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ABA RIOTS OR THE IGBO WOMEN'S WAR? --  
IDEOLOGY, STRATIFICATION AND THE  
INVISIBILITY OF WOMEN\*

by

Judith Van Allen

The events in Calabar and Owerri Provinces in southeastern Nigeria in November and December of 1929 that have come to be known in Western social science literature as the "Aba Riots" are a natural focus for an investigation of the impact of colonialism on Igbo women. In the development and the results of that crisis can be found all the elements of the system that has weakened women's position in Igboland -- and in much of the rest of Africa as well.<sup>1</sup>

The "Aba Riots" are also a symbol of the "invisibility" of women. "Aba Riots" is the name adopted by the British; the Igbo call it the "Women's War" -- *Ogu Umunwanyi*.<sup>2</sup> This is more than a word game. In politics, the control of language means the control of history. The words that "win" call up -- or cloud -- pictures in the heads of those who have no other sources of information. There are almost always different names given to conflicts by the dominant group and the subordinate group, whether they are colonizers and colonized, military government and guerrilla army, or university administration and students. In what is known as the "Boston Massacre" in American history books, five Americans were killed and six wounded by British soldiers. Those same books refer to the "Haymarket Riot", in which four workers were killed and more than fifty injured when police opened fire on a labor protest meeting; seven police were killed and 67 injured after the shooting. Labor-oriented and radical histories call it the "Haymarket Massacre"; but in standard, respectable American history, management won and it is their words that children learn in school.<sup>3</sup>

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In November of 1929 in Calabar and Owerri Provinces, thousands of women converged on the Native Administration centers. The women chanted, danced, sang songs of ridicule and demanded the caps of office (the official insignia) of the Warrant Chiefs — the Igbo chosen from each village by the British to sit as members of the Native Court. Prisons were broken into and prisoners released at a few locations. Attacks were made on sixteen Native Courts, and most of them were broken up or burned. The "disturbed area" covered about 6,000 square miles and contained about two million people. It is not known how many women were involved, but the figure was in the tens of thousands. On two occasions, when British District Officers had called in police and troops, the women were fired upon, leaving more than 50 women dead and another 50 wounded. No one was seriously injured on the other side.<sup>4</sup>

As far as Western social science is concerned, the British words "won"; only a very few scholars even tell us that the Igbo called it the "Women's War".

As George Orwell put it, "Political language ... is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable..."<sup>5</sup> "Riots", according to *Webster's*, conveys a picture of uncontrolled, irrational action, involving violence to property or persons or both — a "wild, violent public disturbance". It serves to justify the "necessary action to restore order", and it accords with the British picture of the outpouring of Igbo women from their villages as some sort of spontaneous frenzy, explicable by the general "excitability" of these "least disciplined" of African peoples.<sup>6</sup> In addition, the term "Aba Riots" neatly removes the women from the picture. They are not the "Women's Riots" nor even the "Aba Women's Riots", but simply the "Aba Riots". The "picture" we have left is of "some riots at Aba" — not by women, not involving complex organization, and not ranging over most of southeastern Nigeria.

A particular use of political language is not necessarily a conscious choice made to convey a specific impression. The more cynical we believe the wielders of power to be, the more we are likely to see their choices of words as conscious lies (e.g., the U.S. Government's use of "incursion" and "pacification"). For the less cynical namers of events, it is simply a question of seeing things differently. To the British, the women rioted. But the significance of the "riots", as seen by the British Commissions of Enquiry, was that the *Igbo* were dissatisfied with the general system of administration. The women were seen as expressing this underlying general dissatisfaction. The British explanation for its having been women rather than men who "rioted" was that the women were aroused by a rumor that they would be taxed at a time of declining profits from the palm products trade, and that they believed themselves to be immune from danger because they thought British soldiers would not fire on women.<sup>7</sup>

The possibility that women might have acted because *as women* they were particularly distressed by the native administration system does not seem to have been taken seriously by the Commissions, any more than they seriously considered the demands made by women, in testimony, that women be included in the Native Courts.<sup>8</sup> Women are politically invisible in many societies and in most history books. One would think that the mass action of tens of thousands of women would be somewhat "visible" historically. But it is simply "Aba Riots"; hence in standard and un-standard works on Nigeria today, one can read of "Aba Riots" or "serious disturbances" with no reference to women even having been involved.<sup>9</sup>

"Women's War", in sharp contrast, retains both the presence and the significance of the women, both in specifically saying "women" and in the word "war", which was from the pidgin English expression, "making war", and institutionalized form of punishment employed by Igbo women, also known as "sitting on a man".

To "sit on" or "make war on" a man involved gathering at his compound at a previously agreed time, dancing, singing scurrilous songs that detailed the women's grievances against him (and often insulted him along the way by calling his manhood into question), banging on his hut with the pestles women used for pounding yams, and, in extreme cases, tearing up his hut (usually meaning pulling the roof off). This might be done to an individual man who had grossly mistreated his wife, or who violated the women's market rules, or who persistently let his cows eat the women's crops. The women would stay at his hut all night and day if necessary, until he repented and promised to mend his ways in the future.<sup>10</sup>

"Women's War" thus conveys an action by women, following a traditional method used by women — though not on so large a scale — to settle grievances with men who had acted badly with specific regard to women. "Women's War", understood from the Igbo perspective, thus contains within it the existence of Igbo women's traditional institutions, symbolized by "making war", which was the ultimate sanction available to the women for enforcing their judgements. To call it the Women's War — in the Igbo context, not the contemporary English meaning of "war" — is therefore to direct attention to the existence of those female political and economic institutions that were not taken into account before or after 1929 by the British, nor by contemporary social scientists writing about the development of nationalist movements.

Conventionally, Western influence has been seen as "emancipating" African women through the weakening of kinship bonds, the provision of "free choice" in Christian monogamous marriage, the

suppression of "barbarous" practices (female circumcision, ostracism of mothers of twins, slavery), the opening of schools, the introduction of modern medicine and hygiene, and, sometimes, of female suffrage. What has not been seen by Westerners is that for some African women -- of whom Igbo women are a striking example -- actual or potential autonomy, economic independence and political power stem not from Western influences but from traditional "tribal" life. To the extent that Igbo women have participated in any "political" action -- from anti-colonial or nationalist struggles to local community development to the Biafran war -- it has not been so much because of as in spite of the influence of the system of stratification and values imposed on them by British colonial officers, missionaries and merchants.

It is an indication of the sexist bias of Western scholarship that so little has been reported in the literature about Igbo or other African women's historical or contemporary political roles. Only now as Western female scholars realize the extent to which we are not emancipated -- and the extent to which our status, roles and treatment are not "modern" (universalistic, achieved, egalitarian) -- can we begin to dig out the assumptions and make visible the sexism in the study of African and other "modernizing" areas; and the sexism of the colonialists who "brought civilization" to places such as Igboland.<sup>11</sup> Only then can we accurately understand what has happened and is happening to African women.

#### Traditional Igbo Political Institutions

In traditional Igbo society, women did not have a political role equal to that of men. But they did have a role -- more accurately, a series of roles -- in the political life of their communities despite the patrilineal organization of Igbo society. The possibilities for them to participate in traditional politics must be examined in terms of both structures and values. Also involved is a consideration of what it means to talk about "politics" and "political roles" in a society that has no differentiated, centralized governmental institutions.

