

EMERGENT MASCULINITIES: THE GENDERED STRUGGLE FOR POWER IN
SOUTHEASTERN NIGERIA, 1850-1920

By

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation uses oral history, written sources, and emic interpretations of material culture and rituals to explore the impact of changes in gender constructions on the historical processes of socio-political transformation among the Ohafia-Igbo of southeastern Nigeria between 1850 and 1920. Centering Ohafia-Igbo men and women as innovative historical actors, this dissertation examines the gendered impact of Ohafia-Igbo engagements with the Atlantic and domestic slave trade, legitimate commerce, British colonialism, Scottish Christian missionary evangelism, and Western education in the 19th and 20th centuries. It argues that the struggles for social mobility, economic and political power between and among men and women shaped dynamic constructions of gender identities in this West African society, and defined changes in lineage ideologies, and the borrowing and adaptation of new political institutions. It concludes that competitive performances of masculinity and political power by Ohafia men and women underlines the dramatic shift from a pre-colonial period characterized by female bread-winners and more powerful and effective female socio-political institutions, to a colonial period of male socio-political domination in southeastern Nigeria.

DEDICATION

To the memory of my father, late Chief Ndubueze C. Mbah, my mother, Mrs. Janet Mbah, my teachers and Ohafia-Igbo men and women, whose forbearance made this study a reality.

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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is a study of gendered identity formation and social change in 19th and 20th century Ohafia, the only matrilineal society among the Igbo people of southeastern Nigeria. Comprised of twenty-six villages (two of which are now almost extinct), Ohafia has a current population estimate of 125,000. It covers about 110 square miles of territory in the western part of the middle Cross River region, and marks the eastern limit of Igboland. Various non-Igbo ethnic communities bound Ohafia in the north, south, and west.¹ Between the 16th and 18th centuries, the Ohafia-Igbo people borrowed and adapted institutions and practices such as secret societies, an age-grade system of political administration, and a matrilineal kinship system from their non-Igbo neighbors.² The adaptation of these institutions and their roles in the dynamic constructions of gender identities between the 19th and 20th centuries, center Ohafia-Igbo individuals in complex processes of social change in southeastern Nigeria. As this study will show, Ohafia pioneered the expansion of the Igbo ethnic group into the Cross River region between the 1500s and 1650s, and were at the center of militant slave production in the Bight of Biafra, between the 1650s and 1850s.³ As a frontier Igbo community, the Ohafia-Igbo evidence the social changes that followed British colonial and European missionary penetration of

¹ NAI CSO 26/3 File 29196. C.J. Mayne, "Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934," 58; Philip Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo People* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), 1, 10; Onwuka Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo Society* (Nigeria: Whytam Press, 2000), vi. Mayne's estimate of Ohafia population in the 1930s was 24, 556. Nsugbe's 1960s estimate was 69,000. Ohafia Local Government website shows 125,000 for 1999.

² Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 15; Chukwuma Azuonye, "The Narrative War Songs of the Ohafia Igbo: A Critical Analysis of their Characteristic Features in Relation to their Social Functions" *Ph.D. Thesis*, (London, 1979), 22; Monday Abasiattai, *Akwa Ibom and Cross River States: the Land, the People and their Culture* (Calabar: Wusen Press, 1987), 50.

³ See chapters 1 and 3.

Igbo land at the turn of the 20th century. They thus provide a window into the major socio-political changes that took place in southeastern Nigeria before and after the 20th century.

“Emergent Masculinities” is a pioneer study of the constructions and transformations of masculinities in pre-colonial Africa, and the first study of masculinities in southeastern Nigeria. Locating masculinity (*ufiem*) as a concept within the cultural logic, norms, practices, and institutions of Ohafia-Igbo society, this dissertation argues that the struggles for social mobility and power between and among men and women shaped dynamic constructions of gender identities in the society. By bringing the literature on female power and authority in West Africa into dialogue with the nascent field of African masculinity studies, this dissertation argues that masculinities and femininities were mutually constitutive⁴ (women’s actions shaped men’s lives and *vice versa*), and defines the African gender system as one of power relations among men and women and between men and women.

In theorizing masculinity as a historically constructed gender identity, this study deconstructs assumptions of male power and patriarchy in the accepted narratives of African lives,⁵ and examines the gendering of identities as a historical process that entailed the negotiation of power. “Emergent Masculinities” argues that *ufiem* (masculinity) was a historical definition of power, in the sense that *ufiem* accomplishment vested social power in some men, denied social privileges to other men, and did not enable men to exercise power over women until the early colonial period (1900-1920). The few Ohafia men who accomplished *ufiem* did so

⁴ Joan Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

⁵ Van Allen, “Sitting on a Man,” 165-171; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo Society*, 24; Mba, *Nigerian Women Mobilized*, 27, 29, 37, 62; Lebeuf, “The Role of Women in the Political Organization of African Societies,” 109, 113; Ifeka-Moller, “Female Militancy and Colonial Revolt: The Women’s War of 1929, Eastern Nigeria,” in Ardener, ed., *Perceiving Women*, 134.

through hard work, and not because they were biologically male. In fact, many Ohafia men did not accomplish *ufiem*, and were as such, ridiculed and victimized by both men and women.

In addition to playing key roles in defining the gender identities of men, Ohafia-Igbo women also performed various forms of masculinity between 1850 and 1920.⁶ This study contends that the changes in constructions of masculinities, and the changing performances of female power and authority among the Ohafia-Igbo were correspondent. Before 1900, women's occasional and incidental performances of masculinity through military distinction were not informed by a profound quest for political and economic power (chapter 3). However, as Ohafia-Igbo women became increasingly marginalized from the dominant socio-political positions of power in their society between 1900 and 1920 (chapter 5), they sought through their struggles, to redefine existing conceptions of gendered spaces, roles and opportunities. During this period, their performances of masculinity increased substantially, became a primary means of social mobility, and constituted resistance to emergent European and African patriarchies.

Whereas existing scholarship argues that Igbo women occupied a subservient,⁷ or at best, complementary⁸ position vis-à-vis men until colonialism led to the deterioration of their status,

⁶ See chapters 3 and 5.

⁷ For this view, see Nina Mba, *Nigerian Women Mobilized: Women's Political Activity in Southern Nigeria, 1900-1965* (Berkeley, California: Institute of International Studies, University of California, 1982), 37, 67, 87-89; Karen Sacks, "An Overview of Women and Power in Africa" in Jean F. O'Barr, ed., *Perspectives On Power: Women in Africa, Asia, and Latin America* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Center for International Studies, 1982), 5-9; Annie Lebeuf, "The Role of Women in the Political Organization of African Societies," in D. Paulme, ed., *Women of Tropical Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 93-120; Jean O'Barr, "African Women in Politics," in Margaret Jean Hay and Sharon Sticher (eds.), *African Women South of the Sahara* (London: Longman, 1984), 140-144.

⁸ For this view, see Nwando Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors and Kings: Female Power and Authority in Northern Igboland, 1900-1960* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2005); Kamene Okonjo, "The Dual Sex Political System in Operation: Igbo Women and Community Politics in Midwestern Nigeria" in Nancy Hafkin and Edna Bay (eds.), *Women in Africa* (Stanford,

this dissertation argues that Ohafia female socio-political institutional practices, rooted in the power-base of a matrilineal kinship system, were until 1900, more powerful and more effective than their male counterparts. Between 1850 and 1900, Ohafia-Igbo women were the major breadwinners of their families, and they were central to the distribution of land and capital.⁹ The gradual disempowerment of women is inseparable from the processes through which men themselves came to dominate significant spheres of authority between 1900 and 1920.

Challenging the notion that pre-colonial Africa was comprised of social groups confined within abiding structures and lacking in individualism until Western capitalist intervention,¹⁰ this work argues that constructing new individual and collective identities for political purposes was a real and immediate necessity in both pre-colonial and colonial Africa. The gendered character of this identity formation underlines the dramatic shift from a pre-colonial period characterized by more powerful and more effective female socio-political institutions, to a colonial period of male socio-political domination in southeastern Nigeria.

California: Stanford University Press, 1976), 46-56; Ifi Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society* (London: Zed Books Limited, 1989), 119-123; Sylvia Leith-Ross, *African Women: A Study of the Ibo of Nigeria* (London: Faber & Faber, 1938), 19-21; Audrey Wipper, "Women's Voluntary Associations," in Hay and Sticher (eds.), *African Women South of the Sahara*, 70 and 86.

⁹ See chapters 1 and 2.

¹⁰ This is the dilemma at the heart of debates about the degree of the impact of Atlantic slavery on Africa (Eltis and Richardson 2008, Thornton 1998, Hawthorne 2008), whether indigenous African slave systems were mild compared to New World slavery (Lovejoy 2000), whether significant systems of knowledge were transferred from Africa to the New World through the Atlantic slave trade (Matory 2005, Carney 2001, Sweet 2003, Hawthorne 2008), whether Foucault's notion of power/knowledge regime (Foucault 2002) is applicable to African colonial contexts (Moore 1991, Hartsock 1990, Comaroff 1985, Sawicki 1986), whether private property ownership existed in Africa pre-Western capital intervention, whether modernization led to the disintegration of African cultures (Moore and Vaughan 1994, Holy 1986, Poewe 1980, Vuyk 1991, Mahir 1992, Lovett 1997), and feminists preoccupation with the Western world's "Other-ing" of Africans as objects of knowledge (Nnaemeka 2005, Nnaemeka 1998, Oyewunmi 1997, Arnfred et al. 2004).

Lastly, the shifts in gendered power and identity performance among the Ohafia-Igbo were shaped by both external and internal historical forces, and informed by preexisting indigenous gender ideologies and historical gendered power contestation.¹¹ Thus, in theorizing social change, this study interrogates the dialectics of individualism, subjectivity and consciousness in the face of internal influences such as socio-political organization, migrations and warfare, slave raiding and headhunting; and external influences such as the Atlantic slave trade, British colonialism, Christian missionary evangelism, and Western education.

The Periodization of Ohafia-Igbo History: A Window into Changes in Gender Construction and Gendered Power

The periodization of African history shapes the kind of history produced. A Eurocentric periodization generates at best, a history of European agency and innovation and African adaptation and resistance. An African-centered periodization emphasizes a history of African identity making, which incorporated Europeans when they came into the picture. Thus, Ade Ajayi noted in the 1960s, “Colonialism must be seen not as a complete departure from the

¹¹ This study’s view that historical gender ideologies and internal historical processes informed individuals’ engagements with new notions of masculinity introduced through the Atlantic slave trade, Christian missionary evangelism and British colonialism, is informed by Prasenjit Duara’s observation that new representations of social identity are informed by pre-existing historical forms of identity. See Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 9. This view challenges the notion that the spread of European empires and ideologies brought a global gender order and a prospect of all indigenous gender regimes floundering under the institutional and cultural pressure of colonialism and capitalism. As Stephen Miescher observed, while colonialism led to a masculinization of African political systems, it did not lead to a collapse of the indigenous gender system, which was fluid. See Stephan F. Miescher, *Making Men in Ghana* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 2005), 199. For the oppositional view, see R.W. Connell, *Masculinities* (California: University of California Press, 1995), 199-200; Robert Morrell, “Of Boys and Men: Masculinity and Gender in Southern Africa,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 24, 4 (1998), 612-619.

African past, but as one episode in the continuous flow of African history.”¹² This study privileges an Ohafia-centered periodization, as it seeks to destabilize the sharp break with the past, often found in historical and anthropological studies that define the 20th century as an ethnographic baseline.

This study focuses primarily on the historical period from 1850 to 1920. The 1850s was a period of intense socio-political change among the Ohafia-Igbo. While the Atlantic slave trade was abolished in 1807, the British colonial government legalized domestic slave trade in southeastern Nigeria until 1916.¹³ Forging an alliance with the Aro, the Ohafia-Igbo played a dominant role in militant slave production in the Biafran hinterland in the mid-19th century,¹⁴ and the nascent legitimate commerce in palm produce occasioned widespread socio-political

¹² J. F. A. Ajayi, “The Continuity of African Institutions under Colonialism,” In T. O. Ranger, ed. *Emerging Themes of African History* (Dar es Salaam: East African Pub. House, 1968), 194.

¹³ British National Archives (BNA), CO (Colonial Office: Southern Nigeria Protectorate Original Correspondence) 520/38, Dec. 1906 [88-91]; CO520/107, Nov. 23, 1911; CO520/123, Mar. 1913; CO520/124, May 1913; CO520/126, July 1913; CO583/8, Dec. 1913; CO583/12, April 1914; CO583/30, Feb. 1915; CO583/49, Nov. 1916. The British colonial government was reluctant to acknowledge that the House Rule System was a slave system. After decades of public outcry against the system, the government passed laws enabling slaves to purchase their freedom. However, it soon discovered that this amendment generated “greater evils,” because of the power it vested in slave owners, who increasingly made it impossible for slaves to gain their freedom. Realizing that the petition of the governor of southern Nigeria to transform the Native Houses into Trading Houses was a pretext to continue the slave system, the secretary of state for the colonies called for its repeal. Increasing pressure from the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society mounted, and the Native House Rule System was repealed in January 1915. The following year, the “Slavery Bill, 1916” abolished *further* enslavements in the region.

¹⁴ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 69-89; Arthur Glyn Leonard, “Notes of a Journey to Bende,” *The Journal of the Manchester Geographical Society*, XIV (1898), 196-197; Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 13-15; Elizabeth Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People* (London: Macmillan Press, 1976), 82; K.O. Dike and F.I. Ekejiuba, *The Aro of South-eastern Nigeria, 1650-1980: A study of Socio-Economic Formation and Transformation in Nigeria* (Ibadan: University Press, 1990); J.N. Oriji, “Slave Trade, Warfare and Aro Expansion in the Igbo Hinterland,” *Geneve-Afrique* 24, 2 (1986), 107-114.

transformations in the society. The 1920s witnessed the consolidation of colonial rule and reflects the impact of Christian missionary evangelism in the society.¹⁵

Between the two major time periods of this study, 1850-1920, Ohafia-Igbo people mostly do not recall specific dates; rather, they recall specific events, social upheavals, and calamities, as historical moments.¹⁶ Thus, the first and second smallpox epidemics of the 1890s and 1918-1919 respectively, are popularly recalled as *mgbe ogarelu mbu* (in the time of the first smallpox epidemic) and *mgbe ogarelu abuo* (in the time of the second smallpox epidemic). Through the records of Christian missionaries in the Cross River region, British colonial documents, and secondary literature on southeastern Nigeria history, one is able to identify the specific time periods referenced by the local time markers.¹⁷ This mode of recalling the past is more useful in shedding light on the impact of macro processes on local communities, because it captures Africans' historical experiences, as well as their innovation, adaptation, and resistance.

¹⁵ Both the Church of Scotland Mission and the British colonial government consolidated their hold on Ohafia in the 1920s. Geoffrey Johnston, *Of God and Maxim Guns: Presbyterianism in Nigeria, 1846-1966* (Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1988), 4, 39. The 1920s also witnessed women's economic backlash against men through revolutionary cassava production, and invasion of hitherto exclusively male pursuits such as yam cultivation. See chapter 4.

¹⁶ Nwando Achebe made a similar observation in her study of Nsukka women. See Nwando Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors and Kings: Female Power and Authority in Northern Igboland, 1900-1960* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2005), 23-26.

¹⁷ "Collins, Robert, Missionary in Calabar, Letters of: Letter from Collins Robert to Mr. Ashcroft," dated 7th May 1920, *West Africa* (National Library of Scotland, MS.7793); *Dibia Agwu Arua*, oral interview by author; Elizabeth Isichei, *Igbo Worlds: An Anthology of Oral Histories and Historical Descriptions* (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1978), 231-232; Johnston, *Of God and Maxim Guns*, 197; Ohadike, "The Influenza Pandemic of 1918-1919," 179-191. The social malaise, which plagued the Ohafia-Igbo in the late 19th and early 20th century, provided a fertile ground for the eager embrace of Presbyterian missionaries. The Ohafia-Igbo had it so bad that following the second epidemic; British officials (Mr. Chubb and Mr. A.I Weir) described them as "the poorest in the division" and recommended a 20-50% reduction in taxes on the community. See NAE OW 342/27, ABADIST 8/11/2. L.T. Chubb, "Assessment Reports: Bende Division, 1927-1929," 2-6.

In order to further ground the period, 1850-1920 within Ohafia-Igbo sense of historical time, this dissertation delineates the Ohafia-Igbo concept of *mgbe ichin* (the olden days), by which they refer to the entire period between the 16th and 20th centuries. The historical memories within which the Ohafia-Igbo situate *mgbe ichin* fall within four successive time periods: a period of migration and settlement — c. 1500-1650;¹⁸ a period of slave production for the Atlantic market — 1650-1820s; a period of slave production for domestic markets and long distance trade mostly in palm produce — 1820-1880s;¹⁹ and a period of European missionary

¹⁸ See G.I. Jones, *Annual Reports of Bende Division, South Eastern Nigeria, 1905-1912* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1986), 1-2; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 1-15, 67; Chukwuma Azuonye, “The Heroic Age of the Ohafia Igbo,” *Geneve-Afrique* 28, 1 (1990), 9; A.O. Arua, *A Short History of Ohafia* (Enugu: Omnibus Press, 1951), 2; David Iyam, *The Broken Hoe: Cultural Reconfiguration in Biase Southeastern Nigeria* (Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 4, 29-32; Monday Abasiattai, *Akwa Ibom and Cross River States: the Land, the People and their Culture* (Calabar: Wusen Press, 1987), 8-11, 27-40, 48; Sandy O. Onor, *The Ejagham Nation in the Cross River Region of Nigeria* (Ibadan: Kraft Books Limited, 1994), 13-31; Kannan K. Nair, *Politics and Society in South Eastern Nigeria, 1841-1906* (London: Frank Cass, 1972), 3-4; David Northrup, *Trade Without Rulers: Pre-Colonial Economic Development in South-Eastern Nigeria* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 31-36, 119; Kenneth O. Dike and Felicia Ekejiuba, “The Aro State: A Case-Study of State-Formation in Southeastern Nigeria,” *Journal of African Studies* 5, 1 (1978), 273; John N. Oriji, *Traditions of Igbo Origin: A Study of Pre-Colonial Population Movements in Africa*, Rvd. Ed. (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 1994), 11.

¹⁹ Indeed, illegal slave trade across the Atlantic continued into the 1850s. While anti-slave British squadrons patrolled the coasts of West Africa, several European and American slavers still managed to load and ship slaves, sometimes using trade in palm oil as a cover for carrying off slaves. For a long time, the British government could not sign any anti-slave treaty with New Calabar (under King Amacree), and Spanish, Portuguese, and American ships continued to load their cargo with slaves from the port of New Calabar. See BNA, FO84/858: “Slave Trade: Africa, West Coast (Consular) – Mr. Beecroft, Mr. Fraser, and Mr. Hanson – Jan.-Dec. 1851,” 218-223; FO84/920: “Slave Trade: West Coast of Africa (Consular); January to December 1853,” 59-69; FO84/950: “Slave Trade: West Coast of Africa (Consular); January to December 1854,” 175-178. However, trade in palm oil and kernel peaked between 1820 and 1880, as the coastal societies reorganized themselves into trading, as opposed to slaving houses, and increasingly relied on the Igbo and Ibibio interior communities for their supplies. See FO84/950: “Slave Trade: West Coast of Africa (Consular), January to December 1854,” 141-144. African ex-slaves in the coastal communities of Calabar also joined the extensive trade in palm produce between Europeans at the coast and Africans in the interior. See FO84/1001: “Slave Trade: West

evangelism and British colonial rule — 1890s-1960. It is necessary to understand Ohafia-Igbo experiences of these pre-colonial socio-political processes couched within *mgbe ichin* reference, to better comprehend the subsequent 20th century socio-political transformations.

The major changes in constructions of masculinities among the Ohafia-Igbo fit into this indigenous mental map of historical change over distinctive time periods. Thus, between 1500 and 1650, as the Ohafia-Igbo sought to pacify a bellicose environment and defend their newly acquired territories, warriors who went to war and brought back human heads were awarded the title of *ufiem*, which meant the attainment of respectable manhood status in the society, hence masculinity.²⁰ Men who failed to perform *igbu ishi* (“to cut a head”) were defined as *ujo* (weak/coward/one who embodied fear). The word *ujo* in Igbo general usage means “fear.” However, Ohafia people employ the term, as a noun in reference to an individual who embodies fear; that is a coward. They also equate the *ujo* with *onye ngolongo* (a weak person). The *ujo* were subjected to various social handicaps and discriminations (see chapter 3).

Coast of Africa (Consular); Bight of Biafra (Consul Hutchinson); January to December 1856,” 68-72, 156-176, 204-317. The palm produce trade inspired British intensified efforts to “open up the interior” to “free trade.” In this regard, King Jaja of Opobo, Pepple of Bonny, and later, the Aro people constituted obstacles, which the British government had to remove in order to reach the “palm belt” of the Cross River peoples. See FO84/1001, 365-372; FO84/2020: “Africa (Slave Trade), West Coast: “Africa (Slave Trade), West Coast: Consuls for the Oil Rivers— Hewett, Munro, and Annesley; 1890,” 120-132. Also, the British Royal Niger Company was formed in 1885 to ensure effective extraction of surplus palm produce from the region. See FO84/1750: “Africa (Slave Trade) West Coast – Consul for the Gold Coast: Griffith; Vice-Consuls for the Oil Rivers: Johnston and White; January to December 1886,” 32-37, 43-54. The Ohafia-Igbo belong to the Bende District of the Cross River Division of the Eastern Province, identified as contributing the highest quota of palm produce in southeastern Nigeria in the 19th century. See CO520/47: “Colonial Office: Southern Nigeria Protectorate Original Correspondence; Governor, 12th June to 22nd July 1907,” 743-777.

²⁰ See chapter 3 for detailed discussion.

Between 1650 and the 1820s, in the course of the Atlantic slave trade, live slave captives came to symbolize “heads” cut by warriors to attain *ufiem* (masculinity).²¹

Between the 1820s and 1880s, individuals who acquired wealth through trade, hunting and yam cultivation, were said to have “cut heads,” and their masculinity performance took the form of building hitherto non-existing modern story buildings with zinc roofs, marrying many wives, and possessing many slaves.²² Reflecting on this change among the Cross River peoples, the Scottish missionary Mary Slessor observed in 1886, that “The people . . . are becoming quite civilized and decent. They are getting houses of a better stamp, they have candles and paraffin lamps, clocks, pictures, etc. and have begun to wear hats and boots and nice things.”²³ In Ohafia, such individuals were said to have accomplished *ogaranya* (wealth) masculinity.²⁴

²¹ Chief Udensi Ekea, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon Village, August 4, 2010; Chief Olua Iro Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Ebem, Aug. 3, 2010; Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Elu, Aug. 10, 2010; Mr. Davidson Kalu Oki, oral interview by author, Okon Village, Aug. 5, 2010; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amangwu Village, Aug. 15, 2011; Kalu Awa, *ezie-ogo* of Ibina (Ihenta), oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Dec. 12, 2011; Chief Kalu Awa Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Ufiele Village. Oct. 27, 2011.

²² See chapter 4. Also see Mayne, “Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan,” p. 5.

²³ The Missionary Record of the United Presbyterian Church, November 1886.

²⁴ Chief Udensi Ekea, oral interview by author; Chief Olua Iro Kalu, oral interview by author; Chief Kevin Ukiro, oral interview by author; Ndukwe Otta and Elder Uduma Uka, Group Interview by author; Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author; Chief Eke Emetu Kalu, oral interview by author; Chief Emeh Okonkwo, oral interview by author; Chief Kalu Awa Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Ufiele Village, Oct. 27, 2011; Chief K.K. Owen, oral interview by author. Also see Felix K. Ekechi, *Tradition and Transformation in Eastern Nigeria: A Sociopolitical History of Owerri and its Hinterland, 1902-1947* (Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1989), 145-146; Raphael C. Njoku, *African Cultural Values: Igbo Political Leadership in Colonial Nigeria, 1900-1966* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 19-21. In his study of Igbo colonial society as a product of dialogue and negotiations between “indigenous” and “Western” cultures, Njoku posits *ogaranya* as a “syndrome,” bred by the slave trade, the increasing circulation of wealth, and the obsession with foreign goods. He defines *ogaranya* as absolute patriarchs, emergent robber barons,

In the same logic, between the 1890s and 1920s, the academic degree became “heads” that when brought home, established the passage to full manhood.²⁵

However, these changes in signification of masculinity achievement did not entail clean breaks with the past. Thus, in the course of the Atlantic slave trade, warriors still cut heads to perform *ufiem* in addition to capturing live captives defined as heads. This was similar to some Ohafia-Igbo men who fought in the Nigerian-Biafran war (1967-1970) and saw the war as an opportunity to decapitate enemy warriors and be celebrated as *ufiem*, sixty years after the abolition of headhunting.²⁶ Also, hunters, *dibia* (medicine men and spirit-medium priests), and yam farmers continued to perform the masculinity of their professions in the 20th century, as they did in the pre-colonial period (see chapter 4). Moreover, some individual men and women

unscrupulous rogues, and corrupters of British colonial principles. This view was logical for the author, who examines the historical roots of elite political corruption in modern Nigeria.

²⁵ John McCall, *Dancing Histories: Heuristic Ethnography with the Ohafia Igbo* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2000), 73. In articulation of this accomplishment, the Ohafia-Igbo say, “*E gbughi m nke mma; mana e gbu m nke a fu anya*” - “I did not cut a head with a knife; but I cut that which is synonymous with a head.” Chief Kalu Awa Kalu, oral interview by author; *Ezie-ogo* Vasco U. Iro of Nkwebi Village, in council with elders of Nkwebi Village, Group Interview with author, at Obu-Nta Kwebi, dig. voice recording. Nov. 17, 2011. For Nwando Achebe’s concept of “full manhood,” see Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors and Kings*, 206-215; Nwando Achebe, “And She Became a Man”: King Ahebi Ugbabe in the History of Enugu-Ezike, Northern Igboland, 1880-1948,” in Lisa A. Lindsay and Stephan F. Miescher, eds. *Men and Masculinities in Modern Africa* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2003), 52-68; Achebe, *The Female King*, 97-223.

²⁶ OW 342/27, ABADIST 8/11/2. L.T. Chubb, “Assessment Reports: Bende Division, 1927-1929”; Onwuka Njoku, “Inter-Village Trade in Ohafia, 1900-1979,” University of Nigeria Nsukka Press, Aug. 1981, 29; Chief Uduma Nnochin Ogbuagu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amuke Village, Nov. 24, 2011; *Ezie* Uka Uduma Uka (*Okpere Oha 1 of Akanu-Ukwu Autonomous Community*), oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Nov. 2, 2011.

exploited these pre-colonial forms of gendered identities (*dibia*, yam farmer, and hunter) to redefine the performance of *ogaranya* (wealth) masculinity in the 20th century.²⁷

Others incorporated 20th century material culture (such as cars and modern houses) into the performance of *ufiem*. Before the 1820s, yam ownership was a major measure of wealth among the Ohafia-Igbo and men, who produced over 8000 tubers of yam per year, were celebrated as *ogaranya*.²⁸ Guns came into use in Ohafia in the 18th century, and by the 19th century, they had become the hunter's chief weapon. Because guns were very expensive, the few men who acquired them employed them as a symbol of social prestige and *ogaranya* performance. Between the 1820s and the 1880s, *ogaranya* performance placed a premium on the acquisition of palm plantations, massive use of slave labor in trade and agriculture, possession of numerous wives and concubines, and the burial of deceased *ogaranya* with male slaves. Similarly, individuals who acquired wealth in scarce European commodities such as kerosene lanterns, and later, in the 20th century, bicycles and automobiles, were perceived as *ogaranya*.

While these various forms of *ufiem* coexisted, some enjoyed prominence in certain periods of Ohafia-Igbo history, and this reflected the major socio-political transformations taking place, not just in the society, but also in the region. These changes fall within the four major time-periods of Ohafia-Igbo history thus established. In the changing constructions and performances of *ufiem*, emphasis shifted from physical acquisition of heads (1500-1650), to the capturing of slaves in warfare (1650-1820); and from trading wealth (1820-1880), to educational

²⁷ The case-studies of Chief Otuwe Agwu and Unyang Uka, two of the few women, who performed *ogaranya* masculinity and became female husbands, by exploiting membership of the all-male *dibia* guild and long-distance trade, are discussed in chapter five.

²⁸ Emea O. Arua, "Yam Ceremonies and the Values of Ohafia Culture," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 51, 2 (1981), 694-705; Oriji, *Traditions of Igbo Origin*, 6.

accomplishments (1890-1920). Throughout these periods, the persistent and dominant idiom of expressing masculinity, *igbu ishi* (to cut a head) was that of warrior masculinities. This reflected the social hegemony that warrior masculinities held over other forms of *ufiem* (until 1900), which this dissertation theorizes as subordinate and sometimes, subversive.

The persistent articulation of *ufiem* accomplishment in the form of wealth accumulation and education as *igbu ishi*, into the 20th century was not so much a reflection of the continued socio-political importance of warriors in the society during this period. Rather, by this time, the idiom had gained a life of its own. It had become what Pierre Bourdieu defines as a *habitus* — unconscious practices of social reproduction, continually shaped by individuals' social encounters and agency, and sustained through symbolic representation.²⁹ This *habitus* is evident in the continued celebration of *ufiem* accomplishment today, through the Ohafia war dance, historic praise singing, the celebration of secret societies, the beating of the *ikoro* war drum, and the physical demarcations of gendered spaces within the landscape itself. In the same vein, women's rituals and political resistance strategies, which are still performed today, evidence *habitus*, as much as consciousness, because they challenge emergent patriarchies in their society.

Indeed, the two broad time periods of Ohafia-Igbo history, 1820-1880 and 1890-1920, underline the broad transition from a pre-colonial period of pronounced female economic and political autonomy to a colonial period of declining female power and authority.³⁰ Between the 1820s and 1880s, the British colonial government sought to replace the slave trade with

²⁹ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 79. Bourdieu has also defined the *habitus* as “a system of choices which no one makes.” See Pierre Bourdieu and Alan C. M. Ross, *The Algerians* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1962), 111.

³⁰ The contrast in pre-colonial and colonial gendered power is examined in chapters 1, 2, and 5.

legitimate commerce.³¹ However, the new “legitimate trade” relied upon indigenous slave labor for palm produce, cocoa and rubber production until 1916.³² Ohafia men’s dominant role in militant slave production vested them with a new form of wealth, which few women possessed — slaves.³³ The changing exploitation of slave labor was manifest in new oil palm, palm wine, kola-nut and cocoa plantations,³⁴ which redefined indigenous practices of land tenure, and threatened women’s position as primary transmitters of land in the society (see chapter 1). Similarly, the gender-discriminatory nature of the European credit trust system, and the dangers associated with long distance trade in legitimate commodities, enabled men to dominate this trade, as opposed to women. The few women who acquired wealth in slaves and performed *ogaranya* masculinity were perceived as men.³⁵

³¹ In addition to footnote 17 above, see Adiele E. Afigbo, *Ropes of Sand: Studies in Igbo History and Culture* (Oxford, 1981), 241-242.

³² Ibid.

³³ See chapter 3.

³⁴ Individuals such as Nna Ekea discussed in chapter 4 and Kalu Ezelu discussed in chapter 5 established such plantations in Ohafia in the 1890s and in 1915, respectively. Mayne, “Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934,” 41-44; Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 122; Eke Kalu, “An Ibo Autobiography: The Autobiography of Mr. Eke Kalu, Ohaffia’s Well-honored Son,” *The Nigerian Field*, Journal of the Nigerian Field Society, 7, 4 (October, 1938), 166; Mberi Ndukwe, “From Slavery to the Order of British Empire: A Biography of Chief Eke Kalu Uwaoma of Ohafia” (B.A thesis, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, October 1998), 54; Chief Udensi Ekea, oral interview by author, Okon. Aug. 4, 2010; Elders of Umu-Anya Family, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Elu, Aug. 14, 2011; Mecha Ukpai Akanu, *ezie-ogo* of Amangwu and Members of the Men’s Court, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Aug. 18, 2011; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amangwu Village, Ohafia. August 15, 2011.

³⁵ For the case-study of one such woman, Unyang Uka (a.k.a Unyang Okpu Agu) discussed in chapter 5, see Tessy Uzoma Odum, oral interview with author, digital voice recording, Ohafia Local Government Council Office, Ebem Village, Sept. 5, 2011; Mr. E.I. Udensi, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Ebem Village. Sept. 5, 2011.

Ohafia-Igbo men's slave production also enabled them to introduce new secret societies that excluded women and redefined the performances of masculinity and power in their society. Ohafia-Igbo women's resistance to these secret societies such as *okonko* limited its socio-political power and influence locally; unlike in Calabar and other parts of Igboland, where *okonko* was gender-inclusive, and enjoyed preeminent socio-political influence (see chapter 4). By the 19th century, *okonko* had become an important avenue for the performance of *ogaranya* masculinity, and had spread to various parts of Igboland, whereas J.G.C. Allen observed, *okonko* members "began to take over many duties which hitherto had been regarded as the prerogative of the village council."³⁶ Elizabeth Isichei confirms that during this period, the rule of the elders was increasingly undermined by the rule of the wealthy and powerful.³⁷

Yet, in the Ohafia case, *okonko* never gained significant political influence, and women maintained superior political authority until 1900 (see chapters 2 and 4). By examining expressions of female power and authority between 1850 and 1900, this dissertation challenges the prevailing view of Igbo women as subordinate to men in the pre-colonial period.³⁸ This study also shows that Ohafia women maintained their enviable position as chief breadwinners of their families until the first two decades of the 20th century (see chapters 1 and 5).

Women lost significant socio-political power between 1900 and 1920 — a fact documented by several scholars of Igbo history.³⁹ Colonialism, Christianity, and Western education became new frontiers for gendered contestation of power. The incursion of

³⁶ NAE, E7021. J.G.C. Allen, "Intelligence Report on the Ngwa Clan, Vol. 1, 1933," 41.

³⁷ Elizabeth Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People* (London: Macmillan Press, 1976), 105.

³⁸ For this view, see footnote 8 above.

³⁹ See footnotes 8 and 9.

Presbyterian missionaries and British colonial forces⁴⁰ into Ohafia between 1897 and 1920 weakened the structure of Ohafia matrilineage in such a way that indigenous female religious and political institutions declined while male-dominated institutions remained vibrant (see chapter 5). Between 1901 and 1920, British colonial reforms of Ohafia-Igbo political systems entailed the substitution of indigenous gendered political organizations with exclusively male political institutions. Thus, the *okonko* gained legitimacy under British colonial rule, and the new exclusively male warrant-chief system became the only recognized form of government within the society (see chapter 5). In contrast, the office of the *ezie-nwami* (female ruler) appears as a footnote in the colonial Intelligence Report on Ohafia society — a report upon which pro-male and anti-female colonial reform of the society’s political administration was based. Also, the Christian mission-run “Normal Schools” that emerged in the region between 1895 and 1919 did not admit girls until the 1940s; and female-exclusive educational institutions, when they became established, focused on domestic science and marriage training.⁴¹ As a result, Ohafia-Igbo men, not women, emerged as the new colonial elite who filled the ranks of teachers, pastors, clerks, interpreters, and accountants in the colonial economy.

These politically powerful male breadwinners of the colonial period, who I call “emergent masculinities,” because of the unprecedented socio-political power and privileges they suddenly came to enjoy (see chapter 5), used their new wealth and position to redefine gendered access to socio-political opportunities in society. Thus, the society’s public welfare institutions, such as the age grade institution and the development unions, which hitherto provided gender-inclusive assistance to Ohafia citizens, were galvanized in this period to sponsor

⁴⁰ The British subdued Ohafia in the course of the 1901 Aro expedition. See Donald MacAlister, “Aro Country, Southern Nigeria,” *Scottish Geographical Magazine* 18 (1902), 634.

⁴¹ Johnston, *Of God and Maxim Guns*, 224-228.

only male persons in pursuit of higher education (see chapter 5). As men consequently came to replace women as the breadwinners of their families and increasingly performed *ogaranya* masculinity during this period, the redefinition of gendered political power moved from the public to the intimate spaces of the home.⁴²

In re-establishing their economic and political autonomy, Ohafia-Igbo women utilized various indigenous institutions to resist disempowerment and negotiate new forms of privilege and power. In this sense, women's rituals and political negotiating strategies such as boycotts, strike actions, deserting their homes en masse, and making war upon men, represent a conscious effort to reclaim their place in society.⁴³ This revolution against emergent masculinities is also borne out in the collective decision of Ohafia women to begin yam cultivation (the only food crop which Ohafia men produced in the pre-colonial period) in 1919, against historic gender practices, whereby men exclusively produced yam.⁴⁴ Through the life histories of Ohafia women, who performed *ogaranya* masculinity in the first two decades of the 20th century, this study shows that women, who found themselves on the margins of the colonial-*cum*-missionary decision-making apparatuses, sought through their struggles to negotiate and transcend gendered

⁴² For instance, as chapter 5 shows, these emergent masculinities expressed their social status through the practice of elite polygyny, and constantly denied women divorce petitions, by virtue of their membership in the Prebyterian church councils and the colonial native court.

⁴³ For similar arguments on Igbo women's resistance, agency and power in the colonial period, see footnotes 8 and 9. What is unique about my dissertation is that it seeks to establish the pre-eminent socio-political power that Ohafia-Igbo women enjoyed in the pre-colonial period, and also links the devolution of female power to changing constructions of masculinities.

⁴⁴ The gendered power implication of yam production and its role in masculinity performance is explored in chapter 4. Ndukwe Otta and Uduma Uka, oral conversation with author, Asaga Village. September 16, 2011; Mama Docas Kalu and Mama Mary Ezera of Ebem village, Group Interview by author; Nmia Nnaya Agbai of Elu village, oral interview by author; *Ikpirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu Village, Group Interview; Chief Olua Iro Kalu of Ebem village, oral interview by author; Mama Orié Emeh and Chief Mrs. Grace Ojieke, oral interview by author.

spaces, roles and opportunities. In so doing, they opened up the rules governing inclusion, and redefined dominant culture. Thus, women who lacked access to western education and employment in Christian churches and colonial service, took up long distance trade and *dibia* practice — social positions hitherto monopolized by men — and performed *ogaranya* masculinity like the warrant chiefs and western-educated elite of their day (see chapter 5).

Gendered Memories and the Periodization of Ohafia-Igbo History

The periodization of Ohafia-Igbo history is gendered in the manner in which men and women recall the past. Ohafia-Igbo men and women’s historical memories privilege distinctive historical periods. In recounting the central role of men in the consolidation of new territories upon migration and settlement, as well as in slave production, Ohafia men’s oral traditions emphasize the *mgbe ichin* periods, 1500-1650, and 1650-1820. However, Ohafia women’s oral traditions situated within this period emphasize a different phenomenon, namely, the dominant matrilineage system that they borrowed from their non-Igbo Cross River neighbors in the 17th century⁴⁵ and the centrality of the matrilineage to female power and authority in their society.

The historical memories of Ohafia-Igbo people are also gendered, because they are shaped by the relative experiences of men and women. For instance, women’s memory of what has come to be known as the yam revolution⁴⁶ (c.1920), which occurred at the end of *mgbe ogarelu abuo*, is centered upon blaming the male age-grade leadership at the time for the women’s protest. This age-grade was called Emeago. In recalling this event, Ohafia women from Ebem village (where this revolution began) always said, “*mgbe uke Emeago*” (in the time of

⁴⁵ Chukwuma Azuonye, “The Heroic Age,” *Geneve-Afrique* 28, 1 (1990), 9; Nsugbe, *Ohafia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 90-115; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 67.

⁴⁶ The “yam revolution,” which refers to Ohafia-Igbo women’s popular decision to begin yam cultivation in 1920, is discussed in Chapter 4.

Emeago age-grade), or they began their narrative with the assertion, “Emeago taught us a lesson, which made us stop depending on men for yams.”⁴⁷ Thus, “in the time of Emeago” (1918-1920s) is the historical time period for the yam revolution. Indeed, the existence of a well-organized age-grade system among the Ohafia-Igbo facilitates dating and chronology, and enables individuals to identify their age and specific events.⁴⁸ Similarly, the women of Elu village recall *mgbe ochichi Nna Kalu* (during the time of Warrant Chief Kalu Ezelu’s rulership: 1911-1927), as the historical period for the emergence of men in dominant socio-political positions, which also generated various women’s protest movements against these emergent masculinities.⁴⁹

Similarly, men’s recalling and sensory map of historical time is relative to women’s historical experiences. Ohafia women marked dynamic social changes on their bodies, through changes in dress habits and fashion.⁵⁰ This in turn shaped men’s views of historical time, in the sense that they identify women as embodying historical change. Thus, some of my male

⁴⁷ Mama Mary Ezera, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Ebem. August 3, 2010.

⁴⁸ For a similar case, see Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors and Kings*, 183-186.

⁴⁹ This referenc came up in two instances. The first was in reference to Elu women’s mass strike action (*ibo ezi*) against the men of their community, when the latter refused to make financial contributions for a communal project initiated by women. In what amounted to a critique of emerging male domination under colonial rule (discussed in chapter 5), Elu women said, “Since you say you own and control this land, here is your land, take it! When you have changed your mind, come and call on us!” The second was in reference to the tendency of *ogaranya* masculinities to thwart women’s divorce petitions through the auspices of the Presbyterian council. Nmia Nnaya Agbai, oral interview by author; *Ezie-nwami* Ucha Oji Iwe of Elu and her Cabinet, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording. Oct. 25, 2011; Mama Orie Emeh and Chief Grace Ojieke, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Elu. Aug. 18, 2011.

⁵⁰ *Ezie-nwami* Ogbonne Kalu Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Uduma Ukwu Village. November 17, 2011; *Ezie-nwami* Mmia Abali of Eziafor Village, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Dec. 17, 2011; Mama Orie Emeh and Chief Mrs. Grace Ojieke, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Elu Village. August 18, 2011.

collaborators referred to the period before the 1920s as a time “when young unmarried girls who had reached puberty still wore *ejigido*.”⁵¹ This time marker refers to a period before European clothing became widespread in Ohafia — before 1920.⁵² They contrast this with a post-1920 period, “when young girls started putting on clothes.”⁵³ In the view of Ohafia men, in the former period, women were chaste and “uncorrupted” by money.⁵⁴ During this period, Ohafia-Igbo women were able to exercise control over the sexuality and moral precepts of young men and women, through their political organ, *ikprikpe ndi inyom* (see chapter 2).

According to Nna Agbai Ndukwe, during the post-1920s period of effective British colonization however, “the world turned upside down,” because of increasing rural-urban migration, the weakening of female political institutions, and the inability of male-dominated

⁵¹ *Ejigido* (also called *jigida*) is a string of beads, which pre-colonial Igbo women wore around their waist to cover their nakedness, define their waistline, and signify their chastity. Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Elu. August 10, 2010; Chief Olua Iro Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Ebem Village, Ohafia. August 3, 2010; Elders of Umu-Anyia Family, Ndi Imaga Compound, Elu Ohafia, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Elu Village. August 14, 2011; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amanguw Village. August 15, 2011.

⁵² Mayne, “Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan,” 5. This gendered recalling situates the Ohafia-Igbo at the center of wider social processes. The increase in legitimate commerce was marked at the local level by mundane practices. The *ejigido* that young and unmarried Ohafia-Igbo women wore before the 19th century originally came from Calabar, where they were locally made. However, by the 1850s, the importation of European beads into the Bight of Biafra increased. Northrup, *Trade Without Rulers*, 208-211 shows that trade in goods between Europe and the Bight of Biafra increased exponentially between 1820 and 1850, just as the slave trade declined in the 1830s and palm oil trade increased until the 1860s. Many of the increased imports such as iron bars, salt, cloth, clothing, and beads, were goods that the hinterland had once furnished itself. Similarly, Miescher, *Making Men in Ghana*, 11 noted that in the mid-19th century, Akan traders traded hides, metal craft, and slaves for kola nuts, imported fabric, and glass beads. Thus, Nna Agbai recalls that in the 1920s, in addition to wearing *ejigido*, women also wore beads of various colors

⁵³ Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Elu. August 10, 2010.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

colonial political institutions to control social compartments of sexuality.⁵⁵ Donna Perry observed in the case of Wolof farmers in rural Senegal that as patriarchal control of household dependents diminished as a result of economic liberalization, there was a “crisis of masculinity,” and this was evident in men’s discourses which criticized women for their individualism, selfishness and open sexuality.⁵⁶ However, unlike the Wolof case, there is no evidence of patriarchal control over female sexuality in pre-colonial Ohafia-Igbo society. Rather, as female political organizations weakened in the early 20th century, the emergent colonial patriarchal institutions lacked the power to control female sexuality. Ohafia-Igbo men articulate this devolution of female power through discourses of changes in girls’ dress habits and promiscuity.

Sources

“Emergent Masculinities” combines archival records, oral history, and life history, emic interpretations of material culture, and gendered rituals and memorialization ceremonies, to examine gendered power, slavery, religion, and colonialism in southeastern Nigeria in the 19th and 20th centuries. This study is borne out of two pre-dissertation summer research trips to Nigeria in 2009 and 2010, and a one-year dissertation research trip from July 2011 to July 2012, to Nigeria and the United Kingdom, funded by the Wenner-Gren Foundation and by the Michigan State University (MSU) History Department. The research includes oral history projects and ethnographic fieldwork in Ohafia, southeastern Nigeria, and archival research at the

⁵⁵ Nna Agbai Ndukwe stated, during this latter period, “it became difficult to tell when young girls were pregnant, so teenage pregnancy increased. In the days when they wore *ejigido*, girls shielded themselves from sexual contacts with men. With the introduction of full-body female dresses, the world turned upside down!” See chapters 2 and 5.

⁵⁶ See Donna L. Perry, “Wolof Women, Economic Liberalization, and the Crisis of Masculinity in Rural Senegal,” *Ethnology* 44, 3 (Summer 2005), 207-226.

Nigerian National Archives Lagos, the Nigerian National Archives Ibadan, the Nigerian National Archives Enugu, the British National Archives, Kew, and the National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh. The archival sources include correspondence between British consuls, European shipmasters, and African peoples in the Bight of Biafra spanning the period, 1840s to 1900; the reports of British colonial officials on Ohafia institutions and cultural practices between 1900 and 1930s; native court case records between 1908 and 1919; and the journals of Church of Scotland missionaries active in the Ohafia region between the 1890s and 1940s. The ethnographic materials include 170 oral interviews with Ohafia women and men, and documentary evidence from Ohafia-Igbo cultural artifacts and rituals that embody the historical experiences of the people.

Written Sources

Unlike West African empires and centralized states, where non-European written sources (scripts, king lists, Arabic scripts, biographies, chronicles, hagiographies, and personal letters)⁵⁷ abound for the pre-colonial period, there are very few indigenous written sources for reconstructing the history of the peoples of southeastern Nigeria. As several scholars have pointed out, unlike the area west of the Niger where European travelers, traders and missionaries left records of historical conditions, the Cross River hinterland remained closed to literate visitors until towards the end of the nineteenth century.⁵⁸ This dissertation relies upon autobiographies and novels written by Africans, as well as European colonial and missionary

⁵⁷ John Hunwick, "Arabic Sources for African History," In John Edward Philips, ed., *Writing African History* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2005), 218, 233-235.

⁵⁸ S.J.S Cookey, "An Igbo Slave Story of the Late Nineteenth Century and Its Implications," *Ikenga: Journal of African Studies* 1, 2, (July, 1972), 1; Felicia Ekejiuba, "The Aro System of Trade in the Nineteenth Century," *Ikenga: Journal of African Studies* 1, 1 (January, 1972), 11.

records. For a study of Igbo masculinities and gendered power, novels such as Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, and Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine*, are, in spite of being works of fiction, crucial to an imaginative reconstruction of the past. This genre of literature has shaped popular knowledge of Igbo masculinities, and has also been used to perpetuate myths and stereotypes about West African peoples.⁵⁹ Against this background, African literature is indispensable to post-colonial writings on African history.

The reminiscences of Igbo peoples such as Olaudah Equiano's *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* (1798), Eke Kalu's "An Ibo Autobiography: The Autobiography of Mr. Eke Kalu, Ohaffia's Well-Honored Son," and the autobiography of Nnochiri Oriaku of Uzuakoli,⁶⁰ afford first-hand accounts of the experiences of indigenous and trans-Atlantic slavery, and British colonialism. The very idea of an autobiography as a historical source raises problematic questions for a historian; questions anchored significantly on constructionism and political agenda.⁶¹ Kalu wrote his autobiography between the 1920s and 1930s, and it was published in 1938 in *The Nigerian Field*, a journal of the British-run Nigeria Fields Society. His autobiography was partly an effort to bolster his image as a legitimate warrant-chief and ruler of the Ohafia-Igbo, against political contestations of his non-Ohafia origin. The publication of

⁵⁹ Chinua Achebe, "Africa's Tarnished Name," in Hal Wylie and Bernth Lindfors, *Multiculturalism and Hybridity in African Literatures* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2000), 13-24; Robert Lyons and Chinua Achebe, *Another Africa* (New York: Anchor Books 1998), 103-177; Joseph E. Harris, *Africans and Their History* (Meridan, 1998), 13-29; Dorothy Hammond and Alta Jablow, *The Myth of Africa* (Library of Social Science, 2012), 7-48.

⁶⁰ Eke Kalu, "An Ibo Autobiography: The Autobiography of Mr. Eke Kalu, Ohaffia's Well-honored Son," *The Nigerian Field*, Journal of the Nigerian Field Society, 7, 4 (October, 1938); Isichei, *Igbo Worlds*, 295-299.

⁶¹ This has been the most notable limitation of African autobiography writing. See Mamphela Ramphele, *Accross Boundaries: The Journey of a South African Woman Leader* (New York: The Feminist Press, 1996); Wambui Waiyaki Oteieno, *Mau Mau's Daughter: A Life History* (Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998).

Kalu's autobiography by the British-run journal, with a popular audience based in England seemed to have fulfilled his objective, as British colonial officials in the region came to see him as "a loyal servant of the Government."⁶² His writing was also a literary critique of slavery and a mockery of the indigenous religious institution of *dibia* (spirit-mediumship and healing), in an effort to define himself as a Presbyterian masculinity. Kalu was not unlike many West African writers, who exaggerated their people's past and turned history into anti-colonial propaganda.⁶³

However, rather than dismiss Kalu's autobiography as a mere political construct, this dissertation critically embraces the biases, exaggerations and tensions in Kalu's self-serving account as part of the historical process to construct his identity. Reconciling the autobiography with extensive oral interviews, records of court cases involving Kalu, and British colonial reports, this dissertation provides a double-reading of the autobiographical account; first, as a conscious act, and second, for its historical details. On the one hand, it is an intriguing story of a self-made *ufiem* (masculinity), and a deliberate attempt to socially construct that image. On the other hand, it is a rich first-hand account of the various mechanisms of enslavement not just in the Igbo hinterland, but also in the coastal communities of Bonny and Opobo. There are hardly any ethnographic accounts of the capture and transportation of slaves from the Igbo hinterland to the coast.⁶⁴ Kalu's account is one of two known exceptions.⁶⁵ Moreover, perhaps for its political

⁶² N.A.E, OW 342/27, ABADIST 8/11/2, "Assessment Reports: Bende Division, 1927-1929."

⁶³ Toyin Falola, "Mission and Colonial Documents," In Philips, ed., *Writing African History*, 276-280; Daniel McCall, "Introduction," In Philips, ed., *Writing African History*, 17.

⁶⁴ See Akuma-Kalu Njoku, "Before the Middle Passage: Igbo Slave Journeys to Old Calabar and Bonny," In Carolyn Brown and Paul Lovejoy, eds. *Repercussions of the Atlantic Slave Trade: The Interior of the Bight of Biafra and the African Diaspora* (Eritrea: AWP, 2010), 57-69.

⁶⁵ The second is *Equiano's Travels: His Autobiography. The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa the African*, abr. and ed. by Paul Edwards (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1967).

tone, Kalu's autobiography provides a lacking perspective of African agency in socio-political change in the 19th and 20th centuries.

While they are few and require critical assessments as political narratives, African writings are an antidote to 18th and 19th century European written sources (the records of explorers, traders and early missionaries) for the history of West Africa. These early European records relied on hearsay and interpreters for their descriptions of the lives of Africans beyond the coastal communities. As John Thornton and Toyin Falola have argued respectively, these descriptions are sometimes outright inventions, and represent the work of outsiders, who were more interested in trade than in the societies they describe.⁶⁶ European observers recorded events from their own points of view, neglected the subjective experiences of African peoples, and often attributed aspects of African civilization to outsiders — the Hamitic hypothesis.⁶⁷

For the Bight of Biafra, these sources include correspondence between British consuls and African chiefs, as well as journals of British high commissioners and reports of European merchants and shipmasters, spanning the period, 1840s-1900, and classified FO 84 and FO 2, at the British National Archives, Kew, and the Nigerian National Archives, Lagos.⁶⁸ These records are particularly relevant for the same reason they are problematic: their focus on commercial interactions between Europeans and African peoples in the coasts of Calabar, Bonny and Opobo. Located nine miles east of the Cross River, and significantly cut off from most Igbo societies to

⁶⁶ John Thornton, "European Documents and African History," In Philips, ed., *Writing African History*, 255.

⁶⁷ Falola, "Mission and Colonial Documents," 277-280.

⁶⁸ FO84: Slave Trade and General Correspondence Before 1906, Bight of Biafra (Files 775, 816, 858, 886, 920, 950, 975, 1001, 1030, 1061, 1087, 1117, 1278, 1377, 1634, 1659-1661, 1701-1702, 1749, 1750, 1881, 1882, 1940, 1941, 2020, 2109-2111, 2194); FO881: Confidential Prints; FO541: Confidential Print, Slave Trade Abolition; and FO2: General Correspondence Before 1906, Niger Coast Protectorate.

their west, by dense forests and the Oban Hills until the late 19th century, the Ohafia-Igbo were actively engaged in trade up the Cross River to Calabar and Bonny in the 18th and 19th centuries.⁶⁹ The Foreign Office records provide insight into the nature of, and changes in the economic activities of interior Igbo societies such as the Ohafia-Igbo. They speak to whether and when slave production ceased in spite of the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade; what types of commodities were made available at the coast, how, and by whom; and the impact and repercussions of British imperial policies on the socio-economic conditions of Igbo societies.⁷⁰

In combination with evidence from oral interviews and analysis of material culture, these sources show that whereas the trans-Atlantic slave trade had ushered Ohafia-Igbo society into a slave mode of production, the glut of slaves on the local markets transformed the society's mode of exploitation of slave labor, and significantly informed the changes in the constructions and performance of masculinities, between 1850 and 1920. Moreover, these records highlight British economic policies on inland trade in the Bight of Biafra in the 19th century, and show that the environment in which Africans participated in the emerging "legitimate commerce" was one of piracy, bullying, draconian capitalism, British gun-boat diplomacy, an unreliable "trust system," ever-increasing taxes, fluctuations in the value and price of European commodities, monetization schemes that forced Africans into losing accrued wealth, and British consulate bigotry. As such,

⁶⁹ Ogbu U. Kalu, "The River Highway: Christianizing the Igbo," In Ogbu U. Kalu, ed., *A Century and Half of Presbyterian Witness in Nigeria, 1846-1996* (Lagos, Nigeria: Ida-Ivory Press, 1996), 50; Njoku, "Inter-Village Trade in Ohafia, 1900-1979," 11; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 47-52; Azuonye, "The Narrative War Songs;" Azuonye, "The Heroic Age," 9; Nsugbe, *Ohafia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 1-20; Oriji, *Traditions of Igbo Origin*, 32.

⁷⁰ Also helpful are secondary literature such as Daryll Forde and G.I. Jones, *The Ibo and Ibibio-Speaking Peoples of South-Eastern Nigeria* (London: International African Institute, 1950); Northrup, *Trade Without Rulers*. Most studies on the economic history of southeastern Nigeria had until the 1970s, focused on the coastal communities, and overlooked the Ibibio and Igbo communities in the hinterland.

those Africans who attained success in the trade, and performed *ogaranya* masculinity, did so, only with the greatest ingenuity, tenacity of purpose, and agency.

Missionaries, more than trader-authors, left more informative records, because their desire to convert Africans made them interested in African culture, and their hostility to African religions did not prevent them from making detailed descriptions of those customs and traditions. Many of them were also African converts, who spoke the languages of the societies they documented, and their journals, magazines and newspapers are indispensable to reconstructing the history of southeastern Nigeria.⁷¹ However, most missionaries believed that Africans were inferior to them and many set out to demonstrate a theory of racial inferiority.⁷² The writings of pioneer African missionaries were also self-congratulatory. Nonetheless, the correspondences of missionaries of the Roman Catholic Mission, the Niger Delta Pastorate, the Primitive Methodist Mission, and the Church of Scotland Mission, active in the Cross River region in the late 19th century, shed light on the gradual spread of Christianity from Calabar through Ibibio land, to the Cross River Igbo territories of Arochukwu and Ohafia.⁷³ For the Ohafia-Igbo, where the Church

⁷¹ See Samuel A. Crowther and Christopher J. Taylor, *The Gospel on the Banks of the Niger: Journals and Notices of the Native Missionaries Accompanying the Niger Expedition of 1857-1859* (London: Dawsons, 1868); Hope Masterton Waddell, *Twenty-Nine Years in the West Indies and Central Africa* (London: Thomas Nelson, 1863); Hope Masterton Waddell, "Journal of the Old Calabar Mission (1846-58)," United Presbyterian Church papers, NLS, MSSS. 7739-7743 and 8953; Thornton, "European Documents and African History," 260, 272.

⁷² Falola, "Mission and Colonial Documents," 278-279.

⁷³ CMS Archives, G8/A/0. Crowther to Baylis, 5/10/1903; PMM Archives, S/R Box 1, Christie to Guttery, 1709; N.A.E, UMDIV 3/1/98. Church of Scotland Mission Abiriba; N.A.I, ESO 1/13. Southern Nigeria Despatches No. 238. Conf. Report, 24/5/1905; N.A.E, Presbynig 1/1/6. Calabar Mission Council Minutes, Items 84, 153 of 23/10/1913, and 186 of 7/5/1914; Church Missionary Society, *Letters from the Front: Being a Selection from the Annual Letters from the Missions* (London: CMS, 1912), 25-42; C.M.S. Niger Mission Minutes and Reports of Executive Committee, February 1929; Samuel A. Crowther and Christopher J. Taylor, *The Gospel on the Banks of the Niger: Journals and Notices of the Native Missionaries Accompanying the Niger Expedition of 1857-1859* (London: Dawsons of Pall Mall, [1859] 1868).

of Scotland mission was the only Christian mission active between 1890 and 1940, the journals and letters of Rev. Robert Collins and Rev. A.K. Mincher provide information on Ohafia-Igbo gendered responses to Christianity and Western education.

They highlight the impact of Christian missionary evangelism on indigenous institutions such as *dibia* (spirit-mediumship and medicare), and changes in matrilineage practices. They capture the chronology and details of Ohafia social experiences such as the epidemics of the 1890s and 1919, the Aro expedition of 1901-02, and the adaptation of the age-grade institutions to modernization schemes between 1902 and 1917. Since the missionaries often intervened directly in domestic and public disputes, which were often gendered, their journals and letters highlight the anxieties of Ohafia men and women to the socio-political changes taking place in their society during this period. The records and registers of the Ohafia Girls Training School established in 1922 to train “good Christian wives” for the new Ohafia male elite elucidate the domesticity focus of missionary education for Ohafia women, in contrast to the technical and literary education provided to men.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ See United Presbyterian Church, No. 26, MS. 7715. “Collins Elizabeth Stewart, Wife of Robert, Missionary in Calabar, nee Glen; Letters to, 1900-1916;” UPC, “Collins Robert, Missionary in Calabar, Letters to, 1898-1929;” Acc. 7548/A13-14, “Copies of Out-going Letters from Mission Committee to Collins;” Acc. 7548/D44, “Copies of Out-going Letters from Mission Committee to Mincher;” Dep.298/127-137, “Minutes Relating to Calabar, Robert Collins and Mincher, United Free Church of Scotland;” Acc.7548/D44, “Calabar Correspondence and Papers, 1913-1945;” Dep.298/127-137. “Minutes Relating to Calabar, Robert Collins and Mincher, United Free Church of Scotland;” Dep.298/157-167. “Minutes relating to Calabar, Robert Collins and Mincher, the Church of Scotland;” UPC, Shelfmark Q.124. “Journals of News on Women’s Missions, 1904-1926;” UPC, Shelfmark Q.124. “Journals of Woman’s Work in the Church;” The Missionary Record of the United Free Church of Scotland, No. 1 (Jan. 1901) – No. 164 (Aug. 1914); The Record of the Home and Foreign Mission Work of the United Free Church of Scotland, New Ser., No. 165 (Sept. 1914) – Apr. 1928); The Record of the United Free Church of Scotland, May 1928 – Sept. 1929; The Record of the Church of Scotland, Oct. 1929 – Dec. 1929; UPC. Acc. 7548, Foreign Mission Records of the Church of Scotland Since 1929 with some earlier records (Outgoing Letters, 1-186, and Files Relating to Mission Fields, 1938-1964); and “Scottish Missionary Journals, 1850-1950: Church

At the turn of the 20th century, British colonial officials and ethnographers generated field notes providing extensive documentation of the peoples of southeastern Nigeria, their cultures, and the changes occasioned by European colonial rule.⁷⁵ As part of the consolidation of colonial rule, colonial officials and missionaries were instructed to collect genealogical records and ethnographic data on the peoples of southeastern Nigeria. The call for more data was answered in the form of gazetteers, census reports, and annual reports, as well as ethnographies by colonial anthropologists such as Amaury Talbot, Northcote Thomas, G.T. Basden, and C.K. Meek.⁷⁶ These colonial ethnographies represented the African past as static, and espoused a biased view of Igbo peoples as docile and unproductive, particularly women. However, they are first-hand accounts of the cultural practices of the peoples of southeastern Nigeria in the early 20th century. Moreover, some colonial anthropologists disagreed with British colonial officials, not just in principle, but also over their account of Igbo political institutions and cultural practices.⁷⁷ Their accounts provide alternative perspectives to those of British colonial officials.

Following the Igbo Women's War of 1929, British colonial officials also began to collect Intelligence Reports on the socio-political organizations and cultural practices of the peoples of

of Scotland (1-10), United Presbyterian Church (11-15), and Free Church of Scotland (16-23).” Also see Johnston, *Of God and Maxim Guns*, 197, 221-239.

⁷⁵ Falola, “Mission and Colonial Documents,” 273.

⁷⁶ Percy A. Talbot, *In the Shadow of the Bush* (London: William Heinemann, 1912); Percy A. Talbot, *Life in Southern Nigeria* (London: Macmillan, 1923); Percy A. Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria* (London: Oxford University Press, 1926); Northcote Thomas, *Anthroological Report on the Ibo-Speaking Peoples of Nigeria*, 4 vols. (London: Harrison, 1913-14); G.T. Basden, *Among the Ibos of Nigeria* (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1921 [1966]); G.T. Basden, *Niger Ibos* (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1938 [1966]); C.K. Meek, *Law and Authority in a Nigerian Tribe: A Study in Indirect Rule* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937 [1950]).

⁷⁷ Northcote Thomas's anthropological survey of Igboland began in the Awka region. He did not see eye to eye with various British officials particularly, Mr. Sproston, the district commissioner, famed for his extensive knowledge of the Awka region. BNA, CO520/105, Dispatch No. 493, Aug. 23, 1911; CO520/115, Dispatch No. 398, May 1912.

southeastern Nigeria.⁷⁸ Expressing the frustration with the biased tone of the Intelligence Reports on Ohafia, Ogbu Kalu declared, “It would appear that the effort to collate reliable data after the Women’s Riot failed in this culture zone.”⁷⁹ However, like other European sources, the Intelligence Reports are some of the few available sources for reconstructing Igbo history.

These Intelligence Reports, Annual Reports, and courts records, available at the Nigerian National Archives Enugu and the Nigerian National Archives Ibadan, provide historical and ethnographic descriptions of Ohafia-Igbo socio-political institutions, economic activities, and customary practices, as they existed before and during the first three decades of the 20th century. They contain critical European commentaries on the Ohafia kinship system and residential arrangements, Ohafia slave production, illicit headhunting and the activities of exclusively-male secret societies. They account for the establishment of colonial courts, the institution of forced labor and taxation, the introduction of the warrant chief system, and the establishment of Christian missions and schools, during this period. The court records indicate a preponderance of gendered disputes especially between 1908 and 1919, over land and property inheritance, matrilineal versus patrilineal residence, and divorce proceedings.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Falola, “Mission and Colonial Documents,” 274-276.

⁷⁹ Kalu, “The River Highway: Christianizing the Igbo,” 69.

⁸⁰ See G.I Jones, *Annual Reports of Bende Division, South Eastern Nigeria, 1905-1912* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1986); N.A.E, CSE 12/1: Annual Reports on Owerri Province, 1918-1934; N.A.E, MINLOC 17/1: Secret Societies; N.A.E, AD/495/B49 Arodist 1/1/7: Okonko Secret Society; N.A.E RIVPROF. 8/8/443: Okonko Club: Activity of; N.A.E, UMDIV 3/1/656: Ukekwe Society and Okonko: Proclamation as Unlawful; N.A.I, CSO 26/3-97: Assessment Reports on Bende Division, 1919-1926; N.A.E, CSO 26/3, ABADIST 8/11/2, File OW 342/27: Assessment Reports: Bende Division, 1927-1927; N.A.I, CSO 26/3 File 29196: Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan by Mr. C.J. Mayne, ADO; N.A.E, UMDIV 7/1/70-100: Native Court Records; N.A.E Calprof. 14/4/951: Annual Report Bende District, 1909; N.A.E C/40/21 Calprof 4/10/31, N.A.E Calprof 5/16/46, N.A.E C145/7 Calprof 5/8/97, N.A.E C277/18 Calprof 5/8/228, N.A.E Calprof 14/756, N.A.E, Calprof 5/14/85, and N.A.E Calprof 5/16/46 (On the aftermath of the Aro Expedition and Christian Missionaries); N.A.E, C22/1927 ABADIST

These sources, in combination with colonial office (CO) records from the British National Archives Kew,⁸¹ show that the 20th century ushered a significant transformation in Ohafia gendered distribution of power. They show that the actions of Ohafia-Igbo men often corresponded with the patriarchal ideologies of European officials and missionaries, and facilitated the subjugation of women, between 1890 and 1920.

Men's Words, Women's Worldview: Oral Sources, Historical Ethnography, and Positionality

*To 'live' a culture demands more than knowledge of its events' system and institutions; it requires growing up with these events and being emotionally involved with cultural values and biases.*⁸²

In order to present the historical experiences of pre-literate societies and social groups such as women and the working class, who had been marginalized in academic studies,⁸³ as well as to provide alternative voices to European written records, Africanist scholars have since the 1960s, popularized the use of oral history. Whereas David Henige defines oral history as a methodology by which peoples' traditions and memories of the past are understood as valid historical texts,⁸⁴ Paul Thompson insists that "Neither oral nor written evidence can be said to

2/1/11: Palm Produce Development; N.A.E, UMDIV 7/1/84: Bende District - Selection of H.Q. for; N.A.E, CSE 12/1/332: Owerri Prof. Annual Report, 1931; N.A.E, ABADIST 14/1/267: Report on Political and Social Organization in the Owerri Division; N.A.E, SCE 12/1/334, File EP1308A: Annual Report Owerri Province, 1932. Also see D.A. Macalister, "The Aro Country, Southern Nigeria," *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, xviii (Dec. 1902).

⁸¹ BNA CO 444, 520, 591, 592, 583, 445, and 554. See bibliography for full citation.

⁸² Victor Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria* (New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Toronto, London: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1965), 9.

⁸³ Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford: OUP, 1978), 1-64, 165-185.

⁸⁴ David Henige, "Oral Tradition as a Means of Reconstructing the Past," in John Edward Philips, ed., *Writing African History* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2005), 169; Felix Ekechi, "An African View of the Legendary Vansina," in Robert Harms, Joseph Miller, David Newbury, and Michele Wagner, eds., *Paths Toward the Past: African Historical Essays in*

be generally superior; it depends on the context.”⁸⁵ Since the 1990s, many Africanist scholars have come to insist that oral testimonies could stand by themselves as authoritative accounts of lived experience, unmediated,⁸⁶ and that varied forms of oral communication including rumor, gossip, proverbs, folklore, and jokes are valid historical sources, for they evince how Africans represent their historical experiences of being African, beyond the framework of colonial institutions.⁸⁷

The oral sources used here include personal and group interviews with men and women, conducted between 2010 and 2012, in twenty-four Ohafia-Igbo villages. Most of these interviews were audio-recorded, and were conducted in the homes of collaborators. Some interviews were video-recorded in the course of ceremonies such as new yam festivals, *dibia* (doctors and diviners) celebrations, and women’s rituals. I interviewed farmers, hunters, *dibia*, and members of secret societies to understand alternative forms of masculinities (*ufiem*), besides the warrior masculinity. I interviewed female heads of matrilineage, female and male political leaders, and members of women’s political organizations to examine changes in gendered political power.

Because oral histories are cumulative interpretations of the past, which capture the subjective experiences of groups, not individuals, personal interviews began with life histories, emphasizing socialization from childhood to adulthood, and social mobility. From this subjective

Honor of Jan Vansina (Atlanta: African Studies Association Press, 1994), 1-9; Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 27, 63-66.

⁸⁵ Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*, 100.

⁸⁶ Luise White, Stephan Miescher, and David William Cohen, eds. *African Words, African Voices: Critical Practices in Oral History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 2-3.

⁸⁷ White, Miescher, and Cohen, eds. *African Words, African Voices*, 15-19; Luise White, *Speaking With Vampires: Rumor and History in Colonial Africa* (California: University of California Press, 2000).

reflection about the past,⁸⁸ research collaborators⁸⁹ then provided what Louise Tilley has described as histories of social relations.⁹⁰ This methodology is particularly useful in restoring women to history.⁹¹ Indeed, in using oral history to demonstrate how peoples of the past lived,⁹² this study interrogates men's words with women's voices, and *vice versa*. As Nwando Achebe has noted, "the best and sometimes the only way to uncover the history of women is to interview both men and women [since] men were often able to recall institutions of female power."⁹³

Doing oral history entails negotiation of access and meaning.⁹⁴ Born and raised in a patrilineal Igbo society of southeastern Nigeria, my encounter with the Ohafia-Igbo was one of strange familiarity. The Ohafia-Igbo dominant matrilineage principles,⁹⁵ their relative disregard for kola nut culture (in preference for alcohol libation and application of *nzu* white chalk to

⁸⁸ Stephan Miescher, "The Life Histories of Boakye Yiadom: Exploring the Subjectivity and Voices of a Teacher-Catechist in Colonial Ghana," In White, Miescher, and Cohen, eds., *African Words, African Voices: Critical Practices in Oral History*, 163.

⁸⁹ I use this term to denote the active role of my oral interview respondents in the interpretation of Ohafia-Igbo history. Nwando Achebe uses this term to describe her Nsukka-Igbo respondents, who forced her to abandon a predetermined agenda to prove that colonialism and Christianity removed Igbo women from positions of power. It also reflects Achebe's positionality as a "relative outsider" and returned Igbo daughter relying upon her respondents to reintroduce her to the realities of African life in the course of fieldwork. See Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors and Kings*, 5, 12-13; Nwando Achebe, "Nwando Achebe - Daughter, Wife, and Guest - A Researcher at the Crossroads," *Journal of Women's History* 14, 3 (Autumn 2002), 14-22.

⁹⁰ Louise A. Tilley, "People's History and Social Science History," *Social Science History* 7, 4 (1983), 457-474.

⁹¹ Berida Ndambuki and Claire C. Robertson, "*We Only Come Here to Struggle:*" *Stories from Berida's Life* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000), xi

⁹² Robert Perks and A. Thomson, *The Oral History Reader* (London: Routledge, 1998), 2-3.

⁹³ Achebe, "Nwando Achebe - Daughter, Wife, and Guest," 22.

⁹⁴ See Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors and Kings*, 13-15.

⁹⁵ See chapter 1.

welcome visitors), a practice which Ugo Nwokeji has equated with pan-Igbo ethnicity,⁹⁶ as well as the Cross-River Igbo dialect of the Ohafia-Igbo, which is unintelligible to the average Igbo language native speaker,⁹⁷ were some of the immediate cultural differences that established my outsider status within the society. Moreover, the preeminent socio-political power and autonomy that Ohafia-Igbo women continue to enjoy in their society, their unparalleled consciousness of past female power and authority, and their eagerness to comment on this historical awareness set them apart from my previous understanding of Igbo socio-political life.⁹⁸ My native fluency in the Igbo language facilitated quicker learning of the Ohafia-Igbo dialect, and I found many Ohafia-Igbo cultural practices familiar and intelligible *vis-a-vis* my own lived culture.

Nonetheless, gaining access to the private worlds of Ohafia-Igbo men and women involved a long process of building trust, through home visits, following women to farms, and attending communal ceremonies.⁹⁹ In the months preceding my arrival in Ohafia, a number of cultural artifacts including some *nkwa* (elaborately carved wooden beams) and *ikoro* (wooden slit drum) had been stolen from Ohafia villages. This created a suspicious environment that made it very difficult for the researcher to gain trust in each new village. At times, the presence and assurances of my Ohafia research assistant was not sufficient to restore confidence. In such

⁹⁶ Ugo G. Nwokeji, *The Slave Trade and Culture in the Bight of Biafra: An African Society in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge University Press, 2010)

⁹⁷ Isichei confirms. See Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, 86.

⁹⁸ My fieldwork experience in my own community between 2006 and 2007 as an undergraduate student of the University of Nigeria Nigeria Nsukka, when I conducted ethnographic research for my B.A. thesis, was a polar opposite to my encounter with Ohafia-Igbo women's eagerness to define their community's history. Similarly, Nwando Achebe experienced "great disillusionment" with Nsukka women, who outrightly confessed a lack of knowledge about their community history, and sometimes a general apathy towards commenting on their own life history. See Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors and Kings*, 14-15. Ohafia women differed.

⁹⁹ For a similar case, see Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors and Kings*, 13-19.

instances, phone calls to familiar members of the particular village, or preliminary visits to the *ezie-ogo* and *ezie-nwami* became prerequisite to gaining access to members of the community.

The greatest challenge at the onset of my dissertation research was the silence in both published literature and archival sources of Ohafia female voices. Audrey Smedley has pointed out that “it is an often unacknowledged reality that male scholars have been restricted in their access to women’s private lives by the conventions of the societies they studied.”¹⁰⁰ I quickly discovered that as a male, capturing Ohafia women’s perspectives required moving from the familiar world of men — a reflection of my existing contacts and acquaintances — to the unfamiliar world of women. After I was introduced to the male *ezie-ogo* (male ruler) of Elu Village (the most senior Ohafia village), his cabinet members presented me with a list of names of knowledgeable local historians from twenty-two Ohafia villages, all of which were male. When I asked for the names of women, some of the elders said that women had no knowledge of Ohafia history, but that if I insisted on talking to women, the *ezie-nwami* (female ruler) and her cabinet may be invited to the *ezie-ogo*’s palace for me to interact with them.¹⁰¹

I later gained access to women through informal referrals from elderly male collaborators, who confessed their lack of knowledge about women’s socialization, political organizations and worldview. The women, whose life histories I documented, later referred me to the *ezie-nwami* of their villages, who provided me access to more women. The worldview of women provides critical lenses to re-examine men’s historical narratives. What do men mean when they say that: “Women played no role in the history of our community; women are to be

¹⁰⁰ Audrey Smedley, *Women Creating Patriliney: Gender and Environment in West Africa* (California: AltaMira Press, 2004), 1.

¹⁰¹ Ohafia-Igbo women would later inform me that the *ezie-ogo* could not summon the *ezie-nwami* in council to answer to my interview questions. Tradition, politics, and deference required that men and women be consulted separately, in the comfort of their gendered spaces.

seen, not to be heard”)? And why did most male collaborators take this position despite affirming the eminent socio-political power and independence of Ohafia women, historically? Most male collaborators agreed that Ohafia-Igbo women possessed more powerful, more effective, and more coercive socio-political institutions before the 20th century.¹⁰² Yet, these men described a history without women — a history of warfare and conquest, headhunting and bravery, slave production, secret societies exclusive of women, and male socialization from *igba nnunu* (to kill a hummingbird — the first “head” a boy-child “cuts”) to *igbu ishi* (to “cut a head” as an adult masculinity). This history by men about men is the popular history of the Ohafia-Igbo, and is preserved in the historical lore (*abu aha*) of the society that glorifies Ohafia’s heroic past.

Ohafia-Igbo women’s historical accounts are more gender-inclusive: they describe women’s indispensability to men’s conducts of warfare and performance of *ufiem*, showing that masculinities and femininities were mutually constitutive. Women described the superiority of their political institutions and their ability to exercise judicial authority over both women and men — a power which men lacked. They emphasized their superior position within the Ohafia-Igbo matrilineage, which reflect their dominance of the agro-based economy, their control over farmland, and their position as breadwinners of their families. Ohafia-Igbo women also account

¹⁰² Okorie Kalu, *ezie-ogo* of Isiugwu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Isiugwu Village. December 10, 2011; Elders of Umu-Anya Family, Ndi Imaga Compound, Elu Ohafia, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Elu. August 14, 2011; Mecha Ukpai Akanu, *ezie-ogo* of Amangwu and Members of the Men’s Court, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Amangwu. August 18, 2011; Anaso Awalekwa, *ezie-ogo* of Ndea-Nku and Members of the Men’s Court, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Ndea-Nku Village. November 17, 2011; Vasco U. Iro, *ezie-ogo* of Nkwebi Village, Members of the Men’s Court and *Nde-Ichin*, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Nkwebi Village. November 17, 2011; Kalu Awa, *ezie-ogo* of Ibina (Ihenta), oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Ibina (Ihenta) Village. December 12, 2011. *Nde-Ichin*, Amuma Village, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Amuma. November 26, 2011; Godwin Nwankwo Uko, *ezie-ogo* of Amankwu Village and his cabinet members, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Amankwu. October 25, 2011. Also, see Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 25.

for their ability to negotiate marriages and divorces, very easily, in contrast to the fate of their sisters in the rest of patrilineal Igbo society, and attest that this facilitated their historical negotiation of multiple ethnicities in a borderland region. In effect, both my male and female collaborators concurred that Ohafia women were socio-politically more powerful than men in the pre-colonial period. Yet, the historical narratives, which men and women emphasized, differed.

It is now well known that oral sources, like European written records, must be critically evaluated. Chronology, telescoping and selectivity are some of the major limitations of oral traditions.¹⁰³ In the course of my fieldwork in Ohafia, several lineages, and sometimes, villages were engaged in legal disputes over political succession. Thus, oral interviews sometimes became a platform for articulating a social charter, and to validate current political claims. It was perhaps in view of this that G.I. Jones declared that traditions referring to the distant past “cannot help us. They are no substitute for history and are best regarded as systems in which [a] very limited number of items are manipulated to explain or justify existing institutions and social groups.”¹⁰⁴ However, as Adiele Afigbo has cautioned, the implication of this viewpoint for historians working among segmentary societies would be “complete paralysis.”¹⁰⁵ He contends rather, that one should not ask of oral history, that which oral history cannot answer.¹⁰⁶

By incorporating other sources, such as linguistic evidence, analysis of material culture, practices and rituals, this dissertation seeks to ensure a rigorous use of oral history, as opposed to the view that oral testimonies have a transcendent status by which they could stand on their own,

¹⁰³ Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History*, 186-201.

¹⁰⁴ G.I. Jones, *The Trading States of the Oil Rivers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), 24

¹⁰⁵ Adiele Afigbo, “Oral Tradition and the History of Segmentary Societies,” *History in Africa* 12 (1985), 3, 9.

¹⁰⁶ Afigbo, “Oral Tradition and the History of Segmentary Societies,” 4-9.

as authoritative accounts of lived experience, unmediated.¹⁰⁷ This study shows that in combination with other sources, oral history can be used to reconstruct the pre-colonial history of the Ohafia-Igbo. My interdisciplinary methodology seeks to establish ‘what really happened’ (objectivity), as well as how the Ohafia-Igbo memorialize the past (subjectivity).

For instance, Ohafia-Igbo women force the researcher to focus not only on discourse, but also on practices, which are equally evidence of agency, self-representation, and consciousness.¹⁰⁸ Women embraced the interview to emphasize and re-enact their consciousness of past female power and authority in their society. They often transformed the interview sessions into public performances in front of awed audiences of younger women, children, and men. They danced and mocked men, re-emphasizing their power to “teach men lessons” when necessary. Whereas Ruth Finnegan noted that the performative nature of oral history before participatory audiences impacts the meaning produced,¹⁰⁹ Barbara Cooper shows that because of its performative nature, oral evidence enables us to explore the social production of memory, self and subjectivity.¹¹⁰ In view of the problem which memory has posed to the reconstruction of the

¹⁰⁷ Luise White, Stephan Miescher, and David W. Cohen, eds., *African Words, African Voices: Critical Practices in Oral History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 2-10.

¹⁰⁸ Anthony Giddens, *New Rules of Sociological Method: A Positive Critique of Interpretative Sociologies* (London: Hutchinson, 1976); Anthony Giddens, *Central problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure and Contradiction in Social Analysis* (London: Macmillan, 1979); Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*; Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Cambridge: Polity, 1990), Pierre Bourdieu and John B. Thompson, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1991); Henrietta Moore and Meghan Vaughan, *Cutting Down Trees: Gender, Nutrition and Agricultural Change in the Northern Province of Zambia, 1890-1990* (Portsmouth, 1994); Steven Loyal, *The Sociology of Anthony Giddens* (London: Pluto Press, 2003); Jeff Browitt and Brian Nelson (eds.), *Practicing Theory: Pierre Bourdieu and the Field of Cultural Production* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004).

¹⁰⁹ Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Literature in Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 2-3.

¹¹⁰ Barbara Cooper, “Oral Sources and the Challenge of African History,” in Philips, ed., *Writing African History*, 202-207.

African past,¹¹¹ Ohafia-Igbo women's re-enactments of the past through both discourses and performances, capture Jan Vansina's view that the performance and reproduction of tradition is often inspired by the practical use of traditions (in the Ohafia-Igbo case, women lay claim to a historical tradition of female power and authority in the fieldwork situation).¹¹²

Women's rituals¹¹³ such as *uzo-iyi*¹¹⁴ (virginity testing) and *ije akpaka*¹¹⁵ (ritual declaration of war); political resistance strategies such as *ibo ezi* (strike and boycott) and *ikpo mgbogho* (social ostracism);¹¹⁶ and material culture practices such as the raising of ancestral pot monuments (*ududu*), are simultaneously, contemporary performances of female power and authority, and gendered memorializations of the past. They center women in Ohafia-Igbo history, in Janice Boddy's words, as "culture producers and social actors."¹¹⁷ These practices elucidate

¹¹¹ See Ralph A. Austen, "The Slave Trade as History and Memory: Confrontations of Slaving Voyage Documents and Communal Traditions," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 58, 1 (Jan. 2001); Donald R. Wright, "Requiem for the Use of Oral Tradition to Reconstruct the Precolonial History of the Lower Gambia," *History in Africa* 18 (1991), 401-402; Martin Klein, "Studying the History of Those Who Would Rather Forget: Oral History and the Experience of Slavery," *History in Africa* 16 (1989), 209-217; Anne C. Bailey, *African Voices of the Atlantic Slave Trade: Beyond the Silence and the Shame* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005); Mariane Ferme, *The Underneath of Things: Violence, History, and the Everyday in Sierra Leone* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2001); Rosalind Shaw, *Memories of the Slave Trade: Ritual Imagination in Sierra Leone* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

¹¹² Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History*, 40.

