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Still Sitting on Men: Understanding the Continuities of Indirect Rule Through Pre-Colonial Forms of Female Resistance, Ethnic Power Politics and Economic Violence in Southeast Nigeria

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Still Sitting on Men: Understanding the Continuities of Indirect Rule Through Pre-Colonial
Forms of Female Resistance, Ethnic Power Politics and Economic Violence in Southeast Nigeria

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
of Bard College

by
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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Chapter I.....	9
Chapter II.....	33
Chapter III.....	57
Conclusion.....	77
Bibliography.....	83

Introduction

On November 25, 1929, a conflict between Nwanyeruwa and Mark Emeruwa led to one of the foundational moments of women's resistance in Nigeria.¹ Emeruwa came to Nwanyeruwa's compound while her husband, Ojim, was away. While she was crushing palm nuts to make palm oil, he asked her to count her "goats, sheep and people" to which she responded "I have been in mourning for the death of [my son's wife who died in labor]. Was your mother counted?"² He began strangling her, and she strangled him back with palm oil still on her hands. She called other women over to help her, Emeruwa fled and the women chased him to Warrant Chief Okugo's compound. Protesting did not stop with Okugo giving up his cap, and Nwanyeruwa's actions led to the amassing of over 10,000 women to protest the British Native Courts system and Indirect Rule; over fifty women died, and the actions of British soldiers who shot them were "deemed to be completely 'justified'" out of fear for their lives caused by the unarmed women.³

To this day, "Madam Nwanyeruwa 'is and still remains a name to conjure with' in the history of female militancy in Nigeria."⁴ In August, 2016, women protested the Nigerian government and Seven Energy and, speaking through their "Women Leader, Mrs. Dorothy

¹ Aba Commission of Inquiry, *Notes of Evidence Taken by the Nigerian Commission of Inquiry appointed to Inquire into the Disturbances in the Calabar and Owerri Provinces, December, 1929*, Lagos, 1930, p. 24-26, para. 363-364.

² Aba Commission of Inquiry, p. 24, para. 363.

³ Marc Matera, Misty L. Bastian and Susan Kingsley Kent, *The Women's War of 1929: Gender and Violence in Colonial Nigeria*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 187.

⁴ Felix K. Ekechi, "Historical Women in the Fight for Liberation," in *The feminization of development processes in Africa: Current and future perspectives*, edited by Valentine Udoh James and James Etim, (Greenwood Publishing Group, 1999): 95-113, p. 101.

Nkanta,” threatened to “protest naked to ‘provoke the gods’ of their lands.”⁵ Three years earlier, a different case of women protesting “‘defied soldiers to shoot them or leave their community.’”⁶ Women’s resistance and coercive violence are still defining aspects of the Nigerian political system and society. The legacy of Nwanyeruwa and the women involved with the Women’s War of 1929 is elicited in the movements and non-violent protests of women in the Niger Delta today.

The focus of this project is not simply a history of Nigeria, Nigerian women or power relationships. It is not simply a political analysis of the crises of colonial and independent Nigeria. It is, rather, meant to serve as an example for the necessity of investigation and exploration of the two fields as symbionts. Too often, scholars trying to understand why a country is ‘underdeveloped’ will look at the current political effects or only at the ‘colonial legacy.’ While the later has been used to show a level of continuity in events and study through today, there is a necessity for development theory to accept that there are multiple reasons as to why certain phenomenon of the past have a heavy influence on actions of the present. Meaning that colonialism at large did not cause the problem of ‘underdeveloped’ post-independence countries, but, rather, the implementation and administration of different aspects of colonialism yielded different results and experiences.

The first chapter is formed around the ideas presented by Marc Matera, Misty L. Bastian and Susan Kingsley Kent’s study of the Women’s War of 1929, who in turn had expanded on the work of Judith Van Allen.⁷ Matera and Kent are both historians and Bastian is an anthropologist.

⁵ The Whistler NG Editor, "Oil Spillage: Akwa Ibom Women To Protest Naked Against FG, Oil...," The Whistler NG, August 31, 2016, <https://thewhistler.ng/oil-spillage-akwa-ibom-women-to-protest-naked-against-fg-oil-companies/>.

⁶ Rafiu Ajakaye, "Women Protest in Nigeria's Oil-rich Delta – Naked," Anadolu Ajansi, July 10, 2013, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/world/women-protest-in-nigerias-oil-rich-delta-naked/213152>.

⁷ Matera, Bastian and Kent, and see Judith Van Allen, “‘Sitting on a Man’: Colonialism and the Lost political Institutions of Igbo Women,” presented at the Annual Meeting of The African Studies Association in Denver,

Van Allen is a political scientist who has been studying African women for over forty years.⁸ These authors formed the basis for the secondary source work of this chapter on the changes to gender relations. Their work showed that the British brought with them not only a new political system, but also a new cultural system, one that meant to divide and subjugate the Igbo population, and Nigeria at large. Their works build off *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa*⁹ by Frederick John Dealtry Lugard and the *Notes of Evidence* from the Aba Commission of Inquiry.¹⁰ The former is a written manual on how Indirect Rule was administered and why it was needed in Nigeria. This text and Lugard's career with the British colonial administration as Governor-General of Nigeria created the structure of Indirect Rule in Nigeria. The *Notes of Evidence*, conducted by a Crown Counsel, is an extensive official record of Nigerians and British accounts of what happened in regards to the 'Aba Riots of 1929.'¹¹ These two texts make up the bulk of primary source material that influenced the chapter.

Chapter One satisfies the historical ramifications of Indirect Rule more than the political structure of the administration, though the political structure is explored.¹² While the latter is important, it is duly necessary to recognize the importance of a firm historical background for the events, experiences and consequences of the colonial administration. Therefore, rather than

Colorado in November, 1971, in *Perspectives on Africa: A Reader in Culture, History, and Representation*, edited by Roy Richard Grinker and Christopher B. Steiner (Malden: Blackwell, 1997), and Judith Van Allen, "'Aba Riots' or Igbo 'Women's War': Ideology, Stratification, and the Invisibility of Women," in *Women in Africa: Studies in Social and Economic Change*, edited by Nancy J. Hafkin and Edna G. Bay (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976).

⁸ Cornell University, "Judith Van Allen," Academia.edu, accessed April 17, 2019, <http://cornell.academia.edu/JudithVanAllen>.

⁹ Frederick J. D. Lugard, "Methods of Ruling Native Races" from *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* (London: Blackwood, 1922), in *Perspectives on Africa: A Reader in Culture, History & Representation*, edited by Roy Richard Grinker and Christopher B. Steiner (Malden: Blackwell, 1997).

¹⁰ Aba Commission of Inquiry, p. 8, para. 114-117.

¹¹ The distinction between 'Aba Riots' and 'Women's War' was a serious debate in the later twentieth century, and will be discussed in Chapter One.

¹² For an extensive understanding of the Warrant Chief system, see Adiele Eberechukwu Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs*, (London: Longman, 1972), and for a record of the belief behind Indirect Rule, refer to Lugard.

immediately engaging with how Indirect Rule influenced the present, the majority of Chapter One centers around the historical changes the British brought with their colonial agenda. This is not solely to satisfy the direction of this work as a joint-project, but also because it is necessary to comprehend and appreciate the historical value of actions that manifest today. The Women's War may not have directly led to women's resistance in Biafra in the 1960s, but understanding the creation of and challenges to the political regimes of the colonial and early independent eras represents a core theme of this work.

The second chapter was less directly influenced by one work or another. Rather, it is compiled from a variety of works, many of which agree on general dispositions towards certain topics, such as regionalism, particularly Northern Nigeria's resentment of Southern Nigeria's education. Jimi Peters' *The Nigerian Military and the State* explained the history of regionalism in Nigeria and created the political framework for Chapter Two's understanding and argument as to why ethnic conflict became so prevalent following the end of the colonial era.¹³ Chinua Achebe's memoir also influenced the work by confirming historical events and sentiments presented by Peters, such as the North-South education divide.¹⁴ Gloria Chuku's analysis of Igbo women throughout the first six decades of the twentieth century showed the continuity of women's actions in the region to different forms of centralizing power.¹⁵ Egodi Uchendu's work was valuable to this project because it studied ethnic Igbo women outside of a direct zone of conflict and analyzed how their actions were still heavily influenced by the crimes against Igbos in Biafra.¹⁶ Christie Achebe's psychological analysis of the effects of the Biafran war showed

¹³ Jimi Peters, *The Nigerian Military and the State*, International Library of African Studies series, (New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 1997).

¹⁴ Chinua Achebe, *There Was a Country*, (New York: Penguin Press, 2012).

¹⁵ Gloria Chuku, *Igbo Women and Economic Transformation in Southeastern Nigeria, 1900-1960*, (New York: Routledge, 2005).

¹⁶ Egodi Uchendu, *Women and Conflict in the Nigerian Civil War*, (New Jersey: Africa World Press, Inc., 2007).

how changes to culture affected the Igbo women in a variety of ways, and how these women maintained their identity against imposition through their forms of resistance.¹⁷

The work by the latter three, female scholars helped me to see the connections between the colonial and early independent state. Their works showed that women in Nigeria not only protested and resisted because of a history, but because the changes brought by the British to society created a culture of resistance. Christie Achebe's work focuses on the conscious efforts of women in Biafra during the civil war, and how "women tried to understand the conditions they were in to derive meaning from the difficult situations that presented themselves and revise their selection of strategies to make them mesh with their new understanding or interpretation."¹⁸ The women of Biafra were consciously trying to preserve their status as providers and as equal components to the struggle against the "stronger Nigerian military."¹⁹

The third and final chapter of this project used three sources as the main evidence: one a history and structure of the Nigerian oil market,²⁰ one a history and analysis of the environmentally and socially corrosive effects of the oil market,²¹ and one an article on the relatively hidden history of violence and atrocity in the Niger Delta.²² Kenneth Omeje's work addresses the three main transnational oil companies of the Niger Delta and how the Nigerian state, colonial and independent, helped the companies hijack Nigeria's oil fields at the expense of local host communities. Okonta and Douglas have a similar approach but focus specifically on

¹⁷ Christie Achebe, "Igbo Women in the Nigerian-Biafran War 1967-1970: An Interplay of Control," *Journal of Black Studies* 40, no. 5 (May 2010), <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0021934709351546>.

¹⁸ Christie Achebe, p. 806.

¹⁹ Christie Achebe, p. 805.

²⁰ Kenneth Omeje, *High Stake and Stakeholders: Oil Conflict and Security in Nigeria*, (Vermont: Ashgate, 2006).

²¹ Ike Okonta and Oronto Doulgas, *Where Vultures Feast: Shell, Human Rights and Oil in the Niger Delta*, (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 2001).

²² Ifeanyi I. Onwuazombe, "Human Rights Abuse and Violations in Nigeria: A Case Study of the Oil-Producing Communities in the Niger Delta," *Annual Survey of International and Comparative Law* 22, (Spring 2017), editor-in-Chief Christian Nwachukwu Okeke.

Shell, the only of the major three oil companies to have the majority of its rigs on shore and in proximity to Nigerian citizens. Onwuazombe's article reveals some of the hidden horrors and campaigns of suppression in various Niger Delta communities; it gives direct details to the events that Omeje and Okonta and Douglas are studying.

This project has been influenced by a variety of fields, and, I believe, cannot be solely defined as a 'historical' or 'political' analysis. This is not only the nature of the project, but also the theme of the project. Studying Indirect Rule and Nigeria in this method is taking an underutilized approach to the study of political economic development. Different fields of academia are prone to stagnation in a variety of ways, and development theory is no different. It is important to keep pushing the boundaries of how and why. Asking far reaching questions may net results that were never expected and may lead to revelations for future study. This project is not meant to be an inspiration to all aspiring development theorists, but simply to give a case study of a unique question and analyze how the results were received.

The question asked is: how did Indirect Rule affect Nigeria through the present day, and how do Southeastern women show the changes and effects of this political structure? The answer follows in the three chapters; in short, however, the answer is that Indirect Rule changed the political culture of Nigeria and the ramifications of this change were severe. In the Southeast, the British introduced the tradition of extreme violence to meet political dissent, and this tradition has defined the Nigerian state through today. Further, rather than simply understanding the colonial economic reasons for why Shell oil dominates so much of the Nigerian oil market,²³ this paper analyzes why Shell has its current power structures in place. The economic reasons for Shell's interest in Nigeria are simple and protest against the company

²³ Shell oil has been involved with Nigerian oil production since 1956, Okonta and Douglas, p. 2.

is understandable; what is uncertain and necessary for study is why and how are people protesting. A large element behind the protests is against the environmental damage the company has wrought. This cannot be the whole reason,²⁴ however, and noticing and understanding that the people of Southeast Nigeria resist Shell and the government for a variety of complex reasons is why this project was created.

The development field is complex. Some scholars only want to look at problems and situations through the nation-state model; others only want to understand how the colonial presence created strife. In reality, it seems that both of these approaches by themselves, though valuable, are inherently limited. It is important to ask and answer questions with both of these perspectives in conversation. Therefore, this project is not simply a history of Nigerian military atrocities, nor solely about changes in political culture, but it does use both of these pieces as well as many others to create a unique perspective. Colonial and political studies are inseparable, I believe, when addressing many of the issues facing the ‘third world.’

²⁴ There many economic factors, such as male rural emigration that have caused women to protest the oil market. Some of these factors will be evaluated and analyzed in Chapter Three.

Chapter I

The Women's War of 1929 and its Place in the Nigerian Development Discourse

Writing about the history of Africa is challenging; terms are ambiguous and can often carry Western connotations of African inferiority.²⁵ For example, words like 'tribe' and 'native' do not necessarily represent the complex understanding of how Africans view themselves as multi-layered individuals who have complex relationships to kin, religion and society.²⁶ For this reason, rather than using the term 'tribe' to give a broad, general understanding of Southeastern Nigerian social systems, I will try to use different words for different contexts. Use of these words to retain Western ideals of African inferiority also represents one of the themes of this work: that Western influence is still significant and negative in Nigeria in a similar context as it was during the colonial period.

Whether the illusion of destroying African culture and creating backwardness through false assumptions was at the forefront of British ideology or an unintended, yet inevitable, consequence is debatable, but what is certain is that the British did have a heavy hand in altering the social, cultural, political and economic life of the Igbo through Indirect Rule. The British made Igbo society more patriarchal and more hierarchical, making it more of a British-gendered version of African ideology. In short, the women won the battles, such as no taxes and dismantling the chiefs, but lost the war: gender exclusive politics and economics disrupted female way of life and complementarity to their husbands.

Slavery, since it began in the fifteenth century, has heavily influenced African culture and power structures. Certain communities had to move inland to avoid contact with Europeans and

²⁵ Curtis Keim, *Mistaking Africa: Curiosities and Inventions of the American Mind*, (Boulder: Westview, 2009), see chapter 8.

²⁶ Keim, p. 119.

others did the opposite, exploiting their contemporary indigenous Africans by selling prisoners of war to Europeans. Following the end of the British slave trade in 1807, the era of legitimate trade persisted until the Berlin Conference in 1885. This era, however, began as a monetary incentive to allow for a moral cause: the end of slavery.²⁷ This monetary incentive eventually allowed for cash crops and single export economies to rise, a system which persists today. Slavery and the era of legitimate trade preceded the Berlin Conference and had an effect on the course of African history that is extensive beyond the scope of this work.

The conquest of territory in Africa raged from roughly 1885 to 1905. European leaders held the Berlin Conference in 1885 and, thereafter, began to “scramble” for African colonies. These European conquests in Africa included ruthless killings. The horrific slaughters were perpetuated by recent inventions such as the automatic machine gun.²⁸ England proclaimed dominance in Nigeria following years of campaigns to subdue, or ‘pacify,’ indigenous Africans. In the years following the conquests, and fully ‘realized’ in the 1920s, Europeans saw money as the savior of African woes.²⁹ The money needed to ‘save’ Africans would ultimately come from them and destroy them.³⁰ Davidson notes that “African men were made to pay taxes in money they could get only if they worked for wages; that is, only if they worked for Europeans.”³¹ This salvation by monetary gains was a hoax aimed at making sure that “taxes paid the colonial government. They also forced Africans into the labour pool.”³² It is important to note that taxes were a very heavy, unwelcome burden on Nigerians. Taxation and cash crops

²⁷ C. L. Brown, "The Origins of 'Legitimate Commerce,'" Research Gate, January 2011, accessed November 26, 2018, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/290765032_The_origins_of_'legitimate_commerce'.

²⁸ Basil Davidson, *Modern Africa: A Social and Political History*, 2nd ed., (London: Longman, 1989), p. 5-8.

²⁹ Davidson, 1989, p. 8-10.

³⁰ Richard J. Reid, *A History of Modern Africa: 1800 to the Present*, 2nd ed., (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), p. 193-195.

³¹ Davidson, 1989, p. 17.

³² Davidson, 1989, p. 17.

are two forms of monetary enslavement that European powers pursued, the latter of which the current presence of Western hegemony is very much inclined to retain.