Fallers suggests that for such societies, it is necessary to view

*the polity or political system... not as a concretely distinct part of the social system, but rather as a functional aspect of the whole social system: that aspect concerned with making and carrying out decisions regarding public policy, by whatever institutional means.<sup>12</sup>*

Fallers' definition is preferable to several other functionalist definitions of "the political" because it attempts to give some content to the category "political". Examples will make this clearer.

If in a society there is no set of differentiated political institutions to which we can ascribe Weber's "monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory", and yet the society holds together in reasonable order, the question asked is: What are the mechanisms of social control? To this may be added, based on a notion of the basic governmental function being "authoritative allocation": What are the mechanisms that authoritatively allocate goods and services? A third common notion of politics is concerned with power relationships, and so we ask: Who has power (or influence) over whom?

The problem with all of these approaches is that they are at the same time too broad and too narrow. If *everything* in a society that promotes order, resolves conflicts, allocates goods or involves the power of one person over another is "political", then you have scarcely succeeded in distinguishing the political as any special kind of activity or area or relationship. Igbo women certainly played a role in promoting order and resolving conflicts.<sup>13</sup> But that does not make them political actors.

In response to each of those broad definitions, it is still possible to ask: Is this mechanism of social control, or allocation, or this power relationship, a *political* mechanism or relationship? To answer that question, we need to say something about the nature of the political, and it is here that Fallers provides some content. It is their relationship to *public* policy that makes mechanisms, relationships or activities political.

There are many different concepts of "public" in Western thought. We will consider only two of those notions, chosen because there seems to be some possibility of applying them to Igbo politics without producing a distorted picture. There seem to be actions taken, and distinctions made, in Igbo politics and language that make it not quite so ethnocentric to try to use the Western concepts.

One notion of "public" relates it to issues that are of concern to the whole community; ends served by "political functions" are beneficial to the community as a whole. Although different individuals or groups may seek different *resolutions* of problems or disputes, the political can nevertheless be seen as encompassing all those human concerns and problems that are common to all members of the community, or at least to large numbers of people within the community. Political problems are shared

problems that are appropriately dealt with through group action -- their resolutions are collective, not individual. This separates them from purely personal problems.

The second notion of "public" is that which is distinguished from "secret". That is, "public" means open to public view, accessible to all members of the community. The settling of questions that concern the welfare of the community in a "public" way necessitates the sharing of "political knowledge" -- the knowledge needed for participation in political discussion and decision. A system in which *public* policy is made *publicly* and the relevant knowledge is widely shared contrasts sharply with those systems in which a privileged few possess the relevant knowledge -- whether priestly mysteries or bureaucratic expertise -- and therefore can control policy decisions.

Traditional Igbo society was predominantly partilineal and segmental. People lived in "villages" composed of the scattered compounds of relatively close patrikinsmen, and related villages formed what are usually referred to as "village groups", the largest functional political unit. Forde and Jones found between four and five thousand village groups, ranging in population from several hundred to several thousand persons.<sup>14</sup>

Political power was diffuse, and leadership was fluid and informal. Community decisions were made and disputes settled in a variety of gatherings -- village-wide assemblies, women's meetings, age grades, secret and title societies, contribution clubs, lineage groups, and congregations at funerals, markets or annual rituals -- as well as by oracles and diviners.<sup>15</sup> Decisions were made by discussion until mutual agreement was reached. Any adult present who had something to say on the matter under discussion was entitled to speak -- as long as he or she said something that the others considered worth listening to; as the Igbo say, "A case forbids no one".<sup>16</sup> Leaders were those who had "mouth". Age was respected, but did not confer leadership unless accompanied by wisdom and the ability to speak well. In village assemblies, after much discussion, a small group of elders retired for "consultation", and then offered a decision for the approval of the assembly.<sup>17</sup>

In some areas, the assemblies are said to have been of "all adult males". In some, women are reported to have participated in the assemblies, but to have been less likely to speak unless involved in the dispute and less likely to take part in "consultation". Participation by women in the settling of particular disputes appeared to be more common, as women may have been among the "arbitrators" that disputants invited to settle cases; if one party to the dispute appealed to the village as a whole,

however, male elders would have been more likely to offer the final settlement.<sup>18</sup> Age grades existed in most Igbo communities, but their functions varied, and the predominant pattern seems to have been that of young men's age grades carrying out decisions of the village assembly, such as clearing a path, building a bridge, or collecting a fine.<sup>19</sup>

There was thus no distinction among what we call executive, legislative and judicial activities, and no political authority to issue commands. The settling of a dispute could merge into a discussion of a new "rule", and acceptance by the disputants and the group hearing the dispute was necessary for the settlement of anything. Only within a family compound could an individual demand obedience to orders. There the compound head offered guidance, aid and protection to members of his family, and in return received respect, obedience and material tokens of good will. Neither was there any distinction between the religious and the political -- rituals and political discussions were interwoven in patterns of action to promote the good of the community. These rituals, too, were performed by various groups of women, of men, and of women and men together.<sup>20</sup>

Matters dealt with in the village assembly were those of common concern to all -- either common problems for which collective action was appropriate ("How can we make our market 'bigger' than the other village markets?" -- which profited everyone, as opposed to "What can I do to make more profits in the market for me?"), or conflicts that threatened the unity of the village (e.g., a dispute between members of different lineages, or between the men and the women).<sup>21</sup> The assembly thus dealt with *public policy publicly*.

The mode of discourse was that of proverb, parable and metaphor drawn from the body of Igbo tradition. The needed political knowledge was accessible to all Igbo, who were reared by and with these proverbs and parables. Influential speech was the creative and skillful use of this tradition to provide counsel and justification -- to assure others that a certain course of action was both a *wise* thing to do and a *right* thing to do. The accessibility (the public nature) of this knowledge is itself indicated by an Igbo proverb: "If you tell a proverb to a fool, he will ask you its meaning."<sup>22</sup> Fools were excluded from the political community, but women were not -- a situation the reverse of that found in many places.

Women as well as men thus had access to political participation; for women as well as for men, public status was to a great extent achieved, not ascribed. A woman's status was determined more by her own achievements than by the achievements of her husband. The



resources available to men were greater, however; so that while a woman might rank higher among women than her husband did among men, very few women could afford to take the highest titles, a major source of prestige.<sup>23</sup>

Men "owned" the most profitable crops, received the bulk of the money from bridewealth, and, if compound heads, presents from compound members. Through the patrilineage, they controlled the land, which they could lease to non-kinsmen or to women for a good profit. Men also did more of the long-distance trading, which had a higher rate of profit than the trading in local and regional markets, which was almost entirely in women's hands.<sup>24</sup>

Women were entitled to sell the surplus of their own crops. They also received the palm kernels as their share of the palm produce (they processed the palm oil for the men to sell). They might also sell prepared foods, or the products of special skills of women in that village -- e.g., processed salt, pots and baskets. All the profits were theirs to keep.<sup>25</sup> But these increments of profit were relatively low. Almost all of those who took the higher and very expensive titles were men, and most of the leaders in village-wide discussions and decisions were men.<sup>26</sup>

Women, therefore, came out as second-class citizens. While status and the political influence it could bring were "achieved" and there were no formal limits to women's political power,<sup>27</sup> men by their ascriptive status (members of the patrilineage) acquired wealth that gave them a head start and a lifelong advantage over women. The Igbo say that "a child who washes his hands clean deserves to eat with his elders".<sup>28</sup> What they do not say is that at birth some children were given water and some were not.

