority.
(47)
It is to Chineke, God the creator, that they offer it when they offer it to the sun.'

Even though women as females did not receive homage gifts, the special or privileged position of the first daughter was indicated by the fact that a brother in first son position and also the occupant of his father's obi would give his oldest sister the privilege of cutting palm-fruits from a particular palm-tree in their obi. As long as that daughter cut the palm-fruits, during the annual remembrance or worship of the ancestors, ilo nmuo, she was obliged to take a fowl to be killed in her father's obi. She would then give the appropriate parts of that fowl as homage gift to her brother, who in return would give her back the neck of the fowl in acknowledgement.

In the case of women in headship positions of an obi or family, only those who had officially been accorded male status received a homage gift. Nwajiuba, for example, (see Chapter One and Appendix 2, Figure 2), would receive homage gift from the obi(s) which make up the minor patrilineage of Umu Okpala as she was officially made male and occupied the first son position. In contrast to Nwajiuba, the first son position of the minor patrilineage of Umu Ochom (see Chapter Two and Appendix 2, Figure 3), would not receive homage gifts, as their founding ancestress Ochom was not officially accorded a male status. He would take homage gifts to Umu Oshuga patrilineage, whose founding ancestor was the brother of Ochom. In the case of Ochom, unlike Nwajiuba, it was not as a result of shortage of men in the obi that she remained in her father's obi. The story

is that she was a very ugly woman and could not therefore find a husband. She remained at home and conceived, so her brother Oshuga gave her a piece of land on which she lived and founded a lineage. Even though the patrilineage of Oshuga ranks fourth in the order of seniority of Amadunu minor patrilineages, Umu Ochom patrilineage founded by his sister who was female must always rank last.

Even in the case of Nwajiuba, although homage gifts were given to her in principle, I did not verify whether she herself received the gifts since, as a woman, she could not tend patrilineage spirits. In ritual matters, Raphael Ezeani, a senior male in her patrilineage, acts as her messenger. In practice, he tends the patrilineage ancestral shrine and the shrine to the Earth Spirit. In this capacity, he is referred to by Nwajiuba as a messenger.

The general paying of ritual homage was done to mark the beginning of the period of religious worship which also coincided with the period of New Yam festival, when new yam was eaten. There was therefore an annual reaffirmation of status differences in addition to the daily reminder of role and gender differences in the family and in the patrilineages through other practices and customs, such as the breaking and sharing of kola-nuts.

As with the giving of homage gifts, the rules governing the breaking and sharing of kola-nuts symbolized authority, status and gender differentiation in Nnobi. As a general rule, a woman should never

break kola when a man was present,⁽⁴⁸⁾ be it a little boy. The man should bless and break it. A man should not eat kola split by a woman. A woman should not pick up a fallen kola-nut pod, but must ask a male to pick it up for her. In male company, whether in the family, the patrilineage or a general gathering, the most senior male present, either by age or by social seniority, should break the kola. The pieces of kola would then be taken in order of seniority. Women took kola last.

No ceremony or ritual could begin without the breaking and sharing of kola. The first thing offered to a visitor was kola. It was in fact the medium of worship and invocation of blessing or saying of incantations, igo oji. A junior or an inferior could not invoke blessings on a senior or superior.

In the company of only women, the breaking and sharing of kola also symbolized status differences between them. Daughters, as males, should break kola when in the company of wives. The daughter may, however, touch the kola and give the most senior wife present authority to break it.

Thus, again, as shown in the previous chapters, there were contradictions in the structure of ideologies which acted as a system of checks and balances. Some practices reinforced strict sexual dualism in social organization, others showed some flexibility in gender construction, thus mediating or breaking the dual-sex barriers, giving women access to power and authority in the political structure.

CHAPTER FOUR: Notes

1. The English word master implies a male sex, whereas its Igbo equivalent, di, is genderless.
2. Similar terms of relationship in the domestic set-up are recorded for Onitsha society by Henderson (1972). He describes the terms husband and wife as implying 'a combination of masterful control and responsibility on the one hand, compliance on the other' (ibid: 215). Also in Onitsha society, as in most Igbo societies, as Henderson states, the term husband 'is used as a prefix to characterize persons having a high degree of control over some specific set of nonkinship activities; a man who has acquired exceptional mastery of farming may be called "husband (master) of yam" (di-ji), with the implication that yams respond dependably to his command. Similarly, when a man is characterized as a "wife" of another man (done only in certain nonkin relationships), this implies obedient "domestic" service' (ibid).
3. See the section on 'Okwa' festival and patriarchal ideology in this chapter.
4. This culture had a wealth of vocabulary for a woman in her menses. The first two words, ino na, in the three expressions mean being in. In the first expression, ezi means outside. Iba in the second expression means little hut. Nso in the third expression means forbidden or taboo. The actual word blood is therefore avoided, for blood is looked

at positively in this culture. The closest of relationships and affections are viewed in terms of the closeness or oneness of blood, or in terms of springing from one womb.

5. See Chapter One.

6. Ibid.

7. Women's religious worship is discussed under the section on The goddess Idemili in this chapter.

8. These traditional routines and habits had not changed much from my observation during fieldwork conducted in the rainy season of 1980. Just before cooking the evening meal, women and children would be seen in the farms and bush looking for food for the goats. Part of the evening greeting was 'are you looking for goat-food?' After saying goodbye, again the parting remark was 'let me go and look for goat-food'. The cries of the hungry goats coincided with the rise of smoke from the compounds, the cracking of twigs and firewood, the smell of roast corn, for it was the corn season, the sound of pounding of food and the fall of dusk.

9. While dogs are essentially carnivorous, goats are vegetarian.

10. Since there was no status of illegitimacy, the stigma was not on the child but on the girl. The girl's patrilineage incorporated the child, in which case the child would take its mother's family name. Alternatively, the child's father was required to make double payments before gaining legal rights over his child, and the woman. He should not get

the child without getting its mother as wife.

Exceptions to the rule were mature first daughters, or daughters who, for various reasons, were allowed to remain in their father's home and bear children into their patrilineage.

11. These male socialization processes are described in great detail for Onitsha society by Henderson (1972). About these activities he writes, 'Within the hunting group, boys learn to stand up for their rights and to strive for excellence; they learn to wrestle while their elders criticize and praise them; they learn to divide meat according to ritual standards. When they encounter equivalent groups from other villages, they learn how to fight together as a unit' (ibid: 354).

12. While Nnobi, unlike Onitsha society, was not politically organized on age-grade system, people however associated with their age-mates and joined their age-sets for recreational activities.

13. Henderson (1972) describes these masquerades as 'the collective incarnate dead'; that is, the 'ancestral ghosts of Onitsha community' (ibid: 348).

14. I was told that the picture facing the front page of Basden's (1966) Niger Ibos is that of an igbenu-oba war dancer, although Basden did not state this anywhere in his book. He describes the man as 'body and spirit', with the explanatory words, 'This man believes, and his fellow villagers thought likewise, that, after certain ceremonies, he was half man and half spirit and was treated accordingly'.

Basden therefore presented the man out of social context, which makes his observation meaningless.

15. Boys went naked, but when they reached the second stage in their development, they may then tie a loin-cloth.

16. These are some of the traditional religious festivals described later in this chapter.

17. These expressions do not appear to be translatable. However, they seem to be derived from descriptions of heads of insects or ants.

18. Disc-like plastic beads.

19. See Chapter Three.

20. At the time of this discussion, I thought that what this elderly woman was saying was ridiculous. I became more enlightened on the subject after I read Nawal El Saadawi (1980), The Hidden Face of Eve, on the politics and problems of virginity and female circumcision in the Arab world. While El Saadawi is an Egyptian medical doctor, Nwajiuba is simply an elderly Nnobi woman. Yet I think that El Saadawi offers a scientific explanation to Nwajiuba's claim. In the Arab world, pre-marital virginity is linked to a girl's honour and that of her family. Only through the shedding of blood could such loss of honour be wiped out. A girl not only had to be found a virgin at marriage, but must bleed during her first intercourse. El Saadawi, strongly opposed to this practice, points out the injustice of attaching supreme importance to female virginity, considering the varying forms of the membrane called the hymen.

From the statistics of the Institute of Forensic Medicine, Baghdad, Iraq, 1940-1970, published in The Iraqi Medical Journal dated 21 February 1972, she gives the percentage of different types of hymen. El Saadawi writes, 'It is known that 11.2% of girls are born with an elastic hymen, 16.16% with so fine a membrane that it is easily torn, 31.32% with a thick elastic hymen, and only 41.32% with what may be considered a normal hymen' (ibid:26). El Saadawi had, on the previous page, reported the case of a girl born with a thick, elastic and non-perforated hymen. In this case, it took a jab of El Saadawi's sharp lancet to open the hymen and let out accumulated blood. For girls with an elastic hymen, it is possible to have sexual intercourse and not bleed. Some girls, apparently, are born with no hymen at all, while those born with a fine membrane may in fact lose their virginity through minor accidents unrelated to sex, such as riding a bicycle or falling off a chair.

21. See the section on marriage in Chapter Three.
22. Members of her patrilineage.
23. See Appendix 2, Figure 4.
24. Very wealthy women wore ivory anklets.
25. Ikenga was yet another cult object kept by men of independent status among their enormous collection of ritual objects in comparison to the simple shrines to their personal deities kept by women. In the traditional society, the more power one claimed or acquired over others, the more protective or valid-

ating cult objects one kept. Heading an obi and keeping an ikenga appear to be connected, according to the explanation given to me by the priest of the Idemili shrine. According to Eze Agba,

'A man who leaves his father's obi and builds his own house has to be possessed before having an obi in which he will erect a shrine for his ancestors and Idemili, so that when he needs to perform sacrifice to Idemili, he need not take it to the main shrine. The thing being sacrificed may be killed and eaten in his house. Ikenga is what he will have in the shrine of the ancestors. Not just any man may keep an ikenga. A man has to be possessed to be able to keep an idol representing this spirit. It is the ancestors who will demand that one should keep an ikenga. Once a man has a house and an ikenga in it, he is of equal status to his father. Ikenga spirit usually possesses first sons. If the man has been possessed for three or four decades, from sixty years, he is forced to erect an ikenga. All these involuntary possession victims are given something like goat's horn. When the person dies, the priest of the particular deity repossesses the horn.'

26. Again, having an obi indicates the male status or classification of the goddess Idemili.

27. This is possibly due to the classification of the priest of the goddess as female, since females

should never climb trees.

28. See Chapter One for the rituals involved in the eating of new yam.

29. In the recent trend of cultural revival, this traditional harvest festival has been revived under the name afia olu. This is an annual call of mass return of all Nnobi citizens everywhere for general cultural celebrations and thanksgiving services in the various churches.

30. It was through communal feasting during ceremonies that the broad mass of the people had access to meat protein in the traditional society.

31. It is interesting to note that these claims were made by Christians.

32. This is meaningful in the context of overpopulation in a land tenure system where most of the land is owned by localized patrilineages and individuals with genealogical connections. It is therefore near impossible for a "foreigner" or one with no genealogical links to have access to land from which to cut or pick firewood which was essential for cooking.

33. These personal shrines appear to be linked to the goddess religion, as they were erected outside the obi and distinct from the ancestral shrines, which were in the obi.

34. The words chi and nmuo distinguish both rituals since chi means deity and nmuo means spirit. While spirits are not deities, deities, like people, have spirits.

35. See Chapter Four.

36. Egbe, hawk, which was the sign on the okwa mask, belongs to the kite family, and so, possibly, do the others.

37. The Nnokwa taboo is associated with the story of how the neighbouring town Nnokwa 'opened up rain' on okwa masqueraders returning from Agu Ukwu Nri when they were passing through Nnokwa. 'Opened up rain' means using rain-makers to induce rainfall. As the story goes, only a certain old man called Eze Odiye survived. This old man, when he noticed that it was raining, had taken off his mask from his head and put it on his shoulder. The water trickling down from the mask did not therefore enter his mouth and therefore he did not die. All the other men died as ukpe, which was really poison but used for painting the mask, got wet and entered their mouths. After that incident, okwa was always carried on the shoulder.

38. Ushie or ufie was an exclusive dance performed only by ozo titled men.

39. This wrestling competition was done by young men who were selected by each major patrilineage to represent them. Those who were victorious simply jubilated.

40. It appears that the masks were carried on the head locally and on the shoulder for external visits.

41. Aho's local routes are still well known by most elders in Nnobi today. This is how Mr. R.O. Madueme described it to me in 1982,

- Madueme: That place where Henry Obiaku sells petrol and all the forest and open space around it is what is called Agbo Aho. In those days, when he wished to travel, he would go to the shrine of the Earth Spirit of Nnobi, which is by that forest near our church. From there, he would go down to Udide. There were some elders who met him on the way when he was touring round. They died on the spot there and then.
- You mean they met Aho?
- M. Yes, Aho, when he was going to Udide. This thing I am telling you happened during the unrecallable times of my forefathers; ages unknown to living memory. It is through stories that we learnt these things. They say that that used to be his route. If you look, you'll notice that there are no dwellings along that line. They say that people never used to live along the routes or paths which the spirits used; anyone who dared, perished. That is where Mathew had gone and bought a piece of land to erect a storey-building, then it was revealed to him that it was the route Aho used for his trip to Udide. He stopped building the house because he was told that someone had gone and lived in that same place and had died. It is that same person who is said to have seen Aho and had asked him the question, "You this man, where are you going?" There and then, he stood

there, fell to the ground and died.

- What did Aho used to go and do at Udide?
- M. He used to go to meet Udide; perhaps his girl-friend. The deity Udide, I think is a woman, isn't she?

42. Nnobi people believed that objects or people's physical characteristics had strong influences on babies in the womb. Consequently, pregnant women avoided looking at "ugly" or deformed people for fear that their babies would resemble them.

43. The fact that figurines of all the other deities in Nnobi which have their shrines elsewhere, including Aho himself, are represented in the main Idemili shrine supports this thesis.

44. Deities.

45. Some claimed that Ogwugwu was the second daughter of Idemili. She is a goddess of fertility.

46. The original ancestral obi.

47. According to some Nnobi people, Idemili is the daughter of the Great God, Chi-Ukwu, the Creator.

The chief propounder of this theory is an Nnobi professor called John Umeh. According to him, the Jews inherited the son of God, di-okpala Chukwu, Jesus, while Nnobi inherited the daughter of God, ada Chukwu, Idemili.

48. A "male daughter" in the position of Nwajiuba was an exception to the rule. During fieldwork in 1982, Nwajiuba and her wife, who was pregnant at the time, had come to visit me. There were also some elders who had come to visit my father. So

we all sat together, as they knew I was collecting information on Nnobi customs. My father, as the host, produced kola-nut for the guests and respectfully offered it to Nwajiuba. She simply touched the kola and gave it back to my father to break. After saying incantations through the kola, he broke it and again offered it to Nwajiuba to take the first pick before anyone else. All the men present picked from the plate before Nwajiuba's wife and myself, as women in the company of men had the last pick.

PART TWO: THE COLONIAL PERIOD

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CHAPTER FIVE: THE ECONOMY UNDER COLONIALISM

Colonial conquest in Igboland meant the strong presence of European trade; firms, factories and machinery, with which women found themselves to be in competition. Not only did women lose some degree of economic independence and their monopoly over the processing and sale of certain food items, they also lost their power of applying economic sanction in both the domestic and public spheres as men found a new independence in relationships with European firms and businesses. A process was thus set in motion which was to affect power relationships in the communities.

The economic history of nineteenth-century Igboland marked the transition from trade in slaves to trade in palm-oil. During the period of the slave trade, the trade frontier of the British had been the Delta States, which supplied the middlemen, while the Igbo interior produced the victims (Isichei 1973: 44-60). With the abolition of slavery and the blockading of the Delta ports by the British, European merchants shifted from the export of slaves to the export of palm-oil - which European factories had found a new use for in the nineteenth-century. First, palm-oil was used as a lubricant, a fuel and in the production of candles and, later, it was used for making soap. Palm-kernels too soon became useful in European soap, margarine and cattle-feed

industries (ibid: 62-67).

The case studies reported in Chapter One reveal the economic and political prominence of women in indigenous Nnobi society, owing to their participation in the production and sale of palm-oil and kernel much earlier in the nineteenth-century. This was long before the period between the eighteen-eighties and the first two decades of the twentieth century given by Ifeka-Moller (1975: 135-7) for the emergence of a large number of trader women and the accumulation of wealth by women. This is in spite of her admission that not much is known about the social history of Igbo and Ibibio hinterlands during the early to middle years of the nineteenth-century.

In pre-1900 indigenous Nnobi society, the ideology of female industriousness, matrifocal and favourable female-oriented notions as represented in the myth of origin and domestic arrangements, meant that women had a strong position in the economic sector. Although the formal rules of unilineal succession guaranteed males ownership of immovable property, in the actual social process women were in control of agricultural production, sale of produce and processed food; hence their control of markets and marketing. Women therefore had more frequent access to liquid money. (See Chapter One.) The representation of women in the formal political system meant that women, like men, could convert wealth to prestige and political offices such as the Ekwe or Ogbuefi titles. Flexible gender ideo-

logies meant that male roles were open to certain categories of woman through such practises as nhanye, "male daughters", and igba ohu, "female husbands". These institutions placed women in a more favourable position for the acquisition of wealth and formal political power and authority.

Under colonialism, these indigenous institutions were abandoned or re-interpreted to the detriment of women, as they were condemned by the churches as "pagan" and anti-Christian practices. Ekwe title, which was both a social and political acknowledgment of female economic success, and therefore a reward for female industriousness, was banned. Indigenous customary laws associated with the institution of woman-to-woman marriage, became confused as a result of its re-interpretation according to canon law and Christian morality. I shall use a case study of one obi through three generations, from the period just before colonial invasion to the present day, to illustrate changes in marriage practices, gender relations and its economic and political effect on the women involved.

As most of the participants in this drama are still alive, and since the settlement of the dispute did not meet with the approval of most of those concerned, I have used fictitious names in narrating what is a true story.

Origin of the Problem - The Indigenous Institution
of "Female Husband"

Oke Nwanyi was one of the wealthiest and most popular women in Nnobi in the latter half of the nineteenth-century. She overshadowed her husband, who died without leaving much to be remembered by. Oke Nwanyi was then inherited by her husband's first son, Okonkwo, who succeeded his father in the obi. He was born to Oke Nwanyi's co-wife. Oke Nwanyi herself had two children by her husband, a boy called Emeliena and a daughter called Nwadiuto. By all indications, Oke Nwanyi's stepson, Okonkwo, who became her husband, must have been a very young man, as he did not seem to have had much control over her, though she bore him a son called Maduabuchi.

Oke Nwanyi was said to have been very beautiful and to have been aware of it, as she had an affair with a powerful and wealthy titled man at the time. When caught at it in the rich man's compound, and confronted by the man's senior and equally powerful wife, Oke Nwanyi beat the woman up and boasted that she was not only beautiful, but also very strong! It is thought that it was through this affair with the powerful, titled, man, that she managed to arrange a marriage between her son Emeliena and the man's daughter called Ada Eze.

As was the common practice with wealthy women in those days, Oke Nwanyi had several wives. Some

of them were said to have gone away and others had stayed and had children. One of the wives who went away and remarried in a neighbouring town, bore four children, a girl, who was sold, and three boys, namely, Kaine, Osita and Nkemka. Oke Nwanyi's son Emeliena and his wife Ada Eze for their part had borne five sons and three daughters. Their first son was called Obiora and the second son was called Nwokem. Nwokem, who is now an old man, and a Christian, commenting on the children borne by the wife who went away and remarried, said, 'It was through Oke Nwanyi that these people were born. It was nothing to do with Emeliena, my father. A woman brought in a fellow woman, and she bore them. That woman had left before Ada Eze, my mother, was even married. My mother did not even know her.'

The Problem - Re-interpretation of the Institution
of "Female Husband"

The husband of Oke Nwanyi had two sons before he died. Okonkwo as the eldest son, succeeded his father in the obi and this made the other son, Emeliena, the head of a subordinate obi. Following the principle of unilineal inheritance, Okonkwo's son Maduabuchi superceded his father's brother Emeliena and succeeded his father in the obi. All this while, no problems were posed by any issue from Oke Nwanyi's wives, as she had redistributed them to various husbands and had collected marriage payment, except for the wife who ran away, and the money paid to acquire her was not reclaimed. The problem arose when colonial rule was imposed, and the warrant chief system of local administration was used in Igboland between 1898 and 1929.⁽¹⁾

Maduabuchi, through the influence of his nwadiana, the son of his father's half-sister Nwadiuto, was made a warrant chief. Through various proclamations by the colonial government, these warrant chiefs and their native courts acquired various judicial, legislative and executive powers which were hitherto diffused in the indigenous political system. Laws were passed which upheld their economic position and political authority. The chiefs even had powers of conscription as stated in the Roads and Creeks (Rivers) Proclamation, 1903. About this proclamation,

an Igbo historian writes,

'Once instructed a warrant chief had the right to call out any man between the ages of fifteen and fifty and any woman between fifteen and forty years old residing within his area of authority to work on the road or waterway or part of it for a length of time not exceeding six days in a quarter' Afigbo (1972: 96).

Maduabuchi, like other corrupt warrant chiefs of his time, found the space provided by his father's obi too confined for his new lifestyle, so he vacated the obi and built a big, two storied house, somewhere else, which he used as a court. As he acquired for himself a lot of what was hitherto communal land, he found that he needed a lot of manpower. His mode of transportation was said to have been a truck, which was pushed along by a few men. It was in this context that his action of reclaiming and bringing back home the sons of the wife who ran away was understood. As one of the "cheated" sons put it to me,

'When Maduabuchi became chief and needed a lot of manpower, he went and collected back the sons of the runaway wife and used them as slaves. Then, when my father Emeliena died, he brought up the case. Ada Eze, my mother, was alone then. Her oldest son, Obiora, who should succeed my father in his obi, was in an urban town then. When she heard that the case was coming up, she sent for Obiora but, before he arrived,

Maduabuchi and his fellow chiefs had taken a decision on the case. He put one of the sons of the runaway wife in his own obi, as he no longer had use for it since he had vacated it and gone elsewhere to build a court. The other son of the runaway wife was put in my father's obi without waiting for my eldest brother, Obiora, to get back. As the decision arrived at was not in her son's favour, my mother was very hurt and very angry. Obiora went back to the urban town, got rich, came back, bought a massive piece of land and built the first three-storeyed house in Nnobi. This was near the only tarred road, which was the major road, too. Everyone went to look at it. My mother was happy again. Others thought that, if they took the obi away from us, we would become useless. In fact, the taking away of the obi from us because our father was dead, and the unhappiness of our mother, made us very determined to succeed. All five sons had left home and gone to find employment in the urban centres. Soon after our senior brother finished his own house, I sent him money to build mine, also along the major road. Before long, our youngest brother came home, bought a piece of land and built his own house, also by the major road. So we all had somewhere to live. The females had all gone to their husbands' homes.'

When I discussed this case with those involved,

I came to the conclusion that there was a conflict of opinion in their interpretation of the case. The conflict of opinion was on the interpretation of the status of the woman who ran away. The woman had been married to another woman and, in fact, the literal translation of the term used for this practice, igba ohu, is "buying a slave". As explained earlier in Chapter One, this term was restricted to woman-to-woman marriage and not man-to-man marriage, but both types of marriage were governed by the same customary laws. This might in fact explain why Nnobi and other related areas have no slave settlements, even though they participated in the slave trade. Nnobi indigenous institutions made no provision for the status of a slave. Instead, there was the institution of osu, cult slaves or those dedicated to the goddess Idemili. Those of the "injured sons" who referred to the runaway woman and her sons as slaves, did so from Christian and Western influence. In this, they were challenged by other members of their patrilineage, including one of the injured sons, who insist that the runaway woman was a wife and that therefore her sons had right of inheritance. According to this son,

'The man who was put in the obi was not born from that obi. His mother bore him elsewhere. Emeliena did not father him. Everybody knew that. The question then became whether she was married, or bought by a woman. Either way, she was a wife in that obi. Native law

stipulates that, as long as bride price was not reclaimed, any children borne by her inside or outside this obi belong to this obi. It was on this understanding that our people went and brought back the children she bore from somewhere else. Not demanding back the bride price was a serious mistake on our part.'

It is in fact only because of the difference of opinion on the status of the runaway woman that the "injured sons" were unable to chase out the present occupants of the obi in question. The man who was put in the obi in question had married two wives. As the quarrel intensified and life became uncomfortable for him in the obi, he packed his things and returned to his biological father's town. When he left, only one wife agreed to leave with him - the other wife stayed behind. As he had left of his own accord, those involved were glad that the problem had been solved, not knowing that the wife who had remained behind was pregnant. When she gave birth, the baby was a male issue. He therefore succeeded to his father's position in the obi. Thus the problem remained. He in turn now has a son born, like himself, in the obi, and this son will succeed him in the obi.

The other reason why the present occupants remain in the obi is that the houses and homes built by the "injured sons" have now overshadowed the original obi. The disputed occupants of the obi have in fact served as servants to some of the

"injured sons" and have been set up in business by them. But a fact known by everyone involved is that if the "injured sons" desperately want to get rid of the present occupants, they could do so easily by applying new meanings to old institutions and they would be supported by the church, birth certificates and the law court.

The effect of this case on the mother of the "injured sons" also reveals the new helplessness of women against modern institutions. Ada Eze was described as a very popular woman, who commanded a lot of respect. Women from her father's obi were said to have commanded a lot of respect, as he was a very powerful titled man. They were also proud, and other women looked up to them and listened to them. As one of her sons recounted,

'Before this case, I remember my mother as a very happy woman. She got married very early as a girl and was married to my father only because he too was from a great obi. Our mother was hard-working. She alone used to cultivate all that land that we owned with maduabuchi. It was from it that she fed all of us. As my father died early, and his obi was usurped, my senior brothers had no assets. They made the journey to a particular urban town on foot and started from nothing, hence it took them some time to succeed. This is why I did not go to university. Had there been money, I would have continued my education. The little education I had, was sponsored by

my mother and my most senior brother, till I won a scholarship to go to secondary school. In those days, after school, I used to go to meet my mother. At the close of the market day, she would wait for me and I would go and help her head-load her goods back to the house. She used to sell foodstuff from her farm. She was quite wealthy, and harvested a lot of yam, cocoyam and cassava from her farm. She never bought cocoyam from the market and always had enough until it was time to harvest new cocoyam. She managed this by drying and storing some cocoyam, which was used when the fresh ones were used up.

She belonged to all the women's associations in Nnobi at that time. I used to see them come to our house for all kinds of meetings. She also belonged to the Women's Council.

Obiora, her first son, killed her a cow, hence she was an ogbuefi titled woman. He bought her coral beads. He also bought her ivory anklets and bracelets. In those days, these were the highest ornaments one could buy for one's mother. The day that the anklets were being paid for, I was one of those who cried at seeing all our money being heaped into the basket. (2)

As the basket was being carried away, we burst into tears. It was only on the day that she wore the ornaments and we went to the market to celebrate with her friends, that we danced for

joy. What we call thanksgiving today was what used to be known as izu afia, market outing, when one danced with friends round the market-place and then friends would give the person presents and money. During the occasion of my mother's outing, her daughter danced and nearly died dancing from sheer happiness. Later, a cow was killed for my mother and she took the appropriate title. This made her one of the spokeswomen, and therefore she was a very dignified and powerful woman.

It was after the case of who should be in our obi, when it was decided that the son of the runaway woman should be in our obi, that she became a very disappointed woman. She was very hurt and disappointed by that decision. Apart from this case, my mother did not fall out with anyone. My mother was so popular that she was always chosen as a representative if the women needed one. We tried our best to make her go to church like the rest of us, but she refused. Obiora bought everything that would make her happy so that he could convince her to go to church, but she refused. She did go for a few days and then fell back. It did not make any sense to her. When discussing with someone, one had the impression that she had been to school. Certain events helped shake her faith. The events were; the behaviour of church-goers; some did not speak the truth; the things she saw with her own eyes that were being done by

church people; their lies and hypocrisy and, worst of all, the outcome of the case of who should be in our obi. This helped shatter her faith. She felt very hurt. She felt that Maduabuchi, the brother of her husband, knowing that the presence of the sons of the runaway woman would deprive her sons of their position, should not have brought them back, or when he no longer had need of their service, he should have taken them back to the town where they were born and claimed back the original bride price, since the town would have been pleased to have them back as they knew their father there. That problem would have been resolved ages ago to the satisfaction of everyone.'

There were all kinds of insinuations as to why Maduahuchi had "cheated" Ada Eze's sons of their rightful place in their father's obi. One of them was the pride and arrogance of Ada Eze who, according to customary law, should have been inherited by Maduabuchi at the death of her husband. As Maduabuchi had become a staunch Christian and officially a monogamist, one can only guess at some of the conflicts that would have arisen in relationships between Christians and non-Christians in the complex compound. Ada Eze's father, a very powerful man, had been disgraced by the colonialists, while Maduabuchi, a "nobody", had been made powerful by the colonialists. From my knowledge of the viciousness and power of the tongues of Nnobi women, she could not have left

him in peace. Her husband, Emeliena, was also known as a very powerful dibia who had knowledge of all forms of that profession. The church with which Maduabuchi was synonymous condemned that profession, though he was said to have continued to use the services of a dibia in secret, especially in his quarrel with Ada Eze.

The basic argument against Maduabuchi was not that he had gone against customary law. It was basically the fact that he had slighted Ada Eze, a woman of such high status. He could have avoided the problem of succession, as one of Ada Eze's sons pointed out, by sending the men back to their father and claiming compensation from him. But colonial government gave him the power with which to belittle a woman of Ada Eze's status; a thing he could not have dared do before the coming of the white man, as he would have had Ada Eze's powerful father to contend with.

As the case of Ada Eze and her own wife will show, it was customary for a woman's son to inherit her wives, thus giving the sons borne by her wives equal status to those born to her son. The second son of Ada Eze told me that, as his mother was a very wealthy woman, she acquired a wife, and he mentioned the name of the woman in question. He told me that it was Ada Eze who married the woman before she was later inherited by Ada Eze's son.

Two explanations were given to me as to why Ada Eze acquired a wife. One was a matter of status

and prestige. She was a very wealthy woman, and an aristocrat, therefore she acquired a wife. The other explanation was a matter of necessity. Things had changed. All her sons had left to seek employment and live in the urban centres. The daughters had left for their husbands' homes, some of which were not even in Nnobi. Consequently, she was alone and without help, and therefore some of her children, especially the daughters, decided that she should acquire a wife. Her last daughter, now a woman in her sixties, told me how they went to a neighbouring town to acquire a wife. According to her, it was a quick business and very little money was paid to acquire rights over the very young girl.

Complications arose later when the girl grew into womanhood and no arrangements had been made to allocate her to a man, as Ada Eze was a widow. The girl's family insisted that she should be inherited by Ada Eze's son, or else they would claim her back. But Ada Eze's son was a Christian and already had a wife, with whom he had been joined in holy matrimony. As the girl's family insisted on taking back their daughter, Ada Eze's son decided to take her, and she became an additional wife. In this case, a son, and in fact an only son, had already been born out of holy matrimony, and therefore his succession to his father's obi was guaranteed. Any other issue from subsequent marriages would have equal status, but they would all be junior to the firstborn.