Before engaging further into the history of colonial African events, a distinction must be made between Direct and Indirect Rule. The former was not officially an aspect of the Nigerian colonial system during the time in question. However, this is not to discredit the influence that Direct Rule had on Nigeria and on the British Empire. Naseemullah and Staniland recognize that there is a spectrum of Indirect Rule; some places were freer from oppression (Suzerain), some recognized as a hybrid of colonial and indigenous rule and some more directly controlled by colonial administrations (de jure). As the spectrum moves from Suzerain to de jure, the level of direct colonial interference through violence and coercive force increases.³³ The authors also note that each of these systems could coexist in colonial governance by indication that the British had a hybrid system in India but de jure methods of trade with the British East India company.³⁴ The system in Nigeria was a hybrid that would, as spectrums allow, be more Suzerain and more de jure at times.³⁵ Nigeria was often a “hybrid” of colonial rule because the colonial government shared “authority with social actors, in overlapping spheres of social control and coercion,” and because “titular rulers” were less willing than the British felt necessary “to fully deploy a monopoly of force.”³⁶ Captain John Cook, colonial administrator in Nigeria in November 1929, told the Aba Commission of Inquiry that there was no undisputed member of Oloko who could be called the “natural ruler.”³⁷

³³ Adnan Naseemullah and Paul Staniland, “Indirect Rule and Varieties of Governance,” *Governance: An International Journal of Policy, Administration, and Institutions* 29, no. 1, (January 2016), p. 17.

³⁴ Naseemullah and Staniland, p. 21.

³⁵ Afigbo, p. 1.

³⁶ Naseemullah and Staniland, p. 17.

³⁷ Aba Commission of Inquiry, p. 8, para. 114-117.

More to this point of Indirect vs Direct: Direct Rule was “preoccupied with the shaping of elite preferences” while Indirect Rule “aimed to shape popular preferences.”³⁸ Indirect Rule did not try to assimilate local elites to become “clones of Western modernity,” but rather influenced the elites to become familiar with Western ideals and implement them on their own as people of an existing polity.³⁹ British Indirect Rule in Nigeria was designed and solidified, often violently, as a response to calls for self-rule while retaining political, racial and economic hegemony. Different levels of Indirect Rule were used at different times, and these changes can be illustrated by studying the Women’s War of 1929. Indirect Rule was used because it offered more leniency for the British. Oppressing Nigeria, Africa, India and other colonies with overwhelming force was not feasible for the tiny island empire. Therefore, different systems had to be used at different times, and in Nigeria, Indirect Rule was favored over Direct Rule for a variety of reasons. Some of these reasons will be explained and the historical circumstances surrounding them will be explored. It is, however, more important to remember that Indirect Rule played a large part in shaping the society, culture and economy of independent Nigeria than it is to argue why the British favored Indirect over Direct Rule. Violent, coercive governments were common in independent Nigeria, as seen by the many different civilian and military governments since independence in 1960. The use of these violent governments and transitions of power stemmed from the violence and oppression the British introduced through Indirect Rule.

Indirect Rule was a system of colonial governance in the whole of Nigeria, but different regions received different applications of the administration. Frederick J. D. Lugard is known as

³⁸ Mahmood Mamdani, “Making Sense of Political Violence in Post-Colonial Africa,” in *War and Peace in the 20th Century and Beyond*, 1st ed., edited by Geir Lundestad and Olav Njølstad (World Scientific Pub Co Inc, March 15 2003), p. 137.

³⁹ Mamdani, p. 137.

the primary architect for redesigning British policy that would eventually be known as Indirect Rule in Nigeria. Implemented during the first few years of the twentieth century, Indirect Rule began in Northern Nigeria, which Lugard regarded widely as a success. Since the Fulani of Northern Nigeria, who were “relative newcomers to political power,”⁴⁰ were, in Lugard’s view, “more capable of rule than the indigenous races”⁴¹ of Southeastern Nigeria, the British felt the need to forcefully extend colonial rule south. Through this understanding, Lugard set up the future of Nigerian power politics by favoring the North as the more acceptable region. Beyond being a bureaucrat and colonial administrator, Lugard was also a field commander who had waged war on the indigenous populations of Burma, Afghanistan and Sudan. Lugard rationalized that the successes of Indirect Rule in South Asia and Northern Nigeria, places which had been accustomed to strict political and social hierarchies, would be just as significant and desirable in Southern Nigeria.⁴² However, he failed to realize, or even to consider, that the Igbo people of Southeastern Nigeria were not accustomed to a strict hierarchical rule, such as that which Lugard presented.⁴³

Though the Igbo people had been politically self-sufficient for generations, Lugard decided that “the subject races of Africa are not yet able to stand alone, and that it would not conduce to the happiness of the vast bulk of people- for whose welfare the controlling Power is trustee- that the attempt should be made.”⁴⁴ It is through this British understanding of African inferiority that Indirect Rule was created for Southern Nigeria. Lugard had little respect for the indigenous populations or their political systems.⁴⁵ Indirect Rule allowed for a variety of social

⁴⁰ Reid, p. 170.

⁴¹ Lugard, p. 577.

⁴² Lugard, p. 578.

⁴³ Afigbo, p. 157.

⁴⁴ Lugard, p. 577.

⁴⁵ Karen E. Fields, *Revival and Rebellion in Central Colonial Africa*, (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1997), p. 29.

and economic measures to control Nigeria. The use of a head tax as opposed to a land tax is clear because of the communal use of land. The British would not have been able to successfully apply taxes if the land was taxed. Therefore, the head tax was used.⁴⁶ The Warrant Chief system will be explored, but it should be noted that Warrant Chiefs were not made into property positions. Therefore, they did not receive rights to all the land they ‘ruled.’ They were put in place to serve as the limbs of the colonial regime which meant to tax and control indigenous populations; they did not become codified significant land owners as happened with the Zamindars in India.

Lugard’s model of Indirect Rule in the South created a Native Administration, headed by a Warrant Chief. The Warrant Chief was different than the ‘emir,’ a title given to ‘natural’ rulers in the North. The British exploited the existence of emirs to solidify their position in the North. In the South, however, the colonizers had to create the Warrant Chief as a new position of political and social power. Warrant Chiefs ruled an area which was divided into different sectors. These sectors were under the control of tax collecting ‘Headmen’ who brought taxes back to the Native Treasury, which, oddly enough, also served as a prison for indigenous Africans.⁴⁷ This model will be contrasted to Igbo social, political and cultural norms contemporary to the imposition of Indirect Rule.

Lugard’s model seemed to be politically organized to recreate monarchy. Fields, a sociologist, recognizes that British were interested in Africa as long as their goals could be achieved cheaply. In reality, “money was the root of the strategy.”⁴⁸ British monetary rule

⁴⁶ Aba Commission of Inquiry, p. 5-6, para. 51-88, Captain Cook explains that the British officials would count people individually, count goats and yams and would count compounds to make estimates to the amount of people there. Responses to inquiries over taxes and counting is relatively unclear in certain aspects, such as the counting of yams and goats. While these two commodities may have been factored into taxation, but there is no mention of taxing someone based on a measurement of land holdings.

⁴⁷ Lugard, p. 578.

⁴⁸ Fields, p. 28.

began by the people giving their taxes to a village headman who was assisted by British officials, who then gives the designated proportion to the Native Treasury and the rest is delivered to the Colonial Revenue.⁴⁹ So, in reality, the political system designed by Lugard to control Nigeria was invested in supplementing British hegemony through economic constraints onto the indigenous populations. This was by no means an accident either, the tax was “in a sense, the basis of the whole system.”⁵⁰

The indigenous chiefs were also meant to be an “integral part of the machinery of the administration.” The facade was that chiefs and the British were conceived of as complementary and, supposedly, equals.⁵¹ Regardless of whether or not chiefs were treated as equals by their British counterparts, the chief I will be looking at, Okugo of Oloko, saw himself as equal to the British because of his extension of power over the village by his association with the British.⁵² Okugo believed himself an integral part of the colonial administration and the people of his village saw him as aligned with and encumbered enough by British customs to represent a problem of colonialism and Indirect Rule.⁵³ Another key aspect to Lugard’s system was the idea of a ruling class who would learn from the British then return to their village and instill all the ‘advancements’ of Western Society.⁵⁴ Lugard, and other Western elites, saw this as applicable to all peoples, thereby superseding the notion that Africans in Southeast Nigeria had “evolved a social system of their own” that “must be studied by the Resident and his staff.”⁵⁵ It seems that

⁴⁹ Lugard, p. 578.

⁵⁰ Lugard, p. 579.

⁵¹ Lugard, p. 580.

⁵² Aba Commission of Inquiry, p. 32, para. 499. Okugo calls himself Warrant Chief and that the British recognized him as chief. He mentions in paragraph 500 on page 32 that he “was an ordinary man” before the British, obviously indicating that a change has happened in his social status amongst his villagers and colonial administrators.

⁵³ Nina Emma Mba, *Nigerian Women Mobilized: Women’s Political Activity in Southern Nigeria, 1900-1965*, (Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, 1982), p. 87-91.

⁵⁴ Lugard, p. 582.

⁵⁵ Lugard, p. 582.

the freedom, mobility and individuality promised to Southeastern Nigerians and their chiefs was less significant than ensuring that the “civilizing mission” would continue and the money from the colony would fund the mission while also having a surplus to go to the Colonial Revenue.

Indirect Rule was facilitated by using indigenous men who became Warrant Chiefs through British appointment. The creation of the Warrant Chiefs under British rule has been well documented by Adiele Eberechukwu Afigbo. Afigbo was a Nigerian historian of African, specifically Igbo, culture and politics. *The Warrant Chiefs* is a monograph detailing the creation, use and effects of the Warrant Chief system in Nigeria. His work centers around the idea that Warrant Chiefs corrupted Igbo culture and politics because they were so far removed from the norm.⁵⁶ In short, the Warrant Chief system was created out of the ‘successes’ of Native Courts in Northern Nigeria during the late nineteenth century.⁵⁷ Warrant Chiefs were members of the Native Courts as their primary occupation⁵⁸ and would play a role of not being too much or too little involved in the day to day processes of the Native Courts.⁵⁹ This dynamic extended to Europeans who could control the indigenous, but remained sovereign enough to allow for the system not to be “dominated by the presence of a European.”⁶⁰

In reality, Lugard was not searching for harmony to arise between the Warrant Chief selection process and European ideals. Afigbo argued that Lugard was, however, in search of eager indigenous peoples who were willing to serve the British.⁶¹ Pre-colonial Igbo society had been communal and the use of strict hierarchies, as was used in Northern Nigeria, was a radical

⁵⁶ Afigbo, p. 1-3.

⁵⁷ Afigbo, p. 54 and 118.

⁵⁸ Afigbo, p.37.

⁵⁹ Afigbo, p. 132.

⁶⁰ Afigbo, p. 132.

⁶¹ Afigbo, p. 60, and see Aba Commission of Inquiry, p. 27, para. 391 for Nwanyeruwa telling the commission that Okugo was a regular, ordinary man before the British came. This point is stressed many times throughout the entirety of the *Notes of Evidence* by male and female Africans as well as male English officials.

change to the Igbo social structure. Indirect Rule could have been implemented with less violence if chiefs were already present in Igboland, but, since they were not, the creation of the Warrant Chiefs was the British attempt to rule without creating massive social upheaval. Rather than rule directly and face direct backlash from the population, the Warrant Chiefs were used as a barrier for the British to maintain their power positions while dealing with problems without being on the frontline.

Okugo was used by the British to further consolidate their power in the region. While he was eager to serve the British, they ultimately blamed him for the problems and protests in the area. He converted to Christianity, passed by a number of possible ‘successors’ to pre-colonial positions of power and claimed that he paid “from [his] own pocket the tax of men and grown up boys who could not afford to pay their own tax.”⁶² So, he is expressing his desire, at personal expense, to maintain the tax system and the socio-cultural changes the British brought. Okugo was an ordinary man, he was far removed from any conception of being a successor to any sort of power position. His support of the British colonial regime is the only logical conclusion as to why he ascertained the position of Warrant Chief. By the end of the events, Okugo was jailed and blamed for trying to tax the women. Okugo’s trial was moved forward and expedited to serve the interest of quieting the women; the British made him the problem, rather than investigation whether or not the system was inevitably going to cause corruption.⁶³

Afigbo emphasized that Lugard was in denial about how successful his system had been. Labeled as an autocrat determined to make Nigeria a “one-man show,” he favored “praising to informed and objective criticism.”⁶⁴ A lack of desire to act on any problems in the

⁶² Aba Commission of Inquiry, p. 33, para. 532.

⁶³ Aba Commission of Inquiry, p. 984, para. 18944, and p. 992, para. 19008-19018.

⁶⁴ Afigbo, p. 164.

Warrant Chief system eventually led to cultural and administrative problems. The former will be addressed throughout the chapter; the latter is in relation to the corruption that spread from the system. Afigbo writes that “all the chiefs and court staff were corrupt, the people were being badly oppressed under the system and the court clerk had become the lord of all he could survey.”⁶⁵ This technical corruption of the operation of the Warrant Chief system most led to initial incidents of the Women’s War.⁶⁶

Through Indirect Rule, the British used ordinary men, such as Okugo, the Warrant Chief who began the reactions that lead to the Women’s War,⁶⁷ to consolidate their own power, as foreigners, over a local host-community. These men-turned-chiefs were sympathetic to British ideals⁶⁸ and saw themselves as community leaders who must be socially and economically respected. The British creation of these chiefs was a new invention in Igboland, one that claimed to be using indigenous ‘tradition’ in conjunction with colonial policy. This system, however, was really just a new way of conquering through false dialogues of acceptance.⁶⁹ The Women’s War, therefore, is significant as a reaction to the creation of new British political institutions and cultures in Nigeria to replace, rather than supplement, those that had already existed.

The Women’s War, or *Ogu Umunwaanyi*,⁷⁰ of 1929 took place across many provinces and communities: Oloko, Umuahia, Ayaba, Obowo, Okigwi, Alayi, Owerri and Aba to name a

⁶⁵ Afigbo, p. 166.

⁶⁶ Aba Commission of Inquiry, p. 992, para. 19015, this paragraph will be addressed later, but it deals with the British blaming Okugo for coming up with the taxing and claimed to have nothing to do with it: that he acted on his own free will to “oppress the people and use the position of Warrant Chief to make himself comfortable at the expense of his town.”

⁶⁷ Aba Commission of Inquiry, p. 32-39, para. 494-660. Okugo’s extensive testimony details the events that began the Women’s War, his rise to Warrant Chief and the intimate interactions he had with District Officers and colonial administrators.

⁶⁸ Basil Davidson, writer and narrator, “The Magnificent Cake,” in *Africa: A Voyage of Discovery with Basil Davidson*, Channel 4, 1984, this documentary by Davidson is highly acclaimed and in this episode he presents the notion that Africans would help the English create fake history to help solidify colonial rule through historical “legitimacy” often in hopes of rewards from the British.

⁶⁹ Afigbo, p. 4.

⁷⁰ Matera, Bastian and Kent, p. 2.

few.⁷¹ The conflict met its pinnacle in December when over fifty women died from British officials and soldiers who were trying to quiet the “Aba Riots.”⁷² Nwanyeruwa, a woman, began the war when she was confronted by Emeruwa, a man. Okugo, the Warrant Chief of Oloko, sent Emeruwa to count the women, animals and men of the village. They engaged in a physical altercation after Nwanyeruwa demanded to not be counted because she was certain it would be for the purpose of taxing her. When Emeruwa retreated to Okugo’s compound, Nwanyeruwa went to the women of her village to “sit on” Okugo; the women also sat on Emeruwa, but primarily Okugo because he had more authority and liability than Emeruwa. Other villages began to hear of the incident and more women came in to support the cause against Okugo.⁷³

Sitting on a man, or waging war on him, is the act of using song and dance as well as minor property damage and mild physical assault as a way of expressing grievance; sitting on a man is not an overtly violent affair to merit the British reaction against the women.⁷⁴ Warrant Chiefs who were sat on had to “give up their caps” and assure the women that they would not be taxed to bring an end to the disgrace brought by the women.⁷⁵ The cap was a symbol of the extension of British rule through African men, cap bearers would collect taxes and create policy. The war lasted through November and December as women went from town to town taking caps and attacking, often burning, Native Courts. By the end of 1929, over fifty women had been killed and the British made the women return the caps of the unseated Warrant Chiefs.⁷⁶

⁷¹ Aba Commission of Inquiry, p. 1, para. 7, these are some of the locations the commission visited or inquired about.

⁷² The distinction between Aba Riots and Women’s War has been a significant controversy in academia and Judith Van Allen’s work gives insightful details on the differences between the terms, Van Allen, 1997.

⁷³ Matera, Bastian and Kent, p. 136-139, and Aba Commission of Inquiry, p. 24-26, para. 363-365.

⁷⁴ Van Allen, 1997, p. 540.

⁷⁵ Van Allen, 1997, p. 543.

⁷⁶ Caps were sometimes given back to the chiefs themselves and sometimes to the British colonial officials, see Aba Commission of Inquiry, p. 984, para. 18944.

