

Transition to Modernity:  
Political, Economic, and Religious Change  
Among the Ibo of Nigeria 1900-1930

## Abstract

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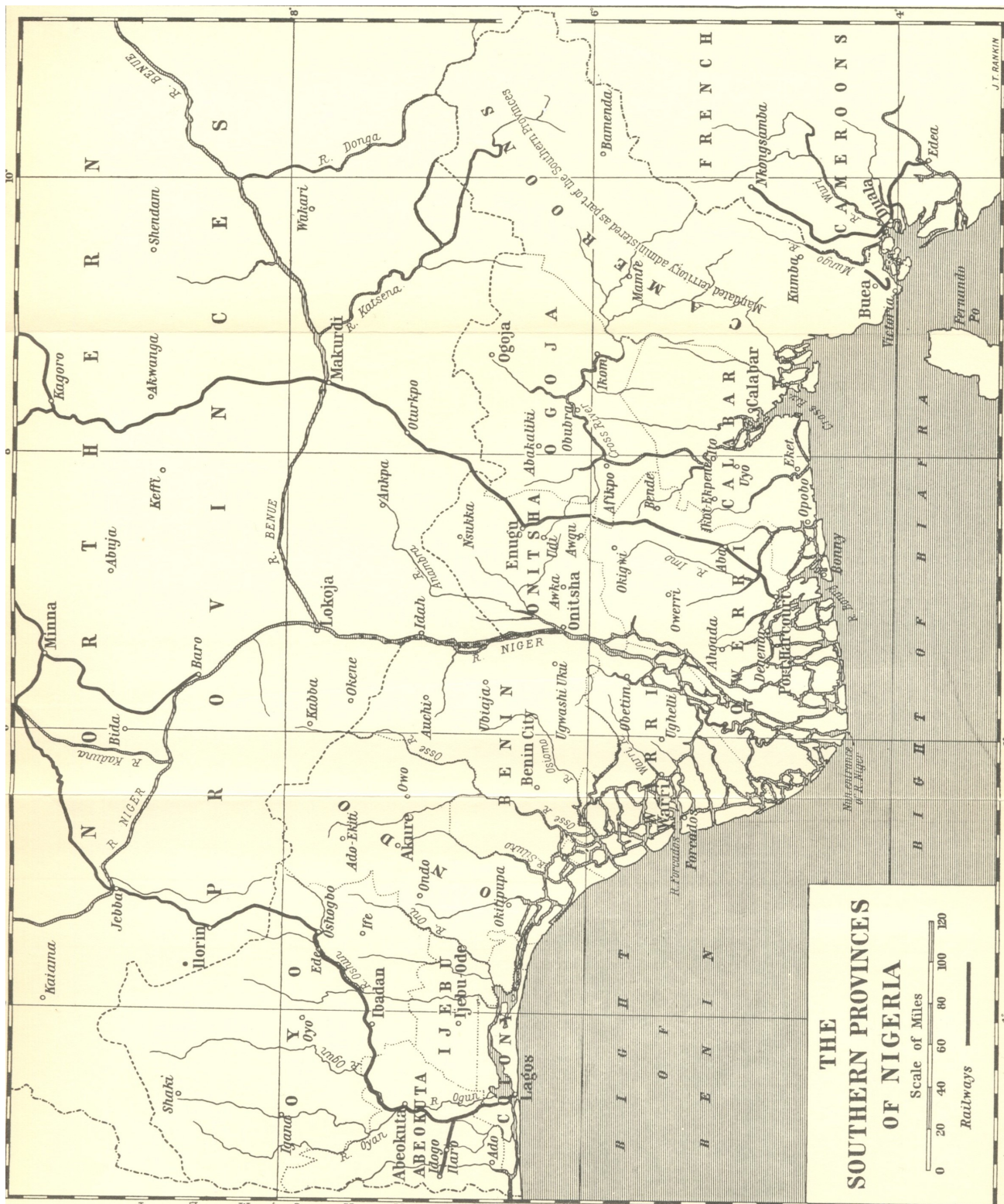
Corruption is a debilitating phenomenon that plagues many sub-saharan African nations today. There are many studies into its causes, behaviors, and possible solutions. For myself, at the beginning of this study I sought to answer a few basic questions: How do corrupt elites maintain power? What produced the relationship that allows illegitimate governments to remain in power? Post-colonial theory provides a framework for examining how violent colonial histories shape contemporary African politics. I hypothesize that the health of corrupt governments in Africa is a reflection of past colonial governance and furthermore, if we can understand what existed before colonial rule and how local indigenous forms of power changed under colonial rule, we may understand more about the nature of illegitimate governance.

The system of indirect rule in Iboland, south-eastern Nigeria in the early 20th century (1900-1930) was characterized by a centralized, hierarchical power contained in a single entity (per district), the Native Court, and a single Warrant Chief to preside there over. The process of centralization paralleled the elimination of indigenous forms of accountability so that Warrant Chiefs and other colonial employees could take full advantage of their unchecked power.

The thesis traces the power shift from spiritual and symbolic leaders and dispersed power structures in pre-colonial Ibo societies, the predominant ethnic group in south-eastern Nigeria, to the establishment of colonial rule and the rise of the Warrant Chiefs. Particular emphasis will be placed on the elimination of indigenous structures of accountability and the predatory characteristics of the Warrant Chiefs and of the colonial system as a whole.

The most powerful critique of colonial rule is heard in the protest movements of Ibo women in the 1920's. Both the Dancing Women's Movement, which targeted Warrant Chiefs and the Ibo Women's War, in which thousands of women symbolically tore down, or beat on colonial structures including Native Courts and protested British colonial administrators and their African collaborators, the Warrant Chiefs and other court members. Thus, in my presentation I will not only track the shift of power between African men and European men, but also the reclamation of agency by Ibo women and their rejection of the dual oppression of colonial rule.

Keywords: colonialism, Nigeria, legitimacy, accountability, Ibo

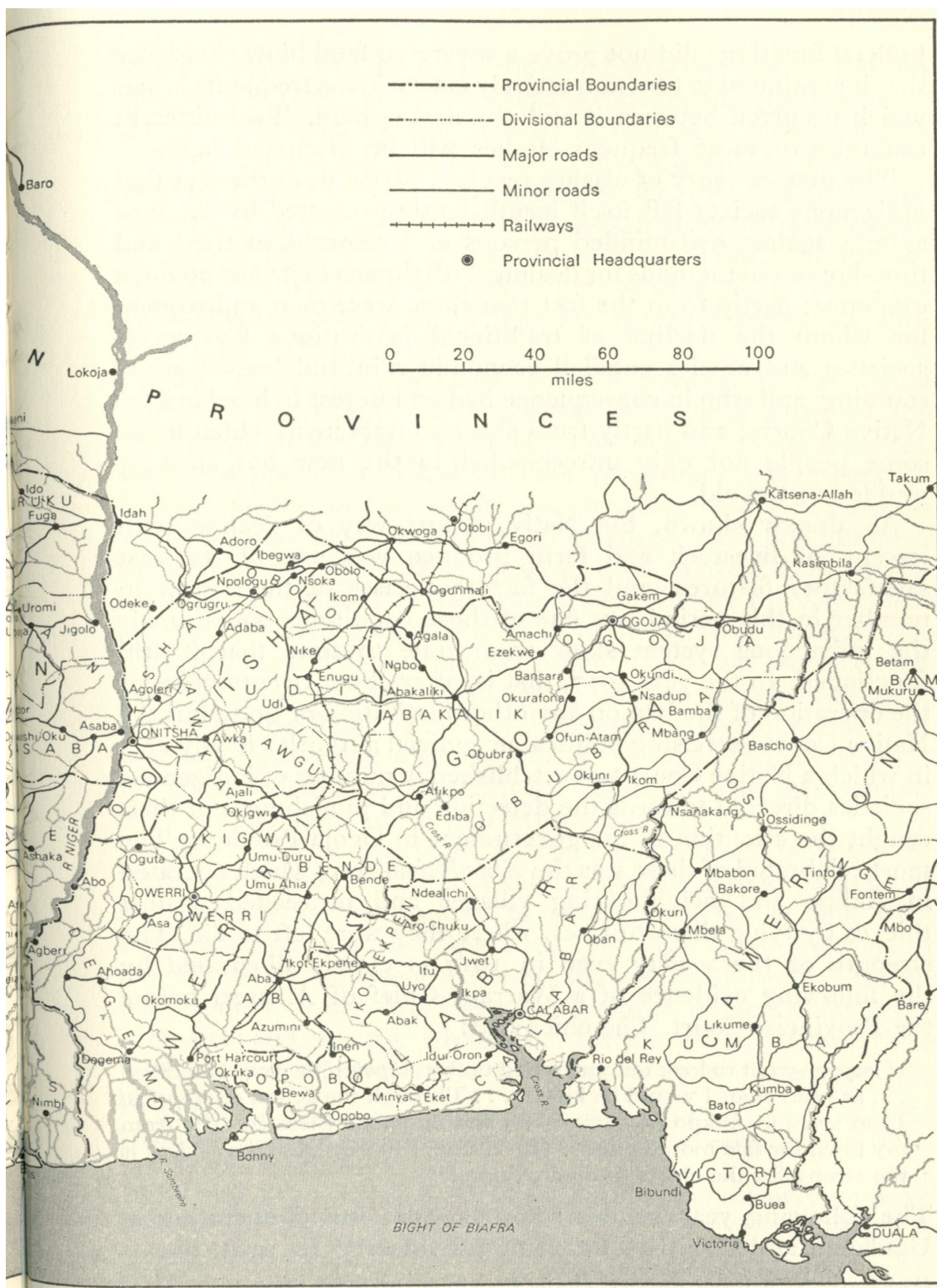


Southern Provinces of the Nigerian Protectorate<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Perham, *Native Administration in Nigeria*, appendix.





The Southeastern Provinces, 1926<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs*, 289.

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# I

## *-Introduction and Statement of Purpose-*

*States the genesis of the project, its purpose and contemporary significance.*

*Outlines development of argument and gives brief synopsis of Ibo Women's War.*

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The central question of my research emerges from a long process of thought and internal debate, driven by my desire to disprove or at least complicate the popularly held assumptions in the Global North of the inherent instability of African politics. Political dysfunction is common in many contemporary sub-Saharan African nations, particularly with regard to corruption: a virtual free-for-all in which many leaders claim to represent their people's needs but rather use their position to stuff their pockets. These trends give rise to all manner of explanation by Western spectators, comfortable in their own representational democracies and baffled that anyone could botch such an impeccable system. There are a number of reasons that Westerners, especially those who work in development, give for political instability in Africa. I have grown up in the foreign development community and have therefore been subject to the speculations of development workers since I can remember. I have found, however, that much of this posturing boils down to a purely racist and paternalistic attitudes that can only be called *neo-* colonial because we live in the twenty first century.

I have known from the beginning that this manner of explanation is only a convenient guise to cover an ugly truth and sought to understand the real roots of corrupt

and illegitimate government. In Michael Schatzberg's book *Political Legitimacy in Middle Africa*, he describes how different sub-Saharan African societies understand political legitimacy. One of the conditions is that the leader is expected to “eat, and eat well”, meaning that it is expected that he get “fat” from his position. However, he becomes illegitimate if he continues to engorge himself while his “children”, the polity, are starving. Yet clearly there have been many a leader who continues to fatten himself at the expense of his people. If what Schatzberg describes is a condition of a legitimate government and many governments/dictators overstep this boundary, how do corrupt elites maintain power? What produced the relationship that allows illegitimate governments to remain in power?

What I read in postcolonial theory spoke to uncover, acknowledge, and process the effects of colonialism, but it only gave me part of the picture. We may attempt to complicate eurocentrism, or adjust the economic system we are left with, even to decolonize our minds; but what use is it, how will we know what to target, which diseased part of ourselves to amputate, if we don't know how it was poisoned to begin with?

I hypothesize that the predominance of corrupt governments in Africa is a reflection of past colonial governance and furthermore, if we can understand what existed before colonial rule and how local indigenous forms of power changed under colonial rule, we may understand more about the nature of illegitimate governance. I therefore take a historical approach to the question of unaccountable leadership, in order to find a time when the bonds of political accountability were alive and well, how these bonds were dismantled, and therefore, perhaps, better understand how they can be reformed.

To declare the system to be rotten falls short of the root of the problem. Time and time again, military and pseudo-democratic leaders have risen to power and written a new constitution as part of its plan to stamp out corruption and/or legitimize their government. But it is not a matter of different zoning or how many members of parliament per which region. Such changes are superficial; they make no difference if the leaders that occupy these government positions are also contaminated. Corruption is an attitude, an expectation of leadership, power, and personal gain that perpetuates corruption, not the institutions themselves, nor the inherent qualities of Nigerian leaders.

I make my argument with the following assumptions in mind:

The form of government in Nigeria is directly inherited from the colonial structure at independence. This colonial structure, though it had many stages of development, was, in essence, built for control and extraction of resources. Therefore, this form of government is not ideal for the representation and betterment of Nigerians but rather perpetuates the parasitic attitude and behavior left by colonial government.

Early twentieth century colonial south-east Nigeria, also known as Iboland, is indicative of the transition from indigenous political structures characterized by popularly accountable leadership to colonial government, which was centralized, hierarchical and alien to the Ibo communities over which it ruled. The time period of roughly 1900-1930 was characterized by social disintegration, due in part to the colonial policy of indirect rule, in which the British colonial government appointed Ibo rulers, called warrant chiefs, to enforce colonial rule in their respective districts. To fully examine this tumultuous period, one must take note that British Colonial Administration was only one facet of the forces that challenged traditional Ibo society: the disintegrating influences of Christianity



and mission education, and the economic burden of colonial extraction and entrance into the global capitalist system are inseparable from the political branch of colonialism.

My thesis began as a study of what I presumed to be the foundation of parasitic leadership in Nigeria, the rise of the warrant chiefs and loss of public accountability.<sup>3</sup> In some ways, it remains as such but with a number of crucial complications. Colonial rule established a state structure in which local representatives enforced the interests of the colonial state at large. This state structure was inherited at independence, and though it differed immensely from Britain, the colonial state has been Nigeria's, and therefore Iboland's initiation into modernity. Therefore, there have been two conflicting experiences of modernity: that of Britain and the colonial actors of its empire, and that which was enforced upon colonial subjects as “modernity” or “civilization” which were, in fact, neither. The colonized experience of modernity was rather the creation of bonds of servitude to Britain to fuel her civilization and her progress. My thesis traces the transition of the Ibo into the latter form of modernity, through colonial hierarchy, economic extraction, and conversion to Christianity.

Colonists stated that they were bringing the light of civilization into the dark continent but in reality were opening up the resources of Africa to fuel their own political and economic interests. The “civilizing mission” was therefore nothing but a reflection of British colonial sense of racial and cultural superiority. I argue that a process of so-called modernization, civilization, and progress, was in fact the process of indoctrination and violent enforcement of white supremacy. E. A. Brett describes this process as cultural domination which caused a dependency complex among the colonized;<sup>4</sup> which Fanon

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<sup>3</sup>Public or popular accountability refers to the relative power of Ibo communities to check, control, and/or monitor the actions of authority figures in their communities.

<sup>4</sup> Brett, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment in East Africa: The Politics of Economic Change 1919-1939*,

calls the systematic negation of humanity.<sup>5</sup>

*Colonial Critique: The Ibo Women's War*

My study of this time period is greatly influenced by the Ibo Women's War, in which thousands of women took it upon themselves to speak out against colonial rule. This piece is not another analysis of their pivotal and inspiring movement, for there have been many<sup>6</sup>, but rather uses it as a portal into the lives and concerns of ordinary Ibo actors living with colonial rule. Their voices best describe the harmful impacts of the colonial system and it is through their eyes that I seek to view it for what it is: the establishment of unstable and nonrepresentational government. My critique of colonial rule is based, in part, on the concerns they voiced in their protests, specifically centered around corruption of warrant chiefs, the burden of taxation, unfair produce prices compared to high-cost imported goods, and, at times bluntly stated, the injustice and intrusion of colonial government into their culture, communities, and way of life.

My knowledge and reading of Ibo communities in transition are based largely off of the Aba Commission of Inquiry, a 1,200 page official colonial inquiry into the “disturbances” of what the colonial administration referred to as the “Aba Riots”, or the Ibo Women's War of 1929. During the Ibo Women's War, fifty women were shot and

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<sup>5</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 250.

<sup>6</sup> For further reading on the Women's War:

Bastian, ““Vultures of the Marketplace: Southeastern Nigerian Women and Discourses of the *Ogu Umunwaanyi* (Women's War) of 1929.”