In the case of Oke Nwanyi, the sons borne by her wife were of equal status to her own sons. They were also born before the sons of her sons. They therefore had first right of succession in the event of her own sons' vacating the obi, which is what Maduabuchi did when he went elsewhere to build a court. The son of Ada Eze therefore had nothing to worry about under customary law. All his sons were regarded as legitimate under customary law, even though it is common knowledge that the sons borne by the inherited woman were not fathered by him. But under church law, all his sons are not legitimate; only the son born in holy matrimony was recognized as legitimate by the church. Obiora himself, as a punishment for collecting wives, was banned, not from attending church and giving donations, but from taking holy communion. This became the church sanction for polygyny. Indeed, it seems that polygynists were not baptized in the early days of Christianity, (see Isichei 1976: 165, 181).

When I interviewed the inherited wife, she was proud of the fact that she had been the wife of Ada Eze. I had made a comparison between Ada Eze and her daughter, who is known to me, and asked the inherited wife if the daughter looked like her mother. The very smart, agile, elderly lady denied any such similarity hotly. She used both the term "our mother", nne anyi, and "my husband", di'm, when she referred to Ada Eze, who died in the middle of this century. According to her, Ada Eze was stout, but firm and

dignified, wielding authority with confidence. Her daughter, on the other hand, according to this lady, is fat and flabby, bad-tempered and foul-mouthed.

'My husband was never like that! No, they are not alike!' she said. This lady still runs errands for the daughter of Ada Eze, whom she had served as a child. In any case, Ada Eze's daughter is her classificatory husband as a senior daughter in the patrilineage into which she is married, and therefore her superior (see Chapter Two).

It is not only the institution of "female husband" and the associated practice of inheriting wives that has been affected by canon law and Christian morality. The very practical traditional practice of widow inheritance has also been rejected by the Christians and educated elites.

Ada Eze's son Obiora, for example, died some years ago and left three widows. Two other wives had died before him. Traditionally, these women should have been inherited by his brothers, but this has not been the case even though the youngest wife is of child-bearing age. In fact, the wife of one of Obiora's brothers died recently, leaving him a widower. During fieldwork, when I raised the point that customary law allowed him to take at least the youngest of his dead brother's wives, the idea seemed to him repugnant and abominable! Yet Oke Nwanyi, the mother or his father, had been inherited by her stepson, with whom she bore Maduabuchi. Indeed, this fact has now become a "family secret".

It was from other members of the minor lineage that I gathered this information and even then, only the elderly men in the family admitted it. It was too "embarrassing" to be talked about by the other, educated, Christian sons. Such a practice in Christian morality and marriage laws is abomination and unlawful. It is clearly stated in the Bible, ⁽³⁾ 'The nakedness of thy father's wife shall thou not uncover: It is thy father's nakedness' (Leviticus, XVIII.V.8). The man who gave me the information has never, in fact, been to church. He still worships the goddess Idemili. In the end, the most educated son when talking about it, told me that it was the custom of those days. He is the one who is now a widower and, although relating to his brother's widows as a husband, he would not entertain the idea of inheriting any of them officially. He is now searching for a wife elsewhere.

If this son were to seek support for his position from quotations in the Bible, he would refer to Leviticus, where it is stated, 'Thou shall not uncover the nakedness of thy brother's wife: it is thy brother's nakedness' (XVIII.V.16). This is again repeated in Leviticus XX, where the punishment for breaking this law is stated: 'And if a man shall take his brother's wife, it is an unclean thing: he hath uncovered his brother's nakedness; they shall be childless' (v.21). This was the verse quoted by no less a person than the Tudor King of England, Henry VIII, in his debate with the church when he

wished to discard his wife by levirate, Catherine of Aragon, and marry Anne Boleyn.⁽⁴⁾ The church on its part, in its opposition to Henry VIII, found support in Deuteronomy, where it is stated that God did permit levirate: 'If brethren dwell together, and one of them die, and have no child, the wife of the dead shall not marry without unto a stranger: her husband's brother shall go in unto her, and take her to him to wife, and perform the duty of an husband's brother unto her' (Deuteronomy XXV.V.5).

In the case of Henry VIII, as with Hebrew culture, levirate served a male interest of continuity of the lineage, as is stated in Deuteronomy XXV.V.6, 'And it shall be, that the firstborn which she beareth shall succeed in the name of his brother which is dead, that his name be not put out of Israel'. In Igbo culture, levirate practice was a means of retaining property in the lineage, including wives as well as giving social continuity and guaranteeing economic security for elderly women. This point was also made by Basden (1938), who, after stating the fact that wives were inherited as part of the property of the deceased man, wrote, 'If the women are old, they remain quietly as members of the compound under the new owner, and are rarely disturbed' (ibid: 268). As access or right to farmland was linked with the status of wifehood, levirate ensured that wives did not lose their means of subsistence. It also ensured that elderly and therefore no longer sexually attractive

or biologically reproductive women did not find themselves without husbands or homeless.

As the wives of Obiora have not been inherited by any of the lineage men, but remain in his compound fending for themselves and their children, since Obiora's son lives in an urban town with his church-wedded wife, these women may take lovers and even have children by them, and not be rebuked by anyone. One does not ask a widow who the father of her child is in Nnobi culture or elsewhere in Igboland. Such widows, in the past, stood a great chance of accumulating wealth, which would be converted to wives and then more wealth and titles, as they were free from marital and domestic responsibilities. This is the case with a few wealthy trader-women in the urban centres today. These, having accumulated wealth, may acquire wives in the names of their sons or male relatives. Since Nnobi no longer has titles for women, women can no longer seek formal political power for themselves through title-taking as wealthy men do in Nnobi today.

The last Ekwe titled women died before the middle of this century. Even with these twentieth-century titled women, customs associated with the titled had changed. From my observations during fieldwork, Christianity did not seem to have stopped men from accumulating a large number of wives, as their wealth allowed them. This was not the case with wealthy women. A seventy-one year old elder, Chief Akudolu, talking about his father and one of

his wives, who was an Ekwe titled woman, said that his father was a wealthy man and that he had nine wives, that is, those whom he met, since some died and some left his father. One of these wives was an Ekwe titled woman. She was a midwife and took no payment for her services. It appears that this woman's method of inducing labour was to make the pregnant women run a certain distance for a number of times and thus set the baby in motion and ready to come out. She prescribed herbs as well. When I asked this elder if this woman had bought wives, he said,

'No, she did not buy wives. By the time she took the Ekwe title, people had become enlightened. It is not long since she died. It was way back in the past that they bought wives. She herself did not buy a wife, but married wives for all her sons.'

Women and the New Cash Economy

Writers on the Igbo in general have expressed two views on the effect of colonialism on the economic position of Igbo women. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Ifeka-Moller, for example, in her essay on Igbo women's war against the British colonial government in 1929, lays emphasis on the economic ascendancy of women from 1880 to early twentieth-century. This she attributes first to the expansion of the overseas trade in palm oil and palm kernels, and later, when colonial government was established, the spread of petty commodity production, the emergence of a new cash economy and the large-scale trading corporations. The combination of these produced a new generation of traders and, as she put it, 'the important novelty was that many of them were women' (1975: 136-7). My Nnobi data, however, does not support a latter emergence of wealthy trader women, nor her views that the exclusion of women in the colonial formal political structure is a carry-over of the traditional system of political domination by men. She writes, 'The formal political system, which was under male management, did not shift towards integrating women as chiefs or priests as their economic influence grew' (ibid: 134). This view is again emphasized as she writes, 'I have argued that the sexual norms of these cultures were unchanged by the development of a cash economy and

did not adjust to the emergence of women as an economic force. This is, perhaps, not surprising given women's inability to achieve a political authority and recognition commensurate with their economic influence. Mission Christianity and colonial rule worked in favour of the male domination, rather than the 'reverse' (ibid: 142-3).

The institutions of the Ekwe title, the availability of the Ogbuefi title for those women who had killed a cow for the goddess, the presence of dibia women, ritual specialists, and both the ritual and political roles of daughters and of the Ekwe titled women, the practice of "female-husband", are indications of formal political power and authority for women, some of which was based on the idea of achievement and reward. It was, however, under church and colonial rule in Nnobi that women suffered a reverse in the achievement of economic and political power.

Both Okigbo (1965) and Judith Van Allen (1976) support the view that it was as a result of colonial rule and the strong presence of a cash economy and European firms that women suffered a reverse in both economic and political power. The Pax Britannica, as well as increasing the involvement of women in long-distance trade, also brought about the firm presence of European firms and factories and their monopoly over certain commodities and the fixing of prices at the expense of women competitors. No doubt there emerged a few very wealthy women in urban towns, who acted as middlewomen for the European firms,

but for the great majority of women, as Van Allen put it, 'the accumulated surplus remained small, often providing only subsistence and a few years' school fees for some of their children - the preference for sending boys to school further disadvantaging the next generation of women' (1976: 78-9).

Okigbo (1965), in a structural analysis of the social consequences of economic development, locates the reversal of the economic ascendancy of Igbo women over their husbands in changes in traditional methods of production and the consequent changes in relations of production. On the economic importance of the palm-tree, he writes, 'All along the coastal belt of West Africa, the production of palm oil and kernels is one of the major sources of revenue and one of the main pillars of external trade. For the family, it constitutes a direct source of cash income' (ibid: 416). As already pointed out in Chapter One, the centrality of women in the production and sale of both the palm-oil and kernels in traditional Nnobi society gave them a considerable advantage over their husbands. The introduction of pioneer oil mills mechanized the whole process of extracting the palm-oil and cracking the kernels. This, of course, meant a much higher oil yield which necessitated bulk buying by the agents of the mills and the channelling of most of the village's palm-fruit to the mills. The main centre of production was therefore shifted from the family to the mills. At the same time, wives lost the near monopoly they

enjoyed in the traditional method of production and the independent income they derived from it (ibid: 418). Instead of wives selling the palm-oil and keeping some of the profits, husbands now sold direct to the oil mills or their agents, and collected the money direct.

It is therefore in connection with the threatened loss of economic independence and power for women that Okigbo saw the rioting in the Ibibio area between 1951 and 1952. He writes, 'When the erection of a pioneer oil mill was mooted in the Ibibio area of Nigeria in 1951-52, the women led a violent demonstration that threatened order and peace in the area for several months. The mills may raise the family's income, but they disrupt the family organization. The resistance came only from the women, a fact suggesting that it was the woman's role and position, not the man's that was threatened' (ibid: 419). It was Ibibio women who, with Igbo women, fought the Women's War of 1929. Economic discontent and anxieties of the women have been stressed as strong factors which motivated that widespread revolt and militancy. Ifeka-Moller, for example, writes, 'With one exception, all the recorded cases of women's protest movements in the nineteen-twenties testify to the catalytic effect of economic discontent' (1975: 134 and footnote). Nnobi women, together with their menfolk, had succeeded in removing their own paramount chief, Igwe Eze Okoli I, in 1928, long before their fellow women started

rioting in 1929 in other parts of Igboland, for the same end.⁽⁵⁾

As women felt the pinch in their pockets when male taxation was introduced, so also did they feel the economic difficulties associated with the payment of school fees for their children. This is again proved by public demonstration by women in 1958, when the government of the Eastern Region re-introduced the payment of school fees in classes above infants II. The government had embarked on a universal and free primary school education in January 1957, but after a year, found it difficult to cope financially, as the number of schools and enrolments increased very rapidly (Nwabara 1977: 72-4). With the re-introduction of school fees, there quickly followed a drop in enrolment, and 2,580 teachers were made redundant. As Nwabara put it, 'A government of integrity would have resigned for deceiving the people' (ibid: 74). This demonstration is remembered very vividly in Nnobi, where women marched throughout the town and the central market-place.

We therefore find that although the economic position of women both in Nnobi and elsewhere in Igboland had changed, in Nnobi, for example, the ideologies which supported the economic centrality of women had not changed. Matrifocal notions and the ideology of hard work, were still associated with females. While women in general fed their children and paid a lot of the school fees, wealthier women, instead of accumulating wives for

themselves, paid bride price for male relatives, sons or husbands. Thus, the local ruler in Nnobi, Edmund Eze Okoli, Igwe II, was able to say to me in August 1980,

'Women take a more active part in farming, the production of foodstuff, and marketing. It is to their credit that we eat today. Men are mainly traders and business men. It is women today, because of what they inherited from the goddess Idemili, who do all the work. When you come to Nnewi, again, you'll see that that is how they are as well. The industriousness of Nnewi today, was inherited from this woman Edo.⁽⁶⁾ That is why, in Nnewi, everyone is doing something. If one is not pushing a truck, he'll be doing various other things.'

If it is to the credit of the womenfolk that the people of Nnobi eat today as the local chief said, Nnobi has certainly not rewarded these women with titles like the menfolk. (See Chapter Eight.) But perhaps, as most of the women themselves pointed out, they worked very hard but found they had little to show for it in terms of substantial profits. Again, the local chief confirmed this when he said to me that there was no woman in Nnobi today rich enough to take the Ekwe title, as it was done in the past. I found that this was not the case with the menfolk: on the contrary, more men were taking the Ozo title than ever before. Most of them were business men and traders.

During a discussion held with members of the Women's Council in January 1982, this comparative lack of wealth among women was one of the points raised. The women in fact found it difficult to point out a very wealthy Nnobi woman. Most names mentioned were names of other Igbo women living in the urban centres. The name of an Nnobi woman who lived in an urban town was then mentioned, but some of the women refused to recognize her as a very wealthy woman. According to them, she simply had a large provision store and another dress-making shop, where she employed a few hands. Other names mentioned were, again, those wives in the urban centres who were in business with their husbands and wealthy only as a result of being the wives of wealthy business men, contractors or traders. The leaders of the Women's Council, in the end, reached the conclusion that women were no longer wealthy in Nnobi. They felt that the sheer struggle for subsistence took all their time.

While men were involved in various businesses and contracting work, most of the women in Nnobi were still basically farming housewives. They cultivated subsistence crops on the family farm plots, and sold their surplus at the market-place. Figures recorded in Table 5 of the 1973-74 Rural Economic Survey Report of the East Central State of Nigeria, published by the Ministry of Economic Development, indicated that over 78 per cent of the rural population were farmers. Statistical figures

entered in Table 7 of the 1977-78 Rural Economic Survey Report, unpublished as at January 1982, indicated that 72.5 per cent of the rural population of Anambra state were farmers; 42.7 percent of the population were women involved in farming; 16.5 per cent were solely farmers; 2.6 per cent were part-time farmers; 0.1 per cent were farm labourers; and 23.7 per cent were farming housewives. The figures for men were 29.8 per cent involved in farming; 23.9 per cent were solely farmers; 5.5 per cent were part-time farmers; and 0.4 per cent were farm labourers. The percentage of women in the rural areas who were solely housewives was 0.8 per cent. In fact, the entry is NIL for solely housewives in Idemili and Nnewi local government areas, under which Nnobi is entered in these reports.

The estimated number of people entered in Table 1 as the rural population of Anambra state, as at 1977-78, is 3,615,900 with 1,931,300 females to 1,684,600 males. The figures for Idemili and Nnewi local government areas is a total population of 454,100 with 241,300 females and 212,800 males. In Table 2, an average number of six persons were recorded per household, while 72,000 households were entered for both local government areas. Of the total number of households, 59,200 were entered in Table 17 as farming households, which was 82.2 per cent of all the households. Figures entered in Table 30 indicate that most of the farm plots were less than 0.050 hectares. 205,710 farm plots were less than 0.050

hectares, while 47,400 plots were between 0.050 - 0.099 hectares in both Idemili and Nnewi local government areas.

Farmers in these areas would, therefore, not be regarded as big farmers who would qualify for government loans or grants. This is confirmed by entries in Table 36, which shows that Idemili and Nnewi areas, which are not regarded as agriculturally productive areas, did not receive any loans granted to farming households by financial institutions. Family accounts, rather than financial institutions, accounted for money used for farming. Table 32 also revealed holder-owner type of tenure, derived from inheritance rather than allocation or purchase, although figures entered in Tables 32-35 in the published report for 1973-4 indicates that some farms in the Idemili division were purchased, leased or received as gifts. But 88 per cent were still acquired through inheritance.

CHAPTER FIVE: Notes

1. See Chapter Six.
2. The introduction of European money caused general inflation and the devaluation of local coinage; in this case, cowrie shells.
3. The Bible used in this thesis is Collins' edition.
4. See Palmer (1971: 45-50).
5. See Chapter Six.
6. See Chapter One.

CHAPTER SIX THE EROSION OF WOMEN'S POWER

Pre-1900 Nnobi society, though not centralized under a monarchical system, showed some degree of social differentiation and inequality based on sex, gender and elitism. The formal structure which was linked to the language of subjection in the family, stressed the authority of men over women in general, even though this was contradicted by social facts. But the flexibility of Nnobi gender ideology meant that certain categories of woman were allowed to be males and thus had formal authority. These categories of woman in this dual-sex ideologically and socially divided society, were able therefore to cross sexual boundaries and play typical male roles through the institution of "male daughters", or the practice of "female husbands", or gain prominence in public politics or religious worship, as, for example, the Agba Ekwe titled woman - the second in rank to the goddess Idemili and one who held vetoing rights in village assemblies. The post-1900 period saw the invasion of Igbo hinterlands by the British, and this was followed by the violent suppression of indigenous institutions, the imposition of Christianity and Western education, the introduction of a new economy and the introduction of local government administration through the warrant chief system. These new institutions with their linked ideologies and cultures, greatly

affected the structural position of women in modern Nnobi society. Whereas indigenous concepts linked to flexible gender constructions in terms of access to power and authority mediated dual-sex divisions, the new Western concepts introduced through colonial conquest carried strong sexual and class inequalities supported by rigid gender ideology and constructions; a woman was always female regardless of her social achievements or status.

Christianity: A New Gender Reality in
the Religious Sphere

Christianity first reached Igboland through the Delta States. The first contact with Christian missionaries was in 1841 in Aboh. By 1857, a permanent Christian mission had been established in Onitsha, (Isichei 1976: 160; Nwabara 1977: 47). Once a strong presence had been established at Onitsha, a large trade and commercial centre on the banks of the river Niger, missionary contact with Igbo people in the hinterland soon followed. By 1883, Bishop Samuel Adjai Crowther, one of the early evangelists, was reported to have gone to Obosi to dedicate a new C.M.S. church, (Nwabara 1977: 51). It was at Obosi, a town along the Idemili river and not far from Nnobi, that Eze Okoli, who later established the C.M.S. church in Nnobi, was said to have been converted to Christianity in 1908, (Abalukwu Vol. 1, September 1975 p.13).

For some of the information on the introduction of the Church Missionary Society (C.M.S.) church in Nnobi, as well as relying on publications in Abalukwu magazine and other people in Nnobi, I am also relying on discussions with Samuel Ikebeotu in August 1980. He was an old school teacher, born at the close of the last century. He started church in 1909 and first attended school in 1910. Though old in years, he is still alert and agile. He is

presently a leading member of the clergy at St. Paul's Church, Ebenesi, Nnobi. In 1980 he gave a sermon based on a detailed eye-witness account of the coming of the C.M.S. to Nnobi. Throughout my stay during fieldwork, this sermon was widely quoted in Nnobi.

Apparently, when Christianity was first introduced in Nnobi, it was not seen as a thing for the masses, consequently it did not gain ground at first. Those privileged few who sat together to discuss the new doctrine, were elders, ozo titled men and ukozala title holders. Women do not seem to have been involved at this stage. This is understandable, as the privileged women who would have had access to it or qualified to sit in the company of titled men, would have been the Ekwe titled women. The fact that their lives were centred around the service of the goddess would have made it impossible for them to welcome the new religion so readily. Other writers on the Igbo in general have also commented on the unwillingness of elderly women to be converted during the early period, and also their resentment of missionary propaganda and attacks against indigenous religious cults. Ifeka-Moller, for example, writes, 'Missions attracted youths anxious for education and a chance for a "pen-pushing" job. Mature women were generally less receptive, for the colonial system did not offer women posts in the native administration, churches, or trading firms' (1975: 141 and footnote 61 for other references

in support of this claim).

This resistance to conversion has been sustained by a few people in Nnobi. Eze Agba, the present priest of Idemili, does not go to church, nor does Nwajiuba, the "male daughter", who is head of the first and most senior obi in Nnobi. Together with a few other elderly people, they practice the indigenous religion - the worship of the goddess. The Christians refer to them as "pagans" or "heathens", but they call themselves ndi odinani, the custodians of the indigenous culture! They are now, in fact, more of a cultural association. The youngest of them are middle-aged. All their children and grand-children are Christians. A new resistance against Christianity ironically now springs from the Western educated elite, who were in fact brought up in the church and educated in mission schools. They are strong supporters and admirers of ndi odinani and preach the doctrine of cultural revival alongside their condemnation of aspects of Western culture and dominance.⁽²⁾

The emergence of "big men" with eze, kingly, title, was a strong feature of many Igbo communities in the nineteenth-century, (see Chapter Two and Isichei 1976: 104-6). Towards the end of the nineteenth-century, each quarter of Nnobi had its "big man", who was usually an ozo titled man with an eze prefixed name or title. These men claimed access before anyone else to any new phenomenon which promised material or social benefits. The early

missionaries had made the mistake of associating themselves with commercial firms, giving the local people the impression of a joint enterprise. As an Igbo historian put it, 'The mission needed financial backing to establish itself and therefore had to lean very heavily on commercial firms, creating the impression of shareholders in a gigantic corporation. Until 1879 both worked hand in hand, intermingling religion with commerce. Missionary stations set themselves up near trading settlements because it was financially advantageous to them' (Nwabara 1977: 48-9). It was therefore in terms of material benefits that Nnobi "big men" first saw Christianity.

At the end of the last century the three villages that make up Nnobi - Ebenesi, Ngo and Awuda - each had its powerful man. Iba Nwalie was the powerful man in Ebenesi. Ngo had Amaefuna, who was later replaced by Eze Okoli, and Awuda had Eze Okigbo. Iba Nwalie was a very wealthy man who traded in palm-oil and kernels. He first introduced the church in his compound, hoping thereby to command a strong centre around his obi. The attempt failed, as no visible benefits seemed to be coming from the new "club" or "association", which was how they saw Christianity at the time. All that seemed to be happening was looking at the English Bible. They could neither read nor write English. As these "big men" were political rivals, when Iba Nwalie's venture failed, Amaefuna in Ngo shifted the meeting place to his compound and restricted attendance to

titled men only and fenced the meeting place. Again nothing seemed to be coming in the way of benefits, so his attempt also failed. This initial failure was also reported by other evangelists at the end of the nineteenth-century. Isichei, for example, quotes one of the early missionaries as saying, 'A thankless task among a thankless people... Religion is only merited for material purposes' (1973: 153).

The two men who were able to win the church a following were those who could prove that some benefits - material or otherwise - could be derived from Christianity. They did so with the active support of the colonial government. They were Eze Okoli, whose name is connected with the establishment of the C.M.S. church in Nnobi, and who became a warrant chief and later a paramount chief. The other was called Okanume, but was better known as Ome ihe Ukwu, (one who does great deeds). He brought the Catholic church to Nnobi. Information about Okanume and the coming of the Catholic church to Nnobi was given to me by John Okigbo, titled Chief Eze Anyidiaso Okigbo, whom I interviewed in January 1982. He is the grandson of Okanume and a titled member of the Igwe's council. Okanume was also made a warrant chief by the colonial government.

John Okigbo showed me his staff of office. The crown was made of silver and had a hippopotamus at the top of it. The British royal crown was

engraved on the front and under the crown was written:

Native Council
Southern Nigeria
Central Province

This staff must be highly prized, as John Okigbo told me that only two other chieftaincy seats in the province had and still have the staff. They were Chief Orizu in Nnewi and Chief Idigo in Aguleri.

According to John Okigbo's story, which is supported by events recorded by historians for other Igbo communities, Okanume brought the Catholic church to Nnobi and gave the Catholics land in front of his obi on which to erect a church. Isichei (1976) describes the devotion to the new faith, and the righteousness of some of the wealthy and prestigious chiefs who, she claimed, 'Sacrificed their standing and their family ties to become Christians' (ibid: 163). She describes Chief Idigo of Aguleri in particular, who was mentioned by John Okigbo. Okanume told Nnobi people to go to the church, that since the church forbade people to eat tortoise, python and dog, it was in accordance with the custom of Nnobi. He also pointed out the fact that the church, like Nnobi people, believed in hard work, as he had given them a piece of land which was really bush, and the Catholics with perseverance had cleared it. In the words of John Okigbo,

'When the church was introduced the catechists who were aiding and taking the Catholic father round were Joseph Ilikannu and Dominique Okigbo.

They were all of Umudinya, the lineage of Eze Okigbo. The young men who used to take the priest across the water boundary between us and Ojoto were Ugochukwu and Ugoafo. They carried the priest on their backs. Later, as the church had more converts, Father Beach took the church to Agu. That is where some people went and stole from the father after which the church divided with St. Decraine in Ebenesi; St. Paul in Umuhu was built in 1928 and St. Mary's in Awuda was built in 1925. Then, in the 60's a central church, Madonna, the size of a cathedral, was built.'

Unlike his contemporary, Chief Idigo of Aguleri, Okanume does not seem to have been a Christian fanatic, changing from polygamy becoming to his high status in the indigenous concept, to monogamy as prescribed by Christian doctrine. Nor did Okanume fall so short in the eyes of his people after his conversion as Chief Idigo did, to have suffered persecution which forced him to run away from his town and found a Christian settlement near the river (Isichei 1976: 164). Okanume still lived like a "big man". He inherited the wives of his father, Eze Okigbo, and added two more wives himself. When he died, Nnobi is said to have mourned him well. After he died, his son Anadi took his position in court as chief and, because of the advent of the church, he married only one wife, called Mgbugo.

According to his son, John Okigbo,

'My father had only two children, myself and a girl called Ekenma. After my father, Anadi, died, I took his place and Nnobi gave me my due position and I am one of the rulers. There were eighteen ichie(s)⁽³⁾ when I was crowned. Now I am the only one of those original ichie(s) left. All the other seventeen have died, showing that I was very young when I was crowned ichie in 1952. I was born on the 1st of August, 1928. I have five sons and two daughters. I and all my children are Catholics. My son is an accountant and I am a trader. Now that the Catholics have incorporated both the ozo and ichie titles into the church, my son can succeed me'.

The flexibility of the Catholic church where advantage is to be gained is pointed out by Isichei when reporting the relationship between the Holy Ghost fathers and Chief Idigo of Aguleri in the late 1880's. Having been invited by the chief and influenced by him, the Holy Ghost fathers began expansion in the Anambra. In their gratitude, they bought the chief a title. As Isichei put it, 'Oddly enough, they procured an elderly horse from the Royal Niger Company, so that Idigo could take the ogbuanyinya⁽⁴⁾ title - an action in curious contrast to the mission's later condemnation of title-taking, which was to cause Igbo Christians so much laceration of heart' (Isichei 1976: 163). While the Catholic church in Igboland has now accepted

the taking of the ozo⁽⁵⁾ title, in the Anglican church, the dialogue continues, as does the frustration and bitterness of wealthy men. The idea of incorporating female titles is not even included in the debate.

Like Okanume, Eze Okoli is reported to have encouraged people to follow the new religion. According to an article written by his son Eze Okoli II, the present igwe of Nnobi, and published in Abalukwu vol. 1, September 1975 p.13, Eze Okoli became a Christian and began to fight "paganism". In 1909, he invited the first missionary teacher to Nnobi, and within the next few years he had built the two C.M.S. churches - St. Simon Church and St. Paul's Church. On his death in July 1955, according to his will, he became the first chief in Nnobi to be buried outside his palace, and, says his son, 'without the usual pagan rites'.⁽⁶⁾

By the first two decades of the present century, with the firm establishment of both the Protestant and Catholic churches and their schools, Christian and Western ideas and cultures were being introduced into Nnobi with the support of British political allies, namely the warrant chiefs. According to Ikebeotu, church and school were synonymous at that time. Classes were in fact held in church buildings and one was not admitted into the school before one had become a Christian convert. This practice later led to bitter quarrels between the colonial government and the missionaries, with the government

insisting on the separation of education from religious instruction. To enforce its stand, the government ruled that it would refuse grant to any mission schools in Southern Nigeria which insisted on compulsory attendance at religious teachings (Nwabara 1977: 62-3 and footnotes).

The first lessons and teachings at that time were focussed on the condemnation of indigenous religion and beliefs (ibid: 53, 56). About the hostility of the early missionaries to Igbo religion, Isichei writes '...not once, but repeatedly, in their writings and correspondence does one find Igboland described as the kingdom of Satan... Only the belief that each conversion meant another soul destined for heaven gave them the courage to labour, suffer and die for the conversion of Igboland. Had they seen Igbo religion as one manifestation of that light which enlightens every man born into the world, they would never have come to the Niger at all' (1976: 161-2).

Thus in Nnobi, people were told to stop worshipping alusì, indigenous religious symbols which the Christians interpreted as idols. The Christian doctrine claimed that God created all persons and all things, and that God was a "he" and not a "she" like the goddess Idemili. Is it any wonder that the colonial anthropologist, Reverend G.T. Basden, a member of the Church Missionary Society and a universal reference on Igbo indigenous culture, describes the goddess Idemili as a he and a god!

(Basden 1938: 41-3.) He writes, 'There are five Ide-Millis, each with his distinctive status and functions' (ibid: 41). The male image persists in his imagination in spite of female symbols like water-stream and roundness-pot: 'All these five gods have but one patronal head, namely, the python (Ekke)' (ibid: 43).

A male image again invaded the imagination of the Igbo professor of history, J.C. Anene, when he referred to the Earth spirit as a god and not a goddess. Thus he writes, 'Among the Ibo, religion, law, justice and politics were inextricably bound up. Law and custom were believed to have been handed down from the spirit world, from time immemorial, from ancestor to ancestor. The spirit world comprized a hierarchy of gods; the most important perhaps was the god of land - the unseen president of the small local community. No community is complete without a shrine of the god of the land' (1966: 12-3). Another male historian made the correction by saying, 'Anene's terminology would be more accurate if he used "the Earth Goddess" in place of "the god of the land" ' (Afigbo 1972: 17, footnote 41). The famous Igbo novelist, Chinua Achebe, also a product of Western education, is no less guilty of the masculinization of the water goddess, whom he describes in his novel Things Fall Apart, as the 'god of water'. He also wrongfully claims that the associated python, a totemic symbol, which is basically thought of as female, is addressed as

'Our Father' (1958: 144).

The church taught that this supreme God who should be worshipped instead of the local deities - gods and goddesses - was a living God and should be worshipped alone. The Ten Commandments were taught. People were told to leave off murder; that human sacrifice and the practice of burying the dead with a human being and the killing of twins were all acts of murder. All activities which centred around the goddess were condemned and replaced by those which have roots in the belief in and the doctrine of a patriarchal Christian God and his son Jesus Christ.

According to the Nnobi elder Ikebeotu, at first, there were conflicts between Christians and followers of indigenous religion. This was also the case in some other Igbo communities (Nwabara 1977: 50-1, 55). In some cases, the Christians were punished through isolation or ostracism, as, for example, Chief Idigo of Aguleri who was forced to flee his town. By far the greatest conflict centred on the Christian practice of killing the python, which is a totemic symbol of those who worship the goddess Idemili. To kill the python was a taboo, the breaking of which carried a heavy penalty. The frustration of those involved was heightened by the fact that when these cases were reported to the district officer's court, the D.O. would tell the villagers to leave it up to the particular deity to deal with the offender. A particular incident which took place

towards the middle of this century is vividly remembered in Nnobi today. This was the case of a man called Nathaniel from Ngo village, but better known as Natty, whose action had incensed the women enough to bring out a demonstration of indigenous female militancy.