The women's demonstrations in 1929 were extended through professional academia following the events. Distinction between the 'Aba Riot' and 'Women's War' of 1929 has been a critical junction for understanding the historical phenomenon. Judith Van Allen presents the idea that using the term 'Aba Riots' made the women invisible.⁷⁷ They were far from it, by engaging in movements covering over 6,000 square miles and passing by over 2 million Igbo men and women.⁷⁸ The history of language of the term 'Aba Riots' has clearly been given a meaning to reduce the agency of women and bolster the fear that colonial uprisings can cause. Van Allen notes that in the end, the British won the Women's War, killing fifty-three and losing none of their own, and they reaped the linguistic, historical benefits for a while.⁷⁹

Scholars have explained the causes of the Women's War from a variety of perspectives. For example, Matera, Bastian, Kent, Mba, and Onwuteaka saw it as a reaction to the diminishing economic status of women.⁸⁰ Matera, Bastian and Kent, however, also saw it as a reaction to the cultural shifts imposed by the British.⁸¹ Matera, Bastian and Kent, as well as their predecessor Van Allen, consider and offer some of the most comprehensive and complex issues and results of the Women's War. Matera, Bastian and Kent mention that "the political and economic factors that gave rise to the *Ogu Umunwaanyi* cannot be separated from Igbo and other southeastern social systems, which were being transformed by and reacting to their engagement with the tenets of colonial, western society."⁸² This comes as a reaction to thinking in the 1970s. The decades preceding the 1960s and 1970s saw the "Aba Riots" as a naked, lawless group of

⁷⁷ Van Allen, 1976, p. 59.

⁷⁸ Van Allen, 1976, p. 60.

⁷⁹ Van Allen, 1976, p. 60.

⁸⁰ See Matera, Bastian and Kent as well as Mba, p. 90, and J. C. Onwuteaka, "The Aba Riot of 1929 and its relation to the System of Indirect Rule," *The Nigerian Journal of Economic and Social Studies*, (November 1965), p. 274.

⁸¹ Matera, Bastian and Kent, p. 6.

⁸² Matera, Bastian and Kent, p. 6.

women trying to savagely attack the British.⁸³ Perham shows a similarity to this thinking and also that of Matera, Bastian and Kent by noting “the women were far more interested in destroying the native courts and mobbing the warrant chiefs than in looting.”⁸⁴ Perham is then recognizing the political ambition of the women as greater than some force of evil savagery, but her language still connects to the hostility many British officials felt towards the women. Perham wrote a biography of Lugard and, as his contemporary, was involved in colonial administration and writing history on Africa for an imperial British audience. She, clearly, disconnects from Van Allen, who shared a view similar to that of the three authors, Matera, Bastian and Kent, aforementioned.

Matera, Bastian and Kent argue that the “women were not so much targeting any one group as they were engaged in a difficult and dangerous cosmological maneuver, trying to set their world aright by shifting the balance of all men’s relations to women.”⁸⁵ The Igbo connection between life, religion, economics and politics is extremely complex and it is a complexity that was disregarded by colonial powers. Matera, Bastian and Kent maintain that this is still disregarded by Western elites who dissect Nigeria to study it even now.⁸⁶ The cosmological movements engaged by the women of 1929, and the reactions by the contemporary British, showed that the colonial regime did not sufficiently comprehend the complexity of Igbo life and values. This is largely in part because the Western model of political authority, private property and gendered society did not allow for considerations of communal relationships that

⁸³ Matera, Bastian and Kent, p. 51-52.

⁸⁴ Margery Perham, “The Aba Market Women’s Riot in Nigeria, 1929,” in *The African Reader: Colonial Africa*, edited by Wilfred Cartey and Martin Kilson (New York: Random House, 1970), p. 166.

⁸⁵ Matera, Bastian and Kent, p. 236.

⁸⁶ Matera, Bastian and Kent, p. 45.

the Igbo presented. Indirect Rule was the mechanism that attempted to change Igbo political economic culture and gender norms.

Economics played an integral part for Nigerian women in resisting Indirect Rule in Southeastern Nigeria. Nigerian women retaliated against the imposition of colonial monetary shackling and efforts to prevent taxes on women through the so-called “Aba Riots of 1929” were successful. The immediate main goal of the Women’s War, preventing the taxes on women, was successful and the powers of the Warrant Chiefs were “dismantled.”⁸⁷ However, these women were not just reacting to being taxed or to losing their share in the market. Drawing on the arguments of Matera, Bastian and Kent, the *Ogu Umunwaanyi* was really a reaction against the idea of Western imposition of power and culture, mostly through reacting against Indirect Rule. The women exposed that the British were not truly trying to create a better Nigeria through mutually beneficial assistance, but, rather, that they were instilling their culture and beliefs while maintaining the illusion of keeping indigenous beliefs.

This British colonial system contrasts with the Igbo political and social systems that had preceded it. Nothing truly formed a Western modeled ‘state’ in Igbo heritage;⁸⁸ claims to sovereign plots of land were not explicitly divided up based on words written in treaties. Divided land in Igbo societies was based around use and religion, not entitlements. Igbo culture was mostly formed by shared languages and territory, and what could be named as politics was not centralized like the British creation, but, rather, as Van Allen emphasized, Igbo politics centered around community discussion.⁸⁹ For example, rather than having a constant standing

⁸⁷ Matera, Bastian and Kent, p. 238.

⁸⁸ In one of the early testimonies of the Aba Commission of Inquiry, a female African surprised the Chairman when she told him that she still lived in her father’s house though he was dead, Aba Commission of Inquiry, p. 20, para. 263.

⁸⁹ Van Allen, 1997, p. 537.

governmental institution, such as Parliament or a Native Court, traditional Igbo politics “formed ‘village groups’ which came together for limited ritual and jural purposes.”⁹⁰

As mentioned before, Matera, Bastian and Kent highlight the notion that the war was a reaction by women to an opposing political system by writing that different spheres of society, such as religion, politics and economy, cannot be separated for study and utilize each other in the Nigerian experience.⁹¹ The system of Indirect Rule upset the preceding system of community and discussion. The use of increasingly secularized taxation, political structure and economic change was a frustrating and confusing change for Igbo culture. This shift in political power as represented in a physical place, along with a social context, also changed political culture of the Igbo and of Nigerian politics at large. The women of the Women’s War created a political culture of resistance to centralizing authority which was met with a counter-political culture of the Nigeria state meeting resistance with violence.⁹²

The new system of Indirect Rule not only disrupted the political realm, but also social, economic, political and cultural gender structures. Igbo women were directly and indirectly affected by the new ideas and systems the British presented. In pre-colonial Igbo society “for women as well as for men, status was largely achieved, not ascribed.”⁹³ Van Allen emphasized that wisdom and a sense of community prevailed over age and wealth as indicators of stature.⁹⁴ Women and men were part of a political realm that was not defined solely by difference. Discussion until “mutual agreement was reached”⁹⁵ allowed for fluid politics that were much more gender inclusive than the British system.

⁹⁰ Van Allen, 1997, p. 537.

⁹¹ Matera, Bastian and Kent, p. 6.

⁹² The topic of how this violence from continued throughout the early independent era into the present day is explored in chapters II and III.

⁹³ Van Allen, 1997, p. 538.

⁹⁴ Van Allen, 1997, p. 538.

⁹⁵ Van Allen, 1997, p. 537.

Political affiliation between men and women was much more balanced in Igbo politics, constituting a “dual-sex political system.”⁹⁶ This dual-sex system is important because it reveals that “each sex manages its own affairs.”⁹⁷ In terms of gendered politics, rather than being a defining part of political participation as it was in British politics, being a man in Igbo politics only allowed for political representation, not political dominance. Dual-sex politics was challenged heavily under Indirect Rule. Dual-sex did not, however, provide women with instant access to political rights. Based on male ability to acquire wealth, men had “a head start and lifelong advantage over women.”⁹⁸ This was in the total scheme of politics, but in female politics, which operated within, but also largely outside of, male political structures, women were able to rise or fall in status regardless of their husband’s movement.⁹⁹ These separate gender spheres of politics would overlap sometimes, and women could make rules that affected men, showcasing the dual-sex system.¹⁰⁰

These aspects of gender relations in politics in conjunction with the fact that the women of the Women’s War of 1929 ““have no special leaders”” and that ““if any woman had anything to say in connection with the disturbances, she came forward with it””¹⁰¹ reveal the tension brought on by the British, who both directly and indirectly advocated for a greater level of patriarchy than was present in pre-colonial Igbo society. The idea of Nigerian female determination to join the British political process emerged as a strategy to reacquire their freedom that was once ensured to them before British rule. Gender exclusive politics was

⁹⁶ K. C. Okonjo, “The Dual Sex Political System in Operation: Igbo Women and Community Politics in Mid-Western Nigeria,” in *Women in Africa: Studies in Social and Economic Change*, edited by Nancy J. Hafkin and Edna G. Bay (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976).

⁹⁷ Okonjo, p. 45.

⁹⁸ Van Allen, 1976, p. 68.

⁹⁹ Van Allen, 1976, p. 67-68.

¹⁰⁰ Van Allen, 1976, p. 69.

¹⁰¹ Mba, p. 83.

something that had defined Western, especially Anglo-Saxon, politics for hundreds of years. Regardless of the right to vote, which, ironically, came about around in Britain just a few years before the Women's War, women in the Western world had been largely discouraged or directly excluded from politics. Igbo culture was much more progressive than the British colonial model.

The political ramifications of Indirect Rule were not only the exclusion of the people at large, but also the direct exclusion of women from the political process. Korieh argues the division of men and women in Igbo politics was a direct tactic used by the British to make sure their systems could be implemented with greater ease.¹⁰² They did this by reorganizing local politics to use "divide-and-rule tactics" to curb "the effectiveness of Igbo general assemblies and generally eliminated women's participation in them."¹⁰³ To make a more efficient point, the British did not so much want division between the two sexes, but rather the exclusion of one. The Warrant Chief system led to the Women's War which "was primarily a movement of women to protect their economic and political interests, which were endangered by taxation, the economic crisis, and the actions of the Warrant Chiefs."¹⁰⁴

Nina Mba explains that the women of 1929 fought the Warrant Chief system largely on the grounds of exclusion. She notes that "the women expressed their hope that the good relations between them and the government be restored."¹⁰⁵ The women were reacting against the actors of the system, the Warrant Chiefs, rather than simply reaction to the system of British colonialism itself. The women engaged a strategy of creating distinction between the colonial government and the Warrant Chiefs without forgetting that the chiefs were established through

¹⁰² Chima J. Korieh, "The Invisible Farmer? Women, Gender, and Colonial Agricultural Policy in the Igbo Region of Nigeria, c. 1913-1954," in *African Economic History*, no. 29, (Madison: African Studies Program at the University of Wisconsin, 2001), p. 120-121, https://www.jstor.org/stable/3601709?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents.

¹⁰³ Korieh, p. 120-121.

¹⁰⁴ Mba, p. 90.

¹⁰⁵ Mba, p. 89.

Indirect Rule. Mba further notes “the manifest intelligence of the women suggests rather that this approach was a strategy employed by the women to please the government.”¹⁰⁶ The women, therefore, tried to gain favor with the government to both get rid of current chiefs and demand “that women should have a say in selecting” new chiefs in their respective villages.¹⁰⁷

Many women involved with the women’s war wanted societal and economic division to maintain their relative pre-colonial equality; they especially wanted the men out of the local markets.¹⁰⁸ British installation of “modern markets”¹⁰⁹ was to reinforce the patriarchal notions of the British system and impose it onto the Nigerian economy and politics. Igbo men were generally involved with long distance trading. This long-distance trading was more profitable which often helped men achieve higher statuses than women.¹¹⁰ The British surely would have had more interaction with the men and their long-distance trading than with the women in their local markets. This reason surely helped perpetuate the British stereotype that men were more necessary to Igbo society than women.

The women wanted to retain this social division because they thought that men had “forgotten the importance of women’s work.”¹¹¹ Bastian argues that the women of *Ogu Umunwaanyi* were not only against the colonial administration, but also their heavy influence on African men. They constituted a “determined effort on the part of southeastern Nigerian women to seize and hold the attention of a set of masculine persons, both African and European.”¹¹² Therefore, the women were not only sitting on Warrant Chiefs and colonialists,

¹⁰⁶ Mba, p. 89.

¹⁰⁷ Mba, p. 88.

¹⁰⁸ Misty Bastian, “Vultures of the Marketplace,” in *Women in African Colonial Histories*, edited by Jean Allman, Susan Geiger and Nakanyike Musisi (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), p. 266.

¹⁰⁹ Bastian, 2002, p. 266.

¹¹⁰ Van Allen, 1976, p. 67.

¹¹¹ Bastian, 2002, p. 269.

¹¹² Bastian, 2002, p. 269.

but also on the indigenous men who sought to accept British patriarchal and culturally destructive ideals, such as Emeruwa.¹¹³

It is crucial to understand that “to implement indirect rule through the systems of warrant chiefs, the British turned to local, masculine institutions and authority, those being the only types the colonialists generally recognized, unless confronted with what was an obviously female ruler.”¹¹⁴ Historian Nwando Achebe “argues that to discuss political power in pre-colonial Igbo societies without taking into account the role of the spiritual world in earthly matters does not adequately address the ways in which power actually worked.”¹¹⁵ British Indirect Rule brought changes to gendered politics and gender relations; pre-colonial Igbo society saw reincarnation as gender fluid.¹¹⁶ This concept of reincarnation contrasts to the Anglo-Saxon model and the idea of gender fluidity is something that is still emerging in the West. According to Matera, Bastian and Kent, socially men and women were harmonious and physically equals, and both were crucial to maintaining the lifestyle and environment of pre-colonial Igboland. The main female deity, Agbala, which presided over harvest and fertility was replaced by God.¹¹⁷ This replacement began the trend of associating Chukwu, the main god, who was not humanized, with God and masculinity. These changes mark a significant shift in thinking, one that the Women’s War of 1929 attempted to combat. This is why the connection to the spiritual world is linked to female reproductivity as masters of the harvest, which in turn creates the importance and necessity of Nigeria women in all social aspects.

¹¹³ Emeruwa was a member of Nwanyeruwa’s family yet she physically responds to his attacks and summons others to sit on him. This moment is one example of showcasing the impact that colonial rule had on upsetting the socio-familial relations and bonds of Oloko, Aba Commission of Inquiry, p. 28, para. 395.

¹¹⁴ Matera, Bastian and Kent, p. 35.

¹¹⁵ Anene Ejikeme, “Review of *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings: Female Power and Authority in Northern Igboland, 1900-1960* by Nwando Achebe,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 40, no. 3 (African Studies Center: Boston University, 2007), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40034048>.

¹¹⁶ Matera, Bastian and Kent, p. 17.

¹¹⁷ Matera, Bastian and Kent, p. 43.

Ohandum was a multicultural women's organization that formed to promote the continuation of complementary gender relations. It was also a reaction to Indirect Rule and the Warrant Chiefs, as well as the patriarchal issues with the two.¹¹⁸ Men in Igbo society had little if any issue with women's organizations. Nwanyeruwa's husband Ojim, an Igbo male, in his testimony to the Aba Commission recounted that he did not try to stop or deny his villages' women's organizations. His response to "did you approve of your women going," was that he was "not a woman" and should not influence them.¹¹⁹ This multi-layered women's movement was not solely protesting taxation or lack of political representation, but through the connection of these, as well as with religion and social standing, the women represent a unified indigenous force reacting against the oppression of colonial culture.

The Women's War was a direct reaction against Western imposition of gender 'norms.' The *Ogu* "represented a serious attempt to ward off cataclysmic social death."¹²⁰ Pre-colonial life in Igboland was different than the life the British tried to construct, largely because of the division that it brought. Gendered division was only one of the many threats the British brought both consciously and unconsciously to Nigeria. In the Western model of politics, economy and society are individually studied. Indirect Rule in Nigeria, then, shows how this conception was brought to Nigeria and how it failed to create a coherent understanding of the indigenous people. Colonial administrators thought it would suffice to change the politics of Igboland without any changes to the economy or society. Further, they did not try to stop these methods of analysis for fear of being labeled as disloyal.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Matera, Bastian and Kent, p. 238.

¹¹⁹ Aba Commission, p. 78, para. 1568-1569.

¹²⁰ Matera, Bastian and Kent, p. 238.

¹²¹ Afigbo, p. 157-160.

The war, then, was not just a reaction to one or the other social aspect, but, rather, it was the women's reaction to all the elements of change brought by the Western model. Such was the way Igbo thinking was drawn. Many of the women involved had a much more holistic approach to understanding their changing world.¹²² This is not, however, to say that these women did not actively seek out one thing or another to protest at a time. The women's movements, also, "have not been anti-government as such, whether the government was colonial, semi-colonial, or independent."¹²³ Women were reacting against policy changes that were affecting their way of life. Through this thought, these women were not 'rioting,' as Perham stated, or protesting for their political or economic freedom, but they were protesting for their control over their own lives.

Fields notes that "any study of events in the past must reconstruct the horizon within which historical subject thought and acted."¹²⁴ For this reason, it is important to note that world economic collapse had begun during the time in which the Women's War occurred. Palm oil prices had dropped in 1927, and had reached a low in 1929.¹²⁵ The new taxation that came from Okugo and Emeruwa was, in part, a result of the economic down turn.¹²⁶ The economics did play a role in the actions of the women, but it did not define them. Ironically, without European interventions, perhaps local trading women would not have been affected by the Great Depression. It is well documented that the women of Southeastern Nigeria would help their husbands and sons pay taxes.¹²⁷ Through this understanding, women were not averse to paying taxes, though they clearly preferred not to, but they were averse to their importance being

¹²² Mba, p. 68-72.

¹²³ Mba, p. 68.

¹²⁴ Fields, p. 20.

¹²⁵ See table on falling palm oil prices in Afigbo, p. 239.

¹²⁶ Afigbo, p. 237-239

¹²⁷ Afigbo, p. 239.

overlooked. Fertility and mobility to the markets were two aspects of women's lives in Nigeria that would have been threatened by the new taxes.¹²⁸ So, again, the women were reacting to their way of life being interrupted rather than solely to economic change and imposition.