Dorward, *The Igbo "Women's War" of 1929: Documents Relating to the Aba Riots in Eastern Nigeria*.

Gailey, [The Road to Aba: A Study of British Administrative Policy in Eastern Nigeria](#).

Martin, *Palm Oil and Protest: An Economic History of the Ngwa Region, South-Eastern Nigeria, 1800-1980*.

Mba, *Nigerian Women Mobilized: Women's Political Activity in Southern Nigeria, 1900-1965*.

Van Allen, *"Aba Riots" or "Women's War"?: British Ideology and Eastern Nigerian Women's Political Activism*.

Van Allen, ““Sitting on a Man”: Colonialism and the Lost Political Institutions of Igbo Women.”

killed by colonial forces, and many more wounded, causing a public outcry in Britain which resulted in two official inquiries into the events. The first consisted of mostly male testimony, dominated by colonial officials and African colonial servants. The second inquiry (1930) made a greater effort to encourage Ibo women to testify about the causes, motives, and structure of women's organization in the Women's War, and verbatim notes of the Commission were published in the British parliamentary papers. I use the testimony of Ibo women, colonial servants, and colonial officers as a portal into the time period and the motives, attitudes, and perspectives of these groups and through which feign to understand both the process of colonization and Ibo women's critique thereof.

### *Chapter Outline*

VIII. Chapter II describes pre-colonial Ibo social structures in order to understand how the Ibo conceived of their world: their political structures, spirituality, and forms of power within the community. A concrete grasp of what existed prior to colonial rule is essential to our conception of how the Ibo perceived colonial incursion into their communities and the intensity of the political, social and religious changes wrought by colonial rule.

IX. Chapter III explores colonial motivations for indirect rule, the philosophy of imperialism that shaped the action of the colonizer, as well as the basic structure of indirect rule and the warrant chief system. As colonial governance proceeded top-down, this chapter seeks to understand what was at work at the top tier of the colonial hierarchy that shaped the decisions of colonial actors in colonized space. I argue that the economic motives of raw material extraction and making the colony pay for itself, coupled with the paternalistic attitude colonial officers

- harbored for their Ibo subjects, directly shaped the structure of indirect rule.
- X. Chapter IV portrays the consequences of the Warrant Chief System, specifically in regards to the elimination of popular accountability. Indirect rule created a colonial hierarchy in which warrant chiefs answer to and enforced the exploitative rule of the colonial government. Chapter 3 and 4 are closely related, for they track the amalgamation of power into a hierarchical violent state combined with the indoctrination of the categories of civilized and backward. Those who were loyal to the state and accepted the "new ways" were civilized and those who resisted, remained committed to Ibo forms of authority and governance were portrayed as uncivilized. Those who accepted modern ways and the "civilized" government of colonial rule gained power by association with the colonial. Participation in the colonial bureaucracy was the political orientation to white power.
- XI. Chapter V deals with the economic subjugation of the Ibo to the colonial state through taxation and inclusion into the global circuit of capital in which the colonies, Nigerian Protectorate being one of many, fueled the development of the imperial center. It therefore traces the development of economic exploitation on a local, state, and international level.
- XII. Chapter VI describes the effect of missionization, both conversion to Christianity and mission education. Missions indoctrinated its converts, most commonly Ibo youth, in modern modes of thought to the exclusion of traditional practice and values, which became backwards, uncivilized, and suddenly distasteful to missionized youth. Missions provided an alternative form of power to clan elders and in so doing undermined their authority and drove a wedge

between the younger and older Ibo generations. The progression of the chapters traces the penetration of colonialism in all three modes being administration, inclusion into the capitalist market, and missionization, into the landscape and mindscapes of the Ibo until it touched the very heart of their communities.



## II

### *-Indigenous Ibo Social Structures: Overlapping Power and Decentralized Leadership-*

*The chapter describes pre-colonial Ibo society, its heterarchical political formations, Ibo philosophy of life and its impact on social norms and social control, structures of accountability, and traditional leadership. The second part of the chapter focuses on women's power within Ibo communities seen through two women's anti-colonial protest movements of the 1920's.*

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In order to form an informed critique of colonial rule it is essential to understand Ibo society prior to colonization. Colonial rule was established in the 1890's; however the colonial presence was not entirely felt or profoundly disruptive of Ibo society until around World War I. It is perhaps misleading to use "Ibo" as a homogenous identifier, for within the southeast there were huge variations from community to community. The structures of which I speak are there for commonalities which existed in some form or another throughout the interior of the southeast. The community structures that I describe is neither coastal nor urban, but characterized the rural communities of the interior. I bracket coastal and urban areas out of my study because they had greater and more prolonged contact with colonial forces, political, economic, and religious than did the interior. The interior of Iboland was more sheltered from colonial incursion until around World War I, and so it is easier to see a concise timeframe of tumult and transition in this region. In this general area the institution of chieftainship as a central political ruler did not exist. There were different positions of authority within the community, none of which held direct power over the others. One man did not hold total power and authority, as the British assumed, but rather people competed for influence and power was

constantly in flux. Ibo political structures were characterized by dispersed concentrations of power and overlapping networks of authority. I portray the political institutions of the Ibo to contrast their form of government with that imposed under colonial rule.

The first portion of the chapter describes forms of leadership and the political realm. Ibo society had a diffuse, heterarchical, acephalous government in which power was wielded by overlapping groups who all exercised small amounts of power within their spheres of influence. Senior men spoke more loudly in the public political sphere; however, women were not inert actors in men's spaces. The second section of the chapter describes the women's power in monitoring and maintaining social balance. Therefore, although the political realm seemed to be dominated by men, women had the ultimate sanction and could check the political power of men should it prove detrimental to the group as a whole.

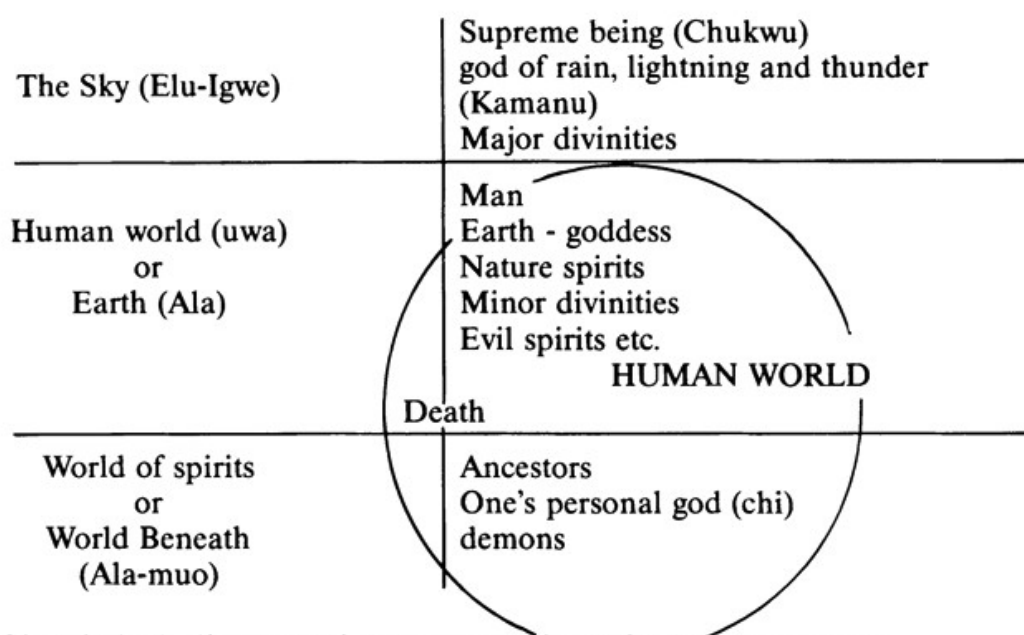
Kin groups were the basic unit of Ibo social organization: the immediate family consisted of a man, his wives and their children, which were, in turn, part of a larger network of family ties. Margery Perham, a British anthropologist who lived in several Ibo communities for a number of years, stated that “the kindred, a group of families numbering anything from fifty person to one or two thousands, who are held together mainly by the belief in their descent from a common founder, even when they can no longer prove it by their genealogy, is the all-important social unit.”<sup>7</sup> Leadership was rooted in family ties, making any degree of separation between the decisions made in family or town councils and the people they impacted practically impossible.

Preeminence in Ibo communities was usually along gerontocratic lines where senior men dominated positions of influence, “the oldest man of the whole group,

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<sup>7</sup> Perham, *Native Administration in Nigeria*, 227.

irrespective of family, is regarded as the head.”<sup>8</sup> The concept of gerontocratic leadership was sometimes applied to whole towns, in which the ceremonial head was the eldest man of a senior family, descended from a (sometimes mythical) founding ancestor. As Margaret Mackeson Green, another anthropologist who lived among the Ibo in the 1930's describes the institution of the *ofo* of the village, “the sacred, club-like symbol of ancestral authority, of the village-group.”<sup>9</sup> The *ofo* was often held by the eldest man of a senior family, referred to as *Ezeani* in the Aba Testimony.<sup>10</sup> The *ofo* marked him as a link of continuity, part of a long chain of inheritance which kept the village in harmony with the ancestors.



**Sketch 1: A diagrammatic representation of Igbo cosmology.**

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Perham states of Ibo leadership that, “[T]he true elder is the agent, or minister, of

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 228.

<sup>9</sup> Green, *Ibo Village Affairs*, 12.

<sup>10</sup> Aba Commission of Inquiry, *Notes of Evidence Taken by the Commission of Inquiry Appointed to Inquire into the Disturbances in the Calabar and Owerri Provinces, December, 1929*, 213.

<sup>11</sup> Oriji, John N.. "Sacred Authority in Igbo Society," 115.

the ancestors with all their capacity to help or harm, while the priests can direct the powers of the deities they serve. The ordinary Ibo believes that his visible and physical life extends in all directions into an invisible world filled with spiritual beings of all kinds; the deities of the sky and the earth, the spirit of the local land and river; the dead members of his family waiting, perhaps, to be re-born; evil spirits ready to do him harm, and the spirits of animals. The society is set within this spiritual world and is ritually linked to it on every side.”<sup>12</sup> Because Ibo society was closely connected to the spiritual world, spiritual figureheads and the elders who acted as emissaries for the ancestors were the main leaders to whom entire communities turned for guidance.

However, the influence of their positions was rooted in deference and respect, meaning they had a great deal of influence in kindred or town council, not in physical force, nor wealth, nor elite class status. M.M. Green describes the position thusly: “apart from this ceremonial precedence, [the *ofò*] holder did not seem to interfere in the concerns of the village except in certain rare cases.”<sup>13</sup> In this, as in most forms of Ibo leadership, political power meant social standing but without respectable conduct, political power was void because it undermined one's social standing.

Within the Ibo system of organization, there were real and intentional checks against the concentration of power. Margery Perham cites the institution of titles as preventing the accumulation of power in a few hands: “Titles were a means of allowing rich and ambitious men, who might otherwise be a disruptive force, full play in the constitution of their group.”<sup>14</sup> Inclusion worked to incorporate potentially harmful individuals so that they, too, were held to social standards of behavior and act

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<sup>12</sup> Perham, *Native Administration in Nigeria*, 235.

<sup>13</sup> Green, *Ibo Village Affairs*, 12.

<sup>14</sup> Perham, *Native Administration in Nigeria*, 229.

accordingly. The men that earned titles enjoyed a position of honor in the community: “[Titles] gives the owner a position of great dignity and an important voice, irrespective of age, at family, kindred, or 'town' council.”<sup>15</sup> While titles gave men heightened social status, it came with increased responsibility: “a higher standard was expected of him than of others- the saying runs that an *Ozo* [titled] man does not lie- and he was more heavily punished if he offended.”<sup>16</sup>

Increased social standing came in conjunction with higher expectations; rather than shielding the titled man from punishment, it made him all the more susceptible to critique by his peers and fellow community members. If these standards were violated, the title-holder's disgrace would counteract any benefit they may have gained out of selfish or anti-social behavior. With power came the understanding that one would be deposed should it be abused. In this way, accountability was intrinsic to any position of increased social status for these were positions of honor and would be void should they be used dishonorably.

The Ibo also had spiritual leaders, who helped keep the community in harmony with the local and general deities (earth, river, lake, leopard, python etc.) as well as the ancestors. These spiritual leaders, or priests, followed a similar structure to the village head, a “hereditary priestly family [...] said to have been chosen in the old days by the guardian deity of the village. The head of the family was specifically the priest, though his brothers were also involved.”<sup>17</sup> However, while these figures were integral to maintaining balance with the spirit world and the past, present, and future, their power was ceremonial: “When we turn to the spiritual sphere and ask what element of authority

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 228.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 229.

<sup>17</sup> Green, *Ibo Village Affairs*, 49.



it supplies in village affairs, we find [...] that there was no individual of outstanding power or authority either directly in things spiritual or indirectly in things secular.”<sup>18</sup> Therefore the power of spiritual leaders, as with ceremonial heads, as with titled men, was contained in performing their social and spiritual function and nothing more. Should they overstep their bounds, the sanctity of their position would be compromised and so, too, would their power.

Society was separated into age grades with separate civic responsibilities. When one grew older, one inherited the new social burdens associated with gaining social standing. One's identity was totally dependent on fulfilling these responsibilities: “Life is governed by a common ideology; everyone has a status and knows the duties attached to it.”<sup>19</sup> Community members treated these roles very seriously, as can be seen in the annual clearing of the paths to the market; as M. M. Green describes: “people talked a good deal about it and insisted that a man could not be a real Agbaja man if he failed to participate.”<sup>20</sup> Decisions were made in group councils of adult males in which social standing dictated the weight of one's influence. Therefore, if a man was well liked and generous and fulfilled his familial, spiritual, and civic duties, his opinion carried more weight—likewise if he was an elder. If he was known to lie, cheat people, steal, or shirk his social or spiritual responsibilities his voice was not heard. Ibo society was characterized by disparate and overlapping forms of authority. This placement of oneself within a chain of continuity rooted them in traditions of inheritance.

Political and communal decisions were reached through direct democracy, each head of household had his say, but not one had authority over another, except in terms of

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Perham, *Native Administration in Nigeria*, 235.

<sup>20</sup> Green, *Ibo Village Affairs*, 12.

social standing, which increased influence over the group and ability to argue and muster support. Green describes their system of organization thusly: “the working of village affairs was considerably bound up with the system of checks and balances and of institutional rivalry introduced by this dualism.”<sup>21</sup> In short, politics, wealth, and violence were never concentrated in one place or person but intentionally diffused and people at every level exercised some amount of power.

### *Social Control and Women's Power*

Thus far I have described the public political institutions of the Ibo, all of which were occupied by men with few exceptions. Women's power in Ibo communities lay in their popularly perceived moral high ground; they had the ability to check the power of men should they overstep their bounds. Women's moral high ground was due in part to their spiritual kinship with *Ala*, the goddess of the earth. M.M. Green states that for the Ibo, “Ala- the earth- is sacred.”<sup>22</sup> Women's political authority was derived, in part, from their kinship with *Ala*. Ibo women exercised their power through *egwu*, a practice which will be described in full later on. Two Ibo women's protests in the 1920's portray women's political power on a massive scale. The participants of the Dancing Women's Movement and the Ibo Women's War were both calling attention to a threat to the health of the land and the danger these threats posed to their communities. These movements were manifestations of women's political power within the village demonstrated on a far larger scale.

Ibo culture revolved around the land; maintaining harmony between the human world and the natural world was considered essential for any healthy society. Ibo culture

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 26.

revered the earth goddess, *Ala*, one of the prominent Ibo deities. Ibo women expressed social disharmony through the health or decay of the land. Ibo women in the Aba testimony said “the land is dying” and “the land is changed” to express their urgency and why they were pushed to act. Ibo society closely associated women with *Ala*, the earth goddess and central deity. Women felt the effects of *Ala*'s wrath most immediately, as women bore children which exhibited the marks of *Ala*'s anger or pleasure: “*Ala/Ani* was thought to contribute form (*onunu*) to the newborn child [...] children who are too perfectly formed or children who suffer deformity from birth are still associated with the earth deity”<sup>23</sup>

Women also, like *Ala*, bore fruit and were responsible for safeguarding the fruits of the earth just as the fruits of their loins. Participants of the Ibo Women's War referred to themselves as “the trees that bear fruit.”<sup>24</sup> It was the “right and responsibility of women to safeguard the fruits of the earth, i.e., of *Ajala* [a.k.a. *Ala*]”<sup>25</sup> It was their responsibility to keep spaces clean and free of pollutants, both of private life, the home, and public, the marketplace.