This man, out of Christian fanaticism, had killed a python. When news reached the women, they went mad and demonstrated their anger by bypassing the local court controlled by equally fanatical Christians and marching half naked to Onitsha to besiege the resident's office. He, on his part, pleaded for calmness and patience and asked the women to go home, that he would look into the case. The women considered this a feeble response, so they returned to Nnobi, went straight to the man's house and razed it to the ground. This was the indigenous Igbo female custom of dealing with offending men, (Harris 1939-40: 147; Green 1964: 196-214; Leith-Ross 1939: 109). Two weeks after the incident, the man was said to have died. The song about this case popularly known in Nnobi, but sung to me by Mr. B. Emeh, goes like this:

"O no n'ezì gbasika - o!

O no n'uno gbasika - o!

Naaty gbulu eke - o!"

"Those on the street, out of the way!

Those inside the house, out of the way!

Naaty has killed a python!"

This is reminiscent of the song sung by lineage

daughters as they made their way home bringing back the corpse of a sister who died as a wife elsewhere. (See Chapter Two.)

The violence which occurred as a result of disrespect for indigenous taboos by Christians is recorded for other areas which experienced missionary activities. Nwabara, for example, writes,

'In Brass in 1873 the killing of iguana - a totem animal - resulted in the destruction of church property, hostility towards converts, and Christians were even assaulted. The church's attempt to stop the annual clean-up of the town, which caused erosion, was considered an offence to Ala⁽⁷⁾ and the missionaries were beaten up. At Onitsha, the killing of twins evoked wrath in the Reverend D.C. Davidson. Indeed mission activities were nearly crippled because of an outburst of persecutions' (1977: 50 and footnotes).

Again, the Igbo novelist Chinua Achebe, who was in fact born in Nnobi,⁽⁸⁾ records the conflict between Christians and their non-Christian village folks in his sociological novel, Things Fall Apart. His account of the incident involving the killing of the royal python by an over-zealous Christian is particularly significant as it is reminiscent of the fate which befell Natty in Nnobi. As punishment for the crime committed by Okoli, he and all the other Christians were outlawed by the village. About Okoli himself, Achebe wrote, 'Okoli was not

there to answer. He had fallen ill on the previous night. Before the day was over he was dead. His death showed that the gods were still able to fight their own battles. The clan saw no reason then for molesting the Christians' (1958: 147).

Christian disrespect was not only directed against the totemic symbols, they are said to have been also fond of killing and eating animals sacrificed to the goddess. Again, the D.O.'s response to the complaints were nonchalant. He would tell the people to leave it to the goddess to show her power. In this way the Christians hoped to expose and confirm their claim of the impotence of the "idols". The missionaries would also take in twins and their mothers and bring them up in the church. These social "outcasts" in fact formed the early congregation of the church. These claims by Nnobi people are also confirmed by the findings of the historian Elizabeth Isichei, who writes, 'The bulk of the first Christian converts were drawn from the poor, the needy, and the rejected: the mothers of twins, women accused of witchcraft, those suffering from diseases such as leprosy which were seen as an abomination' (1976: 162).

In the opinion of the elder, Samuel Ikebeotu, Christianity soon gained many followers as they picked on those things or laws or customs which people found difficult, unjust or irksome but tolerated for fear of retribution. At the same time, this staunch believer and avid church-goer claimed

that the church and Christian denominations are to be blamed for the backwardness and lack of unity in Nnobi today. This opinion is also shared by historians of Igboland. Isichei, for example, writes, 'Traditions collected in various parts of Igboland make it clear that the Protestant-Catholic rivalry, in particular, often seriously divided Igbo communities' (ibid: 170). Nwabara put it another way, 'The converts sensed an unhealthy rivalry among the missionaries as they came to be identified with particular "denominations" - a rivalry that is still with the Nigerian Christians today, making the "God-head" not three-in-one but one-in-three...' (1977: 56). This division was to affect the hitherto uniform and unified indigenous women's organizations in Nnobi.

Western Education and the Invisibility of Women

As Christianity masculinized the religious deity it introduced, religious beliefs and practices no longer focussed around the female goddess, but around a male God, his son, his bishops and priests. As women formed the great majority of the congregation - the body of the church - a few men, the clergy, constituted the headship of the church. These new gender relationships and realities were also being generated through the early patterns of Western education.

From the figures of enrolment quoted in Nwabara (1977) which he drew from the Annual Report of the Department of Education for the year 1906, boys had a head start over girls in the early years of Western education in Igboland. In the Eastern Province of the protectorate, for the year 1906, Nwabara quotes a figure of 1,592 boys and 132 girls for the twelve schools managed by the United Free Church of Scotland. The four schools run by the Roman Catholic mission had 213 boys and 109 girls. For the nine schools which belonged to the Niger Delta Pastorate there were 538 boys to 184 girls. The government itself by 1900, had only one school which was only for boys. This sex imbalance in the schools was also true of the Central Province of the protectorate under which Nnobi was grouped. For the nineteen government schools there was an enrolment of 1,038 boys to 116 girls. The

figures for the twenty-one Roman Catholic mission schools were 1,550 boys to 11 girls. The Church of England for its part, had only one school, called Onitsha Industrial Mission, which was invariably a school for boys. Two of the mission schools provided opportunity for advanced education in those vocations usually considered male, such as carpentry, tailoring, printing etc. Only males thus had the first access to higher education. When the need arose to train indigenous West Africans for teaching jobs, it was men who were first trained as teachers. They were indeed not only restricted to teaching the English language, but they served as learner-clerks and were also trained for government services and trading with European firms (Nwabara 1977: 60-2).

Male bias was therefore a strong feature of government educational programmes as well as mission policies and education. Had the government's attitude to women been more progressive, great hopes for women would have been sought in the government schools, where at least one was sure that education was not dependent on conversion and religious instruction. In any case, mission schools were far more numerous than government educational institutions.

The Annual Report of the Department of Education for the year 1909 gives a figure of 4,302 boys to 279 girls for the government schools in the three provinces of the eastern protectorates. The number of mission schools kept a steady wide margin over government schools. In 1911, for example, in the

Central Province, the government had 28 schools while the missions had 45. In the Eastern Province, the government had 22 schools compared to the 107 run by the missions in this province. The Annual Colonial Report of 1911 entered a figure of 1,160 boys to 20 girls in 29 schools.

This pattern of higher male enrolment continued in the first half of the present century as figures of enrolment into government and private schools between 1929-38 indicate. (See Nwabara 1977: 68-9. Nnobi was in Onitsha province.) However, the figures in table 2.2, page 6 of edition 4 of the Statistical Digest (1973) of the East-Central State of Nigeria, show that by the early 1970's, the number of female enrolments in primary schools was quickly catching up with that for males. (In these tables from the Statistical Digest, Nnobi falls under the Idemili division.) Table 2.3 on page 7 shows a comparatively higher enrolment for girls into secondary schools in more recent years, especially in the urban towns. Still the girls seem to drop out after completing secondary school, especially in the rural areas, including Idemili Division, where no female intakes are recorded for the sixth form. The explanation could be that girls get married much earlier in the rural areas, and immediately after marriage concentrate their time and energy in the subsistence sector and domestic responsibilities. This explanation is supported by figures in table 2.6, page 10, which enters high enrolment numbers for girls up to

the age of twenty years in the urban town of Enugu and much lower female figures for some rural towns. As figures for Ezzikwo and Nkanu indicate, some areas of Igboland were still not sending girls to school by 1973.

The setback suffered by Igbo women with the introduction of Western education and religion, was not only in the sexual imbalance in schools, but also in the quality of education designed for males and females. While boys were prepared for government, trade, industry, church and educational services, girls were prepared for domestic services and taught cooking, cleaning, childcare and sewing. About the first girls' school opened at Ogbunike in Onitsha on 22nd November, 1895, Nwabara writes, 'The girls' school proved to be a great means of consolation and justified a story by Bishop Crowther, in a speech to the general conference in Exeter Hall in 1888 about a chief on the Niger who changed from an opponent to a friend of the mission when he discovered that the pupils were taught how to cook' (1977: 53). The first few schools opened for women therefore taught domestic science.

By the 1970's the pattern of male-female education had changed very slightly with a few females trickling into what had been hitherto considered male disciplines. Table 2.32 p.35 of the Statistical Digest, for example, gives enrolment figures for the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, which was the only university in Eastern Nigeria till only

a few years ago. Females still monopolized the department of home economics, except for an odd male admitted in 1972 in the midst of 30 females, and three more in 1973 as against 34 females. New male interest in cooking can be understood in the context of urban Nigerian societies where hotel catering and management is a booming enterprise. In the public sector, cooking is a paying vocation. Even though Igbo women have been described as avid traders, the figures show that very few of them go to university to study business administration. Only in the study of languages do the figures of female enrolment seem to have toppled those of males in 1973. There were 48 males to 58 females. The figures show male predominance in the department of education. In the field of engineering the figures were nil for females in 1970 and 1971, except three females in architecture/estate management. By 1973 the girls were becoming more daring as five females enrolled for engineering as against 515 males, while eleven females enrolled for architecture/estate management in the midst of 174 males and one female enrolled for surveying as opposed to 76 males.

In the fields of law, medicine, science and social sciences, the enrolment figures for females are very low indeed. Table 2.34 p.38 in the Statistical Digest shows the pattern of male-female enrolments over the period of ten years from 1964-74. Very few people of the total population had access to university education by 1974 and still fewer

females than men had university degrees.

Judith Van Allen (1976) tried to find some answers to the questions why men had preference in the "modern" development schemes and why it was mainly boys who were educated and given a different education from girls. In response to these questions she writes, 'At least part of the answer must lie in the values of the colonialists, values that led the British to assume that girls and boys, women and men, should be treated and should behave as people supposedly did in "civilized" Victorian England. Strong male domination was imposed on Igbo society both indirectly, by new economic structures, and directly, by the recruitment of only men into Native Administration. In addition, the new economic and political structures were supported by the inculcation of sexist ideology in the mission schools' (ibid: 80).⁽⁹⁾

As we have seen, strong male domination and ideology did exist in formal, traditional Nnobi social and ideological structure, but at the same time the flexibility of gender mediated sexual dualism. This was not the case with the Victorian ideology transported into Igboland by the British missionaries and educationalists. It was from these ideologies that the expression "a woman's place is in the home" was derived. This slogan has ever since become a popular topic for school debates in Nigeria. Other notions of womanhood embedded in Victorian ideology also idealized the virtuous

and frail minded female incapable of mastering "masculine" subjects like science, politics and business. These were some of the prejudices against women which were held by the colonialists and missionaries and carried over into Igboland (Van Allen 1976: 80-1 and footnotes).

The significance of these prejudices against women, the masculinization of religion and government, will be seen in the exclusion of women from the colonial political administration in Nnobi and elsewhere in Igboland. The political and economic frustration felt by the women was to lead to mass demonstrations and rioting by women all over Igboland at different times.

The Exclusion of Women from the
Colonial Local Administrative System

With the introduction of Christianity and both Western and Victorian ideologies, women took a secondary position in the field of education and religious leadership. A new gender reality was introduced in religious beliefs and practices in the maleness of the supreme being, God; his other manifestation - his son, Jesus Christ, who gathered only male disciples; his vicar on earth - the Pope; and the bulk of his clergy. The same process of masculinization occurred in political representation in the local government system, both in Nnobi and all other communities in Igboland. Only men were made warrant chiefs, court clerks and court messengers. These were the people who wielded power in the local communities during the colonial period.

The colonial government in its classification of indigenous Igbo political systems had wrongfully included Nnobi among those communities with traditional constitutional monarchies (Afigbo 1972: 141-2). It is therefore not surprising that, when the British colonialists came to Nnobi as part of the military expeditions in Igboland (1900-19) to break the resistance of the natives and damage their guns (Nwabara 1977: 97-155), the name of Eze Okigbo was given to them as they insisted on meeting local kings even where there were no kings. In Nnobi oral tradition,

the British military expedition has come to be known as "the gun-breaking war", as this seemed to have been very important to the invaders. This was stated as one of the instruction in the memorandum of instructions to the officer commanding the Onitsha hinterland patrol. He was told to insist on the surrender of all guns in both friendly and hostile towns. Other instructions included seeing to the safety of the Niger Company's trade, to organize tolls on trade routes, to ensure the control of towns still practising human sacrifice, cannibalism and the killing of twins, and to destroy the ju-ju at Akwa.

They were given permission 'to feed off the land where active operations were being conducted, and to pay for all supplies where the atmosphere was friendly' (Nwabara 1977: 132).

The atmosphere was certainly not friendly in Nnobi, so looting and even rape seems to have been committed there. According to John Okigbo,

'When the white people came to break the guns at Afo market-place, they demanded to see the chief of Nnobi, so it was revealed to them that Eze Okigbo was around. Eze Okigbo had learnt of the presence of the white men and had asked for a description of them. He was told that they were white and that they had no toes, so he swore that he would not set eyes on them. When therefore, the white men sent for him, he hid himself and refused to meet them. The white people then threatened to shoot the whole of Nnobi if he would not come out. Nnobi agreed to be shot. When Eze Okigbo heard this, he gave himself up. The white people then took him to ichi abia shrine in Afo market-place and whipped him there. They then took some of his wives and raped them. As they were whipping him at the shrine, elulu⁽¹¹⁾ broke out and bit some of them to death. As Eze Okigbo had said that he would not set eyes on the white man, after they whipped him, he went back to his obi, took poison and died. Nnobi then decided to mourn him for the period of seven months. He was buried in the old-fashioned way with a human being captured from outside Nnobi town. He was given a twenty-four gun salute every day for the period of seven months. He died in 1906, the same year the white men broke the guns'.

Mr. R.O. Madueme's version of the encounter between Eze Okigbo and the whites is only slightly different from that given by John Okigbo. According to Madueme's version, Eze Okigbo and Eze Okwocha, the "big man" in Awka-Etiti, a neighbouring town, were friends. When Okwocha heard that the white men were coming, he sent off a warning to Eze Okigbo who on his part swore that he would not meet the whites nor aid them in capturing his friend Okwocha as long as he was on his feet, except if carried. When the whites came and Eze Okigbo refused to surrender himself to the white invaders, he was caught, tied up and taken to the central market-place. There he was whipped, put on a hammock and taken to Awka-Etiti where his friend was also seized. Thus he kept his promise that he would not willingly be party to the capture of his friend.

After the death of Eze Okigbo, the system of government in Nnobi changed, as everywhere else in Igboland, after the military expeditions and firm establishment of colonial presence and rule. Ignoring the different indigenous political systems in Igboland, the colonial government established a universal system of local government all over Igboland in the form of the warrant chief system from 1891-1929. Afigbo (1972), is so far the most detailed account and analysis of the warrant chief system. Describing this system, he writes, 'The British selected certain natives who they thought were traditional chiefs and gave them certificates of recognition and authority

called warrants. The warrant entitled each of these men to sit on the native court from time to time to judge cases. It also empowered him to assume within the community he represented, executive and judicial powers which were novel both in degree and territorial scope' (1972: 6-7).

As such warrant chiefs had already been appointed in the neighbouring towns of Obosi and Nnewi, politically ambitious men in Nnobi knew therefore about this new short-cut to power. After the death of Eze Okigbo, a state of emergency followed in Nnobi while there was competition for leadership among the wealthy men who fought for powerful positions in the new local government structure. Tracing the marriage connections between three particular obi(s), those of Eze Okigbo, Anozie and Eze Ebube, which produced the first warrant chiefs, it seems to me that by the end of the last century, Nnobi society was becoming more and more stratified. As a prominent Nnobi man said, 'Great or large obi, oke obi, married into great obi; Egoeme, my mother, who was the daughter of Eze Okigbo, was married to Umeliwu, my father, only because he too was from a great obi'.

(12)

Ifeyinwa 'Olinke's son Arinze became a warrant chief, her other son Umeliwu married the daughter of Eze Okigbo. Her only daughter, Mgbeke, married Eze Ebube and they bore Eze Okoli who became more than a warrant, a paramount chief.

Eze Okoli, the First Igwe' of Nnobi
and the Birth of a New Era of Male Domination

My information on Chief Solomon Eze Okoli is derived from interviews and discussions held with various people in Nnobi. Most of them knew him personally or were related to him. There is a short account of his life and activities written by his son, Edmund Eze Okoli, the present igwe of Nnobi, published in Abalukwu vol.1, September 1975 p.13. Solomon Eze Okoli is also mentioned in Afigbo (1972). The accounts of the life of Solomon Eze Okigbo given to me by Nnobi people are very similar to the description given by Elizabeth Isichei of "the new men" who emerged in the history of many Igbo communities in the nineteenth-century (1976: 104-7). The background of Chief Idigo of Aguleri (ibid: 16) in particular is similar to that of Chief Solomon Eze Okoli recorded in Abalukwu, September 1975. Like Chief Idigo, Solomon Okoli was also a dibia by profession and became wealthy through that profession. Both acquired knowledge and influence from having travelled widely. Both also stood very firm against local opposition in the pursuit of friendship and favour with the white strangers - the British Colonialists.

Chief Solomon Eze Okoli was a wealthy and famous dibia. This placed him among the most privileged and powerful in Nnobi, hence he was able

to defeat opposing forces in his support of colonial invasion and rule. His father, Eze Ebube Akunma, had also been a very rich man and, as the only surviving son, Eze Okoli succeeded his father at his death. In no time, he himself had risen to high esteem in wealth and influence. Unlike Eze Okigbo, who was in his declining years when the white men came to Nnobi, Eze Okoli was in his prime, alert and shrewd. He quickly assessed the political climate and made choices which placed him in a favourable position for power.

He had first learnt of the new type of government - the warrant chief system of local government - in Nnewi and, as an ambitious young man, had gone to Nnewi to ask the Nnewi warrant chief, Eze Odineme, to nominate him for chieftaincy. Eze Odineme had humiliated him by referring to him as a little dibia boy who had the nerve to come to Nnewi to compete for chieftaincy with his seniors. According to an Nnobi man, Eze Enyinwa, a titled member of the present igwe's council, it was as a result of this humiliation that Eze Okoli came back to Nnobi, took a powerful Nnobi dibia called Oje Ka Dibia to Nnewi court. There, he told Eze Odineme to keep his court and promised him that he was going to start his own court in Nnobi.

Solomon Eze Okoli, to put himself in an advantageous position in his bid for power, took private lessons in speaking, reading and writing English. This won him the respect of administrators, district

officers, and court clerks and interpreters. He also gained favour with the missionaries as he became a Christian convert and actively aided them in the spread of Christianity in Nnobi. He also gained favour with the colonial government as he supplied them with troops in the Cameroons and accommodated British troops in Nnobi during the military campaigns of the Royal Niger Company Army (1900-1912). As a reward for his loyalty and support, the colonial administration made him a warrant chief and opened the Obiaja court in Nnobi in 1915. Chief Solomon Eze Okoli later became a paramount chief in 1918, following the Native Authority Ordinance of 1916, when certain native court areas came under "Sole Native Authorities" who later became paramount chiefs. This was as a result of Lugard's venture to bring local government in the Eastern Provinces into line with the system in the Northern Emirates, regardless of differences in indigenous political systems (Afigbo 1972: 140-2).

Chief Solomon Eze Okoli, a paramount chief, backed by the colonial government, went through a brief imperialistic career himself setting up "hegemony" according to his son, over thirteen towns which he named Mbailinito. He had his native court and the district officers' rest house and court in an area of Nnobi called Obiaja, which had been designated as crown land.⁽¹³⁾ Again, in keeping with the practices of the warrant chiefs,

Chief Eze Okoli made his son president of the district court for the Thirteen Towns in Idemili Division.

The communities which made up the Thirteen Towns were Nnobi, Awka-Etiti, Alo, Oraukwu, Nnokwa, Abatete, Umuoji, Uke, Nkpo, Oba, Ojoto, Obosi and Akwukwu. Interestingly, Nnewi, the "daughter" of Nnobi, never came under her "hegemony". Today, Nnobi hardly appears on maps of Eastern Nigeria. In modern development and commerce, Nnobi trails behind Nnewi. Nnobi people themselves admit it.

Solomon Eze Okoli had become so powerful that he could influence the appointment of other chiefs and headmen in Nnobi. Through his influence a chief was appointed for each quarter of Nnobi, Ebenesi, Ngo and Awuda. In the case of Ebenesi, the chieftaincy was being contested by a couple of wealthy men. On the day of the announcement of the names of the appointed chiefs, the two contestants were present in court when the white people started calling the name Ujochukwu (the fear of God) in a very English accent. As this was not a recognized Igbo name, no-one but Abraham Arinze answered, having been briefed by his sister's son, that is, his nwadiana, Solomon Eze Okoli. So, he was made the chief of Ebenesi. As Eze Enyinwa put it, 'everyone left the court in disgust!'

Having established himself, relatives and friends in the powerful seats of local government, he then set out to develop Nnobi and the other towns under his authority. He established schools,

churches and built roads between the towns. He built himself a palace, set up a court in it, and employed a court clerk called Augustine Ezenabo. He appointed chiefs in the Thirteen Towns who were given warrants by the district officer. When the colonial government embarked on its plan to introduce direct taxation in the Eastern Provinces, Chief Eze Okoli was among those warrant chiefs escorted by Mr. F.S. Purchas, the then district officer of Onitsha, for a tour of those areas already taxed in the Western Provinces. The tour, which lasted from 2-12th February 1928, was meant as a short course in native administration and also as a display of the benefits of taxation (Afigbo 1972: 224). The climax of the career of Chief Eze Okoli was the award, while on their tour, in Lagos, of a certificate and medal of honour by King George V of England through the then commander-in-chief of Nigeria, Sir Graeme Thompson. He was then appointed a district head in Onitsha and paid as such.

Already the warrant chief system of local administration was very much detested in Igboland owing to the corruption and high-handedness of the warrant chiefs, court messengers and clerks. To make matters worse, direct taxation was introduced and district heads were appointed. These and other social and economic factors led to a period of general unrest in the then Eastern Provinces; the climax of which was the Women's War which broke out in the old Owerri and Calabar provinces in 1929.

The structure of the warrant chief system, its inherent weaknesses, the corruption of the chiefs and native courts, and the general background which led to the Women's War are well documented in Afigbo (1972).

According to the views of the present local chief of Nnobi, Chief Edmund Eze Okoli, the son of Chief Solomon Eze Okoli, who himself served as president for the Thirteen Towns, 'The introduction of polo tax and the appointment of district heads in Igboland met with unpleasant consequences. In old Owerri province, the situation resulted in the women's riot of 1929. In Nnobi, Eze Okoli's political enemies quickly exploited this highly explosive situation in Igboland and antagonized him. They were held responsible for introducing tax revenue in Igboland. By that Nnobi community in Idemili division suffered a major political setback which is yet very difficult to correct' (Abalukwu September 1975: p.14).

Eze Okoli was guilty of corruption and abuse of power according to the information gathered from Nnobi and also from references in Afigbo (1972). For that reason, he was dethroned in 1928 even before the Women's War (1929-30), and the consequent fall of the warrant chief system. When direct taxation was introduced in 1928, the colonial government had recommended a system whereby each village or ward was the tax unit, and the village head or ward head was the tax agent responsible for the taking

of the tax collected by compound heads and handing the proceeds over to district headquarters. In Onitsha Division, where the ward head was the official tax agent, Chief Eze Okoli ignored the ward head and collected tax himself throughout Nnobi court area (Afigbo 1972: 231 and footnotes).

As most of those interviewed in Nnobi pointed out, government by might and oppression - ochichi aka ike, greed and ambition - ochichi anya ukwu, wealth - ochichi ego, were features of indigenous rule. Ezeike for example was rich and therefore controlled Nnobi as he freely provided gunpowder for inter-village wars.⁽¹⁴⁾ As a result of British support and unchecked powers given to paramount chiefs, some of whom would not have been regarded as "big men" by their local communities, warrant chiefs, interpreters and even court clerks began to live the lifestyle of "big men", accumulating wives and wealth. About the court messengers, the Igbo historian Nwabara writes, 'The court messengers became "demi-gods" and a law unto themselves as they went about serving writs of summonses and warrants. They demanded money under false pretences from alleged offenders' (1977: 171). The clerk of the court on the other hand, as he alone could speak and write English, 'assumed an air of superiority' and became the "master" and not the "servant".

This office too quickly brought wealth and prestige and, according to Nwabara, 'Some of them

owned prestigious houses and bicycles - rare acquisitions in those days'. He goes on to point out that 'As a triumvirate the chiefs, scribes and court messengers became a terror to the people' (ibid: 171-2).

In the case of Chief Eze Okoli, drunk with uncontrolled power, in Nnobi, he proclaimed that any child or animal born on Eke day (traditionally a holy day reserved for the goddess Idemili) was his property; he also claimed the services of everyone on Eke day. For this decision he had the support of The Roads and Creeks (Rivers) Proclamation of 1903 which was enacted on the assumption that traditionally chiefs had the right to conscript or call out members of the community for communal labour. About this proclamation, Afigbo (1972) writes, 'The execution of their duties under this proclamation and the ruthless exploitation of the opportunities which it offered for personal enrichment later became one of the reasons which corroded away much of the respect which the Warrant Chiefs could otherwise have received from those under them' (ibid: 96-7).

As government by warrant chiefs became autocratic and oppressive, in the words of an Nnobi elder, Mr. R.O. Madueme, 'People's eyes opened under this oppression and they began to question the autocracy of the chiefs. They said that the chiefs were not gods but people. In Nnobi people refused to go and work for the igwe. When he

summoned them, they would not go to his palace'. This state of affairs soon led a group of Nnobi citizens to petition the resident at Onitsha that they no longer wanted the igwe, and in this they were actively supported by the Women's Council. So, Chief Solomon Eze Okoli was dethroned.

Afigbo (1972) reveals that even though the other two provinces of Eastern Nigeria, Ogoja and Onitsha provinces, had not taken part in the 1929 Women's War in Owerri and Calabar provinces, localized violent opposition to direct taxation had occurred in Ogoja and Onitsha provinces as soon as taxation was introduced in 1928. In one particular court area in Onitsha province, people had refused to pay tax and had been forced to do so by the threat of the government to move in soldiers. Afikpo clan in Ogoja province also proved stubborn and intervention by the government resulted in angry demonstrations by women which were sternly brought under control. In another community, in July 1928, throngs of irate women seized discs issued to the villages and threw them away. In yet another community, supporters of the warrant chiefs working with the government were forced to run for their lives to the district headquarters. Here the situation was checked by the arrest and prosecution of the supposed ringleaders. In yet another division, "riotous mobs", in May 1928, were to chase the divisional officer from their area. He later returned with twenty-five police escorts, arrested and

delivered immediate punishment to the ringleaders (Afigbo 1972: 232-5).

It is therefore correct to state that those areas which did not participate in the 1929 riots had demonstrated their own opposition to taxation in 1928. Professor Afigbo (1972) also made the point in his footnote on page 244 that information gathered during his fieldwork in both the Ogoja and Onitsha provinces indicated that women in these provinces had been given a false official reason for the riots by the other women in Owerri and Calabar provinces in 1929. They were told that the mass riots were due to objections to taxation imposed on these women by a local chief. As these women locally were dealing with their own oppressive chiefs, as with Chief Eze Okoli in Nnobi, they therefore saw the disturbances in the other provinces as localized.

In their frenzy, what women all over Igboland demanded was the removal of the warrant chiefs, the closure of the native courts and the European firms.⁽¹⁵⁾ Women had no place whatsoever in the colonial government, law courts, and they were losing out very quickly in the new economic structure. As Professor Afigbo put it, 'The point is that nobody in the upper reaches of the administrative pyramid, where official policy was made, realized the need to go fast with reform. To learn this lesson they needed the shock of mobs of irate women tearing down native court houses, snatching Warrant Chiefs' caps and

hurling themselves in desperation at trained troops armed with rifles and machine guns' (1972: 245). Even when reforms were made in 1933 as a result of the fight with women, the demands of women for a place in the judiciary and government were ignored as they seemed ridiculous to the British who were ignorant of indigenous women's organizations and their place in the traditional political structure (Van Allen 1976: 74).

Perhaps it was not so much ignorance on the part of the British as their refusal to accept a gender relationship alien to Victorian Christian concepts of womanhood. After all, 'a woman's place is in the home' and the man should be the breadwinner. The British therefore in 1933 legitimized a new sexual politics based on a very rigid gender ideology which Igbo men were to manipulate effectively in their monopolization of power in the public spheres.

CHAPTER SIX: Notes

1. Or custodians of the customs of the land.
2. I shall retain the expression ndi odinani or odinani people for those who still believe in and practice the indigenous religion. I shall use the expression "traditionalists" for those who believe in a cultural revival.
3. Titled members of the igwe's council, the traditional ruler's council, (see Chapter Seven).
4. One who has killed a horse, which is similar to the cow-killer title.
5. The Catholic church in approving the taking of the ozo title by its members had insisted on the expurgation of the "paganistic" aspects of the rituals involved in the taking of the title. During fieldwork in January 1982, I attended an ozo title-taking ceremony and was surprised when some Anglican relatives who took me to the ceremony claimed that what we saw was "paganistic". They were disgusted by the fact that a Catholic Reverend Father had come and given it his blessing. The man taking the title belonged to the major patrilineage of Umuona. Consequently, the participants were all from Umuona. The priest of the Aho shrine, Ekechukwu, received the man into the ozo title, while the Umuona elder, Ezudona, again, a non-Christian, capped him. The Aho shrine priest used the abosi leaf for "washing" the man's tongue. From thence-

forth, the man was expected to speak nothing but the truth. Again, for the same purpose, he passed an egg and the abosi leaf over the man's body, then his tongue. Next, he placed the egg on the ground and the leaf over it. The ozo candidate was then instructed to step on it and squash the egg. I was told that in the past, a chick would be used instead of an egg. The candidate had to sit on it to kill it. It was the use of the old symbols that my Anglican relatives objected to, without thinking of what they symbolized, which was righteousness. The title which the ozo man took was Igbo-fu-ego, when an Igbo person sees money... This is a short form of the saying, Igbo fu ego, ogholu aku; the insect called aku, like moths, is attracted to light. The analogy therefore is that the Igbo and money are like moths and light. The implication, I think, is that an Igbo turns money into fortune; they are enterprising. The ozo title is voluntary and achievement based. When a man becomes financially successful, he seeks power and prestige by buying the ozo title.

6. This was a custom of burying chiefs and titled men with a slave. (See Nwabara 1977: 51; Basden 1938: 292-4.) About the slaves, Arinze writes, 'These people executed were often slaves, or people captured from far away towns, but never fellow townsmen.' (1970: 88.)

7. The Earth Goddess

8. Achebe's father who is from the nearby town of

Ogidi, was a school teacher in Nnobi when Achebe was born.

