

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

Women generally are accorded low status in human societies. It is with the systematic intellectual approach, which contemporary women struggle for better life, attention and equal opportunities with men that the problem is now being addressed. Before now, women development efforts had centered largely on providing the needs of members of the family. Today, these efforts have gone beyond the family level. Women have been seen as a unique potential source of economic, social and political focal point of power if only they are properly tapped.

Society is dynamic in nature and the changes that occur affect the economic and socio-political life of the people. Change in this context means passing from one state or condition to another. Every human society at every stage of its evolution, experiences constant movement and changes in response to internal and external factors. Historical evidence has shown that the phenomenon of change began in Igbo land over millennia, long before the advent of European colonialism.¹ Abundant evidence exists to show that African societies and economies were receptive and responsive to changes and innovations in their development processes as against the views of most Euro-centric writers who portrayed Africans and African societies as static, backward, primitive and under-developed.² Africans reacted differently to innovations and change both as individuals and as groups. Endogenous

agents of change existed in traditional Igbo society of which Abakaliki is a significant part.

This study therefore debunks the view, which either attributes these changes to entirely European impact or assesses them on Western models. Trade, both local and long distance, warfare, occupational specialization and skill, technological innovations or improvements, population density and demographic shifts, as forces or agents often associated with transition, were operative in Abakaliki traditional society, as in other Igbo communities prior to the advent of Christianity and Western education³. Ottenberg observed that the Igbo are probably the most receptive to culture change among any large group in Nigeria⁴. They possess tremendous ability to integrate external borrowings into their indigenous formations and practices. Thus, Ottenberg concluded, “of all Nigerian peoples, the Ibo have probably changed the least while changing the most”⁵. Abakaliki women were not left out; they demonstrated their adaptive capacity in their various economic, social and political pursuits. For instance, well organized network of markets and trade routes existed in traditional Igbo societies that nineteenth century European observer remarked:

That such immense crowds should meet day after day in perfect harmony and order (in West Africa Markets) and transact their affairs like one great family without fighting and bloodshed is more wonderful because it stands out in such bold contrasts to what is even in lands boasted of civilization and good government⁶.

This organized system led to the development of a dynamic exchange economy, new bonds of relationships, flow of ideas and cultures. The advent of iron technology and the production of iron implements by some Igbo communities facilitated the fight to control the environment and revolutionized agriculture, hunting and warfare. Diversification and professionalization of occupations also developed and social institutions emerged and expanded⁷. These factors impacted both positively and negatively on the people, especially women, making for conflict, order, stability and progress. However, “the degree and pace of change may not have been fast because technological innovation was low or less advanced.”⁸

Despite the evident changes exhibited by traditional Igbo society, the Euro-centric scholars portrayed Africa as a dark continent in order to justify the European colonization and subsequent exploitation of its human and natural resources. Colonialism no doubt, was not a civilizing mission to Nigeria. The British mission in Nigeria was unarguably exploitative⁹. Nnamdi Azikiwe cited in Eneke describe the British “as the white pests who came to waste Africa and not to West Africa, they came for our goods and not for our good”¹⁰. However, colonialism had its advantages and limitations, ‘good and evil and ‘progress and damage’. For example, Isichei and Suret-Canale argue that while the limited funds provided by capitalist investment and the new imports from Europe helped to raise the standards of living of the colonized peoples to some appreciable degree, they also led to the decline and

eventual ruin of traditional industries and perfected the colonial pattern of exploitation¹¹.

Nevertheless, that colonialism brought about some changes in African societies cannot be disputed. The nature and extent of the changes however, differed from one society to another. Towns that became colonial administrative headquarters and those that embraced western education and Christianity, changes in their economic, political and social life was faster than communities in which these opportunities did not present themselves either early enough, or were thrown away. Christianity and western education introduced some ideas and values, which encouraged and promoted the pace of political, economic, social and cultural change of Igbo land, yet some Igbo communities did not allow their traditional institutions and values, which had sustained them over the ages to succumb easily to the innovations brought about by colonialism. Rather, they responded to these changes with a great deal of resentment, tact, wisdom and caution. For instance, Anyanwu observes, that decades after the establishment of colonial rule the people of Ezza, a major clan in Abakaliki “rejected western education”, “an institution like ritual circumcision remained unchanged in the face of colonial assault” while Christianity up to 1960 remained the religion of a minority”.¹² Thus, change microscopic as it might be in Abakaliki society, was not as a result of colonialism alone. Abakaliki women have, in time and space, and under the changing conditions, made vital contributions to societal development.

Statement of the Problem

The subject of change and development is a topical issue of considerable interest to scholars, especially geographers, sociologists, economists, philosophers, political scientists and historians. However, in spite of the accelerated pace of internally and externally induced change in the status of Abakaliki women in particular and Igbo women in general, the study of this phenomenon has received little attention from scholars, particularly historians. They have however paid scant attention to the changing position of Abakaliki women, thus rendering this aspect of their history incomplete. Moreover, the negative impression by other culture groups about the Abakaliki area as a backward and stagnant society is also a contributing factor to lack of studies of the people and their women. Thus, this study is designed to fill the gap in our knowledge of the rapidly changing status of Abakaliki women, and the contributions they have made to the socio-economic and political development of Abakaliki.

Purpose of the Study

At every state of human societal evolution, there are forces inducing change and forces opposed to change. The main purpose of this work therefore is to:

- ❖ carry out an in-depth study of the changing status of Abakaliki women in the spheres of socio-economic and political development;

- ❖ identify and examine the internal and external dynamics of change and their impact on Abakaliki women;
- ❖ highlight the problems associated with the changes in the status of women and suggest measures to tackle the ever increasing challenges confronting women; and
- ❖ correct the misconception that the Abakaliki women are conservative and slow to respond to agents or forces of change.

Significance of the Study

This study will help to lay a comprehensive historical foundation for the subject of changing status of Abakaliki women. This study would contribute to a better appreciation of Abakaliki women as active participants and agents in the process of socio-economic and political development of Abakaliki society. This study would help to accord women their deserved recognition and position in the development process of the Igbo nation.

This study is also relevant because it will help to show that Abakaliki people generally and the women in particular are both receptive and responsive. The work will add to the body of existing knowledge and make good reading material to the public just as it will serve as a reference study to researchers on gender related disciplines.

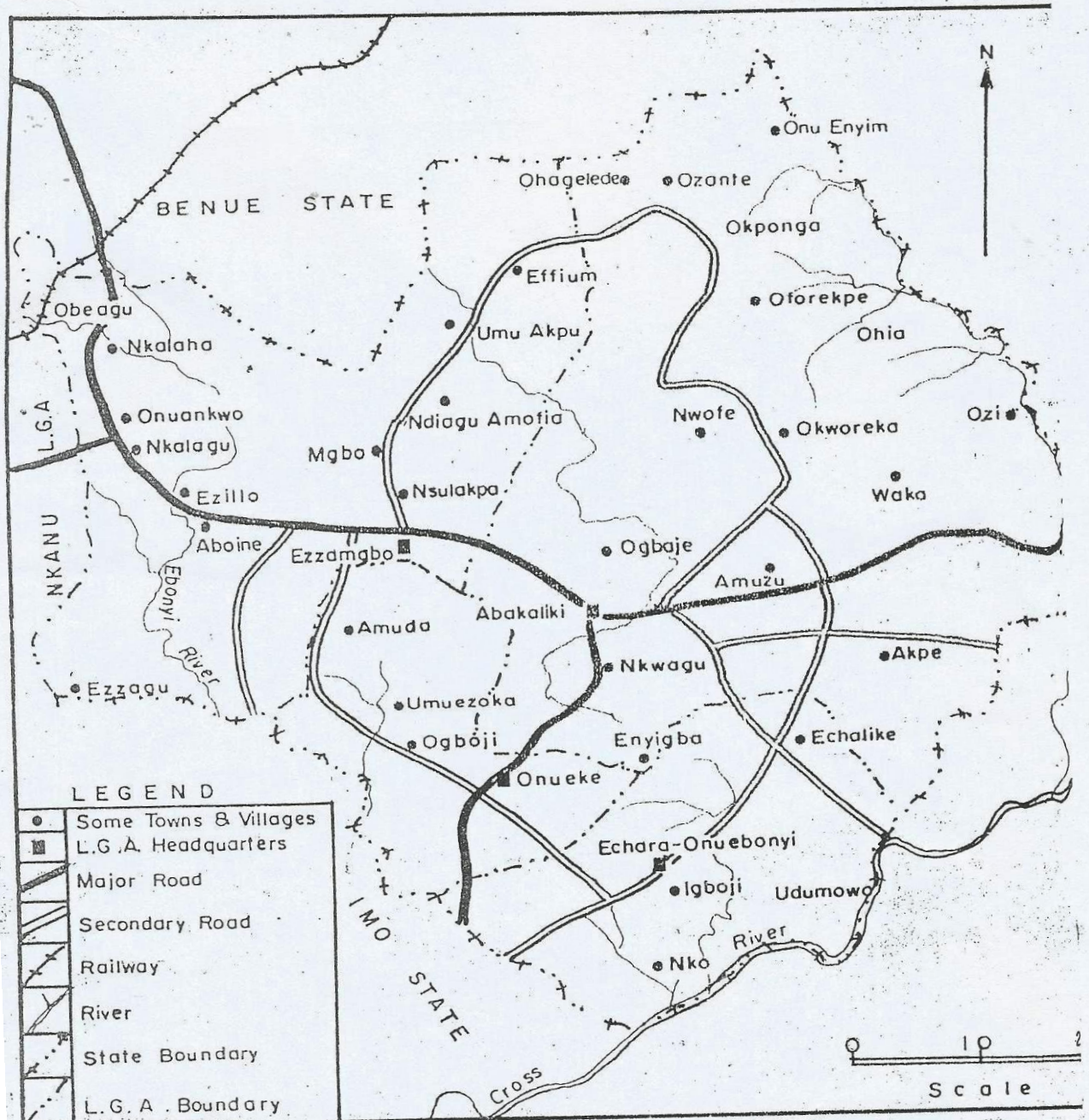


Fig i: Map of old Abakaliki Division

Scope of the Study

This work is a gender study, which canvases women issues from the historical perspectives. The study area is old Abakaliki division of the Ogoja province or currently the two senatorial zones of Ebonyi North and Central. It covers the period from 1929-1999. The two dates are

significant historical landmarks in two major respects. The base year (1929) was the year igbo women revolted against British hegemony. This is referred to as “The Aba Women’s Riot”. The perplexing nature of the revolt inspired interests in studies on women in Igbo society. The choice of 1999 terminal period is also unique in its own way because it marked the end of the 20th century, and epoch that witnessed profound and unprecedented changes on status of Abakaliki women.

Sources and Methodology

This study has adopted a thematic and chronological approach, which aims at addressing the trend of events in the society over time. It used of qualitative and quantitative data drawn from both primary and secondary sources. The primary data sources include oral tradition collated through the random sampling mode, granted directly by reliable informants. Also, among the primary sources are intelligence reports, annual reports and government documents from the National Archives, Enugu.

Secondary sources comprise published and unpublished mainline studies on women, social change and related issues. Such published works include books, journal articles and monographs written by indigenous and foreign authors. Some of the unpublished materials are students’ research projects, dissertations and thesis on the area and related topics.

Conceptual Clarifications

The word status means a privileged rank¹³. Therefore, privilege reflects itself not only in access to goods and services but also finds expression “in various subjective satisfactions and frustrations”.¹⁴ The reason is because society determines the relationship between social differentiation based on wealth, honour and/or power. As the society changes, new roles emerge, people’s ideas about old roles are also modified. Status is therefore something, which we carry about with us. It has no independent, objective existence. It is an intangible quality and expressive feeling of being somehow special and valuable.

A comprehensive study of the status of women should therefore be done within a cultural milieu. This study of the changing socio-economic and socio-political status of Abakaliki women is discussed in relation to the dynamics of the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods of their history during which the status of women underwent a continuous and far reaching changes.

A woman is a mature female adult with domestic, family and biological responsibility. She is the lifeblood of her family and the society where she fines herself. For the purpose of this research, Abakaliki to includes all those communities that made up old Abakaliki Province or currently the two senatorial zones of Ebonyi North and Central.

Theoretical Framework

Conflict theory of Feminism

Conflict theories are perspectives in sociology and social political or material inequality of a social group, that critique the broad social political system, or that otherwise detract from structural functionalism and ideological conservatism¹⁵. Conflicts theories draw dominate ideologies. It is therefore a macro level analysis of society.

Feminism is a very important perspective of conflict theory considered apt for this investigation. It began as 19th century movement championed by women in Europe which sought a radical alteration of their degrading and status as “second class citizens” and passive actors in the process of socio-economic development. It was a critique of patriarchy or system of male authority, which oppressed women through social, economic and political institutions. The central focus of the ideological movement was the emancipation of women by giving them access to political participation and representation, protection of their interests in all spheres of life as well as equal rights and opportunities. According to G. Ritzer, feminism is a “system of general ideas designed to describe and explain human social experiences from a women centered vantage point”.¹⁶

In traditional Igbo society, for example, a menstruating woman would not prepare food for her husband as long her period lasted. She was secluded after child-birth, rarely participated in long distance trade and in some areas, was denied the right to address the congregation of

men while standing. She was denied access to political participation and was consigned to the private sphere of the home. With the advent of British colonial rule, Christianity and Western Education in Nigeria, the spirit (spate) of feminism developed. Serious efforts were made to liberate women from political and cultural inhibitions. The status of women underwent some changes for the better. For example, women had access to education, which opened up for them new vistas of opportunities in administration, teaching, banking, medical professions, engineering, etc. With the emergence of political parties as democratic institutions and the introduction of post – independence Nigerian constitution, women began to participate fully in politics and to acquire political power. “Feminism challenges the patriarchal nature of Igbo society and seeks to end men’s domination and rid society of male chauvinism and its resultant undesirable and unjust exploitation of women”.¹⁷

Modernization Theory

The theory of modernization postulates that change is an evolutionary and continuous process in human society. Modernization denotes change and progress where these phenomena are seen to mean an improvement in the social, economic and political conditions of the people. The determinants of the modernization process would therefore include,

- Individual and institutional transformation.
- Increased social mobility

- Widespread literacy and a network of mass media
- Some degree of self – sustaining growth.
- Increased rate of commercialization, industrialization and urbanization.
- Improved material standards of living and secularization¹⁸.

Coleman describes a modern society as one:

...Characterized by, among other things, a comparatively high per capita income, extensive geographical and social mobility, a relatively high degree of commercialization and industrialization of the economy, an extensive and penetrative network of mass communication media, and, in general by widespread participation and involvement by members of the society in modern social and economic process¹⁹.

Change generated by modernization impacts the society and individual in different ways. At the level of the individual, modernization involves the ability of person to respond to new ideas, skills, knowledge, values and innovation. There is more upward mobility than downward mobility and social and occupational positions are taken up based on achievement rather than inscriptive career.

It is necessary to point out, however, that owing to western education and advances in science and technology, especially with regard to communication and interdependence of societies, modernization does not follow exactly the same pattern in all societies. In other words, some individuals and societies are more receptive to

change and adapt more easily to it than others. A less developed society like Abakaliki, can easily and quickly achieve modernization through scientific and technological transfer and infusion of ideas.

Nevertheless, the modernization theory adopts a historical approach by examining the changes in human society over time and space. It looks at the progress and transformation of society from one condition or state to another. In the words of Adetola and Odemola, “modernization depicts transition from the old to the new and from tradition to modernity”²⁰. The status of Abakaliki women has transited from traditionalism to modernization in the three phases of its history covered by this study. Colonialism, western education, Christianity and indigenous initiative constituted the driving forces of modernization. This phenomenon received its greatest impetus in the post – independence era. However, in spite of the rapid pace of modernization, some traditional institutions, values and practices have remained intact, modified or completely rejected.

Literature Review

The attitude of the European whose patriarchal traditions informed the writing and study of history was male-oriented. Thus, even earlier Afro-centric historians and other experts in the field of African studies failed to recognize women’s contributions as deserving even a cursory attention. However, with the declaration of United Nations Decade for Women 1975-1985, interest in women’s studies increased.

The existing literatures on women are authored by women example Gloria Chuku²¹, Nina Mba²², Bolanle Awe²³, Ngozi Ojiakor²⁴ Stella Effah-Attoe and Solomon Jaja²⁵. The neglect of women by historians has not been unnoticed. A few historians such as Bolanle Awe and Gloria Chuku, have not only written on Igbo women but have also drawn attention to the neglect of women historical studies by male historians. For instance, Bolanle lamented that:

Our history has not been gender sensitive. African historians seem to have inherited a certain amount of western bias. They have perpetuated in their writings the masculine –central view of history ... since it is men who have by and large been responsible for the doing and writing of history. It is their definition of the legitimate historical project which has prevailed²⁶.

This gender – bias in favour of men by African historians, has called for the need to study the position of women in the development of African societies. Evidence has shown that women in the past played a very important role in their societies than has generally been recognized. They were responsive and receptive to economic opportunities and innovations to a considerable degree. It is also worthy of note that over the years, there have been important changes in the status of women in Igbo land. These changes are because of both internal forces and external factors. In the opinion of Chukwu,²⁷ in traditional Igbo society, women had avenues of attaining high status. Some of them were priestess, diviners, as well as wealthy and powerful women who

became 'husbands' to their fellow women. On the other hand, during the colonial period, the power and influence of women, especially rural women were eroded by colonialism.

There have been however, waves of opinions about the status of women in Nigeria and Africa as a whole. For Ottenberg²⁸, Pritchard²⁹ and Cheng chang³⁰, the status of women is that of an oppressed group subordinate to men. They clearly maintain that the status of women in Africa was inferior, approaching that of a domestic animal, even though they did most of the hard work of supporting the family. This view is held by most Eurocentric writers who perhaps had preconceived assumptions of the superiority of European culture to African culture. This group of writers erroneously believed that African women were a deprived group, incapable of giving focus and direction to cultural development, of low status, economically dependent on men, with few legal rights and no political responsibilities³¹. This was not the case with women in pre-colonial Nigeria.

The views of Kamene Okonjo³², Nina Mba³³, M.M. Green³⁴ and Ngozi Ojiakor³⁵ are in direct opposition to the above. There are of the opinion that the status of women in Nigeria as in elsewhere in Africa was complementary to that of men. In this case, issues of inequality and subordination did not arise. Ngozi Ojiakor in her work on "Igbo Women and Politics in Nigeria" examines Igbo women and politics in Nigeria from 1929 to 1999. The study shows that the colonial government

undermined the political consciousness of the Igbo women through non-appointment into political positions. In her words,

In the pre-colonial periods, there were established institutions for articulating the interest of women from grassroots to the highest level of government. These institutions could use all means available to them to oppose decisions, which were against their interest. During colonial time, officialdom sidelined Igbo women to the margin of administrative political construct³⁶.

She contended that Igbo women's resentment against this non-appointment in decision making processes found a violent expression in the Women's protest of 1929.³⁷ Ojiakor, however, concluded that "external ferments of change since the 1970s have aided the women's cause, resulting in increasing participation of women in politics as first ladies, political appointees and, political activists".³⁸

In separate study entitled "History, Gender and Empowerment: Definitions, Approaches and Implication for Policy"³⁹ Ojiakor links historically, the global emancipating movements of women to that of the Nigerian women. The work shows that in attempting to re-write their own history, Nigerian women have discovered that women in traditional societies held admirably economic, social and political powers not commensurate with that of their male counterparts but near enough. She asserts that women in Nigeria hold a key to regaining lost perspectives and creating new dynamics for the society.⁴⁰ There is no doubt that Ojiakor's work on Nigerian women is highly commendable,

incisive and informative, but the usefulness of the study is somewhat diminished by the fact that it is a detailed study of Igbo Women and not on Abakaliki women specifically.

Yet in another work entitled “Empowering Women for National Development”, Ngozi Ojiakor gives a brief survey of women empowerment and development. She examines the position of women during pre-colonial period and asserts that “in practice, royal and aristocratic women had exerted political power, leading armies into battle, devising laws and engaging on statecraft”.⁴¹ She notes that during the colonial period that colonial powers shared a basic belief that the role of women was that of help – mate to men and that women were outside the proper realm of political and economic development and therefore, were sidelined. According to her “Women were sentenced to being perpetual house – wives or seamstresses as it was not deemed lady like for a woman to work outside home”.⁴² She concludes that empowerment would change the woman’s sense of herself as an unimportant and secondary figure.

In “Gender Dimension of Poverty: Issues, Problems and Solutions,”.⁴³ Ojiakor examined the dimensions of poverty as related to female gender and submitted that because of gender discrimination in labour markets, women have limited access to employment and lower earning capacity than men, contributing to their greater vulnerability to poverty. She concluded that, among other things, “Culture institutions have deprived women of inheritance and this has relationship with

feminine poverty”.⁴⁴ This work is a good source material for this study because it discussed women issues, problems and solutions.

Joshua O. Borlarinwa in his article, “Gender Question and African Development: An Overview,”⁴⁵ is of the opinion that more development planners, policy makers and people of influence recognize the link between women’s marginalization, subordination, poverty, population crises and unsustainable forms of economic organization. He highlights the need for African peoples to realize, that their self-interest and self worth requires progress for African women. Until this need is realized according to the author, meaningful commitment in the form of policy changes and the provision of resources to deal with the root causes of women’s condition are addressed, Africa’s, policy documents like the New Partnership for Africa’s Development NEPAD, cannot engender a breakthrough in African development and renaissance.⁴⁶ This is a well researched work on gender and development in Africa.

In “The Position of Women in Pre-colonial African Kingdom”,⁴⁷ J.B Decker examines the roles of women, and noted that

Their positions were varied and they took up such either as front liners or as backbenchers to will, thus demonstrating a thorough understanding of the overall varying capacity of the human race to respond to changes based on the circumstances that govern societies at different points in time.⁴⁸

The work concludes that, contrary to the views expressed by some Eurocentric writers, women were positioned as partners and sometimes as leaders not only in state formation processes but also in state

organization. This work thus, provides a good insight into the position of women before the colonial period and is very useful for this research.

Dan Chukwu in his book, *An Introduction to Nigeria Political History*⁴⁹ asserts that Igbo women participated in the process of law making. This was more pronounced in issues concerning them and instability in the family. He maintains that in such cases, “elderly women considered impeccable in character, would meet and take a decision on how best to maintain stability in the home, their decision, if sanctioned, would become part of the law for the community”⁵⁰. The book captures the position of women before colonial period, thus, is a very good source for this work

However, the most recently developed opinion or approach about the status of women is the view that women in Africa are active agents, helping to inaugurate, define and manage change. Bolanle Awe⁵¹, A.E. Afigbo,⁵² Eno Blankson Ikpe⁵³, and Gloria Chuku,⁵⁴ among others, adopt this approach. According to Eno Ikpe, women “...played dynamic and constructive roles and thus contributed tremendously to social development”.⁵⁵ And to Bolanle Awe, women in Nigeria were indeed “Saviours of their societies”⁵⁶. Thus, the status of women remains a phenomenon of great importance in the history of Nigeria, and of Igbo land.

Gloria Chuku in her work, “The Changing Role of Women in Igbo Economy⁵⁷”, provides a detailed analysis of how Igbo women, both as individuals and as groups, have reacted differently to the innovations

with which they have been presented to. Gloria's work is a major study on women, but its focus is on Igbo economy. The changing status of women was mentioned only in passing. The work is also too general to have captured the changing socio-economic and political status of Abakaliki women.

B.A Cheng Chang in "Women Status in the Afikpo Igbo Society" believes that women did not hold position of authority in the domestic sphere, meaning they did not have any solidarity/organization, which can be compared to that of the men; and there were usually strong sanctions against their behaviour⁵⁸. Cheng Chang's claim does not square with reality because there were women achievers who held the position of "Omezues" (the highest achiever) in the society and they commanded as much respect as the men. On the issue of solidarity organization, the women belonged to different age grades just as the men. However, this work did not capture Abakaliki women but treated women status and thus a good source material.

S. Ottenberg in *Double Descent in Africa Society. The Afikpo Village Group*⁵⁹ submitted that Afikpo is a society with striking sex polarity where women's world is inferior to and separated from the men's. Women talk little to men, even their husbands, except about routine or necessary affairs. They do not conceptualize about social process as freely as men. This work was written from a Eurocentric point of view and therefore some issues raised in the work cannot be substantiated.

The works of social scientists like, M.O. Ijere's *"Women in Rural Development"*⁶⁰ and Nkoli Ezumah's *"Women in Agriculture :Neglect of Women's Role"*⁶¹ have presented the role and place of women in the socio-economic and political systems of different Igbo societies they studied with little or no attention to time perspective. These works tend to ignore the historical dynamics that led to the situations as they found it. In other words, they did not see the different Igbo societies they studied as well as the role and place of women as continually changing formations and processes.

The extent to which African societies underwent changes under colonialism has generated a lot of controversy. However, some scholarly works on "Women and Colonialism" deserve our attention. In Judith Van Allen's *Sitting on a man: Colonialism and the Lost Political Institution of Igbo Women*⁶² and A.E Afigbo's "Igbo women, colonialism and socio-economic change,"⁶³ the authors argue that colonialism exploited both men and women in Igboland, but that the women were worse off. However, the authors enumerated the benefits of colonialism, which included increased participation of women in public affairs. Colonialism also brought about peace and order and restored security, which enabled the women to participate in long-distance trade, which hitherto had been the exclusive preserve of the men. The introduction of new crops such as cassava has brought about changes in the position of Igbo women because while women embraced the new crop, men rejected it.

These works are good source materials for this study because they discussed change.

*In African Women in Towns: An Aspect of African's Social Revolution*⁶⁴, Kenneth Little analyzes the changing position of women in an urban context in Sub-Saharan Africa. He argues that the new role of women in Africa is peculiarly a phenomenon of the city and uses the concept of urbanization to analyze the radical changes taking place. He shows how certain women's movements though different in some respects from women's liberation are growing out of the African women's desire for a new relationship with the men. This leads him to consider the part played by women in the political arena as a revolutionary force, and he pays special attention not only to women's position in monogamous marriage, but also to extra – marital and sexual relationships. Little's work provides an important source material for the changing status of women.

In *"Agriculture and Rural Development in Nigeria: The Abakaliki Experience,"*⁶⁵ C.O. Mgbada tried to analyze the initial contribution of agriculture to the development of Abakaliki area and the effects of the present state of neglect on the people. He notes that since the creation of Ebonyi State, Abakaliki people would seem to have reinterpreted agriculture to be a curse and the reason for their backwardness. Every Abakaliki man now talks of either education or other alternatives to agriculture. The work does not directly refer to women or their status,

but it is an important source for this present study because it discussed the Abakaliki society.

In his book *Equiano's Travels*,⁶⁶ Olauda Equiano asserts that African women played a complementary role to the men and also has an elevated status. In his word:

...our women of distinction wear golden ornaments, which they dispose with some profusion on their arms and legs and when our women are not employed with the men in tillage, their usual occupation is spinning and weaving cotton, which they afterwards dye and make into garments. They also manufacture earthen vessels of which we have many kinds ...

In the area of agriculture and women, he notes that "Agriculture is our chief employment, and everyone, even the children and women are engaged in it. "Thus we are all habituated to labour from our earliest years⁶⁷."

Nico Van Steensel in his book, *The Izhi: Their History and Customs*⁶⁸, captured the Abakaliki women. He observed that the women of this area, as farmers, had organizations and could organize themselves in work groups (*Ogbo*), when there was not much work to do in the dry season. Some women groups, *Ogbo umunwanyi*, still come together usually to discuss issues for the common good of their communities. In the area of title taking, Women had a similar title to that of men, which gave them the right to the funeral procession like the men. The title qualified the women for the funeral procession, *erwu ubvu*, and to participate in other people's processions and receive portions of

whatever were to be shared (meat) in the cause of the burial, which the society cherishes. He concluded that the impact of western civilization in the form of colonial subjugation, technological superiority, and education upset the social structures of African society⁶⁹, of which Abakaliki is a part.

Agbo Becna Nwobodo in her work, "The Role of Educated Women in the Socio-Economic and Political Development of Umuogudu Akpu Community in Ngbo West Local Government Area," captured the social and economic status of Women in Ngbo, which is a clan in Abakaliki. She wrote that Women's personal property at the time of her marriage belonged to her husband; she merely exercised a little right over them. In her words, "One was constantly being reminded that a woman had no property, but in present day Umuogudu Akpu, Ngbo, a woman is now free to acquire and dispose off property she has the capacity to acquire wealth in the same way as men"⁷⁰. This work captured the socio-economic status of women in the Abakaliki area so is a good source material for this work.

J. W., Wallace in his article, "Agriculture in Abakaliki and Afikpo"⁷¹ praised the farming ability of the Ezza, a major clan in Abakaliki, they grew in abundance crops such as yam, cassava,(grown mainly by women), rice, cocoyam, pepper and so on. Wallace's article is valuable in discussing the people's economic activities, especially farming.

S. Ottenberg wrote on "The Social and Administrative History of a Nigerian township".⁷² In it, he analyzed the different classes of people that emerged in the process of Abakaliki's growth into a township. He also tried to show how the people reacted to the challenges posed by this growth. According to him,

The rural Ibo have been extremely conservative and unadjustive in terms of the developing township. Still trying to push outward in rural areas, they have missed the chance to play crucial role in the development of the town where another set of Ibo from the central Ibo area have been the innovators⁷³.

Ottenberg's assertion does not stand on solid and reasoned foundation. The rural Igbo from the inception of colonial rule were active. Ottenberg himself admitted that, with the assistance of both voluntary and forced labour supplied mainly by the Ezza and Izzi men and women, bungalows for the senior administrative officers, and fences and barracks were soon erected⁷⁴. Beside the rural Igbo moved to townships as traders on foodstuffs, house helps, mostly young women, office messengers, then with time as clerks, mechanics, and bicycle repairers and so on. These services helped to sustain the Europeans and stranger Igbo elements. Thus, it will be wrong to claim that they did not play a crucial role in the growth of the town. However, whatever are the shortcomings of these articles, it will be stressed that they have helped to enrich our knowledge of Abakaliki but since they did not deal

directly to the focus of this work, they did not fill the gap, which this work intends to fill.

Organization

The study is organized into six chapters. Chapter one is the introduction, which provides the background to the study and statement of the problem. It also addresses the purpose, scope, significance, theoretical framework, sources and methodology ends with the review of literature.

Chapter two presents a geo-historical survey of Abakaliki, the traditional socio-political institutions and the web of relationships, which helped the society to cohere and survive. This is necessary to establish a basis for the study and understanding of the ways these institutions and social relationships have changed over time and space.

Chapter three examines the opening of a new era: Abakaliki women during the colonial period. It examines the British conquest and administration of Abakaliki. Chapter four discusses Abakaliki women and the Nigerian Civil War, 1967-1970.

Chapter five focuses on Abakaliki women and agents of change during the period 1970-1999, an epoch that witnessed profound and unprecedented changes on the status of women. During this epoch women issues were canvassed globally. The United Nations Decade for Women, 1975-1985, contributed significantly to the political and economic empowerment of women. Chapter six examines change amidst continuity in the status of Abakaliki Women. Issues such as

women in politics and other social changes are discussed. Chapter seven summarizes and concludes the work.

Conclusion

Although a few studies have been done on Abakaliki, none has focused on the causes, processes and consequences of the rapid pace of change in the status of women. The phenomenon of change in Abakaliki women's status began at a slow pace before the Nigerian Civil war of 1967-1970 and proceeded at an accelerated rate after the conflict and during the period 1975-1985, which was declared as the United Nations Decade for Women. This period had a tremendous impact on the position of women who demonstrated remarkable ability to respond favourably to factors of change and innovation in their society. It is hoped that this study will fill the gap in our knowledge of the dynamics of change in Abakaliki women's status and contribute to enhance our knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon of change and its implications for human societies and on gender studies.