If an imbalance took place in the land or society, women acted to right it. Ibo spirituality dictated that the welfare of the land was inseparable from the welfare of society, and therefore whatever disturbed the social fabric also created a disturbance in the land. Ibo society closely associated women with *Ala*, who also “control[ed] public morality among men.”<sup>26</sup> Women also fulfilled the role of “the watch-dogs of the community, the people who tr[ie]d to restore equilibrium when anti-social behavior is on

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<sup>23</sup>Bastian, “Dancing Women and Colonial Men,” 111.

<sup>24</sup>Bastian, ““Vultures of the Marketplace”: Southeastern Nigerian Women and Discourses of the *Ogu Umunwaanyi* (Women’s War) of 1929,” 273.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>26</sup> Ifeka-Moller, “White Power: Social-Structural Factors in Conversion to Christianity, Eastern Nigeria, 1921-1966,” 60.

the increase.”<sup>27</sup> Women's power was linked to that of Ala, both checked socially harmful behavior before it hurt the land/community.

Women, because of their positions as social stewards had “spiritual and temporal power in that [they] were, so to speak, backed by Ajala, and could be enforced by means of [...] 'war', that is to say, the destruction of property, or the infliction of corporal punishment, generally of a ridicule-making nature, by the women themselves”.<sup>28</sup> Such sanctions, also called “sitting on a man” or *egwu*, were used to challenge male authority when it had outstepped its bounds. Public demonstrations which consisted of performed songs and dances were also done in response to the Earth, or Ala, coming under threat.

The Warrant Chief System and the colonial government gave rise to a burgeoning of corrupt power which threatened the health of the land/community. These trends greatly alarmed Ibo women, causing them to organize and perform *egwu* in the 1920's Ibo women's protest movements: The Dancing Women's Movement and the Ibo Women's War. Each targeted a different phase of colonial rule; participants of the Dancing Women's Movement occupied and purged the contaminated compounds of prominent elders and warrant chiefs, while in the Ibo Women's War women actively revoked the illegitimate power of colonial servants, the warrant chiefs, by demanding their caps (as a symbol of their resignation), tore down colonial structures, and confronted colonial power head-on.

The Dancing Women's Movement, also deemed “Women's Purity Campaign” was rife with symbolic message and directly embodied women's positions as social stewards. Participants called themselves *Nwaobiala* – children from heart/center of Ala.<sup>29</sup> Even in

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<sup>27</sup> Green, *Ibo Village Affairs*, 101.

<sup>28</sup> Leith-Ross, *African Women: A Study of the Ibo of Nigeria*, 109.

<sup>29</sup> Bastian, “Dancing Women and Colonial Men: the Nwaobiala of 1925,” 110.

name the Dancing Women drew a direct connection between themselves as representatives or protectors of Ala. They acted as a “portent sent from the Earth to warn people of their transgressions”, enforcing the interconnectedness of Earth and the community.<sup>30</sup>

The *Nwaobiala* would appear in a village where they were strangers and begin a deliberate, ritualized sweeping of public spaces, starting in the marketplace while singing and dancing. It would be most unusual for alien women to clean a village's public spaces, for that was the responsibility of women in the village. The *Nwaobiala* established their mastery over these spaces by purging these areas of pollutants to maintain the health of the land and vis-à-vis the village itself. By performing these cathartic rituals in alien villages the *Nwaobiala* demonstrated that the source of corruption was pervasive, it affected all communities and the whole land must be purged of its influence.

The women worked inward from the village periphery and even gathered to sweep the compounds of important elders, warrant chiefs, and other court members. Entering private space uninvited was highly unusual, their disregard of social norms indicated the urgency of their cause, “it was unheard of for women unattached to the patronage or to the village group, to enter these privatized spaces and clean them, much less set up the ground for an unwanted *egwu* there.”<sup>31</sup> By entering these spaces and sweeping them, these women confronted warrant chiefs and demonstrated how polluted their spaces had become. Home invasion and imposed cleansing of private space was a symbolic reclamation of power over unaccountable leaders: “by sweeping warrant chief's compounds, the dancers established their control over the space, as well as over those

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 114.



inhabiting the space.”<sup>32</sup>

The sweeping of warrant chiefs compounds were warnings; this time the women would clean up the mess that these men had made, but if they continued to pollute their communities, the women would return in force, “[they] ushered the male audience of the potential for a stronger sanction.”<sup>33</sup> In ritually cleaning the land of pollution, the women targeted the illegitimate political leaders that threatened society. The *Nwaobiala* warned of a blight on the land which had spread even into their communities, even into their homes and their protest was borne from the knowledge of imminent disaster should the source of contamination not be checked.

The Dancing Women's Movement was a call to action to eradicate the sources of contamination that threatened the health of their societies and the earth itself. Herein lies the connection between the Dancing Women's Movement and the Ibo Women's War: the threat to the land was a threat to society and a cause for action. The participants of the Ibo Women's War, *Ohandum*, women of all towns, made literal reference to the joint fate of the people and the land. They called out “the land is dying” or “the land is changed” in tandem with “we are dying”, “what is the smell? Death is the smell?” - both symbolic death, and sadly in its physical form as colonial extraction had driven many to starvation and as many as 50 women were shot and killed in the course of the protests.<sup>34</sup>

Bastian states that the women of the Opobo movement were “preparing themselves for a physical confrontation with the authorities and for their possible deaths

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<sup>32</sup> Bastian, “Dancing Women and Colonial Men: the Nwaobiala of 1925,” 115.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Perham, *Native Administration in Nigeria*, 209.

in that confrontation but also commenting on the moral condition (death) of the land.”<sup>35</sup> The welfare of women's bodies was directly related to the health of the land: if the land was sick, women would have sick children, if the land was dying, women were dying, too. The deterioration of both land and women's own bodies showed that the Ibo Women's War was not simply about taxation, but about the serious threat that colonial rule posed to the welfare and very survival of their society.

Ibo society was based on overlapping units of authority which, especially in terms of women's *egwu* prevented any of the parts of the whole from gaining disproportionate power and disrupting the social balance. The strength of Ibo indigenous structures of political accountability lay in the fact that politics and community were not separate but closely intertwined. Under indirect rule colonial officers centralized power into the institution of the Native Court, headed by a warrant chief which existed above and apart from Ibo communities. As will be discussed in full in chapter 4, the structure of the Warrant Chief System eliminated traditional forms of accountability and essentially granted warrant chiefs absolute power.

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<sup>35</sup> Bastian, ““*Vultures of the Marketplace: Southeastern Nigerian Women and Discourses of the Ogu Umunwaanyi (Women's War) of 1929,*” 265.

### III

#### *-The Structure of the Warrant Chief System and Colonial Benefits of Indirect Rule-*

*Details the designs of indirect rule and how its structure related to its function in the British colonial system, it's centralized, top-down approach to governance. The chapter also illustrates the colonial mindset and the assumptions of colonial officers that influenced their attitudes towards colonial governance and their colonial subjects.*

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The colonial government was inherited by the Nigerian state at independence. Though it had changed substantially by 1960, it is important to examine how the colonial state was established and for the benefit of whom. My project ends at the Ibo Women's War (1930) and so does not cover the transition to independence; however the foundation of colonial rule did and continues to influence independent Nigeria. This chapter therefore explores the founding principles of the colonial state in the southeast, the institutions established by the policy of indirect rule, the Native Court and Warrant Chief Systems, the fundamental divergence of colonial state structure from indigenous political organization, and in whose interest the state was designed. Indirect rule refers to the British colonial policy of using indigenous leaders to enforce colonial authority: "[Indirect Rule] was supposed to achieve the conversion of the indigenous political system of the peoples of the protectorate into an instrument with which the new rulers would govern, 'influence' and 'civilise' the natives."<sup>36</sup> Indirect rule set up a system through which the British colonial government could enforce its rule with who they perceived to be chiefs, rather than colonial officers.

But before one can delve into the structure of indirect rule we must first establish

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<sup>36</sup>Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs*, 1.

the purpose, motivations, and attitudes that governed imperial action in Nigeria. The philosophical significance of colonialism to the colonizers greatly influenced their perception of the Ibo, and of Africans in general, and their way of life and governance. Fredrick Lugard, Governor General of Nigeria, stated that colonizers were charged by a “dual mandate”, “the responsibility that it had pleased God and history to bequeathe to Great Britain, to make available to Europeans and the rest of humanity the riches and resources of African, which 'lay wasted and ungarnered... because the natives did not know their use and value. [...] Who can deny the right of the hungry people of Europe to utilise the wasted bounties of nature, or that the task of developing these resources was, as Mr. Chamberlain expressed it, a 'trust for civilisation' and for the benefit of mankind?”<sup>37</sup>

While Lugard acknowledged that the British had economic motives for colonization, he describes the colonial relationship as symbiotic. British colonial subjects gained the benevolent guidance of Britain in their journey towards civilizing and modernizing themselves and Britain gained materially through its colonial presence. Later in the same work, Lugard expressed the colonial gift to Africans as “bringing to the dark places of the earth, the abode of barbarism and cruelty, the torch of culture and progress, while ministering to the material needs of our own civilisation”<sup>38</sup> These views necessitate a perception of the African, and by extension, the Ibo, as a lesser form of humanity. Lugard, like many of his contemporaries, if not all, believed that “The African belonged, if at all, to the infancy of the human race. Worse still, he was a savage, an animal who was able to mimic humans.”<sup>39</sup>

If the African was an infant, then it follows that it was the responsibility of the

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<sup>37</sup> Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa*, 615.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 618.

<sup>39</sup> Taiwo, *Reading the Colonizer's Mind: Lord Lugard and the Philosophical Foundations of British Colonialism*, 165.

matured races, of which the British were the utmost civilized, to guide, educate, and teach him the ways of being truly human. “In exactly the same way it would be irresponsible for parents to let their children grow anyway they wish, it would be irresponsible of civilized races not to take the African in tow and lead him forcefully and firmly to civilization”<sup>40</sup> Colonial administrators had delusions of grandeur, in which their violent and exploitative actions were, in fact, the caring guidance of stern parents with unruly and unwilling children.

In 1914 Lugard was charged with the amalgamation of the north and south protectorates of Nigeria: consisting of the Hausa-Fulani of the north, Yoruba of the west, and the Ibo of the east. Lugard and a number of other officers gained their experience of Nigeria in the regimented hierarchal society of the Muslim emir's feudal state of the north in which one dominant class kept hold of the majority of resources which they exacted from the peasants under them. While the Hausa class of humanity was nowhere near the level of development of the British, “the Fulani in northern Nigeria [belonged] at least to the pubescence of the human race.”<sup>41</sup> Indirect rule was fostered in the colonial interaction with emir society: the strong head figures could be trusted to keep their people in hand while advancing colonial interests. The northern peoples of Nigeria and their hierarchical political formation, while still backward, were far advanced compared to the democratic pagans of the southeast.

Indirect rule in Iboland was the colonial imposition of northern political formations to the south, as this was the closest thing to civilization that could be found in the country. The joining of the south and the north colonies was the incorporation of the

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 167.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 164.

south into northern policy. A.E. Afigbo, a prominent scholar on indirect rule in Iboland, states “the amalgamation of 1914 led to the imposition on the south of the peculiar pattern of indirect rule which had been involved in the Emirates.”<sup>42</sup> This meant enforcing foreign forms of government on the south protectorate – namely a centralized hierarchal system with strong leaders. Lugard stated in his report on the amalgamation (1920) that “the system [of indirect rule] may thus be said to have worked with good results in the north, and I desired to introduce its principles in the south”. Lugard's goal, in other words, was to apply a system of centralized tiered leadership indiscriminately across a vast track of land with hundreds of thousands of inhabitants and hundreds of varied methods of social and political organization.

Lugard's approach was to fix what he saw to be broken or virtually nonexistent. Afigbo states that Lugard “looked at the government of the south with something close to disgust” even to the extent that “he found it wanting in many respects to the extent that he not only 'doubted its existence' but also 'decided that what was needed was the creation of an administration.’”<sup>43</sup> Lugard's attitude toward the “pagan” south can be perhaps explained by his “feudal conception of society and authority which, reinforced by his military training, produced in him a peculiar predilection for a highly regimented system.”<sup>44</sup> Coming from his imperialist notions of the inferiority of the lesser races, Lugard underestimated the complexity of Ibo governance. I. E. Nicholson states in *The Administration of Nigeria* that for Lugard, “law and authority proceeded downwards; there were not working arrangements evolved through discussion and democratic process.”<sup>45</sup> Therefore, there was a direct conflict between the mode of governance already

<sup>42</sup> Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs: Indirect Rule in Southeastern Nigeria, 1891-1929*, 118.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

in existence in the southeast and what, by Lugard's standards and by extension those of the colonial administration, the mode of governance *ought* to be.

Indirect rule in Iboland reflected the disdain of those who implemented it, which translated into colonial establishment of civilized government. Indirect rule by definition means colonial administration enacted through native rulers. In Iboland, indirect rule British officials appointed chiefs by granting them warrants, putting him at the head of the Native Court. In so doing, the British sought to “restore to the chiefs the prestige and authority which they had lost by the British conquest, or forfeited by their own previous mal-administration.”<sup>46</sup> Native Administration centralized power under a single chief per court district, creating a position of power totally unprecedented in the Ibo social tradition. As will be discussed in the next chapter, the men the colonial authorities appointed to be warrant chiefs often had no traditional claim to power, but those who claimed to be chiefs, who colonial officials perceived to act like a chief, or who were most cooperative with colonial officials.

Indigenous Ibo social structures were entirely opposite to the structure of government laid out by the British system of indirect rule; the explicit goal of which was to create a hierarchy that concentrated executive and legislative power and violence within one man (per district), who could then rule native population but answer and remain loyal to the colonial government. Afigbo states that this stemmed from the projection of British political thought onto the Ibo social landscape: “the Warrant Chief System was based on the principle that one or two members of the local community, acting in concert with some Europeans or under the guidance of a representative of the

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<sup>46</sup> Taiwo, “Reading the Colonizer’s Mind: Lord Lugard and the Philosophical Foundations of British Colonialism,” 174.

British Government, could, contrary to traditional constitutional practice, lay down the law for the rest of the community.”<sup>47</sup>

Native Courts were assigned to each Court District. There were initially six large districts in the southeast, with twenty-four courts between them. Each court was headed by a warrant chief, so the number of warrant chiefs was a drastic reduction in the number of leaders compared to traditional Ibo structures. There were no traditional chiefs to cover the amount of territory allocated to a Court District: the “chiefs” who were granted warrants assumed previously nonexistent positions with unprecedented power, and presided over so many people that traditional forms of accountability were made inert. The sheer size of the court districts eliminated communal involvement that had previously kept power-lust in check. Also to be addressed in the next chapter, the warrant chiefs' positions as colonial servants prevented communal accountability even had the court districts been smaller.

Lugard's officers imposed the Warrant Chief System in a way that destroyed the possibility of accountable governance from its very foundation. After a brutal invasion and pacification of Ibo resistance through long, drawn-out wars, the British then went into the communities on which they had just made war and asked them to produce their leaders. Many people either didn't know who would fit the description of “chief” of the village or refused; they had no idea what the British could have in mind, and, with the overwhelming display of violence fresh in their memory, they took no chances.

At times the British did not consult the people at all but merely made assumptions based on behavior: “Ogoke Nwoke was caught on the road by the military and forced to lead the way. And because he did so to the satisfaction of the administration he was

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<sup>47</sup> Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs: Indirect Rule in Southeastern Nigeria, 1891-1929*, 38.



subsequently made a warrant chief.”<sup>48</sup> Another example of this follows: “Okereke Udensi became a warrant chief of Ihiala [...] simply because he helped the government to enforce the disarming of the village group.”<sup>49</sup> Here we see those who cooperated with the British invasion, whether by choice or by force, being granted power because they were seen as valuable, an asset to the colonial government.

Furthermore, once they had had these encounters, communities looked upon these men as understanding the white man's ways: “[...] after their first forced meeting with the soldiers and the white officers they generally came to be considered as experts on relations with the new regime. They encouraged this attitude among their people [...] If the expedition returned to their villages they were generally the first to come out to meet it and to help it get its demands met. Not surprisingly, therefore, they were easily mistaken for chiefs by European officers.”<sup>50</sup> This beginning intermediary position underpins the ability of the Warrant Chief System to act for the colonists, meet their demands and be rewarded for it as well as represent the white man's power to their people.