Vision was a large part of the women's war and remains a large part of Nigerian protest today. The act of being visible was significant to the Igbo women. Their use of nudity was something that was commonly accepted by the pre-colonial indigenous, but not by the British.¹²⁹ The British were taken back by the Igbo women's lack of clothing and linked it to savagery and political failure.¹³⁰ The indigenous Nigerians of the area recognized the use of nudity as a way of expressing grievance, but did not find it as a horrid link to savagery as did the British. The Women's War, which was meant to primarily be a publicly obnoxious display of anger, was waged by naked or semi-naked women. This retention of culture was one of the means employed to combat the British.

The Women's War is unique in that it was not necessarily successful, but it was also not a failure. The women did secure an immediate goal: taxation was not applied to them. Also, the Warrant Chief system which had been an unwelcome imposition was reconstructed. They did not, however, succeed in ridding Nigeria of Western influence. The levels of patriarchy the British brought remained after colonialism left.¹³¹ Western models of influencing and describing Nigeria remain in effect, though there has been some social progress to reinstate women as an integral part of Nigerian life, and not just in the home. Beyond the failures of the movement, it is interesting to note that the women used traditional methods to combat their enemy. Rather than

¹²⁸ See Matera, Bastian and Kent p. 119-126 for fertility and p. 22-25 for a discussion on the necessity of an uninterrupted, female dominated market.

¹²⁹ Matera, Bastian and Kent, p. 42.

¹³⁰ Matera, Bastian and Kent, p. 51-52.

¹³¹ Korieh, p. 117.

use guns and force, which the British were well accustomed to, they used traditional methods of song and dance to annoy the British and the Warrant Chiefs. They did, however, burn the Native Courts that were the symbolic, physical representation of what they were protesting against. Regardless, it is important to know that the women of the 1929 Women's War used traditional methods of "sitting on" the British and British affiliates.

Indirect Rule was constructed for Nigeria because of the social and economic situations that predated it. Religion, society, economics and culture were all entwined in Igboland; hierarchy of power was a relatively impossible concept. Money was not something that directly created status as it did in Britain. Community was also much more important for the Igbo. Indirect Rule was Britain's way of trying to cope with the different society they met. Use of violence was one method in which the British would force the Igbo to assimilate. Direct Rule was not used in Southeast Nigeria because of the lack of uniformity in cultures and power structures as well as the vast geographic distance of community organization. The British could not have implemented a system of strength and coercion in a place that had experienced little of it before colonial invasion. The model in place produced violence that the British used to solve problems when they arose. The Warrant Chief system allowed the British to come to certain areas, or wait for protestors to come to them, and then deal with them rather than oppression any revolutionary action before it began. Nigerian military governments have been frequented in the last five decades, and Indirect Rule was a major contributor to the cycle of violent coercion that persisted in independent Nigeria.

This chapter set up the historical context to a current phenomenon in Nigeria. Western imposition remains as it had since the beginning of the colonial era. Regardless of the amount of 'directness' of this imposition today, many continuities can be seen from the Women's War to

protests today. Women still utilized naked protests in the traditional manner of “sitting on” their offender.¹³² Women in Nigeria are still being killed by the military and engage in minor assaults, such as throwing rocks, during their protests, though it does sometimes turn slightly more violent, such as grabbing at the military’s weapons.¹³³ The chapters following this will analyze the use of military as a ‘Western’ means by showcasing the necessity of force to subdue uprisings in Nigeria. Further, it will be shown that Western institutions also fail to understand Nigerian culture because of the “dissection method.” This method is one which sets out to cut away a piece of data from the whole of Nigeria, analyze it on its own and in relation to similar pieces of data from “developed” countries, then use the analyzed data to create an explanation for “problems” in Nigeria. The lack of a wholistic approach when studying the “problems” of Nigeria is a problem and is an extension of the colonial mindset, if not colonial practice. I have studied different aspects of the Women’s War to find a more detailed explanation for each piece while keeping in mind that the whole is much more important than the parts. It is hard to escape the Western mindset of studying nation-state, but small reactions against it will eventually lead to academia rethinking the possibility of studying poverty and oppression.

¹³² Agabus Pwanagba, "Women Protest Nude, Attack Army for Searching Mysterious Pond in Plateau Community over Missing General", *Daily Post Nigeria*, September 21, 2018, <http://dailypost.ng/2018/09/21/women-protest-nude-attack-army-searching-mysterious-pond-plateau-community-missing-general/>.

¹³³ Pwanagba.

Chapter II

Reactions to Centralizing Power during the Crisis of Independence

This chapter will be discussing division of political and military power in Nigeria from the end of the colonial period through the end of 1970 and the suppression of Biafra. Nigeria gained independence in 1960, but the British had planned how to grant independence before it was obtained to help push Nigeria through to a peaceful, successful transition into a nation state. Independent Nigerian has had four republics, each being ended by a military coup and replaced by military control of the government for a time except the fourth which is currently in power. This chapter considers the influence of Indirect Rule on power concentration in Nigeria's post-independence governance, resistance to attempted centralization of power and changes of power. In many instances, as will be shown, there is no true 'centralized power' in Nigeria. Just as Indirect Rule had varying degrees of success in the North, East and West, each region also has certain powers that put it in and out of balance with the others.¹³⁴

While this chapter is certainly focused on a specific time period, it is also designed to investigate the theme of reactions to centralizing power of the government and military and the forced birth of a heterogeneous nation-state. Therefore, this is not simply a study of Nigerian history in the mid-twentieth century, but rather it is looking at how political, social, cultural and economic power was derived from Indirect Rule. More so, it is investigating how Indirect Rule influenced power relations and challenges to power in the context of the independent Nigerian state in general as well as specifically through studying the experience of Igbo women. Most of the sources used in this chapter refer to actors simply as 'the North' or 'the South' rather than 'the Northern elites' or 'the Southern rural population.' Some sources, when specifically

¹³⁴ Peters, p. 48-49.

referencing the colonial period, mention ‘the Northern emirs’ to directly address the ruling class just beneath the British, but this specification is not used when sources make large, sweeping arguments about the regions designed by the Richards Constitution. The Richards Constitution, drafted by the British in 1946 and implemented in 1947, created the tri-regional federation of the First Nigerian Republic, 1963-1966.

World War II weaponized much of the world, and North Africa was no exception.¹³⁵ The campaigns in North Africa against Rommel by the British used Nigerian and African troops and support to help defeat the Nazis.¹³⁶ This helped further expose Nigeria to Western forms of war and, more importantly, military power, rule and effectiveness of these power relationships. However, while World War II certainly influenced Nigeria’s eventual military governments, it cannot be the only explanation. Indirect Rule created many of the underlying cultural and political issues that gave rise to so many problems of post-independence Nigerian consolidations of power.

Independent Nigeria has been influenced by colonialism in a variety of ways. This chapter will serve to analyze more contemporary shifts in Nigerian politics and society by engaging with the concept of Indirect Rule and violence. One of the major effects of the 1929 Women’s War was a continuation of force and violence that had been prevalent during the conquest in the first two decades of the 1900s. Use of egregious, unrelenting force and industrial war was more commonplace in Europe than in Igboland, showcased by the mechanized warfare that horrified the world from 1914-1918. The women of Southeastern Nigeria faced

¹³⁵ Antony Beevor, *The Second World War*, (New York: Back Bay Books/ Little, Brown and Company, 2012), p. 174-186, and see Chinua Achebe, 2012, p. 44 on his assertion that World War II captivated the world’s, and Nigeria’s, attention coupled with the fact that he lived in ‘northern’ Africa though more correctly in Western Africa.

¹³⁶ Beevor, p. 174-179.

disproportionate levels of violence from the British in 1929, and this trend continued through the present day.¹³⁷ Further, this chapter will analyze the experiences and the vital role women played in the Biafran civil war. While there are similarities to the Women's War which will be noted, the two conflicts did have radical differences. Analyzing Igbo women and keeping them in context will revolve heavily around the Biafran Civil War and the excellent work done by Egodi Uchendu, Gloria Chuku, and Christie Achebe. These scholars showed that the women continued to remain a visual presence of resistance but also represent the ground level effects of Indirect Rule and the power relations that stemmed from it.

This analysis will deal with the different Nigerian governments during the 1950s and 1960s. Specifically looking at the First Republic's federation which lasted 1963 to 1966 and ended with the murder of President Nnamdi Azikiwe, this chapter assesses how levels of coercion and power centrality was influenced by British colonialism. This chapter will also analyze women's reactions to the government as well as against other forms of power and authority. The protesting women of the Women's War of 1929 engaged Warrant Chief Okugo of Oloko and the British colonial administrators in a variety of ways, but they also engaged Southeastern Nigerian men, companies and customs. For this reason, I will analyze the colonial, independent republic and military governments, but the women reacting outside of strictly a political realm are crucial to understanding how Indirect Rule shaped the culture of independent Nigeria. This chapter, then, will engage in Political Economic Development in a bidirectional method, both top-down and bottom-up. Further, this chapter is explicitly investigating the last decade of colonial rule, ending in 1960, in Nigeria as well as the decade of independence through the end of the Biafran Civil War in 1970.

¹³⁷ Matera, Bastian and Kent, and see Uchendu, p. 211.

Essentially, the goal, for the British, Nigerian elites and Nigerian people alike, of the 1950-1970 period was to create a stable, independent Nigeria. Many actors had different interpretations of what this meant, and these will be examined. However, an overarching argument, similar to that of the colonial period, is that Indirect Rule heavily influenced how the goals of the period would be met or prevented. The people of Southeastern Nigeria, which was known simply as the Eastern region during this time frame, had a different view of centralized power than did the Northerners.

Indirect Rule had a heavy hand in setting up some of these early issues of regionalism. For one, “Western education had been introduced and encouraged in the south by British missionaries” in efforts to make the Igbo more willing to follow British traditions and submit to rule.¹³⁸ These acts of the civilizing mission were more prominent in the South than the North “because of its Islamic tradition, had wanted its cultural values to remain unchanged.”¹³⁹ The South also had cultural values it wanted to protect, but since the North had pre-existing hierarchies that the South lacked, the British put more direct effort into shaping the lives of Southern Nigerians than those of Northern Nigerians. Pre-colonial Igbo religion was fundamentally different than Christianity in that it “reflected and exacerbated the chaos and even unknowability of social and political organization there.”¹⁴⁰ Igbo religion showed the complexity of life and was something that the British socio-political colonial system was incapable of cooperation. Drawing on works by historians focused on India, the British in the late 19th, early 20th century were directly involved with shaping the Hindu religion in India to

¹³⁸ Peters, p. 49, and see Peters’ tables 1, 2 and 3 which outline population compared to education in Nigeria. Essentially, in 1952, the South had 2.3 million students enrolled in primary school while the North had 185,484. By 1964, the North had 410,706 pupils in primary education to the South’s 2 million, but only 37 “first degree graduates,” while the South boasted 657.

¹³⁹ Peters, p. 49.

¹⁴⁰ Matera, Bastian and Kent, p. 50-51.

make it more understandable for themselves.¹⁴¹ Through this understanding of British involvement, it follows that the creation of new religious institutions and traditions came with British colonial domination in Africa. This domination ultimately resulted in the British pushing Western education onto their subjects. This does not mean to deny the idea that Africans actively sought out education, but more so enforces that the British created a system which mandated that Africans disown their ‘traditional’ cultures for the ‘modernity’ offered by the British.

Jimi Peters, political scientist currently working for the International Monetary Fund’s Family Association, notes that Indirect Rule would not have worked in the East or the West without “major amendments” to the society’s political structures.¹⁴² It is very clear that the British invested most of their efforts trying to shape the South to conform to Western ideals. This comes in a variety of observances from religious practices to economic functions and even as simply a category as dressing.¹⁴³ In the early colonial period of the 1910s and 1920s, the English attempted to heavily influence the South and, though it may not have changed completely, they certainly did have a significant impact in changing the culture. Much of this stemmed from the English desire to create and control through Indirect Rule.

Beyond the causes of Indirect Rule, the effects, again, were very severe for the political structuring of independent Nigeria. The British were determined to keep Nigeria in line though

¹⁴¹ Thomas R. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 26-40, and see Bernard S. Cohn, *An Anthropologist Among the Historians and Other Essays*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 632-682.

<http://ezproxy01.bard.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsacl&AN=edsacl.MIU0100000000000005101040&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

¹⁴² Peters, p. 49.

¹⁴³ Misty L. Bastian, “The Naked and the Nude,” from *Dirt, Undress, and Difference*, edited by Adeline Masquelier, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), and see an economic investigation and report organized by International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, *The Economic Development of Nigeria*, requested by the United Kingdom and Nigeria, (September 1954).

it was to become independent. For this reason, the British began the Minorities Commission in 1957 to assess whether Southern claims of Northern domination were true. The South feared domination of the North in political processes and requested the British investigate and divide the North into smaller territories. To their dismay, the British “decided not to divide the country into smaller units,” and the Southern Nigerians, elites as well as common people not aspiring to political power, saw it as “an attempt by the British to keep what they saw as a backward and pro-British North, big enough to dominate the country.”¹⁴⁴ This, coupled with the notions that the British had to force their culture into the East against violent reactions from the people,¹⁴⁵ shows that the creation and direction of Indirect Rule affected the creation of the independent state of Nigeria.

For the Igbo, decentralized power represented more of their pre-colonial political apparatus, notably that discussion and inclusion were welcomed, or at least had a place in politics. This hope for inclusion came in an odd way in that the South, notably the East, wanted further divisions of power¹⁴⁶ through the unification of Nigeria.¹⁴⁷ Essentially, the South wanted to create a unified Nigeria by creating more divisions in the federation. Greater divisions of power would produce greater local power and would be a key strategy in resisting Northern domination. The people of East and West colonial Nigeria did not agree on a strategy for a unified independent Nigeria, and the Northerners, who wanted to maintain the federation, outright decried it.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴ Peters, p. 52.

¹⁴⁵ Peters, p. 49.

¹⁴⁶ Peters, p. 52.

¹⁴⁷ Chinua Achebe, 2012, p. 51.

¹⁴⁸ Chinua Achebe, 2012, p. 51.

For the North, centralized power meant dominating the East and the West to ensure that they themselves were not dominated by the intellectual, economic superiority of the two.¹⁴⁹ Chinua Achebe gives personal attention to this matter, writing “Sir Ahmadu Bello,” the leading political figure of the North just before and when Nigeria became independent, “was able to control Northern Nigeria politically by feeding on the fears of the ruling emirs” that “the educationally disadvantaged North did not have as rich a source of Western-educated politicians to choose from as the South did.”¹⁵⁰ Many authors have commented that there was a constant Northern fear that the South had better education than the North and this would be used to overtake and dominate the North in government.¹⁵¹ This fear seems to have led to the forgeries of the 1962 and 1963 censuses.¹⁵²

The process of the British having and wanting Indirect Rule is not sufficient reason for understanding why Western education and missionaries were so present in the South and not the North. As was explored in the previous chapter, Igbo political and social society was quite different than that of Europe. Village communities engaged in public discussions and women represented a different yet complementary section of society. Igbo society had more complementary social parts than did English society with its strict hierarchies and social structure. This will be explored more later but will be noted upon now be engaging with the work done by Gloria Chuku and Egodì Uchendu. Chuku, a professor at University of Maryland, Baltimore County who attended the University of Nigeria for her PhD., worked to analyze the social and economic effects of colonialism and the changes and continuity of women’s roles in

¹⁴⁹ Peters, p. 50-51, and see Daniel C. Bach, “Managing a Plural Society: The Boomerang Effects of Nigerian Federalism,” *The Journal of Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 27, no. 2 (London: Frank Cass & Co. LTD., July 1989), p. 219-220.

¹⁵⁰ Chinua Achebe, 2012, p. 46.

¹⁵¹ Peters, p. 49, Bach, p. 219-220 for the North, and see Chinua Achebe, 2012, p. 44-47 shows that the North and the West were nervous of domination by “the Igbo elite,” p. 45.

¹⁵² Paul Nugent, *Africa: Since Independence*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 91-92.

Igbo society.¹⁵³ Uchendu, a history professor at the University of Nigeria, explored the efforts of the Igbo women of Anioma, just west of the Niger and, therefore, outside of Biafra. Her study shows that the Igbo women there were very connected to the women in Biafra and retained many of the same social and cultural values.¹⁵⁴

Education's influence can be shown through its impact on women traders and social hierarchy in the early to mid-twentieth century. Some of the women who could afford Western education became very invested in politics, such as Madam Rosemary Inyama who "was an active member of the NCNC women's wings" and "played a leading role in organizing women in [Ikot Ekpene and Uyo] to support and vote for NCNC candidates."¹⁵⁵ The NCNC was the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons, the Igbo political party that ruled the East during the First Republic. Western education, which was brought more to the South than to the North, directly affected the women and, in many cases, eventually influenced and impacted the creation and conduct of the independent Nigerian state. Chuku notes that Igbo men, at large, took more advantage of British initiative in colonial trade¹⁵⁶ and had better transportation to trade, and also that Western educated women were much more likely to find work than non-educated women.¹⁵⁷ Western educated or not, Chuku also notes that Igbo women in the early to mid-twentieth century never sacrificed their connection to the home, and "this explains why these women were and are still highly respected and honored in their society."¹⁵⁸

Uchendu's work shows that the Igbo women of Anioma, just west of the Niger River and outside of Biafra proper, not involved in any military or authority roles still displayed high levels

¹⁵³ Chuku.