¹¹³ For detailed discussions of these practices, see chapter 1.

¹¹⁴ Ritual purification of the land and a court of public opinion, where young virgin-girls served as judges. See chapter 2 for discussion.

¹¹⁵ Women's ritual sanction of warfare, which authorized men to go to war.

¹¹⁶ *Ibo ezi* is women's mass desertion of their homes in protest; and *ikpo mgbogho* is women's punitive death sentence — a physico-ritual desecration of an individual and his or her homestead, as well as what Judith Van Allen has described as "sitting on a man." See Judith Van Allen, "Sitting on a Man: Colonialism and the Lost Political Institutions of Igbo Women," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 6 (1972), 172-178.

¹¹⁷ Janice Boddy, *Wombs and Alien Spirits: Women, Men, and the Zar Cult in Northern Sudan* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 4-5.

women's vision of Ohafia-Igbo social identity. Through memorialization rituals, women portray the Ohafia as a matrilineal Igbo society, dominated by powerful female political institutions, and female breadwinners. This differed significantly from Ohafia-Igbo men's vision of their society as a land of noble warriors, a vision that they commemorate through performances such as the war dance. Thus, Ohafia-Igbo women's socio-cultural practices are not just re-enactments of age-long rituals. They are sites for the definition of social identity, and the contestation of gendered power. These practices, when compared to male performances of *ufiem* (masculinity), emerge as contested gendered definitions of socio-political visibility, which shaped indigenous notions of the political relevance and power of men and women.

This study also relies upon indigenous interpretations of material culture, idioms and proverbs. In a bid to challenge a colonial historiography that denied Africans agency in their own history,¹¹⁸ Africanists had since the 1960s, turned to archaeology and linguistics to show that African societies have undergone long-term processes of change before contact with Europeans. Whereas archaeology helped to establish the chronology and sequences of change,¹¹⁹ linguistic evidence helped to show the dispersal of West African cultural complexes.¹²⁰ Both methodologies define material culture as ideas, meanings and symbols that express hidden, cognitive meanings.¹²¹ This informs my analysis of the role of the Ohafia-Igbo material culture

¹¹⁸ John McCall, "Introduction," in Philips, ed., *Writing African History*, 17.

¹¹⁹ Susan Keech McIntosh, "Archaeology and the Reconstruction of the African Past," in Philips, ed., *Writing African History*, 79.

¹²⁰ Christopher Ehret, "Writing African History from Linguistic Evidence," in Philips, ed., *Writing African History*, 86-111.

¹²¹ McIntosh, "Archaeology and the Reconstruction of the African Past," 54-58, 79. Also see Jan Vansina, *Paths in the Rainforests* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990); David Schoenbrun, *A Green Place, A Good Place* (London: Heinemann, 1998); Christopher Ehret, *An*

complex, such as *ududu* (ancestral pots), *nkwa* (wood carvings), *ikoro* (war drums), and the war dance, in the changing constructions of gender identities between the 19th and 20th century. I examine the dynamic social meanings, which Ohafia-Igbo people have given to these material culture symbols between 1850 and 1920, and argue that they were used to articulate changing ideas about masculinity (see chapters 3-5).

Also, my interrogation of Ohafia-Igbo proverbs and idioms (such as *igbu ishi*), as expressing dynamic meanings of identity, is informed by Christopher Ehret's idea that "word histories"¹²² that make up the languages of a people are "artifacts of the past."¹²³ Indeed, by using Ohafia-Igbo sayings such as "We eat through the mother," "Father's penis scatters, mother's womb gathers," to examine ideologies of gendered power,¹²⁴ one can see as Fallou Ngom noted, the social, political, ideological, and cultural forces that have once shaped or still influence a given community.¹²⁵ Idioms and proverbs, as E.J. Alagoa has shown, are used to validate historical memories and demonstrate the relevance of accounts of the past to present concerns.¹²⁶ This dissertation argues that Ohafia-Igbo idioms and proverbs are mechanisms through which men and women center themselves in the history of their community. For instance, the idioms, "*Anyi eri ala a nne*" ["We eat through the mother"] and "*Ohafia wu mba ji*

African Classical Age: Eastern and Southern Africa in World History, 1000 BCE to 400 (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998).

¹²² Ehret, "Writing African History from Linguistic Evidence," 93.

¹²³ Ehret, "Writing African History from Linguistic Evidence," 86, 91.

¹²⁴ For a brilliant example, see Kwesi Yankah, *Speaking for the Chief: Akyeame and the Politics of Akan Royal Oratory* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

¹²⁵ Fallou Ngom, "Lexical Borrowings as Pathways to Senegal's Past and Present," In Toyin Falola and Christian Jennings, eds., *Africanizing Knowledge: African Studies Across the Disciplines* (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2002), 125.

¹²⁶ E. J. Alagoa, "An African Philosophy of History in the Oral Tradition," In Robert Harms, Joseph Miller, David Newbury, and M. Wagner, eds., *Paths Toward the Past: African Historical Essays in Honor of Jan Vansina* (Atlanta: African Studies Association Press, 1994), 15-24.

ishi, acho ishi” [“Ohafia is a community with insatiable appetite for human heads”], refer to two gendered practices. The first refers to dominant matrilineage principles sustained by women, and the second, invokes the warrior image of the society and the historical significance of male warriors to the people’s survival in a bellicose frontier environment.

The centrality of Ohafia-Igbo worldview in the definition of concepts (such as *ufiem* and *igbu ishi*) used in this study reflects the author’s preference for an emic (distinctions/meanings perceived by local peoples themselves), rather than an etic (academic, external, imposed) interpretation of the people’s historical experiences. Indeed, major concepts and theories, such as “geography of masculinity” (chapter 3), and “institutions of masculinity” (chapter 4) emerged from the fieldwork situation, where both researcher and collaborators jointly debated and analyzed the meaning of historical practices. In this way, my interview respondents became transformed into research collaborators. As Achebe, Bridget Teboh, Takyiwaa Manuh, Eileen Boris, and Paula Ebron have argued, respondents’ stories and worldview are theoretical interpretations in themselves, and should be centered, in order to make the research a dialogue.¹²⁷ The local meanings and interpretations of rituals, ceremonies, material culture, praise names, and idioms constitute the foundation of theories used in this dissertation. Major social science theories are used primarily to translate the Ohafia case to the wider academic audience and to enable comparative analysis with realities elsewhere.

¹²⁷ Nwando Achebe and Bridget Teboh, “Dialoguing Women,” in Catherine Cole, Takyiwaa Manuh, and Stephan Miescher, eds. *Africa After Gender* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2007), 63-81; Takyiwaa Manuh, “Doing Gender Work in Ghana,” in Cole, Manuh, and Miescher, eds., *Africa After Gender*, 131; Eileen Boris, “Gender After Africa!” in Cole, Manuh, and Miescher, eds., *Africa After Gender*, 191-204; Paula Ebron, “Constituting Subjects Through Performative Acts,” in Cole, Manuh, and Miescher, eds., *Africa After Gender*, 171-187.

Literature Review

This study makes significant contributions to micro studies on Ohafia and Igboland generally, gender and masculinity studies in Africa, anthropological and historical studies on African matriliney, and slavery studies. The review is organized thematically, beginning with writings on Ohafia and Igboland, which provide information that bears strongly on this dissertation. Second, I situate the major arguments of this study within the literature on African women's economic and political power, as well as emerging studies on African masculinities. Third, in order to introduce some of the major concepts such as matriliney, patriliney, matriarchy, patriarchy, and matrifocal, which this dissertation engages with, I provide a broad outline of the scholarship on African matrilineal societies. Lastly, this literature review shows how my dissertation engages with the scholarship on African slavery and the Atlantic slave trade.

Writings on Ohafia and Igboland

There are two contrasting views of Ohafia-Igbo society as either a matrilineal society or a land of noble warriors. Since 1974 when Philip Nsugbe titled his pioneer work on the society, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo People*, subsequent scholars have emphasized the oppositional social image of the society, beginning with Chukwuma Azuonye's "The Heroic Age of the Ohafia Igbo" and leading to Onwuka Njoku's more counter-positional title, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo Society*.¹²⁸ The social traits, which these two frames of reference reify in their definition of Ohafia-Igbo social identity are gendered, and reflect the politically contested forms of identity in male and female performances of Ohafia-Igbo identity, as chapters 1-3 of this study will show.

¹²⁸ Philip O. Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo People* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974); Chukwuma Azuonye, "The Heroic Age of the Ohafia Igbo," *Geneve-Afrique* 28, 1 (1990); Onwuka Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo Society* (Nigeria: Whytam Press, 2000)

Whereas Nsugbe offers an anthropological survey of Ohafia-Igbo kinship system and political organization, Njoku provides an introductory outline of Ohafia-Igbo history from the pre-colonial period to the modern era. These two works are seminal, for they provide an in-depth insiders' perspective on Ohafia-Igbo history and culture. Azuonye's work on the Ohafia-Igbo, based on his dissertation study of Ohafia war songs¹²⁹ affords significant source material for this present study, including a time-scale for Ohafia migration and settlement, their participation in the Atlantic slave trade during the "heroic age" (18th and 19th centuries), as well as transcriptions of the folk-lore of pre-colonial female masculinities (such as Unyang Olugu and Nne Mgbeafo).

Similar to Njoku and Azuonye, the anthropologist John McCall's works on Ohafia have focused primarily on Ohafia militancy (the Ohafia war dance).¹³⁰ He demonstrates that the Ohafia war dance served as a very important medium for forging and expressing changing forms of gender identities, which reflect the impact of the Atlantic slave trade and British colonial rule on the society. While he does not focus on gender constructions *per se*, McCall points up some of the changes in conceptions of masculinity in Ohafia especially as expressed through the dynamic meanings of *igbu ishi* ("to cut a head") from the pre-colonial to the colonial period.

In a particularly illuminating article titled "The Portrait of a Brave Woman," McCall provides the subjective life history of an Ohafia woman, Nne Uko, who transformed herself into a man, by marrying two wives, constantly dressing as a man, joining exclusively-male secret

¹²⁹ Azuonye, "The Heroic Age of the Ohafia Igbo;" Azuonye, "The Narrative War Songs."

¹³⁰ John McCall, *Dancing Histories: Heuristic Ethnography with the Ohafia Igbo* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2000); John McCall, "The Ohafia War Dance as Lived Experience: History and Identity in a Nigerian Community," Ph.D. Thesis, Indiana University (1992); John McCall, "Dancing the Past: Experiencing Historical Knowledge in Ohafia, Nigeria," *Passages* (1993); John McCall, "Making Peace with Agwu," *Anthropology and Humanism Quarterly* 18, 2 (1993).

societies, participating with men in the war dance, and performing *ogaranya* masculinity (what McCall calls “big man” status) in the mid-20th century.¹³¹ The story of Nne Uko reinforces my argument that Ohafia women drew upon historical gender constructions in their society to perform masculinity and negotiate social mobility during the colonial period (see chapter 5).¹³² McCall also suggests that rituals of gender-role reversal such as *uzo iyi* (virginity testing), where young virgin girls engaged in endeavors (such as wrestling matches) used to constitute masculinity (discussed in chapter 2 of this study), did not evidence a temporary cathartic release from male domination. Rather, both ritual and practical manipulation of gender roles by women reflect a latent system of potential alternatives. In effect, Ohafia gender system was fluid, and women’s performance of masculinity did not translate into an escape from male domination.

A few other publications on the Ohafia-Igbo have been very useful to this dissertation. The work of Emea Arua on the practice of yam titles in Ohafia provides an insiders’ perspective on Ohafia constructions of masculinity through yam cultivation, as well as on the premier position of women as the backbone of the pre-colonial agrarian economy.¹³³ In an effort that inspires the Africanist oral historian, Nnenna Obuba, an untrained historian of Ohafia origin,

¹³¹ John McCall, “Portrait of a Brave Woman,” *American Anthropologist* 98, 1 (1996), 127-136.

¹³² Hence McCall argues that Nne Uko employed the art of bodily presentation and the symbolic potential of clothing to equate herself with Ohafia warrior masculinities of the pre-colonial period. Also, Nne Uko amassed wealth through farming and performed the masculinity of yam cultivation, like other Ohafia women illustrated in chapter 4 of this study. Lastly, McCall lends further credence to my argument in chapter 5 that while Ohafia women who became female husbands performed masculinity, their primary motive was the attainment of Ohafia femininity. Thus he writes that Nne Uko realized full womanhood by means other than biological motherhood, and her position as female husband was as much a feminine as a masculine prerogative. In the context of Ohafia matrilineal society, she sought a wife from outside Ohafia, so that her children would not belong to two different Ohafia matrilineages; in effect to two different mothers. See McCall “Portrait of a Brave Woman,” 129-130, 134.

¹³³ Emea O. Arua, “Yam Ceremonies and the Values of Ohafia Culture,” *Africa: The Journal of the International African Institute* 51, 2 (1981).

undertook the task of compiling over 500 oral interviews on Ohafia history and culture, spanning the period, c.1500-2008.¹³⁴ This dissertation barely scratches the surface of the information contained in Obuba's compendium of oral sources, but it draws upon the emic perspectives, which it affords. Last but not the least is the work of G.I Jones on the Ohafia-Igbo, including his photographic collection and descriptions of Ohafia-Igbo artefacts, his publications, which shed light on Ohafia-Igbo migration and settlement, as well as his compilation of British colonial Annual Reports on Bende Division.¹³⁵

A number of studies on southeastern Nigeria enable a comparative study of the Ohafia-Igbo. Early 20th century descriptions of Igbo socio-political institutions (men's and women's political organizations, secret societies, *dibia* institutions, yam titles, etc.) by British colonial anthropologists such as Northcote Thomas, C.K. Meek and G.T. Basden, as well as Victor Uchendu's ethnographic study of patrilineal Igbo society, enable me to show the similarities and differences between the matrilineal Ohafia-Igbo and the rest of patrilineal Igboland.¹³⁶ Also, Simon Ottenberg's ethnography of the double-descent Afikpo-Igbo society, who dwell in the

¹³⁴ Nnenna E. Obuba, *The History and Culture of Ohafia Covering from About 1432 to 2008: A Collated Oral Tradition* (Ebem Ohafia: Lintdsons Publications, 2008).

¹³⁵ G.I. Jones, "Ohafia Obu Houses," *The Nigerian Field: The Journal of the Nigerian Field Society* VI, 4 (1937); Forde and Jones, *The Ibo and Ibibio-Speaking Peoples of South-Eastern Nigeria*; G.I. Jones, *Annual Reports of Bende Division, South Eastern Nigeria, 1905-1912* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1986).

¹³⁶ Percy A. Talbot, *In the Shadow of the Bush* (London: William Heinemann, 1912); Percy A. Talbot, *Life in Southern Nigeria* (London: Macmillan, 1923); Percy A. Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria* (London: Oxford University Press, 1926); Northcote Thomas, *Anthroological Report on the Ibo-Speaking Peoples of Nigeria*, 4 vols. (London: Harrison, 1913-14); G.T. Basden, *Among the Ibos of Nigeria* (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1921 [1966]); G.T. Basden, *Niger Ibos* (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1938 [1966]); C.K. Meek, *Law and Authority in a Nigerian Tribe: A Study in Indirect Rule* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937 [1950]); Victor Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria* (New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Toronto, London: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1965).

Cross-River territory with the Ohafia-Igbo, further set the Ohafia-Igbo apart from both double-descent and patrilineal African societies, irrespective of significant similarities between Ohafia and Afikpo (see chapter 1).¹³⁷ The works of Ugo Nwokeji, Elizabeth Isichei, David Northrup, Richard Henderson, R.O. Igwebe, John Oriji, Felicia Ekejiuba and Kenneth Dike illuminate Ohafia inter-group relations, especially their mutual pact with the Aro, and their role in militant slave production in the Biafran hinterland in the 18th and 19th centuries.¹³⁸

This dissertation is also informed by studies on Igbo women's economic and political power. Writings on Igbo women in the colonial period were imbued with evolutionist and racialized images of women's bodies and sexualities, and Igbo women appear in colonial and missionary writings as oppressed beasts of burden, subject to drudgery and degrading marriage practices.¹³⁹ Where women's words were captured, they were mediated through men,¹⁴⁰ with the result that women's voices were written out of orthodox historiography.

However, there are a number of studies and confirmations of the significant economic, political, and social institutions and expressions of female power in Southeastern Nigeria. In his 1865 journal on the "Niger Expedition," Rev. J.C. Taylor notes of the Onitsha Igbo, thus, "I must

¹³⁷ Simon Ottenberg, *Double Descent in an African Society: The Afikpo Village-Group* (Seattle: The University of Washington Press, 1968).

¹³⁸ Ugo Nwokeji, *The Slave Trade and Culture in the Bight of Biafra: An African Society in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge University Press, 2010); Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, 50-105; Northrup, *Trade Without Rulers*, 31-34, 62-83, 116-121; Richard Henderson, *The King in Every Man: Evolutionary Trends in Onitsha Society and Culture* (London: Yale University Press, 1972), 502; K.O. Dike and F.I. Ekejiuba, *The Aro of South-eastern Nigeria, 1650-1980: A study of Socio-Economic Formation and Transformation in Nigeria* (Ibadan: University Press, 1990); Ekejiuba, "The Aro System of Trade," 11-19; R.O. Igwebe, *The History of Arondizuogu from 1635-1960* (Aba, 1962), 86-91; Oriji, "Slave Trade, Warfare," 107-114.

¹³⁹ Basden, *Niger Ibos*, 203; Basden, *Among the Ibos of Nigeria*, 88-96.

¹⁴⁰ Josephine Beoku-Betts, "Western Perceptions of African Women in the 19th & Early 20th Centuries," in Andrea Cornwall, ed. *Readings in Gender in Africa* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005), 20-24.

confess that women are not deprived of their rightful status in society, nor, as in other tribes doomed to perpetual degradation.”¹⁴¹ In the first historical study of Igbo women, following the Igbo Women’s War,¹⁴² Sylvia Leith-Ross writes that the Igbo women of Owerri Province “economically and politically, are at least the equal of the men,”¹⁴³ and “because of their economic importance both as mothers, farm cultivators, and traders, (they) have rather more power than is generally thought.”¹⁴⁴

Subsequent works have shown that Igbo women enjoyed equal and complementary socio-political power and positions vis-à-vis men until colonialism led to the deterioration of their status.¹⁴⁵ Whereas Kamene Okonjo and Judith Van Allen argue that with the imposition of

¹⁴¹ Crowther and Taylor, *The Gospel on the Banks of the Niger*, 266.

¹⁴² See Margery Perham, *Native Administration in Nigeria* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), 206-220; Leith-Ross, *African Women*, 23-39; H. A. Gailey, *The Road to Aba* (London: London University Press, 1970), 97-155; Judith Van Allen, “Sitting on a Man: Colonialism and the Lost Political Institutions of Igbo Women,” *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 6 (1972), 172-178; Caroline Ifeka-Moller, “Female Militancy and Colonial Revolt: The Women's War of 1929, Eastern Nigeria,” in Shirley Ardener, ed., *Perceiving Women* (New York: John Wiley, 1975), 127-157; Judith Van Allen, “Aba Riots' or Igbo 'Women's War'? Ideology, Stratification, and the Invisibility of Women,” in Nancy Hafkin and Edna Bay (eds.), *Women in Africa* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1976), 59-85; Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, 151-155; S. N. Nwabara, *Iboland: A Century of Contact With Britain 1860-1960* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1977), 181-201; Nina Mba, *Nigerian Women Mobilized: Women's Political Activity in Southern Nigeria, 1900-1965* (Berkeley, California: Institute of International Studies, University of California, 1982), 79-97; Audrey Wipper, “Riot and Rebellion Among African Women: Three Examples of Women's Political Clout,” in Jean F. O'Barr, ed., *Perspectives On Power: Women in Africa, Asia, and Latin America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Center for International Studies, 1982), 62-65.

¹⁴³ Leith-Ross, *African Women*, 19.

¹⁴⁴ Leith-Ross, *African Women*, 21.

¹⁴⁵ Mba, *Nigerian Women Mobilized*, 67; Karen Sacks, “An Overview of Women and Power in Africa” in O'Barr ed., *Perspectives on Power*, 5-9; Kamene Okonjo, “The Dual Sex Political System in Operation: Igbo Women and Community Politics in Midwestern Nigeria” in Hafkin and Bay (eds.) *Women in Africa*, 46-56; Mba, *Nigerian Women Mobilized*, 37, 87-89; Ifi Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society* (London:

colonial rule, women's active participation in political life diminished,¹⁴⁶ Nina Mba contends that Igbo women's political authorities remained vibrant in the colonial period, and were the pillars on which the Women's War of 1929 was embarked upon.¹⁴⁷

However, up until the 1990s, studies on Igbo women offered generalized analyses of women's socio-political institutions and strategies. They describe Igbo societies primarily in terms of a patrilineal kinship system, and the view of Christianity's impact is mostly restricted to the Roman Catholic Mission and the Church Missionary Society. In this vein, the different historical experiences of the Ohafia and other neighboring Igbo communities, who had a double-descent or dominant matrilineal kinship system, and where the Church of Scotland Mission enjoyed a near-monopoly until the mid-20th century, is not accounted for.

Indeed, the micro studies that followed this scholarship pointed up some contradictions. Caroline Ifeka-Moller opposed Van Allen's argument that pre-colonial Igbo women possessed substantial political power, and rather contends that colonialism delivered Igbo women from male domination and ushered a change in gendered labor division, which enabled women to achieve unprecedented commercial power.¹⁴⁸ Similarly, Phoebe Ottenberg argues that Afikpo women relied upon their husbands for subsistence in the pre-colonial period, but were able to

Zed Books Limited, 1989), 119-123; Annie Lebeuf, "The Role of Women in the Political Organization of African Societies," in D. Paulme, ed., *Women of Tropical Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 93-120; Jean O'Barr, "African Women in Politics," in Margaret Jean Hay and Sharon Sticher (eds.), *African Women South of the Sahara* (London: Longman, 1984), 140-144; Audrey Wipper, "Women's Voluntary Associations," in Hay and Sticher (eds.), *African Women South of the Sahara*, 70 and 86.

¹⁴⁶ Van Allen, "Sitting on a Man," 165; Van Allen, "Aba Riots' or Igbo 'Women's War'?" 62-70; and Okonjo, "The Dual-Sex Political System," 55.

¹⁴⁷ Mba, *Nigerian Women Mobilized*, ix, 67-68, 68-134.

¹⁴⁸ Caroline Ifeka-Moller, "Female Militancy and Colonial Revolt: The Women's War of 1929, Eastern Nigeria," in Ardener, ed., *Perceiving Women*, 132-135. For similar views on the Ohafia-Igbo in particular, which this dissertation challenges, see chapter 2.

improve their economic power as a result of European contact and cassava production.¹⁴⁹ In addition to the notion of women's subservience to men in the pre-colonial period, Susan Martin went further to argue that during the colonial era, with the increase in palm oil trade, Ngwa women adopted cassava production, which afforded them more time to produce greater quantities of palm oil for sale. However, women were still unable to escape male socio-political domination, and men reaped the benefits of women's economic innovation.¹⁵⁰

The works of a number of African scholars in turn challenge these views. Felix Ekechi argues that pre-colonial Igbo women not only produced the bulk of locally consumed food, but they also controlled their material resources, which enabled them to attain social mobility through title-taking and the acquisition of property.¹⁵¹ Chima Korie's argument that colonialism marginalized Igbo women as invisible farmers and privileged men as real farmers, resulting in a food crisis, contradicts the position of Ifeka-Moller, Ottenberg and Martin.¹⁵²

Also, whereas Adiele Afigbo¹⁵³ and Gloria Chuku¹⁵⁴ contend that pre-colonial Igbo women

¹⁴⁹ Phoebe Ottenberg, "The Changing Economic Position of Women among the Afikpo Ibo," in W.T. Bascom and M.J. Herskovits, eds. *Continuity and Change in African Cultures* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), 205-223.

¹⁵⁰ Susan Martin, "Gender and Innovation: Farming, Cooking, and Palm Processing in the Ngwa Region of Southeastern Nigeria, 1900-1930," *Journal of African History* 25, 4 (1984), 411-427.

¹⁵¹ Felix K. Ekechi, "Gender and Economic Power: The Case of Igbo Market Women in Southeastern Nigeria," in Bessie House-Midamba and Felix K. Ekechi, eds. *African Women and Economic Power: The Role of Women in African Economic Development* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1995), 41-57.

¹⁵² Chima Korie, "The Invisible Farmer? Women, Gender, and Colonial Agricultural Policy in the Igbo Region of Nigeria, c1913-1954," *African Economic History* (29 (2001), 117-162.

¹⁵³ Adiele E. Afigbo, "Women in Nigerian History," in Martin O. Ijere, ed. *Women in Nigeria Economy* (Enugu: Acena, 1991), 35-36.

¹⁵⁴ Gloria Chukwu, "From Petty Traders to International Merchants: A Historical Account of Three Igbo Women of Nigeria in Trade and Commerce, 1886-1970," *African Economic History*

dominated agricultural production and monopolized local trade, Felicia Ekejiuba¹⁵⁵ and Nwando Achebe¹⁵⁶ argue that they participated in long distance trade, amassed great wealth there-from, and attained political power and high social status, beyond the capacity of most men in their societies.

My dissertation builds upon these studies to argue that Ohafia women were neither subservient nor complementary to men in the pre-colonial period; rather, they were economically and politically more powerful. In the chapter 1 of this dissertation, I employ the concept of breadwinner to bring into sharp focus, the realities of Ohafia-Igbo women's dominance in food production and distribution, and their prominent role in domestic and long distance trade, in a way that none of these scholars have supposed. Ohafia people articulate pre-colonial women's position as breadwinners with the expressions: *nde n'aku nde ife nri* (those who feed the community) and *anyi eri ala a nne* (we eat through the mother). The breadwinner concept is rooted in the matrifocal ideologies of the Ohafia-Igbo kinship system, and reflects the preoccupation of men with warfare and slave production in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Literature on Gender and Masculinities in Africa

Gender became transformed in its contact with West Africa¹⁵⁷ in three major ways: a redefinition of the relationship between the "biological" and "social" in contrast to received

27 (1999), 1-22; Gloria Chuku, "Women in the Economy of Igboland, 1900-1970: A Survey," *African Economic History* 23 (1995), 37-50.

¹⁵⁵ Felicia I. Ekejiuba, "Omu Okwei, the Merchant Queen of Ossomari: A Biographical Sketch," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 3, 4 (1967), 633-646.

¹⁵⁶ Achebe, *Farmer, Traders, Warriors and Kings*, 110-154.

¹⁵⁷ This review focuses mostly on West Africa as a distinct geographical context. However, the study incorporates in specific chapters, the literature from southern and east Africa, especially Luise White, "Separating the Men from the Boys: Constructions of Gender, Sexuality, and

categories of the Western world,¹⁵⁸ a questioning of the privileging of gender over other social attributes especially age, and wealth;¹⁵⁹ and a revelation that gender is an expression of power struggles between and among men and women.¹⁶⁰ Ifi Amadiume pioneered the idea that gender and sex were distinct in West African societies, when she argued that the flexibility of Igbo gender system, mediated the “dual-sex” social organization, such that women were able to occupy and perform male roles, and vice versa. Thus, gender categories of masculinity and femininity were separate from biological sex.¹⁶¹ However, writing in the 1980s, Amadiume offered a structuralist analysis of gendered power and agency in Nnobi. She did not elucidate

Terrorism in Central Kenya, 1939-1959” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 23, 1 (1990), 1-25; Maria-Barbara Watson-Franke, “Masculinity and the ‘Matrilineal Puzzle’,” *Anthropos* Bd. 87, H. 4./6. (1992), 475-488; Andrea Cornwall and Nancy Lindisfanne, eds. *Dislocating Masculinities: Comparative Ethnographies* (London: Routledge, 1994); Robert Morrell, “Of Boys and Men: Masculinity and Gender in Southern African Studies,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 24, 4 (Dec., 1998); John Colman Wood, *When Men Are Women: Manhood Among Gabra Nomads of East Africa* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999); Dorothy L. Hodgson, “‘Once Intrepid Warriors’: Modernity and the Production of Maasai Masculinities,” *Ethnology* 38, 2 (Spring, 1999), 121-150; Robert Morrell, *From Boys to Gentlemen: Settler Masculinity in Colonial Natal, 1880-1920* (South Africa: Unisa Press, 2001); Robert Morrell, ed., *Changing Men in Southern Africa* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2001); Thembisa Waetjen, *Workers and Warriors: Masculinity and the Struggle for Nation in South Africa* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004).

¹⁵⁸ Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*; Oyeronke Oyewunmi, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); Nwando Achebe, *The Female King of Colonial Nigeria: Ahebi Ugbabe* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2011).

¹⁵⁹ Andrea Cornwall, “To Be A Man Is More Than a Day’s Work: Shifting Ideals of Masculinity in Ado-Odo, Southwestern Nigeria,” in Lindsay and Miescher, eds. *Men and Masculinities*, 230-248; Lisa A. Lindsay, “Money, Marriage, and Masculinity on the Colonial Nigerian Railway,” in Lindsay and Miescher, eds. *Men and Masculinities*, 138-155; Gregory Mann, “Old Soldiers, Young Men: Masculinity, Islam, and Military Veterans in Late 1950s Soudan Francais (Mali),” in Lindsay and Miescher, eds. *Men and Masculinities*, 69-86; Pashington Obeng, “Gendered Nationalism: Forms of Masculinity in Modern Asante of Ghana,” in Lindsay and Miescher, eds. *Men and Masculinities*, 192-208.

¹⁶⁰ Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, 42-68, 119-143; Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors and Kings*, 161-224.

¹⁶¹ Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, 15-17, 28.

gendered contestations especially at the individual level, and did not show how female political activism shaped men's lives. This dissertation demonstrates that the actions and inactions of women shaped the historical processes of gendered identity formation for men (chapter 3). It also provides case studies of individual men and women's negotiation of social mobility and power through successive gender transformations (chapter 5).

The emphasis on structures and institutions of female power and authority is also evident in Edna G. Bay's *Wives of the Leopard*. Bay examines the impact of cultural, economic, and political institutions and practices between 1700 and 1894 on "patterns of female autonomy" — "how power and authority were gained, were exercised, and were lost over the life of the kingdom" of Dahomey.¹⁶² She argues that as the monarchical culture that enabled Dahomean women to exercise choice, influence, and autonomy weakened, and disappeared upon the imposition of French colonial rule, women lost their socio-political power and influence in the society.¹⁶³ Early attempts to locate women in African history took the form of the search for queen mothers, and royal wives within institutional histories of old West African states. My dissertation focuses on a non-centralized society, and examines both formal and informal mechanisms of expressing female power and authority, in addition to how these changed over time. Second, while accounting for the impact of larger historical processes such as the Atlantic slave trade, British colonialism, and Christianity in shaping social identities and gendered power,

¹⁶² Edna G. Bay, *Wives of the Leopard: Gender, Politics, and Culture in the Kingdom of Dahomey* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998), 5.

¹⁶³ Up until the 1970s, West African history was primarily the history of men (African and European) and political institutions. As a reaction against this male-centered historiography, early works on 'gender' in West Africa were largely about women and by women.

this study argues that it was competitive quest for social mobility and *ufiem* performance that defined Ohafia-Igbo engagements with socio-political institutions and macro historical forces.¹⁶⁴

Building on these studies, by the 1990s, a new wave of scholarship, with more complex views of women's work, socio-political organization, and the politics of gender sought to map out women's social history, with particular emphasis on women's forms of work, their words, worlds, consciousness, and questions of subjectivity and agency. They emphasized individual adaptations, negotiation, and contestation of structures, against the background of pre-colonial women's socio-political institutions.¹⁶⁵ This contrasted sharply with the top-down approach evident in the scholarship on women's experience of patriarchal ideologies in East Africa, in the sense that the scholarship focused more on the impact of domesticity, marital and sexual ideologies, and discourses of development on women's loss of power, and less on preexisting mechanisms of female power and authority, and women's negotiations of these colonial

¹⁶⁴ Thus, in chapter 1, I argue that it was changes in individual interpretations of social responsibility and inheritance practices that defined changes in Ohafia lineage system. In chapter 2, I argue that competitive performances of political power between men and women shaped the emergence of *ikpirikpe ndi inyom* as the most powerful political institution in pre-colonial Ohafia-Igbo society. In chapter 3, I argue that through *ufiem* performance, Ohafia men transformed practices such as the war dance into a gendering institution and defined a "geography of masculinity." In chapter 4, I argue that the quest for social mobility shaped the gendered adaptation of Ohafia secret societies and the limited political authority that the all-male *okonko* gained locally. Similarly, in chapter 5, I acknowledge the impact of macro forces such as British colonialism and Christianity, but also show that it was the competitive quest for *ogaranya* masculinity status that determined the workings of colonialism and the spread of Christianity.

¹⁶⁵ Barbara Cooper, *Marriage in Maradi: Gender and Culture in a Hausa Society in Niger, 1900-1989* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1997); Gracia Clark, *Onions Are My Husband: Survival and Accumulation by West African Market Women* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994); Sandra E. Greene, *Gender, Ethnicity, and Social Change on the Upper Slave Coast: A History of the Anlo-Ewe* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1996); Jean Davison, *Gender, Lineage, and Ethnicity in Southern Africa* (Colorado: Westview Press, 1997).

processes.¹⁶⁶ Thus, Andrea Cornwall concludes that, “It is West African research that has given rise to the most potent critiques of Western assumptions.”¹⁶⁷

As women’s studies came to embrace the study of gender relations, attention turned to processes and structures through which women’s and men’s identities and relationships were mediated. Thus, in a study of the politics of gender and the evolution of female power and authority in Nsukka, Northern Igboland, between 1900 and 1960, Achebe examines the religious, economic, and political structures that enabled women to exercise power. She emphasizes individual women’s negotiation of spaces and institutions to empower themselves, in their response to the challenges of colonial rule.¹⁶⁸ In a study of female subjective experiences, Achebe relies on life histories of women to illustrate their roles as medicines and goddesses, priestesses and prophetesses;¹⁶⁹ farmers, traders, potters, and weavers;¹⁷⁰ and king(s).¹⁷¹ Nsukka women appropriated the economic gains acquired through their various forms of work to negotiate social mobility and exercise political power. By comparing women’s resistance

¹⁶⁶ Here, women in the pre-colonial period are presented to be absolutely powerless before men, only to be rescued by colonialism and Christianity. See Grace B. Kyomunhendo and Marjorie K. McIntosh, *Women, Work and Domestic Virtue in Uganda, 1900-2003* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006), 14-15, which offers a teleological narrative of how Ugandan women passively became marginalized over time, first by Ugandan men, and later, by British colonial officials and European missionaries. Also, see Tabitha Kanogo, *African Womanhood in Colonial Kenya, 1900-1950* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005), 241, which explores the intertwined efforts of colonial officials, missionaries, and indigenous authorities to define and control various institutions that regulated womanhood, and argues that colonialism created a fluid environment that afforded women opportunities to negotiate advantages. Kanogo does not discuss the status of women in pre-colonial Kenya and presents colonization as “salvific” for women.

¹⁶⁷ Cornwall, ed. *Readings in Gender in Africa*, 1.

¹⁶⁸ Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors and Kings*.

¹⁶⁹ Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors and Kings*, 53-108.

¹⁷⁰ Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors and Kings*, 109-160.

¹⁷¹ Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors and Kings*, 197-224.

strategies against indigenous and foreign patriarchies before and during the colonial period, Achebe argues that women often transcended exclusive male socio-political positions to assert and express their power and authority.¹⁷² Moreover, Achebe shows that women's exercise of socio-political power and authority impacted men and shaped their gender identities.¹⁷³

My dissertation builds upon Achebe's insight. Whereas she argues that King Ahebi Ugbabe's production of a masked spirit constituted a brash social insult against Nsukka men, I examine how the constitution of a "geography of masculinity" (see chapter 3) set cultural limits that prevented female masculinities from realizing full manhood in Ohafia society. This study also shows the role of women in the constitution of *ufiem*, the discrimination of *ujo*, and redefinitions of (*ogaranya*) masculinity in the first two decades of the 20th century.

However, the foregoing scholarship on gender in West Africa largely assumed patriarchy, rather than historicize male power, with the result that men served as a backdrop in the examination of women's experiences. With the exception of Amadiume, who attempted to theorize "How They Made Them Men,"¹⁷⁴ African feminist writings on gender have largely ignored the historical constitution of male power and privilege. For instance, scholars such as Nina Mba and Annie Lebeuf merely assumed that the existence of male secret societies and *amali* (village assembly), where Igbo women had limited or no access in the pre-colonial period, represented evidence for women's marginalization from total society and formal institutions of

¹⁷² Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors and Kings*, 163, 165-171.

¹⁷³ Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors and Kings*, 197-217.

¹⁷⁴ Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, 94-95.

political power, without interrogating the limitations of these institutions.¹⁷⁵ Their views are still unchallenged. Subsequent scholars have merely tried to show how women negotiated alternative spaces for the exercise of political power, often casting men as a homogenous category. My dissertation interrogates both the historical processes for the establishment of masculine institutions, as well as the limitations that attended their gendered adaptations (see chapter 4). It also shows that there were various categories of masculinities in Ohafia between 1850 and 1920.

It is also in this regard that Robert Morrell and Lahoucine Ouzgane pointed out that much of African feminist scholarship has come to deal with masculinity, but ignores men, such that while a great deal of attention is given to womanhood and motherhood, there is no equivalent discussion of manhood and fatherhood.¹⁷⁶ Elsewhere, Morrell writes, “The dominance of men in the public record has obscured the fact that little is known about masculinity. Men have generally been treated in essentialist terms.”¹⁷⁷ In effect, the preexisting framework did not allow for the theorization of the African gender system as one of power relations among men and women and between men and women. It also did not posit masculinity and femininity as mutually constitutive. New studies centering on masculinities primarily tried to bridge this gap.

In *Men and Masculinities in Modern Africa*, twelve prominent gender scholars provide diverse perspectives to the construction of masculinities in the context of the socio-economic and cultural transformations of colonial and post-colonial Africa. Opposing Robert Connell’s concept of a single hegemonic masculinity, the authors argue that African gender relations were

¹⁷⁵ Van Allen, “Sitting on a Man,” 165-171; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 24; Mba, *Nigerian Women Mobilized*, 27, 29, 37, 62; Lebeuf, “The Role of Women in the Political Organization of African Societies,” 109, 113; Ifeka-Moller, “Female Militancy and Colonial Revolt: The Women’s War of 1929, Eastern Nigeria,” in Ardener, ed., *Perceiving Women*, 134

¹⁷⁶ Robert Morell and Lahoucine Ouzgane, eds. *African Masculinities: Men in Africa from the late Nineteenth Century to the Present* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 1, 6-7.

¹⁷⁷ Morrell, “Of Boys and Men,” 605.

constitutive of a patchwork of patriarchies, some imposed through colonialism, and others locally derived.¹⁷⁸ They contend that “there were multiple and at times conflicting notions of masculinity, promoted by local and foreign institutions.”¹⁷⁹ Whereas Carolyn Brown and Lisa Lindsay argue that African masculinities were “socially constructed” through dominant social and political institutions, Dorothy Hodgson and Luise White show that masculinities were “consciously constructed” by individual African men through subversive measures.¹⁸⁰

However, the construction of masculinity was not always a conscious endeavor. Thus, Frederick Cooper shows that European officials conceived of their African labor policies in masculine terms, while defining the work that women did as “something else.” Also, African men found it in their best interests to support the colonial state on certain issues, even as their patriarchal authority was undermined by the new opportunities that colonial structures and agents provided to junior men and women.¹⁸¹ Similarly, Brown examines how labor affected coal miners’ construction of masculinity in southeastern Nigeria. She links the Enugu context to

¹⁷⁸ Lisa A. Lindsay and Stephan F. Miescher, “Introduction: Men and Masculinities in Modern African History,” in Lindsay and Miescher, eds. *Men and Masculinities*, 3.

¹⁷⁹ Lisa and Miescher, “Introduction,” 13 Thus, Miescher shows that Presbyterian teachers did not perceive some notions of masculinity as hegemonic and others as subordinate. Rather, they created their own synthesis of different cultural practices that were determined by specific contexts by negotiating between competing masculinities (*Men and Masculinities*, 89-104).

¹⁸⁰ Caroline Brown, “A ‘Man’ in the Village Is a ‘Boy’ in the Workplace: Colonial Racism, Worker Militance, and Igbo Notions of Masculinity in the Nigerian Coal Industry, 1930-1945,” In Lindsay and Miescher, eds. *Men and Masculinities*, 156-174; Lindsay, “Money, Marriage, and Masculinity,” 138-155; Dorothy Hodgson, “Being Maasai Men: Modernity and the Production of Maasai Masculinities,” In Lindsay and Miescher, eds. *Men and Masculinities*, 211-229; Luise White, “Matrimony and Rebellion: Masculinity in Mau Mau,” In Lindsay and Miescher, eds. *Men and Masculinities*, 177-191.

¹⁸¹ Frederick Cooper, “Industrial Man Goes to Africa,” in Lindsay and Miescher, eds. *Men and Masculinities*, 128-136.

England's ideologies of miners as "a race apart, outcasts, isolated and primitive,"¹⁸² and argues that Igbo coal miners' individual and collective resistance were defined against European ideologies, while equally serving to fulfill indigenous expectations of manhood, since men had to work to earn money for title-taking and fulfillment of village obligations.¹⁸³

The essays theorize gender as comprising of the history of men and women. Examining the role of wealth creation in the definition of masculine identity, Andrea Cornwall shows that the actions of both men and women enabled the constitution of particular visions of masculinity in southwestern Nigeria.¹⁸⁴ Similarly, examining the relationship between wage labor, money and gender, Lindsay argues that the British colonial government, western Nigerian railway men and their wives initiated a new kind of masculine self-conception (men as breadwinners and wage-earners) in negotiation of social mobility.¹⁸⁵

Men and Masculinities differentiates masculinity from manhood. It defines masculinity as a cluster of norms, values, and behavioral patterns expressing explicit and implicit expectations of how men should act and represent themselves to others; while manhood refers to indigenous notions explicitly related to men's physiology, often recognized in terms of male adulthood.¹⁸⁶ Thus, Achebe argues that the woman Ahebi Ugbabe embraced a highly masculinized form of colonial leadership, reinvented herself as "king" in a society that had no kings and went as far as creating a masked spirit in an effort to realize full manhood.¹⁸⁷ Achebe

¹⁸² Brown, "A 'Man' in the Village Is a 'Boy' in the Workplace," 159.

¹⁸³ Brown, "A 'Man' in the Village Is a 'Boy' in the Workplace," 162.

¹⁸⁴ Cornwall, "To Be A Man Is More Than a Day's Work," 230-245.

¹⁸⁵ Lindsay, "Money, Marriage, and Masculinity," 138-151.

¹⁸⁶ Lisa and Miescher, "Introduction," 4-5.

¹⁸⁷ Achebe, "And She Became a Man," 52-66.

further elaborates on King Ahebi Ugbabe's successive gender transformations in her monograph,¹⁸⁸ and her conclusions enable me to draw important similarities and differences between Ahebi and Ohafia women in the first two decades of the 20th century (chapter 5). Also, the idea of female masculinities and the notion that women's actions and inactions shaped the historical constructions of *ufiem* is cardinal to "Emergent Masculinities."

Men and Masculinities also challenges the dichotomy between the public and domestic spheres, by arguing that men's bodies, their domestic spaces, and their work and leisure places were sites for the construction and contestation of masculinity. Thus, White contends that Mau Mau men's ideas of intimacy and domesticity were an integral part of their political struggles,¹⁸⁹ and McKittrick shows that "fatherhood" was a politicized gendered practice.¹⁹⁰

Lastly, the collection examines gender in view of other categories such as age and seniority. Gregory Mann demonstrates that new opportunities afforded by colonial rule enabled young men and women to challenge the political power and dominant masculinity of older males.¹⁹¹ Pashington Obeng on the other hand, argues that whereas young Asante male nationalists (*nkwankwaa*) who relied on access to wealth, seniority, maleness and political clout, failed in their effort to challenge senior men in the 1950s, Yaa Asantewaa successfully employed

¹⁸⁸ Achebe, *The Female King*.

¹⁸⁹ Luise White, "Afterword," in Lindsay and Miescher, eds. *Men and Masculinities*, 177-189.

¹⁹⁰ Meredith McKittrick, "Forsaking their Fathers? Colonialism, Christianity, and Coming of Age in Ovamboland, Northern Namibia," in Lindsay and Miescher, eds., *Men and Masculinities*, 33-47. The only contributor who examined changing conceptions of masculinity in the pre-colonial period, McKittrick shows that inter-generational tensions in Ovamboland were enhanced by colonialism, when sons increasingly sought alternative avenues (Christianity and labor migration) to side-step their fathers' hegemonic (through cattle-inheritance) hold, thereby creating an elite masculinity. However, "sons" still had to give gifts to "fathers", whose authority was increasingly subverted by colonial labor policies.

¹⁹¹ Mann, "Old Soldiers, Young Men," 69-86.

the ideals of royal lineage, elder status, and personal courage to resist British colonial rule in 1900.¹⁹² He thus demonstrates the limitations of age and sex in the attainment of “senior masculinity.”¹⁹³ These essays inform this study’s examination of how the relationship between fathers and sons shaped the construction and performance of *ufiem* in Ohafia-Igbo society, as well as institutions and practices that enabled the transition from boyhood to adult masculinity.

Building upon this scholarship, Miescher studies the social construction of masculinities in Ghana in the 20th century. Examining the life histories and constantly shifting subjectivities¹⁹⁴ of eight senior men (a cocoa farmer, a policeman and driver, a trader and businessman, two teachers, one pastor, and two shrine attendants), Miescher argues individuals negotiated complex socio-political transformations and notions of masculinity shaped by community expectations, and imported ideologies from missionaries and colonial officials. Thus, structures of colonial rule like the police force, Christian mission, schools, wage labor, and new material culture, introduced new regimes of understanding that tried to redefine manhood in Ghana, and these structures further intersected, often in conflicting ways, with indigenous structures like the matrilineage. However, the eight protagonists created their own synthesis of different cultural practices as they navigated various hegemonic landscapes.¹⁹⁵

He makes three significant contributions to the field. First, he shows that understandings of masculinities are linked to histories of institutions and structures of power, as much as men’s private lives reveal intimate practices, contestations and transformations of gender relations.

¹⁹² Obeng, “Gendered Nationalism,” 202.

¹⁹³ Lisa and Miescher, “Introduction,” 18.

¹⁹⁴ Miescher, *Making Men in Ghana*, 13-16.

¹⁹⁵ Miescher, *Making Men in Ghana*, 43-44, 54, 138.

Thus, he argues that while colonialism led to a “masculinization” of African political systems it did not lead to a collapse of the indigenous gender system, which was fluid.¹⁹⁶ Second, he complicates Cornell’s theory of hegemonic masculinity by demonstrating that it is not always obvious which forms of masculinity were dominant since understandings of gender depended on specific contexts and actors’ subject positions. Third, he demonstrates that the passage to manhood was not always welcome or easy, and thus challenges feminist scholarship’s assumption of patriarchy and male dominance as essential (a given).

The major limitation of Miescher’s work is the question of representativeness of the case studies for the social experiences of most Ghanaian men in the 20th century. His focus on eight men’s subjectivities clouds the structural impact of the exploitative British colonial rule on Ghanaian society. Moreover in examining Ghanaian men’s subjective experiences, the power of translation, arrangement, interpretation, and mediation, rested with Miescher.¹⁹⁷ Also, the focus on the 20th century, did not allow for a detailed study of the changes in gender identity formation in pre-colonial Ghanaian society.¹⁹⁸ Lastly, Miescher does not elucidate how men’s construction

¹⁹⁶ Miescher, *Making Men in Ghana*, 199.

¹⁹⁷ Miescher, *Making Men in Ghana*, xv-xix.

¹⁹⁸ Miescher, *Making Men in Ghana*, 8-13. Miescher asserted that in the 18th century, the hierarchical and patriarchal Asante mediated sexuality and gender relations, recognizing male sexual needs but not those of women, and elite men accumulated women as a sign of wealth. The emphasis on war as a male occupation altered relations between men and women, senior and juniors. Women played a role in warfare and some became ritual men. In the late 19th century, there existed the warrior ideal of masculinity, in addition to notions of adult masculinity (through marriage and gun ownership), senior masculinity (elderhood), and big man masculinity (wealth). British colonial conquest in the mid 19th century ended warfare as an activity for Akan men, and men turned to fishing and trading in kola nuts, imported fabric, and glass beads, and later in the 20th century, to cash crops, erecting large cement buildings in demonstration of their wealth. From the 1890s, the cocoa industry altered gender relations resulting in the feminization of pawning, and women’s monopolization of the markets. In the 1920s, British indirect rule strengthened male chiefly power, and enabled men to promote their ideas about gender. He made passing mention of these complex transformations in gender identities taking place in Akan

and exercise of gendered power and women's exercise of power was correspondent. My work attempts to confront these challenges head-on (see chapters 3-5).

Lindsay makes a remarkable effort to confront this issue in *Working with Gender: Wage Labor and Social Change in Southwestern Nigeria*. Focusing on railway workers, and relying on oral interviews and written sources, Lindsay argues, "all sides of the colonial encounter were bringing gender to their notions of work."¹⁹⁹ She examines the impact of colonial wage economy on the dynamics of family structure and gender ideology in southwestern Nigeria, mostly between 1930 and the early 1960s. Positioning "gender" as a social tool, Lindsay argues that colonial administrators and employers worked with gender in the sense that they based policies on their assumptions about the ideal roles and attributes of men and women. They equally defined local gender and domestic arrangements as index of "backwardness" in their bid to justify racial discrimination in wage-fixing and other benefits. On the other hand, Africans used gender in multiple ways. African men's lives were bound up with social expectations about how "real men" should conduct themselves, both in public and as sons, husbands, fathers, and relatives at home, and women were involved in this definition of gendered expectations.

Second, Lindsay posits gender as discourse. She argues that labor differentiation, domesticity, and gender were inseparable in working men's negotiation of higher allowances and wages through strike actions and in the process, masculinity and femininity were contested and constructed. Defining themselves as "bread-winners," male railway workers justified their demands as financial supporters of their wives. Women equally lent their support to their men's

societies in the 19th century, but moved on quickly to the 20th century, because "many of these big events . . . seemed to touch the interviewed men only marginally . . . The focus here is more on the personal and individual." *Making Men in Ghana*, 12. These ideas touched upon by Miescher are fully engaged with in this present study.

¹⁹⁹ Lisa Lindsay, *Working With Gender: Wage Labor and Social Change in Southwestern Nigeria* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2003), 3.

cause as “bread-winners,” thus participating in the construction of railway workers as “modern men” and “big men.” At the same time, women exploited the discourse of “male bread-winners” and “female housewives” to negotiate their entitlement to resources from their husbands.²⁰⁰

However, some men used the status of family providers to appropriate their wives’ income, even while supporting women’s access to wage labor against colonial government’s efforts to confine women to home and markets. In this way, Lindsay shows that masculinity and femininity were mutually constitutive as both men and women worked with gender.

However, Lindsay’s exploration of gender through subjectivities (how railway workers thought about themselves as men) met with limited success. She does not show how the decline in the earning ability of railway pensioners affected their status at home, how their wives and children treated them, and why some wives divorced their husbands while others did not. By reifying wage labor as the mono-causal factor for these variables, Lindsay overlooked other equally important issues such as marriage types (polygamy or monogamy), religious affiliations, age and seniority, etc. By virtue of her analysis, the structures of colonialism had an overwhelming deterministic influence on men’s lives, with little room for negotiation, as seen in her image of a homogenous group of suffering pensioners.²⁰¹ My work centers the idea that competitive individual negotiation of social mobility defined the introduction, adaptation, and gendered uses of socio-political institutions, as well as Ohafia engagements with colonialism.

The publication of *African Masculinities* excited a prospect of providing a comprehensive theory of African masculinities from pre-colonial to post-colonial times. However, in its bid to recenter African men in gender studies, and challenge their representations as oppressors of

²⁰⁰ Lindsay, *Working With Gender*, 105-132.

²⁰¹ Lindsay, *Working With Gender*, 150-160.

women and victims of slavery, colonialism, and postcolonialism, *African Masculinities* posits that to talk of masculinity as separate from men (as a social construct) is tautological. In effect, Morrell and Ouzgane believed there was no distinction between manhood and masculinity,²⁰² which is problematic in view of the women/gender scholarship above, which has emphasized the fluidity of the African gender system. Moreover, Morrell has emphasized the social constructionism of South African masculinities elsewhere.²⁰³ Also, the title of the book would lead one to expect a study of pre-colonial African masculinities — a lacuna Miescher and Lindsay had called attention to.²⁰⁴ However, this is not the case. The gap remains. My dissertation attempts to fill that gap by examining shifts in the construction, production, contestation, and transformation of African masculinities in the pre-colonial period. The construction of masculinity through institutionalization²⁰⁵ and performance in Ohafia between 1850 and 1900, was part of a broader historical process — the gendered struggle for power.

Situated more within the field of critical men's studies than history, and focusing primarily on Southern Africa,²⁰⁶ *African Masculinities* examines how boys were socialized to become men in African societies, why men behave the way they do in order to be perceived as masculine, and the impact of colonial racism on African masculine identities. As Morrell and Ouzgane put it, the book examines “how African masculinities, African male bodies,

²⁰² Morrell and Ouzgane, eds. *African Masculinities*, 4.

²⁰³ Morrell, “Of Boys and Men,” 605-630.

²⁰⁴ Lindsay and Miescher, eds. *Men and Masculinities*, 2.

²⁰⁵ Michael Kimmel, Jeff Hearn and R.W. Connell, eds., *Handbook of Studies on Men and Masculinities* (London, 2005); Hearn, Jeff, “Theorizing Men and Men’s Theorizing: Varieties of Discursive Practices on Men’s Theorizing of Men,” *Theory and Society* 27, 6 (1998), 781-816.

²⁰⁶ Of the 17 total chapters, 8 were on southern Africa, 3 on Egypt, 1 on Kenya/Tanzania, 1 on Nigeria, and 1 on Guinea, 3 on Africa generally.

subjectivities, and experiences are constituted in specific historical, cultural, and social contexts.”²⁰⁷ Wilson Jacob and Frank Salamone analyze subversive masculinities. Salomone applies the language of gender to queer practices in Hausa society, Northern Nigeria, and argues that the *yan dauda* (men who talk and behave like women and have sex with each other) reinforce and challenge Hausa notions of dominant male heterosexuality and femininity, through public displays of homoeroticism.²⁰⁸ His insights reinforce my argument that Ohafia men’s masculinization of public spaces through *ufiem* performances (chapter 3), and Ohafia women’s transformation of public spaces into the most effective platform for expressing political power and authority (chapter 2), define public spaces as an arena of gendered power contestation. Jacob, the only scholar that tried to highlight conceptions of African masculinity in Egypt before European colonial rule, through an analysis of the two-volume work of Ibrahim Fawzi Pasha on Sudan, argues that new ways of performing colonial masculinity and national identity emerged in the context of Egyptian-Sudanese state relations, before British colonial rule.²⁰⁹

Indeed, the four major concepts (interpretations, representations, constructions, and contestations of masculinity) around which *African Masculinities* is organized are very influential to my dissertation. Writing from a post-colonial perspective, Arthur Saint-Aubin, Beti Ellerson, Lindsay Clowes, Meredith Goldsmith, Kathryn Holland, and Sally Hayward examine the political representations and interpretations of African masculinities and male sexuality in

²⁰⁷ Morell and Ouzgane, eds. *African Masculinities*, 8.

²⁰⁸ Frank A. Salamone, “Hausa Concepts of Masculinity and the ‘*Yan Dauda*,” in Morell and Ouzgane, eds. *African Masculinities*, 75-86.

²⁰⁹ WilsonChacko Jacob, “The Masculine Subject of Colonialism: The Egyptian Loss of the Sudan,” in Morell and Ouzgane, eds. *African Masculinities*, 153-170.

Western scientific and medical discourses,²¹⁰ pro-gay films,²¹¹ the South African *Drum* magazine,²¹² and fictional narratives.²¹³ My dissertation examines Ohafia-Igbo changing interpretations (meaning signification) of *ufiem* through discourses (how men and women describe *ufiem* attributes) and performances (practices that socially legitimate or dramatize *ufiem* accomplishment such as the war dance). It is in this sense that Paulla Ebron²¹⁴ described performance as constituting gender through a stylized repetition of acts (like dancing) or discourses (like *igbu ishi*). With respect to representations, I draw insights from the social constructionism view of anthropologists and historians, and argue that the performances of *ndi ikike* masculinity, in combination with the interpenetrative discourses²¹⁵ of colonial officials and missionaries, and later, historical, and anthropological literature, resulted in the equation of Ohafia ethnicity with warrior masculinity at the turn of the 20th century.

²¹⁰ Arthur F. Saint-Aubin, "A Grammar of Black Masculinity: A Body of Science," in Morell and Ouzgane, eds. *African Masculinities*, 23-42.

²¹¹ Beti Ellerson, "Visualizing Homosexualities in Africa – *Dakan*: An Interview with Filmmaker Mohamed Camara," in Morell and Ouzgane, eds. *African Masculinities*, 61-74.

²¹² Lindsay Clowes, "To Be a Man: Changing Constructions of Manhood in *Drum* Magazine, 1951-1965," Morell and Ouzgane, eds. *African Masculinities*, 89-108.

²¹³ Meredith Goldsmith, "Of Masks, Mimicry, Misogyny, and Miscegenation: Forging Black South African Masculinity in Bloke Modisane's *Blame me on History*," in Morell and Ouzgane, eds. *African Masculinities*, 109-120; Kathryn Holland, "The Troubled Masculinities in Tsitsi Dangaremba's *Nervous Conditions*," in Morell and Ouzgane, eds. *African Masculinities*, 121-136; Sally Hayward, "(Dis)Enabling Masculinities: The Word and the Body, Class Politics, and Male Sexuality in El Saadawi's *God Dies by the Nile*," in Morell and Ouzgane, eds. *African Masculinities*, 137-152.

²¹⁴ Ebron, "Constituting Subjects Through Performative Acts," 171-189.

²¹⁵ Moore and Vaughan, *Cutting Down Trees*, xiv.

Whereas Glen Elder and Morrell argue that the policies of post-colonial South African government conditioned constructions of masculinity and sexuality,²¹⁶ Margrethe Silberschmidt, Deevia Bhana, and Rob Pattman contend that gender inequality in political and economic power shaped constructions of masculinities in East and South Africa.²¹⁷ Their perspectives encourage an interrogation of the relationship between militant conceptions of masculinity in pre-colonial Ohafia society on the one hand, and the status of Ohafia women as breadwinners with powerful political institutions and a matrifocal kinship system on the other. Unlike the cases in East and South Africa, where socio-economic inequalities between men and women produced masculinities (husbands and schoolboys) who expressed violence against women in the post-colonial period, I suggest that the propensity of Ohafia men to fight wars in the 18th and 19th centuries provided a cathartic release from the realities of female socio-economic dominance. It is in this sense that Victor Turner argued that Ndembu men transformed hunting into a distinct masculine pursuit and elevated it onto a ritual plane, in order to create an idyllic sylvan unisexual community, which enabled them to exercise control over young men and escape “the inexorable reality of matrilineal descent and female control of the economic basis of survival.”²¹⁸

²¹⁶ Glen S. Elder, “Somewhere over the Rainbow: Cape Town, South Africa, as a ‘Gay Destination,’” in Morell and Ouzgane, eds. *African Masculinities*, 43-60; Robert Morrell, “Men, Movements, and Gender Transformation in South Africa,” in Morell and Ouzgane, eds. *African Masculinities*, 271-288.

²¹⁷ Margrethe Silberschmidt, “Poverty, Male Disempowerment, and Male Sexuality: Rethinking Men and Masculinities in Rural and Urban east Africa,” in Morell and Ouzgane, eds. *African Masculinities*, 189-204; Deevia Bhana, “Violence and the Gendered Negotiation of Masculinity Among Young Black School Boys in South Africa,” in Morell and Ouzgane, eds. *African Masculinities*, 205-220; Rob Pattman, “Ugandanas,’ ‘Cats’ and Others: Constructing Student Masculinities at the University of Botswana,” in *African Masculinities*, 221-236.

²¹⁸ Victor Turner, *Schism and Continuity in an African Society: A Study of Ndembu Village Life* (London: Manchester University Press 1957), 230, 242-243. I also employ this idea, which I call masculinization, in discussing the gendered uses of hunting and yam cultivation in Ohafia.

Lastly, in this study, I draw upon Robert Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity (a dominant form of masculinity that established the cultural ideal of how real men should behave), his notion of masculinities (the idea that all men are not the same), and his theory of masculinity as a social construct.²¹⁹ However, in order to overcome the structuralist limitations of Connell's approach premised on the idea that masculinity is socially constructed, I draw insights from the works of Andrea Cornwall and Nancy Lindisfane,²²⁰ and Lindsay and Miescher,²²¹ to show that while gender identities were socially constructed, there were ceaseless contestations within and between various forms of *ufiem*. My focus then is on everyday practices, individual consciousness, and innovative manipulation of institutions and spaces, based on Jonathan Glassman's idea that conflict between multiple visions of society lies at the heart of any social system, and individuals negotiate a "tangled web of ideological filaments, each filament spun originally in a different time and place."²²² These analytic categories enable the explication of how various forms of masculinities coexisted in Ohafia in the 19th and 20th centuries, and how individual Ohafia men and women constructed more than one form of *ufiem* in their life time.

One major issue arising from the foregoing literature review is whether masculinity is a social construct or lived experience. Is masculinity performance removed from the realities of African life? Is it a mask or a disguise, which limits our vision of alternative social realities? I suggest that we may look to scholars who have successfully applied queer theory to African

²¹⁹ Connell, *Masculinities*, ch. 1. Especially as situated in the African context by the 'Colloquium on Masculinities in Southern Africa,' articulated by Morrell, "Of Boys and Men," 605-630.

²²⁰ Cornwall and Lindisfane, eds., *Dislocating Masculinities*, 5.

²²¹ Lindsay and Miescher, eds., *Men and Masculinities*, 1-29, 52-68, 89-108, 138-174.

²²² Jonathan Glassman, "The Bondsman's New Clothes: the Contradictory Consciousness of Slave Resistance on the Swahili Coast," *The Journal of African History* 32, 2 (1991), 280, 288.

historical contexts, in order to answer these questions.²²³ Stephanie Newell studies the life history of John Moray Stuart-Young (1881-1939) as an individual with multiple “queer” identities (a homosexual, twice married to women, forger, “spirit rapper,” novelist, poet, and palm oil trader in Onitsha under British colonial rule). Newell argues that Stuart-Young escaped the homophobic environment of late 19th and early 20th century England for “Igbo cultural openness,”²²⁴ which provided “a more expansive ‘geography of desire’,” by accommodating his “queer” identities.²²⁵ Newell contends that Stuart-Young did not embody a single subjectivity, but rather, multiple subjectivities, and concludes that “queer” fits well with Igbo gender flexibility, and reflects the life of Stuart-Young, which revolved around forgeries (without necessarily implying an originality) and complex mechanisms of “masking.”²²⁶

The story of Stuart-Young suggests that his “queer” identities were both real (facilitated his negotiation of social mobility in a homophobic British colonial environment) and social constructs (the various masks he wore). Stuart-Young’s life reflected the challenges of industrialization and colonization in England and facilitated the anti-colonial nationalist movement in Nigeria and Ghana.²²⁷ Yet, his sexual postures towards young African boys, which

²²³ We recall that McCall suggests that African people possessed a “latent system of potential alternatives,” which enabled individuals to perform masculinity and femininity simultaneously, and transform ritual gender-role reversals into mechanisms for exercising political authority and gaining social mobility. McCall “Portrait of a Brave Woman,” 129-130, 134.

²²⁴ Stephanie Newell, *The Forger’s Tale: The Search for Odeziaku* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006), 12-14. Newell describes him as a historical figure marginalized, silenced, and disavowed by the British colonial administrative framework and by historians of British Empire.

²²⁵ Newell, *The Forger’s Tale*, 12, 166.

²²⁶ Newell, *The Forger’s Tale*, 130-132, 147, 160-163.

²²⁷ Newell, *The Forger’s Tale*, 119-137.

Newell describes as a celebration of the youthful body (“Uranian love”)²²⁸ (what is in fact pedophilia) show that sexual relationships across colonial boundaries were not on an equal basis. These complex realities help to demonstrate that gender constructions in African societies were based on socio-political realities, irrespective of how such gender identities were masked or performed. Thus, this dissertation embraces the varied forms of *ufiem* construction in Ohafia-Igbo society, and rather than posit them as conflicting, I theorize a complex relationship of domination, complicity, subordination, and subversion among them (chapters 3 and 4).

West African gender studies are yet to show gendered social change and identity formation in the pre-colonial period. It is yet to satisfactorily theorize the African gender system as one of power relations between and among men. Yet, some scholars argue that gender is not African, has no local meaning within African societies, and is evidence of historical epistemological impositions of the West on Africa during colonial rule.²²⁹ Oyeronke Oyewunmi insists that there is no “power relations” inherent in the “productive/reproductive” relations between African men and women, and that the organizing principle in Yorubaland was seniority, not gender.²³⁰ In contrast, Eileen Boris, Helen Mugambi, and Takyiwaa Manuh argue that gender can and should be historicized in African contexts in spite of the concept’s Western provenance, and that while there may not be an African linguistic equivalent for the word ‘gender,’ Africans had always appropriated gender since pre-colonial times in negotiating access

²²⁸ Newell, *The Forger’s Tale*, 76-78, 87. Stuart-Young suffered a trauma of fatherly abuse in England, which influenced his sexual molestation of boys in Onitsha.

²²⁹ Oyewunmi, *The Invention of Women*, 22.

²³⁰ Oyewunmi, *The Invention of Women*, 50-55, 83. However, she fails to account for the very historical processes through which the Yoruba engaged with gender under colonial rule.

to resources and power.²³¹ Gendered history they insist, must involve other analytic categories, to capture the diversity and dynamism of Africans' historical experiences.

Gender history emerged from challenging the colonial racialized portrayals of West African women, to addressing processes and structures through which women's and men's identities and relationships were mediated. Within West African historical context, it was established that gender is separate from biological sex; gender is best understood in the light of other analytic categories; and 'gender' derives its meaning from geo-cultural and socio-political contexts. The feminist methodology that for a long time was at the heart of gender (albeit, women-centered history) studies pioneered the life history approach, which has been extended to the study of masculinities. The methodology of gender history as it evolved in West Africa differed from its East African counterpart, where the focus on domesticity, marital and sexual relationships, and women's involvement in nationalist struggles and development, reified images of subordinate and oppressed women.²³² The focus on agency, consciousness, and subjectivities, in West African gender studies have steered the field of West African history towards a profound social history. Gender has equally led to the study of material spaces and symbols, as sites for the construction of identities, contestation of power, and negotiation of historical meanings/truths.

²³¹ Eileen Boris, "Gender After Africa!" in Cole, Manuh, and Miescher, eds., *Africa After Gender*, 191-192; Helen Mugambi, "The 'Post-Gender' Question in African Studies," In Cole, Manuh, and Miescher, eds., *Africa After Gender*, 285-302; Takyiwaa Manuh, "Doing Gender Work in Ghana," In Cole, Manuh, and Miescher, eds., *Africa After Gender*, 125-149. Ebron argues that "gender" in West Africa is a performance of "difference," and as such, both the 'self-conscious' and 'unself-conscious' aspects of gender performance should be equally studied, so that "gender becomes a way into understanding other forms of social distinction." Mugambi contends that this reality of two tropes of gender, defeats any attempt to think of an Africa without gender. Boris shows that West Africans have transformed women and gender studies, by expanding the repertoire for intersectional analysis beyond gender, race, class, and nation.

²³² Cornwall, ed. *Readings in Gender in Africa*, 1.

Discourses of African Matriliney: A Brief Survey of Literature

Largely abandoned since the 1990s, studies on African matrilineal societies have not accounted for how changes in matrilineage practices, as a result of external and internal socio-economic factors, affected the lives of both men and women. The post-1970s feminist era steered the field towards challenging the portrayal of a kinship system centered on women, as anomalous. However, the resultant categorization of “gender” as “women” in the context of matriliney led to the gross neglect of the lived experiences of men. Jean Davison and Meredith McKittrick called attention to this oversight in the late 20th and early 21st century, respectively,²³³ yet scholarship has remained the same. By centering masculinities within matriliney, “Emergent Masculinities” offers a revisionist perspective on the subject.

In the view of structural-functionalist anthropologists, African matriliney had an “unnatural” mode of inheritance.²³⁴ First, within this system, sons could not inherit property from their fathers, fathers had limited rights of labor requisition from their children, and agnatic kin could not inherit from each other, whereas maternal relatives enjoyed these privileges.²³⁵ Second, anthropologists insisted that African matrilineal societies were communalistic and that individual property ownership was anomalous.²³⁶ Others argued that any form of private property ownership such as cattle, resulted in the breakdown of the matrilineage.²³⁷ Similarly,

²³³ Jean Davison, *Gender, Lineage, and Ethnicity in Southern Africa* (Colorado, 1997); McKittrick, “Forsaking their Fathers?” 33-51.

²³⁴ R.S. Rattray, *Ashanti* (London: Oxford University Press, 1923), 237-238, described matriliney as limiting individualism because of its “unnatural” mode of inheritance.

²³⁵ Ndukwe Otta and Elder Uduma Uka, Group Interview by author, Ebem Village. August 14, 2010; Chief Udensi Ekea, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. August 4, 2010.

²³⁶ Schneider and Gough, eds., *Matrilineal Kinship*, xv

²³⁷ See Schneider and Gough, eds., *Matrilineal Kinship*, 668.

Kathleen Gough argued in the ‘Modern Disintegration of Matrilineage Groups’ that matriliney was vulnerable in the face of economic change,²³⁸ while Mary Douglas examined the factors that naturally inhibited the spread of matriliney, in her essay, “Is Matriliney Doomed in Africa?”²³⁹ Elizabeth Colson also concluded after her examination of the impact of changing economic conditions on Tonga family and marriage regulation, that customary matrilineage rules created inequalities against women and stifled new opportunities afforded by Western capitalism.²⁴⁰

Revisions of the works of the structural-functionalist anthropologists, as early as the 1950s, unearthed various misconceptions of African matrilineal societies, beginning with the notion of the absence of individualism, and the inability of the matrilineage to adapt to change.²⁴¹ Among others, Igor Kopytoff criticized this structural-functionalist theoretical

²³⁸ Schneider and Gough, eds., *Matrilineal Kinship*, 652.

²³⁹ Mary Douglas and Phyllis M. Kaberry eds., *Man in Africa* (New York: Anchor Books, 1969), 123-137. Articulating popular disillusion with this scholarship, Edmund Leach, *Rethinking Anthropology* (London: University of London Press, 1961), 4, noted “to create a class labeled matrilineal societies is as irrelevant for our understanding of social structure as the creation of blue butterflies is irrelevant for the understanding of the anatomical structure of Lepidoptera.” Similarly, Saul Mahir, “Matrilineal Inheritance and Post-Colonial Prosperity in Southern Bobo Country,” *Man* 27, 2 (1992), 346, stated that to ask whether matriliney is doomed makes little sense because matriliney is “not a ... monad but a cluster of features.” Also challenging the homeostatic vision of African matrilineal societies, T.O. Beidelman, *The Matrilineal Peoples of Eastern Tanzania* (London: International African Institute, 1967) showed that the matrilineal societies of Eastern Tanzania (Zaramo, Kwere, Luguru, Kutu, Kaguru, Sagara, Vidunda, Ngulu, and Zigula) were becoming increasingly patrilineal as a result of Arab incursion and Islam, and this was evident in changing practices of inheritance, succession, residence, marriage, initiation, production, and political organization.

²⁴⁰ Elizabeth Colson, *Marriage and the Family Among the Plateau Tonga of Northern Rhodesia* (Oxford: Manchester University Press, 1958), 346-347.

²⁴¹ Schneider and Gough, eds., *Matrilineal Kinship*, 270-286.

pessimism in the 1970s.²⁴² Later scholars showed that African matrilineal societies' modes of inheritance were logical, these societies adapted to change, and they did not necessarily become patrilineal as a result of contact with Western capitalist culture. The revisionist scholarship established that the historical transformations of African matrilineal societies were defined as much by individualism and communalism, and by internal and external factors.²⁴³ Feminist scholars also argued that structural-functionalist anthropologists downplayed the different implications of matriliney for women, by portraying a kinship system centered on women, as anomalous.²⁴⁴ By examining the changes in inheritance, residence and descent taking place in African matrilineal societies, later scholars stressed the autonomy in local politics and ritual, control of income, and decisions concerning child-bearing and family relations, enjoyed by

²⁴² Igor Kopytoff, "Matrilineality, Residence, and Residential Zones," *American Ethnologist* 4, 3 (1997), 539-58.

²⁴³ However, the new scholarship departed from the structural-functionalist paradigm very slowly. See Karla Poewe, "Matriliney and Capitalism: The Development of Incipient Classes in Luapala, Zambia," *Dialectical Anthropology* 3 (1978), 331-347; Karla Poewe, "Matriliney in the Throes of Change: Kinship, Descent and Marriage in Luapala Zambia Part One," *Africa* 48, 3 (1978), 207; Karla Poewe, "Matriliney in the Throes of Change: Kinship, Descent and Marriage in Luapala Zambia Part Two," *Africa* 48, 4, (1978); Karla Poewe, "Matrilineal Ideology: The Economic Activities of Women in Luapala Zambia," in L.S. Cordell and S. Beckerman (eds.) *The Versatility of Kinship* (London: Academic Press, 1980), 345; Karla Poewe, "Religion, Matriliney, and Change: Jehovah's Witnesses and Seventh-Day Adventists in Luapala, Zambia," *American Ethnologist* 5 2 (May 1978), 303-321; Karla Poewe, *Matrilineal Ideology: Male-Female Dynamics in Luapala, Zambia* (London: Academic Press, 1981); Karla Poewe, *Religion, Kinship, and Economy in Luapala, Zambia* (New York: The Edwin Meller Press, 1989), 1 Poewe's logic was consistently premised on the structuralist binaries between modern and primitive; capitalist and non-capitalist; patriliney and matriliney; productive individualism and distributive communism. Poewe persistently argued that matriliney inhibited "productive individualism" and economic development.

²⁴⁴ Peters, "Introduction," 133-134.

women in these societies. They suggested that in all cases where there had been shifts away from patterns associated with matriliney, women's authority had declined.²⁴⁵

Thus, in a comparative study of the matrilineal Ngwezi and Guta societies of the Toka people of Zambia, Ladislov Holy argues that matrilineal traits remained resilient among the Toka in spite of absorption into the capitalist market system. Holy shows, that while the introduction of the ox-plough among the Ngwezi strengthened patrilineal or agnatic ties, the people did not abandon matrilineal values. The Toka could at one and the same time, accept the desirability of matrilineal descent and agnatic inheritance, because matriliney was a norm of strategic resource. According to Holy, matriliney is an appropriable ideology – a cluster of norms, which groups and individuals invoked and refuted under various circumstances to advance their interests.²⁴⁶ This view of matriliney informed Mariane Ferme's argument that matriliney was used to conceal the legacy of slavery among the Kpuawala of Sierra Leone, through matrilineal marriage practices

²⁴⁵ See Chet S. Lancaster, "Brideservice, Residence, and Authority Among the Goba (N. Shona) of the Zambezi Valley," *Africa* 44 (1974), 46-64; Chet S. Lancaster, "Battle of the Sexes in Zambia: A Reply to Karla Poewe," *American Anthropologist* 81 (1979), 117-119; Chet S. Lancaster, "Women, Horticulture and Society in Sub-Saharan Africa," *American Anthropologist* 81, (1976), 545; Chet S. Lancaster, *The Goba of the Zambezi: Sex Roles, Economics and Change* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1981), xii.

²⁴⁶ Holy, *Strategies and Norms in a Changing Matrilineal Society*. Holy's distinction between matrilineal ties (descent) and values (principles) were insights provided by Morgan as early as 1877, and later reinforced by Basehart (1950s) and Turner (1957). Basehart had noted that there was a preponderance of female principles among the Ashanti, and that lineage hierarchies were consciously concealed in an effort to enhance cohesiveness. Ashanti "concealment" entailed discourses (taboos against discussing one's lineage origins) and practices (cross-cousin marriages) employed to resolve the matrilineal puzzle. See Schneider and Gough, eds., *Matrilineal Kinship*, 281. Similarly, Turner argued that the matrilineal principle constituted a structured set of norms and values, which are held in common by members of Ndembu society. However, while the Ndembu verbalize and ritualize the importance of marital ties, marriage remained brittle for practical reasons. Turner, *Schism and Continuity in an African Society*, 89.

that transformed slaves (property) into cousins (kin).²⁴⁷ It also led scholars to examine gendered consciousness. Francesca Declich explores this in the gendered memorializations of descent among the Zigula community of East Africa,²⁴⁸ while Janice Boddy examines this in her study of the Hofriyati people of Northern Sudan, where women relied upon a historical ideology of matriliney to resist Islam and escape patrilineal/patriarchal ideologies.²⁴⁹

Similarly, Kings Phiri examined the changes in matrilineal practices among the Chewa of Malawi since the 19th century, and argued that men who found themselves in uxori-local residences utilized their membership in secret societies and cross-cousin marriages to escape “the full consequences of uxori-locality.”²⁵⁰ Phiri also noted that some patrilineal immigrants into Malawi such as the Chikunda and the Ngoni became “matrilinealized” by the Chewa.²⁵¹ Phiri’s work was a counter-narrative to the popular literature on the Yao, Nyanga and peoples of the Shire River valley, which had championed the notion that the matrilineage would disappear as a functional unit with the advance of Christianity, colonialism, and modern capitalist economy.

²⁴⁷ Mariane C. Ferme, *The Underneath of Things: Violence, History, and the Everyday in Sierra Leone* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2001), 6, 18-19, 165, 226. Ferme argued that the “domain of secrecy is essentially political at multiple levels,” that the play between concealment and revelation constitute Kpuawala power dynamics, and that gender dynamics bear a “history of violence” embedded in the inequalities and tensions of domestic relations expressed through idioms of marriage and kinship. Like Rosalind Shaw, *Memories of the Slave Trade: Ritual and the Historical Imagination in Sierra Leone* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 2, Ferme argued that this “history of violence” must be understood in the context of slavery and the modes of dependencies it produced.

²⁴⁸ Francesca Declich, “Gendered Narratives, History, and Identity: Two Centuries along the Juba River among the Zigula and Shanbara,” *History in Africa* 22 (1995), 93-122.

²⁴⁹ Janice Boddy, *Wombs and Alien Spirits: Women, Men, and the Zar Cult in Northern Sudan* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 26-27, 35, 82-84, 232-234, 241-242.

²⁵⁰ Kings M. Phiri, “Some Changes in the Matrilineal Family System among the Chewa of Malawi Since the Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of African History* 24 (1983), 261.

²⁵¹ Phiri, “Some Changes in the Matrilineal Family System,” 266.

The revisionist literature peaked in the 1990s,²⁵² and culminated in the collaborative work of two historians and two anthropologists, who revisited the “matrilineal puzzle of the structural-functionalists,” because it “seemed to be dealing with issues of gender while in reality sidelining them.”²⁵³ Pauline Peters, Cynthia Brantley, Margot Lovett, and Kate Crehan, argue that matriliney was not a “puzzle;” rather, “the particular animus directed against matriliney is because of its different gender patterns, especially its association with more social independence

²⁵² It was during this period that historians expressed interest in a field monopolized by anthropologists, and a number of scholars began to employ matriliney as an analytic category to explain spirit possession rituals (Janice Boddy), memory (Francesca Declich) and concealment (Victor Turner and Mariane Ferme), women’s market monopolies and informal economies (Gracia Clark), and the impact of dominant knowledge systems on social practices (Gillian Barber). Following historians, anthropologists began to revisit the works of their forebears. See Henrietta Moore and Megan Vaughan, *Cutting Down Trees: Gender, Nutrition and Agricultural Change in the Northern Province of Zambia, 1890-1990* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1994). Moore and Vaughan revisited the work of Audrey Richards, in a systematic study of the Bemba to elucidate several misconceptions in Richards’ account. They challenged the “anthropological tendency” towards over-systematization and the resultant failure to allow for multiple dimensions. The Bemba they argue had both matrilineal and bilateral principles of organization. The authors emphasized the inappropriateness of the concept of “breakdown” in describing changes in matrilineal organization, and introduced such concepts as multiplicity, contingency, indeterminacy, and contestation. Since the turn of the 21st century, interest in matriliney has declined and the subject has rather been used to explain different (“anomalous”) situations. Thus, Trudie Gerris describes the beliefs, experiences, and coping strategies of infertile Macua women in the context of matrilineal kinship to argue that in matrilineal societies, “matrilineality” itself may be somewhat protective of women who find themselves in the potentially stigmatizing situation of infertility. Gerris contrasts this situation with the case in patrilineal societies. See Trudie Gerrits, “Infertility and Matrilineality: The Exceptional Case of the Macua of Mozambique” in Marcia C. Inhorn and Frank van Balen (eds.) *Infertility Around the Globe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 233-246. However, some of the new revisionist literature have also sought to re-invigorate old myths, especially that of the cow being the enemy of matriliney. Clare Janaki Holden and Ruth Mace especially, have reinvented the argument that when matrilineal cultures acquire cattle, they become patrilineal. They focused their comparative study on the matrilineal Chewa in Malawi and the patrilineal Gabbra in Kenya. For evidence, they relied on evolutionist theories and Bantu language tree. See Clare Janaki Holden and Ruth Mace, “Spread of Cattle Led to the Loss of Matrilineal Descent in Africa: A Coevolutionary Analysis,” *Proceedings: Biological Sciences* 270, 1532 (2003), 2425-2433.