#### *Native Court Enforcement of Colonial Rule*

The Warrant Chief System performed executive and judicial functions and helped to establish and the infrastructure for an export economy. The judicial aspect of the Native Court is the most obvious, it was the location to which people in the Court District brought their grievances, such as outstanding debts, bride-price disputes, and other civil cases, as well as the prosecution of criminal cases, for example, murder, theft, adultery. The structures of the court was one not unlike our own, with a judge, plaintiff, and

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 62.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 63.

defendant, as well as a court clerk to take down court records for review of the District Officer, the local colonial official.

Native Courts operated as the local outposts of colonial governance. The British Colonial Administration had neither the resources nor the man-power to control the whole of southeastern Nigeria; indirect rule was designed so that local leaders could enforce colonial rule without the physical presence of a white officer. Afigbo states that “each administrative division was usually too large for the small European staff posted thereto cover effectively” and furthermore that the native court was the “cheapest and most effective way of 'planting the British flag wherever it was possible to do so after military conquest”<sup>51</sup>.

Native governance made the colonial presence felt in the maintenance of law and order as the colonizers defined it. As a result the Native Court did not reflect of the values, political notions, or sense of justice of the native population. Because traditional Ibo political structures were so overlapping and decentralized, creating an institution that combined executive, legislative, judicial and economic power, as well as the violence of the Nigerian police and army to enforce colonial law, was alien and oppressive by definition. There is a point in the Aba testimony where British officials discussed whether or not centralized power is natural to their colonial subjects:

*Mr. Thompson:* Would you say it is native law and custom that both judicial and executive functions should be in one person or could they be divorced one from another?

*Witness:* I believe so. I think if you divorced one from the other, authority would

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 250.

cease.”<sup>52</sup>

The witness explicitly states that power must be centralized in a single entity (the warrant chief) in order to maintain his grip on authority. In Ibo society, there could be no authority without legitimacy, social norms had meaning because people recognized and obeyed them. In the political system under indirect rule, authority was maintained by force. It did not matter whether the Ibo believed in the justice administered by the Native Court, it mattered that they obeyed and if they did not obey they would be met with fines or violent consequences. The implied goal was control, not effective or representational governance.

The Native Court performed more than executive and legislative functions, it enforced the colonial agenda through alien structures. It was the British judiciary in miniature, but with none of the cultural foundations that caused such a system to arise in Britain. The Native Court therefore acted as a foreign governing body that enforced alien justice top-down while colonial officials made weak attempts to codify and incorporate Ibo “law” into its functions. This process was highly subjective and resulted that whatever the warrant chief said was law. The end result was that “the native law and custom that the native courts were charged with enforcing was hardly recognizable to many people who were supposed to be bound by it.”<sup>53</sup> To some extent British law overlapped with Ibo conceptions of right and wrong: adultery, theft, and murder were punished in both societies; although they were addressed in drastically different ways in traditional Ibo society, they were still considered “crimes”. The manner with which these crimes were dealt was often unsatisfactory.

<sup>52</sup> Aba Commission of Inquiry, *Notes of Evidence Taken by the Commission of Inquiry Appointed to Inquire into the Disturbances in the Calabar and Owerri Provinces, December, 1929*, 574.

<sup>53</sup> Taiwo, “Reading the Colonizer’s Mind: Lord Lugard and the Philosophical Foundations of British Colonialism,” 177.

Native Courts enforced colonial laws and ordinances which furthered the reach of colonial extortion. Native Courts implemented the Roads and Rivers Ordinance of 1903 which established roads for motor access, “which spanned the Eastern Provinces by the end of colonial rule.”<sup>54</sup> The Native Court also assisted in recruiting laborers for the building of roads and railroads, as carriers for Europeans officials, forced labor (as a form of indirect taxation), and miners for European firms.<sup>55</sup> The Native Court thus worked to extract labor from the local populous within its district for colonial infrastructure (roads, railroads) and as workers in European companies, something that might have taken a great deal more man-power and violence had the British officers themselves tried to round-up these people.

The Native Court passed and enforced trade regulations. The Native Court was essential in integrating Ibo trade as part of a financially beneficial British colony. This included making currency regulations and stabilizing the rate of exchange: “in 1906 an order was made fixing the exchange rates of brass rods at four for one shilling, and of *okpoho* manillas at twelves for one shilling [...] Native Courts passed rules enforcing the rates of exchange by law. Refusal to accept payment in English or indigenous currency became punishable by fine or imprisonment.”<sup>56</sup> This stabilized rates of exchange, making prices more constant from the coast to the hinterland and between Ibo village markets, middle men, and European firms.

Furthermore, the Native Court became involved in regulating the palm trade, the major cash crop of the South East. They passed rules “prohibiting the felling or tapping of palm trees without the consent of the District Commissioner.”<sup>57</sup> This was a marked

<sup>54</sup> Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs: Indirect Rule in Southeastern Nigeria, 1891-1929*, 252.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 253.

step into the affairs of village life, as palm trees were known to be the property of senior men, heads of compounds, who gave permission to tap them. By creating this rule, the Native Courts allocated the power over the palm plant from its owners within the cultural tradition- elders - to a colonial officer. The transfer of authority of this kind was highly symbolic, which exacerbated a tension and animosity between elder men, the top of the traditional hierarchy, versus the colonial administration, the new power in the land.

British imperialist philosophy of pacification, conquering and civilizing was projected onto colonial spaces so that these spaces embodied the colonial mission. The sanctity of colonial spaces was central to the understanding and justification of violence, in which protecting European and government property was more important than maintaining human life. One instance of colonial violence during the Ibo Women's War illustrates this attitude. The District Officer had called a meeting with the women to hear and assuage their grievances, which ended in bloodshed. The District Officer, Mr. Hill, justified firing into the crowd by the fact that they were shaking a fence and approaching the post office:

*“Mr. Macaulay:* The suggestion put forward by Mr. Hill was that his action was justified. I am suggesting that there was no serious intimidation on the part of the people. They were simply making a demonstration outside. [...] I think they could have dispersed the women by other means than rifle fire.

*Chairman:* What is the question about not doing any damage if they did get in?

*Mr. Macaulay:* The people did not intend to do any damage.

*Chairman:* Is your suggestion that it would perhaps have been better to let

them in [to the Administrative Office] than keep them out by rifle fire? [...] the troops were protecting Government property.”<sup>58</sup>

The District Officer and accompanying colonial officials, government, police, and army, considered it worth firing 61 rounds of rifle fire into a demonstrating crowd, killing eighteen women and wounding nineteen more in order to protect a government building. Other Europeans, shop and factory owners, were also sworn in as special constables with authority to fire on the crowd. European property was prioritized over human life: “The police constable in charge told me his instructions were to guard my property, and if necessary, to shoot to kill.”<sup>59</sup> The blood of these women was cheaper than restocking a shop or rebuilding a Post Office because these were not just shops or Post Offices but colonial tamed spaces.

The Warrant Chief System was a cheap way for the colonial government to manage a large area and a large population, to maintain control and build infrastructure to expedite trade. The priorities of the Warrant Chief System were therefore efficiency and control, neither of which characterized traditional Ibo structures of social organization. However, colonists' paternalism dictated that not only was the Native Court the best form of government that the Ibo had ever seen, but also that the Native Court system was the means to teach the Ibo how to govern themselves: it was British law abbreviated and expedited for African consumption. The colonial attitude, one that many mission-educated Africans adopted, too, was that colonialism brought modernity, that it was there to help Africans to catch-up to advanced European methods of governance, culture, and civilization.

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<sup>58</sup> Aba Commission of Inquiry, *Notes of Evidence Taken by the Commission of Inquiry Appointed to Inquire into the Disturbances in the Calabar and Owerri Provinces, December, 1929*, 391.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 402.

Colonial servants, warrant chiefs and other court members, adopted the colonial attitude of paternalism. One episode in the testimony exemplifies the pattern of colonial servants emanating colonial attitudes: Atok Udo Mendie, a warrant chief, when asked if the Native Court system should incorporate a court of appeals to prevent corruption stated that:

“Government has been attempting to teach the people to govern themselves and it would be a retrograde step [...] one hears rumors of corruption in the Native Courts. Undoubtedly some exists, we do not deny it, but the first step in Government policy is to get the natives and encourage to improve on original native institutions, so that to a certain extend they can govern themselves.”<sup>60</sup>

Atok Udo Mendie at once disregards the corruption in the Native Courts, implying that corruption was a result of the native's learning curve and that once they became more advanced, corruption would cease.

Atok Udo Mendie's testimony aptly portrays the colonial mindset: one, the court is corrupt; two, Ibo are in the process of learning good government. Within the colonial mindset this first of all, excuses colonial officers of any culpability for the dysfunction of the Native Court because it is due to general native deficiency and second of all, removes them from any responsibility to ameliorate the situation, as it would be interfering in the learning process of the people. The Native Court was designed in a way that almost guaranteed corruption, as will be shown in later chapters, and furthermore that it was not “the natives” who were learning government, but the Native Court members, like Atok Udo Mendie, who were learning how best to take advantage of a position of absolute power. By attributing the faults of colonial rule to the inferiority of their Ibo subjects,

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 947.

colonial officers could avoid facing the injustice of colonial rule indefinitely.

The philosophical foundations of colonialism heavily influenced the structure of colonial rule. The needs of colonial extraction were ingrained into the institutions of indirect rule, the Native Court, and into the bodies of colonial servants, the warrant chiefs and other participants of colonial bureaucracy. Just as colonial needs shaped the actions of both colonial officials and colonial servants, so too did colonial philosophy shape the attitudes of those who worked towards colonial needs. The warrant chiefs were put into positions of unchecked power due to their alignment with their colonial state, they embodied the colonial presence, enforced its laws and maintained its orders; they could not escape representing colonial oppression in their own actions and attitudes towards their communities. The following chapter will describe the colonial servants' loyalty to the colonial state at the detriment of their communities, and the dismantling of political accountability that this relationship entailed. Chapter 6 will discuss indigenous group's adoption of colonial philosophy through participation in colonial structures, specifically through Christian conversion and mission education.



## IV

- "Between two fires":

*Elimination of popular accountability in the Warrant Chief System-*

*Describes the impact of the Warrant Chief System on Ibo communities. Particular focus is placed on the structure of the colonial hierarchy, conflicting loyalties, the elimination of popular accountability and the resulting trends of chiefs' corruption, extortion, and abuses toward the Ibo people.*

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Chapter III described the paternalistic attitude of racial and cultural superiority which lay at the heart of the colonial state and the structures of indirect rule which benefited and expedited colonial extraction and oppression. What remains to be seen, however, is how the colonial attitude and political structure influenced the actions and mindset of Africans working within it. In this chapter I argue that from the outset, the Warrant Chief System created a breeding ground for corrupt, unaccountable leaders who emulated their colonial actors in thought and deed. Due to their elevated position in the colonial hierarchy, Warrant Chiefs and other court members could prey off of the populous without concern for recourse. The warrant chiefs and other court members gained their power from the colonial state and so these men had a vested interest in obeying and remaining loyal to the colonial state at the expense of their people.

The warrant chiefs' position necessitated that their loyalty to the colonial government disallowed their loyalty to their own people. The warrant chiefs' position in the colonial hierarchy is exceptionally portrayed in a rumor that circulated around the time of their initial appointment: "when the Agba clan was asked to produce its chief, the

demand led to the spread of the gruesome rumor that at death such a chief would be divided lengthwise into two equal halves, one part going to the white man and the other to the chief's people. This rumor was perhaps merely a vivid symbolical representation of the people's conception of the appointee's novel position as a servant torn between two irreconcilable loyalties [...]"<sup>61</sup> While indeed gruesome, the vivid representation of the chief being cut in half is indicative of the fact that the warrant chief could not be both a good servant to the colonial government and a good leader to his people. These two obligations pulled him in opposite directions. It is the object of this chapter to show that not only did warrant chiefs succumb to the authority of the colonial government at the expense of their communities, but also took advantage of their position as the agent of colonial violence to prey off these communities without fear of reprisal.

“Between two fires”<sup>62</sup> is a metaphor for the position of the warrant chief. They navigated the gap between the top and bottom tiers of the colonial hierarchy, between colonial administrators and Ibo communities. The warrant chiefs, and other court members who worked in Native Courts or were otherwise associated with the colonial bureaucracy as clerks, court messengers, or translators, gained their power from the colonial state, which in turn elevated them above Ibo communities. E.A. Brett says in *Colonialism and Underdevelopment in East Africa* states of indirect rule that, “the authority of the chief had [...] to be subordinated to that of the District Commissioner [District Officer], and he therefore ceased to depend on his standing with his own people, to whom he was now only nominally responsible.”<sup>63</sup> Due to his position in the colonial

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<sup>61</sup> Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs: Indirect Rule in Southeastern Nigeria, 1891-1929*, 63.

<sup>62</sup> Aba Commission of Inquiry, *Notes of Evidence Taken by the Commission of Inquiry Appointed to Inquire into the Disturbances in the Calabar and Owerri Provinces, December, 1929*, 253.

<sup>63</sup> Brett, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment in East Africa: The Politics of Economic Change 1919-1939*, 302.

hierarchy, the warrant chief no longer needed to answer to his people. This widened the gap between leaders and the power they conveyed and the communities in which they lived. This separation worked to eliminate Ibo forms of political accountability which were in part based on the close proximity and intertwined structure of power. The chief's position, betwixt and between these two opposing worlds, benefited by gaining power through one and exerting it on the other.

Ibo rightly saw the court members as an extension of the colonial administration, they were essentially white servants and bore no regard for the communities in which they “served”. These impressions were reinforced by the corrupt and extortionist practices of warrant chiefs on a local level. There is one occasion in the testimony where a Warrant Chief, Nwaturocha, is confronted about his misuse of his position to amass wealth:

*Mr. Graham-Paul:* How many wives have you?

*Witness:* Eighteen. Some of them have five children, others eight children.

*Mr Graham-Paul:* Is that the usual number of wives for one Warrant Chief to have?

*Witness:* I would say it is usual. Any chief marries according to his liking and financial ability [...]

*Mr. Graham-Paul:* So you have 10 more wives than your father. Is that because you have a Warrant? [...] do you know of any instance of a man, who is not a Warrant chief, having so many wives as you have?<sup>64</sup>

Nwaturocha had been tried for stealing and accepting bribes. Mr. Graham-Paul, a British lawyer, was accusing Nwaturocha, a warrant chief, of gaining his wealth from using his power in corrupt ways. The old measure of wealth and status, having many wives, was gained through evil practices; there is a contradiction between what status a man with

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<sup>64</sup>Aba Commission of Inquiry, *Notes of Evidence Taken by the Commission of Inquiry Appointed to Inquire into the Disturbances in the Calabar and Owerri Provinces, December, 1929*, 234.

many wives would have had in the old days, being respect and standing in the community, and the status that this man has in his community now, that is that he is notoriously corrupt and distrusted. He states that it is not an extraordinary thing to have so many wives, citing it as a traditional status symbol: “it has been customary from time immemorial. We believe in having children and plenty of yams. That is our wealth.”<sup>65</sup> Although personal enrichment was an unintended side effect of warrant chiefs' elevated position, they could use their unchecked power to accumulate wealth in unprecedented proportions.

Nwakaji a woman of the Ekweli region, complained of corruption:

*Crown Counsel:* What I want to know is whether in the olden days, as far as you can remember, there was ever a time when there was no bribery, no corruption, in this country?

*Witness:* Yes, there was a time when there was no bribery; all of a sudden bribery commenced [...] Chiefs began to ill-treat men and women.

*Crown Counsel:* What made the start sudden?

*Witness:* We asked them, and they replied that the District Officer said so, and we were afraid of them.”<sup>66</sup> The warrant chief used the threat of white violence to further his own interests.

One witness, a male farmer named Anomneze, spoke in the women's defense, saying that “The Chiefs have been doing injustice. Their actions have been responsible for the disturbances in the country. They extort money from people. [...] it is on account of the Chiefs that women have been moving about. The Chiefs make people become

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 85.

poor.” When inquired about his local warrant chief, Anomneze replied, “Asuzor [his warrant chief] aims at big things, because he was formerly a Court Messenger and has been with white men.”<sup>67</sup> Being with white men implies that Asuzor has grown disconnected from his people and his sights are set high, his loyalty is with the colonial state and he can take advantage of his position within it for personal gain.