### Women's Political Institutions

While women's associations are best described for the south -- the area of the Women's War -- their existence is reported for most other areas. Forde and Jones made the general observation that

*Women's associations express their disapproval and secure their demands by collective public demonstrations, including ridicule, satirical singing and dancing, and group strikes.*<sup>29</sup>

Two sorts of women's associations are relevant politically: *ogbo* and *inyemedi* or *mikiri*. Since traditional Igbo society was predominantly patrilocal and exogamous, adult women resident in a village would almost all be wives -- the others being divorced or widowed "daughters of the village" who had returned home to live. *Ogbo* were gatherings of women born in the same lineage

village or village group, the *umuada*. Their ritual functions at funerals of all members of their kindred gave them power over their "brothers" and their brothers' wives, since none of them could have a proper funeral without the participation of the *umuada*. They helped to settle disputes among their "brothers" by using the same ritual-based power.<sup>30</sup> In addition, they might have more informal social gatherings, rotated among their members' marital villages, thereby forming part of the Igbo female communication network.<sup>31</sup>

The gatherings that appear to have performed the major role in self-rule among women and that articulated women's interests, as opposed to those of men were the lineage-wide or village-wide gatherings of all wives, the *inyemedi*, which came to be called *mikiri* or *mitiri*.<sup>32</sup> *Mikiri* were multi-purpose women's associations. They provided women with a forum in which to develop their political talents, and a means for protecting their interests as traders, farmers, wives and mothers through collective action -- against individual women, individual men, and men as a group.

In *mikiri* women made rules about markets, crops and livestock that applied to men as well as women, and exerted pressure to maintain moral norms among women. They heard complaints from wives about mistreatment by individual husbands, and discussed how to deal with problems they were having with "the men" as a whole. They also made decisions about rituals for the female aspect of the village's guardian spirit, and rituals needed to protect the fruitfulness of women and of their farms.<sup>33</sup> If fines for violations, or repeated requests to husbands and elders, were ignored, they might "sit on" an individual offender or go on strike. They may refuse to cook, or to take care of small children, or to have sexual relations with their husbands. Men regarded the *mikiri* as legitimate and the use of the more extreme sanctions seems to have been rare, but well-remembered.<sup>34</sup>

While both *ogbo* and *mikiri* served to articulate and protect women's interests, it is probably more accurate to see them as sharing in diffused political authority than as acting only as pressure groups for women's interests. Okonjo argues that traditional Igbo society had a "bisexual" political system -- that is, that there was a dual system of male and female political/religious institutions, each with its own autonomous sphere of authority.<sup>35</sup> Thus, women on their own settled disputes among women, but also made decisions and rules affecting men. They had the right to enforce these decisions and rules themselves, using forms of group ostracism similar to those used by men.

In a society of such diffuse political authority, it would be misleading to call only the village assembly a "public" gathering.

The "public", too, is diffuse, and different parts of it may meet in different ways to deal with issues of common concern. Most Western observers will unquestioningly accept a gathering of all of a community's adult men as a "public" gathering, but the point about Igbo society is that a gathering of all adult women must also be accepted as a "public" gathering.

### Colonial "Penetration"<sup>36</sup>

Into this system of diffuse authority, fluid and informal leadership, shared rights of enforcement, and a more or less stable balance of male and female power, the British tried to introduce ideas of "native administration" derived from colonial experience with chiefs and emirs in northern Nigeria. Southern Nigeria was declared a protectorate in 1900, but ten years passed before the conquest was effective. As colonial power was established in what the British perceived as a situation of "ordered anarchy", Igboland was divided into Native Court Areas, which violated the autonomy of villages by lumping many unrelated villages into each court area. British District Officers were to preside over the courts, but were not always present as there were more courts than officers. The Igbo membership was formed by choosing from each village a "representative" who was given a warrant of office. These Warrant Chiefs were also constituted the Native Authority. They were required to see that the orders of the District Officers were executed in their own villages and were the only link between the colonial power and the people.<sup>37</sup>

It was a violation of Igbo concepts to have one man represent the village in the first place and more of a violation that he should give orders to everyone else. The people obeyed the Warrant Chief when they had to, since British power backed him up. In some places Warrant Chiefs were lineage heads or wealthy men who were already leaders in the village. But in many places they were simply ambitious, opportunistic young men who put themselves forward as friends of the conquerors. Even the relatively less corrupt Warrant Chief was still, more than anything else, an agent of the British. The people avoided using Native Courts when they could do so. But Warrant Chiefs could force cases into the Native Courts and could fine people for infractions of rules. By having the ear of the British, the Warrant Chief could himself violate local traditions and even British rules, and get away with it since his version would be believed eventually.<sup>38</sup>

Women suffered particularly under the arbitrary rule of Warrant Chiefs, who were reported as having taken women to marry without conforming to the customary process, which included the woman's right to refuse a particular suitor. They also helped themselves to the women's agricultural produce, and to their domestic animals.<sup>39</sup>

Recommendations for reform of the system were made almost from its inception both by junior officers in the field and by senior officers sent out from headquarters to investigate. But no real improvements were made.<sup>40</sup> An attempt by the British in 1918 to make the Native Courts more "native" by removing the District Officers had little effect, and that mostly bad. Removing the District Officers simply left more of the courts' power in the hands of corrupt Warrant Chiefs and the increasingly powerful Court Clerks. The latter, intended as "servants of the court", were able in some cases to dominate the courts because of their monopoly of expertise -- namely, literacy.<sup>41</sup>

### The Women's War

In 1925 the British decided to introduce direct taxation in order to create the Native Treasury, which was supposed to pay for improvements in the Native Administration, in accord with the British imperial philosophy that the colonized should pay the costs of colonization. Prices in the palm trade were high, and the tax -- on adult males -- was set accordingly. The taxes were collected without widespread trouble, although there were "tax riots" in Warri Province (west of the Niger) in 1927.<sup>42</sup>

In 1929 a zealous Assistant District Officer in Bende division of Owerri Province, apparently acting on his own initiative, decided to "tighten up" the census registers by re-counting households and property. He told the Chiefs that there was no plan to increase taxes, or to tax women. But the counting of women and their property raised fears that women were to be taxed, particularly because the Bende District Officer had lied when the men were counted for tax purposes, and had told the men that they were not going to be taxed. Naturally the women, therefore, did not believe reassurances that they were not going to be taxed. The taxation rumor spread quickly through the women's communication networks, and meetings of women were held in various market squares, the women's common place for large meetings.<sup>43</sup>

In the Oloko Native Court Area -- one of the areas of deception about the men's tax -- the women leaders, Ikonnia, Nwannedie and Nwugo, called a general meeting at Orié market, at which it was decided that as long as only men were approached in a compound and asked for information, the women would do nothing. If any woman were approached, she was to raise the alarm and the rest would meet to decide what to do. They wanted clear evidence that the women were to be taxed.<sup>44</sup>

On November 23, the agent of the Oloko Warrant Chief, Okugo, entered a compound and told one of the married women, Nwanyeruwa, to count her goats and sheep. She replied angrily, "Was your mother

counted?" — at which "they closed, seizing each other by the throat".<sup>45</sup> Nwanyeruwa's report to the Oloko women convinced them that they were to be taxed. Messengers were sent to neighboring areas. Women streamed into Oloko from all over Owerri Province. They "sat on" Okugo and demanded his cap of office. They massed in protest at the District Office, succeeding in getting written assurances that they were not to be taxed, and (after several days of mass meetings in protest) in getting Okugo arrested, tried and convicted of "spreading news likely to cause alarm" and of physical assault on the women. He was sentenced to two years' imprisonment.<sup>46</sup>