²⁵³ Stephen Nugeni, “Editorial,” *Critique of Anthropology* 17, 2 (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 123. These scholars concluded that matrilineal descent, succession and inheritance constitute the definitive features of matriliney.

and political authority for women . . . The matrilineal puzzle was in fact . . . a gender puzzle.”²⁵⁴ Focusing on South-Central Africa, they examined the relationship between matriliney and gender, and whether matriliney is best depicted as a total system or a cluster of characteristics. The structural-functionalist view of matriliney as a total system and a puzzle, they argue, was focused on “group corporateness,” premised on the conjugal family and “male-biased.”²⁵⁵ Matriliney they contend is a set of values intentionally appropriated by different historically situated individuals. Thus, rather than argue that matriliney determined how individuals lived their lives among the Kaonde-speaking communities of Zambia's North-Western Province in the 1980s, Crehan argues that kinship lays down what might be called “structures or moral expectation,” which could be negotiated and subverted.²⁵⁶

Moreover, Lovett and Brantley emphasized the need to situate studies of change in matriliney within wider historical and socio-cultural contexts.²⁵⁷ It was in this respect that Wyatt

²⁵⁴ Peters, “Introduction,” 141.

²⁵⁵ Peters, “Introduction,” 126-130.

²⁵⁶ Crehan, “Of Chickens and Guinea Fowl,” 211-213.

²⁵⁷ Margot L. Lovett, “From Sisters to Wives and ‘Slaves’: Redefining Matriliney and the Lives of Lakeside Tonga Women, 1888-1955,” *Critique of Anthropology* 17, 2 (1997), 171-184; Cynthia Brantley, “Through Ngoni Eyes: Margaret Read’s Matrilineal Interpretations From Nyasaland,” *Critique of Anthropology* 17, 2 (1997), 147-164. Lovett re-examined the work of J. van Velsen and argued that as Tonga people adopted practices such as virilocal residence and bride-wealth, Lakeside Tonga women progressively lost power in their status as sisters and mothers. However, the adoption of these practices common in patrilineal societies did not make the Tonga any less matrilineal. The Tonga continued to privilege matrilineal descent and matrikin relations. Similarly, Brantley re-examines the unpublished data, which Margaret Read collected as part of the 1939 Nyasaland Nutrition Survey and her simultaneous study on the impact of migrant labor on village life in Nyasa land. She argued that Read’s conclusion that matrilineal practices were being taken over by patrilineal ones is not borne out by the evidence she collected. Rather, as peoples in the three nutrition survey villages (Yao, Chewa and Ngoni) and in the surrounding areas experienced much interaction and as, especially, patrilineal Ngoni interacted with matrilineal Chewa, practices usually associated with one or another of these descent systems became mutually modified rather than uni-directional. Aspects of patriliney

MacGaffey argues that the West-Central African region had an essential bilateral mode of descent, and that matriliney developed as a consequence of the slave trade.²⁵⁸ Brantley and Peters also argue that matriliney was not a fragile complex vulnerable to collapse in the face of European intervention.²⁵⁹ Peters argues that the matrilineage practices and ideologies of the Shire Highland survived successive European campaigns against matriliney, which they viewed as “inhibitive to development.” Shire matriliney also survived Christian and Islamic missions’ war against uxori-local marriage and promotion of a patriarchal nuclear family ideal, and the colonial government’s effort to undermine matrilineal inheritance through patriarchal estate tenancy and agricultural development policies.²⁶⁰ The war against matriliney in Peters’ view was a war against women’s power and autonomy. Thus, the resilience of matrilineage principles evidence women’s agency and power. This view is evident in Jean Davison’s comparative study of Malawi, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Zambia, in which she examines how matriliney and its

actually failed to give advantage to many people, and aspects of matriliney, such as inheritance, rights to land, and control over labor and children, proved to be more durable than her interpretations implied.

²⁵⁸ Wyatt MacGaffey, “Lineage Structure, Marriage, and the Family Amongst the Central Bantu,” *Journal of African History* 24 (1983), 173-197. MacGaffey focused on the complementarity and flexibility of patrilineal and matrilineal relationships among the BaKongo, BaSuku, and BaPende of Zaire, Congo, Zimbabwe and Angola.

²⁵⁹ Similarly, in a revisionist essay challenging Schneider and Richards on the vulnerability of matriliney to abrupt change, Gillian Barber examines how resilient notions of matrilineal inheritance and residence patterns among the Chiradzulu of Southern Malawi constitute a corpus of “authoritative knowledge” that influence decisions that are made regarding child-bearing. See Gillian Barber, “It’s Only Natural!’ The Views of Villagers from Chiradzulu District, Southern Malawi on Matrilineal Inheritance and Matrilocal Residence” in John McCracken, Timothy J. Lovering, and Fiona Johnson Chalamanda (eds.) *Twentieth Century Malawi: Perspectives on History and Culture* (University of Stirling: Center of Commonwealth Studies, 2001), 58-68.

²⁶⁰ Pauline Peters, “Against the Odds: Matriliney, Land and Gender in the Shire Highland of Malawi,” *Critique of Anthropology* 17, 2 (1997), 189-210.

attendant practices influenced women's and men's access to and control over productive resources.²⁶¹

This historiography informs my study of Ohafia, where changes in lineage ideologies governing ownership of persons and property occurred gradually between the 1850s and 1920s, and shaped transformations in indigenous conceptions of gendered power. At the end of his seminal work on Ohafia-Igbo matrilineage system, Nsugbe asserted, "It remains to show whether there have been shifts indicating any fundamental change in the Ohaffia descent system as described, particularly with regard to the rules of inheritance."²⁶² This aspect of Ohafia history remains unstudied, and this dissertation strives to fill the gap, because changes in property inheritance shaped changes in lineage practices and gendered power distribution in the society.

A Brief Note on How this Dissertation Engages with the Scholarship on the Atlantic Slave Trade and African Slavery

Beginning in the 1960s, Africanist scholars of the Atlantic slave trade were obsessed with centralized states and elites in analyzing the processes of slave production, transformations in uses of slaves, and changes in African slave systems, until scholars such as Robert Baum, Andrew Hubbell, Walter Hawthorne, and Ugo Nwokeji challenged what has come to be known as the "predatory state thesis."²⁶³ By examining the transformative role of the Ohafia-Igbo in

²⁶¹ Jean Davison, *Gender, Lineage, and Ethnicity in Southern Africa* (Colorado: Westview Press, 1997) Contrasting matriliney to patriliney, Davison argues that rural woman's and men's needs, interests, and priorities changes in the face of colonial capitalism and development in the post-independent period.

²⁶² Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 122.

²⁶³ Robert M. Baum, *Shrines of the Slave Trade: Diola Religion and Society in Precolonial Senegambia* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1999); Andrew Hubbell, "A View of the Slave Trade from the Margin: Souroudougou in the Late Nineteenth – Century Slave Trade of the Niger Bend," *The Journal of African History* 42, 1 (2001); Walter Hawthorne, *Planting Rice and Harvesting Slaves: Transformations along the Guinea-Bissau Coast, 1400-1900* (Portsmouth,

militant slave production in the Bight of Biafra, and the impact of the dynamic constructions of gender identities on changing exploitation of slave labor and indigenous slave systems, this study demonstrates that non-centralized and non-oligarchic African societies were not passive victims of the Atlantic slave trade.²⁶⁴ Indeed, the Atlantic slave trade ushered Ohafia into a slave mode of production²⁶⁵ and shaped the emergence of a heroic ethos that redefined the society's conceptions of masculinity (*ufiem*), ethnic identity, and gendered power and authority (chapter 3).

Secondly, "Emergent Masculinities" draws upon the scholarship of a number of scholars who have examined how African slave systems became transformed as a result of the Atlantic

NH: Heinemann, 2003); Ugo G. Nwokeji, *The Slave Trade and Culture in the Bight of Biafra: An African Society in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

²⁶⁴ Walter Rodney, "African Slavery and Other Forms of Social Oppression on the Upper Guinea Coast in the Context of the Atlantic Slave-Trade," *The Journal of African History*, 7, 3 (1966), 434; Walter Rodney, *A History of the Upper Guinea Coast, 1545 to 1800* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970), 109; Jack Goody, *Tradition, Technology, and the State in Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971); Philip Curtin, *Economic Change in Precolonial Africa: Senegambia in the Era of the Slave Trade* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1975); Joseph Smaldone, *Warfare in the Sokoto Caliphate: Historical and Sociological Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); I.A. Akinjogbin, *Dahomey and its Neighbors, 1708-1818* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); J.D. Fage, "Slavery and the Slave Trade in the Context of West African History," *Journal of African History* 10, 3 (1969), 393-404; J.D. Fage, "African Societies and the Atlantic Slave Trade," *Past & Present*, No. 125 (Nov. 1989), 106-111; Adu A. Boahen, "New Trends and Processes in Africa in the Nineteenth Century," in Ade J.F. Ajayi (ed.), *General History of Africa*, vol. 6, *Africa in the Nineteenth Century Until 1880s* (Oxford: Heinemann International, 1989), 40-63; Patrick Manning, *Slavery and African Life: Occidental, Oriental, and African Slave Trades* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Boubacar Barry, *Senegambia and the Atlantic Slave Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 107; Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery*, xv, 68-69, 84-65, 103-104, 126-128, 148, 182-184, 188-189; Klein, "The Impact of the Atlantic Slave Trade," 234-235, 237-239; Rosalind Shaw, *Memories of the Slave Trade: Ritual Imagination in Sierra Leone* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 207, 213-216.

²⁶⁵ Rodney, "African Slavery," 433-442; Fage, "African Societies," 111, 106; Klein, "The Impact of the Atlantic Slave Trade on the Societies of the Western Sudan," *Social Science History*, 14, 2 (Summer, 1990), pp. 234-240; Jay Spaulding and Stephanie Beswick, eds. *African Systems of Slavery* (New Jersey: Africa World Press, 2010); Brown and Lovejoy (eds.) *Repercussions of the Atlantic Slave Trade*, pp. 221-229, 321-328; Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery*, pp. xv, 68-69.

slave trade.²⁶⁶ It argues that the increasing availability of slaves within the Bight of Biafra, sequel to the abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, resulted in the transformation of the mode of exploitation of slaves and their labor. With the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade, there was a glut of slaves on the local market, the volume of domestic slavery increased, British economic policies encouraged an intensified exploitation of slave labor within the region, and the rate of inhumane uses of slaves increased due to indigenous practices of a new form of *ufiem* premised on wealth — *ogaranya* masculinity. It was in this environment that a deity (*obu nkwa*) that had served as a major institutional foundation of Ohafia militant slave production became transformed into a protective deity to ameliorate slave exploitation, resulting in the production of communities of spiritual slaves²⁶⁷ in the region. Thus, this study demonstrates that the transformations in indigenous African slave systems complicate the popular distinctions between a static and benign African slavery and chattel New World slavery. The Atlantic slave trade and the transformations in indigenous slave systems have also shaped the historical memories of the slave trade as trauma, discourse and tradition.²⁶⁸ This dissertation examines Ohafia practices such as the war dance and *idioms* of expressing masculinity, against the background of the legacies of the slave trade.

²⁶⁶ Spaulding and Beswick (eds.) *African Systems of Slavery*; Brown and Lovejoy (eds.) *Repercussions of the Atlantic Slave Trade*.

²⁶⁷ For this original concept, see Nwando Achebe, “When Deities Marry: Indigenous ‘Slave’ Systems Expanding and Metamorphosing in the Igbo Hinterland,” in Jay Spaulding and Stephanie Beswick (eds.) *African Systems of Slavery* (Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, Inc., 2010), 105-133.

²⁶⁸ Paul Obiani, “The Stigmatization of the Descendants of Slaves in Igboland,” in Brown and Lovejoy (eds.) *Repercussions of the Atlantic Slave Trade*, pp. 321-328; Akuma-Kalu Njoku, “Before the Middle Passage: Igbo Slave Journeys to Old Calabar and Bonny,” in Brown and Lovejoy (eds.) *Repercussions of the Atlantic Slave Trade*, pp. 57-69; John McCall, “The Atlantic Slave Trade and the Ohafia Warrior Tradition: Global Forces and Local Histories,” in Brown and Lovejoy (eds.) *Repercussions of the Atlantic Slave Trade*, pp. 75-76; Mariane C. Ferme, *The Underneath of Things: Violence, History, and the Everyday in Sierra Leone* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2001); Anne C. Bailey, *African Voices of the Atlantic Slave Trade: Beyond the Silence and the Shame* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005); Rosalind Shaw,

Thirdly, the unusually high percentage of females in the number of slaves exported from the Bight of Biafra shaped what is meant by “creole” in the Americas, especially in Cuba, Jamaica, Hispaniola, Barbados, United States (Georgia, Maryland and Virginia), Belize, and Caribbean island such as Trinidad and Tobago, and Guyana.²⁶⁹ “Emergent Masculinities” argues that the guerilla tactics of Ohafia warriors, the long distances which they traversed in the course of their slave raids, the matrilineal kinship system of the warrior society, and the masculinity ethos that required the cutting of male heads in combats, account for the production of more female slaves and children than male slaves from the Igbo and Ibibio hinterland (chapter 3). On the other hand, the life history of Chief Eke Kalu, who rose from slavery to warrant chief status between 1860 and the 1930s, challenges the rigid conceptions of social identity formation in African societies,²⁷⁰ and the ideology that conscious resistance was limited to political groups, who developed class-consciousness, and undermined the slave system.²⁷¹

Memories of the Slave Trade: Ritual Imagination in Sierra Leone (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); John Thornton, “Cannibals, Witches, and Slave Traders in the Atlantic World,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 60, 2 (April, 2003); Nicholas Argenti, *The Intestines of the State: Youth, Violence, and Belated Histories in the Cameroon Grassfields* (Chicago: the University of Chicago Press, 2007).

²⁶⁹ Douglass B. Chambers, “Tracing Igbo into the African Diaspora,” in Paul E. Lovejoy (Ed.), *The Black Atlantic* (New York: Continuum, 2000); Morgan D. Philip and Sean Hawkins, *Black Experience and the Empire* (London: Oxford University Press, 2004); Douglass B. Chambers, *Murder at Montpelier: Igbo Africans in Virginia* (Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2005); Michael A. Gomez, “A Quality of Anguish: The Igbo Response to Enslavement in the Americas,” in Paul E. Lovejoy and David V. Trotman (eds.), *Trans-Atlantic Dimension of Ethnicity in the African Diaspora* (New York: Continuum, 2003).

²⁷⁰ Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff, “Introduction,” In *Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives*, eds. Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1977).

²⁷¹ Thornton, *Africa and Africans*, pp. 174-300; James H. Sweet, *Culture, Kinship, and Religion in the African-Portuguese World: Recreating Africa, 1441-1770* (University of North Carolina Press, 2003), pp. 20, 215; Walter Hawthorne, “Being Now, as it were, One Family: Shipmate Bonding on the Slave Vessel Emilia, in Rio de Janeiro and Throughout the Atlantic World”,

Summary of Chapters

This dissertation is comprised of five chapters, and divided into three parts. Part one includes the introduction and chapters one and two, which provide a background to the dissertation and the Ohafia-Igbo. The introduction situates the Ohafia-Igbo within existing scholarship on gender and masculinities in West Africa. Chapter one examines the history of migration and settlement of the Ohafia-Igbo, and historicizes their emergence as the only matrilineal society in Igboland. Situating Ohafia within existing studies of matriliney in South-central, East, and West Africa, this chapter argues that until the late 19th century, the Ohafia-Igbo possessed dominant matrilineal principles, and that missionary and colonial influences amplified the transformations in matrilineage practices in the society at the turn of the 20th century. This resulted in the transformation of the society into a double unilineal system, and reshaped the distribution of socio-political power for men and women. Between 1900 and 1920, Ohafia-Igbo women increasingly lost the privileges they had enjoyed within the matrilineage system in the pre-colonial period, due to changing practices of land tenure, property ownership, inheritance, marriage, and redefinitions of paternal responsibility and authority.

Chapter two examines Ohafia-Igbo gendered socio-political organization between 1850 and 1900. It focuses on female power, agency, and consciousness through a comparative analysis of gendered socio-political institutions and rituals. It posits political power as the exercise of coercive influence, based on the threat or use of sanctions, control over public morality and communal values, and over the distribution of material resources. It argues that contrary to the prevailing notion (see chapter 2) that Ohafia-Igbo women were socio-politically subordinate to men, politically invisible and docile, they maintained one of the most powerful socio-political

Luso-Brazilian Review, Vol. 45, No. 1 (2008), p. 55; Judith A. Carney, *Black Rice: The African Origins of Rice Cultivation in the Americas* (Harvard University Press, 2001).

institutions in pre-colonial southeastern Nigeria, and performed political strategies that were more effective and powerful than those of men until the advent of British colonial rule in 1901.

Part two comprises chapters three and four, and explores the constructions of masculinities among the Ohafia-Igbo as a product of competitive social mobility and personal distinction from 1850 to 1900. Chapter three examines masculinity (*ufiem*) performance in the leisure practices and military (headhunting and warfare) activities of the Ohafia-Igbo, and argues that masculinity was negotiated daily in the society's kinship relations and political practices. The chapter argues that *ufiem* (masculinity) entailed a construction of privilege, power, and social status. Rather than assume that the Ohafia-Igbo were patriarchal, the chapter examines how male power and privilege were historically constructed between the 1850 and 1900. It analyzes the historical processes (slave production and headhunting) through which *ndi ikike* (warrior masculinities) attained social hegemony over other forms of *ufiem* in the society, which enabled them to define the dominant values of how real men should behave. The historical constructions of *ndi ikike* masculinity shaped the popular imagination of Ohafia as a warrior society at the turn of the 20th century. However, while warrior masculinities discriminated against other men known as *ujo* (cowards), who failed to distinguish themselves in warfare, they lacked political power over women. Moreover, the chapter demonstrates that Ohafia-Igbo some women also performed warrior masculinity in a bid to deliver some men from *ujo* status, and that their actions and inactions shaped the gender identities of men.

Chapter four examines institutions of masculinity such as secret societies, the *dibia* cult, hunting, and yam cultivation, to demonstrate how past socio-cultural practices and organizations significantly shaped the production and understanding of *ufiem* (masculinity), and the gendered contestation of power in Ohafia-Igbo society between 1850 and 1900. These institutions embody

the impact of macro-historical forces such as the Atlantic slave trade and legitimate commerce, on the society. They enabled the successive transition from boyhood to adult masculinity, and represent a conscious effort by male society to masculinize the public space and render it exclusive to women. They also reflect structural lineage oppositions and contestations, which were also gendered. The chapter distinguishes the purely performative aspects of *ufiem* (masculinity) from the institutions within which they operated in the society. It demonstrates that individuals were managers of meaning and identity in their inevitable social contexts, because they were remaking institutions and their meanings as they used them. By analyzing other forms of *ufiem* (masculinity) besides warrior masculinities, this chapter argues that *ufiem* (masculinity) was immanent and manifest in political (secret societies), economic (trade, agriculture, hunting, and traditional medicare), and spiritual activities of the Ohafia-Igbo. Thus, the chapter provides a counter-narrative to the dominant militant conception of Ohafia-Igbo masculinities. It demonstrates that the *ujo*, who emerge in the Ohafia-Igbo context as disprivileged subalterns, had access to alternative, subordinate, and sometimes, subversive *ufiem* identities.

Chapter five forms the third part of this dissertation. The chapter examines the changing constructions of gender identities between 1900 and 1920 through the lens of *ogaranya* (wealth) masculinity, and argues that it was a cause and consequence of the declining power of women. The chapter analyzes the impact of the performances of *ogaranya* (wealth) masculinity on the increase in domestic slave trade, transformations in uses of slaves, and indigenous memories of the slave trade. It offers a counter-narrative of women's performances of *ogaranya* masculinity, as indicative of increasing female resistance to emerging male socio-economic hegemony in the first two decades of the 20th century. The chapter explores the gendered impact of British colonialism, Christianity and Western education on Ohafia and argues that the gradual

disempowerment of women was inseparable from the processes through which men themselves came to dominate significant spheres of authority between 1900 and 1920. It contends that while colonialism and Christianity obliterated traditional avenues for *ufiem* distinction, such as headhunting and slave production between 1900 and 1920, Ohafia-Igbo men often colluded with European officials and missionaries to forge patriarchal, exploitative, and discriminatory ideologies that facilitated the subjugation of women. Women's redefinitions of gendered roles and spaces through economic and political pursuits constituted resistance to an emergent patchwork of European and African patriarchies during this period.

The conclusion clearly shows the major contributions of the dissertation to studies on African matriliney, women and gender, African slave systems and the Atlantic slave trade. It restates the case for the theorization of masculinity as a historically constructed gendered identity, which processes involved the interactive exercise and negotiation of power between men and women. It also re-emphasizes the argument that complex individual and collective identity formation was taking place in this pre-colonial African society before contact with Europeans. In so doing, the dissertation deconstructs popular and narrow conceptions of African historical identity formation and social change.

CHAPTER ONE

ORIGIN STORIES: HISTORICIZING THE SOCIAL CONFIGURATION OF OHAFIA-IGBO SOCIETY

This chapter seeks to provide the 16th-19th century historical background to Ohafia-Igbo acquisition of key socio-political institutions and practices such as a matrilineal kinship system, an age-grade system of political organization, secret societies, and a militant ethos, which distinguished them from most Igbo communities, and later shaped the constructions of gender identities in the 19th and 20th centuries. Thus, the chapter examines the migration and settlement of the Ohafia-Igbo in a borderland territory and the impact of their geographical location on these historical processes. Situating Ohafia in comparative perspective with the wider literature on African matriliney, the chapter provides an overview of the character and changes in Ohafia-Igbo lineage practices, as well as the impact of dominant matrilineal principles on gendered power relations in the society. Thus, the chapter offers important perspectives on Ohafia-Igbo gendered religious and economic organization before British colonial rule.

Traditions of Origin, Migration and Settlement

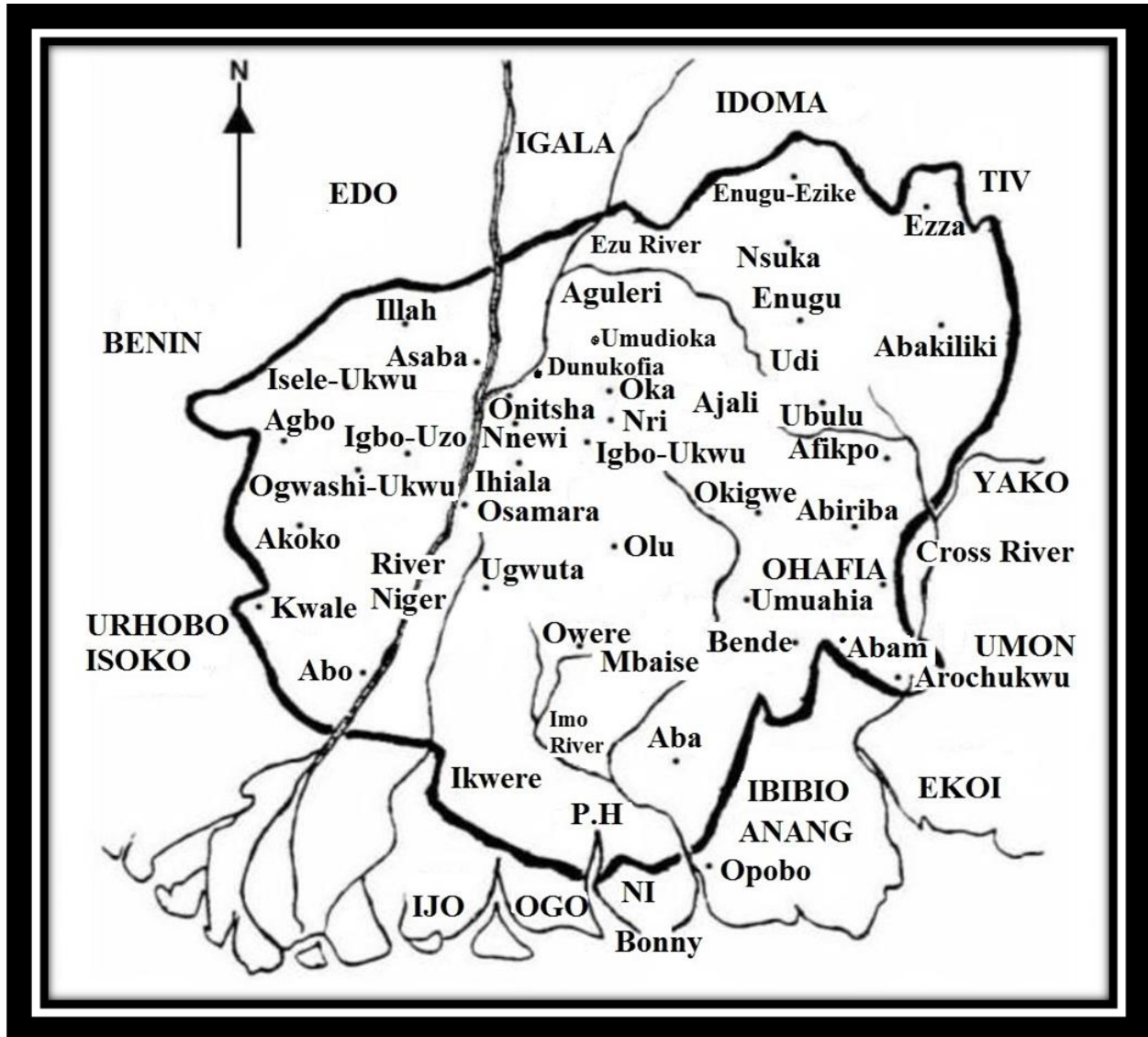
The Cross-River Igbo,²⁷² as the Ohafia and their Igbo neighbors (Ada, Ihe, Aro, Abam, and Abiriba) have come to be known, mark the eastern limit of Igboland. The Ohafia are bounded in the north, west and south, by Igbo communities such as Ihechiowa, Ututu, and Arochukwu (south); Abiriba and Abam (west); and Nkporo and Ada (north).²⁷³ To their east, they are bordered by non-Igbo speaking, riverine ethnic groups including the Ibibio (Biakpan,

²⁷² Defined in Forde and Jones, *The Ibo and Ibibio-Speaking Peoples*, 9-10, 52.

²⁷³ Azuonye, "The Heroic Age," 9; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 67.

Ikun, Urugbam, and Agbanwan), Annang, Efik, Eket, Qua, Ekoi (Ejagham, Bekwarra, Yako, Biase/Agwagune/Akunakuna, Bahumono, Agbo, and Mbembe), and Ogoja peoples.²⁷⁴

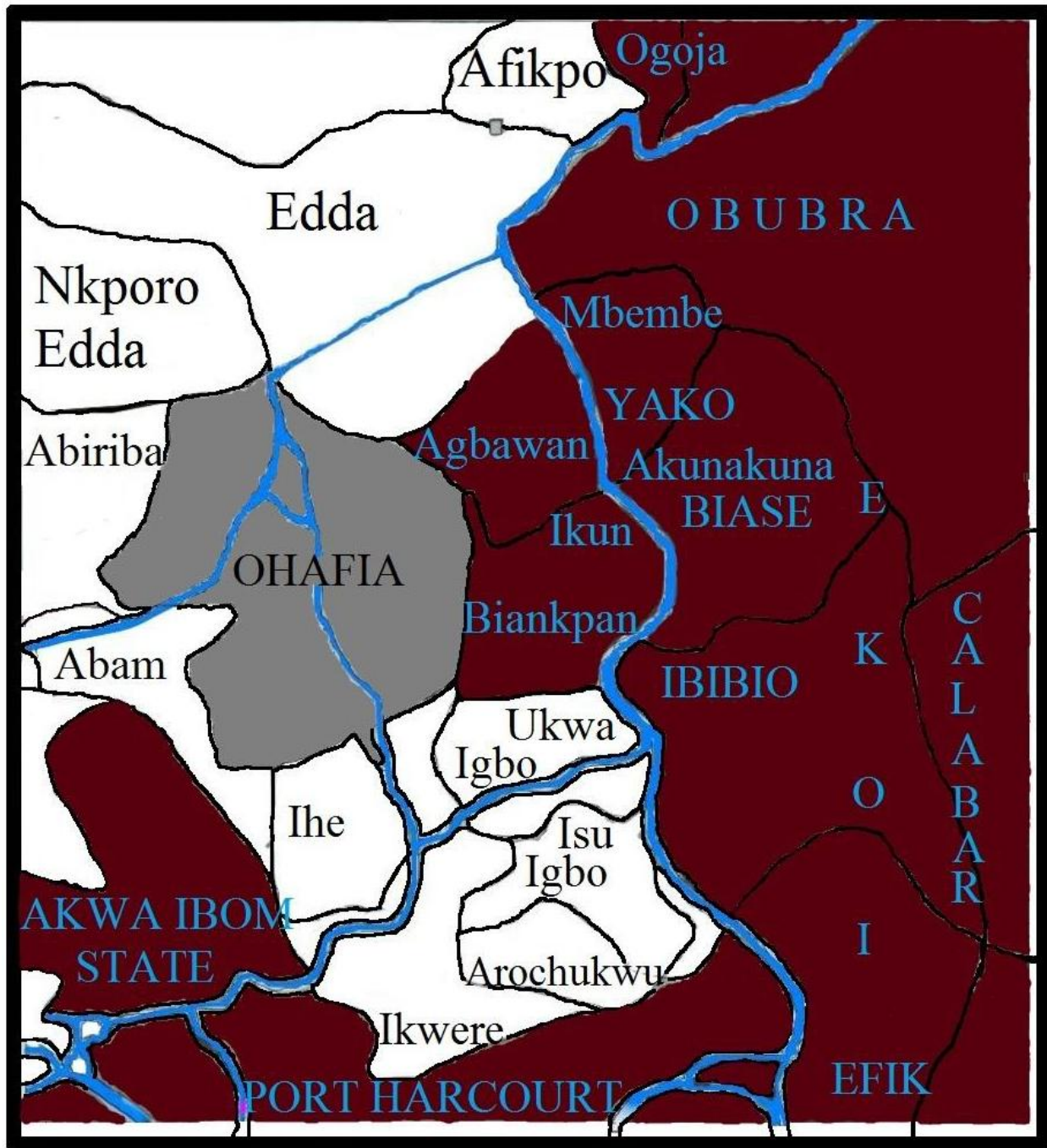
Figure 1: Map of Igboland



Source: Google Maps.

²⁷⁴ Attoe, A Federation of the Biase People; Jaja, Erim, and Andah, History and Culture of the Upper Cross River; Iyam, *The Broken Hoe*, 4, 29-32; Abasiattai, *Akwa Ibom and Cross River States*, 8-11, 27-40, 48; Onor, *The Ejagham Nation*, 13-31; Nair, *Politics and Society*, 3-4, ff.

Figure 2: Map of Ohafia-Igbo and their Neighbors



- Grey - Ohafia**
- White - Igbo Communities**
- Brown - Cross River Ethnic Groups**
- Blue - The Cross River and its Estuaries**

For interpretation of the references to color in this and all other figures, the reader is referred to the electronic version of this dissertation.

A major challenge to the reconstruction of Ohafia-Igbo history is lack of evidence for precise dating of historical events in the pre-colonial period. Ohafia traditions of migration before their arrival in Ibeku (Umuahia) in the early 16th century are largely conjectural.²⁷⁵ The post-Ibeku migration phase is easier to reconstruct because indigenous accounts of this period align with documented population movements in the region, and is collaborated by the oral testimonies and kinship practices of Ibeku, Abam, Abiriba, and Ada peoples.²⁷⁶ Ada (north of Ohafia) traditions of origin, which show that the people lived in Okagwe village, Ohafia for a while, before migrating to their present location lends credence to the antiquity of Ohafia settlement.²⁷⁷ Similarly, Abiriba oral traditions show that the Ohafia-Igbo were already established before the former settled in their present location, migrating from Ekoi to Obubra, Orugbam, and eventually, Udaro-Abuo located west of Ohafia in the mid-17th century.²⁷⁸

A number of scholars have argued that the Ohafia-Igbo must have settled in their present location before the 17th century,²⁷⁹ since the foundation of Arochukwu (south of Ohafia)

²⁷⁵ As evident in these oral interviews: Chief Oluka Mba, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Nde-Ibe village, Ohafia. Nov. 3, 2011; Elders of Nde Odo Compound, Akanu Village, Group Interview with author; Elders of Nde Oka compound, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon Village, Ohafia. September 14-15, 2011.

²⁷⁶ Oriji, *Traditions of Igbo Origin*, 149-155; Forde and Jones, *The Ibo and Ibibio-Speaking Peoples*, 54; Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 12-17. Till date, the Ohafia and Ibeku maintain ritual kin relationships. They avoid mutual blood-shed, and Ibeku individuals visiting Ohafia are given special privileges such as being the first to be served a cup of wine or kola nut (the cultural expression of peaceful reception) in a public gathering, because the Ibeku are seen as “the begetter” of the Ohafia. Certain cultural practices such as the raising of ancestral pot monuments that exist in Ibeku and Ohafia, do not exist in other surrounding villages.

²⁷⁷ Oriji, *Traditions of Igbo Origin*, 151; Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 28.

²⁷⁸ Oriji, *Traditions of Igbo Origin*, 154-155.

²⁷⁹ See footnote 19, Introduction.

corresponds with the settlement of the Ohafia-Igbo.²⁸⁰ This is significant because Ohafia forged an alliance with the Aro and played a major role in militant slave production and the spread of Aro commercial influence in the course of the Atlantic slave trade (1660s-1840s). Aro foundation thus sheds light on the antiquity of Ohafia settlement in their present location.²⁸¹ Various studies on the non-Igbo Cross River ethnic groups also account for demographic shifts occasioned by Ohafia settlement in the region during the 17th century.²⁸² Lastly, by the time of British colonial contact with Ohafia, in the course of the Aro expedition (1901-1902),²⁸³ all the 26 Ohafia-Igbo villages had been founded, and this lends further support to a pre-colonial antiquity of settlement.²⁸⁴

The Ohafia-Igbo trace their ancestry to a common father, Uduma Ezema Atita.²⁸⁵

Several oral traditions of the Ohafia-Igbo indicate that their ancestors migrated from the Niger-

²⁸⁰ Oriji, *Traditions of Igbo Origin*, 148-153.

²⁸¹ Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 27.

²⁸² Nkparom C. Ejituwu, *A History of Obolo (Andoni) in the Niger Delta* (Oron: Mason Publishing Company, 1991), 28-29; Forde and Jones, *The Ibo and Ibibio-Speaking Peoples*, 52; Johnston, *Of God and Maxim Guns*, 11-12; Afigbo, *Ropes of Sand*, 229-230.

²⁸³ BNA, CO520/1, 95, 128-134, 506-515; CO520/2, 229-333, 433-434; CO520/3, 5-7, 14-23, 99-100; CO520/7, 197-200; CO520/8, 403-437, 453-460, 598-758. Also, Macalister, "The Aro Country, Southern Nigeria," 631-637; Meek, *Law and Authority in a Nigerian Tribe*, 44.

²⁸⁴ Phone conversation with Prof. Onwuka Njoku, Lansing to Enugu Nigeria, March 22, 2013.

²⁸⁵ Thus, the people are often referred to as Ohafia Uduma Ezema. The Ohafia-Igbo were a patrilineal group before their arrival in their present location. Ogbuka Ogbuka Abaa, oral interview by author, Nde Oji Compound, Isiugwu Village Ohafia. Decemcer 10, 2011; Elders of Umu-Anya Family, Ndi Imaga Compound, Elu Ohafia, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Elu Village. August 14, 2011; Mecha Ukpai Akanu, *ezie-ogo* of Amangwu Village and Members of the Men's Court, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Amangwu Village. August 18, 2011; Anaso Awalekwa, *ezie-ogo* of Ndea-Nku Village and Members of the Men's Court, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording. Nov. 17, 2011.

Benue confluence to Umunede and Owan near Benin before the 16th century.²⁸⁶ With the expansion of Benin kingdom eastwards, and ensuing military conflicts between the Benin monarchy and Eze Chima of Onitsha (c.1480 and c.1517),²⁸⁷ some of the Ohafia-Igbo migrants, then known as Mben, migrated to the West Niger region of Aniocha, while others settled east of the Niger at Ndoni.²⁸⁸ Some traditions suggest that the Ohafia Mben ancestors, led by Nna Atita Akpo Ukwu later migrated from Ndoni to Okwala in Andoni, north of Opobo, attracted by the emerging coastal trade in European commodities.²⁸⁹ From Andoni, the Mben, led by Ezema Atita Akpo (oldest son of Nna Atita Akpo Ukwu, who died at Andoni) later migrated to Isieke in Ibeku (present-day Umuahia). Nkparom Ejitiwu argues that the Mben were forced out of Andoni because they were in the habit of raiding neighboring villages.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁶ Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author; Chief Eke Emetu Kalu, oral interview by author; Chief Emeh Okonkwo, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, August 15, 2010; Chief Kalu Awa Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Nde-Ukpai, Ufielle Village. October 27, 2011; Chief K.K. Owen, oral interview by author; Chief Olua Iro Kalu, oral interview by author. Also documented in Eze O. Uma, *Factors in Ohafia History* (Elu Ohafia, 1989), 8-10; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 2; Oji K. Oji, "A Study of Migrations and Warfare in Ohafia" (B.A. Thesis, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 1974), 6-15.

²⁸⁷ Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, 51-52, suggests that other Igbo communities such as Oguta also settled at Illah, during this period.

²⁸⁸ Uma, *Factors in Ohafia History*, 9; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 3

²⁸⁹ Vasco U. Iro, *ezie-ogo* of Nkwebi Village, Members of the Men's Court and *Nde-Ichin*, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Nkwebi. Nov. 17, 2011; Kalu Awa, *ezie-ogo* of Ibina (Ihenta), oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Ibina (Ihenta) Village. Dec. 12, 2011. *Nde-Ichin*, Amuma Village, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Amuma. Nov. 26, 2011; Godwin Nwankwo Uko, *ezie-ogo* of Amankwu Village and his cabinet members., Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Amankwu Village. October 25, 2011. The claim of this migration stream is supported by Kenneth O. Dike, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta, 1830-1885: An Introduction to the Economic and Political History of Nigeria* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), 24; Ejituwu, *A History of Obolo (Andoni) in the Niger Delta*, 28-29; Ole U. Ikpa, *The Age Grade System: A Way of Life in Ohafia* (Lagos, 1984), 8.

²⁹⁰ Ejituwu, *A History of Obolo (Andoni)*, 28.

Extant evidence affirms that the Ohafia-Igbo lived in Ibeku for a time. John Oriji points out that the Ibeku view the Ohafia as their kinsmen, and Ibeku traditions of origin claim that they and the Ohafia descended from a common ancestor called Ifukwu.²⁹¹ According to Daryll Forde and G.I. Jones, all the towns in the Ohafia-Abam complex (Ohafia, Abam, Abiriba, Ututu, and Ihechiowa) claim to have derived from Ibeku.²⁹² Nsugbe writes that the Mben migrants settled at Umuajiji in Ibeku, inter-married, and lived peacefully, until their Ibeku hosts became jealous of their agricultural prosperity, and disdained their resistance to cultural and political assimilation.²⁹³

Other traditions suggest that as mutual distrust developed between the Ibeku and Mben settlers, the latter engaged in hostile practices such as burying sharpened bamboo spikes in the paths leading to their community and killing visitors and strangers,²⁹⁴ in order to defend themselves against slave raids from the Asa and Ndoki peoples, who lived in the northern territories of the Niger-Delta.²⁹⁵ Around the late 16th century,²⁹⁶ a military conflict developed between the Isieke Ibeku and the Osa people. The latter sought protection (*ukwuzi*) from the

²⁹¹ Oriji, *Traditions of Igbo Origin*, 149; Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 15-18

²⁹² Forde and Jones, *The Ibo and Ibibio-Speaking Peoples*, 54.

²⁹³ Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 12-17.

²⁹⁴ Mayne, "Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934," 10-11.

²⁹⁵ These peoples are referred to as "Ukwa Anya-Ocha" in Ohafia oral traditions. See Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, 58; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 7. This defense mechanism was widespread among the Cross River Igbo peoples, and they later employed it in their resistance to British colonial rule. See Jones, *Annual Reports of Bende Division*, 63-64.

²⁹⁶ This date is suggested based on the documented period between Mben migration out of Umunede (1480-1517) and their settlement in their present location in the early 17th century.

Ohafia (Mben) settlers, and the Isieke Ibeku interpreted Ohafia protection of the Osa as a declaration of war.²⁹⁷

The Ohafia people feared an imminent Ibeku reprisal, and lived in constant fear. Thus, when in the middle of a night, a woman's calabash dishes (*oba*) accidentally fell from the strings (*ngu*), which held them up in the cooking hearth, many Mben people thought the noise to be a war alarm, and in the ensuing panic, began to flee their Ibeku settlement. Their neighbors, the Leru, also fearing an Ibeku attack, fled with them. A popular rendition of this tradition goes:

Aka metu ngu (A hand touched a calabash line); *Ngwu metu oba* (The line touched the calabashes); *Oba mee kpogoro* (The calabashes sounded 'kpogoro'); *Uso su Mben, su Leru, Mben uso, Leru uso* (Mben fled, Leru fled).²⁹⁸

It is probable that the Ibeku people had recently settled in their location before the arrival of the Mben. As Northrup noted, the Igbo-speaking communities (Ibere, Obero, Olokoro, Isuorgu, and Ibeku [Bende]) north of the Ngwa peoples, most likely established their settlements around the 15th and 16th centuries, and since land was not a scarce resource, they were willing to accommodate new migrants, provided such migrants were willing to respect local traditions.²⁹⁹ Similarly, describing the first inhabitants of the territories between the Imo and the Cross Rivers, Jones indicates that Ngwa Uku and Ibeku were the original settlement points for the Isuama Igbo, who were the first Igbo group that crossed the Imo River and fused with

²⁹⁷ Mayne, "Intelligence Report," 11-12. Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 8.

²⁹⁸ Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author; Chief Eke Emetu Kalu, oral interview by author; Chief Emeh Okonkwo, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Aug. 15, 2010; Chief Kalu Awa Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Ufielie Village. Oct. 27, 2011; Chief K.K. Owen, oral interview by author; Chief Olua Iro Kalu, oral interview by author; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 8; Nnenna E. Obuba, *The History and Culture of Ohafia, Covering from About 1432 to 2008: Collated Oral Tradition* (Ohafia: Lintdsons Publications, 2008), 2-3; Oriji, *Traditions*, 150.

²⁹⁹ Northrup, *Trade Without Rulers*, 31-34. It was perhaps a violation of such precepts existing between hosts and visitors that resulted in Mben emigration from Ibeku.

northern Ibibio and other Cross-River peoples between 1550 and 1600. He argues that following the Ngwa, the Ibeku and Ohuhu also crossed the Imo River, and from Ibeku, some groups including the Ohafia and Abam, moved “across the broken country drained by the Enyong [River] to the high ground between it and the Cross River.”³⁰⁰

Ohafia-Igbo traditions of origin show that they were one of the pioneer Igbo groups to settle in the middle Cross River between the 1550s and early 1650s. As a number of scholars (Forde, Jones, Northrup, Oriji, Njoku, Nsugbe, Azuonye) have pointed out, upon leaving Ibeku, the Mben founded Abam, Ohafia, and Ada in succession.³⁰¹ Arochukwu, the only other Igbo

³⁰⁰ Jones, *Annual Reports of Bende Division*, 1. Thus, the Ngwa, Ibeku, and Ohuhu were the primary points of settlement, and their military contacts with the non-Igbo Cross River peoples were less significant than those of the later Mben migrants, whose settlements were entirely in Ibibio, Annang, Efik, Ekoi and Eket territories.

³⁰¹ From Ibeku, the Mben were led northwards through Okputong Bende, by Onyerubi Atita and Ezema Atita Akpo (sons of Nna Atita Akpo Ukwu). After crossing the Igwu River, the wife of Onyerubi, who was pregnant could not continue the journey, and some of the Mben party camped at a place called Amaelu, which became the present home of the Abam people. Ezema Atita Akpo led the rest of the Mben party onwards until he died, and was succeeded by his son, Uduma Ezema Atita, who led the Ohafia people to their present location. See Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 9-10. While Forde and Jones, *The Ibo and Ibibio-Speaking Peoples*, 53-56, 85, argue that the Ada were a subgroup of the Aro, Oriji, *Traditions of Igbo Origin*, 151 records a tradition which asserts that the Ada first settled in Okagwe village, Ohafia, and from there, migrated to their present location. This is supported by Ohafia accounts that Egbebu Atita (brother of Ezema and Onyerubi) migrated with the Mben to Ohafia, and upon a breach of peace, was evicted and thus, founded Abam. See Obuba, *The History and Culture of Ohafia*, 2-5. Nsugbe, *Ohafia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 11-18, and Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 9. Njoku and Nsugbe further argue that as the Mben fled their Ibeku settlement at night, they told people they met on their way that they were going to a market (*afia*). Because it was strange for a whole community (*oha*) to go to a market (*afia*) at night, the Mben came to be known as *oha-afia* (a community that goes to market *en masse*). Other traditions say that the name came from Onyerubi Atita, who described the Mben party as “Ohu Ofia” (“slaves of the forest”) because they continued to wander the forest, after the former joined his pregnant wife to settle at Abam.

community on the Cross River emerged as a result of the fusion of Igbo settlers³⁰² with non-Igbo peoples during the same period.³⁰³

The arrival of the Ohafia-Igbo in the Cross River region of southern Nigeria triggered extensive demographic transformations among the various ethnic groups in the area. Upon arrival, the Ohafia-Igbo displaced most of the aboriginal non-Igbo people during the 16th-17th century Igbo-Ibibio wars,³⁰⁴ and assimilated the rest.³⁰⁵ Ohafia-Igbo displacement of populations resulted in the emergence of mixed Igbo-Ibibio towns on the Cross River.³⁰⁶ The displaced non-Igbo peoples viewed the Ohafia-Igbo as land-grabbers and, according to Chukwuma Azuonye, “the young were reminded of their duty to retake all the stolen land or at

³⁰² Forde and Jones, *The Ibo and Ibibio-Speaking Peoples*, 52, argue that the the Eastern Igbo people - Aro, Ada, and Abam originated in the past from Igbo groups which crossed the Okigwe-Arochukwu ridge at an early date. Jones (1964: 30) also noted that a second migration stream, from the Isuama area resulted first in the settlement of the Ngwa peoples (Aba), and second, the Ibeku (Umuahia) settlement from where the Ohafia-Arochukwu ridge was settled, and the North-Eastern Igbo offshoot established. Afigbo, *Ropes of Sand*, 229-230 concurs with Jones.

³⁰³ Jones, *The Trading States of the Oil Rivers*, 134 suggests the Aro had been established by the mid-17th century. Ekejiuba, “The Aro System of Trade,” 13-14, argues that the early Aro comprised a mixture of autochthonous Igbo and Ibibio groups including the Losi, Nkalaku, Iwerri and Ohaodu. Following a succession dispute, the Igbo group invited the Ankpa (Akpa), who helped them to establish economic and political dominance. Northrup, *Trade Without Rulers*, 35, has suggested that the Akpa were an offshoot of the Agwaguna (a Biase subgroup). The exact origin of the Aro has been controversial. See Afigbo, *Ropes of Sand*, 187-237.

³⁰⁴ Abasiattai, *Akwa Ibom and Cross River States*, 55.

³⁰⁵ Jones, *Annual Reports of Bende Division*, 1; Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 35, 116-118; Dike and Ekejiuba, “The Aro State: A Case-Study of State-Formation,” 273; R. Harris, “The Influence of Ecological Factors and External Relations on the Mbembe Tribes of South-east Nigeria,” *Africa* 32 (1962), 43-47. Harris noted that Ohafia and Ada squeezed the non-Igbo peoples out of their land. Obuba, *The History and Culture of Ohafia*, 8 identifies some of the aborigines in the primary area of Ohafia settlement as Ihenta, Umu-Oku, Letu, Umu-Amawa, and Oha-Odu. Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 35, argues that from the core area (Elu-Amaekpu-Ebem) of primary settlement, Ohafia expanded eastwards towards the Cross River, where they dislodged Ibibio and Biase peoples, who had dominant matrilineal practices.

³⁰⁶ Abasiattai, *Akwa Ibom and Cross River States*, 55; Dike and Ekejiuba, “The Aro State: A Case-Study of State-Formation,” 273; Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 131.

least render them unsafe for human habitation.”³⁰⁷ Until the 1890s, the Ohafia-Igbo were engaged in inter-group warfare with these eastern neighbors.³⁰⁸ It is plausible that conflicts between the Igbo communities (Aro and Ohafia) and the Ibibio, Annang, Efik, Eket, and Ekoi peoples on the eastern part of the Cross River, played a part in the migration of Efik peoples from Uruan near Itu, to found Creek Town (1590s), Old Town (1630s), and Duke Town (1650s), before the expansive growth of the Atlantic slave trade, in the late 17th century.³⁰⁹

While the relationship between Ohafia and her Igbo neighbors such as the Abam, Ada, and Abiriba, with whom they share a tradition of common ancestry and ritual kinship was cordial and restricted to skirmishes at worst,³¹⁰ Ohafia traditions portray their eastern neighbors as alien and hostile people.³¹¹ Prior to Ohafia settlement in the Cross-River region in the 16th century, Ibibio and Ogoja peoples engaged in headhunting expeditions as a psychological means of defense,³¹² and embarked on raids usually occasioned by drought, seasonal hunger (*unwu*), and crop failure. In a bid to regain their lost land between 1700 and 1890s, they employed these defense mechanisms against the Ohafia-Igbo.³¹³ In turn, the Ohafia imitated the war tactics of

³⁰⁷ Azuonye, “The Heroic Age,” 13.

³⁰⁸ Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 27-28; Abasiattai, *Akwa Ibom and Cross River*, 55

³⁰⁹ A.J. H. Latham, *Old Calabar, 1600-1891: The Impact of the International Economy Upon a Traditional Society* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1973), 9-10; Kalada A. Hart, *Report of the Enquiry into the Dispute over the Obongship of Calabar* (Enugu: Enugu Government Printer, Official Document 17 of 1964), 10-17; Johnston, *Of God and Maxim Guns*, 11-12.

³¹⁰ Mba Odo Okereke, *ezie-ogo* of Akanu Village, oral conversation with the author, Akanu. Oct. 15, 2011; Chief Ugbu Uduma, *ezie-ogo* of Nde-Amogu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Ihenta (Ibina). Nov. 11, 2011; Chief Oluwa Iro Kalu, oral interview by author.

³¹¹ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 67

³¹² FO84/2020. “Africa, West Coast, 1890,” 348-359; Azuonye, “The Heroic Age,” 14.

³¹³ CO520/20: “Southern Nigeria Original Correspondence, 1903,” 18-20, 44-54, 173-187, 263-265; Azuonye, “The Heroic Age,” 13; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 68.

their hostile neighbors, often taking the battle to the doorsteps of their enemies, beating them at their own game, and successfully taking their heads to deter them from venturing into their domains.³¹⁴ Hence, various scholars have noted that headhunting developed as a defensive warfare tactic of the Cross-River ethnic communities during this period.³¹⁵

The hostile frontier environment in which Ohafia settled was fundamental to the evolution of what Njoku and Azuonye describe as a heroic age (1700-1900), which placed emphasis on militant conceptions of manhood and honor.³¹⁶ During this period, in order to better defend themselves, the Ohafia-Igbo borrowed the better-organized military and paramilitary organizations of their matrilineal and bilateral Ibibio and Ogoja eastern neighbors. These borrowed practices include a well-integrated age-grade system with elaborate rites of passage, which ensured a substantial reserve of on-call, battle-ready, able-bodied men; secret societies; and a village residential layout akin to a military garrison.³¹⁷ The borrowing of institutions from non-Igbo ethnic groups and their gendered adaptation within Ohafia³¹⁸ imbued the society with

³¹⁴ Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amangwu Village, Ohafia. August 15, 2011. Harris, "The Influence of Ecological Factors," 46-47, described the Cross River region as being in a constant state of unrest during this period, as local groups fought and jockeyed for territories, and engaged in headhunting forays. From the 17th century, Ohafia warriors also raided the Ibibio settlements for slaves as well. See CO520/8, 510-514. Thus, Nsugbe argues that the slave-trade encouraged hostilities in the Cross River area. Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 31.

³¹⁵ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 87; Azuonye, "The Heroic Age," 14; Azuonye, "The Narrative War Songs," 32; Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 27, 56.

³¹⁶ Azuonye, "The Heroic Age," 9, 13-14; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 68-72. It was also in this forest environment where bush hogs ravaged farm-crops and leopards "swooped upon homesteads seizing and devouring livestock and men," that hunting became transformed into a means of masculine distinction.

³¹⁷ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 68; Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 51.

³¹⁸ See chapters 2-4 for a discussion of the role of these institutions in the gendering of identities.

a socio-political system more akin to those of her non-Igbo neighbors (particularly the Biakpan, Ikun, Biase, Yako, and Mbembe). Thus, in contrast to most Igbo communities, which possessed a lineage-based political system, and where age-grades were mostly convivial, the Ohafia political system was based on pyramidal age-grade organizations between 1800 and 1900.³¹⁹

Matriliney and Gendered Power: A Historical Background

G.T. Basden, Forde and Jones, and C.J. Mayne noted the unusual predominance of matrilineal elements among the Cross-River Igbo (excluding the Aro-Igbo),³²⁰ and Nsugbe, then a government ethnographer, made it a subject of study in 1960-62. He established that among the Cross River Igbo, matrilineal principles were strongest in Ohafia, and that matriliney became definitive to Ohafia-Igbo ethnicity upon their settlement west of the Cross River around the 16th century.³²¹ Ibeku, where the Ohafia-Igbo (Mben) lived for some time, was not a matrilineal society.³²² Ohafia oral traditions account that they (the Mben) developed matrilineal principles in the course of their migration from Ibeku, and upon integration with pre-existing Ibibio, Yako, Mbembe, and Biase peoples, who possessed dominant matrilineal principles, and lived west of

³¹⁹ Nsugbe, *Ohafia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 58, 69; Forde and Jones, *The Ibo and Ibibio-Speaking Peoples*, 52; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 26, 59; M.M. Green, *Ibo Village Affairs* (London: Frank Cass, 1947), 25; Afigbo, *Ropes of Sand*, 22; Uma O. Eleazu, "Traditional Institutions and Modernization," *Ohafia Review* 1 (April 1981), 9; Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria*, 84; Meek, *Law and Authority in a Nigerian Tribe*, 198.

³²⁰ Basden, *Niger Ibos*, 268; Forde and Jones, *The Ibo and Ibibio-Speaking Peoples*, 52; Mayne, "Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934," 39

³²¹ Nsugbe, *Ohafia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 18-20, 112-118; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 15; Azuonye, "The Narrative War Songs," 22; Abasiattai, *Akwa Ibom and Cross River States*, 50.

³²² Mayne, "Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934," 47; Nsugbe, *Ohafia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 16-18. Ibeku was patrilineal. Thus, while in Ibeku, pot monuments were raised to the memory of males only, in Ohafia, it was raised for both male and female ancestors to varying degrees, and preserved and handed down from generation to generation as long the matrilineage and patrilineage persisted.

the Cross River until the Ohafia-Igbo pushed them east of the River, absorbing remnants of the inhabitants and their customs.³²³ Villages such as Amangwu, Okon, Ufiele, and Nde-Ibe, where the Mben (Ohafia) immigrants integrated with the Ibibio (Biakpan and Ikun) peoples are strongly matrilineal, and the non-Igbo ethnic groups have survived as distinct lineages within them.³²⁴ However, the Ihenta patrilineal aboriginal people, who the Ohafia also integrated with upon settlement, have survived as the only patrilineal Ohafia village.³²⁵

Some Ohafia oral traditions link the origins of matriliney to the active role women played in the foundation of new villages, by assisting their community in times of crisis, or rescuing male individuals from difficult situations.³²⁶ Yet, others ascribe the origin of matriliney to

³²³ Forde and Jones, *The Ibo and Ibibio-Speaking Peoples*, 96-97, 105-106; Harris, "The Influence of Ecological Factors," 40-48, 95; Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 117-118. These Cross River societies such as the Yako, Mbembe and the Agoi lineage systems as they existed before the 20th century, are best described as double descent or double unilineal, because, even though matrilineal inheritance was prominent, and marriage within the matrilineage was forbidden, patrilineal inheritance was strongly practiced. Thus, the emergence of dominant matrilineal ideologies and practices among the Ohafia-Igbo as a result of their geographical proximity to these societies was not a result of simple culture-transfer, but rather, a product of active borrowing, selection and gendered practices. This is fully explored below.

³²⁴ *Dibia* Agwu Arua, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon Village. Aug. 4, 2010; Mr. Davidson Kalu Oki, oral interview by author, Okon Village. Aug. 5, 2010; *Dibia* Kalu Uko (a.k.a Ekpo), oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon Village, Sept. 14 and 20, 2011; *Dibia* Uche Dimgba, oral interview by author, Okon Village. Sept. 22, 2011; Chief Obasi Kama, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, September 26, 2011.

³²⁵ Kalu Awa, *ezie-ogo* of Ibina (Ihenta), oral interview by author, digital voice recording; *Nde ichin* (ten elders of) Amuma, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Amuma Village. November 26, 2011; Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 37.

³²⁶ Obuba, *The History and Culture of Ohafia*, 4; Chief Ikenga Ibe, in Group Interview with *nde ichin* (ten elders of) Amuma Ohafia, digital voice recording, Amuma Village. November 26, 2011; Kalu Awa, *ezie-ogo* of Ibina (Ihenta), oral interview by author, digital voice recording; Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author; Chief Eke Emetu Kalu, oral interview by author; Chief Emeh Okonkwo, oral interview by author; Chief Kalu Awa Kalu, oral interview by author; Chief K.K. Owen, oral interview by author; Chief Oluwa Iro Kalu, oral interview by author.

ancestresses who individually founded a village.³²⁷ As Nsugbe rightly pointed out, it is not the historical truth of these traditions that make them important, as much as their role in validating the structural principles upon which crucial social relations were built before colonial rule.³²⁸

The first popular tradition, provided by Chief Ikenga Ibe during a group interview with elders of Amuma village, accounts that after the Mben migrants left Ibeku, they reached a certain river (River Igwu), which they had no way of crossing because of the absence of a bridge. At that point, a woman from Umuinyam³²⁹ lineage produced an axe, which the party used to cut down a large tree, which served as a bridge that enabled the Mben to cross into the middle Cross River. To commemorate the indispensable role of women in the course of migration, the Ohafia-Igbo upon settlement, passed down land and other movable property through their matrilineage.³³⁰

The second tradition tells the story of an Ohafia man, who had accidentally killed a fellow citizen. The deceased's family requested the culprit to provide another individual in

³²⁷ The case of Ebem village is discussed below. The subject of female founders of villages looms large in the oral traditions of the Mben (Ohafia, Abam, Ada) peoples. Obuba, *The History and Culture of Ohafia*, 4; Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author; Chief K.K. Owen, oral interview by author; Godwin Nwankwo Uko, *ezie-ogo* of Amankwu, oral interview by author; Chief Udensi Ekea, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. August 4, 2010.

³²⁸ Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 112. This is important given that the neighboring Afikpo shares a second Ohafia tradition of matriliney. See Ottenberg, *Double Descent in an African Society*, 94

³²⁹ The lineage of this woman is contested among the traditions of various villages in Ohafia. In Amaekpu and Elu villages, the traditions claim that this woman was called Nne Orié and she belonged to Umu Okochi maternal family, and that the historic axe is still hidden in Elu Village. See Obuba, *The History and Culture of Ohafia*, 4. However, all the traditions concur that it was a woman, who enabled the Mben to cross the river.

³³⁰ Chief Ikenga Ibe, in Group Interview with *nde ichin* (ten elders of) Amuma Ohafia, digital voice recording, Amuma Village. November 26, 2011; Kalu Awa, *ezie-ogo* of Ibina (Ihenta), oral interview by author, digital voice recording; Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author; Chief Eke Emetu Kalu, oral interview by author; Chief Emeh Okonkwo, oral interview by author; Chief Kalu Awa Kalu, oral interview by author; Chief K.K. Owen, oral interview by author; Chief Olua Iro Kalu, oral interview by author.

recompense, or face death himself. This human substitution is known in Ohafia as *igwa ochu* (to cleanse murder). The murderer tried to offer one of his children, but none of his wives would give up their child to save him. He then ran to a brother (a patrilineal kinsman), who rather than assist him, offered him up to be killed. The murderer managed to escape, and this time, ran to a sister, who rather than give up her brother, chose to offer her own head in place of his.³³¹ Many years later, when the man was dying, he willed all his possessions to his sister's children in gratitude. In this manner, Ohafia-Igbo people adopted matrilineal inheritance, because as they saw it, a man's worst enemy is his patrikin, while his best friend is his matrikin.³³²

The last tradition of matriliney centers on the village of Ebem, which was founded by a woman, Mgboenini.³³³ According to Ikenga Ibe and Torti Kalu, Ohafia people first settled at Elu, which became the headquarters of the village-group. After several generations at Elu, a woman called Mgboenini became pregnant, and her co-wife spread a false rumor that she was pregnant with twin children. To prevent Mgboenini from having twin children in their new settlement, a situation that was held as an abomination, the Ohafia expelled Mgboenini from their community. She moved downhill (*ebem*) into the forest, and there, had a son, who she named Ofia-ire ("the forest has provided for me").³³⁴ Because a woman founded Ebem,

³³¹ In some versions of this tradition, it is said that the sister offered her son. Chief Kevin Ukiro, oral interview by author, Asaga. August 10, 2010; Mama Docas Kalu and Mama Mary Ezera, Group Interview by author; Nmia Nnaya Agbai, oral interview by author.

³³² Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 19; Chief Eke Emetu Kalu, oral interview by author; Chief Emeh Okonkwo, oral interview by author; Chief Kalu Awa Kalu, oral interview by author; Chief K.K. Owen, oral interview by author; Chief Olua Iro Kalu, oral interview by author; Chief Udensi Ekea, oral interview by author.

³³³ Mayne recorded a version of this tradition, which provides the name of the female founder as Chiasara. Mayne, "Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934," 18-21.

³³⁴ Chief Ikenga Ibe and Chief Torti Kalu, in Group Interview with *Nde Ichin* (ten elders of) Amuma Ohafia, digital voice recording, Amuma Village Ohafia. November 26, 2011.

matrilineal practices are strongest in this community.³³⁵ Here, in addition to land, estates, and movable property, political offices are matrilineally inherited.³³⁶

Nsugbe noted that the stories of Ohafia migration from Ibeku to their present location, which he documented in the 1960s, were riddled with accounts of pregnant women being left behind, and that such women became founders of new settlements.³³⁷ Mayne recorded one such tradition in his Intelligence Report on the Ohafia-Igbo. He noted that a woman founded the village of Nkwebi, like that of Ebem. The Nkwebi founder was Ugoagha Imaga. Similarly, she was driven out of Elu village, because she birthed twins.³³⁸ The historic role of women as founders and co-founders of villages, are commemorated through annual ritual performances in Amuma and Amaekpu villages, for instance, during which a woman leads the ceremony.³³⁹

The religious practices of Ohafia also evidence what Amadiume describes as a matriarchal ideology.³⁴⁰ In the case of Amuma, a rock outcrop with footprints is believed to represent the female founder of the village, and constitutes the common ancestral shrine of the

³³⁵ Mayne, "Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934," 18-21. The foundation of Ebem, is perhaps the most popular tradition in Ohafia, and is easily recounted by most Ohafia people. Almost every individual interviewed for this study recounted a version of the story. The story always began with the assertion, "*anyi eri ala a nne*" ("we eat through the mother.")

³³⁶ Mayne, "Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934," 21-24; Ndukwe Otta and Elder Uduma Uka, Group Interview by author, Ebem. August 14, 2010; Chief Kevin Ukiro, oral interview by author; Chief K.K. Owen, oral interview by author; Chief Olua Iro Kalu, oral interview by author; Chief Emeh Okonkwo, oral interview by author.

³³⁷ Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 19.

³³⁸ Mayne, "Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934," 29.

³³⁹ Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 19; Nnenna Obuba, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amaekpu. Aug. 15, 2011; Chief Torti Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amuma. Nov. 26, 2011.

³⁴⁰ Amadiume, *Male Daughters and Female Husbands*, 99.

community.³⁴¹ In the case of Amaekpu, Nsugbe noted that earlier attempts by men to establish a village community failed, because “the land was too hot for them, and nothing would grow upon it;”³⁴² until the successful male founder paid heed to a priest’s advice and married his mother’s brother’s daughter (*ada nne*) who then cooled the land, enabled things to grow, and averted annihilation.³⁴³ Hence, female ancestor worship in pre-colonial Ohafia emphasized the salvific role of women’s reproductive abilities in the course of Ohafia settlement.³⁴⁴ This ideology was ramified in the establishment of shrines of a fertility goddess, *uduma* in every Ohafia compound, and the naming of many Ohafia-Igbo people, Uduma.³⁴⁵

In effect, the Ohafia-Igbo became a matrilineal society due to a number of conjunctive factors, including female agency in the course of migration, women’s foundation of new settlements, and cultural borrowing from pre-existing matrilineal/double unilineal Ekoi and Ibibio peoples. However, the maintenance or reproduction of dominant matrilineage principles is best seen in the socio-political practices of men and women, upon settlement.

On the one hand, scholars such as Azuonye and Nsugbe argue that over two centuries of Ohafia-Igbo constant involvement in heroic warfare, from the time of settlement, placed the

³⁴¹ Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 103; *Nde-Ichin* (elders of) Amuma Village, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Obu Nde-Torti, Amuma. November 27, 2011.

³⁴² Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 20.

³⁴³ Ibid.

³⁴⁴ Mama Docas Kalu and Mama Mary Ezera, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Elu Village, August 10, 2010; Nmia Nnaya Agbai, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Elu Village, August 18, 2011; *Ezie-nwami* Ucha Oji Iwe of Elu Village and her Cabinet, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording. October 25, 2011.

³⁴⁵ Mrs. Nnenna Obuba, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amaekpu, Aug. 15, 2011; Ndukwe Otta and Uduma Uka, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Ebem Village, Aug. 14, 2011; *Ezie-ogo* Mecha Ukpai Akanu, the *Uduma Anaga* 2nd of Amangwu Village, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Aug. 18, 2011.

burden of agricultural production and family sustenance on women. As a result, women controlled food production and the transmission of agrarian land, while men defended the homestead and controlled the transmission of residential (patrilineage) estates.³⁴⁶ Thus, all land immediately beyond the residential units (these land are called *agbugbo ezi*) as a rule, belonged to the matrilineages in Ohafia, and patrilineages generally established new settlements or farmland on land pledged from matrilineages.³⁴⁷ Articulating the social structure that emerged, Njoku writes, “The Ohafia were a matrilineal people. Residentially, they were patrilocally organized.”³⁴⁸ This means that patrilineages had physical compounds and matrilineages did not.

On the other hand, this study suggests that the reproduction of dominant matrilineal principles should also be sought in the memorialization practices, narratives, and sayings of the Ohafia-Igbo. The symbolic figure of the female in Ohafia-Igbo traditions of settlement, as the giver of life, the bread-winner, and the source of communal stability and survival, reflected the dominant role of women in agricultural production, their reproductive value in a settler society on the fringe of extinction, and their control over the distribution of material resources before the 20th century. By examining gendered agricultural production and trade, property ownership and inheritance, marriage and divorce procedures, women’s ownership of children, and the religious corpus (ancestral worship) of the Ohafia-Igbo, this study seeks to highlight the social power of Ohafia-Igbo women, and their roles in the constitution and maintenance of the matrilineage until 1900. These practices, which evince the dominant social position of women among the Ohafia-Igbo have historically shaped the emergence of a matrifocal (mother-centered) social system.

³⁴⁶ Azuonye, “The Heroic Age,” 13; Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 21.

³⁴⁷ Mayne, “Intelligence Report,” 39; Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 87.

³⁴⁸ Njoku, “Inter-Village Trade in Ohafia,” 18.

Anyi Eri Ala a Nne - We Eat Through the Mother: Matriliney, Economy and the Breadwinner Concept

The idiom, “*anyi eri ala a nne*” (we eat through the mother) expresses both the indispensable role of women as premier food producers and distributors, as well as the fact that property was passed down through the mother-line until the first two decades of the 20th century among the Ohafia-Igbo.³⁴⁹ Ohafia men’s preoccupation with the military defense of their territories (c.1500-1650), their preoccupation with warfare, headhunting and slave raids in the 18th and 19th centuries (the so-called “heroic age”), as well as the scarcity of land for agricultural purposes, particularly for the cultivation of yams, in the densely-populated region of the Cross-River, led women to dominate agricultural production.³⁵⁰ Thus, Nsugbe describes pre-colonial Ohafia-Igbo men as poor farmers, who only cultivated yam as a prestige crop that was not sufficient to provision a family through half of the year; while women produced the real staple crops (maize, rice, cassava, coco-yam, beans, and vegetables), in addition to carrying out the continuous work of weeding the yam farms throughout the agricultural year.³⁵¹

³⁴⁹ Nnenna Emeri and Mmia Nnaya Basse, members of *Ikipirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu Village, Group Interview. Nov. 3, 2011; Nmia Nnaya Agbai, oral interview by author; Kalu Awa Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Ufiele Village. October 27, 2011.

³⁵⁰ Emea O. Arua, “Yam Ceremonies and the Values of Ohafia Culture,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 51, 2 (1981), 695; McCall, *Dancing Histories*, 83; Northrup, *Trade Without Rulers*, 116; Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 21; Mama Docas Kalu and Mama Mary Ezera, Group Interview by author; Nmia Nnaya Agbai, oral interview by author; *Ikipirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu Village, Group Interview; Chief Olua Iro Kalu, oral interview by author; Mama Orie Emeh and Chief Mrs. Grace Ojieke, oral interview by author.

³⁵¹ Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 21. Other studies indicate that in most Igbo societies, agricultural production was gender-complementary. See J.S. Harris, “Some Aspects of the Economics of Sixteen Ibo Individuals,” *Africa* 14 (1943-44), 319; Ikennna Nzimiro, “Social Structure,” in G.E.K. Ofomata, ed., *The Nsukka Environment* (Enugu, Nigeria: Fourth Dimension, 1978), 245; Amadiume, *Male Daughters and Female Husbands*, 29-31; Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors and Kings*, 109-122.

In view of the preeminent role of Ohafia-Igbo women as food producers, Nsugbe noted that “Ohaffia women [were] considered by other Ibo groups to be the hardest-worked on the farm of any Ibo womenfolk . . . and the men [were] often ridiculed for the hard use they put their women to.”³⁵² McCall concurs when he writes that “the traditional Ohafia economy depended largely on women’s agricultural labor,” and “women’s day-to-day agricultural labor and food marketing activities formed the basis of subsistence production and consumption.”³⁵³ However, his assertion that warriors married many wives and thus controlled the products of their labor is misleading. Abundant evidence shows that Ohafia-Igbo women controlled the production and distribution of the bulk of the family food until the 1920s.³⁵⁴ Mayne writes that before colonial rule, “It is to the farm that [Ohafia] people turned their attention, deriving their income almost entirely from this source.”³⁵⁵ While women continued to dominate food production in the first two decades of the 20th century, the changing economies ushered by Western education and colonial service, which birthed new forms of *ogaranya* masculinity reduced men’s dependence on women for food (see chapter 5). Thus, I argue that agricultural production no longer provided a basis for women to enjoy breadwinner status under colonial rule.

The nature of pre-20th century long-distance trade in the Bight of Biafra also shaped indigenous notions of the breadwinner concept. This trade was mostly based on the export of

³⁵² Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 21.

³⁵³ McCall, *Dancing Histories*, 83.

³⁵⁴ Mayne, “Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934,” 41-44; Arua, “Yam Ceremonies and the Values of Ohafia Culture,” 695; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 38; Nnenna Emeri and Mmia Nnaya Bassey, members of *Ikipirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu Village, Group Interview, Nov. 3, 2011; Mmia Nnaya Agbai, oral interview by author, Aug. 18, 2011; Kalu Awa Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Ufiele Village. October 27, 2011.

³⁵⁵ Mayne, “Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934,” 5.

food-crops from the hinterland to the coastal communities, in exchange for Efik and Ibibio crafts, as well as European commodities until the 1890s.³⁵⁶ As Northrup shows, food items from the hinterland provisioned the coastal trading societies as well as slave populations destined for the Americas, before the 1850s. After abolition (1807-1815), the population of the coastal states continued to increase because of incessant slave supplies, and they produced very little food for their sustenance.³⁵⁷ The palm-oil trade, which peaked between 1820 and the 1860s, also increased the number of people involved in the production and marketing of palm produce in the Biafran hinterland.³⁵⁸ Other trading societies including the Aro and Ndoki almost ceased to farm at all, and with more and more labor withdrawn from the agricultural sector in the long 19th century, greater demand for food increased throughout the Biafran hinterland.³⁵⁹

Until 1900, Ohafia women produced food to meet family needs as well as regional market demands. In various oral narratives, Ohafia men recounted stories of male individuals between 1850 and 1900, who were so dependent upon their wives for food that they negotiated yearly sustenance by marrying more wives, and offering gifts of yams and European manufactures especially the *jooji* wrapper cloth to women.³⁶⁰ It was not until the 1930s that foods and crafts such as palm oil, oranges, snails, roofing mats, and wood carvings from the Biafran hinterland were traded to the northern part of Nigeria for products such as beef, onions,

³⁵⁶ Northrup, *Trade Without Rulers*, 208-219.

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

³⁵⁸ Northrup, *Trade Without Rulers*, 208.

³⁵⁹ Northrup, *Trade Without Rulers*, 218.

³⁶⁰ Godwin Nwankwo Uko, *ezie-ogo* of Amankwu Village and his cabinet members., Group Interview by author; Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author; Chief Oluwa Iro Kalu, oral interview by author; Ndukwe Otta and Elder Uduma Uka, oral conversation with author, Asaga Village, Ohafia. September 16, 2011.

dried fish, and cod.³⁶¹ Since the bulk of both locally consumed and regionally traded food was produced by women between 1800 and 1900, the indispensability of female labor to food production shaped Ohafia-Igbo conceptions of women as the breadwinners of their families.

Nsugbe's characterization of Ohafia-Igbo men should however be contextualized, for as Njoku noted, no human community ever survived on warfare and headhunting alone.³⁶² According to both scholars, unlike in Northern and Western (riverine) Igboland, where men dominated agricultural production, among the Central and Eastern (Cross River) Igbo, women controlled farm-work because of land scarcity, limited arable land, high population density, and men's preoccupation with warfare.³⁶³ But it must be pointed out that in addition to their limited yam cultivation,³⁶⁴ Ohafia-Igbo men produced crafts (mat-making, woodcarving, and blacksmithing), and engaged in long-distance trading between 1850 and 1900.³⁶⁵ As Jones noted, the internal slave trade (1820-1900) rendered the Cross River region so unsafe for traveling that men from Ohafia, Abiriba, and Arochukwu dominated long-distance trading.³⁶⁶ Also, in the few villages such as Okon, Amangwu, Isiugwu, Nkwebi and Okagwe, which

³⁶¹ Jones, *Annual Reports of Bende Division*, 37.

³⁶² Njoku, "Inter-Village Trade in Ohafia, 1900-1979," 5.

³⁶³ Njoku, "Inter-Village Trade in Ohafia," 12-13; Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 21.

³⁶⁴ In chapter 4, I argue that yam production became masculinized, in the sense that men used it to perform *ogaranya* masculinity. The concept of masculinization also captures the fact that following the yam revolution, discussed in chapter 4, Ohafia women who performed the masculinity of yam cultivation were socially perceived as masculine.

³⁶⁵ Chief Torti Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amuma Village. Nov. 26, 2011; Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author; Chief Emeh Okonkwo, oral interview by author. While women (especially young girls and nursing mothers) wove mat and ropes, the arduous task of wood carving, particularly, the *nkwa* (statues and wood-beam carvings) woodcarvings and mortar and pestle making were the preserve of men.

³⁶⁶ Jones, *Annual Reports of Bende Division*, 5.

possessed rivers and streams, men also dominated fishing.³⁶⁷ Moreover, female dominance in agriculture led Ohafia men to transform hunting into a distinct masculine pursuit.³⁶⁸

Nonetheless, men's economic endeavors before 1900 were marginal to women's economic activities,³⁶⁹ and indigenous notions of breadwinner were premised on female dominance in agricultural production.³⁷⁰ For instance, Ohafia-Igbo blacksmiths and wood carvers did not achieve the reputation and regional specialization of Nkwere, Awka and Abiriba blacksmiths. Thus, while there were few Ohafia blacksmiths,³⁷¹ the Ohafia-Igbo mostly relied on Abiriba professional blacksmiths for their metal weapons and agricultural tools.³⁷² It was perhaps in the traditional medicare and spirit-medium (*dibia*) profession that Ohafia-Igbo men enjoyed a profound advantage over women, because the *dibia* institution was a masculine one.³⁷³ Yet, the status of *dibia* also brought with it professional limitations, because while some *dibia* participated in itinerant trading, *dibia* were generally proscribed by the taboos of their profession, from engaging in any agricultural pursuit, including yam cultivation.³⁷⁴ Moreover,

³⁶⁷ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 40.

³⁶⁸ See chapter 4 for details. I employ the concept of masculinization to show that hunting was not necessarily feminine, originally, but Ohafia men transformed it into an institution for performing *ogaranya* masculinity. Also, see Turner, *Schism and Continuity*, 230-243.

³⁶⁹ Nsugbe, *Ohafia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 21-22.

³⁷⁰ Mayne, "Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934," 5; Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author; *Ikpirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu Village, Group Interview; Mama Docas Kalu and Mama Mary Ezera, Group Interview.

³⁷¹ Kalu, "An Ibo Autobiography," 158-170.

³⁷² Leonard, "Notes of a Journey to Bende," 196-197; Nsugbe, *Ohafia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 14; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 43.

³⁷³ See chapter 5 for detailed discussion.

³⁷⁴ Chief Udensi Ekea, oral interview by author.

because women became *dibia*, and in the process, performed masculinity between 1850 and 1920,³⁷⁵ they redefined the institution as non-male dominated.

The reputation of Ohafia men as warriors has led a number of scholars to argue that Ohafia did not participate in the regional trade of the Bight of Biafra before the 20th century, in contrast to their neighbors, the Aro and Abiriba peoples.³⁷⁶ The notion of Ohafia commercial inactivity fails to account for the gendered nature of pre-colonial Ohafia economy; namely, that while men engaged in slave production, women were active players in the regional food and palm produce trade. Moreover, Ohafia men adapted to the changing economies of the region. They played a prominent role in the Atlantic and domestic slave trade until the 1890s,³⁷⁷ and participated in the palm produce trade from the 1860s.³⁷⁸ For both the trade in slaves and palm produce, they exploited the region-wide commercial network of the *okonko* secret society.³⁷⁹

Indeed, the Ohafia-Igbo participated in the regional trade of the Bight of Biafra by utilizing the cowries of the Lower Niger, the manillas of Bonny and Kalabari, and the brass rods

³⁷⁵ See Chapter 4.

³⁷⁶ Northrup, *Trade Without Rulers*, 116; Azuonye, “The Heroic Age,” 9; Isichei, *Igbo Worlds*, 132.

³⁷⁷ Ohafia slave traders enjoyed privileged access to Aro controlled markets in Bende, Uzuakoli, and Itu. Charles Patridge, *Cross River Natives* (London, 1905); A.G. Leonard, *The Lower Niger and its Tribes* (London: 1906); Basden, *Among the Ibos*, 37, 208-209; Basden, *Niger Ibos*, 377-388; Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria*, 184; Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 12-13, 27-28; Dike and Ekejiuba, *The Aro of South-eastern Nigeria*; Oriji, “Slave Trade, Warfare and Aro Expansion,” 107-114; Azuonye, “The Narrative War Songs,” 34; Azuonye, “The Heroic Age,” 15; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 49. Bende was the largest market in the hinterland of southeastern Nigeria until 1897 when Uzuakoli displaced it. Uburu ranked next to Bende. Each of these markets, controlled by the Aro, held every 28 days, for 4 consecutive days. Traders visited Bende from the length and breadth of southeastern Nigeria, including Onitsha, Ikom, Ibibioland, Awka, Nkwerre, and Niger Delta. Ekejiuba, “The Aro System of Trade,” 18-19.

³⁷⁸ Jones, *Annual Reports of Bende Division*, 33.

³⁷⁹ This *okonko* is fully explored in Chapter 4.

of the Cross River for trade, in addition to the barter system.³⁸⁰ They made use of three major trade routes. Two of these routes were waterways, through which Ohafia-Igbo men traded mostly slaves and palm oil, while women traded food items. The first route comprised the Enyong and the Cross River, which enabled the Ohafia-Igbo to trade with their non-Igbo neighbors, including the Ekoi, Ibibio,³⁸¹ Obubra, Efik, and Calabar peoples.³⁸² On the one hand, in addition to slaves mostly from Northern Igboland,³⁸³ Ohafia-Igbo warriors formed an alliance with the Odoro Ikpe clan of the Ibibio, and raided other Ibibio communities, especially the Ikpe clan for slaves, who they sold to the Aro, and also traded at Bende.³⁸⁴ On the other hand, Ohafia-Igbo men supplied palm oil to the Ikpa and the Enyong on the Cross River, through Arochukwu.³⁸⁵ The second route was the Uduma stream, which ran parallel to the western tip of Ohafia, and linked the Ohafia-Igbo with Arochukwu, Itu, Ikpe and Ikot Eto.³⁸⁶ Beginning in the 1850s, Ohafia men traded swamp rice, palm oil and palm kernels to Itu and Calabar, in exchange for Ibibio masquerade outfits and European imports such as guns, textiles, and animal traps.³⁸⁷

³⁸⁰ Jones, *Annual Reports of Bende Division*, 31; Mayne, "Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934," 15, 49-51.

³⁸¹ Ekoi (Ejagham, Bekwarra, Yako/Yakurr, Biase/Agwagune/Akunakuna, Abiayong, Bahumono, Agbo, and Mbembe); Ibibio (Biakpan, Ikun, Urugbam, Isumutong, and Agbanwan).

³⁸² Dibia Kalu Uko, oral interview by author; Mecha Ukpai Akanu, *ezie-ogo* of Amangwu and Members of the Men's Court, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording; Ogbuka Ogbuka Abaa, oral interview by author; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 50.

³⁸³ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 85.

³⁸⁴ Northrup, *Trade Without Rulers*, 119.

³⁸⁵ Northrup, *Trade Without Rulers*, 201.

³⁸⁶ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 51; Mayne, "Intelligence Report," 50-51.

³⁸⁷ CO520/63: "Southern Nigeria Original Correspondence, 9th July-31st July 1908," 129-134; *Ezie-ogo* Okorie Kalu of Isiugwu Village, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Dec. 10, 2011; Chief Ikpo Chukwu Ndukwe, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Ohafia. April 6, 2012; Northrup, *Trade Without Rulers*, 121; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 51.