One farmer by the name of Kalu complained of his local chief's abuse of power but explained that he had no choice but to obey: “we do what the chiefs tell us in our town, because Government has given them Warrants.”<sup>68</sup> The colonial government acted as an unquestionable, inaccessible force and its African agents (warrant chiefs, court clerks, interpreters and court messengers) were an extension of that power and could not be questioned or defied for fear of retaliation of the violent state. This created a disturbing trend which exposes the symbiotic relationship between the colonial administration and the authority figures they installed, in which both can use the other to further exploit the Ibo people.

However, colonial administrators saw the court members as indigenous leaders. As Margery Perham explains, “While administrative officers were regarding the Warrant Chiefs as to some extent the leaders and representatives of the people, the latter were looking upon them as the African agents of their white rulers.”<sup>69</sup> As warrant chiefs were neither one nor the other, they could reap the benefits of pretending to be both: they could maintain absolute power by drawing on the implied violence of the colonial government and pretend to represent their districts by acting as the mouth-piece for the people as a whole.

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>69</sup> Perham, *Native Administration in Nigeria*, 234.

Perham blames the failure of the Warrant Chief System on a flaw in its foundation: “It is not surprising that men, automatically disqualified for their task by the act of selection, and therefore unable to summon any traditional obedience or wield any of the accepted sanctions, should have *drawn entirely on the alien authority of the big Government* and became corrupt and overbearing in their isolation.”<sup>70</sup> Her attitude reflects a general belief of colonial actors, also exhibited in the Aba Testimony, that if warrant chiefs had been indigenously legitimate, traditional leaders, all the issues, abuses, and corruption that arose would be eliminated.

In the testimony, colonial officers dedicated a great deal of energy trying to define and discover legitimate Ibo leadership, working off the assumption that the only thing missing from indirect rule was the real chiefs. They failed to realize that the people they were looking for did not exist. Colonial officials made constant attempts to find who the “natural” chiefs were, whom they called *Ezealas*, they would call a warrant chief to the stand and ask him if he was the traditional headmen of the town, was he an *Ezealas*; most of them claimed the role enthusiastically. Witness Archdeacon Basden clarified the confused terms of traditional Ibo leadership at the testimony:

“As far as I know in this part of the world, [Ezeala] means nothing. Practically, it means rich man. If a man has made money he could be called an Ezeala, but he has no power. The Ezeani is the man who has the power, but these Ezeanis are very ancient men, and I do not think they would be much help for administrative purposes. They are also very often poor. They are from the original family that founded the village.”<sup>71</sup>

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. Italic emphasis made by thesis author.

<sup>71</sup> Aba Commission of Inquiry, *Notes of Evidence Taken by the Commission of Inquiry Appointed to Inquire into the Disturbances in the Calabar and Owerri Provinces, December, 1929*, 213.

The Ezeala, who the British had perceived as the legitimate rulers and to whom they had bestowed unchecked power, had no traditional ties to any leadership position. It is no wonder that officials might be confused, as the term “rich man” aptly suited the warrant chiefs, fattened off the spoils of power. Those who were the closest thing to chiefs were not enriched in the same way as their political standing was symbolic. Furthermore, being closely connected to legitimate power and traditional rites, were useless to the colonial project because they could not be used as puppets.

To some extent, the British Officials may have been correct in thinking that having traditional leaders might recreate some the bonds of accountability which had been lost. However, the sheer size of the Court Districts would make the application of “real” leaders quite impossible. Traditional forms of accountability arose from social pressure: each person had their role to fill and to deviate from that role was to jeopardize one's social standing. Once applied to such a vast area and diverse population, that level of social pressure was impossible and so traditional bonds of local accountability broke down.

Court Members did not have to fear the disapproval of the people in their districts for a number of reasons: the expansion of their authority over a large area prevented them from having to answer to one group in particular, they were not held personally accountable by the people they ruled because they lacked personal connections, partly because of their geographic segregation in the Native Court compound, and their authority was an extension of the colonial state therefore their actions were endowed with colonial power.

Apart from lack of traditional accountability, the court members were not

accountable to the people in the Native Court district through official Government means either. Technically anyone could complain or petition to the district officer, the local colonial official, however, many times the district officer would uphold the decision of the chiefs in order to avoid undermining his authority. Countless times in the Aba testimony, women recounted instances of corrupt or extortionist practices by the chiefs.<sup>72</sup> When asked if they had reported these abuses, they replied that they had gone to the district officer, the sole party to whom the warrant chiefs were accountable, to report misdeeds and were either blatantly ignored or told, “Let the judgment of the Chiefs stand.”<sup>73</sup> Rachel Nenenta, a participant of the Ibo Women's War, spoke of Court messengers' abuses towards women and her limited options for recourse:

“If a woman is strong enough to catch hold of the Court Messengers and say 'Let us go to the Chief in order that I may report to him what you are doing,' all that the Chief will say when they go to him is, 'Go away I cannot do anything in the matter.’” You return home crying. You cannot get redress even if you take out a summons against the Court Messengers. If your case is heard in the court and you are not satisfied with the judgement and you ask for a review or appeal, the case is left for the District Officer to review it. When the District Officer comes to review the case, he will not ask you what you have to say in the matter [...] You are not allowed to argue. You are not even asked, 'Why have you asked for the reopening of this case?' The District Officer simply confirms the Chiefs judgement. He simply says, 'Let it stand as the Chiefs have ordered.’”<sup>74</sup>

Indirect rule eliminated native structures of accountability without providing real or lasting replacements. The warrant chiefs could act as dictators because they were well assured in their positions as intermediaries. As Chief Oparaocha, a warrant chief stated,

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 232, 234, 251, 261, 263, 273, 275, 484, 487, 740, 778.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 742.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., 742.



“The Chiefs are not with the Government nor with the people of their town.”<sup>75</sup> They did not answer to their people, and were not held to the possibility of being reported, as they were considered both the spokespeople for the native population, and more civilized and trustworthy by the district officers than the people they ruled.

*Colonial Hierarchy and the Growing Gap between the People and the Powerful*

Members of the Aba Commission revealed their perception of the colonial hierarchy in the way they addressed Ibo women as participants in the Ibo Women's War, Ibo men- farmers and traders, in contrast to court members. Ibo women and suspected participants of the Ibo Women's War, were treated with the utmost condescension. This can be seen in a colonial officer's, Mr. Macaulay, questioning of Lucy Pepple, an Ibo woman and participant of the protests, concerning her disrespect of a colonial officer:

*Mr. Macaulay:* At one time you gave trouble when the Governor came here. Do you remember that?

*Witness:* If a man speaks to me, I will answer him.

*Mr. Macaulay:* When you say things that are very annoying, don't you think that is very bad?<sup>76</sup>

Colonial officers used wide generalizations about the natural dishonest and suspicious nature of the African to account for any number of real and valid complaints. Mr. Jackson, a District Officer, wrote off the numerous complaints of corruption and injustice of the Native Court, arguing that the Native Court itself is not corrupt but that, “it is the ingrained dishonesty of the masses that permits this iniquity and it is an evil that can only be completely cured by the people themselves, that is, by the evolution of the nation.”<sup>77</sup> He defended the corrupt court members by blaming injustice on the backward

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<sup>75</sup>Ibid., 253.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., 429.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 563.

character of the people as a whole. He admitted to receiving complaints and ignoring them:

*“Mr. Macaulay: Do you know that the facts of corruption going on in the Native Court have been brought before you several times by certain local societies?*

*Witness [Mr. Jackson]: I am aware that a local association has brought up statements of corruption [...] It is useless to make sweeping statements without giving specific instances.”*<sup>78</sup>

This is ironic, as his blaming colonial failures on the racial inferiority of colonial subjects and refusing to fill his own role in taking complaints seriously are precisely symptomatic of the gap of communication between the colonial administration and Ibo communities that allowed court members to be so corrupt in the first place.

British ignorance of Ibo society, language, and culture exacerbated the divide between Ibo people and the colonial administration. Margery Perham, a staunch defender of indirect rule, admits that “many administrative problems can be traced to this peculiar 'otherworldliness' of our African subjects.”<sup>79</sup> Most officers did not speak Ibo and totally relied on interpreters and court clerks as the voices of an entire people. This provided a massive communication gap eliminating any means of institutional recourse or check on court members’ powers. Perham describes the isolation of Ibo villagers from colonial officers, apart from violent encounters, and the limited conditions for recourse which their minimal communication allowed:

“The rustic villager who hardly visited headquarters except when conscripted for one type of work or the other hardly ever went to headquarters to consult petition writers

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Perham, *Native Administration in Nigeria*, 235.

on oppressions which he suffered in the village at the hands of Warrant Chiefs. [...] Petitions merely drew the attention of the political officer to a complaint and whether the grievance was remedied depended on whether the European officer had the time to go into the case and whether the interpreter was honest.”<sup>80</sup>

Court members could avoid being challenged from the people in their district because they were a part of the colonial government and backed by its authority. By granting this position to Court Members, colonial rule eliminated social control of power from below and failed to provide any institutional alternative. Even had the District Officer taken his role of overseeing the warrant chief more seriously, the language barrier maintained the court members as the voices of the Ibo people-and they knew it. Afigbo states that “Warrant Chiefs, Court Clerks, messengers and district interpreters usually formed a coalition in each district designed to frighten people away from the district officer and make it difficult for the latter to get at the truth even on those matters which manage to get to him” through means of “a system of intimidation and blackmail throughout the district.”<sup>81</sup> Even if we adopt the perspective of colonial officials and assume that centralized state structures are the best for governance, giving absolute power to a group of people who remain exempt from popular reprimand and could prevent unwanted communication between the populace and the state is a glaring contradiction to any notion that the government was just, or “civilized”.

The Native Court elevated court members to privileged positions in which they felt more powerful, civilized, advanced than the people they ruled, for they did not govern citizens, they ruled subjects. It worked to create a class which answered to the

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 280.

<sup>81</sup> Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs: Indirect Rule in Southeastern Nigeria, 1891-1929*, 280-281.

District Officers and was loyal to the Government. This is exhibited time and time again in the testimony when warrant chiefs were used to control the movement of the women, prevent women from joining, as well as to control and disperse the crowds.

One can see the hierarchy of violence that colonial rule created through events in the testimony: the District Officer orders the court members, the court members comply and act violently upon their own people. For example, when Chief Nwatu of Obikabia ordered the women protesting around the District Officer's compound to disperse, they ignored him and so he sent court messengers to repress the protest: “The District Officer then sent Court Messengers to warn them strictly that he would disperse them by force [...] The Court Messengers then held them. They resisted. [...] Those who behaved in that manner, that is resisting the Court Messengers, were arrested and imprisoned for six months each.”<sup>82</sup> Court messengers had the power of incarceration: “[Chief] Ngadi sent a Court Messenger, and he took away four of the leaders of that meeting and brought them to the District Officer.”<sup>83</sup>

It is clear that the Court Members who crippled the women's protest by physically arresting them or eliminating their leaders saw them as a threat to their position, just as they were a threat to the colonial government. The court members defended the colonial government because it was an integral to maintaining their elevated position. A court clerk described the destruction of the Native Court, emphasizing the fact that he did all he could to defend it against the mad mass of women and that he recognized some of the women and gave their names to the District Officer.<sup>84</sup> The sense of loyalty to the colonial government over a sense of duty to the community is epitomized in Lance Corporal

<sup>82</sup> Aba Commission of Inquiry, *Notes of Evidence Taken by the Commission of Inquiry Appointed to Inquire into the Disturbances in the Calabar and Owerri Provinces, December, 1929*, 518.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

Ongenzeka's testimony. When asked if he remember when taxation was implemented, he replied yes; when asked if the chiefs had agreed to this he stated: “We agreed at once. We said the white man is our master and we will not disagree”.<sup>85</sup>

By creating this bond of loyalty, indirect rule created a class of leaders; authority figures who emanated their colonial masters. Government was an intricate network of control that allowed Britain to rule for their benefit and to the detriment of their colonial subjects. Furthermore, by building this elite class, colonial rule served to create an indigenous rank of mimics who re-enacted and intensified colonial exploitation on a local scale.

The participants of the Ibo Women's War knew this exploitation well. Court member's extortionate practices, combined with colonial oppression, weighed heavily on these women and their communities. Ibo women protestors during the Ibo Women's War targeted Native Courts in almost every place where they organized. Mr. Ferguson, a District Officer, described his efforts to control what he saw as an unruly mob of women: “They went round beating [Native Court] buildings, and having done their little piece, they retired and danced about.”<sup>86</sup> As the chairman then pointed out, this was their nonviolent “demonstration of contempt” for both the corrupt institution itself, and its symbolic embodiment of the infiltration of colonial rule into their communities.

The Native Court compounds symbolized colonial domination and the cooperation of court members in said system was exhibited by their habitation of colonial spaces. Perham describes the Ibo Women's War, referring to it as the Aba Riots, noting the women's attitude towards the chiefs was telling of the effect of the Warrant Chief

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<sup>85</sup> Aba Commission of Inquiry, *Notes of Evidence Taken by the Commission of Inquiry Appointed to Inquire into the Disturbances in the Calabar and Owerri Provinces, December, 1929*, 123.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., 83.

System: “Demonstrations in front of chiefs' houses, the seizure of chiefs' caps, and the rough treatment of their persons, resulted from a belief that the chiefs had betrayed them to the Government. [...] Clearly there was no recognition that these people were the leaders or the servants of the people, any more than when they destroyed the court houses there was any recognition that these buildings were their own, even though they had been built and maintained by themselves.”<sup>87</sup> Court members lived apart from the rest of the community, their compounds, as well as Native Court compounds were geographically isolated from the people they “served”, showing their alignment with the colonial government through their occupation of colonial spaces.

While it is clear that indirect rule established an unaccountable, corrupt class of colonized leadership, it does not follow that this form of government would be adopted by the society at large. Indirect rule certainly interfered in people's lives, court members preyed off of the people in their Court Districts, taxation was an oppressive burden, and there was the imminent threat of the violent crackdown of the Government. However, the adoption of colonial values through conversion and mission education contributed to the penetration of colonial oppression deep into the heart of Ibo life to the extent that it could not function as before or indeed, in any way recognizable to those who could recall pre-government days.

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<sup>87</sup> Perham, *Native Administration in Nigeria*, 216.

## V

*-Colonial Extraction: Taxation, Cash-Crops, and Economic Power-*

*The chapter portrays the role of taxation in solidifying the exploitative relationship of colonial governance and their local collaborators, the warrant chiefs, with Ibo communities, the undermined position of the producer in a colonial capitalist market, and Ibo women's rejection of this dual oppression during the Ibo Women's War.*

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"We are not so happy as we were before... Our grievance is that the land is changed - we are all dying."<sup>88</sup> *-Ibo women during Ibo Women's War*

The British initially established colonial rule through violent military expeditions working inland from the coast. We may view the spread of colonial political and economic power through this image of violent incursion inward, through literal military invasion, physical laying of alien roads for colonial purposes, and restructuring of political and economic roles. The *Nwaobiala* of the Dancing Women's Movement swept public spaces to purge them of symbolic contamination of colonial infiltration. Although the *Nwaobiala* protested within Ibo villages and did not address colonial officials directly as did *Ohandum* of the Ibo Women's War, many of the *Nwaobiala*'s messages addressed the social disintegration caused by colonial rule, including calling for a return to old traditions, pathways, indigenous currency, and to respect women's roles in the marketplace. The latter three portray the character of the colonial economic relationship with the Ibo.

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<sup>88</sup>Leith-Ross, *African Women: A Study of the Ibo of Nigeria*, 38.

Previous chapters have described the negative impacts of colonial political institutions, the amalgamation of power into the bodies of warrant chiefs, the symbiotic relationship between the upper tiers of the colonial hierarchy, and the loyalty of “native” rulers to the colonial state. The implementation of direct taxation in Iboland in 1928 with the passage of the Native Revenue Ordinance further reinforced such loyalties, as taxation provided economic incentives for chiefs to extract from their communities on behalf of the colonial government.<sup>89</sup> Taxation was the mechanism for the consolidation of political and economic authority: it funded the colonial government, as one half of all tax collected went into administrative coffers; it reinforced and exacerbated the conflicting loyalty set up by indirect rule, as the warrant chiefs were responsible for tax collection with the added incentive of a percentage of tax paying their cash salary; tax also forced people into a Eurocentric capitalist economy.

#### *Taxation as Colonial Extraction*

Taxation was heavily resisted by the Ibo as it was completely contrary to the Ibo frame of mind, given absence of centralized government in pre-colonial Ibo society. Taxation was a potent symbol of the infiltration of colonial rule and even literal invasion as colonial servants counted their persons, children, animals, huts, and even beds to assess their contribution for tax.