News of this victory spread rapidly through the market - *mikiri-ogbo* network, and women in many areas then attempted to get rid of their Warrant Chiefs as well as the Native Administration itself. Nwanyeruwa became something of a heroine as reports of her resistance spread. From all the Ngwa clan towns in Aba and Owerri divisions, money poured in from grateful women. She was "content to allow" leadership in her area to be exercised by someone else, however. The money collected was used not for her, but to finance trips for delegates to meetings of women throughout the East, for the coordination of the Women's War.<sup>47</sup>

The British only ended the rebellion by using large numbers of police and soldiers — and, on one occasion, Boy Scouts. Although the shootings in mid-December 1929, and the growing numbers of police and soldiers in the area led the women to halt most of their activities, disturbances in local areas continued into 1930.<sup>48</sup> The "disaffected areas" — all of Owerri and Calabar Provinces — were occupied by government forces. Punitive expeditions burned or demolished compounds, confiscated property to enforce fines levied arbitrarily against villages to pay for damages from the disturbances, and took provisions from the villages for troops.<sup>49</sup>

During the colonial investigations following the Women's War, the British discovered that the market network had been used to spread the rumor of taxation, but they did not inquire further into the concerted action of the women, the grassroots leadership, the agreement on demands, or even into the fact that thousands of women showed up at Native Administration centers dressed and adorned in the same unusual way. Their faces smeared with charcoal or ashes and their heads bound with young ferns, the women had all worn short loincloths and carried in their hands sticks wreathed with young palms — the dress and adornment signifying "war" and the sticks being those used to invoke the power of the female ancestors.<sup>50</sup>

In exonerating the soldiers who fired on the women, a Commission of Enquiry spoke of the "savage passions" of the "mobs", and one military officer told the Commission that "he had never seen crowds

in such a state of frenzy". Yet these "frenzied mobs" injured no one seriously, which the British found "surprising",<sup>51</sup> because they had no understanding that the women were engaged in a traditional practice with traditional rules and limitations, but carried out on a much larger scale than in pre-colonial times.<sup>52</sup>

#### Reforms — But Not for Women

Since the British failed to recognize the Women's War as a collective response to the abrogation of rights, they did not inquire into the structures that prepared the women for such action. They failed to ask, "How do the women make group decisions? How do they choose their leaders?" And they raised no questions as to whether women might have had a role in the traditional political system that should be incorporated into the institutions of colonial government.

Because both the women and the men regarded the investigations as attempts to discover whom to punish, they volunteered no information about women's organizations. But would the British have understood them if they had? The discovery of the market network had suggested no further lines of inquiry. The majority of District Officers thought that the men had organized the women's actions and were secretly directing them. The women's demands that the Native Courts no longer hear cases and that "all white men should go to their own country" — or at least that women should serve on the Native Courts and a woman be appointed a District Officer — were demands in line with the power of women in traditional society, but were regarded by the British as irrational and ridiculous.<sup>53</sup>

The 1933 reforms therefore ignored the women's traditional political role, while making some adjustment to traditional Igbo male and male-dominated political forms. The number of Native Court Areas was greatly increased and their boundaries arranged to conform roughly to traditional divisions. Warrant Chiefs were replaced by "massed benches" — allowing large numbers of judges to sit at one time. In most cases it was left up to the villages to decide whom and how many to send. This benefitted the women by eliminating the corruption of the Warrant Chiefs, and it made their persons and property more secure. But it provided no outlet for collective action, their real base of power.<sup>54</sup>

In 1901 the British had declared all jural institutions except the Native Courts illegitimate, but it was only in the years following the 1933 reforms that Native Administration local government became effective enough to make that declaration meaningful. They had also outlawed "self-help" — the use of force by anyone but the government to punish wrongdoers — and the increasingly effective enforcement of this ban eliminated the women's ultimate weapon: "sitting

on a man". In attempting to create specialized political institutions on the Western model with participation on the basis of individual achievement, the British created a system in which there was no place for group solidarity, no possibility of dispersed and shared political authority or power of enforcement, and thus very little place for women.<sup>55</sup>

As in the village assemblies, the women could not compete with men for leadership in the reformed Native Administration because as individuals they lacked the resources of the men. This imbalance in resources was increased by the other facets of British colonialism economic penetration and missionary influence. All three -- colonial government, foreign investment and church influence -- contributed to the growth of a system of political and economic stratification that made community decision-making less "public" in both senses we have discussed and led to the current concentration of national political power in the hands of a small, educated, wealthy, *male* elite. For while we are here focusing on the *political* results of colonialism, these results must be seen as part of the whole system of imposed class and sex stratification.<sup>56</sup>

### Missionary Influence

Christian missions were established in Igboland in the late 19th century. They had few converts at first, but their influence by the 1930s was considered significant, generally among the young.<sup>57</sup> A majority of Igbo eventually "became Christians" -- they had to profess Christianity in order to attend mission schools, and education was highly valued. But regardless of how nominal their membership was, they had to obey the rules to remain in good standing, and one rule was to avoid "pagan" rituals. Women were discouraged from attending meetings at which traditional rituals were performed or money collected for the rituals, which in effect meant all *mikiri*, *ogbo* and many other women's gatherings.<sup>58</sup>

Probably more significant, since *mikiri* were in the process of losing some of their political functions anyway, was mission education. English and Western education came to be seen as increasingly necessary for political leadership -- needed to deal with the British and their law -- and women had less access to this new knowledge than men. Boys were more often sent to school, for a variety of reasons generally related to their favored position in the patri-lineage, including the fact that they, not their sisters, would be expected to support their parents in old age.<sup>59</sup> But even when girls did go, they tended not to receive the same type of education. In mission schools, and increasingly in special "training homes" that dispensed with most academic courses, the girls were taught European domestic skills and the Bible, often in the vernacular. The missionaries' avowed purpose in educating girls was to train

them to be Christian wives and mothers, not for jobs or for citizenship.<sup>60</sup> Missionaries were not necessarily against women's participation in politics — clergy in England, as in America, could be found supporting women's suffrage. But in Africa their concern was the church, and for the church they needed Christian families. Therefore, Christian wives and mothers, not female political leaders, was the missions' aim. As Mary Slessor, the influential Calabar missionary said: "God-like motherhood is the finest sphere for women, and the way to the redemption of the world".<sup>61</sup> This philosophy notwithstanding, the English language and other knowledge of "book" became the requisite political knowledge, and access to political life became more restricted (differentially so to women) and policy-making became less public. The differential effects of these were more disadvantageous to women.