Notes

1. D.I, Ajaegbo "Nnewi of North Western Igbo Land: A Study of An Igbo society in Transition, 1905-1999", Unpublished PhD thesis, Department of History University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 2010, 2-3.
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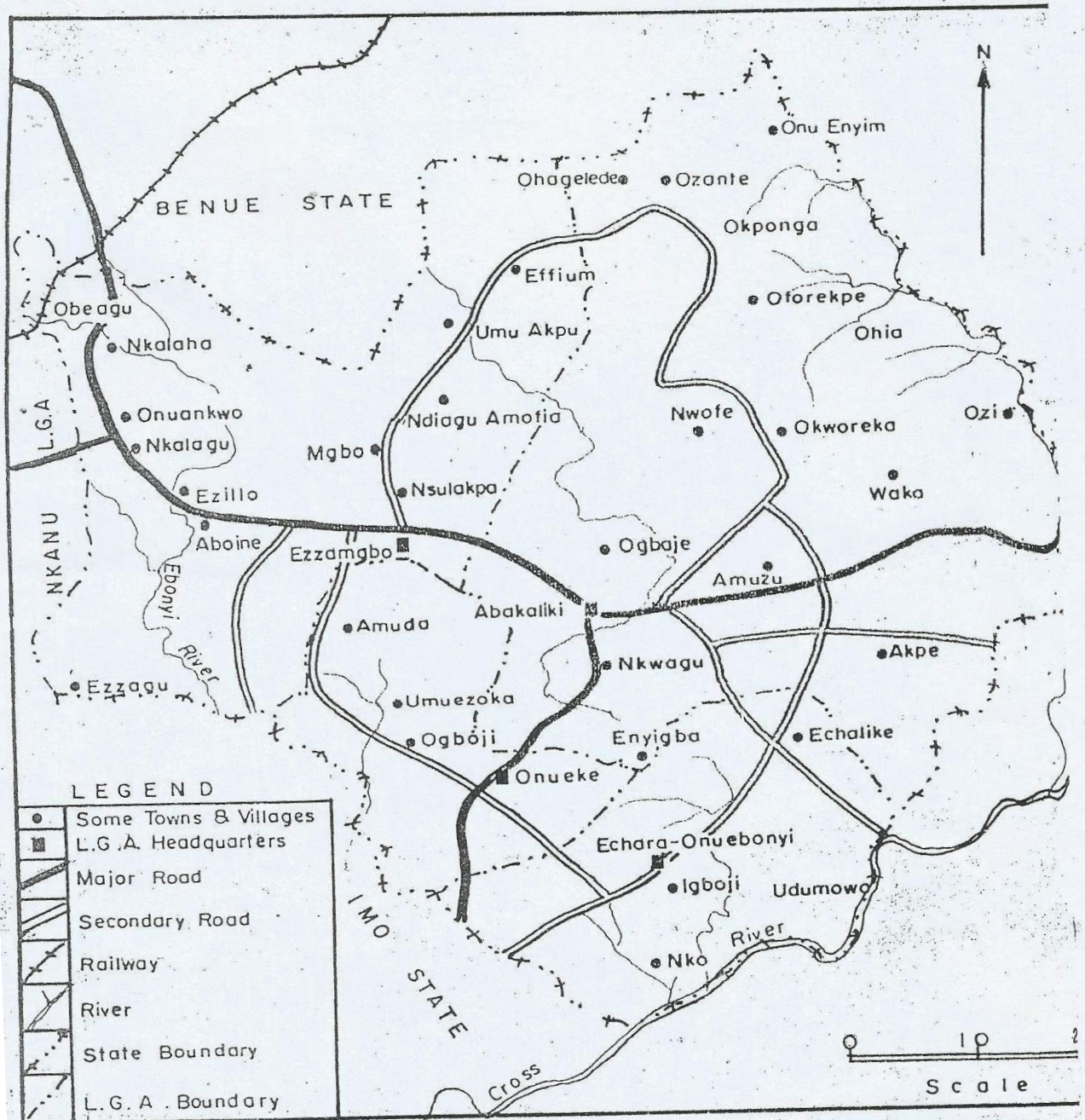


Fig ii: Map of old Abakaliki Division

CHAPTER TWO

ABAKALIKI WOMEN BEFORE 1929

2.1 A Geo – Historical Survey of Abakaliki

Abakaliki was originally known and called Abankaleke, which was a name derived from one of the communities in Izzi Clan. For ease of pronunciation and writing, Abankaleke was corrupted to Abakaliki by the early European visitors to Igboland. However, Abakaliki people refer to the Abakaliki speaking people of Ebonyi State. They include sub-dialect groups such as the Ezza, Izzi, Ikwo, Ezzamgbo and Ngbo as well as the Agba group which was a descendant of Izzi¹ Mgbada observe that Abakaliki people comprise the Igbo speaking group-Igbo essa groups of Eziulo, Nkalaha, Nkalagu, Umuhali, Amaso, Iyono and Obegu as well as non-Igbo speaking groups such as the Okpoto, Korri and Ntezi in Ishielu Local Government Area; the Amuda and Okpomoro in Ezza North Local Government Area; the Effium in Ohaukwu Local Government Area; and the Isobo and Oferekpe in Ikwo Local Government Area. Collectively, these culture groups or communities are called Unwu Ekuma Enyi²

The area is bounded to the North by Benue State, to the South by Afikpo North and Ohaozara Local Government Areas of Ebonyi State, to the East by Enugu State and to the West by Cross River State. Abakaliki is almost completely a flat undulating terrain and rises some 120-180 metres above sea level³.

Rainfall ranges between 1800-2000mm per annum and is often heaviest in the months of March to July. A long dry season begins around November and ends in March. The average temperature is about 27 degrees Celsius; the natural vegetation is generally the type found in the Guinea Savannah, though the area was originally high forest, which has been extensively transformed.⁴

The people engage in agriculture, fishing, hunting, animal husbandry, trading, crafts as well as government public service. In the 1991 population census, Abakaliki recorded a population of 1,060,279 in the following proportions: Aba nkeleke - 225, 752; Ezza 188, 535; Ikwo - 166, 269; Ishielu – 132, 552; Izzi – 166, 239; and Ohaukwu – 180, 932.⁵ According to 2006 population census, the population of the area rose from 1,060, 279 in 1991 to 1,406, 467 in 2006 in the following order; Abakaliki – 149, 683; Ebonyi – 127, 226; Ezza North – 146, 149; Ezza South – 133, 625; Ikwo – 214, 969; Ishielu – 152, 581; Izzi – 236, 679, and Ohaukwu – 195, 555.⁶

Scholars agree that the Ezza, Izzi and Ikwo have single racial cord. In the opinion of C.C. Ifemesia;

Bordering on the Northern Igbo were the Northern Igbo of Abakaliki ... The largest groups among them were the Ezza, Izzi and the Ikwo ... The major groups would assert that their ancestors had blood and marriage ties with, and that they migrated from, the Item and Aro Chukwu to the South. But it is possible that they had some connections with the Igbo of Owerri Area whose dialects appear to be related to theirs.⁷

According to another scholar:

Generally, the origin of Ikwo people is traced along with that of Ezza and Izhi. Izhi, begot Mgbolizhi. Ezza, Ikwo, Izhi and Mgbolizhia clans form the part of Abankaleke culturally referred to as *Unwu Ekuma Enyi* (the descendants of Ekuma Enyi). Apart from Unwu Ekuma Enyi, Abankaleke also includes Igboesaaa and Korri clans. So Unwu Ekuma Enyi and these two clans constitute Abankaleke area in the North – Eastern Igboland.⁸

Yet another scholar states that:

The Izzi are usually mentioned together with Ikwo and Ezza. They have a common ancestor called Enyi. Those sister tribes supply his full name; Enyi Nwegu. He had three sons who became the founder of the Ezza, Izzi and Ikwo tribes. These facts are argued upon by the oral traditions of each of the three tribes. About the details, however, is much difference of opinion.⁹

Afigbo observes that the Igbo have lost all memories of their present homeland.¹⁰ He further remarks that “it is difficult to reconstruct the early history of a preliterate and cephalous people. Those who seek to do so easily fall victim of either wild romanticism or sterile skepticism¹¹”.

For the Abakaliki people, the above quotations illustrate to a great extent the close ties among the various Igbo dialectical groups in the Abakaliki area but, equally, they present a high impression of varieties of versions and speculations regarding their original abode. The point to be made, however is that before Abakaliki history of origins and migrations can be meaningfully reconstructed, the problem of origin

and migration of the Igbo in general must be reconciled. The admonition issued by C. Wrigley is relevant here. Wrigley has contended that “where certainty is unattainably, scientific method required not complete agnosticism, but acceptable of the most probable hypothesis”¹². According to Nwandegu’s record and Chapman’s Intelligence Report, the time of Izzi settlement is placed at about early 17th century A.D.¹³ Writing to the Resident Officer of Ogoja Province on the history of Abakaliki, the acting District Officer for Abakaliki, reported inter-alia that.

The original inhabitants of what is now Abakaliki Division were probably semi-Bantu tribes of whom the Ossopony and related peoples now in Obubra Division, and the Awkum (Okum) and Nitrogum clans of Ogoja, are the descendants. The only remnants are the small Orri clans who originally occupied the land now owned by Ezza. The three big clans Izzi, Ezza and Ikwo are believed to derive from a common ancestor who is supposed to have led a band of warriors from the heart of Ibo country to the South West, possibly Aro Chukwu, or Item in Bende Division, and settled here. The three clans speak similar and distinctive dialects of Ibo, and are commonly known as Wawas. The three founders settled in different parts of the area, and their descendants pushed outwards displacing or absorbing the less virile Semi-Bantu inhabitants. Earlier Officers have estimated the arrival of the founder to have taken place about 1600. A. D. The Ngbo clan is possibly an offshoot, not independent of the Izzi clan mingled with the original inhabitants now living in Idoma.¹⁴

Afigbo also quoted G.I Jones as describing the Nri-Awka and Isuama (Orlu) area as “The Igbo Centre or Core” from where waves of migration, often described as massive, took off mainly to the south and east. It was assumed that an early dispersion from this centre to the Nsukka – Udi highland in the east and an early drift southwards towards the coast were the decongestants of the Oratta, Ikwere, Etche, Asa and Ndoki tribes took place. This was followed by later and more massive dispersals which were mainly south eastwards from the Igbo centre into what is now Eastern Isuama area.¹⁵

From this subsidiary dispersion area there was one movement south east into the Aba Division to form the Ngwa group of tribes, and another movement east into the Umuahia area and thence to the Ohafia – Aro Chukwu ridge, with an offshoot that struck north to become isolated as the heart of the eastern plains and to develop into the North Eastern Ibo.¹⁶

From the foregoing, it may be plausible to suggest that the founding father of Izzi and other Abakaliki culture groups settled in their present location some time in the 17th century. Yet if the 17th century A.D should be taken for when Ekuma Enyi the patriarch of the Abakaliki separated from other Igbo groups, then when they actually detached from and developed into different dialectical groups had to be ascertained. The same applies to Ezza, Ikwo and to some extent the Ngbo and Ezzamgbo.

Women in the Traditional Economy

1. Farming

The main economic activity of Abakaliki people was agriculture. The primary goal of agricultural effort each year was to produce adequate food (crops) for the family, to save enough to plant during the subsequent farming season, and to exchange any surpluses for what they needed but did not have. Agricultural production for purposes of marketing and exchange occupied a low place in the economic system. Agriculture provided the basic foodstuffs and domestic raw materials. The type of farming practiced was shifting cultivation. Farmers left cultivated lands to lie fallow for up to 3 to 5 years while they moved to farm new areas. The work involved could be grouped under six headings: clearing, hoeing, planting, tending harvesting and storage. These activities depended on traditional methods and implements (knives, machets, digging, sticks, spears and hoes of different sizes constituted the farming implements. The crops grown were yam, cocoyam, cassava, maize, vegetables, groundnuts, rice, beans (akidi) and so on.

Abakaliki people regarded land as very important and indispensable resource. The centrality of land in the economic and social life of the people was reflected in their strong attachment to land. It was the most important asset to the people, a source of security, and therefore, was protected from alienation. This has led them to several aggressive campaigns aimed at securing more land from their weaker

neighbours. Afigbo and Anyanwu have shown how this long tradition of aggressive territorial expansion had made Abakaliki a war – like people. According to Afigbo, they achieved “special dexterity in wielding the matchet, an art in which they still excel”.¹⁷

2. Land Tenure

Just like other Igbo communities, land was communally owned in Abakaliki area. The basic land owning unit was the *umunna*. The *Ishiegu* held the land in custody for the community. At the village level, the council and the *Ishi-uke* senior age grade exercised varying degree of regulatory powers over land use, such as mapping out land for building houses. The Ogerenya (eldest member of the extended family) was in-charge of the family land and allocated it to members of the family during the farming season. One important feature of land ownership in Abakaliki was that no member of a family or community would sell his own plot, though he could pledge it for some years. In other words, land could not be sold or alienated on a permanent basis because being community property, its could not be sold without displeasing the ancestors.

Women in Abakaliki, like elsewhere in Igboland, were denied the right to own land nor did they inherit land or other properties on equal basis with men. The only way women could have access to land was in their capacity either as sisters, daughters or wives to a particular man or through lease. However, from the colonial period, when some of them began to acquire wealth through trade and the commercialization of the

oil palm industry from the 19th century, some of them started investing on landed property and some bought land for their sons.

The basic unit of labour was the family, comprising a man, his wife or wives and children. The more wives a man had the greater his labour force and the higher his volume of production¹⁸. Children and wives had to work three days on their husband's or father's farm the three days were called *eswe-ozì nnajiuphu*, (working for the father of the house) while the remaining two days were for the wives. Labour was effective and well organized. It was augmented by hired labour provided by relations, in – laws and cooperative work groups such as members of age grade associations. Powerful and affluent farmers, augmented the basic labour unit with domestic slaves, migrant – labour and clientele. Sometimes debtors worked as pawns for their creditors. Labour was not paid for in cash but in kind, such as rich and sumptuous meals and drinks in addition to gifts of yam and farming implements.

Labour functions were divided along age and sex lines. Men and women, boys and girls performed specific tasks. For instance, men cleared the forests, prepared the yam mounds, cut the stakes, tended the yam vines and harvested the yams. Women and children planted cassava and vegetables, weeded the farm and carried home the products of the farm. The household remains the most important economic unit in Igboland (Abakaliki area) a situation, which accounts for the strength and resilience of the institution of polygamy.¹⁹

Co-operative work groups rendered invaluable assistance especially to members of age-grades, clubs, friends, sons' in-law and close relations went into reciprocal exchange of labour (*onwe oru*) or *ogbo oru*. Women banded together for such purpose as weeding the farm, planting cassava and carrying home harvested farm crops. Women, particularly married ones, formed themselves into *nwanyi di* (women married in one lineage) and helped one another in ridge – making, food crop planting, weeding and harvesting members' crops. Other women (not necessarily of the same lineage or age – grade) formed themselves into a group 10-15 known as *Ogbo oru*. Regina Uguru asserted that the purpose of this society was to help the members in cleaning and weeding their farms. It did not involve any financial expenditure, but the beneficiary usually provided others with food.²⁰

Traditionally, while men were responsible for such farming assignments as clearing the bush and preparing yam mounds, women were responsible for weeding, harvesting and transporting home produce from the farm.

According to Afigbo;

The man sowed the seed yams in the mounds, while the women planted the maize and beans in the spaces between the mounds. The man cut the sticks and tended the yam vines, while the women did the weeding and planting of cassava. Though cocoyam could be planted at the base of the yam mounds, for the most part they were planted separately, and this was largely a woman's job.²¹

In the view of Leith – Ross, however,

Division of labour as between the sexes does not seem so clear cut among the Ibo as among other tribes. In agriculture, division of labour is strict in theory; variable in practice... convenience was more important in indicating how the family did their work.²²

Leith – Ross is quite correct in her observation. For example, in Abakaliki area, some women were allowed to own farmlands and yam barns but they were never allowed to plant a particular variety of yams such as white yam, (*Igum Nwokpoke*). This was so because yam was ritualized in Igboland as a whole. Again women of the area were forbidden from cutting the Indian bamboo (echara) which was used for staking this variety of yam. It was the responsibility of the man to plant the yam for their wives in their farms. They were also responsible for cutting of the bamboo, used in staking the yam. A widow required another man she trusted to do the work for her. Women were only allowed to plant and stake a very poor variety of yams called *nvila* or *jiabila*.²³ Thus Denton once observed that “yam is by far the most important crop in the area (Abakaliki) and the wealthier members of the community grow large quantities of them”.²⁴ Elisabeth Isichei also recorded one version of tradition among the north – eastern Igbo states which stated that “the founder of Izzi searched in the bush for food for his starving parents and sisters. He found a number of special wild yams, some of which have since been domesticated”.²⁵ Chuku supported this tradition which in her classification of the various Igbo

groups, she classified the Abakaliki people as *Ndi Olugbo Zone* and identified them particularly as *Ogu-ukwu* (big hoe people).²⁶ J.W Wallace also shares Chuku's view stating that "The soil is sun – baked and relatively hard and in reaction, the Abakaliki developed a large and heavy circular iron blade, which still retains a short handle but is wielded more like a pick axe than a hoe".²⁷

Apart from growing crops, Abakaliki reared domestic animals. Livestock kept includes goats, sheep, dogs, poultry, cows and horses. A man's wealth was assessed by the size of his yam barn and the number of domestic animals he had. These animals were not reared as a full – time or professional occupation but as adjuncts to farming. Cows were herded by children between the ages of 10 – 15 years. Goats and sheep were confined in pens but dogs and poultry were left to roam the compound and the fields. According to J.G.C. Allen, almost every Abakaliki man and women possess at least one sheep and goat and very many cows.²⁸ J.W Wallace estimated that the livestock in Abakaliki was much greater than anywhere else in the Eastern province.²⁹ The animals not only provided meat for food but were also sold for money and used for ritual sacrifices during title – taking and funeral ceremonies. The dung provided a good source of manure.

Fishing was done by those people who lived close to the river. It was practiced by both men and women. It was quite a lucrative venture for riverine communities. Notable among them was the Ikwo people, who shares a boundary with the Cross River and thus engaged and

supplied the proximate clans and their other neighbours with fish. Women were deeply involved in the smoking and selling of fish.

Hunting was an adjunct to farming in the area. It was the preserve of men. Individual and group hunting was practiced. Traps, bows and arrows, clubs, spears, pits and later guns were the main implements. The animals were hunted essentially for their meat and hides and skins. These were traded in the local markets.

3. Craft and Industries

The Abakaliki people both men and women practiced some crafts and industries both on part-time and full-time basis. Women crafts included salt production, pottery, woodcarving, spinning and weaving, basket work, grass weaving and clothweaving. However, these crafts and industries were concentrated in a few lineages or communities (like Enyigba, Amekka and Ngbo) just to mention but a few, in Abakaliki area because of the differential distribution of essential mineral deposits as well as the people's possession of the requisite skills. Blacksmithing, salt manufacture, pottery and grass weaving were among the best developed industries in the area.

For an agrarian society, blacksmithing was a very important industry. It provided the technology base of the economy by supplying hoes, knives, matchet, spears, and diggers, oral sources strongly portray the Ezza clan in Abakaliki as professional blacksmiths who produced hoes, knives, gongs, guns and ritual objects.³⁰ According to Anyanwu, this industry appeared to have assumed added importance in the mid

19th century because it supplied tools like iron spears, gongs, matchets and so on needed for Ezza wars and their rituals.³¹ The Ezza did not learn blacksmithing from any group because the industry is as old as the Ezza society, though they acknowledge the presence of Awka blacksmiths prior to colonialism.³² Although blacksmithing was male-dominated, women played vital roles in the production process. For instance, women take bellows to heat iron in the furnace.

4. Salt production

Salt production centres were in Enyigba and Amekka communities in Abakaliki. The salt industry in pre-colonial Abakaliki was said to be associated with some spirit forces. It was believed that the brine belonged to local god who handed down rules guiding its exploitation. The women stored the brine in pots and evaporated it over fire in special earthenware. Salt production was embedded in the tradition of the people and hedged around with taboos and laws.

These were as follows:

- a. Only women could fetch and evaporate the brine;
- b. Menstruating women were prevented from fetching the brine;
- c. Women were made to go to the lake almost nude to ensure compliance with number two regulation above;
- d. Only women from the salt – producing communities of Enyigba and Amekka could fetch the salt water in the respective communities.

- e. Only members of the association of salt producers were allowed to fetch the salt water;
- f. It was a taboo to produce salt using materials other than earthen pots (nja);
- g. It was also an abomination to adulterate salt during production;
- h. It was an abomination to urinate and defecate near the filtration camp and
- i. Men were prevented from coming near the salt lake , except the chief priest at Amekka who could do so occasionally.³³



Photo i: First stage of the producton process. Filtration pots filled with the salt water at the lake.



Photo ii. Second stage of the production process (the filtered water is being boiled)

The production processes were somewhat crude. A heap of sand was collected and mixed with salt water (brine). The mixture was molded into balls and dried under the sun. When a producer wanted to produce salt, some of these balls were grounded into powder. Two pots were set, one below the other. A small opening covered with plantain leaves or coconut fibre was made at the bottom of the top pot. The ground substance was poured inside this pot and then, salt water was added. The brine trickled into the lower pot through the opening at the bottom of the top pot. The trickling usually lasted about one whole day. This was the filtration process. Subsequently, the brine solution, *ochiche* was taken home in the *ite ochiche* (filtration pot) for boiling. During boiling, evaporation of water occurred, leaving the salt crystals inside the pot. The salt crystals were then moulded using of different sizes and

shapes. According to Chuku, the following sizes of the salt balls were usually produced:

Ezunnu (about 1.5kg), nonu akaja (about 5kg) mkpowa and nnuike or nnunjagba. The first two were used as trade currency. It is said that before the 1920s twelve (12) nnuakja were equivalent to one shilling, whereas akaja was equivalent to a penny, while two ezunnu were worth half a penny.³⁴

Salt production in Abakaliki area enhanced the economic status of the women producers. This was because salt in Igboland during this period served as medicine and currency. Salt was used as a medium of exchange, usually in a block form called *nnuakaj*. Salt has been universally used as a chief food condiment. A biological necessity for man, salt is used in virtually every meal. Salt was also important and widely sought for because of its medicinal value. The filtered salt water was also used for the treatment of old wounds. Some women salt producers were able to take titles like *jioke* through the money their made from salt. Some were able to sponsor their sons' marriage while some made occasional gifts of money to their husbands as a show of affluence and affection. Production was mainly, though, not entirely for subsistence use.



Photo iii. A potter at work

5. Pottery

Pottery was an industry of note, and speciality of women. The leading community in this was the Ogboji. Pottery was not extensively practiced in this area when compared with Afikpo and Ishiagu in Ebonyi State. Its practice depended on the availability of the raw materials, *ura* and *ezi ura*. Vessels of different types, shapes and sizes were produced and used for varying purposes. The industry was hedged around with some taboos and superstitions. For example, menstruating women were barred from going to clay pits. As a result, the production of pots in this area was in the hands of women who had passed the age of child bearing.

About five (5) stages were involved in the production and they are mixing and pounding the clay, removal of debris and stones particles molding and firing. The clay was usually collected and mixed with a type of soil locally known as *eziura* which made the mixture “elastic”

and strong. The mixture was watered and pounded for elasticity and workability. The clay was watered for three to four days to make it soft, before adding the *eziura* which is usually in powdered form on the clay. Another important stage was the removal of debris and stones particles from the clay. Lumps of clay were made into rings, using the rings to form the base of the pot in the palm before putting it down. Subsequent rings were added, each on top of the other from the base in a circular form until the desired shape and size of the pot was produced. The sides of the pot were smoothened with a flat piece of bamboo and a wet leaf. When the pot was not yet sufficiently dry, simple decorations and designs were made on it. After this, the pot was allowed to dry for hours in the sun or sometimes longer hours during the rainy season under a kitchen roof (*Ekfu*) before the neck was added. Handles were added to cooking pots and the ones designed to serve as musical instruments, *udu*. The pots were then sent to the firing place, *Ohuhu* furnace.

Depending on its intensity, firing usually took two or three hours. Grasses were used to make fire. Potters usually rubbed a mixture on the outer surface of the pot. This was usually made from boiling the bark of a special tree locally called *Otury* with cassava roots to produce a gummy liquid. This liquid gave the pot a shining colour or appearance.³⁵ Various types of earthen wares served various functions among the Igbo and the Abakaliki as well. Nwobu Nkechi is of the view that the sizes, designs and shapes of the earthen ware depended on the purposes for which they were intended. These were

Ite mini – pot for fetching water
 Ite nri – pot for cooking
 Adu – pot for storing drinking water
 Nja – small earthen plates
 Nja ohe – soup plate
 Nja ikweka – plate for washing hand
 Udu-egwu - musical instrument
 Njamaa – ritual pot
 Mgbaja – ritual pot for jioke title holder
 Ite nmaya – pot for palm oil.³⁶

From the listing above, it is clear most of the pottery products were household utensils and served a variety of purposes. Some were used as dishes, some for ritual and musical purposes. The availability and various uses of earthen products resulted in their high demand. High demand necessitated increase in production. The sale of these products helped to enhance the economic power and subsequently, the social status of the women potters. Some of these potters were able to perform the ceremonies and took the titles of *O-kuru – ema* or *Okwariberu Okuta*, *O-ghu – aguiyi* and *onma Inya* for their husbands with money realized from the sale of pottery products.

6. Weaving

Weaving in Igboland was another specialty for women. It comprised weaving of local fans, bags, cotton cloth, grasses and basket weaving which was and is still done by Ntezi women. Abakaliki was one of the notable areas for weaving in Igboland.

In Abakaliki division, the Ngbo and Ezzamgbo sub clan of Izzi are known for weaving and like in other parts of Igboland, weaving started

with raffia before cotton began to be used from locally – spun yarn. Abakaliki weavers produced the famous *Ukara Ekpe* cloth used by the exclusivist *Ekpe* society of south eastern Nigeria. The cloths were mainly in blue indigo background with patches of white. Another distinctive feature of the Abakaliki cloth was that it was usually small in size because the looms were small. Women are engaged in weaving when they were not occupied in family chores or marketing.

One of the most important industries in Ngbo was that of cotton cloth weaving. Ngbo and Ezzamgbo cloths were worn throughout the Abakaliki division and were bought by the traders who sold them in the other divisions such as Afikpo division³⁷. Practically every man in the Abakaliki division wore a loin cloth that was produced in Ngbo.

Cotton was grown locally and over a half of the cotton used in weaving was bought from the Nkalaha area, either in a raw state or as a spun thread. When spun, the thread was thick and coarse much resembling woolen yarn. This was woven on loom 1½ to 2½ feet broad.³⁸ The threads were crossed either close together or loosely according to the skill or the intentions of the weaver. Some woven cloth was spun undyed, some in simple patterns of alternate blue and white stripes, and the best in stripes of varying shades ranging from ultramarine to navy blue, with occasional thin white stripes. Cloth was made in any length, the most popular being 3 feet broad which was just long enough to go around the waist and to form a loin cloth.³⁹ The Undyed cloth which was employed for shrouding a corpse usually

consisted of a series of short lengths of about 1½ yards joined together.⁴⁰ The output was largest during the latter half of the dry season when there was adequate supply of cotton in the market.

The price of Ngbo cloths varied greatly in the local markets. Outside Ngbo and Ezzamgbo, the prices for Ngbo dyed loin cloth varied from 9d to 2/-, according to the size and quality.⁴¹ Its wearing and lasting qualities are excellent and could compete favourably with European cotton cloth, hence its popularity. Ngbo cloth weavers employed only one dye, a blue vegetable. Undyed cloth is often stained red by the buyer with camwood or a scarlet vegetable dye. The price of undyed cloth varied from 4d to 8d a length according to size and quality.

The most superior cloth worn in Abakaliki was made in Agala, a village in Ngbo in narrow stripes of 6 inches or less in width and of great length which is joined to make large blankets or cloaks 6 or 8 yards by 4 yards in size. The cloths are expensive and are bought by Ngbo Isiales (title men and women) as part of their regalia. This industry increased the status of women cloth weavers in the Abakaliki area.⁴²

Basket weaving was and is still one of the major craft for women and young girls in Ntezi in Ishielu Local Government Area. Basket of different sizes and shapes were produced for various functions by women. Traders who used the basket in storing and displaying their goods patronized them. Many of the women who were involved in making of basket trained their children and take care of their families

with proceed from basket making. It was and still a lucrative business because before the introduction of European wares it was an important house hold utensil.

7. Trade

Trade was the second most important economic activity. It was a means of making profit by buying cheap and selling dear, of disposing of the surplus fruits of one's labour and of acquiring commodities which were in short supply or not produced at all in a given community. Two types of trade existed – domestic and external. By domestic trade we refer to exchange of goods and services within the territory that later became Nigeria and between the people who lived within it. External trade refers to trade between Nigeria on the one hand and the outside world on the other.⁴³

There were two types of domestic trade, namely local trade and long distance trade. Local trade was conducted within Abakaliki and between them and the neighbouring communities. It arose from the variations in natural resource endowments and differences in human productive capacities. Most Igbo communities had four market days: Eke, Orie, Afor and Nkwo; but the Izzi clan of Abakaliki had five market days. However, the Ikwo and Ezza had a week of 4 days (or 8 days). Only Izzi had a week of 5 days, like Igede and other culture groups in Benue state.⁴⁴

Steensel asserted that "It is probable that Izhi is influenced by the former inhabitants of the area and their neighbours".⁴⁵ The names of the

five days here are the names of places where markets are held on that particular day. The five days are:

Ophoke, (Ophoke – Iziogo and Ophoke Ogbala)
Azua (Mbam – Oko)
Iboko or (Onuvu)
Okpo (or Nwophe)
Nkwegu (or Odomoke)

By the period of this study, Opoke, Nwophe and Odomoke developed as the most popular yam markets in Abakaliki area. The sister communities of Ezza and Ikwo had Eke, Orie, Afo and Nkwo markets, respectively. Among the major markets in Ezza were Eke-imoha, Afor Nkomoro and Orie Egbe. In Ikwo, the Eke market at Amegu, Nwele and the Igboji market at Echara were the most popular. The Eke-imoha was the biggest in the area and the whole or northeastern Igboland. So because of its size, the market attracted traders from the Cross River area, Uburu, Abiriba and Aro chukwu. Goods bought and sold in the market were mostly agricultural products such as yams, cocoyam, livestock, and palm produce. Products of wood carvers like wooden utensils and blacksmiths products like hoes, matches and diggers were also bought and sold. Many distant communities sold their wares in the market for example, Uburu traders sold horses, Aro traders brought gun powder and Abiriba traders sold iron rods. Astonished by the sea of heads and the wide range of goods sold in the market, Hitchcock, one of the early vanguards of the Church of Scotland Mission, had this to say;

Ekeimohan (Ekeimoha) was in full swing and in the open plain, as far as the eyes could see, long lines of men and women streamed in with their loads on their heads. Here the power of the Aro was evident.⁴⁶

To support the above observation, Njoku and Nworie captured this about Eke-imoha; “Indeed early British writers who traded with the Aros from the hinterland mentioned that Ekeimoha was one of the slave markets in Igboland”.⁴⁷ The trade in slaves therefore made Ekeimoha popular and unique in the area. On every market day, traders, producers and consumers converged at the different markets to transact business. These markets were organized in rings or cycles. Ajaegbo notes that market rings or cycles tended to operate on the principle that proximate communities did not hold their markets on the same day or one immediately after the other. In this way, markets clashes were avoided⁴⁸ In any case, rotation of markets also “ensured that each community in a ring had easy access to the goods and services it needed”.⁴⁹ To maintain order in the markets, customary laws existed to ensure peaceful conduct of business. Such cases as stealing and fighting in the market attracted fines, the value of which depended on the gravity of the offence.