The third route was an extensive overland system that converged at Abiriba (Abiriba-Ada-Afikpo-Uburu; Abiriba-Bende-Uzuakoli; and Abiriba-Isikwuato-Ututu), then went through Ohafia to Arochukwu, Ihechiowa and Ututu.³⁸⁸ Women dominated the trade of the overland route, and to overcome the insecurity of long-distance trade, as a result of the domestic slave trade between 1820 and 1900, they often went to distant markets in groups accompanied by male warrior-guards.³⁸⁹ Many Ohafia-Igbo women, who frequented the major hinterland Bende market, to trade their agricultural produce for Akwete cloths (*akwa mmin*), Ututu mats, Uburu and Okposi mined salt, Abiriba metal products, and European imported commodities, were often satirized in the songs of the all-male *obon* secret society for being too enterprising, and abandoning their farms and responsibilities as bread-winners of their families.³⁹⁰

It is important to note that slaves were the only commercial commodity over which Ohafia-Igbo men exercised productive control in the 19th century, and most slaves were traded over the land route to Bende or Uzuakoli.³⁹¹ Palm oil and palm kernels had become the main exports of the Bight of Biafra by the 1830s,³⁹² and their manufacture was monopolized by women, who sold these in local markets, where male entrepreneurs bulked and transported them

³⁸⁸ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 49.

³⁸⁹ *Ikpirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu Village, Group Interview; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author; Mama Docas Kalu and Mama Mary Ezera, Group Interview; Njoku, "Inter-Village Trade in Ohafia, 1900-1979," 23.

³⁹⁰ Mecha Ukpai Akanu, *ezie-ogo* of Amangwu Village and Members of the Men's Court, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording; Ogbuka Abaa, oral interview by author; Chief Torti Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amuma Village Ohafia. November 26, 2011; Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author; Chief Eke Emetu Kalu, oral interview by author; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 50. Indeed, the market was the domain of women, and served as venue for trade, socialization, gossip, and political mobilization.

³⁹¹ CO520/107. "Southern Nigeria Original Correspondence, Oct. - Nov. 1911," 220.

³⁹² Jones, *Annual Reports of Bende Division*, 33.

to Arochukwu, Itu and Ibibio markets through the waterways.³⁹³ Thus, the regional markets were linked with the domestic intra-village and inter-village four-day markets, controlled by women.³⁹⁴ Before the 20th century, a women's council (*Ikpirikpe Ndi Inyom*) governed the domestic markets, regulated prices, and settled disputes arising in the market.³⁹⁵ This council also established and maintained taboos governing male and female participation in the productive economy. For instance, it generally forbade men from participating in the lucrative business of palm oil and kernel production and sale.³⁹⁶ It was not until the 1860s, at the peak of the palm produce trade in the Bight of Biafra, that men were allowed to bulk and sell palm produce to distant markets, but women still maintained monopoly over its production.³⁹⁷ Given women's dominance in agricultural production and their prominent role in domestic and long distance trade, it is not surprising that Ohafia people describe women as the breadwinners of their families. It is in this context that the matriliney expression, "*anyi eri ala a nne*" — "We eat through the mother,"³⁹⁸ is most meaningful.

³⁹³ Kalu, "An Ibo Autobiography," 164; Chief Ikpo Chukwu Ndukwe, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Ndi Ado Compound, Ohafia. April 6, 2012; *Ikpirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu Village, Group Interview.

³⁹⁴ Njoku, "Inter-Village Trade in Ohafia, 1900-1979," 22, 27.

³⁹⁵ Mama Docas Kalu and Mama Mary Ezera, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Elu Village. August 10, 2010; Nmia Nnaya Agbai, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Elu Village, August 18, 2011; *Ezie-Nwami* Ucha Oji Iwe of Elu Village and her Cabinet, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording. October 25, 2011; Njoku, "Inter-Village Trade in Ohafia, 1900-1979," 23.

³⁹⁶ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 24.

³⁹⁷ Mayne, "Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934," 15; Chief Ikpo C. Ndukwe, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Ndi Ado Compound, Ohafia. April 6, 2012; Hon. Tessy Uzoma Odum, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Ohafia Local Government Council Office, Ebem. Sept. 5, 2011; *Ikpirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu Village, Group Interview.

³⁹⁸ Nmia Nnaya Agbai, oral interview by author; Mama Orie Emeh and Chief Mrs. Grace Ojieke, oral interview by author; *Ezie-nwami* Ogbonne Kalu, oral interview by author, digital

Ancestral Worship and *Ududu* Veneration: The Construction and Maintenance of a Matriarchy

Victor Uchendu clearly describes pre-colonial Igbo cosmology when he writes,

The Igbo world is a “real” one in every respect. There is the world of man peopled by all created beings and things, both animate and inanimate. The spirit world is the abode of the creator, the deities, the disembodied and malignant spirits, and the ancestral spirits. It is the future abode of the living after their death. There is constant interaction between the world of man and the world of the dead; the visible and invisible forces . . . The [dead] are a part of the Igbo social world . . . The principle of seniority makes the ancestors the head of the lineage. Without death, there will be no population increase in the ancestral households and correspondingly, no change in social status for the living Igbo.³⁹⁹

However, in contrast to the Igbo that Uchendu describes whose ancestors were “organized in lineages with patrilineal emphasis just as are those on earth,”⁴⁰⁰ the reverse was the case among the Ohafia-Igbo, where the reconstitution of lineages in the ancestral world had a matrilineal emphasis, because the matrilineage, as opposed to the patrilineage was the dominant descent system. While libations were performed for male and female ancestors, the dominant religious practice was matrilineal ancestress veneration through the raising of pot mounments (*ududu*). As Amadiume observed in this regard in the case of Nnobi, individuals created their own gods and goddesses in terms of their own gender relations.⁴⁰¹

voice recording, Uduma Ukwu Village. November 17, 2011; *Ezie-nwami* Ucha Oji Iwe of Elu Village and her Cabinet, Group Interview; *Ikpirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu Village, Group Interview; Godwin Uko, *ezie-ogo* of Amankwu and his cabinet members, Group Interview by author; Anaso Awalekwa, *ezie-ogo* of Ndea-Nku and Members of the Men’s Court, Group Interview.

³⁹⁹ Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria*, 11-12.

⁴⁰⁰ Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria*, 12 defines cosmology as an action system of prescriptive ethics. In other words, it was human activities that gave meaning to the spirit world.

⁴⁰¹ Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, 99.

Among the Ohafia-Igbo before the 20th century, both men and women were buried inside their respective homes when they died.⁴⁰² During the burial, a hole was made in the ground, into the mouth of the interned deceased. This hole served as a link between the dead and the living; for in the period following the burial, drink was occasionally poured into it, in prayers and libation by family members of the deceased. It was this practice that established dead Ohafia-Igbo men and women as ancestors.⁴⁰³ However, while deceased individuals became ancestors, only a few were deified and worshipped. For men, deification (*idoru nna*) was restricted to warriors who had gone to war and brought back a human head as proof of their accomplishment.⁴⁰⁴ Such men were said to have accomplished *ufiem* (masculinity).⁴⁰⁵ Deceased male individuals who did not accomplish *ufiem* were not deified after death.⁴⁰⁶ After the deification ritual known as *idoru nna* (to lay a father to rest),⁴⁰⁷ a pot monument was raised in honor of the deceased *ufiem*. Men who did not receive the honor of *idoru-nna* were believed to constitute restless spirits, stuck between the world of the living and the dead, and attracted shame and derision to their

⁴⁰² Mayne, "Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934," 44. This burial practice was peculiar to Ohafia-Igbo people and shaped the practice of libation performances within the home.

⁴⁰³ *Ezie-nwami* Ogbonne Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Uduma Ukwu Village. Nov. 17, 2011; Ndukwe Otta and Elder Uduma Uka, Group Interview by author, Ebem Village. Aug. 14, 2010; Mecha Ukpai Akanu, *ezie-ogo* of Amangwu and Members of the Men's Court, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Amangwu Village. Aug. 18, 2011; Chief Udensi Ekea, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Aug. 4, 2010; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amangwu Village. August 15, 2011.

⁴⁰⁴ Mayne, "Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934," 45; Chief Eke Emetu Kalu, oral interview by author; Ndukwe Otta and Uduma Uka, Group Interview by author. For similar rituals in Afikpo, see Ottenberg, *Double Descent in an African Society*, 193, 197-198.

⁴⁰⁵ This subject is fully explored in Chapter 3.

⁴⁰⁶ N. Uka, "A Note on the 'Abam' Warriors of Igbo Land," *Ikenga: Journal of African Studies* 1, 2 (1972), 78; Azuonye, "The Heroic Age," 23.

⁴⁰⁷ The burial of *ufiem* and the rite of *idoru-nna* are fully explored in Chapter 3.

descendants.⁴⁰⁸ The *ududu* (pot monuments) of male ancestors were arranged in a chronological order in their patrilineage *obu* (meeting-hall),⁴⁰⁹ where they received libations during patrilineage meetings and rituals such as the New Yam Festival.⁴¹⁰ Notably, the male *ududu* emphasized individual accomplishments, and their representation as cult objects was confined to specific patrilineage segments, as opposed to the village-group.⁴¹¹

Deceased women on the other hand, had *ududu* raised in their honor within their matrilineages (*ikwu*). Upon the foundation of Ohafia-Igbo villages, the female descendants of the founding female settlers raised pot monuments (*ududu*) in honor of their mothers when they died, inaugurating the practice of *ududu* ancestor worship.⁴¹² Up to the early 20th century, daughters and sisters continued to raise *ududu* in honor of their mothers and sisters.⁴¹³ With population increase between the 17th and 20th centuries, each matrilineage had developed a number of sub-units called *ulue* (houses).⁴¹⁴ Each *ulue* was led by the oldest female member

⁴⁰⁸ Ndukwe Otta and Elder Uduma Uka, Group Interview by author.

⁴⁰⁹ Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 108

⁴¹⁰ Chief Eke Emetu Kalu, oral interview by author; Chief Emeh Okonkwo, oral interview by author; Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author; Chief Udensi Ekea, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Aug. 4, 2010; Chief Ikenga Ibe, in Group Interview with *nde ichin* (ten elders of) Amuma, digital voice recording, Amuma Village. Nov. 26, 2011; Chief Oluka Mba, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Nde-Ibe Village. Nov. 3, 2011.

⁴¹¹ Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 103.

⁴¹² Obuba, *The History and Culture of Ohafia*, 50. Ottenberg, *Double Descent in an African Society*, 204 records a similar practice among the Afikpo.

⁴¹³ Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 109

⁴¹⁴ *Ezie-nwami* Ogbonne Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Uduma Ukwu Village. Nov. 17, 2011; Ndukwe Otta and Elder Uduma Uka, Group Interview by author, Ebem Village. Aug. 14, 2010; Mecha Ukpai Akanu, *ezie-ogo* of Amangwu and Members of the Men's Court, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Amangwu Village. Aug. 18, 2011; Chief Udensi Ekea, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Aug. 4, 2010; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amangwu Village. August 15, 2011.

called *ezie-nwami*.⁴¹⁵ As the spiritual head of the matrilineage,⁴¹⁶ the *ezie-nwami ikwu* kept the successive *ududu* of her female ancestors, tracing their origins to a common founding ancestress. She chronologically arranged the *ududu* in her home, emphasizing an unbroken chain of matrilineage matriarchs.⁴¹⁷ Unlike the male *ududu*, which Nsugbe noted were not under the care of any particular priest, and thus suffered damage from exposure and neglect,⁴¹⁸ the female *ududu* were “fed” daily by the *ezie-nwami*,⁴¹⁹ as well as “on specific occasions prescribed by custom or at an emergency following the request for such a rite by a member of the matrilineage whose well-being needed to be assured.”⁴²⁰

These specific occasions prescribed by custom include annual ceremonies such as *omume iri uduma* (ritual inaugurating the farming season in April) and the New Yam Festival (ritual celebrating successful harvest in September). In both cases, the various *ezie-nwami ikwu* offered sacrifices on behalf of the entire Ohafia community, and for matrikin beyond Ohafia, in addition

⁴¹⁵ Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 93. “A male cannot be its ritual head.”

⁴¹⁶ The matrifocal leadership of the Ohafia-Igbo religious system differed significantly from the case of Afikpo, who Ottenberg describes as possessing “primary” matrilineal ties, but are best seen as a double-descent society, and where the matrilineal shrine was controlled by a priest and male elders. See Ottenberg, *Double Descent in an African Society*, 94-141, 204.

⁴¹⁷ Onwuka Njoku, oral conversation with author, University of Nigeria Nsukka, July 12, 2010; Ndukwe Otta and Uduma Uka, Group Interview; Obuba, *The History and Culture of Ohafia*, 50.

⁴¹⁸ Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 111. Nsugbe concluded that the female *ududu* “still evoke stronger and deeper emotions of loyalty even today than their male counterparts.”

⁴¹⁹ In addition to drink libations, these *ududu* were usually fed with pounded yam and *egusi* (mellon seed) soup, which was considered prestige food in pre-colonial Igbo societies. Chief Udensi Ekea, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. August 4, 2010; Ndukwe Otta and Uduma Uka, Group Interview, digital voice recording. Aug. 14, 2011; Chief Olua Iro Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Ebem Village Ohafia. August 3, 2010; Chief Kevin Ukiro, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Asaga. August 10, 2010.

⁴²⁰ Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 93.

to appeasing the matriarchal *ududu*.⁴²¹ In an agro-based economy dominated by women, the appeasement of female ancestors to insure good harvest, was accompanied by the appeasement of women by their husbands, during *omume iri uduma*.⁴²² Thus, every husband also paid a ritual homage to his wife, by weaving a beautiful basket and filling it with huge yam tubers, an expensive *jooji* wrapper cloth, and a hoe.⁴²³ During these ceremonies, men, women, and children from various Ohafia villages and neighboring towns trooped to the home of their respective *ezie-nwami ikwu* to worship Ohafia matriarchs, pray for the new farming year, and offer thanksgiving for good life and harvest.⁴²⁴ Hence, Uduma Uka stated that “*Ulue nne ikwu di eleghe ulue-uka mgbe ichin*”⁴²⁵ (the matrilineage mother’s home was like a church in the pre-colonial period.)

Unlike the male *ududu* which were confined to patrilineage segments, the matrilineage *ududu* enjoyed an inter-village and inter-ethnic religious loyalty. First, they were not stationary like the male *ududu*, because they moved with successive *ezie-nwami ikwu* to various

⁴²¹ Chief Udensi Ekea, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Aug. 4, 2010; Ndukwe Otta and Uduma Uka, Group Interview; Chief Olua Iro Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Ebem Village Ohafia. August 3, 2010; Chief Kevin Ukiro, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Asaga. August 10, 2010; *Ezie-ogo* Mba Odo Okereke (Modok), oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Akanu. October 26, 2011.

⁴²² Mayne, “Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934,” 46.

⁴²³ Chief Olua Iro Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Ebem. Aug. 3, 2010; Ndukwe Otta and Uduma Uka, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording. Aug. 14, 2011; Chief Emeh Okonkwo, oral interview by author. The hoe is significant in this regard, for as Nsugbe noted, “the more versatile farm tool, the hoe, is a woman’s tool in Ohaffia. But this is not so in those Ibo communities where farming is squarely a man’s occupation, where the hoe is a man’s tool and much bigger and heavier.” Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 22.

⁴²⁴ Arua, “Yam Ceremonies and the Values of Ohafia Culture,” 698; Ndukwe Otta and Uduma Uka, Group Interview, by author, digital voice recording. Aug. 14, 2011; Chief Eke Emetu Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording.

⁴²⁵ Ndukwe Otta and Uduma Uka, Group Interview, digital voice recording. Aug. 14, 2011.

patrilineage compounds and villages (natal or marital). Second, because as Njoku noted, the members of the matrilineage were resident “in every village,”⁴²⁶ and sometimes lived in patrilocal residences in neighboring communities,⁴²⁷ the matrilineage and its *ududu* enjoyed religious veneration beyond the segmentary patrilineage units. Thus, while members of a matrilineage were territorially dispersed, their allegiance to both the living heads of the group and the sacred pots (*ududu*) of their ancestresses, afforded them a formidable sense of cohesion, which inspired the notion, “father’s penis scatters; and mother’s womb gathers.”⁴²⁸ In this way, matrilineages and their matriarchs came to symbolize societal well-being and group solidarity.

Indeed, whereas it was the ambition of every Ohafia-Igbo man to attain *ufiem* status and earn the privilege of *idoru-anna* (deification), Ohafia-Igbo women did everything possible to have a daughter, who would immortalize them as a matrilineage matriarch, including purchasing and adopting female slaves, and becoming female husbands.⁴²⁹ Hence, the religious practices of the Ohafia-Igbo shaped gender ideologies of social power and status achievement and informed dynamic constructions of gender identities in the society before 1900. Secondly, Amadiume noted, “A phenomenon in Ohaffia, which is absent in accounts of patrilineal Igbo areas, is the ritual superiority of the female in the matrilineage.”⁴³⁰ She went further to write that unlike in Nnobi, where men sought control over women through their control of ancestral symbols and

⁴²⁶ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 26.

⁴²⁷ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 68.

⁴²⁸ Chief Eke Emetu Kalu, oral interview by author; Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 94; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 26.

⁴²⁹ Case studies of female husbands are presented in Chapter 5. For similar studies, see McCall, “Portrait of a Brave Woman,” 127-136; Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, 185-186; Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors and Kings*, 206-215; Achebe, “And She Became a Man,” 52-68; Achebe, *The Female King*, 97-196.

⁴³⁰ Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, 174.

rituals, men were never able to perform the role of *ezie-nwami ikwu* in Ohafia, while women sometimes fulfilled the secular role of superintending over the material wealth of the matrilineage, in the absence of an adult male.⁴³¹ This chapter suggests that the matrilineage provided the basis for profound mother-centered or pro-feminist (matrifocal) ideologies and principles, which translated into female dominance in the agro-based economy, and informed the adoption of extreme mechanisms of punishment by *ikpirikpe* (the female court) in defending the rights of individual women, and the rules governing moral precepts in their society (chapter 2).

The Matrifocal Definition of Ohafia-Igbo Citizenship

Among the Ohafia-Igbo before the 20th century, the patrilineage was a temporary owner of persons and property, and citizenship (rights, duties, and privileges based on socially-accepted definitions of descent, belongingness, inheritance, succession, and burial) was defined through membership of a matrilineage. According to Nnenna Obuba, “By Ohafia customary law, a child belonged to his/her matrilineage.”⁴³² Thus, in contrast to patrilineal Igbo societies where children belonged to their fathers and their patrilineage (*umunna*) upon divorce, and where first daughters had to become gendered male by avoiding marriage, in order to retain their father’s heritable wealth;⁴³³ among the Ohafia-Igbo, all children belonged to their mother upon divorce, and all heritable property of a deceased individual reverted to his or her maternal relatives

⁴³¹ Ibid.

⁴³² Obuba, *The History and Culture of Ohafia*, 49.

⁴³³ Amadiume define such daughters as “male daughters,” and Achebe argues they are best seen as “female sons” since they changed gender and not biology. Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, 31-33; Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors and Kings*, 206-215; Achebe, “And She Became a Man,” 52-68. This author also found similar cases of “male daughters” as well as “female husbands” among the Inyi people of Enugu State in the course of his B.A. thesis research in 2006. See Ndubueze Leonard Mbah, “Some Aspects of the History of Inyi, 1907-1968 (University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 2007).

(*ikwu*), as opposed to the patrilineage (*umudi*). This was because a man belonged to a different matrilineage (his mother's) while his children belonged to another matrilineage (their mother's).⁴³⁴

Until colonial rule, a family unit within a patrilineage compound may at any time comprise of a husband and wife (or wives), their children by blood, dependent relations, adopted children, indentured servants, slaves, and resident specialists such as *dibia* (spirit-medium and medicare providers).⁴³⁵ Both male and female members of a patrilineage were often localized within their patrilineage compound because of patrilineage endogamy, but some female members also married and lived far away from their patrilineages.⁴³⁶ Spouses had little or no right over each other's property, and women were economically self-sufficient.⁴³⁷ At the death of a man, his patrilineage, his matrilineage, and his wife's matrilineage often took great interest in redistributing his property. The only property which his eldest son (*okwara*) inherited was his house. However, if this house was erected on land pledged from a matrilineage, it reverted back to the matrilineage upon the death of the individual.⁴³⁸ The deceased's eldest sister took charge

⁴³⁴ Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 72-78. Ohafia matrifocal conceptions of citizenship are further reflected in the etymology of matrilineage (*ikwu*) and patrilineage (*umudi*). As Nsugbe shows, *ikwu* (matrilineage) in Ohafia refers to a distinct descent system and denotes "the descendants of an original 'mother' [whose members are] related to each other through females only;" in contrast to patrilineal Igbo societies where *ikwu* has a more temporal meaning as the immediate blood relatives of one's mother. On the other hand, the term for patrilineage, *umudi* (children of mother's husband) among the Ohafia-Igbo is configured from a woman's perspective as half-siblings (the children of a man from other wife/wives). This was in contrast to other Igbo societies where the patrilineage (*umunna* - children of an original father) is defined from a male-centered perspective as a distinct descent category.

⁴³⁵ Obuba, *The History and Culture of Ohafia*, 49.

⁴³⁶ Mayne, "Intelligence Report," 39; Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 75.

⁴³⁷ Obuba, *The History and Culture of Ohafia*, 51.

⁴³⁸ Obuba, *The History and Culture of Ohafia*, 53.

of all his property, including land, farm produce, slaves and adopted children, which she publicly transferred to her own son, or mother's brother in that order.⁴³⁹

If the deceased had no brother, his eldest sister inherited his property, and if he had no sibling, his mother became the inheritor.⁴⁴⁰ The deceased's biological children belonged to their mother, who either chose to live alone or remarry, since widow-inheritance was viewed with horror among the Ohafia-Igbo, in contrast to patrilineal Igbo societies.⁴⁴¹ If the deceased was a married woman, her daughters shared her property including land, slaves, house, money, farm produce, economic trees, and personal effects such as clothes, ornaments, and kitchen utensils, the eldest receiving the largest share. If she was unmarried, her eldest sister inherited her property. In the absence of the deceased's sister, her mother took her place.⁴⁴² In either case, the inheritors were maternal relatives, while patrilineage members were marginalized. The trustee took responsibility for the deceased's debts and burial expenses, and the deceased's matrilineage

⁴³⁹ Mayne, "Intelligence Report," 42; Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 86, 89-92.

⁴⁴⁰ Mayne, "Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934," 43.

⁴⁴¹ Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 82; Workshop on Widowhood Practices, *Widowhood Practices in Imo State: Proceedings of the Better Life Programme for Rural Women Workshop, Multi-Purpose Hall, Owerri, June 6-7* (Owerri: Government Printer, 1989); Felix Ekechi, *Tradition and Transformation in Eastern Nigeria* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1989); Chima Korie, "Widowhood Among the Igbo of Eastern Nigeria" (M.A Thesis, University of Bergen, Norway, 1996); Augustine C. Odimegwa, "Widowhood and the Dignity of Womanhood in Igboland: A Pastoral Challenge to the Discipleship of the Roman Catholic Church in Igboland," (Jan. 1, 2010).

⁴⁴² Mayne, "Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934," 44; Obuba, *The History and Culture of Ohafia*, 55. The children of a male member of the matrilineage are referred to as *umu ikwu* (children of the matrilineage) while their father's male and female siblings constitute *nna* (father) to the children. The children of a female member of the matrilineage on the other hand constitute the *umunne* (brothers and sisters) to the matrilineage, and inherit within it. Thus, at any point in time, an individual was simultaneously, *nwa ikwu* (child of the matrilineage) to his father's matrilineage, and *nwanne* (brother or sister) to his mother's matrilineage. The individual had no inheritance right from his or her father as *nwa ikwu*; but he or she had inheritance rights from his or her mother as *nwanne*. Also, whereas women constituted an eternal link of successive inheritance, men could not pass any significant property to their children.

presided over his/her funeral.⁴⁴³ In effect, all persons and property ultimately belonged to a matrilineage as opposed to a patrilineage. Thus, Uchendu's assertion that "An Igbo without 'umunna' [patrilineage] . . . is an Igbo without citizenship,"⁴⁴⁴ does not hold true for the Ohafia-Igbo, where the parameter of citizenship was membership in a matrilineage before colonial rule.

The matrifocal definition of citizenship shaped the rights of individual men and women. Divorce was granted at the wish of either spouse, unlike in patrilineal Igbo societies, where it was difficult for women to obtain divorce.⁴⁴⁵ According to Nnenna Emeri and Mmia Bassey, before the advent of Christianity (1911), women expressed divorce by simply gathering their property and children and moving out of their husband's house. If the husband contested the grounds for divorce, the wife then initiated a formal legal petition (*ikpe kupu m aka*), which in practice, entailed her approaching the members of her husband's patrilineage with a drink to formally inform them of her decision.⁴⁴⁶ In the divorce process, a woman's greatest ally was her matrilineage, to which she and her children represented both productive and reproductive resources to be safeguarded.⁴⁴⁷ Divorce rate among the Ohafia-Igbo was very high before the 20th century, but prostitution was curtailed due to a practice called *jonkijo*, where every four

⁴⁴³ Mayne, "Intelligence Report," 44; Obuba, *The History and Culture of Ohafia*, 52.

⁴⁴⁴ Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria*, 13.

⁴⁴⁵ Mayne, "Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934," 47-48. The difficulty of divorce for women in patrilineal Igbo societies was not a result of the notion that wives were property to their husbands as Meek and Basden argued, but rather, the difficulty stemmed from the complex processes of bride-price repayment, which often resulted in the wife's relatives pressurizing her to remain with her husband. See Basden, *Among the Ibos*, 76-77; Meek, *Law and Authority*, 279-284; Korieh, "Widowhood Among the Igbo of Eastern Nigeria," Chapter 1.

⁴⁴⁶ Nnenna Emeri and Mmia Nnaya Bassey, in Group Interview with *Ikipirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu. Nov. 3, 2011. The formal declaration of divorce was necessary because it was taboo for a divorcee to resume cohabitation with his/her spouse without a formal ritual of reunion.

⁴⁴⁷ *Ikipirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu Village, Group Interview with author. Nov. 3, 2011.

years, widows or unmarried women, had an opportunity to choose a man as a husband, and any man thus chosen had no choice but to become husband.⁴⁴⁸

Whereas the death of a male represented a relative increase in the redistributive resources of his matrilineage, the death of a female constituted a grave loss, because the wealth in persons and property which her offspring would have accrued the matrilineage were lost forever. Thus, Njoku noted that “it was considered a calamitous circumstance if a matrilineage was faced with the possible extinction of its femalefolk.”⁴⁴⁹ Nsugbe also writes:

Daughters were highly prized in Ohaffia, so much so that a prosperous Ohaffia household without any would endeavour to acquire or ‘purchase’ women from *outside* Ohaffia . . . They were ‘purchased’ mainly from the neighbouring patrilineal Ibo communities, as well as from groups east of Ohaffia at a much higher cost than [married] Ohaffia women. When married they were referred to as either *aluralu* (‘married’ but also connoting ‘purchased’) or *ohu nwanyi* (‘slave woman’; ‘slave’ here connoting ‘expensive’) . . . Children resulting from such marriages, although regarded as full and free-born citizens, did not, by Ohaffia custom, belong to their father’s patrilineage. On their father’s death they were passed over to their father’s matrilineage (*ikwu*).⁴⁵⁰

The act of marrying wives from patrilineal societies was a mechanism through which male and female husbands ensured the continuity of their dwindling matrilineages.⁴⁵¹ Ugo Nwokeji noted that women bought and owned female slaves in 19th century Arochukwu as well, and argues that this was what Ifi Amadiume “misidentified as ‘female husbands’.”⁴⁵² However, among the Ohafia-Igbo during the same period, women not only married wives, thereby becoming female husbands, they also purchased and owned female slaves, some of whom they

⁴⁴⁸ Chief K.K. Owen, oral interview by author; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author; Chief Oluo Iro Kalu, oral interview by author.

⁴⁴⁹ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 26.

⁴⁵⁰ Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 83.

⁴⁵¹ See Chapter 5 for discussion of female husbands and masculinity performance.

⁴⁵² Nwokeji, “African Conceptions of Gender and the Slave Traffic,” 58

distributed as wives to their matri-kin.⁴⁵³ This was in contrast to Ottenberg's observation in the case of Afikpo, that "there was no device of bringing an outside female into the [matrilineal] descent group as a fictional relative to produce children for a dying matrilineage."⁴⁵⁴ In Ohafia, the stranger-wife's means of incorporation as a legitimate member of society was her membership of a matrilineage. Having no matrilineage of her own within Ohafia, she automatically became a member of her husband's matrilineage. Such a wife was regarded as *nwannediya* (husband's sister) and as such, received special care and attention from her husband and his matrilineage.⁴⁵⁵ In contrast to the view that *nwannediya* symbolized wealth and affluence of her husband's family,⁴⁵⁶ Ohafia-Igbo women forged critical discourses against this incorporation of stranger-wives into their community. In their view, patrilineal Igbo women were "expensive property" and "slaves" of the matrilineage, unlike indigenous wives.⁴⁵⁷ Women shaped discourses of legitimate citizenship through gossip, rumor, *iko-onu* (verbal aspersions) and rituals such as *uzo-iyi* (virginity test) during which they made distinctions of citizenship.⁴⁵⁸

⁴⁵³ Ndukwe Otta and Elder Uduma Uka, Group Interview by author, Ebem, Ohafia. August 14, 2010; Chief Kevin Ukiro, oral interview by author; Hon. Tessy Uzoma Odum, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Ebem Ohafia Local Govt. Council Office. Sept. 5, 2011.

⁴⁵⁴ Ottenberg, *Double Descent in an African Society*, 141.

⁴⁵⁵ Obuba, *The History and Culture of Ohafia*, 51.

⁴⁵⁶ Nwannediya Mmonwu-Oti, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Ndi Owom, Okon Village. August 5, 2010; Nmia Nnaya Agbai, oral interview by author; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amangwu Village, Ohafia. August 15, 2011.

⁴⁵⁷ *Ikipirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu Village, Group Interview with author. Nov. 3, 2011; Ndukwe Otta and Elder Uduma Uka, Group Interview by author, Ebem Village, Ohafia. August 14, 2010; Chief Kevin Ukiro, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Asaga Village, Ohafia. August 10, 2010; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 26.

⁴⁵⁸ Nmia Nnaya Agbai, oral interview by author; Mama Orie Emeh and Chief Mrs. Grace Ojieke, oral interview. See Chapter 3 for detailed discussion of *uzo-iyi* ritual.

Through discourses and marriage practices, Ohafia-Igbo women also defined themselves as the only mechanism through which Ohafia-Igbo men and male individuals from the neighboring Cross River ethnic communities historically attained legal citizenship within Ohafia, since it was the husband's and children's belongingness to the wife and mother, respectively, that assured them citizenship.⁴⁵⁹ Through inter-marriage with non-Igbo ethnic communities, Ohafia-Igbo women transformed the multi-ethnic Cross-River region into a network of matrilineal kin-relationships, such that various Ibibio and Ekoi ethnic communities have had chiefs of Ohafia maternal descent.⁴⁶⁰ Since all children belonged to their mother's matrilineage, Ohafia-Igbo women who married outside Ohafia produced children who had property and citizenship rights within Ohafia, as well as in their father's ethnic homeland. Thus, before the 20th century, individuals were occasionally invited from outside Ohafia to succeed to matrilineally-inherited political offices within Ohafia.⁴⁶¹ This was not possible in patrilineal Igbo societies.

By appropriating the cluster of norms and practices that constitute matriliney,⁴⁶² individuals transcended ethnic boundaries in the Cross River region through marriage, divorce,

⁴⁵⁹ *Ezie-nwami* Ogbonne Kalu Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Uduma Ukwu. Nov. 17, 2011; *Ezie-nwami* Ucha Oji Iwe of Elu Village and her Cabinet, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording. October 25, 2011; *Ikpirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu Village, Group Interview; Mama Ori Emeh and Chief Mrs. Grace Ojieke, Group Interview; Mama Docas Kalu and Mama Mary Ezera, Group Interview; Nmia Nnaya Agbai, oral interview.

⁴⁶⁰ Mayne, "Intelligence Report," 23; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 68.

⁴⁶¹ Mayne, "Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934," 23; Kalu Awa Kalu, oral interview by author; Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author; Chief Eke Emetu Kalu, oral interview by author; Chief Emeh Okonkwo, oral interview by author; Chief Olua Iro Kalu, oral interview by author; *Ezie-nwami* Ucha Oji Iwe of Elu and her Cabinet, Group Interview; *Ikpirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu Village, Group Interview; Mecha Ukpai Akanu, *ezie-ogo* of Amangwu and Members of the Men's Court, Group Interview.

⁴⁶² For this view of matriliney as an appropriable ideology as opposed to a system, see Turner, *Schism and Continuity in an African Society*, 89, 242-243; Holy, *Strategies and Norms in a*

and inheritance before the 20th century. These practices enabled Ohafia-Igbo women to strengthen the matrilineage because, whereas the patrilineage gained strength through demographic unity and concentric expansion, the matrilineage gained strength through spatial and demographic diversity, segmentation and dispersal.⁴⁶³ The premier social position of women in Ohafia-Igbo society enabled them to play a central role in the reproduction and perpetuation of the matrilineage until British colonial rule.⁴⁶⁴

Ohafia matrifocal conception of citizenship was particularly exotic to the Western experience, and was regarded in anthropology as a special problem.⁴⁶⁵ The constant fissure (high divorce rate) of the nuclear family in African matrilineal societies preoccupied early

Changing Matrilineal Society; Mahir, "Matrilineal Inheritance," 346; Peters, "Introduction," 126-130, 141; Crehan, "Of Chickens and Guinea Fowl," 211-213.

⁴⁶³ Ottenberg, *Double Descent in an African Society*, 140-141.

⁴⁶⁴ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 25.

⁴⁶⁵ The classical evolutionists defined matriliney as a complex of traits and banished it to the beginnings of human society, while the structural-functionalists later redefined it as a "puzzle" – a fragile complex prone to breakdown upon contact with modernity and social complexity. See Audrey Richards, "Some Types of Family Structure Among the Central Bantu," in A.R. Radcliffe-Brown and C.D. Forde, eds., *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage* (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), 246. From the 1950s, the "matrilineal puzzle" pre-occupied anthropologists who began to study the so-called "matrilineal belt" – the region from Angola eastwards, through sections of Zaire, Zambia and Malawi, to the Indian Ocean coast of Mozambique and Tanzania. The conflict between the husband and the wife's brother(s) over the control of children became the definition of African matrilineal societies, and the focus of study until the 1980s. Anthropologists assumed that the only productive and inheritable property in African matrilineal societies was children of the matrilineage. The means of distribution of sons, daughters, sisters, brothers, nephews, and nieces, defined the social structure. The resultant structural-functionalist argument that men found ways out of the "matrilineal puzzle" by opting out of matrilocal residence, replacing bride-service with bride-wealth, and favoring their own sons (as opposed to sisters' sons) as primary heirs, was very andro-centric and facilitated the 1970s/80s feminist back-lash. The fear that colonialism would erode African cultures and that under the pressure of capitalist individualism, African matrilineal societies founded on distributive communalism, would become patrilineal, also fostered a salvage ethnographic mentality. See L.L. Langness, *The Study of Culture* (California: Chandler and Sharp, 2005).

studies on African matriliney, resulting in the definition of matriliney as deviant and unstable.⁴⁶⁶ However, these scholars failed to see that the matrilineage, rather than the nuclear family, constituted the primary social unit in African matrilineal societies.⁴⁶⁷ They also overlooked the fact that while the nuclear family and the patrilineage were temporary social systems of individual identification, matrilineage practices such as cross-cousin marriage ensured the stability of both the nuclear family and the patrilineage. Hence, matriliney did not generate an unstable social system. In Ohafia, sons and daughters of a man could marry sons and daughters of the man's sister, and *vice versa*, because the couple belonged to two different matrilineages, even though they were members of the same patrilineage.⁴⁶⁸ In effect, while the matrilineages

⁴⁶⁶ The study of African matriliney progressed from evolutionism to structural-functionalism. The anthropologists trained by Branislaw Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown, including Audrey Richards, Margaret Read, Fred Eggan, Meyer Fortes, Clyde Mitchell, Elizabeth Colson and Victor Turner, all studied matrilineal societies in Africa. See Sally Falk Moore, *Anthropology and Africa: Changing Perspectives on a Changing Scene* (Charlottesville: the University Press of Virginia, 1994), 8-15. Within the structural-functionalist model, African matrilineal societies were studied merely as examples of functionally integrated social structures or "systems" and within the context of wider theoretical interests founded on evolutionism. Since the 1900s, matriliney has been conceptualized as anomalous, primitive, and crisis-ridden. For a review of the early literature by scholars such as J.J. Bachofen, McLennan, E.B. Tylor and Morgan, see David M. Schneider and Kathleen Gough, eds. *Matrilineal Kinship* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), 3-23. George Murdock, *Social Structure* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1949) argued that matriliney created conflict in the nuclear family; it was a destabilizing influence to civilized, Christian family values. Levi-Strauss, Mary Douglass, and David Schneider made similar arguments. See Mary Douglas, "Is Matriliney Doomed in Africa?" in Mary Douglas and Phyllis M. Kaberry eds. *Man in Africa* (New York: Anchor Books, 1969), 122-123. The structural-functionalist model focused on "a bounded social structure" and anything that appeared to divide a person's identification with the conjugal family was assumed to create problems. However, the "dispersal" of women through marriage in non-matrilineal societies was never considered a problem or "puzzle." This perception of matriliney as deviance generated a large literature on high rates of divorce among matrilineal peoples in Africa. See Meyer Fortes, "Structure of Unilineal Descent Groups," *American Anthropologist* 55 (1953).

⁴⁶⁷ Schneider and Gough, eds. *Matrilineal Kinship*, vii-xx; Peters, "Introduction," 127-134.

⁴⁶⁸ Nsugbe, *Ohafia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 73, 79.

were exogamous (no inter-marriage within them), the patrilineage groups (*umudi*) were endogamous (paternal cousins inter-married).⁴⁶⁹ In patrilineal Igbo societies, this was taboo.

Ikwu Nwe Ali - The Matrilineage Owns the Land: Gendered Implications of Changes in Property Ownership and Inheritance Among the Ohafia-Igbo, 1850-1920

Land means many things to the Igbo. It is the domain of the earth-goddess, a burial place for the ancestors, a place to live on and make a living. Land is therefore *the most important asset to the people*. It is a source of security, which is *emotionally protected from alienation*. It is believed that a people cannot have too much land and that no opportunity to acquire *rights in land* should be lost.⁴⁷⁰ [*Italics mine.*]

In addition to the literature on African matriliney, my examination of changing practices of property ownership and inheritance is informed by Anthony Hopkin's observation that studies of West African property rights have focused overwhelmingly on slaves and wage labor.⁴⁷¹ This has birthed the notion that land was surplus, freely given, and not a basis of socio-economic

⁴⁶⁹ This author witnessed three cases of endogamous patrilineage marriages during his fieldwork.

⁴⁷⁰ Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria*, 22. This quote is inserted here for its ambiguity. It suggests that the Igbo were averse to land sale before the 20th century, but also suggests that individuals and groups sought avenues to acquire land. Second, it is a counter to John Thornton's popular assumption that since "African law *made land available to whoever would cultivate it*, free or slave, as long as no previous cultivator was actively using it," Africans did not have private ownership of land as an alienable factor of production, and thus, slave labor (including marriage which he defines as an "institution of dependency," since "ownership of labor also constituted slavery") or rights-in-people (Miers and Kopytoff) became the only privately owned factor of production, hence slavery was so widespread in Africa before the Atlantic slave trade. See John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1680* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 84-87; Igor Kopytoff and Suzanne Miers, "Introduction: 'African Slavery' as an Institution of Marginality," in Miers and Kopytoff (eds), *Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1977), 7-11. As this study shows, individual land alienation was common among the Ohafia-Igbo, through rent, leases, and later on in the mid-19th century, sale. Among the Ohafia-Igbo, land was not abundant and individuals did not have free access to land. Rights-in-land was earned through kin-networks as well as private capital.

⁴⁷¹ Anthony G. Hopkins, "Property Rights and Empire Building: Britain's Annexation of Lagos, 1861" *The Journal of Economic History* 40, 4 (Dec., 1980), 797.

differentiation in pre-colonial African societies,⁴⁷² while slaves were the only alienable and revenue-generating factor of production.⁴⁷³ As Assan Sarr demonstrates with regard to the Lower Gambia basin between the 19th and 20th centuries, emphasis on rights/wealth-in-people/slaves ignores the political and social value pre-colonial Africans placed on land, and obscures the fact that both Western influences and local forces shaped changing land-tenure practices.⁴⁷⁴

Land was the chief resource of the Ohafia-Igbo and the basis of their socio-economic organization in the pre-colonial period. A key part of the mechanism of Ohafia-Igbo land acquisition and population expansion upon settlement in the Cross-River region was inter-marriage with the pre-existing matrilineal Ekoi and bilateral Ibibio peoples.⁴⁷⁵ Contrary to the notion that matriliney disintegrates upon contact with patrilineal societies, the patrilineal Ohafia-

⁴⁷² Jack Glazier, *Land and the Uses of Tradition Among the Mbeere of Kenya* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1985), 1-2; R.E. Downs and S.Reyna (eds.) *Land and Society in Contemporary Africa* (London: University Press of New England, 1988), 13; Joseph C. Miller, *Way of Death: Merchant Capitalism and the Angolan Slave Trade, 1730-1830* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 44; John L. Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, *Of revelation and revolution: The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier*, Vol. II (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 369.

⁴⁷³ Thornton, *Africa and Africans*, 74-78; Martin Klein (ed.) *Peasants in Africa: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (London: Sage, 1980), 13-22, 43; Miller, *Way of Death*, 43-44.

⁴⁷⁴ Assan Sarr, "Land and Historical Change in a River Valley: Property, Power and Dependency in the Lower Gambia Basin, Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries," 7-11.

⁴⁷⁵ Mr. Davidson Kalu Oki, oral interview by author, Okon. August 5, 2010; *Dibia Kalu Uko*, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon Village, Ohafia, September 14 and 20, 2011; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author. According to Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 18, this practice was informed by Ohafia-Igbo experience at Ibeku, where their neighbors the Osa, were reluctant to part with their daughters as wives to the Ohafia. When they did, they accepted no marriage payment, and rather insisted that the children of such marriages would inherit from them and belong to their descent group. The Ohafia however received marriage payments for any daughters they married to the Osa. As a result, the Ohafia lost their rights over their sons as well as their daughters, because what they gained in monetary value, they lost in persons. While the Osa population expanded, Ohafia-Igbo population thinned out. As a result argues Nsugbe, the Ohafia-Igbo adopted matriliney upon settlement in their present location.

Igbo, like the Ngoni studied by Kings Phiri, became matrilinealized upon contact with societies, which possessed dominant matrilineal or mother-centered practices. The result was that before the 20th century, most land were communally owned, most of these belonged to matrilineages, and access to land was governed by an individual's membership in a matrilineage.⁴⁷⁶

However, individuals negotiated private access to land through kinship networks, leases, pledges and rent.⁴⁷⁷ The negotiation of rights-in-land through kinship networks was gendered. Men gained access to farming land through women — mothers (descent) and wives (marriage), while women qualified for individual land allocation through marriage.⁴⁷⁸ In effect, individuals received land portions upon reaching adult status, which was defined by marriage and the establishment of a new home.⁴⁷⁹ Upon marriage, a man received a tiny portion of *ala ezi* (patrilineal land) for settlement within the compound, and had access to two categories of matrilineage land for farming: *agbugbo ezi* (land immediately beyond patrilineage compounds)

⁴⁷⁶ Obuba, *The History and Culture of Ohafia*, 49-56; Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 87-88; Ndukwe Otta and Elder Uduma Uka, Group Interview by author, Ebem. August 14, 2010; Chief Kevin Ukiro, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Asaga. August 10, 2010. Ottenberg's observation in the case of Afikpo that all but about 15 percent of farmland was matrilineally controlled was even truer for the Ohafia-Igbo where the matrilineage owned all but residential units. See Ottenberg, *Double Descent in an African Society*, 204.

⁴⁷⁷ Chief Udensi Ekea, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Aug. 4, 2010; Elders of Umu-Anyia Family, Ndi Imaga Compound, Elu Village, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording. Aug. 14, 2011; Mecha Ukpai Akanu, *Ezie-ogo* of Amangwu Village and Members of the Men's Court, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording. Aug. 18, 2011; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author, Amangwu Village, Ohafia. August 15, 2011.

⁴⁷⁸ Mayne, "Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934," 41; Ndukwe Otta and Elder Uduma Uka, Group Interview by author, Ebem, Ohafia. Aug. 14, 2010; Chief Kevin Ukiro, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Asaga, Ohafia. Aug. 10, 2010; Obuba, *The History and Culture of Ohafia*, 49-56; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author.

⁴⁷⁹ Mayne, "Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934," 43; Chief Udensi Ekea, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. August 4, 2010; Chief K.K. Owen, oral interview by author; Nmia Nnaya Agbai, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Elu. August 18, 2011; Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria*, 86.

and *agu* (bush or forests land).⁴⁸⁰ Women similarly earned rights to these categories of matrilineage land upon marriage.⁴⁸¹

Also, patrilineages often leased land (*ala ukwuzi*) from matrilineages for settlement and agricultural purposes. In the latter case, male and female members received parcels for their agricultural needs, each individual maintaining rights over his or her produce.⁴⁸² This land tenure system guaranteed Ohafia women economic autonomy, and their dominant role in agricultural production enabled them to enjoy bread-winner status before the 20th century. Moreover, the fact that Ohafia women inherited and passed on land to their descendants was in sharp contrast to patrilineal Igbo societies where women did not own land in the pre-colonial period.⁴⁸³

Beyond kin-based land rights, individual men and women pledged, leased or rented land by establishing a lien on the land through the provision of variable forms of wealth such as yams and slaves.⁴⁸⁴ As the British colonial officer C.J. Mayne noted in his Intelligence Report on the Ohafia-Igbo, such privately owned land was “controlled by the individual and all matters in connection with pledging or renting was for him to decide.”⁴⁸⁵ Thus, individuals not only

⁴⁸⁰ Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 89.

⁴⁸¹ Mayne, “Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934,” 41; *Ikipirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu, Group Interview with author. Nov. 3, 2011. Upon divorce, husband and wife lost access to each other’s farming land.

⁴⁸² Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 23, 88-89; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 38. *Agbugbo ezi* land, which patrilineages pledged from matrilineages for settlement and farming, always reverted back to the matrilineage when the sites became abandoned.

⁴⁸³ M.M. Green, *Land Tenure in an Ibo Village in South-Eastern Nigeria* (London: LSEPS, 1941), 12-13; L.T. Chubb, *Ibo Land tenure* (Ibadan, 1961); Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria*, 87.

⁴⁸⁴ Mayne, “Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934,” 41.

⁴⁸⁵ Mayne, “Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934,” 41.

acquired land as private property, they also possessed the right to further rent or lease the property to another. Mayne also noted, “It was gathered that in olden days, land was sometimes sold but not often and then only to some person in the same town . . . It might be added that . . . in order to raise money in olden days sale of land was resorted to.”⁴⁸⁶ Hence, Thornton’s claim that private land ownership and alienation was alien in pre-colonial Africa, and that slave labor was the only privately owned factor of production,⁴⁸⁷ is unfounded in the Ohafia-Igbo case.

Land sale was indeed rare until the 20th century, not because of any “African law” as Thornton claims, but rather, because the political-economy of land usage until the mid-19th century was subsistence-based. Thus, during the 1860-1900 growth of legitimate trade, individuals who acquired wealth through continued slave production as well as long-distance trade, rented land from their matrilineages, as did their forebears, but this time, they established oil palm, kola-nut, cocoa, and wine palm plantations.⁴⁸⁸ A few of these individuals who performed *ogaranya* (wealth) masculinity outrightly purchased land in the 1870s.⁴⁸⁹ Hence, communal land ownership became increasingly complimented by large-scale individual land usage.⁴⁹⁰ This new land tenure practice was cash-crop driven, reliant on slave labor and male-dominated. Hopkins and Sara Berry have shown similar transformations in land tenure in Lagos and the Gold Coast respectively, as a result of the expansive growth in cash crop production

⁴⁸⁶ Mayne, “Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934,” 41.

⁴⁸⁷ Thornton, *Africa and Africans*, 84-87.

⁴⁸⁸ For the case of Nna Udensi Ekea (1840s-1916), see chapter 4; and for Chief Kalu Ezelu Uwaoma (c.1870-1968), see chapter 5. Such individuals performed *ogaranya* masculinity.

⁴⁸⁹ Mayne, “Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934,” 42; Chief Udensi Ekea, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. August 4, 2010.

⁴⁹⁰ Mayne, “Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934,” 41.

during this period.⁴⁹¹ By the 20th century, with the growth of a colonial market economy, individual land acquisition through purchase became common-place in Ohafia.⁴⁹²

These changing practices of land-tenure reflected broader changes in practices of property ownership and inheritance between the 1850 and 1900, which occasioned transformations in lineage practices among the Ohafia-Igbo. As individual property ownership increased, the transmission of property beyond the control of matrilineages also increased.

The major heritable form of individual property before the 20th century, was movable property such as livestock, food, clothes, ornaments, utensils, furniture, and agricultural tools.⁴⁹³ Father-son inheritance was restricted to this form of property. Wealthy individuals who wished to avert the complete transfer of their wealth to their sister's son tried to provide for their own sons as much as possible while they were still alive. Yam (*Dioscorea rotundata* and *Dioscorea cayenensis*) was a major form of wealth in the 19th century.⁴⁹⁴ Fathers usually provided their sons with their first yam seedlings in an adult initiation ritual called *igwa oba* (to start a yam barn).⁴⁹⁵ Those who desired to play a more active role in their son's life also provided the bride-

⁴⁹¹ Hopkins, "Property Rights and Empire Building," 790; Sara Berry, *No Condition is Permanent: The Social Dynamics of Agrarian Change in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), 16.

⁴⁹² Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 38; Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 90.

⁴⁹³ Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 122; Chief Olua Iro Kalu, oral interview by author; Chief Kevin Ukiro, oral interview by author; Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author; Chief Eke Emetu Kalu, oral interview by author; Chief Emeh Okonkwo, oral interview by author; Chief Kalu Awa Kalu, oral interview by author; Chief K.K. Owen, oral interview by author.

⁴⁹⁴ See Chapter 5 for detailed discussion of yam and masculinity performance.

⁴⁹⁵ Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 122; Chief Olua Iro Kalu, oral interview by author; Chief Kevin Ukiro, oral interview by author; Ndukwe Otta and Elder Uduma Uka, Group Interview by author; Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral

price for their son's first wife, and presented their son with a machete and farmland.⁴⁹⁶ Such fathers gained respect as *ufiem* (performed masculinity) because they had risen to their social obligations, in spite of their son's matrilineage, and enabled their sons to establish a home (*ibi ulo*) and attain adult masculinity.⁴⁹⁷

By the mid-19th century, wealthy fathers who often performed *ogaranya* masculinity by purchasing large tracts of land began to apportion land and plantation farms to their sons, while they were still alive. This property transfer was as a rule, transacted in the presence of the individual's matrilineage, otherwise his son lost his claims upon his father's death.⁴⁹⁸ Simon Ottenberg recorded a similar case among the Afikpo village-group.⁴⁹⁹ Also, during this period, when gun ownership had become more widespread,⁵⁰⁰ distinguished hunters (*di nta*) bequeathed guns to their sons, who often served as their apprentices.⁵⁰¹ Lastly, fathers transferred money

interview by author; Chief Eke Emetu Kalu, oral interview by author; Chief Emeh Okonkwo, oral interview by author; Chief Kalu Awa Kalu, oral interview by author.

⁴⁹⁶ Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author, Amangwu. Aug. 15, 2011.

⁴⁹⁷ Chief Udensi Ekea, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon. Aug. 4, 2010.

⁴⁹⁸ Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 122; Chief Udensi Ekea, oral interview by author, Okon. Aug. 4, 2010; Elders of Umu-Anya Family, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Elu. Aug. 14, 2011; Mecha Ukpai Akanu, *ezie-ogo* of Amangwu and Members of the Men's Court, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording. Aug. 18, 2011; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amangwu Village, Ohafia. August 15, 2011.

⁴⁹⁹ Ottenberg, *Double Descent in an African Society*, 199-202.

⁵⁰⁰ FO84/1701: "Africa: Slave Trade, West Coast, 1885," 298-300; CO520/11: "Southern Nigeria Original Correspondence," 538-540; CO520/15: "Southern Nigeria Original Correspondence, July to October, 1902," 492-497; Arthur G. Leonard, "Notes of a Journey to Bende," *The Journal of the Manchester Geographical Society*, XIV (1898), 196; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 40; Isichei, *The Ibo and the Europeans* (London: Oxford Uni. Press, 1973), 52.

⁵⁰¹ Ogbuka Abaa, oral interview by author, Isiugwu Village Ohafia. Dec. 10, 2011.

and businesses to their sons,⁵⁰² and whatever an individual received from his father while he was still alive, the matrilineage could not take away.⁵⁰³

In the last quarter of the 19th century, individuals negotiated matrilineage control over personally acquired landed property in two major ways. First, women increasingly made financial contributions to their husband's land purchase, such that upon the passing of their husband, they and their children inherited the estate to the exclusion of the husband's maternal relatives.⁵⁰⁴ Second, sons popularized a practice of burying their deceased fathers on land the deceased had privately purchased, thereby transforming such land from matrilineage property into patrilineage compounds, which they then inherited, as opposed to the matrilineage.⁵⁰⁵

Personally acquired property at the turn of the 20th century consisted mainly of land, estates, business ventures, and movable property such as automobiles within Ohafia, but also outside Ohafia in emerging colonial cities such as Umuahia, Aba, Enugu and PortHarcourt.⁵⁰⁶ The new forms of property acquisition were facilitated by a colonial wage labor system and legitimate trade.⁵⁰⁷ When a property-owning individual died, rather than his matrilineage

⁵⁰² Chief Udensi Ekea, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon. Aug. 4, 2010.

⁵⁰³ A.K. Uche, *Customs and Practices in Ohaffia* (Aba, Nigeria: A.K. Uche, 1960), 39-40; Obuba, *The History and Culture of Ohafia*, 54; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amangwu Village. Aug. 15, 2011.

⁵⁰⁴ *Ezie-nwami* Ogbonne Kalu, oral interview by author, Uduma Ukwu. Nov. 17, 2011; Mama Docas Kalu and Mama Mary Ezera of Ebem Village, Group Interview by author.

⁵⁰⁵ Mecha Ukpai Akanu, *ezie-ogo* of Amangwu and Members of the Men's Court, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Amangwu Village. August 18, 2011; Anaso Awalekwa, *ezie-ogo* of Ndea-Nku Village and Members of the Men's Court, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording. Nov. 17, 2011.

⁵⁰⁶ Jones, *Annual Reports of Bende Division*, 12; Kalu, "An Ibo Autobiography," 166-170; Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 90; Hon. Tessy Uzoma Odum, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Ebem Ohafia Local Govt. Council Office. Sept. 5, 2011.

⁵⁰⁷ Jones, *Annual Reports of Bende Division*, 31-39, 47-61.

customarily inheriting his property, the Judiciary Courts determined the right of inheritance.⁵⁰⁸

Where the individual had legally willed property to his children, or where it was established that his business was a nuclear family venture, his matrilineage lost their rights of inheritance.⁵⁰⁹ In these instances, the deceased's children and his patrilineage took responsibility for his funeral. In the absence of a will or proof of family investment, the matrilineage became the inheritor.⁵¹⁰

The changing practices of property inheritance were also shaped by changes in individual interpretations of social responsibility. Whereas an individual's matrilineage had been largely responsible for his welfare (bride-price payment, fees for initiation into secret societies, debt-payments, and burial rites) and training (apprentice fees for training in warfare, hunting, and business ventures) before the 20th century,⁵¹¹ in the first three decades of the 20th century, as more and more Ohafia men acquired Western education and converted to Christianity, some of them began to sponsor their sons to mission-run primary, post-primary and teacher-training schools in Ohafia, Itu, and Calabar, where they learned to read and write, trained as teachers, catechists, and clerks, and received training in carpentry, brickmaking, and tailoring.⁵¹²

Several Ohafia-Igbo men indicated that a revolution in lineage affiliation, and conceptions of masculinity (*ufiem*) occurred as a result of fathers' increasing assumption of social responsibility towards their own children. For instance, Mr. Arunsi Kalu stated that

⁵⁰⁸ Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 90.

⁵⁰⁹ Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author, Amangwu. Aug. 15, 2011.

⁵¹⁰ Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 90.

⁵¹¹ Obuba, *The History and Culture of Ohafia*, 52.

⁵¹² Johnston, *Of God and Maxim Guns*, 160-164; Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 122-123; Chief Emeh Okonkwo, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Ebem. Aug. 2010; Ndukwe Otta and Elder Uduma Uka, Group Interview by author; Chief Kevin Ukiro, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Asaga Village. August 10, 2010; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author; Chief K.K. Owen, oral interview by author.

“masculinity is the individual prowess of every man,” and “a father who trained his son in school, thereby helping him to marry a wife, secure a farmland, and establish a home performed *ufiem*.”⁵¹³ The emphasis on home establishment within the patrilineage compound as essential to *ufiem* construction stemmed from the fact that men who lived in the homes of their wife’s family (uxorilocal residence) upon marriage (a practice which Ohafia-Igbo men said existed in the pre-colonial past) were perceived as *ujo* (cowards).⁵¹⁴ Thus, a father who helped his son to acquire a wife and attain adult masculinity was seen as *ufiem*.

Chief Oluwa Iro Kalu stated that proper marriage was an elaborate and expensive rite of passage into full manhood.⁵¹⁵ Mayne observed that dowry in the pre-colonial period consisted of rare and expensive brass rods known as *okpogho*.⁵¹⁶ The term *okpogho* came to represent all forms of monetary wealth at the turn of the 20th century, and individuals who became *ogaranya*, were defined as those who possessed *okpogho*.⁵¹⁷ Such *okpogho*-possessing individual fathers sponsored their son’s marriage in the following way:

The father would purchase goats, cocks, yams, and drinks. He and his son invited their friends, relatives, and age-grade (*uke*) members. The groom’s *uke* erected a huge hut completely covered with expensive *jooji* cloth. This was called *ulue*

⁵¹³ Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author, Amangwu. Aug. 15, 2011.

⁵¹⁴ Chief Oluwa Iro Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Ebem, Ohafia. August 3, 2010; Chief Kevin Ukiro, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Asaga Village. August 10, 2010. However, uxorilocal residence did not completely disappear. Chief Kalu Ezelu Uwaoma, the subject of chapter 5 of this study, lived with his wife’s family in Isigwu village until 1916, when he had accumulated sufficient wealth to establish himself as *ufiem*, and returned to his natal village in Elu Ohafia, to build a modern storey building in performance of *ogaranya* masculinity. See Geoffrey Johnston, “Ohafia 1911-40: A Study in Church Developments in Eastern Nigeria,” *The Bulletin of the Society for African Church History* II, 2 (1966), 144; Kalu, “An Ibo Autobiography,” 166-167.

⁵¹⁵ Chief Oluwa Iro Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Ebem. August 3, 2010.

⁵¹⁶ Mayne, “Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934,” 47.

⁵¹⁷ Chief Udensi Ekea, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon. Aug. 4, 2010.

okara (the cloth house). Within this hut, the groom's age-grade members were entertained. Permission for this hut was obtained from patrilineage elders upon fee payment. The male organ of the *uke* [age-grade] known as *akpan* was also presented with wine and gifts.⁵¹⁸

It was also in expression of *ufiem* as the fulfillment of paternal social obligations that Chief Emeh Okonkwo asserted, "My father lived during colonial rule, and so did not have a chance to fight any wars and cut a head, but he accomplished *ufiem* because he married a wife when he was of proper age! He trained his children in schools. He rode a bicycle and then a car when he was supposed to! He was a man!"⁵¹⁹ An individual trained in school or trade, or provided with a wife by his father was often referred to as *enyi nnaya* (father's friend).⁵²⁰ Such sons demonstrated their love for their fathers by building new houses for them, thereby, performing *ogaranya* masculinity themselves.⁵²¹ The growing popularity of *enyi-nnaya* relationship in the early 20th century posed a threat to matrilineage rights. As fathers invested more in the welfare of their children, their matrilineages lost the rights-in-people they had customarily enjoyed, while the agnatic kin gained greater stake in their sons and daughters.

Since the 20th century, while the normative principles of inheritance among the Ohafia-Igbo were still dominantly matrilineal, individuals have increasingly come to emphasize the social importance of fathers and the patrilineage.⁵²² The socio-political processes (slave

⁵¹⁸ Chief Oluwa Iro Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Ebem. August 3, 2010.

⁵¹⁹ Chief Emeh Okonkwo, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Ebem. Aug. 2010.

⁵²⁰ Mecha Ukpai Akanu, *ezie-ogo* of Amangwu and Members of the Men's Court, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Amangwu Village. August 18, 2011.

⁵²¹ Godwin Nwankwo Uko, *ezie-ogo* of Amankwu and his cabinet members. Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Amankwu. October 25, 2011.

⁵²² Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amangwu Village, Ohafia. August 15, 2011; Chief Udensi Ekea of Ndi Ekea Compound, Okon Village, oral

production, cash crop-driven plantation economy, legitimate trade, Christianity and Western education) which enabled men to displace women as the bread-winners of their families between 1900 and 1920 (see chapter 6) similarly challenged the matrifocal ideologies of the Ohafia-Igbo.

Ohafia: A Matrilineal Igbo Society?

Various studies on the peoples of southeastern Nigeria suggest that most Igbo communities practiced a patrilineal kinship system (of property inheritance), and a dual-sex system of social organization;⁵²³ while some communities practiced what has been called a double descent kinship system,⁵²⁴ alongside the dual-sex system. Studies on the double descent system have resolved that the major defining factors are the existence of both patri-clans and matri-clans as the kinship/corporate groups within which property is owned and inherited (“double inheritance”); that both descent groups are exogamous (“double clanship”); and that every individual belongs to both his/her patrilineal and matrilineal descent group.⁵²⁵

The co-existence of patrilineage residential compound units alongside dominant matrilineage practices in Ohafia has led some scholars to challenge the characterization of Ohafia as matrilineal. These scholars argue that Ohafia is best seen as double unilineal or double-

interview by author, digital voice recording. Aug. 4, 2010; Ndukwe Otta and Elder Uduma Uka, Group Interview by author; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 27.

⁵²³ Ibewuiké, *African Women and Religious Change*, 49-54; Okonjo, “The Dual Sex Political System, 45-46; Mba, *Nigerian Women Mobilized*, 36; Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria*, 13. “Patriliney” refers to the system where an individual belongs to, and possesses rights of inheritance in his paternal descent group. The Igbo are generally considered a patrilineal society, so much so that Uchendu asserted that “An Igbo without ‘umunna’ [patrilineage . . . is an Igbo without citizenship.”

⁵²⁴ Jack Goody, “The Classification of Double Descent,” *Current Anthropology* 2, 1 (Feb., 1961), 3-25; Forde and Jones, *The Ibo and Ibibio-Speaking Peoples*, 55. Simon Ottenberg’s *Double Descent in an African Society* is a case in point.

⁵²⁵ J. Goody, *Comparative Studies in Kinship* (California: Stanford University Press, 1969), 112.

descent.⁵²⁶ Contending that the Ohafia-Igbo were a double descent society, Simon Ottenberg claimed that patrilineal groupings were the basic unit of the society's political system, and that as such, "politics seems patrilineal rather than matrilineal."⁵²⁷ This is misleading however, because the basis of the Ohafia-Igbo political system in the pre-colonial period was not the lineages but the age grades.⁵²⁸ When this question was posed to an Ohafia elder, Chief Oluo Iro Kalu, he declared: "Listen! *Umunna* [patrilineage] ruled within their *umunna* homestead; *Ikwu* [matrilineage] ruled within their *ikwu* matri-clan. When it came to communal issues, it was the *uke* (age grade) that took charge of it, and the *uke* comprised men and women."⁵²⁹

Indeed, among the Ohafia-Igbo in the pre-colonial period, the matrilineage never had a unifying compound unit (*ezi* or *mba*), unlike the patrilineage. However, the matrilineage was the main property-owning and property-inheriting group, as opposed to the patrilineage. Thus, men and women pledged their land to their matrilineage as opposed to their patrilineage, and landed property were matrilineally inherited. Second, the matrilineage was the only exogamous unit, such that intermarriage among its members were prohibited, while members of the same patrilineage were able to inter-marry, in sharp contrast to what obtained in the rest of patrilineal

⁵²⁶ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 27; Abner Cohen, review of *Ohafia: A Matrilineal Ibo People* by Philip Nsugbe, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 40, 3 (1977), 683-684; Caroline Ifeka, review of *Ohafia: A Matrilineal Ibo People* by Philip Nsugbe, *Journal of African History* 16, 2 (1975), 311-312; Simon Ottenberg, "Ohafia: A Matrilineal Ibo People by Philip O. Nsugbe," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 46, 3 (1976), 296.

⁵²⁷ Ottenberg, "Ohafia: A Matrilineal Ibo People by Philip O. Nsugbe," 296.

⁵²⁸ David U. Iyam, *The Broken Hoe: Cultural Reconfiguration in Biase Southeast Nigeria* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 133-135, similarly shows that while kinship was important for the Biase, it was "a less profound basis for social organization than nondomestic social groups" such as *Inyono* and *Ekpe* mystical organizations, and *Abu* and *Ebrambi* secular associations of social bonding. For the Biase, these organs were more important than kinship in shaping, ordering, and regulating individuals' behavior.

⁵²⁹ Chief Oluo Iro Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Ebem. August 3, 2010.

Igboland.⁵³⁰ Third, while the matrilineage was dispersed (no residential compounds), its members maintained unity through day-to-day practices such as *ududu* (ancestral pots and deities of matrilineage ancestresses) veneration, marriages, divorces, burials, physical and legal protection over members and provision of resources (food, land, labor, and material wealth) to members. I argue that it was these practices, as opposed to residential arrangements, that shaped local ideologies of kinship affiliation.

Amadiume has persistently argued that the Igbo double descent system derives from the historical imposition of an Igbo patrilineal system upon the matrilineal systems of indigenous populations through military conquest.⁵³¹ At first glance, this would seem to fit with the Ohafia-

⁵³⁰ Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 119-121. In patrilineal Igbo societies, the patrilineage was the only exogamous unit, and the principal owner of persons and property. Hence Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria*, 13, asserted that “An Igbo without ‘umunna’ [patrilineage] . . . is an Igbo without citizenship.”

⁵³¹ See Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, 186-194. Indeed, Nsugbe’s work inspired Okonjo and Amadiume to speculate about “gender parallelism” and matriarchy for a wide range of African societies. See Okonjo, “The Dual Sex Political System in Operation,” 45-58. In a later work titled *African Matriarchal Foundations: the Igbo Case* (1987), Amadiume argued that the Igbo were in the past a matriarchal society, and that, elements of Igbo matriarchy have survived in inheritance and succession practices and especially in religion. In 1997, Amadiume published a compilation of essays written between 1989 and 1994 titled *Re-Inventing Africa: Matriarchy, Religion and Culture*. She argued that there were structural gender contestations premised on the presence of matriarchy “in the fundamentals of the ideas of kinship in ancient and traditional African societies.” She insisted that Christianity, colonialism and capitalism were corrupting influences on African matriarchal heritage, and evidence “patriarchal paradigmatic monolithism,” which can only be deconstructed through a study of indigenous religions, as embodying “contesting and complementary gendered systems,” and providing “alternative social history to the unpopular assumptions of anthropology.” See Ifi Amadiume, *Re-Inventing Africa: Matriarchy, Religion and Culture* (London: Zeb Books, 1997), ix-8. However, Amadiume did not substantiate her claim of “primordial and empowering matriarchy.” Nkiru Nzegwu pointed out two key flaws in Amadiume’s work: the conceptual fuzziness of key notions such as matriarchy, gender, and afrocentrism; and the inadequate reference to the work of scholars from the diverse societies whose cultures she analyzed. Nzegwu concluded that the ideology Amadiume is portraying as matriarchal is fundamentally patriarchal, and that “whatever it is Igbo created it certainly was not matriarchy, and it does not need that name.” See Nkiru

Igbo case, but the immediate result of Ohafia-Igbo absorption of matrilineal non-Igbo peoples, between the 16th and 17th centuries, was their emergence as a matrilineal Igbo society, not a double descent society. Thus, Nsugbe argues that the Ohafia-Igbo were more like the Ashanti of Ghana, and less like double descent communities such as the Yako and the Lo Dagaba.⁵³²

It is plausible that after relying on male leaders for so long, without finding a permanent home, the Ohafia-Igbo sought to attain stability by relying upon women for subsistence production, while men became preoccupied with the military defense of their new territory.⁵³³ It is in this context that the popular Ohafia-Igbo adage, “*utu n’atusa atusa; ikpu n’ekpokota* *ekpokota*” (“the penis scatters; the womb gathers”) becomes very meaningful.⁵³⁴ Practices such as the raising of *ududu* pot monuments in honor of deceased matriarchs began as a mechanism to foster communal strength and stability, as it brought members of the community into a ritual unity.⁵³⁵ Similarly, the practice of patrilineal endogamy, which is peculiar to the Ohafia-Igbo, in contrast to patrilineal Igbo communities where such unions were viewed as incestuous, served to ensure communal peace. Hence the Ohafia-Igbo say, “*Anyi namu, nuru, maka udo*” (“we take in

Nzegwu, “Chasing Shadows: The Misplaced Search for Matriarchy,” *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 32, 3 (1998), 594-622.

⁵³² Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 119-123.

⁵³³ Scholars of Ohafia-Igbo history agree on this point. See Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 21; Azuonye, “The Heroic Age,” 9, 11, 18-20, 31. Nsugbe and Azuonye concur that as men were preoccupied with the defense of their new territory, the bulk of farm-work was transferred to women, and after so many generations of controlling farmland, women became the sole transmitters of the right of its ownership.

⁵³⁴ Chief Kevin Ukiro, oral interview by author; Chief Udensi Ekea, oral interview by author.

⁵³⁵ Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 93. This practice did not exist when the Ohafia-Igbo (Mben) lived in Ibeku, where such pots were raised only for deceased male ancestors.

marriage whom we bear, for peace.”)⁵³⁶ Nsugbe thus concludes that a prominent feature of Ohafia social ideology is their strength of common feeling as a single maternal community.⁵³⁷

The opposition to the description of Ohafia-Igbo society as matrilineal derives from a structural-functionalist conception of lineages as static corporate groups or structures, as well as the reductionist view of lineages as descent groups,⁵³⁸ as opposed to social practices. In the structural-functionalist perspective, true matriliney is defined as a system where “kinship was traced only through the mother.”⁵³⁹ Thus, any trace of patrilineal ideology in the society is construed as undermining matriliney. In contrast, the existence of trace matrilineal principles and practices in so-called patrilineal Igbo societies has not led scholars to define these societies as double unilineal or double-descent. Indeed, *ikwu* is recognized in so-called patrilineal Igbo societies, as a descent system, hence Uchendu writes that when the Igbo individual found himself in conflict with his agnatic kin (*umunna*), he always ran to his *umunna* (mother’s agnates or *ikwu*) among whom he enjoyed *okene/nwadiala* privileges. When he faced conviction for crime or danger for his life in his *umunna*, the Igbo individual always found safety among his *ikwu-nne*, where he was considered sacred.⁵⁴⁰ The point is that the conception of lineages as descent groups does not shed any light on individuals’ value placement on lineage affiliation. However,

⁵³⁶ Nsugbe, *Ohafia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 79.

⁵³⁷ Nsugbe, *Ohafia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 39.

⁵³⁸ Peters, “Introduction,” 134. For exponents of this view, see George Murdock, *Social Structure* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1949); Mary Douglas, “Is Matriliney Doomed in Africa?” in Mary Douglas and Phyllis M. Kaberry eds., *Man in Africa* (New York: Anchor Books, 1969), 122-123; David M. Schneider and Kathleen Gough, eds. *Matrilineal Kinship* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), 16, 23; Meyer Fortes, “Structure of Unilineal Descent Groups,” *American Anthropologist*, 55, (1953), 17-41.

⁵³⁹ Schneider and Gough, eds. *Matrilineal Kinship*, vii-xx; Peters, “Introduction,” 127.

⁵⁴⁰ Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria*, 13-14.

inheritance practices, religious beliefs, and social conceptions of motherhood and fatherhood tell us which lineage principles are dominant.

What has not been examined, with regard to southeastern Nigeria, are the evident transformations in kinship practices over time. The Ohafia-Igbo case suggests that what was at once a matrilineal society increasingly became, at the turn of the 20th century, a double unilineal society, with multi-faceted implications for gendered power relations. Thus, this dissertation argues that lineages are best viewed as practices.⁵⁴¹ It was people's practices — the proclivity of association and belongingness, gift-giving and reciprocity, social responsibility to offsprings, marriage and divorce — that constituted lineages in the first place, continued to give lineage its meaning, and ushered significant changes in lineage principles over time.⁵⁴² Recounting the changes in lineage ideology, Ohafia men and women cite the increase in individual property ownership (as opposed to ownership by the matrilineage) since the mid-19th century, the transmission of property (first, yam wealth before the 1820s, slaves up to the late 19th century,

⁵⁴¹ For case-studies showing changes in lineage systems as a result of changing ideologies and practices, see Ottenberg, *Double Descent in an African Society*, 147-148, 192-202; Karla Poewe, "Matrilineal Ideology: The Economic Activities of Women in Luapala Zambia," in L.S. Cordell and S. Beckerman (eds.) *The Versatility of Kinship* (London and New York: Academic Press, 1980), 345; G. Geisler, "Moving With Tradition: The Politics of Marriage Among the Toka of Zambia" 1990, cited in Peters, "Introduction," 135.

⁵⁴² This is what the 19th century Prussian-born American anthropologist Franz Boaz called the "genius of the people." Thus, Emile Durkheim argued that the origin of an institution does not explain its function; rather, the meaning of an institution should be sought in synchronic practices. It is then that as Radcliffe-Brown points out, we can understand the "systems of real relations of connectedness between individuals occupying various social roles," the "phenomenal reality" of "social structure." In the processes of their practices, lineages emerged as distinguishable structures that shaped individuals themselves, but it was people's actions that continued to give lineages their meanings, and ushered significant changes in lineage practices over time. See L.L. Langness, *The Study of Culture* (California: Chandler and Sharp, 2005), 22; Claude Levi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, Vol. II (New York: Basic Books, 1976), 4; Adam Kuper, *Anthropology and Anthropologists: The Modern British School* (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1996), 47-48; A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, *A Natural Science of Society* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1957), 45, 55.

and estates in the early 20th century) from father to son (opposed to inheritance by uterine siblings), and fathers' (opposed to maternal uncles) assumption of responsibility for the welfare of their children.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the implications of Ohafia-Igbo migration and settlement in the Cross River region in the 16th century for their emergence as a matrilineal Igbo society. The chapter argues that Ohafia-Igbo women enjoyed prominent socio-economic positions in their society, which enabled them to reinforce matrifocal conceptions of social identity until 1900.

Against the background of studies on African matriliney, and popular conceptions of African property ownership, the chapter analyzed changes in lineage ideologies as evident in changing practices of property ownership and inheritance between 1850 and 1900. It shows that as men replaced women as the breadwinners of their families, and increasingly bequeathed property to their sons, as opposed to their sister's sons, matrilineage rights-in-people declined.

Lastly, the chapter re-examined the emerging challenges to the description of Ohafia-Igbo society as matrilineal, by examining the limitations of the double-descent hypothesis. It argues that lineages are best seen as a product of individual practices and negotiations, rather than a concrete system.

Ohafia-Igbo settlement in the Cross River region also facilitated their acquisition of an age-grade system (*uke*) of political organization, a militant ethos, and secret societies, which distinguished them from most other Igbo societies, and later shaped social conceptions of gendered identity and power between 1850 and 1900. These historical processes are examined successively in chapters 2, 3, and 4.

CHAPTER TWO

THE GENDERED SOCIO-POLITICAL ORGANIZATION OF THE OHAFIA-IGBO, 1850-1900

This chapter examines the Ohafia-Igbo age-grade system (*uke*) as a gendered socio-political organization, and analyzes the concept of female political power against the background of discourses of Ohafia-Igbo women's powerlessness in the pre-colonial period (1850-1900).

First, the chapter examines the age-grade as a distinct Ohafia-Igbo socio-political system, by arguing that its organization differed from the age-grades of other Igbo societies between 1850 and 1900. Second, the chapter highlights the role of the *uke* (age-grade) in gendered socialization (the separation of boys from girls and the transformation of boys into men and girls into women).

Third, the chapter differentiates the various stages of age-grade organizations among the Ohafia-Igbo, and clearly shows that at a certain stage of its organization (the *uke ji ogo* stage), Ohafia-Igbo gender-inclusive age-grades would be separated to form two political organizations: the all-male *akpan* and the all-female *ikpirikpe*. Both of these political associations resulting from age-grade organizations constituted the male and female courts, respectively, and between 1850 and 1900, they were responsible for the regulation of political relations in each village.

Hence, Ohafia-Igbo political system between 1850 and 1900 was sex-differentiated. Indeed, Ohafia was such a society constructed, as V.O Ibewuiké writes, with respect to Asaba, "an organization of parallel gender institutions."⁵⁴³ Okonjo defines this as a "dual sex" system of social organization in which "each sex generally managed its own affairs," such that each sex had its own kinship institutions, age grades, secret societies, and title societies.⁵⁴⁴ Mba describes

⁵⁴³ Victoria O. Ibewuiké, *African Women and Religious Change: A Study of the Western Igbo of Nigeria: with a Special Focus on Asaba Town* (Uppsala: Victoria O. Ibewuiké, 2006), 52.

⁵⁴⁴ Okonjo, "The Dual Sex Political System, 45-46.

this as “sex political differentiation.”⁵⁴⁵ However, in Ohafia, while women and men maintained their separate political, economic, and social institutions, they collaborated within *The Age Grade System*, having equal rights and obligations.

Defining the Problem: The Notion of Invisible and Docile Women

The scholarship on Ohafia socio-political organization has emphasized male socio-political institutions. Accounts of female socio-political organization appear as a last-ditch effort to say something about women.⁵⁴⁶ The result is that a gendered analysis of Ohafia socio-political institutions does not exist. Moreover, the view that Ohafia women were politically “inferior” to Ohafia men is prominent in literature authored by indigenous Ohafia historians. Thus, Uduma Uduma writes that “the subordinate position of women is manifest in every area of life in all societies including Ohafia,” and that women “are hardly allowed to feature prominently in any . . . prestigious endeavors.”⁵⁴⁷ He further states that “female inferiority” in Ohafia is “culturally based,” and as such, “it is not possible to be completely phased out.”⁵⁴⁸

Another indigenous historian, Grace Kalu contends that “women’s roles in Ohafia society were limited mostly to bearing children and agricultural engagement,” and that it was the “salvific” influences of Christianity and Western education that enabled women to become

⁵⁴⁵ Mba, *Nigerian Women Mobilized*, 36.

⁵⁴⁶ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 17-33; Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 58-71

⁵⁴⁷ Uduma O. Uduma, *The People of Ohafia Ezema* (Nigeria: Arinson Publishers, 2007), 97.

⁵⁴⁸ Uduma, *The People of Ohafia Ezema*, 100-101. For other proponents of this view, see E.E. Nkata, “The Role of Women in Development,” *Ikoru*, (Vol. 2, No. 2, 1976), 35-36; Ogbeyalu Nchonwa, “The Role of Women in Development,” *Ohafia Review* (April 1981), 7-9; and A.I. Udensi, “Elevating the Ohafia Woman,” *Ikoru*, (Vol. 3, No. 3, December 1998), 40-44.

politically “visible.”⁵⁴⁹ Njoku, a prominent Ohafia-born scholar of Igbo history further added that “Ohafia, like the rest of traditional Igbo society, is a male-dominated society and men are more politically visible than women.”⁵⁵⁰ However, it is not clear if Njoku is describing present-day Ohafia society or pre-colonial Ohafia society. The skewed idea of Igbo women’s pre-colonial socio-political insignificance was also espoused by G.T. Basden, who argued that colonialism liberated Igbo women from traditional and cultural burdens,⁵⁵¹ rescuing them from “generations of monotonous routine,” in which “cheery and bright, their lives run in a hopeless groove.”⁵⁵²

The mentality of a male-centered heroic past, which continues to be dramatized through the popular culture of *iri-aha* (Ohafia war dance) also tends to obscure the preeminent socio-political power and positions of Ohafia-Igbo women in the pre-colonial period. The overwhelming academic focus on Ohafia’s historical militancy and their characterization as brave “headhunters” and “Aro mercenaries,”⁵⁵³ further contributes to the marginalization of women in academic discourses. Indeed, the dominant ideology is that men distinguished themselves in renowned warfare and women did not. This inability to construct *ufiem*

⁵⁴⁹ Grace U. Kalu, “Women in Social and Economic Change in Ohafia, 1945-1990” (Nsukka, Nigeria, 2005), 1, 36.

⁵⁵⁰ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 24.

⁵⁵¹ Basden, *Niger Ibos*, 203; Basden, *Among the Ibos of Nigeria*, 88-96.

⁵⁵² Basden, *Among the Ibos*, 93.

⁵⁵³ Patridge, *Cross River Natives*; Leonard, *The Lower Niger and its Tribes*; Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria*, 18; Basden, *Among the Ibos*, 37, 208-209; Basden, *Niger Ibos*, 377-388; Kenneth O. Dike, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta, 1830-1885* (London: 1956); Dike and Ekejiuba, *The Aro of South-eastern Nigeria*; Northrup, *Trade Without Rulers*; Oriji, “Slave Trade, Warfare and Aro Expansion,” 107-114; Azuonye, “The Narrative War Songs;” Azuonye, “The Heroic Age,” 8-35; John C. McCall, “Dancing the Past: Experiencing Historical Knowledge in Ohafia, Nigeria,” *Passages: A Chronicle of the Humanities* 6 (1993).

(masculinity) is often interpreted as a lack and limitation on women, and taken as the major basis of their socio-political invisibility.⁵⁵⁴

Similarly, Philip Nsugbe's observation that "Ohaffia women are considered by other Ibo groups to be the hardest-worked on the farm of any Ibo womenfolk . . . and the men are often ridiculed for the hard use they put their women to,"⁵⁵⁵ has popularized the notion that Ohafia men exploited their women. It was in this fashion that Basden described Igbo women as "the burden-bearers of the country . . . [who] have few rights in any circumstances, and . . . accept the situation as their grandmothers did before them."⁵⁵⁶ Jean Allman, Susan Geiger, and Nakanyike Musisi have described this as "the brutality of racist discourse."⁵⁵⁷ Here, no attention is given to the agency and consciousness of Ohafia and other Igbo women and the socio-political implications of their dominance in the agro-based economy of their society. Moreover, Nsugbe's emphasis on the ridicule, which Ohafia men encountered from their neighboring communities by virtue of female dominance in agricultural production and subsistence, is always overlooked.