*“Mr. Hunt:* Did [court members, colonial officers] enter the houses and count the beds? It is the counting of beds that seems to have upset the people [...]

*Witness:* It was done in a wrong way. No instructions were given to officers to act like a police officer executing a warrant. I suggested that opportunities might offer for officers to look into houses and form an

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<sup>89</sup> Naanen, *“You Are Demanding Tax from the Dead:” The Introduction of Direct Taxation and Its Aftermath in South-Eastern Nigeria, 1928-39*, 73.



opinion as to whether one or more people lived in them. I do that frequently myself.”<sup>90</sup>

Taxation was a huge weight on the people, both psychologically and economically. They did not take the demands of the colonial government lightly, but resisted them physically and psychologically. As Margery Perham states: “[The colonial government's] main demands upon them [the Ibo], first for labor for road-making and portage, and now for direct taxation, have been at once incomprehensible and distasteful, and only the ultimate sanction of force makes their exaction possible.”<sup>91</sup> Warrant chief's collected tax from people in court districts, forcing compliance with government.

By collecting tax, warrant chief's showed their allegiance to colonial government and their willingness to do so at the expense of their own people. Chief's salaries were a percentage of the tax they collected and they became fat, rich men thanks to this position. By cooperating with the colonial government, warrant chief's gained privilege, luxury, and wealth. This is also where we first see the phenomenon of Big Men, leaders who are gorged with unchecked power and ill-begotten gain.

### *Taxation and Trade*

Taxation incited the Ibo Women's War. Okugo, a notoriously corrupt warrant chief, told Nwanyereuwa, a local woman, that women were to be taxed; while this was not true, he thought that he might extract more money from the women of his district and pocket it without reprimand. Word spread like wild fire across Iboland as thousands of women amassed to protest taxation. They were very much distraught at the prospect, as

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<sup>90</sup> Aba Commission of Inquiry, *Notes of Evidence Taken by the Commission of Inquiry Appointed to Inquire into the Disturbances in the Calabar and Owerri Provinces, December, 1929*, 346.

<sup>91</sup> Perham, *Native Administration in Nigeria*, 236.

they already struggled to bear the heavy burden of working to pay their husbands' and sons' taxes.

Taxation forced women to raise cash through small scale trade of produce, in addition to the regular needs of child-care and farm work. The subsistence agricultural family economy did not operate within the export market, tax forced women to enter this arena, and they soon saw that it was far from an equal playing field. Ben Naanen describes the role of taxation as driving producers into the circuit of capital in his article *"You are Demanding Tax from the Dead": The Introduction of Direct Taxation and its Aftermath in South-Eastern Nigeria 1928-1939*: "taxation was one of the major mechanisms for expanding and strengthening the integration of local populations into market networks mainly for the purpose of stimulating exchange production, especially for export."<sup>92</sup> Taxation was the local manifestation of colonial economic extraction and furthermore fueled colonial extraction on a large scale by pushing people to produce for export.

Taxation forced women to raise the required sum through trade and they, being farmers, sold produce, specifically palm products. With the price of produce at a historical low, they were unable to make enough profit to pay their husbands' and sons' taxes. "the ability to pay tax was conditioned by the state of the international commodity market, and hence resistance became intimately connected to the collapse of produce prices"<sup>93</sup> Women's ability to pay tax was integrally linked to how much they could fetch for their produce from European firms. The events of the Ibo Women's War highlight the inequalities between European firms and women's undermined position in relation to said

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<sup>92</sup> Naanen, *"You Are Demanding Tax from the Dead:" The Introduction of Direct Taxation and Its Aftermath in South-Eastern Nigeria, 1928-39*, 69.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

firms. The low price for produce was central to Ibo Women's grievances and one of their demands:

- “(a) Abolition of tax on males and females.
- (b) Increased prices for produce (palm oil and kernels)
- (c) Decreased prices for imported goods.
- (d) The removal from office of the existing tribunal members.”<sup>94</sup>

One woman, Enyeremaka, recounts the women's protest around produce prices: “We went to the Ayaba Court and told the chiefs the Court should not sit until we were able to settle the matter with the District Officer. [...] We insisted that the prices of produce such as palm oil and ground nuts were to be settled at once. While we were talking about the prices of produce some of the women said that chiefs should not go into the Court until these prices had been settled.”<sup>95</sup> Ibo women attempted to reclaim their say in the rules that dictated trade through collective bargaining and by demanding the attention of colonial officers through protest. Colonial officials offered little sympathy, and simply told the women that prices were determined by the market and there was nothing they could do to change them.

The advent of tax forced all men of taxable age, even those who were still dependent of their father's household, to pay 7s. annually. The taxation rate was based on a method of assessment by court members that noted plots of land, estimated yield and counted palm trees to estimate how much could be made from the sale of palm oil, wine, and kernels. This was a faulty method of assessment for it assumed that dependent males may reap a living from their fathers' land and when the whole family was dependent on

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<sup>94</sup> Aba Commission of Inquiry, *Notes of Evidence Taken by the Commission of Inquiry Appointed to Inquire into the Disturbances in the Calabar and Owerri Provinces, December, 1929*, 101.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

that food to survive, there was not enough excess to make the 7 s. Furthermore, tax assessment did not incorporate the falling price of produce and palm products in these estimations.

Because men and boys could not meet the demands of tax from their regular farm labor (which was also women's work), the responsibility of making extra money to pay tax fell squarely on the shoulders of their wives and mothers. Ibo women, struggling to meet the demands of taxation, sought to collect the desired cash through sale of the produce available to them, mainly palm products, oil and kernels, the cash-crop. However, within a capitalist economy, raw products were undervalued and their price fluctuated with the market. At the time of the disturbances, palm prices were at an all-time low. The already extreme difficulty of raising money for their husbands' and sons' tax was made practically impossible because what these women had to sell was undervalued in the global market, partly due to global recession and consequent drop in produce prices and partly due to British economic policy which undermined small producers.

The value of their produce dwindled in comparison to the high cost of imported goods, like processed liquor, tobacco, and kerosene, upon which the colonial government placed exorbitant duties to fund the colonial project. Such duties were justified as protecting the natives from corrupting western influences. "the Government has recently added to the price of [...] tobacco and spirit by increasing the duty.[...] I am suggesting that the 66 percent duty which the native pays on tobacco is rather a lot."<sup>96</sup> Facing this inequity, women dramatically increased their productivity, driving prices down further.

Ejiohhu, a widow from Owerrinta testified,

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 355.

“if a woman has a son of this size (indicating by hand, say 12 years), he cannot afford to pay tax and the mother has to pay for him. [...] If a family, consisting of four adult males who cannot afford to pay their own tax, they appealed to the mother. If she had no means to pay their tax, she borrowed money elsewhere to pay it. My husband died and I have so many children. Children of this size (indicating by hand, say 12 years) are made to pay tax. [...] I had to borrow the money.”<sup>97</sup>

With little hope of making the desired sum, many people were forced to borrow money to pay their tax. And, if people could not make enough money to pay tax, they certainly would not have enough to pay the equivalent amount plus exorbitant interest: “these poor people in most cases have had to borrow money at exorbitant interest in order to meet these demands[.] Do you know that some of them after having been called upon to pay [tax] had to borrow money and were called upon to pay 220 percent interest[.]”<sup>98</sup>

The heavy burden of tax, at times, drove people to sell their children or to work and bondage themselves. S. D. Akalaonu, a trader, spoke to the burden of taxation and the difficulty many faced in paying it: “The rate fixed by Mr. Archer [the District Officer] is a heavy burden upon us. He did not go into the matter very properly. The burden is too heavy [...] A man upon whom it is imposed would become impoverished and go into bondage in order to raise money to pay it.”<sup>99</sup>

### *Role of Currency*

Traditional Ibo economy revolved around the land. It was very much centered around farming, though trade was common and played an integral role in inter-village social networks. The currency of exchange was cowries (shells) or manillas, which Susan

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<sup>97</sup> Aba Commission of Inquiry, *Notes of Evidence Taken by the Commission of Inquiry Appointed to Inquire into the Disturbances in the Calabar and Owerri Provinces, December, 1929*, 516.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 701.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 282.

Martin states in *Palm Oil and Protest* were “transitional currency”. eastern nigeria [...] traders still relied on 'transitional' currencies like manillas and cowries [...] brass rods and copper wires [...] and gin and iron bars. Early twentieth-century officials wanted to replace all these currencies with a standard coinage [...] [the colonial government] banned the import of brass rods in 1899, of manillas in 1902 and of cowries in 1904. From 1911 all government staff were paid in cash, and rods and manillas ceased to be legal tender in courts.”<sup>100</sup> The banning of indigenous currency in government structures meant that tax must be paid to the British government with British money.

The colonial government sought to standardize the currency of exchange in order to make trade between producers and European firms more efficient. Tax could not be payed in manillas or cowries and so people had to sell to European firms to get English money. “When the colonial administration sought to drive into extinction the indigenous currencies in order to ensure economic and financial unification of the country [...] taxation was perceived as a key weapon for the project.”<sup>101</sup>

One of the songs that the *Nwaobiala* of the Dancing Women's Movement sang addressed the threat that English standardized coinage posed to the workings of their own market economies. They sang “that English money should do away with entirely and that cowries must come more for use.”<sup>102</sup> Their song, in conjunction with their other protest songs which called for Ibo people to preserve their control over their productive lives in the face of colonial interference, spoke to Ibo people's need to maintain their own forms of trade and not let indigenous forms be lost.

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<sup>100</sup> Martin, *Palm Oil and Protest: An Economic History of the Ngwa Region, South-Eastern Nigeria, 1800-1980*, 43.

<sup>101</sup> Naanen, ““You Are Demanding Tax from the Dead:” The Introduction of Direct Taxation and Its Aftermath in South-Eastern Nigeria, 1928-39,” 70

<sup>102</sup> Bastian, *Dancing Women and Colonial Men: the Nwaobiala of 1925*, 117.

*Women's Markets and Colonial Rule*

In Ibo communities, trade had traditionally been women's palaver, the village and inter-village markets were usually dominated by women. Women in the Ibo Women's War acted to reclaim control over their produce. Within the export economy, of which European firms were a part, trade was dominated by men. Men could afford to travel long distances, whereas women could not be gone for many days at a time due the demands of childcare. Export-oriented trade favored men, and colonial men in particular, therefore undermining women's market power. The eroding strength of women's markets was one of the protest songs of the Dancing Women, they sang, ““That men must not go to market but women, that women must not do farm work but [these are] for men”<sup>103</sup> Rachel Nenenta, a participant of the women's war, explained during the testimony how colonial rule had “spoiled” women's markets:

“Market is our [women's] main strength. It is the only trade we have.

When market is spoiled, we are useless. [...] In my town we have no palm trees that we can prepare and sell and make money [...] the Five markets that my sister, the last witness, mentioned here are the markets where we used to attend in order to live and our parents attended those markets. All those five markets have been closed on account of Government employees, Court messengers.”<sup>104</sup>

Colonial rule had undermined the very mechanisms of trade that women had depended on. Women could still trade, of course, and many did well and even prospered from the palm oil trade. The difference, however, is that they were no longer dictating the

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Aba Commission of Inquiry, *Notes of Evidence Taken by the Commission of Inquiry Appointed to Inquire into the Disturbances in the Calabar and Owerri Provinces, December, 1929*, 742.

rules of trade, they no longer had a say, “the population had to [...] produce for the market but allow it to be regulated by forces entirely outside their control.”<sup>105</sup> They could trade, but had to obey colonial terms.

*Changing the Landscape: Colonial Roads and Colonial Incursion*

Colonial roads were the mechanism for both the physical and symbolic 'opening-up' of the interior. In order to expedite trade and access raw materials of the interior, the colonial government established extensive transportation systems in the form of roads and after, railways. “[the colonial] power structure required that primary production for the export market be stated and it therefore imported the resources required [transportation] to get this under way very quickly.”<sup>106</sup> Roads were essential for colonial extraction.

Roads and road-making were laden with symbolic meaning for both *Ohandum* and their colonial opponents. Colonial roads directly challenged Ibo women's power, they represented “new forms of (masculinized) mobility.”<sup>107</sup> Women had traditionally been mobile due to exogamy and walking to surrounding markets. Misty Bastian, author of *Vultures of the Marketplace: Southeastern Nigerian Women and Discourses of the Ogu Umunwaanyi (Women's War) of 1929* and *Dancing Women and Colonial Men: The Nwaobiala of 1925* describes women's roles in the cleaning and maintenance of pathways. “Women were responsible for pathways (ama) that linked periodic markets and insured alliances between towns [...] Their bodily connection to the paths, created by direct, physical contact with the earth, also made them responsible for any abomination

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<sup>105</sup> Brett, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment in East Africa: The Politics of Economic Change 1919-1939*, 301.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 306.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.



that might find its way into the village through the ama [pathways].”<sup>108</sup> Here again we see the theme of women's bodily and metaphorical connection to the earth and, jointly, women's responsibility for the welfare of the village.

These pathways came under threat by colonial construction of new roads for rapid automobile travel at the expense of those who were neither colonial officials nor owned automobiles. Government roads often crossed or destroyed women's pathways, and “lorry traffic could be heavy and dangerous for unwary pedestrians. Women on the way to nearby markets found themselves in peril”<sup>109</sup> The bodily threat of automobile traffic was just one negative effect of Government roads. Government roads signified colonial penetration deep into the interior. Colonial roads served colonial purposes, such as transporting troops or police, creating an infrastructure to more efficiently export cash-crops. Colonial roads were symbols for the divisive influences they brought, just as excavations and road/railway construction literally tore at the earth, so too did colonial penetration tear at the fabric of Ibo society.

Roads can be seen as a metaphor for the journey, how one travels and who travels for what indicate who controls the movement of people, goods, and ideas. Female constructed roads meant there were people keeping evil from befalling the communities that were linked through those pathways. “The advent of ungovernable, unpurifiable roads were a direct challenge to women's power and interest.”<sup>110</sup> Women could not control colonial roads just as they could not protect their communities from the harmful influences colonialism wrought. The loss of control of pathways paralleled social disintegration, as women complained that “the roads built by the colonists [...] made

<sup>108</sup> Bastian, *Dancing Women and Colonial Men: the Nwaobiala of 1925*, 124.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 129.

people 'go missing' through death, servitude, or complete alienation from Ibo values.”<sup>111</sup> Colonial roads were symbolic of the evil that they brought into the village, which is why roads were a target of both the *Nwaobiala* and *Ohandum* who attempted to respectively purge and dismantle these evils.

The *Nwaobiala* sang a number of songs as part of their *egwu*, two of which directly pertained to the significance of old roads versus Government ones. Firstly, they sang, that “all the old roads should be cleaned and reopened”, all the old ways of moving across the earth should be revived and purged of any pollution.<sup>112</sup> Conversely, they staunchly condemned Government roads, saying “That roads made by English people should be destroyed[;] that the roads brought or causes death.”<sup>113</sup> There is a direct contrast between the old ways and old paths and those brought by the English through English roads, which cause death. Part of the *Nwaobiala*'s protest was to bar passage on main roads between court districts as a direct challenge to colonial authority: “By obstructing passage along the illicit roads [...] women pointed to the loci of contamination and made a succinct, activist statement about overweening male ambition and colonial practices.”<sup>114</sup> Bastian argues that the *Nwaobiala* were a prelude to the Ibo Women's War. This form of protest, using female bodies to physically disrupt colonial oppression, took on even greater significance and more aggressive action.

In the Ibo Women's War, participants of *egwu* took control of colonial pathways by using the very roads which brought evil to amass themselves in large numbers and organize more quickly across the landscape. Their movement was a reversal of the

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid. 129.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 124.

colonizers' relationship with the colonized, in which these women moved aggressively *towards* the center of contamination identified above. Not only did these women use colonial tools to push back against colonial oppression, but they also used their bodies to physically obstruct the function of economic exploitation.<sup>115</sup> *Ohandum* used their bodies to prevent the passage of trains, which provided expedited, mechanized, masculinized trade infrastructure, to clog the arteries that led towards the beating heart of colonial rule: economic extraction and unjust governance.

### *Role of European Firms*

One of the sources of cash was to sell to European firms and factories Europeans, which controlled producers' access to the global market. One witness, Prince Pete Eket Inyang Udo, a merchant, recognized this economic oppression and dared to sign a contract with an American firm “in order to do commercial business between New York and West Africa”, as if Nigeria were its own independent state. He attempted to organize local producers to take back the fruits of their own labor:

“I spoke at Ikot Ubo I asked the people if they would like to form an organization amongst themselves [...] to handle their own products and make price for their palm oil [...] I told the people it was time for them to try and do their own business, because in these times we are in a state of economic oppression.”