Abakaliki traders also engaged in long distance trade. Encouraged by Aro traders, they travelled to such distant markets as Afikpo, Uburu, Umon and Akunakuna. Long distance trade was also well organized. Oral interview evidence shows that some women were involved in

traveling from Abakaliki to Uburu for salt. According to Nwidagu and Nwibo Ogah, we leave very early in the morning before anybody could see us. Before we could get to Aba Omege the day would fall. We joined other women who were already waiting for us there to proceed to Uburu to purchase salt.⁵⁰ The traders travelled in caravans, accompanied by guides, head – porters and guards, they also entered into blood covenant among themselves, and their hosts, but some traders made their own independent arrangements as they gained capital and experience. However, long distance trade was the main business of a small class of entrepreneurs whom we could describe as professional traders.⁵¹

Traditional Socio-Political Institutions and Women

Traditional Igbo government has often been described as gerontocracy, but not all elderly men had an equal say in important matters. A prosperous man or woman, who was prosperous, would as it were register and legitimize his/her success by taking a title. The title system served as a substitute for social security; the man/woman who acquired a title paid to do so, and shared in the payments of later entrants. A title was guarantee of character, as well as a success.⁵² This implies that people with questionable character were not given title.

Traditionally polygyny, title taking and possession of a large yam barn were very important for the Abakaliki people. They were symbols of wealth and conferred on the person enormous status and prestige. The Abakaliki man would work hard to get prestige and popularity in

the society. The title taking grantees both economic and social benefits to the person. These benefits are respect, storage of wealth, privileges on village level, prestige and popularity, among others. Oral interview showed that the following titles existed during this period. *Eme jioke* (yam title), *onma* or *anma inya* (horse title), *akwa l'eswi* (cow-title) *O-gbu – ishi* title (people who returned home with human heads during war) or *ogba mini l'eka* (pouring water on the palm), *Obu uwahu* title, *Eja uwa*, *ogwa ochi*, *ozza ozza* (the highest chieftaincy title in Ezza) and *O–kuru ema* or *O – gbu – aguiyi* (women highest title in Izzi).

Most of these titles were taken by men though not without the help or presence of the women. A man must have married a wife before he was qualified to take most of the titles mentioned above. Women were very important either in the preparation stage of title taking ceremonies or at the celebration stage of it. However, this work will examine vividly, those titles that were peculiar to women in this area. They included *ogwa ochi* and *O – kuru – ema*.

a. Ogwa ochi

This was performed by only women; it took place after the *Eja uwa*, a title taken in connection with adult circumcision in the area. *Ogwa ochi* was normally taken by unmarried women and girls. Ominyi Uguru and Nwibo Nwuzor recounted how this was done: The usual place was the compound of the girl's parents. A chief priest that performed sacrifice at each village playground shrine (*Ngamgbo*) offered a sacrifice on unmarried woman's first shrine – the *ochi*. The priest killed

a hen on the *ochi* and mixed *akputo I' oboroto* (concoction) which he sprinkled on the girl.⁵³ Special blessings were made over the girl asking God to grant her fertility. This title was taken by young girls whose parents were well to do, that is, people who could afford the bill.

b. O-kuru - ema

This women title was similar to that of men. It was performed by rich and wealthy women who could afford it. It accorded respect, prestige and also made women as influential as the men title holder though to an extent. *O-kuru – ema* conferred on women a right to the funeral procession (*erwu – ubuv*) an aspect of the peoples culture that was very important to both men and women alike. The process involved in the *O- ku ema* or *O'kwari okuta* or *Ogbu – aguiyi* title taking was that after the woman had caught a big fish or a young crocodile, she could call the leaders of the women, whose duty it was to sacrifice at the fishing shrine *Oswa ochi* into which she wanted to be initiated. Sumptuous meal (*utara ji*) was prepared. The fish or the young crocodile was presented to the women. The entrant had to lay her hand on the head of the fish after which she washed her hand ceremoniously (*akw'o eka*) which expressed the title – taken. She paid a fee to the title holders. This expression aspect was negotiable especially if the fish was small then the entrant was made to pay higher.

After the initiation the woman would preserve the skull of the fish, dry it and paint it with yellow and white stripes. This expression of the title was usually hung in the house just like the horse skull for the

men. It was brought out when the *Ochi oswa*, the fishing deity was worshipped and put in front of the dish. Mrs. Ogodo Mbam said that “the first time the shrine was sacrificed on after the title was obtained; the woman (entrant) would sacrifice a fowl. Women who had taken this title received greater share of the meat. The women who had not taken the title were given only bones.⁵⁴ This title qualified the women for the funeral procession *erwu ubvu*. It also allowed them to participate in other people’s processions and received the portions of meat shared. The son of a woman who had taken this title was expected to give the other women a fowl during burial of a title holder. If the title holder was an *O-gbu-aguiyi*, the son was expected to give a goat for her burial procession. In the case of a woman, who had caught a big fish or the young crocodile but had not yet been initiated before her death, the relatives could call the women leaders and give them a small fish and certain amount of money which is negotiable, so that they could still accept her and go in procession for her. This title however was conferred at the village level and therefore varied from one village to another.

c. Jioke Title

Another title taken by women in Abakaliki (Iboko) was the *jioke* title. In this part of Abakaliki women also took the *jioke* title Nwigwe Enyi Aligwe and Madam Theresa Nwiboko narrated how this was done. They identified grade of four *jioke* titles as follows; *ekirika*, *nto’gbolo*

kpoku, *inya* and *eke enwu*. Each grade must be done before the other. They said the *ekirika* was the lowest title and involved the least expenses.

Women who had acquired wealth, from trading and other productive engagement could give it to their sons to take the title on their behalf and the respect and prestige associated to the title was accorded to them.⁵⁵

d. The Rite of Marriage

Marriage was an important and respected traditional institution in Abakaliki. It served as a bound between the families involved. Usually in traditional Abakaliki society, a girl in her infancy was betrothed to a boy. As a result, it was at times not customary to seek a girl's consent when giving her in marriage.⁵⁶ If a girl has a good character, the father may like her to stay in his compound and even arrange by himself a marriage with one of his sons (a half-brother of the girl). The son then becomes an in-law. For an Izzi man, the implication is that he no longer receives any share of the bride – price of the other daughters of the family and this caused disunity and disputes because of the extra claims on in-laws for burials, sacrifices and so on.

Parents and kinsmen of the intending spouses were deeply involved in marriage negotiations and performance of the concomitant rites to ensure that the rule of exogamy and incest were not violated.⁵⁷ The parents of the intending couple, particularly the father had an overriding say in deciding whom their son or daughter would marry. Strong parental involvement and influence was absolutely necessary to

further ensure that none married into a family with a history of sudden and mysterious deaths, childlessness, criminality or into a family of outcasts.⁵⁸ By involving relations, in-laws, friends and married daughters and consulting oracles in the process of making inquiries, these calamities were sometimes avoided. This involvement of parents and kinsmen helped to expose any inhibition or problem of the family from which a daughter or son would marry whether from within the community or outside.

When a girl with an unblemished background was identified, the father of the suitor sent two men with snuff to declare the intention of his son. It was customary for the father of the girl to refuse the snuff on the first day. This enabled them to carry out some investigations about the background of the suitor. The snuff might be rejected more than twice before being finally accepted. When it had been accepted, the suitor would visit the girl's home from time to time with a keg of palm wine, especially during important festivals like the new yam festival, and other ceremonies. After several of such visits, a date was fixed for the marriage negotiation (*ime nzuko*). The father of the girl would officially inform the elders of his kindred who was to marry their daughter and they would agree or disagree with the girl's father. If they agreed, the suitor was given a 'guide' by the kindred of the girl's parents. The guide, among other things, would help the suitor to beat the bride wealth down to a reasonable level. The suitor would visit a selected number of elders from the girl's kindred. A 'head' of about five tobacco

leaves tied together would presented first the bride's family. The suitor would be dismissed by the elders who would demand to know the elder who had been sending him to their place. Another date was then fixed.

On the agreed date, the suitor visited again accompanied by his father or whoever might act in his stead with many pots of wine, some kola nuts and heads of tobacco, depending on the economic standing of the suitor. This was the time when the suitor was considered serious and the bride wealth was listed out for him to pay.

According to Njoku and Nworie,

A suitor who wishes to hasten his bride negotiation goes with a higher quality and quantity of the bridal requirements in the first visit. This attitude signifies his wiliness to pay all necessary bridal requirements at the earliest possible time. This sometimes shortens the long process of wine carrying. When such is the case and if they meet with lenient in-laws, their actions serve as a sign of seriousness and their request is granted according.⁵⁹

However, the items and the cash required for the bride wealth varied from clan to clan in Abakaliki. In Izzi area, for instance, the bride wealth could be settled with cash. However, Njoku and Nworie observe that among the other groups like the Ezza. The normal bride price in Ezza included the following items: two cow and six goats. It is expected that one of the cows Ada Eswi (female cow) should be presented first when the bride price is paid. The second cow can be postponed almost indefinitely until such a time when the children from the marriage are wealthy enough to pay it. The six goats that are usually paid as bride

price are as follows: Eghu ukpara (a goat for welcoming) Eghu obata I' ulo (a goat for entering the family) Eghu unwunnaji (a goat for the kindred) Eghu omeru guu (a goat for the grand father if he is still alive) Eghu nuwhu (a goat for friendship, if the man was the friend of the girl's mother) The last two goats were conditional. These items are defrayed either in cash or in kind.⁶⁰

Before the man could take his bride home, he still had to perform the custom of traditional wedding (*ado' mee*). Sumptuous meal was prepared by the bride's family and amidst wining and dining; the real ceremony was carried out as follows: The most elderly man, from the bride's family, invoked blessing upon the new couple with the kola nuts and dried meat. The man prayed for fruitful marriage, good health, long life and prosperity of the couple while the people observed and cheered with admiration. With this ceremony, the traditional wedding was completed.⁶¹ In some other communities like Izzi, the bride was given a box filled with different items and money by her parents and relatives.

Usually the night the bridegroom returned with his bride to his compound, his friends, relatives and well-wishers would come to enjoy and welcome his new wife. This was called *eme ekele nwanyi*. Sumptuous food and wine would be offered to entertain the guests. The guests then admired the new wife and presented gifts to her.

Divorce

Divorce was a reality in traditional Abakaliki society. If a wife was ill-treated by her husband, she first appeal to her in-laws. If no

improvement occurred, she appealed to her own relatives, who in turn summoned the husband. If he ignored the warning, the wife might decide to desert the husband and return to her father's house. She would go back to her father's house only with the box and the things her parents gave her during wedding, irrespective of what other wealth she had acquired in her husband's place. She could re-marry another man. If she had given birth to a child for her former husband, no refund of the bride-wealth would be offered. Any new child would become the son/daughter of the new husband, unless she was pregnant before she married him. However, the new marriage must be solemnized officially by the father of the groom or his representative.

The women in this area live(d) with a second or third husband and cases about the ownership of children were common. Acceptable reasons for a woman to divorce her husband were poverty (if a husband could not give his wife adequate attention or perform necessary sacrifices for her or if he could not complete the bride-price), laziness (if a healthy husband was unable to feed his wife), impotence (if the husband could not make the wife pregnant and forbade her from having love affairs with other men in order to get pregnant), beating her without good reason, or if the husband was a thief and the wife does not like it. Regularly, women returned to the compound of their first husband at a later age to stay with their oldest son.⁶²

Polygyny

Polygyny, the marriage of one man to many wives was widely practiced in Abakaliki. The ambition of every man in traditional Abakaliki society was to become a polygynist because of the advantages it conferred on him. So a man added to the number of wives he had as circumstances permitted. It was recognized as an integral part of the social economy of the Abakaliki people. The more the number of wives a man had, the more the number of children and the larger his labours force. Polygyny was also a symbol of status, wealth, power influence and authority.

A man with a large number of wives and a much larger number of children was a great asset as a friend and a dangerous man as an enemy.⁶³ To substantiate the above statement, Ajaegbo asserts that, a chain of wives and children further provided the man with able-bodied men to protect his family and property in times of adversity like famine, epidemics, and war when survival dependent on physical might and numerical strength.⁶⁴

Wives encouraged their husbands to marry another wife, because this enhanced their own status. The new younger wives of the husband made the work load of the senior ones lighter. One of my informants said that the first wives were obtained either by direct payment of the bride wealth by the man himself, or was a gift from his parents. In the latter case the woman might be older than the man and might have had a number of children of her own. So there was need for other wives.⁶⁵

The first wife retained her position throughout life. She dominated the household and had more or less control over all other wives who might be added to the family. The second wife might be taken on the advice of the first wife. In some cases, the man took the initiative to marry a second wife to enable him solve many problems that might arise in the family as regarding family life. This generally followed after the birth of the first child by the first wife because it was an abomination for a woman to bear children at a shorter interval of less than three years. This was because, after the birth of a child, the wife was not supposed to cohabit with her husband for a period of about three years while she nursed the child. For this reason, the man sought to remedy the situation by marrying another wife. This action was always welcomed by the first wife who must have suggested the idea or assisted in raising the bride wealth.

Another aspect of the case of polygyny was that a woman was not content to remain the sole wife of a man. She considered herself placed in an unenviable and humiliating position. Again, as the sole wife she had to bear the whole domestic burdens of the household. As a result of all this, the first wife willingly rendered assistance in bringing a second wife into the family. In Abakaliki, the average number was from three and above as desired and could be afforded by the man. For example, writing about Chief Nwiboko Obodo, Steensel stated ...

He also had many wives. About 82 were counted.
His own compound counted hundreds of houses.
He did not know even all his family members. It

happened that he wanted to marry a beautiful girl, but before the Court the girl appeared to be his own daughter.⁶⁶

Widowhood Practices in Abakaliki

In Abakaliki traditional society, women had generally low status even from birth. A husband could beat his wife if she misbehaved. Men also exercised the right to have many wives as well as concubines whereas women were compelled by custom to maintain pre-marital chastity and marital fidelity. If a wife deviated from this norm, she would find her marital life quite miserable.

For a widow, the situation was even worse. The position of a widow in the society was very deplorable. Right from the day a woman lost her husband, she was subjected to a very adverse condition. From that day the widow was pushed into a very dark and poorly ventilated room where nobody could see her. She would be there for the period of mourning. The period was longer if one was a widow of a titled man. She sat on the floor with unkept hair and a piece of mat and just a little cloth to cover her nakedness. At the end of the confinement, the woman's hairs had to be shaved off completely. She was not to be seen laughing heartedly nor attend merry making occasions until she had completed the stipulated mourning period of one year.

After the mourning period however, she could re-marry one of the husband's kinsmen, especially if she was still a young woman. Where there were no kinsmen (young brother or relative) to marry her, usually the elder brother or relative of the dead man was not permitted by

custom to inherit his property, so the woman if she decided to stay in her late husband's compound could be sleeping with other men outside to get pregnant so as to continue the lineage of the late husband. If the husband had any economic tree such as palm trees, kola nut trees as farm lands, houses, yams and livestock, all of them would be take away from the woman especially if the woman, had no male child. In the same way, the bride wealth of all her daughters would also go to her husband's kinsmen and relatives.⁶⁷ One of my informants cried; "I better leave under a harsh husband than be a widow".⁶⁸ This was a sad stage in the life of every woman whose husband had died, not necessarily because of the family burden, which could no longer be shared but because of the feeling of loneliness in that regard.

Custom required that a widow should weep with seriousness and in case of complicity in the death of the husband the widow was expected to swear an oath. These rites were enforced and monitored by other women and the man's relatives. On the other hand, the widower was not maltreated and tortured in the same way. He was even pampered by everybody related to him. Nevertheless, there were some women who had risen to a certain position that they enjoyed some privileges. Such women were those who through hard work had acquired one title or the other, or women who had passed the child bearing age, these women were not bothered with the oath of promise to remain in the house of the dead man.

Pregnancy and Birth

In Abakaliki traditional society, there was a belief that conception involved supernatural forces. A woman sometimes could be said to have gotten her child from her *Oke k' uwa* or *ohenwa* (the god of child bearing). Children could also be “donated” by spirits. However, Abakaliki people were fully aware of the necessity of sexual intercourse in order to conceive. It was also generally believed that to have sex only once was not enough in order to give birth to a healthy child, the seed of a man was needed for the child to feed on in the womb.⁶⁹

A pregnant woman began to be careful with what she ate. She was not allowed to eat any monkey – like animal because this could lead to difficulty during labour. If she ate it, she must keep a small piece of the meat for the delivery day. She was not permitted to eat the meat like pork, bat, owl or any reptiles. Eating a fast moving animal like cat was encouraged because it would make delivery fast and safe. It was believed that if a woman ate any of the animals mentioned above, the child might adopt the peculiar character of those creatures. She was not to stare at ugly objects; otherwise she risked a hard delivery and an ugly child. A pregnant woman was also recognized as two persons; therefore when anything was shared, she had to take two shares.

Most women received herbs and other native medicines during pregnancy. They usually continued with whatever activity they do, otherwise such a woman would be called names. Pregnant women who farmed would never plant yam on the top of the heaps, but only at the

side. Every other planting must be at the side of farm otherwise it was believed that she would stop bearing children. She would also never buy knife, *nma* of any type for herself. If she needed a knife, she would ask another person to buy it for her or she would borrow one.

Abortion was very rare in traditional society. Traditional values were upheld, so unwanted pregnancies (pregnancies that are not planned for) were not common. In the event of an unwanted pregnancy, however, the girl or woman would be ostracized. When a woman miscarried, a diviner was consulted to find out the cause. Usually he attributed it to one of the divinities, *agwa*, dissatisfaction because a particular sacrifice was not offered. Evil spirit was also believed to cause a woman to miscarry. A wicked man or woman could cause miscarriage through the powers of his or her juju.

The period of labour was one of great anxiety and expectation. At the center of it all was the woman in labour who might be likened to a soldier in a war front. She may win or lose the battle. She won if she successfully delivered of the child.⁷⁰ When a woman successfully delivered her child, it was an indication that she did not commit any evil before or during the pregnancy. An expectant mother would surely die if she had violated any of the society's taboo. Such acts included adultery, witchcraft, murder and malicious destruction of neighbour's property and did not confess it either before or during delivery, it could cause her life or that of the child.

Birth normally took place in a small barn *mkpu* behind the woman's house. If it was raining she might deliver against the wall of the house. It was possible for a woman to give birth to a child while going to the market or farm. There was nothing wrong in any of these cases. It would even help to influence the name given to the child. But it was wrong to deliver inside the house, it depicted laziness on part of the woman and the child might take to such character. The traditional birth attendant might be the grand mother, or one of the specialists in the village called *Nwanyi eswi ime*. Some relatives may be allowed in to encourage her. The men were kept at a distance; in fact it was an exclusive preserve of women in Igbo traditional society. The traditional price for a successful delivery was four yams and some money or snuff. The after-birth placenta, *eze*, was usually buried. When the remains of the umbilical cord fell from the child's navel after 5 to 7 days, it was also buried. If this was not buried, it might have effect on the child. For instance, if a child fell down often, it was said that the remains of the umbilical cord were not buried.

A few hours after birth or delivery, the child was bathed with warm water and covered with white powder, *nzu*. Women who came to congratulate the mother and wish the child well were usually given the *nzu* to rub on their faces and neck. The woman was encouraged to feed the child with breast milk but sometimes unhealthy breast milk could result and people believed that the breast milk was poisonous and should not be given to the baby. A herbalist could be consulted for

treatment. The mother took some months of complete rest and could devote herself completely to the care of her baby under the guidance of the grandmother. Nwambe is of the opinion that the people or women of this area do not firmly believe that the first fruit of their womb was to live. If it would live, they would count themselves lucky. If the child was dead, the woman was consoled with: "At least you have known that you are a woman".⁷¹

Childhood and the fate of Twins

In the words of Basden, "The early days of the Ibo child are beset by hazards due to deeply rooted customs, general ignorance of the first principles of infant welfare, and gross superstition. The mortality of children under the age of twelve months is colossal".⁷² This was the situation in traditional Abakaliki society. Any child born with any abnormality was abandoned. Children who cut the upper teeth first and those who walked before cutting the lower teeth were considered abnormal children. It was assumed that births of this kind were as a result of failure to offer sacrifices or perform the second burial ceremonial rite of the departed mother or father. It could also be punishment for some crime committed without confessing them, particularly adultery and murder.

The birth of twins was a sort of detective agency bringing past crimes to light. (That is the gods exposing an unconfessed taboo committed by the woman). It was believed that twins were contrary to human, nature. The order of mankind was to have one child at a time.

The woman who gave birth to twins would be ostracized because she had brought disgrace upon herself and her household. She was considered to have broken the law and therefore must pay by being looked down upon and some elders then were of the view that twins were sent by enemies into the womb of a woman and so should be eliminated.

Her attitude towards the babies was as scornful as that of her relatives and the entire community. For fear of what calamity the presence of the twins would bring upon the community, the children were hurriedly put into an old water pot. A few leaves and coconut fiber would be used to cover the mouth of the pot and then, the pot would be deposited in the bush where the children could either been eaten by wild animal, die or even survived on their own. The mother must also undergo a ceremonial purification, she was not considered free until she had vindicated her reputation by giving birth to a single normal child.

The tradition of doing away with twins, no doubt put so many women in a state of childlessness for some of them lost up to four children to this uncanny and helpless tradition.⁷³ Some women who were victims of this tradition committed suicide.



Photo iv: Nwanyi deru mbo (tattooed woman during ritual circumcision)

Ritual Circumcision

Ritual circumcision or female adult circumcision *ubvu Ogerenya* was the ceremony which made a girl a real woman and prepared her for marriage. Adult circumcision was in two forms, the male and the female. The subject of our discussion here is the female adult circumcision called *Ogwa Ochi* in Ezza clan. The *Ogwa Ochi* was a ritual performed on a female child. The usual place for the ritual was the compound of the girl's parents. If she was already pregnant they would hasten the speed of the ritual to avoid her delivering the baby before the end of the circumcision rituals. This was so because it was necessary the circumcision is done before a woman could give birth for it was reasoned that the uncut clitoris might affect delivery negatively. Circumcision (*Obvu Ogerenya*) requirements were two gallons of palm wine, *Ogologo Igwe*, *Oji akwo*, tobacco, coconuts and then foodstuffs like

yams and a fat goat for the feast meal. The night preceding the day of circumcision, the parents of the lady left the house for the new couple to sleep together. This sleeping together is called '*Olaka mgbà*' (tearing of pant). The circumcision proper was performed in the yam barn *Oba ji* or cocoyam barn (*mkpu*) as noted earlier. The circumcision was performed by the circumcision doctor of the village, *uke*. It was performed on Nkwo or Orie day (Ophoke in Izzi) in the early hours of the morning. The lady, her sponsor, a friend and then the *uke* would enter into the barn for the operation. On arrival, the lady sat on the ground covered with banana leaves over a small hole made by the doctor (*uke*). The women held the lady while the doctor cut off the clitoris and buried it on the hole dug in the barn. Soon after the circumcision, the suitor would have already been waiting to welcome the circumcised wife.

This idea or tradition differed from clan to clan. In Izzi and Ikwo Clan, about a week after the circumcision, when the girl had recovered a bit, a message would be sent to the husband that she had been circumcised. He would provide coconuts, soap, a new cloth for the parents and also killed a cock "to take away the dirt".⁷⁴ When she entered the house, Camwood was rubbed on her body and she was expected to stay in her parent's home till two market days before *Otutara*, which was a sacrifice done to ward off evil spirits. She played the traditional musical instrument to effect a mental distraction from her pains since she was expected to be courageous because it was considered shameful to cry during and after the operation.

On successful completion of this ritual, the girl commenced her second fattening confinement. No cutting was made on the genital this time around. Just like in the first stage of confinement, goats were killed. But before killing the goats this time, camwood would be robbed on the horn signifying that it was meant to be killed for the enjoyment of a woman in fattening room. The skin was dried for display on the day of outing after bathing. Relations also brought consumable gifts within the period. Very significant here, was the tattooing of the lady's chest from the neck to the lower abdomen called *Mbo*, in Ikwo dialect. Some other clans decorated the face and the arms by tattooing them too. Some specialists are invited to do the tattooing with iron sharp object-*Agube*. They also applied some herbs before and after the tattooing to reduce pains. The fatty substance from the killed goat was used to rob on the tattoo wound it was believed that it helped to heal the wound. These marks, after undergoing the initiation, were used to distinguish married and initiated women from a girl and non-initiates and it attracted respect and enhanced the status of the woman.

Traditional Religion

Religion was based on a belief in a variety of spirits to which sacrifices could be offered. There were shrines almost everywhere. Often the sacred objects are rocks, grouped under a tree, with pots among them. Shrines symbolized the diversity of the beliefs and rituals in Abakaliki area. Important shrines the area were as follows: *Ohenwa*, god of child bearing, *ukoro*, the god of war, *orinte*, the god of covenant, *igwe*

uturu and *aliobu*, a family god in every compound, “*Okemini* was a shrine for a pond along the river Ebonyi, *Ophoke Amegu* and the *Enya-Ojiji* were the only shrines for the entire Izhi.”⁷⁵

These gods named above were believed to be the harbingers of all knowledge and were responsible for solving all sorts of problems. When a woman had a problem connected to child bearing, the god of *Ohenwa* was consulted whereas when there was any uncertainty about the truth of a matter, the god of *orinte* was consulted to resolve such matters. These gods were the guardians of morality in the whole land. This was more so because the people held a belief in life after – death (reincarnation). No human community can really exist without the constant help of the gods.

In addition, there was a general high spirit or god called by various names such as the sky god (*Igwe*), *Chileke*, *Chipfu* “The great God”, *Oke k’ uwa* (creator of the earth). Abakaliki people believed that *Oke k’ uwa* could be offended if one’s wife delivered of a child and one did not sacrifice before one took a title. Everyone had his own *uwa*, his personal creator. One informant, Oke, said that *chileke* is heaven and earth, *igwe* and *ali*, and that was why they called on him when oaths were taken.⁷⁶

The most important god in the people’s social life was *Ali*, the earth goddess. Consultation of the earth goddess was usually free but other gods were consulted with certain prescribed materials. For instance, the sun god – *Anyanwu*, the sky god – *igwe* and any other gods

were consulted with offerings like goats, fowl and four big tubers of yam.⁷⁷ Abakaliki people believed that worshiping of these gods was a sure way to life and property. Children bore names such as *Ali*, *Igwe*, *Ukoro*, *Oke* in the various communities and this attested to the veracity of the claim that the gods really helped the parents of these children.⁷⁸

Ancestral worship was practiced and that was why when a visitor was welcome with a kola nut, the kola nut was never eaten until a prayer was offered to the ancestors and a piece of it given to them before the remaining kola could be eaten. Traditional religion was quite elastic and accommodated lots of different trapping. Other gods such as *Anyanwu*, *Ibini Ukpabi of Aro Chukwu* and *Igwe Ka Ala of Umunoha* were all consulted and worshipped.

Women Organization (*Ogbo Unwanyi/Ogidale*)

Women, both as groups and as individuals, exercised enormous influence on the decisions taken on various subjects by men at all levels of the social political structure. They did this through such institutions as *umuada* or *umuokpu*, *Otu Nludi* or *Anutaradi* women Council. Ojiakor notes that *umuada* was known by various names such as *umuokpu*, *umoku alu alu* and *otu umuada*, and that given that there are many dialects of the igbo language, it is possible *umuada* could go by other names.⁷⁹ This was the case in the Abakaliki area. The women under the above umbrella were known as *Ogbo unwanyi*. The women discussed issues for their common good and how to punish women who did not cooperate

with them. They work together, danced together and settled cases in their midst and contributed together to help one.

Most villages in the area had what could be called a village mother, *Ishi Unwanyi ohalogwa omenge*. An intelligence report on Ngbo clan recorded that:

... In Ngbo there are no age grades or companies in the true sense. There are merely two classes of women, unmarried girls and married. No account is taken of the form. They call themselves a company and have as a controlling body a council called *ogidale*, which looks after the affairs of women in Ngbo. Members appear to be co-opted by the council and retire from it when they become too old for active work...⁸⁰

The head of this women group in Ngbo was called *Ogwa Omenye*. Josephine Odoh said that *Ogwa omenye* of Okposi Abak was the last woman head of Ngbo. After her period, however Omana Idoke of Ekwasi became the head of the women of Ngbo, saying that the head of the women of Ngbo should come from the senior ward of Ngbo.⁸¹ However, because of the variation in dialects, the women leaders answered various names like the *Ishi unwanyi oha, ogwa omenye or omana idoke*. Whatever was the name, she was chosen by the women by mutual consent, usually from the influential ones and had some assistants. She organized the women, settled cases in the women gatherings and played important role in the burials of woman and in marriage ceremonies, *afu I' ubvu* and ensured that things went according to the customs.

The women then exerted pressure to maintain moral norms among women. They heard complaints from wives about maltreatment by husbands and discussed how to deal with the problems that arose from time to time between them and the men folk. They also made decisions about the rituals made to the female guardian spirit of the village and about rituals for the protection of the fruitfulness of women and their farms. Fines were imposed for violating their regulations.

Death and Burial Rites of a Woman

Death occasioned sorrow and mourning. Except abnormal death, all other deaths attracted weeping and sorrow.⁸² There were three phases connected with death and burial which stood out with distinctive prominence. First, was death itself, "*Onwu*". The second phase was the first burial, *akwa ozu*, it may be a simple matter of rolling a corpse in a mat and disposed of it with little or no ceremony depending on the persons rank and social status. The third phase was the "Second burial". If this was done soon after the death, it was termed "*Ozu-ndu*", but if it was after a longer interval, it was called *Ikwa-ndu*.⁸³ However, the last was very important and indeed very serious affair in the traditional Abakaliki society.

Most of the aspects of the burial of a man were almost the same with that of a woman with little differences that would be discussed in the following analysis. A woman was never buried inside her house, but usually behind her firewood – kitchen, *akpata uku*. The woman was laid on her right side, facing her house with her left hand raised this was the

hand she used in carrying her baby. A piece of stone from her kitchen was laid on her grave. For titled women, especially those who were initiated into *Ogbu agiyi* or *O-kuru –ema* society, a fowl, called *Oku ugbu oswa* should be given to the women who followed the death woman procession *erwu ubvu*. There was no *Okperegede* music for the burial of a woman and no masquerade displays either.

House hold utensils were put in the tomb. For this reason the tomb for women were larger than that of men, the first floor was the same as with men, but the second floor was made round, wide and deep enough. Not all the materials brought were put in the tomb, a selection was made. Whatever remains would be for the woman's relatives. *Ndu nwe nwanyi*. The meat of the cow and goat used in the burial of woman was usually divided into three: *ndu nwe nwanyi*, *ipfu I' ophu* and *ndu alu nwanyi*. But that of men was shared between the man's family and that his mother that is two groups.⁸⁴

Great care was taken not to bury a pregnant woman together with her pregnancy. If a pregnant woman died, she was operated upon and the baby removed. The people believed that if the child is not removed from the womb for him or her to have it's own grave, the child's 'chi' would be so angry and this was believed to be able to make the whole family childless.

The Woman Second Burial

This was of utmost importance to the people. It was a completion of the burial ceremony. It was believed that without second burial the

person was not yet “home” and not yet really dead.⁸⁵ It was that last phase of the burial that signals her incorporation into the spirit world. The second burial accorded a woman a place among the ancestors. It qualified the dead person to be given food on *otutara*, a festival of remembrance and feeding of the dead parents. The second burial was a costly affair. In the words of Basden

“...the very poorest will spend their all, and often heavy debts are incurred in the effort to give the best possible “said-off” to a relative”.⁸⁶

There was no specific period for the second burial. It depended on the wealth of the children or sometimes in case of a problem such as sickness it would be arranged quickly to prevent any calamity. It could be celebrated a few months after the death, but it could also take many years before the burial could take place.

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CHAPTER THREE

ABAKALIKI WOMEN, 1929 – 1960

The British Conquest and Administration of Abakaliki

The British conquest of Igboland was motivated by their desire to open up the hinterland for direct and free trade, contact for unfettered Christian Missionary activities and finally to establish effective occupation and with these cardinal objectives in mind, the British launched a military expedition against the Aro in December, 1901.¹

The Aro expedition, a most celebrated encounter in the history of the British conquest of Igboland, ended in January, 1902 with the defeat of the Aro and the occupation of Arochukwu. The British were, however, mistaken in thinking that the subjugation of the Aro would end Igbo resistance to British imperialism in South eastern Nigeria.² It turned out as Afigbo puts it, that “the Aro expedition which had been projected as the war to end all wars in the Igbo and Ibibio interior soon proved to be the beginning”.³ The British were thus faced with an aggressive and truculent Igbo people in the hinterland.