¹⁵⁴ Uchendu, p. 209-221.

¹⁵⁵ Chuku, p. 199.

¹⁵⁶ I believe it is fair to argue that the British almost certainly favored men as traders over the women.

¹⁵⁷ Chuku, p. 200.

¹⁵⁸ Chuku, p. 201.

of action and visibility through movement into the North to help Igbo family members escape persecution.¹⁵⁹ She also notes that women joined the army and militia in support of the Biafran movement.¹⁶⁰ Women did not occupy frontline duties in any large or frequent capacity nor could they access the highest levels of military officers. They did, however, represent a similar complementary relationship to men, however, as the women of 1929 did. Uchendu exposes many reasons for why women joined the war, and Christie Achebe's psychological study of women in Biafra helps explain some of the underlying motives. Christie Achebe exposed that "the women were operating from a worldview that believes in personal reinvention and initiative to resolve issues" and that their world view was much in line with that of their ancestors in 1929.¹⁶¹

While these authors draw no direct relationship between the legacy of 1929 and the mentality of women involved in Biafra, at the least a connection can be made that the Igbo women of Nigeria held similar beliefs over time and this manifested in their ability to infiltrate and complement male society. Both show that the Igbo women had a connected mentality of motherhood, family and community. The Igbo women in and outside of Biafra engaged in risky trade, farming and operations to help the Biafran cause as well as satisfy their own, personal goals and needs. Christie Achebe's work, which will be explored in depth later, roots the connection between the mentality that Chuku discusses and investigates and the events that Uchendu reveals. The connections to family and trade preceded the English involvement in Igboland, but the women in the twentieth century were shaped by the new social, economic and political systems the British brought. Their reactions to systematic imposition of power comes

¹⁵⁹ Uchendu, p. 52.

¹⁶⁰ Uchendu, p. 120-123.

¹⁶¹ Christie Achebe, p. 805.

from a long cultural history of women being largely in control of their own destinies. The consciousness of Igbo women seems deep rooted, but their actions and social standings were influenced by the imposition of Indirect Rule.

Beyond this, following in the British view for the larger part of colonialism,¹⁶² Islam was seen as a relatively useful and successful model of governance that the British could change after the South had been subdued into a similar submission to hierarchy. In reality there was fierce protection over Muslim cultural values, and the chance for cultural change in the North did not occur. The British never changed their focus of the civilizing mission to the North because the South never fully conformed to accepting Indirect Rule and its hierarchies.¹⁶³ For this reason, Chinua Achebe gives a strong reason as to why the British so heavily favored the North. In a 1968 speech, Chinua Achebe said that

the British who had done precious little to create a spirit of common nationality in Nigeria during the fifty years they were in control, made certain on the eve of their departure that power went to that conservative element in the country which had played no part in the struggle for independence. This would ensure Nigeria's obedience even unto freedom.¹⁶⁴

The South, therefore, was not only a society that 'failed' to fit the contemporary Western model of governance, they also rejected and resisted it. The South proved to be a region that would not satisfy the hopes of the British and would not compromise their social and cultural composition to make British colonial administration easier. For this reason, the North was favored over the South as the region to dominate Nigerian politics. The British were determined, as Chinua Achebe notes in many of his works, not to emphasize unity precisely so they could emphasize hegemony. Regarding himself and his fellow writers, Chinua Achebe said the writer "found that

¹⁶² Metcalf, p. 138.

¹⁶³ Peters, p. 49.

¹⁶⁴ Chinua Achebe, "The Duty and Involvement of the African Writer," 1968, *Black Past*, February 09, 2019, https://www.blackpast.org/major_speeches/1968-chinua-achebe-duty-and-involvement-african-writer/.

the independence his country was supposed to have won was totally without content. The old white master was still in power.”¹⁶⁵

Rather than be regarded broadly as colonial power, the British creation of the regional system shows their maintenance of Indirect Rule through the creation of an Independent Nigeria. In this way, the British maintained their capacity to dominate the territory of Nigeria in a variety of ways; the North was under the British thumb while the South, though largely the East, remained hostile to conforming to British ideals of how government should be run in Nigeria. The legacy of Indirect Rule went beyond the creation of cultural, social and religious reforms, it was deeply integrated into the direct political culture and structure that governed recently independent Nigeria.

While Nigerian involvement was integral in shaping their destiny, the British were precise in their actions and attitudes for their colony. Chinua Achebe notes that

the British governed their colony of Nigeria with considerable care. There was a very highly competent cadre of government officials imbued with a high level of knowledge of how to run a country. This was not something that the British achieved only in Nigeria; they were able to manage this on a bigger scale in India and Australia. The British had experience of governing and doing it competently. I am not justifying colonialism. But it is important to face the fact that British colonies, more or less, were expertly run.¹⁶⁶

On the surface, this quote seems to challenge ideas that the colonial British flight from Nigeria was hasty. However, I do not believe that the deeper meaning of this quote agrees with that. It seems that the British were very good at running colonial governments through the expanse of the empire and succeeded in large areas such as India. I would agree that the British had a very strong sense of *how to govern in* empire, but this does not necessarily correlate to having a strong sense of *creating the ability to govern* in a new nation-state. Chinua Achebe writes, expanding

¹⁶⁵ Chinua Achebe, 1968.

¹⁶⁶ Chinua Achebe, 2012, p. 43.

on thoughts already presented by Peters, “by 1951 [the British] had divided the country into the Northern, Eastern, and Western Regions, with their own respective houses of assembly, to contain this rising threat” of “inter-ethnic tensions and posturing for power among the three main ethnic groups.”¹⁶⁷ This division kept the regions of the colony of Nigeria at relative peace with each other while all being dominated by the Crown.

It seems, then, the British were very capable of keeping ethnic tensions somewhat suppressed when they were the centralized power. Through different uses of Indirect Rule, the British were able to keep the three regions separate while keeping them in a coherent geographical territory mostly dominated by the North.¹⁶⁸ Indirect Rule had a hand in both helping to prevent ethnic, regional based conflict while also exacerbating it. In 1957, the lack of division of the North showed the British desire to maintain control over independent Nigeria; they kept the pro-British North completely intact to prevent power from being relocated to the South. The 1951 regional divisions, however, showed how Indirect Rule influenced the totality of Nigeria, rather than simply in one part as was explored in Chapter One. This means that Nigeria as a nation-state was influenced by Indirect Rule in a specific way of creating interior power struggles between the regions. Indirect Rule, therefore, was influential at two levels, the federal interregional level and at the local intraregional. So, while I agree with Chinua Achebe that the British were good at a type of governing, it must be acknowledged the British were subjectively good at governing through imperialism and not objectively good at governing because Nigeria fell into civil war less than a decade after independence because of the systematic issues created by the Richards Constitution.

¹⁶⁷ Chinua Achebe, 2012, p. 47.

¹⁶⁸ Uchendu, p. 4.

Indirect Rule influenced the cultures of Northern and Southern Nigeria differently. The use of different intensities of Indirect Rule created and helped consolidate the differences between the Northern Muslim and, recently converted, Southern Christian cultures. Indirect Rule allowed for there to be multitudes of cultures and political structures in Nigeria. This was allowed because the British acted as a sort of cleaning crew: once a problem would arise, a colonial decree could directly influence how that problem was to be solved. Following independence, however, this Western structure was ended, and Nigerians of different regions had to work together to find solutions. Therefore, Indirect Rule influenced Nigeria's inability to create satisfactory, or at least unchallengeable, compromises and it created the regional divisions of power that led to this inability.

The 1966 coup of the First Republic, organized by Igbo military elites to overthrow the Northern dominated government in favor of creating a unified Nigeria,¹⁶⁹ marks a moment of how Indirect Rule set up unified, federal Nigeria as a nation-state to fail. During the colonial era, the South, as Peters notes, often reacted violently against imposition of Western culture.¹⁷⁰ Following the end of the colonial era, Nigerians had no one to blame but their own government. Therefore, the Igbo led coup of 1966 can be seen as a continuation of an Igbo legacy of resistance. In reality, the Igbo officers who killed two of the North's most important leaders, four senior Northern soldiers, one of the West's politicians and two senior Western soldiers were not on a blood thirsty chase for power as was used to justify incredibly violent reactions from Northerners.¹⁷¹ Rather, they were reacting against a governing power determined to centralize power outside of Igbo influence or input, much as they had been in the colonial era. It is

¹⁶⁹ Chinua Achebe, 2012, p. 51, the NPC (the Northern party) dominated the Parliament and the majority of the government structure, but the President was of the NCNC (Eastern party).

¹⁷⁰ Peters, p. 49.

¹⁷¹ Uchendu, p. 51-55.

impossible to deny the ethnic component to the Eastern coup and the counter-coup by the North leading to Biafra's secession, but it is worth considering, at least investigating, the idea that these coups were not purely ethnically motivated, but that they were motivated through a historical precedence of anti-colonialism and anti-domination.

Perhaps Northern fears that the educated Igbo simply wanted to dominate them were true.¹⁷² But on May 24, 1966, the Igbo led government dissolved the federation in favor of a unified Nigeria and "announced that the regional civil services were to be unified."¹⁷³ This can be seen as a justification of Northern fears because they would have to compete for jobs with the Igbo, and, essentially, integrate heavily beyond any notions of commonality expressed before. Reactions were harsh as "violence against Easterners erupted in the North on a far more terrible scale than before, and the purpose was not simply to seek vengeance but to drive Easterners out of the North altogether."¹⁷⁴ This violence was not only ethnic; the legacy of Indirect Rule and its influence through education and regionalism had a heavy hand in the setup of this conflict.

The surface reason for the counter-coup led by the North was that politicians and emirs feared Southern domination because of the higher levels of education present there. This was certainly a factor influencing Northern action, but it is also significant to realize that the North had been bitterly, culturally opposed to domination. Peters' insight on Northern Indirect Rule during the colonial period is crucial in understanding how power was designed in the North.¹⁷⁵ Since they had not experienced direct imposition of the British as a new form of a ruling class, or at least one attempting to restructure their political system, they had not experienced new,

¹⁷² Peters, p. 50-51, and Bach, p. 219-220.

¹⁷³ Martin Meredith, *The Fate of Africa*, (New York: Public Affairs, 2005), p. 201. It must also be noted that Martin Meredith's work has been received with academic skepticism and that any quotes or ideas drawn from it are also explored in other sources. Some sources explore some topics that Meredith makes connections from, and I agree with these connections.

¹⁷⁴ Meredith, p. 202, and see Bach, p. 219-220.

¹⁷⁵ Peters, p. 49

unknown domination by a foreign entity ruling remotely. Essentially, the South was trying to prevent domination by the British favored North. The Northern region used corrupt methods to maintain its 'legitimacy,' such as through the forged census,¹⁷⁶ and the North reacted violently to what it saw as the South trying to take its place in the sun and rule Nigeria.¹⁷⁷

Southern Nigerians engaged in "wild rejoicing" for the overthrow of corruption in Nigeria.¹⁷⁸ They hoped they had achieved a unified Nigeria, rather than remain subjugated to a system of federations where one region, the North, dominated the other three, the West, East, and Mid-West. The violent reactions led to the Federal Military Government of 1967, during the Biafran Civil War, admitting "in our common desire to win independence, many vital problems were left unresolved. One of these outstanding problems was the creation of more states that could have provided a more lasting foundation for stability of the Federation of Nigeria."¹⁷⁹ What is interesting is that the Igbo government during its short reign decided to unify rather than further divide the country. This could be because of the failed Minority Commission in 1957, because the Igbo at large really did want to dominate the North or simply because they thought a unified Nigeria would directly lead to stability. Whatever the reason, the short-lived Igbo government failed to create peace in Nigeria and ultimately exacerbated violence, but it seems that an underlying reason is Indirect Rule's influence on a political culture of regionalism and oppression. The power creations and the historic interactions between power and Indirect Rule during the colonial era set up this system of ethnic conflict as well as produce the method for which these ethnic political battles would be waged.

¹⁷⁶ Nugent, p. 91-92.

¹⁷⁷ Meredith, p. 197-202, and Bach p. 219-220.

¹⁷⁸ Meredith, p. 199.

¹⁷⁹ 'The Struggle for One Nigeria', Lagos: Federal Ministry of Information, 1967, p. 3. Cited in Obasanjo, Olusegun: *My Command: An Account of the Nigerian Civil War, 1967-1970*, Ibadan: Heinemann, 1980, p. 3, as cited in Peters, p. 53.

The creation of the independent Nigerian state in 1960 sustained many problems stemming from differences in ethnicity and culture. In the 1950s, as independence grew nearer, the British used the 1953-1954 census to help influence the best method for creating a stable Nigeria. In their view, giving the North “79 per cent of the territory of the federation and 55 per cent of its population”¹⁸⁰ would be the most efficient way to ensure peace in Nigeria. This ended up being quite a failure and “because each region produced its own political party dominated by the major ethnic group based there, the struggle turned into ethnic combat.”¹⁸¹ Needless to say, Britain’s division of Nigeria into three regions of a federation came with many consequences that began developing in the early 1950s.¹⁸² Nefarious means attempted to correct some of these divisions. In the 1962 census attempt, it seems that population figures were drastically inflated by the South, having at least a seventy percent increase of population in a decade, and some areas claiming a two hundred percent increase. The 1963 census was the Northern correction to this, and enough people were found in the North to likewise increase the population by more than seventy percent.¹⁸³ Population was directly linked to controlling Parliament and, therefore, independent Nigeria. Use of a forged census proved incredibly important for the North to maintain hegemony in Parliament.¹⁸⁴

“This structure had the perverse effect of encouraging first a winner-take-all quest for electoral power *within* each of the three regions, and then competition *between* the regions for power at the federal level.”¹⁸⁵ For Southeastern Nigeria, the British, essentially, had put in place

¹⁸⁰ Bach, p. 219.

¹⁸¹ Meredith, p. 194, and see Chinua Achebe, 2012, p. 44-47, for a discussion on the growth of Nigerian parties and ethnic-party consciousness.

¹⁸² Frederick Cooper, *Africa Since 1940*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 69.

¹⁸³ Meredith, p. 197.

¹⁸⁴ Chinua Achebe, 2012, notes that 1963 the “NPC in essence became Nigeria’s ruling party” and “would not only hold the majority of seats in the post-independence parliament, but as a consequence would be called upon to name the first prime minister of Nigeria,” p. 47.

¹⁸⁵ Cooper, p. 69.

a system of State-level Indirect Rule using a federation. The creation of centralized power was inherently non-Igbo and was more of a British trait. Therefore, the creation of the new political structure in Nigeria in the 1950s was designed to make rule of law the new controlling power. This creation of ideology around power had changed much throughout Nigeria's colonial history, and it would change again after independence. More so, there was a deep Northern fear of the Southerners' educational advancements, so merit or discussion-based government was not a highly sought-after approach by the North as they wanted regions to assign bureaucrats domestically.¹⁸⁶

Competition for power began through the instillation of British ideals of success and prosperity as well as influenced by the appeal of multi-level yet still centralized political power.¹⁸⁷ This colonial, regional competition was also supported by the British imbuing the belief that the system was not wrong, the actors were. Cooper writes "the governor told London, 'inevitably the people are going to be disillusioned, but it is better that they should be disillusioned as a result of the failure of their own people than that they should be disillusioned as a result of our actions.'"¹⁸⁸ Through creating this fail-safe during the colonial period, the British created a system during independence where failure to obtain power made people want to chase it harder, rather than reevaluate what that power meant and to the level that it was accessible.

The British, when leaving Nigeria and Africa in the late 1950s, were less concerned with creating stable government platforms than they were with keeping their hands clean. Essentially, England provided its colonies with independence because, as Cooper points out, "self-

¹⁸⁶ Meredith, p. 200-201.

¹⁸⁷ Cooper, p. 69.

¹⁸⁸ Cooper, p. 77.

government presented a way out: each colony would be led step by step along a path that increased the power of the elected legislature.”¹⁸⁹ Creation of the independent Nigerian state in 1960 required more than a rapid, disorganized retreat leaving behind a Western copy of government; the issue was that, in the late 1950s, colonial “officials realized how little had been done to Africanize the bureaucracy, and programs were hastily put in place.”¹⁹⁰

There is a very interesting connection between the British leaving Nigeria and the dispositions towards Okugo and the British soldiers involved with the Women’s War. For one, the British had no problem with Captain Hill, the District Officer at the time, taking the cap of Okugo and giving it to the women. The reason this was acceptable was because

the cap is an emblem of authority. Hill in giving the cap to the people, did it as the best method of showing his *bona fides*, i.e. that he really did intend to take proceedings against Okugo. Women did not destroy the cap, but ultimately returned it, showing they only wanted to see that symbol taken away from Okugo. Hill’s action was therefore reasonable.¹⁹¹

Captain Hill faced no repercussions from the British not because his action objectively merited no punishment, but because the response from the women was favorable. Through Hill’s actions, he demonstrated that the British were not seen as the corruptors in colonial Nigeria, but it was the Nigerians in British positions that represented the problem. Okugo was described, by Captain Vivian Fox-Strangways, as “a man who used to oppress the people and use the position of Warrant Chief to make himself comfortable at the expense of his town.”¹⁹² There is, then, a historical connection of placing blame on the Nigerians for problems that were, ultimately, created by the British system of Indirect Rule. It must be noted, however, that Mba’s discussion

¹⁸⁹ Cooper, p. 77.