In addition, the dearth of information on female socio-political institutions in European colonial and missionary records has clouded the prominence of past female power and authority in Ohafia society. For instance, in his Intelligence Report on the Ohafia-Igbo, Mayne presented pre-colonial Ohafia political administrative and judicial systems as exclusively-male. He writes,

The administration of each village in ancient times was essentially on democratic line, the supreme control being lodged in the hands of the Village Council . . .

⁵⁵⁴ Kalu, "Women in Social and Economic Change," 14, 29; Azuonye, "The Heroic Age," 23-29. Azuonye further equates Ohafia-Igbo social identity with warrior masculinity.

⁵⁵⁵ Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 21.

⁵⁵⁶ Basden, *Among the Ibos*, 88.

⁵⁵⁷ Jean Allman, Susan Geiger, and Nakanyike Musisi, "Women in African Colonial Histories: An Introduction," in Jean Allman, Susan Geiger, and Nakanyike Musisi, eds., *Women in African Colonial Histories* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002), 1.

composed of the EZEOGO [male ruler] of the village together with each family head. In addition to this, certain elders were also entitled to be present by virtue of their age or because they had been called by the EZEOGO and family heads . . . and the head of the local *Akpan*.”⁵⁵⁸

He further stated that this Village Council was solely responsible for civil and criminal cases.⁵⁵⁹ Under the title, “Ethnological,” where he discussed land tenure, inheritance of property, and festivals, Mayne devoted five sentences to a sub-section titled “EZE NWANYI OR QUEEN.” He noted, “Her functions are to settle petty disputes between women in matters touching land and other small matters between females of her village.”⁵⁶⁰ Mayne never indicated that the “EZE NWANYI OR QUEEN” was in any way, part of the political administrative and judicial system he described. In his proposal for the future administration of Ohafia under colonial rule, following the abrogation of the ill-fated warrant chief system in 1927, Mayne argued that “the Clan Council membership consist of the EZEOGO of each village, the family heads and senior men of the AKPAN of each village.”⁵⁶¹ It is no surprise then that writings on Ohafia-Igbo political organization, which have relied on this authoritative archival document, have been male-centered.

The Annual Reports on the region (Bende District) are silent about women generally. Preoccupied with political and administrative developments under colonial rule, such as the establishment of Native Courts, the appointment of court clerks and warrant chiefs, military expeditions, the mobilization of African labor for road construction and river dredging, the expansion of trade, and the spread of Christian missions and schools, the reports focused on

⁵⁵⁸ Mayne, “Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934,” 12.

⁵⁵⁹ Mayne, “Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934,” 30-31.

⁵⁶⁰ Mayne, “Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934,” 46.

⁵⁶¹ Mayne, “Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934,” 52.

European and African men.⁵⁶² As a result of the silencing of women in published literature and European written sources, this dissertation relies upon oral histories of Ohafia-Igbo women and documentation of Ohafia-Igbo women's rituals and resistance strategies, in order to give voice to this section of society, whose agency in the pre-colonial period has been grossly obscured.

Uke (the Age Grade): A Distinct Ohafia-Igbo Socio-Political System

The age-grade system (*uke*) was the foundation of Ohafia political administration before the 20th century. Unlike other parts of Igboland, where the socio-political system was based on lineage organizations, and village assemblies,⁵⁶³ among the Ohafia-Igbo, the regulation of political relations in the village (*mba*) was the responsibility of the *uke* (age-grades), which formed a pyramidal socio-political hierarchy.⁵⁶⁴ Indeed, while the Ohafia-Igbo possessed politically responsible kinship organizations such as the *onu ulue* (nuclear family), *utuga/isi ogo* (minimal patrilineage), and *umudi ezi* (the patrilineage compound), these lineage institutions did not exercise socio-political influence beyond the organization of patrilineage kin.⁵⁶⁵ In contrast to most Igbo communities whereas M.M. Green observed, “age groups were largely social and

⁵⁶² Jones, *Annual Reports of Bende Division*, 68-88.

⁵⁶³ Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria*, 39-44, describes the “general pattern of political process which is shared by all Igbo,” as one comprising kin-based organizations (first stage), lineages (second stage), and village-level democracy and representative assembly (comprising all adult males). Here, age-grade associations were at best, one of the many “instruments of government.”

⁵⁶⁴ Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 58, 69. The Ohafia refer to the age-grade system as *ukeibe*, often shortened to *uke*. The hierarchies of the *uke* are discussed below.

⁵⁶⁵ Chief Oluwa Iro Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Ebem Village Ohafia. August 3, 2010; Chief Emeh Okonkwo, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Ebem Village Ohafia. Aug. 2010; Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Elu Ohafia. August 10, 2010; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amangwu Village, Ohafia. August 15, 2011.

convivial in their activities, and concerned with the interests of their own members;”⁵⁶⁶ in Ohafia and other neighboring Cross-River Igbo societies such as Abiriba, Abam, Afikpo, and Nkporo, the *uke* was highly developed, and associated with elaborate initiation rituals.⁵⁶⁷ In the words of Ohafia oral historian, Uma Eleazu, the *uke* was “a basic institutional form as far as the continuity and stability of the social system was concerned.”⁵⁶⁸

The *uke* had emerged as the major basis of Ohafia socio-political organization by the 18th century.⁵⁶⁹ Hence, Njoku describes the institution as “Ohafia’s way of life, as old as the community.”⁵⁷⁰ The Ohafia-Igbo arrived at their present location with what Afigbo described as a “loosely-integrated age-grade system”⁵⁷¹ characteristic of most Igbo societies, but they found it militarily and politically expedient to adopt the well-integrated and “most-purposively and effectively organized”⁵⁷² age-grade system of their non-Igbo Cross-River neighbors. Because of its historic role in the mobilization of male warriors for territorial defense between the 17th and 18th centuries,⁵⁷³ its instrumentality to women’s exercise of socio-political power and authority before the 20th century,⁵⁷⁴ its function in the gendered socialization of boys into men and girls into women, and its emergence as a social welfare and self-help developmental agency since the

⁵⁶⁶ M.M. Green, *Ibo Village Affairs* (London: Frank Cass, 1947), 25.

⁵⁶⁷ Forde, and Jones, *Ibo and Ibibio-Speaking Peoples*, 52; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 59.

⁵⁶⁸ Uma Eleazu, “Traditional Institutions and Modernization,” *Ohafia Review* 1 (1983), 9.

⁵⁶⁹ Azuonye, “The Heroic Age,” 21-23; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 26; Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 58 concur that the Ohafia-Igbo adapted the better-organized age-grade system of their non-Igbo Cross River neighbors during the “heroic age” of the 18th century.

⁵⁷⁰ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 26.

⁵⁷¹ Afigbo, *Ropes of Sand*, 22.

⁵⁷² Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 59.

⁵⁷³ Azuonye, “The Heroic Age,” 21-23.

⁵⁷⁴ See discussion below.

20th century,⁵⁷⁵ the *uke* (age grade) has been described as “the matrix of socialization, resource mobilization, self-actualization and community development.”⁵⁷⁶ Thus, in order to clearly show the gendered political organization of the *uke* system, this study first examines *uke* as a mechanism of gendered socialization, and highlights the functional changes of the *uke* between the 19th and 20th centuries.

Uke: A Mechanism of Gendered Socialization

Chieka Ifemesia defined the age-grade system as “a vital institution among the Igbo for fostering communal and humane living.”⁵⁷⁷ The twin principles undergirding the *uke* were seniority and personal achievement. With regard to the first principle, Uchendu observed that the age-grade served as a basic means of differentiating seniors from juniors “irrespective of sex,”⁵⁷⁸ in Igbo societies where seniority was of great importance. Among the Ohafia-Igbo, before the 20th century, boys and girls born within a three-year age bracket were grouped into the same *uke* (age grade), and this grouping was repeated every three years for each new set of three-year olds in each village.⁵⁷⁹

⁵⁷⁵ Agwu Don Chima, “*The Age Grade System in Traditional Ohafia up to 1935*,” B.A. Thesis, Department of History, University of Nigeria Nsukka (October 1996), 32-71.

⁵⁷⁶ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 26.

⁵⁷⁷ Chieka Ifemesia, *Traditional Humane Living Among the Igbo* (Enugu: 1980).

⁵⁷⁸ Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria*, 84.

⁵⁷⁹ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 26; Nsugbe, *Ohafia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 58; Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Elu. August 10, 2010; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amangwu. August 15, 2011. Most Ohafia people interviewed on this subject concur. The *uke* system is based on a seven-year shifting cultivation land tenure system. Within the seven-year period when the village moves on to a new farm-land, allowing the previous farm-land to lie fallow, two *uke* are constituted.

As children, boys and girls within an *uke* lacked clearly defined gender categories.⁵⁸⁰ Recalling his childhood in the early 20th century, Nna Agbai Ndukwe stated that boys and girls within an *uke* played as equals, hunted animals together, and made “no distinction between male and female.”⁵⁸¹ Within the *uke*, boys and girls enjoyed equal rights and complementary responsibilities, and girls often expressed this equanimity. Another Ohafia male elder, Mr. Arunsi Kalu avers, “*mgbe ichin* [in olden times] within the *uke*, a girl always asserted her right as your equal. She would call you a small boy, because you were of the same *uke*. If you felt angered, she would challenge you to a wrestling bout.”⁵⁸² This joking relationship was based on a philosophy of gendered equality and camaraderie within the age-grades,⁵⁸³ whereas Meek observed, “each age-grade was a *ensor morum* for its own members.”⁵⁸⁴ The gender-equal philosophy of the *uke* defined the organization of communal work, the assignment of levies, and the logic of interpersonal relations such as the distribution of kola nuts, food, and drinks, at home and in public.⁵⁸⁵

In spite of the gender-inclusive socialization within the *uke*, boys and girls tended to distinguish themselves from each other. This distinction began informally during play. Thus, while the girls cooked, and pretended to be mothers, using dolls made out of plantain stem or carved wooden dolls, boys often occupied themselves with erecting play houses using twigs, and

⁵⁸⁰ Uduma, *The People of Ohafia Ezema*, 53-54.

⁵⁸¹ Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Elu. August 10, 2010.

⁵⁸² Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amangwu. Aug. 15, 2011.

⁵⁸³ *Ikpirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu Village, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Akanu. November 3, 2011; Mama Orié Emeh and Chief Mrs. Grace Ojieke, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Elu. August 18, 2011.

⁵⁸⁴ Meek, *Law and Authority in a Nigerian Tribe*, p.198.

⁵⁸⁵ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 27.

engaging in mock gun-battles (*egbe too-too*).⁵⁸⁶ It was in this respect that Rattray noted in the case of the Asante that young children were daily “undergoing unconscious instruction, mostly perhaps by a process of imitation of their elders.”⁵⁸⁷ However, it was not until the age of 10-16 years that the social distinction between boys and girls was actualized, through the respective performance of *igba nnunu* (to shoot and kill a bird) and *ino nhiha* (menstruation-seclusion).⁵⁸⁸

When boys accomplished the feat of *igba nnunu*, they were socially constructed as having “cut their first head” (*igbu ishi mbu*), which signified overcoming *ujo*⁵⁸⁹ (coward) status. This accomplishment enabled a boy to transition from motherly care into the world of men.⁵⁹⁰ From this point onwards, boys were schooled in the art of warfare and secrecy.⁵⁹¹ When a girl experienced her first menstruation (*ifu nso*), which was accompanied by ritual seclusion (*ino nhiha*), she was said to have “cut the first head” or “killed an antelope” (*igbu ele*).⁵⁹² In this

⁵⁸⁶ Uduma, *The People of Ohafia Ezema*, 54; N. Uka, “A Note on the ‘Abam’ warriors of Igbo Land,” *Ikenga: Journal of African Studies* 1, 2 (Nsukka: Institute of African Studies, 1972), 77

⁵⁸⁷ R.S. Rattray, *Ashanti Law and Constitution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929), 11-13.

⁵⁸⁸ Mama Docas Kalu and Mary Ezera, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Ebem Village. Aug. 10, 2010; Nmia Nnaya Agbai, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Elu Village, Aug. 18, 2011; *Ikpirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu Village, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Akanu Village. Nov. 3, 2011; Mama Orié Emeh and Chief Mrs. Grace Ojieké, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Elu village. Aug. 18, 2011.

⁵⁸⁹ The word *ujo* means “fear” in Igbo general usage. However, the Ohafia use it to refer to a coward. Here, *ujo* denotes an individual who personifies or embodies fear. The *ujo* were the polar opposite of *ufiem* (real men/masculinity).

⁵⁹⁰ Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amangwu Village, Ohafia. August 15, 2011; Chief Kalu Awa Kalu, oral interview by author; Uduma, *The People of Ohafia Ezema*, 56; As shown in chapter 4, the accomplishment of *igba nnunu*, enabled the boy-child to physically and symbolically move out of his mother’s house into the boys’ quarters or men’s house (*uluenta*), where he lived with other boys, and learned how to be a man.

⁵⁹¹ For detailed discussion, see Chapter 4.

⁵⁹² Mama Docas Kalu and Mary Ezera, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Ebem Village. Aug. 10, 2010; Nmia Nnaya Agbai, oral interview by author, digital voice

case, a girl was distinguished by the women-folk as having taken the first step towards womanhood.⁵⁹³ According to Ohafia female elder, Mary Ezera, the first menstruation is characterized as *igbu ishi* (to cut a head) because it was not an easy accomplishment.⁵⁹⁴ Another female elder, Chief Mrs. Grace Ojieke said that women likened the first menstruation to a woman's first birth, which they describe as *igbu ishi abuo* (to cut the second head).⁵⁹⁵ The phrase, *igbu ele* is used because upon a girl's first menstruation, her father killed an antelope to commemorate the accomplishment.⁵⁹⁶

Until they reached the age of 18 years, the *uke* remained informal associations, and the members were generally regarded as *umurima* (non-adult persons).⁵⁹⁷ Each *uke* up to 18 years did not have a name; rather, each was identified by the name of one of its members, usually the most outstanding. In most cases, the *uke* was known by the name of the first boy to perform *igba*

recording, Elu Village, Aug. 18, 2011; *Ikpirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu Village, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Akanu Village. Nov. 3, 2011; Mama Orie Emeh and Chief Mrs. Grace Ojieke, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Elu village. Aug. 18, 2011.

⁵⁹³ Ibid. The girl was then surrounded with several taboos to limit physical contact with men. She constantly bathed herself in a group of other girls, after which they applied *nzu* (white chalk) and *uife* (red color) decorations on their bodies. These bodily decorations must remain intact till the following day as evidence that a girl had not been touched by a man. This bathing and body decoration exercise was repeated daily to maintain sexual purity.

⁵⁹⁴ Mama Docas Kalu and Mary Ezera, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Ebem. August 10, 2010.

⁵⁹⁵ Mama Orie Emeh and Chief Mrs. Grace Ojieke, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Elu. Aug. 18, 2011.

⁵⁹⁶ Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amangwu Village, Ohafia. August 15, 2011; Mama Orie Emeh and Chief Mrs. Grace Ojieke, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Elu village. Aug. 18, 2011; Mama Docas Kalu and Mary Ezera, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Ebem. August 10, 2010.

⁵⁹⁷ Chief Udensi Ekea, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. August 4, 2010; Ndukwe Otta and Uduma Uka, Group Interview, digital voice recording. Aug. 14, 2011; Chief Oluwa Iro Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Ebem Village. August 3, 2010; Chief Kevin Ukiro, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Asaga. August 10, 2010.

nnunu or the first girl to accomplish *ifu nso* (menstruation).⁵⁹⁸ This is because leadership of an *uke* was not based on age but on personal achievement.⁵⁹⁹ These groups of *uke* were assigned simple community tasks such as sanitation exercises and collection of minor contributions for communal festivals.⁶⁰⁰

After the age of 18, the 3 years gap between the various *uke* becomes secondary to the principle of achievement. Thus, the first informal *uke* to accomplish a significant self-imposed community project launched itself into formal recognition, through a public parade and commemoration ceremony known as *ifiwe uke* (to establish an age grade).⁶⁰¹ The *ifiwe uke* project could be the building of a community hall or the construction of a major road linking a village with its neighbors. Any *uke* between the ages of 18 and 24 (that is two *uke* ranges) might perform *ifiwe uke*.⁶⁰² According to Azuonye, the mutual competition among *uke* members for leadership, and between various *uke* for formal recognition, “emphasize[d] the need for individuals to make notable contributions to the glory and welfare of the community at various stages of their lives.”⁶⁰³

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁹ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 27.

⁶⁰⁰ Nmia Nnaya Agbai, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Elu Village, Aug. 18, 2011; *Ikpirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu Village, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Akanu Village. Nov. 3, 2011; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amangwu Village, Ohafia. August 15, 2011; Chief Kalu Awa Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Nde-Ukpai, Ufiele Village. October 27, 2011; Chief K.K. Owen, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Elu Village. Aug. 12, 2010.

⁶⁰¹ Chief Kevin Ukiro, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Asaga. August 10, 2010; Ndukwe Otta and Uduma Uka, Group Interview, digital voice recording. Aug. 14, 2011.

⁶⁰² Chief Olua Iro Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Ebem Village Ohafia. August 3, 2010; Chief Kalu Awa Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Nde-Ukpai, Ufiele Village. October 27, 2011.

⁶⁰³ Azuonye, “The Heroic Age,” 18.

A formally recognized *uke* was known as *uke ji ogo* (the *uke* that holds the community), and at any point in time, there might be four different age grades in this category (its age range was 25-36 years).⁶⁰⁴ The major responsibility of the *uke ji ogo* was to organize its junior informal counterpart for their *ifiwe uke* (in effect, to establish an *uke* that would take their place). The *uke ji ogo* gave a temporary name to its potential successor. It supervised the junior *uke* and ensured that the latter formally compiled the names of its members, held regular meetings, organized themselves for a second communal project, and from time to time, undertook certain self-imposed communal tasks, in the quest for popularity and name-making.⁶⁰⁵

Both the newly established *uke* and the *uke ji ogo* were tasked with community vigilance (*inotu uche*). Between 1850 and 1900, they often organized themselves into two vigilante groups to guard the community against enemy attacks, especially on farm-days when most people were not at home.⁶⁰⁶ They also guarded the yam barns and community farms. It was these two age grades that provided the young ambitious warriors of the community; for it was primarily between the ages of 18 and 35 that a man must accomplish *ufiem* or remain *ujo*.⁶⁰⁷ The relationship between the newly established *uke* and the *uke ji ogo* was a competitive one. Nsugbe described the newly established *uke* as “a stumbling block,” “an obstacle in one’s path,” “the

⁶⁰⁴ Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 59.

⁶⁰⁵ Chief K.K. Owen, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Elu Village. Aug. 12, 2010; Chief Udensi Ekea, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. August 4, 2010; Ndukwe Otta and Uduma Uka, Group Interview, digital voice recording. Aug. 14, 2011; Chief Kalu Awa Kalu, oral interview by author.

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁷ Azuonye, “The Heroic Age,” 22; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amangwu Village. August 15, 2011; Chief Udensi Ekea, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. August 4, 2010; Ndukwe Otta and Uduma Uka, Group Interview, digital voice recording. Aug. 14, 2011; Chief Oluwa Iro Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Ebem Village Ohafia. August 3, 2010; Chief Kevin Ukiro, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Asaga. August 10, 2010.

opposition,” “the left hand,” and the “impetuous ones” because they were “poised, waiting to take over from the senior set, *uke ji ogo*.⁶⁰⁸

Uke Ji Ogo: The Age Grade System of Gendered Political Organization

Membership of the *uke ji ogo* was a major turning point in the lives of Ohafia-Igbo men and women between 1850 and 1900; because it marked the beginning of formal political leadership. It was at the stage of *uke ji ogo* that for the first time, the sexes formed separate political groups. The female members of the *uke ji ogo* formed a political association known as *ikpirikpe ndi inyom*,⁶⁰⁹ while the male members constituted an equivalent organ called *akpan*.⁶¹⁰ The life span of both political organizations ranged from 36 to 55 years, at the expiration of which the members retired into a distinguished class of honored elders (*nde ichin*).

In practice, the *akpan* worked under the leadership of the *ezie-ogo* (male ruler) to constitute a men’s court, while the *ikpirikpe*, under the leadership of the *ezie nwami* (female ruler), constituted the women’s court. To mark the transition from *uke ji ogo* to active

⁶⁰⁸ Nsugbe, *Ohafia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 58 (footnote).

⁶⁰⁹ In general Igbo translation, *ikpirikpe ndi inyom* would mean the assembly of wives. However, in Ohafia, this organization included both married and unmarried adult daughters of a village, as well as wives, in addition to the *ezie nwami*. This female court is examined below.

⁶¹⁰ In eight Ohafia villages, known collectively as the *Ohaeke*, which claim autochthonous privileges, older members between the ages of 46 and 55 years are selected from the *akpan* to form *umuaka*. Mama Docas Kalu and Mary Ezera, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Ebem Village. Aug. 10, 2010; Nmia Nnaya Agbai, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Elu Village, Aug. 18, 2011; *Ikpirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu Village, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Akanu Village. Nov. 3, 2011; Mama Orie Emeh and Chief Mrs. Grace Ojieke, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Elu village. Aug. 18, 2011; Chief Oluwa Iro Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Ebem Village Ohafia. August 3, 2010; Chief Kevin Ukiro, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Asaga Village. August 10, 2010; Chief K.K. Owen, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Elu Village. Aug. 12, 2010; Chief Udensi Ekea, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. August 4, 2010; Ndukwe Otta and Uduma Uka, Group Interview, digital voice recording. Aug. 14, 2011; Chief Kalu Awa Kalu, oral interview by author.

governmental responsibility, the age-grade as a collective, males and females, would launch itself into community recognition by accomplishing a significant project. This ranged from the building of new bridges to embarking upon military expeditions. The *uke* must however, perform duties demanding physical prowess, endurance, and valor. This process is called *ifiwe uche* (to give political mandate to an age grade).⁶¹¹

At this stage, the female members of the *uke* were mostly married. Between raising their children and providing the bulk of their families' subsistence through farming and trade, they made equal financial and material contributions to the *ifiwe uche*, undertaken by their *uke*.⁶¹² Upon this accomplishment, the *uke* relinquished its "temporary name" and was given a name by the elders of their village,⁶¹³ commensurate with their accomplishments, in a ceremony called *iza afa* ("to answer a name"). The formal name of an age-grade served as a chronicle of its achievements, and was indeed a praise-name. Thus, between 1850 and 1900, various *uke* were given the names of founding ancestors or heroic warriors such as Uke Uduma Ezema (founding ancestor of Ohafia) and Uke Inyima Offia Ire (heroic son of the female founder of Ebem).⁶¹⁴

⁶¹¹ Onwuka E. Oti, *The Age Grade System and Otomu Ceremony in Ohafia* (Aba: EMS Corporate, 2007), 11.

⁶¹² Mama Orié Emeh and Chief Mrs. Grace Ojieke, oral interview by author; *Ezie-nwami* Ogonne Kalu Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Uduma Ukwu Village. November 17, 2011; *Ezie-ogo* Okorie Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Isiugwu Village. December 10, 2011. Indeed, most on my oral interview collaborators affirm that women always matched their male counterparts with material and financial contributions for every project undertaken by their *uke*.

⁶¹³ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 28. The *uke* in Ohafia were often named after heroic ancestors and ancestresses, who played distinguished roles in the formation and history of the society. Through such naming, these personalities are honored and immortalized, and their names were often recycled for various *uke*.

⁶¹⁴ Chief Udensi Ekea oral interview by author, digital voice recording. August 4, 2010.

At the turn of the 20th century, when *ogaranya* (wealth) masculinity became popular, many age-grades lobbied to be called Uke Akajiuba (the age grade that possesses wealth).⁶¹⁵ Also, under British colonial rule, some *uke* lobbied to be named Uke London (in reference to the British metropolis), and Uke Agent (in reference to the representatives of the United African Company).⁶¹⁶ Each *uke* lobbied their community for a name befitting their accomplishment, and the female members often fed the entire village in order to accomplish this objective.⁶¹⁷ Thus, the responsibilities for the establishment of an *uke* were shared by its female and male members, such that it is inconceivable to speak of an *uke* without women at every stage of its development.

Upon the completion of *ifiwe uche* project (to earn political mandate) and *iza afa* (“to answer a name”), the *uke ji ogo* became known as *uke n’ogo* (“the age-grade that is out in the village,” i.e., the ruling age grade). Thus, whereas Uke Anyafumba was the *uke n’ogo* in Ebem village between 1897 and 1907,⁶¹⁸ Uke London was the *uke n’ogo* in Nkwebi Village between

⁶¹⁵ Oti, *The Age Grade System*, 19.

⁶¹⁶ Ndukwe Otta and Uduma Uka, Group Interview, digital voice recording. Aug. 14, 2011. The U.A.C. established in Ohafia in 1930, and Chief Kalu Ezelu, who performed *ogaranya* masculinity in Ohafia between 1900 and 1920, was an agent of the U.A.C, and the wealthiest individual in Ohafia during that period.

⁶¹⁷ Women’s feeding of the village was known as *isu ahu*, “to pound mellon seed,” which was a reference to the large quantities of mellon seed they expended in preparing *egusi* soup and pounded yam for the entire community. Oti, *The Age Grade System*, 14; Mama Orié Emeh and Chief Mrs. Grace Ojieke, oral interview; *Ezie Nwami* Ogbonne Kalu Kalu of Uduma Ukwu Village, oral interview; Mama Docas Kalu and Mama Mary Ezera, Group Interview; Nmia Nnaya Agbai, oral interview; *Ezie-nwami* Ucha Oji Iwe of Elu Village and her Cabinet, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording. October 25, 2011.

⁶¹⁸ Ndukwe Otta and Uduma Uka, Group Interview, digital voice recording. Aug. 14, 2011. “Anyafumba” refers to one was too eager to take over a territory, and it referred to the age-grades that fought the last battles of the 19th century, such as the Ukpati War and Eror (Nsukka) War in the 1880s, and the Nteje war in 1891. The average rulership tenure for each *uke n’ogo* is 7 years, but this sometimes varied. Chief Uduma Nnochin Ogbuagu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amuke, Ohafia. Nov. 24, 2011.

1914 and 1921.⁶¹⁹ *Ifiwe uche* was the starting point of mandatory community service, and members of *uke n'ogo* served in daily governance as political leaders, judges, and orators.⁶²⁰ The *uke n'ogo* were the ruling age-grade, and they were held responsible for the peace of the community. According to Ohafia oral historian, Onwuka Oti, they constituted “the pulse, the active, the taxable and the major productive cream of the society.”⁶²¹ Njoku described the male members of *uke n'ogo* as “the arrow-head of community defense,” the seasoned war leaders “so dreaded throughout most of southeastern Nigeria.”⁶²² The female members regulated peace within the village, especially within the patrilineages, by superintending over the ethical and legal conducts of men and women, married and unmarried, and they constituted the dominant productive resources in the agro-based economy.⁶²³

At about the age of 55-60 years, the *uke n'ogo* retired from active community service through an elaborate ceremony called *igba uche* (to celebrate the age-grade),⁶²⁴ after which they

⁶¹⁹ Vasco U. Iro, *ezie-ogo* of Nkwebi Village, Members of the Men’s Court and *Nde-Ichin*, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Nkwebi Village. November 17, 2011.

⁶²⁰ Azuonye, “The Heroic Age,” 22.

⁶²¹ Oti, *The Age Grade System*, 12.

⁶²² Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 28.

⁶²³ Mayne, “Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934,” 41-44; Arua, “Yam Ceremonies and the Values of Ohafia Culture,” 695; Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 24; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 24, 37-38; Eze Onuoha Uma, *Guidance and Destiny: My Life and Thought; Autobiography of His Royal Highness, Eze Elder Onuoha Uma, Udumeze of Isiama Ohafia* (Ohafia: Eze Onuoha Uma, 2002), 2; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author; Mrs. Nnenna Emeri and Mmia Nnaya Bassey, members of *Ikpirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu Village, Group Interview. Nov. 3, 2011; Kalu Awa Kalu, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording, Ufielie Village. October 27, 2011 *Ikpirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu Village, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Akanu. Nov. 3, 2011.

⁶²⁴ In some Ohafia villages, the ceremony is called *igba ekpe* (masquerade celebration), because of the public parade of masquerades that accompanied the celebration. In some other villages, it is called *igba ota omu*, and the meaning derives from a practice, whereby a warrior’s shield (*ota*) was decorated with yellow palm fronds (*omu*) to mark his retirement from active war service.

became *nde-ichin* (elders). Before this transition, the *uke n'ogo* must have accomplished a specified community project such as building the village *obu* or a hut to house the village's *ikoro* (large wooden public address system), the construction of a major road, the reconstruction of a market, or the provision of recreational facilities. Since the 1920s, various *uke* have provided pipe borne water, school buildings, maternity homes, and electricity to their communities. Each *uke* sought to outshine its predecessor, such that today, over ninety percent of the social amenities in Ohafia were provided by various *uke*.⁶²⁵ While some completed their projects in less than four years, others spent up to ten years. Whereas the age-grades had split up at the *uke ji ogo/uke n'ogo* stage for political administrative purposes along sex lines, they combined efforts to organize their *igba uche*, and both men and women made equal financial contributions to their assigned projects.⁶²⁶

Upon satisfactory completion of the assigned project, the *uke* attained the status of *nde-nchin* (elders), which Azuonye has described as “the supreme goal of life,” when the individual was looked upon as a “living ancestor . . . [and] addressed by the title, *Nna* (ancestral father) or

Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amangwu Village. August 15, 2011; Chief Udensi Ekea, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. August 4, 2010; Chief Olua Iro Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Ebem. August 3, 2010; Chief Kevin Ukiro, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Asaga. August 10, 2010.

⁶²⁵ Mama Docas Kalu and Mary Ezera, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Ebem Village. Aug. 10, 2010; Nmia Nnaya Agbai, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Elu Village, Aug. 18, 2011; *Ikpirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu Village, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Akanu Village. Nov. 3, 2011; Mama Orié Emeh and Chief Mrs. Grace Ojieke, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Elu village. Aug. 18, 2011; Chief Olua Iro Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Ebem Village Ohafia. August 3, 2010; Chief Kevin Ukiro, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Asaga Village. August 10, 2010; Chief K.K. Owen, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Elu Village. Aug. 12, 2010; Chief Udensi Ekea, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. August 4, 2010; Ndukwe Otta and Uduma Uka, Group Interview. Aug. 14, 2011.

⁶²⁶ Ibid.

Nne (ancestral mother).”⁶²⁷ Njoku distinguishes two grades of *ndi ichin*: the junior set between sixty years and seventy years, and the senior set, seventy years and above. He noted that the former were sometimes called upon to serve as expert witnesses in the male and female courts between 1850 and 1900. The latter were *ndi ichin* in the fullest meaning of the concept. They were the ultimate repositories of indigenous wisdom and the embodiment of the people’s custom and history, and they were only consulted to resolve intractable issues in the community.⁶²⁸

Nsugbe, like most scholars of Ohafia history after him, provided an inconclusive account of the age-grades and their functioning relationship with other political bodies in the community.⁶²⁹ He links only the male governmental agencies of *akpan*, and *umuaka* to succession through the age-grade political system, as the age-based associations “controlling governmental powers in the village.”⁶³⁰ Analytically, he excludes the female political institution of *ikpirikpe*, as an equivalent political body.⁶³¹ Amadiume observed that Nsugbe’s study of the matrilineal Ohafia was disappointing from a gender perspective, but she also missed the insight that the autonomous non-lineage-based *ikpirikpe* did in fact derive from the age-grade

⁶²⁷ Ibid.

⁶²⁸ Mayne, “Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934,” 46; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 28; Meek, *Law and Authority in a Nigerian Tribe*, 200. Meek observed that while the elders may have retired from active community service, their opinions were sometimes sought, especially in land disputes, and that in order to prevent them from inadvertently giving wrong decisions, the younger age-grades often combined to form pressure groups against the elders. Mayne indicates that where land disputes involved women, female *ichin* (elders) became responsible for resolving such disputes.

⁶²⁹ Azuka A. Dike, “Review of *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo People* by Philip O. Nsugbe,” *American Anthropologist* 78, 1 (Mar., 1976), 173.

⁶³⁰ Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 59.

⁶³¹ Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 59-70.

institution.⁶³² This oversight is corrected in this chapter. Nsugbe describes *ndi-ichin* as “men.”⁶³³ However, *ndi-ichin* includes both women and men,⁶³⁴ and the variations in the duties of male and female *ichin* are explored below. Other scholars have presented the *uke* as a dominantly male organization.⁶³⁵ This chapter differs: it situates girls and boys, women and men, within the age grade institution, and charts the formative stages of Ohafia gendered political institutions.

Ezie Ogo, Nde-Ichin and Akpan: The Men’s Court, 1850-1900

Elderly male representatives (*ndi ichin*) of various *umudi ezi* (patrilineage compounds) in each village, in addition to members of *akpan* age-grade, constituted a men’s court or assembly, headed by the *ezie-ogo* (male ruler) who was usually the head of the most senior compound in the village.⁶³⁶ This assembly is known as *amali*, and it usually held court at the home of the *ezie-ogo*. The *ezie-ogo* wielded considerable moral power, derived from his role as the

⁶³² Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, 173-174.

⁶³³ Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 66.

⁶³⁴ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 28-29. Also, all my oral interviews confirm this.

⁶³⁵ Azuonye, “The Heroic Age,” 21-22.

⁶³⁶ The information for this section is based on oral interviews with various *ezie-ogo*, their council members and *ndi-ichin*: Okorie Kalu, *Ezie-ogo* of Isiugwu Village, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Isiugwu Village. December 10, 2011; Elders of Umu-Anya Family, Ndi Imaga Compound, Elu Ohafia, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Elu Village. August 14, 2011; Mecha Ukpai Akanu, *Ezie-ogo* of Amangwu Village and Members of the Men’s Court, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Amangwu Village. August 18, 2011; Anaso Awalekwa, *Ezie-ogo* of Ndea-Nku Village and Members of the Men’s Court, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Ndea-Nku Village. November 17, 2011; Vasco U. Iro, *Ezie-ogo* of Nkwebi Village, Members of the Men’s Court and *Nde-Ichin*, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Nkwebi Village. November 17, 2011; Kalu Awa, *Ezie-ogo* of Ibina (Ihenta), oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Ibina (Ihenta) Village. December 12, 2011. *Nde-Ichin*, Amuma Village, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Obu Nde-Torti, Amuma Village. November 26, 2011; Godwin Nwankwo Uko, *Ezie-ogo* of Amankwu Village and his cabinet members, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Amankwu Village. October 25, 2011.

customary custodian of the sacred symbols of the community's ancestors, as well as the communal land of the patrilineages. He performed sacrifices to the ancestral spirits on occasions such as the commencement of the farming season and the celebration of the new yam festival or the New Year.⁶³⁷ The *ezie-ogo* was installed into office in an official coronation rite called *Isuyi Nzu Isi*, followed by a public presentation, a day after.⁶³⁸

Amali made decrees relayed to the community by a village announcer. In consultation with *ikpirikpe ndi-iyom* (discussed below), *amali* set the annual farming calendar, as well as dates for the celebration of important festivals. It made rules about the conduct of the citizens of the village and mediated relations with other villages. As a judicial body, *amali* settled disputes, which defied solution at lower levels of the political and administrative arrangement such as the patrilineage compounds (*umudi ezi*).⁶³⁹ *Amali* sometimes summoned a meeting of all free born adult males of the community (*oha ogo*), to deliberate on matters of grave importance such as an untraced murder, threat of external attack, mobilization for external attack, spread of dangerous epidemic, or 'abomination of the Earth' (*aru*).⁶⁴⁰ When such an *ad hoc* assembly was called, every person, irrespective of age, who had a contribution to make, was given a chance to do so, the crowd shouting down unpopular opinions while applauding popular ones. According to

⁶³⁷ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 21.

⁶³⁸ The various *ezie-ogo* cited in footnote 535 above discussed this rite; also, Mba Odo Okereke, *ezie-ogo* of Akanu, oral conversation with the author, Akanu Village. October 15, 2011.

⁶³⁹ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 22.

⁶⁴⁰ The summons for this meeting was announced using the *ikoro*, housed in a hut, at the village square. The *ikoro* is beaten sparingly, mostly in times of emergency.

Njoku, “young men with power of speech would easily sway the assembly,” and this “provided a forum where the young . . . could bring their influence to bear on the old and conservative.”⁶⁴¹

In his characterization of pre-colonial Igbo of Nigeria, Uchendu writes,

Every villager who [could] contribute to [a] discussion [was] given a hearing. When the matter [had] been thoroughly talked out, the leaders from each lineage in the village retire[d] for *izuzu* (consultation). The right to participate in *izuzu* [was] a greatly cherished . . . one and [was] restricted to men of weight and prestige, men who [had] the wisdom to understand and appreciate all schools of thought and achieve a compromise which the *Amala* [could] accept. After *izuzu*, a spokesman who [was] chosen not because of his age but for his power of oratory, his persuasive talents, and his ability to put the verdict in perspective, announce[d] the decision. This [was] either accepted by the *Amala* by general acclamation or rejected by shouts of derision. In the latter event the view of the assembly prevail[ed].⁶⁴²

Uchendu’s description was equally true of Ohafia society between 1850 and 1900, according to Mayne’s observations.⁶⁴³ At the center of the men’s court was the *akpan* age-grade.

Akpan was a police organ, which enforced the decisions of the *amali*.⁶⁴⁴ Mayne writes,

In ancient times [before 1910, when the warrant chiefs were appointed], each village of Ohafia possessed its AKPAN . . . [which was] appointed by a council of elders to investigate all matters both criminal and civil. Their duty was not only to investigate but to arrange for the appearance of both parties and their witnesses and carry into effect the decisions of the [men’s] court or council.⁶⁴⁵

Some of the decisions which *akpan* enforced include prohibitions of fishing out of season or at night, collecting firewood from the forest when the ban prohibiting it was yet to be lifted, or the planting of yam before the ritual inauguration by *ndi-eze-ji* (yam priests). *Akpan* announced

⁶⁴¹ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 23.

⁶⁴² Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria*, 41-42.

⁶⁴³ Mayne, “Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934,” 12-13.

⁶⁴⁴ And in the eight *Oha-eke* villages, those of the *umuaka* as well. In the 18 villages where *umuaka* did not exist, *akpan* assumed the responsibilities of *umuaka* as well. Chief Ugbu Uduma, *ezie-ogo* of Nde-Amogu, oral interview by author, Ihenta (Ibina) Village. November 11, 2011.

⁶⁴⁵ Mayne, “Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934,” 8.

the days when specific age-grades would be required to perform certain tasks in the village, and they sometimes kept watch over the village and its farmland. In enforcing laws, *akpan* utilized two mediums: *nkwa akpan* (*akpan* drum) and *ekpe akpan* (*akpan* masquerade). The major means of law enforcement was the imposition of fines on violators, and these fines were often paid in the form of brass rods currency.⁶⁴⁶ According to Njoku, during their fine imposition missions, the *akpan* “walk[ed] in a single file, speechless and no person dare[d] to cross their way.”⁶⁴⁷

Akpan arrested offenders in their homes. When offenders were visited by *akpan*, they were first required to pay a “summons fee” known as *ima nzu*.⁶⁴⁸ If an offender refused to comply or tried to argue with *akpan*, they, without uttering a word, hung the *nkwa akpan* at the entrance of the house of the head of the compound in which the offender resided. This signified that the offender had “carried *akpan* on his head — *buru akpan isi*.”⁶⁴⁹ This was a calamitous offense that incriminated both the offender and male members of his compound. The latter would pressurize the individual into appeasing the *akpan*, by paying his fine. Alternatively, *akpan* would seize the offender’s property, or any property of significant value in the immediate neighborhood. In the latter case, pressure from the real owners of the property forced the offender to meet *akpan*’s demands.⁶⁵⁰

⁶⁴⁶ Mayne, “Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934,” 31.

⁶⁴⁷ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 22.

⁶⁴⁸ Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 61.

⁶⁴⁹ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 22.

⁶⁵⁰ Chief Uduma Nnochin Ogbuagu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amuke, Village, Ohafia. Nov. 24, 2011.

As an organ that enforced the resolutions of the male government, *akpan* was not to be disobeyed, and the penalty for disobedience was severe.⁶⁵¹ On special occasions, such as the burial of a member of *akpan*, or the celebration of the new yam festival, *ekpe akpan* (*akpan* masquerade), the organ's secret society, was produced. In most Ohafia villages, only the most senior members of *akpan* participated in the masquerade performance, but in others, every male irrespective of age took part.⁶⁵² In order to dramatize its power, and elicit obeisance from penalized individuals, the *akpan* masquerade was hideous and frightful.⁶⁵³ It wore a very loose, over-flowing gown of coarse jute material with live cocks suspended on its back. Before the British colonial government established a Native Court in Ohafia in 1907, when *ekpe akpan* was exerting punishment against an offender, it killed with impunity any livestock it laid hands on.⁶⁵⁴ The masquerade symbolized the emergence of the ancestors in corporeal form, and this reified the sacredness of *akpan* powers.

The Men's Court and Its Power Limits

This chapter deals specifically with gendered political power, and it is apt to clarify the limits of men's political power in Ohafia-Igbo society between 1850 and 1900. The political prerogatives of the men's court placed an emphasis on community defense, and the regulation of

⁶⁵¹ Meek, *Law and Authority in a Nigerian Tribe*, 199.

⁶⁵² Chief Oluka Mba, oral interview with author, digital voice recording, Nde-Ibe Village. November 3, 2011. This differed in other Igbo societies, where only initiates took part in masquerade societies. Indeed, the *akpan* masquerade was the only one in Ohafia that allowed uninitiated males to take part in its public performances. Other Ohafia secret societies discussed in chapter 5 did not allow uninitiated males into their circles.

⁶⁵³ *Nde-Ichin*, Amuma Village, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Obu Nde-Torti, Amuma Village. November 26, 2011; Chief Uduma Nnochin Ogbuagu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amuke, Ohafia. Nov. 24, 2011; Ndukwe Otta and Uduma Uka, Group Interview, digital voice recording. Aug. 14, 2011.

⁶⁵⁴ *Ibid.* The logic was that the offender bore the cost of replacing all *akpan* damages.

inter-group relations within and outside Ohafia.⁶⁵⁵ Men's dominance in these spheres of administration resulted primarily from a historical tradition where men were preoccupied with the military defense of their communities and the maintenance of peaceful relations with their neighbors through *ukwuzi* (diplomatic contract) negotiations.⁶⁵⁶ The men's court had no jurisdiction over women, a reality that will be made very clear in the following section.

Second, the level of organization of the men's court varied from one village to another depending on the relative size of each village. This was often reflected in the number of *ndi ichin* representation in *amali*, as well as the calibre of individuals that made up the *akpan*.⁶⁵⁷ Moreover, the office of the *ezie-ogo* (male ruler) was powerful only to the extent of the individual occupying that position. Nsugbe noted that the *ezie-ogo* of Amaekpu village in Ohafia was "kept out of village politics . . . He did not openly participate in the running of the affairs of his own village; he [did] not attend meetings and therefore did not preside over them; nor did he undertake any ritual duties. He [was] greatly respected but not regarded in any sense as a sacred

⁶⁵⁵ Okorie Kalu, *ezie-ogo* of Isiugwu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Isiugwu Village. December 10, 2011; Elders of Umu-Anya Family, Ndi Imaga Compound, Elu Ohafia, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Elu Village. August 14, 2011; Mecha Ukpai Akanu, *ezie-ogo* of Amangwu and Members of the Men's Court, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Amangwu Village. August 18, 2011; Anaso Awalekwa, *ezie-ogo* of Ndea-Nku and Members of the Men's Court, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Ndea-Nku Village. November 17, 2011; Vasco U. Iro, *ezie-ogo* of Nkwebi Village, Members of the Men's Court and *Nde-Ichin*, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Nkwebi Village. November 17, 2011; Kalu Awa, *ezie-ogo* of Ibina (Ihenta), oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Ibina (Ihenta) Village. December 12, 2011. *Nde-Ichin*, Amuma Village, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Obu Nde-Torti, Amuma Village. November 26, 2011; Godwin Nwankwo Uko, *ezie-ogo* of Amankwu Village and his cabinet members., Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Amankwu Village. October 25, 2011.

⁶⁵⁶ Ibid. Ohafia external relations are fully explored in chapters 2 and 4.

⁶⁵⁷ Onwuka Njoku, phone conversation with author, Michigan to Nigeria, Sept. 2, 2012.

functionary.”⁶⁵⁸ Similarly, Mayne noted that before colonial rule, the *ezie-ogo*’s authority “amounted to that of a figure-head. He had no actual control over any outside village in any matter,”⁶⁵⁹ he “had no autocratic power whatsoever in his village,” and “he had also no autocratic power even in his own family.”⁶⁶⁰ His position as *ezie-ogo* gave him “only the right to announce the decisions of his Village Council.”⁶⁶¹ Azuonye affirms that the *ezie-ogo*’s function was “interestingly, limited to the management of relations” between one village and another.⁶⁶²

In addition, no uniform rule of succession applied in Ohafia for the selection of the *ezie-ogo* (male ruler). Rather, in the various villages, succession practices varied from alternate selection from two or more patrilineages, to collective (among various patrilineages) and individual usurpation; and wealth and influence sometimes governed a choice.⁶⁶³ Mayne similarly reported that “there [was] no hard and fast rule” governing the selection of an *ezie-ogo* before colonial rule.⁶⁶⁴ Also, within any patrilineage, personal distinction and accomplishment, rather than seniority, was the determining factor for selection.⁶⁶⁵ Thus, individual status achievement, rather than ascription, was the fundamental factor in election into political office.

⁶⁵⁸ Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 69.

⁶⁵⁹ Mayne, “Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934,” 21.

⁶⁶⁰ Mayne, “Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934,” 13 and 16.

⁶⁶¹ Mayne, “Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934,” 13.

⁶⁶² Azuonye, “The Heroic Age,” 19.

⁶⁶³ Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 95-101.

⁶⁶⁴ Mayne, “Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934,” 20.

⁶⁶⁵ Vasco U. Iro, *ezie-ogo* of Nkwebi Village, Members of the Men’s Court and *Nde-Ichin*, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Nkwebi Village. November 17, 2011; Okorie Kalu, *ezie-ogo* of Isiugwu Village, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Isiugwu Village. December 10, 2011; Elders of Umu-Anya Family, Ndi Imaga Compound, Elu Ohafia, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Elu Village. August 14, 2011.

Ezie Nwami, Ndi-Ichin and Ikipirikpe Ndi Inyom: An Outline of the Socio-Political Make-Up and Prerogatives of the Women's Court, 1850-1900⁶⁶⁶

This chapter argues that Ohafia-Igbo women constituted and maintained a gendered political system, which enabled them to exercise more political power in the society over and above men, between 1850 and 1900. By outlining the limits of women's political jurisdiction (over both men and women), in contrast to men's (who lacked political jurisdiction over women), this study seeks to show that Ohafia-Igbo women were not the docile and invisible political subjects they have been made out to be, between 1850 and 1900. During this period, women's political authority was most effectively expressed through a very powerful and dynamic institution known as *ikipirikpe ndi inyom*. In the first two decades of the 20th century, as women lost their political prerogatives to warrant chiefs, court clerks and Presbyterian Church elders, the expression of female power and authority increasingly took the form of individualized performances of *ogaranya* masculinity. This evolution of female power and authority is examined in its proper context in chapter 5.

This present chapter seeks to highlight the kind of structures that enabled Ohafia-Igbo women to exhibit greater measures of political power than men between 1850 and 1900. Njoku writes that “In fact, *ikipirikpe ndi-inyom* [was] much sterner and stricter in exacting fines and

⁶⁶⁶ I have to clearly state that the choice of 1850-1900 as a representative time period for the “pre-colonial” period is both arbitrary and informed. In the former sense, it is a heuristic device, which I chose to situate within a manageable time-frame, the stories which Ohafia men and women situated within *mgbe ichin* (olden days), by which they generally meant before colonial rule. In the latter sense, many of the case studies, which Ohafia people recall happened in the 1890s, while other incidents within living memory happened in the first two decades of the 20th century. My respondents talked about their parents and grandparents, who were born between 1850 and 1900. Thus, this time frame enables me to discuss a pre-colonial period, for which I can provide evidence. Moreover, as indicated in chapter 1, the major socio-political changes in southeastern Nigeria, which the larger dissertation deals with, such as legitimate commerce and slave production for domestic markets, occurred between 1850 and 1900.

commanding obedience than its male counterpart,”⁶⁶⁷ *akpan*. I contend that it was precisely through their effective enforcement of *ilu ndi-inyom* (women’s laws) that *ikpirikpe ndi-inyom* defined itself as a most powerful political entity between 1850 and 1900. This contradicts Mayne’s statement that before 1900, “supreme control” rested with the *ezie-ogo*, patrilineage male elders, and *akpan*,⁶⁶⁸ and that the *ezie-nwami* settled “petty disputes between women in matters touching land and other small matters between females of her village.”⁶⁶⁹ *Au contraire*, *ikpirikpe* dealt with both men and women, and while they governed women’s affairs, they also dramatized their power over men.⁶⁷⁰ What did female power and authority between 1850 and 1900 entail and how was it expressed?

⁶⁶⁷ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 25.

⁶⁶⁸ Mayne, “Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934,” 12.

⁶⁶⁹ Mayne, “Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934,” 46. Mayne’s statement was more in tandem with the rest of patrilineal Igbo society, whereas Nina Mba stated, “women were not involved in the communal judicial process, though disputes between and among women were settled by the women’s associations.” See Mba, *Nigerian Women Mobilized*, 27. The *ikpirikpe* also differed from the Women’s Council of Nnobi studied by Amadiume, where, even though the *Agba Ekwe* (ruler of the women’s council) held the most honored title in Nnobi, women were only invited by men to settle disputes only as a last resort. See Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, 67. The Ohafia case differed because *ikpirikpe* had sole jurisdiction in any case involving a woman.

⁶⁷⁰ This argument is significant because Nina Mba’s assertion that while pre-colonial Igbo women largely controlled their own world, they lacked direct influence over communal politics, and were not allowed formal direct participation in the decision-making processes, has not been challenged. Mba viewed Igbo women’s political organizations as informal associations, beyond the mainstream, because the assembly of wives and daughters were *ad hoc* in nature. See Mba, *Nigerian Women Mobilized*, 29. Caroline Ifeka-Moller also argued that in eastern Nigerian, what is ethnographically known as the formal political system was by custom allocated to men, and that where women held some offices, owned marketing associations, and relatively independent sphere of all-female activities, they were merely nominal instances of female autonomy. Ifeka-Moller, “Female Militancy and Colonial Revolt,” 134. Also, see Annie M.D. Lebeuf, “The Role of Women in the Political Organization of African Societies,” in Denise Paulme, ed., *Women of Tropical Africa* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1960), 109, 113. The *ikpirikpe* was very different, because it was a formal political organization, rooted in an extensive age-grade organization, which was hierarchical in nature. It had a direct male

Like its male counterpart, Ohafia female political organization encompassed all women. A village council of female elders (*ndi ichin*),⁶⁷¹ often representatives from the various *umudi ezi* (patrilineage compounds), in addition to *ikpirikpe ndi-iyom* constituted a women's court under the leadership of the *ezie-nwami*. While some female elders and *ikpirikpe* members were daughters of a village, others derived from both within and outside the village as wives. Thus, *ikpirikpe* comprised married, unmarried, divorced, and widowed daughters of a village, known in other Igbo communities as *umuada* (assembly of daughters); as well as village-driven and foreign wives, hence, *otu inyomdi* (assembly of wives), also found in the rest of Igboland. Both *umuada* and *otu inyomdi* are subjects of significant studies.⁶⁷² Achebe has described the former as a police force, the most powerful government organ in northern Igboland, a supreme court of appeal, a rotating credit union, the custodians of religious morality, the preserver of market peace, and a welfare organization. Achebe describes the latter as a lower court where cases involving women were initially brought, a self-help group, and the regulators of husbands' treatment of their wives.⁶⁷³

equivalent, *akpan*. However, its political prerogatives and authority outshone those of the *akpan*. Namely, whereas *ikpirikpe* exercised power over both men and women, *akpan* could not. The Ohafia-Igbo political system was the age-grade institution writ-large. Moreover, Ifeka-Moller's argument that Eastern Nigerian men's political power was based on "production," does not translate to the Ohafia-Igbo case, where women were the breadwinners of their families. Lebeuf's argument that in kinship-based societies, women rose to formal leadership positions only through religious practices and inheritance from fathers is also not true of *ikpirikpe*.

⁶⁷¹ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 24.

⁶⁷² Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, 59-67; Okonjo, "The Dual-Sex Political System;" Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors and Kings*, 164-171.

⁶⁷³ Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors and Kings*, 164-171.

However, unlike the rest of Igboland where these female organs existed independent of each other, and only merged to form a temporary Women's Assembly during emergencies,⁶⁷⁴ the Ohafia-Igbo *ikpirikpe ndi-inyom* permanently comprised individuals, who could be classified as *umuada* and *inyomdi*. The powers and prerogatives of *ikpirikpe ndi-inyom* also encompassed those of these two institutions. Amadiume clearly stated with regard to patrilineal Igbo societies that "the fact remains that even though there was a unifying organization which safeguarded women's interests, female solidarity was neutralized, to some extent, through the division of women on the basis of gender; daughters were seen as males in relation to wives and superior in authority to wives . . . Daughters, in alliance with their fathers and brothers, identified themselves with male interests."⁶⁷⁵

The Ohafia-case was remarkably different, for *ikpirikpe* derived its members from the *uke* (age-grade), and included both select wives and daughters in profound group solidarity. The existence of women who were simultaneously wives and daughters in each Ohafia village was made possible by endogamous marriage practices within the patrilineage, since the dominant matrilineage was the only exogamous unit in the society.⁶⁷⁶ As Nina Mba indicates, this was different in the rest of patrilineal Igbo society, where village exogamy was practiced, and as a result, wives of a village came from a distance away, and remained essentially outsiders, even when they had children.⁶⁷⁷ The Ohafia case was different, because both wives and daughters could derive from the same patrilineage. Thus, the *ezie-nwami* as both daughter and wife of the

⁶⁷⁴ Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors and Kings*, 170-171; Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, 67.

⁶⁷⁵ Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, 67.

⁶⁷⁶ Nsugbe, *Ohafia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 72-79.

⁶⁷⁷ Mba, *Nigerian Women Mobilized*, 62.

village, led the women. It is in light of a women's council, combining the powers of *umuada*, *otu inyomdi*, and a female ruler that the Ohafia female court is to be seen.

Mayne translates the title *ezie-nwami* as queen. However, Ohafia women constantly referred to the *ezie-nwami* as *ezie anyi* ("our king"), and contrasted her to the *ezie-nwoke*⁶⁷⁸ ("male king"). When I asked *ikpirikpe ndi-inyom* of Elu village why they referred to their *ezie-nwami* as king of the women, Uche Kalu Ebi responded, "in Ohafia, women managed their own affairs independent of men. The *ezie-nwoke* [male king] ruled over the men, and this *ezie anyi* [our king] is the ruler of the women . . . Since the olden days, women's rulership in this Ohafia have been stronger than the men's."⁶⁷⁹ Thus, *ezie anyi* ("our king") evinces women's consciousness of a gendered political system, and reaffirms the *ezie-nwami*'s political autonomy. This is why Amadiume boldly translated the Ohafia title *ezie nwami* as "female king."⁶⁸⁰

The concept of "queen," which refers simultaneously to a female sovereign or monarch as well as the wife or consort of a king, does not fully capture the status of *ezie-nwami* in Ohafia-Igbo society. First, her right to rulership and her position did not derive from being the wife of a king; indeed, her husband was no king. Rather, her right to rule derived from her membership of a royal lineage, just like the *ezie-ogo*. Secondly, the *ezie-nwami* was autonomous from the "male

⁶⁷⁸ The following male elders also made this distinction by referring to the *ezie-ogo* (male ruler) as *ezie-nwoke* (male king), and describing the *ezie-nwami* (female ruler) as *ezie ndi-iyom* ("king of the women"), and *onye-ishi ndi-inyom* ("head of the women"): *Ezie-ogo* Okpan Ncheghe of Ndi-Orie-Eke Village, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Dec. 15, 2011; *Ezie-ogo* Ukonu Okoro Ekere of Eziafor Village, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Dec. 17, 2011; Chief Kevin Ukiro, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Asaga. August 10, 2010; Chief K.K. Owen, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Elu. Aug. 12, 2010; Chief Udensi Ekea, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. August 4, 2010.

⁶⁷⁹ Mrs. Uche Kalu Ebi, Cabinet Member of *Ikpirikpe Ndi-Iyom* of Elu Village, In Group Interview with *Ezie-nwami* Ucha Oji Iwe of Elu Village and her Cabinet, digital voice recording, Elu Ohafia. October 25, 2011.

⁶⁸⁰ Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, 174. This is not unlike Achebe's translation of "female eze" (C.K. Meek) as "female king." Achebe, *The Female King*, 2.

king,” and it was expected that both worked hand-in-hand with their courts for the peace and well being of their village. The coronation of the *ezie-nwami* is also known as *isuyi nzu isi*.⁶⁸¹

The *ezie-nwami* is in a sense, comparable to the *omu* in Onitsha, Asaba, Osommari, Ilah, and other Ika-Igbo areas, who Basden observed, “[was] installed with regal ceremony, for the rites include[d] a symbolic crowning . . . on similar lines to the coronation ceremonies observed when installing a king. After this ceremony, [she was] known and saluted as ‘Omu’ (Queen). It (“Queen”) [was] merely a courtesy title, for the ‘Omu’ [was] never the wife of a king.”⁶⁸² She and her male counterpart, the *Asagba/Obi* were autonomous monarchs with separate but cognate powers and functions.⁶⁸³ However, the *ezie-nwami* differed significantly from the *omu* because unlike the latter, most of her powers were not exercised over the regulation of trade and the market, but rather, over all socio-political spheres of the society involving women.⁶⁸⁴

The notion of the *ezie-nwami* as king of the women, reframes popular conceptions of female power and authority in southeastern Nigeria. In her study of the “life and times of Ahebi Ugbabe, the only female warrant chief and king in colonial Nigeria,”⁶⁸⁵ Achebe argues that Ahebi transformed herself into a “man” to become king in a society with no kings. However, the

⁶⁸¹ Information for this section derived from oral interviews conducted with: *Ezie Nwami* Ogonne Kalu Kalu of Uduma Ukwu Village, oral interview; *Ezie-nwami* Ucha Oji Iwe of Elu Village and her Cabinet, Group Interview; *Ikpirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu Village, Group Interview; Mecha Ukpai Akanu, *ezie-ogo* of Amangwu Village and Members of the Men’s Court, Group Interview; Anaso Awalekwa, *ezie-ogo* of Ndea-Nku Village and Members of the Men’s Court, Group Interview; Kalu Awa, *ezie-ogo* of Ibina (Ihenta), oral interview; Godwin Nwankwo Uko, *ezie-ogo* of Amankwu and his cabinet members, Group Interview by author.

⁶⁸² Basden, *Niger Ibos*, 209-210.

⁶⁸³ Elizabeth Isichei, “Historical Change in an Ibo Polity: Asaba to 1885,” *Journal of African History* 10, 3 (1969), 424; Okonjo, “The Dual-Sex Political System,” 47-48; Ibewuikwe, “*African Women and Religious Change*,” 62-67, Mba, *Nigerian Women Mobilized*, 21-26

⁶⁸⁴ N.A.I, CSO 26/3 File 29196: C.J. Mayne, Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934, 46.

⁶⁸⁵ Achebe, *The Female King*, 2.

ezie-nwami never had to construct herself as male in order to be socially perceived as king of the women. The gendered distinction between *ezie-nwoke* (“male king”) and “king of the women” is located within the indigenous logic of the Ohafia-Igbo. Here, the significant factor of distinction is not the gender of the individual king but the gender of those over whom the king exercised her or his power and authority. Thus, the *ezie-nwami* as “king of the women” was *king over the women*, and the *ezie-ogo* also called *ezie-nwoke*,⁶⁸⁶ as “male king” was *king over the men*.⁶⁸⁷

The *ezie-nwami*, writes Nsugbe, “combined the secular function of presiding over meetings, or speaking for the body (*ikpirikpe*), with the ritual one of initiating the planting of crops by women in the farms.”⁶⁸⁸ Until this ritual called *ichu aja izu orie*, which involved the *ezie-nwami* touching the earth with hoe in blessing was performed, nobody planted anything in the community. According to Nnaya Bassey, anybody violating this taboo “must come and appease us (*ikpirikpe ndi inyom*) in a ritual of *ikwa ali* (to mourn the land), because the person would have accursed the soil and poisoned all crops with blight and insect-infection.”⁶⁸⁹

Between 1850 and 1900, the female court set the calendar for planting and harvesting women’s crops (and in concert with men, decided on the best time to begin yam planting), and maintained taboos, which forbade men from participating in economic ventures such as palm produce sale.⁶⁹⁰

⁶⁸⁶ Chief K.K. Owen, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Elu. August 12, 2010.

⁶⁸⁷ This interpretation emerged from oral conversations with the various *ezie-ogo* and *ezie-nwami* and their council members, interviewed for this study.

⁶⁸⁸ Nsugbe, *Ohafia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 68.

⁶⁸⁹ *Ikpirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu Village, Group Interview; Elders of Nde Odo Patrilineage, Akanu Village, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording. Nov. 2, 2011.

⁶⁹⁰ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 24.

The *ezie-nwami* was actively involved in the political organization of women. Her home was both a palace and a court where the female council held their meetings and heard cases. Because the *ezie-nwami* was usually much older than the members of *ikpirikpe ndi inyom*, she appointed a leader among the *ikpirikpe* members, responsible for carrying and beating *nkwa ndi inyom* (*ikpirikpe* drum), the group's instrument of authority. However, the *ezie-nwami* remained the custodian of this instrument. In practice, women between the ages of 45 and 60 years usually made up *ikpirikpe ndi-inyom*. The broader age-range of this organization resulted from the practice of selecting very active and politically conscious members from the various *uke* that had graduated from the *uke ji ogo* (an age-grade that had been formally recognized) stage.⁶⁹¹ Thus, *ikpirikpe* differed from the Igbo Women's Assembly (which combines the Assembly of Wives and the Assembly of Daughters) in the sense that it derived directly from Ohafia age-grade organizations, and it did not comprise all daughters and wives (rather, active representatives), but it was always able to summon all adult women and young girls, whenever it initiated a decision-enforcement strategy.⁶⁹²

Beyond her village, the *ezie-nwami* maintained inter-village sisterhood with all the *ezie-nwami* in each Ohafia village, such that when her cabinet members and all female persons in her village abandoned their homes in protest against men and migrated to another village, the *ezie-nwami* of the refuge village became a hostess to her fleeing sisters. In such cases, all the so-

⁶⁹¹ *Ezie-nwami* Ucha Oji Iwe of Elu Village and her Cabinet, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording. October 25, 2011; *Ezie-nwami* Ogbonne Kalu Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Uduma Ukwu Village. November 17, 2011; *Ezie-nwami* Mmia Abali of Eziafor Village, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Dec. 17, 2011; *Ikpirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu Village, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Akanu Village. November 3, 2011; Mama Orie Emeh and Chief Mrs. Grace Ojieke, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Elu Village. August 18, 2011.

⁶⁹² Ibid.

called refugee women would be put up in the home of the *ezie-nwami* and the surrounding compounds. Here, the *ezie-nwami* provided the food, which the women of her village cooked and served to their visitors, amidst soul-lifting songs and dance performances. In some cases, the women spent the night under the care of the hostess *ezie-nwami*. According to the *ezie-nwami* of Eziafor village, Mmia Abali, the concentration of both human and material resources of the female members of one village in caring for women from another village, was often too unbearable for the men of either village. This often forced men into negotiating the return of women, and promising to meet any of their demands.⁶⁹³ Thus, the *ezie-nwami* was cardinal to active female exercise of political power.

Unlike its male counterparts, *akpan*, which primary duty was law enforcement; and *umuaka*, which could only legislate but could not enforce, *ikpirikpe ndi-inyom* was both legislator and enforcer of its own laws.⁶⁹⁴ This was a frightening reality, one that was constantly expressed especially by men, in the course of fieldwork for this study, namely, that the punitive measures of *ikpirikpe ndi-inyom* were fiercer than those of men, because, “*wo ji iwe ikpe wo kpee, a wara ndi ife*”⁶⁹⁵ — they vented the anger and bitterness of the cases which they had heard upon their offenders’ arrest. In this vein, they made use of *nkwa ndi inyom* (*ikpirikpe* drum). What is *nkwa ndi-inyom*? In a group interview with *ikpirikpe ndi-inyom* of Akanu, Nne Agwu Ukpai stated:

It is the instrument of authority used to govern all laws (*ilu*) and affairs concerning women. Be you a man or woman, once you violate any of the laws, which the women uphold, this *ikpirikpe* would come to your home, and this entire village of ours will be quietened with fear! Man, woman, and child! No one will

⁶⁹³ *Ezie-nwami* Mmia Abali, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Dec. 17, 2011.

⁶⁹⁴ Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 68.

⁶⁹⁵ Nna Uma Ukariwe Uma, in Group Interview with Elders of Nde Odo Patrilineage, Akanu, Ohafia, digital voice recording. Nov. 2, 2011.

step out of his or her home! We have various names for our drum. We call it *nne* (mother and ancestress), *ogotum ikwere* (oracular truth-establisher), but the main name is *ikpu adighi ike eri aku mba!* (the vagina which has no difficulty in consuming the wealth of others). Just like we told you that *it* cannot be abused, once you abuse *it*, you have incurred *its* wrath, and *it* will require you to produce that wealth which you possess, and the people of this world would devour it! This is because *it* was on *its* own and you looked for *its* trouble. I mean, *it* was on *its* own and you looked for *its* trouble [Laughter]. *Ozoro ezoro akpa uka!* (sneaky trouble maker!)⁶⁹⁶

The equation of the drum with women's vagina evoked the sacredness of the female body and sexuality among the Ohafia-Igbo before colonial rule. Njoku writes,

It was a grave offense for a man to make an obscene remark about a woman or female sexuality. Such an action attracted a swift and hostile reaction from the entire women-folk of the village. They would assemble at the residence of the offender, chanting bellicose songs, questioning the manhood of the offender and wondering if he ever had a mother. The women would demonstrate in front of the man's house in such bodily exposure that could not but embarrass and shame him, his wife, age grades and relatives. The offender would invariably sue for peace by meeting the fines imposed by the council of women elders.⁶⁹⁷

So, when the women say "*it*," they simultaneously made reference to both the drum and their genitals. Armed with this knowledge, that the sacred cannot be so openly named, it was with a great sense of trepidation that the author implored the women to interpret the name of this drum — a fear which the women relished, and one that positioned them in a more powerful position to define their subjective understanding of female power and authority in their society. Ohafia-Igbo women's subjectivity equally manifested itself when in the course of oral interviews; they narrated, re-enacted, and relived stories of de-emasculatation of men. In these cases, they transformed the interview sessions into public performances, where younger women, children, and men constituted an awed audience. They danced and teased and cajoled, re-emphasizing their power to teach men lessons when necessary. In this case, Ohafia-Igbo women

⁶⁹⁶ Nne Agwu Ukpai, in Group Interview with *Ikpirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu Village.

⁶⁹⁷ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 25.

mirror the Arab-speaking Muslim Sudan Hofriyat female community, whose cult rituals re-enact past female power in a patriarchal society,⁶⁹⁸ and whom Janice Boddy defines as “culture producers and social actors.”⁶⁹⁹

Female power and authority in Ohafia was conveyed through ritual stipulations. Males (men and boys) observed rules of “no entry” when the *ikpirikpe* held its meetings, unless the individual had been specifically invited for a hearing. The secret nature of *ikpirikpe* consultations elevated their aura, and promoted public anxiety. When *ikpirikpe* as a body embarked upon fine imposition missions, they observed dead silence and proceeded in a single file, just like the *akpan*, because, the drum, which they carried on such journeys, was considered a sacred cult object.⁷⁰⁰ *Ezie-nwami* Ogbonne Kalu stated, “Nobody can stand in our way when we are on a march. When we are marching with the *ikpirikpe* in a single file, nobody can walk in front of us. If you see us coming and walk in front of us, we will immediately make a detour and visit you at your home with the *ikpirikpe*. We will place it on your table and it is only after you have appeased the *ikpirikpe* that we will lift it up and continue on our original mission.”⁷⁰¹

What type of cases did *ikpirikpe* hear and what laws did they enforce? According to Madam Comfort Ukoha of *ikpirikpe ndi-iyom* of Akanu,

⁶⁹⁸ Janice Boddy, *Wombs and Alien Spirits: Women, Men, and the Zar Cult in Northern Sudan* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989).

⁶⁹⁹ Boddy, *Wombs and Alien Spirits*, 4-5.

⁷⁰⁰ *Ezie-nwami* Ucha Oji Iwe of Elu Village and her Cabinet, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording. October 25, 2011; *Ezie-nwami* Ogbonne Kalu Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Uduma Ukwu Village. November 17, 2011; *Ezie-nwami* Mmia Abali of Eziafor Village, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Dec. 17, 2011. The *ikpirikpe* drum is best seen as a personal deity, because the women employed it as a spiritual relic, used for oath-taking. Hence, *ogotum ikwere* (oracular truth-establisher).

⁷⁰¹ *Ezie-nwami* Ogbonne Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Uduma Ukwu Village. Nov. 17, 2011.

If you abused a woman verbally in relation to her *okpu* or *ike* (vagina/buttocks), that was when our *ikpirikpe* came out. If you appeased us at that point, then our *ikpirikpe* had fulfilled its purpose. You could see a married woman in her husband's home and ask her to leave her home. If this was violated, our *ikpirikpe* came out. You could accuse your fellow woman of *okpara* (marital infidelity) — that she was married and was sleeping with another man. If this was violated, our *ikpirikpe* would come out. You could tell a woman that she was smelly (*ishi ishi*). In this our land, if you violated this law, our *ikpirikpe* came out, and we the women, would come to you so that you could wash us clean. You would present us with soap, body lotion, *nzu* (white chalk/powder), cloths, perfume, and every sort of make-up we required; because when you said that a woman was smelly, you had abused all the women. These were the functions of our *ikpirikpe* before colonial rule, and these were the laws that held our village together. You could not snatch another woman's husband and edge her out of her marriage. We did not permit abortion, both for single and married women. If we learned of a violation of this, *ikpirikpe* would come out. The violators and their families would perform a funeral for this land. They would furnish us with a number of requirements. We adjudged it a murder. The violators would buy a coffin, a *jooji* cloth, chieftaincy regalia, *okpu agu* (warrior's cap), eagle plumes, yams, a goat, chicken, a pair of shoes, and a large sum of money. We would take that piece of *jooji* cloth with which our *nne* [the drum] had been appeased, and wrap it around her. Then, we would take her back to her house, where she lived.⁷⁰²

Besides the regulation of all feminine matters (marriage, education, sexuality, divorce, and initiation ceremony for girls), the female court was solely responsible for administering justice in cases involving both men and women, between 1850 and 1900. Thus, Nsugbe noted, “In cases of adultery . . . *umuaka* could, if the matter came before it, punish the male culprit, but would be powerless over the female accomplice,” because *ikpirikpe* “[was] the one and only body that [could] deal with the offenses committed by women.”⁷⁰³ Mayne, who as a British colonial officer, marginalized Ohafia women from his description of pre-colonial Ohafia-Igbo political organization also wrote that adultery was considered a serious crime, and while the male

⁷⁰² Madam Comfort Ukoha, in Group Interview with *Ikpirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu Village, digital voice recording.

⁷⁰³ Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 68.

culprit was sold into slavery as punishment, “nothing was done to the woman.”⁷⁰⁴ Yet, in ensuring justice for a female member of society, *ikpirikpe* did not let any man stand in her way. Thus, Nnenna Emeri said, “If men violated the laws upheld by *ndi inyom*, they were held to the same obligations and punishments . . . If a man abused his wife physically or verbally in relation to her sexuality, or accused her of sleeping with other men, once women learned of it, *ikpirikpe* went and showed him that there was a power above him . . . And once they came in, if the man was not co-operating, they may put him down and urinate upon him!”⁷⁰⁵

Urinating upon men was Ohafia-Igbo women’s manifestation of what Nina Mba described as “Sitting on a Man,”⁷⁰⁶ and what Shirley Ardener has described as African women’s “sexual insult” upon men, employed to enforce women’s political decisions.⁷⁰⁷ This was a serious punishment against male offenders, and the ability of women to punish men, as individuals and as a group, distinguished *ikpirikpe* as more than a protest organization (like the Igbo women’s assembly), and more of a formal political entity that constantly governed societal mores. It is plausible that the matrifocal principles of citizenship, inheritance, and political succession⁷⁰⁸ (see chapter 2) among the Ohafia-Igbo encouraged an intense preservation of women’s civil rights between 1850 and 1900, which often translated into regulating the conduct

⁷⁰⁴ Mayne, “Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934,” 32.

⁷⁰⁵ Nne Nnenna Emeri, in Group Interview with *Ikpirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu Village, digital voice recording. Ohafia women’s employment of this strategy was corroborated by *Ezie-nwami* Ogonne Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Uduma Ukwu Village. November 17, 2011; and *Ezie-nwami* Mmia Abali of Eziafor Village, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Dec. 17, 2011. These *ezie-nwami* added that *ikpirikpe* also enacted “sitting on a man” against such an individual. This is discussed further below.

⁷⁰⁶ Van Allen, “Sitting on a Man,” 165-181.

⁷⁰⁷ Ardener, “Sexual Insult and Female Militancy,” in Ardener, ed., *Perceiving Women*, 29-53.

⁷⁰⁸ Mayne, “Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934,” 23-24.

of both men and women. *Ikipirikpe* also employed similar aggressive strategies in securing the property of women from their ex-husbands' homes, after divorce, and in all cases of female domesticity. Thus, in cases of abortion, *ikipirikpe* exerted punishment on both the man and woman involved,⁷⁰⁹ through what is known as *ikpa mgbogho* (desecration and ostracism), which Njoku describes as “one of the most disgraceful and humiliating things that could happen to a young girl and a young man.”⁷¹⁰

The socio-political roles of women in Ohafia-Igbo society between 1850 and 1900 reified female power and authority, both at home and in public. As shown in chapter 1, women were the breadwinners of their families, and through the withholding of food to men, as evident in the practice of *ibo-ezi* (deserting their homes *en-massse*) discussed below, they enforced their political decisions. Amadiume noted a similar case in Nnobi, when she writes, “if men proved stubborn, wives went on strike, in which case they would refuse to cook for or have sexual intercourse with their husbands. In [Igbo] culture, men did not cook: control of food was therefore a political asset for the women.”⁷¹¹ Ohafia-Igbo women not only controlled food processing; they also controlled food production. As the late *ezie-ogo* of Isiana Autonomous Community, Ohafia wrote in his autobiography, before colonial rule, “women were the breadwinners, and every man, boy and girl depended on the harvests from the farms of the women-folk.”⁷¹² Njoku further noted, “The kitchen was the preserve of the women.”⁷¹³

⁷⁰⁹ Nmia Nnaya Agbai, oral interview by author.

⁷¹⁰ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 25. *Ikpa mgbogho* is examined below.

⁷¹¹ Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, 65.

⁷¹² Uma, *Guidance and Destiny*, 2.

⁷¹³ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 24.

Also, while Ohafia men were preoccupied with the defense of the community, which shaped their socio-political prerogatives, women were indispensable in this process, both in the construction of the dominant *ufiem* (*ndi ikike* [warrior] masculinity), and in the prosecution of warfare (see chapter 4). Nne Nnenna Uma Eke stated, “In this our land, anytime it was announced that *nde ikom* (men) would go to war, there was a traditional rite which *nde inyom* (women) must perform. We call it *ije akpaka*. If *nde-inyom* did not perform *ije akpaka*, *nde-ikom* could not go to war.”⁷¹⁴ Between 1850 and 1900, refusal to perform *ije akpaka* was a mechanism, which Ohafia-Igbo women used to denounce and prevent what they considered illegitimate war between Ohafia and their ritual kin, Ibeku and Abam.⁷¹⁵ Achebe recorded a similar situation in Nsukka, where the women of Orba foiled an unjust war with Obukpa by sitting naked in front of their homes, to shame their men into submission (nudity as protest).⁷¹⁶

The difference is that whereas *ije akpaka* was a formally established practice that regulated prescriptive behavior (authorizing warfare),⁷¹⁷ nudity as protest was an informal protest mechanism, which African women employed to engineer favorable political decisions.⁷¹⁸ Moreover, accounts of distinguished Ohafia female warriors abound, and women played specific

⁷¹⁴ Nnenna Uma Eke, in Group Interview with *Ikipirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu Village, digital voice recording. The ritual of *ije akpaka* is fully discussed in chapter 4.

⁷¹⁵ Chief Uduma Nnochin Ogbuagu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amuke. Nov. 24, 2011; *Ezie-ogo* Ukonu Okoro Ekere of Eziafor Village, Ohafia, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Dec. 17, 2011; *Ezie-ogo* Okpan Ncheghe of Ndi-Orie-Eke Village, Ohafia, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Dec. 15, 2011.

⁷¹⁶ Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors and Kings*, 177.

⁷¹⁷ Here, men could not conduct any warfare, if women did not approve it. In effect, women ultimately decided whether or not, men could go to war. In the nudity as protest case, men made decisions about going to war, and women only protested when they did not consider it appropriate. The difference was in the decision-making process.

⁷¹⁸ Ardener, “Sexual Insult and Female Militancy,” 29-53.

roles in welcoming a male warrior back from battle, and in ensuring his re-admission into society, through ritual purification.⁷¹⁹ It is thus by balancing their obligations to their community and protecting their self-interests, that Ohafia women defined their socio-political significance between 1850 and 1900, through the formal political institution of *ikpirikpe*. In view of these, it is not logical to assert that they were docile and politically invisible.

***Ikpirikpe* Political Enforcement Strategies between 1850 and 1900**

ND:⁷²⁰ Before colonial rule, what happened when a man violated the laws upheld by women? Mama Docas Kalu: *Mgbe ichin* [in the olden days], they imposed a fine on the man. If he wanted to show that he was strong, women would go and tear him down to show him that they were the people that brought him into the earth.⁷²¹

In a group interview with female elders of Ebem village, they tell the story of a man named Igbe, who, during *mgbe ogarelu mbu* (time of the first small-pox epidemic: 1890s)⁷²² formed a despicable habit of peeping at women when they took their showers in the patrilineage

⁷¹⁹ These are discussed in chapter 4.

⁷²⁰ “ND” is the name which Ohafia people called me while in the field. It is a shortened version of ‘Ndubueze.’ The abbreviation was a gesture of familiarity.

⁷²¹ Mama Docas Kalu and Mama Mary Ezera, Group Interview by author.

⁷²² Mama Docas Kalu said that she was born in the period, between the first smallpox epidemic (when her older brother was born), and the establishment of British rule (1901-1920). Her *uke* is named Okezie, and she is the oldest individual in Mgbaga section of Ebem village, Ohafia. She is in her mid-90s. So, she must have been born between 1915 and 1920. The incident of Mr. Igbe happened when her older brother was born. However, this story is popular among Ebem Ohafia women. So, it must have been passed down at least from one generation to the next. This became clearer, when Mama Docas and Mama Mary Ezera broke into an “Igbe Song” in the middle of the story, and started performing the *ikpa mgbogho* dance. A number of spectators gathered. Both women teased me, asking me if I really wanted them to perform this dance “on me;” not *for* me. The point is that this story is well remembered because women relive and joke about it. We may also recall that Ndukwe Otta had described the time period between 1890 and 1910, as “the time of Uke Anya-Afumba” [Anya-Afumba ag-grade]. See Ndukwe Otta and Uduma Uka, Group Interview, digital voice recording. Aug. 14, 2011. Ndukwe Otta was present at my interview with Mama Docas and Mama Orié Emeh, and he pointed out that *mgbe ogarelu mbu* coincided with the reign of Uke Anya-Afumba [his father’s age-grade.]

compound bathroom. Upon learning of this, “Women reacted: they imposed a fine upon him and beat him up; they destroyed his house, and also cursed him. The older women raised their skirts, opened their private parts on his face, and sat on him, saying, ‘you want to see our private parts, here they are!’ They carried all sorts of garbage into his house. Igbe later died due to the humiliation and subsequent isolation he suffered.”⁷²³ Igbe’s action was sacrilegious to Ohafia society’s moral order. Ohafia women as custodians of public morality “sat” upon Igbe in restitution of the moral balance. Judith Van Allen has described this as “Sitting on a Man.”⁷²⁴

Articulating Ohafia women’s propensity to employ disarming strategies in enforcing their political will, Nsugbe writes, “*ikpirikpe* [could] mount a strong and sustained opposition against any action or decision by the men.”⁷²⁵ This study discusses the various ways through which *ikpirikpe* enforced their decisions upon men in Ohafia-Igbo society in the pre-colonial period, and analyzes the galvanization of female institutions to express political dissent. It argues that female political institutions were more effective than their male counterparts, because women developed more powerful strategies of enforcing their laws. Most Ohafia female protest movements were gendered in that they were mostly directed against men. Ohafia women did not often attempt to resist the verdicts of the women’s court, or penalties imposed for violation of laws upheld by women. However, men sometimes did, and most women’s punitive strategies were directed against them.⁷²⁶

⁷²³ Mama Docas Kalu, in Group Interview with Mama Mary Ezera, digital voice recording.

⁷²⁴ Van Allen, “Sitting on a Man,” 165-181.

⁷²⁵ Nsugbe, *Ohafia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 68

⁷²⁶ Mecha Ukpai Akanu, *ezie-ogo* of Amangwu and Members of the Men’s Court, Group Interview; Anaso Awalekwa, *ezie-ogo* of Ndea-Nku and Members of the Men’s Court, Group Interview; Kalu Awa, *ezie-ogo* of Ibina (Ihenta), oral interview; Godwin Nwankwo Uko, *ezie-ogo* of Amankwu and his cabinet members, Group Interview by author; *Ezie-nwami* Ucha Oji

A number of scholars of Igbo history have demonstrated that before 1900, Igbo women employed political strategies that were psychologically and socially devastating to enforce their political objectives. Amadiume argues that the most powerful political strategy employed by pre-colonial Nnobi women was the right to order strikes and demonstrations by all women.⁷²⁷ Nina Mba argues that in pre-colonial Igbo societies, the assembly of wives intervened in marital disputes, by mobilizing against a defaulting husband through ridicule and the process of “sitting on a man,” whereby the women sat outside the man’s compound, singing abusive songs and refusing to leave until he agreed to their demands. She went further to state that besides sanctions directed at individual men or women, women’s associations could apply collective sanctions against the male community, such as threatening to leave.⁷²⁸

According to Achebe, in pre-colonial Nsukka-Igbo society, when women’s requests regarding objectionable male behavior were not complied with, the various women’s assemblies engineered a militant, immediate and punitive collective action, through the use of strikes, boycotts, force, sit-ins or sleep-ins, nudity, and sitting on a man. Once these sanctions were engaged, expensive ritual ceremonies had to be performed by the offender(s) to restore harmony and sanctity and placate womanhood as well as the larger community.⁷²⁹ Ifeka-Moller argues

Iwe of Elu and her Cabinet, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording. Oct. 25, 2011; *Ezie-nwami* Ogonne Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Uduma Ukwu. Nov. 17, 2011; *Ezie-nwami* Mmia Abali of Eziafor, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Dec. 17, 2011; *Ikpirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu Village, Group Interview by author.