9. A research was conducted by Miss M.E. Amadiume (July 1982) for a masters degree in Education Guidance and Counselling at the University of Jos, Nigeria. Her topic was 'Sex differences in the career' choice of university students: A case study of the Univeristy of Jos.' Her main hypothesis was this: 'course selection and career proposals among undergraduate students of the University of Jos indicate sex-bias.' From a random selection of equal numbers of male and female students of different ethnic groups from all the faculties in the university, M. Amadiume reached the conclusion that 'students subscribed to the arbitrary idea of "masculinization" and "femininization" of careers.' She found evidence of stigmatization of and general curiosity around those whom she describes as 'female deviants, that is, those in "traditionally masculine" fields, and the "acada girls", that is, a female graduate. The belief is that too much education would jeopardize a girl's chances of marriage. M. Amadiume writes, 'Where she registers for a "feminine" course, especially one that qualifies her for teaching, she may be easily "pardoned" and will, in fact attract ready suitors. For an "acada" girl who compounds her crime of academic ambition by registering for a course in a non-traditional field, the general feeling among the males and even the females is that marrying such a girl will be tantamount to bringing "another

man" into the family - a situation which will seriously jeopardize harmony in the family.

Nicknames and ridiculous comments are often used to antagonize such female deviants. The male deviant in a feminine field such as the home economics department, is considered as probably lacking in ambition and not a match for his fellow men. He himself might even wonder if his attraction to such nurturant careers could be a sign of sexual abnormality' (ibid: 14-15).

10. Ichi abia is the shrine dedicated to the collective protective medicine or sorcery of all Nnobi. It is therefore located in a forbidden virgin forest in the central market-place. The spirit or deity residing in this shrine is considered male. It is the spirit which Nnobi takes to external wars against strangers. As the central market-place is a public place, open to non-Nnobi people, Ichiabia is believed to protect Nnobi people against bad medicines from strangers. The tenders of this shrine are the dibia professionals of Nnobi. On the day of its worship, all the ritual specialists in Nnobi come out and stand in a single file and go round the shrine chanting incantations. Then they will kill a cock or a he-goat at the shrine and sprinkle the blood on it. They will then cook and eat the flesh there before they disperse. They alone may enter the forest where the shrine is located. Anyone else who dares, does so at great risk. There are various stories of consequences to those who have broken the

taboo of not entering the forest. Colonial soldiers were said to have been attacked by insects when they entered it, so they retreated. Some Anglican Christians are said to have died as a result of attempts to clear the bush. An outbreak of smallpox epidemic has also been attributed to an attempt to clear the bush. Another story refers to the demonstration by women in Nnobi over the general increase in school fees mentioned in Chapter Five. The soldiers sent to quell the demonstration in Nnobi had gone into the bush to cut sticks with which to whip the women. The general claim is that smallpox took care of the soldiers!

11. Some kind of insect.

12. Described in Chapter One.

13. Igbo native law and custom recognized both individual, family and communal ownership of land, (see Chapter One). As the principle of communal ownership suited the colonial government best, other methods of land tenure in Igboland were quickly denied. Following both the Native and Public Lands Acquisition Proclamations of 1903, the colonial government gave itself the right to acquire any lands for public and governmental purposes, (Nwabara 1977: 34-9).

14. See Chapter Two.

15. See Perham 1937, Native Administration in Nigeria. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

PART THREE: THE POST INDEPENDENCE PERIOD

CHAPTER SEVEN: THE MARGINALIZATION OF
WOMEN'S POSITION

The general mass demonstrations and rioting by Igbo women from 1928-1930 against exclusively male and anti-female colonial institutions referred to in the previous chapter, finally led to the collapse of the warrant chief system of local government. In seeking reforms in the colonial system of local government, various ordinances were passed between 1930 and 1960, when independence was granted to Nigeria. (See Nwabara 1977: 203-215.) But even after the general unrest, women's demands as revealed to the Commission of Inquiry set up in 1930 to hear evidence of the riots in the southern provinces, that they should be incorporated into the ruling administrative bodies,⁽¹⁾ were not taken seriously by the colonial government. Thus, after a series of unpopular ordinances aimed at native court reforms, when the idea of democratic representation and consultation finally dawned on the colonial legislators, leading to the promulgation of the Eastern Region Local Government Ordinance Number 16 of 1950, a guaranteed place for women in government bodies was not written into law. The emergent county councils and district councils became political institutions monopolized by men, especially the decision-making processes. In community effort,

in terms of projects that followed, as for example, the building of schools, churches, maternity homes, assembly halls, roads, pipe-borne water, electricity, police barracks and post offices etc., men made the decisions and imposed levies. Women, even though they would also pay levy, became an *unwaged* labour force for bush clearing, carrying sand and wood and fetching water. They generally became the public cleansing department and a guaranteed entertainment group to dance for local chiefs and politicians.

Male control of the machinery of local government was confirmed in Ordinance 18 of 1959, which provided for the formation of a provincial assembly in each province of Eastern Nigeria. (Nwabara 1977: 212.) This was a consultative and deliberative body above the native council. Its duty was to advise the government on local matters such as development projects or allocation of funds through provincial commissioners. Thus provincial administration was established with sub-divisions and counties within the provinces. In the structure or composition of local leadership, no seats were given to women.

'At the head of each province there was a provincial commissioner, an indigene appointed by the Governor on the recommendation of the premier; other members included a provincial secretary, senior officers of certain regional ministries, administrative officers in charge and such other officers or staff necessary for carrying into effect the intentions and purposes of the law. Added to the above were provincial members elected by local councils in the province

and ex officio members consisting of members of the House of Assembly and of the House of Chiefs in the province' (ibid: 213). A few months before independence, on 1 July 1960, the Eastern Region Independence Local Government Law shifted control of legislative, judicial and executive powers from colonial officers to indigenous Nigerian men. Electoral regulations were made. Functions and rights of different levels of local government bodies were defined.

Sexual dualism pervaded the social, economic and political organization of all Igbo societies. But in some Igbo societies as in Nnobi, the flexibility of gender in language and sex-linked roles mediated sexual dualism. Certain categories of woman could occupy male associated roles and thereby wield structural power and authority as for example "male daughters", "female husbands" or the position of daughters vis-a-vis wives, or Ekwe titled women. This was not the case with political structures erected by colonial administrators or the cultures they imported and generated. In the filling of government administrative offices, male⁽²⁾ preference and dominance was either stated or implied. Males therefore had a head start over women in all social fields as a result of the rigidity of gender embodied in Western ideologies and institutions.

Nnobi Welfare Organization and Male Politics

Colonialism and its associated innovations affected the structural position of women in Nnobi. Western culture with its rigid gender ideology favoured the menfolk, who quickly filled the positions of power in the churches and other administrative departments of local government. Since men could still buy ozo and chieftaincy titles, they were still able to hold strong positions in the seats of government by converting wealth to power. This was not the case with women. The rigid gender ideology of the Christian religion would not tolerate women in male roles, such as the clergy which held the leadership of the church. As the church clamped down on indigenous religious beliefs and practices, it meant a ban on involuntary titles, which included the Ekwe title taken by women. Thus women lost a prescribed and guaranteed position in the centre of local government. There are no titles in Nnobi today that women may take. In the local ruling council, that is, the igwe's council, with recognized seats for certain titled men such as the igwe himself, who should never be a woman, and the ichie(s)⁽³⁾ there are no such guaranteed seats for women. As in the church, women in local government again form the bulk of the masses, not the paid leadership positions. Women leaders of the women's organizations are used simply for enlisting women's support and

vote.

The modern political history of Nnobi is about men, their rivalries for power and their organized efforts to suppress and control the women's organizations. The backbone of the women's organization was finally broken in 1977, when leaders of the Women's Council were arrested and detained in custody on charges of subversion. After that arrest, the Women's Council was put under the supervision of the male dominated and controlled organ of local government: The Nnobi Welfare Organization.

Information on the modern political history of Nnobi is based on interviews, discussions and observations during fieldwork in Nnobi between 1981 and January 1982. Among those interviewed were people who had participated in the various improvement unions over the years and have themselves been political activists both in Nnobi and in the urban towns. Such men include Mr. R.O. Madueme, whose name has been mentioned several times in this work; Mr. B.B.O. Eneh, a business tycoon in his fifties and a notable political figure both in Nnobi, the state and federal political levels. He was one of the candidates who stood for election to the state House of Assembly in the 1979 elections. Information was also received from Chief Akudolu, a seventy-one year old Onitsha based trader. He was one of the founder members of Nnobi Welfare Organization. Another Nnobi elder, Eze Enyinwa, a member of the igwe's council was also interviewed, including the "male daughter",

Nwajiuba.

Chief Solomon Eze Okoli, Igwe I of Nnobi, had become corrupt and tyrannical like most of the other warrant chiefs in other Igbo communities, hence the petition for his removal by Nnobi people. A name mentioned by most people in connection with the movement to remove Chief Eze Okoli was a rich Onitsha based merchant called Frederick Egbue. Some claim that he was motivated by jealousy, as he was in rivalry with Chief Eze Okoli. Others saw patriotism as his motive. In any case, with the local chief removed and encouragement from the colonial administration for local self-help projects, Frederick Egbue himself in 1942 formed an association called Nnobi Patriotic Union, which was intended to see to the welfare of the hometown. As some Nnobi people had reached the conclusion that this organization was formed for the purpose of discrediting the former local ruler, the igwe and his family, all those related to the igwe were said to have washed their hands off the whole venture and declared that they were not party to its activities. The organization therefore flopped and was dissolved.

It was not until 1946, following the rapid spread of improvement unions all over Igboland, that another Onitsha based Nnobi man called Samson Ezenagu set up the Nnobi Improvement Union with the knowledge of the deposed igwe. This organization then took over the leadership of Nnobi under a

chairman, secretary and representatives from various branches in the urban towns. They began to help in the administration of Nnobi. Samson Ezenagu then died, and another man called Richard Anoliefo took over the presidency, after which it was yet another man called Michael Ugochukwu. No woman has yet been either chairman, president, secretary or treasurer of the Patriotic Union, which later became known as Nnobi Welfare Organization (N.W.O.).

In 1951, N.W.O., under the presidency of Richard Anoliefo, reached a unanimous decision to have the igwe of Nnobi reinstated. It was thus that Chief Solomon Eze Okoli again became the Igwe I of Nnobi in 1951. The reason given for wanting a traditional ruler was said to be the fact that all the surrounding towns had their own traditional rulers and that at meetings of traditional rulers, Nnobi had no representative and was therefore losing some of the amenities due to them.⁽⁴⁾ The igwe appears to have been a purely ceremonial head during his second term of office, as the administration of the town was really run by the Welfare Organization. When the igwe died in 1955, his first son, Lawrence was invited to take over the office of igweship, but he declined the offer, so his junior brother Edmund Eze Okoli was made Igwe II of Nnobi in 1957.

N.W.O. and Male Monopoly of Decision
Making Processes in Nnobi Local Politics

There was an all male composition of the central executive of the N.W.O. in the persons of a president general and a secretary general. Officers of the central executive were elected at proposed general meetings of all Nnobians⁽⁵⁾ residing outside and in Nnobi. Like other ethnic associations described by Lloyd (1967: 195-202), N.W.O. had branches in all the towns in Nigeria where Nnobians reside. The central focus however was the hometown where general meetings were held. For the general meetings, each branch was expected to send two representatives. Each quarter of Nnobi was also expected to send representatives and finally the Women's Council was also expected to be represented. In its composition, therefore, N.W.O. can be said to be democratic.

As well as the N.W.O. there are two other ruling bodies in Nnobi which are exclusively male composed. One is the igwe's council. The igwe himself is the local chief, known by the title igwe. This title is not indigenouse to Nnobi as Nnobi did not have overall male chiefs.⁽⁶⁾ There were ozo or eze titled men who were associated with specific lineages or quarters except for the occasional emergence of "big men" who through influence, might and wealth had overall recognition. The only male title which

was generally recognized was the eze ana, a title usually taken by the isi ana of Nnobi, the priest of the Earth Spirit. This title was however hereditary and could be taken in only one obi in Nnobi, the obi which holds the okpalaship, first son status. The title had ritual and first share prerogatives. It was therefore not a kingship title. It was only the female Ekwe which had overall political power in the sense of vetoing rights in public assemblies or constitutional assemblies.⁽⁷⁾ As the church banned the female title, colonial rule brought about the introduction of a ruling male chieftaincy in Nnobi. Eze Okoli took the title of Igwe of Nnobi when he became a warrant chief.

As a result of a new identification with chieftaincy and kingship titles, it became necessary for interested parties in Nnobi to re-examine and re-interpret the indigenouse political systems of Nnobi. Some recognized successive generations of eze, kingly, titled men in the obi of Eze Okigbo in Awuda as past dynasties.⁽⁸⁾ Since in Igbo political concept, kings did not crown themselves, king-makers were not sought in Awuda but were found elsewhere in Ebenesi. Ebenesi was then given the status of traditional king-makers, for that reason, they should not produce the kings, but crown the kings.⁽⁹⁾ When the first igwe who was from Ngo died, the argument was whether to make the igweship a hereditary office or for it to rotate between Awuda and Ngo, leaving Ebenesi as the king-makers, or for the

three quarters in Nnobi to take turns in holding the title. As this threatened to erupt into a big political issue in Nnobi, it was felt that it was safer and easier to invite the son of the first igwe to take up the igweship. The method of filling the igweship and okpalaship is still a dangerous and unresolved political issue in Nnobi today.⁽¹⁰⁾ In the dialogue and debate concerning the filling of these political offices, no thought is given to the possibility of female candidates or parallel female offices.

The igwe's council is therefore made up of the igwe himself, the okpala, eighteen ichie titled men elected by their wards. In addition to the eighteen ichie titled men, there are three special ichie titled men nominated by the igwe. He usually nominates one in each *village*. The ichie titled men and the okpala act as advisers to the igwe. When all these titled men sit together, their meeting is referred to as igwe-in-council. They deal mainly with traditional matters as well as native law and custom.

The other administrative body is the local government which is an official government body. It is composed of elected and nominated all male councillors and other local administrators. These councillors are supposed to be picked through election. For administrative purposes, Nnobi is divided into thirty-six wards, with twelve wards in each quarter or village. Usually, the ward nominates

a candidate who stands unopposed. But I was told that where there are two contestants, each candidate enlists the female members of his lineage on the day of the election. Otherwise, only male ward members meet to elect a ward councillor. There has never been any female candidate for councillorship. The local government council is an independent government body. Its members usually consult and co-operate with the N.W.O. as well as the igwe-in council. They are however able to give orders to the other two bodies in their capacity as an arm of government. Funds and government development projects are channelled through them.

By far the most powerful of all the governing bodies was the widely represented and self-supporting N.W.O. Most community self-help and development projects were initiated and supervised by the N.W.O. Levies for these projects were also made and collected by the N.W.O. However, for major projects and associated levies, N.W.O. liaised with igwe-in-council and sought its sanction. Thus final decisions regarding specific projects in Nnobi were taken in the joint meeting of N.W.O. and igwe-in-council when committees for specific projects were set up. Such consultations also took place between ward councillors and the igwe's council for the discussion and execution of local government projects. Where projects concerned women, such as the market-place, the Women's Council was invited to the meetings. Thus at all levels of local administration and govern-

ment, initial decisions and suggestions were made by an all male caucus before a later display of attempt at wider consultation.

Local Political Issues: 1946-1960

As the N.W.O. had the mass support of Nnobians, since they saw the organization as their invention and not government linked, the N.W.O. found itself dealing with religious, cultural, economic and political problems. During this earlier period of the N.W.O., members of the Women's Council claimed that they were always invited to the meetings of the N.W.O.

The main religious problem at the time was the divisive effect of Christian denominations, the neglect of "idol" shrines and squares, since the church had condemned and outlawed Christian participation in indigenous religious festivals and ceremonies. The N.W.O. therefore found itself dealing with these problems. Rivalry between Anglicans and Catholics appears to have been so intense that members of both denominations did not intermarry. The problem was then taken to the N.W.O. which on its part ruled that Catholics should be able to marry Protestants and vice versa. From my observation, the problem of Catholics refusing to marry non-Catholics is still present all over Igbo-land. The other problem the N.W.O. found itself dealing with during this period was said to have been the neglect of the idol squares till they were covered in grass and weed. The N.W.O. therefore found itself ruling that women should tend and

sweep these squares and open spaces. The women were assured that there was nothing sinful about entering "ju-ju" squares as long as one did not believe in and worship "idols"; that they would only be keeping the place clean and it would not mean that they were worshipping the idols to which the squares belonged.

It appears that, even during this earlier period, the N.W.O. had begun to undermine the customary autonomy of the Women's Council by passing laws or making rules concerning some of the indigenous ceremonies which brought mothers material benefits through their daughters, as for example, the Etedenaghu gifts. (See Chapter Four.) The giving of this gift was not really compulsory, only one who wished may do so. A son-in-law was not duty bound to give this gift after the bearing of their first child. Knowing the strength of local gossip and innuendo - a communication sphere controlled by women - I would think that most sons-in-law gave this gift.

As this ceremony was beneficial to the mass of women, it appears that the influence of Christianity did not immediately mean an end to it. Instead of giving it up altogether, the Christians put it at Christmas, and it became part of the Christmas gift exchanges. But then problems arose when in the words of Mr. R.O. Madueme, 'This festival became so luxurious that people even started taking goat and textile material, taking so much that it took

seven to eight people to carry the gift. This was not how it used to be. Men were the givers of this gift, women the receivers. It would therefore be men who would complain of these supposed excesses. The problem was therefore taken to the N.W.O., which in turn made rules which controlled the amount of gifts to be given.

The N.W.O. was able to control the "excesses" of gifts given to women by their sons-in-law, but the organization itself, according to Mr. R.O. Madueme, under the leadership of Michael Ugochukwu and Clement Anyaechie, his general secretary, soon found itself dealing with the problem of alleged embezzlement of money. In the words of Mr. Madueme, 'When Nnobi collected money, the money would not be accounted for and would not be used for the work for which it was collected. The money would just be lost. Unrest therefore descended on Nnobi. This happened either in 1951 or 1952'.

As a result of suspicions and general dissatisfaction with financial activities of the N.W.O., Nnobi elders were said to have ruled that no-one should pay the levy demanded for the construction of pipe-borne water (pump) in Nnobi. The elders' ruling was said to have been regardless of whether or not the levy was demanded by the government, since they believed that those who were administering the affairs of Nnobi were no longer telling them the truth. They were no longer using money collected for the purpose for which the money was levied.

They therefore called for a commission of inquiry in 1958. Mr. R.O. Madueme, who was a key figure in this controversy, pointed out the irony of the fact that it was the N.W.O. which set up the commission of inquiry, that is to say that the same people who were to be investigated appointed the people who would do it! This commission of inquiry, as would be expected, was quickly opposed and dismissed by a group of people who appointed an independent body, of which Mr. R.O. Madueme was the head. Though both men and women had paid levies, members of the commission of inquiry were all men. The six appointed men therefore looked into the accounts of the N.W.O., made their own inquiries and then summoned the men involved.

For the purpose of this investigation, a court of inquiry was built on the premises of St. Paul's Church, Ebenesi, and there Mr. Madueme summoned all those involved. Anyone who was required before the court received a letter which ordered him to appear before the court. The procedure and findings of this inquiry is best reported in the words of Mr. Madueme who led the inquiry,

'I collected facts about the money misappropriated; those who paid their levy and those who did not pay theirs, and all that money that got lost in Nnobi; the community money used for training Barrister Nwaeje and that used for training Doctor Eruchalu, and the aluminium plates collected for building the post office.

All those things people did not know where they were, we found out all about them. We carried out this inquiry for six months. Then the whole of Nnobi was summoned, those in the wilderness⁽¹¹⁾ and those at home. They all gathered at St. Simon's School. We met them there and I read out our findings. What I read revealed that, for example, those given the sum of £200 for a particular job used only £150. We therefore demanded that they should produce the balance of £50. Some paid it. This is just an example to show you the nature of the job we did. Even those given £900, but who used only £700, were asked the question, "the balance of £200, where is it?", for we were able to discover that the £200 was not utilized in the job.

After reading the results, the last word I said to them in the hall before I left was, "anyone who thinks he has been unjustly found guilty should sue me in court!" But no one did! No-one has arrested me until today which indicates that I spoke the truth. Then the next levy was collected even though those people who had been accused of withholding community money had not paid it back. This is so even to the present day. But with this next levy, as a result of fear generated by the inquiry we carried out, the money collected for the building of the post office was used appro-

priately. So, after the building of the post office, the intelligent people in Nnobi were happy, saying that Madueme and his colleagues did a good job. The stupid ones, that is, those who had shared the embezzled money, began to deride us saying that we were bad people; that we had not done well, and nicknamed me D.O. Ekwensu.⁽¹²⁾ I shall not go into the amount of nonsense said at that time, which even involved personal abuse, all in the effort to soil my name. Still my name shone as bright as daylight since God has written so on a white blackboard.'

Mr. R.O. Madueme's account, apart from exposing male monopoly and dominance, reveals the very personal and vicious nature of local level politics, not only in Nnobi but in all other Igbo communities. It shows the relative autonomy and isolation of rural communities in terms of development programmes and finance. It also reveals the supreme judicial powers of the rural community over its members, whether at home or in the diaspora.

Local Political Issues: 1960-1982

In the early history of the N.W.O. it is possible to claim that what had motivated the formation of the organization and the leaders of it was necessity and patriotism, as was the case with other such developments and improvement unions which emerged in all the other Igbo communities at that period of Igbo history. (See Isichei 1976: 217-223.) Isichei's researches showed that these unions were founded mainly in the 1930's and early 1940's. As these unions were mostly founded in the urban centres, Isichei compares their evolution to similar clubs and societies formed by workers in large industrial cities of England in the early nineteenth-century during the Industrial Revolution. The workers in England sought friendship, security and mutual aid in very individualized large cities. The Igbos in urban centres sought the same security but a stronger focus was on the hometown. As Isichei writes, 'The Igbo who left their villages for the first time responded in exactly the same way. They too formed associations, bound by strict rules, meeting regularly and providing a network of benefits and obligations. The main difference was that in Igboland these societies were organized according to a man's town of origin, and had as one of their main purposes the provision of amenities for it' (ibid: 217).

Neglected at the national level of development programmes, individuals took it upon themselves to do things for their hometown which should really be done by the government, and thereby seek reward, fame and power. In electoral politics, they became favourite candidates, hence the link between wealth, conspicuous display of it and political power.

In recent years, local political issues in Nnobi have been severalfold. As men competed for control of N.W.O. and local events in Nnobi, prominence in local and national politics, some elements in Nnobi society and the N.W.O. sought to subdue and control the Women's Council.

Nnobi Home Welfare Organization: 1977

As the history of the N.W.O. has shown, most of its early founders and leaders were urban based. They were especially wealthy male traders living at Onitsha. In 1979, urban control of N.W.O. became a burning issue. On 11th April 1977, a man called Clement Ezeogu, now dead, and a Mr. W.O. Ugochukwu, under the chairmanship of the self-titled chief R.O. Madueme, formed what seems to me a rival organization to N.W.O. called Nnobi Home Welfare Organization (N.H.W.O.). Their quarrel with N.W.O. was based on the claim that N.W.O. financed and generally catered only for the funerals of Nnobians who died in the diaspora, bringing the corpse back to Nnobi for burial. They resented the fact that, even though all citizens of Nnobi, male and female, paid contributions and levies to N.W.O., N.W.O. did not concern itself with the funerals of those who lived in Nnobi. It was left to their lineage or particular church denomination. Mr. Clement Ezeogu therefore made the suggestion to the N.W.O. that those at home should be mourned in the same way as those in the diaspora. When N.W.O. turned down his suggestion, the all male N.H.W.O. was formed. Its membership is drawn from Nnobi males who live in Nnobi. As the present leader, Chief R.O. Madueme said in 1982, this all male, growing organization is now poised to take over the duties

of the N.W.O. Mr. R.O. Madueme said,

'I was elected a chairman and I am still the chairman today. The job we do in Nnobi is to bury our members who die. If any of our members die, we go and mourn him, not caring whether or not others attend the funeral. We take it upon ourselves to elect a day on which we go and mourn him. When this organization was first formed, there were a few of us. People have now flocked into it. Now we have decided to give N.W.O. a little more time to sort themselves out. If not we will then take it upon ourselves to come forward and propose development programmes for Nnobi and take on the job.'

The general resentment against the leadership of the N.W.O. was the fact that most of their leaders lived outside Nnobi and people felt that these leaders had no right to dictate to them from an urban town. Madueme admitted that although the N.H.W.O. appeared to be very popular, the membership was still small, the reason being the fact that the people staying in Nnobi were comparatively poor. As he said, 'Those outside Nnobi are millionaires, but some of the people staying at home do not even have anything to eat for some days.' The lack of a large membership has not deterred the N.H.W.O. from ambitious proposals as, for example, the wish to build lock-up shops in the central market. Meanwhile, the N.H.W.O. was busy learning a dance

with which they would attend the funerals of their members. In their constitution also was the rule that a wife of a deceased member should be given two hundred naira. The N.H.W.O. as at January 1982 had no intention of admitting women to its membership - in the words of its chairman, Mr. R.O. Madueme, 'We did not invite them at all.'

The Arrest of Leaders of
the Women's Council: 1977

Even though events are vividly remembered and recounted by rural people, dates seem hazy and unimportant to them, so that one gets conflicting dates for events which took place as recently as only a few years ago. This was the case with an important event such as the arrest of the leaders of the Women's Council. I was told by those involved that this took place either in 1977 or 1978. In the end, they thought that it was most likely in 1977.

The sexual duality of indigenous formal political organizations in Nnobi, meant that women ruled over women while men ruled over men, but formally, males, which sometimes included certain categories of woman, exercised overall authority (see Chapter Two). As these indigenous organizations are embedded in descent and kingship systems, colonial rule and influence could not wipe out the indigenous lineage and kingship based organizations. Even though some of their legislative and judicial roles were transferred to government institutions, they are still in control of routine management of life-cycle ceremonies of birth, marriage and death. The Women's Council on the other hand, was still strongly in control of the daily affairs of the local women and sometimes extended this control to men. With the increasing male control of public politics

and the concentration of legislative, executive and judicial powers in the hands of modern male controlled organizations like N.W.O. or government approved councils like the local council and the ruling igwe's council, a clash with the Women's Council over the exercising of rights and duties was bound to take place. What one did not anticipate, was the form that that clash took in Nnobi - police arrest and imprisonment of elderly women in Nnobi in 1977.

As this incident was recounted to me by Nwajiuba, the "male daughter" who is the present head of the most senior obi in Nnobi, the immediate event which led to the arrest was the judgment of a case involving two women who had fought at a public water pump. In accordance with the traditional role of the Women's Council, the offending women were invited to the Council's meeting and fined after their case was heard. They were not told to pay the double fine of fourteen shillings immediately but were given a specific day on which to pay it. By the evening following that day on which the women were supposed to pay the fine, rumours began to spread like wild-fire that the leaders of the Women's Council had been arrested. When the leaders managed to find out the reason for their arrest through a secret source, they quickly denied that they had fined the women fourteen shillings each. They instead claimed that the women had been told to bring some kola-nuts. Members of the Women's Council

quickly hid the papers in which minutes of the meeting had been entered. Anyhow, the president and the vice-president were arrested and taken to prison before their release on the following day.

The frenzy and confusion engendered by this arrest is best reported in the words of one of the participants, Nwajiuba,

'The following day, all members of the Women's Council were instructed to go to Onitsha. Men had come back and had held a meeting, after which everyone was told to assemble at Afo market-place, dressed in their best. The "pagans" were allowed to come fortified with all their sorcery. Nnobi was shaking with uncertainty that day; swaying backwards and forwards. The men provided transportation and we were all taken to Onitsha. When we reached Onitsha, we all got off the buses and sat down waiting to be told which court to go to. The women were restless and sitting under shades. Three women went from each ward, therefore there were 108 of us. We were then told where to go. When we got there, instead of the war we went for, we were served food and drinks. The leaders had settled things with them. We do not know what decisions they arrived at!'

Nwajiuba's account is corroborated by that of the very versatile Chief R.O. Madueme, who said,

'This arrest took place about 1977. A meeting was called at Ngo where it was decided how

we should proceed. Then Amadunu lineage elected that I should go and bring back Inyom Nnobi. So I got ready and went to Onitsha. When I got there, I went straight to the office and met the police officer and told him that I had come for these women. Then I did what I had to do⁽¹³⁾ after which I approached those in charge of Nnobi's money in Onitsha. I heard them debating among themselves about the amount of money required for bailing the women. As soon as they sighted me, they all dispersed. No-one knew when they disappeared from the scene. I was therefore left alone with the women. Then the police officer said that he would co-operate for my sake. He said that since it was on behalf of these women that I had come, he would release them. He did so and they went home. I did not go to Onitsha because I sent them there or because I said that they should be arrested. I was only sent there to go and bail them and release them.'

On the question of who was responsible for this arrest, no-one seemed willing to stick out their necks. I was told that this arrest was based on what in Igbo expression is known as akwukwo nnunu (bird's letter), an anonymous letter, in short, written to the police in Onitsha. The anonymous letter was supposed to have contained the claims that representatives of the Women's Council were obstinate to the igwe; that their institution was

too powerful and that they were like a state within a state; they were their own government. It was complained that they fined people indiscriminately; that if one had the slightest dispute with one's wife, the Women's Council stepped in to fine the person. It was therefore claimed that their government was upsetting Nnobi. An example was cited of a particular man who quarrelled with his wife and was fined £25 by the Women's Council. I was told that it was on the basis of these reports that the police travelled down from Onitsha and picked up the women.

Even as at January 1982, this incident was talked about "hush hush". Those leaders who were arrested, when interviewed, said they knew who was responsible for their arrest but would mention no names. They claimed that they booed him a few times after that arrest and made it impossible for him to enter the market-place. In any case, the person or persons who actually sued the Women's Council was kept a secret. Commonsense tells one that the person or persons must have had considerable standing and recognized authority in Nnobi for the police to have heeded the request to arrest the women. The police from Onitsha were not likely to ignore the authorities in another town, enter it, and then arrest the leaders of all the women of that town. Still the fear of women was such that those concerned had to resort to secrecy or anonymity. After the arrest, I was told that the women became

vigilant and cautious, stating that they had gone to prison once, and that the next time, they are bound to know who sues them. Consequently, they devised a method whereby any woman who was judged or fined was warned against revealing it. She was told that if the facts leaked out, she would be held responsible for the consequences.

The arrest of the Women's Council is a landmark in the political history of Nnobi for several reasons. The confidence of the women was broken. For the first time in their history, the women thus assaulted found themselves denied of their indigenous militancy in self-protection and war against their menfolk. Instead of fighting the men indiscriminately, they were being organized for mass action by some men, while their leaders were collaborating with other men as was confirmed by Nwajiuba when she said that the leaders had settled things with the men without consulting the rest of the women. The rest of the women were not even told what decisions were arrived at. They were simply fed and driven back to Nnobi. The women had therefore lost confidence in their leaders.

After this arrest, meetings and activities of the Women's Council were banned till 1978, when Mr. B.C.B. Eruchalu, elected general president of the N.W.O. in December 1977, invited the women to Eziehulu Hall and told them that they could start their meetings again. This move had followed pressures from individuals in Nnobi who had been embarrassed

by the arrest of leaders of the Women's Council and the ban on meetings of the Council. Thus, when a new executive for the N.W.O. was elected in December 1977, it found itself bombarded with questions about the reinstatement of the Women's Council. In a paper entitled 'The Task Before the New Executive' written by a Mr. Amadi Obi, on page 20 of Abalukwu, April 1978, Vol.7, he writes, 'When I talked about the market, I remember the "Inyom Nnobi". I wonder how we can rule without our women. This noble women-body should be reorganized without further delay. Their services are essential'.