Meanwhile, in the Cross River area, the Aro continued to instigate the Ikwo, Ezza, and Izzi clans to resist British penetration⁴ even after the Aro-Chukwu expedition of 1902. This belated effort of the Aro was made through peaceful diplomacy. They encouraged other groups to resist violently in order to achieve the Aro objective of obstructing British penetration. The purpose of this obstruction was to safe-guard

Aro satellite settlements which sustained the role of the Aro middlemen in the hinterland and even beyond the Igbo frontiers. Unfortunately, these belated efforts of alliance did not yield much fruitful results and so the British forces continued their march and conquest of various Igbo communities.

The British conquest and occupation of Abakaliki was launched from three areas, Afikpo in Igboland and Ediba and Obubra in the Cross River. According to an elder from Izzi clan, Stephen Nwanchor Alo, the white man came to Abakaliki from three major fronts, namely Itigidi area near Ediba on the Cross River in the South, Obuba Hill in the East, and in the South-West through Ugulangu and Onicha village in the Ohaozara area.⁵ From these three communities, the British mounted pressure on the people of Abakaliki area to surrender their sovereignty.

In the South, the British troops stationed at Afikpo joined those based at Ediba in the invasion of Abakaliki area. After the conquest of Abomege on the border of Ezza with Ikwo, the British patrol team moved into Ikwo and Ezza clans⁶ in 1905 and demanded peaceful surrender. When the two clans did not receive the British political Officer kindly, the latter withdrew to prepare for an attack on the area.

The Ezza and their Ikwo allies had attached the messengers sent to inform them of a meeting scheduled to discuss peaceful relations between them and the British colonial government. The messengers were seized and killed and the killing provoked Major Cockburn, whose escort team was also attacked. Major Cockburn mobilized his forces for

an onslaught against the Ezza and their Ikwo allies. The forces under his command first attacked Echara and Ohike Ikwo in 1905.⁷ The Ezza age grades joined their Ikwo counterparts to resist the British forces. The joint military response of Ikwo and Ezza soldiers was so effective that the British forces found it difficult to dislodge the allied forces ably organized by the age grades. There were many casualties on both sides in this encounter which took place at Nanakang in the Cross River basin.⁸

After the withdrawal of the British colonial officials from Ikwo hinterland, the Ezza fighting men also withdrew from Ikwo to their own clan. Women and adolescent boys often sent food and water to their husbands and relations behind the scene of hostilities.⁹ Thereafter, the people of Ikwo became entirely uncontrolled.¹⁰ This was because the British were not able to subdue the whole Ikwo clan and as a result, the people fell back into operating their pre-colonial system. This was the opportunity which the Aro people in Ikwo land did not lose. The Aro thereafter took over Ikwo and convinced them that the British officials had departed finally. This made the Aro to have much power in Ikwo again until the British forces later returned to conquer Ikwo hinterland.

Meanwhile, the British found their way to the more friendly people of Izzi clan. Some of the Izzi people needed the British as allies because of their war with Ezza clan over land dispute. Oral traditions from the people of Izzi clan living near Ntezi-Aba and Nkaleke which became the first site of Abakaliki (Aba and Nkaleke) town recalls how

the British patrol team cut their way from Obubra district through Ikwo to Nkaleke and Agbaja hill which they made their base camp.¹¹ It was this base camp that became the British headquarters in the Abakaliki area.

Ottenberg in his own account notes that,

Between 1895 and 1905 there was a gradual movement of military forces from the South into the Abakaliki region as part of the pacification of Eastern Nigeria by the British. The British led military composed mainly of Hausa and other Moslems from the North entered Abakaliki area several times after the turn of the century to settle disputes over land boundaries among the four Ibo groups living there. In 1905 they moved in on a permanent basis on the invitation of the Izi, concerned over expansion of another Ibo group, the Ezza, into their area. The British, of course, had larger goals in mind. After some small-scale fighting, the British officers chose the present site of Abakaliki town as their permanent headquarters. This was a place with a good water supply and a dominating hill, useful as a lookout post.¹²

Nevertheless, the process of transforming this base camp into a divisional administrative headquarters started in earnest soon after the invasion. From the Abakaliki town British colonial administration and Christian missionary activities began to spread to the other clans in the whole of old Abakaliki division. The British colonial administration was effectively established and monitored in Abakaliki area through the use of military force and the police. To consolidate their rule, the British also introduced their system and administrative structure such as the

warrant chiefs, Native Authorities, Councils and Courts, Advisory Boards and later elected Local Government Councils.¹³ The British political officials appointed some indigenous leaders as chiefs over the conquered clans and sub-clans. This however, was not in all cases; some were not recognized by their communities but the British gave those leaders special written warrants which made them warrant chiefs.

Some of the chiefs appointed during the early period were Okenu Epehu of Umuoghara, Nwafor Aja of Idembia, Effia Alope of Amuzu and Ede Uduma of Ekka in Ezza clan.¹⁴ Also among the early warrant chiefs in Ezza clan were Nwaliobu Obaji from Umunwagu Idembia and Ugbala Egede of Umuikegwu Ekka.¹⁵ In Ikwo clan, the first warrant chief was one Anyigo Agwu, of whom it has been said that “neither he nor his father was a village head before the coming of the Whiteman”.¹⁶ Ogwudu Aleke in Etam Ikwo, and Obura Opeke in Epelu were appointed chiefs by the British officials after the war of resistance by the Ikwo people.¹⁷ In Izzi and Ishielu clans, Chief Igboji Ola of Igbeagu, and Chita Alidor were appointed in Izzi clan while Chief Obu was the ruler of Iyonu village in the Igbo Asaa area. Chief Ukpai Erishi of Akwura-kwu Agba and Elei Adagba of Mgbo were made warrants chiefs from their communities.¹⁸ No woman however, was appointed a warrant chief. Ojiakor notes that the appointment of warrant chiefs also led to the isolation of women leaders and groups from the decision-making process.¹⁹ Uchendu observes that the colonial administrators because of their own perception of the proper place of woman could not

understand why the women complained. They could not understand why Igbo women would not accept their administration.²⁰

These warrant chiefs were appointed indiscriminately in some parts of Abakaliki district. Investigations into the background of these men showed that only a few of them were Ishiali traditional rulers in their communities before their appointments. Some of the men appointed were the ones who caused or created a lot of problems for the British colonial officials in Abakaliki. Others were men who collaborated with the Whiteman at a time others ran away. It was only in a few cases that the appointment of warrant chiefs was made from the traditional leadership structure. It could therefore be right to say that the appointment of warrant chiefs was rather haphazard or arbitrary.

The Native Courts began to flourish in the Abakaliki area. These Native Courts were visible and outward symbols of the warrant chiefs. In all, by the late 1920s each of the six clans in Abakaliki had got its own Native court. They were located at Nkwegu in Izzi, Mgbo in Ishielu and Achiegu in Ezza and Agubia in Ikwo. Others were sited at Nkalagu, Effium Orri-Agba, all in Ishielu clans.²¹ The native authorities were given the responsibility of local governance under the supervision of a British District Commissioner or District Officers. The powers and functions of the native authorities were clearly defined by law. They were responsible for maintenance of law and order in their areas. They administered justice, were expected to promote trade and agriculture, in their areas of jurisdiction. They were also to undertake local public

works such as the building of markets, dispensaries, maternity centres, roads and bridges to connect towns, villages and clans. To raise money for local use taxation was introduced by the British colonial administration to supplement funds raised from court fines. "So long as the native authorities carried out their duties satisfactorily, the British allowed them to remain in office, if they failed in their duties, they were removed".²² The British appointed and dismissed the native authorities. Such control had somewhat salutary effect on the position of the traditional rulers. It freed them from the checks and balances²³ of traditional government. The colonial administration, therefore, *"Produced Super-emirs, Super – Obas and Super – warrant chiefs"*.²⁴

The women resented the whole idea of warrant chief, and other colonial policies. The administration was male – dominated. To exacerbate the situation, the warrant chiefs were arrogant and corrupt. Some became autocrats in their own communities and even used age grades to do their private buildings. With the general unpopularity of the warrant chiefs and the sour relationship existing between the women and the former over the taxation which they controlled, Ojiakor observes that;

The scene was no longer conducive for the various women organizations to function effectively as before. The women used any slightest excuse to vent their anger on the colonialists. This accounted for the anti-government propaganda by Igbo women in many parts of Igbo land which manifested itself in various forms including the Aba women's war of 1929.²⁵

Ojiakor again notes that the rumour of extending taxation to the Eastern provinces sparked off a lot of protest.

In 1928, there were the Ezza and Izzi women's uprisings which repeatedly broke up meetings of men likely to be in favour of the government plan of introducing taxation. The women were cowed down through arrests and subsequent prosecution of their leaders.²⁶

Howbeit, the women were able to register their grievances through the uprisings even though they were not well articulated.

Women in the Abakaliki area did not participate in the protest or the women war of 1929 which took place in some parts of former Owerri and Calabar Provinces but the restlessness and anxiety shown in their attitude was a clear indication that they were in sympathy and that given the chance they would have reacted violently too.²⁷ The District Officer at Abakaliki during the time of the revolt, Captain E.J G, Kelly, made special arrangements to guard against violent reactions among the people.

After the revolt the colonial Government set out to collect intelligence reports on the indigenous political, economic and social organizations of Nigerian communities including Abakaliki. There was the need to find out, among other things, why the people of Abakaliki were dissatisfied with the warrant chief system and why the system of taxation broke down within a short period of its introduction,²⁸ and thus provide data for the reform of the local government system.

Various colonial officials were assigned to collect the intelligence reports. The A.D.O for Abakaliki, Mr. G.B.G. Chapman, investigated the traditional systems of the people of Ezza and Ikwo clans. Mr. J.G.C Allen worked on Izzi clan, while Mr. G.I. Jones, worked on Mgbo and Ishielu area. Mr. J. Brayne – Baker investigated the indigenous systems of Igbo Asaa also in Ishielu area, while Mr. A.E. Cook, got the information about Ntezi and Okpoto people of Ishielu. Mr. M. Aston Smith, A.D.O complied the report on Agba, another group in Ishielu area. These officials submitted their finding from the early 1930s.

The reorganization of the 1930's was based on these reports. The British colonial officials felt a strong need to reorganize the local government system which had since functioned through the warrant chiefs. The disturbances of 1929 by women in the then Owerri and Calabar provinces had shown that the warrant chief system had failed to satisfy the governed. Afigbo and other scholars have shown details of how this system became discredited.²⁹ Writing about Ezza clan in 1932, G.B G, Chapman said that despite the fact that the people were "apparently perfectly friendly to the administration" they were "definitely hostile to the warrant Chiefs and desire them to be removed en block".³⁰ This resulted to the search for the indigenous form of government agreeable to both the rulers and the ruled. Thereafter there were periods of reforms in the local government system in the 1930's and 1940's.

Anyanwu noted that the 1930's reform had lost much of its credibility. The elders had difficulty blending the traditional system and the colonial system of administration at the behest of the colonial government. The Members of the Native Authority Councils and courts were corrupt. They accepted bribes to twist justice or blatantly embezzled money.³¹ To substantiate the above assertion, colonial officer wrote in 1941, "The *Ngambo* or sub-clan courts had but out lived their usefulness and had inherent problems of corruption and they were unwieldy".³² These reforms failed also because the pre-colonial organization, introduced for local government could not function effectively and satisfactorily.

In the 1950's the process of establishing a modern local government administration was set in motion. The Abakaliki Divisional Council was established in 1953. This was the first time elected offices were introduced in the area. By 1955, the new Local Government Law no 25 provided, *inter alia*, the removal of Divisional officers from exercising strict control over the local government councils. Secondly, the divisional councils were reduced to Districts councils made up of homogenous clans so as to lessen the fear of domination among the people. Mr Livingstone –Booth, the D O, acting in consonance with the new local government law, introduced the modern local government councils. The former Divisional Council at Abakaliki became a county council. Under this body were three rural District Councils, namely

Ezzikwo, Izzi and Ishielu. Between 1958 and 1960, these bodies became country councils.

Christianity, Western Education and Social Change

The decade, 1950-1960, witnessed the growth of Christian missionary activities in the six clans of the area. As the missionaries widened their areas of religious operation, educational institutions were also established. Thus, a new economic and social order followed. By 1960, three Christian groups were prominent in the spread of the gospel in Abakaliki area. These Christian missionary bodies were the Catholic, the Presbyterian, and the Methodist churches, the most successful of all the missions operating in Abakaliki division.³³ Progress at converting the people of this area was so slow that about three decades after evangelization began, a colonial officer observed that “there were so few Christians in the division ...”³⁴

To facilitate the process and pace of evangelization, the Christian missionary bodies began to establish churches. For instance, St Theresa’s Catholic Church, Abakaliki was established in 1938, and six other parishes were later established between 1940 and 1957. These were sacred Heart Mission Ezza, between 1949 and 1950,³⁵ St Vincent Ndubia Izzi in 1952, Nkalegu parish in 1954, Umuezeoka parish in 1955, Effium in 1956 and Ikwo parish at Abina 1957.³⁶ The churches were located where the people’s traditional religion, culture and custom waxed very strongly. The Christians assailed Abakaliki’s polytheism. The gods and goddesses were regarded by the Christian missionaries as nothing but

mere idols which possessed no powers. The Christians preached that there was only one God. Ancestor worship which was an aspect of Abakaliki traditional religion was condemned. The ancestors, the Christians, claimed were dead, powerless and could not come to the world again.

The Christian missions and the government built schools knowing that this was the best way of doing away with cut slavery and other outdated practices like trial by ordeal and killing of twins. Other decadent and discriminatory practices were attacked such as cut slavery *Ohu*, *abalaji* (people dedicated to ancient shrines) and indecent burials accorded to the people who died without children. To the Christians, the birth of a child with the legs first or cutting the upper tooth first meant nothing. Other actions regarded as abominations like burial of men and women suspected to be wizards and witches and those who died with swollen stomach were accommodated by the Christians of all the denominations. Lepers and other people with dreadful diseases were received in mission establishment and cared for.

Other aspects of Abakaliki cultural life came under attack and condemnation such as polygyny. A man should marry only one wife, after the marriage the two would continue to live together until death separated them. The greatest attack on Abakaliki traditional social institution and culture was on their ritual circumcision. This circumcision as earlier started, was the soul of Abakaliki culture and religion.

Their festivals *Nnefioha*, *Aji*, *Eke Opoto*, *Ima inya*, *Obu Uwhu* title, *Ubvu Oguernya* adult circumcision among others were not spared the condemnation by the missionaries as 'paganism'. The missionaries condemned sacrifices made to idol especially during the festivals. The combined efforts of the Christians challenged the traditional order so effectively that the observance of some of their customs and traditions began to diminish; and some hitherto held beliefs became obsolete though never completely.

One of the achievements of the Christian missionaries was the education of girls and women. This was initiated by the Church Missionary Society (C.M.S). An ideal woman to the western missionaries was to be knowledgeable in domestic science. Thus, apart from the three RS, (Reading and Writing, Arithmetic and Religious Instruction) she was to be trained in house work and needle work (domestic science). All these would equip her to fit appropriately into the life style of the educated man who worked for the colonial government, expatriate firms and Christian missions. To achieve this aim, the mission attached great importance to training girls in domestic science, character formation, marriage life as well as how to set up their own businesses.

According to Clara Osinulu,

Education had been the primary tactic adopted by the church for the liberation of women. Each church denomination had a significant women's organization through which women acquired a

greater social status and assumed direct responsibility.³⁷

Western education did improve the lot of Abakaliki women. Apart from the abolition of the killing of twins, they provided medical services which improved the health condition of the people, especially pregnant women, nursing mothers and infants. One of my informants, Chief A. O Ewa, is of the view that “*Christianity brought good things such as education to our people*”,³⁸ He further argued that western education brought western civilization and emphasized on the rights of women. For example, the culture of nudity was banned in the Abakaliki area and other activities considered improper by missionaries and the educated elites as well. Another informant, Stephen Nweke, argued that western education expanded and diversified women’s occupational and economic activities. Most of them became economically independent of the men and thus assumed an enhanced status.³⁹

Western influence “emancipated” African (Abakaliki) women –

Through the weakening of kinship bonds and the provision of “free choice” in Christian monogamous marriage, the suppression of “barbarous” practices, the opening of schools, the introduction of modern medicine and hygiene, and, sometimes, of female suffrage.⁴⁰

With the introduction of education, the missionaries succeeded in transforming the position of women both the freeborn and slaves in Abakaliki society. The women started going to school, and in this way became enlightened. Some of them got good jobs as teachers, doctors,

accountants, lawyers, etc, which was something different from the previous roles played by the freeborn women in the traditional Abakaliki society. Some of these women includes; Mrs Ngozi Ochere, Nnenna Nwaigboji, Beatrice Atuma, teachers. Nnenna Uzoigwe, Nkechi Mbam, lawyers, Dr Nneoma igwe, Dr Patricia Nwafor, Faith Nweze nurse, just to mention but a few. For the cut slave women, this changed their position in the society, as some of them became doctors, nurses, etc, which was not the case in the traditional society, where they were treated with disdain.

Thus the coming of Christianity to Abakaliki brought about positive changes to the social statues of women as some of them who were educated have become important people in the modern Abakaliki society.

The Activities and Achievements of the Abakaliki Divisional Council

The Abakaliki Divisional Council (ADC) was made up of representatives from the six clans of Abakaliki District. It was composed of a chairman, a Vice – chairman and several sub-committees each with a chairman and members attached. Every elected member of the Divisional Council belonged to either education, finance, works and planning (General purpose) or Health and Agriculture Committee.⁴¹

The A D C undertook many development and social tasks. They embarked on the education of the people on new methods of agriculture, including the use of fertilizer and insecticides. Under the first group of elected Councilors agriculture in the area got its scientific

orientation.⁴² The first Ogoja Provincial Agricultural show was held on Johnson's ground at Abakaliki Township on 21st November, 1953.⁴³ The agricultural show was designed to teach the people new methods of cultivation.

The Abakaliki Agricultural Division of the Eastern Region Ministry of Agriculture made giant steps to introduce new varieties of crops which included cocoa (the amazon), citrus with budded tree stems, kola and selected seeds. Also introduced were different species of maize (selected cobs) and different types of cassava. The cultivation and production of different types of cassava which was done by women enhanced their social and economic status. There was a new emphasis on breeding of live-stock. For example cattle, boar pigs, the ram and Gimmers varieties of sheep and Red Island Rhodes Cockerels and pullets were demonstrated.⁴⁴ Rice of different species, groundnuts, cow peas, vegetables and flowers⁴⁵ were grown too. Most of animals, crops and vegetables mentioned above were domesticated, cultivated and grown by women. These measures helped to popularize agriculture in Abakaliki, especially rice cultivation which was introduced in 1942.

Among the other achievements of the Councillors was the move to ban nudity in the whole of the Abakaliki area. In 1953, Mr. Sampson Elom, a member of the Divisional Council moved a motion for the enactment of a law prohibiting nudity by women in the area, and this was supported by Mr. S.U Nweke of Ezzagu. Mr. Nweged Nwamgbo was said to have tried to oppose it arguing that it was the custom of the

people meant to preserve morality or chastity on the part of the women. The council members argued that the custom had been overtaken by events and that as time changed, outmoded practices should change also.⁴⁶ In 1954, with the support of the D O, Mr. J.D Livingstone – Booth, a council bye-law prohibiting nudity in Abakaliki area was passed. Offenders were to be liable to three years imprisonment or a fine of thirty pounds (£30: Os:Ods) in the alternative. It was in 1960 that the Regional government recognized the need to ban it.⁴⁷

The Divisional Councils were the major campaigners so as to enforce the provisions of the nudity bye – law. The councillors visited the major villages in the six clans and the market explaining the need for people to cloth themselves as nudity was rampant especially among women and girls in the area. According to Isha Monday, the campaign became vigorous as Nigeria was approaching independence.⁴⁸ He further explained that nudity in the Abakaliki area was not as a result of abject dislike for clothing apparel. The need to preserve purity of the sexes over-rode the issue of foreign cultures. Most of the adult men were well protected with indigenous fabric and the ‘Aro – Cloth’. They wore loose woven cloth to avoid the heat and sweat which tight cloths attracted when they were engaged in their traditional occupation of farming, while the women and girls appeared nude to prove their chastity,⁴⁹ however, it was in the later 1950’s that the de-centralized councils fully attacked and improved on the situation of nudity.

Simon Ottenberg, captured the issue of nudity in Abakaliki when he wrote *"Another rural Igbo issue that stirred the government at Abakaliki to action twice in this period, was the question of nudity, especially among rural women"*.⁵⁰ He noted that while the colonial government was making effort to pass anti-nudity laws, with fines for violators, backed by the native authority police, the rural leaders in the division frequently objected, saying that they had many wives and could not afford to clothe them all.⁵¹ However, by the early 1960s, nudity campaign which was directed towards rural women had achieved some measure of success. *"There were no sensational published reports of nudity during the independence celebration in Abakaliki Division, although the passing of the anti-nudity rules evoked some newspaper and magazine comments before Independence Day"*.⁵²

The next major issue undertaken by the Divisional Council was the effort to improve literacy in the whole of the district. This needed an increase in taxes and rates to be paid by every adult male. The Divisional Council came decided that every adult should pay an education levy of £1:05: Od (~~₦~~2.00).⁵³ This compulsory levy was designed to enable more people to go to school. The approval of this education project by the D O and the Secretary to the Administration, and the passing of the Education levy into law in 1953 sparked off a popular and historic protest by the women folk in Abakaliki Division from 1953 to 1954.⁵⁴

The Women Protest of 1953/54

Igbo women organized several demonstrations against school authorities and government when government started playing direct role in the maintenance of schools, especially in the area of financial assistance, there arose the need to raise government revenue. An Education committee was established in each district of Southeastern Nigeria comprising one-third Native Authority membership required by law, the managers of the missions involved, and the provincial Education officer. The purpose was to raise fund for the running of schools when the financial burden of education rates were introduced in 1952. The rates were to be paid before 31 December, 1952, into the Native Administration Treasury for use in the 1953 school year.⁵⁵ There was considerable opposition to the rates by the Igbo because of its burden on them. The women championed the demonstrations in Bende Division, Arochukwu, Orlu and Abakaliki Districts.

In the case of Abakaliki District, the agitators argued that development levy for education had risen beyond the financial capacity of their husbands and children.⁵⁶ The women accused the elected councillors, chiefs, and honourable members to Eastern Region House of Assembly of financial mismanagement before the education levy and that the increase was another machination to enrich themselves. These leaders were also accused of collaboration with the British colonial official, to cheat the people of Abakaliki. The women protest was mainly

over the introduction of the Education Rate. There was the rumour that women themselves would also pay the sum of 75k as education rate.⁵⁷

Some of the councillors and traditional rulers who were so accused were Egba Amaga, Ikegwu Aluma, Nwusulor Chima, Akam Iteshi of Ameka and Augustine Ewa all from Ezza. Those from Ikwo were Nwancho Atuma and Ogbunte.⁵⁸ Those who were unfortunate to be caught by the protesting women were beaten up, disgraced and made to march along with the women.⁵⁹ The rate and tax agents were tied up and rubbed with ashes and *Akpako* (plant used for evil sacrifice) placed on their necks. They were decorated with wild leaves which were traditionally used by only those who suffered from yaws to scar away flies. The women twisted the snake – like plant *Akpako* round their necks as a mockery of the beads which the councillors and chiefs usually wore, depicting royalty. The attack on some of the chiefs and law makers stemmed from the fact that, like the councillors, they were all decision-makers under the colonial regime.

Some men who were outside the council instigated the women to react against these representatives of the people. One of my informants Oguji Nwedu, said that one of the strong supporters of the women's revolt was one late Mr. Davidson Igwe, a Surveyor and petition writer. He had much interest in the financial remuneration of the services he rendered to the women. The large sum of money the women contributed was misused in this anti- education levy movement.⁶⁰ The women marched to different parts of the Division, including important

Offices at Abakaliki Divisional headquarters, clan courts, and homes of the councillors and chiefs. The incident resulted in serious cases of assault and disgrace of the men who were involved.

The vigorous protest of Abakaliki women against colonial taxation and Education Rate took place between January and March, 1954. The agitation was so serious that schools were closed down during the period for safety of the teachers and pupils. Government officials disappeared from their offices at the approach or sight of the women to avoid being insulted and disgraced. The slogans of these women included; *“Down with the white man, to hell with their collaborator councillors and chiefs, there is death in money!”* (*Okpoga bu onwu du, riama rioodoo whe!*)

The chiefs, councillors and the tax and rate agents were made to dance to the tunes of the women's songs as they marched round markets, playgrounds and along the major high ways to the Divisional headquarters at Abakaliki and the nine native courts in the six clans of Achiagu, Ezza, Agubia and Echi Alike Ikwo, Nkwagu and Iboko Izzi, Mgbo, Orri-Agba, Nkalagu and Effium in Ishielu.⁶¹

The D O in-charge of Abakaliki District, Mr. J.D Livingstone – Booth, with the Councillors went to Eke Imoha market square to see the women agitators. The D O and other Councillors watched helplessly as the woman attacked some of the councillors who were identified on the entourage. Among the councillors who were identified and publicly flogged were Augustine Ewa of Amana Ezza, Akam Iteshi of Ameka

Ezza South, Egbe Amaga of Umezeokoha and Usulor Chima of Echara.⁶² Augustine Ewa was tied with a rope and flogged near Eze Okohu's compound at Ezzama section of the Eke Imoha market square. Some others in the D.O's entourage were also flogged by the women.⁶³ However, some of the rulers were not harmed, for instance, Mr. Stephen U. Nweke and the Chief Nnabu Nweze. According Augustine Ewa, others who were not harmed had escaped and those whose homes the women could not reach because of long distance and geographical barriers.⁶⁴

The British officials in Abakaliki Division saw this agitation against tax and education rate as a challenge to the colonial administration. The Senior D O, Mr. Livingstone – Booth, witnessed the attack at Eke Imoha market on the Councillors and other authorities. He quickly assembled a detachment of the police force to the scene the following day. The women were still at Eke Imoha market square when the D.O and the Police arrived. The police used tear gas to disperse the women. The tear gas affected some of the agitators. Some ran away especially the younger ones, while others were dazed by to the severe effect of the tear gas. This was an experience never to be forgotten by this women.⁶⁵

The D.O wanted more action to be taken against the women agitators and their collaborators. He was not happy when he saw Mr. Ewa's face still swollen a day after the beating. But when asked, Mr. Ewa told the D.O that he knocked his face against a wall. The D.O told

the superintendent of police (a fellow white) that Councillor Ewa was trying to save his people by his refusal to state that he was beaten by the women agitators. Thereafter D.O and the police team withdraw without further reprisal.

Evidence showed that some men were behind the women protests. The anti-education rate agitators at Echara Ikwo assaulted two native court messengers on 20th February 1954. This resulted in some arrests by the police on 23rd February. By 24 February, the Senior District Officer, Abakaliki Division and his party were surrounded and attacked near the village of Akwunakuna in Ikwo by a crowd of about 300 persons who were agitating against the education rate. On 25 February 1954, the S D O, Mr. J. D Livingston – Booth, the senior superintended of police and two anti-riot units were again attacked at Ikwo by anti-education rate agitators.⁶⁶ The British Officials often succeeded in warding off the attacks of the women agitators. The disbanding of the agitators sometimes with a few wounded, did not prevent further agitation the following day. However, the women protest was dislodged after about three months of police action.

Some of the women for instance, Igboji Nwankpu, Elom Okwor, Aniyor Onele, Obaji Iganga and remained weeks in Eke Imoha market square without going home. The women agitation lasted for a long time without casualties at the initial stage. But unfortunately, the disgraced and humiliated councillors as well as the rate and tax agents conspired and attacked the women at night in Eke Imoha market square in Ekka in

1954. This incidence took place when the women were asleep. At least two women lost their lives and a few others got matchet cuts,⁶⁷

What surprised everyone about the violent attack and killing of some of the women agitators while they were asleep was that no one was even imprisoned or detained in the usual way of treating those involved in murder cases. It was only the case of ex-councillor Nwusulor Chima that went to court out of so many who were invited for questioning. He was charged for murder. The Chief Judge at the end of the summary trial discharged him for want of evidence. The trial Judge said that the mere waving of a knife at Eke market did not prove any case of murder.⁶⁸

The result of the agitation was that the women succeeded in warding off their being involved in the payment of 7s: 6d- (75k) as education rate but the men paid the rate of one pound (£1 or ₦2.00) after long protests.⁶⁹ Ikwo people suffered in other ways, such as the loss of their livestock and food for feeding the police.⁷⁰ Generally, the British Officials played a partisan role and never protected the women during their protest against the introduction of education rates.

The way this protest against British rule was handled by the Divisonal council showed the alliance between the colonial officials and collaborators. Nobody was convicted for the killing and wounding of some of the women agitators. The British Officials were also equally involved in the killing.⁷¹ In Ikwo, for instance, the women agitators

clashed with the councillors and chiefs of the area and held such as Ogbu Nte, Nwancho Atama and Onwe Oga Nweke hostage.⁷²

The Divisional Council succeeded in the end and forced the people of Abakaliki to pay the compulsory Education Rate.⁷³ It enabled the Council to launch free primary education for the people before independence. Before 1954, the payment of school fees by individual pupils in both the Native Authority and Mission Schools militated against the educational up-liftment of Abakaliki people. But with the free education the schools ceased to be empty.

Nevertheless the Abakaliki Divisional Council did not achieve much up to the time of its desolation in 1954, due to so many reasons. According to Anyanwu, the Abakaliki district council was not without its problems.

There were allegations of inefficiency and ineffectiveness as well as mismanagement of funds. Illiterate councillors continued to dominate the council in a forum which should have been dominated by the literates⁷⁴

Thus, from 1955, the council did not establish any new schools. Only the four N.A schools established in 1946 at Achiagu Ezza, Agubia Ikwo, Nkwagu Izzi and Mgbo Ishielu remained the only institutions under their care. In the Abakaliki district, there was no post- primary institution and this was due to civil disturbances and much attention devoted to the solution of more acute social problems. The dissipation of much energy to quell the women agitation against education rate and

the vigorous campaign against nudity militated against the progress the early councillors would have made in the advancement of education in the area.

Women and Abakaliki Economy under Colonial Rule

Rice farming and Production

Colonial rule made a new economy a reality in the Abakaliki district. Hitherto, the people of Abakaliki never knew any other type of economic activities other than the traditional system of farming with the hoe and machet. This was in most cases at the subsistence level of feeding self, family and to help members of the extended family. Farmers exchanged their surplus products in the markets such as Eke Ezza, Nkwagu Izzi, Igboji Ikwo and Okwu Mgbo in Ishielu. However, contact with foreign ideas introduced so many economic changes, especially for the women in the Abakaliki area.

In the area of agriculture, rice was introduced in 1942⁷⁵, adding new crop to the agricultural experience of the women. The making of nursery for rice seedlings and tomatoes was a revolutionary step in farming and it was dominated by women and young girls. The colonial government showed some interest in the cultivation of rice. This they did by developing Abakaliki Division as area of paddy.⁷⁶ The free distribution of rice seedlings to farmers, educating them on the methods of growing the rice through demonstration farms and carrying out artificial fertilizer experiment, the people were taught how to apply fertilizers to their crops.