⁷²⁷ Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, 67.

⁷²⁸ Mba, *Nigerian Women Mobilized*, 29; M.M. Green, *Ibo Village Affairs, chiefly with reference to the village of Umueke Agbaja, Second Edition* (London: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd., 1964), 196-214; J. Harris, “The Position of Women in a Nigerian Society,” *Transactions of the New York Academy of Sciences* 2, 5 (March 1940), 141-148.

⁷²⁹ Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors and Kings*, 173-177.

that these Igbo women's strategies were an economic and political response to male socio-political domination.⁷³⁰

Building on the works of these respected scholars, this chapter contends that Ohafia-Igbo women's enforcement strategies did not derive from informal, marginalized spheres of women's autonomy, but rather, from the formal institution of the age-grade system, which enabled *ikpirikpe* to effectively mobilize all the female members of their society, irrespective of representation within the women's court, between 1850 and 1900. *Ikpirikpe* enforcement strategies, which included various rituals (examined below), were also not a response to male domination, as Nina Mba and Ifeka-Moller argue with respect to Igbo women in the pre-colonial period, but rather, a mechanism to enforce *ilu ndi inyom* (women's laws). This is a major difference between the Igbo women's assembly, and *ikpirikpe* between 1850 and 1900.

Ohafia-Igbo women went to great extents to enforce their laws and dramatize their authority between 1850 and 1900. According to Mama Mary Ezera,

Mgbe Ichin [in the pre-colonial past], if you violated any of the laws upheld by *ndi inyom*, we would first of all inform you of your violation of such law. Upon our reaching your home, you would perform *ima nzu* — presentation of *nzu* and money, as token of welcome and peace. You would give us kola, and spirit-liquor. After you have presented these gifts, we would inform you the reason why we came to see you. Come with us! If the individual refused to come with us, we would lift up our *ikpirikpe* and start beating it as we march away. This our village has four primary patrilineages (*isi ogo*). We would march, beating the drum to Ekeluogo section, then onto Amafo section, then Nde-Odo; we would even go to Ibina section. When we reached Ibina, we turned around. Then, we would beat the drum to the home of the individual, who had violated our law. There, we would place our *ikpirikpe*. This *ikpirikpe* of ours does not touch the ground! This ground where people step on. It cannot be kept behind the house. Wherever and however we placed it that was where and how it shall remain. We would leave it there and go. In the room in which it was kept, the doors could never be shut close. It could not be locked up. Once we have kept it, it could not be beaten. You could not move it from the chair on which it was kept to another. It must remain there. And the individual must feed it, and stand watch to make sure that no fly perched on it!

⁷³⁰ Ifeka-Moller, "Female Militancy and Colonial Revolt," 132-135.

In the mornings, you would take *nzu* and smear over it. You would take distilled liquor and pour out to it in libation. You would bless and venerate it. If it stayed there till nightfall and then dawn, all the men and women in this Akanu village, must leave their homes and gather themselves out of their compounds (*ibo ezi*). Everybody would come to your house and you would be required to meet certain obligations to appease the *ikpirikpe*.⁷³¹

Apparent in Mary Ezera's recitation of this *ikpirikpe* enforcement mechanism, is the fact that the institution was able to coerce both men and women into social responsibility for its own rulings. Second, Ohafia-Igbo women's strategies of enforcing their laws were systematic: they increased in severity depending on the crime, and the disposition of the violator. If the individual's guilt was not clearly established, but he refused to be answerable to the women, the latter coerced the entire community into pressurizing the individual as illustrated above. If there was a gendered divide or the men of the community were not as supportive as they ought to be, or if the individual proved recalcitrant in spite of communal intervention, the women would involve women from the twenty-six Ohafia-Igbo villages. Thus continues Mary Ezera,

If the individual who violated our law proved stubborn or disobedient at this point, we would go and call upon the twenty-six villages in Ohafia. The women would come and constitute a pressure group. After the individual acquiesced, he must provide a goat each, with accompanying distilled liquor, to every village before the women would leave. This is because the individual believed that the village of Akanu could do anything to him, so we brought the whole of Ohafia! The individual had challenged our strength, so we showed him!⁷³²

In cases of abominable crime, such as rape, the women moved swiftly, swooping down on the male individual. In such cases, they performed *ikpa mgbogho* against the offender. Mayne

⁷³¹ Mama Mary Ezera in Group Interview with *Ikpirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu Village, digital voice recording. This was confirmed by *Ezie-nwami* Ucha Oji Iwe of Elu and her Cabinet, Group Interview by author; *Ezie-nwami* Mmia Abali of Eziafor, oral interview by author. Dec. 17, 2011; Chief Oluwa Iro Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Ebem. August 3, 2010; Chief Kevin Ukiro, oral interview by author. Asaga Village. August 10, 2010; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amangwu, Ohafia. Aug. 15, 2011.

⁷³² Mama Mary Ezera in Group Interview with *Ikpirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu Village.

recorded that such “automatic punishment, without any formal trial, where the offender was caught *flagrante delicto*,” was never enacted by the men’s court.⁷³³ According to *ezie-nwami* Ogbonne Kalu, “If anybody violated our laws, and we took our *nne* to the individual’s house, and the person failed to appease us (*idupuga anyi*), we [also] performed *ikpa mgbogho* against him.”⁷³⁴ Njoku writes, “The custom of *ikpa mgbogho* typified women’s show of power and authority.”⁷³⁵ Women carried all kinds of garbage such as domestic refuse, animal and human feces, grasses and leafy tree branches, dancing through the village and chanting derogatory songs against the offender. Upon reaching the offender’s home, they dumped these into his house, and continued dumping until the house was overflowing and the doorways blockaded. Sometimes, women pulled down the houses of such individuals.⁷³⁶ Ikediya Okenu stated,

Ikipirikpe would summon all the women in the community. They would start carrying garbage (*alughulu*) and grasses (*akirika*) to the man’s house from morning till night. When they tired, they went home and ate and came out again to continue. The following day, they would continue again. After two days of garbage dumping, if the individual still failed to appease *ikipirikpe*, they would mandate all the compounds in Akanu to join them in *ikpa mgbogho*. After twenty-four hours of the entire village performing *ikpa mgbogho* and the individual still proved adamant, the following morning, *ikipirikpe* would start going to the twenty-six Ohafia villages (*mba ofu la ishi*) and these villages would join them in garbage-dumping on that person’s home. If in the course of *ikpa mgbogho* the individual or his family decided to seek peace, they would be mandated to appease each of the villages with a goat each, and distilled liquor. Then, *ikipirikpe* would be appeased as well.⁷³⁷

⁷³³ Mayne, “Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934,” 31.

⁷³⁴ *Ezie-nwami* Ogbonne Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Nov. 17, 2011.

⁷³⁵ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 25.

⁷³⁶ Nmia Nnaya Agbai, oral interview by author; *Ikipirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu Village, Group Interview; Mama Docas Kalu and Mama Mary Ezera, Group Interview.

⁷³⁷ Madam Ikediya Okenu, in Group Interview with *ezie-nwami* Ucha Oji Iwe of Elu Village and her Cabinet, digital voice recording. October 25, 2011.

In extreme cases, this garbage dumping continued until the house, and the larger patrilineage compounds were covered, including the entrance to the compound. After the women had been appeased, the individual assisted by his *umunne* (maternal siblings) undertook the task of clearing and cleaning the house and surrounding compounds and carrying the garbage to the evil forest (*okoko*). However, the household and compounds thus accursed by the women, were not considered “cleansed” until the individual involved underwent a ritual purification at *iyi ose* (the ose river), accompanied by the women. This ritual involved yet another level of social degradation and rebirth, after which the individual could be readmitted as a member of society.⁷³⁸ Other scholars have described similar strategies for other parts of Igboland.⁷³⁹

Collective female resistance and bargaining strategies varied in magnitude. Nsugbe observed, “If for example, the menfolk ruled against cutting wood from the farm-bush too early in the season, this might be objected to by the women. In such circumstances, *Ikipirikpe* would rule that village housewives should leave their homes and husbands *en masse*, abandoning all children temporarily, except suckling babies, and [they] would not return unless their views were heard . . . and some compromise reached.”⁷⁴⁰ Njoku has described this practice as women “voting with their feet,” and he noted that the effectiveness of this strategy rested primarily in the fact that the kitchen was the preserve of the women.⁷⁴¹ Voting with the feet, what Ohafia-Igbo

⁷³⁸ *Ikipirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu Village, Group Interview; *Ezie-nwami Ucha Oji Iwe* of Elu Village and her Cabinet, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording. October 25, 2011; *Ezie-nwami Mmia Abali* of Eziafor Village, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Dec. 17, 2011. This ritual is discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

⁷³⁹ Van Allen, “Sitting on a Man,” 175; Wipper, “Riot and Rebellion Among African Women,” 65; Ifeka-Moller, “Female Militancy and Colonial Revolt,” 132; Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors and Kings*, 176.

⁷⁴⁰ Nsugbe, *Ohafia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 68

⁷⁴¹ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 24.

women call *ibo ezi* (home desertion), was a complex process that demonstrated female agency and consciousness of power.

Ibo ezi was a realization of female group solidarity. The statement, “Anytime the men of our community offended us and made no reparations, we deserted them *en masse*,”⁷⁴² was both a recollection of history and a confirmation of contemporary practice. The tenacity of this practice, as well as *ikpa mgbogho*, in spite of the existence of modern systems of law enforcement and justice, speaks to the effectiveness of this strategy in ensuring justice for women in Ohafia-Igbo society. The author conducted interviews in the twenty-six villages and in every village, women recalled popular incidences of *ibo ezi*. One of the most important issues over which women often disagreed with men as a collective between 1850 and 1900, was the setting of the annual farming calendar.⁷⁴³ The male tendency to place the yam crop above every other crop irrespective of the year’s weather conditions (especially the density or scarcity of rainfall) often resulted in gendered communal fissures. Women had specific times when they had to plant their beans and vegetables and cassava tubers, to ensure a high yield, and if the farming calendar did not suit their interests, they performed *ibo ezi*, until their demands were met.⁷⁴⁴

⁷⁴² Nne Agwu Ukpai, in Group Interview with *Ikipirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu Village.

⁷⁴³ Hon. Tessy Uzoma Odum (grand-daughter of Unyang Uka) of Amangwu, oral interview by author, Ebem Village. September 5, 2011; Nwannediya Mmonwu-Oti, oral interview by author, Okon Village. August 5, 2010; Mama Orie Emeh and Chief Mrs. Grace Ojieke, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Elu village. Aug. 18, 2011; Mama Docas Kalu and Mary Ezera, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Ebem Village. Aug. 10, 2010; Nmia Nnaya Agbai, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Elu Village, Aug. 18, 2011; *Ezie-nwami* Ucha Oji Iwe of Elu Village and her Cabinet, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording. October 25, 2011; *Ezie-nwami* Ogonne Kalu Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Uduma Ukwu Village. November 17, 2011; *Ezie-nwami* Mmia Abali of Eziafor Village, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Dec. 17, 2011.

⁷⁴⁴ *Ezie-nwami* Ucha Oji Iwe of Elu and her Cabinet, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording. October 25, 2011; *Ikipirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu, Group Interview; *Ezie-nwami* Ogonne Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Uduma Ukwu. Nov. 17, 2011.

This practice stemmed from an awareness that women accounted for over eighty percent of the society's subsistence between 1850 and 1900.⁷⁴⁵

It was difficult for women to recall specific incidences of *ibo ezi* before colonial rule. However, they remembered a few in the first two decades of the 20th century. Around 1909, when herds of Hausa cattle destroyed vast hectares of women's cassava farms in Akanu village, the women embarked upon what they called *uso lama* (the cattle exodus), deserting their homes until the restitution of their losses was secured, through the Ebem Native Court.⁷⁴⁶ The women of Elu village recall that *mgbe ochichi Nna Kalu* (during the time of Warrant Chief Kalu Ezelu's rulership: 1911-1927), the men of their community refused to make financial contributions for a community project (the installation of a water well) initiated by women, and the women performed *ibo ezi*. In what amounted to a critique of emerging male domination under colonial rule (discussed in chapter 5), Elu women said, "Since you say you own and control this land, here is your land, take it! When you have changed your mind, come and call on us!"⁷⁴⁷ In this particular incident, most men went for three days without food. As Nmia Nnaya Agbai recalls, "I was a little girl then. We stayed there (Amaekpu village) for three days! And they were providing us with food and drinks for the duration of that period. I remember that my father came to call on me to return home with him, since there was nobody to cook for him; and

⁷⁴⁵ Mayne, "Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934," 41-44; Arua, "Yam Ceremonies and the Values of Ohafia Culture," 695; Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 24; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 37-38; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author; Mrs. Nnenna Emeri and Nmia Nnaya Bassey, members of *Ikipirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu, Group Interview. Nov. 3, 2011; Kalu Awa Kalu, oral interview by author, Ufiel. October 27, 2011; Uma, *Guidance and Destiny*, 2.

⁷⁴⁶ *Ikipirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu Village, Group Interview. Nnenna Emeri and Nne Agwu Ukpai said that this was shortly after the establishment of the Ebem Native Court (1905-07). See chapter 5 for the Native Court administration.

⁷⁴⁷ Nmia Nnaya Agbai, oral interview by author; *Ezie-nwami* Ucha Oji Iwe of Elu and her Cabinet, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording. Oct. 25, 2011; Mama Orié Emeh and Chief Grace Ojjeke, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Elu. Aug. 18, 2011.

whenever he came, I ran further back inside the crowd of women.”⁷⁴⁸ Similarly, Ebem women recall that during the reign of Emeago Age Grade (1920s), they performed *ibo ezi* because their men refused to make yam contributions for an annual ceremony.⁷⁴⁹

How was *ibo ezi* organized? First, the women summoned the entire community, to openly state their grievances. Thus, Nnenna Emeri stated, “If there was a dispute of a communal nature involving the women, we would take our *ikpirikpe* drum and beat it in every section of the village. When we have completed this, no female, young and old, in this village would cook anything, and nobody could go to the farm or on any other pursuit, both men and women. Everyone would appear to hear what the *ikpirikpe* had to say . . .”⁷⁵⁰ In oral interviews with *ikpirikpe ndi inyom* of Elu village and the *ezie-nwami* of Uduma Ukwu village, they also confirmed that this ability of *ikpirikpe* to summon both men and women was a testament to its powers.⁷⁵¹ In the rest of Igboland, no comparable institution existed, capable of commanding such authority. If *ikpirikpe* did not receive a favorable response, Ohafia-Igbo women then initiated *ibo ezi*, which entailed a mass exodus of the women to a particular village.

⁷⁴⁸ Nmia Nnaya Agbai, oral interview by author.

⁷⁴⁹ Mama Docas Kalu and Mary Ezera, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Ebem. Aug. 10, 2010. The reign of Emeago age-grade is one of the best remembered periods in Ebem Ohafia community politics. It coincided with the second small pox epidemic of 1918-1920, which caused a famine that disabled men from making their annual yam contributions for the *Omume Iri Uduma* ceremony. The result was what has come to be known as the “yam revolution.” See chapter 5. These events are also remembered by Ebem men. Ndukwe Otta and Uduma Uka, Group Interview, digital voice recording. Aug. 14, 2011; Chief Olua Iro Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Ebem Village Ohafia. August 3, 2010.

⁷⁵⁰ Nne Nnenna Emeri, in Group Interview with *Ikpirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu Village.

⁷⁵¹ *Ezie-nwami* Ucha Oji Iwe of Elu Village and her Cabinet, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording. October 25, 2011; *Ezie-nwami* Ogbonne Kalu Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Uduma Ukwu Village. November 17, 2011.

The choice of a destination village for *ibo ezi* was political. Inter-village rivalry was common between 1850 and 1900,⁷⁵² and the decision of the women of one village to seek refuge in a rival village constituted a public defamation of their men, emphasizing their inability to satisfy their women, and live up to their social responsibilities.⁷⁵³ The logic of this practice can be illustrated with divorce. The high rate of divorce⁷⁵⁴ in pre-colonial Ohafia society was a replication of women's tendency to "vote with their feet" at the individual level. One of the most common grounds for divorce in the pre-colonial period was the inability of a man to attain *ufiem* through distinction in warfare, which wrought unbearable discrimination and disgrace upon both a wife and her husband.⁷⁵⁵ The threat of *ibo ezi*, as with the threat of divorce was an instrument of political negotiation.

In many cases, women have sought refuge at Elu village, the capital of the Ohafia village-group.⁷⁵⁶ The choice of Elu was informed by the desire for publicity of women's protest. Since Elu is located in the most "open" and border-land part of the village-group, for any group

⁷⁵² Jones, *Annual Reports of Bende Division*, 4; Chief Kalu Awa Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Ufieme Village. October 27, 2011; Elders of Nde Odo Patrilineage, Akanu Village, Ohafia, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording. Nov. 2, 2011.

⁷⁵³ Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amangwu, Ohafia. Aug. 15, 2011; Chief Udensi Ekea, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Aug. 4, 2010; *Ezie-nwami* Mmia Abali, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Dec. 17, 2011.

⁷⁵⁴ Mayne, "Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934," 48; Johnston, "Ohafia 1911-40: A Study in Church Developments," 148; Mrs. Nnenna Emeri and Mmia Nnaya Bassey, in Group Interview with *Ikipirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu. Nov. 3, 2011; Chief K.K. Owen, oral interview by author; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author; Chief Olua Iro Kalu, oral interview by author.

⁷⁵⁵ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 64; Chief Eke Emetu Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Obu Ndi-Anaga, Elu Village. August 11, 2010; Chief Emeh Okonkwo, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, August 15, 2010; Chief Kalu Awa Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Nde-Ukpai, Ufieme Village. October 27, 2011. The status of *ujo* and their plight is fully examined in chapter 4.

⁷⁵⁶ Mayne, "Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934," 11-14.

of women to march from their village to Elu, they must as a necessity pass through several other villages. It is this strategy of publicizing the closeted, which equally informed Ohafia women's decision to go past Elu village as well as march to non-Ohafia neighboring communities such as Abiriba.⁷⁵⁷ The sight of the women, in their hundreds, their babies strapped to their backs, and their voices chanting their woes, was often too unbearable for anybody to behold, and women exploited the plethora of public reactions, ranging from pity to outrage to their own advantage.⁷⁵⁸ Thus, Nne Agwu Ukpai said,

There was no place where we went and were not well received. If you saw the whole of Akanu women approaching your village, would you not be agitated and concerned? Would you not want to ensure that they were okay? Indeed, if we got to Abiriba and continued to march, past them, Abiriba people would come out and block our path, pleading with us not to go on, because it was indeed a sorry sight to behold — all the females in a community, old and young, mothers and children, marching under various weather conditions, away from their village; there was no greater condemnation of the men left behind.⁷⁵⁹

Moreover, *ibo ezi* served to reinforce women's socio-political solidarity across villages. As women marched past every village, women of those villages supplied them with water, food, and well wishes, cursing the men that had made them to undergo such misery.⁷⁶⁰ Upon reaching their destination, the *ezie-nwami* and women of that village played hostesses, as noted above. When it was time for the women to return home, after the men of their village had had to come

⁷⁵⁷ Mama Orié Emeh and Chief Mrs. Grace Ojéke, oral interview by author; Nmíá Nnýá Agbái of Elu village, oral interview by author; Nná Agbái Ndukwe, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Elu Ohafia. August 10, 2010; Nne Agwu Ukpai, in Group Interview with *Ikpírikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu Village, digital voice recording.

⁷⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁹ Nne Agwu Ukpai, in Group Interview with *Ikpírikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu Village.

⁷⁶⁰ Nmíá Nnýá Agbái, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Elu, Aug. 18, 2011; Mama Orié Emeh and Chief Grace Ojéke, oral interview by author; *Ezie-nwami* Mmíá Abalí of Eziafor, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Dec. 17, 2011; *Ezie-nwami* Ucha Ojí Iwe of Elu and her Cabinet, Group Interview by author. October 25, 2011.

suing for peace (with gifts of a goat, yam tubers, two bottles of gin, and stockfish),⁷⁶¹ the host village supplied them with a live goat and other gifts, as a testament of goodwill, and an open invitation for similar future visits.⁷⁶² All gestures of female solidarity throughout *ibo ezi*, are known as *igba mkpu* (participatory condemnation). As Madam Eunice Kalu put it, *igba mkpu* made a statement to the effect: “what could have led women to do a thing like this?”⁷⁶³ The social defamation of men through *ibo ezi* was so disarming that there have been cases (such as Ebem women’s *ibo ezi* during the time of Emeago age-grade), when the men of a village so deserted, fought with the villages that had welcomed and sheltered their women.⁷⁶⁴

Some scholars of women’s political organizations in southeastern Nigeria such as Nina Mba, Caroline Ifeka-Moller, and Annie M.D. Lebeuf⁷⁶⁵ have portrayed women’s political institutions as marginal to total society and formal communal government, irrespective of the degree of power which women possessed and exercised. Thus, Mba argues that “the men’s world” determined the fate of the larger society, and since women were excluded from male political institutions, their political significance was “minimal” vis-a-vis the power of the

⁷⁶¹ Ibid. Mayne also identified these commodities as the major items of Ohafia gift-giving. See Mayne, “Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934,” 45-47.

⁷⁶² Nmia Nnaya Agbai, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Elu, Aug. 18, 2011; *Ezie-nwami* Mmia Abali, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Dec. 17, 2011.

⁷⁶³ *Ikipirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu Village, Group Interview.

⁷⁶⁴ Chief Eke Emetu Kalu, oral interview by author; Chief Emeh Okonkwo, oral interview by author; Chief Kalu Awa Kalu, oral interview by author; *Ezie-nwami* Ucha Oji Iwe of Elu and her Cabinet, Group Interview by author. The men of Ebem village attacked the people of Akanu village for welcoming their wives, sisters, and mothers, and supporting them against Ebem men’s self-interests, namely, the timely planting of their yam seedlings, due to women’s refusal to perform the ritual of *omume iri uduma*, which inaugurated the planting of crops.

⁷⁶⁵ See Mba, *Nigerian Women Mobilized*, 29; Ifeka-Moller, “Female Militancy and Colonial Revolt,” 134; Annie M.D. Lebeuf, “The Role of Women in the Political Organization of African Societies,” in Denise Paulme, ed., *Women of Tropical Africa* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1960), 109, 113.

men.⁷⁶⁶ The case study of Ohafia-Igbo women clearly shows that *ikpirikpe* was a formal political organization that derived directly from the age-grade institution, with a crowned female ruler serving as “king of the women,” and age-grade representatives and select female elders, who served as regulators of societal mores. The influence of *ikpirikpe* over communal politics was not informal and indirect, but formal and direct. Indeed, male governmental institutions had limited powers over women, while women were able to enlist enforcement strategies, utilized by other Igbo women in the pre-colonial period, to exercise political power over both men and women, as far as a woman was involved.

Rituals as Institutions of Government

*All the mechanisms that help to maintain or create internal cooperation, such as rituals, ceremonies or procedures that ensure a periodical or occasional renewal of society, are instruments of political action just as much as rulers and bureaucracy.*⁷⁶⁷

Rituals were an important component of Ohafia female socio-political organization between 1850 and 1900, and they served specific purposes. Some rituals such as *idighi omara* (land purification rite) and *uzo-iyi* (virginity testing) were organized by the *ikpirikpe*, and were distinguished by significant age-role inversions. In both cases, young virgin girls assumed the role of a public court of critical opinion, primarily against the male elders of the society.⁷⁶⁸

⁷⁶⁶ Mba, *Nigerian Women Mobilized*, 29, 37.

⁷⁶⁷ G. Balandier, *Political Anthropology* Trans. by A.M. Sheridan Smith (London: Penguin Press, 1970), 36.

⁷⁶⁸ *Dibia* Chikezie Emeri, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Akanu Village. Nov. 2, 2011; *Dibia* Uduma Uchendu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Akanu Village, Ohafia. Nov. 2, 2011; Nwannediya Mmonwu-Oti, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Ndi Owom, Okon Village. Aug. 5, 2010; Nmia Nnaya Agbai, oral interview by author; *Ezie-nwami* Ogbonne Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Uduma Ukwu. Nov. 17, 2011; Mama Orié Emeh and Chief Mrs. Grace Ojieke, oral interview; Mr.

Here, ritual ceremonies were transformed into political platforms for registering dissent and bringing to public ridicule male elders who had committed social ills in secret.

In the *idighi omara* ritual, performed in the course of the new yam festival, the women of the community cooked a sumptuous meal of *egusi*⁷⁶⁹ soup, chicken and pounded yam. This was dished into a calabash and given to a young virgin girl, who carried it around, serving it only to the male elders. Any married man who had committed adultery or taken a bribe to thwart the course of justice would be cursed with fatal diarrhea upon consuming the food.⁷⁷⁰ In the course of this ritual, all women in the society were socially perceived as sacred, and any man who beheld his wife embraced her and fired a gun salute in her honor. According to Chief Olua Iro Kalu and Nwannediya Mmonwu-Oti, this homage to women, similar to that performed during *omume iri uduma* ceremony (see chapter 2) served to honor women as breadwinners of their families, as well as an acknowledgment of their role in maintaining public morality.⁷⁷¹ To mark the end of the ceremony, the young virgin girl went to a river to perform a ritual bath, the belief being that she had embodied the male elders' sins, and through her purification, moral purity was restored in the community.⁷⁷² After bathing and purifying herself, her age mates joined her in

Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author; *Ezie-nwami* Mmia Abali of Eziafor Village, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Dec. 17, 2011; Chief, Dr. (*Dibia*) Azueke Kalu of Nde Idika Okoro, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording, Okon. September 22, 2011.

⁷⁶⁹ *Egusi* is ground mellon seed. The soup is a special delicacy in southeastern Nigeria.

⁷⁷⁰ The people of Ohafia completely believed in the efficacy of this ritual and its consequences. Nwannediya Mmonwu-Oti, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording, Okon. Aug. 5, 2010; *Ezie-nwami* Ogbonne Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Nov. 17, 2011.

⁷⁷¹ Nwannediya Mmonwu-Oti, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon. Aug. 5, 2010; Chief Olua Iro Kalu, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording. Ebem. August 3, 2010.

⁷⁷² *Dibia* Chikezie Emeri, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Akanu. Nov. 2, 2011; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amangwu. Aug. 15, 2011; Nwannediya Mmonwu-Oti, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon. Aug. 5, 2010; Chief Olua Iro Kalu, oral interview by author, Ebem. Aug. 3, 2010.

celebration. In effect, this ritual reinforced the social perception of women as the guardians of public morality, in the pre-colonial period (before the introduction of Christianity).

The *uzo-iyi* ritual was more complex.⁷⁷³ It was celebrated every two years between January and February. It began on an *Eke* market day in Elu, the most senior village, and the celebration lasted for eight days, and was taken up by other villages in succession. To hand over to the next village, one village sang and danced to the boundary of the next, and there the women engaged in verbal criticisms of each other's village (*ikotu onu*). Each group of women pointed out the failings of the other in guarding their community's morality and checking the abuses of men.⁷⁷⁴ This exercise lasted four days. The second phase began with the rite of *ije ugbo*. Here, adolescent girls who had experienced menstruation were distinguished from those who had not. The latter, known as *uke oluwere* went and lived in the homes of the former, offering labor services such as fetching firewood. Only girls, who had experienced menstruation, and thereby attained womanhood, participated in *ije ugbo*. *Ije ugbo* began with wrestling competitions among adolescent girls, through which the girls were said to have "become as men."⁷⁷⁵ This lasted two

⁷⁷³ Information on *uzo-iyi* is based on the following sources: Mrs. Nnenna Obuba, oral interview by author, Amaekpu. Aug. 15, 2011; Nmia Nnaya Agbai, oral interview by author; Mama Orié Emeh and Chief Mrs. Grace Ojéke, oral interview; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author; *Dibia* Chikezie Emeri, oral interview by author, Akanu, Ohafia. Nov. 2, 2011; *Dibia* Uduma Uchendu, oral interview by author, Akanu, Ohafia. Nov. 2, 2011; Mr. Davidson Kalu Oki, oral interview by author, Okon. Aug. 5, 2010; *Dibia* Kalu Uko, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording, Okon, Ohafia, Sept. 14 and 20, 2011; Chief K.K. Owen, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Elu. Aug. 12, 2010; Obuba, *The History and Culture of Ohafia*, 16-20.

⁷⁷⁴ Mrs. Nnenna Obuba, oral interview by author, Amaekpu. Aug. 15, 2011; Mama Orié Emeh and Mrs. Grace Ojéke, oral interview; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author; *Dibia* Chikezie Emeri, oral interview by author, Akanu. Nov. 2, 2011; *Dibia* Uduma Uchendu, oral interview by author, Akanu. Nov. 2, 2011; Mr. Davidson Kalu Oki, oral interview by author, Okon. Aug. 5, 2010; *Dibia* Kalu Uko, oral interview by author, Okon. Sept. 14 and 20, 2011.

⁷⁷⁵ Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author; Mr. Davidson Kalu Oki, oral interview by author, Okon. Aug. 5, 2010; *Dibia* Chikezie Emeri, oral interview by author, Akanu. Nov. 2, 2011.

days and at the end of each bout, the *ugbo* virgins would bear a little girl on their shoulders with a celebratory song.⁷⁷⁶

The next day (day seven), the *ugbo* virgins sang and danced around the village, and afterwards, they went to their community yam barns to eat yams roasted by older women, while all stranger-residents (including wives from outside Ohafia, resident *dibia*, and slaves) in each village were sent out to clear the path to the river where *uzo-iyi* would be performed.⁷⁷⁷ Upon reaching the yam barns, the girls ate their yams in a hurry, rushed to the river to take a bath, and rushed back to the venue for their virginity and purity screening. Disqualified girls included: a girl who lived with her mother after the said mother had had twin babies; a girl whose mother was not from the village in question; a girl who started menstruating at the very last moment of going to *ugbo*; a girl who had engaged in sexual intercourse.⁷⁷⁸ As the screening went on, the *ugbo* virgins sang:

<i>Aratu esogi anyi jeni ee!</i>	A non-virgin girl shall not come with us!
<i>Aratu huru ibobo laje ee!</i>	A girl who is seeing her menstruation shall go home!
<i>Onye nne ya amagi Ekidi ee!</i>	She whose mother does not know <i>Ekidi</i> [<i>uzo iyi</i> goddess]
<i>O nagi eso anyi jeni!</i>	She will not go with us!
<i>Onye nne ya wu ohu ofia laje!</i>	She whose mother is a slave or foreign wife must leave!
<i>O naga eje ugbo Ekidi ee!</i>	She will not go to <i>Ekidi</i> 's home/farm!
<i>E e! Ebu eme ya eme!</i>	Yes! This is how it has always been done!

⁷⁷⁶ Mrs. Nnenna Obuba, oral interview by author, Amaekpu. Aug. 15, 2011; Nmia Nnaya Agbai, oral interview by author; Mama Orié Emeh and Mrs. Grace Ojéke, oral interview; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author; *Dibia* Chikezie Emeri, oral interview by author, Akanu. Nov. 2, 2011; *Dibia* Uduma Uchendu, oral interview by author, Akanu. Nov. 2, 2011; Mr. Davidson Kalu Oki, oral interview by author, Okon. Aug. 5, 2010; *Dibia* Kalu Uko, oral interview by author, Okon. Sept. 14 and 20, 2011; Obuba, *The History and Culture of Ohafia*, 17.

⁷⁷⁷ In Elu, the river was called *isha*, in Amaekpu, it was *ekidi*, in Amangwu, it was *utogho bila*.

⁷⁷⁸ Mrs. Nnenna Obuba, oral interview by author, Amaekpu. Aug. 15, 2011; Nmia Nnaya Agbai, oral interview by author; Mama Orié Emeh and Chief Mrs. Grace Ojéke, oral interview; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author; *Dibia* Chikezie Emeri, oral interview by author, Akanu Village. Nov. 2, 2011; *Dibia* Uduma Uchendu, oral interview by author, Akanu. Nov. 2, 2011; Mr. Davidson Kalu Oki, oral interview by author, Okon Village. August 5, 2010; *Dibia* Kalu Uko, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording, Okon Village. September 14 and 20, 2011.

Onye nne ya wu Igbo laje! She whose mother is Igbo⁷⁷⁹ [stranger/foreign] must go!
O naga eje ugbo Ekidi ee! She will not go to *Ekidi*'s home/farm!
Ono iberani lajee! Stranger elements must go home!
*I sogi anyi jeni ee! Etc.*⁷⁸⁰ You must not follow us to go!

As the *ugbo* virgins sang, *uke oluwere* (girls who had not experienced menstruation) responded, “*Iyoo!*” When an *ugbo* aspirant was disqualified, her relatives wailed, while successful ones were celebrated.⁷⁸¹ Successful candidates then undertook a long journey through the forest, led by matrons who sang mellow lyrics instructing the girls on the virtues of chastity and the woes that accompanied promiscuity. On this journey, the girls maintained a ritual silence, their mouths sealed with *omu* (palm frond), until they reached the *uzo-iyi* river, where amidst the cheering of other female participants, they stripped naked, and took an oath, thus, “*Ekidi*, if since I was born, any man had ever touched me, may *Ekidi a Chima Okoro* kill me.”⁷⁸² The priestess of *Ekidi* then sealed off the strait through which water flowed into the pond, and the girls began the exhausting task of bailing out water from the pond until only mud

⁷⁷⁹ Ohafia women refer to wives from patrilineal Igbo societies, as strangers. See chapter 1.

⁷⁸⁰ The following women rendered this song: *Ezie-nwami* Ogbonne Kalu, oral interview by author; Mrs. Nnenna E. Obuba, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording, Amaekpu Village. Aug. 15, 2011; Nmia Nnaya Agbai, oral interview by author; Mama Orié Emeh and Chief Mrs. Grace Ojéke, oral interview; *Ezie-nwami* Mmia Abali of Eziafor, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Dec. 17, 2011; Obuba, *The History and Culture of Ohafia*, 18.

⁷⁸¹ Nmia Nnaya Agbai, oral interview by author; Mama Orié Emeh and Chief Mrs. Grace Ojéke, oral interview; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author; Mr. Davidson Kalu Oki, oral interview by author, Okon Village, Ohafia. August 5, 2010; *Dibia* Kalu Uko (a.k.a Ekpo), oral interview by author, dig. voice recording, Okon Village, Ohafia, September 14 and 20, 2011; Mrs. Nnenna E. Obuba, oral interview by author, Amaekpu Village. Aug. 15, 2011.

⁷⁸² Ogbonne Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Uduma Ukwu. Nov. 17, 2011; Mrs. Nnenna E. Obuba, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording, Amaekpu. Aug. 15, 2011; Nmia Nnaya Agbai, oral interview by author; Mama Orié Emeh and Chief Mrs. Grace Ojéke, oral interview; *Ezie-nwami* Mmia Abali of Eziafor, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Dec. 17, 2011; Obuba, *The History and Culture of Ohafia*, 18.

remained. If a girl had lied under oath or was “impure,” the water would not cease flowing, until the individual was identified.⁷⁸³

The rite of *ije ugbo* aimed to keep girls chaste, until they were married. According to Nnenna Obuba, it was the responsibility of *ikpirikpe* to ensure that the chastity of girls were maintained, and that was why they exacted grave penalty against any man that sexually assaulted a woman in the pre-colonial period.⁷⁸⁴ She also indicates that men placed great value on female chastity, such that “If a husband slept with his bride on the first night after marriage and found her a virgin, he would send a goat to the girl’s mother the following morning in appreciation. If on the other hand the proof of her virginity was lost, the husband sent a machete to indicate that someone had already cut wide the ‘bush’.”⁷⁸⁵

⁷⁸³ Nmia Nnaya Agbai, oral interview by author; Mama Orié Emeh and Chief Mrs. Grace Ojjeke, oral interview; Obuba, *The History and Culture of Ohafia*, 19.

⁷⁸⁴ Mrs. Nnenna Obuba, oral interview by author, Amaekpu. Aug. 15, 2011.

⁷⁸⁵ Obuba, *The History and Culture of Ohafia*, 16. It should be pointed out that *ikpirikpe* control over young girls sexuality was not disempowering to women. These are little girls in question. Indeed, what may be described as sexual promiscuity was popular among married adult women in the pre-colonial period. It also accounted for why women were not punished for adultery, but men were. Ohafia women were said to be in the habit of “jumping from one man to another, having children everywhere.” This is based on the following: Hon. Tessy Uzoma Odum, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording, Ohafia Local Government office, Ebem Village, Ohafia, September 5, 2011; Mrs. Margaret Eke Anya, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording, Amaekpu. May 18, 2012; Mrs. Orié Udo Eke, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Asaga Village, Ohafia. April 30, 2012; Chief Ikpo Chukwu Ndukwe, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Ebem Village, Ohafia. May 2, 2012; Elder Ukpai Onum Ndukwe, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording, Asaga, Ohafia, April 13, 2012; Chief Udensi Ekea of Ndi Ekea Compound, Okon Village, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording. August 4, 2010; Godwin Nwankwo Uko, *ezie-ogo* of Amankwu Village and his cabinet members., Group Interview by author, Oct. 25, 2011; Chief George Bassey, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Ebem Village, Ohafia. May 2, 2012.

The virgin girls who took part in the *uzo-iyi* ritual were rewarded with fertility.⁷⁸⁶ Thus, the ceremony concluded with a rite where the young girls returned to the mud pond to either look for fish or *nzu* (white chalk). In the case of the former, every girl would catch a fish and put it back in the water for others to catch, and each successful candidate was said to have caught her future baby and was celebrated; and in the latter, when any of the girls found *nzu*, she shared it with her colleagues, to ensure that they would all be blessed with fertility.⁷⁸⁷ We may recall that in the Introduction, Nna Agbai Ndukwe made a contrast between a pre-colonial period (1850-1900) “when young unmarried girls who had reached puberty still wore *ejigido*,” and a colonial period, “when young girls started putting on clothes.”⁷⁸⁸ In his view, *ikpirikpe* was able to maintain female chastity in the pre-colonial period, but lost this ability as a result of British colonial imposition of warrant-chiefs.

Uzo-iyi provided *ikpirikpe* an avenue to check the moral conducts of men in their society. On the day of *ije ugbo*, the rest of the women stayed at home and nobody went to farm. In various sections of the village, women held discussion sessions (*iku asiri*) in which they gossiped about the various ills that men had secretly committed in their community, over the last two

⁷⁸⁶ McCall, “Portrait of a Brave Woman,” 133.

⁷⁸⁷ Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author; Nmia Nnaya Agbai, oral interview by author; Mrs. Nnenna Obuba, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording, Amaekpu Village. Aug. 15, 2011; Mama Orie Emeh and Chief Mrs. Grace Ojieke, oral interview; *Dibia* Chikezie Emeri, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Akanu Village, Ohafia. Nov. 2, 2011; *Dibia* Uduma Uchendu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Akanu Village, Ohafia. Nov. 2, 2011; Mr. Davidson Kalu Oki, oral interview by author, Okon Village, Ohafia. August 5, 2010; *Dibia* Kalu Uko, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording, Okon Village, Ohafia, September 14 and 20, 2011; Obuba, *The History and Culture of Ohafia*, 19-20.

⁷⁸⁸ Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Elu. August 10, 2010. This also enables us to situate the *uzo-iyi* ritual between 1850 and 1900, as a historical practice.

years.⁷⁸⁹ The next day, *ikpirikpe* selected four qualified virgin girls and spent time instructing the girls on these scandalous secret atrocities committed by men of their village. Then, mounting a podium in the center of the village square, each girl shouted out the various atrocities and abominations committed by the identified male elders of her community. Thus, thieves, wife beaters, bribe takers, and murderers were exposed.⁷⁹⁰

However, for this exercise of *iko onu* to be successful, the virgin girl had to begin the criticism with her own parents and other members of her family, as the Ohafia say, “*Oko onu a zi onwe ya*”⁷⁹¹ (the abuser begins with herself). If she did not do this satisfactorily, she was asked to come down from the podium, and another girl took her place. The purity of Ohafia virgin girls after *ije ugbo*, vested them with the oracular power and authority of the *Ekidi* goddess,⁷⁹² enabling them to *out* and publicly condemn any man, irrespective of his social status. These girls and their *ikpirikpe* matrons remained immune to any harm or challenge throughout the period of *uzo-iyi*. They constituted a public court of condemnation against the

⁷⁸⁹ *Ezie-nwami* Ogbonne Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Nov. 17, 2011; Mrs. Nnenna Obuba, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording, Amaekpu. Aug. 15, 2011; Nmia Nnaya Agbai, oral interview by author; Mama Orie Emeh and Chief Mrs. Grace Ojieke, oral interview; *Ezie-nwami* Mmia Abali of Eziafor, oral interview by author.

⁷⁹⁰ Mrs. Nnenna Obuba, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording, Amaekpu. Aug. 15, 2011; Nmia Nnaya Agbai, oral interview by author; Mama Orie Emeh and Chief Mrs. Grace Ojieke, oral interview; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author; *Dibia* Chikezie Emeri, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Akanu. Nov. 2, 2011; *Dibia* Uduma Uchendu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Akanu. Nov. 2, 2011; Mr. Davidson Kalu Oki, oral interview by author, Okon Village. August 5, 2010; *Dibia* Kalu Uko, oral interview by author, Okon. September 14 and 20, 2011; Obuba, *The History and Culture of Ohafia*, 17.

⁷⁹¹ Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author.

⁷⁹² *Dibia* Uduma Uchendu, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording, Akanu. Nov. 2, 2011; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amangwu. Aug. 15, 2011.

men of their community. *Ikipirikpe* utilized these ceremonies to socially and politically check the excesses of the male elders, stifle immorality in their society, and sanitize the land.⁷⁹³

Uzo-iyi practices such as virginity testing and various distinctions of female purity locate the female body as a site of great moral anxiety and for the negotiation of various forms of identity. Through this ritual, young virgin girls assumed the oracular power of a goddess (*ekidi*). Through the ritual, Ohafia-Igbo women distinguished indigenes from strangers, thereby defining what may be regarded as legitimate citizenship. They also differentiated between slaves and freeborn, childhood (*uke oluwere*) and womanhood (*ugbo* virgins, who had experienced menstruation), and sexual chastity and sexual impurity. Arguably, through these ritual definitions of social identity, they defined public notions of what Julie Livingston describes as the “moral imagination.”⁷⁹⁴ Women shaped discourses of these forms of identity through a combination of rituals, gossip, and rumors.⁷⁹⁵

The last ritual employed by *ikipirikpe* to exercise political authority in the pre-colonial period, was a post-*ikpa mgbogho* (desecration and ostracism) cleansing rite known as *iyi ose*.⁷⁹⁶

⁷⁹³ Chief K.K. Owen, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Elu Village. Aug. 12, 2010; *Dibia* Chikezie Emeri, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Akanu. Nov. 2, 2011; Mr. Davidson Kalu Oki, oral interview by author, Okon Village, Ohafia. August 5, 2010.

⁷⁹⁴ For an explication of this concept, see Julie Livingston, *Debility and the Moral Imagination in Botswana* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005), 1, 6, 40-63. As Livingstone points out, rituals such as this focused on the human body “as the locus of personhood and the material manifestation of self,” because they defined individuals’ negotiations of social relationships, as well as a society’s moral order. Like the Tswana women studied by Livingston, Ohafia women took the lead in shaping public debates that defined the moral order through gossip and rumors (in the case of *uzo iyi*), as well as ostracism and inclusion (in the case of *iyi ose*, examined below).

⁷⁹⁵ Nmia Nnaya Agbai, oral interview by author.

⁷⁹⁶ The following described *iyi ose* ritual: Mrs. Margaret Eke Anya, oral interview by author, Amaekpu. May 18, 2012; Hon. Tessy Uzoma Odum, oral interview by author, Ohafia Local Government office, Ebem Village. September 5, 2011; *Ikipirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu, Group

The *iyi ose* cleansing ritual dramatized the futility of defying female power and authority. This ritual, which made the desirable, obligatory, was most often imposed on men, after they had undergone *ikpa mghogho*. Nne Nnenna Emeri, described the *iyi ose* procedure as follows: After *ikpa mgbogho*, a man was obliged to provide a goat for the *iyi ose* cleansing ritual. Upon providing the goat,

He was marched around the village, paraded under the curses and verbal aspersions of the women, and the general public was invited to witness his ignominy. There is what we call *iko*; we take *eku-agbo* (calabash) and attach a cock to it, strung on *omu* (palm frond) — this was hung on the man’s neck. We stripped him naked. We also slung a half-burned firewood from the kitchen hearth (*oreforo*) over his back. He was obliged to take the goat on this parade. We drummed up music from our *ikpirikpe* drum, and he was obligated to dance to this music of shame. We paraded him in various villages. Now, when the music was playing and he was dancing, he was obligated to shout, *Ee eleghe mme wo! Ee eleghe mme wo!* (“This is what I have done! This is what I have brought upon myself!”) Anytime he failed to shout the song, the hot coal from the firewood was pressed into his back to ensure compliance . . . The *ikpirikpe* drum beat *kpo kpo ti! kpo kpo ti! kpo kpo ti!* And *nja* (vibra-slap), which is a women’s instrument made from bamboo, beat *cha! cha cha! cha! cha cha!* Together, the drum and *nja* produced the lyric, *Ee eleghe mme wo!* If he did not dance to the music energetically, he was whipped with a cane . . . men and women were obliged to join in this act. After the parade, he was then marched to the river. His mother carried a pot where the goat’s head would be put into, and his brother/sister led the goat. The family also produced pepper, palm oil, spices, and one yam tuber, which would be used to cook the goat at the river. Upon reaching the river, the man went in, accompanied by his relatives and age mates. Each person, who had accompanied him would take the cock, and flagging it around their head, say, “This thing that has happened, let it never happen again, because it is not a good thing. Let it not infect me from this person.” Everybody present then performed this ritual denunciation. The man also denounced his conduct and then cast the cock into the river. He then removed the *iko* around his neck and cast it into the river as well. He bathed himself, and afterwards, he was sent home. As he marched home, he was never to look back. At the river, the goat was killed, and its head . . . was put in an earthen pot . . . And that goat was not killed with a knife. From the top of a hill, it was cast down towards the river and this was repeated until the goat expired . . .⁷⁹⁷

Interview by author, Akanu Village. Nov. 3, 2011; *Ezie-nwami* Ucha Oji Iwe of Elu and her Cabinet, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording. Oct. 25, 2011; *Ezie-nwami* Mmia Abali of Eziafor, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Dec. 17, 2011.

⁷⁹⁷ Nne Nnenna Emeri, in Group Interview with *Ikpirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu Village.

The ritual of *iyi ose* may be likened to what Richard Werbner describes as a “nostalgic genre,” which enables the redefinition of interdependent lives, and the reworking of the past and its meanings.⁷⁹⁸ This is because the *iyi ose* ritual was a dramatic reconfiguration of Ohafia society’s moral imagination. The ritual functioned to forge a dominant narrative to explain what had happened, simultaneously redefining right and wrong, and re-introducing an ostracized individual as a legitimate member of society.⁷⁹⁹ Thus, it defined how the individual was to be socially perceived, by legitimating his social relationships with other members of society. Because Ohafia women were the ones that defined social ostracism and inclusion through the imposition of *ikpa mgbogho* and the cleansing ritual of *iyi ose*, they defined societal mores in the pre-colonial period. By exercising control over when and how this ritual was performed, and over whom it was exerted, they constantly performed and reinforced their political power.

The Fallacy of Women’s Invisibility: The Publicity of Female Political Organization

At the beginning of this chapter, I highlighted the various characterizations of Ohafia-Igbo women’s socio-political status in the pre-colonial period, particularly the notion that they were politically invisible and docile, and confined to bearing children and agricultural production. In the course of my oral interviews with some Ohafia male collaborators, they also espoused these views. In both published literature and archival sources, Ohafia women’s voices are lacking. In this section, I want to present the language, which Ohafia-Igbo women used to describe their political status in their society between 1850 and 1900.

⁷⁹⁸ Richard Werbner, *Tears of the Dead: The Social Biography of an African Family* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996), 4.

⁷⁹⁹ Turner, *Schism and Continuity in an African Society*, 161-169.

They describe their homes as being both private and public, and they describe various occasions, which they exploited to publicize their socio-political relevance in the society. While Ohafia-Igbo women have appeared to be politically invisible since colonial rule (see chapter 5), they define the pre-colonial period as a time when they were visible and dominant. They also do not hesitate to demonstrate this consciousness of female power through time-tested strategies of political enforcement and collective bargaining, when occasion demands it, even today. Female power and authority in Ohafia was not premised on “a shared consciousness of being a disadvantaged sex with special interests”⁸⁰⁰ as Mba argues with respect to pre-colonial Southern Nigeria. Rather, the consciousness of female power is rooted in a belief that in the pre-colonial past, women were completely autonomous and powerful, and this was a natural state of affairs.

The following is an excerpt of conversation with Akanu women:

ND: Some men told me that *mgbe ichin* (in olden times), women were politically invisible, insignificant, and powerless. I thought I would come and ask you.

All the Women: (Laughter)

Nne Agwu Ukpai: If women have no strong government in any community, how can such a community be a good community?

Mmia Nnaya Bassey: We call our *Nne, Ikpu adighi ike eri aku mba!* Men cannot stand and talk about or decide on sensitive, moral questions regarding female sexuality.

Another Woman: I tell you solemnly, women are much more powerful than men.

Mrs. Nnenna Emeri: Women’s rulership has been there since the days of old, just as men’s rulership has been there since the days of old. Men cannot handle women’s affairs. Like you are here today, if I come into your home and find out that you have in any way abused your wife, men cannot come and satisfactorily solve that problem and put an end to it. Once women come in, they will effectively resolve the problem.

Mmia Nnaya Bassey: And once they come in, if the man is not co-operating, they may put him down and all urinate upon him! (**All the Women:** Laughter)

Mrs. Nnenna Emeri: Indeed, if you see the women marching to your home, you cannot stand upon both your feet! You cannot keep your head in one place! You

⁸⁰⁰ Mba, *Nigerian Women Mobilized*, viii.

will start wondering already, what have I done that the women have come to see me, because, the punishment for the violation of any law upheld by the women is much more severe than for those upheld by the men.

Mmia Nnaya Bassey: Much more powerful!

Mrs. Nnenna Emeri: Women's power is as old as the community itself, and as established as female parturition. When a woman is under labor, a man cannot come and attend her. Is it possible? It is a woman that will see her fellow woman and immediately understand that she is in labor, and then do something to help. If there is no curtain to protect the pregnant woman's privacy during birthing, it is a fellow woman that will take off one of her own double cloth wrapper, and shield the woman in labor from public view. A man cannot do this. This is the tradition and way of life (*agburu*) established since the beginning of the world: that women take charge of their own affairs and men, theirs!

Mmia Nnaya Bassey: If you are aware of any other community where the female government is weak, here in Akanu, things are very different!

Mrs. Nnenna Emeri: There has never been a time when our laws/rulership proved weak (*daa mgbo*)

Another Woman: Whoever told you that women are weak in this village is wrong.

Mmia Nnaya Bassey: Now, there is disagreement over the annual farming calendar. Some of the old men in the village stated in very clear terms, that from their own experiences, the problem cannot be resolved unless women's opinions and interests are well represented. Once women rise and express their position on the matter, it would be resolved. This is why female power is as old as the community itself.

Another Woman: We are powerful; we are very powerful.

Mmia Nnaya Bassey: And believe me when I tell you that if we express our position and the men do not accept it, they may no longer be able to come back into their homes, because we can render such home uninhabitable.

The foregoing highlights the energy and passion with which women speak of their political power and visibility. In their view, the home was both private and public and whatever happened outside the home was dealt with inside the home. If men forgot about female socio-political significance outside the home, women rendered their homes uninhabitable, through the

withholding of food and sexual favors, or outright abandonment (*ibo ezi*).⁸⁰¹ The public nature of the home, especially in West African societies is not a new concept. In her study of Maradi reactions to 20th century upheavals,⁸⁰² Barbara Cooper argues that by transforming their homes into public spaces, where they expressed their own inventiveness, agency, and subjective experiences,⁸⁰³ Maradi women redefined their rights of access to land, labor, and produce.⁸⁰⁴ In addition to reshaping their roles in the local economy, they also contested dominant interpretations of marriage and female respectability.⁸⁰⁵

Both Ohafia women and men organized politically from the homestead of their *ezie* (king) between 1850 and 1900. The female courts and the male courts in every village were the home/palace of the *ezie*. When the male members of a patrilineage compound (*umudi ezi*) organized a meeting, they held it in their patrilineage meeting house (*obu*). In his examination of the functions of the *obu*, Nsugbe concluded that the *obu* served “the multiple functions of a home, an ancestral shrine, and a meeting-place,”⁸⁰⁶ in Ohafia and in most parts of Igboland. Thus, among the Ohafia-Igbo, the home was private as much as it was public. Women saw their home as a factory for the processing of raw materials into finished goods for consumption, a

⁸⁰¹ Nmia Nnaya Agbai, oral interview by author; *Ezie-nwami* Ucha Oji Iwe of Elu and her Cabinet, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording. Oct. 25, 2011; Mama Orié Emeh and Chief Grace Ojjeke, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Elu. Aug. 18, 2011.

⁸⁰² Including the consequences of the abolition and decline of domestic slavery, the colonial imposition of taxation and cash cropping, the emergence of secular education and state employment, and the rise and redefinition of Islam.

⁸⁰³ Cooper, *Marriage in Maradi*, 62-89.

⁸⁰⁴ Cooper, *Marriage in Maradi*, 40-61.

⁸⁰⁵ Cooper, *Marriage in Maradi*, 110-142.

⁸⁰⁶ Nsugbe, *Ohafia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 106.

point of sale that saw constant streams of customers, a venue for public meetings and a rallying-point for political organization.

With regards to the various occasions on which women publicized their socio-political significance, Ohafia women identified the birth of a child and funeral ceremony for deceased women. According to Nne Agwu Ukpai,

When *onye ichin* [elder], especially one who had carried the *ikpirikpe* died, women did not keep quiet and they did not sit back. We took up the *ikpirikpe* and went and made some noise in her honor, for the entire period until she was buried . . . We made contributions to match the individual's status in life. If she was an *ezie-nwami*, we provided gifts befitting a king. Being a woman, we gathered all manner of farming implements in a basin and presented to her, including a goat to signify that this *nne* (ancestress [deceased woman]),⁸⁰⁷ lived a fulfilled and outstanding life (*o tozu etozu*). When we have paid our respects, we gathered the gifts made to our *nne* (*ikpirikpe*), and marched home through the streets, singing victorious songs. As we danced, we often received gifts and well wishes from people in encouragement.⁸⁰⁸

Ohafia women were indefatigable and they saw themselves as such. This is borne out in the greetings and songs with which they opened any of their meetings:

<i>Ndi Inyom! Unu kwe wo! (All: Whoa!)</i>	Great women! Greetings to you!
<i>Akanu ka nu! (All: Uhum!) 2x</i>	Akanu! Hail!
<i>Odo awu ukwu ka nu! (All: Whoa!)</i>	The imponderables! Hail!
<i>Uzo anyi ga eje! (All: Anighi aga ya ala!)</i>	The path we go on! None can go on it and return!
<i>Uzo anyi ga ala! (All: Anighi aga ya eje!)</i>	The path we return on! None can come and go on!
<i>Afufu! Kwe nu! (All: Whoa!)</i>	The proud sufferers! Hail!
<i>Ilulu! Kwe nu! (All: Whoa!)</i>	The morning dew! Hail!
<i>Atule Abali! Kwe nu! (All: Whoa!)</i>	The brave of the night! Hail!
<i>Nno m I bia! (All: Whoa!)</i>	The autochthones! Hail!
<i>Ememini ememini kwe nu! (All: Whoa!)"</i>	The truth-establishers! Hail!

These praise-names of women speak to their self-perception. They believe that their power is incomparable; that none other can thread the paths which they have thread or match their

⁸⁰⁷ The Ohafia refer to female elders and ancestresses as *nne*. *Ikpirikpe* members also refer to their drum as *nne* (mother).

⁸⁰⁸ Nne Agwu Ukpai, in Group Interview with *Ikpirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu Village.

accomplishments; that as the backbone of their society's subsistence economy and those who work without rest to keep their community at peace, they are proud sufferers. On the significance of *nde afufu*, *ilulu*, and *atule abali*, Nne Nnenna Emeri stated,

Since this morning, we have not had anything to eat. We did not even have time to shower this morning. We have been busy, running around to ensure that our community is at peace . . . There is no part of Akanu where we have not been to. Last night, we did not get home until 9:00pm . . . At 6:00am the following morning, we were out of bed and about our business again . . . by the time we get home, something else requiring our urgent attention may come up, and we will come out again . . . We call ourselves *afufu* in celebration of our tireless services. Most of our journeys take place during the late evening, and none of us will say, 'I cannot leave my husband and go or I cannot leave my children and go.' We are always ready, and wherever we are called, we go and answer. Those nights, we have no fear, be it 10:00pm or 2:00am! Sometimes, we have had to stay out till daybreak! That is why we call ourselves *atule abali* . . . There are times when we have to embark on journeys early in the morning. When this happens, all the *ilulu* (dew) left and right on the footpaths throughout the village are cleared by our skirt and feet. You will not say, 'I am wearing a gorgeous dress or a new wrapper, and I do not want it to get stained from the dew.' You will go in that beautiful cloth, even if it gets ruined and torn up, and you will return in it. That is *ilulu*.⁸⁰⁹

In similar songs, the women refer to themselves as "*nde nwe ogo*" (owners of the village), and "*nde nwe ife jide ife wa*" (possessors of power who hold onto their power).⁸¹⁰ Ohafia women's descriptions of their roles in government, set them apart from the Igbo women's assembly, for in their view, they were a formal (not *ad hoc*) institution, involved in day-to-day administration.

It was through their constant fearful performances of overwhelming authority that the *ikpirikpe ndi-inyom* came to be socially perceived as a supreme public court, one that simultaneously became a litigant who never lost, an arbiter who often voted in its own favor, with its own feet, and an enforcer of its own ruling. The *ikpirikpe* marched more often than their male counterparts. They were the ones who constantly transformed private and secret

⁸⁰⁹ Nne Nnenna Emeri, in Group Interview with *Ikpirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu Village.

⁸¹⁰ Nmia Nnaya Bassey, in Group Interview with *Ikpirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu Village.

disagreements into public spectacles, subject to the entire society's moral debate. So, where lies women's political invisibility? Indeed, the public was the most important and effective platform for Ohafia women's assertion and performance of political power, between 1850 and 1900, and they continue to exploit the public platform today. During the period of my fieldwork in Ohafia, I witnessed at least a dozen women's public marches; most of them were *ikpa mgbogho*, especially against men, while the rest were *isopu ogo* or *ibo ezi*. I did not, in this entire period, observe a single incidence of *akpan* or *umuaka* public march. While this is not evidence that none ever took place, it is a reflection of the varying degree of consistency with which either gendered marches were performed, and the varying degree of publicity, which either of them entailed. Njoku affirms that *akpan* did not march as regularly, in its own case, in a bid to command fear and respect when it did appear.⁸¹¹

⁸¹¹ Njoku, oral conversation with author, phone call from Michigan, U.S.A to Nigeria.

Conclusion

The age-grade system of Ohafia distinguished its political organization from most Igbo communities. The *uke* political system was a means of ensuring that the eye of the society focused on its members to evaluate their progress and achievement, such that individuals were made more acutely conscious of the necessity for personal success and of the pains of failure.⁸¹² As the basis for men's military distinction and attainment of *ufiem*, and women's forging of an effective political institution, the *uke* was the quintessence of political individualism and achievement orientation. While it has been imperative to discuss men and women as homogenous groups in order to elucidate gendered political organization and power, it was the actions of men and women that birthed and shaped Ohafia political institutions. Thus, the qualification for any political office was premised on personal achievement and distinction, and social mobility was never ascriptive, including the office of the *ezie*.⁸¹³

Nina Mba aptly described political power as the exercise of "coercive influence,"⁸¹⁴ based on the threat or use of sanctions, control over public morality and communal values, and over the distribution of material resources. Achebe argues that through the role of women as daughters, mothers, traders and wives, as well as social conceptions of superior female principles in Nsukka, women were able to enforce compliance to their rules and regulations in both the pre-colonial and colonial period.⁸¹⁵ This chapter has argued that contrary to the notion that women were socio-politically subordinate to men, politically invisible, and docile, Ohafia women

⁸¹² Azuonye, "The Heroic Age," 22.

⁸¹³ Mmonwu-Oti, oral interview by author; Mecha Ukpai Akanu, *ezie-ogo* of Amangwu and Members of the Men's Court, Group Interview; Anaso Awalekwa, *ezie-ogo* of Ndea-Nku and Members of the Men's Court, Group Interview.

⁸¹⁴ Mba, *Nigerian Women Mobilized*, vii-viii.

⁸¹⁵ Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors and Kings*, 161.

maintained one of the most powerful political institutions in southeastern Nigeria, and performed political strategies that were more effective than those of their men, between 1850 and 1900.

A number of scholars such as Nina Mba and Philip Nsugbe noted that Ohafia kinship system differed from those of other patrilineal Igbo societies, but they did not examine the ramifications of Ohafia dominant matrilineage system for women's exercise of political power. This chapter suggests that the position of Ohafia-Igbo women as breadwinners, as well as their matrilineal kinship system, which placed women in an especial position of importance,⁸¹⁶ shaped the prominence of female political power in the society. In effect, the matrifocal conceptions of citizenship and the high socio-cultural value placed on women, defined the society's moral order, and shaped the severity of their political enforcement strategies between 1850 and 1900.

Moreover, because of endogamous marriage practices within the patrilineage, the *ikpirikpe* consisted of both wives and daughters within a village, and was able to fulfill political roles, which the assembly of wives and the assembly of daughters played in patrilineal Igbo societies. However, *ikpirikpe* was led by a coronated female political ruler, who served as "king of the women." This and the fact that it derived from the age-grade system, enabled it to function as a formal political institution, rather than an *ad hoc* assembly of women, and a mere pressure group, distanced from total society. Lastly, whereas the men's court was incapable of exercising power and authority over women, *ikpirikpe* exercised its power and authority over both men and women. Thus, I argue that not only were they more effective in the exercise of coercive influence, the more extensive limits of their political jurisdiction enabled them to exercise more power than their male counterparts.

⁸¹⁶ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 25. This is the subject of Chapter 1.

CHAPTER THREE

PERFORMING *UFIEM*: THE SOCIO-CULTURAL CONSTITUTION OF *NDI IKIKE* (WARRIOR) MASCULINITIES, 1850-1900

First, this chapter will clearly show that *ufiem* (masculinity) was a construction of privilege, power, and social status. The history of how *ufiem* powers and privileges were constructed, is the primary concern, and this is explored in the leisure and military activities of the Ohafia-Igbo in the second half of the 19th century. The chapter argues that boys were socialized into the ethics of military distinction and honor from childhood through games.

Second, the chapter contends that there were many forms of *ufiem* in 19th century Ohafia-Igbo society, and all were not equally powerful as social forces. *Ndi ikike* (warriors) defined the dominant values of masculinity in Ohafia-Igbo society, between 1850 and 1900. They discriminated against other forms of *ufiem* including yam farmers, *dibia* (medicine men), hunters, and wealthy merchants (*ogaranya*), who *ndi ikike* defined as *ujo* (coward and weak).⁸¹⁷ By analyzing how women ritually became men, how some women performed *ndi ikike* masculinity, and the role of women in the social distinctions between *ufiem* and *ujo*, the chapter argues that men and women played mutually constitutive roles in *ufiem* construction and performance.

Third, while various forms of *ufiem* were practiced in Ohafia between 1850 and 1900, it was only the *ndi ikike* (warrior) masculinity that attained a hegemonic character, such that other forms of *ufiem* became subordinated to it, and the *ndi ikike* idiom of *igbu ishi* (to cut a head), became the dominant idiom of expressing masculinity performance at the turn of the 20th century. Thus writes McCall, “the academic degree and the Mercedes-Benz [would become]

⁸¹⁷ Chapter 4 shows that those defined as *ujo* constructed forms of *ufiem* that were sometimes subordinate and subversive to “how real men should behave.” Morrell, “Of Boys and Men,” 608.

“heads” that, when *brought home*, establish[ed] the passage to full adulthood and status as a local hero.”⁸¹⁸ The attainment of *ufiem* he observed placed an emphasis on “going out into the realm beyond the limits of the familiar Ohafia world . . . confronting the unknown, prevailing against alien forces and conquering them on their own ground. Returning with the head completed the act of incorporation.”⁸¹⁹ The head symbolized the proof of successful return.

Thus, the picture of the successful Ohafia warrior who returned with a head in his right hand is expressed as *ilu ikenga* (to enact righteousness, accomplishment, and social mobility).⁸²⁰ In this sense, as McCall noted, a celebration of the head was a celebration of masculinity.⁸²¹ To demonstrate how *ndi ikike* came to be seen as real men above all other forms of *ufiem*, this chapter examines the changing practices of headhunting, and the organization of warfare in the second half of the 19th century. Highlighting the social privileges of *ndi ikike* masculinities, the chapter argues that the practices of an exclusive society called *ite odo*, facilitated the entrenchment of *ndi ikike* hegemony in the period, 1880-1920.

Fourth, this chapter argues that the historical constructions of masculinity between 1850 and 1900 structured Ohafia society in peculiar ways and contributed to the popular imagination of the Ohafia-Igbo as a warrior society at the turn of the 20th century. In order to demonstrate the impact of the performance of *ndi ikike* masculinity on the Ohafia-Igbo, this chapter examines the

⁸¹⁸ McCall, *Dancing Histories*, 73.

⁸¹⁹ McCall, *Dancing Histories*, 74. This interpretation was corroborated by my interview respondents: Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amangwu Village, Ohafia. August 15, 2011; Kalu Awa, *ezie-ogo* of Ibina (Ihenta), oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Ibina (Ihenta) Village. December 12, 2011; Chief Kalu Awa Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Ufielie Village. October 27, 2011.

⁸²⁰ *Ikipirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu Village, Group Interview.

⁸²¹ McCall, *Dancing Histories*, 74.

myth of cannibalism that developed between 1890 and 1920, the geography of masculinity, 1850-1920, and the role of the war dance in shaping social visions of Ohafia-Igbo society.

Igba Nnunu (To Kill a Bird): Gendering through Games

*What is learned by constant informal practice, and taught by formal coaching, is for each sport a specific combination of force and skill. Force, meaning the irresistible occupation of space; skill, meaning the ability to operate on space or the object in it.*⁸²²

The scholarship on African leisure activities have shown that as socially configured practices, games provided an arena for the negotiation of social identity.⁸²³ Second, in its juxtaposition with work, leisure or play involved both non-obligatory activities and practices that involved the fulfillment of social obligations.⁸²⁴ Since leisure activities are largely voluntary, they provide a reliable index of African gendered agency in social change.⁸²⁵ Third, the creation of gendered spaces through leisure, generated cultural notions of masculine and feminine spheres of play, and shaped masculine identities.⁸²⁶ Hence, Peter Alegi argues that the emphasis which the Xhosa sport of stick-fighting placed on “physical prowess, masculine identity, theatrical performance, and martial competition,” was fundamental to “the striving for status, the assertion

⁸²² Robert W. Connell, *Which Way is Up? Essays on Class, Sex and Culture* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1983), 18.

⁸²³ Phyllis Martin, *Leisure and Society in Colonial Brazzaville* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 2, 52-53, 96-99; Laura Fair, *Pastimes and Politics: Culture, Community and Identity in Post-abolition Urban Zanzibar, 1890-1945* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2001), 3-4, 9-10, 14-15, 64-109, 169-270; Peter Alegi, *Laduma! Soccer, Politics and Society in South Africa* (South Africa: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2004), 42-47, 62-63, 87-110.

⁸²⁴ Martin, *Leisure and Society*, 7.

⁸²⁵ Hortense Powdermaker, *Copper Town: Changing Africa, The Human Situation on the Rhodesian Copperbelt* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), xiv, 14, 167; Clyde J. Mitchell, *The Kalela Dance: Aspects of Social Relationships among Urban Africans in Northern Rhodesia* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1956), 12, 18-22, 31-34.

⁸²⁶ Martin, *Leisure and Society*, 153; Alegi, *Laduma!* 1-3, 28-37.

of identity, the maintenance of power in one form or another, and the indoctrination of youth into the culture of their elders.”⁸²⁷

Games were central to gender-formation in Ohafia-Igbo society before the 20th century. They served to distinguish boys from girls,⁸²⁸ the good child from the useless child, and braves from cowards.⁸²⁹ The education of an Ohafia boy focused on military training. This began informally through play such as hide-and-seek, mock gun-battles, archery, and wrestling contests, from the age of 5 to about 18 years.⁸³⁰ Nna Agbai Ndukwe recalls that growing up in the 1920s, “The first thing we did as children when we woke up every morning was *uta ngwuru* [lizard hunt] . . . no other thought preoccupied us beyond going about the village and hunting lizards with bow and arrows, which we made ourselves; even hunger did not deter us . . . We also hunted birds.”⁸³¹ Children often sold captured lizards to medicine-men (*dibia*) who utilized them in the preparation of various curative medicines.⁸³² Through participation in this game, children honed their archery skills daily in preparation for the most important accomplishment in the early stage of their life — *igba nnunu* (to kill a hummingbird).⁸³³

⁸²⁷ Alegi, *Laduma!* 7.

⁸²⁸ Basden, *Niger Ibos*, 190.

⁸²⁹ Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amangwu Village, Ohafia. August 15, 2011; Ndukwe Otta and Elder Uduma Uka, Group Interview by author; Chief Kevin Ukiro, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Asaga Village, Ohafia. August 10, 2010; Chief K.K. Owen, oral interview by author.

⁸³⁰ N. Uka, “A Note on the ‘Abam’ Warriors of Igbo Land,” *Ikenga: Journal of African Studies* 1, 2 (1972), p.77.

⁸³¹ Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author

⁸³² Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author; See the masculinity of *dibia* in Chapter 5.

⁸³³ Chief Olua Iro Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Ebem Village Ohafia. August 3, 2010; Chief Kevin Ukiro, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Asaga Village, Ohafia. August 10, 2010

To embark on an *igba nnunu* venture, a group of young boys were led by an older boy of about 15 years, who had himself successfully accomplished the feat. This boy was called *ochi agha* (war leader), and he replicated the role of a warrior, who customarily led newly groomed warriors to their first headhunting adventure.⁸³⁴ He instructed the young warriors in the various techniques of bird hunting, including where and when to look for the bird, how to set traps, and how to shoot with bow and arrow. The choice-bird was *nza* — the hummingbird. The Ohafia describe it as the king bird (*ezie nnunu*), because, as a very small bird, with great agility, it was difficult to kill.⁸³⁵ An individual who killed a big bird was subjected to ridicule.⁸³⁶ The hummingbirds arrived during the dry season to feed on the flowers of a particular tree known as *obolo-nza*. Kamalu Uriom captures the bird-hunt scene in his historical fiction:

Anyabule and the youngsters were sitting quietly under an *Ubolo* shrub with their bows set waiting for birds to appear. Above, growing on the shrubs, were clusters of brightly coloured flowers. Just as the warriors strove to acquire human skulls to give them glory, these youngsters were hunting for birds for the same reason . . . The youngsters watched eagerly, their bows and arrows in readiness. A flock of birds . . . alight and start sucking the sweet juice of the flowers. ‘Don’t shoot immediately the birds arrive. Keep quiet, allow them to settle down. Then, choose one nearest to you, aim properly and then, let go,’ Anyabule advised.⁸³⁷

Njoku writes, “It was a red-letter day when a boy killed a bird with his bow and arrow.”⁸³⁸ This accomplishment and its celebration launched the boy’s *uke* [age-grade] into

⁸³⁴ Before the 20th century, Ohafia-Igbo men often contracted the services of seasoned warriors to lead their sons into their first battle. Such contracted warriors were known as *ochi-agma*. Each military regiment was also commanded by a warrior (*ochi-agma*). Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author; Chief Eke Emetu Kalu, oral interview by author; Kamalu Uriom, *The Adventures of Ancient Ikperikpeogu Warriors* (Owerri: Basich Publishers, 1990), 29.

⁸³⁵ Chief Emeh Okonkwo, oral interview by author, Ebem Village. Aug. 7, 2010; Chief Olua Iro Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Ebem Village. August 3, 2010.

⁸³⁶ Chief Olua Iro Kalu, oral interview by author, Ebem Village. August 3, 2010.

⁸³⁷ Uriom, *The Adventures of Ancient Ikperikpeogu Warriors*, 29.

⁸³⁸ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 61.

social recognition. The young hero earned an ordinal position in the ranks of the heroes of his age-grade.⁸³⁹ Providing a sense of the *igba nnunu* tradition, Ndukwe Otta recalled his experience in the 1940s:

Immediately I shot it, my age-mates applauded. We attached the bird to the tip of my bow, and I raised it high over my head, and shouted, ‘*Ujo o!* [Cowards!] Whoever fails to accomplish *igba nnunu* this year may also not be able to accomplish it next year!’ Then I broke into a swift run about town, accompanied by my age-mates. We went from one compound to another, and whichever compound we arrived at, I would shout “*Ujo o!*” referring to all my age-mates out there who had not fulfilled their *igba nnunu*. Then, I said that whoever was not capable of accomplishing this feat which I had just accomplished, in that year, would also not be able to accomplish it in the following year, either. I would shout this so that my age mates would hear it — it was partly a way to inform them of my accomplishment, and partly a way to pressurize all the “cowards” out there to fulfill *igba nnunu*.⁸⁴⁰

After this initial performance of accomplishment, the successful warrior went back home to inform his parents. To celebrate his success, they dressed him up like a brave warrior, adorned him with *okpu agu* (warrior’s cap), *abubo ugo* (eagle plumes), and *jooji* cloth.⁸⁴¹ Then, the young warrior performed a formal public outing, visiting his kinspeople. John McCall noted that it was through this process that the young boy first came to know most of his maternal relations, many of whom by virtue of the dispersed residence of the maternal family, he may never have

⁸³⁹ Uka, “A Note on the ‘Abam’ Warriors of Igbo Land,” 77; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 61; Mama Orie Emeh and Chief Mrs. Grace Ojieke, oral interview by author; Mama Docas Kalu and Mama Mary Ezera, Group Interview by author; Nmia Nnaya Agbai, oral interview by author; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author; Chief Eke Emetu Kalu, oral interview by author; Chief Emeh Okonkwo, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Ebem. Aug. 7, 2010. The first boy to accomplish *igba nnunu* among his *uke* became the leader of that age-grade, just as the first girl to undergo *ifu nso* (menstruation) and *ipso facto, ino nhiha* (ritual seclusion) became the leader of her age-grade, irrespective of age.

⁸⁴⁰ Ndukwe Otta and Elder Uduma Uka, Group Interview by author, Ebem. Aug. 14, 2010.

⁸⁴¹ These were the regalia of a brave and accomplished warrior. Chief Kalu Awa Kalu, oral interview by author. The *jooji* cloth or *okara* was a status symbol for the rich and respectable in most Igbo societies. It was originally imported from India until the late 19th century when large quantities were imported from Manchester (Azuonye, 1990: 32).

met. He then became a person of interest to his maternal family, the people who would ultimately grant him land and livelihood.⁸⁴² This time continued Otta,

By the evening of the *igba nnunu* day, when people had returned home from their daily engagements, I gathered my age mates who had successfully performed *igba nnunu* to celebrate my *inu nnunu* [bird-hunt celebration]. This was to show that I had grown, that I had come of age, and that I had *obtained the first head* [*e gbuele m isi mbu*], which every Ohafia male child should *obtain*. I then *carried* this bird, accompanied with music from my age mates, and we visited all my relatives in their various compounds in our village that night. We made our entrance as people prepared their dinner. My age-mates would then increase the tempo of the music, and I would perform the energetic warrior's dance, like this [performs the dance]. At each compound, before I received any gifts, I was asked to perform *iba mba* [the warrior's boast]. I took the stage and said: '*Mmamanu o! Mmamanu o! Agba mi nke mbu, ya akwahi! Mi mgbaa nke abuo, ya akwahi! Mi mgbaa nke ato, ya danyi ebeo, pua!*' [Greetings! Greetings! I shot the first arrow, the bird dodged it! I shot the second one, the bird dodged it! I then shot the third one, and the bird fell over there!] The response was a resounding '*Whoa! Eyooo!*' At this point, the person whose home we came to went into his house and fetched whatever he or she had and offered it as a gift to me. One of my age-mates carried a bowl to receive all the material gifts including yams and cloths, while another collected all the monetary gifts. We continued in this manner until we had visited almost every compound in the village. When we returned home, my age-mates and I poured out all the gifts and divided them up among ourselves. Then, we took the bird, that tiny bird, and roasted it. My age-mates took out the head and gave it to me! Then, they divided up the rest into tiny pieces among themselves, ensuring that each person got a share.⁸⁴³ [*Italics mine*]

Igba nnunu was the first logical step towards *igbu ishi* (to cut a head), which was the highest performance of *ufiem* in Ohafia-Igbo society before 1900. Thus, when a boy killed a bird, he was said to have performed his first *igbu ishi*.⁸⁴⁴ The equation of the bird-kill with a human

⁸⁴² McCall, *Dancing Histories*, 70-71.

⁸⁴³ Ndukwe Otta and Elder Uduma Uka, Group Interview by author.

⁸⁴⁴ Ndukwe Otta and Elder Uduma Uka, Group Interview by author; Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amangwu Village, Ohafia. August 15, 2011; Chief Eke Emetu Kalu, oral interview by author; Chief Emeh Okonkwo, oral interview by author; Chief Kalu Awa Kalu, oral interview by author; Chief K.K. Owen, oral interview by author; Chief Oluwa Iro Kalu, oral interview by author; N. Uka (1972: 77), John McCall (2000: 70), and Nnenna Obuba (2008: 24) noted that when the Ohafia boy-child cut his first teeth, he was said to have "cut his first head" and upon killing a

head served to prepare boys for manhood. A boy that accomplished *igba nnunu* at the appropriate age was a good child because he held the promise of fulfilling the dominant *ufiem* (warrior masculinity) upon adulthood.⁸⁴⁵ The performance of this accomplishment introduced boys to the taste of *ufiem* privileges, and the benefits of individual accomplishment. The symbolic equation of the head of the bird with a human head is partly realized through descriptive language. The word *ibu* (from *ibu ibu* — to carry a heavy object) is used to describe the act of bearing the head of the bird. This image of the head of a hummingbird as a heavy object is equally seen in the tradition of cooking the caught hummingbird in a big pot.⁸⁴⁶

The performance of *agha nnunu* (bird war) and *inu nnunu* (bird-hunt celebration) by male children was a simulation of the performance of headhunting and the celebration of warrior *ufiem* among adult males in the society. *Iba mba* (warrior's boast) was a composite oral tradition, reiterated in every case of *igbu ishi*, irrespective of the exact details of the head-hunt itself (the killing of a bird or the cutting of a human head). The celebration of *igba nnunu* involved a warrior's dance called *iri nnunu* (bird dance), and this was a replication of the war dance (*iri aha*), performed by adult male warriors in the society. *Iri nnunu* is defined as *ite ujo* (to dance away the cloak of *ujo* — cowardice/fear), because it enabled a boy to become socially gendered male: it marked his physical separation from his mother, and admission into the world of men.⁸⁴⁷

small bird, the boy was said to have “cut his second head.” However, oral evidence gathered by this author during fieldwork does not account for the teething version.

⁸⁴⁵ Uka, “A Note on the ‘Abam’ Warriors of Igbo Land,” 77.

⁸⁴⁶ Chief K.K. Owen, oral interview by author.

⁸⁴⁷ This physical separation is elaborated below. Ndukwe Otta and Uduma Uka, Group Interview by author; Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 54.

While boys were expected to shoot birds themselves, their experienced war-leaders sometimes performed this task for them.⁸⁴⁸ This mirrored cases where wealthy patriarchs sometimes purchased the services of a distinguished warrior to lead their young sons into battle and ensure that they returned home alive, and with a human head.⁸⁴⁹ However, the killing of a bird or taking of a human head by a war-leader on behalf of a young warrior was kept a secret (between the boy and his helper), and the maintenance of this secret was cardinal to a warrior's reputation. The ability to keep secrets ensured brotherhood and inter-dependence among warriors, and this was the primary objective of Ohafia secret societies (see chapter 4).

This is also seen in the changing practices of *igba nnunu*. Whereas boys had shot birds with bows and arrows before the 20th century to perform *ite ujo* (to dance away the cloak of cowardice), since the 1900s, they have come to rely upon rubber sling-shots, which have greater range and accuracy than the traditional bows, and they keep this a secret from male elders, who insist on the maintenance of the ancestral tradition (using bows and arrows).⁸⁵⁰ The elders' fastidious defense of traditional mechanisms of *igba nnunu*, and the tendency of young men to subvert the rigid rules of man-making in their society, in the quest for social mobility and distinction, similarly characterized the adaptation of headhunting to slave production in the 18th

⁸⁴⁸ Ndukwe Otta and Elder Uduma Uka, Group Interview by author.

⁸⁴⁹ Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author; Uriom, *The Adventures of Ancient Ikperikpeogu Warriors*, 13, 23.

⁸⁵⁰ McCall, *Dancing Histories*, 71. This ideology is also mirrored in the fastidious insistence of the elders that young warriors brought back the heads they had caught in battle dripping blood to ensure that it was not the head of a female or a child, before the abolition of headhunting in the early 20th century. See Chubb, "Assessment Reports: Bende Division, 1927-1929"; Njoku, "Inter-Village Trade in Ohafia, 1900-1979," 29; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 63.

and 19th centuries, when young warriors increasingly took live captives as slaves, instead of cutting a head, thereby redefining conceptions of warrior *ufiem*.⁸⁵¹

Just as adult males who failed to accomplish *igbu ishi* were constructed as *ujo* (cowards), boys who failed to perform *igba nnunu* were equally constructed as “cowards.” *Ujo* was the most dreaded status in Ohafia-Igbo society. It was a status of shame and degradation,⁸⁵² and the life of the *ujo* was worse than that of a slave.⁸⁵³ So each time a boy had successfully performed *igba nnunu*, he and his age-mates who had achieved this status fetched a big clay pot (*ite ujo*) and filled it with all sorts of garbage, and sometimes, they defecated into the pot. Then, singing derisive songs against their *ujo* mates, they marched to the home of any *ujo*, and in front of his mother’s house or kitchen, smashed the pot. According to Agbai Ndukwe, this act questioned, “Why should a coward live here?”⁸⁵⁴ The insult against the mother is equally seen in some of the boasts that accompanied *igba nnunu* such as “*Onye agbaghi nnunu, a gbara ikpu nne ya woo!*”⁸⁵⁵ [Whoever failed to shoot a bird has shot his mother’s vagina! Whoa!] Thus, each time a boy performed *igba nnunu*, his *ujo* mates and their mothers dreaded this consequential humiliation.⁸⁵⁶

The choice of the mother as the recipient of this symbolic derision, in lieu of the father, did not signify lack of respect for women. Rather, it was a social criticism of a mother’s failure to fulfill her obligations towards the raising of a good child. In precolonial Ohafia society, both

⁸⁵¹ Chief Udensi Ekea, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Aug. 4, 2010; Chief Emeh Okonkwo, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Ebem Village. Aug. 2010.