The need for the reinstatement of the Women's Council was put more directly in an interview with the general president of the N.W.O., Mr. B.C.B. Eruchalu recorded on page 9 of the same volume of Abalukwu magazine.

'Question: As you are aware of the fact that Inyom Nnobi is no more functioning, what is your intention about them?

B.C.B. Eruchalu: My humble answer to this question is that you cannot rule a nation without women. Men alone cannot answer Nnobi.

It is only my foremost job to reorganize the Inyom Nnobi and get their organization functioning because they are another militant wing in our community, whose job is to be reckoned with, such as maintenance of law and order, general cleanliness of our town, orderliness in our market, communal labour, maintenance

of our customs and traditions, training and care of our children, collection of authorized development levies. These are the main duties which Inyom Nnobi can perform for the interest of our town.'

Having thus spelt out his need for a female labour force and financial contributions, and nothing about incorporating women into the ruling ranks of the executive of N.W.O., the N.W.O. reorganized the Women's Council. The women said that they were invited to Eziehulu Hall and told to start their meetings again. Their method of representation in the Council was altered. They were then told to start picking representatives according to wards - three from each ward, two Christians and one "pagan". If there were no "pagans" in the ward, then three Christians were to represent the ward. The women reported that they were given what, to them, was mpempe akwukwo, a piece of paper, which they were to follow. This was in fact a constitution, even though the bulk of the leadership of the women was illiterate. The N.W.O. cut down heavily the offences on which fines were to be levied. In short, it put the Women's Council under its guidance and supervision.

New Gender Realities which Contributed to the
Arrest and Detention of Elderly Women

Opinion expressed by Nnobi people on the arrest of leaders of the Women's Council, who were really elderly women, varied. Those who looked at it from the traditional attitude towards women expressed their shock and disbelief. Both men and women from this point of view said that pandemonium would have broken loose in Nnobi had this happened before the colonial period. The thought of it, they said, made them shudder. There were elders, including men and women, who would have been of the same opinion, but who said that they were compromised by their distrust of the leaders of the Women's Council. They felt the leaders were corrupt and used their powers dishonourably, conspiring in secret and fining people unjustly in order to enrich themselves. These elders, especially the females, felt that if the leaders of the Women's Council had not been sanctioned by now, they would have done sacrilege,⁽¹⁴⁾ especially against young girls in their homes, who fight quite easily with relatives. They therefore saw the arrest only as a sanction against excessive use of power, not that the women should not use those powers.⁽¹⁵⁾

The opinion expressing outright condemnation of the women echoed the supposed content of the anonymous letter to the police. The women were

a government of their own and becoming uncontrollable. When I asked Chief R.O. Madueme, who had gone to bail the women, whether the arrest and detention of the women was considered a sacrilege, his reply was that it was not so. 'The law', as he said, 'does not know a king'. He believed that if indeed the women broke the law, they should be arrested, locked up and then bailed. Then they would be summoned to court and the case judged. But, as he said, the case of the Women's Council did not eventually go to court. Madueme bailed them and the matter died and was never raised again. Madueme's wife, who was present when her husband was being interviewed, interrupted the discussion to say that the arrest of the women and their detention was alu, sacrilege. She repeated this opinion several times, spitting and showing total disgust on her face. On the basis of his wife's reaction, I asked Madueme whether this action had disgusted Nnobi. This was his reply.

'No! In fact Nnobi said that what Inyon Nnobi was doing was wrong. They had gone beyond their limit. Anyone who had the slightest argument with his wife was arrested and both of them were fined. This is not proper. After this incident, N.W.O. gave them a code of conduct. The women have therefore lost power. They do not have that power any more. They are at a very low scale now; so that before they embark on anything, it will not

be contrary to the wish of the Welfare. In the past, at the slightest offence, they would send a messenger and extract some money from you. They were not answerable to anyone. They just didn't care! Regardless of what you said, any day they decided to come and break down your house, they would come and do it, those women!

They tried using this excessive power at the water tap in my house, you know. They fought a certain mad woman here at my tap; because of the scuffle she had with someone, Inyom Nnobi threatened to uproot my pump. But they did not do it. The matter had already been settled on the day of the quarrel.⁽¹⁶⁾ Inyom Nnobi should not have taken it up again.

They were afraid to try the threat of uprooting my pump. They were going beyond the line of right action, or else they would not have been packed to prison. Imagine being fined for conversation with your wife in your house if your voices became too loud; for they had spies all over the place! These usually go and sit in people's homes to listen to conversations between husband and wife. Whatever you said to your wife those women would go and tell them and then they in turn would fine you. That authority has now been removed.'

Madueme's very relevant rhetoric reveals the near supreme power enjoyed by the Women's Council

and the pervasive nature of its communications network which in a modern situation could be considered an invasion of privacy, a point which was indirectly made by Mr. Madueme. The sheer audacity and militancy of the women comes across in their language, such as the threat to uproot Mr. Madueme's water pump or break down people's houses. Clearly, in the minds of Christians and Western influenced elites, such "maleness" and "strongheadedness" was unfeminine. In the words of Chief R.O. Madueme, a notable figure in administrative, political and church activities in Nnobi, a man who has several times given church sermons and taught lessons, the present chairman of the Nnobi Home Welfare Organization,

'All women ought to bow their heads to their husbands. It is befitting that when any umunna (17) speaks, their wives should listen to what they say, for God said that a woman shall be under her husband and obey her husband. When God created the world, when he caused Adam to fall into a deep sleep, when it was just Adam in the Garden of Eden, then one day, God caused him to fall into a deep sleep. When he woke up from sleep, he beheld a woman at his side and then God said to him, "Look, this is your wife"; and Adam said, "Now indeed, God has given me someone who should be my helper - A HELPMATE." This is in chapter one of Genesis. Such a thing, written by God, one

should respect, and it is also sacred, so that women should on account of it be obedient to their husbands'. (18)

There is clearly a new politics of control of meaning in the construction of new gender realities in this changing society. In the re-interpretation of relations of gender, some, like Chief R.O. Madueme, look to the Bible and Hebrew culture. Others, like a wealthy Onitsha based trader, Chief Akudolu, one of the founder members of the N.W.O., look to the traditional culture in stating the proper status of women vis-a-vis men. In the opinion of Chief Akudolu,

'Women have changed. In the past, women had respect. In those days, once a husband told a wife to stand, she would stand. But today, when a husband tells his wife to stand, she asks him why she should stand, so that when a man is talking a woman talks as well! The reason for this is eye-opening (19) and Western education. In some cases, the woman is even more educated than the man. Take for example a man with a primary school education who marries a girl who has a secondary school education plus a teacher's training certificate. The woman can use the English language to make rubbish of the man. She can just speak English in such a way as to make him appear a fool. (20)

Apart from patrilineage daughters, women did

not have this much power in the past. Once a man told a woman to stand, she stood. When our forefathers were still in control; during their times, they used to build women their own homes away at the back. They would then build for themselves an obi and a bed-chamber. Where women went to was separate. They would not go into the obi if they were in nso.⁽²¹⁾ If you wish to write it down, do so because I am speaking the truth. A woman usually stayed in her nkpuke.⁽²²⁾ A man only gave food to his wife once every four days when he would go into his farm and unearth some yam. For the rest of the days of the four-days week, it was up to the woman to feed the man until another Eke day when a man would go to his yam store and get some yam for his wife. Therefore women fed husband and children. Nowadays, a husband is supposed to give his wife money for food even if the woman works'.

Chief Akudolu's interpretation of indigenous gender relationships is full of contradictions. The first section of this thesis which dealt with indigenous culture revealed that separation did not mean subjugation, nor did subordination necessarily result in subjugation. Sexual dualism in the traditional domestic arrangement gave women a measure of autonomy. Clearly, spatial proximity and "rubbing shoulders" with women is not particularly palatable to those socialized in a dual-sex society

as most elders in Nnobi were, but flexibility of gender made it acceptable for certain females to prove themselves and occupy male linked roles. Nor is competing with women any more acceptable to modern men influenced by cultures which carry rigid gender ideologies where, clearly, women should never play male roles, and where the public is considered a male sphere and the domestic a female sphere. Thus in this situation of plurality of cultures, interpretation and meaning becomes a political issue in social relations. Those in positions of power seek to impose their own interpretations of culture, or elect aspects of a particular culture which suit them best.

Nnobi men therefore appear to have discarded aspects of their traditional culture which guaranteed women full participation in the political structure. They have proceeded to monopolize the modern institutions of government, seeking to justify new forms of male dominance in borrowed cultures, while "feeding" themselves and their women alien gender ideologies. Had they sought justification in the traditional culture, they would never have entertained the idea of arresting and detaining members of the Women's Council. Had the women not been baffled and inhibited by modern institutions, they would have acted spontaneously as their mothers did over the Natty case only forty years ago when they marched to Onitsha, (see Chapter Six). Instead they waited for leadership from the men who would

hire buses, organize food and drinks and negotiate with the police. But on the other hand, one is aware of the fact that women in Nnobi have had no practice in dealing with modern public institutions as leadership in the organizations which would have given them that chance has so far been monopolized by men, such as the local government council or the executive of N.W.O. which deal with modern developments in Nnobi.

A Steering Committee of the N.W.O., Early 1960's-1977

Officially, every Nnobi adult of taxable age was supposed to belong to the N.W.O. without ceremony. It was therefore thought of as an organization of the people. However, the organization was run by an all male executive which, before the alleged fund mismanagement crisis of 1958, was selected by election held annually. Following the crisis within the executive, as a result of the activities of the commission of inquiry headed by Chiel R.O. Madueme, the N.W.O. executive was dissolved. A steering committee made up of representatives from the different branches of the N.W.O. and initially set up to settle the dispute within the N.W.O., took over the functions of the dissolved executive of the N.W.O. This unelected committee with an all male membership, under the chairmanship of Mr. M.O. Ugochukwu took it upon itself to handle the affairs of Nnobi from the early 1960's right through the period of the Biafran-Nigerian War (1967-1970) and after until 1977.

A few community self-help projects were carried out during this period. In 1954, Nnobi, through community efforts, had built itself a maternity. In 1958 its first secondary school for boys was built. A girls' one followed in 1959. In 1961, pipe-borne water ran in Nnobi for the first time. Still it could supply water to only a few people and areas

of Nnobi. The majority of the people had to fetch pipe-borne water from the public tap at the central market-place or from the iron-gated homes of a few wealthy individuals who were really urban based.

This state of affairs was to lead to a refusal to pay levies by a section of Nnobi when contributions for the building of a police barracks were called for. Wards 3 and 5 of Ifite major patri-lineage claimed that they had been promised pipe-borne water when the previous levy was collected, but after the levy was paid, water was not extended to their section of the town. N.W.O. on its part, gave them a two week ultimatum in which to pay their levy, but they did not pay it and consequently did not get pipe-borne water during the next phase of development. (23)

A police barracks capable of housing just over thirty policemen was finally completed and on the 8th of June 1976, the then military governor of Anambra State, Colonel John Atom Kpera visited Nnobi to inspect the police barracks after the community had built it out of its own pocket. Having built a police barracks, the people then had to beg the government for policemen to fill it. Thus the placards carried during the state governor's visit read - "Open our community-built post office"; "Give us policemen"; "Improve our water supply". (24)

Again, after building themselves a waterworks, Nnobi invited the then state commissioner for works and housing, Mr. B.C. Okwu, for the opening ceremony.

He in turn praised the efforts of the people. The message for the commissioner by a contributor to Abalukwu magazine was 'Think of our post office, think of a hospital, think of a good market and a civic centre for our holidaying youths'.⁽²⁵⁾ When Nnobi post office was finally completed on the 18th of June 1977, it was, as usual, opened by an important government official, in this case, the then territorial controller of post and telegraphs department in the state capital, Enugu, Mr. Egbosimba.⁽²⁶⁾

The number of self-help projects undertaken during this period indicates that the N.W.O. must have handled a considerable amount of money collected through levies. By 1977, the steering committee was under a great deal of pressure from the general public to render accounts to the public. Articles in Abalukwu of September 1977, for example, referred to the steering committee as 'an all powerful body' which never has time to render accounts of its services to the public. The fact that its members were unelected but 'hand picked' was objected to as it was thought that this made members of the committee unaccountable to the people it was supposed to govern. It was thought that there was a 'total lack of purposeful leadership'. But the most controversial issue was the claim that the method of collection of and paying in of levies was defective. Individuals made their own personal calculations to try and give people an idea of the amount of money handled by the N.W.O. From the figures derived

from lineage registers during the still-born election for Okpalaship, it was calculated that there were 6,000 taxable male adults in Nnobi. The normal least levy of five naira on each adult male would give a sum total of 30,000 naira. This would be money collected from males alone. Usually females paid two naira when males paid five. Thus alarms were sounded at the amount of money which passed through the hands of individuals and not banks.

Entries in Abalukwu Vol. 7 of April 1978, later revealed that the administrative wing of the N.W.O. had, at the general meeting of 31st December 1977, openly made it known to Nnobi people that 'it had looked for auditors for THREE GOOD YEARS to audit it without success'. The reading public was told, 'It is no longer a secret that Nnobi operated, at least, from 1970 to 31st December 1977 without a bank account'. The sum used for the building of the post office was then exposed. Fifty thousand naira had been handled by individuals!

Discrediting the elder and male-dominated steering committee, the younger and more educated men called for the setting up of a committee to draw up a new constitution for the town, to be followed by a general election. They demanded that in the new N.W.O., women, youths and social organizations in the town should be given seats in the executive committee.

The Collapse of N.W.O. - 1980

As a result of pressures from the public, a general meeting of N.W.O. was called in December 1977. The steering committee was disbanded, a general election was held, and an executive committee was elected. The call to include women in the executive committee had not been heeded. The list of elected officers published in Abalukwu Vol.7 of April 1978 shows that it was again an all male executive committee that was chosen in December 1977 to run the affairs of all Nnobi people.

General President	-	Mr. B.C.B. Eruchalu
1st Vice President	-	Mr. John Nwezuoke
2nd Vice President	-	Mr. U.C.D. Okoye
General Secretary	-	Mr. Cornelius A. Umeh
1st Vice Secretary	-	Mr. John Okigbo
2nd Vice Secretary	-	Mr. Raphael Udechukwu
Financial Secretary	-	Mr. P.I.D. Obika
Treasurer	-	Mr. Okongwu (Odikeshishe)
Publicity Secretary	-	Mr. BECO Okpala

When I inquired why there were no female officers, I was told that women did not stand for election, therefore no females were elected. Even though women were not represented in that executive, the executive had its plans which included rules for the Women's Council and the control of the Council by N.W.O.

Conflicts within the N.W.O. and cases of peculation

are not peculiar to Nnobi. Reviewing the history of such improvement unions in other Igbo towns, the historian on the Igbo, Dr. Elizabeth Isichei writes,

'It would be wrong to depict the history of the unions as a simple success story. Some unions have a history of sectional conflict, others have suffered through peculation, or - not always the same thing - suspicions of peculation. The goals have not always been well chosen. Often members have made great sacrifices - virtually compulsory levies - to build empty prestige projects. Post offices (often in an area already served by a postal agency) town halls and village sports stadia are frequently erected, where a more rational selection of priorities would have built a cottage hospital, an electrification scheme, or an improved water supply' (ibid: 1976: 220).

Clearly Dr. Isichei does not see the provision of these basic social facilities as the responsibility of the extremely oil-wealthy Nigerian government to its tax paying masses.

As peculation or suspicion of it had led to the overthrow of the steering committee, the editorial page of Abalukwu Vol. 7, April 1978 carried a piece of advice to the newly elected executive committee of N.W.O. It ran, 'it is worthwhile advising the new executives to learn from the past mistakes of

the steering committee. There is no need hiding the truth from the people who are becoming more and more inquisitive. To side-track the masses on important issues affecting their welfare is to say the least fishing in troubled water. Time is past when any person would pay his levy without asking what was done with it'. It consequently called for a committee to review the constitution of N.W.O., the bankers for the organization to be named and an account opened for the organization. By so doing, it was hoped that one would avoid entrusting large sums of money in the hands of one man. The editors of the magazine Abalukwu advised that there was need for information and that lack of it bred rumour, hence the importance of their magazine Abalukwu.

The same volume of Abalukwu carried an interview with the general president of N.W.O., Mr. B.C.B. Eruchalu soon after his election. In it he mapped out his line of action for the effective running and organization of Nnobi. His plan was to set up different committees, such as, a water committee, market committee, social committee, security committee, who would liaise with igwe-in-council. All the ichie titled men would constitute the igwe's council with the igwe himself acting as chairman. Duties of these committees would include land matters, boundary matters, all traditional matters and advising the president-general on matters of tradition and custom of Nnobi. Land matters

would include communal land boundary and family land boundary adjustments. As already pointed out earlier in this chapter, the Women's Council was to be reorganized and put under the guidance and supervision of N.W.O. Women's services were to be used only in their capacity as a public cleansing department, labour force, levy collectors, child-bearers and trainers (mothers). They were to help in the maintenance of law and order in a way that would be dictated to them. They were to help in the maintenance of customs and traditions and I expect these would be customs or traditions not threatening to the ruling men.

The general president thus spelt out the blueprint for a male monopolized local government in Nnobi. Safeguarding his own position, he did not fail to express his personal bitterness against the manner in which, by his implication, Nnobi framed, humiliated and punished those they appointed to serve them. This message was crystalized in the form of a proverb which he used in his maiden speech. Mr. B.C.B. Eruchalu, the newly elected general president of N.W.O., said, 'Nnobi people are fond of sending rain after a child they have sent on an errand with a parcel of salt!' In 1980, Mr. B.C.B. Eruchalu was himself caught in the rain carrying a parcel of salt - the organization he was heading collapsed.

The editorial of Abalukwu of April 1978 had warned the newly elected executive committee of

the N.W.O. of the dangers of lack of information. It also pointed out the fact that Nnobi people were becoming more enlightened and therefore more inquisitive about the running of their affairs, especially when it concerned the use made of their personal money. The newly elected executive did not seem to have heeded that warning or else they had not been given enough time to organize themselves. However in 1980, there was again a problem of accountability and as a result of the action by Awuda, the most junior quarter or village of Nnobi, the central executive of the N.W.O. ceased to exist.

The N.W.O. had demanded the payment of the highest levies ever heard of in Nnobi. All Nnobi men both at home and outside Nnobi were requested to pay twenty naira, women at home and outside were to pay five naira. People were said to have paid the money dutifully, then sat and waited for the development and improvement projects for which the money had been collected, to begin. Nothing seemed to be happening. So unrest began. People were said to have muttered and murmured till commotion set in and the town just became rowdy. It was then that Awuda came out in the open and demanded an account of the money collected or else they would never pay any more levies in Nnobi. They pointed out the fact that a lot of money was at stake, yet no-one had given the figures of the money collected, no-one had given account of what was done with the money either.

I was told that the N.W.O. was basically a government based on representation of four groups, the three quarters which make up Nnobi - Ebenesi, Ngo and Awuda. The fourth group was the Women's Council which was regarded as a branch of the N.W.O. and as such, they were supposed to send their representatives to all the meetings regardless of what was being discussed. Decisions of the meeting were said to be based on consensus or on majority vote. What is nearest to a veto is a walk-out by one group. It was in this way that Awuda was able to bring the N.W.O. to a standstill. N.W.O. ceased to function when Awuda boycotted its meetings. If the N.W.O. is supposed to have been made up of four groups, these four groups, do not seem to have had equal powers as I was told that a walk-out by the Women's Council would not have had the same effect. As I was informed, the women could have walked out and the N.W.O. would have functioned without them. Indeed, the leaders of the Women's Council complained that they were hardly invited to meetings at all.

As the problems of the N.W.O. were based on suspicion and rumour and not on proved embezzlement of funds, an audit panel was set up to audit the account of the organization from 1970 to 1980. Various amounts of money were collected at different times within this period for the provision of such amenities as a police barracks, post office, improvement of the market-place, the supply of electricity and water etc. At the same time, a much wider body

called a peace committee was appointed to look into the whole affair and come up with a new constitution before the N.W.O. would start again as a newly constituted body. Again this peace committee, which was meant to represent all sections of Nnobi, was strongly male monopolized and dominated. It comprised:

- a) One member from each of the thirty-six wards of Nnobi - all men.
- b) Six members from the Women's Council - all women.
- c) All members of the audit panel - basically all men.
- d) All members of the dissolved N.W.O. executive - they were all men.
- e) All ichie titled men.
- f) The secretary of the committee, Mr. C. Anyaeché.
- g) The chairman of the committee, Mr. R. Anoliefo.

By January 1982 during my last period of field-work in Nnobi, and even as at August 1982 by correspondence, I learnt that the committee was still sitting and that there has been no proved embezzlement of funds except a lot of inefficiency and dis-organization in the N.W.O.

It is therefore in the context of public dis-credibility of the N.W.O. that the potential threat of a takeover of its functions by the Nnobi Home Welfare Organization formed in 1977 by Madueme and others can be understood. As Mr. Madueme said,

'Nothing moves forward now. When the igwe

speaks, he is not obeyed. Is it the dissolving welfare that can now give directives? Nnobi today is at a standstill. We in the Home Welfare have decided to give the N.W.O. a little more time to sort themselves out, or else we will then take it upon ourselves to come forward and propose development programmes for Nnobi and take on the job.'

If women had secondary position in the N.W.O., with the N.H.W.O. they have no place at all. When I put it to the chairman of the N.H.W.O. that at least women still had a seat in the igwe's council and also in the N.W.O., his reply was this,

'A seat in igwe-in-council and the welfare organization? Is it the dissolved welfare organization or our own welfare organization? I do not see where they have power for we did not invite them at all. The main welfare has been dissolved, so no-one should say they have a position in the welfare until an election has been held.'

The Response of the Women

The representatives of the Women's Council during discussions held with them in January 1982 complained that they were no longer invited to meetings. They maintained that in the earlier days of the N.W.O. under the leadership of men like Ezinagu or Ajaluaku, they used to receive messages for meetings when Nnobi proposed a meeting. In the words of the women,

'Those of us who were the representatives would attend. Our chairwoman would sit at the front table with the chairman and our members stay with the other male members. Nowadays, they do not invite us to meetings. We are only invited to work. For example, when the building of the post office was decided, we cleared the bush before the post office could be built. Recently it was us who went to clear and clean up the old native administrative court where visitors were received for the launching of the new Obiaja local government of which Nnobi has been made the headquarters.'

Clearly the women were aware of their political exclusion and resentful about it but did nothing about it. Asked why they tolerated the situation, they said that they were now being directed by the N.W.O., that they now worked with its general pres-

ident who wrote down what some of the women called 'certain things' (constitution), which they were to follow. It was difficult to get the women to express their opinion about their exclusion from local government. While maintaining that they were excluded from the decision-making process, they also claimed that they had a seat in the igwe's council and in the N.W.O. But then they had been arrested in 1977 and consequently were afraid of being implicated. Thus the spokeswoman, trying not to implicate herself and the rest of the women, especially as one woman had said that the men have monopolized everything, said,

'Listen, do not implicate me. All I know is that we have been given a position in government. Yes, we do have a position. If there is any meeting or anything that they wish us to do, they send for us and we the representatives go and meet them and discuss it. We discuss as men and women; contributing opinions.

They do not give orders and tell us not to speak. We have a position for they gave Inyom Nnobi a seat. If we have anything to say to them, we do so. If they have things to say to us they do so. Yes, we have a seat. We collect levies from women, they collect from men.'

Yet I learnt that not so long ago, the Women's Council had clashed with a special market committee appointed by the igwe's council to take over the

policing of Nnobi market. This committee had been appointed without the consent of the Women's Council. The igwe himself admitted the fact that the women had made life impossible for those sent to reorganize and police the central market. When reminded of this incident, the women confirmed that they had refused to co-operate. 'We said that men should also take over the sweeping of the market. Yes, that they should begin to sweep the streets and open space. In no time, the market-place was covered in weeds and grass. The market became a bush.'

A compromise solution was the appointment of market masters jointly by N.W.O. and the Women's Council.. The market masters were to be responsible for the allocation of market stalls and the policing of the market with baton and whistle. The general tidiness of the market was left to the Women's Council. But even in this arrangement, as was remarked by an Nnobi research student, Mr. Ezeani in his special research project on Nnobi market, the market masters were not coping as a result of what he termed 'millions of insults received from the illiterate market women' (Ezeani 1980: 32).

As Ezeani observed, even in 1980, the market-place was still very much the women's domain. 'Apart from the itinerant bulking traders, butchers and shopkeepers on the periphery of the market, the trade is almost totally dominated by women. Many of these women are obliged to bring their

infants and pre-schoolers, who spend the day in the market's dark dank and unhygienic environment' (ibid: 30).

Women were therefore still able to act in a situation where they were not dependent on a leadership; that is, when they felt offended on their home ground - the market-place. There, women may act individually or collectively by making life difficult for any threatening or intruding elements such as market masters and their batons and whistles. This was not so with wider political issues in Nnobi. On the affairs of the N.W.O., for example, I found members of the Women's Council quite ignorant, uninformed and helpless. For example, they had no idea that the peace commission of which they were a part had been assigned to write up a constitution for Nnobi. The constitution in any case would be discussed and written in English. These women were uneducated, illiterate in English and inexperienced in Western legal language. (27)

CHAPTER SEVEN: Notes

1. The findings of the commission of inquiry were published in the same year as a Blue Book called Nigeria: Report of the Aba Commission of Inquiry.
2. In terms of sex.
3. Titled members of the igwe's council.
4. The government of the then Eastern Region had established a House of Chiefs in 1951 and had appointed the anthropologist G.I. Jones to look into the traditional political system and advise on methods of determining chieftaincy. In order to have representation in the House of Chiefs, there followed a general revival of kingship and chieftaincy titles. Businessmen quickly claimed chiefly titles. (See Ikenna Nzimiro's paper, 'Anthropological Briefs on Eze-ship in Ibagwa Ani', Odinani 1977, No.2.)
5. A modern term used in Nnobi today.
6. See Chapter Two.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. See Abalukwu, December 1976, Vol.5, page 7.
10. If Nnobi had traditionally been centralized under a single monarch, there would not have been so much confusion and controversy over the filling of these two political posts. There would have been prescribed rules to follow on these matters. On the 25th September 1976, for example, a planned election for okpalaship had fallen through as a

result of poor turnout, unclear regulations concerning the registration of votes, qualification of voters, approval of candidates etc. (Ibid: 12.)

11. Diaspora.

12. D.O. = District Officer. Ekwensu = Devil.

13. Bribed the police.

14. Igbu ochu, to commit murder, was the expression they used.

15. I enclose here a transcript of part of a discussion held with leaders of the Women's Council in which they described some of their methods of punishment.

- What kind of punishment do you mete out to those who break your rules?
- We send a message to the person and ask her to come to our meeting. When she arrives we tell her where she has defaulted and then tell her what her punishment is. If she defies us then we ban her from the market and from fetching water from the public tap which is in the market. If she proves stubborn and attends market then we go to her shade and carry out what we call isi nta or isi ahihaa, (picketing). We prevent her displaying her goods, fetching tap water. She will not enter our market or pass through Nnobi.
- How is isi ahihaa performed?
- We go to her shade and sing:

ahihaa, anyi ahawu haa - oo,
ekweghewuu - oo, anyi ekweghewuu - oo,
don idoo, chorus, iidoo!

don idoo, chorus, iidoo!

nde ni weta okpili ka anyi na ha tie - ee

chorus, iidoo!

(This song, which is not easily translatable, conveys total disapproval and obstinacy on the part of the women. The imagery used or suggested is a tug-of-war, hence the warning, 'we are about to pull'. The concluding line is, 'bring your batons or clubs, let's exchange blows!')

The person quickly takes her things and runs. In fact, it is at the sound of the first word ahihaa that she runs.

- Do you really do this today?
- All the women replied, yes, of course! We still do it even now (wild uproar and laughter). We did it to your in-law. (I did not press to find out which of my in-laws they did it to and why. I thought it best to let sleeping dogs lie!) If he comes to the market we boo him. Yes, we still do it.
- It seems to me you still have some power!
- Indeed! The men respect us. We do not walk in their house and they on their part do not walk in our house. A man may want to quarrel with his wife, but when he considers the fact that he does not have the energy or power to face Inyom Nnobi, he desists. When husbands and wives quarrel, we go and repair the quarrel. We settle the matter. We work for peace in

the family. People do not like to confront
Inyom Nnobi.

16. That is, Madueme himself had scolded the women who fought and thus settled the case himself.
17. The organization of patrilineage men.
18. See Genesis II.V.21; III.V.16.
19. Enlightenment.
20. On the one hand, there is a general apprehension of very educated women as they may prove uncontrollable. On the other hand, there is a growing tendency for comparatively illiterate and very wealthy traders seeking wives among graduates as a symbol of prestige. This is also true of very educated and wealthy politicians, businessmen and other elites who now accumulate graduate and post-graduate wives. This is a new type of polygyny in the form of 'serial marriages', leading to a growing number of matriarchal homes with visiting fathers.
21. State of prohibition - menstruation.
22. Female sub-compound unit.
23. Abalukwu, April 1976, vol. 3.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. Abalukwu, September 1977, Vol. 6.
27. See Appendix 4 for a summary of proposals drawn up for the new constitution which shows that women have not been included in the seats of power.

CHAPTER EIGHT: WEALTH, TITLES AND MOTHERHOOD

Okigbo (1965) points at the individualization of activities as the most important change in West African societies in the twentieth-century. According to him, instead of age, similarity of outlook and education now formed the basis of alignments in the new associations. The emergence of a new class of wealthy traders and contractors divorced from the land signalled the gradual weakening of the authority of the elders in kinship relations. The presence of more enlightened, wealthy and educated groups of elites in the local councils meant a challenge to the control which traditional rulers such as elders and chiefs had in the local administration (ibid: 420-3). Isichei (1976), on the other hand, following the history of the improvement unions in Igbo societies, makes the point that as a result of the ethnic unions, vertical bonds of locality replaced horizontal class identification. At the same time, however, there were signs of a growing class identification among Igbo elites which was not based on bonds of common hometown as, for example, the emergence of the okaa society in 1963, described as 'an exclusive association of wealthy men', which included businessmen, professional men and civil servants (ibid: 221). Although Isichei, perhaps misinformed by her source, describes okaa society as exclusively wealthy men, numerous wealthy matrons

were known to have belonged to it. They were referred to as okaa madams or with okaa prefixed to the commodity each individual woman controlled.⁽¹⁾

In the case of Nnobi and Nnobi citizens in the diaspora, what appears to have taken place is a process of multiple alignments. There was the N.W.O., to which all citizens of Nnobi, in principle, belonged. This identification was based on a vertical bond of locality irrespective of horizontal class loyalties. There were, on the other hand, individual Nnobi citizens, males and females, who belonged to several associations in the towns where they lived which had no relevance whatsoever to daily politics and administration in Nnobi, except in terms of prestige. At the funeral of a member, for example, fellow members would visit the deceased member's hometown and give him or her honour through conspicuous display of wealth. They would, for example, flood the streets with symbols of prestige such as cars, food, money and drinks. Any other benefits were individually derived, such as shared loans and businesses. On the whole, new associations in Nnobi and elsewhere in Igboland have called themselves age-grade societies, contrary to Okigbo's claim about the underplay of age in the new associations of the wealthy and educated elites. Similar associations or organizations formed by women have however named themselves after the female-linked role of motherhood. The most numerous and widely spread women's organizations being those of the church, women call themselves Christian Mothers in the Catholic church and Mother's Union

in the Anglican church. Another women's organization of successful business women with a universal Nigerian membership and which has a branch in Nnobi, calls itself Sweet Mother.