### Economic Colonialism

The traditional Igbo division of labor — in which women owned their surplus crops and their market profits, while men controlled the more valuable yams and palm products and did more long-distance trading — was part of a subsistence economy. Small surpluses could be accumulated, but these were generally not used for continued capital investment. Rather, in accord with traditional values, the surplus was used for social rather than economic gain. It was returned to the community through feasts and feasts for rituals regarding title-taking, weddings, funerals and other ceremonies, or through projects to help the community "get up". One did not become a "big man" or a "big woman" by hoarding one's wealth, but by spending it on others in prestigious ways.<sup>62</sup>

Igbo women had been active traders before the Pax Britannica, except for a few areas such as Afikpo where women farmed but did not trade.<sup>63</sup> The traditional system was able to deal with conflicts with relatively little warfare through the ties of exogamous marriage among patrilineages and the peace-keeping activities of women, that is, the cross-cutting network of women which provided channels for communication and confiliation, and the ritual power of the *umuada* providing female sanctions when persuasion failed.<sup>64</sup> Conflict also took the non-violent form of mutual insults in obscene and satirical songs,<sup>65</sup> and even warfare itself was conducted within limits, with appropriate weapons and actions increasing in seriousness as kinship ties increased in distance.<sup>66</sup>

Women from mutually hostile village groups who had married into the same patrilineage could if necessary act as "protectors" for each other so that they could trade in "stranger" markets.<sup>67</sup> Women also protected themselves by carrying the stout sticks they



used as pestles for pounding yams (the same ones carried in the Women's War). Even after European slave-trading led to an increase in danger from slave-hunters (as well as from head-hunters), Igbo women went by themselves to their farms and with other women to market, with their pestles as weapons for physical protection.<sup>68</sup>

The Pax increased the safety of short and especially of longer distance trading, for Igbo women as for women in other parts of Africa.<sup>69</sup> But the Pax also made it possible for European firms to dominate the market economy. Onwuteaka argues that one cause of the Women's War was Igbo women's resentment of British firms' monopoly on buying, which allowed those firms to fix prices and to adopt methods of buying that increased their own profits at the women's expense.<sup>70</sup> Women's petty trading grew to include European products, but for many women the accumulated surplus remains small, often providing only subsistence and a few years' school fees for some of their children -- the preference for sending boys to school further disadvantaging the next generation of women.<sup>71</sup>

A few women did become "big traders", dealing in £1,000 lots of European goods.<sup>72</sup> But women traders remain for the most part close to subsistence level. For West African women in towns, little is open to them except trading or prostitution unless they are among the tiny number who have special vocational or professional training as dressmakers or nurses or teachers.<sup>73</sup> The "modern" economic sector, like the political, is dominated by men. Women's access was limited "by their low level of literacy and by the general tendency to give priority to men in the employment recruitment to the modern sector."<sup>74</sup> The great majority of women outside urban areas find themselves feeding their children by farming with their traditional implements while men move into cash-cropping (with tools and training from "agricultural development programs"), migrant wage labor and the more profitable trading with Europeans in cash crops.<sup>75</sup>

Thus, as Mintz suggests,

*while the economic growth advanced by Westernization has doubtless increased opportunities for (at least some) female traders, it may also and simultaneously limit the range of their activities, as economic changes outside the internal market system continue to multiply.*<sup>76</sup>

To the extent that economic opportunities for Africans in the "modern" sector continue to grow, women will become relatively more dependent economically on men and unlikely to "catch up"

for a very long time, even if we accept education as the key. The relative stagnation of African economic "growth", however, suggests that the traditional markets will not disappear or even noticeably shrink, but will continue to be needed by the large numbers of urban migrants living economically marginal lives. Women can thus continue to subsist by petty trading, but cannot achieve real economic independence from men, nor gain access to the resources needed for equal participation in community life.

It seems reasonable to see the traditional Igbo division of labor in production as interwoven with the traditional Igbo dispersal of political authority into a dual or "bisexual" system. It seems equally reasonable to see the disruptions of colonialism as producing a new, similarly interwoven economic-political pattern — but one with stronger male domination of the cash economy and of political life.

To see this relationship, however, is not to explain it. Even if the exclusion of women from the colonial Native Administration and from nationalist politics could be shown to derive from their exclusion from the "modern" economic sector, we would still need to ask why it was *men* who were offered agricultural training and new tools for cash-cropping, and who are hired in factories and shops in preference to women with the same education. And we would still need to ask why it was boys who were sent to school, and why, once there, they were educated differently from girls.

### Victorianism and Women's Invisibility

At least part of the answer must lie in the values already held by the colonists, Victorian values that led the British to assume that girls and boys, women and men should be treated and should behave as people supposedly did in "civilized" England. Not only was strong male domination introduced into Igbo society indirectly by new economic structures; it was also directly imposed by the recruitment of only men as part of the Native Administration. In addition, the new economic and political structures were supported by the inculcation of sexist ideology in the mission schools.

Not all capitalist, colonialist societies are equally sexist (or racist), and the Victorian society from which came the conquerors of Igboland was one in which the "woman's-place-is-in-the-home" ideology had hardened into the most rigid form it has taken in recent Western history. Although attacked by feminists, it remained the dominant mode of thought throughout the colonial period, and is far from dead today.

We are concerned here primarily with the view of women and politics, which produced the expectation that men would be active in politics and business but women would not. The ideal of Victorian womanhood — attainable, of course, only by the middle class, but widely believed in throughout the society — was of a sensitive, morally superior being who was the hearthside guardian of Christian virtues and sentiments absent in the outside world. Her mind was not strong enough for the appropriately masculine subjects: science, business and politics.<sup>77</sup> A woman who showed talent in these areas posed a challenge to acceptable ideas about typical women. The exceptional woman simply "had the brain of a man", as Sir George Goldie said of Mary Kingsley.<sup>78</sup>

A thorough investigation of the diaries, journals, reports and letters of colonial officers and missionaries would be needed to prove that most of them held these Victorian values. But preliminary reading of biographies, autobiographies, journals and "reminiscences", and the evidence of their own statements about Igbo women at the time of the Women's War, strongly suggest the plausibility of the hypothesis that they were deflected from any attempt to discover and protect Igbo women's political and economic roles by their assumption that politics and business are neither proper nor normal places for women.<sup>79</sup> When the Women's War forced the colonial administrators to recognize the presence of Igbo women, their brief "visibility" was insufficient to shake these assumptions. Their behavior was simply seen as aberrant and inexplicable. When they returned to "normal", they were once again invisible.

This inability to "see" what is before one's eyes is strikingly illustrated by an account of a visit by the High Commissioner, Sir Ralph Moor, to Aro Chukwu after the British had destroyed (temporarily) the powerful oracle there: "To Sir Ralph's astonishment, the women of Aro Chukwu solicited his permission to re-establish the Long Juju, which the women intended to control themselves".<sup>80</sup> Would Sir Ralph have been "astonished" if, for example, the older men had controlled the oracle before its destruction and the younger Aro men had wanted to take it over?

Although there was a feminist movement in colonial England, it had not successfully challenged basic ideas about women nor made the absence of women from public life seem to be a problem that required remedy. The movement had not succeeded in creating a "feminist" consciousness in any but a few "deviants", and such a consciousness is far from widespread today; for to have a "feminist" consciousness means that one notices the "invisibility" of women. It means that one wonders where the women are — in life and in print. That we have not wondered is an indication of

our own ideological bondage to a system of sex and class stratification. What we can see, if we look, is that, like other African men, Igbo men have come to dominate the social scene politically and economically, while individual women have become economic auxiliaries to their husbands and women as a group have become political auxiliaries to nationalist parties.