At Abakaliki, all rice harvested in 1943 was bought up by government for processing. Processing demonstrations were later carried out, initially, the parboiling, drying and hand hulling in deep mortars was the exclusive preserve of women in the area. Ottenberg attested to this fact when he wrote. *“At first, the milling of the hulled rice was done by the Izi and other indigenous Igbo women, employing wooden mortars. This earned them small sums but proved to be slow and inefficient”*.⁷⁷

Rice cultivation enhanced and changed the social status and economic power of Abakaliki women. Its cultivation and trade proved a huge success because rice is not easily perishable and so attract a good price. Rice attracted a high price during March and August, so that those who were able to preserve theirs made very substantial profits. On the introduction of rice growing in Abakaliki, G.I Jones said write, “My work in eastern Nigeria has consistently proved that where the demand justified it people were prepared to change ...”⁷⁸ This was the attitude of the women in this area who responded both to the internal and external agencies of change during the colonial period.

Okechukwu⁷⁹ quoted in Ottenberg stated that stranger male Igbo (*Ijekebee*) and some women from Akoka, Onitsha, and Owerri encouraged by the indigenous women, moved into the country side, rented land, and began growing paddy, and by late 1950s, a Rice Traders’ Association, later known as the Rice Traders’ Company was formed and had over 490 men and women members.

Wood for boiling the husked rice was clearly a major source of income for the rural Abakaliki women. Ottenberg noted that:

With the help of three assistants, I counted the number of women bringing wood to the town in one day in November 1960, at the height of the harvest period, much of it used to boil paddy. Roughly 1,500 females came along the major routes each with a head load of wood, they were mainly Izi but there were also some Ezza"

One of my informants, Mrs. Nwafor Beatrice,⁸⁰ said that, the rural women who were not involved in cultivation or trading on the paddy were hired by the traders and farmers alike for parboiling. In her words, 'parboiling was mostly accomplished in Abakaliki town by the rural Abakaliki women especially for the stranger Igbo women referred to as the *Ijekebe* who in turn paid the rural women for their services.

Unmilled rice was also purchased by the stranger Igbo women (*Ijekebe*) from farmers in the division's rural markets or directly from their homes, stimulating the growth of these trading centres, ideas and the contraction of roads between the rural people and Abakaliki town. The women who made money in paddy growing, milling and selling, invested funds in other enterprises houses in Abakaliki town or at their communities, trade, education, open shops, or into rice production.

Cassava

A number of other new crops became important during this period. One was cassava (*manioc*) in its prepared and eatable form garri. Its presence in any part of eastern Nigeria was a good index of the level

of change. It became an important though barely nutritious food source for the people during the season when other crops were no longer available and before the next harvest. Cassava had already spread through much of Southern Nigeria before reaching Abakaliki Division. Abakaliki being a yam producing clan, the men rejected cassava, saying it would ruin the soil for yam growing. The women accepted it and it became a traditional women's crop even in the other parts of Igbo land in contrast to yams.

Cassava became more prominent and widespread during this period. The reason was that cassava enjoyed some inherent advantages over yam. It can be grown on poor soils most of the year. This is in contrast to the cultivation of yam which is seasonal. Mature cassava could be left in the soil for up to three years while it was being gradually harvested as the need arose. New improved species locally called "Agric" mature faster and could be harvested within one year. Another advantage of cassava over yam is that it could adapt to a wider range of soil and climatic conditions yam like producing well on old farm lands with diminished fertility and it was also drought resistant. It was less vulnerable to invasion by insect pests than yam. Cassava requires less labour than yam. For example, little weeding was required and no staking and no rituals was needed before harvesting or eating, unlike yam. So it was easier than the cultivation of yam for the women.

The most remarkable development in the processing of cassava came with the knowledge of garri production, through the use of both

manual and mechanical graters; garri production based on mechanized grater was done in a few places during this period. In Abakaliki, the processing of cassava for *foo foo* and garri with locally – made hand graters, *Okwo*, was still prevalent, especially in the rural areas where older women/men preferred *foo foo* to garri. Cassava was also eaten in the form of tapioca and the women traded on garri, foofoo and tapioca within and outside the Abakaliki area.

With the introduction of cassava, agricultural workload of Abakaliki women increased greatly, for they took up the task of planting and processing the crop. Unlike in other areas of Nigeria, such as (Yoruba land), where both men and women participated in the production, processing and marketing of cassava, everything about cassava in Abakaliki was in the hands of women during this period.

The Trade in Yam

Although the cultivation of yam rested in the hands of the men, its marketing was mostly done by women who carried it around the town by the rural women, while some engaged in the export of the product to the other parts of Nigeria. According to Ottenberg, *“During World War II, and until 1949, the government allowed only a limited amount of yams to go out of the division to the west, that which went was mostly for the use of the prison and troops at Enugu and for other government purposes”*.⁸¹ The trade in yam began inland at the Nkalagu, Ikwo, Izzi and Ezza markets, going to the riverside by lorry or by hired labourers mostly women who carried the yam on their heads. Some yam traders went by

canoe (river) from Abakaliki to Ndibe Beach at Afikpo, and from there down the Cross River to Calabar. Another yam trading route that involved women was in the south by lorry to Afikpo, where Abakaliki yams were in great demand.⁸² While indigenous Abakaliki women and other inhabitants took yams to the river (Cross River), they seldom canoed them downstream themselves.

The Mining Industries

From 1922 to 1960, there were different mining operations in the Abakaliki area. The lead and zinc deposits at Enyigba in Izzi, Ameka in Ezza and Ameri in Ikwo were exploited by British Merchants and their agents. These mineral deposits and the consequent exploitation by Messrs Union and Rhodesia Trust limited involved a complete change in the mining process and exploitation.⁸³ In the word of Ottenberg, *"Between 1950 and 1952, the American smelting and mining company joined the British group with their own engineers"*.⁸⁴ They introduced to the people the new way of harnessing the deposit by underground mining instead of open cast or surface mining method of old. Many people, including women, were employed at these sites and some learnt how to drill and pump out water with pumping plant and they in turn gained experience which made some to have useful skill which aided them in the operation of the mine even after the termination of colonial rule. For instance, Timothy Odanwu was one of the fore most people trained by the Rhodesia Trust limited.

The gainful employment which the mining corporations offered to the women and some who traded on the site cannot be over emphasized. Gainful employment also led to further investment of the savings by the workers, some used their savings to build houses or train their children in school. The communities where the minerals were found also benefited. Apart from the royalties paid by the East Central government, women had opportunity of selling their farm produce and some who could afford it opened small stalls for the sale of European goods, like cigarettes, dry gin, just to mention these two.

The Nigerian cement factory at Nkalagu was established on 20th December, 1956.⁸⁵ The cement company also employed men and women of Abakaliki origin. Their standard of living changed, like the workers at the mines, the industries generally promoted business of many kinds in and around their locations. This helped to advance the importance of Nkalagu town. The villagers including women who went there to sell their agricultural products equally benefited from the enterprise.

Other ancillary services like health centres and maternity homes managed by women sprang up. Nkalagu later got a hospital to cater for the health of workers and the people of the surrounding areas. According to my informant, Mrs. Elizabeth Nwafor – Idu, I worked as one of the nurses at the maternity homes. The area was destroyed during the Nigerian civil war when we all ran out of the place. I now work as a cook in this place.⁸⁶ Both the mines and cement industry were

positive agents of change and development for Abakaliki women during this period.

Impact of Colonial Rule

Improved transport systems facilitated the movement of women from the rural areas to markets in urban centres. The volume of trade increased as more women got involved in long distance trade which was hitherto monopolized by men. Bicycle transport was the major means of transportation between markets and men and women cyclists carried their wares to the distance markets. Chuku asserts that bicycle transport had an advantage over motor transport because *“cyclists could penetrate the interior markets and villages where lorries could not. Cyclists, therefore acted as feeders to the main lorry collection centres”*.⁸⁷

Women were able to carry on their trading activities all the year round despite the constraints in long distance trade. In fact, the involvement of women in long distance trade was a relatively new phenomenon in the Abakaliki area. It created avenue for them to gain financial independence which enabled invest in building houses and rice mills just to mention these two.

Colonial rule also made some impact on the hitherto traditional economy of the people of Abakaliki district. The imperialist principle of economic exploitation and allowing the colony to pay for itself prevailed throughout the period of the colonial enterprise. The road network developed between 1905 and 1960 formed the link between the communities in the local government areas. People came into the

Abakaliki area to sell European goods and to take away various food and cash crops such as yams and rice.

The banning of nudity by the local authorities and subsequently by the Eastern Regional government, produced some unforeseen results. The nudity campaign resulted in food shortage in the Abakaliki Area. This was because farmers withdrew their products from the markets. The farmer and women traders feared being caught on the high ways and markets and put to jail because the Nudity Bye – Law imposed a fine of £25 (~~N~~50.00) or six months imprisonment on conviction.⁸⁸ The farmers and their families decided that it was better and safer to stay at home than get caught by the law.

Another impact of colonial rule was the effort made under the provincial administration of Abakaliki by Mr. J.W. Leach to attract social amenities from the Eastern Nigeria Government. This effort of J.W Leach, the provincial secretary, came as a result of his assessment of area. He saw that Abakaliki had more human and natural resources than Ogoja but the people had no right over this wealth because of their level of literacy and there was equally no direction to improve on their social and economic status.⁸⁹ Mr. J.W Leach helped them to use their lands effectively and to form village integration, that is combining two or more villages so that they work together for mutual benefits. He brought the slogan that Abakaliki people had the land but other people reaped the benefits. The process of improving on the situation began in earnest from 1958. Thus, more Abakaliki people participated in the

quest to use agriculture to bring about economic welfare for self and others. The people's savings were directed towards economic pursuits instead of the traditional title – taking and ceremonies that go with it.

Mr. J.O Okoro was brought to Abakaliki as a supervisor of village integration. He was appointed Community Development Officer in charge of village integration. Thus, from village integration the rural development scheme was embarked upon. Roads and bridges were built to encourage communication and free flow of ideas and other influences that affected women positively. This was the origin of community development in Abina Ikwo, Ekka in Ezza, Iboko in Izzi and Mgbo in Ishielu. This scheme was funded by International Organizations such as the United States Agency for International Development (U.S.A.I.D.) with J. W. Leach as the Chief Rural Development Officer and also Rural Development Adviser to Eastern Regional Government in charge of Abakaliki province.⁹⁰

However, the social welfare scheme did not achieve much because up to 1960, no village integration unit had electricity, pipe borne water, maternity or health centre. The scheme did not involve the people of the clans sufficiently. Only few houses for the colonial officers were made. Also, some impounded water reservoirs were provided through self-help efforts of such communities as Abina and Inyimagu Ikwo. Individuals were left to seek the means of their survival through legitimate employments and personal pursuits.

During colonial rule trade of all kinds expanded. Some of the indigenes, women inclusive, who were not mine or factory workers became interpreters, cooks, stewards, dispensers, office messengers, court clerks, court bailiffs, agricultural attendants, garden boys, store-keepers, tailors, drivers, welders, mechanics, bicycle repairers and traders. All these trades enhanced self-reliance for personal survival, the community, and the economic advancement of the clan at large. In some cases there were some opportunities that enabled the individuals concerned to engage in private business and to contribute his quota towards the basic needs of the extended family and the surplus savings made was used for the enhancement of the social and economic well-being of the individual. The increase in the individual's standard of living made the citizens of Abakaliki to build houses with concrete blocks with corrugated iron sheets and thus saved energy which was previously expended on perpetual repairs of thatched grass huts.

The zinc houses made the citizens to get clean rain water during the rains and this helped them to improve on their health by eliminating guinea worm and other water-borne diseases. These new ventures had profound effect on the people. More than any other factors, the establishment of educational institution was a great event of revolutionary importance. The advent of western education in Abakaliki set in motion a chain of events which brought about profound social changes in the town and in the status of women. The introduction of formal education gave a new impetus to learning and helped to spread

literacy. The school afforded the people the opportunity to provide their children with western education and introduce literacy among the indigenes of the town including women. Through the acquisition of the art of reading and writing, there emerged a literate and semi-illiterate population which began to understand the language of the colonial overlord. Communication between the exploiter and the exploited became easier while the indigenes rapidly acquired western values, ideas and lifestyles. The gradual emergence of a literate society not only helped to promote business and social change but also keeping of records... and strengthen cohesion among a ruling elite.⁹¹ The school produced the first generation of teachers, clerks, messengers, technicians, interpreters and missionary servants who later emerged as the new elite in the community, among them were women, some will later be discussed in this work.

Colonial administration, Western Education and Christianity created new challenges and opportunities, which the traditional elite were unprepared and ill equipped to confront and utilize but which the new elite easily responded to. Gradually, the new elite began to displace the traditional elite and wielded such enormous power, authority and influence that they emerged as pace-setters and successful leaders and entrepreneurs in various fields of human endeavour in their communities and beyond especially in post-independence Nigeria.

Nevertheless, the effect of western education which was acquired from the colonialists and the mission schools was a mixed grill. It

contributed to building a modern society in the Abakaliki District, but at the same time it aided in the destruction of the social fabrics that hitherto held the society together. The society was divided into two the traditionalists on one side and the new elite on the other. The influence of the new elite led to the sagging influence of the traditional authority who eventually lost much power to the elite. The elite who gained the power because of the church and the influence of education were in a dilemma. This was because they acquired and inherited defective educational system from the curriculum of western colonial education which emphasized theory and less practical orientation. This situation, coupled with the abandoning of the African value system and social orientation, left many confused.

Traditional industries suffered stagnation and decline during the colonial period. The colonial economic policies aligned the structure of African production to the needs of the industrial economics of Europe and America.⁹² Colonial administration showed little or no interest in indigenous products but rather promoted the flow of European manufactured products some of which were not superior in quality and cheaper than locally manufactured ones. For example, locally produced salt, pots, and woven cloths were rapidly displaced by foreign mass produced ones. Consequently, local craftsmen and women not only faced unequal and stiff competition from foreign trading firms but also began to operate at reduced profit margins.⁹³

To keep afloat and avert complete economic decline and the concomitant descent to abject poverty, a good number of these craftsmen and women were compelled to abandon their traditional trade or occupations to their modern equivalents. For example, carvers took to carpentry, black smiths to motor mechanic and iron works, and weavers to tailoring.⁹⁴ Traditional craftsmen who continued to practice their traditional occupations had to survive by improving the quality and designs of their products. The people's eagerness to embrace new tastes, participate in the cash-oriented economy and their adaptive potentialities encouraged change and modernization.

Finally, it is pertinent to note that colonial economy necessitated the introduction of cash which provided the people with coins to buy some exotic commodities. Prior to this period however, there was no generally acceptable currency in use in the Abakaliki area and the country as a whole. The colonial period therefore witnessed a number of conscious efforts by the colonial administration to demonetize the traditional currencies and impose the British currency as the only generally acceptable monetary medium.

In sum, therefore the British colonial administration was established in Abakaliki in the opening decade of the 20th century. Before then the people had already been engaged in many productive and commercial enterprises such as salt production, cloth weaving, blacksmithing and internal trade which helped them to accumulate domestic investment. The imposition of colonial administration only

provided the stimuli which helped to accelerate and expand the process. The colonial government showed little interest in developing the town. However, through self-financing and by taking key entrepreneurial initiatives and decisions, the Abakaliki people exploited the opportunities created by British colonial presence and infrastructure. Admittedly, less substantial political, social and economic development was recorded during the colonial period of Abakaliki history. Undoubtedly, however, the colonial period witnessed the deliberate and successful sowing of the seeds of the institutions for the social and economic changes in the status of the women which visibly germinated and blossomed after the Nigeria Civil War of 1967-1970.

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CHAPTER FOUR

ABAKALIKI WOMEN AND THE NIGERIAN CIVIL WAR, 1967-1970

Prelude to the Nigerian Civil War, 1960-1966

It is a historical fact that since the 1914 amalgamation of Nigeria by Lord Frederick Lugard the country has never been fashioned into a cohesive monolithic political entity, notwithstanding the post independence constitution. The history of Nigeria's political evolution has been bedeviled by the crises of ethnic politics, North – South religious divide, the bloody Kano riots of 1953, the question of regional minorities, rivalry and fear of domination among the three major ethnic groups and threats of secession.¹ Ajaegbo,² again noted that “This climate of crises, suspicion and distrust conceived by some well – meaning and right – thinking individuals that the sword of Damocles hung over the unity and stability of Nigeria”. In 1947, for instance, Alhaji Tafawa Balewa, who later became the Prime Minister of independent Nigeria, bewildered by the epidemic of political crises in the country, poignantly stated that “since the amalgamation of the Southern and Northern provinces in 1914, Nigeria has existed as one country only on paper ... it is still far from being united, Nigerian unity is only a British intention”.³ Sir Ahmadu Bello, later premier of Northern Nigeria remarked in 1953, that “*the mistake of 1914 has now come to light and I should like to go no further*”⁴ similarly, Sir John Stuart Macpherson, Governor – General of Nigeria (1948-1954) was quoted to have made the following statement about the 1914 amalgamation: “Recent events in the

country have clearly but painfully shown that the cement holding Nigeria together is the British presence and influence".⁵ The euphoria of independence soon dissipated as the country became tossed by one crises after another, each of which severely tested the parliamentary democracy inherited from Britain.⁶

The first major incident took place in 1962 in the Western Region, when a rift occurred in the leadership of the Action Group (AG) the dominant political party in the region. The rift led to the revocation of the region's premier, degenerated into disorder and violence and affected the peace of the entire nation.⁷ Ethnic and political tensions and intrigues increased in intensity and ferocity resulting in the 1962-63 census controversy. This census was important because seats in the Federal House of Representatives were allocated to the three regions according to their population strengths. Ojiakor,⁸ notes that "the 1962 census figures were cancelled because of irregularities and alleged inflation of the figures by all the Regions". Egodi Uchendu asserts that:

Alleged rigging, miscounting, and inflation of figures discredited the 1963 recount and destabilized the country as contending regional premiers resorted to threats and lawsuits and disorganized existing political partnerships in the regions and at the federal level.⁹

Again, there were the Tiv riots, the violence that characterized the 1964 federal election and the October 1965 Western Regional election and its aftermath of bloody disturbances. As one writer notes, Western

Nigeria became the country's problem area.¹⁰ Ajaegbo supports this news and states:

It would appear that this latter election which was brazenly rigged and resulted in widespread rioting, lawlessness, arson and deaths provided the flash point in the long and tempestuous gathering storm. It was little wonder that barely three months after the electoral fraud, violence and bloodshed in the West, on 15th January 1966, a group of young army officers widely believed to have been led by major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu, executed the first military coup d'état in Nigeria's political and constitutional history.¹¹

The military take over of government ended Nigeria's experiment at post-Independence civil rule. Prominent political and military victims of the putsch were Alhaji Tafawa Balewa (the Prime Minister), Sir Ahmadu Bello (Premier of the Western Region), Chief Festus Okotie-Eboh (Federal Minister of Finance), Brigadier Zakariya Maimalari, Colonial Largema, Lt Colonial Y. J. Pam, Col. R.A. Sodeinde, Brigadier Sam Ademulegun and Lt. Colonial Arthur Unegbe. The Premier of the Eastern Region, Dr. Michael Okpara, was inexplicably spared.¹²

The coup was greeted by a wild out burst of celebration in the Southern part of the country. In Lagos and other major Southern towns, there were popular demonstrations expressing support for Ironsi's military government. According to Morning Post, quoted in John de St Torre,

The press, the most outspoken and ebullient in Africa, indulged itself in an orgy of invention and high spirits. One of the best headlines of all, in West African Pidgin English, ran: Bribe? E Done Die-O. Chop-chop E No Dey' (Bribery is Dead. Corruption is Not there).¹³

The coup leaders became heroes and the violence in the West gave way, almost overnight, to an unaccustomed but very welcome state of calm. Anifowose Remi, observed that "Among many classes and ethnic groups in the country, the immediate reaction to the Putsch and the consequent change of government was one of relief."¹⁴

According to Torre:

The welcome accorded the incident by Nigerians and their unrestrained jubilations at the restoration of peace waned especially in the north with the British press announcement that the putsch was an Igbo coup, a judgment based on the preponderance of Igbo officers among the plotters ¹⁵

In the view of Ojiakor, "After a period of widespread jubilation in the country, there followed a vigorous campaign giving the event of January 15 a tribal connotation of being an Igbo coup".¹⁶ No matter the virtues of the coup, the Northern Region, the most affected in the killings, would not be pacified. The coup divided the country into two. On 29th May, 1966, there was widespread riot against defenceless civilians of Eastern Nigeria origin, especially the Igbo residing in the major cities in the North.¹⁷ Ostensibly this was a reaction to the seemingly selective killings by the coup plotters, the failure of the Ironsi

regime to put the coup planners to trial, the planned rotation of military governors, unification of the civil service and substitution of the federal structure of government with a unitary system of administration.¹⁸ The Northern military and civilian elements descended on the Igbo with savage brutality and barbarism slaughtering them and looting and destroying their property. Nwakego Okeyi has this to say. "Igbo males were killed instantly, I saw them pouring petrol on Igbo houses and setting them ablaze with the occupants still sleeping; I saw how they tortured a group of ten Igbo young men who ran to them and how they showered them with bullets.¹⁹ Alexander Madiebo observed that:

...Most of them had one or other part of their bodies either broken or completely missing while thousands of Igbo children arrived back home safely, some did so with severed limbs or without their parents. The adult bore the brunt of the killings and very few arrived from the North unharmed. Some, whose limbs were not severed, brought them back shattered and had to be amputated. Many others had their noses and tongues plucked out. The highlight of this horror was the arrival in Enugu of hundreds of headless corpses of Igbo men and women above the age of ten.²⁰

Former Secretary to the Government of Biafra, A.N Akpan; he wrote:

I have never been able to forget the shock I received when I went down to the railway station one evening... to meet a friend coming from Port-Harcourt. Before the arrival of the Port-Harcourt train, a train from the North carrying refugees had

pulled into station. What came out of the train was beyond description. Some got out with severed limbs, others with broken heads. However, the most chilling sight was a woman who came out completely naked, clutching in her hand the head of her child killed in the North. This particular sight aroused the crowds standing in the station to a frenzy.²¹

In fact, Northern military officers and their civilian populace attempted to redress their grievances through the pogroms of May and July 1966 in which the Igbo were massacred on a large scale, particularly those in the North of the country. Among those killed was Major General Aguiyi –Ironsi with thirty-three officers of Eastern Nigeria origin, majority of whom were Igbo.²² More massacres occurred in September and October of that year, mostly affecting military officers of Igbo origin. The killing of the Igbo in 1966, as direct consequences of the January Coup was indiscriminate.²³ As Egodi Uchendu States,

Horrid tales of the incident and assaults, with pictorial proof of the maimed and the disfigured, enraged the entire Igbo nation. The evolving tragedy culminated in the secession of the Eastern Region, the core Igbo area from the Nigerian federation on May 1967. The secession was unacceptable to Lt. Col Yakubu Gowon, who took over as head of state from Major General Aguiyi –Ironsi and he promptly declared war on the Eastern Region, now the Republic of Biafra.²⁴

The seething hostilities resulted to violent pogroms directed against Eastern Nigerians, especially the Igbo. Over 30,000 Easterners

were reported to have been killed, while over 2 million of them fled to the Eastern Region as refugees and became internally displaced persons (IDPs).²⁵ As Gloria Chuku, “ observes, the war which broke out on 6 July 1967, was therefore, the climax of a combination of social, political and tribal acrimonies plaguing Nigeria”²⁶

The War Period, 6 July, 1967 – 15 January, 1970

The War started on 6 July, 1967 and raged for thirty bloody months. It further deepened the ethnic distrust and rivalry among the federating ethnic nationalities in Nigeria. During this period, each side to the conflict mobilized its men and resources to the fullest in a bid to secure a quick victory. While Nigeria was determined to crush the ‘rebellion’ and re-integrate the Easterners into the Nigeria polity, Biafra demonstrated admirable, incredible and amazing gallantry and valour in defence of not only her brutalized, battered and dispossessed citizens but also the territorial integrity of the young republic. Ajaegbo captured this when he wrote:

It was a cruel, fratricidal and remorseless war, which pitched two unequal combatants against each other. Nigeria enjoyed enormous political, economic, military, moral and diplomatic advantage over Biafra. It had superior weaponry, better trained, equipped, better paid and therefore more motivated armed forces. She had also more prosperous and more friendly and powerful external allies.²⁷

As a result of this, the federal side expected a quick victory but Biafra saw the war as that of survival and was ready to fight to the last man. Thus, Biafra's initial military successes sent shock waves to the spine of Nigeria soldiers. For instance, Anyanwu asserts that in the first two days of the war progress on the federal side was serious and that the University town of Nsukka fell into federal hands. But the momentum could not be sustained in the face of Biafra's courageous and stiff resistance.²⁸ By August 1967, the Biafrans had crossed the Mid-West arriving at Ibadan and then Lagos but were pushed back.²⁹ However, from 1968 when Biafra began to suffer steady military losses, Nigeria's moral and combat superiority over Biafra was never in doubt.³⁰ Most Igbo women at this time were in a state of shock, anguish and deprivation having lost most of their relations and children in war.³¹

In fact, the excruciating pains the Igbo suffered in course of the war were further accentuated by the Federal Military Government strategy of economic warfare against Biafra. The effective use of economic 'blockade and food freeze' as instruments of warfare suffocated Biafra and consequently spelt disaster for her. Lacking munitions of war, food, drugs and Medicare, many strategic Biafran towns and cities fell in quick succession to the federal troops.³² The blockage on the Eastern region was imposed in order to check the shipment of arms to Biafra through Nigeria's territorial waters as well as to prevent the shipment of petroleum from Biafra which would have provided them with the badly needed foreign exchange. In order to

ensure the effectiveness of the blockage, Nigeria operated naval boats on its territorial waters.³³ Benjamin Adekunle “Black scorpion” who led the 3rd Marine Commandos, of the Nigerian Navy said:

I want see no Red Cross, no Caritas, no World Council of Churches, no Pope, no Missionary and UN delegation. I want to prevent even one Ibo from having even one piece to eat before their capitulation. We shoot at anything that moves and when our troops march into the centre of the Ibo territory, we shoot at anything even at things that do not move...³⁴

A plan to capture Abakaliki came under what was tagged the “D’ – Day and Northern Operation”.³⁵ As part of the plan, Brigade on the Ogoja sector prepared itself for and launched an attack on the cement town of Nkalagu by mid – October, 1967. The offensive was spear headed by 2, 23 and 24 battalions supported by artillery, reece and engineers. After several battles, attacks and counter – attacks all along the route from Eha – Amufu into Nkalagu, 2 Battalion under the command of Captain Buhari, finally moved into Nkalagu on 13 November.³⁶ The next prime target of the federal troops was Abakaliki township. A series of grim battles supported by aerial attacks drew the noose tighter and on 4 April, 1968, Abakaliki town was abandoned to the federal troops with heavy casualties on both sides.³⁷

In the words of Alexander Madiebo:

The greatest disaster attendant upon the loss of Abakaliki was the fact that it was by far the greatest food producing area of Biafra ... several tons of

food were abandoned in the town by the food directorate, probably through no fault of their.³⁸

The war period in Abakaliki, especially between late 1968 and the early 70's was a difficult period in Abakaliki history. Almost all the people interviewed spoke ill of the war and would not want to remember, it especially the women folk. Lives and property were lost. Food and medicine were in high demand during the crises. Kwashiorkor was the biggest human killer.³⁹ This in turn led to various survival strategies such as the eating of rats, lizards and grasses.⁴⁰

Some Abakaliki women were sexually abused or taken away forever by the federal troops.⁴¹ Perhaps the issue that generated the greatest concern was the wanton starvation, disease and sufferings of the civilian victims, following a food crisis that developed because of federal blockade of air, sea and land routes into Biafra, cutting of the supply of food and other essential materials.⁴²

The first victims of this shortage of food supplies were the women, especially nursing mothers and children who become malnourished and were daily faced with starvation and its attendant consequences. Uchendu states that, "War situations generate conditions for rape and mental suffering in women in addition to obvious physical trauma and can also lead to personality developments ..."⁴³ Ojiakor also observes, that it was a bizarre experience, especially for the Igbo women who had to bear the brunt of the pogrom as they had to cope with hunger – stricken children and amputated husbands.⁴⁴ Some women engaged in

some risky ventures – risky both morally and physically for the purpose of economic survival.

Nevertheless, greatly weakened partly by blockade which denied them food, medicine and munitions,⁴⁵ and partly by internal crisis⁴⁶ among other factors, Biafra capitulated on 12 January, 1970. Lt. Col Philip Effiong carried the message of Biafra's surrender to Gowon in Lagos. In a broadcast to the nation shortly after the end of the war, Gowon guaranteed "the security of life and property of all citizens in every part of Nigeria ... and the right of every Nigeria to reside and work wherever he chooses in the federation as equal citizens of one united country".⁴⁷ On this basis the federal government declared that there was no victor and no vanquished in the war. It launched the policy of rehabilitation, reconciliation and reconstruction (3RS) as a vital programme for the reintegration of the ex-rebels into the Nigerian society.

Abakaliki Women and the War Efforts

Women did not sit idly by waiting for the men risking their lives to come home from the battlefield; they played many roles in the civil war. Many women supported the war efforts in diverse ways. Some served as nurses and aids, while others took a more risky venture by serving as spies, smugglers or relief workers. Whatever their duties were, these new jobs redefined their traditional roles as homemakers and mothers and made them an important part of the war effort.

Traditionally, Abakaliki women engaged in a variety of occupations, including trading cloth, weaving, salt production, fishing and drying of fishes, and of course farming. All these activities were seen as assistance to their husbands. Often women would rather describe themselves as wealth eaters and not as income – earners.⁴⁸ But during the war period, there was a whole variety of experiences of the war which were peculiar to the women. Many of these resulted from the traditional female roles as wives and mothers to becoming household heads. Perhaps, the greatest contribution during this period was (especially) in the upkeep of their families. As men were drafted into the army and some went into hiding for fear of being enlisted, sick relatives, elderly men, women and children were left. Feeding and caring for the family fell solely on the women. These women took up the challenge with zeal and left no stone unturned in carrying out their new roles.

Women took up most economic activities, which were previously done by men. For example, they became involved in such activities as local and long distance trading, militia, Red Cross and then their usual cooperative organizations, which helped greatly to aid the war efforts.

Farming

In the sphere of agriculture, women demonstrated their ingenuity in food production during the period. With all the farming land at their disposal and Abakaliki being one of the major food producing areas of Biafra, the women engaged in intensive food production. This was in order to meet up with the challenge of increasing demand for foodstuff.

There was virtually no rest for them. When they were not in the farm planting cassava, weeding the farm, harvesting cassava, or other crops, they were processing them into garri, *akpu*, *abacha* or *akra*

The absence of men increased the varieties of crops women planted in Abakaliki during the war period. In addition to their traditional crops, women also planted white yams (*igum*) which hitherto was the exclusive preserve of men. The absence of men also increased the workload of women in agriculture. They cleared the bush, made the mounds, planted the seeds and seedlings, staked, weeded and harvested the crops. Some of them had yam barns where they stored the yams and which they sold or used some as the need arose. As Ajaegbo observes:

There was a boost in agricultural production. Every available piece of land was utilized for agriculture particularly by women, children and men who had escaped the age of enlistment into the army. More attention was given to the cultivation of yams, cocoyam and cassava because of their fast rate of maturation.⁴⁹

Women tried to cope with these enormous tasks by using their children's labour. They were very active in meeting the food needs of soldiers and that of their families. Not only did women contribute food items they also helped to cook for the soldiers. Early in the war, women leaders in the catchments area of each military formation were consulted to work out a schedule for preparing food for soldiers in the various sections of the community. Sometimes women were forcibly recruited by soldiers to cook for them. According to Ndidi Uguru,⁵⁰ soldiers who

were stationed at Igboji Ikwo, frequently forced some women to cook for them. The women who often spent a whole day doing the cooking usually got no compensation in cash or in kind for their efforts. Rather they were sometimes abused emotionally and physically depending on the mood of the soldiers at the time.

However, the positive attitude of the women towards the upkeep of soldiers in this area did not last long. With the fall of Abakaliki and the shrinking of the Biafran territory and diminishing food supplies, women began to come under increasing pressure in meeting the food requirements of their families and so many of them engaged themselves in other activities.