For this the commission accused him of “telling the people they were kept in economic suppression by European merchants [...] to cause disaffection and discontent among them”.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>116</sup> *Aba Commission of Inquiry, Notes of Evidence Taken by the Commission of Inquiry Appointed to Inquire into the Disturbances in the Calabar and Owerri Provinces, December, 1929*, 408.

European firms presented a further threat than simply reaping a disproportionate share of profit. The women reported instances of their palm oil and kernels being thrown away by African produce inspectors due to its apparent low quality:

“We said that after we had cracked our nuts and conveyed the kernels to Port Harcourt they were inspected and condemned and that instead of our being allowed to carry away the condemned kernels they were thrown away.[...] The same thing happens to oil. If you carry your oil to a factory for sale you are made to boil it and then it is examined. There may be very little dirt in the oil that should not matter but because of that small dirt your oil is thrown away and the owner is arrested and imprisoned.”<sup>117</sup>

In addition to receiving low prices for palm products, women often faced their hard work being scorned and wasted by “high-handed officials...” The attitude of superiority that these men exhibited was prevalent in many African men who were on European payrolls or who embraced European influence.

*Fines in the Wake of the Women's War*

Colonial treatment of the Ibo during and after the disturbances further reinforced the Ibo's servile relationship to their oppressors as they were forced to feed, shelter, and pay for the troops that attacked their own women:

“*Witness:* [The District Officer] said that unless the houses [for the troops] were put up in ten minutes as fixed by him he would open fire. [...] they had to unroof their own houses in order to build these houses for the soldiers [...] to make an estimate of the minimum number of houses built I should say 80 or 100 houses [Then] he wanted yams, goats, sheep, oil, pepper, salt, rice, fowls [...] Azumini people were to supply them to the District Officers for the soldiers [...] sixteen goats, sixteen sheep, two bags of rice. [...] four tins of oil, two bags of salt, two bags of peeper, twenty-five fowls, eggs innumerable. Two bags of onions. He gave us thirty

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 746.

minutes to supply all these things.

*Mr. Esin:* You know how many days he and the soldiers encamped at Azumini?

*Witness:* Eight days.

*Mr. Esin:* Each day of the eight days you supplied these provisions?

*Witness:* Yes.<sup>118</sup>

The exacting toll European firms and the colonial economy as a whole took on Ibo labor was indicative of the fact that the fruits of their toil was not their own, but belonged to the very people responsible for their suffering. The legacy of such an economic relationship was debilitating: “[colonialism] left behind an economy characterized by continuing and perhaps intensifying structural imbalances, massive and growing inequalities, apparently irreducible dependence on external sources of technological innovation, and a tendency towards political authoritarianism and instability.”<sup>119</sup> Colonial rule perpetuated a debilitating form of bondage on every level that, in essence, was little better than slavery.

Colonial economic bondage, compiled with the wholesale destruction of healthy and functioning forms of political and social organization in favor of centralized, “civilized” and extremely corrupt governance, was more than could be borne. The cries of *Ohandum*, “we are dying” can therefore hardly be considered an exaggeration.

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<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 783-784.

<sup>119</sup> Brett, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment in East Africa: The Politics of Economic Change 1919-1939*, 305.

## VI

### *-Colonizing the Mind: Missions, Schools, and Materialism:*

#### *Western Notions of Morality, Progress, Success-*

*Identifies Christianity and the indoctrination of Ibo converts to foreign morality and philosophy of life as a major disintegrating influence of traditional Ibo values and how, by extension, these influences helped to dismantle forms of social control, cultural inheritance, and group cohesion.*

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The Ibo experience in the first decades of the twentieth century represented a society on the brink; traditions which had previously shaped and contextualized the Ibo were being eroded and new invasive ways of understanding power, trade, and morality were infiltrating deeper and deeper into Ibo way of life, so far as to change interpersonal relationships. People who had previously had little power, i.e. junior men, who, impatient for their turn and chaffing under their overbearing elders, had a great deal to gain from the upset of traditional society. “For some, access to [...] top positions as achieved by a judicious use of kinship, communal or ethnic ties [...] the only alternative resource was religious power.” Young Ibo men and women had expected to be rewarded for reverence and good social behavior bit by bit, accumulating social privilege in a ripe mature age within their communities. Colonial rule, conversion, Western Education, employment at factories or in the colonial bureaucracy offered power, money and/ or privilege immediately through association, collaboration, or cooperation with the white man, the new power in the land.

I would argue, however, that there was a psychological and philosophical shift of understanding more profound than merely pretending to adopt certain behaviors to please

a powerful white man. Leith-Ross, observing southeastern Nigeria, describes this shift as “singlet-mindedness”:

“[...] there is an intangible something which has penetrated far beyond the actual range of church and school, all the more remarkable when one remembers the enormous population and the little direct influence the Mission can exert. After searching in vain for a definition of this minute alteration I found myself describing it as 'singlet-minded'. A singlet, the cheap white vest of English make one finds in every market where a few European goods are sold, is the Ibo's first step towards civilization. Schoolboys or lads or grown men, they 'go buy singlet'. But even those who have not got a singlet nor would even think of buying one, are yet psychologically on the way to wearing one.”<sup>120</sup>

While Leith-Ross' British perspective does not necessarily directly correlate with Ibo's understanding of themselves, her observations are certainly founded on a pervasive experience and an obvious change in people's behavior and expectations. I would name “singlet-mindedness” as creating new notions of *becoming*- how one defined oneself to oneself, how one defined oneself to others, how one sought power, esteem or prestige. The transformation was three-fold, each intrinsically related to the other: morality, progress, and success, relating respectively to the Church, education, and materialism.

Firstly, with conversion to Christianity and mission education came inter-generational conflict between junior and senior men. In *Palm Oil and Protest: An Economic History of the Ngwa Region, South-Eastern Nigeria, 1800-1980* Susan Martin emphasizes the fact that “the education which often accompanied Christian conversion offered an escape route from the rural community itself. Women and junior men were the first to seize these opportunities, which had the additional attraction of being outside the economic sphere controlled by senior men”<sup>121</sup>

<sup>120</sup> Leith-Ross, *African Women: A Study of the Ibo of Nigeria*, 131.

<sup>121</sup> Martin, *Palm Oil and Protest: An Economic History of the Ngwa Region, South-Eastern Nigeria, 1800-*

Mission education could not be extricated from the Western perspective and notions of modernity that it imparted to its students. Young boys who went to school were cited to “lecture [their] elders on such topics as idol worship and polygamous relationships.”<sup>122</sup> Within the context of gerontocratic social organization, it would have been unheard of for a boy to address his elder with anything but respect, much less the disdain that this interaction imparts.

In more drastic and somewhat isolated cases “pagan” idols were targeted for destruction as symbols of the backward ways that young converts had left behind: “the essence of conversion was the forswearing of all other gods and the burning of idols [...] in February 1916 a wave of idol-burning and Church-building occurred in the Ndoki area. Enthusiastic young men began organizing parties to destroy the shrines of their neighbours[...].”<sup>123</sup>

The destruction of idols were public pronouncements of Christian faith: the idols had previously been treated with the utmost severity and respect for fear that spurning the deities would bring grave consequences. The fact that converts could debase them without fear was a testament to the power of their new god in triumph over the old ones. The actions of these young men were a direct result of their indoctrination into Christian and modern modes of thought: “the beneficiaries of missionary education [...] had become exactly what the missionaries thought and desired that they would be: iconoclasts and rebels against the old ways of doing things.”<sup>124</sup> These cases were not the norm, they

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1980, 67.

<sup>122</sup> Bastian, *Young Converts: Christian Missions, Gender and Youth in Onitsha, Nigeria 1880-1929*, page numbers.

<sup>123</sup> Martin, *Palm Oil and Protest: An Economic History of the Ngwa Region, South-Eastern Nigeria, 1800-1980*, 70.

<sup>124</sup> Taiwo, *Reading the Colonizer's Mind: Lord Lugard and the Philosophical Foundations of British Colonialism*, 179.



are instead radical manifestations of the opposing forces that pulled at Ibo youth.

Christian teaching created conflict between fathers and sons. In some cases these conflicts lead to confrontation and disrespect, as seen above. However, there was also a great deal of reconciliation and compromise. For example, a father who felt reverence towards the pagan deity- the yam spirit- and the Christian son who disdained his father's pagan ways:

“N.E. became involved in a serious case in in which his opponents had the sacred spear of Ajioko Ji, the yam spirit, placed outside his house as a menace of disaster if he should fail to produce the fine demanded. S. (his son) told me that he himself, as a Christian thought of throwing the spear away to show the worthlessness of pagan threats; hut his father who was a pagan and was greatly frightened about the spear would not allow him to do so. In great perplexity he obeyed his father and left the spear, and the reason he gave was that he thought that if he disobeyed his father, he would be disobeying the laws of God. What restrained him in his own opinion was thus the new sanctions and not the old”<sup>125</sup>

The son respected his father not because of his reverence for traditional spirituality of his forefathers but due to his Christian morality, adhering to the commandment of honor thy father and thy mother.

Progress refers to the colonial ideology, as relayed in Mission schools, of “civilization”, “modernity”, and a linear mode of thought in which humanity moves symbolically ever forward and upward to the future which is intrinsically superior to the past: *excelsior!* On this timeline Ibo, and African society as a whole, were in the past in a primitive, disorganized state of social organization, and Britain and Europe represented the advanced, civilized society of the future. “Africans [were] mired in the infancy of the

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 85.

human race and as of yet having a long road to join the ranks of humanity”<sup>126</sup> The resolution to both of these shortcomings was to transcend the backward state of primitive society and “to plunge forward into Western civilization” by whatever means available.<sup>127</sup>

In traditional gerontocratic Ibo society, younger men accumulated responsibilities and privileges by ceremoniously inheriting them at the graduation of each age grade period. The needs of the community as a whole were only met if each tier or group participated; the effect of the bottom tiers refusing to take part or no longer caring about the importance of these roles undermined the community's ability to regenerate. Youth apathy towards the inheritance of such rights meant that the way of life previous generations of Ibo had known for so long died with them.

The danger of lost or forgotten rights that should have been inherited by younger generations was a key concern of the *Nwaobiala* of the Dancing Women's Movement and was identified in one of their protest songs. They sang that “old customs should be observed and not allowed to lapse.”<sup>128</sup> The *Nwaobiala's* movement cited many forces of disintegration, including the effect of missions of girls, government roads, capitalist money, all were incursions of the new way of life into the old. Their protest song concerning old customs showed their worry of the ability of Ibo society to reproduce itself in generations to come.

Through mission education and conversion, boys gained power from alternative sources to their fathers and communities. Caroline Ifeka-Moller argues in her article *White Power: Social-Structural Factors in Conversion to Christianity, Eastern Nigeria 1921-1966* that “Christianity promised a new kind of power, the power of the white man,

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 185.

<sup>127</sup> Leith-Ross, *African Women: A Study of the Ibo of Nigeria*, 19.

<sup>128</sup> Bastian, *Dancing Women and Colonial Men: the Nwaobiala of 1925*, 116.

which people could use to discover the secret of his [...] superiority.”<sup>129</sup> Rather than from accumulated social responsibilities or taking titles, they gained it from becoming “modern” to the extent that they were in the position to challenge traditional authority. In the testimony, there are also a number of witnesses who cited the negative impact of missions in that mission educated and/or converted youth lost respect for their elders. One of whom was Cyril Alexander, Lieutenant Governor of the Southern Provinces.

*“The Chairman:* In your [Alexander’s]report, I think you said that the effect of education has been to cause the younger generation to have less respect for their elders in many cases? [...]

*Witness:* [...] my idea is that generally speaking in the past teaching has been such as rather to flatter a boy that he was as good as anybody else, and there was no reason why he should particularly respect his parents or village elders, and I should said even went so far as to discourage him to respect his village elder because he was a pagan.”<sup>130</sup>

Leith-Ross documents the trend of deteriorating relations between junior and senior men, also noting the attitudes of parents who, having lost their authority over their sons, were tired of the struggle: “[Parents] accepted the fact with perhaps a tinge of regret but no resentment [...] that children who went to school were less respectful to their parents or that they were less well behaved. [...] their emotional resistance to the new had spent itself and the attitude I took for tolerance was in reality an acquiescence born of fatigue and a sense of defeat[.]”<sup>131</sup>

<sup>129</sup> Ifeka-Moller, *White Power: Social-Structural Factors in Conversion to Christianity, Eastern Nigeria 1921-1966*, 61.

<sup>130</sup> Aba Commission of Inquiry, *Notes of Evidence Taken by the Commission of Inquiry Appointed to Inquire into the Disturbances in the Calabar and Owerri Provinces, December, 1929*, 441.

<sup>131</sup> Leith-Ross, *African Women: A Study of the Ibo of Nigeria*, 233.

Youth's waning respect for elders was somewhat similar to the trend of destroying idols which had previously inspired respect and fear: in each case the youths had something bigger and stronger on their side, as they perceived it, and no longer appealed to traditional sources for power. I refer to the shift in the path of ambition. Missionized youth aimed at education, employment, and emanating Christian and modern values through their dress, property, and actions. As a result, previous mentors, senior men, and previous belief systems, as represented by the idols, had no place and were therefore a source of scorn. In this way, “the beneficiaries of mission education [...] had become exactly what the missionaries thought and desired that they would be: iconoclasts against the old way of doing things.”<sup>132</sup>

Ibo people began to face a dilemma regarding the definition success; who would be respected or valued? The Ibo concept of success emphasized one's importance to the community, public perception, and commitment to one's ancestors and the local and general deities. Those who gained power through participation in colonial structures, religious or otherwise, oriented themselves towards new notions of success and self-worth. The shift in some Ibo's attitude toward success can be seen in Silvia Leith-Ross's portrayal of the general attitude she observed after the fall of palm-oil prices: “they had been well on the road to prosperity and now where were they? They had a subtle conviction that they had gone back in the social scale, had been, perhaps, pushed back. And joined to this was the memory that they had had money in their hands, the wherewithal to buy cloths and head-ties and necklaces, and they wanted them again, with obstinacy and with passion”<sup>133</sup> Success had become an economic imperative, measured

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<sup>132</sup> Taiwo, *Reading the Colonizer's Mind: Lord Lugard and the Philosophical Foundations of British Colonialism*, 179.

<sup>133</sup> Leith-Ross, *African Women: A Study of the Ibo of Nigeria*, 179.

by fetishized Western products.

Ibo conceptions of success shifted from becoming a valued and influential member of one's community, and the power that that position brought, to attaining status symbols, exhibiting, prestige, wealth, power, without earning them in traditional ways, including having numerous wives, a European-style house with a metal roof, young women wearing cloth to hide their shameful bodies. Misty Bastian describes women's traditional measures of wealth or prestige, the wrapper, which had been a mark of women who had borne children and therefore earned her cloth, being degraded.

“As young women became more involved with the numerous Christian missions, they were exhorted to cover their nakedness and to engage in wage labor that would enable them to buy cloth to make 'frocks' and undergarments. [...] young women, under the twin pressures of Christianization and modernity, invested in clothing at an unprecedented rate[...]"<sup>134</sup>

The position of older women was undermined as the wrapper took on different social meaning to the younger, converted generation. These young girls did not follow the traditional trajectory of assuming womanhood, they followed Christian morality which told them their bodies were shameful and must be covered.

So, too, in regards to *mgbede*, also known as 'fattening', we see traditional coming-of-age rights appropriated by Christian notions of morality:

“the coming of Christianity was the ending of *mgbede*, a period of seclusion which marked a girl's entry into puberty and her preparation for marriage. ....with the arrival of missionaries, even the wealthier families began to abandon *mgbede* in a move towards 'singlet-mindedness', with the Christian emphasis on decorum reinforcing the value of costly

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<sup>134</sup> Bastian, *Dancing Women and Colonial Men: the Nwaobiala of 1925*, 122.

wrappers as a form of display. For example, Mrs. Selina Danne Nwosu recalls that in the 1920's a young girl would acquire her first wrapper on puberty, with older married women wearing up to four wrappers as a sign of wealth. While the importance of puberty continued to be publicly recognised, the form of recognition had changed.”<sup>135</sup>

Young girls, as children, had not previously worn frocks until, as Bastian states above, they had earned them through assuming full womanhood through bearing children. Introducing frocks in place of *Mgbede* showed the transition from old rites of passage to new forms of recognition. Such new forms of recognition related to Christian notions of sin and modesty, that a girl was pubescent and therefore her body assumed sexuality and therefore impurity which needed to be hidden by cloth.