¹⁹⁰ Cooper, p. 77.

¹⁹¹ Aba Commission of Inquiry, p. 984, para. 18944.

¹⁹² Aba Commission of Inquiry, p. 992, para. 19015.

on the matter reveals that the women were, in fact, cognizant of how to obtain favor from the government.¹⁹³ Their actions, however, did further consolidate British power.

Nigeria's colonial administration had never tried to resolve the ethnic dilemmas that could come with lumping together all of the different cultures in the territory.¹⁹⁴ Peters also mentions Chief Awolowo's assessment of Nigeria: "Nigeria is not a nation; it is a mere geographical expression."¹⁹⁵ The culmination of the three largest cultures, the Hausa-Fulani, the Yoruba, and the Igbo, was unlikely to be successful in a Western model of society and politics since the three each had distinct lifestyles. Peters offers a unique argument that Indirect Rule failed in Igbo Nigeria because of the violent responses to British disregard for pre-existing political institutions and traditions.¹⁹⁶ It does not seem fair to say that Indirect Rule 'failed' since it did have a lasting effect on Nigerian culture and it influenced Nigeria as an independent state in the international world, but Peters does write Indirect Rule "created other problems that were to have a devastating impact on political development in Nigeria."¹⁹⁷

So, in many ways, the use of Indirect Rule in Nigeria caused a variety of levels of success and this, in turn, affected the way independent Nigeria would be governed and how successful it would be. Also, the British were able to use the Western model of development to claim what is right and wrong and used Indirect Rule as a scapegoat. Indirect Rule, as Peters also notes, was implemented after various considerations and changes were made due to resistance from the people it was to be imposed upon;¹⁹⁸ it was successful in many of its goals and the British were able to extort the system until it was no longer beneficial to do so.

¹⁹³ Mba, p. 89.

¹⁹⁴ Peters, p. 48.

¹⁹⁵ Obafemi Awolowo, *Path to Nigerian Freedom*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1947), p. 47-48, as cited in Peters, p. 65.

¹⁹⁶ Peters, p. 49.

¹⁹⁷ Peters, p. 49.

¹⁹⁸ Peters, p. 49.

Regardless of success or failure and who was to blame, Indirect Rule did leave a legacy in Nigeria. This legacy extends not only through the political institutions but through the gender relations as well. Women in Nigerian politics are a largely underrepresented group in formal government structures, never consisting of more than ten percent of all legislative positions.¹⁹⁹ The British officials and missionaries tried to institutionalize conservative Christianity in Southeastern Nigeria in the twentieth century and, therefore, marginalized women from a variety of jobs and social roles that they had already occupied as well as new ones, such as religious affiliation and leadership.²⁰⁰ Pre-colonial women in the same cultures and territories used to have a political voice as well as an independent social sphere; today in Nigeria, society and politics are both male dominated. Studies by Inkeles and Smith, sociologists studying what make conceptions of ‘modern and traditional,’ in 1974 showed that women in Nigeria were becoming invisible because of industrialization and development projects.²⁰¹

Scott goes on to write that Inkeles and Smith discovered that women in traditional societies are more likely to “accept the role and status assigned to them” while women in the Western world are more likely to seek opportunity outside of the home.²⁰² Not only is this construction of traditional women accepting status largely a British creation for Southeastern Nigeria, it is misleading and largely incorrect. Igbo women, since, and shown by, the women of the Women’s War, have a deep connection to fertility and community. Statistically, most women in Nigeria, based on World Bank data from 2016, give birth to over five children.²⁰³

¹⁹⁹ Toluwani Eniola, "Where Are All the Women in Nigerian Politics," *Equal Times*, August 7, 2018, <https://www.equaltimes.org/where-are-all-the-women-in#.XGoOw-hKjD4>.

²⁰⁰ Matera, Bastian and Kent, p. 37-43.

²⁰¹ Catherine V. Scott, *Gender and Development*, (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1996), p. 25, discussing her thoughts from Alex Inkeles and David Horton Smith, *Becoming Modern: Individual Change in Six Developing Countries*, (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1974).

²⁰² Scott, p. 25-26.

²⁰³ World Bank, "Fertility Rate, Total (births per Woman)," 2016, accessed April 16, 2019, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?end=2016&locations=NG&start=1960&view=chart>.

Nigeria is Africa's most populated country and the South has a long history of the importance of fertility.²⁰⁴ For this reason, women in southern Nigeria are less likely to maintain a status quo job that can satisfy statistics of development and employment since they place a heavy emphasis on child rearing.

This is not to be misconstrued as accepting the idea that pre-colonial women fit the same model as colonial European women did as docile homebodies. It is, however, meant to expose that women were beyond the confines of the home, contrary to the notions of what 'traditional' gender roles are. These women worked and interacted mostly in and around the home, but they largely chose this way of life, they were not socially mandated to accept it. Chapter One explored the importance of the local markets for Nigerian women, and this second chapter will explore how some women moved beyond local markets while still maintaining a connection to the home and a family focused life. Matera, Bastian and Kent also note that expansion of British influence in the early 1900s exacerbated "the gendered nature of paid employment under colonial control."²⁰⁵

The importance of understanding that Igbo women in Nigeria are not invisible is important for recognizing their continued resistance to centralized power after independence as well as recognizing the effects Indirect Rule had on regular people. The Nigerian Federation was loosely put together to maintain a cultural cluster that the British could hope to exploit as a trading partner in Africa. Each region feared domination by the other regions for a variety of reasons, eventually leading to the secession of Biafra.²⁰⁶ When Biafra seceded in 1967, the Nigerian military was in the hands of the North and its job was to bring the Southeast back into

²⁰⁴ Matera, Bastian and Kent, p. 119-126.

²⁰⁵ Matera, Bastian and Kent, p. 126.

²⁰⁶ Peters, p. 49-54.

the Federation. Biafra was largely outnumbered and outgunned, but the war came down to starvation as a key deciding factor. Christie Achebe writes that tactics of starvation were a direct attack on the capabilities of women, who were protectors of the health and well-being of the Nigerian state and people.²⁰⁷ The Nigerian military strategically occupied areas that were necessary or extremely useful for Igbo agriculture and, essentially, planned to starve Biafra into submission. Igbo women's response to this occupation of sustainable land was dangerous; they would cross over to enemy territory disguised as market women and secure valuable items and harvest crops for survival.²⁰⁸

The Biafran Civil War began just over two decades after World War II had ended. World War II marked a solidification in war ideology by continuing legacies of ethnic conflict and civilian targeting during the interwar period.²⁰⁹ Still, never before 1939 had civilian populations been targeted so harshly and with direct intentions. The Nazis and Soviets' ideologies were riddled with war crimes and crimes against humanity, but a direct comparison between Hitler, Stalin and the Nigerian military is a campaign of starvation. Hitler, as well as Stalin, was determined to make the Ukraine into a slave state by starving over 30 million people to death.²¹⁰ The Nigerian military had a very similar strategy, as Christie Achebe points out.

Meredith, though academically controversial,²¹¹ notes that it was largely through foreign relief that the "imminent defeat" was prolonged.²¹² This, of course, though likely indirectly and without malice, undermines the legacy of Igbo women in the Biafran conflict. Though they were

²⁰⁷ Christie Achebe, p. 794.

²⁰⁸ Christie Achebe, p. 794-795.

²⁰⁹ Beevor, Robert Gerwarth, *The Vanquished*, (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2016), and see Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin*, (New York: Basic Books, 2010).

²¹⁰ Beevor, p. 187.

²¹¹ Kwame Akonor, "Review of *The Fate of Africa: A History of the Continent Since Independence* by Martin Meredith," *Journal of Black Studies* 37, no. 5 (2007), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40034367>, p. 794 notes that Meredith is a senior journalist but he fails to assess external influences in his discussion of Africa's problems.

²¹² Meredith, p. 205.

prolonging a conflict that many writers seem to believe had an inevitable outcome, the women of Biafra continued and supported their legacy as providers though it was challenged by the Nigerian military.²¹³ They did so by finding new ways of producing food from parts that were originally discarded when collecting food from guava trees. Further, they were able to find medicinal uses, notably for Malaria relief, from the guava trees as well. So, in a spirit of resistance, women in Biafra retained their traditional roles as providers and helped the survival of Biafra for many months. Though, like in 1929, Igbo women's efforts to stop the onslaught of an outside power ultimately failed, there is a clear comparison of retaining traditional values in the face of a force determined to create conformity. Women in both scenarios, though reacting to different situation with different resources, have similarities at their core of resistance to centralization and imposition of power.

The women euphemistically called it 'affia attack trade.'²¹⁴ The affia, or market, attack was the women's adaption to their environment of hostility. As noted before, women made excursions into Nigerian military zones to harvest and secure necessary goods, but it is important to note that these excursions had a "war-like nature."²¹⁵ Faced with war scenarios that were closer to home than they historically had been, because of the legacy of civilian atrocities in World War II, the women tried to retain their traditional roles as "nurturers, traders, and peacemakers of society" in the face of "an attack that impugned their very reason for being."²¹⁶

The Igbo women of Biafra were, in many ways, psychologically connected to their ancestors of the Women's War. They were unrelenting in the ability to resist authority and centralized power. Like their predecessors, they ultimately 'failed' in stopping their enemy, but

²¹³ Christie Achebe, p. 794.

²¹⁴ Christie Achebe, p. 794.

²¹⁵ Christie Achebe, p. 794.

²¹⁶ Christie Achebe, p. 794.

retained their worldview.²¹⁷ Their worldview was that “no condition is permanent in this world’ and that a constant in the world is change.”²¹⁸ There is, then, a correlation between the women of the Biafra Civil War and the women who resisted British Indirect Rule in 1929. While this legacy of resistance surely came from the cultural openness that predated the British, it also was heavily influenced by the British imposition. Indirect Rule was the first use of centralized, dominating power in the last two centuries, and it left a legacy of power struggle in Nigeria.

While focusing on years immediately before and following Nigeria's 1960 independence from Britain, this chapter has developed in particulate a thematic analysis of ethnic, regional political struggle. This has not been to say that the struggles of creating independence and those of Biafra are inherently the same as those during the Women’s War, but that there are some noteworthy points of continuity worthy of exploration. From a wide lens, the creation and administration of Indirect Rule is similar in many respects. In both cases, the North was treated differently from the South at an administrative level because of the pre-existing and reactionary sentiments of the colonized people. Looking closer at women, in both cases they are reacting to centralized power and coercion by outside powers imposing policy from the top down in a very non-European, traditional Igbo capacity. So, while they are different moments in time and different struggles, there is much to learn by studying the Women’s War in context to the late colonial, early independent period of Nigerian history.

²¹⁷ Christie Achebe, p. 804-805.

²¹⁸ Christie Achebe, p. 804.

Chapter III

Centralization of Economics: Understanding Oil, Unrest and Violence

The goal of this chapter is to further engage in the dialogue of Political Economic Development and understanding colonialism. This chapter will study oil as a commodity in contemporary Nigeria to reveal how power relations among business, the state and the people demonstrate a need for deep historical research to understand contemporary issues. Oil from the Niger Delta is the most important commodity of the Nigerian state today. This chapter will study and consider the transnational oil companies (TNOCs), specifically Royal Dutch Shell, and oil sales in Nigeria since 1970 with a focus on more current protests to understand the ground level power dynamics of economics as a complex force. Understanding that the reaction to TNOCs is complex because of historic power relations as presented in the first two chapters will show that history has complicated the Nigerian political economic developments of the present day. This chapter will reveal that the TNOCs relationship to the state and to host communities was influenced by colonialism at large and Indirect Rule in particular.

Nearly every source I have encountered on oil in the Niger Delta has commented on the corrosive effects of the oil on communities: socially and environmentally.²¹⁹ Oduah, an Igbo woman from Nigeria, comments that “that these mind-boggling profits belong to the people here.”²²⁰ Oil is pulled from the earth, which, as noted in the earlier chapters, is conceptualized differently in Nigerian heritage than in Western heritage. For Southeastern Nigerians, the use of land and its resources is a communal process. Land and agriculture are sacred to culture and

²¹⁹ Chika Oduah, "Trouble Is Brewing in Nigeria's Oil Country," *Foreign Policy*, June 14, 2016, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/06/14/trouble-is-brewing-in-nigerias-oil-country/> and see Stephanie Hanson, "MEND: The Niger Delta's Umbrella Militant Group," *Council on Foreign Relations*, March 21, 2007, <https://www.cfr.org/background/mend-niger-deltas-umbrella-militant-group>.

²²⁰ Oduah.

identity and are not merely commodities. The production of crops such as yams and palm oil shows how farming and land organization are gendered political and social, not simply economic, Nigerian relations.²²¹ Western conceptions of property, land organizations and resources are quite different than those of the Igbo. In the Western conception, what is under your land is yours privately. Therefore, land that is found to have oil in Ohio, for example, would have to be sold, or the oil rights could be sold, by the owner before a company may drill. Omeje mentions that myriad legislations have created “a ‘hegemonic alliance’ between the Nigerian state and the TNOCs.”²²² In colonial Nigeria, oil and minerals were said to be the direct property of the British Crown. Independent Nigeria nationalized oil in the 1970s and continued this legacy of government control over the land and its resources.²²³ Repercussions have been felt through today as groups such as The Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and The Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) disrupt the Nigerian oil market.²²⁴

Kenneth Omeje’s *High Stake and Stakeholders: Oil Conflict and Security in Nigeria* has been extremely valuable as a source for this chapter. Omeje is a Senior Research Fellow and a professional academic focusing on peace and conflict studies.²²⁵ In reviewing *High Stakes and Stakeholders*, Edlyne E. Anugwom wrote “probably its most innovative contribution is the attempt to deconstruct the narrative of a hegemonic alliance between the state and the TNOCs that influences oil policies.”²²⁶ Omeje gives historical context to the power relations that grew

²²¹ Matera, Bastian and Kent, p. 18-19.

²²² Omeje, Ashgate, p. 4.

²²³ Omeje, Ashgate, p. 35-39.

²²⁴ Hanson and Onwuazombe, p. 124-126.

²²⁵ Manifoldcrown.org, "Prof Kenneth Omeje," accessed March 26, 2019, <https://www.manifoldcrown.org/team/prof-kenneth-omeje/>.

²²⁶ Edlyne E. Anugwom, “Review of *High Stakes and Stakeholders: Oil Conflict and Security in Nigeria* by Kenneth Omeje,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 77, no. 1 (January 1, 2007).

out of the colonial era. He notes that “the colonial authorities applied more direct and authoritarian methods of administration that further weakened and, in some cases, obliterated a number of traditional institutions.”²²⁷ The current situation in the Niger Delta is very militarized and communities there face threats from the government, government soldiers hired by TNOCs and grassroots insurgents bent on combatting centralized authorities revolving around oil as an export commodity.²²⁸ This chapter is heavily influenced by Omeje’s work because it agrees with his consideration that colonialism significantly affected the consequences and security factors of the oil market in Nigeria.

I argue that Indirect Rule during the colonial era as a method of creating political culture and power has, in the years since political independence, affected the creation of the relationships between TNOCs and host communities. Furthermore, current headline stories of oil protests in Nigeria will be addressed in relation to the women involved in the region. The work on women’s reactions to the petroleum industry has not received the same amount of attention as has women’s reactions to social changes in culture, agriculture, politics and war in earlier eras of Nigerian history. Oduah’s article does mention that “teenage girls cooked for MEND fighters, cleaned their guns, and served as lookouts,”²²⁹ and this depth of gender study will be analyzed and commented on later.

Omeje believes that colonialism had a heavy hand in directing the future of Nigeria through coercive, controlling policy and militarization.²³⁰ He notes that the colonial Oil Pipeline Act (1956) and the independent era Petroleum Act (1969) expanded and empowered the

²²⁷ Omeje, Ashgate, p. 6.

²²⁸ Onwuazombe, p. 119-127.

²²⁹ Oduah.

²³⁰ Omeje, Ashgate, p. 40-47.

Nigerian government by giving complete ownership of any and all oil in Nigeria to the state.²³¹ Already, he is establishing a link between the colonial and the early independent state. He also writes that the Land Use Act of 1979 neutralized “all traditional impediments to land acquisition under customary laws and thus [freed] land for oil activities.”²³² Essentially, the Land Use Act made all Nigerian land property of the state for the implication of extracting oil at the expense of people living on the land. The act set up the legal legitimacy for the Nigerian military to react violently against host communities under the pretense that they were protecting Nigeria’s land and economy by securing oil fields at the expense of the people. The implication here is a continuity, Omeje observes, of colonialism through the disinterest or blatant disregard for indigenous rights. It is not a stretch to argue that Indirect Rule is responsible for creating a political culture of disregarding indigeneity. The policies of the colonial regime were adopted and revised to fit in the independent state. This is not to argue that Indirect Rule directly created the Land Use Act, but rather to argue that investigating the power relationships observable in the two instances can yield interesting and significant results and discoveries.

Another key to supporting the argument that Indirect Rule influenced the oil market is the use of coercive power. The colonial regime, especially in the South, used violence to match protests against colonial imposition. The current Nigerian political system has been favoring the businesses in the Niger Delta over the host communities and has repeatedly suppressed protests with extreme violence in the region. Omeje asserts that “the state has used soldiers and mobile policemen in the 1980s and 1990s to exterminate and maim thousands of displaced peasants protesting the expropriation of their farmlands.”²³³ This is merely a very condensed summary of

²³¹ Omeje, Ashgate, p. 40-41.