The Age-Grade Associations and Local Politics

The early 1970's, the period after the Biafran War, saw the spread of age-grade clubs and societies all over Igboland. For Nnobi, three such social clubs were entered in the Nnobi magazine Abalukwu. The first to be formed was the Oganiru Middle Age-Grade of Nnobi, which was launched in December, 1973. Its membership is drawn from Nnobi males and females born between 1945 and 1950. This club is essentially dominated by male traders. This is also the case with another such club called Igwebike Age-Grade of Nnobi. This draws its membership from those who refer to themselves as youths born between 1938 and 1944. By far the most powerful of these clubs is the Abalukwu Social Club of Nnobi. This club, which was formed by a few 'youths' in Enugu in 1973, was officially launched in 1974. Although started by a few youths in the lower grades of the civil service, successful business men and women and other reputable professionals had become honoured members. By 1975, the club had branches at Aba, Lagos, Onitsha and the hometown, Nnobi. The opening up of branches in other important Nigerian towns with Nnobi residents followed gradually.

The Abalukwu Social Club, whose motto is 'love, unity and development', describes itself as 'purely a social club devoid of any taint of politics'. It lists its objectives as follows:

- 1) to foster love and unity among all the youths of Nnobi;
- 2) to participate actively in and embark upon any project that will enhance the progress of Nnobi;
- 3) to project the image of Nnobi by holding social as well as cultural activities in and outside Nnobi. (Abalukwu Vol. 1, September 1975, p.7.)

Its strongest mouthpiece is the Abalukwu magazine which in 1975 stated its commitment to the preservation of Nnobi culture. Thus the entry read, 'It must be noted that where our traditions go contrary to civilized precepts, they can be modified. It is a matter of deep regret that such happy celebrations like Igba Ota, Odinke etc.⁽²⁾ are falling into oblivion - all sacrificed on the altar of Western civilization. This magazine therefore calls for a vigorous cultural revival that will restore our dignity as a people'. (Ibid: p.32.) It is in the attempt at cultural revival that these age-grade societies of Nnobi and other such clubs elsewhere in Igboland began the practice of ordering a periodic mass return of members living outside the hometown. Those who fail to return are usually fined very heavily. This practice of 'periodic compulsory General Return Home' in the attempt to preserve town unity and culture is also reported of the improvement unions in other Igbo towns by Isichei (1976: 218).

There is no doubt that these age-grade societies are informal political groups, even though they

see themselves as purely cultural associations. In the attempt to gain prestige and power in the hometown, these associations compete with one another in identifying themselves with development projects. They would build recreational and meeting halls, construct roads, bridges, health centres and award scholarships to pupils and students. The important thing was to sound their own trumpet, praising individual financial contributors and announcing the exact sum donated by each person. This was usually done on the grand occasion referred to as launching. Launching has come to provide a political platform and arena for wealthy businessmen, contractors, traders and ambitious civil servants for potential political power. A would-be politician was usually picked from the size of his financial donations during local events. This platform and arena was invariably monopolized by men, except for a few wealthy women given prominent seats as they too may perhaps donate large sums of money.

Abalukwu Social Club is the richest, largest and most popular of such clubs in Nnobi. Its membership is drawn from all elites: academic, business and the civil service. Although the captions of the club usually read 'sons and daughters of Nnobi', membership is almost exclusively male. Daughters were usually mentioned in connection with advertisements for launching occasions when there was need to raise money. This really meant an invitation to prominent Nnobi daughters to show their

patriotism. During these occasions, the word daughters became all embracing and stood for all women, including wives. The irony here is that the mass of Nnobi daughters/wives were basically petty traders and foodstuff sellers and would not venture near these launching events, as they knew that they were occasions for the display of wealth. They would not, as they were not wealthy. If they did, they would remain inconspicuous in the background as onlookers applauding the rich. Not only did these expressive occasions inhibit and exclude the less wealthy, especially the mass of the women, the entrance fee was also very high. The financial undertakings of the club required the raising of a lot of money, hence the frequency of launching occasions. Their bereavement payment to members and families of deceased members was also very high. Abalukwu Social Club has in fact undertaken to build a large cottage hospital in Nnobi, and this is near completion. It will be the first and only hospital in Nnobi.

Like the N.W.O., the executive of Abalukwu has an all male membership. An article in Abalukwu Vol. 3 of April 1976, for example, shows that the national president, the national secretary and the vice-secretary are all men. It reads, 'On the 15th of August, 1976, the National President of Abalukwu Social Club of Nigeria, Nnobi, Mr. Becco Okpala accompanied by the National Secretary, Mr. J.A.C. Obiefuna and the National Vice-Secretary, Mr. Vin.

Obichili arrived Nnobi Hall, Aba, to present the sum of 1,320.00 naira to the members of the club who were adversely affected by the fire disaster' (ibid: 23). These donations were broken down into executive members' donations and branch individual donations so that one knew who gave what. Thus only those who had money to give or display stood prominent in the club.

The more one gave, the more praise one received. It would appear therefore that, by giving, men bought themselves political office or potential votes. Abalukwu Vol.6 of September 1977, for example, carried an article entitled 'Spotlight on the Well Known Benevolent Patriot from Umuhai, Awuda'. The patriot is introduced thus, 'A silent actor, Ichie Ezechin-emelu Onochili, represents the maxim that good deeds speak louder than voice'. This 'patriot' is said to have accepted the request to join two other men to accompany the igwe of Nnobi during special occasions during the Biafran War for the sake of saving the face of Nnobi. As the writer put it, 'Not the dignity of a chief's regalia was the preoccupation of his mind in accepting the assignment'. The generosity of this man was said to have already been felt in his own village where he was nominated as a representative in the igwe's cabinet. After the Biafran War, he then received a meritorious reward and became one of the three special ichie titled men appointed by the igwe. He was a member of Abalukwu Social Club and it appears prestigious to note

that he was one of the co-chairmen during the bazaar of December 1976. He had quietly purchased a post office box number for Abalukwu Social Club without publicity. He had also donated a fantastic sum for the club's almanac. Then the article on this man who is supposed to avoid publicity, concludes, 'I know Ichie Chinemelu Onochili may not wish to be so published, but I crave his indulgence to let me show people what it means to be patriotic. It is not what you can gain from the town that makes you patriotic, but how much you can contribute to the welfare of the town' (ibid: 44).

In local politics, the wealthy and benevolent received rewards in the form of titles or political appointments. While Chief Chinemelu Onochili, a wealthy Onitsha based trader, received ichie title for his show of wealth, Mr. B.B.O. Emeh, a wealthy printer and business contractor and well known also for his 'generosity', was approached by Nnobi to stand as their N.P.P. candidate for the State House of Assembly in the 1979 general elections. Mr. Emeh had in 1977 awarded seventeen post-primary scholarships worth 500 naira, covering tuition fees to some children in his patrilineage, Umu-dinya in Awuda, for the 1976-77 school year. This gesture was reported in Abalukwu Vol. 6 of September 1977. In this report, it was stated that the chairman of Umu-dinya Brothers' Union, Mr. Gabriel Okigbo, thanked Mr. Emeh and called on other 'public spirited individuals in the town to emulate his good

examples? (p.9).

The 1979 General Election

As wealth determined prominence and power in the informal associations, so also did wealth ensure not only nomination for, but success in political careers. We therefore find that successful politicians are not women but men who have shown visible evidence of wealth in their local towns. They are men who would, for example, build schools, factories and other visible symbols of modern development. They are also men who act as brokers, entrepreneurs and middlemen, having knowledge of and access to state and central government departments responsible for development plans for the local areas. Such men would therefore claim praise and reward for completed government development projects in the local areas. Their reward was usually in the form of titles or nomination as candidates in electoral politics. We thus find that political campaigns are fought not so much on ideological principles, but on the basis of concrete material gains and necessities such as water, roads, electricity, schools, health services etc.

It is therefore not surprising that Nnobi would pick out Mr. B.B.O. Emeh as the likely candidate for the State House of Assembly. Apart from the fact that Emeh was a very wealthy man, he was 'generous' with his money, giving scholarships to Nnobi students. He was a prominent member of

N.W.O. and Abalukwu Social Club and donated visible large amounts of money during launching occasions and bazaar festivals. He also had personal acquaintance with prominent politicians at both state and federal levels of government: for example, he claimed personal acquaintance with Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe (Zik), chairman of the Nigerian People's Party (N.P.P.) and its presidential candidate for the 1979 federal election.

When interviewed during fieldwork in January 1982, Emeh claimed that he was among those who, with Zik, formed the N.P.P. on the 10th of November 1978 when the military ban on electoral politics was lifted. He and six other men were supposed to have approached Zik and persuaded him to denounce his fatherhood position and re-enter active politics. Consequently, Emeh claimed that on the 14th of November 1978, he paid for a world conference, during which Zik announced his re-entry into active politics. Emeh then put his money and energy into establishing branches of the N.P.P. throughout Idemili local government area. Unfortunately, he decided to quit the N.P.P. as a result of a quarrel between his N.P.P. faction and another faction led by Mr. Jim Nwobodo and Zik over the presidential candidate nomination. In his own words,

'On the 16th of November 1978, my group fell out with Zik on principle because Zik wanted us to go and oust Alhaji Waziri Ibrahim from the presidential candidature of the N.P.P.

We wouldn't go, but the other group led by Nwobodo went. As a result of this, Nwobodo is now governor of Anambra State. As I had worked hard in establishing branches of the N.P.P. throughout Idemili local government area, when I left the party on the 21st of November 1973 to declare for the N.P.N.,⁽³⁾ people were wounded by my departure because I had not cleared with them. When, therefore, I stood for the State House of Assembly, the argument of Nnobi people was that I was a member of the N.P.P. and had left the party without telling them, therefore they would stick with the N.P.P. The real truth of the matter is that the national political view of the Igbo man is that his identity must be established. Therefore in consistency with this, Nnobi, like other Igbo people, voted N.P.P., which was the recognized Igbo party. Thus the slogan, "Where do you cast your vote?" was answered by "N.P.P., because Zik is the Igbo candidate". But Zik lost!

N.P.P. lost the presidential election but won the gubernatorial elections in the two Igbo states - Anambra State and Imo State. Nearly all the local government areas in these two states were also taken by N.P.P. candidates.

It appears as if Eneh had hoped for a nomination to a higher political office from the N.P.P. Thus, when Nnobi approached him to stand as the local

candidate for the House of Assembly, he is said to have declined the offer at first, but later changed his mind. By that time, someone else had been nominated. As Chief R.O. Madueme put it,

'The truth is that Emeh was the person we wanted to send to the House of Assembly. But when he was first approached, he declined the offer and said he would not go. He said it himself that he would not go; that his business would flop as his business was stil young. So we agreed with him. Then a meeting was called at Eziehulu Hall. I organized and established N.P.P. rallies. In this area, people knew nothing about other parties or the new N.P.P. party, except the old N.C.N.C.⁽⁴⁾ identified with Zik. We said N.P.P. was the same as the old N.C.N.C. So, at Eziehulu Hall, Emeh was approached for the second time and Mr. Ogbuka was present as well. Emeh replied that he had said that he would not go. A third meeting was called and Ogbuka was invited and told to go and resign his job, but was told that he had not given his employers advance notice. He was therefore told to pay his employers the sum of 2,000 naira. So he paid it. Then when we attended the next meeting, Emeh came out and said that he would stand election. Everyone jeered at him and said, "Emeh, can it be you saying this? Ogbuka who has now resigned his job, do you want him to become a truck-pusher?

You were asked twice and you said NO. It was in order to avoid being left out in government that we invited Ogbuka. What do you expect us to do?" This is why many Nnobi people had not cast their vote for Emeh, as he had said with his own mouth that he would not stand election. Even I myself, I was prepared to vote him but he said to me that he would not be standing. We therefore campaigned for Ogbuka. At the polls, there was one box for Emeh, another for Ogbuka. When the votes were counted, Ogbuka, whom we campaigned for, won, and Emeh lost his deposit. What hurt us is that when Ogbuka got to the House, we hoped for good things but got nothing. That was where it all ended'.

It was therefore Ogbuka who became the N.P.P. candidate in the 1979 local election. Emeh in the end stood as an N.P.N. candidate and Mr. Uzowulu was the candidate for the Unity Party of Nigeria (U.P.N.). In spite of the fact that Nnobi as a whole identified itself with the N.P.P., candidates drew their highest votes from their individual villages. As Emeh was from Awuda, he got seventy per cent of Awuda votes and under five per cent of Ngo votes, because Ogbuka was from Ngo. The third village, Ebenesi, was split in half. Emeh received forty-eight per cent of the Ebenesi votes. So Ogbuka, the recognized N.P.P. candidate, won the election. The fact that Emeh won any votes at all, having identified himself with the N.P.N. which was gen-

erally considered as the Hausa party, is a proof of his popularity and high standing in Nnobi.

There appear to have been no central or ideological positions from which the parties fought the local elections. The various parties were identified with "cult" figures, such as Zik for the N.P.P. and Awolowo for the U.P.N. As Emeh said, 'The main campaign of Ogbuka and his group was to tell people that the N.P.N. was a Hausa party and therefore, if they were to vote that party, they would all be forced to become Muslims and the churches would be broken down. Things like that!' Emeh pointed out the fact that people did not give campaigners conditions on which their parties would be supported. People were said to have voted N.P.P. simply because it was Zik's party, that is, the party of the Igbo people. Emeh said that Igbo people have this great problem of wanting to stress the "Igbo identity", with local groups fearing isolation. This was confirmed by R.O. Madueme when he said, 'What Nnobi said was that so long as Zik's name was mentioned in connection with that party, that party replaced the old N.C.N.C.; that Nnobi would therefore vote N.P.P.; that if Nnobi needed anything to be done for them, once Zik got into power, he would do it. Then the election was held and Zik failed. Shagari won and therefore N.P.N. got into power. Since N.P.N. got into power, they claim credit for everything'.

As Emeh had a powerful position in the N.P.N.,

I asked him what the N.P.N. as the government in power has done for Nnobi. His reply was this,

'I am the chairman of the party in Anambra State. Consequently, when Nwobodo took on the job of building the roads, I stopped him as it was a federal government concern. The federal government will now build the roads. As you know, Nnobi falls within the erosion zone. The government has made a budget of fifteen million naira to check erosion in this area. They are also going to provide electricity and telephones. I personally wrote to the President of the country, Alhaji Shagari, requesting for those facilities, and I enclosed a coloured map of Nnobi in the letter. The government has also given me a loan of one million naira to build a paper conversion and packaging industry in Nnobi. I expect that you have heard that Nnobi has been made the headquarters of a new local government area, Obiaja local government? I am the father of it. In 1976, the government wanted to create more local government areas. When I learnt of this, I invited the six towns related in some ways to Nnobi and we decided to pursue the move for a new local government. We met twice before the others lost interest; so I carried on the fight till I submitted a petition to the Tagbo commission of inquiry set up to look into the creation of more local

government areas. I summoned again the usual group and they agreed to pursue the case. A general meeting of all Idemili towns was summoned at the palace of the Igwe of Oba.

There it was decided that the present Idemili local government area should be split into three. Another meeting was held at Ogidi and each town was asked to prepare theirs. Then another meeting was held when it was learnt that the new headquarters was going to be stationed at Oba.

I was asked to write a petition against this idea and all the igwe(s) signed it. Then at the end of 1981, an announcement was made by the state government that new local governments had been created. Nnobi, Uke, Awka-Etiti, Ideani, Nnokwa, Oraukwu and Alor came under the new Obiaja local government'.

Madueme confirmed that Nwobodo was stopped from building the main roads in Nnobi. In his opinion, N.P.N. has not really done anything for Nnobi. N.P.N. supporters simply claimed the benefit of any development or improvement projects, as it is the government in power. In reply to Emeh's claims, Madueme said,

'Since N.P.N. is in power, they claim credit for everything. That is wrong. Tell Emeh that this is not correct. Why I say so is because this road for example used to be impassable. It was Nwobodo of the N.P.P. who repaired it. Yes, Nwobodo took on the job. Then we were

told that the vice-president, Dr. Alex Ekwueme, objected to it, saying that Nwobodo was jumping into jobs which were not his responsibility; that it was a federal road; that Nwobodo should stop building that road, that he himself would build it. From that time till today, Ekwueme has not done anything. So they should stop talking rubbish. There is nothing that N.P.N. has done for Nnobi till this very moment.

N.P.P. has done nothing either, except that Nwobodo built us the road. Whoever is talking to you about electricity, there has been electricity even before the election. The government had erected these poles before the 1979 election. Don't mind them and their lies'.

Clearly, R.O. Madueme, who was always at the centre of local politics, was not impressed with any of the parties in terms of concrete achievements in Nnobi. People were not really concerned about the ideological stance of politicians or their ideals. Politicians were judged in terms of material benefits brought to the town or to individuals.⁽⁵⁾ Thus, nominated candidates or politicians were talked about as those sent on an errand or a mission, as was evident in R.O. Madueme's language - 'the person we wanted to send', 'Ogbuka was told to go and get ready'. Thus, when Ogbuka got to the House, Nnobi hoped for visible returns. According to general opinion, Ogbuka was an idealist and an intellectual who, instead of scrambling for a share of material

benefits for Nnobi, spent his time in the House speaking sophisticated English. It was believed and insinuated that he had not as much as requested 'a grain of sand for Nnobi, as if Nnobi will eat fat English!' This was clearly stated by the very bitter and disappointed Chief R.O. Madueme,

'Nwobodo came to Nnobi as he normally visits towns and did not do anything for Nnobi. So he was asked at the market-place why this was so. So he said that the reason he had done nothing for Nnobi is that since Ogbuka was sent to Enugu to participate in meetings, he has never requested from him so much as a grain of sand for Nnobi; that all he did was to speak sophisticated English which if one begins to write down will stretch from Nnobi market to Nnewi market; that all he was doing was speak fat English to him. Then he said, "Nnobi, will you eat fat English?" and we all replied, "No, we will not eat it!" This is why nothing has been done for Nnobi until today and it is nearly time for another election while we just sit and stare. Those of us who are N.P.P. members, who used up our own money and time to ensure that Ogbuka got into the House, we are all forgotten people. I myself am now a nonentity; someone like myself, who attended local government training at the University of Ibadan. Just because one does not know the Governor personally, those who are supposed

to be given government positions are forgotten. They have given me nothing up till this very moment that we are sitting here'. (6)

From people's expectations and needs, we can begin to see on the one hand the advantages and dominance of the wealthy and the influential, and on the other hand, the predicament of young politicians not backed by wealth but striving for achievements and general local improvements through legislation. Ogbuka, for example, soon fell out with his party and he and some other party members were suspended for what the party termed, 'anti party activities', a convenient and popular expression used by political parties in Nigeria for the expulsion or suspension of party members. As the needs of the local people were immediate and material, such as the provision of basic social necessities like pipe-borne drinking water and electricity, it is easy to buy their votes and support with money, hence the predominance of the very wealthy in the seats of power and the near total exclusion of women. The female politicians were employed to campaign for female votes for male candidates and not for themselves. They worked for the men and sometimes got rewards through honorary appointments.

Emeh, for example, claimed that in establishing branches of the N.P.P. throughout the Idemili local government area, two women accompanied him on all his tours. The job of the women was to enlist the local women into the parties. They did not stand

as candidates seeking particular political positions for themselves. They were, however, later rewarded by the parties they campaigned for. Mrs. Helen Okafor from the neighbouring town of Umuoji remained in the N.P.P. and was made a commissioner in the electoral commission. Mrs. Nwaeje from Nnobi remained loyal to Eneh and quit the N.P.P. with him. She became the leader of the female wing of the Idemili branch of the N.P.N. Mrs. Maria Ndubisi, a businesswoman who also helped Eneh in his campaigns, remained in the N.P.P. and was made a commissioner in the local government commission. Again, in the present title boom, while wealthy Igbo men and politicians buy titles, the few prominent women in the N.P.P. are given honorary titles. Mrs. Uche Ofianwali, the Anambra state commissioner for special duties, was given in January 1982 the title Ada di ora nma (a daughter who is pleasing to the public) of Enugu Ukwu; while Mrs. Justina Eze was made Chief of Imiliki.

Women's Associations and the Politics of Motherhood

We have seen in Chapter Three how in the indigenous Nnobi society, women organized themselves in their capacity as wives and mothers and sought structural power on that basis. As wives and mothers, they had access to essential economic resources - land and market. Those who were successful economically, or showed signs of charismatic leadership ability, could take certain titles and become political and ritual leaders, as, for example, Ekwe titled women. As wives and mothers, women had an exclusive formal organization which had specific rights in the fertility and marriage of daughters. The valuation of mothers was therefore economically and politically rewarding. We find that in the colonial and post-colonial Nnobi society, though the material situation of women has changed, women have clung to their social and cultural valuation as mothers, and have sought power in that capacity even though no provisions are made for women as mothers in the seats of power. No title is given to women as a reward for motherhood that would guarantee them a seat in igwe's council alongside other titled seats for men in the ruling council.

Whereas in male organizations such as the patriotic unions, improvement unions, clubs and age-grade associations, the strong motivation of men has been competition for power and the distinguishing

of oneself. In the case of women's organizations controlled by the ideology of motherhood, the strong guiding principle has been the suppression of self; self-sacrifice and the concern for order and peace. This was only one aspect of ideas associated with motherhood in the indigenous culture, for motherhood had its social rewards and was known to motivate aggression and competition in economic pursuit and militancy in self-defence or in the pursuit of public peace. (See Chapters Two and Four.) The suppressive and inhibitive aspects of the ideology of motherhood are rampant in the modern women's organizations, which are now basically church-linked and controlled. They have been encouraged by the very male biased and patriarchal family laws of the Old Testament, especially the levitical laws which carry strong anti-female notions of pollution. Church women do not therefore see themselves as possible clergy members. For a lot of the women, their exclusion from public politics has become acceptable in terms of patriarchal laws of the church, which places women directly under the authority and rule of their husbands, and demands their obedience and servitude. This would explain the difference in the attitudes of the present leaders of the Women's Council, their ambivalence and contradictions as they are torn between traditional positive female aggressiveness and modern negative female subservience. The attitudes and opinions of the present leaders of the Women's

Council were tested on two issues. One was their position with regard to the quarrel within the N.W.O. and the disintegration of that organization (see Chapter Seven), and the other was on the question of title taking for women.

Unlike the competitive attitude and ambitious hopes of the N.H.W.O. vis-a-vis the N.W.O., leaders of the Women's Council saw their role essentially as peace makers, as it was the duty of mothers to settle disputes and see that peace exists among their children. It was therefore in this vein that they spoke of the executive members of the N.W.O. and their dispute as if they were naughty children having a quarrel. Thus, according to the spokeswoman of the Women's Council, their intention was to call the men to ask them to speak up and say what the quarrel was about. Their intention was to ask the men what benefit they derived from quarrelling. According to the women, they themselves do not quarrel. In the words of the spokeswoman, 'On the day we will invite them, we shall write them a letter and ask the most troublesome ones, for there are some of them who are the worst offenders. We will then invite them to Igwe's palace, then we will put these questions to them'. Even though the women pointed out competitiveness as the root of the quarrel in the N.W.O., to the women, this sort of thing arises from lack of respect and, according to them, men do not understand respect, hence their tendency to bypass one another and go to seek fame individually.

The impression one got from the discussions with the women was that they were aware of the mediatory role they were supposed to play in the traditional concept, but in reality found themselves powerless. They were, for example, aware of the fact that Nnobi men had made comments about the role that the Women's Council would have played in the present political stalemate had the Council been the way it used to be in the olden days. As the Women's Council was practically excluded from the decision making process, the leaders did not really know the details of the dispute, nor were they being consulted in the peace moves. One is therefore not surprised that they had done nothing about summoning a meeting with the men. They did not really have the confidence. After all, they had been disgraced, imprisoned and put under the leadership and supervision of the N.W.O. It is therefore not surprising that it is to God that they looked for peace. As the women said, 'By the grace of God, if the men are to be at peace with one another as the women are, then Nnobi would really be blessed'.

It is this hope in God, this dependency on canon law and Christian ethics, which governs the attitude of the Christian leaders of the women to the idea of title taking for women. Even though they were aware of the connection between wealth, title and political power for men, the Christian women objected to the suggestion of such equivalent

titles for wealthy or prominent women in Nnobi.

The women said, 'No, we will not participate in such things. We will not take titles with them for we are church-goers, we are Christ's people'.

Testing their position further, it was put to them that nowadays, a successful rich man has the opportunity of buying himself prestige and power by taking the ozo title, but that rich women no longer seem to have any social rewards or power through title taking, as women no longer take the Ekwe title. There seems to be nothing now to indicate to people that a particular woman is very wealthy or extremely economically successful. After hard work, what is the social reward these days for women, as the ozo title is for men?

The Christian women in reply stated that the Ekwe title was involuntary and that it was not taken just because a woman was rich. They did not accept the suggestion that signs of wealth brought on the possession. In their opinion, the possession brought wealth. Things just multiplied for a woman possessed because a lot of money was required for taking the title. The call to the title itself produced money for the taking of the title. Yet they admitted the fact that Ekwe tendency ran in lines of descent. The spokeswoman of the women, a self-appointed leader by sheer audacity, a very pushy and charismatic character, pointed out the fact that the mother of her mother's mother had taken the Ekwe title. The said woman who had taken

the Ekwe title was also related to another outstanding representative of the Women's Council. The titled woman had been the mother of her husband's mother. Another prominent representative, a non-Christian who still dressed in the indigenous manner⁽⁷⁾ and was called Agba Ekwe, said that the woman whose reincarnation she is was a titled Agba Ekwe woman, hence her name. The point being made here is that in the present Nnobi society, none of these women are wealthy, but they all have leadership qualities, hence their prominent positions in the Women's Council. In the indigenous society, it is most likely that their pushiness would have led them to wealth, titles and position in the ruling structure.

Today, for the Christian women, the Ekwe title is against the teaching of the church. The church did not, in fact, leave the question of the Ekwe title to individual moral conscience, but actively passed laws to put a stop to it. As far as the Christian women were concerned, the rituals involved in the conferring of the Ekwe title, such as giving the title taker prestige and acknowledging her superiority through the act of crawling on all fours in a single file between her legs, made the woman appear like a god. In the words of the women,

'Were we to participate in these things we would not carry Christ's cross. It is the cross of Christ that we will carry. As far as women are concerned, it is the cross of Christ that we will carry. We are steadfast in our reso-

lution. Let the men do what they like. You see our understanding of the Ekwe title taking is different from your understanding of it.

In the past, when a woman took the Ekwe title and the women crawled under her, they took her as their chi.⁽⁸⁾ From our understanding now, we believe that no human being should be worshipped except Chineke.⁽⁹⁾ This does not mean that we do not respect people. But to worship a person as a god! NO! This is what we mean by faith in Christ. The bible says it is a sin to worship someone like a god'.

It must be noted that this was not the attitude of the non-Christian representatives of the Women's Council, who looked at the idea of a revival of female titles with excitement. It was, in any case, apparent that they were dominated and intimidated by the more "enlightened" Christian women, to the extent that the "pagan" women in public gatherings ended their prayers in the Christian manner by concluding with 'In the name of Jesus Christ our lord'. When asked why they did this, they burst into laughter and, as a matter of fact, said it was the fashion.

Even though the Christian women were intimidated and influenced by their commitment to the church, their attitude to title taking was not altogether unambivalent. The suggestion of honorary titles to them in particular for their services to Nnobi was very welcome and exciting to those who would qualify for it. The argument put to them was this,

'Listen, let me defend myself. You know that the vice-President of Nigeria, who is an Igbo man, is called Ekwueme, and you know that this name is also a title. It is a title given by people of the town in appreciation of what someone has done for them. Ekwueme means one who fulfills his promises. He proposes and carries out his proposals. I see no reason why Nnobi should not have similar titles to give to women as a reward and encouragement for hard work. Take this leader of yours, for example. You appreciate and praise her dynamism and efforts. Why should she not be rewarded with a title? Say, something like odozi obodo, which means one who keeps the town at peace or works for the well-being of the town. In which case, one would feel happy and rewarded to continue their good work. Perhaps you all now understand what I've been driving at. I do not suggest that you worship another human being, indeed, I'd be the last person to suggest such a thing!.

This idea of honorary titles was welcomed by most of the women, who in fact suggested that, since I had access to those in power, I should suggest it to them! Obviously, the women had now only a shadow of the power they used to wield. As they had no idea that a constitution was being drafted for Nnobi, they would not even have the opportunity to make this suggestion. Discussions with those

assigned with the drafting of the constitution revealed that a section of the constitution would include the revival of certain male titles. The idea would be to expunge them of rituals offensive to Christianity.⁽¹⁰⁾ Only one or two men considered the idea of a revival of the female Ekwe title. As we have seen, the idea is not welcomed by Christian women. Moreover, as the present Chief of Nnobi said, women in Nnobi today are no longer rich enough to take the title.

The Christian women, in rejecting the Ekwe title, were not opposed to the idea of title taking per se, as they maintained that the only kind of title taking in which they participated was membership of the select committee of what, in the Catholic church, they call Christian Mother, and Mothers' Union in the Anglican church. They described this as a select committee equivalent to the ichie titled men of the igwe's council. As there are superior elders among ozo titled men, known as ndi ushe (respected elders), so did the women consider the select committee of the Christian Mothers and the Mothers' Union. The Mothers' Union of the Anglicans, for example, has a large membership, but there are a few select women who are the leaders. It is what they decide that the rest of the women do. The idea of select leaders is seen as the same principle as the Women's Council, which is made up of representatives from the various wards of Nnobi. The same principles of formal organization used at descent

level and town level are carried over to the church organizations.

The Women's Council, for example, is a representation of all married women in Nnobi, as are the church unions' organizations of married women in their various churches. Whereas the indigenous organizations are descent and town linked, the church unions are branches of a wider, national church union. Steady (1976), for example, describes the Mothers' Union of the Anglican church as 'a worldwide body that sets itself up as the guardian of Christian marriage and morality' (Hafkin and Bay ed. 1976: 230). Whereas leadership in the indigenous organizations was based on titles and seniority (but now on seniority), in the church, wives of the clergy, lay readers or prominent men in Nnobi tend to assume leadership positions. This is in spite of the presence of more educated elite Christian women, who, however, live in the urban centres. The educated elites tend to be elected as chairpersons⁽¹¹⁾ in their various branches. The home based leaders maintained that these branch chairpersons were under them. As the spokeswoman of the Women's Council said,

'The real head of Nnobi women is the head of the Women's Council at home. Those in the diaspora respect us. Even if they fight in their branches, we meet here, consider the case and write to them and admonish them for spoiling our name. Therefore we do not neglect

those outside Nnobi. If we were to dissociate ourselves from them just because they are on the road, they would wander away and actually get lost. We are therefore doing things quite sensibly. When they default, they are fined in their branches and at home. An offender outside Nnobi can in fact be summoned back to Nnobi where her case is judged, if she proves too powerful for the branch leaders. The strongest committee is usually from those at home. The annual general meetings last for three days and the educated women are not really powerful or in control of things at these meetings. We at home control them. We admit that we learn a few things from them, since they are educated and can read, write and keep books.'