Voluntary Contributions

Women organizations also made voluntary contributions including money, food items and articles of clothing which they distributed to different military units and refugee camps. In Abakaliki, Chief Mrs. Mary Enigwe organized women for contributing essential commodities for the army. According to Enigwe,⁵¹ the women contributed about 5-10 shillings each. With the money she traveled with three –five other women to Benue markets in a ‘911’ lorry to buy yams, goats, cigarettes and other items she considered vital in that market for the survival of the soldiers. They at times, bought food items worth up to £200. They traveled through Eha Amufu, a route which was safer and nearer than the Enugu route which was open. They also gave the military between £50 and £95 in addition to the food items in every trip

they made. Mrs. Enigwe said her group made their money from the sale of their agricultural products as well as from salt produced from Enyigba salt lake. They also levied themselves specified quantities of food items, such as garri, yam, rice which were also donated to the military authorities.

The Red Cross

Another voluntary organization in which women especially the young and educated, played active parts was the Red Cross. The organization which existed in Nigeria long before the war, had branches and outposts in schools and colleges. The organization also had volunteers trained in first aid and other forms of assistance to people in need of the services rendered by this and similar organizations. Trained volunteers were attached to hospitals, health centres, sick bays and refugee camps. Women played vital roles in complimenting the effort of trained personnel and other health workers who were not always there. They received crash training in nursing which enabled them act as nurses in caring for the young, the old and other afflicted persons, including the soldiers. Linda Paul notes that;

Nursing was a gruesome job that provided a close look at the horrific casualties of the War. Civil war nurses cleaned and bandaged wounds, fed soldiers, dispensed medication and assisted surgeons during operations and medical procedures like amputations.⁵²

Abakaliki women were not left out. Mrs. Uche Ali, a teacher who became a refugee, in Ikwo met one of her classmates who recruited her

as a nurse. In the words of Ali, I headed a group that took care of the old people".⁵³ People like her were also active in running of the feeding centres where malnourished and other war affected children were given protein enriched reviving diets by voluntary organizations, much of which were supplied by the International Committee of the Red Cross (I.C.R.C). It is to the credit of the I.C.R.C as well as the Caritas International: (CI) and the World Council of Churches, (WCC) that many children who would otherwise have died of starvation, malnutrition and related ailments survived the war. Some women helped in the distribution of the supplies of these organizations.

The Para-military Services

The young and fit among the women joined the para-military services, especially the civil defence corps. They helped to man the numerous checkpoints erected all over the place especially in the rural areas to check enemy infiltration. But with increasing pressure on Biafra and continued territorial contraction, the fear of enemy or 'Saboteur' infiltration became even more real. Gradually, Civil defence personnel were replaced or complemented by members of the police force (regular and mobile) at checkpoints, especially those leading into important towns and cities. Civil defenders were, as a result of this, consigned to inter-village and other non-important roads. In the eyes of some volunteers, this amounted to a loss of prestige, and they left the organization out of this frustration.⁵⁴

Spies

Although the exact number is unknown, it is speculated that hundreds of women served as spies during the Nigerian Civil War. Women spies usually gathered valuable military information by flirting with male soldiers at parties, dinners or other social events. These women also smuggled supplies, ammunition and medicine across enemy lines by hiding them underneath their wrappers. One of my Informants, Nwanchor Atum,⁵⁵ asserted that one Anthonia Ogai, a very beautiful lady acted as a spy to the Biafran soldiers at Abakaliki. He said that the lady was almost living with the Nigeria soldiers when Abakaliki fell to the federal troops but would always come to the Biafran camp and relate what happened there in the Abakaliki igbo dialect, even while she was with the Nigerian soldiers. Some women who were involved in the “attack trade” acted as spies too.

Relief Workers

Many Abakaliki women participated in war relief efforts, for instance at sewing centres, where they mended cloths for soldiers. They also held charity drives where they gathered food, medical supplies and bedding for local military encampments and hospitals. Women also raised money through fund raising and by auctioning off donated items that were not in high demand. This group was mainly made up of women from the elite class, and it was alleged that some of the members used their privileged position to hijack essential commodities from the rural women who were mostly illiterate. Finally, in addition to

donations of material resources to the win – the war effort, Abakaliki women also prayed for divine intervention for Biafra.

Women and Ahia Attack

To ensure that their dependants did not die of hunger, many women traded during this period. Trading here can be classified into two, the internal trade within Biafra and the trade with Nigerian – held Biafran territory, that is a trade across the front lines often called “ahia attack” (attack trade).⁵⁶ The War – time cross border trade involved a lot of risks and needed a great deal of courage and careful planning. Ajaegbo states that the traders on both sides of the lines of attack and defence concluded alliances, entered into covenants, offered bribes in cash and kind and cultivated good relations with Biafra and Nigerian troops to ensure their safety and that of their goods.⁵⁷

To E.O Dike, the trade signified crossing the enemy line to perform the task that would keep humans alive in food and medication.⁵⁸

Origin of Ahia Attack

‘Attack trade’ started from Otuocha and Aguleri at the northern side of Biafra. Traded in these places were mainly food items. The people who went there to trade were from Nnewi, and Aguata axis, which were still free from enemy incursion. As a result of the importance of these areas as the food baskets of Biafra; enemy planes like jet fighters and bombers visited them very often to discharge their deadly weapons on innocent civilians on market days. The victims of

these aerial bombardments were mostly women who dominated the markets.

The 'attack trade' was in two forms, the first was trade within the Biafra region or Igboland communities of Owerri, Orlu, Okigwe, Umuahia, Ohaozara, Abakaliki, Ikwerre – Etche, Otuocho, Aguleri, Nnewi and some Cross River Communities. The second type of trade had to do with or was carried out between Biafran and Nigerians, mostly in the border towns' communities. This trade was risky because of constant air-raids and checks by both Biafran and Nigerian soldiers.

Again the stringent conditions at which Biafran military manpower was conscripted impeded greatly the movement of men. Therefore, the need for food to assuage hunger to keep life going rested on the women. The women had hitherto taken up the task of caring for their children, sometimes their husbands in the hiding places, the aged and even some sick relatives. Diseases were very common. Mortality rate was high, certain foods fell under the essential on which many diseases emanated, but were traded in certain areas. This therefore required crossing behind the enemy line to obtain such foods. The above scenario precipitated "Ahia attack" (Attack trade). "Afia Attack according to Dike ..."was the circumstantially imposed condition of intense risk-taking for the altruistic purpose of complementing and sustaining life on the Biafra side during the Nigeria civil war".⁵⁹ More specifically, 'ahia attack' denoted trade in areas of active military engagement.

Medium of Exchange

The medium of exchange in Biafra was the Biafran currency while the Nigerian currency and barter system were used in the 'attack trade'. Nigeria left the coins unaffected when she changed her currency in 1967.⁶⁰ This lapse however, played an important part in Biafra's survival. Nigerian coins continued to circulate unofficially in Biafra through out the war. On this Emezue said:

A booming business involving the exchange of Nigeria coins for Biafran notes existed in Biafra for most of the war. At the peak of the business in 1969 a one shilling coin fetched as much as two Biafran pounds representing a ration of 40:1, ...⁶¹

Ojiakor also aptly captured this scenario when she wrote; "Nigerian coins were the medium of exchange. The coins were brought by women traders from Nkwere, Nnewi etc. These were exchanged for Biafra notes at Alani."⁶² The above substantiates the fact that the coins were the major medium of exchange in the attack trade.

Organization of the Trade

The traders embarked on the journey with money and some articles which were in demand at the market. They concluded alliances on both sides of the lines of attack and entered into covenants. They also offered bribes in cash and in kind and cultivated good relations with Biafra and Nigeria troops to ensure their safety and free flow of goods. They traveled during the day or early hours of the morning. In the other type of the trade where they had to cross to Nigerian held Biafran

territory, the group had to by – pass war fronts and trade behind enemy lines. They made use of carriers some times to increase the number of their wares. They made their journeys mostly at night when there was calm at the war fronts. Oken Anunirika said that, this women lived away from their villages near the war front mostly in a cleared space in a bush. Their shelter were constructed with palm fronds and their nearness to the war front was to facilitate the monitoring of events at the war front to avoid making move that could cost them their lives.⁶³

The trade was an all female affair, and the traders traveled in convoys or in a fleet of canoes from Atani to Midwest territory.⁶⁴ Some of the traders shared cultural and linguistic affinities with their Nigerian counterparts and hosts. There were also inter-marriages (relationships) between them. All these, facilitated the establishment of mutual understanding between the two groups of traders. Chuku supported this when she wrote, that:

The Biafran traders were at times provided with sleeping accommodation by their Nigerian customers. This was partly why Biafran traders who started the trade newly traveled in company of their ‘privileged’ older colleagues. The new – comers were introduced to the Nigerian traders by the older traders as the latter’s relatives. In this way hospitalities provided to these older customers were extended to their new colleagues.⁶⁵

Ahia attack was full of hazards both for its practitioners and the public at large for examples, some women lost their lives to the soldiers who will mistake them sometimes for the Biafra soldier and some who

regard them as saboteurs. The traders had to battle with the ever present threat to their lives, because the border crossings were in 'active' military zones where safety was never guaranteed.

The Routes of the Trade

There were two major routes available for the attack traders during this period. Ojiakor asserts that:

Route one from Atani: the traders paddled across the River Niger in small canoes to Abala Oshimili from where they trekked to Abalauno market in the Midwest. Route Two: the traders paddled down by canoe to Akili Ozizor and from there they crossed over to Oko Ogbele to Utchu all in the Midwest.⁶⁶

Another scholar asserted that "the routes of the trade were many and varied depending on what place the trader took off, and the point of transactions".⁶⁷ Whatever route, either from Biafra one which was a small land corridor separating the Onitsha from the Enugu sector of the war or with Biafra two that is the agriculturally rich area of Otuocha, Anam, Adani, Abakaliki and Nsukka. The issue was that it was a route through which the traders and goods crossed the front line.

Abakaliki women traveled from one part of Biafra to the other. For instance, they traveled to Uburu where they could buy salt and fish from Afikpo area. They traveled to the Cross River where they used canoe and paddled across to Itigidi, Ediba and some time down to Unwana in the Afikpo area, from where they could find their way to Okposi in Ohaozara for salt.

Articles of the Trade

The articles of the trade varied, depending on the type of the attack trade. For the trade within the Biafran enclave, the articles of trade were mostly agricultural or food items that were produced in one part and for which there was dire need in other parts. These included such staples as garri, yam, fermented cassava, palm oil, salt, fish, beans and rice.

In the other type of the attack trade that is across the enemy territory, the traders sometimes bought valuable personal effects from Biafra such as gold trinkets, expensive lace materials, wrappers, iron beds, sewing machines, cloths, wearing apparels and *kaikai* (local gong) in Biafra. They took these across the Nigerian side, sold them for Nigerian money and used the money to buy goods from Nigeria, especially salt or other relief items like milk and canned food etc.

Risks of the Trade

The risks that were involved in this trade were endless. It was risky both physically and morally. The women traders were often indecently assaulted by soldiers. It was partly because of this that the trade was associated with immorality by many people. Ezeigbo states that:

Attack traders were regarded as enemy by the Biafran army as well as by the federal army. The Biafran army deemed them to be saboteurs of the government while the Nigerian army regarded them as spies or Biafran guerrillas. As such they

stood the risk of being shot dead either by Biafran or Nigeria army.⁶⁸

Again, markets were mostly targets of the Nigerian jet fighter and bombers. Evidence has shown that the number of people who were killed by jet was greater than the number killed in the battle field.⁶⁹ The attack traders got a fair share of this indiscriminate murder by the Nigerian soldiers. So if the 'attack traders' were not shot in the market on their way back home by either the federal troops who regarded them as guerrillas or by the Biafran troops who regarded them as saboteurs. Example Nweke Ogboji lost her life to the Biafra troops who regarded her and her group in Abina Ikwo.

The women also took up the tasks of organizing the home before leaving and sometimes taking along with them children who needed to be cared for. All these the women did to make food available to assuage hunger and make life worth anything during this time. They were not conscripted into the army, but they were exposed to all manner of insecurity, abuse and hardship that some paid with their lives.

Relevance of the Trade

The traders made huge profits from their venture.⁷⁰ It was also during this time that some women had the opportunity to travel to long distance markets which was hitherto men's preserve in the Abakaliki area. The women also had the opportunity of interacting with women from other Igbo communities, learnt their ways of life and applied them

to their own communities. Some of these ideas helped in changing their status.

Effects of the War on Women

The Nigerian Civil War engendered the destruction of the social, political and economic structures of the Nigerian society at large and Abakaliki in particular. A reign of terror marked the arrival of the federal troops in Abakaliki who had hitherto perceived the war as a conflict between the mainstream Igbo (Ijekebes) and the Hausa people over the administration of Nigeria. The increasing squeezing and encirclement of the Biafran territory by the advancing federal troops, coupled with the bombardment of Abakaliki town and the invasion of the Abakaliki – Enugu, Abakaliki – Afikpo and Abakaliki – Ogoja highways by the federal troops frightened the local populations who took to their heels.

Many people had abandoned their property while fleeing for their lives. Some property was destroyed through shelling and constant air raids. Many became homeless, sleeping in bushes, dilapidated houses or houses poorly constructed with palm fronts and grasses. According to Uchendu, “the situation in the occupied towns was chaotic, while the presence of federal soldiers symbolized for the people pain, disillusionment, uncertainty and mutual distrust of individuals”.⁷¹ There was unrestrained destruction and massive looting of the property of the local populations, mostly in homes vacated by those who had taken refuge either in the bush or in the neighboring towns which had not

been occupied by the federal troops. No town was spared the wounds of the war in Abakaliki area.

People suffered untold hardship ranging from hunger and starvation to diseases. Incidence of diseases was high. Mal-nutrition and over-crowded refugee camps made the people more vulnerable to diseases than in the pre-war years. Nwoko Kenneth Chukwuemeka noted that though the Nigerian civil war was fought between the federal troops and the Biafran troops, the impact was more felt by the Ordinary civil population, especially the most vulnerable. Just like in the Abakaliki area, wives saw their husbands killed, mothers saw their daughters slaughtered because they refused the soldiers' advances and children saw their parents being mowed down. It was a traumatic reality which had its effect on the survivors.⁷²

In the opinion of Emezue, the war marked a watershed of a negative type in lives of women. They were frequently targeted, humiliated, and even killed in ways that were as nerve-wrecking and cruel as those of the men.⁷³ No wonder M.I Okpara, quoted by Offodile said that each time he thought of the deaths, sheer starvation and other harrowing experiences which could be equated to an attempt for ethnic extermination, he came close to tears.⁷⁴

Social Effects

At the outbreak of the war in Abakaliki, there was a call on all men within the age range of thirteen (13) years and above to demonstrate their patriotism by joining the armed forces for the defence

of Biafran sovereignty. Many within the appropriate age range heeded this call and joined the army without making adequate arrangements for the protection and maintenance of their families. The burden of keeping the home front therefore fell on the women most of whom were both ill-prepared and ill-equipped to play their new roles. The burden was made even heavier by the fact that the typical soldier remained in the war without a break until he was able to stow away, injured or committed some offence, which required that he may be tried in the rear. Again because of inadequate communication, the soldiers wives remained in almost complete oblivion of the condition of their husbands.

While these women were bemoaning the harrowing experiences of their husbands, it became clear that they could not be spared. A number of pregnant women were not only killed but had their wombs ripped open and their unborn children removed and killed. Some were raped or forced into marital union with the enemy soldiers. Nweke Ogwali, a native of Ezzama in Ezza South, recalls a gruesome sight he beheld in his hometown when “each and every one of the five pregnant women and three girls had long sticks pushed through their external genitals.”⁷⁵

Starvation was used as an instrument of war. Following this policy, no relief was allowed into Abakaliki and whatever went in had to be delivered by night in rickety planes and on bad runways. In effect, many pregnant women were lost to nutrition related ailments particularly Kwashiorkor. Some not only struggled for their own

survival but also carried the burden of providing for their children who, by tradition and in practice of polygeny (then prevailing;) depended on them for support and upkeep.

Rape was not a crime perpetrated only against adult women but little girls were as much the victims of this weapon of war as their older sisters and mothers. The sexual abuse of women is a regular feature of wars. In Abakaliki, it was one of the dreadful atrocities committed during the civil war against women. Soldiers acted out their contempt for male civilians by sexually abusing their women, showing the helplessness of civilians to protect their women during crisis. Atina Grossman quoted in Uchendu affirmed that, "women are the booty of every war, the unrecognized and uncompensated targets of war crime."⁷⁶ Rape displays the perpetrator's contempt for the victim and casts doubt on women's integrity and makes them strangers to themselves".⁷⁷ The widespread recourse to rape by soldiers during armed hostility has been cited as proof that sexual violence is endemic to military culture and the recurrent sexual abuse of women by soldiers all over the globe is evidence that those trained to fight wars are not best suited to protect the human rights of women and female children.⁷⁸

The assault on Abakaliki women made them very insecure during the war period. It effectively inhibited their freedom to move about and to express sympathy for the Biafran cause. To avoid mistreatment, young women disguised themselves as old women before leaving their homes. Some preferred to leave their home carrying newborn babies or

a toddler to give the impression that they were married or nursing mothers.⁷⁹ Yet, that did not always guarantee immunity from assault for all women because some soldiers had few scruples about seeking intimacy with married women. Other group like the Aro and some members of the Biafran Organization of Freedom Fighters (BOFF) also committed all sorts of criminal acts against women. For instance, stealing their farm produce, and raping them. Thus many Abakaliki women suffered a fate similar to those of the Tutsi during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. Where women were deliberately raped by Hutu men who were Hiv positive (Human Immune – Deficiency Virus)

Women suffered untold hardship as a result of their gender.⁸⁰ Apart from experiencing physical and emotional abuse in the hands of the federal troops, many suffered the injustice associated with the Igbo culture of which Abakaliki is a part. According to Obegu Nkwuda, some women who were found guilty of infidelity in the course of the war went through a cleansing ritual, which entailed sacrificing chickens and goats to appease the gods and seek forgiveness and reacceptance into the community. Some woman refused to perform such sacrifices and were ostracized from their communities. This entailed never allowing them to buy from or sell to anybody.⁸¹

The effect of this ritual cleansing was the stigmatization that was associated with it. It was this stigmatization of the victim rather than the culprits particularly Nigerian Soldiers that compelled many Abakaliki women to get involved into marital union with the soldiers. Yet no

sooner they contracted the marriage than it broke down. Some soldiers saw the marriages no more than a part of the joy of their field experience and so never committed themselves seriously to such marriages.

The experiences of women had isolated their peculiar phenomenon from the other whelming general situation of the war. The Nigerian civil war was watershed to the manifestation of age long disregard for women in the society. Prior to the war, the status of women was quite inferior to that of the male folks. The men and the women seemed to have accepted their gender roles as a *fait accompli*. Men and women were sensitized and indoctrinated in such a way that there were no conflicts. Nevertheless, during the civil war, there was a dramatic social change in the status of women. They became wealth generators instead of wealth consumers'. Despite this role, they could not break the male chauvinistic character of domination. Thus, the nature of social predicament, which Abakaliki women faced during the civil war, could appropriately be described as social disempowerment. They had no access to the basis of social power.⁸² In other words, they were victims of various forms of sexual assault without redress, and suffered poverty resulting from the scourge of the war. Despite their contributing to the war, such as contributing to the win the war fund which came in cash as well as in kind, and donating food to the soldiers and refugee camps, Ify Emejulu noted that they were still made to believe they were second to men⁸³. This was because they could not have access to the basis of social power in the society.

Economic Effects of the War on the Women

The Nigeria civil war was a watershed in the country's economic history. The specifics of economic disruption on the Biafran territory are yet to be determined. The harsh economic situation of the Biafrans started in 1966 when the Hausa – Fulani ethnic group unleashed a program in which several thousands of defenceless and innocent Igbo men and women residing in the North were massacred. The hundreds of the thousands of the Igbo who returned to their home towns put severe strains on accumulated reserves and available amenities,⁸⁴ thus compounding the economic situation in Biafra.

With the outbreak of the war, the resources to the eastern states were excluded from the national pool. In other words there was no allocation to the eastern states, coupled with massive conscription of able bodied youth into the armed forces which led to scarcity of resources and food items. They joined the military service without adequate preparation and provision for their families. This resulted in uncertain economic future for women.

There is no doubt that Abakaliki, like other Igbo groups, before the war, thrived on the principle of competitiveness. Abakaliki area was also one of the major food producing areas in the then Eastern region. This was a blessing which gave rise to distrust suspicion and envy from her non-Igbo neighbours. This war provided an opportunity for these neighbours, who acted as saboteurs to attack Abakaliki. With the

presence of the Nigerian soldiers, Abakaliki was taken over. They looted homes and strangulated economic activities in Abakaliki.

Infact, the war led to a manifestation of the ingrained anti-Igbo feeling in Nigeria. It gave legitimate basis for some hard-liners, in the Gowon's cabinet, particularly Chief Obafemi Awolowo, to cut his pound of flesh. This was evident when he declared that hunger was a legitimate instrument of war. To do this, he imposed blockaded the production of petroleum from Biafra which would have provided Biafrans with badly needed foreign exchange.⁸⁵ No relief was allowed into Biafra and whatever went in had to be delivered secretly at night by rickety plans and through dirty run ways. In effect, hunger induced – diseases resulted in the death of many Abakaliki women and children. Because of this economic dislocation and the need to save the children from the scourge of war, women began to play husband's role without adequate preparation and means to do so. For some women the new situation meant going extra mile⁸⁶. This was evident in account rendered by Margaret Nwakpa who over night had to venture into an unfamiliar business of managing a restaurant because her soldier husband was away and so the burden of maintaining the family fell fully on her. Margaret Nwakpa explained the transition and the challenges which confronted her thus:

I have never been into hotel or any business before. In fact, my parents had hostile attitude to the business because of certain nuisance value associated with it. To them a hotel business was like a breeding ground for and place of practice of

prostitution especially around the “Spera in Deo” junction where the shop was. Even then the temptations for prostitution were much. To protect myself, I had to station a close relative of my husband permanently in the restaurant.⁸⁷

Many women who had not been traders were not only forced to become one but also to partake in the very dangerous cross-border trade, *ahia attack*. This trade exposed participants, especially the women, to unimaginable risks. The most dangerous thing about the trade was that it involved very risky navigations across active military lines. In addition, both sides distrusted the traders as each suspected them of being spies. The federal soldiers felt that their activities mitigated the suffering of Biafrans whom they hoped to starve to submission through an economic embargo. Envious Nigerian soldiers did not only snatch their goods from them but also raped them.⁸⁸ These unprecedented sufferings forced many people to indulge in many unethical and immoral practices in order to survive. For example, some women abandoned their marital homes and absconded with soldiers in army barracks where relief materials were easier to obtain. This attitude was rampant among women who participated in the ‘attack’ trade. Many of them had to compromise themselves for free access to border markets in Nigeria.⁸⁹ In spite the unpredictable enemy attacks, Abakaliki women continued their trading activities.

As would be expected, there was acute shortage of vehicles which took the women to the market. A vehicle, filled with passengers, was

sometimes commandeered on its way to the market there by leaving the passengers stranded. Some who had the energy continued their journey on foot while those who could not trek for long distance, retraced their steps back home. It was therefore a common sight to see women carrying their young ones on their backs circumnavigating the territory looking for new trade routes.

With the help of the Biafran soldiers, women identified new food items and intercropping for maximum yield, though agriculture could not flourish well due to the infertility of soil caused by the detonation of poisonous weapons. A system of cassava fermentation, which could take only a day instead of three, was discovered. However, one would find it difficult to imagine what would have been the nutritional and health situation in Biafra if the women had not taken the risks they did.

The economic effects of the war on Abakaliki women on the one hand, was characterized by upheaval, on the other hand, the upheaval created an opportunity for the development of initiative. Offodile, quoting an editorial of the *Biafra Sun*, of 4 April, 1968, commended the women, stating that,

Right from the hectic days of the pogrom down through the exertions of the current war, Biafran women have stood firmly and resolutely behind their men... with the outbreak of the war, these women have exceeded the most optimistic and the highest estimation of even their best admirers. Short of fighting in trenches, they have done everything our men have been able to do. What is more, they have such enthusiasm, devotion and courage, as

had been a source of constant inspiration to the fighting boys and government.⁹⁰

These women were respected and loved by their husbands and relations for their effort during the war. The women demonstrated to the greatest degree their flexibility and innovative abilities through their various economic pursuits and social organizations.⁹¹ The Eke-Imoha market which had acquired fame as the commercial nerve centre of Northeastern Igboland and which attracted traders from different localities like, Akuna Akuna in Cross – River State, Uburu and Arochukwu just to mention but few was disrupted during the war.

Van – Allen, also maintains that “during the war, the women’s market network and other women’s organizations maintained a distributive system for what food there was and provided channels for the passage of food and information to the army”⁹² Their participation in the cross – border trade boosted the Igbo economy. Some families became so wealthy after the war because of the trade. Yet some women who participated in that trade are looked upon with spite in some Igbo communities, while some became so wealthy, proud and arrogant that they despised their husband. The frequency of divorce and unwanted pregnancies also increased

Displaced Persons and Abakaliki Women

The horrendous massacres and atrocities of 1966 which lead to the eventual outbreak of the Nigeria civil war created the opportunity where people from the different parts of the Eastern region, especially

the Igbo, fled to their respective natal towns in 1967 either as refugees or as internally displaced persons. (IDPs). Most of the refugees and internally displaced were women, children and the aged.⁹³ However the number of women in each of these categories was reasonably high".⁹⁴

Abakaliki attracted many traders and refugees without money or resources, uncertain about their sustenance, anxious about the future and traumatized by the terrific war time experiences.⁹⁵ The refugees who were mostly women flocked into Abakaliki where they hoped would ensure greater relief from the consequences of the raging conflict. But with the fall of Abakaliki town, on 4 April, 1968, the plight of the refugees turned into a nightmare. The exact number of refugees hosted by Abakaliki people is difficult to establish because of lack of relevant records. But refugee camps were set up in many communities. For instance, the present Ezza Girls' Secondary School popularly called Onuzor Nwogboji was a popular refugee camp. Achiagu County Council headquarters, Urban Central School, Echara Ikwo and St. Joseph Catholic Church, Igbegu were converted into refugee camps.⁹⁶

Lacking adequate food, shelter, clothing, sanitation and health care services, the refugees suffered enormous deprivations and hardships. The scourge of widespread famine, hunger, malnutrition, disease and poverty descended heavily and mercilessly on the refugees. Hundreds died of tuberculosis, kwashiorkor, maramus, measles, malarial fever, dysentery and whooping cough.⁹⁷

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Caritas International (CI), the World Council of Churches (WCC), United

Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and other International and local relief agencies mounted various relief services in Biafra.⁹⁸ They brought in food, milk, fish, salt, drugs, medical personnel, facilities and provided medical services. In this way, they contributed immensely towards the reduction of the resultant death tolls in Biafra.

Abakaliki people especially women also offered succour to the refugees in their own little but significant ways. Almost everything in Biafra apart from disease and hunger was scare. The public institutions which served as refugee camps, were not enough, so some individuals demonstrated their love and value for the traditional social security system and spirit of mutual aid by providing accommodation to the refugees in their private homes. Some refugees were given land for farming while others received assistance in the form of foodstuffs, cooking utensils, mats and clothing contributed by women. Thirdly, many Abakaliki women volunteered to attend to sick and orphaned children in hospitals or work in refugee camps. Some worked as counselors, relief workers, cooks and traveling guides.⁹⁹ In these ways, the Abakaliki women not only ensured the safety and security of their 'guests' but also helped in no small measure to ameliorate their adversities and inspire them with a sense of belonging and communal living. It is necessary to point out, however, that sometimes case of conflicts did occur between the refugees and their guests. Driven by extreme poverty, hunger and starvation, some of the refugees killed

domestic and totemic animals and harvested crops and fruits of their hosts – misdemeanors that often led to friction and deterioration of relations.¹⁰⁰

The Internally Displaced Persons

The majority of the displaced persons were women who resided in bushes and farmlands. They sought help from local women who came the bush to attend to their husbands who were in hiding or to attend market sessions or even to tend their farms. Occasionally, conflicts arose between the displaced women and the owners of the farms over theft of farm produce. The displaced women also went for bush combing in search for food, especially edible leaves and fruits growing in the wild, and sometimes yams the farmers did not see during harvest. Mushrooms, snails and rodents became important food items too.

However, majority of the women engaged in farming when it became obvious that the conflict was not likely to end soon. They had occasional set back as a result of their periodic relocation, yet they still managed to visit the old farms from their new places of abode to take some produce. The most affected group in this periodic relocation were the Ezza's. Anyanwu states that,

Perhaps the greatest effect of the war on the Ezza was the mass movement of their population away from areas about to fall into federal hands. The most affected, especially in the early period of the war, were the Ezza in Diaspora... Most were fleeing to Amana, their ancestral homeland, wishing if they would die, to do so in their ancestral homeland.¹⁰¹

Thus, Amana played host to its citizens, a situation that increased its population to perhaps four times its former size. Another area next in population concentration to Amana by the internally displaced persons was the area around Ebonyi River, which offered hope of protection, because of its thick-forested vegetation. Here the Ezza groups of Ogboji, Nkomorro, Ekka and Inyere as well as other communities were said to have congested themselves after abandoning Achiagu to the federal troops.

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CHAPTER FIVE

ABAKALIKI WOMEN AND AGENTS OF CHANGE, 1970-1999

Certain practices, policies/ institutions aided the changing status of Abakaliki women during this period. They include Urbanization, United Nations Decade for Women, Education, Christianity, and Abakaliki town as the capital of Ebonyi State.

Urbanization

Urbanization represents a complex process of social change affecting the whole pattern of life in a given society.¹ Certain criteria which must exist for this phenomenon to occur are permanent settlement, size, density and heterogeneity of population, technological innovation, occupational diversity, new forms of social organization and relationships, increasing control of the natural environment, the existence of a large market, among others, are the major determinants that give a town its urban status or character.²

Urban expansion was characterized by both the growth of new centres and the development of new layouts in existing centres.³ For the growth of Abakaliki into a township or urban Centre, its foundation was led by the inter-relationship between the northeastern Igbo groups and the British.⁴ According to the 1963 Nigerian population census definition of an urban centre as a compact settlement of 20,000 peoples⁵ and over, Abakaliki is the fastest urbanizing town in Ebonyi state. The 1963 census of the Abakaliki Urban Council area gave a figure of 31,177 persons.⁶ There were 19,444 males and 11,733 females, a change in a continuation

of earlier condition in a town of dominance of male in-migration, with wives often remaining at home.

The consolidation of the colonial government's administrative control over the division precipitated the growth of an Igbo stranger community in the Abakaliki Township. When the Abakaliki/Enugu road was opened up, lorries began to ply it and the other Igbo groups called the *ijekebee* came in numbers as carpenters, tailors, traders, bicycle and shoe repairers and persons seeking government jobs. Some of these other Igbo groups came as farmers and urban traders to participate and compete with the native (Ezza, Izzi, Ikwo etc) in the growing economic activities, especially in growing and selling of Abakaliki rice. As the number of stranger elements increased, they began to organize themselves into improvement associations or unions. Thus Onitsha Divisional Improvement Union, Awka District Union, Owerri Division Union etc. sprang up. The idea was later copied by Abakaliki women, hence the Abakaliki Women Association and other groups.

The steady and rapid increase in the population of the town was due to a number of other factors. These included high birth rates resulting from the introduction of modern health institutions and provision of improved medical service, the increase in the volume of trade on rice, yam, the provision of social amenities and infrastructural facilities, migration and the growth of higher institutions of learning.

As more people moved into the town to avail themselves of the benefits of an expanding economy and social services, Abakaliki became

a vital growth centre for innovation and change, new ideas, relationships, inter-marriages, lifestyles, production and distribution of goods and services increased, this encouraged the flow of goods and service between Abakaliki and the surrounding communities. There is improvement in the general standard of living, housing, good roads access to better educational opportunities. For example, many women attend evening classes and pursue sandwich programmes at various levels of education, especially at the Ebonyi State College of Education, Ikwo. This has enabled the women engaged in better employment with higher salaries and wages, other than farming activities. These take them out of their homes and immediate locality and offer them the opportunity of meeting other people with new ideas and ways of doing things.