²³² Omeje, Ashgate, p. 41.

²³³ Omeje, Ashgate, p. 57.

the work by Ifeanyi I. Onwuazombe. Onwuazombe wrote about many instances of violence and extra-judicial killings in the Niger Delta as well as commented on the theories of why these killings happened. Onwuazombe notes that “all the oil corporations operating in the Niger Delta oil-producing communities for over five decades have directly and indirectly violated the rights of the inhabitants of the region with impunity.”²³⁴ This coupled with the notion that the state is enabling and encouraging federal soldiers to maintain security of the oil companies’ property shows that the centralized political, military and economic relationship in independent Nigeria is similar to that of colonial Nigeria.

TNOCs are also not averse to using local populations as a protection method for their oil production. In an article, Omeje notes that some TNOCs, notably Shell, utilize “community youth volunteers in ‘security contract services’”²³⁵ and that

this way of engaging with the local youths has in practice ostensibly compounded the security problems of both petrobusiness and the oil-bearing communities through increased gun violence, pipeline sabotage by disaffected and envious rival groups, communal and inter-group warfare and local terrorism. This backlash has left petrobusiness at a dangerous crossroads. Most oil companies are particularly reluctant to disengage with the services of the youths for fear of more catastrophic consequences.²³⁶

This is very similar to the Warrant Chief system explored in Chapter One. This relates to Indirect Rule and the Warrant Chiefs by use of a local population through a foreign centralized authority to further subdue the local population. This began as a reaction to local demands for use of unemployed workers rather than importing foreigners to work.²³⁷ This begs the questions, then, as to whether or not community youth volunteers failed because of their own merit, or because the system of using locals in newly manifested power positions is a recipe for disaster.

²³⁴ Onwuazombe, p. 132.

²³⁵ Kenneth Omeje, “Petrobusiness and Security Threats in the Niger Delta, Nigeria,” *Current Sociology* 54, no. 3, (London: Sage, May 2006), p. 483.

²³⁶ Omeje, Sage, p. 487.

²³⁷ Omeje, Sage, p. 483-486.

Further engagement with Indirect Rule, colonial studies and development theory is needed to ask and answer questions similar to these.

Ike Okonta is a research fellow at Oxford and a political scientist and Orono Douglas was a Nigerian official and one of the top environmentalists.²³⁸ They co-authored a work, *Where Vultures Feast: Shell, Human Rights and Oil in the Niger Delta*, that traces the TNOC's current environmental crises as well as gives historical background to the current actions of the company.²³⁹ The majority of their work centers around the ideas, discussions and discoveries of Shell's environmental atrocities. Using this work and *High Stakes and Stakeholders*, my goal is to discover the level of influence the Indirect Rule had on the creation of Shell's oil operations. Shell has been protested by Niger Delta communities since the late colonial period.²⁴⁰

Interestingly, Okonta and Douglas go against the tide of classification of the colonial Nigerian administration system and they argue that the South was ruled directly, not indirectly as many historians argue.²⁴¹ So while I will not debate the level of applicability of the term "indirect rule" in regards to the authors' usage, I will state that I do not agree that the South experienced Direct Rule and I recommend referring back to the discussion of levels of Indirect Rule by Naseemullah and Staniland discussed in Chapter One.²⁴² I do agree with Okonta and Douglas that "the British were, however, determined to rule the country as two separate political units."²⁴³ Different applications, administrations and reactions to Indirect Rule ultimately shaped

²³⁸ The Guardian, "Ike Okonta," accessed April 01, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/profile/ikeokonta>, and Musikilu Mojeed, "President Jonathan's Top Aide, Orono Douglas, Is Dead," *Premium Times Nigeria*, April 09, 2015, <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/180816-president-jonathans-top-aide-orono-douglas-is-dead.html>.

²³⁹ Okonta and Douglas.

²⁴⁰ Okonta and Douglas, p. 78.

²⁴¹ Okonta and Douglas, p. 15, and see Afigbo, p. 1, Mamdani, p. 137, Lugard, p. 575, and Aba Commission of Inquiry.

²⁴² Naseemullah and Staniland.

²⁴³ Okonta and Douglas, p. 16.

the level of political cohesion between the North and the South in the late-colonial and independent Nigerian state. Okonta and Douglas' work adds to this dialogue by understanding Shell as a complex actor during the independent state era. While it may not be directly related to Indirect Rule, there is a correlation between Indirect Rule, the devices used to administer the colonial regime and reactions against the regime and the current political, environmental and economic crisis in the Niger Delta by the TNO Shell and the independent Nigerian state.

Nnimmo Bassey writes "Royal Dutch/Shell is more than a colonial force in Nigeria. A colonial power exhibits some measure of concern over the territory over which it lords. This is not the case with this mogul" in the foreword of *Where Vultures Feast*.²⁴⁴ This a multi-layered distinction that has many complicated themes for understanding the political economic discourse of the Niger Delta. For one, it acknowledges the colonial precedence of events in Nigeria without relying on it. Many theories and discourses in the development dialogue are structured solely around the colonial influence or the free, open market nation-state systems. This is inherently limiting since it lacks an understanding of historical action and continuity. Therefore, Bassey recognizes that Okonta and Douglas are embracing colonial and post-colonial studies without using only one as a scape goat for problems in Nigeria. They are discussing colonialism as a force of creation rather than the sole creator of problems. Investigating Shell and transnational companies through a colonial perspective is valuable for understanding the complex power relations that are severely limited by the nation-state model.

This chapter will expose that 'Nigerians' in the Niger Delta are not necessarily Nigerians as can fit in a definable category. This creation of distinction is something that was used by the British in India as well as Africa. Creating a binary of 'rulers and ruled' in correlation to

²⁴⁴ Okonta and Douglas, p. xi.

‘modernity and tradition’ also came with understandings to whom legal protection is extended. In the colonial Nigerian South, the British were the ‘modern,’ ruling class who fully embraced legal protections and the Igbo were the ‘traditional,’ ruled class who were relatively unprotected by the legal system, exemplified by the brutal suppression of the Women’s War of 1929.²⁴⁵ The process of Indirect Rule was the mechanism for codifying these differences and how they would be represented in the political process. The continuity between the oil market and the current Nigerian political system is such that this codification of modern and traditional, of us and other, is very similar to that of the colonial administration.²⁴⁶ The Ogoni, as a minority in the Nigerian state, are treated as others,²⁴⁷ and as expendable nuisances in the path towards oil modernity and development of the Nigerian state. The Ogoni were treated with the same brutal repression as the women of 1929 when they attempted to preserve their way of life that proved difficult for Shell to work with.²⁴⁸

The Ogoni, the Ijaw and the Nembe are some of the communities that have been severely affected by Shell’s activities. “With a population of 500,000 inhabiting a total land area of 404 square miles, Ogoni is one of the most densely populated rural communities in the world.”²⁴⁹ Nigeria’s population exceeds 190 million (130 million in 2003 when *Where Vultures Feast* was published), making the 500,000 Ogoni a minority in a country already plagued with severe ethnic

²⁴⁵ The extensive Aba Commission of Inquiry following the ‘Aba Riots’ shows that the British were more concerned with understanding why the women were protesting than with prosecuting the soldiers involved with the shooting.

²⁴⁶ Ike Okonta, *When Citizens Revolt: Nigerian Elites, Big Oil, and the Ogoni Struggle for Self-Determination*, (New Jersey: Africa World Press, Inc., 2008), the majority of this work structures around how the Ogoni began to conceive of themselves as a distinct ethnic group during the colonial period and the ramifications of this way of thinking through independence.

²⁴⁷ Okonta, p. 14 notes that the third chapter of this work is focused on how “the Nigerian civil war of 1967-1970 and its aftermath forced the Ogoni even more firmly into subject status. In this bloody contest for territory, political power, and economic resources between the three major ethnic groups, small groups like the Ogoni, Ijo, Ibibio, and Ikwerre, and their constituent groups, in the Eastern Region had to find their own allies.”

²⁴⁸ Omeje, Ashgate, p. 141-145, Okonta and Douglas, p. 74-79, and see Onwuazombe, p. 124-126.

²⁴⁹ Okonta and Douglas, p. 75.

and regional divisions. Chinua Achebe wrote “the minorities of the Niger Delta, Mid-West, and the Middle Belt regions of Nigeria were always uncomfortable with the notion that they had to fit into the tripod of the largest ethnic groups that was Nigeria- Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo.”²⁵⁰ It is difficult to study the objective ‘Nigerian way of life’ when communities like the Ogoni struggle against the major three ethnicities,²⁵¹ the government and Shell while communities like the Muslim North have enjoyed extended periods of political dominance. Therefore, it is crucial to not only recognize there are vast differences in Nigerians’ lives, but to also investigate why these differences exist.

Indirect Rule was the implementation of British power over British-created Nigerian groups. The 1947 Richards Constitution²⁵² geographically codified difference in Nigeria. This legal structure created the ethnic regionalism of the late colonial, early independent period. In the later years of the colonial regime extending until the end of the Biafran war, geographical territories were given ethnic rulers, and the Ogoni were a group to be ruled by another ethnicity in that region; regions later became States, and the three regions of 1947 have been divided into thirty-six States of today.²⁵³ The Ogoni are in the Southeast, an area that has been largely Igbo dominated since at least 1947. This gives it a unique position of being studied for the value of continuity of Indirect Rule’s effect on the Southeast, but also for understanding how changing power status and relations affected the conduct of the Igbo.

Use of egregious force against the Ogoni has been well documented,²⁵⁴ but Okonta, Douglas and Omeje all note that Shell has done a good job of keeping publicity positive.²⁵⁵

²⁵⁰ Chinua Achebe, 2012, p. 47.

²⁵¹ Okonta, p. 12-18.

²⁵² Okonta and Douglas, p. 16.

²⁵³ Okonta, p. 119-146.

²⁵⁴ Onwuazombe, p. 124-125.

²⁵⁵ Omeje, Ashgate, p. 79-82, and see Okonta and Douglas, p. 3.

Okonta and Douglas' environmental outlook led them to write "all available evidence suggests that Shell's destruction of the Niger Delta is informed by near-total disregard for the welfare of the local people."²⁵⁶ Omeje notes that "it is most apparent that Shell encouraged violent state repressions of protestors or at least failed to discourage the phenomenon at the early stages of 'petro-violence.'"²⁵⁷ Tracing violence to a more direct note, Onwuazombe writes

the Abacha military junta conducted a scorched-earth military operation in Ogoni following the May 21, 1994 murders of four Ogoni chiefs at Giokoo, an offensive that led to the deaths of over 2,000 Ogonis and destruction of Ogoni villages. Shell was later revealed to be the sponsor of the Ogoni pacification project - in some cases funding the operations and providing logistics for the invading security forces. In a leaked Government House secret memo, dated May 12, 1994, "the ruling military regime had detailed wasting operations to eliminate vocal Ogoni leaders. The wasting operations were deemed necessary to ensure resumption of oil drilling operations in Ogoni."²⁵⁸

The conduct of Shell and the Nigerian state in regards to people on its territory, but not of the 'Nigerian nation' at large, has many continuities from the colonial regime. In many ways, the Nigerian government, as controlled by the three major ethnic groups, is operating under many political traditions inherited from the British and, in this discussion, specifically the tradition of using force against domestic non-conformers as a means of satisfying political and economic ambition. Shell, with support of the Nigeria government and military, for many years violated and extorted Nigerian host-communities as a powerful foreign entity that also recruited and engaged said communities to gather a greater understanding of how to consolidate control.

The violence against people like the Ogoni is inherited from colonialism, and the tool from which that violence spawned was, at least in part, Indirect Rule. Shell has worked to gain legitimacy from, and good standing with, the Nigerian government. The TNOC has abused

²⁵⁶ Okonta and Douglas, p. 65.

²⁵⁷ Omeje, Ashgate, p. 81.

²⁵⁸ See Onwuazombe, p. 125, and see Onwuazombe's footnote: Leburah Ganago, *Banish Shell*, NIGERIA WORLD (Jan. 4, 2011), http://nigeriaworld.com/feature/publication/ganago/0104_11.html.

minorities in the Niger Delta to further its economic ambitions and it has engaged both military and political mechanisms to do so. Protest against Shell and its gas flaring has been a crusade for decades, and the government has supported Shell's ambition by providing ample room in the legal codex. Okonta and Douglas reveal that Shell "prefers to pay the miniscule levy that the government later imposed as a penalty for flaring" than end the cost-effective method of burning excess flammable gas.²⁵⁹ Shell is not merely a colonial force, as was stated earlier, but it is also an economic, militant and political force. This hegemonic trio is backed by the Nigerian government at large which seems to favor oil revenues over the lives of its minority citizens. The government 'at large' is meant to express that regardless of who has been in power, there has been consistency in the atrocities of the Niger Delta oil-producing communities. The political culture of using violence to secure oil profits at the expense of Nigerian minorities transcends the ethnic, regional divides of the three major ethnic parties.

Shell is a complex entity in Nigeria because of its political economic implications and its militaristic tendencies, which, together, produce high levels of mystery surrounding the company's actions, and sponsored actions, in the Niger Delta. For decades, Shell has been riding the backs of decrees set up by military dictators in the early decades of the independent state.²⁶⁰ The Petroleum Decree of 1969 and the 1978 Land Use Act opened the doors for Shell to infiltrate occupied land with little to no host community compensation as well as few ramifications. The former provides Shell with the backing of the Nigerian government and military since the state has direct interest in taking its lion's share of taxes and royalties of oil, a nationalized commodity. The Land Use Act allowed for Shell to have political legitimacy for taking land, not just the oil. This is an important distinction, and it is the Land Use Act that has,

²⁵⁹ Okonta and Douglas, p. 73.

²⁶⁰ Okonta and Douglas, p. 105.

in many ways, caused more problems for the people of the Niger Delta. The act, as stated earlier, gives ownership of earthly territory containing oil to the government, and many backlashes against the oil market come from Nigerians protesting against the way the land has been managed and abused by the government. The people there are concerned with receiving their fair share of oil revenue, but are more concerned with maintaining their land and environment.²⁶¹

Shell's actions represent a shift in physical landscape through use of socio-economic structures similar to what happened with the Warrant Chief system. The Warrant Chief system saw a physical, social landscape change through the creation of the Native Courts. For the Igbo, the political world was largely free and open, with villages meeting together at agreed upon locations to engage in open discussions.²⁶² The British installed a centralized legal authority in a mandated, consistent location. This demanded that Igbo people made trips to a predetermined location that symbolically relocated power from the land and community to a single space and a single entity. Shell is engaged in a similar practice. Shell's operations require many miles of large oil rigs and pipelines, and a consequence is vast areas of land corrupted by oil spills that are not properly contained. Economics are secured in one location, the oil rig, whereas the 'product' comes from a larger area. The land in the Niger Delta is sacred to many of the minority communities there,²⁶³ and creating centralized economics follows with the ideas of centralization presented by Indirect Rule. Therefore, Shell is disregarding the sanctity of the land, structuring power in a fixed location, socially and physically, and trying to force conformity from the indigenous population.

²⁶¹ Okonta and Douglas, p. 68-74.

²⁶² Van Allen, 1997, p. 537.

²⁶³ Okonta and Douglas, p. 75.

Like the process of Indirect Rule and colonialism at large, the oil market and its ramifications are heavily gendered. Eno Okoko's article on the Ibeno community reveals that the environmental destruction caused by Shell has led to emigration of the men into urban areas.²⁶⁴ There has not been sufficient study on the gendered nature of the oil market in Nigeria, but news posts and articles reveal that the militants are largely, if not entirely, male, but that women do have a place in resistance groups. There does not seem to be the structural gendered positions similar to those of the 1967-1970 Nigerian Civil War, but women across Nigeria maintain resistance through peaceful protests on drill sites. The Ibeno women "act as 'managers' of environmental resources"²⁶⁵ while not directly substituting themselves into traditionally masculine positions. This maintenance of agency and physical space is in itself resistance to the oil giants of Nigeria. Beyond this retention of their homes, many women of the Niger Delta and beyond take to oil rigs, often stripping down in doing so, to protest the environmental and economic damages and broken promises of the companies.²⁶⁶

One news article, by Rafiu Ajakaye with the Anadolu Ajansi, notes that "in most parts of Nigeria, public nudity is considered unacceptable."²⁶⁷ This notion of 'unacceptable' is complex and Misty Bastian has done extensive work on the social meaning of undress. For Igbo women, disrobing meant "women were willing to give up their personal identities and become part of an undifferentiated, female, reproductive mass, representing, in a graphic manner, the wrath of the earth goddess herself- including the deity's power to destroy those who would pollute her."²⁶⁸

²⁶⁴ Eno Okoko, "Women and Environmental Change in the Niger Delta, Nigeria: Evidence from Ibeno," *Gender, Place, and Culture* 6, no. 4, (December 1999), p. 375-377.

²⁶⁵ Okoko, p. 377.

²⁶⁶ The Associated Press, "Nigerian Women, in Peaceful Protest, Shut Down Oil Plant," *New York Times*, July 14, 2002, <https://www.nytimes.com/2002/07/14/world/nigerian-women-in-peaceful-protest-shut-down-oil-plant.html>.

²⁶⁷ Ajakaye.

²⁶⁸ Bastian, 2000, p. 46.