*Mgbede* and frocks were both symbolic of a woman's transition into womanhood. They showed that she was ready to assume, or had assumed, full responsibility within community as a mother and wife and gained social recognition as part of these initiations or status markers. Christianity undermined these traditional markers of coming-of-age. Instead, frocks, which could be gained through wage-labor, marked a girl's pubescence and therefore beginning of sexual shame based on Christian morals. Christian displacement of these rites of passage signified the shift towards Christian notions of shame and encouraged participation in the capitalist market.

Furthermore, young people's adoption of physical marks of European influence, clothes, houses, possessions etc. were valued as reflections of self-worth, as Leith Ross describes in the 1930's:

“[...] even the indirect knowledge that such [European goods] exist and can be bought, even the occasional sight of the white man's products, are

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<sup>135</sup> Martin, *Palm Oil and Protest: An Economic History of the Ngwa Region, South-Eastern Nigeria, 1800-1980*, 75.

creating new desires and these desires are being reinforced and, so to speak, legitimized by education and religion. The boy learns about the wonders of mechanical progress and immediately feel justified in wanting a bicycle; the girl is taught it is wicked to go naked and, delighted to find that vanity and righteousness go hand in hand, runs home and begs her mother to buy her a frock.”<sup>136</sup>

Just as vanity and righteousness went hand in hand, so too did Western morality and capitalist materialism. These children were taught that they were not right as they were and, because they can buy white man's products, sought to buy material goods to right themselves.<sup>137</sup>

Christian conversion gave the younger generation the option to disregard traditional forms of social control. The animist worldview stated that each person within the community had a role, a purpose, to serve in order to maintain balance with the spirit world and the ancestors. Once people opted out of Ibo religion and, by extension, Ibo values, they no longer participated in maintaining this balance but, in the spirit of Christian morality and Western values, became secluded in individualized private spaces that reflected their newfound identities.<sup>138</sup>

Aside from the reorganization of space, the abandonment of Ibo values undermined the notion of social equilibrium. In regards to women's role in maintaining said equilibrium, the loss of belief in Ala made their *egwu*, warnings from the land, empty of actual consequences. Leith-Ross states that people's “fear of Ala has lessened” and so the women's warnings lacked the power of serious reprimand.<sup>139</sup>

Christianity also worked to dismantle women's networks, as Ibo Christian women

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<sup>136</sup> Leith-Ross, *African Women: A Study of the Ibo of Nigeria*, 131.

<sup>137</sup> Bastian, *Dancing Women and Colonial Men: the Nwaobiala of 1925*, 123.

<sup>138</sup> Bastian, *Young Converts: Christian Missions, Gender and Youth in Onitsha, Nigeria 1880-1929*, 149.

<sup>139</sup> Leith-Ross, *African Women: A Study of the Ibo of Nigeria*, 29.

were discouraged from participating in “pagan” rituals or interacting with non-Christian members of their kin networks. “Some Christian girls may have used this severing of ties to older women's community (*umunwaanyi*) to their individual advantage, or as a marker of their resistance to 'outmoded' ways.”<sup>140</sup> Without the involvement of younger generation, the strength of these organizations lessened and traditional forms of women's power diminished. Christian girls were taught that their influence lay in “providing decent, Christian homes” and domestic responsibilities.<sup>141</sup>

Converts perceived many benefits to participation in Christianity. Some of which have already been identified, including young men and women's expedited assumption of increased social status through accessing alternative sources of power than traditional institutions. Ifeka-Moller argues that conversion to Christianity was a direct result of the disruptive influence of colonialism. The Ibo realized that traditional forms of power could not protect them from these incursions, and so pursued Christianity as something that might. Converts believed that conversion would protect them from the colonial violence, that “conversion would provide them 'immunity from government (i.e. punitive) expeditions' as well as protection from the 'consul men' [court members] or thugs who roughed up villagers.” Christianity was also perceived to be the source of the white man's power, therefore if they were Christian, they might access it, too: “people believed that the white man's religion would give them some kind of access to the mainspring of his technical power.”<sup>142</sup>

Ifeka-Moller argues that high rates of conversion were directly related to colonial oppression. As dispersed power structures gave way to the hierarchical formations of the

<sup>140</sup> Bastian, *Young Converts: Christian Missions, Gender and Youth in Onitsha, Nigeria 1880-1929*, 149.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

<sup>142</sup> Ifeka-Moller, *White Power: Social-Structural Factors in Conversion to Christianity, Eastern Nigeria 1921-1966*, 65.



colonial bureaucracy, many Ibo faced “exclusion from secular power, radical change in the old order, and community depravation” and so many turned to “the only alternative resource [which] was religious power.”<sup>143</sup> Concurrently, elimination of traditional access to political power drove young men to seek mission education for “materially rewarding participation in the colonial system.”<sup>144</sup> Mission education, in turn, indoctrinated its students with Western values of modernity and Christian religion.

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 68-69.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 66.

## VII

### *Conclusion*

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I began this study in search of the root of parasitic governance. It was with this motivation that I approached the Warrant Chief System. Colonial governance centralized political power in a few Big Men, simultaneously destroying popular accountability and creating local colonial servants loyal to the colonial state that became corrupt and overbearing on their communities. Their behavior and the power they lorded over the people in their districts were microcosmic embodiments of the structure of the colonial state. Indirect rule created a hierarchy in which political power and wealth came with loyalty to the colonial regime. Colonial servants adopted the behavior and attitudes of their colonial masters, and just as the independent state of Nigeria inherited colonial political structures, so too did it inherit colonial attitudes.

Indirect rule created a class which answered to the District Officers and supported the colonial government. These bonds of loyalty elevated native administrative leadership to privileged positions in which they exercised more power than Ibo rulers ever had, and rationalized those positions with the assumption that they were more civilized, advanced than the people they ruled. Ogatu, a participant of the Ibo Women's War, described the condescending attitudes of warrant chiefs:

“We want the total abolition of tax and the removal of Warrant Chiefs. We don't want them. If we women approach the Warrant Chiefs and ask them

to go with us, they refuse to do so and say that we have a bad smell. They treat us thus because they are richer than we are. We know that they are rich, but how much money are you paying them to make them rich?"<sup>145</sup>

Colonial political systems were oppressive, but they remained alien to the majority of the Ibo population. They were resented, resisted, avoided; they invaded Ibo communities without being a part of them. The physical infiltration of colonial rule into the interior and into Ibo communities themselves was certainly debilitating, but the indoctrination of colonial paternalism, western notions of progress and racial hierarchy, and Christian morality<sup>146</sup> into the collective consciousness was the deepest and arguably most damaging invasion of colonial rule. This invasion resulted in what Brett calls a "dependency complex" which led many colonial peoples to accept the 'characteristics assigned to them by the dominant group.'<sup>147</sup> The adoption of colonial modes of thought necessitated adoption of its characterization of African inferiority, which in essence was the acceptance of white supremacy.

Adoption of colonial modes of thought meant acceptance of racial and cultural inferiority and drove those who accepted their original sin to modernize or civilize themselves in order to transcend their sub-humanity. "Where Europe, especially Germany and England, troubled itself about the future of civilization and of the chosen races, [educated elite] sought to fit their community into a system which Europe had set up for its own convenience. In this scheme, their society was primitive, underdeveloped."<sup>148</sup>

<sup>145</sup> Aba Commission of Inquiry, *Notes of Evidence Taken by the Commission of Inquiry Appointed to Inquire into the Disturbances in the Calabar and Owerri Provinces, December, 1929*, 279.

<sup>146</sup> Colonial paternalism, western notions of progress, racial hierarchy, and Christian morality will hereafter be referred to collectively as colonial modes of thought.

<sup>147</sup> Brett, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment in East Africa: The Politics of Economic Change 1919-1939*, 11.

<sup>148</sup> Taiwo, Olufemi. "Reading the Colonizer's Mind," 183.

In the Aba Testimony, one European entrepreneur and former missionary George Kearly Weeks described the struggle for attaining whiteness as a motive for conversion:

*Witness:* [The African] comes into contact with Europeans and seems to recognize that there is a person who has a little more sense and ability than he has got himself, and with his own religion he thinks the white man has got a better religion than he has [...] consequently, if I make schools, he comes along to try to read my books. If I have a Church he will come along to be baptized and will go through all the performances hoping to be my equivalent.[...]

*Chairman:* Are there some young men who think they have achieved what they expected? [...] by adopting the Christian religion they are going to become as good as the white man?

*Witness:* That is their ambition.

In the cases that Weeks describes above, which applied to who adopted of Christianity and pursued mission education and I would argue also applied to participants in colonial bureaucracy, these people attempted to access colonial power through cooperating with its structures and obeying its dictums. Furthermore, those who adopted colonial modes of thought projected its values onto themselves and others. They had attained a greater height of humanity by becoming 'better', more civilized, more modern than others, even if these others had previously held their respect:

*Chairman:* Having gone through 'all the performances', do they think that they are as good as the white man and better than their own parents and act accordingly?

*Witness:* Yes, they think that they are better than the people who have not done what they have done."<sup>149</sup>

The pursuit and adoption of Whiteness caused a perspective shift. Those who underwent this process came out the other side with a new understanding of what was

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<sup>149</sup> Aba Commission of Inquiry, *Notes of Evidence Taken by the Commission of Inquiry Appointed to Inquire into the Disturbances in the Calabar and Owerri Provinces, December, 1929*, 648.

right and wrong, what goals to strive for, and who or what to *become*. “Government servants, railway clerks and so on are recruited from this district, and having gone out to work their ideas widen, and they get certain ideas about modern civilization. When they return to their village they cannot see eye to eye with their elders.”<sup>150</sup> This is what the *Nwaobiala* of the Dancing Women's Movement referred to as people 'go missing' through complete alienation from Ibo values.<sup>151</sup> A clerk from a European factory had scolded protesting women, saying, “you are people who are supposed to be civilized; you should not allow things that are taking place at Aba take place here.”<sup>152</sup> He did not say that they were acted violent or that they should calm down, but that they were acting *uncivilized*, which was equivalent to being less than human.

The acceptance of colonial modes of thought was the initiation of the colonized into modernity. Just as the adoption of colonial modes of thought was the acceptance of white supremacy, so too was it the acceptance of European domination. “the acceptance of Western assumptions and the associated political and economic linkages with the West was the source of their powerlessness”<sup>153</sup> This trend was exhibited by Sir Kitoyi Ajasa, the only African lawyer at the Commission hearings, who had adopted the perspective that the Ibo were far behind the development of Britain civilization:

*Sir Kitoyi Ajasa:* You know the people of this country have a great admiration and respect for British justice?

*[Mr. E. M. Falk, Senior Resident]:* I am happy to say so.

*Sir Kitoyi Ajasa:* They prefer to be tried by a British judge or magistrate.

*Witness:* You would have to have many magistrates to hear the cases, and

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 731.

<sup>151</sup> Bastian, *Dancing Women and Colonial Men: the Nwaobiala of 1925*, 129.

<sup>152</sup> Aba Commission of Inquiry, *Notes of Evidence Taken by the Commission of Inquiry Appointed to Inquire into the Disturbances in the Calabar and Owerri Provinces, December, 1929*, 558.

<sup>153</sup> Brett, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment in East Africa: The Politics of Economic Change 1919-1939*, 11.

if you have 60,000 cases a year, you would require an army to deal with them all. Then again, would it be a good thing for the country in the long run if the whole jurisdiction was placed in the hands of aliens and not to some extent given to the people themselves? Is it not better that some of the people should gradually learn to undertake the responsibility themselves, and so gradually attain a higher standard?

*Sir Kitoyi Ajasa:* I suggest to you that one of the mistakes the Administration makes is that it goes too fast?

*Witness:* It is true that things are hurried along in this country in which we live rather faster than I care for myself. I am inclined to agree with you on that point.

*Sir Kitoyi Ajasa:* It will take centuries for us to gain the efficiency which you have attained in the English Courts. You cannot expect a civilization such as ours to have attained this standard already?

*Witness:* It would be unreasonable to expect it.<sup>154</sup>

Ajasa was invested in the colonial system, he had learned its laws, and clearly espoused its ideas of progress. He states that the colonial administration's problem is that it expects too much of a backwards people who could not possibly catch up to British civilization in twenty years. Ajasa understood the inferiority of “a civilization such as [his]” and assumed that contact with Britain was educational. In so doing, he exhibits similar tendencies to other educated Nigerians, who had “adopted colonial attitudes and saw themselves as lacking and so fought tirelessly to overcome their racial and cultural inferiority [...] the customs, morals and institutions of his people [desperately] need[ed] improvement through the use of good (probably European) models.”<sup>155</sup> Adopting colonial notions of underdevelopment necessitated acceptance of colonial domination. Those who accepted African inferiority were driven to transcend it.

The physical means of transcending the identity of primitivism and pursuit of modernization translated directly into loyalty, participation and acceptance of colonial

<sup>154</sup> Aba Commission of Inquiry, *Notes of Evidence Taken by the Commission of Inquiry Appointed to Inquire into the Disturbances in the Calabar and Owerri Provinces, December, 1929*, 353.

<sup>155</sup> Taiwo, Olufemi. “Reading the Colonizer’s Mind,” 183.

state, economic and religious structures. These beneficiaries followed colonial paternalist justifications of colonialism to the point that they believed that they would indeed learn civilization from the British, “[educated Nigerians] thought that the basis of the legitimacy of both the missionizing activities of the evangelists and the imperial activities of the administrators was to be found in their claim to being the purveyors and embodiments of a superior civilization.”<sup>156</sup> The British may seemed as such, to themselves as well as their colonial subjects, but their superiority was not accessible to inferior races. British superiority, which I understand as white supremacy, could only be defined in relation to an inferior body. If the inferior race could attain whiteness through any path, religious, political, economic, or otherwise, it would make the very categories of inferiority and superiority mute. Colonialism was not built on charity, it was built on domination: the colonized were never meant to access the civilization that they colonizers brought.

At the end of the modernizing process, when people had been baptized, learned English, shunned 'outmoded ways' and their previous traditions, what had they gained? Certainly Warrant Chiefs, Court Members, mission educated converts and others, like clerks of European factories, reaped short term gains from their participation in colonial structures. They benefited monetarily, the colonial state granted them social privileges and relatively elevated positions in the colonial hierarchy compared to those who did not cooperate. But implied colonial promises that such involvement would result in some grand human advancement for their race, that such involvement would make them the equals to their white colonial masters, were simply lies.

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<sup>156</sup>Taiwo, Olufemi. “Reading the Colonizer’s Mind,” 181.

The transformation that many underwent in the pursuit of modernized, civilized, and culturally forward identities ended in disappointment. The same entrepreneur in the Aba testimony stated, at the end of people's efforts, they realized that "they are not exactly what they thought they were going to be after having done all this, and they are discontented, and a discontented condition often brings trouble."<sup>157</sup> After people had accepted the new ways of capitalist production, colonial political takeover, and religious change many realized that they had failed to obtain the grand reward that they had been promised. This sense of lost potential, disappointment, and disaffection with Western interference is still happening in contemporary Nigeria, and in Africa at large.

The purpose of the colonizing mission was to bring the light of civilization into the dark heart of Africa. Certainly natives could see this light; some aggressively pursued it only to realize that it was eternally out of reach. Colonizers had brought modernity into African and Ibo communities but it was only for show, the colonized were never meant to attain it. And how could they? For the modernity that Britain and other capitalist industrial nations had experienced were only possible through the exploitation of the rest of the world, justified through white supremacy. The racial hierarchy demanded that there be a slave race and a master race; there was no possibility of redemption.

Jean-Marie Teno, a political filmmaker from Cameroon, made a film called *Head in the Clouds* about the unmet expectations and empty promises of modernity.

"colonisation, civilisation, independence, then humanitarian talk are merely excuses and theatrical gestures to ensure that Africa remains the place which foreign powers can

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<sup>157</sup> Aba Commission of Inquiry, *Notes of Evidence Taken by the Commission of Inquiry Appointed to Inquire into the Disturbances in the Calabar and Owerri Provinces, December, 1929*, 648.



exploit with a good conscience.”<sup>158</sup> The civilizing mission was nothing more than a convenient justification and the foundation of western control over African resources, politics, and people. This thesis has been an attempt to understand the process of that foundation, of the establishment of white supremacy, and of the internalization of colonial oppression. It is only by understanding how this was laid that one can begin to imagine how to undo it.

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<sup>158</sup> Jossner, *Finding one's own language for one's own history*, Culturebase.net.

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