However, majority of the urban dwellers were in the informal sector and engaged in self-employment as carpenters, truck pushers, hawkers, petty traders, hair makers, dress makers or tailors nannies, house maids, mason servers, technicians or mechanics, food sellers and even touts. By engaging in self-reliant economic activity, they helped to reduce urban unemployment. Nevertheless, some supplemented their menial or low status jobs wages by prostitution, armed robbery, stealing, pick pocketing, counterfeiting, drug peddling and host of other criminal or fraudulent activities.⁷

United Nations Decade for Women 1970-1985

The period 1970 to 1985, is tagged globally as the United Nations Decade for Women (UNDW).⁸ The first UN Women's conference, was held in Mexico City, Mexico in 1975; it designated 1975-85 as the UN Decade for Women, and five months later the UN General Assembly launched that programme. The second UN women's conference was held in Copenhagen, Denmark in 1980, and the third conference was held in Nairobi, Kenya in 1985. The participants at these meetings discussed issues such as equity, violence against women, land holding and basic human rights.⁹

The UNDW concentrated mainly on women and development. The UN women's conference in Mexico City produced two major documents. The "Declaration of Mexico on Equality of Women and their Contribution to Development and Peace" and the World Plan of Action for the implementation of the objective of the International Women's Year.¹⁰ The conference in Copenhagen was used to report on progress since the Mexico City meeting and produced a "Programme of Action". The conference in Nairobi celebrated the accomplishment of the Decade for women and establishment of an agenda that would guide future efforts to promote world-wide equality for women. The Nairobi conference adopted a document titled "The Nairobi Forward – looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women". A fourth World Conference on women was held in Beijing China, September 1995 to accelerate the implementation of the policies outlined in that document.

The UN Decade for women and its conferences helped to establish the legitimacy of women's issues regarding their roles as workers in the home and outside it. The decade also brought change to the many inequalities women faced in education, health care, and work place to the attention of national leaders and the general public. It was not until then, that the "women question" entered the political agenda in Nigeria. Various national development plans (before and after independence) were gender insensitive and gave no specific place to gender issues in Nigeria. Ojiakor asserts that, it was during these periods that the wind of change gained appreciable momentum.¹¹ Encouraged and supported by the increasing number of women organizations, governmental and non-governmental, but committed to the extension and protection of the rights of women in their societies, more women began to gain more ground in politics.

Some of the significant effects of UNDW on women include formation of numerous women organizations, increasing involvement of women in partisan politics, appointment of women into leadership positions at all levels of government and the revision of some existing electoral laws to accommodate women, among others. Other concrete effects of the Declaration included increased political mobilization of women through Seminars, Conferences and Political rallies, establishment of the National Commission for Women as well as a Ministry for Women Affairs and Social Welfare.¹²

Ojiakor further noted that the Nigerian government became a signatory to the International Declaration on Women's Issues and Rights including;

1. Convention of the elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) 1979 to 1993.
2. The Nairobi forward – looking strategies for women emancipation (1985)
3. The International conference on population and development (ICPD; 1994).
4. Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995).¹³ Some of the note worthy taken by the Nigeria Government were:
 - i. Official pronouncement favouring 50% representation of women in all elected or appointed public positions.
 - ii. Amendment of existing electoral laws, regulations and practices with a view to eliminating obstacles to women's full political participation.
 - iii. Mainstreaming of women's issues in party manifesto.¹⁴

Another author wrote; the Federal Government of Nigeria established in 1981 a National Committee on Women and Development under the supervision of the Federal Ministry of Women Development, Youths, Sports and Culture.¹⁵ This Committee concerned itself with analyzing the effects of development on women and examining what could be done to ameliorate negative effects of development so as to

give women greater control over their own lives. The National Council of Women's Societies (NCWS) played a leading role as a co-ordinating body, especially in respect to female non-governmental organization (NGO).¹⁶ Others like Women's Right Advancement and Protection Alternative also existed.

In the Abakaliki area, specific women organizations like, Federated Abakaliki Women Association ((FAWA), Ndubia Women Farmers Cooperative Society, (N.W.F.C.S), Ezza Ezekuna Welfare Association Women Wing (E.E.W.A) just to mention but a few, were formed to mobilize and rekindle the interest of women in education, politics, business and development. Catherine Nshii said that FAWA which has metamorphosed into Federated Ebonyi Women Association (FEWA) was one of the major avenues women in the rural areas became aware of what was happening in the world around them, and which gave the women the opportunity to express their views through this association.¹⁷ Some of these organizations gave women economic empowerment and thus equipped them financially. For example, Nshii again asserted that the wife of the first Executive Governor of Ebonyi State Chief (Mrs.) Eunice Ukamaka Egwu, organized workshops and seminars for young women from the rural areas of Abakaliki to expose them to the western ways of life and broaden their perspectives of the world.¹⁸ The organizations also included Better Life Programme for Rural Women, Family Support Programme,¹⁹ just to mention but these two.

Again, the Women Development Centre Complex, a building sited at Ezza Road in Abakaliki was built to ensure women development in Abakaliki area. It is a symbol of honour in recognition of change in women status in the area. That is change from society assigned sex roles to active participation in public life. It is also a place where women acquire skills in tailoring, cloth weaving and other domestic chores. Therefore, as long as the structure exists, it gives Abakaliki women a changed status. This was espoused while laying the foundation stone of the Women Development Centre in October, 1999 by the then first Lady of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Mrs Stella Obasanjo who said that the establishment of the centre is to improve the welfare of women and the less privileged in the area.²⁰ In addition to the building of the Women Development Centre, Chief (Mrs.) Cecilia U. Akanu, the then Commissioner for Women Affairs has this to say:

We created avenues for the women to maximize their potentials by organizing various workshops on skills acquisition for women. Here about twenty skills were taught. Skills in bakery; soap, powder, pomade and paint making amongst others... I attracted food processing machines from the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs for our women. Four milling machines, four garri making machines, four garri making machines, four processing machines for corn, beans and others. As well as thirteen palm kernel cracking machines. After I discovered vagina vascular fistula (VVF), I wrote to the Federal Government who has since intervened.²¹

Going by the issues canvassed, it could be said that the activities of Abakaliki women received attention in no small measure during this period and has therefore contributed significantly to the change of their status from the hitherto society assigned sex roles to active participation in public life.

Women as Migrants

Moving from one place to another in search for greener pasture is not new in human history. Following the UN Decade for women, there were noticeable change and increase in women's movement from the rural areas to the urban centres. The movement from the rural areas first took the form of male labour migration. Most contracts were of six to nine months' duration, and quite often a returned recruit's report of his experiences abroad induced others who had never worked for wages to move, in turn, to industrial centres.²² These men did not go with their women folk to the labour camp which were largely male reserves.

However, with urban growth and urbanization in Nigeria, as well as in Abakaliki came the migration of women to towns where they could marry whom they pleased and where they could do other works other than the traditional farming and again where wives could join their husbands in the towns. This paved the way for a wider exodus of women which reflected, in turn, the direction of structural changes that the urban-industrial economy had set in motion. Positions in the latter was based largely on such qualifications as education and technical know-how. Therefore it was the younger men with this qualification that

led the way and so achieved a degree of status and prestige unavailable in the traditional system of the Abakaliki area. This apparently gave rise to a process whereby, broadly speaking, “the men followed the money and the women followed the men”.²³ Thus, there came into being an autonomous urban system capable of generating its own population, and this developed because, in addition to target workers concerned with circular migration, an increasing number of men and women set out on one-way journeys to avoid rural poverty and maximize their family incomes.

The reason for the migration of women to towns abound. Since it is their duty, there are some wives who accompany their husbands, but they go all the more readily because they expect to find urban opportunities of earning money for themselves. The migration of women can also increasingly appear as the best option for the entire family, as the global demand for labour rises in highly gendered niches such as domestic work, health, child and elderly care, and also in the garment and entertainment industries. This demand acts as a powerful “pull factor” for women in depressed rural area.

Despite being devalued in most societies, the domestic and care sector plays an important role in the social and economic development of every country. Many developed and middle-income workers are now facing a well-recognized care crisis due to the increased waged labour participation of women, unequal discussions of care responsibilities in households, changing demographic profiles, and the reluctance of

nationals to take on low-paid; low-skilled and low-status domestic jobs²⁴. The recruitment of migrant women workers help to contain this care crisis. Thus many Abakaliki women and girls work in many homes in such cities like Enugu, Onitsha, Lagos, Abuja just to mention but a few. However, these domestic and care workers often do jobs that are segregated at the margins of society, often outside of the realm for national labour laws, and often exposed to many human rights abuses.

Again, rural women migrants, depending on the context of their migration, may gain more autonomy by improving their social and economic situation. Also, they can send remittances back home, which significantly contribute to the welfare of the families they left behind as well as to rural development. In rural areas, financial and social remittances, combined with transfers of goods from migrant women relatives, contributes to better health, education and nutritional outcomes in the communities of their origin.

Yet again, are other women and girls who have not succeed in getting married, and so they leave their families and go to mining camps, recruiting centres, or housing developments, in order to find husbands.²⁵ And there are also women and girls who are divorced or have deserted their husbands, or who want an easier life than is a woman's lot in a farming community, or who have been lured by the town's reputation as an exciting place to be in. Another motive is to avoid the dire sanctions applied by custom against unmarried mothers in the Abakalili area. Again, due to the patriarchal nature of the area, the

women whose right to live in family or village depended upon their relationship to some men, alive or dead. The definition of a woman's household duties also depends indirectly on this, in so far as this determines her seniority relative to the other females of the family. Therefore, moving to towns frees them from both the men and the senior women, and means that, at least, money may be earned, and lodgings or accommodation hired and property acquired regardless of sex, seniority, or even marital status.

Again since the loss of the husband's earnings may also cripple a widow economically, her only course may be to become a wage earner herself. Although the widow is able to go back to her parents' home in this area, but her presence sooner or later may become an irritant. Similar to that of a mature unmarried daughter, so going to town offers more hopeful prospects for independence.

Finally, in the rural areas, pregnancy outside wedlock brings such shame and disgrace among the Abakaliki people. As one such unmarried mother explained, she stayed at home only until the child was weaned. She said, my chances of getting married to younger men were very small as I was in the village. I could no longer mix with the girls of my own age, which made me very unhappy, so I felt I must go to town.²⁶

It would be quite wrong, however, to imagine that the migration of single or married women implies automatically a loss of contact with their natal rural areas. On the contrary, many of them are just as

assiduous as the men in sending gifts and remitting money to their relatives at home. What the situation does amount to is that while a few women migrants were forced to remain incapacitated like the men in their own circle of fellow villages, the temptation to develop important interests in town seemed less easy for them to resist. As a result, having become independent, many such women emphasized that their participation in urban life had come to mean a great deal. For instance, there are business and other things capable of granting the women the possibility of maintaining themselves by their own efforts

Women who have migrated to the towns also formed occupational or professional unions such as Abakaliki Women Association, Abakaliki Market Women etc. Associations of this sort provided a range of assistance to the members such as capital resources, credit and information about new businesses and methods of investments. They offers protection to the members, fix and regulates charges especially for those who do menial jobs. This mutual assistance in business enabled some Abakaliki women who started from humble beginnings to develop large –scale businesses with a turn-over in thousands of naira. Example, Chinecherem distoning company, one of the largest distoning companies in the Abakaliki rice mill. Nwagu plaza at Water works road Abakaliki just to mention but these two. Some of these women were not lettered but had built themselves beautiful modern houses, bought motor cycles, cars and sent their children to overseas for higher education.

Women Non-Governmental Organizations

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) are organizations that are neither governmental nor for profit making. NGOs can be large, highly visible organizations with long histories like the International Red Cross,²⁷ NGOs can also be small groups formed for community self-help, social or charitable activities, village sports clubs, labour- sharing groups, rotating credit groups and others. The UN Declaration of 1975-1985 as a Women's Decade stimulated Nigerian women to take concrete actions concerning their plight as earlier mentioned. As a result, many women NGO's such as National Council of Women Societies, Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative etc, were formed to empower Nigerian women. They ventured into areas such as, female genital mutilation, women trafficking, widowhood rites, early marriage, and women reproductive health, among others.

Many NGOs have contributed substantially in eradicating poverty in Nigeria. The micro-credit or macro finance NGOs are many in the country and are mainly established to help the poor, especially in rural areas, like Abakaliki, to obtain loans with little interest, to educate the people on how to use the loans and on some income generating activities and to establish collage industries for the poor. Examples of such NGOs abound in the country, for instance Farmers' Development Union (FADU); Lift Above Poverty (LAPO); County Women and Development (COWAD), Progressive Farmers Development Organization (PROFADO), Country Women Association of Nigeria

(COWAN), Community Development and Micro-Finance Roundtable (CDMR), Women in Co-operative, Agriculture and Development (WICAD)²⁸ and a host of others.

Since the creation of Ebonyi State in October, 1996, with Abakaliki town as state capital, there has been a remarkable increase in the number of NGOs, in the area. There are also numerous women organizations that not only seek to restore and recognize women's rights but also their empowerment. Some of them that are at times sponsored by foreign agencies include, United Nation International Children Emergence Fund (UNICEF). They are Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative, (WRAPA), National Council of Women Societies (NCWS), Abakaliki Women Association (AWA), Federated Ebonyi Women Association (FEWA), Ebonyi North Women Association, Ebonyi Central Women Association (ECWA), Women Development Committee (WODECO), Abakaliki Cooperative Society (ACS), Abakaliki Rice Farmers' Development Union (ARFDU), Adeline Advocacy for the Dignity of the Destitute Foundation (AADODF), Centre for Public Health and Development Studies, Outreach Foundation,²⁹ etc.

Other Professional Women Organizations noticeable in the area are Nigerian Association of Women Journalists (NAWOJ), Association of Female Lawyers (AFL), Judges Wives Association (J.WA) Defence and Police Officers Wives Association (DEPOWA), National Association of Women Judges, (NAWJ), Women in College of Education (WICE) and

a host of others. Each of these women associations is involved in different projects or programmes to promote and create awareness on the rights of women which invariably has changed their status. A few of these NGOs are discussed below:

Abakaliki Women Association (AWA)

This was the first women organization formed by Abakaliki Women. It was formed around 1984. According to Nwankwo,³⁰ the organization was formed after the death of Mrs. Uche Offia Nwali. It was meant to bring the women of the area together. About ten Abakaliki women initiated the plan. Some of them were Chief Mrs. Josephine Elechi, former first lady of Ebonyi State and the President of the Home branch; Mrs. Ngozi Nwankwo, President Enugu branch, Barr. Mrs. Adeline Idike, President Nsukka branch, Mrs. Nwani Agana, member, Mrs. Theresa Anyigor, member, Mrs. Justina Mbam, member, Mrs. Catherine Nshii, member, Mrs. Uche Offia Nwali, member and a host of others. The gathering of all the branches was called, federated Abakaliki women (FAWA). With the creation of Ebonyi State in 1996, the Federated Abakaliki Women turned into Federated Ebonyi Women Association (FEWA). This Association was formed with the aim of raising the standard of living of the people of the area through the creation of different self-sustaining projects. It also created avenues for women with diverse ideas and creativity to meet. The Association offered loans to women to enable them start their own enterprises and small scale businesses. The Association was open to all Abakaliki

women. It improved the economic condition and changed the status of the rural women through its access to financial services. It financially and materially empowered parents with multiple births and those who were physically challenged. It also provided the necessary technical training in different vocations such as tailoring, soap and pomade making as well as in various agricultural projects. Members of this Association raised fund themselves that was reinvested into such projects as poultry, farming, sewing, workshops and grain processing.³¹ The association also championed the sanitization programme against female circumcision and early marriage which hitherto were widely practiced in the Abakaliki area.

There were also the Senatorial Zones Women Associations. For example, the Ebonyi North and Ebonyi Central Women Association, Through this forum, the Association mobilized, encouraged and supported its members to take part in partisan politics and has produced some women who have excelled in the political arena. Some of these women will be discussed later in this work.

Abakaliki Farmers Co-operative of Rice Mill Society Limited

This is a non-governmental, non-political organization established in Abakaliki to unite grassroots women to help them develop various businesses through cooperative efforts. The organization consisted of 18 vibrant unions with at least 30 members in each union. The mandate of the organization was to improve the economic status of women through production and sell of Abakaliki rice and its mission was to eradicate

poverty and empower women economically. In pursuance of its objective, the society held monthly meetings at the societal and union levels where revolving loans were granted to individual members and societies, respectively to boost their economic pursuits. The credit scheme of the organization was individual and group based and with a meager interest of not above 5%. Repayment period was one year. The Society has a building along Ogoja Road in Abakaliki called Abakaliki Rice Mill Co-operative Society Building. It houses many rented out stores and the society co-operative shopping center managed by Mrs. Nwidagu Felicia, a member of the co-operative and extensive citrus farm at Obegu village and other on going projects.³²

Adeline Advocacy for the Dignity of Destitute Foundation (AADODF)

Adeline Advocacy for the Dignity of Destitute Foundation is an NGO solely run by a woman. It was founded in 1992. This organization is a platform for assisting under-privileged persons, especially young girls in terms of educational materials, scholarship awards to indigent persons, empowerment and counselling. The organization also offers succour in form of materials like clothes, toiletries and food to internally displaced women.

The organization also encourages Christian women by ensuring that many indigent members of the CWO who cannot buy the Diocesan uniform are provided the full regalia in the following parishes, St. John the Baptist Parish, Ndubia, Mater Dei Parish, Umuogudu Osha Ngbo,

St. Gabriel's Parish Onuebonyi and St. Joseph's Catholic station, Ndigwe. This enable them to joined other women in the church activities and other enlightenment programmes that have changed their lives for better. At least, seventeen indigent under graduates have been on the scholarship payroll of AADODF, while dozens of indigent students and pupils are beneficiaries of AADODF.³³

Centre for Public Health and Development Studies (CPHDS)

This is another NGO operating in the area. The organization was also founded and sustained by Lady Frances Mgbada. This organization is into training of women on family planning, women reproductive health, use of contraceptives and planned parent-hood. The organization was borne out of the desire to sustain the programmes of the Better Life Programme for rural women. Apart from training the women on health issues, the organization also trains women on preparation of contemporary dishes, making of beads, hair making and tailoring. The organization had once received an aid of one million naira (N1,000, 000.00) from the Department of International Development (DFID) for the Ohaukwu and the Ezza zones in Abakaliki.³⁴

Governmental Organizations and Women

Better Life for Rural Women

This was one of the governmental organizations strategized for promoting rural development through the mobilization of women. The founder and initiator was Mrs. Maryan Babangida the then First Lady of

the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The programme was launched on 18th September, 1987. It was targeted at elevating the living standards of rural women.

The broad objectives of the Programme were spelt out as follows:

- a. to encourage and stimulate the rural women in particular and the rural populace in general towards improving their standards of living, their families and environment;
- b. to inculcate the spirit of self-development, particularly of the rural women in the areas of education, business and recreation; and,
- c. to create greater awareness among the populace about the plight of women.

The specific objectives of the programme were to

- a. raise the social consciousness of women about their rights, as well as their social, political and economic responsibilities;
- b. bring women together and closer for better understanding and resolution of their problems through collective action;
- c. mobilize women for concrete activities towards achieving specific objectives; including seeking leadership roles in all sphere of national life;
- d. educate women in simple hygiene, family planning and on the importance of child care³⁵ among others.

In the Abakaliki area, the programme was organized in zones. Mrs. Ugoeze Felicia Mgbada, a woman activist and the former President of the Women Council of Nigeria in Abakaliaki, was the overall

coordinator. The coordinators took the message of the Better Life Programme to the grassroots and every part of Abakaliki. They met the rural women face to face and gave them the hope for imminent solution to their problems. This they did by establishing centres where women came together for training on simple hygiene, family planning, child care, tie and dye, soap making, out door catering, dancing steps, grain milling, weaving, sewing/knitting, trading, tailoring, extraction of oil using modern method and thrift/credit operations.³⁶

The initiator of the programme also provided the women/coordinators with materials and cash of fifty thousand naira (N50,000.00)³⁷ Ojiakor noted that Better Life for Rural Women programme “assisted tremendously in emancipating the womanhood”.³⁸ It created awareness in the women and encouraged them to realize, utilize and develop their potentials for more fulfilling life.³⁹ Farm inputs such as improved seeds and stem cuttings, as well as extension services reached the rural women from the Better Life Programme through agricultural development projects and research institutes. Some of the women who proved their potentials through their empowerment from the programme include Mrs. Juliana Alegu, a cake baker, Ifeoma Uhuo who runs one of the best eateries at Onueke Ezza, Maria Oke is one of the famous dancers in Ebonyi cultural troop, while Ngozi Okpata runs a day Care Centre for children of 0-1 year and a host of other women too numerous to be mentioned. To say the least, the

Better Life for Rural Women, enhanced the economic, social, political and psychological well being of Abakaliki women.

Family Support Programme (FSP)

This was one of the different policies and structural programmes initiated by the Nigerian government in the bid to overcome mass poverty. The Family Support Programme was inaugurated in 1994 by the wife of the then Head of State, Mrs. Miriam Sani Abacha. It was a child of necessity borne out of the need to improve the life and lot of Nigerian masses, especially women in the rural areas, like parts of Abakaliki. It was to improve the previous experiences of women in development programmes. This programme was a shift of policy thrust on the role of family in national development, particularly as it affected major social sectors such as health, education and economic empowerment amongst other.⁴⁰

Some of the policy objectives among others were to

- a. improve and sustain family cohesion through the promotion of social and economic well-being of the Nigerian family for its maximum contribution to national development.
- b. promote policies and programmes that strengthen the observance and protection of human rights and advancement of social justice and human dignity.
- c. promote decent health care delivery in reducing maternal and child mortality and morbidity through improved health care system⁴¹ etc.

In Abakaliki area, Lady Frances Mgbada⁴² was the coordinator of the programme. She said that the programme created awareness amongst the women of the area on how to take decisions and be part of decision-making in their homes. Skill acquisition centres were also established in the major communities/towns in Abakaliki. The programme enabled the women to acquire skills on tailoring, bead making, weaving, brewing, computer operations and running of saloon. The men and women of the area also received training on the use of contraceptives, child care and child spacing, among other things.

Ojiakor asserts that the Family Support Programme was criticized for focusing attention mainly on the urban areas leaving the rural areas.⁴³ However, FSP impacted on the Abakaliki women positively.

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CHAPTER SIX

CHANGE AND CONTINUITY

There is no society in the world that is ever static be this in political, economic or social aspect of life. Thus emphasizing continuity and change, the change in Abakaliki Women's status, resulted principally from the impact of external factors. These forces of change brought about socio-economic and political benefits but also wreaked havoc on traditional social, political and economic institutions and values,¹ But they did not completely alter or obliterate all the sub-systems of Abakaliki society. Consequently, with some modifications, a number of traditional institutions, values and practices continue to survive and function, with some vigour and vitality. External factors posed a serious challenge to the traditional system which equally mounted a formidable response.

Ajaegbo observes that:

This environment of challenge and response culminated in the acceptance and adoption of some alien institutions, practices, ideas and values, the rejection of others and the continuity of some traditional institutions, albeit in modified forms.²

It should be noted that the people of Abakaliki resist change especially in cultural systems. The few adherents of foreign culture have been captivated by the accidental or derived benefits of the missionary efforts. These admirers observed that the missionaries have devoted

their time, their entire life and resources and have done much to correct the ills as well as the deplorable conditions of the society which hitherto affected the status of women. The missionary groups have contributed greatly in bringing about radical and permanent changes in the social order and religious practices of the Abakaliki people which had earlier on marginalized women in the area. It therefore became possible that the women could adopt and learn the ways of the missionaries sufficiently so as to lift themselves up towards the direction of change desired by the missionaries.

A number of Christian denominations had established their presence in the Abakaliki area as we had earlier noted. But after the Nigerian Civil war, a stream of charismatic and faith healing churches invaded Abakaliki and its environs. There was also a corresponding expansion of the existing ones primarily because of increased rate of urbanization. These spiritual, Pentecostal churches or prayer houses appear under different names such as Grace of God Church, Jesus is Lord Ministry, Deeper Life Bible Church, Assemblies of God Church, God is Here Ministry, and a host of others. Some of these organizations have women as their founders and leaders. For example, Evangelist Mrs

Obioma Nkwuda, is the founder and leader of Solution Center Ministry Okpaugwu, Abakaliki and Sister Dorcas Isreal-Ogbuinya, of Virtuous Woman Ministry, Echiaba. They lay emphasis on the movement of the Holy Spirit and then the physical manifestation of the powers of God. They also heal the sick and find solutions to human

problems through the power of vision and prayer. As a result, many people mostly women flock the churches for solution to their children's husband or their own challenges and problems as the case may be.

However, these numerous churches and prayer houses, challenged the traditional religious institutions and values. Women abandoned the traditional titles but rather take titles in the church like Ezinne (good mother), Nne-oha (mother of all) etc. The law against nudity and slavery in the Abakaliki area were some of the major changes that happened to the people. Citing Mr Augustine Elom Letter to the Resident, Ogoja Province through the District Officer, Abakaliki, he wrote thus:

The Church has helped us out of our heathenism to a certain extent and your government has prevailed on us to stop our cannibalism, yet how shameful that the same government has not by force or persuasion made the women of Abakaliki district to appreciate that they are a nuisance to civilization...³

The above quotation attests that all the various attempts to dislodge the status quo did not completely succeed.

Financial Independence

The changing economic and social conditions brought about by Christianity, colonialism, education, urbanization, migration and urbanization in Abakaliki significantly transformed the socio-economic and political position of women. Western education was a powerful corollary of Christianity.⁴ The establishment of primary, secondary and teacher training institutions in the town by the missions and lately

private individuals opened up as well as widened women's educational opportunities. Ottenberg asserts that the Presbyterian Primary School had an enrolment in 1960 of 1,150 pupils both sexes and the Catholic primary school, St. Patrick's, had 794 pupils, of which 364 were female, was an important trend in the division towards greater girls' schooling than in the past.⁵ Particularly significant also was the establishment of girls' secondary schools, namely Sharon Girls' Secondary School Igbeagu in Abakaliki in 1976, Girls' High School, Ikwo 1980 and Girls Secondary School, Ndufu Alike 1981.⁶ These schools were built specifically during the regime of the then Governor of Anambra State, Chief Jim Ifeanyichukwu Nwobodo, to encourage and promote the education of young women in the Abakaliki area.

Again the expansion of schools was in keeping with the attempt of the Eastern Region Government of Introduction of Universal Primary School Education (UPE) a process which began in 1955, with government support and control of the curriculum.⁷ It was a form of compulsory mass education programme designed to curb illiteracy and alleviate poverty. This programme further led to a surge in primary and secondary school education. Some girls, example; Dr mrs Rose Nwambe, Barr Adeline Idike, Mrs Elizabeth Nwite, Dr mrs Ngozi Aja etc, pursued higher education in universities, College of Agriculture, Colleges of Education and Polytechnics within and outside the country.

However, with the establishment of Girls' school in 1976, 1980 and 1981, more women acquired primary, secondary and tertiary

education, the education industry became the key to their emancipation from the hitherto traditional bonds. The traditional hierarchical structures of the society, gender division and roles which had put men to public life and reserved roles while condemning women to the private domain of the home began to crumble.

Educational attainment and economic Independence propelled these women to reject and challenge male dominance of the public spheres of paid employment, political participation in governance and ascribed status in the society. Apart from performing the new public roles, the agents of change helped more women to engage in a vast array of training activities/skills such as dressmaking, confectionary restaurant services and contract business as avenues for self – employment and opportunity for financial independence. With improved transportation and communication; women also began to engage in inter-regional and overseas trade, traveling to various parts of Nigeria. Examples of such women include; Mrs ify Alazu, owner of Favours, a confectionary restaurant in old Enugu road, Abakaliki. Mrs Eunice Ukamaka Egwu, owner of Grace Court hotel & suites, Nna Street Abakaliki. Mrs Okeagu Simon, owner of Simon Suites, Ishieke.etc. These women manage this business on their own and pay taxes accrued to such areas, In support of the above, Ottenberg wrote,...Abakaliki women, being active traders, were sensitive to tax issues.⁸

With the creation of Ebonyi State, and Abakaliki being the state capital, its urban – industrial economy offered women of the area the

opportunity to alter their social values and expectations to achieve economic independence and improve their general standard of living. Chief Ngozi Uloma Nwankwo, Principal Partner, Nwankwo Ngozi Uloma & Co, (certified National Accountants), Honourable Justice Kate Onyeka Onwe (First Female Commissioner for Justice), Lady Frances Mgbada, (First Female Sole Administrator in Abakaliki) and Mrs. Beatrice Ikepazu (a school headmistress and owner of a flourishing beauty care salon) just to mention these few, shining examples. By 1999, the bulk of the active population of women had so improved their economic and social status that some had cars while a preponderant number had ladies' motor-cycles. This served them as a means of transacting business and commuting to their work places, business centres as well as attending to their social engagements, impatient of their traditionally ascribed position to the private sphere of the home and agricultural life. Abakaliki women saw the emergence of urban phenomena as an exciting opportunity to alter their status and achieve financial independence. According to Baker and Bird;

Financial independence has been the aspired goal for many women in Africa... urban conditions offer the greatest opportunities for women to achieve this desired financial independence⁹

Profile of some Abakaliki Women in Politics

In spite of constraints, like the challenges of women education, which include, early marriage, poverty, cultural practices, lack of father's support, among others, in the Abakaliki area, women have

made a lot of progress since the Nigerian independence in 1960 and more progress since the creation of Ebonyi State in 1996. There is evidence of women integration into the state and federal political arena. Factors which contributed to this development included the expansion of Nigerian educational system and the subsequent introduction of free primary and secondary Education, the recognition and the series of actions by the United Nations to improve the lot of women world wide. The United Nations adopted the “Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against women” whose third article of that stipulates that

All appropriate measures should be taken to educate public opinion and direct national aspirations towards the eradication of prejudice and the abolition of Customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority of women.¹⁰

These customary and other practices had hitherto hindered Abakaliki women from participating in politics and other areas formally regarded as men’s preserve. Thus encouraged by its abolition since independence and most especially the adoption of the objectives of the UN Decade for Women, Abakaliki women, like their counter parts in other states of Nigerian, organized themselves and against all odds struggled to contribute their own quota. For instance, the *Daily Times*, that captured Mexico Conference wrote:

It was time for women to strive hard to develop their leadership ability to cope with the numerous challenges of temporary society and an opportunity of women in Trade unions rights to education and freedom of movement, establishment of permanent national commissions for women's programmes and appointment of more women ambassadors.¹¹

The UN objective became the guidelines for Abakaliki women in their efforts to be heard and seen in Nigerian public affairs. The following tables are few examples.