Wives supplement their husbands' incomes, but remain economically dependent; women's "branches" have provided votes, money and bodies for street demonstrations for the parties, while remaining dependent on male leaders for policy-making. Market women's associations were a crucial base of support for the early National Council for Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), the party that eventually was to become dominant in Igbo regions (although it began as a truly national party). But while a few market women leaders were ultimately rewarded for their loyalty to the NCNC by appointment to party or legislative positions, market women's associations never attained a share in policy-making that approached their contribution to NCNC electoral success.<sup>81</sup>

Though the Northern People's Congress (NPC), dominated by Moslem emirs, opposed the idea, the NCNC at first urged female suffrage throughout the country. Soon, however, the male leadership gave up pushing for it in the north (where women have never yet voted), in order to make peace with the NPC and the British and thus to try to insure themselves a share of the power in the post-independence government. During the period between independence in 1960 and the 1966 military coups that ended party rule, some progress was made in education for girls. By 1966, consequently, female literacy in the East — more than 50% in some urban areas and at least 15% overall — was high for Africa, where the overall average is about 10% and the rural average may be as low as 2%.<sup>82</sup>

Exhortations to greater female participation in "modern life" appeared frequently in the newspapers owned by the NCNC leader, Nnamdi Azikiwe, and a leadership training course for women was begun in 1959 at the Man O'War Bay Training Centre, to be "run on exactly the same lines as the courses for men, with slight modifications", as *The Pilot* put it. The motto of the first class of 22 was, "What the men can do, the women can".<sup>83</sup> But there was more rhetoric than reality in these programs for female emancipation. During the period of party politics, no women were elected to regional or national legislatures. Those few who were appointed gained favor by supporting "party first", not "women first". Perhaps none of this should be surprising, given the corruption that had come to dominate national party politics.<sup>84</sup>

### Biafra and Beyond

On January 15, 1966, a military coup ended the Igbo's relationship with the NCNC by outlawing all political parties, and therefore their women's branches. A year and a half later — after massacres of more than 30,000 Easterners in the North, the flight of more than a million refugees back to the East, a counter-coup, and the division of the Igbo-dominated Eastern Region into three states — Biafra declared itself an independent state. In January 1970, Biafra surrendered. The remaining Igbo are now landlocked, oilless and under military occupation by a Northern-dominated military government.<sup>85</sup>

In 1966 and after, Igbo women demonstrated in the streets to protest the massacres, to urge secession, and, later, to protest Soviet involvement in the war.<sup>86</sup> During the war the women's market network and other organizations of women maintained a distribution system for what food there was, and provided channels for the passage of food and information to the army.<sup>87</sup> Women joined local civilian defense militia units, and in May 1969, they formed a "Women's Front", and called on the Biafran leadership to allow them to enlist in the infantry.<sup>88</sup>

During the war and since, local civilian government has continued to exist more or less in the form that evolved under the "reformed" Native Administration. The decentralization produced by the war has by some reports strengthened these local councils, and the absence of many men has strengthened female participation.<sup>89</sup> Thus, at tragic human cost, the war may have made possible a resurgence of female political activity. If this is so, women's participation again stems much more from Igbo tradition than from Western innovation, and consciously so. A young Biafran woman, answering a Western reporter's question about women's past influence, became "quite grimly militant" in recounting the story of the Women's War and its relationship to more recent women's protests.<sup>90</sup>

It remains to be seen whether Igbo women, or any African women, can gain real political power without the creation of a "modern" version of the traditional "bisexual" system — advocated by Okonjo — or without a drastic change in economic structures so that economic equality could support political equality for all women and men, as economic stratification now supports male domination and female dependence. What seems clear from women's experiences — whether under capitalism, colonialism or revolutionary socialism — is that formal political equality and economic equality are not enough. Unless the male members of a liberation movement, a ruling party or a government themselves develop a feminist consciousness and a commitment to male-female equality, women will end up where they have always been: invisible except when men, for their own purposes, whether personal or political, look for female bodies.

FOOTNOTES

1. Today the Igbo, numbering some 8.7 million, live mainly in the East Central State of Nigeria, with about half a million in the Mid-Western State. The area in which they live corresponds approximately to Igboland at the time of the colonial conquest. The old Calabar and Owerri Provinces covered roughly the southeast and southwest boundaries of Igboland. Ibibio women from Calabar were also drawn into the rebellion, but the bulk of the participants were Igbo. For an extension of the analysis to other parts of Africa, see Brain (this volume) and Judith Van Allen, "African Women -- Modernizing into Dependence?" paper presented at the Conference on Social and Political Change: The Role of Women, sponsored by the University of California, Santa Barbara, and the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions; and Judith Van Allen, "Memsahib, Militante, Femme Libre: Political and Apolitical Styles of African Women", in Jane Jaquette (ed), *Women in Politics* (New York: John Wiley & Sons), 1974.
2. Victor C. Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), p.5; and Kamene Okonjo, "Political Systems with Bisexual Functional Roles -- The Case of Women's Participation in Politics in Nigeria", paper presented at American Political Science Association Annual Meeting, Chicago, 1974, p. 25, note 40.
3. Compare, for example, Howard L. Hurwitz, *An Encyclopedic Dictionary of American History* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1970); and Philip S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States, Vol. 4: The Industrial Workers of the World, 1905-1917* (New York: International Publishers, 1965).
4. Afigbo and Gailey provide the most detailed of the available descriptions and analyses of the Women's War. Their descriptions, like Perham's, are based on the reports of the two Commissions of Enquiry, issued as Sessional Papers of the Nigerian Legislative Council, Nos. 12 and 28 of 1930, the the Minutes of Evidence issued with the latter. They also used the Intelligence Reports done in the early 1930s by political officers. Afigbo, an Igbo scholar, provides the most extensive and authoritative account, particularly regarding traditional Igbo society.
5. George Orwell, "Politics and the English Language", in *The Orwell Reader* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1956; essay orig. publ. 1946), p. 366.

6. Margery Perham, *Native Administration in Nigeria* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), p. 219.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 213-214; 216-217.
8. Sylvia Leith-Ross, *African Women* (London: Faber and Faber, 1939), p. 165.
9. e.g. Simon Ottenberg, "Ibo Receptivity to Change", in Bascom and Herskovits, (eds) *Continuity and Change in African Cultures* (University of Chicago Press, 1959), p. 133; and A.H. St. John Wood, "Nigeria: Fifty Years of Political Development among the Ibos", in Raymond Apthorpe, (ed) *From Tribal Rule to Modern Government* (Lusaka, Northern Rhodesia: Rhodes-Livingston Institute for Social Research, 1960), p. 127.
10. Leith-Ross, *African Women*, p. 109; J.S. Harris, "The Position of Women in a Nigerian Society", *Transactions of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1940, pp. 146-148.
11. Ideology, as used herein, refers to a set of beliefs that are well-integrated, but based on unquestioned assumptions and often revealed most clearly by a society's ideas about what is "natural". An ideology is "sexist" if it uses sex as a criterion for assigning moral, mental and physical superiority and inferiority, thereby assuming members of one sex or the other to be unfit for certain psychological, social, economic, professional and political roles and tasks. Since an ideology is expressed at least as much by what is not said as by what is said, sexism is often revealed by the absence of comment about women.
12. Lloyd Ashton Fallers, "Political Sociology and the Anthropological Study of African Politics", *Archives Europeenes de Sociologie*, 1963.
13. M.M. Green, *Igbo Village Affairs* (London: Frank Cass; New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1947, 1964), pp. 178-216; also Leith-Ross, *African Women*, pp. 97, 106-109.
14. Daryll Forde and G.I. Jones, *The Ibo- and Ibibio-Speaking Peoples of South-Eastern Nigeria* (London: International African Institute, 1950), pp. 9, 39.
15. There is a variation among Igbo groups, but the general pattern described here apply fairly well to the southern Igbo, those involved in the Women's War. The strongest exceptions are the western and riverain Igbo, who have a "constitutional villate monarchy" system, as Afigbo terms it, and the Afikpo