⁸⁵² Uka, “A Note on the ‘Abam’ Warriors of Igbo Land,” 78

⁸⁵³ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 65. See further distinctions between *ujo* and *ufiem* below.

⁸⁵⁴ Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author.

⁸⁵⁵ Chief Kalu Awa Kalu, oral interview by author.

⁸⁵⁶ Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author, Amangwu. Aug. 15, 2011.

men and women played roles in the constructions of masculinity and femininity. Mothers fulfilled their social obligations towards their sons and daughters by ensuring timely gendered socialization. A boy lived with his mother until he was ready to be gendered male in the society.⁸⁵⁷ The weaning of the male child from the mother's care and pampering began with *igba nnunu* accomplishment, after which the prospective Ohafia male warrior symbolically moved out of his mother's house to live with his father or with other boys in a separate house in the compound. This boys' hut (*uluenta*)⁸⁵⁸ was usually established near the father's house, or close to the home of the most senior male member of the patrilineage. Against this background, a boy who failed to perform *igba nnunu* was seen as inhibited by his mother's pampering.

This practice was prevalent among the Cross-River Igbo peoples, and in the Afikpo village-group, the boys' quarters were called *ulote*.⁸⁵⁹ In these boys' houses, a boy slept, stored his treasures, received his friends, and mastered various crafts such as mat making and woodcarving.⁸⁶⁰ There, he learned "much about farming [fishing, climbing palm trees] and

⁸⁵⁷ Nsugbe, *Ohafia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 54 writes that the age and sex of a child defined whether he lived with his mother or father: "A male child, if still suckling or under seven years, would sleep in the mother's hut. *Older male children sleep with senior adult males in their huts* until they are of an age to live in separate huts, which they do at about the age of sixteen to eighteen years." Thus, I stated in chapter 2 that until boys reached the age of about 18 years, they were considered *umirima* (neutral-gendered non-adults) in Ohafia. *Igba nnunu* was the first step towards their physical separation from their mothers, as well as their man making. Basden, *Niger Ibos*, 196 also writes, "A boy lives in his mother's hut until he is old enough to build quarters for himself." Also, see Ottenberg, below. My interpretation is based on Chief Kalu Awa Kalu, oral interview by author; Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author; Chief Udensi Ekea, oral interview by author; Chief Emeh Okonkwo, oral interview by author.

⁸⁵⁸ Uduma, *The People of Ohafia Ezema*, 56.

⁸⁵⁹ Ottenberg, *Double Descent in an African Society*, 182.

⁸⁶⁰ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 41-43.

matters affecting men in general.”⁸⁶¹ Moreover, a boy’s informal and formal military training continued through his association with other boys in this context. Thus, after *igba nnunu*, a boy joined his peers and seniors in games, often organized competitively between various *uke*.

Post-Igba Nnunu Man Making Games

The Ohafia male child became a warrior apprentice after *igba nnunu*. Through participation in age-grade competitive sports, he defined himself as a promising *ufiem*. A prominent game in this respect was mock gun battles (*egbe tootoo*),⁸⁶² where boys from two separate *uke* engaged in inter-group gun combats, using wooden guns in hand-to-hand battle formation. The primary objective was to trap an opponent in a tight corner.⁸⁶³ In this way, writes Uka, “they learn from a very young age, how to face the enemy in battle without fear.”⁸⁶⁴ It was also during such games that the youths learned the intricacies and codes of warfare. They also received training in guerilla warfare through a game called *ina ope*, in which they honed their skills on how to attack and dodge.⁸⁶⁵

Shooting competitions were conducted with bows and arrows. In the game of *igba aju*, the pitch of a cocoyam leaf or plantain stem, or an unripe orange was used as a target. The competitors took turns in shooting at the target from a given distance. Each member contributed a stipulated number of cowrie shells or an arrow to a pool and this constituted the prize for the winner. Each time a competitor missed the target, he lost cowries or an arrow to each of those

⁸⁶¹ Ottenberg, *Double Descent in an African Society*, 183.

⁸⁶² Chief K.K. Owen, oral interview by author.

⁸⁶³ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 61; Uduma, *The People of Ohafia Ezema*, 57.

⁸⁶⁴ Uka, “A Note on the ‘Abam’ Warriors of Igbo Land,” 77.

⁸⁶⁵ Chief Emeh Okonkwo, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Ebem. Aug. 2010.

who got the target. In the end, winners and losers were ranked, based on the number of arrows they accumulated or lost, and losers were sometimes subjected to receiving knocks on their heads from the winners.⁸⁶⁶ In a similar game called *aka-oku*, a ball of red-hot fire-cracker was launched into the air and archers shot at the moving target with their arrows.⁸⁶⁷ Other games such as *iti ukporo* (stick and captive hoop game),⁸⁶⁸ and *itu ndu* (local badminton) aimed at improving targeting skills and mental acuity.

Wrestling was a prominent feature of childhood socialization and skills development in the 19th century. Boys engaged in wrestling competitions informally and formally during annual festivities such as the new yam festival. Wrestling was a necessary skill to acquire because all Ohafia-Igbo 19th century warfare involved significant hand-to-hand combats.⁸⁶⁹ It is also in this respect that every Ohafia male child between the ages of 19 and 21 was expected to be dexterous in the use of the machete as a war weapon.⁸⁷⁰ Local wrestling champions were matched against leading opponents from other villages and towns. Distinguished wrestlers attained high honor in the society, and their praise-names were a marker of social distinction. The wrestler-hero was called *di-mgba* (husband/master of wrestling), and successful wrestlers were often hailed

⁸⁶⁶ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 61; Basden, *Niger Ibos*, 343; Chief K.K. Owen, oral interview by author; Chief Emeh Okonkwo, oral interview by author.

⁸⁶⁷ This was performed during new yam festivals and annual wrestling bouts (*igba mgba*). Emeh Okonkwo, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Ebem Village. Aug. 2010.

⁸⁶⁸ This game was also popular in “Native” America and in Eastern Europe.

⁸⁶⁹ Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amangwu Village, Ohafia. August 15, 2011; Chief Emeh Okonkwo, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Ebem Village Ohafia. Aug. 7, 2010; Chief Olua Iro Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Ebem Village Ohafia. August 3, 2010.

⁸⁷⁰ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 61.

azueruala (the back that does not touch the ground).⁸⁷¹ *Di-mgba* often served as Ohafia war leaders in the 19th century.⁸⁷²

Indeed, praise naming was an essential part of Ohafia gendered socialization. As Afam Ebeogu observed, Igbo praise-names are “not mere linguistic expressions but are also indicators of experiences which reveal much about the political attitudes and practices of the traditional Igbo.”⁸⁷³ Beginning with the informal naming of an age-grade after the first boy to perform *igba nnunu*, the general practice of heroic naming among the Ohafia-Igbo served to reward accomplishment and encourage individual distinction. Peter Alegi similarly observed in the Xhosa sport of stick fighting that praise naming served to excite and delight. They were a fairly faithful and inspired record of one’s career and character. In youth, they told one’s measure of promise, his inclinations and his dormant but dominant qualities. Such names, writes Alegi, expressed individual identities in a “ritual language that attempted to ‘fix’ and stabilize a sense of self in a process of restless adolescent gendering.”⁸⁷⁴

Successful wrestlers are memorialized in the oral traditions of the Ohafia-Igbo. For instance, the tradition of origin of Okon village in Ohafia revolves around the figures of two epic wrestlers, who were fortified with medicine by two competing *dibias* (medicine men and spirit mediums). When the first wrestler threw the second and pinned him to the ground, he suddenly died on top of the latter. Thus, while the superior wrestler won the bout, he lost the peace because his people atoned for murder (*igwa ochu*) by relinquishing their prevailing political

⁸⁷¹ M. Iwundu, “Naming and Heroism in Igbo Traditional Life,” *Journal of Liberal Studies* 4, 1-2 (1994), 34-47.

⁸⁷² Chief Emeh Okonkwo, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Ebem. Aug. 2010.

⁸⁷³ Afam Ebeogu, “Onomastics and Igbo Tradition of Politics,” in U.D. Anyanwu, and J.C.U. Aguwa (eds.) *The Igbo and the Tradition of Politics* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension, 1993), 79.

⁸⁷⁴ Alegi, *Laduma!* 9.

authority to their opponents. In Okon village, this tradition serves to make sense of a situation whereby the first settlers lost their political authority to the second group of later migrants into the region; and it emphasizes the indispensable role of two classes of *ufiem* (wrestlers and *dibia*) to the society's welfare.⁸⁷⁵ Wrestlers are also celebrated as iconic historical *ufiem*. Thus, Emeh Okonkwo compares his performance of *ogaranya* masculinity in the 1940s, with his father's performance of *ufiem* through wrestling in the early 20th century, by asserting that his father often brought back home the *ikoro mgba* (wrestler drum/trophy) from other villages.⁸⁷⁶

Dancing was an activity that shaped the gendering of identities among the Ohafia-Igbo before the 20th century. Whereas for women, dancing was a mechanism of socialization and the dramatization of political power, for men, dancing was both competitive sport and military training. Besides women's political dances discussed in chapter 3, dances such as *oyo-oyo* were a rite of passage into adult womanhood. It served to educate young girls in the virtues of chastity, hard work, and group solidarity.⁸⁷⁷ According to Nnenna Emeri, *oyo-oyo* was "a form of education developed by Ohafia ancestresses in the precolonial period. Whoever refused to partake in the dance training was considered unruly and immoral, and those who mastered it

⁸⁷⁵ Dibia Agwu Arua, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon. August 4, 2010; Mr. Davidson Kalu Oki, oral interview by author, Okon. August 5, 2010; Dibia Kalu Uko, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon. September 14 and 20, 2011; Dibia Uche Dingba, oral interview by author, Okon. September 22, 2011; Chief Obasi Kama, oral interview by author, Okon Village. September 26, 2011.

⁸⁷⁶ Chief Emeh Okonkwo, oral interview by author.

⁸⁷⁷ Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amangwu Village, Ohafia. August 15, 2011; *Ikipirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu, Group Interview by author; Mama Orié Emeh and Chief Mrs. Grace Ojieke, Group Interview; Mama Docas Kalu and Mama Mary Ezera, Group Interview by author.

were seen as good girls. The girls danced bare-chested, their waists, covered with *ejigido* (beads) . . . The dance was not displayed to men.”⁸⁷⁸

In contrast to the female dances, the male dances are known as *iri-aha* (the war dance). The Ohafia war dance differed from the dance-forms of other Igbo communities. In his study of *iri-aha*, McCall argues that the dance rhythm identifies a distinctly masculine genre, which emphasizes a fast manly tempo as opposed to a graceful womanly tempo.⁸⁷⁹ Whereas the women’s dances involved a lilting bodily motion, the war dance involved swift and fluid leopard-like movements accompanied by bodily convulsions called *ofufu*.⁸⁸⁰ While the professional war dance was the preserve of adult males (discussed later in this chapter) with its characteristic mimetic performance of valorous warfare, the training for this extremely kinetic dance form began in childhood, through membership in various exclusively male secret societies like *obon* and *akan*, discussed in chapter 4.

In arguing that *ufiem* formation began from childhood, as the distinction of boys from girls, and the braves from the cowards, this study shows that identity formation through leisure practices was a political reality for African peoples in the pre-colonial period. Thus, it contributes to the growing literature on African leisure activities, which in spite of its overwhelming focus on the colonial period, elucidate the role of sports, games, and/or play in socialization and in identity formation. Ohafia-Igbo gendered games highlight individual agency, choice, control, and identity formation through the mediation of social relations, be it the performance of *igba nnunu* or the burden of *ujo* status; the physical and symbolic movement of a

⁸⁷⁸ Nnenna Emeri, in Group Interview with *Ikipirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu, Nov. 3, 2011.

⁸⁷⁹ McCall, *Dancing Histories*, 57-58.

⁸⁸⁰ McCall, *Dancing Histories*, 58-59.

boy-child from motherly care into the world of men; or the attainment of a praise-name, which stabilized a sense of self.

The skills which boys acquired through games prepared them for adulthood and the attainment of various *ufiem* identities such as *di nta* (the hunter hero), *di ji* (the yam hero), *di-mgba* (the wrestler hero), *dimkpa* and *onye ikom* (the warrior hero). Thus, upon inquiring about the socio-cultural constitution of *ufiem* in Ohafia-igbo society, most male respondents offered the same answer over and over, namely, that *ufiem* was a man who accomplished *igba nnunu* at the proper age; then became a member of *obon* and *akan* secret societies; performed *ike oba* (the establishment of a yam barn) and accomplished *igwa nnu* (the highest title for successful yam farmers); possibly, became a distinguished hunter of dangerous animals; married a wife in a manner his age-mates found fulfilling (*inyu mamiri ishi ulue*); and ultimately, went to war and came back with a human head (*igbu ishi*). However, each account of *ufiem* began with childhood socialization through games.

How Ndi Ikike (Warriors) Became Ndi Ikom (the Real Men)

*A man of intelligence and uncommon power of speech was admired and respected. But if he could not match his words with deeds, his prestige was compromised . . . The proficient farmer, the master-wrestler, and the proficient hunter were heroes . . . But this genre of heroism stood no comparison with military heroism, the hallmark of which was attained when a man brought home, as trophy, the head of an enemy slain in battle or combat.*⁸⁸¹

The Ohafia general term for “man/men” in the 19th century, was “*onye* [sing] *ikom/ndi* [pl] *ikom*.”⁸⁸² However, *ikom* also referred distinctively to real men because, the entire adult

⁸⁸¹ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 56-57.

⁸⁸² Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amangwu, Ohafia. August 15, 2011; Chief Olua Iro Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Ebem,

male population was socially divided into two classes of people — real men (*ikom*) and *ujo* (cowards).⁸⁸³ Real men were male individuals who had gone to war and brought back a human head as battle trophy.⁸⁸⁴ The etymology of *ikom* (man) is therefore premised on the notion that *ufiem* was attained through the physical acquisition of a human head in battle. Hence, while a hunter may be recognized as *dike* (a brave man), the yam-farmer as *di ji*, and the *dibia* could perform *ogaranya* (wealth) masculinity through the exploitation of an exclusive profession, *ufiem*, in its strictest meaning, was synonymous with warrior masculinities (*ndi ikike*). Real men were warriors, and *ndi ikike* (warriors) eclipsed all other forms of masculinity in social significance. They defined the dominant ideology of masculinity in 19th century Ohafia society.

The emphasis which the Ohafia-Igbo placed on military heroism between the 17th century period of settlement in the bellicose Cross River frontier environment, and the 19th century period of militant slave production enabled *ndi ikike* to emerge as the highest category of *ufiem* in the society. The social expectation and self-ambition of every male in the society during this period, was *igbu ishi* (to cut a head) in order to rid oneself of the odium of *ujo* status. This distinguished Ohafia from most other Igbo societies, and indeed many West African societies like the Akan, where the greatest performance of *ufiem* included astute oratory and mastery of

Ohafia. August 3, 2010; Chief Udensi Ekea of Ndi Ekea Compound, Okon Village, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Aug. 4, 2010.

⁸⁸³ Azuonye, “The Heroic Age,” 14; McCall, *Dancing Histories*, 79-80; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 62.

⁸⁸⁴ Mayne, “Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934,” 45; FO84/2019: “Africa (Slave Trade) West Coast, 1890,” 348-353; CO520/20: “Southern Nigeria Original Correspondence, August to October, 1903,” 18-20, 44-54; McCall, *Dancing Histories*, 80; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 56; Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, 82; Uka, “A Note on the ‘Abam’ Warriors of Igbo Land,” 78; Azuonye, “The Heroic Age,” 14; Jones, *Annual Reports of Bende Division*, 4.

proverbs in view of the belief that the elders spoke “with the voice of the ancestors,”⁸⁸⁵ as well as title-taking in demonstration of wealth.⁸⁸⁶ While *ogaranya* (wealth) masculinity became popular by the mid-19th century,⁸⁸⁷ title-taking was an unknown practice among the Ohafia-Igbo in contrast to most Igbo communities.⁸⁸⁸

Indeed, the importance which the Ohafia-Igbo placed on *igbu ishi* has led many scholars into the erroneous portrayal of Ohafia-Igbo men as bloodthirsty headhunters, Aro mercenaries, and men who had no knowledge of alternative civil pursuits. While these views were originally

⁸⁸⁵ Kwesi Yankah, *Speaking for the Chief: Akyeame and the Politics of Akan Royal Oratory* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 95.

⁸⁸⁶ Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria*, 41-42, 90-92; Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, 119-123; Allen, “Sitting on a Man,” 165-181; Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors and Kings*, 171-173, 206-215; Achebe, *The Female King*, 99-135. For wealth and the construction of masculinity see Hodgson, “‘Once Intrepid Warriors’: Modernity and the Production of Maasai Masculinities,” *Ethnology* 38, 2, (1999), 121-150; Cornwall, “To Be A Man Is More Than a Day’s Work,” 230-248; McKittrick, “Forsaking their Fathers?” 33-51; Lindsay, “Money, Marriage, and Masculinity,” 138-155.

⁸⁸⁷ Chief Udensi Ekea, oral interview by author; Chief Oluwa Iro Kalu of Ebem village, oral interview by author; Chief Kevin Ukiro, oral interview by author; Ndukwe Otta and Elder Uduma Uka, Group Interview by author; Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author; Chief Eke Emetu Kalu, oral interview by author; Chief Emeh Okonkwo, oral interview by author; Chief Kalu Awa Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Ufiela Village, Ohafia. October 27, 2011; Chief K.K. Owen, oral interview by author. Also see Felix K. Ekechi, *Tradition and Transformation in Eastern Nigeria: A Sociopolitical History of Owerri and its Hinterland, 1902-1947* (Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1989), 145-146; Raphael C. Njoku, *African Cultural Values: Igbo Political Leadership in Colonial Nigeria, 1900-1966* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 19-21; John McCall, “The Atlantic Slave Trade and the Ohafia Warrior Tradition: Global Forces and Local Histories,” In Carolyn Brown and Paul Lovejoy, eds. *Repercussions of the Atlantic Slave Trade: The Interior of the Bight of Biafra and the African Diaspora*. (New Jersey/Eritrea: African World Press, 2010), 71-76; Adiele E. Afigbo, *Ropes of Sand: Studies in Igbo Culture and History* (Ibadan: Published for University Press in association with Oxford University Press, 1981), 241-242.

⁸⁸⁸ Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria*, 82; Adiele E. Afigbo, *Igbo Enwe Eze: Beyond Onwumehili and Onwuejeogwu* (Nigeria: Whytem Publishers, 2001), 1-29; U.D. Anyanwu, and J.C.U. Aguwa (eds.) *The Igbo and the Tradition of Politics* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension, 1993); Obododimma Oha, “Praise Names and Power De/constructions in Contemporary Igbo Chiefship,” *Culture, Language, and representation VII* (2009), 101-116.

advanced as part of an imperialist discourse by early European writers such as Charles Patridge, A.G. Leonard, G.T. Basden, G.I. Jones, and P.A. Talbot, later European and African scholars reframed the old picture, including Kenneth Dike, David Northrup, Philip Nsugbe, Richard Henderson, and John McCall. Whereas Chukwuma Azuonye challenged this notion, his assertion that Ohafia warriors came to see “every war no matter who the combatants were or what the quarrel was, as their own war,”⁸⁸⁹ is misleading, for as Isichei and Njoku noted, the Ohafia-Igbo did not accept every war.⁸⁹⁰ Njoku appears to be a lone-voice calling for a novel, “ecumenical history,”⁸⁹¹ more sensitive to methodology, historical evidence and emic interpretations of Ohafia inter-group relations.⁸⁹² By offering a diffuse conception of *ufiem*, as immanent and manifest in leisure, military, and economic (trade, agriculture, hunting, and traditional medicare) activities of Ohafia, and constructed through the society’s kinship and gendered political practices, this study offers a more complex and balanced view of Ohafia-Igbo masculinities.

O Chi Udo Eje Ogu [He That Goes To War With A Rope]: The Transformation of Igbo Ishi [To Cut A Head] from a Defense Mechanism to Ufiem Habitus

It has been noted in chapter 2 that the hostile environment in which the Ohafia settled was fundamental to the evolution of a heroic age (18th-19th centuries), which placed emphasis on militant conceptions of manhood and honor.⁸⁹³ It has also been noted that in addition to inspiring the borrowing of institutions such as the *uke* (age-grades) and secret societies, this

⁸⁸⁹ Azuonye, “The Heroic Age,” 15.

⁸⁹⁰ Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, 82; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 71.

⁸⁹¹ William McNeill, “Mythistory, or Truth, Myth, History, and Historians,” *The American Historical Review* 91 (1986), 7; Jerry Bentley, “Myths, Wagers, and Some Moral Implications of World History,” *JWH* 16, 1(Mar. 2005), 53.

⁸⁹² Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, vi-viii, 65-72.

⁸⁹³ Azuonye, “The Heroic Age,” 9; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 68.

hostile environment led the Ohafia-Igbo to adapt the practice of headhunting as a psychological mechanism of defense.⁸⁹⁴ However, the institutionalization of headhunting was realized through the constructions of *ndi ikike* masculinity. While men who went to war and brought back a human head were socially celebrated as *ufiem*, those who failed in this venture were constructed as *ujo*. The ambition to rid oneself of *ujo* status was one of the major reasons for which individual men went to battle between 1850 and 1900,⁸⁹⁵ and armies went to war at the flimsiest excuse.⁸⁹⁶ Even in times of peace, young men were required to prove their manhood to the society by hunting human heads.⁸⁹⁷ Headhunting was so internalized by the Ohafia-Igbo that during the Nigerian-Biafran civil war between 1967 and 1970, some Ohafia men still exploited the war as an opportunity to cut human heads.⁸⁹⁸

Second, after over 250 years of militant slave production in collusion with the Aro during the period of the Atlantic slave trade,⁸⁹⁹ Ohafia-Igbo society had by the 19th century, become

⁸⁹⁴ This has continued to date in the form of rumors of continuing headhunting, spread by Ohafia people in the period of fieldwork for this study [20010-2012], to discourage kidnapping for ransom in their territory.

⁸⁹⁵ Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, 58; Northrup, *Trade Without Rulers*, 119; Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 79, 82; Azuonye, "The Heroic Age," 14-17.

⁸⁹⁶ Njoku, *Ohaffia: A Heroic Igbo*, 72; Uka, "A Note on the 'Abam' Warriors of Igbo Land," 78.

⁸⁹⁷ Chief Udensi Ekea, oral interview by author; Mecha Ukpai Akanu, *ezie-ogo* of Amangwu and Members of the Men's Court, Group Interview by author, Aug. 18, 2011; Chief Kevin Ukiro, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Asaga, Ohafia. August 10, 2010.

⁸⁹⁸ Chief Uduma Nnochin Ogbuagu, oral interview by author; Ndukwe Otta and Elder Uduma Uka, Group Interview.

⁸⁹⁹ Northrup, *Trade Without Rulers*, 119-121; Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 27; Azuonye, "The Heroic Age," 15-17; Nwokeji, *The Slave Trade and Culture*, 1-14; Ekejiuba, "The Aro System of Trade," 11-16; Dike and Ekejiuba, *The Aro of Southeastern Nigeria*.

ushered into a slave mode of production,⁹⁰⁰ internalizing warfare as a way of life.⁹⁰¹ As Richard Roberts cogently observed, while warriors may have engaged in warfare in the interest of contractual parties, they retained their own agenda, and continuous warfare became the result of the warriors' need to reproduce themselves irrespective of a market for their commodities.⁹⁰² Many Ohafia warriors in the second half of the 19th century not only cut a head; they also captured slaves alive and their captives were defined as heads they had cut to attain *ndi ikike* masculinity.⁹⁰³ Such *ndi ikike* were known as *o chi udo eje ogu* [he that went to war with a rope].⁹⁰⁴ Davidson Oki stated,

⁹⁰⁰ Richard Roberts writes that the unity of a social system, which had attained a slave mode of production rested on the reproduction of its material conditions and social relations of production. See Richard Roberts, "Production and Reproduction of Warrior States: Segu Bambara and Segu Tokolor, c. 1712-1890," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 13, 3 (1980), 419. For the view that the Atlantic slave trade ushered various African societies into a slave mode of production, see Walter Rodney, "African slavery and Other Forms of Social Oppression on the Upper Guinea Coast in the Context of the Atlantic Slave-Trade," *The Journal of African History* 7, 3 (1966), 433-442; Martin Klein, "The Impact of the Atlantic Slave Trade on the Societies of the Western Sudan," *Social Science History* 14, 2 (Summer, 1990), 234-235, 237-239. Klein's description of the societies of the Western Sudan, as becoming more efficient slaving operations during the 17th and 18th centuries, such that slavery and warfare became a way for these states to reproduce themselves, was also true for the non-centralized Ohafia-Igbo. The Ohafia-Igbo did not fit into Paul E. Lovejoy's picture, which subsumes "decentralized" societies into a category of "random enslavement," that did not affect population density. See Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa, Second Edition* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 68-69, 84-86, 103-104, 126-128, 148, 182-184, 188-189. As this chapter demonstrates below, the Ohafia-Igbo military was organized based on the *uke* system, and their activities occasioned significant demographic changes in southeastern Nigeria in the 18th and 19th centuries.

⁹⁰¹ McCall, "The Atlantic Slave Trade and the Ohafia Warrior Tradition," 75-76. The Ohafia-Igbo were not alone in this. In the Western Sudan, warriors often massacred their captives following the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade. See Claude Meillassoux, "the Role of Slavery in the Economic and Social History of Sahelo-Sudanic Africa," in Inikori, ed., *Forced Migration: The Impact of the Export Slave Trade on African Societies* (New York, 1982), 89-90.

⁹⁰² Roberts, "Production and Reproduction of Warrior States," 398, 400.

⁹⁰³ Chief Udensi Ekea, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Aug. 4, 2010; Vasco U. Iro, *ezie-ogo* of Nkwebi Village, Members of the Men's Court and *Nde-Ichin*, Group Interview

My grand-father lived for about 90 years. He died in 1957. My father was popularly known as *o chi udo eje ogu*. He fought in Ukpati [1880s] and Nteje [1890s].⁹⁰⁵ When he went to war, he took his ropes and tied it around his waist. After taking enough heads, he took captives alive, and tethered them to his rope, and upon reaching home, the village broke out in celebration . . . Some of his female slaves gave birth to children for him. They are still in Okon today . . . He was a great yam farmer, and owned plantations. When he brought home his slaves, he sent them to his farms as laborers. He sold some of his slaves at Itu.⁹⁰⁶

In the course of their slave raids, many Ohafia warriors cut male heads and captured mostly female slaves and children, whom they sold to the Aro.⁹⁰⁷ Between the last quarter of the 19th century and the first decade of the 20th century, sale prices of children and female slaves were much more profitable than the prices of adult male slaves in the Cross River Division markets such as Itu and Asan.⁹⁰⁸ This may have facilitated the cutting of male heads, and the

by author, digital voice recording, Nkwebi. Nov. 17, 2011; Kalu Awa, *ezie-ogo* of Ibina, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Ibina (Ihenta) Village. December 12, 2011. *Nde-Ichin*, Amuma Village, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Amuma. November 26, 2011; Godwin Nwankwo Uko, *ezie-ogo* of Amankwu Village and his cabinet members, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Amankwu Village. October 25, 2011.

⁹⁰⁴ Davidson Kalu Oki, oral interview by author, Okon Village, Ohafia. August 5, 2010.

⁹⁰⁵ Arua, *A Short History of Ohafia*, 11; Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, 85; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 84; R.O. Igwebe, *The History of Arondizuogu from 1635-1960* (Aba, 1962), 91.

⁹⁰⁶ Mr. Davidson Kalu Oki, oral interview by author, Okon Village, Ohafia. August 5, 2010.

⁹⁰⁷ Northrup, *Trade Without Rulers*, 119; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 63-64; Ugo G. Nwokeji, "African Conceptions of Gender and the Slave Traffic," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series 58, 1, 62-63; Ugo Nwokeji, "The Atlantic Slave Trade and Population Density: A Historical Demography of the Biafran Hinterland," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 34, 3 (2000), 625-626; Chief Uduma Nnochin Ogbuagu, oral interview by author; Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author; Nde-Ichin, Amuma Village, Group Interview by author; Anaso Awalekwa, *ezie-ogo* of Ndea-Nku Village and Members of the Men's Court, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording. Nov. 17, 2011; Chief Kalu Awa Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Ufiele. Oct. 27, 2011.

⁹⁰⁸ CO520/8. "Southern Nigeria Original Correspondence, May to August, 1901," 570-574.

dominance of women in the ratio of slaves produced from the region.⁹⁰⁹ However as Nwokeji suggests, in studying how African conceptions of gender shaped the slave trade, there is a need to look beyond market forces, to lineage principles, division of labor, and ideas about gender.⁹¹⁰

Indeed, several Ohafia-Igbo informants argued that the matrifocal conceptions of Ohafia-Igbo citizenship, the preeminent position of women as premier food producers and bread-winners, and the high socio-cultural value which the matrilineages placed on women encouraged the taking of women as captives, and led to the definition of female heads as “illegitimate.”⁹¹¹ As noted above, slaves came to signify “heads” cut by warriors to attain *ufiem* in the 19th century, and the tendency to take women captive, in lieu of men, was high among *ndi ikike*, who relied on such women for food provisioning,⁹¹² to strengthen their matrilineages, and to signify

⁹⁰⁹ Paul E. Lovejoy and David Richardson, “Competing Markets for Male and Female Slaves: Prices in the Interior of West Africa, 1750-1850,” *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 28 (1995), 261-293; Nwokeji, “African Conceptions of Gender and the Slave Traffic,” 49, 52-53. Nwokeji writes that more than half of the slave exports from the region in the 17th century were female, which declined to 40% in the second half of the 18th century, and one-third in the 19th century.

⁹¹⁰ Nwokeji, “African Conceptions of Gender and the Slave Traffic,” 49, 66.

⁹¹¹ Anaso Awalekwa, *ezie-ogo* of Ndea-Nku Village and Members of the Men’s Court, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording. Nov. 17, 2011; Chief Udensi Ekea of Ndi Ekea Compound, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Aug. 4, 2010; Mecha Ukpai Akanu, *ezie-ogo* of Amangwu Village and Members of the Men’s Court, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording. Aug. 18, 2011; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amangwu Village, Ohafia. Aug. 15, 2011; Chief Kevin Ukiro, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Asaga, Ohafia. August 10, 2010

⁹¹² Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, *African Women: A Modern History* (Westview Press, 1997), 11; Mama Docas Kalu and Mama Mary Ezera, Group Interview by author; Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author, Amangwu. August 15, 2011; Chief Udensi Ekea, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Aug. 4, 2010; Arua, “Yam Ceremonies and the Values of Ohafia Culture,” 695. When McCall, *Dancing Histories*, 83, writes that *ndi ikike* “married” wives and controlled their labor, he was referring to such slave women who became *Nwannediya* in Ohafia-Igbo society during this period (See chapter 1).

their status as *ogaranya* (wealthy *ufiem*).⁹¹³ The guerilla tactics of Ohafia warriors and the long distances they traversed after military campaigns also encouraged the capture of more women and children than adult men, who were more difficult to control.⁹¹⁴

This view contrasts with Nwokeji's argument that it was the economic importance of Igbo and Ibibio men to yam cultivation that resulted in the production of more female slaves than male slaves from the Bight of Biafra.⁹¹⁵ Nwokeji asked, "why did the region's specialized warriors decapitate men captured in warfare instead of selling them?"⁹¹⁶ "If the economic role of women was so large, why were more females sent into the trade from this region than elsewhere in Atlantic Africa?" His answers that women only assumed a major role in agricultural production in the 20th century, and that in the Bight of Biafra, female slavery for domestic purposes was very marginal because women did not establish lineages, do not accord with the Ohafia, where women were dominant food producers and central pillars of the materilineage.

In spite of the increasing equation of slaves with heads in the second half of the 19th century among the Ohafia-Igbo, young men still strove to physically obtain a head in performance of *ufiem*. The quest to cut a head was so strong that while it was illegal and against the society's heroic ethic for warriors to bring back the head of a woman or a child, or cut a head

⁹¹³ Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author, Elu. August 10, 2010; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author, Amangwu. August 15, 2011; Chief Udensi Ekea, oral interview by author. Aug. 4, 2010. Individuals such as Kalu Ezelu went out of their way to adopt twin mothers as wives after the cessation of slave trading at the turn of the 20th century, in performance of *ogaranya* masculinity. See Kalu, "An Ibo Autobiography," 166-167. The high divorce rate in Ohafia in the second half of the 19th century might also have encouraged this high incidence of marriage of slave women. See Mayne, "Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934," 47-48.

⁹¹⁴ Chief Udensi Ekea, oral interview by author. August 4, 2010; Chief Ikenga Ibe, in Group Interview with *Nde Ichin* (ten elders of) Amuma Village. November 26, 2011; Chief Oluka Mba, oral interview by author, Nde-Ibe village. November 3, 2011.

⁹¹⁵ Nwokeji, "African Conceptions of Gender and the Slave Traffic," 56, 62-64.

⁹¹⁶ Nwokeji, "African Conceptions of Gender and the Slave Traffic," 50.

from within Ohafia,⁹¹⁷ young men impatient to rid themselves of *ujo* burden sometimes violated these stipulations.⁹¹⁸ To disguise the illegitimacy of their actions, warriors disfigured the facial features of their head trophies beyond easy recognition by the elders, who were strict guardians of *ufiem* conferment.⁹¹⁹ In effect, the changing practices of *igbu ishi* between 1850 and 1900 was such that there was not a clear break from physical headhunting to *igbu ishi* signification through slave production. It is the contention of this study that while headhunting may have begun as a psychological mechanism of defense in the 17th century, its perpetuation resulted from the ambition of individual men to acquire the power and social privileges that came with *ufiem* attainment. Thus, headhunting and slave production became a routine way of life in the second half of the 19th century — a habitus of *ufiem* performance.

Kalu Awa Kalu recalls that when his grand-father returned from the 1891 Nteje war with a human head, his new-born niece was named *ugo-aha* (the glory of war) in commemoration of his accomplishment.⁹²⁰ During the 19th century, warrior *ufiem* enjoyed a lot of privileges in the society. They married the choicest women in the village, and were exempted from minor public works.⁹²¹ At death, renowned *ndi ikike* were buried with slaves and war captives, who would

⁹¹⁷ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 62-63.

⁹¹⁸ Chief Udensi Ekea, oral interview by author. Aug. 4, 2010; Mecha Ukpai Akanu, *ezie-ogo* of Amangwu Village and Members of the Men's Court, Group Interview by author, Aug. 18, 2011; Ndukwe Otta and Elder Uduma Uka, Group Interview by author, Ebem. August 14, 2010; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 80.

⁹¹⁹ Mayne, "Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934," 45; Ndukwe Otta and Elder Uduma Uka, Group Interview by author.

⁹²⁰ Chief Kalu Awa Kalu, oral interview by author.

⁹²¹ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 63.

serve them in the afterlife.⁹²² *Ndi ikike* who accomplished *ufiem* distinguished themselves socially. They alone could wear the expensive *jooji* wrapper cloth distinguished by its red color in the second half of the 19th century.⁹²³ The *jooji* cloth was a major symbol of Ohafia-Igbo involvement in the Atlantic economy in the 19th century. Originally produced in India, the *jooji* cloth became a major British export to the Bight of Biafra in the early 19th century, and it gained popularity among African royal families in Ghana, Calabar and Opobo.⁹²⁴ Through their commercial contacts with the Ijaw and Efik, Ohafia-Igbo people incorporated *jooji* cloth into local textures of gender construction, by transforming it into a social marker of *ufiem* accomplishment.⁹²⁵ Because it was rare and expensive, the *jooji* cloth was reserved for individuals who had accomplished *ufiem* in the society.

This *ufiem* attire of social distinction was complemented with red and white striped *okpu agu* (the leopard cap of bravery), red tail feathers of the parrot and eagle plumes.⁹²⁶ At social events or in preparation for war, *ndi ikike* also wore long white ram's manes on their left arms. While red was the color of bravery, representing human blood, the ram's mane symbolized the

⁹²² O.K. Oji, "A Study of Migration and Warfare in Ohafia," B.A Thesis, Dept. of History, University of Nigeria Nsukka (1974), 42-44; FO84/2020: "Africa (Slave Trade), West Coast, 1890," 348-351; CO520/8: "Southern Nigeria Original Correspondence, May to August, 1901," 570-574; CO520/36: "Southern Nigeria Original Correspondence, June to August, 1906," 170-184; Patridge, *Cross River Natives*, 72.

⁹²³ Nna Kalu Awa, oral interview by author, Amuma Village. November 26, 2011; Chief Torti Kalu, oral interview by author, Amuma Village. November 26, 2011.

⁹²⁴ Northrup, *Trade Without Rulers*, 208-211; Miescher, *Making Men in Ghana*, 11.

⁹²⁵ Chief Kalu Awa Kalu, oral interview by author, Ufiele Village. October 27, 2011; Chief Oluka Mba, oral interview by author, Nde-Ibe Village. November 3, 2011.

⁹²⁶ Mayne, "Intelligence Report," 44; Chief Eke Emetu Kalu, oral interview by author; Chief Emeh Okonkwo, oral interview by author; Chief Kalu Awa Kalu, oral interview by author; Chief K.K. Owen, oral interview by author; Chief Olua Iro Kalu, oral interview by author; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 63; Uka, "A Note on the 'Abam' Warriors of Igbo Land," 78.

stubborn, forceful and sacrificial nature of the ram⁹²⁷ — the social perception of the brave warrior. The Ohafia have a proverbial saying that “*Ishi onye ikom wu ishi ebule*,”⁹²⁸ [the head of a man is the head of a ram] because if a man went to war, his return was not guaranteed. Secondly, during this period, if a man proved too dissident in the society through criminal acts or disgraceful conduct as *ujo* (coward), he could be expended in a ritual hunt called *eye nta* — a sacrificial hunt undertaken at the outset of a war, when the identified culprit, was killed, deliberately mistaken for an animal hunt.⁹²⁹

In contrast to *ufiem*, the *ujo* was subjected to all forms of humiliating insults. His *ufiem* mates could loot his property at will, and most popular in this regard was the act of dispossessing the *ujo* of all his yams (a major symbol of wealth),⁹³⁰ and distributing them among the heroes of his age grade; and the society usually did not afford him any avenue for redress, besides the attainment of *ufiem*.⁹³¹ Moreover, *ujo* were not allowed to take any yam titles or perform the masculinity associated with yam cultivation. Also, the *ujo* could be sold as a slave, because his life was not considered valuable. Indeed, freedom, the security of life and property, and the only way to insure the attainment of other social categories of *ufiem* in the society, such as *ike oba* and *igwa nnu* (yam masculinities), *ilu nwami* (marriage and adult masculinity), and *idoru-nna*

⁹²⁷ McCall, *Dancing Histories*, 68; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 63.

⁹²⁸ Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author.

⁹²⁹ Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author.

⁹³⁰ Nwokeji, “African Conceptions of Gender and the Slave Traffic,” 59-60.

⁹³¹ Uka, “A Note on the ‘Abam’ Warriors of Igbo Land,” 78; Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author; Chief Eke Emetu Kalu, oral interview by author; Chief Emeh Okonkwo, oral interview by author; Chief Kalu Awa Kalu, oral interview by author; Chief K.K. Owen, oral interview by author; Chief Olua Iro Kalu, oral interview.

(ancestral masculinity) was to overcome *ujo* status.⁹³² The *ujo* may be denied the privilege to marry, and if he did marry, it was short-lived because his wife would likely initiate a divorce unless he overcame *ujo* status.⁹³³

In 19th century Ohafia-Igbo society, the *ujo* was regarded as a “woman in the skin of a man,”⁹³⁴ — a social aberration. This social vision of the *ujo* was not a reflection of female powerlessness, but rather a recognition of normative gender roles: Women were not responsible for military defense of Ohafia-Igbo society during this period. Their social roles enabled them to maintain productive and distributive control in the society, and men were able to go to war, because women fulfilled their roles as breadwinners.⁹³⁵ The *ujo*, as a “woman in the skin of a man,” was neither a warrior nor a breadwinner. He was a laggard, and his social ostracism was reflected in his exclusion from age-grade activities, which in effect, denied him a voice in the political administration of his society.⁹³⁶ The wives of *ujo* were not denied political participation in the government of their society, and the high divorce rate among the Ohafia-Igbo in the 19th

⁹³² Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author; Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author; Chief Eke Emetu Kalu, oral interview by author; Chief Emeh Okonkwo, oral interview by author; Uka, “A Note on the ‘Abam’ Warriors of Igbo Land,” 78. The Igbo proverb that the coward stands in his compound and points to where the warrior used to live, celebrates bravery, but reminds one that the coward outlives the warrior. In a sense, this proverb had limited application to 19th century Ohafia-Igbo society, where the *ujo* had a miserable existence, and his only escape was the accomplishment of *igbu ishi*. However, as chapter 4 shows, individuals sought alternative avenues of *ufiem* accomplishment beyond warfare and headhunting.

⁹³³ Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author; Emea O. Arua, “Yam Ceremonies and the Values of Ohafia Culture,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 51, 2 (1981), 695.

⁹³⁴ McCall, *Dancing Histories*, 80.

⁹³⁵ Arua, “Yam Ceremonies and the Values of Ohafia Culture,” 695.

⁹³⁶ Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amangwu Village, Ohafia. August 15, 2011; Chief Olua Iro Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Ebem Village Ohafia. August 3, 2010; Chief Udensi Ekea of Ndi Ekea Compound, Okon Village, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Aug. 4, 2010; McCall, *Dancing Histories*, 80; Arua, “Yam Ceremonies and the Values of Ohafia Culture,” 695.

century, stemmed partly from the tendency of women to divorce an irredeemable *ujo* husband.⁹³⁷

Indeed, women's roles in the construction of *ufiem* and *ujo* were significant. Besides women's refusal to marry, and tendency to divorce *ujo*, the wives of *ufiem* ensured that the wives of *ujo* did not wear a *jooji* wrapper, always dressed up as mourners, wore their hair short, did not rub cam-wood dye on their bodies, did not wear bracelets of brass, armlets of elephant tusks, and anklets,⁹³⁸ which were the social markers of distinction and *ufiem* accomplishment. If the *ujo* or his wife wore a *jooji* wrapper cloth out in public or at a ceremony, the *ufiem* or his wife would strip either of the former of their dress, often leaving them naked.⁹³⁹ Women especially and sometimes children and even slaves, often taunted *ujo* with derisive names in public, such as "*ujonta otula akoro*" [coward with dry buttocks].⁹⁴⁰ However, women who performed *ufiem* were accorded the privileges of *ndi ikike*, irrespective of their husbands, and several Ohafia

⁹³⁷ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo Society*, 64; Arua, "Yam Ceremonies and the Values of Ohafia Culture," 695; Uka, "A Note on the 'Abam' Warriors of Igbo Land," 77-79; Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author; Chief Udensi Ekea, oral interview by author; Mrs. Nnenna Emeri and Mmia Nnaya Basse, members of *Ikpirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu Village, Group Interview. Nov. 3, 2011; Nmia Nnaya Agbai of Elu Village, oral interview by author. Aug. 18, 2011.

⁹³⁸ Uka, "A Note on the 'Abam' Warriors of Igbo Land," 78.

⁹³⁹ Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author; Chief Emeh Okonkwo, oral interview by author; Uka, "A Note on the 'Abam' Warriors of Igbo Land," 78.

⁹⁴⁰ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo Society*, 64; Arua, "Yam Ceremonies and the Values of Ohafia Culture," 695; Uka, "A Note on the 'Abam' Warriors of Igbo Land," 77-79; Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author; Chief Udensi Ekea, oral interview by author; Mrs. Nnenna Emeri and Mmia Nnaya Basse, members of *Ikpirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu Village, Group Interview. Nov. 3, 2011; Nmia Nnaya Agbai of Elu Village, oral interview by author. Aug. 18, 2011.

traditions account that some women had embarked on warfare in the 18th and 19th centuries, in order to put an end to the humiliating status of their *ujo* husbands.⁹⁴¹

Nne Mgbafo and Unyang Olugu were such women during the heroic age (c. 1700-1850), who Azuonye describes as “man-like female warriors, who surprise[d] [their] generation[s] by taking up arms and marching to battle, fighting even more ferociously than men.”⁹⁴² Oral narratives of the legend of Nne Mgbafo, recorded by Azuonye, account that she possessed man-like qualities from an early age.⁹⁴³ Having lost her husband at Arochukwu, Nne Mgbafo came to Ohafia to find a new husband.⁹⁴⁴ Before setting out on her quest for the husband, Nne Mgbafo went to a market and bought a war cap, a dane-gun, and a sharpened machete, and dressed up as a warrior. Her search led her to Akanu village in Ohafia, where she met a man named Uduma and took him for a husband.⁹⁴⁵ Later, when her husband, Uduma went to war at Atatum in Ibibioland and was killed, Nne Mgbafo set out to find him.⁹⁴⁶ She took her husband’s hunting gun, machete, *jooji* wrapper cloth, and war cap.⁹⁴⁷ When she found her husband slain in the battlefield, Nne Mgbafo became so upset that she overpowered an Ibibio warrior, and sacrificed him on her husband’s grave.⁹⁴⁸ The inability of Uduma to successfully return from battle

⁹⁴¹ Mr. Davidson Kalu Oki, oral interview by author, Okon Village, Ohafia. August 5, 2010; Ndukwe Otta and Elder Uduma Uka, Group Interview by author, Ebem Village. August 14, 2010; Azuonye, “The Narrative War Songs,” 405-463; Azuonye, “The Heroic Age,” 15.

⁹⁴² Azuonye, “The Narrative War Songs,” 132.

⁹⁴³ Azuonye, “The Narrative War Songs,” 320.

⁹⁴⁴ Azuonye, “The Narrative War Songs,” 412-463.

⁹⁴⁵ Azuonye, “The Narrative War Songs,” 315.

⁹⁴⁶ Azuonye, “The Narrative War Songs,” 320.

⁹⁴⁷ Azuonye, “The Narrative War Songs,” 440-441.

⁹⁴⁸ Azuonye, “The Narrative War Songs,” 418.

defined him as *ujo*. Nne Mgbafo sought to change his status, posthumously. Thus, Ohafia oral historians remember Nne Mgbafo as “she-that-was-her-husband’s-heart,” “she-that-did-things-like-her-father,” “woman that behaved like a man,” and “great leopard.”⁹⁴⁹

Similarly, in the oral tradition of Unyang Olugu, recorded by Azuonye, her husband is described as an *ujo* from whom “the penal-yam-for-cowardice”⁹⁵⁰ was exacted. Ohafia oral historian and current lead-singer of Ohafia war songs (*abu aha*), Davidson Oki, describes Unyang Olugu’s husband as *onye ngolongo* (weak man).⁹⁵¹ In order to put an end to her husband’s *ujo* status, Unyang Olugu went to war against the people of Nkalu (the original inhabitants of present-day Afikpo),⁹⁵² who were engaged in mutual hostilities (abductions, raids and headhunting) with Ohafia during the heroic age.⁹⁵³ In the ensuing battle, Unyang Olugu killed five Nkalu men, assembled their heads (which she dressed in *okpu agu*) in a long basket, presented them to her husband, and escorted him before the *ikoro* (wooden slit-drum used to announce warriors’ accomplishments) in order to establish him as *ufiem*.⁹⁵⁴ However, when the *ikoro* began to praise her husband, Unyang Olugu insisted that “they should not chant praises to

⁹⁴⁹ Azuonye, “The Narrative War Songs,” 436, 443, 454.

⁹⁵⁰ Azuonye, “The Narrative War Songs,” 409.

⁹⁵¹ Mr. Davidson Kalu Oki, oral interview by author.

⁹⁵² The Nkalu were one of the two (the second group being Egu) original settlers of the Afikpo area. They had migrated from Akoi (Ekuri, Erei, Agwuaguna) on the eastern part of the Cross River State to settle at Afikpo. They were skilled farmers and fierce warriors, who introduced yam cultivation to Ehugbo (Afikpo). Ohafia oral traditions suggest that Nkalu was founded during the same period as Ohafia. CSE 1/85/6197A. I.R.Heslop, “Intelligence Report on the Nkalu Clan, Orlu District, Okigwi Division, Owerri Province;” Gabriel Mbey, “Origin of Ehugbo (Afikpo),” www.ebonyionline.com/afikpo.html; Obuba, *The History and Culture of Ohafia*, 4.

⁹⁵³ Azuonye, “The Narrative War Songs,” 410-411.

⁹⁵⁴ Azuonye, “The Narrative War Songs,” 405-408.

him. Rather let them chant praises to Unyang Olugu, killer-that-gave-the-honor-to-her-husband; she-that-kills-and-packs-in-long-baskets . . . the woman that won heads in battle.”⁹⁵⁵

The Organization of Warfare

In the quest for communal defense, human heads and slaves, Ohafia warriors went to war as individuals, in small bands of a handful of men, and as huge armies levied by war chiefs of the twenty-six village groups, in the 18th and 19th centuries.⁹⁵⁶ As noted in chapter 3, Ohafia warriors were organized according to age-grades (*uke*),⁹⁵⁷ and both women and men were involved in the organization of warfare and in the celebration of warrior *ufiem*. Women endorsed the execution of communal warfare through a ritual called *ije akpaka*,⁹⁵⁸ during which all adult women in the community became men. As noted in chapter 3, if women did not perform this ritual, men would not go to war. When men decided to embark on a war, they informed women. At the stroke of midnight, a day before men went to war, all adult women in the village assembled at the village square, led by a young woman, who became the *ochi agha* (expeditionary war leader). The *ochi agha* dressed up as a male warrior; she tied *onugwe*⁹⁵⁹ (men’s loincloth), she did not cover her breasts (just like men), and she donned *okpu agu* (brave

⁹⁵⁵ Azuonye, “The Narrative War Songs,” 407-408.

⁹⁵⁶ Azuonye, “The Narrative War Songs,” 15.

⁹⁵⁷ Also, see Azuonye, “The Narrative War Songs,” 22.

⁹⁵⁸ The following account of *ije akpaka* is based mostly on the group interview with *Ikipirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu Village and oral interview with Nwannediya Mmonwu-Oti, op. cit.

⁹⁵⁹ Arthur Glyn Leonard, “Notes of a Journey to Bende,” *The Journal of the Manchester Geographical Society*, XIV (1898), 196, 200, describes the making of this cloth from a tree called *aji* and from a species of local cotton plant in Ohafia, and neighboring communities. In some parts of Igboland such as Udi, a boy’s transition into adulthood was marked by the custom of *iwa ogodu* in which the boy’s father provided a cow and marched the boy around the market square. When the boy cut off the tail of the cow with a machete in one blow, he was celebrated as having made this transition and thenceforth was allowed to wear *onugwe*.

warrior's cap) with *abubo ugo* (eagle feathers). On her head, she carried a large farm-basin (*abuo*), which the women filled with a species of every plant-seedling cultivated by women in the society, as well as a hoe (Ohafia woman's farm tool) and a machete (Ohafia man's farm tool and weapon of war.)⁹⁶⁰ The female *ochi agha* symbolized two personae: a male warrior and a female breadwinner; both gendered roles were fundamental to communal welfare and survival.⁹⁶¹

The rest of the women went naked — they tied a wrapper cloth but beneath they were naked. Their bodies decorated with *nzu* (white chalk) which signified ritual purity, they formed a circle around the female *ochi agha* so that the two sets of adult male age-grades who accompanied them as guards on this ritual expedition would not behold the female warrior leader. The male warriors followed behind the women, maintaining a rituo-sacral distance, occasioned by the women's nudity and their spiritual state. Singing and dancing, the women marched to a river, where they performed a ritual bath, offered their farm-basin and its contents as sacrifice, and prayed for the successful military expedition of the male warriors. At the end of this purification, all the women reapplied *nzu* on their bodies and every one of them donned *okpu agu*, and tied *onugwe*, signifying their ritual rebirth as male warriors, and their sanction of warfare. Upon women's return at dawn, male warriors embarked on warfare.⁹⁶²

John Wood has argued in the case of the nomadic camel-herding Gabra of East Africa (when men become women) that indigenous logic of gendered power and agency become

⁹⁶⁰ Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 22.

⁹⁶¹ Indeed, both when men went to war and when they were at home, women shouldered the responsibility of providing for their families, and indeed, feeding the society. See chapter 5.

⁹⁶² *Ikipirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu Village, Group Interview; Nwannediya Mmonwu-Oti, oral interview by author.

evident in the juxtaposition, symbolic reversals, and interrelation of opposites.⁹⁶³ This is evident in the Ohafia ritual of *ije akpaka* where women became men. The female *ochi agha* was concealed from the vision of men because of her persona ambiguity. On the one hand, she symbolized *ujo* (in this sense, a man in the skin of a woman; a queer, a social aberration), which men must overcome in order to attain *ndi ikike* masculinity.⁹⁶⁴ On the other hand, she symbolized the reproductive power of women — their ability to give birth to male warriors.⁹⁶⁵ In this sense, women’s performance of ritual warfare authorized men’s embarkation on physical warfare, showing that the construction of *ufiem* was not realized exclusive of women.

The sound of the *ikoro* summoned male warriors to the village square. Azuonye noted, “it was the custom for each of the twenty-[six] village-groups to contribute a ‘battalion’ of *abuo-adighi-ya-na-nnu-abo*, i.e. ‘two short of four hundred times two,’ or 798 men.”⁹⁶⁶ The exactness of this figure is not certain, but it suggests a large army, and the ability of the male elders-in-council to summon such an army at very short notice. In most cases, not all Ohafia villages took part in every campaign, but when a number of villages were involved, they met at the *achichi* shrine at Elu, the head-village, under the headship of the *ezie-ogo* of Elu village.

In preparation for battle, mothers and wives of male warriors provided warriors with preservable foods, and warriors supplemented these with forest provisions. Warriors abstained from sexual intercourse in the days before their battle in order to maintain spiritual purity, and

⁹⁶³ John C. Wood, *When Men Are Women: Manhood among Gabra Nomads of East Africa* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1999), 3-9.

⁹⁶⁴ *Ezie-nwami* Ogbonne Kalu, oral interview by author, Uduma Ukwu. Nov. 17, 2011; Mrs. Nnenna Emeri and Mmia Nnaya Bassey, members of *Ikipirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu, Group Interview. Nov. 3, 2011.

⁹⁶⁵ Mrs. Nnenna Emeri and Mmia Nnaya Bassey, members of *Ikipirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu, Group Interview; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author, Amangwu. August 15, 2011.

⁹⁶⁶ Azuonye, “The Narrative War Songs,” 32

dibias prepared medicines, charms and amulets for warriors.⁹⁶⁷ These were believed to shield them from bullets, arrows and machete blows, render them invisible to their enemies, and enabled them to disappear when the battle odds were against them.⁹⁶⁸ Indeed, the villages of Ihenta, Okon, and Akanu, are renowned to have possessed very powerful deities for these purposes, as well as *dibias* specialized in spiritual fortification of warriors during the 19th century.⁹⁶⁹ The *ishi uta* deity in Okon was one such shrine and Ohafia warriors, upon their successful return from battle, went to propitiate this deity with animals.⁹⁷⁰ Moreover, before leaving for battle, each warrior presented himself before the *kamalu* (personal deity) shrine in his compound for blessings. Then, he passed through the patrilineage *obu* (hall) where he also sought the blessings of his ancestors. Finally, the warrior stepped through *nkuma onu agba* (his compound's sacred stone), before proceeding to the village square.⁹⁷¹ From each village square, the warriors were bid farewell by relatives and friends, on their march to *achichi* shrine at Elu

⁹⁶⁷ Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author; Chief Ugbu Uduma, *ezie-ogo* of Nde-Amogu, oral interview by author; Kalu Awa, *ezie-ogo* of Ihenta (Ibina), oral interview by author; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 78; Chief Obasi Kama, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon Village, Sept. 26, 2011; *Dibia* Akirika, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon, Sept. 26, 2011; *Dibia* Kalu Ekea, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon, Sept. 24, 2011; *Dibia* Kalu Eke, oral interview by author, video-recording. Okon Village. September 22, 2011; *Dibia* Kakarere (Oyibo) oral interview by author, video-recording. Okon. Sept. 22, 2011; *Dibia* Agwu Arua, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon. August 4, 2010; Mr. Davidson Kalu Oki, oral interview by author, Okon. August 5, 2010; *Dibia* Kalu Uko, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon. September 14 and 20, 2011; *Dibia* Uche Dimgba, oral interview by author, Okon. September 22, 2011.

⁹⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁶⁹ Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author; Chief Ugbu Uduma, *ezie-ogo* of Nde-Amogu, oral interview by author; Kalu Awa, *ezie-ogo* of Ihenta (Ibina), oral interview by author; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 78.

⁹⁷⁰ Mr. Davidson Kalu Oki, oral interview by author, Okon Village, Ohafia. August 5, 2010.

⁹⁷¹ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 78.

village. Here, the priest of Ohafia war god, *ikwan*, blessed the warriors, before they set out on their campaign.⁹⁷²

Ohafia warriors' utilized guerrilla tactics including espionage, surprise attacks, and hand-to-hand combat.⁹⁷³ According to Njoku, at a fair distance to the target of the attack, the fighters pitched their camp, and veteran warriors were sent out to reconnoiter the community. Each village contingent was led by its own *ochi agha* but the war leaders coordinated their actions.⁹⁷⁴ Most often, Ohafia warriors attacked their targeted communities at dawn. Before launching an attack, warriors put on their gear, consisting of a sheathed, razor-sharp, thin-bladed machete called *akparaja*; a pouch hanging down from their left hip, for securing the prized human head trophy; and facial and bodily decorations used to frighten victims, including red (*ufie*), white (*nzu*), and yellow (*odo*) substances, and a ram's mane covering the left arm.⁹⁷⁵ While a signal horn-blower and spy was on the lookout atop a tree,⁹⁷⁶ the war leaders rehearsed coded signals for all to grasp and the warriors stealthily crawled towards the community, surrounding the territory and blockading all escape routes. At the opportune moment, the horn-blower signaled for the attack, and the warriors swooped down on their drowsy, ill-prepared victims.⁹⁷⁷

⁹⁷² Obuba, *The History and Culture of Ohafia*, 22; Azuonye, "The Narrative War Songs," 47.

⁹⁷³ Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author; Chief Udensi Ekea, oral interview by author; Chief Kalu Awa Kalu, oral interview by author; Mr. Davidson Kalu Oki, oral interview by author; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 79; Uka, "A Note on the 'Abam' Warriors," 77.

⁹⁷⁴ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 79.

⁹⁷⁵ The ram's mane was the signature of the dreaded Ohafia warriors. Chief Uduma Nnochin Ogbuagu, oral interview by author; Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author; Ndukwe Otta and Elder Uduma Uka, Group Interview by author; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 79.

⁹⁷⁶ Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author.

⁹⁷⁷ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 79.

Most Ohafia military campaigns involved long distance travels to northern Igboland, the Anambra River valley, and the Ibibio and Ogoja territories on the upper and lower Cross River basins. First, in a bid to maintain peace with immediate Igbo neighbors, the Ohafia-Igbo forbade their warriors from hunting heads and slaves in neighborly territories such as Abiriba, Ada and Arochukwu.⁹⁷⁸ Secondly, the semi-savannah nature of northern Igboland was conducive to Ohafia military tactics in contrast to the riverine and dense forest region of Osomari, Aboh, Akwete, Azumini, and Ahoada, where the Ohafia hardly ever raided for heads or slaves. Third, northern Igboland and the Ibibio territories were the most densely populated areas in southeastern Nigeria.⁹⁷⁹ Thus, Ohafia warriors carried out raids in the Anambra River valley and surrounding territories (including Awka, Nnewi, Onitsha, Awkuzu, Nteje, Aguleri, Okija, Ezinnachi, Ozubulu, Ihiala, Enugu Ukwu, Nsugbe, Urualla, Uli, Ugwu Ele, Mkpa, Ukwa, and Isingu,), Enugu (including Agwu, Igbariam, Ngwo, Agbaja, Umuagu, Umuogima, Ora, Okigwe, and Okpanku), Nsukka (Opi, Ukehe, Eror, and Ukpati), Imo River valley (including Ihube, Akara Isu), and Itu district (Ibesikpo and Ikorokpan Nwan).⁹⁸⁰

It often took warriors several days and sometimes, weeks to reach their destinations.⁹⁸¹ The warriors' return took even longer, because reprisal attacks rendered the forests more dangerous, after a village had been massacred, and slaves captured. Hence, R.O. Igwebe writes that Ohafia warriors would crawl in the bush "on their knees for some days only to see that they

⁹⁷⁸ Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, 82; Jones, *Annual Reports of Bende Division*, 4.

⁹⁷⁹ Nwokeji, "African Conceptions of Gender and the Slave Traffic," 53-54; Nwokeji, "The Atlantic Slave Trade and Population," 617-626; Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors and Kings*, 33, 55; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 84.

⁹⁸⁰ Henderson, *The King in Every Man*, 502; Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, 84-85; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 85; Oriji, "Slave Trade, Warfare and Aro Expansion," 111.

⁹⁸¹ Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amangwu. Aug. 15, 2011.

reach[ed] home safely.”⁹⁸² Njoku adds that, “Some Ohafia warriors who survived the raids succumbed to hunger and sheer exhaustion from long, grueling treks; some lost their way while others, failing to obtain the desired trophy [human heads and slaves], preferred not to return. Some were captured.”⁹⁸³ Thus, a number of Ohafia settlements emerged in various parts of Igboland such as Orofia in Abagana, Uduma Achara in Agwu, Lohum in Uzuakoli, and Ohambele in Ndokiland.⁹⁸⁴

The consequences of Ohafia military raids varied. Since warriors used machetes and scorned guns and firearms as weapons of the weak,⁹⁸⁵ the scale of human loss of life might have been relatively small. However, in his 1902 campaign against the importation of machetes into the Bight of Biafra, the British High Commissioner and Consul General Ralph Moore argued that Ohafia-Igbo military tactics and reliance on machetes instead of dane guns, resulted in more casualties.⁹⁸⁶ Moreover, there are accounts of communities such as Ukpati and Ora near Okigwi being completely wiped out in the second half of the 18th century and the first half of the 19th century respectively, as a result of Ohafia military raids.⁹⁸⁷ While Ohafia did not fight for territorial and political hegemony over other groups, they were largely militarily responsible for

⁹⁸² Igwebe, *The History of Arondizuogu*, 91.

⁹⁸³ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 90.

⁹⁸⁴ A.O. Arua, *A Short History of Ohafia* (Enugu: Omnibus Press, 1951), 11.

⁹⁸⁵ Chief Eke Emetu Kalu, oral interview by author; Chief Emeh Okonkwo, oral interview by author, Ebem. Aug. 2010; Chief Kalu Awa Kalu, oral interview by author, Ufiele. Oct. 27, 2011.

⁹⁸⁶ CO520/15: “Southern Nigeria Original Correspondence, July to October, 1902,” 492-497.

⁹⁸⁷ Nwokeji, “The Atlantic Slave Trade and Population Density,” 632; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 89; Mr. Davidson Kalu Oki, oral interview by author, Okon Village, Ohafia. August 5, 2010; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author, Amangwu Village, Ohafia. August 15, 2011.

Aro conquest and establishment of Diaspora settlements at Ndienyi, Ajali, Ndikelionwu, Arondizuogu, and Otanchara.⁹⁸⁸

Ohafia raids for heads and slaves forced many communities to reorganize their socio-political and territorial arrangements. These included the expansion of military and political operations through the formation of confederacies as seen in the cases of Isuochi and Nneato towns (Isumisu confederacy in Okigwe), and the Amakwan and Umuchu confederacies in Awka and Onitsha.⁹⁸⁹ Communities such as Enugu Ukwu resorted to poisoning their waters, wine and food; Akwa communities surrounded their compounds with high walls with loopholes for firing, and high watch towers; Ohuhu people built trenches around their homes; and many communities resorted to hilltop settlements with poor soils.⁹⁹⁰ In addition, some of Ohafia battles were interventionist attempts to restore law and order in troubled areas or to safe-guard major trade routes in southeastern Nigeria; and upon invitation, to defend militarily weaker communities from their more powerful neighbors⁹⁹¹ — roles which the British government came to fulfill in the region at the turn of the 20th century.⁹⁹²

⁹⁸⁸ Northrup, *Trade Without Rulers*, 119-121; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 69; Igwebe, *The History of Arondizuogu*, 86-87; Mr. Davidson Kalu Oki, oral interview by author, Okon Village, Ohafia. August 5, 2010.

⁹⁸⁹ Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, 84-85; Henderson, *The King in Every Man*, 498-501.

⁹⁹⁰ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 89-90; Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, 85.

⁹⁹¹ CO520/8: "Southern Nigeria Original Correspondence, May to August, 1901," 510-514; Oriji, "Slave Trade, Warfare and Aro Expansion," 111; Uriom, *The Adventures of Ancient Ikperikpeogu Warriors*, 1-23; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 90; Uma O. Uma, "Ohafia and Her Neighbors: Intergroup Relations up to 1967" (B.A. Thesis, University of Nigeria Nsukka, 1984).

⁹⁹² CO583/34: "Nigeria Original Correspondence, 16 June-31 July, 1915," 219-232; Jones, *Annual Reports of Bende Division*, 7; Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, 82.

Ohafia Inter-Group Relations: Beyond Warfare

Ohafia inter-group relations was not only characterized by warfare in the 19th century. As noted in chapter 2, Ohafia forged lasting diplomatic relationships with her immediate Igbo and non-Igbo neighbors through inter-group marriages which transformed the region into a network of matrilineal kin-relationships.⁹⁹³ Thus, the Ikun, Urugbam and Biakpan have had chiefs of Ohafia maternal descent.⁹⁹⁴ Other mechanisms for maintaining peace within Ohafia-Igbo territory and with neighbors include the use of *nzu* (white chalk) instead of kolanuts to welcome visitors, blood covenants (*igbandu*) between neighbors in order to establish ritual kinship, and reliance on the *okonko* secret society. *Nzu* was a major symbol of peace in 19th century Ohafia, where travel from one village to another was sometimes dangerous due to heightened kidnapping occasioned by the domestic slave trade and human sacrifice, and hostilities in the Cross River area.⁹⁹⁵ Nsugbe writes,

In welcoming one, [Ohafia did] not say, as most other Ibo communities would, *nno* ('welcome'), or *I biala?* ('have you come?'). Instead, they ask[ed], *Udo dikwa?* ('peace, is it there?'). Nor [did] the Ohaffia offer the visitor the traditional kola first, as [did] most Ibo. Rather, they first offere[d] a wooden bowl (*okwa*)

⁹⁹³ Chief Kalu Awa Kalu, oral interview by author; Ndukwe Otta and Elder Uduma Uka, Group Interview by author; Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author; Chief Eke Emetu Kalu, oral interview by author; Chief Emeh Okonkwo, oral interview by author; Chief Olua Iro Kalu, oral interview by author; *Ezie-nwami* Ucha Oji Iwe of Elu Village and her Cabinet, Group Interview; Ikpirikpe Ndi Inyom of Akanu Village, Group Interview; Mecha Ukpai Akanu, *ezie-ogo* of Amangwu Village and Members of the Men's Court, Group Interview; Kalu Awa, *ezie-ogo* of Ibina (Ihenta), oral interview by author.

⁹⁹⁴ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 68.

⁹⁹⁵ FO84/2020: "Africa (Slave Trade), West Coast, 1890," 348-351; CO520/8: "Southern Nigeria Original Correspondence, May to August, 1901," 570-574; CO520/36: "Southern Nigeria Original Correspondence, June to August, 1906," 170-184; "Annual Report on Bende District for the year ended 31st December, 1910," in Jones, *Annual Reports of Bende Division*, 70; Jones, *Annual Reports of Bende Division*, 5; Patridge, *Cross River Natives*, 72; Basden, *Niger Ibos*, 244, 254-255; Meek, *Law and Authority in a Nigerian Tribe*, 204; Waddell, *Twenty-Nine Years in the West Indies and Central Africa*, 315-316, 429.

containing a ball of white chalk (*nzu*) which signific[d] *obi ocha* ('whiteness of heart' or 'good intentions') among the Ibo.⁹⁹⁶

During the second half of the 19th century, Ohafia also practiced *igbandu* (blood covenant) in order to avert homicide and military conflicts with her immediate Igbo neighbors, and individuals established similar blood covenants in various communities along the regional trade routes to ensure safe passage.⁹⁹⁷ However, the most important institution for assuring safe passage for travelers who ventured into the non-Igbo regions south of Ohafia during this period, was the *okonko*, which was a widespread secret society that cut across Efik, Ekoi, Igbo, and Ibibio ethnic groups.⁹⁹⁸ *Okonko* membership, which came at a high financial cost, guaranteed wealthy traders, and upward mobile slaves and ex-slaves, a legal immunity to travel freely to places where others feared to go. *Okonko* members relied on the secret sign language of *nsibidi* and jural sanctions to negotiate safe passage throughout the Cross River region, in the second half of the 19th century.⁹⁹⁹

⁹⁹⁶ Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 31.

⁹⁹⁷ Mr. Davidson Kalu Oki, oral interview by author; Dibia Uche Dimgba, oral interview by author, Okon Village, Ohafia. September 22, 2011; McCall, *Dancing Histories*, 82; Jones, *Annual Reports of Bende Division*, 4.

⁹⁹⁸ McCall, *Dancing Histories*, 81. *Okonko* is examined in chapter 4 as an *ufiem* institution.

⁹⁹⁹ Mayne, "Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934," 45-46; NAE, RIV PROF. 8/8/433: "Okonko Club: Activity of;" Ifemesia, *Traditional Humane Living Among the Igbo: An Historical Perspective* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1979), 93-94; Chieka Ifemesia, *Southern Nigeria in the Nineteenth Century: An Introductory Analysis* (New York: NOK Publishers, 1978), 43-46; Patrick Nwosu, "The Age of Cultural Hybridisation: A Case Study of *Okonko* Society vis-vis Christianity in Igboland," *Anthropologist* 12, 3 (2010), 163; Dike, *Trade and Politics*, 155-159; G.I. Jones, "The Political Organization of Old Calabar" in Daryll Forde (ed.), *Efik Traders of Old Calabar* (London: International African Institute, 1956), 148-157; K.K. Nair, *Politics and Society in South Eastern Nigeria 1841-1906* (London: Frank Cass, 1972), 48-55; A.J.H. Latham, *Old Calabar 1600-1891: The Impact of the International Economy Upon a Traditional Society* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 34-41, 75-79, 91-96.

Isichei noted that during the 19th century, Ohafia balanced warfare abroad with peaceful diplomacy at home.¹⁰⁰⁰ McCall writes that the precolonial Ohafia man had two faces: the outward looking face was that of a rootless warrior, while the inward-looking face was that of a negotiator, peacemaker, husband, and father.¹⁰⁰¹ With her immediate Igbo neighbors including the Aro, Ohafia established diplomatic contracts through a ritual called *ukwuzi*. *Ukwuzi* was a process whereby a more powerful deity,¹⁰⁰² an individual or a group offered protection to another individual or group of persons, in return for favors.¹⁰⁰³ In an *ukwuzi* contract between a man and a woman especially a widow, the man provided shelter, protection and support in exchange for the woman's sexual favors, assistance in farm work, and food provisioning.¹⁰⁰⁴ A person could also invoke *ukwuzi* with a powerful deity for a temporary period until the danger was over. It was in this fashion that criminals and slaves sought the protection of powerful deities such as the *obu nkwa* in Asaga village, Ohafia between the second half of the 19th century and first two decades of the 20th century, thereby becoming spiritual slaves.¹⁰⁰⁵ Weak individuals also sought *ukwuzi* with powerful persons, and land and other property could be

¹⁰⁰⁰ Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, 82.

¹⁰⁰¹ McCall, *Dancing Histories*, 84.

¹⁰⁰² For a detailed study of this in the Nsukka case, see Nwando Achebe, "When Deities Marry: Indigenous 'Slave' Systems Expanding and Metamorphosing in the Igbo Hinterland," in Jay Spaulding and Stephanie Beswick (eds.), *African Systems of Slavery* (Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, Inc., 2010), 105-133.

¹⁰⁰³ Nsugbe, *Ohafia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 12-15.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amangwu Village, Ohafia. August 15, 2011; Chief Kevin Ukiro, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Asaga Village, Ohafia. August 10, 2010; Ndukwe Otta and Elder Uduma Uka, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Ebem Village, Ohafia. Aug. 14, 2010.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Chief Idika Aso, the Chief Priest of *Obu Nkwa* shrine, Asaga village Ohafia, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Asaga. August 12, 2010; Chief Kevin Ukiro, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Asaga Village. August 10, 2010; Mr. Onwuka Kalu Agwu, Chief Priest of *Obu Ndi Idika*, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. August 3, 2010.

secured through pledge to a more powerful person or group who establish *ukwuzi* protection over such property.¹⁰⁰⁶

As a renowned warrior society, the Ohafia were in a position to provide *ukwuzi* protection to their neighbors such as Abiriba, Arochukwu, and Aro-protected territories like Bende, Uzuakoli, Aro Ndizuogu, Ajali, and Ndienu.¹⁰⁰⁷ As blacksmiths *par excellence*, Abiriba supplied Ohafia with weapons and ammunitions of war, while Aro furnished Ohafia with European trade goods and assured them access to Aro-controlled markets.¹⁰⁰⁸ Jones noted that the Aro were not warriors but an organization of traders.¹⁰⁰⁹ Describing Aro commercial influence, he writes that,

The advent of the overseas slave trade . . . enabled the Aro to buy slaves from the whole of the Niger-Cross River hinterland and to bring them by routes which converged upon Bende market, whence they could be distributed to the “up river” markets on the delta margin, where they were sold to traders from the coastal states that traded direct with the overseas slavers . . . By the 19th century, there were Aro settlements in Bende, in the terminal markets [at Imo, Etche, Otamini, Isoba, Kalabari, New Calabar, Oloko, Ngwa, Bonny, Uwet and Old Calabar] and along the routes leading to them . . . They also enjoyed monopoly of the internal slave trade.¹⁰¹⁰

Northrup writes that the Aro lacked “substantial state structures and [a] military force”¹⁰¹¹ of their own, but he defined the Aro as “The God Men of the Slave Trade,” and noted,

¹⁰⁰⁶ Chief Kevin Ukiro, oral interview by author; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amangwu Village. August 15, 2011.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 84; Northrup, *Trade Without Rulers*, 119-121; Igwebe, *The History of Arondizuogu*, 86-87; Ekejiuba, “The Aro System of Trade,” 18-19.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Leonard, “Notes of a Journey to Bende,” 196-197; Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 13-15, 27. Northrup, *Trade Without Rulers*, 142.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Jones, *Annual Reports of Bende Division*, 4.

¹⁰¹⁰ Jones, *Annual Reports of Bende Division*, 5-6.

¹⁰¹¹ Northrup, *Trade Without Rulers*, 137.

There is every indication that the basis of Aro expansion . . . was economic . . . The Aro created no new currencies and few new markets, relying instead on those already in existence. They were not alone in forming trading alliances and dealing in slaves and goods . . . Their achievement was . . . a virtual monopoly over long-distance trade in much of the region . . . their ability to travel unmolested [due to] fear of divine retribution or military retaliation . . . [and their ability] to transcend and combine into a single marketing grid the already existing regional networks of trade and through alliances with other leading trading peoples . . . These alliances were based upon equality, not upon Aro domination.¹⁰¹²

However, in his study of “the interconnectedness of major changes in the Bight of Biafra with changes in the overseas trade and its aftermath over three centuries,”¹⁰¹³ Nwokeji contends that Aro economic organization was informed by their political system, and that through their trading networks, over 150 diaspora settlements in the Bight of Biafra by the mid-19th century, as well as their ritual authority, the Aro were able to transform the region of the Bight of Biafra, which once supplied a small number of captives so quickly into the second most important supplier of slaves.¹⁰¹⁴ Azuonye argues that “the spread of the warlike and headhunting activities of the Ohafia people to other parts of Igbo country, in the 18th and 19th centuries, was accelerated by their contacts with the Aro.”¹⁰¹⁵

Perhaps, no aspect of Ohafia inter-group relations has received more commentary than their relationship with the Aro, in which the Ohafia are presented primarily as slavocratic Aro mercenaries, who came to see any war as their own irrespective of the logic or party involved.¹⁰¹⁶ This picture is grossly misleading. In the wars of the 19th century, which are best

¹⁰¹² Northrup, *Trade Without Rulers*, 142.

¹⁰¹³ Nwokeji, *The Slave Trade and Culture in the Bight of Biafra*, 7.

¹⁰¹⁴ Klein, “The Atlantic Slave Trade and Decentralized Societies,” 62.

¹⁰¹⁵ Azuonye, “The Narrative War Songs,” 15.

¹⁰¹⁶ Patrige, *Cross River Natives*, 70-75; Leonard, *The Lower Niger and its Tribes*; Basden, *Among the Ibos*, 37, 208-209; Basden, *Niger Ibos*, 377-388; Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern*

remembered because they were the most recent,¹⁰¹⁷ Ohafia did not receive payments from the Aro for military aid, the Aro did not furnish them with food provisions or weapons, and they did not accept every Aro invitation to fight wars on their behalf, because they had a clearly defined understanding of “legitimate war.”¹⁰¹⁸ Azuonye writes, the “Ohafia warriors were not mercenaries kept and controlled by the Aro . . . The Ohafia were rather an independent group in full control of their fighting forces and free to offer or withhold their services as they saw fit.”¹⁰¹⁹ Northrup further noted that the Aro were able to safeguard their territories from Ohafia military attack because of the *ukwuzi* pact, but the Aro “did not control [Ohafia] activities elsewhere.”¹⁰²⁰

Aro chiefs customarily presented “items of kola”¹⁰²¹ including two rams (*ebule aha* — ram of war) sacrificed to *ikwan di orie*, the Ohafia god of war, as well as drinks and kola nuts, which constituted the customary obligations for invoking *ukwuzi*.¹⁰²² Uka noted that in the last quarter of the 19th century, while consultation fees including “ten pounds, four war caps, heads of tobacco, and a case of drinks,” were presented to Ohafia chiefs and elders, the warriors themselves had no share in this, and it was a cultural prerequisite for the initiation of *igba ndu* (blood covenant) with the Aro, who were expected to guarantee safe passage for Ohafia

Nigeria, 184; Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 13, 27-28; Dike and Ekejiuba, *The Aro of South-eastern Nigeria*; Oriji, “Slave Trade, Warfare and Aro Expansion,” 107-114; Azuonye, “The Narrative War Songs,” 34; Azuonye, “The Heroic Age,” 15; Jones, *Annual Reports of Bende Division*, 6-7.

¹⁰¹⁷ Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, 82-85.

¹⁰¹⁸ Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, 82.

¹⁰¹⁹ Azuonye, “The Narrative War Songs,” 119.

¹⁰²⁰ Northrup, *Trade Without Rulers*, 119.

¹⁰²¹ A symbolic equivalent of “kola-nut” used to welcome visitors, pay homage to a superior, or invoke *ukwuzi*.

¹⁰²² Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 70; Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author.

warriors.¹⁰²³ To describe this pre-war ritual as mere payment for mercenary services, thus amounts to an abstraction of its socio-cultural context.

Moreover, a number of scholars have concluded that the Ohafia-Igbo did not gain as much bounty as the Aro, from their military engagements. McCall writes that most Ohafia warriors fought in order to acquire human heads and the prestige and social power they brought.¹⁰²⁴ Other scholars as well as Ohafia informants have insisted that while the Aro pillaged villages conquered by Ohafia warriors for property and slaves, Ohafia warriors were mostly preoccupied with obtaining the concrete symbol of military prowess, prestige and social power — human heads.¹⁰²⁵ Azuonye insists that Ohafia wars with the Ibibio and Ogoja were mostly “a struggle for survival.”¹⁰²⁶ However, in return for their assistance to the Aro, Ohafia also raided for slaves and were permitted full access to Aro monopolized markets where they could dispose of their own captives.¹⁰²⁷ It must be noted that there was not always a neat distinction between headhunting, slave production, defense, punishment, and honor in the military activities of the Ohafia-Igbo in the second half of the 19th century, even when they were contracted by the Aro. Martin Klein acknowledged that warriors often fought for selfish reasons when he pointed out that slave-producing warriors of the Western Sudan did not always act as

¹⁰²³ Uka, “A Note on the ‘Abam’ Warriors of Igbo Land,” 79.

¹⁰²⁴ McCall, *Dancing Histories*, 83.

¹⁰²⁵ Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, 82; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 69; Azuonye, “The Heroic Age,” 16-17; Uka, “A Note on the ‘Abam’ Warriors of Igbo Land,” 78-79; Chief K.K. Owen, oral interview by author; Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author.

¹⁰²⁶ Azuonye, “The Heroic Age,” 17.

¹⁰²⁷ Nsugbe, *Ohafia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 13, 31-32; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 69-72; Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, 82.

expected, for they could unmake rulers in order to strengthen their own positions.¹⁰²⁸ Richard Roberts has also observed that what may have been a political decision to wage war on the part of a group, often became an economic or social one for warriors.¹⁰²⁹

A Celebration of the Head Was a Celebration of Masculinity: The *Ite-Odo* Society and the Construction of *Ndi Ikike* Social Hegemony in the Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries.

Ite odo is a huge clay pot, usually 40 gallons in volume, the outside of which was covered with human skulls and jaws — a most grotesque sight intended to frighten observers.¹⁰³⁰ *Ite odo* was a cult object, worshipped by members of the *ite odo* society. The warriors' pot was not a deity, but it served as a totem of the most accomplished Ohafia-Igbo warriors in the 19th century.¹⁰³¹ Every Ohafia-Igbo village possessed an *ite odo* society in the 19th century.¹⁰³² *Ite odo* was similar to the *ese-ike* institution among the Ngwa people, which was open only to young men and elders who had performed unusual acts of prowess.¹⁰³³ The *ite odo* society was exclusive in the sense that it comprised of the most distinguished war-lords (*ndi ikike*

¹⁰²⁸ Klein, "The Impact of the Atlantic Slave Trade," 238.

¹⁰²⁹ Roberts, "Production and Reproduction of Warrior States," 398, 400.

¹⁰³⁰ Chief Kalu Awa Kalu, oral interview by author; Mr. Davidson Kalu Oki, oral interview by author; Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author; Chief Eke Emetu Kalu, oral interview by author; Chief Emeh Okonkwo, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, August 15, 2010.