As these same leaders of church women have come to assume the leadership of the Women's Council, the belief among the "pagan" women was that the Ekwe title, which conferred unopposed leadership of the Women's Council, was being taken in the church in secret by church women; how else did these women come to become leaders of the Women's Council? Yet they wondered who sanctified that title, as only the priest of the goddess Idemili had the power to confer and sanctify the title, and the priest does not go to church!

Whereas the indigenous women's organizations were political organizations which had some form

of representation at every level of the political structure, the church unions are non-political organizations, whose membership is based not merely on the status of wifehood and motherhood; only those who have been wedded in the church may join the union. Even then, they are screened for good character. As Steady (1976) pointed out from her study of similar associations in Freetown,

'First, these associations support the church. Second, they contribute to the maintenance of the male-dominated clergy (the status quo) by providing alternative avenues for the development of female religious leadership. Third, they help maintain a double standard of morality, which has a very pragmatic basis in that it ensures the present structure of marriage as a legal entity with economic obligation of the husband' (ibid: 225).

In services rendered by these women to the church, such as bazaars, thanksgiving services, harvest festivals and fund-raising activities, the overwhelming factor is not political ambitions of the women, but selfless service to the church. While men use such occasions to donate generously, show off their wealth and gain individual prominence, women are expected to work hard, unnoticed and seeking no reward like good mothers for the benefit of their children and in the service of Christ. Thus, most of the money raised for church maintenance and activities, is through the efforts of women. By

extension, too, the charitable work has become a female concern. The thrift and industriousness of Nnobi women in their management of subsistence economy has been carried over to fund-raising ventures for the church. Sections of the church women's associations, for example, purchase chairs and cooking utensils, which are hired out to the public during various occasions and ceremonies such as marriage, birth or funeral ceremonies, at great profit. The proceeds are usually reported at the annual general meetings. Some of the profits are put back into some other profit yielding enterprise, while some is used for entertainment by the women and the rest is donated to the church or charitable organizations. Thus, in these church organizations, the focus is not on self-aggrandizement, unlike the situation in male organizations where the motive of individuals is power and prominence.

The only non-church based women's association in Nnobi which came into focus during the period of fieldwork in January 1982, is an organization called Sweet Mother. Data was not collected on this association as it was not specifically Nnobi originated, nor does it as yet have any structural effect on Nnobi. A non-Nnobi woman, married to an Nnobi man, had just started this club, and the membership was still very insignificant. Sweet Mother, like many other such clubs, is a national organization of professional, business and trader women, which welcomes branches in any town in Nigeria. Its membership is open to women of any ethnic group,

like the Christian Mothers and the Mothers' Union. Sweet Mother has its own uniforms and other distinguishing symbols. This association is relevant to Nnobi insofar as it could provide an alternative option for politically ambitious women, constrained by church rules and morality. Sweet Mother to some extent shares the same principles as male associations and clubs. There is a high membership fee, which includes a specific number of cartons of beer to be shared by the members. This has kept membership very low. There is a periodic contribution of money. There is a specific amount ruled for bereavement payment to a member by her particular branch, and also by the national headquarters. This form of life insurance policy appears to be the main attraction of these associations. For this reason, some of these clubs have put an age limit to membership, as they fear a lower intake of younger women who may not bother to join early to avoid paying periodic contributions for many years, and a higher intake of older women, whose membership will only last for a few years, but whose family would have the same claim to bereavement payment as any other members. At one level, therefore, the motivating factor is self-aggrandizement. At another level, as is evident by the name the association adopted, like its counterparts linked to the church, the ideal of motherhood is a strong motivating factor, hence the involvement and concern of this association with welfare and

charitable projects.

Another exclusively female association which was mentioned during fieldwork was a club known as Okwesili Eze (those fit to be kings). From the name of the club, one immediately sees a different orientation from the other motherhood-linked female clubs. Again, detailed data was not collected on this club, as it did not even have a branch in Nnobi. Only a few individual Nnobi urban based women were said to belong to it. This club is, however, relevant insofar as individuals can effect social change. Women who belong to this club, as the name of the club suggests, see themselves as those who should be kings, or those fit to be kings. It is therefore not surprising that this is an exclusive club of extremely wealthy women. The popular belief was that only post-menopausal women were admitted into the club. This may be only a way of insisting that only women free of domestic duties and childcare might belong to the club. Most of the members, therefore, tend to be wealthy divorced women or rich widows. They are mostly business contractors, factory owners and big traders.

As their rules of membership eliminate some of the constraining female factors, these women come out in full social, economic and political association and competition with men. They are made a chairperson during ceremonial occasions. They donate high sums, like men, during launching or fund-raising occasions. They play philan-

thropic roles like wealthy men, and in many cases buy or are given chieftainship titles by towns which have such provisions for wealthy women. It is from such women that state and federal governments pick a few women for appointed offices. It is, in fact, such women who stand ready to be nominated as candidates by political parties, or failing to do so, are made leaders of female wings of political parties. In Nnobi, it is such women who find themselves odd persons, but supposedly equal in mixed-sex clubs and associations such as Abalukwu Social Club or Okaa Social Club, which was banned by the military government, but later resurfaced as The People's Social Club when the ban on political activities was lifted in 1978.

CHAPTER EIGHT: Notes

1. See introduction.
2. See Chapter Four.
3. National Party of Nigeria.
4. National Council for Nigeria and the Cameroons, founded by Azikiwe in 1944.
5. See Appendix 6 for a sample of the type of bitterness and resentment expressed by individual towns against the political party they voted into office in 1979 and from which they believe they have received no rewards. Such letters are written when towns or prominent personalities in a town have decided to quit one party and join another. The fact that a State Governor has to reassure communities that a change of loyalty to another party would not deny them their rights to social amenities (see Appendix 7), confirms that there is a general belief that the denial of social amenities is a punitive measure used by political parties.
6. I learnt that Chief R.O. Madueme has now left the N.P.P. and is campaigning for the 1983 general elections on N.P.N. platform.
7. Her body was decorated with black dye and she wore ivory anklets and bracelets.
8. Deity.
9. God the Creator.
10. By August 1982, the proposal for honorary titles for men had already been put into practice.

See Appendix 5 for a copy of the letter sent out by the traditional ruler to those nominated for honorary titles. It includes my father, Solomon Amadiume! There is no woman among them. Yet the traditional ruler himself said to me and I quote him, 'Women take more active part in farming, the production of foodstuff and marketing. It is to their credit that we eat today'. (See Chapter Five.)

11. I have used this expression to illustrate the new attempts to demasculinize certain important male linked roles in the English language and make them genderless, therefore open to both sexes. (See Introduction and Chapter Four.)

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have looked at the use of the ideology of gender in the socio-cultural systems of Nnobi at three historical periods and its effect on the structural position of women in that society. In the indigenous society, the dual-sex principle behind social organization was mediated by the flexible gender system of the traditional culture and language. The fact that sex-gender did not always correspond to ideological gender meant that women could play roles usually monopolized by men, or be classified as "males" in terms of power and authority over others. As such roles were not rigidly masculinized or feminized, the breaking of gender-rules did not therefore carry a stigma. Furthermore, the presence of an all-embracing goddess focussed religion favoured the acceptance of women in statuses and roles of authority and power. In contrast to the traditional culture, Western culture and the Christian religion brought by colonialism carried rigid gender ideologies which aided and supported the exclusion of women from the power hierarchy, whether in government or the church in the modern society. The rigidity of this gender system meant that roles are strictly masculinized or feminized; the breaking of gender rules therefore carries a stigma.

In the indigenous society, the dual-sex division of labour located women squarely in the subsistence economy and men in ritual specialization. As a result of the ideology of gender, we find that women's access to power and authority differed according to the categories in which they were classified (see Chapters One and Two). Daughters, for example, had prescribed powers and authority which was not based on economic achievement. They had access to power as a result of the flexible gender system which classified them as "males" in the same way as men in their patrilineages. They were therefore superior to wives in terms of authority. "Male daughters" even had superior authority to the rest of the male members of the ancestral houses, or the patrilineages which they headed. Unlike daughters, the power of women as wives was based on economic achievement. This was supported by an ideology of female industriousness with its social rewards in the form of female titles. Perseverance, industriousness, the "pot of prosperity" were gifts which women were said to have inherited from the goddess Idemili (see Chapter One). The women were therefore seen as the earthly manifestations of the goddess. Their titles were therefore political offices which had significance in the administrative and political structure of the society, just like the goddess religion.

While Ekwe titled women ruled over women, ozo titled men exercised similar power over men in the

dual-sex political system. But this apparent dual-sex political system was mediated by the gender ideology which classified daughters as males. The single-sex composition and solidarity of the women's organizations was therefore undermined by the ideology of gender which divided them. The achievement of solidarity on the basis of oneness of sex was situational. Daughters, for example, allied with their brothers or fathers to safeguard the interest of their patrilineage. In their status and role as daughters, they sought power through the control of patrilineage funerals. On the other hand, women as wives and mothers sought the interest of women in general. In this capacity, they sought control of fertility rituals and ceremonies and derived power thereby (see Chapter Three). A separate organization of daughters therefore acted as a check system in the face of a separate organization of wives and an autonomous council of all Nnobi women.

The institution of "female husbands" also favoured the social prominence of women. Such women who were defined as being in authority and control over other women, just like any husband over a wife, had an economic advantage through the control of the services of their wives. As men acquired wealth, titles and power and consequently more wealth through polygyny, so did women through the accumulation of wives in woman-to-woman marriages. While wealthy men could buy the ozo title and gain social and

political prominence, women could buy the "cow-killer" title, which was open to both men and women. There was therefore both an ideological gender and a "class" or, to be more appropriate, elitist division of women in the indigenous society.

There are contradictions in the ideologies embodied in the culture which supported this socio-political system. The contradictions are in the juxtaposition of beliefs and customs derived from both matriarchal and patriarchal ideologies. Each embodied particular gender ideals. The religion based on the worship of a female goddess, symbolized the ideal female in the person of the chief Ekwe titled woman. Like the goddess in the hierarchy of deities, she had the highest central political office, as she held vetoing right in the constitutional assembly. These facts were, however, contradicted in rituals symbolizing male superiority and authority over females. The rituals were justified by a patriarchal ideology which was embedded in the cult of ancestors. However, the flexibility of gender classification meant that women could be classified as "males". The ideological structure therefore acted as a system of checks and balances (see Chapter Four).

There were enough contradictions in the cultural system of the indigenous society, for Nnobi men to be able to use whichever logic suited them best in order to marginalize the position of their womenfolk in the political structure of the modern

and contemporary society. What aided this process most was the colonial experience. As shown in Chapter Five, such practices as the institution of "female husbands" and female titles, which gave women both economic and political advantages in the traditional society, were banned by the church. The Christian religion and Western culture transmitted through Western education carried their own rigid gender ideologies which justified the exclusion of women from power (see Chapter Eight). Women were not included in the local administrative system of the colonial government, nor in the leadership of the church. A female was no longer the focus of religious worship. The high self-esteem and identification with power which women felt under the traditional religious and political systems were dealt a great blow by the masculinized institutions of the colonial rule. New gender realities were therefore generated by the new culture, as old ones were re-interpreted for political advantage.

Events and experiences of the colonial period set the precedent for the monopolization of the decision making processes in local administration by men after independence. This involved not only the breaking of rules which governed the traditional dual-sex political system by Nnobi men, but also the arrest and detention of leaders of the Women's Council. As a result of this, the confidence of the women was broken and their council put under the supervision of the male controlled organs of local government. As shown in Chapters Seven and Eight,

the divisive effect of Christian denominations contributed to the weakening of the solidarity of the women's organizations and Council.

The theme of wealth, titles and motherhood examined in Chapter Eight is not a new one altogether, as it was touched upon in the first section of the thesis when the access of individuals to power was assessed. It was, for example, pointed out in Chapter One that women as well as men had access to power through the accumulation of wealth, which was transformed into titles, and titles brought power. The political offices and importance of the titles were shown in Chapter Two. In Chapters Three and Four, I showed how women sought power and influence through their role as mothers. Insofar as motherhood was an ideal canonized in the traditional culture, it had political and social rewards in titles, praise, respect, reverence and love.

However, in the contemporary society, especially in the rural areas, I have argued that women are the losers insofar as they are still defined and confined in the motherhood role. In this case, it is all the negative and constraining aspects which are stressed and demanded of them. This is in contrast to the self-aggrandizement of the men, and this seems to be the key to political success in the contemporary Nigerian society. While men seek wealth in order to convert it to titles and political recognition, the bulk of the women are constrained by the charity and self-denial orient-

ation of church organizations. We find that the politically orientated women's organizations are not church based. They systematically attract economically successful women and put a restriction on the membership of younger women who are still dependent on husbands and constrained by domestic responsibilities. They are therefore dominated by post-menopausal widows and divorced women. We find that it is such women who are invited to political offices, nominated as possible candidates by political parties, or given honorary titles by towns and governments. In the new gender realities, such women are still seen and defined as females, even though they are no longer personally involved in domestic female roles. They are used in departments and services considered "feminine", such as education, health, the social services and welfare. Politically, their role is restricted to the winning or the organizing of female votes for political parties. In practice, there is therefore a trend towards rigid Western gender systems, which is supported by the official English language. This is in spite of the flexible gender system of the mother-tongue, the Igbo language.

I believe that more research is required on the relationship between language and gender structure. This is especially important as more and more people are now using both English and the traditional Igbo language. As well as showing the effect of language on socio-cultural structures, this thesis provides

further evidence of the strong prominence of matriarchal principles in the supposedly "patrilineal" Igbo societies. It shows the juxtaposition and manipulation of principles derived from both patriarchal and matriarchal ideologies in traditional Igbo societies. It therefore challenges the rigid classification of traditional Igbo societies on the basis of principles of succession and inheritance based on descent. It shows that this approach has not led to the understanding of gender relations in Igbo communities either in the traditional or modern setting. Nor has it explained the better economic position of women vis-a-vis men in the indigenous societies.

A concern with the politics of sex and gender offers an alternative approach to the study of the structural position of women in Igbo communities both in the traditional and contemporary societies. This type of concern would prove more helpful in the research of new marriage patterns and family composition in both urban and rural towns. There seems to be a widespread revival of matriarchal or matrifocal households. These are autonomous households headed by women who have visiting husbands or lovers. Most of these women are either graduates, traders or business contractors, and therefore economically independent. It would be interesting to study the effect of such arrangements on gender relations; the economic and political mobility of such women; the effect of such a background on the

gender attitudes of their children. Finally, I do not think that the growing number of women's organizations in the urban centres has found a place in Igbo studies, nor their role in the history and activities of the political parties.

With regard to the relevance of this thesis to women's studies in general, I hope it provides ample and detailed data which substantiates some recent significant theoretical positions in women's studies in social anthropology, and challenges others. It supports and substantiates the position taken in Ardener (ed. 1978) that gender is a cultural construct. Therefore, the categorical imperatives of gender differ within one society as between societies (Bujra: 1978).

By looking at the valuation made of "maternal and domestic roles" historically, the evidence in this case study does not support the position taken by Rosaldo (1974), Chodorow (1974), Ortner (1974) that what accounts for the universal subordination of women is the definition of them in terms largely of maternal and domestic roles. The fault of their theory lies in its lack of socio-cultural analysis. As values are culturally determined, these roles may not carry the same valuation in all societies. They were, for example, highly valued and rewarded in traditional Nnobi society, but constraining and unrewarded in modern and contemporary Nnobi society.

Again, I do not think that analysis of the relations of production can be divorced from cult-

ural systems. In a statistical cross-cultural examination of the status of women in the public domain, for example, Sanday (1974) reveals that there is no simple correlation between female high status and their contribution to subsistence, but concedes that 'contribution to production is a necessary but not sufficient condition' (ibid: 200). To this, Friedl (1975) adds the importance of having rights to extra-domestic distribution in order to have power and prestige in society. This case study shows that contribution to subsistence is not in fact necessary to female high status. Nnobi daughters who had no economic base had a higher status than wives, whose labour was central to the economy as a whole. The power and authority of daughters was a result of a cultural construct and not of economic achievement, or of any rights to extra-domestic distribution. The status of women in woman-to-woman marriage also shows the "class", or more appropriately, elitist division of women. In this case, "female husbands" who did not themselves contribute their labour to the economy, had a higher status than the women whose labour and services they controlled. The high status of Ekwe titled women, on the other hand, had both a cultural and an economic base.

These perceptions were possible as a result of the combination of a gender perspective and a class analysis. As a result of the comparative method used, it was possible to examine changes in gender

relations in a specific society and culture both historically and cross-culturally. It is therefore hoped that this thesis provides more data for the formulation of theories, and poses more themes for further research and dialogue in feminist anthropology and the women's movement as a whole. The option of a dual-sex political system, for example, requires further research, especially as this seems to be catching on in the West. In Britain, for example, some London local authorities have instituted women's units and committees responsible for women's rights and interests. They are the Greater London Council, Camden, Brent, Greenwich, Hackney, Islington, Lewisham and Southwark. These women's units and committees allocate funds and grants for nurseries, women's centres which provide recreation and advisory services, etc. In seeking separation or segregation, are women constraining themselves in "domestic and maternal" roles? In integration, that is, mixed-sex ruling bodies and committees, are men concerned with female issues? Are women in male-dominated organizations still interested in female affairs? Or are they "swallowed up" by men? Do such women begin to consider themselves males? These are important questions for debate and research.

To end on a more positive note with regard to oppression anywhere, whether sexual, gender, class or race, I quote Bloch (1976) who, following Marx, made a distinction between ideology and knowledge. He pointed out that social actors have terms by

which they can criticize the social order. 'People may be extensively mystified by the static and organic imaginary models of their society which gains a shadowy phenomenological reality in ritual communication; but they also have available to them another source of concepts, the use of which can lead to the realization of exploitation and its challenge' (ibid: 287).

Some Practical Considerations .

Finally, I feel a strong moral commitment to include a section dealing with practical considerations arising from this study, as otherwise I would not feel justified in carrying out such a detailed research in my own hometown. Furthermore, those with whom I worked in Nnobi expected such commitment from me. The women especially did not consider me a stranger or a visitor, or a scientist divorced from local problems and politics. It is understandable why this type of commitment is not usually encouraged in theses written in the Western world. Most Western anthropologists have not worked in their own societies, but have travelled far away to study other people's. This is not the case in Nigeria, where thesis recommendation is formally encouraged. There could be two possible explanations for this. One is that Nigeria is a developing country, and therefore the opinion of everyone is sought. The second may have roots in an Igbo saying: 'You do not see a spring nearby and leave it and go far away looking for water to fetch'. It is therefore as an Nnobi daughter obligated to the women of Nnobi that I include these practical formulations.

The study confirmed the existence of a dual-sex political system in the traditional society of Nnobi, but showed that divisions and interests of political groups were not only on the basis of

sex-gender, they also reflected ideological gender and elitist divisions. However, as a result of Western influence, local men now manipulate a rigid gender ideology in contemporary sexual politics and thereby succeed in marginalizing the political position of their womenfolk, or excluding them from power altogether. In view of this, this thesis recommends:

1. The institution of a true dual-sex political system in local administration, with spheres of interest clearly defined. This position assumes that, in practice, the general interests and concern of the mass of rural women is different from those of men. Therefore, the dual-sex political institutions being suggested are a modification of those being revived in the western and riverine Igbo towns. In this system, the traditional female ruler's cabinet dealt with "female affairs" and the traditional male ruler's council dealt with "male affairs" (see the Introduction to this thesis; Henderson 1972; Okonjo 1976).
2. As subsistence in the household and subsistence economy as a whole is regarded as women's responsibility, it is suggested that both legislative and executive rights over the markets be regarded as "female affairs". This would give women effective power to check male politicians who are monopolizing the distribution and sale of food items, traditionally a female domain. It is suggested that the Women's Council retain judicial powers in "very female

affairs". This is especially in matters affecting the health and sanity of women, such as wife battering, sexual abuse of women including rape, and the postpartum sex taboo.

3. In view of a separate women's cabinet, it will be necessary and imperative to create female titles parallel to male titles.

4. In order that women and their interest are represented in the wider decision making processes; that politically ambitious women are not confined in and constrained by a separate female sphere; it is necessary to create political seats for representatives of the Women's Council in the other three organs of local government. They are, namely, Nnobi Welfare Organization, the local government council and the traditional igwe's council. It is imperative that there are equal numbers of titled women to titled men in Igwe-in-council.

5. It is important that the system of voting in the councils be organized in such a way that there are equal numbers of votes between males and females in order to reflect the dual-sex political system. Some men may, however, choose to vote with women and vice versa, according to their convictions. The possibility of block-voting also allows for collective action by women to check or frustrate male dominance.

6. This system of government makes it imperative that there are two elected or nominated candidates in local government elections for each ward, a

male councillor and a female one.

7. In order that women should participate and be represented in national politics, in general elections, the community should approach men as well as women when choosing and supporting candidates for the State House of Assembly and the Federal House of Assembly. This would give female politicians in hitherto male dominated political parties an opportunity and choice to direct their efforts in canvassing for female votes for themselves or for female candidates, and not for males as they are currently being used.

8. Finally, in view of these new suggestions, the current constitution for Nnobi should be scrapped, the constitution committee dissolved and a new one of equal numbers of men and women set up. New proposals reflecting the dual-sex political system should be put forward, discussed and finally written down in the Igbo language.

APPENDIX 1Anthropological Document on the Origin of Nnobi

Chief Edmund Ezeokoli, Igwe II of Nnobi, (reading from a document left by his father, Chief Solomon Ezeokoli, Igwe I of Nnobi),

'Nnobi means ancient or traditional or the popular tribal obi. There is no self-evident decree available to enable us to review the past records of the history with regard to the origin of Nnobi. All that might have been had, is an intelligent observation from the past, from known to unknown. The elders say, "E fe Nshi, e fe Adama. Nnobi aha efe Nshi, kama o bu Adama ka a n'ebulu ihu".⁽¹⁾

This statement is open to various probably interpretations. Nshi refers to the traditional Nri of Agu Ukwu. Although the present elders of Nnobi maintain intimate contact and communication with Nri Oreri, they recognize the Nri of Agu Ukwu and that of Oreri as one. They also hold that Nnokwa had some intimate relationship with Nri Oreri. The Nri was regarded as the highest authority in pagan priesthood in Igboland. In the ancient system of political leadership, there were various adapt-

(1) 'One reveres Nshi, then Adama. Nnobi does not revere Nshi, but pay ritual homage to Adama.'
The order of reverence indicates the superiority of Adama to Nri.

ations to meet with the needs of the time. It is very likely that Nri hegemony conferred the leadership of Nnobi to the pagan priest of Aho. But the actual day-to-day rituals and administration of justice were offices of the Ukozala priesthood. The changeover of leadership of the town came about under the Aho regime which superceded the Nri quasi-religio-political mandate.

Ihu consists of homage originally paid to the family ancestors through their particular living representatives. A stranger or a slave or an indentured servant brought ihu to the head of the family or to his master. A farmer also sent ihu to his landlord. Ihu, therefore, is a sign of homage given to a superior person. In a large family, the descendants and wives observe ihu occasionally to the head of the family. Why did the ancients of Nnobi pay ihu to the Adama(s), the Nri king-makers?

The Adama(s) were special title holders in Agu Ukwu Nri, and in Oreri. They are called the Okpala(s). In both places, they enjoyed the extraordinary privilege of touching the person of Eze Nri for his installation and burial ceremonies. It is difficult to explain this relationship between the Adama and the people of Nnobi - "Nnobi aha efe Nri".⁽¹⁾ There are small villages in Nnobi that are known to be of Nri origin, i.e., Umunshim and Aghaluogu in Ebenesi,

(1) 'Nnobi does not revere Nri.'

Ihunshi in Umuagu in Ngo. The ancestors of these three villages used to engage in the pagan rite of ikwu ahu⁽¹⁾ in Nnobi. This ikwu ahu (pagan ritual of reconciliation) was the prerogative of the Nri throughout the Igbo speaking area. Some guess may be made about the relationship between the Nri and Nnobi people in the pagan days.

In 1924, after the official outing parade of Eze Nri Oreri, Eze Okonkwo, who died in 1944, he visited the River Niger. On his return journey via Nnewi, he called at Ani Nnobi shrine (shrine to the Earth Spirit of Nnobi) and worshipped. He received a metal staff from the head of a village in Umuagu in Ngo called Ikpuotutu village. The significance of this is difficult to assess. The evidence of this visit was offered by Mr. I.C. Amadi, a tutor and an Oreri citizen who knew Eze Okonkwo intimately and with whom Eze Okonkwo discussed his journey and his return to Oreri in 1924. Dr. Achukoson, the Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Nsukka, has found that by 3,000 B.C., the Nri hegemony had spread far beyond the Igbo country. With this contact with Nri in the early years, one is inclined to suggest that the origin of Nnobi must be sought in the year 3,000 B.C. or earlier.

Idemili Nnobi - The Idemili pagan cult is the cult that made Nnobi town popular throughout the Idemili, Ana Edo and parts of Awka divisions. Personal

(1) (See Chapter Four.)

contacts confirm that the Idemili Nnobi is the head of all Idemili(s) wherever the Idemili cult is observed in Igboland. In Agu Ukwu Nri, Idemili shrine is located in Diodo. The Ezu lake in Agulu is the traditional source of the Idemili river. In all the localities through which the river passes, it is called different names. For example, it is called Okogba around Abagana. To be the head of Idemili cult, whose cult is intimately bound up with the River Idemili, Nnobi must have settled originally around the Ezu lake. This suggestion brings us nearer to the traditional contact between the Adama(s) and ancient Nnobi people. The possibilities were that Nnobi people must have settled somewhere around Agu Ukwu, but moved away as the Nri Agu Ukwu people arrived in the locality. The history of the journey of the ancestors of Nri indicates that when the Nri came to the Agu Ukwu site, they met people who already dwelt on the land and they negotiated with them for good neighbourliness. Hence as neighbours, Nnobi people could not give ihu to their fellow neighbours.

With regard to the Adama(s), it may be speculated that the people of Nnobi owe their pagan priesthood leadership to the Adama(s), who must have conferred on them the pagan ozo title. Hence the Adama(s) were superior to Nnobi people on the issue of rank of pagan title. We notice that the ozo title is of Nri origin. In those days, the handing over or ozo stick was part of ozo initiation.

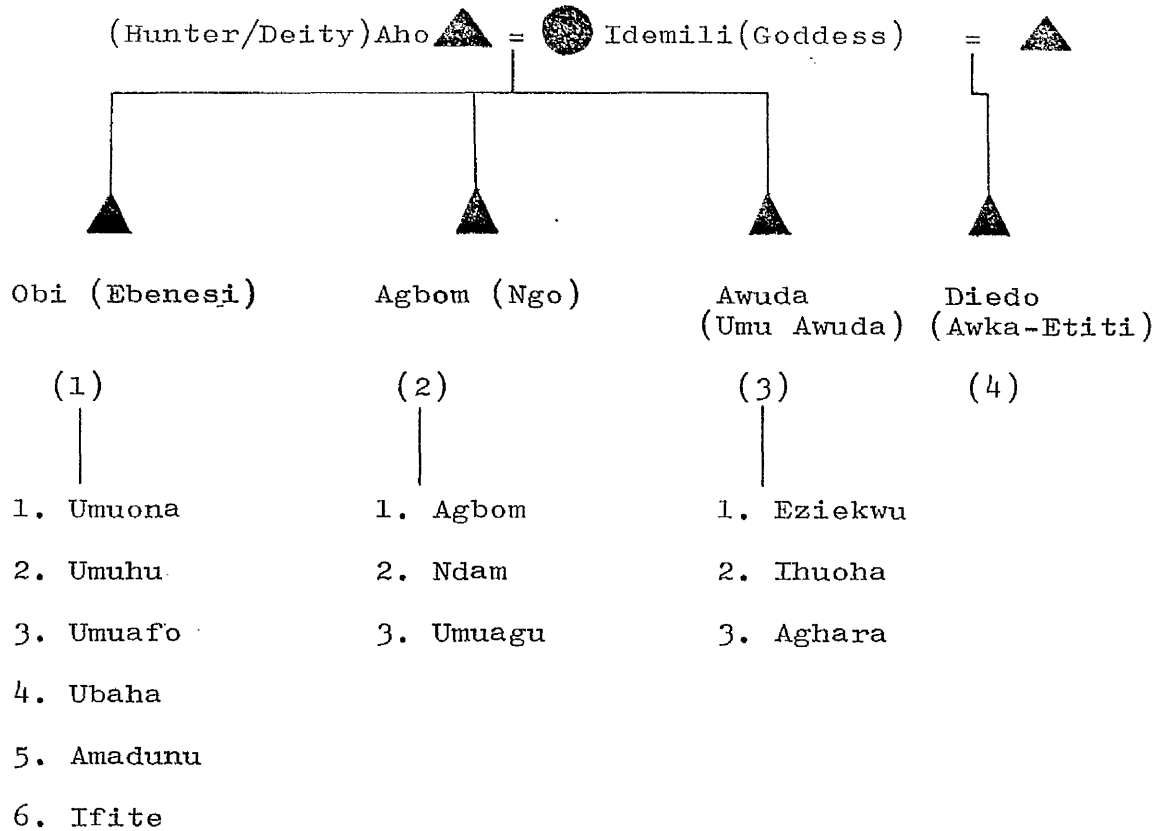
We notice that, in the latter years, the ofò stick for the ozo title in Nnobi was obtained from Nnokwa, the cousin of Nri. The head of the Ukozala cultural ozo rank was at Nnokwa. Again, the ceremony of splitting the kola-nut was the officiality of the priesthood. Nri being superior in this respect, presided over the kola-nut rites. Nnokwa being the cousin of Nri used to chair this ceremony when the people of Nnokwa and Nnobi met. One can therefore infer that Nnobi are aboriginal, but culturally, they owe allegiance to the Nri.

Edo - This goddess Edo is regarded as a descendant of the mother goddess, Idemili Nnobi. This consideration is widely held in Nnewi, the head of the Ana Edo area. The elders of Nnewi hail Nnobi people as ndi nna ochie.⁽¹⁾ This fact was established during my visit to the head of the Edo shrine at Nnewi. The Edo cult also brings Nnobi people into contact with the Abatete and the Ichida people. The Ezemewi of Nnewi, the Omaliko of Abatete and the Otoogwe of Ichida reportedly canvassed the marriage of Edo. But eventually, the Ezemewi of Nnewi won.⁽²⁾ The episode might not be mere human marriage relations. Nnobi has played a senior role in the ancient days over the rest of these towns. This is one of the aspects of local history which the future generation may have to tackle.'

(1) 'Ancient-parents' (see Chapter Two).
 (2) (See Chapter One.)