of the Cross River, who have a double descent system and low female participation in economic and political life. See Phoebe V. Ottenberg, "The Changing Economic Position of Women among the Afikpo Ibo", in Bascom and Herskovits, *Continuity and Change*; also Phoebe V. Ottenberg, "The Afikpo Ibo of Eastern Nigeria", in James L. Gibbs, Jr., (ed), *Peoples of Africa* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965). The western and riverain Igbo are more hierarchically organized than other Igbo, but not stratified by sex, as there is a women's hierarchy parallel to that of the men. See Ikenna Nzirim, *Studies in Ibo Political Systems: Chieftaincy and Politics in Four Niger States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), pp. 21, 55, 64, 76, 96, 129. The Afikpo are stratified strongly by sex, with the senior men's age grade dominating community decision-making. The Afikpo have very weak organization of women's age grades, no *mikiri* or *umuada* (because of the double descent system), no traditional female trading, and very low female status in general, compared to other Igbo groups. Afikpo Igbo, unlike almost all other Igbo, have a men's secret society that has "keeping women in their place" as a major purpose. See the two Ottenberg articles cited above.

16. Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria*, p. 41; Green, *Igbo Village Affairs*, pp. 78-79.
17. Uchendu, pp. 41-44; Green, chaps. 7-11; Harris, "The Position of Women in a Nigerian Society", pp. 142-143.
18. Green, pp. 107, 112-113, 116-129, 169, 199.
19. Uchendu, p. 43.
20. A.E. Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs: Indirect Rule in South-Eastern Nigeria 1891-1929* (London: Longmans, 1972), pp. 13-36; C.K. Meek, *Law and Authority in a Nigerian Tribe* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957; orig. publ. 1937), pp. 98-99, 105; Uchendu, pp. 39-40.
21. Harris, "The Position of Women", pp. 142-143; Uchendu, pp. 34, 42-43.
22. The sources for this description are Uchendu (*The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria*) and personal conversations with an Igbo born in Umu-Domi village of Onicha clan, Afikpo division. Some of the ideas about leadership were suggested by John Schaar's "legitimacy in the Modern State". His discussion of what "humanly meaningful authority" would look like is very suggestive for studies of leadership in "developing" societies.



23. Meek, *Law and Authority*, p. 203.
24. Green, *Igbo Village Affairs*, pp. 32-42.
25. Leith-Ross, *African Women*, pp. 90-92, 138-139, 143.
26. Green, p. 169, Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria*, p. 41.
27. Uchendu, p. 19.
28. *Ibid.*
29. Forde and Jones, *The Ibo- and Ibibio-Speaking Peoples*, p. 21.
30. Okonjo, "Political Systems with Bisexual Functional Roles", p. 25; Michael S.O. Olisa, "Political Culture and Political Stability in Traditional Igbo Society", *Conch*, III:2, September 1971, pp. 24-25.
31. Green, pp. 217-229.
32. Okonjo, p. 25; Green, pp. 217-229; Leith-Ross, pp. 105-110, 115, 163-165; Harris, "The Position of Women".
33. Okonjo, p. 24; Green, 187 ff., 212-214; Leith-Ross, pp. 117-118, 216-218.
34. Green, pp. 114, 143-144, 195-197, 201, 210-214; Leith-Ross, pp. 97, 107; Harris, pp. 146-147.
35. Okonjo argues that pre-colonial African political systems in general have been such "bisexual" systems, using as three specific examples the Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa (the latter having been "bisexual" before Islamic conquest).
36. "Penetration" shares with many other commonly used terms in political and economic discourse a metaphorical semantic connection with male sexuality (e.g., thrust, conquest, potency). It is used here advisedly because it seems to suggest an accurate picture of what colonialism and neocolonialism do to African women and to Mother Africa.
37. Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs*, pp. 13-36, 207-248.
38. Afigbo, pp. 207-248; J.C. Anene, *Southern Nigeria in Transition 1885-1906* (New York: The Cambridge University Press, 1967), p. 259; Meek, *Law and Authority*, pp. 328-330.

39. J.C. Onwuteaka, "The Aba Riot of 1929 and Its Relation to the System of 'Indirect Rule'", *The Nigerian Journal of Economic and Social Studies*, November 1965, p. 274.
40. Meek, *Law and Authority*, pp. 329-330; Harry A. Gailey, *The Road to Aba* (New York: New York University Press, 1970), pp. 66-74; Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs*, *passim*.
41. Meek, p. 329; Gailey, pp. 72-73.
42. Afigbo, pp. 207-248; Gailey, pp. 94-95; Meek, pp. 330-331.
43. Afigbo, *Ibid.*, Gailey, pp. 106-107.
44. Gailey, pp. 107-108.
45. Perham, *Native Administration in Nigeria*, p. 207.
46. Gailey, pp. 108-113.
47. Gailey, p. 112.
48. Gailey, p. 137.
49. Gailey, pp. 135-137.
50. Harris, "The Position of Women", pp. 143-145, 147-148; Perham, p. 207 ff.; Meek, p. ix.
51. Perham, pp. 212-219.
52. A few older men criticized the women for "flinging sand at their chiefs", but Igbo men generally supported the women, while considering it "their fight" against the British. It is also reported that both women and men shared the mistaken belief that the women would not be fired upon because they had observed certain rituals and were carrying the palm-wrapped sticks that invoked the power of the female ancestors. The men had no illusions of immunity for themselves, having vivid memories of the slaughter of Igbo men during the conquest. See Perham, p. 212 ff; Anene, *Southern Nigeria in Transition*, pp. 207-224; S.O. Esike, "The Aba Riots of 1929", *African Historian* (Ibadan), I:3, 1965, p. 11; Meek, p. x.
53. Gailey, p. 130 ff.; Leith-Ross, *African Women*, p. 165; Perham, p. 165 ff.
54. Perham, p. 365 ff.

55. Leith-Ross, *African Women*, pp. 109-110, 163, 214.
56. Mullings' criticism of my "Sitting on a Man", and arguments about systems of stratification (see Leith Mullings, "Women and Economic Change in Africa", paper presented at the UCLA African Studies Center Colloquium on Women and Change in Africa: 1870-1970, 1974), helped to push me to relate the economic effects of colonialism to their political effects in an explicit way. I remain convinced, however, that ideology and consciousness should be treated as independent factors that can directly influence the form of economic and political developments, and that can be changed directly by "consciousness-raising" as well as indirectly by changes in economic structures.
57. Maxwell (Lowry J. Maxwell, *Nigeria: The Land, the People and Christian Progress* (London: World Dominion Press, 1926), pp. 150-152) states that by 1925 there were 26 mission stations and 63 missionaries (twelve of them missionary wives) in Igboland. The earliest station was established in 1857, but except for three all were founded after 1900. Fifteen mission stations and 30 missionaries were among the Igbo in Owerri and Calabar Provinces.
58. Leith-Ross, p. 110; J.F. Ade Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria, 1841-1891: The Making of a New Elite* (Evanston, Illinois: The Northwestern University Press, 1965), pp. 108-109.
59. Leith-Ross, pp. 133, 196-197, 316.
60. According to Leith-Ross, in the  
*Girls' training homes... the scholastic education given was limited, in some of the smaller homes opened at a later date almost negligible, but the domestic training and the general civilizing effect were good.*  
Evidence of these views among missionaries can be found in Ajayi, pp. 65, 142-144; G.T. Basden, *Edith Warner of the Niger* (London: Seeley, Service & co, 1927), pp. 13, 16, 33, 55, 77, 86; Josephine C. Bulifant, *Forty Years in the African Bush* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1950), p. 163 and *passim*; W.P. Livingstone, *Mary Slessor of Calabar* (New York: George H. Doran, n.d.), pp. iii-vi; and Maxwell, *Nigeria: The Land, the People*, pp. 55, 118.
61. Livingstone, *Mary Slessor*, p. 328.

62. Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria*, p. 34; Meek, *Law and Authority*, p. 111.
63. It is an unfortunate accident that the Afikpo Igbo, with their strong sexual stratification, have been used as examples of "the Igbo" or of "the effect of colonialism on women" in widely-read articles. Simon Ottenberg's "Ibo Receptivity to Change" is particularly misleading, since it is about "all" Igbo. There is one specific mention of women: "The social and economic independence of women is much greater in some areas than in others." True, but the social and economic independence of women is much greater in virtually *all* other Igbo groups studied than it is in Afikpo, where the Ottenbergs did field work. There are said to be "a variety of judicial techniques" used, but all the examples given are of men's activities. There is a list of non-kinship organizations, but no women's organizations are listed. Sanday's otherwise useful and thought-provoking article both takes the Afikpo as "the" Igbo and exaggerates the amount of change in female status that female trading brought about. Phoebe Ottenberg, Sanday's ultimate source on Afikpo women, described the change in female status as existing "chiefly on the domestic rather than the general level", with the "men's position of religious, moral and legal authority ... in no way threatened". See Phoebe Ottenberg, "The Changing Economic Position of Women", p. 223. For examples of pre-colonial female trading in Igbo-land and elsewhere, see Kenneth Little, *African Women in Towns* (London: The Cambridge University Press, 1973), particularly p. 46, note 32; Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria*; Judith Van Allen, "From Aba to Biafra: Women's Associations and Political Power in Eastern Nigeria", paper presented at the UCLA African Studies Center Colloquium on Women and Change in Africa: 1870-1970, pp. 5-9; Onwuka K. Dike, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta, 1830-1885* (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), and Jones, G.I., *The Trading States of the Oil Rivers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963).
64. Anene, *Southern Nigeria in Transition*, p. 214 ff.; Green, *Igbo Village Affairs*, pp. 91, 152, 177, 230-232.
65. D.I. Nwoga, "The Concept and Practice of Satire among the Igbo", *Conch*, III:2, September 1971, pp. 33-35, 40-42.
66. Anene, p. 214 ff.
67. Green, p. 151.
68. Esike, "The Aba Riots of 1929", p. 13.

69. Phoebe Ottenberg, "The Changing Economic Position of Women", McCall; Christensen.
70. Onwuteaka, "The Aba Riot of 1929", p. 278.
71. Sidney W. Mintz, "Men, Women and Trade", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, XIII, 1971, pp. 251-268; Ester Boserup, *Woman's Role in Economic Development* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1970), pp. 92-95.
72. Little, *African Women in Towns*, p. 283.
73. Boserup, pp. 85-101, 106-138.
74. *Ibid.*, p. 99.
75. *Ibid.*, pp. 53-61, 87-99; Mintz, *Comparative Studies*, pp. 248-251.
76. Mintz, p. 265.
77. Walter E. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), pp. 349-353. Numerous studies of Victorian and post-Victorian ideas about women, politics and economics describe these patterns. See, for example, Amundsen, Benston, Mitchell, Mill and Taylor Mill. Only the middle class — as little as a sixth of the whole — could approximate the ideal, since women of the "lower classes" had to work in the fields, the mills or the mines, or on the street. But that did not stop the colonialists from carrying the ideal to Africa or from condemning urban prostitution (just as they did at home) without acknowledging their contribution to its origin or continuation.
78. Stephan Gwynn, *The Life of Mary Kingsley* (London: Macmillan, 1932), p. 252. Mary Kingsley, along with other elite female "exceptions" like Flora Shaw Lugard and Margery Perham, all of whom influenced African colonial policy, held the same values as did men, at least in regard to women's roles. They did not expect ordinary women to have political power any more than the men did, and they showed no particular concern for African women.
79. See, for non-missionary examples, Anene, *Southern Nigeria in Transition*, pp. 222-234; W. R. Crocker, *Nigeria: A Critique of British Colonial Administration* (London: George Allan & Urwin, 1936); Meek, *Law and Authority*; Mary H. Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa* (London: Macmillan, 1897); Margery Perham, *Lugard: The Years of Authority, 1898-1945* (London: Collins, 1960); and Wood, "Nigeria: Fifty Years of Political Development among the Ibos".

80. Anene, *Southern Nigeria in Transition*, p. 234.
81. Henry L. Bretton, "Political Influence in Southern Nigeria", in Herbert J. Spiro (ed), *Africa: The Primacy of Politics* (New York: Random House, 1966), p. 61; John P. MacIntosh (ed), *Nigerian Government and Politics* (London: George Allan & Urwin, 1966), pp. 299, 304-309; Richard Sklar, *Nigerian Political Parties* (Princeton University Press, 1963), pp. 41-83, 251, 402.
82. MacIntosh, pp. 17-37; *West African Pilot*, April 29, 1959; Janet E. Pool, "A Cross-Comparative Study of Aspects of Conjugal Behavior among Women of Three West African Countries", *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, Vol 6, No. 2, p. 238; United Nations Economic and Social Council (UNESCO), "Problems of Plan Implementation: Development Planning and Economic Integration in Africa", 1968.
83. Judith Van Allen, "From Aba to Biafra", pp. 17-20.
84. MacIntosh, pp. 299, 612-614; Sklar, p. 402; Van Allen, "From Aba to Biafra", pp. 19-22.
85. The attitude of the Northern emirs who now again dominate the Nigerian government is perhaps indicated by their order in June 1973 that single women get married or leave Northern Nigeria because Moslem religious authorities had decided that the North African drought was caused by prostitution and immorality. Landlords were ordered not to let rooms to single women, and many unmarried women were reported to have fled their home areas (*Agence France-Presse*, in *The San Francisco Chronicle*, June 23, 1973).
86. C. Oduwegwu Ojukwu, *Biafra* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), pp. 91, 143, 145-6, 245.
87. Chinwe Uzoma, "The Role of Women in the Nigerian/Biafran Civil War as Seen through My Experiences then", personal communication, p. 8 ff; Ntiyong U. Akpan, *The Struggle for Secession 1966-1970* (London: Frank Cass, 1971), pp. 65-67, 89, 98-99, 128-130.
88. Uzoma, pp. 5-8; Ojukwu, p. 386.
89. Helen Peters, "Reflections on the Preservation of Igbo Folk Literature", *Conch*, Vol. III, No. 2, September 1971, pp. 102-103; Renate Adler, "Letter from Biafra", *The New Yorker*, October 4, 1969, p. 112; Uzoma, pp. 10-12.
90. Adler, p. 72.

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