Table 1:

The 1991/1992 Elections, Enugu State: Women Elected as councillors

Name	Party	Local Governmet Area	Position
Mrs. Lucy Nzeakor	NRC	Enugu	Councillor
❖ Mrs. Ngozi Franca Ogba	NRC	Ishielu	Councillor
Mrs. Victoria Ugwu	NRC	Nsukka	Councillor
Mrs Mary C. Ezenwa	NRC	Oji River	Councillor
Mrs. Evelyn Ahanonu	NRC	Enugu South	Deputy Chairman

Table 2: Igbo Women in Political Appointments 1987-1993 Enugu State

Names	Position	Department	Date
Chief (Mrs.) Grace Obayi	Director General	Public Utilities	1992
B.U. Agbo	Director General	Commerce and Industry	
Dr. (Mrs.) Regina Eya	Executive Seceretary	State Commission for Women	Oct. 1991- July 1992
Dr. (Mrs.) Regina Eya	Director General	Youth and Sports	Aug.1992 Nov. 1993
Dr. (Mrs.) Rose Onyia	Director General	Women Commission	1992

Hon. (Mrs.) Bridget Orjiekwe	Director General	Local Government Service Ministry	1991 1992
❖ Mrs. Kate Onyeka Onwe	Attorney General	Commissioner for Justice	1992

Table 3: Executive/Board/Legislative Offices/Appointments by Igbo Women

S/N	Names	Office Held with Date
1	❖ Chief (Mrs.) Ngozi Nwankwo	Member Federal Constituent Assembly, Elected Abuja, 1988-1989
2	Prof. (Mrs.) Miriam Ikejiani Clark	Member Constitutional Conference Caretaker Chairman SDP 1989 Minister For State.
3	Hon. (Justice) Chinwe Iyizoba	Commissioner for Justice Anambra State 1994-1997 Member Election Tribunal Kwara State 1999, Nigerian Delegate To The 45 th United Nations General Assembly, New York, 1992
4	Chief (Mrs.) Marie – Theresa Akonobi	Chairperon, Better Life Programme, Mobile Health Service, Enugu State
5	Hon. Bridget Nwajike	Hon. Commissioner
6	Dr. (Mrs.) Dorathy Nwodo	Chairperson, Better Life Programme Anambra State, 1987
7	Lady Franca Oje	Member, Abia State Development Committee that Prepared the Blue Print for the Development of Abia State (1991)
8	Hon. Mrs. Bridget Nwajike	Hon. Member, Abia State, Isiala Ngwa House of Assembly
9	Hon. Mrs. Anthonia E.	Hon. Member Aniocha ANHA (NRC)
10	Hon. Mrs. Theresa Eyiagu	Hon. Member IMHA
11	Mrs. A.T. Amaechi	Hon. Member IMHA

Table 1-3 Source: Ngozi Ojiakor; Igbo Women and Politics in Nigeria, 161, 164 & 165. **Note:** Asterik names in the tables are Abakaliki women.

Table 4: Abakaliki women who held political appointment within the period of study

Names	Position	Department	Date
Mrs. Uche Offia Nwali	Commissioner	Health And Social Welfare	1979-1983
Chief (Mrs.) Ngozi Uloma Nwankwo	Board Member	Imo State Marketing Company Ltd	1987-1990
	Member	State Advisory Committee, National Directorate of Employment, Enugu State	1987-1994
	Member	Abakaliki North Constituency in The Constituent Assembly	
	Director of Finance	Enugu State Broadcasting Service	1988
	Member	Abakaliki L.G.A Caretaker Committee	1990-1996
	Ag. Accountant General	Ebonyi State	1996
	Permanent Secretary	Head Service Office	Jan-Sept1997
Mrs. Ngozi Franca Ogba	Councillor	Ishielu ward (NRC Party)	1997-1999
Barr. (Mrs.) Adeline Idike	Chairman	Social Democratic Party (SDP)	1991-992
	Member	African Peace Mission Committee	1992-1993
	Commissioner	Information and Culture, Ebonyi State	1995
	Chairman	Women Dev. Committee (WODECO) Ebonyi State	1997
Mrs. Ngozi Chuma	Member	Caretaker Committee Old Ezza L.G.A.	1999
			1992-1994

Mrs. Catherine Nshi	Chairperson	Old Abakaliki L.G.A	1992-1993
Lady Frances Mgbada	Sole Administrator and Chairman	Caretaker Committee Abakaliki L.G.A.	1998-1999
Mrs. Patience Ogodo	Member Member	Federal House of Rep. For Ebonyi and Ohaukwu National Board of Trustee (PDP)	1999-2007

Source: Enwo-Irem's field work note

A number of women among the political class were from Abakaliki and many held various important political offices but their names were not captured. Other Abakaliki women who held one political position or the other during our period of study include the Late Mrs. Uche Offia Nwali, Commissioner for Health and Social Welfare, 1979-1983, Barr (Mrs.) Adeline Idike, Chairman Social Democratic Party (SDP) in Enugu State, 1992-1993, Mrs. Ngozi Chuma, Caretaker Committee member Old Ezza Local Government Area, 1992-1993, Mrs. Catherine Nshii, Chairperson Old Abakaliki Local Government Area, 1992-1993, Hon. Barr. Elizabeth Ogbaga, Hon. Patience Ogodo, Dr. Mrs. Udude and Lady Frances Mgbada, Sole Administrator and Chairman Caretaker Committee, Abakaliki Local Government Area, 1998-1999.

At this juncture, it is pertinent to examine briefly the profile of some of these women in politics.

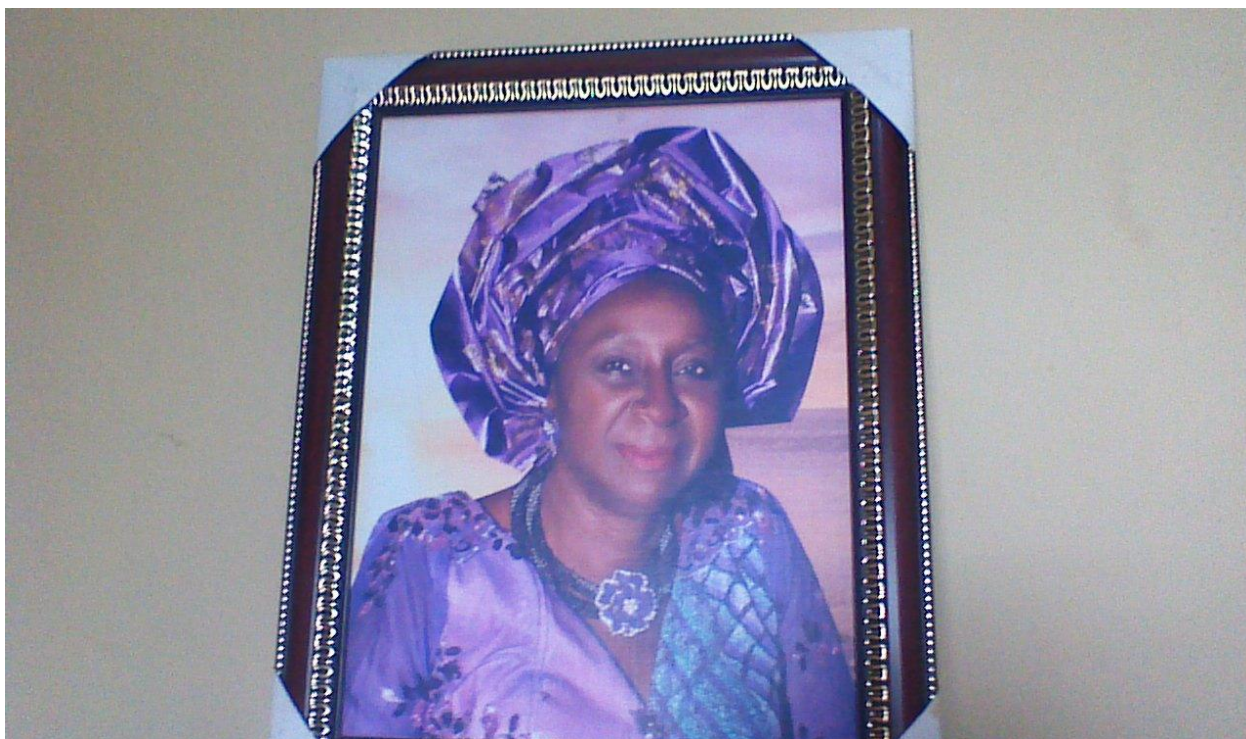


Photo v: Lady Frances Mgbada¹²

Her Political career started in 1998 when she became the Sole Administrator, Abakaliki L G A and also, Chairman, Caretaker Committee of Abakaliki L G A. Lady Mgbada used the opportunity to canvass issues that concerned women. As a social activist and a victim of female circumcision, when she bled for seven (7) days, she tried to promote and to stop degrading and dehumanizing dilemma of the down trodden women in the area. She did this by organizing seminars, workshops and conferences where some of the issues affecting Abakaliki women were discussed. One of the seminars was the Tourism Awareness Seminar by Ebonyi State Tourism Board in collaboration with Ebonyi State Local Government Service Commission in 1998. Another one was the Inter-African Women Workshop on the Harmful

Traditional Practices, Ebonyi 1999. She sponsored many Abakaliki women especially those from the rural areas to attend the seminars and workshop.

Frances Mgbada is a woman of many parts. She is a writer, social activist, women mobilizer and member of many boards of parastatals. She was the Coordinator, Better Life Programme Science Centre, Onueke. As the coordinator, she travelled to all the nooks and crannies of the communities in Onueke Ebonyi Central zone, mobilizing women and helping them to form co-operative societies to enhance their economic status. She initiated a bill for the protection of girl child rights and girl education in the state. She sponsored many girls in the area of skill acquisition. She also fought vigorously to curb girl-child abuse, like raping, under aged or early marriage and other forms of maltreatment of the girl-child in the Ezza area.

Lady Mgbada was also the President of National Council of Women's Societies (NCWS), in Abakaliki; Member, Abakaliki Women Association (AWA) and State Coordinator Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) as well as the founder and sustainer of Centre for Public Health and Development Studies. Through this Centre, she organized workshops and seminars on reproductive health and family planning for married couples, child care and simple hygiene tips for women. Through these programmes, she identified women who were suffering from uterovaginal prolapse and Vesico Vaginal Fistula

(VVF) from the grassroots and sent them to the centre in Abakalilki Township where they received treatment.

Lady Mgbada also created political awareness among Ezza women and encouraged people like Mrs. Mabel Aleke, Hon. Virginia Oketa, Dr. Mrs. Nora Alo and a host of other Abakaliki women to join politics. Her belief in the empowerment of women was captured in her work. “The challenges of Women Education in Ezza”¹³. Lady Frances Mgbada is still in active political service.



Photo vi: Barr. Adeline Idike (PhD)

Barr. Dr. Adeline Idike¹⁴

Her political career started in 1992 when she was appointed Chairman, Social Democratic Party (SDP) in then Enugu State. She implored and encouraged Abakaliki women to join politics. She is the founder and sustainer of Adeline Advocacy for the Dignity of the Destitute Foundation (AADODF). This is her platform for assisting under-privileged persons, giving of scholarship awards to indigent persons especially young girls, empowerment of women in her Local Government Area and also executing other projects like building of parishes for her natal home.

She was one of the members for Miriam Abacha's African Peace Mission Committee in 1995. With her wealth of experience from the committee, Barr. Idike mediated a settlement between her host

community Igbeagu in Izzi L G A and her Cross River neighbours over a land issue that had lingered for many years and finally degenerated into war between the two communities. During the war, properties were damaged and people mostly women were taken captive to the Cross River area. Barr. Idike went to the Cross River area, negotiated with them and brought the women and the other people back. She earned an honourable title, *Ojeleogbu mmini, Okworiberu – Okuta*, meaning literally, some body who fetches water from the deep sea. The title means that Barr. Idike can handle difficult situations.

For her courage and her passion for the enlightenment and sensitization of the rural populace on salient issues of human endeavour and relations. Thus, in 1997 she was appointed the Commissioner for Information and culture in Ebonyi State. In 1999, she was appointed Chairman, Women Development Committee, (WODECO), Ebonyi State. Adeline worked assiduously to improve the lot of Abakaliki women. She organized seminars where the women at the grassroots were taught how to be economically self-reliant to enable them compete with the men in politics. Barr. Idike played major roles in the mobilization of Abakaliki women at the local and state levels through her position as the President of AWA, Nsukka Branch. She was a pioneer Chairman Ebonyi State Independent Electoral Commission (EBSIEC).



Photo vii: Chief Ngozi Uloma Nwankwo

Chief Ngozi Uloma Nwankwo¹⁵

Her political career started in 1987 when she was appointed a Board member of Imo State Marketing Company Limited, Owerri. This Board formulated the Company's policies and met periodically to ensure that the policies were adhered to. By 1988, she was elected to represent Abakaliki North Constituency in the Constituent Assembly. Between 1990-1994 she was the Director of Finance, Enugu State Broadcasting Service, Enugu. Member, State Advisory Committee, National Directorate of Employment, Enugu State. As the only female member of the committee, she used her position and opportunity to help women by giving jobs to women and training in various skills acquisition. Some women were given farm equipment while others were given loans especially at the grassroots level. She was also the

supervisor for Education, Culture and Social Development in Enugu State 1994.

With the creation of Ebonyi state in 1996, Ngozi Nwankwo was appointed member Local Government Caretaker Committee in Abakaliki, 1996. Because of her wealth of experience and hard work, she was appointed Acting Accountant General, Ebonyi State, January-September 1997. Between 1997 and 1999, Ngozi Nwankwo had served as permanent secretary in the following Ministries and Establishments: finance, lands, Education, Health, Agriculture, and Department of Establishment – Head of service office. This was an opportunity Ngozi Nwankwo managed well by employing men and women. Some of them include; Ahaja Veronica, Paul Oche, Ojogo Sunday, Nneka Nwankwo, Ogodu Ogboji, most of whom are now Professional Accountants and a host of others. She earned herself a traditional title *Ada Eji Agho Ada* in 1999 from her village because of her hard work and human relations. *Ada Eji Agho Ada* means a woman that holds others from falling down.

Chief Nwankwo was the foundation President of Abakaliki Women Association (AWA) Enugu Branch in 1984 when the Association was formed after the death of Mrs. Uche Offia Nwali, a foremost woman politician from the Abakaliki area. The Associations main aim was to bring the women of the area together to continue what Mrs. Uche Nwali had started in the area of women mobilization, promotion of the education of the girl child and discourage early marriage which was the trend in the Abakaliki area. This Association challenged the women to

come together especially at the grassroots level. Ngozi was and still is the President of Ebonyi North Women Association, a forum that encourage and supported so many Abakaliki Women to contest elective positions.

She is also a member of numerous professional bodies like, Association of National Accountants of Nigeria (ANAN) 1982, Institute of Management Consultants, 1989, Nigeria Institute of Management and Chartered Institute of Taxation of Nigeria, 1990 and Fellow – Association of National Accountants of Nigeria (FCNA). Ngozi Nwankwo retired as permanent Secretary Ministry of Finance, Ebonyi State, but at present, is a principal partner, Nwankwo Ngozi Uloma & Co, certified National Accountants.

Consequences of Changing Status of Women

The changing status of women did not go without problems. There is a great change on the traditional marriage system because of the influence of Christianity and western education. Western legal system approved or legitimized divorce. That is a husband or wife could terminate a marriage on grounds of infidelity, childlessness or incompatibility, similarly a wife could sue a husband and seek divorce for an act of domestic violence committed against her. In other words, women could sue or be sued for divorce, a phenomenon which was uncommon, on the part of a women in traditional society.

It is also necessary to mention that the widening of women's opportunities and their financial independence tends to make some of

them to abandon their natural duties as wives and mothers. Yet others become so arrogant especially if they are the bread winners of their families. This imposes a serious stress on the marriage. Pursuants of career opportunities has the unfortunate consequence of making some wives or mothers shift their family responsibilities of caring for the members of the family, including their husband, to maids or nannies who were ill-equipped to discharge the responsibilities of house wives and mothers.

With the outbreak of Human Immune Virus (HIV) and Acquired Immuno – Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) in 1981,¹⁶ the spread of contraceptives, especially pills and condoms, significantly revolutionized traditional sexual practices and attitude. Contraceptives gave women, greater control of their bodies, encouraged promiscuous behaviour, promoted family planning and increased the spate of illegal abortions. “Prostitution also became not only an ad-hoc commercial transaction...”,¹⁷ but also a profession as many young girls and some married women began to lodge in hotels where they sold their bodies to clients to make money to meet their needs for accommodation, Medicare, food, education, material benefits and generally live a better life.¹⁸

Pre-marital sex by young girls giving birth to children outside marriage and co-habitation of couples were generally an exception rather than the rule and were seriously frowned at in traditional society. But these unwholesome practices became some of the phenomena

resulting from urbanization and social change. The selection of a marriage partner by daughters/sons became increasingly a free choice of the intending couples, excluding parents and relations in some cases, and thus significantly undermined the importance attached to mutual consultations by extended families before the consummation of a marriage. Marriage itself became optional for some girls. Consequently, there emerged crops of working class women, young widows and single mothers who occupied high positions in education sectors, public service, industry and commerce. Others voluntarily chose to remain single or dedicate themselves to Jesus Christ and Virgin Mary and became ordained as Reverend Sisters in the Catholic church.¹⁹

In conclusion, it is pertinent to state that the changing status of women in Abakaliki, like in the other Igbo societies, is in some respects, a big asset to the family system and the society at large. The traditional consignment of women to the kitchen and local economic activities while men dominated public life and held monopoly of providing economic and financial support systems came under serious strain. Women had used their intellectual powers and economic independence to become chief bread-winners in some families, especially in the event of the death or incapacitation of their husband either by illness or extreme poverty. The changing economic and social status of women had also helped to liberate and give them access to political participation and equal economic opportunities.

Possible Remedies to the Challenges Confronting Women

Considering the challenges that women faced, especially in the rural areas, any development programme in which they are involved must be people-oriented. Conflicts between values of cultural heritage and concepts alien to the people's way of life must be avoided.

Each community needs to select a female leader who should undergo training in project development and management, basic knowledge in home economics, health and other topics to enable her identify problems related to any area and if necessary refer the problem to appropriate specialists

There is also need for self-reliance which will induce self-confidence in the women. Possible ways of achieving this include, continued encouragement of income generating ventures, improvement in health planning and mate selection programmes, education programme should be related to the needs of the women too.

Women should also focus attention on the positive aspects of their fellow women and try to encourage them. Women should not accept negative labels or negative pictures painted of them. Instead, they should strive to excel in all they do. They must strive through their various organizations, to run enlightenment programmes to teach women their rights and responsibilities. These programmes should deal with psychological inhibition, building of self confidence, and training in assertiveness.

Women should utilize the available feminine characteristics of gentleness, tact, intuition, sensitivity and peacefulness that nature bestowed on them in any area they find themselves. Above all, women should stand up for outright legal abolition of prostitution because of the spread of venereal diseases, and the disdain it attracts to the women.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Attempt has been made in the foregoing chapters of this work to examine the transition of Abakaliki's women status from pre-colonial, colonial to the post colonial era. Making a contrast between the situation at the beginning of colonial rule and at the end of the century in 1999 shows that the change in women's status was not dramatic but showed continuity with their past. The survey of the pre-colonial political, economic and social institutions of the people of Abakaliki forms the background of the study and has helped to draw a distinction between the periods especially as the affects women, and also the effect of colonialism on them. Even though the conquest of the area continued into the 2nd decade between 1918-1920. It has been argued that colonialism impacted both positively and negatively on the status of Abakaliki women. New avenues for status change among Abakaliki women were opened up as a result of western presence, even though generally Igbo women were not accorded their deserve position by the colonial administration.

The establishment of colonial rule brought improved roads, a new model of education, employment opportunities and new skills especially for the women. The establishment of the Regional and Divisional Councils also had produced a new power base in the Abakaliki area.

This is also true of the establishment of warrant chief. These new crop of leaders were pulling resources together sidelining the traditional authority who were at the receiving end.

By the time colonial rule was terminated in 1960 the contact with foreign ideas has introduced so many economic changes in the Abakaliki area. In the area of agriculture, the cultivation of rice from the 1940's had added a new dimension to the agricultural base of the people. Nursery for rice seedlings and tomatoes was almost exclusive for women. The way of transplanting and harvesting were new to the people. The cultivation of rice had by the end of colonial rule competed with the practice of yam farming, the use of fertilizer for crops had also become revolutionary.

The introduction of mechanical rice milling in the Abakaliki town in the 1940's had by 1960 spread to other places in the district, including Onueke Ezza and Abina Ikwo. The establishment of Abakaliki Co-operative Rice Mill in the township similarly led to the development of co-operative societies in the clan as shown in this work. By 1960, the colonial officers has successfully modified the traditional system of agriculture to the model of a colonial economy which emphasized the production of cash crops and Abakaliki women demonstrated their receptive and inventive abilities in pursuance of their economic activities which in turn changed their status.

New forms of arts and crafts were learnt by the women during the colonial period. Thus, tailoring became a profession requiring skills. The

trade in cloths and the colonial government ban of nudity made those unable to make their own appeals to buy and cover their nakedness. This is no small measure enhanced the status of Abakaliki women.

The introduction of portable currency facilitated trade. The use of the new currency notes and coins replaced trade by barter and the use of cowries, manilla and iron bars and rods. Markets were widened and new ones opened in the four county council areas at Abakaliki township, Izzi, Ishielu and Ezzikwo. Revolution in the transport system brought about network of roads which complemented and reduced to some extent transport by human portage. With the opening up of new markets and invariably of expansion of trade, more women went into long distance trade which had hitherto been monopolized by men and a few women who could brave it joined. The British system of law and order granted security and this enhanced the movement of women in and out of the other communities other than their own for trade and other economic activity. The advent of the Nigerian Lead and Zinc Company at Enyiaba, Ameka and Ameri and the cement factory at Nkalagu provided opportunities for new employments and learning of new skills that enhanced the position of women of the area.

The influence of western education and religion among the people of Abakaliki became great even when, Ezza a major clan in Abakaliki, rejected western education. Anyanwu asserts that up to 1960 majority of the Ezzas' were still non Christians and since the conquest of Nigerian communities paved way for peace and then the missionaries, so while

their counterpart were enjoying peace and order they were still resisting it. Yet when it came, these institutions threatened the political order of the society and social life as it affected the culture of the area. The cultural erosion initiated by the Christian missions became so effective that the indigenous culture was severely truncated. The communities were divided between believers and traditional worshippers, each struggling to survive the other. By the end of colonial rule in 1960, the Christians whose number had increased began to introduce changes in the people's culture. They preached that the Abakaliki culture is against the Christian belief, ethics and norms, and therefore not worth observing. This greatly impacted positively on the status of women who hitherto had been marginalized using culture and religion as a yardstick.

The introduction of certain innovations was met with serious opposition from Abakaliki women, especially when their interest was threatened. The colonial administrators saw no need in consulting or appointing women in their policy decision-making. The colonial administration consequently undermined and eroded the traditional rights and place of women. Gloria Chuku captured this scenario when she wrote to the greatest astonishment of the colonial administrators, the women, exhibited their "hidden power" through the various demonstrations and revolts.¹

The civil war period and the activities of Abakaliki women during and after the period are also covered in this work. The war brought about psychological and emotional stress on the people. During the war,

women became bread-winners of their families. Their workloads increased enormously. In spite of the risk, insecurity and hazards of the period, the women played significant roles in various fields of endeavours which helped immensely to sustain their families, the soldiers and even the Biafran Government. Yet, their experience during and after the Civil War period, when compared with that of their male counterparts, was never pleasant. Though they were not only the prime target of the war, they suffered discrimination in the guise of age long cultural and religious belief. In-fact, the effect of gender inequity manifested in their overall development which opened sores that turned out to be arrows of suspicion against the women politicians in the area. They were forced by the war to get into areas of endeavour outside the traditional jurisdiction. Yet, as the case may be, most of their efforts and sacrifices have gone unnoticed and unrewarded.

There were really no active policies to assuage the battered people, (Abakaliki women) and no governmental efforts were made to prevent the violence against women. This study also has examine the external influences that contributed to change in the Abakaliki women's status. That is the positive effects of the United Nations Decade for Women (1975-85) and the activities of the National Council of Women Societies on Abakaliki Women. Women members of co-operative societies benefited from some government incentives in agriculture, loan or credit facilities.

With the creation of Ebonyi State in 1996 and Abakaliki being the state capital, the rate of growth of the town increased. The dynamics of changed and accelerated rate of urbanization created their own complex and difficult challenging to women. There was a corresponding increase in crime, pollution and waste accumulation, severe shortage of housing and deagrarianization. A breakdown of the traditional family structure, marriage system and values such as decline of the authority of elders and low level of sexual morality as well as marital disruptions or instability were also apparent in the burgeoning urban town.

The present study concludes that the status of Abakaliki women has experienced a change. The innovative agencies or forces of this change include colonial administration, Christianity, western education, increase in urbanization and more importantly the United Nations Decade for Women. All these encouraged Abakaliki women to participate actively in the activities that enhance their changing status. Women who acquired wealth sponsored various development projects in various communities in Abakaliki and also compete favourably with their male counterparts in politics. The issue of continuity and change is best seen in the dynamics of tradition and modernity. There is a dramatic decline of the traditional social order which had hitherto worked against women but some degree of institutional continuity in changing society as it affects the status of women still exists.

Note

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APPENDIX

S/N	NAME	AGE	OCCUPATION/STATUS	DATE OF INTERVIEW	PLACE OF INTERVIEW
1	Agbo Becina	58 yrs	Teaching	06/06/ 2015	Ngbo
2	Isha Nwaophoke	60 yrs	Garri producer	11/07/2015	Nkalagu
3	Agbo Mary	52 yrs	Medical Practitioner	20/06 2015	Oferekpe Agbaja
4	Alegu Anigo	72 yrs	Retired Civil Servant	25/06/ 2015	Okpuitumo, Ikwo
5	Alagu Nkechi	61 yrs	Secretary	26/07/2015.	Amajim Ameka Ezza
6	Alegu Paulinus	55 yrs	Civil Servant	20/5/2015	Okpagwu
7	Ali Uche	65 yrs	Retired teacher	28/07/2015.	Abakaliki
8	Alo S.N.	70 yrs	Printer/Catechist	16/09/2015	St. Theresa's Catholic Church Abakaliki
9	Amekka Okwor	51 yrs	Salt producer and grass weaver	15/05/2015	Mary Enyigba
10	Atum Nwanchor	70 yrs	Driver	23/09 2015	Unuphu Agbaja, near Abakaliki
11	Atuma Nwanyim	68 yrs	Retired vice Principal	22/07/2015	Igboji Ikwo
12	Chidi – Uzoigwe Nnene	54 yrs	Lawyer	6/08/2015	Ministry of Justice, Abakaliki
13	Chukwu Michael	60 yrs	Head master	6/07/2015	Nduhu Ezzama (Onueke)
14	Ekechi Ngozi	60 yrs	Mortuary attendant	8/06/2015	Nwakpu
15	Nwiesznyi. Elom Mbeke	72 yrs	Farmer and retired Civil Servant	28/07/2015	Ndufu-Alike Ikwo
16	Enigwe Mary (MFR)	98 yrs	Women Activist	10/08/2015	Kpirikpiri Abakaliki
17	Ewa Augustine Onwe	87yrs	Ex-Divisional Councillors	7/08/2015	Onueke Ezza
18	His Royal Highness Eze Ogo Fidelis Ekechi Chukwu	61 yrs	Traditional ruler	20/08/2015	Ekka,Ezza North
19	Idah Margaret	73 yrs	Trader	10/08/2015	Echara Ikwo
20	Ekechi Onwe	52 yrs	Lecturer	25/06/2015	PG School EBSU
21	Idike Adeline	64 yrs	Lecturer	22/11/2015	Onwe Road Abakaliki
22	Iganga Obaji	85 yrs	Retired Head teacher	12,/09/ 201	Igbeagu
23	Igberi Mathew	78 yrs	Security	10/09/2015	Hill-top Abakaliki
24	Igwe John	68 yrs	Farmer and Rice trader	9/06/2015	Umuezeoka,
25	Omenachi James	72 yrs	Retired Head teacher	18/06/2015	Umuoghara

26	Isha Monday	58 yrs	Engineer, Civil Servant	9/09/2015.	Ministry of Land Housing and Survey, Abakaliki
27	Martha Ekoyo	68 yrs	Midwife	12/05/2015	Oriuzor
28	Mbam Ogoto	61 yrs	Palm oil producer	28/07/2015	Enyigba
29	Mgbada Frances	58 yrs	Secretary	2/12/2015	her Office, Ezza Road Abakaliki,
30	Mgbada Ugoeze Felicia	82 yrs	Retired Teacher and Women Activist	20/12/ 2015	her daughter's house off Ogoja Road Abakaliki
31	Ngene Michael	75 yrs	Retired headmaster		26, November, 2015
32	Nkwuda Joseph	70 yrs	Retired permanent Secretary	20/07/2015	Igbudu Inyimegu
33	Nkwuda Obegu	70 yrs	Women Leader	18/09/2015	Ntezi-Aba, in Abakaliki
34	Nsude Nwigwe	76 yrs	Farmer and Ex-Biafran Military Soldier	28/09/2015	Eziulo
35	Nwafor Beatrice	68 yrs	HOD Co-ordinator livestock	28/07/2015	Echara, Ikwo
36	Nwafor Patrick Ifeanyi	50 yrs	Former Commissioner	15/11/2015	Ngbabor, Abakaliki,
37	Nwafor-Idu Elizabeth	68 yrs	Cook	25/08/2015	Federal Government Girls College, Ezzamgbo
38	Nwakpa Margaret	81 yrs	Retired Trader	10/07/2015	her residence, Iboko, Igbeagu
39	Nwambe Roseline	52 yrs	Dean Sch. of Voc, COE	12/06/2015.	her residence
40	Nwanchor Nwedu Ikechukwu	62	Politician	15/07/2015	Mile 50 Abakaliki,
41	Nwankwo Ngozi	67 yrs	Principal	14-15/01/2016	her Office No 2A Old Market Road
42	Nwanshi Igwe	86 yrs	Farmer	22/08/2015	Ekpelu
43	Nwedu Oguji	52 yrs	Lecturer	26/08/2015	his office
44	Nweke Ngozi	54 yrs	Group Leader	20/12/2015	in her Office 11B Ogoja Road Abakaliki
45	Nweke Stephen	65 yrs	Police officer	2/09/2015	Hill Top, Abakaliki
46	Nwidagu Grace	70 yrs	Hospital Cleaner	2/06/2015	Mile 4, Abakaliki
47	Ogah Mary	74	Trader	5/6/2015	Enyibichiri, Izzi
48	Nwigwe Ogoto	68 yrs	Civil Servant and farmer	16/05/2015	Ikwo
49	Nwinyaya Amos	58 yrs	Lecturer	20/09/2015	CAS
50	Nwoba Nkechi	61 yrs	Pot maker	26/05/2015	Ekpelu
51	Nwobodo A. B	54yrs	Hotel Manager	18/12/2015	Ishieke
52	Nwode Eche	68 yrs	Formal Principal	20/08/2015	his residence, Echara, Ikwo,

53	Nwogha James E.	72 yrs	Ex-councillor	5/08/2015	Umuhali
54	Nwokwa Joseph	71 yrs	Blacksmith and farmer	7/06/2015	Ameka Ezza
55	Nwophoke, Agatha	38	A hair salonist/fashion designer	12/11/2015	12 Oje Owerre Street, Abakaliki
56	Odoh Josephine	62 yrs	PDP Woman Leader	8,/08/2015	Okposi Ngbo
57	Oduma Azubuike	62 yrs	Store Keeper	20/08/2015	CAS Campus
58	Ogba Stella	65 yrs	Civil Servant	20/05/2015	Iboko
59	Ogwali Nweke	70	Retired Principal	10/08/2015	Onueke Ezza
60	Okechukwu G. C		Secretary, Rice Mill Trader		In Ottenberg, Farmers and Townspeople.
61	Okedi Ifeoma	73yrs	Trader	04/08/2016	Agubia,Ikwo
62	Oken Anurika	68 yrs	Trader	11/11/2015	Ishieke
63	Okeoworo, Stephen N	58 yrs	Lecturer	20/08/2015	his Office
64	Ominyi Uguru	50 yrs	Yam trader	5/08/2015	Igbeagu
65	Nwibo Nwuzor	62 yrs	Yam trader	5/05/2015	Igbeagu Izzi
66	Onwa Chief James Ede	60 yrs		5/02/1985, by Alegu.	Umuhali
67	Reverend Sister Concillia Odii	45yrs	Medical Practitioner	12/12/2015	St. Vincent Ndubia
68	Ugbega Edward	50 yrs	Lecturer	18/6/2015	Ebonyi State college of Education, Ikwo.
69	Uguru Ndidi	60 yrs	Matron	20/02/2015	Igboji, Hospital
70	Uguru Oke	54 yrs	Teacher	22/07/2015	Ezzamgbo
71	Uguru Regina	66 yrs	Retired teacher and farmer	22/05/2015	Onueke Ezza