APPENDIX 2: Figure 1

Genealogical Structure of Nnobi showing the component
quarters and Major Patrilineages in their Ranking Order



Dual Division in Ebenesi

Ebe n'ato

and

Ohu ana

1. Umuhu

1. Umuona

2. Umuafo

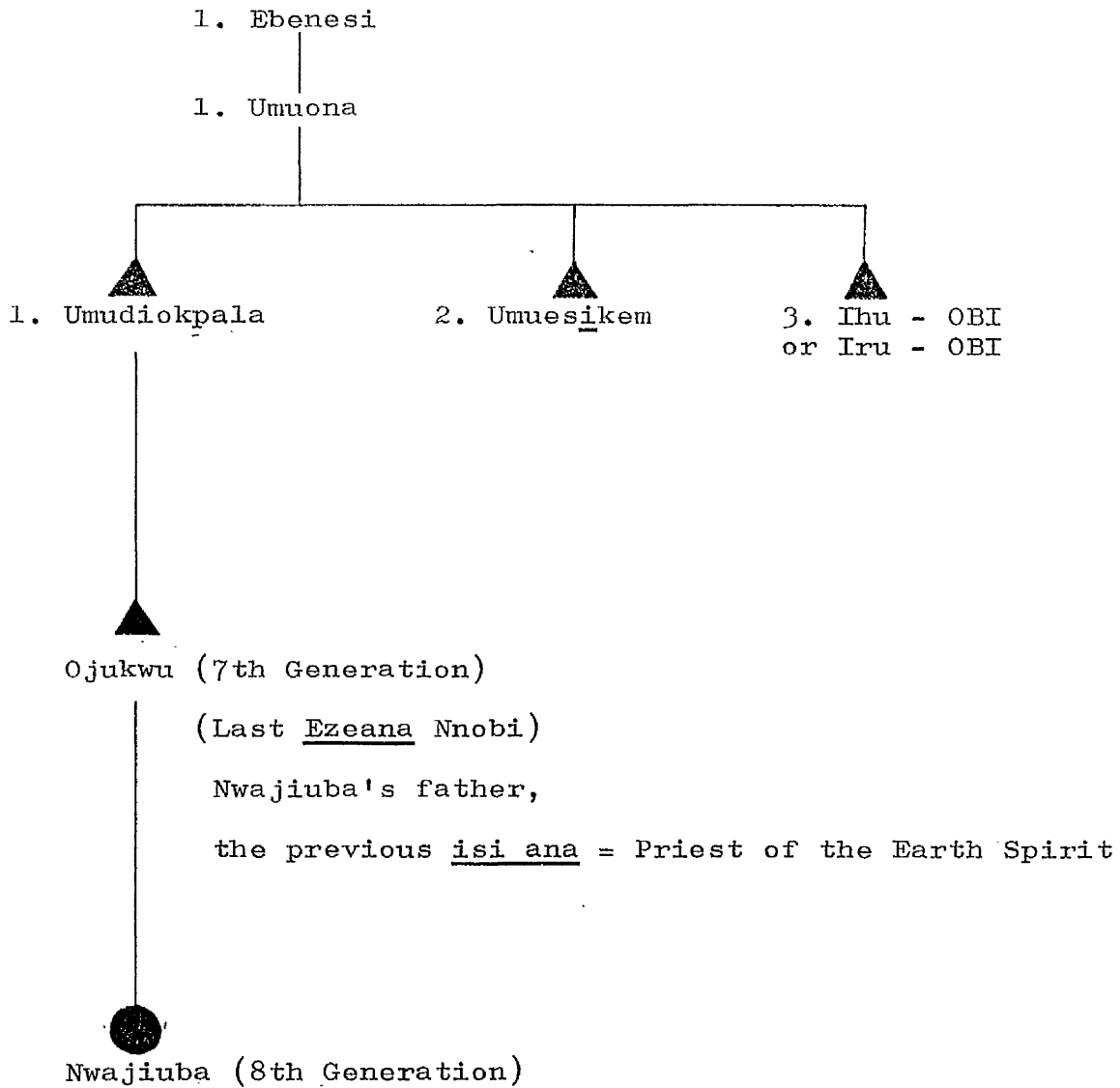
2. Amadunu

3. Ubaha

3. Ifite

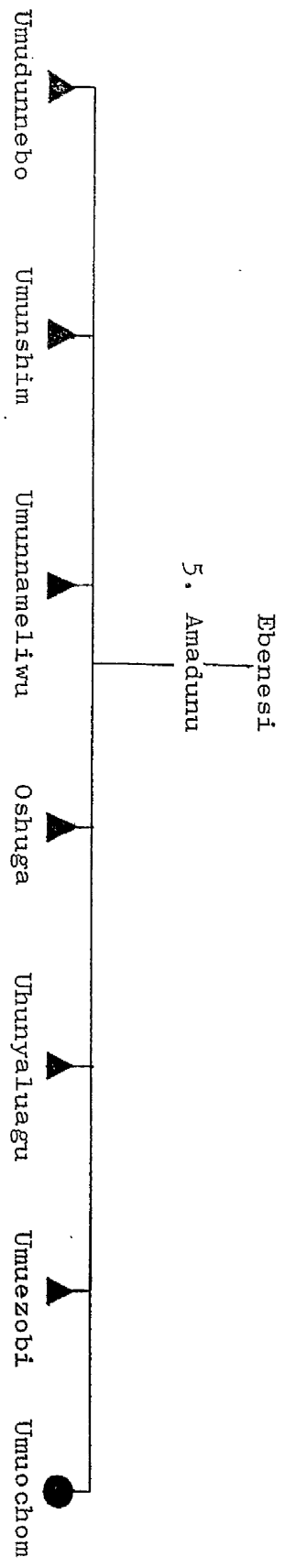
APPENDIX 2: Figure 2

Minor Patrilineages of Umuona and the Genealogical
Position of Nwajiuba



APPENDIX 2: Figure 3

Minor Patrilineages of Amadunu in their Ranking Order

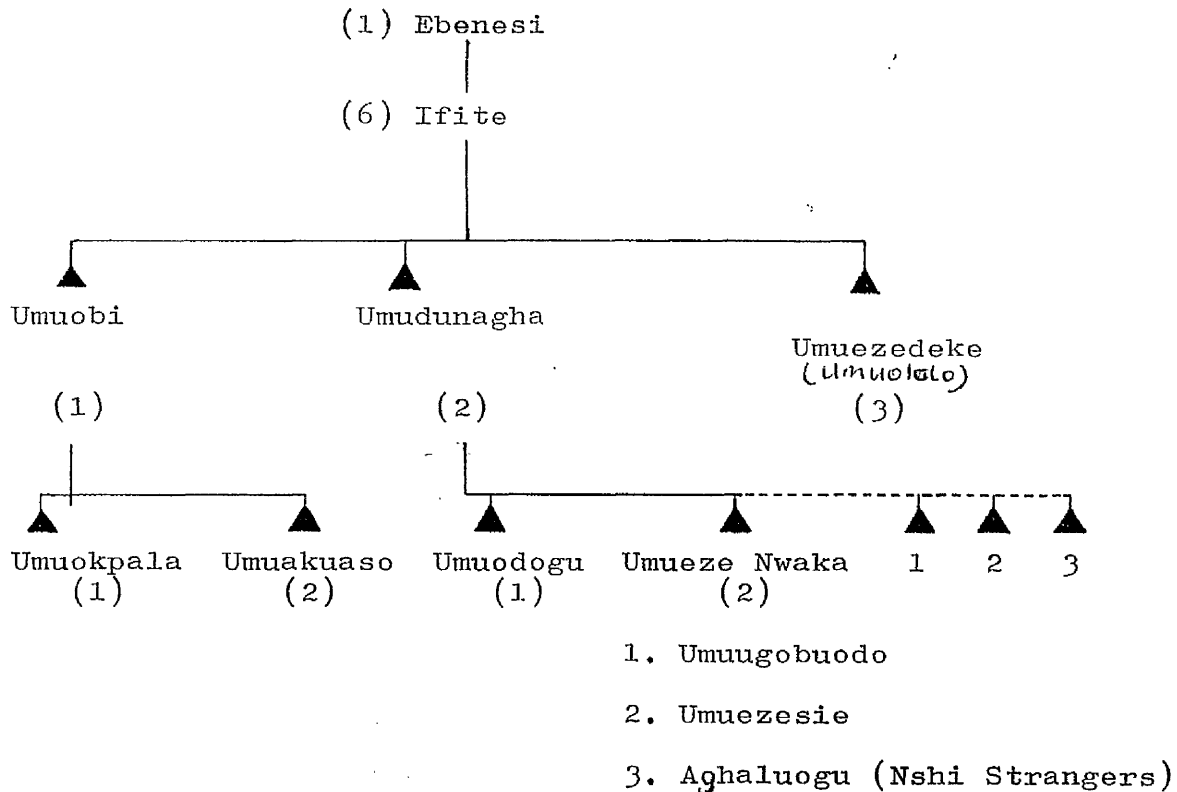


Dual Division in Amadunu

- | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| <u>Umu Ezu</u> | <u>Umu Oka</u> |
| 1. Dunnebo | 1. Umunshim |
| 2. Uhunyalu Agu | 2. Umunnameliwu |
| 3. Umueze Obi | 3. Oshuga |
| | 4. Ochom |

APPENDIX 2: Figure 4

Minor Patrilineages in Ifite and the Component Obi(s)
in their Ranking Order

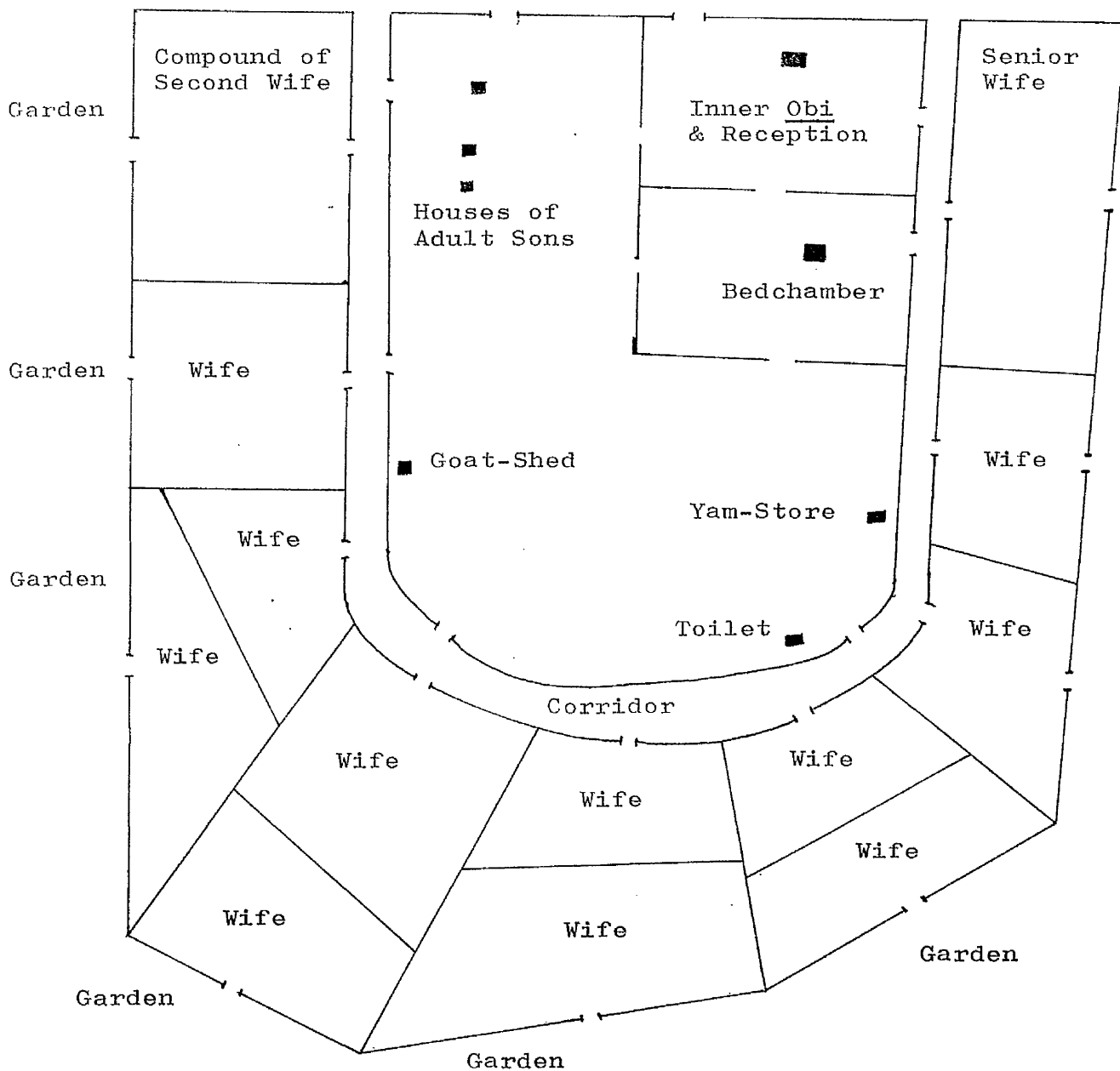


Umuokpala as first son of Obi should bu isi Idemili, provide priest of Idemili, but they do not. Explanation for this is in the Myth of Domestication of Idemili (see Chapter Four). Umuakuaso, last son of Obi, provide the priest of Idemili shrine, but receive the ofu of authority from Umuokpala, who some claimed also give ofu for ozo Aho (Ogidiuche Obi does this). They were also said to have given ofu symbol of authority to all other ozo titles. This contradicts the impression given to the first anthropologist in Nnobi (see Appendix 1) that Nnobi received ofu ozo from neighbouring Nnokwa people, the said cousins of Nri. It also confirms the antiquity of Ifite as the ritual centre of Nnobi and Idemili cult as the indigenous religion.

APPENDIX 3: Plan of the 'Obi' of Eze Okigbo

11

Public
Reception
& Obi



(This three-tier plan is typical of the family compounds of the very wealthy and powerful. Ordinary people had a two-tier system; an obi compound in front and female sub-compound units behind.)

APPENDIX 4: Summary of the Proposed Constitution for Nnobi

In three chapters:

Chapter One, Igweship Constitution

- a) To co-operate with Nnobi Welfare Organization and ratify any important decisions of N.W.O.
- b) Duties of the ichie titled men - supervising social functions, settling non-criminal quarrels.
- c) Igwe to present isiana Nnobi, priest of the Earth Spirit of Nnobi, with he-goat, cock, eight yams, eight kola-nuts and eight gallons of palm-wine before coronation.
- d) Duties of okpala - to deputize for igwe in his absence and to head the cabinet.

Chapter Two, Nnobi Welfare Organization Constitution

- Order of business
- Committees
- Finance
- Conferences

Chapter Three, Socials - Nnobi Social Reform: Marriages, Funerals, Festivals.

- Funeral of igwe and titled men - corpse should not be taken to a mortuary, but should be buried same day by night. Funeral day for the titled fixed. Igwe's funeral to be called last ofalla. After death, one year to elapse before appointment of a new igwe, six months before a new okpala and three months before a new ichie.



His Royal Highness **IGWE E. EZEOKOLI II** The Eze of Nnobi

IGWE EZEOKOLI PALACE NNOBI
Post Office Box 1, Nnobi
Obi Local Government Area
Anambra State, Nigeria.

Bankers:
African Continental Bank Ltd.
Nigeria Central Bank

MY REF.....1/1.....
YOUR REF.....

DATE.....24th August, 1982.....

Messrs. U.C.D. Okoye
" Richard Anoliefo
" Michael Ezike
" Ben Ewelugo
Mr. Solomon Amadi Ume
Hon. Justice M.O. Nweje.

Chiefs/Gentlemen,

I have the pleasure to inform you that it is the wish of Igwe-in-Council and Nnobi Community to confer you an honorary title in appreciation of your great contributions towards the upliftment of our beloved town Nnobi.

The title if accepted, shall not, repeat not be associated with any pagan rites. If accepted please let us know the title you may like to choose and forward same to the Igwe of Nnobi on or before the 5th of September, 1982.

The title shall be conferred on you on 29th September, 1982, being Nnobi Afia Olu Festival day.

Thanks for your usual Co-operation.

Yours,

(Signed)

H.R.H. **IGWE E. EZEOKOLI II**
Nnobi

Ichie Edozie Okonkwo
Secretary.

RCO/nnnnnnnn

- CC Ebenesi Brothers Meeting
- " Ego Brothers Meeting
- " Eyo Community Meeting.



APPENDIX 6'Help X Town

I believe that X Town in X Autonomous Community in X LGA is part and parcel of X State controlled by Governor X. .

The people of X Town have been totally neglected in the provision of social amenities which other communities particularly in X Town have been receiving since the inception of the present state government.

One is forced to ask: Is X Town isolated from the provision of infrastructural amenities, due to our political stand or does it mean that the present X State Government intentionally starved X Town of amenities as a punishment for voting massively for the X Party during the 1979 general elections?

For instance, the present administration layed electric poles from X electric box to the compound of late Justice X and intentionally stopped at a point near to the residence of Eze X, the community leader of X without even connecting light to our recognised Eze X.

Oh! what a pity for X Town.

It is on record that the stopping of the electricity project is best known to Dr X who for one reason or another does not want anything good for X Town.

Again, the health centre built by the X community in 1980 and handed over to the state government is now closed for political reasons.

Since late last year the nurses attached to the health centre by the X LGA health office have been withdrawn and no replacement effected up to the date of this letter.

The sick and pregnant women have to travel many miles to obtain treatment in hazard conditions, while there is a health centre at their disposal.

Health is wealth as the saying goes, and the state government should do away with politics in health affairs.

I kindly appeal to Chief X and Dr X (the alfa (sic) and omega of X) to please send back the nurses attached to X health centre in the interest of the masses.

What about the roads in X ?

Only at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ that the roads will be reconstructed.

The roads in X ranks the worst in the whole state because none of the roads have seen the light of the day except on community efforts since the inception of the present government of X Party.

The whole roads linking X is unmotorable and in many cases the community finds it difficult to travel outside X Town.

So it is the poor masses that always suffer whenever the political tin-gods engage in their political war for selfish reasons.

Therefore, I am appealing to the Chief Executive of X State and Dr X to please come to the aid of X Town, irrespective of party or political differences for the sake of the poor masses who voted in the present government in 1979.

The year 1983 may take a different shape for the government and X Party.'

(Daily Nation, Wednesday, 27 April, 1983.)

APPENDIX 7' X assures X. X. communities

Communities in X State have been assured that the change of political camps by some self-centred politicians would not affect the provision of infrastructural amenities by the state government.

Giving the assurance while receiving leaders of thought and traditional rulers from X and X local government areas at the Government House X last Monday, Governor X pledged that his administration would never sacrifice the interests of a large group because of the ignoble role of a political turncoat.

He declared: "It is not the policy of my government to discriminate against any individual or community in the distribution of amenities. Neither will my government think of punishing any community because of the offence of an opportunist who may have seen his day dream fortunes in another political camp" '

(Daily Star, Wednesday, 27 April, 1983.)

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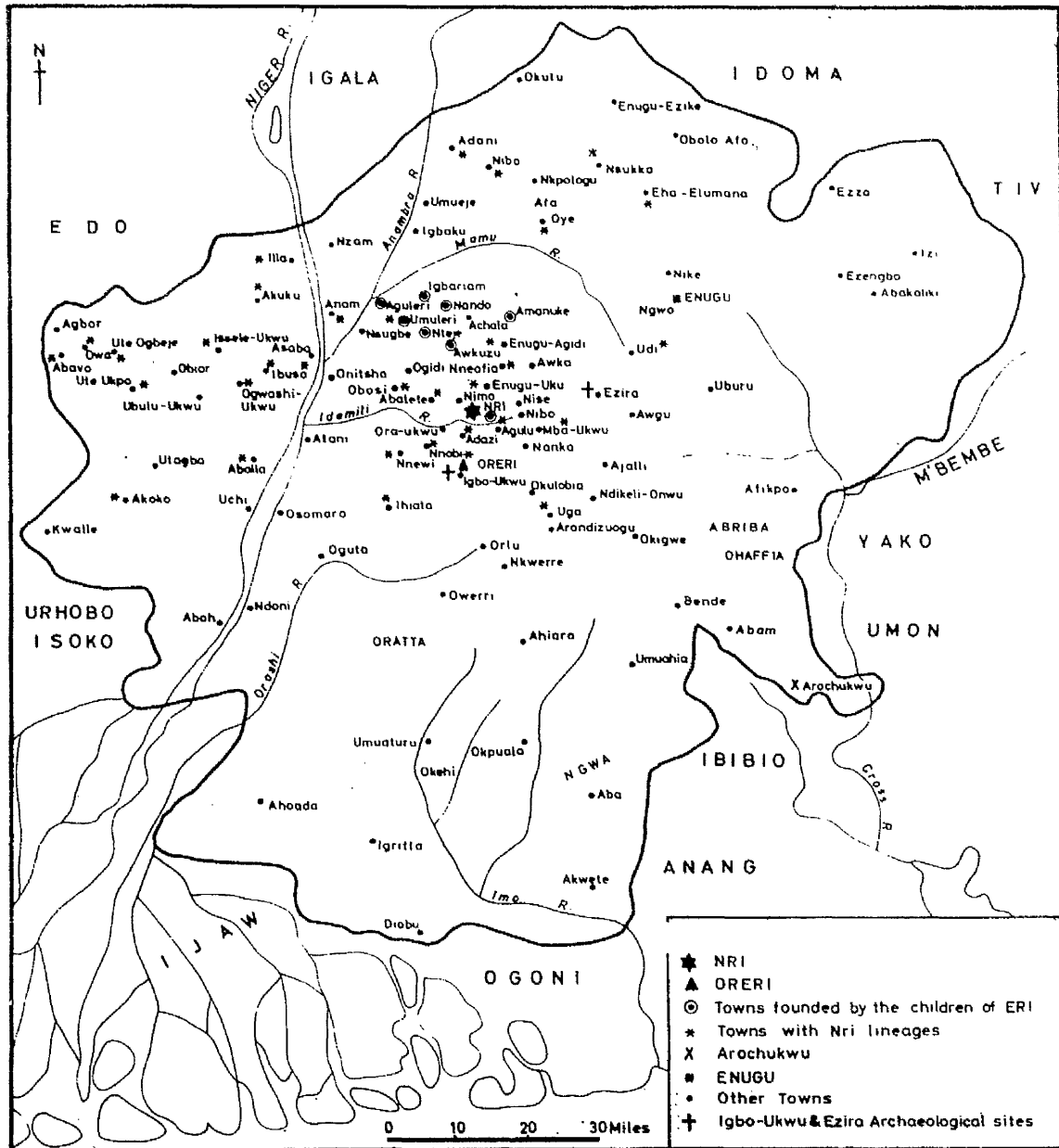
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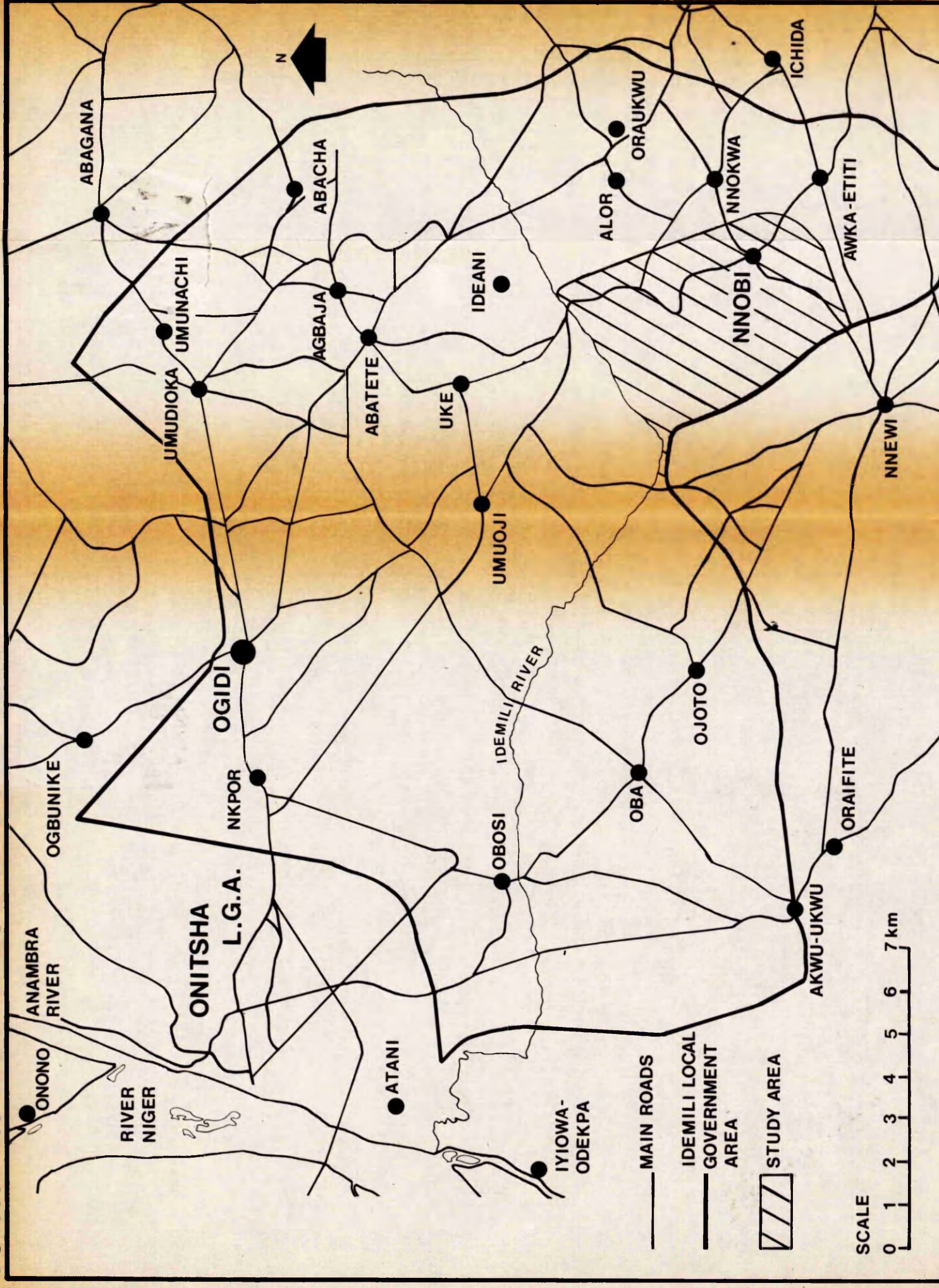
Map 1. Towns in the Igbo Culture Area.



(M. A. Onwuejeogwu 1981:I.)

TOWNS IN IDEMILI LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA

MAP 2



AREA OF ANAMBRA STATE: 17,090 SQ. KM.

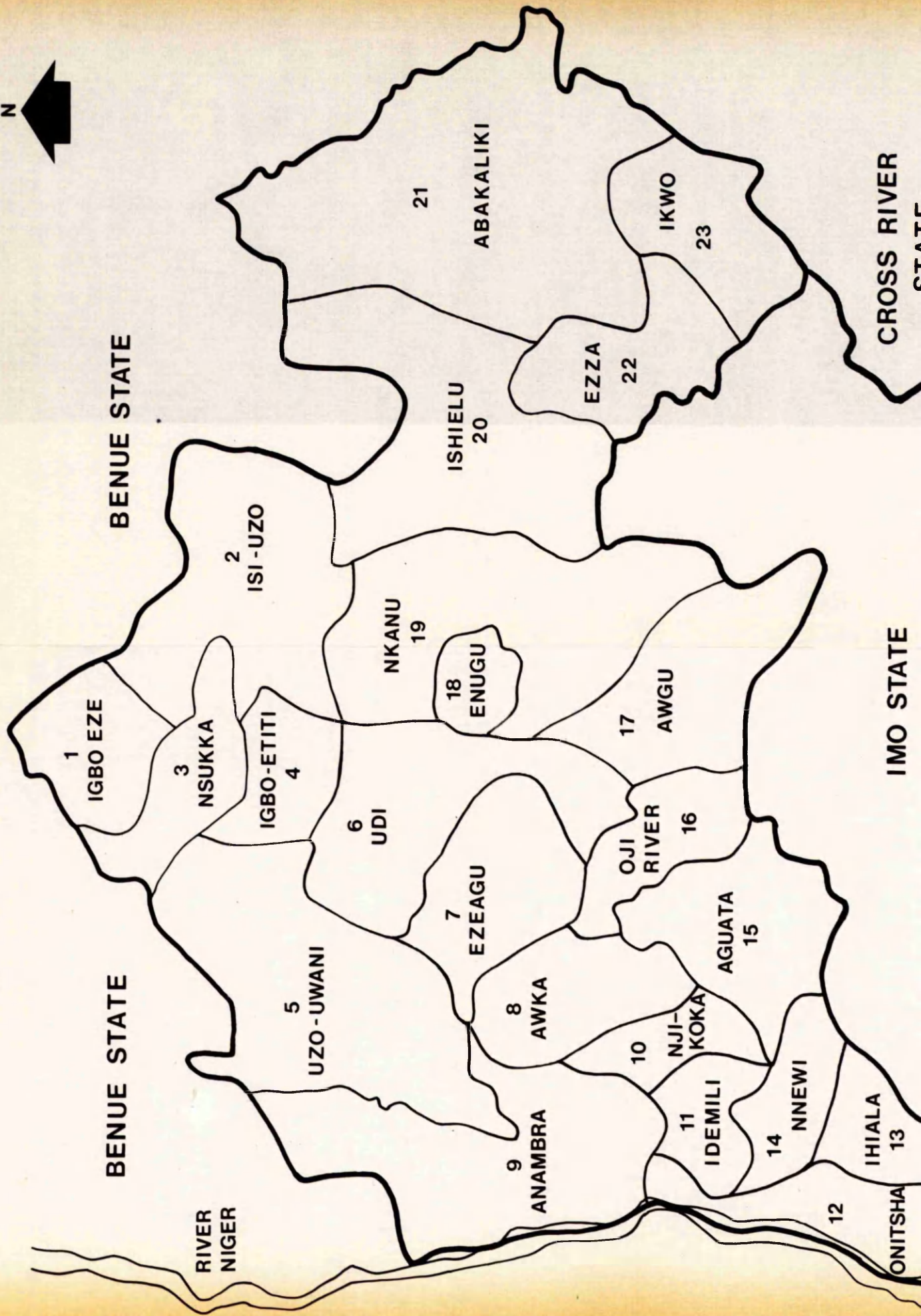
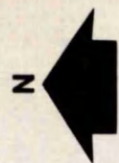
1963 POPULATION: 3,596,631

1976 PROJECTED POP: 5,126,705

LOCAL GOVT. AREA	SQ.KM	1963 POP.	1976 PROJECTED POP.
1	463.00	158,117	217,966
2	1150.00	140,136	193,180
3	463.00	154,032	164,363
4	328.00	119,232	164,363
5	1454.00	117,836	162,440
6	905.00	107,895	148,736
7	635.00	110,184	151,890
8	502.00	176,138	242,811
9	1259.00	198,809	274,060
10	347.05	251,458	346,639
11	278.00	109,094	150,388
12	567.00	196,203	353,148
13	304.00	136,975	188,819
14	325.00	181,864	250,701
15	718.00	250,010	344,640
16	359.00	61,143	84,287
17	799.00	170,647	235,239
18	182.00	174,361	310,574
19	1350.00	154,908	213,541
20	1355.00	191,745	264,322
21	2198.00	208,724	303,538
22	567.00	139,535	192,350
23	583.00	87,585	120,731

POPULATION MAP OF ANAMBRA STATE

MAP 3



NNNOBI TOWN

MAP 4

- LEGEND**
- Major Roads
 - Other Roads
 - ☆ Shrine
 - Market
 - School
 - Church
 - H Hospital
 - ▲ Public Buildings
 - - - Village Boundary
- SCALE 1:10,000