Further than solely being a religious, cultural connotation, Bastian notes that there are strong socio-economic factors of undress; “shedding clothes is directly, as well as metaphorically, connected with shedding relations in southeastern Nigeria.”²⁶⁹ Therefore, wives of Shell oil employees who shed their clothes payed for by Shell oil wages are sending a strong social message to other women by stripping themselves of reliance on Shell. This plays on Van Allen’s works mentioned in Chapter One, discussing the use of nudity as a form of protest against the British.²⁷⁰ This, of course, further consolidates the notion that the British created, or attempted to create, structures in society that the women of Nigeria continued to react against using traditional methods.

Ikelegbe, a Nigerian political scientist, argues that engaging with discussions of civil society is necessary in understanding the complexities of the Nigerian oil crisis in regards to women’s status.²⁷¹ Civil society in Nigeria has largely been shaped by the colonial legacy as well as the current socio-economic unrest characterized by the oil crisis in the Niger Delta.²⁷² This, however, also largely removes agency from the creators of civil society, such as women and women’s organizations. Women in Nigeria, as has been seen in the previous two chapters, have had a long history of reacting against power. Ikelegbe mentions that “civil society has become the basis for mobilization, articulation and struggle in the region.”²⁷³ The issue with this comment is that it is modernizing the use of civil society and resistance. As shown by Chapters One and Two, the mobilization of Igbo women against centralizing authority is not new to the oil

²⁶⁹ Bastian, 2000, p. 38.

²⁷⁰ Van Allen, 1997, and Van Allen, 1976.

²⁷¹ Augustine Ikelegbe, “Engendering civil society: oil, women groups and resource conflicts in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria,” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 43, no. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), doi:10.1017/S0022278X05000820, p. 241-243.

²⁷² Ikelegbe, p. 242.

²⁷³ Ikelegbe, p. 248.

crisis. While there are certainly new methods and factors involved, women in Southeast Nigeria have been involved in protest against the British and Western imposition for generations.

These women are, in many ways, as influential for the creation of culture and civil society in Nigeria as are the forces of colonialism and the oil market. Ikelegbe also notes “women groupings have not only become an active part of the civil challenge and popular struggles, but have begun to appropriate traditional forms of resistance.”²⁷⁴ While he may not be specifically referring to the act of sitting on a man as described in the Women’s War of 1929, eliciting the term ‘traditional’ generates a codified notion. Essentially, to call it ‘traditional forms of resistance,’ Ikelegbe is evoking the idea that the forms of resistance by women are culturally infused and pre-date colonialism in Africa. Moving beyond the issues surrounding the terminology of ‘traditional,’ it is important to recognize that Ikelegbe reveals that there is some consistency in the civil society of women dating from the colonial period and maybe even earlier. Rather than solely look at the idea that the ‘traditional’ form of the protests is the method, it is important to recognize that the act of resisting is the historical action. The nudity and other methods by the women may very well be traditional and a direct continuity from women of the past, but the political culture of resistance and civil society in Southeast Nigeria has been shaped by unarmed women’s protests.

The scholarship around the Nigerian oil crisis has been steadily growing, with many sources being published in the early 2000s roughly a decade after the murder of Ken Saro-Wiwa by the Nigerian government. Saro-Wiwa was one of the Ogoni Nine: leaders in the MOSOP.²⁷⁵ In short, Saro-Wiwa, and the eight other MOSOP members, was “accused of masterminding [the killing of four Ogoni notables] even though there was no evidence linking him to the grisly

²⁷⁴ Ikelegbe, p. 243.

²⁷⁵ Okonta, p. 1.

deed.”²⁷⁶ This led to an increase in international attention to the social and environmental crisis of the Niger Delta, as well as discussions of United States’ sanctions against Nigeria for not adhering to democratic principles.²⁷⁷ Many sources that I have encountered deal with the economics, the security or the environmental issues of the oil crisis. Few works devote significant attention to the women of the Niger Delta and their struggles against the TNOCs. This is in part because of the gendered nature of armed militancy and in part because of the secrecy around militant groups. As for peaceful protest, many news articles can be found online, but I have yet to encounter a work dedicated to attempting to connect them all. I have found some scholarly articles, such as that by Ikelegbe and Okoko, but the complexity of the issue has yet to be fully articulated, similar to what has been done about conflicts like the Women’s War of 1929 and the Biafran War. Regardless, this chapter will be concluding with an attempt to bridge the knowledge gap on why women are protesting.

Foremost, it must be acknowledged that many women likely protest for the simple fact that they are fed up with the circumstances around them. Mrs. Dorothy Nkanta, “Women Leader” from Obotim Nsit community, asked “is this the kind of reward we should receive from government and the gas company for the good thing we did for [the government and gas company]?”²⁷⁸ This question, and others presented in the article, leads to the conclusion that the women of the Niger Delta have endured hit after hit from the two centers of authority, and that many groups finally reached a point of frustration that pushed them into action. From gender

²⁷⁶ Okonta, p. 4.

²⁷⁷ Paul Lewis, "U.S. Seeking Tougher Sanctions To Press Nigeria for Democracy," *New York Times*, March 12, 1996, <https://www.nytimes.com/1996/03/12/world/us-seeking-tougher-sanctions-to-press-nigeria-for-democracy.html>.

²⁷⁸ The Whistler NG.

discrimination in the work force to environmental devastation, the women of the Niger Delta are disproportionately disadvantaged by the TNOCs.

Gender discrimination in the workforce comes from a twist on pre-colonial connotations of gendered work. Today, many women in the Niger Delta remain at home, working as subsistence farmers and managing large families. The disconnect from the pre-colonial culture is that women are now socio-economically confined to the home as they are restricted from beginning businesses.²⁷⁹ There has been a growth in female workers in Nigeria, but this follows after decades of Western culture of gender marginalization. As for environmental destruction, Okonta and Douglas write that the Niger Delta has been “labeled the most endangered delta in the world.”²⁸⁰ Shell oil has not been truthful on its failures to prevent environmental contamination.

In Rafiu Ajakaye’s article, he reveals that over one hundred women took control of an oil plant in the Delta State.²⁸¹ In what seems to be a cycle of violence, the town of Kokori violently reacted against the oil workers there, then the Nigerian military intervened and laid siege to the community and finally the women overtook the plant unarmed. The women “defied soldiers to shoot them,” to leave the community or to stay and perform their husband’s duties.²⁸² The historical correlations are extremely prevalent. It is hard not to think of Nwanyeruwa and the women of the Women’s War who defied soldiers in and around the Aba province.²⁸³

Furthermore, these women’s protests may not be spur of the moment. For one, Okonta and Douglas write that many steps are taken by various Nigerian communities to express

²⁷⁹ Orin Gordon, "Nigeria's Growing Number of Female Oil Bosses," *BBC News*, September 11, 2014, <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-29127436>.

²⁸⁰ Okonta and Douglas, p. 66.

²⁸¹ Ajakaye.

²⁸² Ajakaye, from responses gathered from Freeman Ehinor, a local eyewitness.

²⁸³ Aba Commission of Inquiry, p. 24-26, para. 363-365, and see Van Allen, 1976, p. 60.

grievances through Shell's system.²⁸⁴ In an article from 2014, African Independent Television reported "the spokesperson for Shell Petroleum Development company said that proper channels existed for the women to communicate their grievances instead of taking to the streets" of the Peremabiri community in the Delta State.²⁸⁵ Based on understandings of women's actions from the colonial period through today, and on the information gathered in sources presented in this chapter, it seems fair to argue that the women of the Peremabiri may very well have gone through the 'proper channels' only to realize that those channels were designed to disadvantage them. An Africa Independent Television article mentions "Shell has failed to implement its obligations as contained in a Memorandum of Understanding," and that a Shell spokesman said that "the MoU model has provision for addressing grievances."²⁸⁶ If Shell is already breaking agreements in their MoU with Peremabiri, surely the women's voices through 'proper channels' were not heard or were ignored.

Women at large in Nigeria have been disadvantaged by Western conceptions of domesticity. One of the mechanisms to enforce this during the colonial era was through Indirect Rule and the strict gendering of ruler vs. ruled. Today, women in the Niger Delta are disadvantaged by the oil industry. There seems to be a connection between the civil society and reactions against Indirect Rule and power during the colonial era and the civil society and reactions against Shell today. In both cases, women play an integral role in advancing the ideas and grievances of the communities against foreign domination. This chapter showed that many of the complications of Indirect Rule are reproduced today in a variety of complex ways. Putting locals in newly created positions of power was a method of control used by both the British and

²⁸⁴ Okonta and Douglas, p. 74-88.

²⁸⁵ AIT, "Half Naked Women Protest against Shell in Bayelsa," *Africa Independent Television*, 2014, http://www.aitonline.tv/post-half_naked_women_protest_against_shell_in_bayelsa.

²⁸⁶ AIT.

by Shell. Changes to the physical, social landscape by creating spaces that occupy political and economic authority and domination is another trait that the two shares. There are many questions that can be asked about correlations between the colonial and nation-state eras of Nigeria; many connections can be made in favor of supporting the necessity to study Indirect Rule as an influential factor of Political Economic Development.

Conclusion

This project served to investigate a time period as well as contextualize why phenomenon occur. The rationale for a joint project in History and Political Studies was simple; the two fields work well together when investigating themes such as political culture and relationships to power. The purpose has been at the textual level, to understand the violence in Nigeria, as well as at the theoretical level, to understand that historical actions have intense consequences through today. This investigation has yielded positive results that certain aspects and programs of colonial regimes, Nigerian Indirect Rule in this case, can lead to specific problems and crises of the modern day; this is a reaction to works dedicated solely to addressing the ideology behind generalities of colonialism, such as taxation,²⁸⁷ civilizing mission and imperial expansion, as the reason for why certain events unfold in post-colonial states. This is also a challenge to the ideology of the nation-state: free markets, democracy, and Western culture.

The Women's War of 1929 created the first realization of historical continuity of Indirect Rule through today. Independent Nigeria has been marked, in popular belief, as a state riddled with violence, protest and corruption. Stories about oil protest, Boko Haram and violent transitions of power frequented Western news outlets over the last two decades. The Women's War showed a historical link to the women of today who protest against a variety of issues in Nigeria. Research behind the Women's War shows that it was largely in reaction to colonial Indirect Rule.²⁸⁸ Matera, Bastian and Kent lay out why the women were reacting against certain social, cultural and economic issues, but the heart of the reason is that the British engaged in

²⁸⁷ While taxation can be a specific program worthy of study, it is also worthy to investigate why taxes were collected, why certain taxes were used over others and how taxes influenced the colonial agenda.

²⁸⁸ Matera, Bastian and Kent, p. 236-238, and see Aba Commission of Inquiry, p. 24-30, para. 354-442, many of Nwanyeruwa's grievances in this section center around paying taxes, Okugo being a chief, Emeruwa being in a position of power and disregarding the idea that she is under command of her husband.

changing Igbo society through the process of Indirect Rule. The Igbo of Nigeria are not simply incapable of accepting or adhering to Western ideals as some supporters of the nation-state model maybe believe, nor are they desperately trying to hold onto a pre-colonial utopia as some colonial scholars may argue. There has been a history of reacting against centralization; there is a history of resisting certain aspects of Western culture.

The message is, then, that the factors that the Igbo people resist which Matera, Bastian, Kent, Van Allen, and many other authors present are not the only aspects worthy of study. Understanding the process of changing Igbo culture, through the force of Indirect Rule, is as important as understanding that the British attempted to make changes. For example, an author may write ‘the British changed the socio-economic interactions of the Igbo by bringing greater levels of gender discrimination.’ While this could be absolutely true, it is an insufficient explanation for why gender discrimination persisted throughout the second half of the twentieth century. This project, following with this example, argued that this analysis has deeper value: ‘Indirect Rule created the system of Warrant Chiefs which created a political culture of situating power and authority in a masculine sphere.’ This does not mean to argue that Indirect Rule is the end all for understanding why certain aspects of post-colonial society have developed in the manners in which they have. It does argue, however, that it is necessary to investigate nuanced or abstract colonial programs.

The Aba Commission of Inquiry seems to be a fair recording of the events of 1929, though some opinions presented by the British and Nigerians clearly favor themselves. Nwanyeruwa explains the story in depth, Okugo is largely condemned for his actions and the commission requests audience from a variety of individuals, both African and European men and women. One issue with the *Notes of Evidence* is that it fails to recognize any serious blame on

the British. The Aba Commission noted “so far as the Birrell Gray Commission found firing was justified, no useful purpose served by entering into matter further in addressing Commission.”²⁸⁹ Further, soldiers’ actions were not only justified, but praised for use of their given equipment: “the rifles, the bayonet and the Lewis gun.”²⁹⁰ The Commission further found that “the security of this country depends on troops. It is not suggested that the population of Nigeria is not loyal, but (1) the vast majority is still uncivilised and (2) we are in a foreign land.”²⁹¹ Not only did the British have misconceptions about why the women were protesting, but this culture of justifying the pacification of unruly inhabitants with extreme levels of violence took a larger scale in the suppression of the Biafran War.

The Nigerian Civil War of 1967-1970, also known as the Biafran War and Biafran Civil War, has a complex understanding in Nigerian history. The Igbo viewed it as a reaction against a government that failed to provide security and safety.²⁹² This sentiment followed the brutal violence Igbo people experienced in the North, as well as in the whole of Nigeria.²⁹³ Rather than study this war solely as a continuation of domination and militarism as a colonial legacy, this work has demonstrated that the significance of the Biafran movement is deeply tied to Indirect Rule. The structure of Indirect Rule created the regionalism that led to the ethnic conflict and the 1966-1967 coup and counter coups. Creating ethnic regions that were dominated by a single political party made each region try desperately to ascertain political power in any way possible.

²⁸⁹ Aba Commission of Inquiry, p. 983, para. 18941.

²⁹⁰ Aba Commission of Inquiry, p. 987, para. 18962, the Lewis gun was one of the early automatic machine guns and became the standard military light machine gun during the First World War. The Lewis gun was a weapon of war, not simply for standard police equipment; this further confirms that the troops involved with the Aba shooting were soldiers, not simply police.

²⁹¹ Aba Commission of Inquiry, p. 987, para. 18962.

²⁹² Uchendu, p. 54.

²⁹³ Bach, p. 219-221.

This is reminiscent of how Nigerians tried to gain favor with the British and take power positions under the administration of Indirect Rule.²⁹⁴

The discussion on Shell oil in Chapter Three, and the oil market at large, was not simply to understand how the influences of Indirect Rule have persisted through today, but also how it specifically influenced political culture. Shell oil uses the Nigerian military to satisfy its coercive agenda. The minority groups of the Niger Delta, such as the Ogoni, Ijo, Ibibio, and Ikwerre, are subject to violence and atrocities committed by the three major ethnicities, the Igbo, the Hausa-Fulani and the Yoruba, who are inclined to maintain oil production, Nigeria's most important commodity on the international market. The political culture of violently repressing dissenters in favor of a foreign, centralized authority, Shell, came from the process of securing and enforcing Indirect Rule. The chronology of events, of the violence in 1929 through the Biafran War up to Shell oil's action, further supports the argument that Indirect Rule has continued to affect the Nigerian people for generations.

This study of Shell also shows the issues and consequences of the nation-state model. Mr. Justice Fraser, a judge presiding over the High Court of Justice in the UK, ruled that “there is simply no connection whatsoever between this jurisdiction and the claims brought by the claimants, who are Nigerian citizens, for breaches of statutory duty and/or in common law for acts and omissions in Nigeria, by a Nigeria company.”²⁹⁵ Shell is a Dutch-British company incorporated in the United Kingdom. The United Kingdom abstained from offering to provide any jurisdiction against Shell. There is a direct colonial legacy of Britain and Shell in Nigeria,

²⁹⁴ Aba Commission, p. 32-39, para. 494-660.

²⁹⁵ Adam Vaughan, "Nigerian Oil Pollution Claims against Shell Cannot Be Heard in UK, Court Rules," *The Guardian*, January 26, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2017/jan/26/nigerian-oil-pollution-shell-uk-corporations>.

yet the former will not take action against the TNOC in favor of minorities in the Niger Delta. From the nation-state perspective, this is a logical conclusion because the two states are separate, sovereign entities. By addressing the colonial legacy in conjunction of the nation-state model, the UK is liable for many of Shell and Nigeria's actions in regards to the oil markets and host communities of the Niger Delta.

Indirect Rule has influenced the political culture of Nigeria through today. This project has served to support the argument that colonial practices need to be explored to understand why certain issues have persisted in developing countries. All post-colonial nation-states are different, but there is a worldwide pandemic of Western imposition. For this reason, colonialism in general must be investigated. This does not mean that a case study on Nigerian Indirect Rule can be directly applicable to understanding the events and consequences of the same colonial program in India. It does imply, however, that regardless of the distinction between post-colonial states, they are all worthy of deep investigation. This examination is necessary to understanding the larger implications of why a certain country failed to meet certain Western criteria, or why democracy is failing to flourish as it did in the West. The analysis provided in these chapters could be used to more coherently answer questions such as 'why is Boko Haram such a problematic and successful force in Nigeria' or 'why do TNOCs dominate the Nigerian economy and how does manifest as worker extortion?' The answers to these questions inevitably require more analysis than was presented in the preceding chapters, but the depth and assessment of the analysis can be applicable to any situation of any problem in a developing nation-state. Understanding that specific programs and administrations during the colonial era directly affects the political economic development of nation-states today is the first step in

understanding the binary of developed and developing as well as asking and answering the questions that come from this binary.

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