¹⁰³¹ Chief Ikenga Ibe, in Group Interview with *Nde Ichin* (ten elders of) Amuma Ohafia, digital voice recording, Amuma, Ohafia. November 26, 2011; Chief Oluka Mba, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Nde-Ibe village, Ohafia. November 3, 2011. The word, "totem" is used not because the warriors' pot was a representation of an animal or plant, but rather, because it was a distinctive and venerated emblem of the society.

¹⁰³² Chief Oluka Mba, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Nde-Ibe Village. Nov. 3, 2011; Chief Emeh Okonkwo, oral interview by author, August 15, 2010.

¹⁰³³ Oriji, "Slave Trade, Warfare and Aro Expansion," 109.

masculinities), who had achieved spectacular acts of bravery.¹⁰³⁴ Such acts included being the first among peers to cut a head in battle, single-handedly dislodging or decimating an enemy's fighting force, or participating in several raids and wars and returning unscathed with heads and war captives.¹⁰³⁵

This caliber of men was greeted honorifically as *ogbusua* (first to cut a head), *olua oha* (conqueror of a community), *oji isi eke oba* (he that display human heads as a farmer displays yams), or *omere isi kpara ndu* (he that returned from war with human heads and live captives).¹⁰³⁶ *Ite odo* members regulated the conferment of *ufiem* on warriors, upon their successful return from battle.¹⁰³⁷ Recalling the life and times of his own father (c. 1878-1858), who was a renowned *ite-odo* member in Ebem village, Ohafia in the 1920s, Ndukwe Otta stated that warriors used to troop to the homes of *ite-odo* members to pay homage and respect, and to mime their heroic deeds in order to gain social legitimacy.¹⁰³⁸ Hence, Njoku concludes that initiation into the society became the ultimate target of young men of high ambition.¹⁰³⁹

Ite odo is sometimes described as a dance society. However, it differed from the war dance (*iri aha*), which was a festive dance performed by professionals in celebration of heroic

¹⁰³⁴ Mayne, "Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934," 45; Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author; Chief Eke Emetu Kalu, oral interview by author; Chief Emeh Okonkwo, oral interview by author, August 15, 2010.

¹⁰³⁵ Chief K.K. Owen, oral interview by author; Chief Olua Iro Kalu, oral interview by author; Ndukwe Otta and Elder Uduma Uka, Group Interview by author, Ebem Village. August 14, 2010; Chief Kevin Ukiro, oral interview by author; Chief Olua Iro Kalu, oral interview by author; Chief Emeh Okonkwo, oral interview by author.

¹⁰³⁶ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 63-64.

¹⁰³⁷ McCall, *Dancing Histories*, 92.

¹⁰³⁸ Ndukwe Otta and Uduma Uka, Group Interview by author, Ebem, Ohafia. Aug. 14, 2010.

¹⁰³⁹ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 64.

ancestors and brave warriors in the 19th century.¹⁰⁴⁰ According to Otta, the dance of *ite-odo* was not a formal entertainment, but rather, an occasional performance of *ndi ikike* masculinity, which was “more violent, because *ite odo* members unpredictably swung their machetes up and down, demonstrating their greatest conquests and head-hunts.”¹⁰⁴¹ The public performances of *ite-odo* members shaped social perceptions of *ndi ikike* as the most powerful group of men in 19th century Ohafia-Igbo society. This is evident in the manner and language in which Ohafia interview respondents described their fathers, who were members of the *ite-odo* society between the 1880s and 1920s. Nna Agbai Ndukwe, now in his late 90s recalled the life of his late father, who was a leader of the *ite-odo* society in Elu village:

In my father’s time [1860s-1940s], he used to take the *jooji* wrapper away from the waists of his age mates’ wives and tie them on my mother’s waist! These were his age mates that had not been able to cut human heads. *Aja!* He was a great, brave warrior! My father’s *ite-odo* . . . he was well known for that huge pot that *ndi ikike* used to carry; they did not put on shirts — they were bare-chested, and if you encountered them on the way, you would be overtaken by fear. They tied only their *jooji* wrapper, armed with their machete and if you met them on the way, you would be forced to run away. People used to gather in the village square and watch *ite-odo* members in action. Their performance sometimes got so *charged* that it was no longer safe for people to come out of their houses.¹⁰⁴² [Italics mine.]

Nna Agbai Ndukwe’s father was an *ezie ite-odo* (leader of the *ite-odo* society) and as such, he housed the *ite-odo* pot monument in his home. Ndukwe Otta’s father, late Chief Aru Otta (1878-1858), equally served as *ezie ite-odo* of his village (Ebem) in the 1920s.¹⁰⁴³ Both men are

¹⁰⁴⁰ Chief Kalu Awa Kalu, oral interview by author; Mr. Davidson Kalu Oki, oral interview by author; Azuonye, “The Narrative War Songs,” 62-64; McCall, *Dancing Histories*, 4-6.

¹⁰⁴¹ Ndukwe Otta and Uduma Uka, Group Interview by author, Ebem, Ohafia. Aug. 14, 2010.

¹⁰⁴² Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author.

¹⁰⁴³ Otta recalled that the *ite-odo*, which his father kept, was never stored on the ground but hung from a wall, in his father’s bedroom. As a cult object, it was sacrilegious for the *ite-odo* to “witness” death, and so individuals who were *ezie ite-odo* made sure that they did not die at

popularly recalled in the oral traditions of Elu and Ebem villages, as leading representatives of the age-grades that fought the last wars of the 19th century, in Nnewi (1860-1890s),¹⁰⁴⁴ Ukpati and Eror in Nsukka (1880s),¹⁰⁴⁵ and Nteje, Igbariam, and Aguleri (1890s).¹⁰⁴⁶

The historical role of *ite-odo* members in the construction of *ndi ikike* hegemony is also borne out in their public performances. On the days of their public outing, *ite odo* members filled the *ite-odo* (warriors' pot) with palm wine, and their leader (*ezie ite odo*) carried it on his head, rocking it back-and-forth, and sideways, in an anti-clockwise motion, occasionally spilling some of the wine on the ground. Marching thus in a group, they visited every patrilineage compound (*onu-ogo*) in their village, to pay respect to older *ufiem*, who acknowledged the homage with offers of palm wine, poured into the pot. As the pot filled up, the *ite-odo* members drank it down, always keeping the pot half-full.¹⁰⁴⁷ According to Agbai Ndukwe, "they filled tall cups for men to drink and as the men drank, the senior *ite-odo* members hit the top of their heads with their machete until the cup was drained. This served to show that *ite odo* members were invincible."¹⁰⁴⁸

Njoku describes 19th century *ite odo* members as the inner core of the *ufiem* social class, revered by all.¹⁰⁴⁹ He writes,

home in the presence of the *ite-odo*. Members took the pot away when the keeper was about to die. The pot, which Nna Agbai Ndukwe showed this writer as his father's *ite-odo*, was about 40 gallons in volume. Chief Aru Otta was a member of *uke Anya Afu Mba* [age grade] (1880-1860)

¹⁰⁴⁴ Oriji, "Slave Trade, Warfare and Aro Expansion," 111.

¹⁰⁴⁵ Arua, *A Short History of Ohafia*, 11; Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, 85.

¹⁰⁴⁶ Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, 85; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 84; Igwebe, *The History of Arondizuogu*, 91.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author.

¹⁰⁴⁸ Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author.

¹⁰⁴⁹ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 64.

Their arrival at a gathering of the community at the village square was announced with *ikoro* beat and the sound of *opu ike*, the trumpet of bravery. Their names and acts of valor . . . became edifying songs in the repertory of the traditional heroic singer. They also featured in moonlight stories as role models to youth. At death, they were immolated with human heads and live captives. At the appropriate time, the death of a member was commemorated with *okerenkwa* celebration, the highest heroic honor that could be bestowed on a dead man in Ohafia.¹⁰⁵⁰

At such gatherings, such as the funeral of an *ite-odo* member between the 1890s and 1930s,¹⁰⁵¹ they barricaded themselves from public view, and according to Agbai Ndukwe, “nobody dared go close to them. People often observed from a distance. Only those who had cut heads were allowed into their company, and to take wine from the pot. If you were not a warrior, you would not be able to see what was inside the pot.”¹⁰⁵² While warrior *ufiem* could join in the celebration, the senior members who knew “the secrets of the society” surrounded the pot. Indeed, it was partly in a bid to name “what was inside the pot” that Ohafia people themselves began to speak of *ite-odo* cannibalism (that human heads were inside the pot) in the 1890s — a rumor that the members did not stifle, but rather embraced to bolster their aura.¹⁰⁵³

Ndi ikike enjoyed social hegemony over all other categories of *ufiem*. Uka noted, “happy was the man entitled to don the eagle’s plume and the red tail feathers of the parrot in token of his prowess in battle. In life he enjoyed special privileges, and in death was accorded the dignity

¹⁰⁵⁰ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 64.

¹⁰⁵¹ Mayne, “Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934,” 45.

¹⁰⁵² Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author.

¹⁰⁵³ Mayne, “Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934,” 45; Chief Ikenga Ibe, in Group Interview with *nde ichin* (ten elders of) Amuma Ohafia, digital voice recording, *obu* Nde Torti, Amuma Village Ohafia. November 26, 2011; Chief Oluka Mba, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Nde-Ibe village, Ohafia. November 3, 2011; Ndukwe Otta and Elder Uduma Uka, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Ebem Village, Ohafia. Aug. 14, 2010.

of a warrior's funeral with the special dance known as *okerenkwa*.”¹⁰⁵⁴ *Okerenkwa* was a dance performed during the ritual of *idoru-nna*, which transformed a dead *ufiem* into a deity.¹⁰⁵⁵ This ritual was not open to *ujo*, whose spirits were believed not to have positive impact on individuals' quest for social distinction, high ethical and moral standards, and societal peace and progress.¹⁰⁵⁶ Uchendu sheds light on this when he writes that for the Igbo, life on earth was a link in the chain of status hierarchy which culminated in the achievement of ancestral honor in the world of the dead. Thus, those who died unaccomplished suffered much frustration in the spirit land (*ala mmuo*). They remained 'boys' in both worlds.¹⁰⁵⁷

Indeed, age was an important factor in Ohafia-Igbo gender construction, because at certain points in a man's life, he was expected to have fulfilled particular feats of masculinity. Thus, within the age-grade institution (see chapter 3), hierarchies of *ufiem* were constituted. There was a distinction between adult, warrior, and senior (elder) masculinities. A man attained adult *ufiem* by marrying a wife,¹⁰⁵⁸ in a fashion his age-mates found satisfactory. It was in view of this sense of social fulfillment that Ohafia men express marriage as “*inyu amiri ishi ulue*” [to urinate behind the groom's house]. The idea was that the groom treated his age-mates to so much sumptuous meals and palm wine that they took turns going behind his house to empty their

¹⁰⁵⁴ Uka, “A Note on the ‘Abam’ Warriors of Igbo Land,” 78.

¹⁰⁵⁵ Ndukwe Otta and Elder Uduma Uka, Group Interview by author; Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author; Chief Udensi Ekea of Ndi Ekea Compound, Okon Village, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. August 4, 2010; Chief Ikenga Ibe of Nde Torti Compound, in Group Interview with *Nde Ichin* (ten elders of) Amuma Ohafia, digital voice recording, *obu* Nde Torti, Amuma Village Ohafia. November 26, 2011; Chief Oluka Mba, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Nde-Ibe village, Ohafia. November 3, 2011.

¹⁰⁵⁶ Azuonye, “The Heroic Age,” 23.

¹⁰⁵⁷ Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria*, 16.

¹⁰⁵⁸ See Chapter 1 for discussion of marriage practices.

bowels and bladder, returning for more food and wine, over and over.¹⁰⁵⁹ Thus, adult masculinity entailed a performance of wealth for members of one's age-grade. As was the case in Ovamboland studied by Meredith McKittrick, it was customary for fathers to marry the first wife for their sons in Ohafia-Igbo society, and fathers utilized this practice as a mechanism for exercising control over their sons.¹⁰⁶⁰

Similarly, elders (*ndi ichin*) were accorded great respect for their age, because of the belief that they were living ancestors who embodied the wisdom of ages, and that they were the repositories of their communities' history.¹⁰⁶¹ However, as Chinua Achebe aptly observed, age was respected in Igbo society but achievement was revered.¹⁰⁶² In the Ohafia case, only men who had attained *ndi ikike* masculinity were given the honor of *idoru-nna* irrespective of age. *Ufiem* status, not elderhood, qualified a candidate for *idoru-nna*. Thus, the *ujo* even in old age remained a "boy" in the human and spiritual world.¹⁰⁶³ Uchendu noted that this was a most "frustrating" and "repugnant" status for the Igbo.¹⁰⁶⁴ By contrast, as Azuonye writes, *ndi ichin* (elders) who accomplished *ufiem* constituted the "highest rank in the hierarchy of spirits of the

¹⁰⁵⁹ Chief Emeh Okonkwo, oral interview by author; Chief Kalu Awa Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Nde-Ukpai, Ufieme Village. October 27, 2011.

¹⁰⁶⁰ Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author; McKittrick, "Forsaking their Fathers?" 33-40. The role of fathers in their sons' attainment of adult masculinity is also explored in chapters 1 and 4.

¹⁰⁶¹ See Chapter 2.

¹⁰⁶² Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (London: Heinemann, 1958), 6.

¹⁰⁶³ Ndukwe Otta and Elder Uduma Uka, Group Interview by author; Chief Eke Emetu Kalu, oral interview by author; Anaso Awalekwa, *ezie-ogo* of Ndea-Nku Village and Members of the Men's Court, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording. Nov. 17, 2011.

¹⁰⁶⁴ Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria*, 16.

dead, and are known as *arunshi* (i.e. ‘ancestral’ as opposed to ordinary spirits).”¹⁰⁶⁵ In expression of this achievement focus, the Ohafia say: *Iboro anaghi etu mmadu na nkiti*.¹⁰⁶⁶

Mayne indicates in his Intelligence Report on the Ohafia-Igbo that a man who did not receive *ufiem* burial did not qualify for *idoru-nna* in 19th century Ohafia-Igbo society.¹⁰⁶⁷

Illustrating the burial of deceased *ufiem*, Ndukwe Otta recalls his father’s burial in 1958:

On the day that a fellow warrior dies, *ite odo* members would bring down the *ite-odo* and fill it up with palm wine. On the day of my father’s burial, wherever there was palm wine tree in this land, both in the *ude* (palm wine plantations) and in people’s compounds and backyards, *ndi ikike* went and tapped and confiscated them . . . and there was nothing anyone could do about it. During the entire period of that week in which my father died, the warriors owned the land. On the first day, by 3:00 am, they had gone to the *ude* and tapped all the wine in the land, and drank to their utmost fill, without consuming any food. Throughout that week, the warriors avoided sexual contact with women and they did not eat a meal prepared by any woman. They believed that in this way, they could be strong enough for the task ahead. They marched from here [his home] to Uzo-Ubi towards the boundary with Abam [village; a distance of 5 miles] to fetch the first *ite-akoro*. This *ite-akoro* was just an ordinary pot, decorated and covered with grasses, and filled with wine. They sang and danced from there all the way back [demonstrates the dance]. Their eyes were blood-shot; they wore *onugwe* [loincloth]; they were armed with machetes, which they clapped together as they danced; and they had guns, which they shot into the air as they danced along. I saw them thus demonstrating, until they reached the home of my father. During their march, they cut down and killed and confiscated everything in their path. Whatever they saw, they killed. If they saw a goat, they killed it; plantains, they cut it down; chickens they killed. . . They do not kill people anymore but in the past, they did! In those days when they required another human being to bury the warrior, this march was the time to kill a war captive.

Once they reached our home, they started performing . . . I don’t know what to call it, because they were under some influence or possession. I saw them . . . *kpara kpara kpara* [in a blink], somebody was on top of the roof! The house had a thatched roof and there were no ceilings. They opened up the roof. A grave had been dug up in the middle of my father’s *obi* (living room), and a bamboo pole erected in it. From the rooftop, they threw down that pot of palm wine into my

¹⁰⁶⁵ Azuonye, “The Heroic Age,” 23.

¹⁰⁶⁶ People do not become ancestors easily. In effect, individuals are not venerated/deified in vain; they must have distinguished themselves in peculiar ways.

¹⁰⁶⁷ Mayne, “Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934,” 44-45.

father's grave, and we heard the warriors roar, *whoa!* That was the first stage. This was done by this time of the day [late morning] before the burial ceremony. Then, they returned later, this time, carrying the *ite-odo* decorated with human skulls. When they arrived and began to perform, people ran away, because they behaved like crazy and possessed people. For instance, when they entered this compound, they climbed on top of the fence, and ran about on top of the rough and jagged edges. They did all sorts of incredible things. At the end of the agility performances, they poured wine into the *ite-odo*, and each of them drank from it. The pot looked old and dirty, but they drank from it anyway, in demonstration of bravery. This was to say that if you were not capable of partaking in this rite, you were not a man . . . Then, they covered the grave and took out the bamboo pole, leaving a hole, which directly led into my father's mouth.¹⁰⁶⁸

The community usually announced impending *ite odo* celebrations, warning parents to be aware of their children's safety, because if in the course of their performance they harmed anybody, they were immune to legal reproach.¹⁰⁶⁹ After his burial, the *ufiem* received the deification ceremony of *idoru-nna*, which established him as a powerful patrilineage ancestor.¹⁰⁷⁰ The deceased's son hired the services of a great warrior to perform the *okerenkwa* dance. This warrior, according to Otta, was considered a man, not "because he has a penis; [but] because he had accomplished the requirements of manhood in Ohafia."¹⁰⁷¹ He elaborated:

My father performed *igba okerenkwa* for many people. When Ukagha Onu Aja wanted to perform *idoru-nna* for his father in the 1930s, it was my father that performed *okerenkwa* for him. This dance was performed in a peculiar way, with great masculine agility. As the warrior danced, successive gunshots were fired. After the last gunshot, the process was completed . . . *Okerenkwa* was one of the benefits of distinguishing yourself as a respected *ufiem* in Ohafia. Before my father consented to perform this task, he was paid a large sum of money [and] . . . he received drinks, yams, and goats, in acknowledgment of his masculinity . . . In those days, if *idoru-nna* and *igba okerenkwa* were not performed for your father, we believed that your father would neither belong in the world of the living nor in the world of the dead. And people would actually insult you on that account. We

¹⁰⁶⁸ Ndukwe Otta and Elder Uduma Uka, Group Interview by author.

¹⁰⁶⁹ Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author.

¹⁰⁷⁰ For similar rituals in neighboring Afikpo, see Ottenberg, *Double Descent in an African Society*, 193, 197-198.

¹⁰⁷¹ Ndukwe Otta and Elder Uduma Uka, Group Interview by author.

would say that your father was stranded in the pathway/boundary between the living and the dead. So, when it was time to perform this dance, my father would come out, the music would be playing, and he would be dancing, and warriors and other braves would be singing and shouting his praises (*itu afa*). He would be recounting tales; tales and boasts of his conquests; how he reached this place and killed so and so number of warriors, and when he got to that other place he did so and so . . . He boasted of his own accomplishments; he reminded the elders that he was an accomplished warrior; and through this dance, he sanctioned the honoring of the dead warrior with *idoru nna* (*ududu* establishment). To end a particular tale of conquest and bravery, he would draw his machete and hold it out and the elders seated in a row would hit the machete successively with their walking sticks, *kpa kpa kpa kpa kpa kpa!* Then, he would launch into another tale. Meanwhile, the musical instrument would keep sounding: '*Tunkariri denkari! Tunkariri denkari! Tunkariri denkari!*' How I am dancing now is how father used to dance, with his sword held this way [demonstrates the dance]. At the end, there was something that he cut with his sword, at which point a gunshot was fired.¹⁰⁷²

The collection of expensive fees for the performance of *okerenkwa* was one of the ways through which warriors earned a living in the second half of the 19th century, besides owning slaves, whom they employed in various labor activities.¹⁰⁷³ Moreover, in most cases, the warrior was also a yam farmer and a hunter. Thus, individuals fulfilled various categories of masculinities in their lifetime, each associated with distinct social privileges.¹⁰⁷⁴ Having been deified upon death, the warrior *ufiem* thus completed his life cycle. His memorialization was accomplished through *ududu* veneration, the incorporation of his life into *abu-aha* (war songs), and his celebration through *iri-aha* (war dance).¹⁰⁷⁵ The performance of *ndi ikike* masculinity in

¹⁰⁷² Ndukwe Otta and Elder Uduma Uka, Group Interview by author. Chief Eke Emetu recalls the last time *ududu* establishment was done to be the late 1940s in Elu village, when this was performed for Nna Egbuta, who did not cut a human head, but was a great yam farmer, who accumulated so much wealth, married a lot of wives, and had a lot of children, that he was considered to have fulfilled *igbu ishi*, and thus deified upon death.

¹⁰⁷³ See Chapter 5 for a discussion of domestic slavery.

¹⁰⁷⁴ See Chapter 4 for the masculinity of the hunter, the yam farmer, and the *dibia*.

¹⁰⁷⁵ Chief Eke Emetu Kalu, oral interview by author; Chief Ikenga Ibe, in Group Interview with *Nde Ichin* (ten elders of) Amuma Ohafia, digital voice recording, *obu* Nde Torti, Amuma Village Ohafia. November 26, 2011; Chief Oluka Mba, oral interview by author, digital voice recording,

Ohafia between 1850 and 1920 also generated rumors of cannibalism and masculinist social visions of the society. These processes are examined below.

The Myth of Cannibalism

Mayne writes in his Intelligence Report on the Ohafia-Igbo that in the last quarter of the 19th century, “slaves were eaten after their death by their respective owner and his relatives.”¹⁰⁷⁶ Describing Bende district (of which the Ohafia-Igbo were a part) in the first decade of the 20th century, Jones writes that “in warfare between unrelated towns, the victor could take the head of his enemy as a trophy and could remove as much as he could of the body for sale as meat in the local markets.”¹⁰⁷⁷ In various correspondence of British commanding officers active in Bende division between 1890 and 1915, the most popular justifications for punitive expeditions were the need to curb cannibalism and human sacrifice.¹⁰⁷⁸ The Church of Scotland Mission celebrated the 1901 British expedition against the Aro as a triumph over the “barbarous” and “savage” Aro and their Ohafia and Abam blood-thirsty, cannibalistic allies.¹⁰⁷⁹ In his 1921 tour of the Calabar Mission District, Frank Ashcroft, board chairman of the United Free Church of Scotland Foreign Mission based at Edinburgh, Scotland, described the Ohafia as

Nde-Ibe village, Ohafia. November 3, 2011; Ndukwe Otta and Elder Uduma Uka, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Ebem, Ohafia. Aug. 14, 2010.

¹⁰⁷⁶ Mayne, “Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934,” 44.

¹⁰⁷⁷ Jones, *Annual Reports of Bende Division*, 4.

¹⁰⁷⁸ FO84/2020: “Africa (Slave Trade), West Coast, 1890,” 348-351; CO520/8: “Southern Nigeria Original Correspondence, May to August, 1901,” 570-574; CO520/16: “Southern Nigeria Original Correspondence, November to December, 1902,” 508-516; CO520/36: “Southern Nigeria Original Correspondence, June to August, 1906,” 170-184.

¹⁰⁷⁹ United Free Church of Scotland, “The Recent Expedition Against the Aros,” *The Missionary Record of the United Free Church of Scotland*, No. 1-164 (1902), 453.

“head-hunters and cannibals.”¹⁰⁸⁰ A number of European writers in the 1890s and early 20th century also claimed that the Ohafia-Igbo engaged in cannibalism.¹⁰⁸¹ As earlier noted, some of my Ohafia informants maintained that *ite-odo* members engaged in cannibalism in the last three decades of the 19th century.¹⁰⁸²

These notions of Ohafia-Igbo cannibalism were not based on first-hand accounts. They were largely impressionistic. Neither Mayne, Jones, Ashcroft, Leonard, Patridge, Basden nor any of my informants, who alleged Ohafia-Igbo cannibalism was a witness to such practice. However, a number of them such as Leonard, Patridge, and Basden observed stacks of human heads at various shrines and pathways in the region. Leonard noted that “at Akano [village, Ohafia] the Ju Ju, which was composed of an array of human skulls stacked on a wooden stool, looked, to say the least of it, a grim and gruesome spectacle.”¹⁰⁸³ Similarly, Patridge observed that at the village of Umon on the Cross River, the burial place of a woman named Ekanem was commemorated yearly, and in one corner of the place was “a reeking pile of bloody heads . . . and two human skulls.”¹⁰⁸⁴ Basden equally writes of the practice of using human skulls as protective medicines placed over farm-land to scare away potential intruders.¹⁰⁸⁵ The preponderance of human skulls in Ohafia and neighbouring communities between 1890 and

¹⁰⁸⁰ Frank Ashcroft, “Report on Calabar Mission: Tour of the Calabar Mission Districts, July to August 1921” *West Africa* (National Library of Scotland, MS.7796), 28.

¹⁰⁸¹ Patridge, *Cross River Natives*, 70; Leonard, “Notes of a Journey to Bende,” 190-201; Basden, *Niger Ibos*, 126, 195; Basden, *Among the Ibos*, 37-38.

¹⁰⁸² Ndukwe Otta and Elder Uduma Uka, Group Interview by author; Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author; Godwin Nwankwo Uko, *ezie-ogo* of Amankwu Village, oral interview by author; Anaso Awalekwa, *ezie-ogo* of Ndea-Nku Village, oral interview by author.

¹⁰⁸³ Leonard, “Notes of a Journey to Bende,” 196.

¹⁰⁸⁴ Patridge, *Cross River Natives*, 70.

¹⁰⁸⁵ Basden, *Among the Ibos*, 37-38.

1910, and the reputation of the Ohafia as headhunters informed missionaries', colonial officials', and European writers' reports of cannibalism in the region.

Mayne described Rev. Robert Collins, a pioneer Scottish missionary who lived in Ohafia from 1910 to 1933, as sympathetic with the Ohafia and well-versed with "local laws and customs."¹⁰⁸⁶ Rev. Collins never indicated in any of his journals or correspondence with the Home Office of the CSM that cannibalism existed in Ohafia.¹⁰⁸⁷ Njoku argues emphatically that "cannibalism had no place in the headhunting calculations of Ohafia people."¹⁰⁸⁸

In the absence of concrete evidence to substantiate the practice of cannibalism in Ohafia, this study contends that the cannibalism discourse was a consequence of Ohafia performance of *ndi ikike* masculinity in the last quarter of the 19th century. First, in the early 20th century, the Ohafia-Igbo were widely renowned as Aro mercenaries and headhunters, who during the 19th century, crossed the length and breadth of Ibibioland and Igboland in search of human heads and slaves for *ufiem* attainment.¹⁰⁸⁹ This reputation of Ohafia informed British preemptive deployment of one of the two columns of the Aro expeditionary forces through Ohafia in

¹⁰⁸⁶ Mayne, "Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934," 48.

¹⁰⁸⁷ See United Presbyterian Church, No. 26, MS. 7715: "Collins Elizabeth Stewart, Wife of Robert, Missionary in Calabar, nee Glen; Letters to, 1900-1916;" UPC, "Collins Robert, Missionary in Calabar, Letters to, 1898-1929;" UPC, West Africa, MS. 7793 and MS. 7795. "Collins Robert, Missionary in Calabar, Letters of, 1898-1933;" Acc. 7548/A13-14: "Copies of Out-going Letters from Mission Committee to Collins;" United Free Church of Scotland, De298/127-137: "Minutes Relating to Calabar, Robert Collins and Mincher;" Acc.7548/D44: "Calabar Correspondence and Papers, 1913-1945;" United Free Church of Scotland, Dep.298/127-137: "Minutes relating to Calabar, Robert Collins and Mincher;" The Church of Scotland, Dep.298/157-167: "Minutes relating to Calabar, Robert Collins and Mincher."

¹⁰⁸⁸ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 82.

¹⁰⁸⁹ CO444/2. "Niger Coast Protectorate Original Correspondence, August – October, 1899," 204-224; CO520/107. "Southern Nigeria Original Correspondence, 9^h October to 30th November, 1911," 220-251; Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, 82-85.

1901.¹⁰⁹⁰ Describing Ohafia-Igbo encounter with the British West African Frontier Force (W.A.F.F), Ohafia’s first warrant chief and colonial collaborator (who led the British from Ohafia to Arochukwu) Chief Eke Kalu writes, “No sooner was the [W.A.F.F.] camp placed at Ebem than a host of the native head-hunters came leaping for joy that heads had come to their very doors asking to be cut off. The joy of getting white heads was great amongst the people.”¹⁰⁹¹ British officials such as Captain Mowatt, Mr. Weir, and Mr. L.T. Chubb saw Kalu as “a loyal servant of the Government,”¹⁰⁹² and shared his vision of Ohafia people as bloodthirsty headhunters.¹⁰⁹³ This reputation of Ohafia also informed the punitive measures taken by the British government against Asaga village, Ohafia in the course of the 1905-1908 Bende-Onitsha Hinterland expedition.¹⁰⁹⁴ Since British colonial officials viewed the Ohafia as headhunters in concert with Aro slavocracy, their rumors of cannibalism served to justify both the Aro expedition and subsequent military patrols in the region.

¹⁰⁹⁰ Jones, *Annual Reports of Bende Division*, 8-9; Kalu, “An Ibo Autobiography,” 162-164; Johnston, *Of God and Maxim Guns*, 35.

¹⁰⁹¹ Kalu, “An Ibo Autobiography,” 163.

¹⁰⁹² Chubb, “Assessment Reports: Bende Division, 1927-1929,” 19.

¹⁰⁹³ For this British view of Asaga, documented as “Patrol up the Cross River: Enyong Creek to Obubra Hill,” and “Field Operations, October 1904 to June 1905,” see CO520/31: “Southern Nigeria Original Correspondence, June to August, 1905,” 387-425, 526-528.

¹⁰⁹⁴ CO520/20: “Southern Nigeria Original Correspondence, August to October, 1903,” 44-54; CO520/26: “Southern Nigeria Original Correspondence, October to December, 1904,” 52-78; CO520/31: “Southern Nigeria Original Correspondence, June to August, 1905,” 102-110; CO520/36: “Southern Nigeria Original Correspondence, June to August, 1906,” 170-184; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 97-98; Jones, *Annual Reports of Bende Division*, 9-10; Chief Kevin Ukiro, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Asaga. Aug.10, 2010; Chief K.K. Owen, oral interview by author. The British colonial government alleged that Asaga was involved in the Obegu massacre, and that their intervention in Eziafo and Biakpan inter-communal dispute disrupted peace. Under the command of Captain E.C. Margesson, Asaga was assaulted.

Second, until the Aro expedition of 1901, European missionaries did not gain access to the Cross River Igbo territories, and the Church of Scotland Mission, which was the most active in the region remained a Calabar church, with minimal influence in the middle Cross River.¹⁰⁹⁵ C.S.M missionaries such as James Buchanan, Mary Slessor, and Thomas Edgerly stationed at Unwana, Akunakuna, Okoyong, and Umon had no first-hand knowledge of the Igbo territories west of the Cross River, and their reports of cannibalism and human sacrifice served to instigate the British government to open up the region and make it safe for missionary work.¹⁰⁹⁶ The British colonial government sent a memo to these missionaries asking them to leave the region before the Aro expedition, so that the Aro and their Ohafia allies would not take them hostage.¹⁰⁹⁷ Following the Aro expedition, the C.S.M published an excerpt of the report from *The Times* in its journal, *The Record of the United Free Church of Scotland*, and happily added that “Unwana [the base from which Christianity spread to Arochukwu and Ohafia, 1900-1910], our station in the Cross River, which touches the Ibo-speaking district . . . has been reoccupied.”¹⁰⁹⁸ Johnston noted that the greatest expansion of the Mission came following the Aro expedition.¹⁰⁹⁹ These were the circumstances that set the tone for Ashcroft’s assertion, in his first visit to the region (for a two month period) in 1921, that “Ahofia [*sic*] and Aro [were] a tribe of head hunters and cannibals now turning to Christ.”¹¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁹⁵ Johnston, *Of God and Maxim Guns*, 26.

¹⁰⁹⁶ CO520/8. “Southern Nigeria Original Correspondence, May to August, 1901,” 717-722; UFC, For. No. 16, MS.7672: Letter from Jan Buchanan to Robert Collins dated Sept. 26, 1901.

¹⁰⁹⁷ CO520/8. “Southern Nigeria Original Correspondence, May to August, 1901,” 717-722.

¹⁰⁹⁸ United Free Church of Scotland, “The Recent Expedition Against the Aros,” *The Missionary Record of the United Free Church of Scotland*, No. 1-164 (1902), 453.

¹⁰⁹⁹ Johnston, *Of God and Maxim Guns*, 39.

¹¹⁰⁰ Ashcroft, “Report on Calabar Mission,” 28.

Third, the Ohafia informants who alleged that cannibalism was practiced between 1880 and 1920, did so with specific reference to public *ite-odo* performances, expressing their belief that there were human skulls in the warriors' pots, from which they drank. It is plausible that the fear and aura which *ite-odo* members evoked in non-members, their exclusivism, and the power and privileges they enjoyed in Ohafia society between 1850 and 1920 (including being buried with human heads and slaves), inspired the cannibalism discourse. It was in this sense that Luise White argues that rumors of vampirism in colonial East and Central Africa, were social constructions, genres and mediums through which people articulated and contested differential power dynamics in inter-group relations, especially in violent situations.¹¹⁰¹ Indeed, human heads symbolized *ndi ikike* masculinity and until the 1930s,¹¹⁰² *ndi ikike* made extensive ritual uses of human heads in Ohafia-Igbo society. In order to establish a new home after marriage (adult masculinity), *ndi ikike* buried human heads in the foundation of their houses, and under their patrilineage compound (*ezi*) shrines such as *kamalu* (god of war), *fijoku* (yam deity), and *onu-agba* (ancestral shrine).¹¹⁰³ These practices shaped popular conceptions of real men (*ufiem*), as well as patrilineage autochthony, hence the saying, “*Mba obula enweghi onu agba a ka*

¹¹⁰¹ Luise White, *Speaking With Vampires: Rumor and History in Colonial Africa* (California: University of California Press, 2000), 4, 18, 44-45, 50-54, 58, 91, 98-102, 114.

¹¹⁰² Mayne, “Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934,” 45; Ndukwe Otta and Uduma Uka, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Ebem Village, Ohafia. Aug. 14, 2010.

¹¹⁰³ Dibia Kalu Uko, oral interview by author; Elders of Nde Odo Compound, Akanu, Group Interview by author. Nov. 2. 2011; Obuba, *The History and Culture of Ohafia*, 26-27. Human heads were also used to establish major deities including *achichi* (Ohafia society's tutelary spirit), *ikwan* (the society's god of war), and many others. Information based on the following: Chief K.K. Owen, oral interview by author; Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author; Chief Eke Emetu Kalu, oral interview by author; Chief Emeh Okonkwo, oral interview by author.

bidoghi eleghe ishi ogo”¹¹⁰⁴ [Any compound which does not have *onu agba* cannot be regarded as a primary patrilineage]. The preponderance of human heads surrounding *ndi ikike* may have led people to view *ndi ikike* as cannibals.

The Geography of Masculinity

The military legacies of Ohafia society were evident in the landscape itself; in the architectural layout of Ohafia villages, and the location and gendered uses of certain cultural artefacts such as the *obu*, *ikoro*, *onu-agba*, and shrines such as *fijoku* and *kamalu*.¹¹⁰⁵ These material culture of *ndi ikike* masculinity performance were inscribed in the physical landscape of Ohafia society, and defined a geography of masculinity (public space for *ufiem* performance) between 1850 and 1900. These artefacts played a significant role in the construction of *ndi ikike* hegemony by providing the public platforms for the performance of *ndi ikike* masculinity. They symbolized the efforts of *ndi ikike* to delineate a public sector of male domination in the sense that they set socio-cultural boundaries against *ujo* and female masculinities until the 1920s. This chapter therefore argues that the Ohafia geography of masculinity was historically constructed and reinvented in the daily practices of the people between 1850 and 1900.

Nsugbe describes Ohafia village residences as they were in 1960. He writes,

From the air each village would be seen to consist of very low huts, strung out in unbroken rows as if from an instinctive urge of self-defense against a danger that was once real and constant to the inhabitants . . . a protective response to a turbulent frontier environment . . . At the heart and center of every [village] stands the central meeting-place, *ogo* [village-square]. From the *ogo* the tertiary divisions [patrilineage compounds] radiate outwards like the spokes of a wheel and terminate towards the surrounding bush . . .

¹¹⁰⁴ Dibia Kalu Uko, oral interview by author; Elders of Nde Odo Compound, Akanu Village, Group Interview with author, digital voice recording, Akanu Village Ohafia. November 2. 2011.

¹¹⁰⁵ Dibia Kalu Uko, oral interview by author. The *kamalu* and *onu agba* are still used in yam veneration and remains central to configurations of gendered spaces.

Standing on the periphery of the *ogo*, the central meeting-place, and at the head of each [patrilineage compound], are the big ‘rest-huts,’ called the *obu* [patrilineage meeting-houses] . . . There is at one corner of the [*obu*] a small hut in which the big war-drum [*ikoro*] is housed . . . Also located at one corner of the *ogo* [village-square] is the all-important village shrine . . .

The [patrilineage compound] . . . resembles the sector of a circle, and consists of unbroken rows of huts which run radially from the *ogo* towards the bush behind. In between each paired rows of huts [residential houses] lies a path . . . that leads straight into the [village square], emptying directly behind the appropriate [patrilineage *obu*]. The hind end of the path passes through the bush surrounding the primary unit. The bush separates one territorial unit from the next . . .

Access to a [patrilineage compound] is possible either from the *ogo* or from the bush end of the unit . . . This means that once one finds oneself in the path one becomes effectively trapped, retreat being possible only by continuing in the direction of the *ogo* [village-square] or by returning towards the bush. It can therefore be imagined that should the need to defend a village arise, all that would need to be done would be to block the two ends of the path as one would a bridge. Doors open into the paths between the paired rows of huts. A first visitor to an Ohafia [compound] is bound to experience the disquieting feeling of being watched by scores of eyes from behind the interiors of huts on either side of him, unable to see them himself . . . Most [compounds] . . . are structured this way, with the result that each . . . presents the appearance of a . . . military garrison.¹¹⁰⁶

Mayne, Azuonye and Njoku indicate that this depiction was true of Ohafia society between 1850 and 1920.¹¹⁰⁷ This chapter examines the impact of this geography on the construction of *ndi ikike* hegemony during this period. To begin with, the patrilineage *obu* was a male domain. As shown in chapter 2, it was the abode of male ancestors, where the *ududu* of deceased *ndi ikike* were kept, after the ritual of *idoru-nna* (to lay a father to rest).

¹¹⁰⁶ Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 49-51.

¹¹⁰⁷ Mayne, “Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934,” 4; Azuonye, “The Heroic Age,” 21; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 59.

**Figure 3: Mural Painting at *Obu Ndi Idika*, Mgbaga, Elu Village, Ohafia,
Photographed by Author.**



**Figure 4: Mural Painting at *Obu Ndi Idika*, Mgbaga, Elu Village, Ohafia,
Photographed by Author.**



**Figure 5: Mural Painting at *Obu Ndi Ezera*, Asaga Village, Ohafia,
Photographed by Author.**



The *obu* was a major site for the organization of warfare and the meeting of male elders; and it was a major platform for the performance of *ufiem* by *ite odo* members.¹¹⁰⁸ The wall decor and mural paintings of Ohafia *obu* houses emphasized various masculinities — the brave warrior, the hunter, the *dibia*, the *ezie-ikoro* (*ikoro* master), and symbols of exclusively male

¹¹⁰⁸ Jones, “Ohaffia Obu Houses,” 169; *Ezie-nwami* Ogbonne Kalu, oral interview by author; Ndukwe Otta and Elder Uduma Uka, Group Interview by author; Mecha Ukpai Akanu, *ezie-ogo* of Amangwu Village and Members of the Men’s Court, Group Interview by author; Chief Udensi Ekea, oral interview by author, Aug. 4, 2010; Vasco U. Iro, *ezie-ogo* of Nkwebi, Members of the Men’s Court and *Nde-Ichin*, Group Interview by author; Kalu Awa, *ezie-ogo* of Ibina, oral interview by author, Ibina (Ihenta). December 12, 2011.

secret societies.¹¹⁰⁹ Its location in the center of the village square (*ogo*) defined a public sector of male visibility.¹¹¹⁰ Audrey Smedley has cautioned against essentializing patriliney as patriarchy and matriliney as matriarchy since women played a role in reinforcing patrilineal ideologies.¹¹¹¹ However, the masculinization of Ohafia patrilineage *obu* was in direct structural opposition to the absence of matrilineal residential compound units.¹¹¹²

The term masculinization is used because it was the performances of *ufiem* that defined the *obu* as a distinct male sphere. In front of Anaga patrilineage *obu*, there is a big stack of tightly woven twigs called *egbo*, which contains arrows said to be more than two hundred years old.¹¹¹³ Until the 1930s, it was customary for any man armed with bow and arrow, especially hunters who went past this *obu*, to aim and shoot into the twig pile, before continuing on their journey. Those who failed to fulfill this task had their bow and arrows taken away from them.¹¹¹⁴ The *egbo* was a medicine believed to protect the community, and it gained its power

¹¹⁰⁹ Jones, "Ohaffia Obu Houses," 169-171; Chief Idika Aso, the Chief Priest of *Obu Nkwa* shrine, Asaga, oral interview by author; Aug. 12, 2010; Chief Kevin Ukiro, oral interview by author; Mr. Onwuka Kalu Agwu, Chief Priest of *Obu Ndi Idika*, oral interview by author.

¹¹¹⁰ The subject of female political visibility is examined in Chapter 2.

¹¹¹¹ Smedley, *Women Creating Patriliney*, 1-3.

¹¹¹² *Nde-ichin*, Amuma, Group Interview; Godwin Nwankwo Uko, *ezie-ogo* of Amankwu Village and his cabinet members, Group Interview. Ottenberg, *Double Descent*, 25-93, 192-193, has made similar observations in the case of the neighboring Afikpo village-group.

¹¹¹³ Chief Eke Emetu Kalu, chief priest of *obu ndi Anaga*, oral interview by author, Elu. August 11, 2010; Elders of Umu-Anya Family, Ndi Imaga Compound, Elu Village, Group Interview by author, Aug. 14, 2011; Obuba, *The History and Culture of Ohafia*, 26.

¹¹¹⁴ Chief Eke Emetu Kalu, Chief Priest of *obu ndi Anaga*, oral interview by author; Elders of Umu-Anya Family, Ndi Imaga Compound, Elu Village, Group Interview by author.

through spectacular performances of archery skills by men.¹¹¹⁵ The constant performance of archery by men reinforced the social perception of the Anaga patrilineage *obu* as a male space.

Similarly, the *ikoro*, located at the center of the village square (*ogo*), was both a symbol and public platform for the performance of *ndi ikike* masculinity. Azuonye describes the *ikoro* as a wooden “slit-drum of great size used to summon the able-bodied members of the village in times of serious emergencies.”¹¹¹⁶ According to Nnenna Obuba, until the early 20th century, before effective British colonialism and the entrenchment of Christianity (c. 1920), when the *ikoro* was sounded, only men came out.¹¹¹⁷ The role of beating the *ikoro* was fulfilled by an individual who had accomplished *ndi ikike* masculinity. He was known as *ezie-ikoro* (priest/master of the *ikoro*).¹¹¹⁸ Njoku writes that various male age-grades (*uke*) took turns keeping watch over the *ikoro*, because it represented the strength of a community.¹¹¹⁹

The notion of the *ikoro* as signifying a community’s strength is informed by the arduous labor involved in its creation, as well as its ritual transformation into a protective medicine.¹¹²⁰ The making of the *ikoro* involved the collective labor of all able-bodied adult males in a community, who took turns cutting down the huge tree required for the *ikoro* drum, and hauling it back to the village-square amidst jubilations. Special wood carvers then set to work hollowing

¹¹¹⁵ Chief Eke Emetu Kalu, Chief Priest of *obu ndi Anaga*, oral interview by author.

¹¹¹⁶ Azuonye, “The Heroic Age,” 19.

¹¹¹⁷ Nnenna Obuba, oral interview by author, hand-written notes, Amaekpu. Aug. 26, 2011.

¹¹¹⁸ Chief Ikenga Ibe, in Group Interview with *Nde Ichin* (ten elders of) Amuma, Nov. 26, 2011; Ndukwe Otta and Elder Uduma Uka, Group Interview by author.

¹¹¹⁹ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 81.

¹¹²⁰ Chief Ugbu Uduma, *ezie-ogo* of Nde-Amogu, oral interview by author, Ihenta Village. November 11, 2011; Elders of Nde Odo Compound, Akanu, Group Interview with author; Chief Oluka Mba, oral interview by author, Nde-Ibe Village, Ohafia. November 3, 2011.

out the tree trunk and designing the *ikoro*, over a period of about six months.¹¹²¹ Jones noted the existence of such carvers in Asaga village, in the first two decades of the 20th century.¹¹²² Upon completion, the *ikoro* drum usually stood at nine feet in length, five feet in height, and about seven to ten feet in circumference.¹¹²³ Before the *ikoro* could be used, human heads were sacrificed to it to transform it into a protective medicine.¹¹²⁴

Ikoros were a public platform for *ufiem* performance. It was a stage for the performance of *iba mba* (warrior's boast) identified at the beginning of this chapter. Obuba writes,

After a successful human headhunt, there was always an elaborate ceremony where the [warrior] would display the head. He would then be qualified to be welcomed by the village tom tom (*ikoro*), a victory war drum, which he in turn would salute (*ibiri ikoro*) in a display of gallantry of his prowess in war.¹¹²⁵

Njoku concurs and writes that upon a warrior's return from war in the 19th century, "half-running, half-walking," he trotted to the village-square in front of the "talking *ikoro*," where "holding his trophy [human head] proudly aloft," he saluted it, and performed the warrior's boast.¹¹²⁶ The moment before the *ikoro* was one of ecstasy and grief; jubilation for those whose loved one returned in triumph, and sorrow for those whose relation failed to return or cut a

¹¹²¹ Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author, Amangwu. August 15, 2011; Chief Udensi Ekea, oral interview by author, August 4, 2010; Chief Ikenga Ibe in Group Interview with *Nde Ichin* (ten elders of) Amuma Ohafia, digital voice recording, November 26, 2011; Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author, Elu Ohafia. August 10, 2010.

¹¹²² Jones, "Ohafia Obu Houses," 170-171.

¹¹²³ Field observations; Basden, *Among the Ibos*, 246.

¹¹²⁴ Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author, Elu. Aug. 10, 2010; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author. Aug. 15, 2011; Chief Udensi Ekea, oral interview by author, Aug. 4, 2010; Chief Ikenga Ibe, in Group Interview with *nde ichin* (ten elders of) Amuma, Nov. 26, 2011.

¹¹²⁵ Obuba, *The History and Culture of Ohafia*, 26.

¹¹²⁶ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 81.

human head. It was a moment of social distinction between *ufiem* and *ujo*, in which women played a significant role. According to Mrs. Nnenna Emeri,

When a man who had cut a human head from battle returned; when he arrived at the village square, he threw out the head, which he had cut and the *ikoro* would sound to acknowledge, announce and celebrate his accomplishment. Once the *ikoro* had sounded, everybody would shout, ‘yoooooooo! *uma-moo, uma-moo!*’ As the shouts rent the air, his wife would emerge with *nzu* [white chalk] to decorate and venerate him publicly. Other women would then join her in dancing and jubilation. They would dance to her natal compound, and then to her husband’s compound . . . It was a woman that made the public announcement of her husband’s accomplishment. This established her husband’s new status in the community, for nobody would ever forget the special manner in which his wife danced herself crazy on that occasion.¹¹²⁷

Describing his father (1878-1858) as a brave warrior, who constantly performed masculinity, Otta stated, “he would always tell me what the *ikoro* was saying.”¹¹²⁸ *Ikor* was a talking drum and ‘real men’ (*ufiem*) understood its language. During festivals such as the celebration of the new yam, the entire community assembled at the village-square, and as people made their entrance, the *ezie-ikoro* (priest/master of the *ikoro*) drummed praise beats for the *ufiem* and insolent beats for the *ujo*.

When the *ikoro* saw you wearing a *jooji* wrapper, it would ask you, ‘*Gu o gbuu ole ndu were uko turu isi?*’ [‘Which people have you killed to provide skulls for your hearth?’] If you failed to understand the *ikoro* or ignored it, it would then insult you, saying, ‘*O di gologolo pu!*’ This means, ‘There goes an empty and weak male! He is no man!’ If you understood the *ikoro*, you would perform the warrior’s boast [*iba mba*] before it, informing the *ezie-ikoro* of your recent *igbu ishi* accomplishment. My father would be lying down in his house, listening to the beats of *ikoro*, and he would laugh and say the *ikoro* is insulting so and so person. When he went to the village-square, the *ikoro* hailed him ‘*O-mere-ndi--a-duyi-mweyi-okpa!*’ [‘the terror of the shoe-wearers’]; ‘*Ishi-e-bu-ite-ndi-una!*’ [‘the head that carries the pot of the braves’] — that is the leader of the *ite odo* society; ‘*O-mere-ndi-na-ata-mgba-mgba*’ [‘the terror of Ibibio people.’] Because he accomplished *ufiem*, when I danced with my age-mates during *igba-ota-omu*

¹¹²⁷ Nnenna Emeri, Group Interview with *Ikpirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu Village, Nov. 3, 2011.

¹¹²⁸ Ndukwe Otta and Elder Uduma Uka, Group Interview by author.

[retirement parade of the age-grade], I kept saying, ‘*O wu onye oke mu mi wo!* [‘I was born by a real man!’]¹¹²⁹

From the foregoing, it is clear that *ibiri ikoro* (to salute the *ikoro*) and *iba mba* (the warrior’s boast) were mundane practices in the 19th century; an embodied consciousness (a habitus), a celebration of *ufiem*, a denunciation of *ujo*, and a memorialization of heroic ancestors.

Both men and women were involved in the establishment and celebration of *ufiem* publicly. Women went to the village-square with their symbol of political authority, *ikpirikpe* drum, to legitimate successful warriors as *ufiem*.¹¹³⁰ As men beat their drums (*nkwa*), women clapped their *aja*, “saying, “*O gbuu ishi, O loale! O loale!*” [“He cut a head! He has returned!”]¹¹³¹ Secondly, having shed human blood, the warrior was considered defiled, and would undergo ritual purification before being re-admitted into society, and before entering his home. When a wife applied *nzu* (which symbolized ritual purity) on her husband, she enacted the first step in his ritual re-incorporation into the community.¹¹³² Following his wife’s *nzu* application, the warrior accompanied by members of his age-grade, his wife and other women, was led to his patrilineage compound’s *onu-agba*, where a goat was slaughtered in his honor and its blood sprinkled on his legs.¹¹³³ According to Njoku, the sacrificial animal was later on used to prepare a sacred meal which members of the warrior’s age-grade who had accomplished *ufiem*

¹¹²⁹ Ndukwe Otta and Elder Uduma Uka, Group Interview by author.

¹¹³⁰ *Ikpirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu Village, Group Interview.

¹¹³¹ Chief Kalu Awa, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Ufiele. Oct. 27, 2011.

¹¹³² Vasco U. Iro, *ezie-ogo* of Nkwebi Village, Members of the Men’s Court and *Nde-Ichin*, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Nkwebi Village. November 17, 2011; Nmia Nnaya Agbai, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Elu Village, August 18, 2011; *Ikpirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu Village, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Akanu Village. November 3, 2011; Mama Orié Emeh and Chief Mrs. Grace Ojieke, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Nde Uka Ike, Elu Village. August 18, 2011.

¹¹³³ Ibid.

consumed. After the sprinkling of blood, the new *ufiem* achiever was given a calabash of water, with which he washed his face, legs and hands. Having cleansed himself, he threw the calabash on the ground, breaking it into pieces. Then, he presented himself to the *kamalu* deity of his patrilineage, to which he offered a healthy cock. The priest of the deity ritually blessed him and welcomed him back with strokes of *nzu* on both feet. He was thereafter confined to seclusion for eight days, to complete the purification process.¹¹³⁴

There is an apparent contradiction in the celebration of *igbu ishi* (to cut a head) accomplishment and the simultaneous perception of a warrior as defiled, upon this accomplishment. Murder was a heinous crime in Ohafia society between 1850 and 1920, and as Mayne noted, “the punishment for this offense was death in the manner in which the offender had murdered the deceased. This was carried out by the nearest relative of the deceased.”¹¹³⁵ The fear of retaliation for murder was a major consideration for which headhunting within Ohafia was frowned upon.¹¹³⁶ The reincorporation ritual sought to reconcile this moral contradiction: it celebrated the sanctity of human life by having the warrior undergo successive purifications, thereby reminding warriors and the society that headhunts were not motivated by blood-lust, but by honor.¹¹³⁷ Thus, Njoku argues that the ritual “demonstrates the sacredness with which Ohafia people, even in those times of uncouth valour [*sic*], held human life.”¹¹³⁸

¹¹³⁴ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 81.

¹¹³⁵ Mayne, “Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934,” 32.

¹¹³⁶ Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amangwu. Aug. 15, 2011; Chief Oluka Mba, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Nde-Ibe Village. Nov. 3, 2011; Chief Ugbu Uduma, *ezie-ogo* of Nde-Amogu, oral interview by author. Nov.11, 2011.

¹¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹¹³⁸ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 82.

The *ikoro*, *onu-agba* and *kamalu* were central to social configurations of gendered spaces.¹¹³⁹ Women were not allowed to pass through the *onu-agba* except they were virgins.¹¹⁴⁰ Women’s lack of access to *onu agba* — a mound of stones hedged in by two trees, shaped notions of female political invisibility and inferiority *vis-a-vis* men.¹¹⁴¹ Whereas the *ikoro* was used to announce the death of *ufiem*, as well as their accomplishments, it was never sounded at the death of a woman,¹¹⁴² or to celebrate women’s performances of masculinity, until the 1920s, when women such as Unyang Olugu, who performed *ogaranya* masculinity, had the *ikoro* sounded in their honor.¹¹⁴³ The *ikoro* also distinguished *ufiem* from *ujo*. Chief Kalu Awa Kalu states, “The *ikoro* would be sounded for a man who had cut a head even if he was 30 years old. It was the signifier that you accomplished *ufiem*, so the *ikoro* would be sounded. However, if a male person had not cut head, he was not considered a man, and even if he died at a very old age, the *ikoro* was not sounded for him.”¹¹⁴⁴ Men’s appropriation of public spaces through *ufiem* performances and women’s transformation of public spaces into the most effective platforms for registering political dissent and asserting political authority over both men and

¹¹³⁹ *Dibia Kalu Uko*, oral interview by author; Elders of Nde Odo Compound, Akanu Village, Group Interview by author.

¹¹⁴⁰ Elders of Nde Odo Compound, Akanu Village, Group Interview by author.

¹¹⁴¹ See Chapter 3. In oral interviews with men, they describe this female lack of access to *onu-agba* and other similar spaces as evidence of female political inferiority, in retrospect.

¹¹⁴² Chief Kalu Awa Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Nde-Ukpai, Ufiele Village. October 27, 2011; Chief Ugbu Uduma, *ezie-ogo* of Nde-Amogu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Ihenta (Ibina) Village. November 11, 2011; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amangwu Village, Ohafia. August 15, 2011; Azuonye, “The Narrative War Songs,” 463.

¹¹⁴³ Hon. Tessy Uzoma Odum, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Ebem Ohafia Local Govt. Council Office. Sept. 5, 2011; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amangwu Village, Ohafia. August 15, 2011. The exceptional story of Unyang Olugu is provided in Chapter 5.

¹¹⁴⁴ Chief Kalu Awa Kalu, oral interview by author.

women (chapter 2), indicate that the public space was an arena of gendered contestation, and thus an apposite context for studying the gendered struggle for power.

***Iri-Aha: The Reproduction and Performance of “Tradition,”
Hegemony, and Identity, 1850-1920***

Nothing dramatizes Ohafia’s military propensity in the past [c. 1650-1900] as the
people’s war dance, *iri aha*.¹¹⁴⁵

Through dancing, men link their sense of personhood, masculinity, and their
somatic knowledge of themselves with a continuum of experience that extends
beyond individuals to encompass a corpus of ancestral knowledge.¹¹⁴⁶

A popular tradition traces *iri-aha* (war dance) origins to a woman from Ebem village, called Nne Ugoenyi (or Ucha Aruodo). According to this tradition, during the historical period of Ohafia migration and settlement in the Cross River region (1500-1650), Nne Ugoenyi lost two of her sons in battle, and consequently vowed to protect her third son, Egbelenwa, by forbidding his participation in any war. Throughout Egbelenwa’s childhood, Ugoenyi prevented him from playing with other boys, and often dressed him up as a girl. However, when he came of age, Egbelenwa followed his age-mates to battle without his mother’s awareness. He was successful and not only returned with a human head but with live captives. The entire community rejoiced at Egbelenwa’s successful return, bearing him high over their shoulders. Upon learning of her son’s return, Nne Ugoenyi declared that he must be celebrated. She dressed him up as a warrior, and killed many goats and chickens, providing an elaborate feast. She asked the men to produce a dance to commemorate the occasion and the war dance has been performed ever since.¹¹⁴⁷ The men subsequently assembled three human heads in a basket, representing heads they had cut

¹¹⁴⁵ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 54.

¹¹⁴⁶ McCall, *Dancing Histories*, 63.

¹¹⁴⁷ Chief Kalu Awa Kalu, oral interview by author; Mr. Davidson Kalu Oki, oral interview by author; Azuonye, “The Narrative War Songs,” 62-64; McCall, *Dancing Histories*, 4-6.

from Benin, Umunede, and Ajata Ibeku (the three successive points of Ohafia-Igbo settlement before their arrival in their present location). This basket of heads was known as *oyaya* and the war dancers carried it on their heads when they danced.¹¹⁴⁸

I witnessed and video-recorded several performances of *iri-aha* at funerals, *ezie-ogo* (male ruler) coronations, new yam festivals, and *igba-ota-omu* celebrations, in the course of fieldwork for this study, and also interviewed participants and elders on the origin and significance of the war dance. *Iri-aha*, the Ohafia war dance, also known as *ikpirikpe ogu* is a masculine genre of music and dance in which the lead dancer carries a headdress bearing human skulls (*oyaya*).¹¹⁴⁹ However, since the colonial period, the human skulls have been replaced with wooden sculptures dressed in *okpu agu* and surrounded by white rams' manes. The musical instruments comprised of *akwatankwa* (three pairs of bamboo slats, formally elephant ribs), one long hand drum (*nkwa*), and a "talking" antelope horn. As the music rent the air, and the *abu-aha* (war song) singer narrated heroic tales to accompany the music, the warrior-dancers made their entrance in quick compulsive feet movements, accompanied by convulsive jerking of the entire body, as well as *ofufu* — what McCall describes as "rippling undulations of the pectoral muscles causing the entire chest to pulsate continuously,"¹¹⁵⁰ and the dramatic embodiment of ancestral force and the masculinity associated with it.¹¹⁵¹

¹¹⁴⁸ Chief Uduma Nnochin Ogbuagu, oral interview by author; Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author; *Nde-Ichin*, Amuma, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Obu Nde-Torti, Amuma. November 26, 2011.

¹¹⁴⁹ Chief Kalu Awa Kalu, oral interview by author; Mr. Davidson Kalu Oki, oral interview by author; Azuonye, "The Narrative War Songs," 62-64; Chief Uduma Nnochin Ogbuagu, oral interview by author; Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author; *Nde-Ichin*, Amuma Village, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Obu Nde-Torti, Amuma. Nov. 26, 2011.

¹¹⁵⁰ McCall, *Dancing Histories*, 6

¹¹⁵¹ McCall, *Dancing Histories*, 59

In this highly charged dancing mode, the warrior-dancers slid over rough dusty grounds in wave-like patterned body movements and with the grace of ballet dancers; making sudden pauses, taking long calculated steps as a cat would, charging forward like tigers, and drawing back like defensive warriors.¹¹⁵² The dancers are visual representations of Ohafia warriors: they wear *okpu agu* on their head with eagle feathers, ram's mane on their arms, *onugwe* (loincloths, of blue or blue and red striped jute material) on their waists, leopard skins draping over their shoulders, *omu* (newly grown yellow-colored palm frond) clasped between their lips, and a sheathed machete hanging from their left hip. At certain points in the dance, the dancers re-enacted scenes of warriors drawing and swinging their machete, cutting the head of their enemy, and stowing it in the imaginary pouches hanging from their waists.

The war dance was both a religious ritual and a physical performance. The *oyaya* was a personal deity as well as a symbol of Ohafia military heroism, and its appearance was initiated with a sacrifice of a live cock, which one of the dancers constantly swung over the board of skulls, in sanctification, veneration, and deification. The *omu* signified ritual silence and stealth as well as a "declaration of war,"¹¹⁵³ but it also located the warrior as representing both the living and the dead, and providing a channel of communication between both worlds. In this sense, *ikpirikpe ugu* dancers are comparable to Igbo masquerade heroes, who are reincarnated ancestors distinguished by the following heroic qualities: bravery, honor, reverence, veneration, accomplishment, excellence, courage, wisdom, justice, and integrity.¹¹⁵⁴

¹¹⁵² Video Clip by author, "Ezeogo Coronation, Akanu 5.AVI." 2011.

¹¹⁵³ McCall, *Dancing Histories*, 69.

¹¹⁵⁴ Emeka Nwabueze, "The Masquerade as Hero in Igbo Traditional Society," *Frankfurter Afrikanistische Blatter* 1 (1989), 95-107.

Chukwuma Azuonye and John McCall have studied the complex composition and meanings of the Ohafia war songs (*abu aha*) and war dance (*iri aha*), respectively. Azuonye describes the war songs as the principal channel through which Ohafia cultural traditions and ideals of personal success and veneration of dead ancestors and brave warriors were transmitted to younger generations, inspiring them to emulate the example of their forebears. Through constant performance, *iri aha* and *abu aha* became religious and philosophical traditions, and the expression of a community's identity and history.¹¹⁵⁵ Similarly, McCall argues that in the war dance, the past and present become inter-permeable, experience is structured, and history is reconstituted.¹¹⁵⁶ Elsewhere, McCall argues that the war dance embodied the legacies of the Atlantic slave trade — that it was used to indigenize and domesticate the potentially destructive forces of change that now challenge Nigerian ways of life; it was reflective of Ohafia internalization of warfare, and an expression of manhood and Ohafia identity.¹¹⁵⁷

Iri-aha had been central to the social production of *ndi ikike* masculinity as the dominant *ufiem* in the society between 1850 and 1920. As a performance of history, *iri-aha* not only symbolizes the past, it equally embodies it in the present. Between 1850 and 1900, *iri-aha* was performed at funerals of *ufiem* to celebrate their earthly accomplishments.¹¹⁵⁸ Since the turn of

¹¹⁵⁵ Azuonye, "The Narrative War Songs," 50-52; Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 34.

¹¹⁵⁶ McCall, *Dancing Histories*, 65.

¹¹⁵⁷ McCall, "The Atlantic Slave Trade and the Ohafia Warrior Tradition," 75-76.

¹¹⁵⁸ Chief Oluka Mba, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Nde-Ibe Village. Nov. 3, 2011; *Ezie-ogo* Mecha Ukpai Akanu, the *Uduma Anaga* 2nd of Amangwu Village, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Aug. 18, 2011; Godwin Nwankwo Uko, *ezie-ogo* of Amankwu Village and his cabinet members, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Amankwu. Oct. 25, 2011; Vasco U. Iro, *ezie-ogo* of Nkwebi Village, Members of the Men's Court and *Nde-Ichin*, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Nkwebi. Nov. 17, 2011; Kalu Awa, *ezie-ogo* of Ibina, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Ihenta

the 20th century, when Ohafia men returned home with the insignia of modernity and wealth, evidence of success in academic endeavors or trade, such as school certificates, automobiles, British pounds, the erection of modern houses, or meritorious retirement from the civil service, *iri-aha* dancers performed for them.¹¹⁵⁹ On the one hand, such performances defined the acquired certificate, wealth, or modern house as *igbu ishi* (thus, establishing the achiever as *ufiem*).¹¹⁶⁰ On the other hand, the performances celebrated all past heroes. Hence, Azuonye calls *iri-aha* “a record of the heroic deeds of the ancestors.”¹¹⁶¹

However, *iri-aha* performances have evolved during the modern period. The war dance was performed at home during the Nigerian-Biafran war to drum up confidence and raise hopes;¹¹⁶² at universities such as the University of Nigeria Nsukka in the 1980s to launch history journals such as *Ikenga* and *Ohafia Review*;¹¹⁶³ at Lagos, Nigeria to welcome home national heroes such as Odumegwu Ojukwu; and the dance is showcased on televisions in Nigeria and in the United Kingdom as Igbo cultural heritage. Videos of the dance are you-tube sensations, and provide platforms for Ohafia diasporas to reconnect with each other.¹¹⁶⁴

This chapter argues that the performance of *iri-aha* constructed and entrenched the view of Ohafia as a land of noble warriors, and has encouraged the misrepresentation of Ohafia

Village. Dec. 12, 2011; Chief Ikenga Ibe, in Group Interview with *Nde Ichin* (ten elders of Amuma Ohafia, digital voice recording, *obu* Nde Torti, Amuma Village. November 26, 2011.

¹¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹¹⁶¹ Azuonye, “The Heroic Age,” 23.

¹¹⁶² Chief Kalu Awa Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Ufiele Village. October 27, 2011; Ndukwe Otta and Elder Uduma Uka, Group Interview by author; Chief Kevin Ukiro, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Asaga Village, Ohafia. August 10, 2010.

¹¹⁶³ Onwuka Njoku, oral conversation with author, University of Nigeria Nsukka, July 12, 2010.

¹¹⁶⁴ [; \[http://article.wn.com/view/2012/02/27/Ohafia_War_Dance_in_Honour_of_Odumegwu_Ojukwu/\]\(http://article.wn.com/view/2012/02/27/Ohafia_War_Dance_in_Honour_of_Odumegwu_Ojukwu/\)](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ExHWaf6rT9o&hl=en&fs=1)

women as subservient in mainstream literature, thereby clouding the earlier preeminence of female power in pre-colonial Ohafia society. The dance performance significantly structured the social perception of the society's gender system as one comprising of visible male warriors, and invisible female farmers. The militant conception of manhood and honor embodied in *ndi ikike* became ramified in the war dance.¹¹⁶⁵ Thus, *iri-aha* oversimplifies the complexity of Ohafia-Igbo masculinities by portraying warrior *ufiem* as the only form of masculinity in the society, in addition to projecting the socio-cultural hegemony of *ndi ikike* over all other categories of *ufiem*.

Indeed, as chapter 4 shows, yam farmers, hunters, *dibias*, wealthy merchants, fathers, husbands, and male political leaders all strove towards the accomplishment of *igbu ishi* physically and symbolically between 1850 and 1920, thereby reinforcing the hegemony of this *ufiem* even as they struggled against the discriminations which the lack of its attainment entailed. As this chapter shows, resistance to *ndi ikike* discriminations was defined by gaining inclusion within this *ufiem* category through headhunting. Moreover, *iri-aha* was a major factor in the equation of Ohafia ethnicity with headhunting at the turn of the 20th century. The vision of the war dancers bearing human skulls became the dominant social characterization of Ohafia-Igbo society by successive historical actors in the region, including missionaries, colonial officials, academic researchers, Igbo and non-Igbo neighbors, and Ohafia people themselves.

¹¹⁶⁵ Azuonye, "The Heroic Age," 11.

Conclusion

The performance of *ndi ikike* masculinity was a performance of power over others, defined as *ujo* (cowards). This chapter has theorized masculinity as a historically constructed gender identity among the Ohafia-Igbo through an examination of how *ndi ikike* emerged as a hegemonic form of *ufiem* in the society between 1850 and 1900. Ohafia-Igbo men who accomplished *ndi ikike* masculinity did so through hard work, and not because they were biologically male. Indeed, many Ohafia men did not accomplish *ndi ikike* masculinity, and were as such ridiculed and victimized by both men and women.

The chapter also analyzed the impact of *ndi ikike* masculinity performance on the society between 1890 and 1920, by highlighting the emergence of the cannibalism myth, the production of a geography of masculinity, and the masculinist definition of Ohafia “tradition” through the war dance. These social productions of *ndi ikike* masculinity performance in turn reinforced the ability of warrior *ufiem* to define the dominant stereotype of how real men ought to behave.

The chapter shows that women played significant roles in this historical constitution of *ndi ikike* social hegemony, and that some women performed *ndi ikike* masculinity themselves. In effect, the chapter examines gendering as a historical process. Rather than presume patriarchy, it historicizes the establishment of male power and privilege, and defines it as the exercise of power over other men (not women). It remains to show the implications of *ufiem* construction for female power and authority, as well as the historical responses of the so-called *ujo* to *ndi ikike* hegemony. These issues are addressed in chapters 4 and 5.

CHAPTER FOUR

INSTITUTIONS OF MASCULINITY, 1850-1900

The demise of Okonkwo, the militant *ufiem* in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, in juxtaposition with the survival and social mobility of the compassionate and reasonable Obierika, manifests the Igbo saying that "the coward stands and points to where a warrior used to live."¹¹⁶⁶ This proverb reflects the possibility that while the *ujo* had a miserable life, most of them outlived warriors. By analyzing other forms of *ufiem* (masculinity) besides warriors among the Ohafia-Igbo between 1850 and 1900, this chapter argues that the *ujo* (cowardly and weak), who appear in the Ohafia-Igbo context as disprivileged subalterns, had access to alternative and sometimes, subversive *ufiem* identities. Individuals who did not go to war and cut a head might have been able to negotiate adult masculinity by joining secret societies, perform *ogaranya* (wealth) masculinity through hunting and yam cultivation, or exhibited temporary dominant moral visions of identity and power through *dibia* (medicine men) practice. Through these institutions of *ufiem*, individuals sought to redefine the meaning of *igbu ishi*, beyond the actual cutting of a head in combat, and thus transformed the symbolic representation of masculinity from physical heads to material wealth. Hence, this chapter is a counter-narrative to the dominant vision of *ufiem* established by *ndi ikike* between 1850 and 1900.

Some *ufiem* institutions such as secret societies, which the Ohafia-Igbo adopted from their non-Igbo Cross River neighbors between the 18th and 19th centuries, evidence significant socio-political transformations that took place in this society before colonial rule. These institutions of masculinity, particularly the *okonko* secret society unearth the impact of macro-historical forces such as the Atlantic slave trade and legitimate commerce on the Ohafia-Igbo.

¹¹⁶⁶ Nwando Achebe, written correspondence with author, February 15, 2013.

However, while acknowledging the impact of institutions and structures on the historical processes of identity formation, the chapter shows as Glassman observed, that individuals were constantly negotiating a tangle web of ideological filaments, each filament originally spun in a different time and place.¹¹⁶⁷ Frederick Cooper has noted that often times, individuals “were remaking institutions and their meanings even as they used them.”¹¹⁶⁸ This chapter distinguishes the purely performative aspects of *ufiem* (masculinity) from the institutions within which they operated in society between 1850 and 1900, in order to capture individual agency in the transformative uses of these institutions. It examines indigenous interpretations and individual appropriations of *ufiem* institutional practices, to show that individuals were managers of meaning and identity in their inevitable social contexts.

Secret Societies as Institutions of Masculinities

With the exception of the *ekpe* masquerade institution, which is equivalent to the *mmanwu* (masquerade) in most parts of Igboland, the rest of Ohafia-Igbo secret societies were borrowed and adapted from non-Igbo Cross River peoples between the 18th and 19th centuries.¹¹⁶⁹ By the 1850s, these secret societies had become fundamental to the realization of *ufiem* (masculinity) in Ohafia-Igbo society.¹¹⁷⁰ Initiated into *obon*, the male child graduated

¹¹⁶⁷ Glassman, “The Bondsman’s New Clothes,” 288.

¹¹⁶⁸ Frederick Cooper, “Conflict and Connection: Rethinking Colonial African History,” *American Historical Review* 99 (1994), 1535, 1544.

¹¹⁶⁹ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 29, 68; Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 51; Chief Oluka Mba, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Nde-Ibe Village. Nov. 3, 2011; Mr. E.I. Udensi of Eziukwu Compound, Okagwe Village, oral interview by author, Ohafia Local Government Council Office, Ebem. September 5, 2011; Chief Kalu Awa Kalu, oral interview by author; Elders of Nde Odo Compound, Akanu Village, Group Interview with author.

¹¹⁷⁰ Secret societies, especially in West Africa are usually studied in a religious/spiritual context. This dissertation posits that it is circumscriptive to limit the analysis of these institutions

successively into *akang*, *ekpe* and *ekpe okonko* secret societies.¹¹⁷¹ The common features of these societies were their strict exclusion of women, and their open-secret nature. They were publicized as much as they were shrouded in secrecy. While some of these societies were gender-inclusive in the Cross-River societies from which they derived, they excluded women upon adaptation within Ohafia. This gendered adaptation shaped the degree of legitimacy and socio-political influence that secret societies gained locally. Moreover, they were also gendered in the sense that membership in these societies distinguished boys from adult men, and helped to define adult masculinity as a social category distinct from maleness. Lastly, as gendered practices, these secret societies constitute part of a dynamic system of gendered contestation of public spaces, which became cardinal to the construction of gendered power in the society.

to their religious or political functions. While conscious of the ritual elements of Ohafia-Igbo secret societies and their multivalent uses, this dissertation poses a larger question, namely: how did these institutions fit into the mental map of Ohafia-Igbo social configurations of space, power and inter-personal relations? For religious or other analyses of secret societies some of which are discussed here see Patrick U. Nwosu, "The Age of Cultural Hybridisation: A Case Study of *Okonko* Society vis-vis Christianity in Igboland," *Anthropologist* 12, 3 (2010), 161-165; Patrick U. Nwosu, "The Theory and Practice of Secrecy in *Okonko* and *Ogboni* Societies," www.academia.edu, 1-17; Patrick U. Nwosu, "The Role of *Okonko* Society in Preserving Igbo Environment," *Journal of Human Ecology* 31, 1 (2010), 59-64; Elechukwu N. Njaka, *Igbo Political Culture* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 127-129; Nwabueze, "The Masquerade as Hero in Igbo Traditional Society," 95-107; M. C. Jedrel, "Aspects of a West African Secret Society," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 32, 3 (Autumn, 1976), 234-245; A.O. Onyeneke, *The Dead among the Living: Masquerades in Igbo Society* (Nigeria: Holy Ghost Congregation, Province of Nigeria and Asele Institute, 1987); Chieka Ifemesia, *Traditional Humane Living Among the Igbo: An Historical Perspective* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1979), 76-80; Forde and Jones, *The Ibo and Ibibio-Speaking Peoples of South-Eastern Nigeria*, 52-55; Ottenberg, *Double Descent in an African Society*, 47-48, 147-148; Basden, *Among the Ibos*, 235-243.

¹¹⁷¹ Mayne, "Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934," 45.

Ohafia-Igbo female lack of access to these secret societies shaped the notion that women were socio-politically invisible and inferior to men in the pre-colonial period.¹¹⁷²

Figure 6: *Obon* Preparation, Okon Village, Ohafia, Photographed by Author.



¹¹⁷² Ndubueze L. Mbah, "Matriliney, Masculinity and Contested Gendered Definitions of Ethnic Identity and Power in Southeastern Nigeria, c. 1500-1900," in Jan Bender Shetler (ed.) *Gendering Ethnicity in African Women's Lives* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, Women in Africa and Diaspora series, Forthcoming). For this ideology, see Kalu, "Women in Social and Economic Change," 1, 14, 29, 36; Azuonye, "The Heroic Age of the Ohafia Igbo;" Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 24; Uduma O. Uduma, *The People of Ohafia Ezema* (Nigeria: Arinson Printers and Publishers, 2007), 97, 100-101; E.E. Nkata, "The Role of Women in Development," *Ikoru* 2, 2 (1976), 35-36; Ogbeyalu Nchonwa, "The Role of Women in Development," *Ohafia Review* (April 1981), 7-9; and A.I. Udensi, "Elevating the Ohafia Woman," *Ikoru* 3, 3 (December 1998), 40-44.

Figure 7: *Obon* Preparation, Asaga Village, Ohafia, Photographed by Author.



Since the period of settlement (c. 1600-1650), every year in the days leading up to the new yam festival (September), or in the event of the funeral ceremony of a deceased member of the *obon* secret society, it was customary for *obon* members to erect tightly-knitted palm-frond fences in the center of the village-square, from which they played moving and energetic music.¹¹⁷³ However, women and *ikpo* (uninitiated boys) were never allowed to see what was

¹¹⁷³ *Nde-Ichin*, Amuma Village, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Amuma Village. Nov. 26, 2011; Chief Oluka Mba, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Nde-Ibe Village. Nov. 3, 2011; Vasco U. Iro, *ezie-ogo* of Nkwebi, Members of the Men's Court and *Nde-Ichin*, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Nkwebi. Nov. 17, 2011.

actually happening inside the erected *obon* structures.¹¹⁷⁴ Whenever *obon* members performed, uninitiated boys were according to Njoku, “treated as girls” and “asked to go indoors with their sisters.”¹¹⁷⁵ This discrimination served to humiliate the *ikpo* and their parents who were construed as incapable of fulfilling their social obligations towards their sons by affording the requisite initiation yam-fee payment.¹¹⁷⁶ Since a man’s wealth and social standing was until the colonial period (c. 1900), considerably measured in the number of yams he possessed,¹¹⁷⁷ the inability of a man to provide the *obon* yam-fee payment for his son¹¹⁷⁸ undermined his status in the community. Such men were viewed as *ujo* (cowardly and weak).¹¹⁷⁹ The *ujo*’s lack of yam-wealth meant that he was lazy or had failed to accomplish *igbu ishi*, which precluded him from

¹¹⁷⁴ *Ezie-ogo* Mecha Ukpai Akanu, the *Uduma Anaga* 2nd of Amangwu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Aug. 18, 2011; Godwin Nwankwo Uko, *ezie-ogo* of Amankwu Village and his cabinet members, Group Interview by author, Amankwu. October 25, 2011.

¹¹⁷⁵ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 29.

¹¹⁷⁶ Chief Kalu Awa Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Ufiele Village. October 27, 2011; Chief Oluka Mba, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Nde-Ibe village, Ohafia. November 3, 2011; *Ezie-ogo* Mecha Ukpai Akanu, the *Uduma Anaga* 2nd of Amangwu Village, oral interview by author. Aug. 18, 2011. In the precolonial period, this entrance “yam-fee” comprised of a cock, yam tubers, and *okpogho* (iron rods/money).

¹¹⁷⁷ Emea O. Arua, “Yam Ceremonies and the Values of Ohafia Culture,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 51, 2 (1981), 695; Mecha Ukpai Akanu, *ezie-ogo* of Amangwu Village oral interview by author; Ogbuka Abaa, oral interview by author; Chief Torti Kalu, oral interview by author, Amuma, Ohafia. Nov. 26, 2011; Oriji, *Traditions of Igbo Origin*, 6.

¹¹⁷⁸ In Ohafia matrilineal context in the pre-colonial period, the responsibility of raising a male child was substantially assumed by the maternal uncles, who claimed rights in labor over the child irrespective of his biological father. The struggles between fathers and maternal uncles over ownership of sons, and sons’ changing visions of social responsibility towards fathers would shape the society’s transition into the modern period. See chapter 2 for detailed discussion.

¹¹⁷⁹ Chief Ikenga Ibe, in Group Interview with *Nde Ichin* (ten elders of) Amuma Ohafia, digital voice recording, Amuma Village. November 26, 2011; Chief Oluka Mba, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Nde-Ibe Village. November 3, 2011; *Ezie-ogo* Mecha Ukpai Akanu, the *Uduma Anaga* 2nd of Amangwu Village, oral interview by author. Aug. 18, 2011.

taking yam titles (such as *ike oba* and *igwa nnu*) and the masculinity status associated with proficiency in yam cultivation.¹¹⁸⁰

Obon comprised of boys ten years old and above. Initiation into *obon* was a puberty rite that distinguished boys from girls. While women were not allowed to come near *obon* meeting venues, boys below the age of ten were considered “partial members” because of their maleness and were introduced to the drumbeats and songs of the society’s dance.¹¹⁸¹ However, these “partial members” were also considered *ikpo* (immature), and as such were always asked to leave the venue before the actual dance commenced. Young men who were not initiated into *obon* were socially viewed as immature, and were denied knowledge of the society’s signs and symbols.¹¹⁸² Upon initiation at the age of ten, *obon* members were taught the secrets of the society, including the vigorous rhythmic music and dance. These were skills *sine qua non* to the performance of *ndi ikike* masculinity in Ohafia society. The energetic dance performance was required in the fulfillment of *iri nnunu* (bird-hunt dance) and later in adult life, *iri-aha* (war dance) and *ibiri-ikoro* (post-*igbu ishi* dance before the *ikoro* war drum).¹¹⁸³ Secrecy and sign

¹¹⁸⁰ The logic was that if a man was a *di ji* (great yam farmer), publicly hailed “*okogbua*” (farmer par excellence’) or “*oji ji akugbu mgbamgba*” (a farmer whose yam tendrils grew so profusely that it suffocated the *mgbamgba* tree), he would have possessed enough yams in his barn to feed his entire community, and afford the *obon* initiation fee. Individuals who did not achieve *igbu ishi* were discouraged from taking yam titles, for when they did, their *ufiem* age-mates conscripted their yams. Arua, “Yam Ceremonies and the Values of Ohafia Culture,” 701.

¹¹⁸¹ Chief Oluka Mba, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Nde-Ibe. Nov. 3, 2011; Ndukwe Otta and Uduma Uka, Group Interview by author, Ebem Village. Aug. 14, 2010; Chief Kalu Awa Kalu, oral interview by author, Ufiele. October 27, 2011.

¹¹⁸² Ibid.

¹¹⁸³ See chapter 3 for discussion of *iri nnunu*, *iri-aha* and *ibiri ikoro*.

language instilled camaraderie among potential warriors and was a prerequisite for successful conduct of guerilla warfare, headhunting and slave raids in the 18th and 19th centuries.¹¹⁸⁴

Lastly, *obon* provided a means of social control over young boys by older men — it involved obligatory practices that established paternal authority of fathers and maternal uncles over sons. Indeed, *obon* was a means through which the patrilineages (in fact, the male elders of the lineage) constructed their power and influence over sons, in their structural opposition to the matrilineage, which literally owned all persons in the community.¹¹⁸⁵ Thus, whenever an older member of *obon* died, his son was compulsorily initiated. Where his first son refused initiation, his second or third son, in that order was initiated. If he had no son, his patrilineage provided a substitute. The patrilineage also kept custody of *obon* instruments which were both recreational and ritual objects, and these were often housed in the patrilineage *obu* (meeting house). Therefore, *obon* was in every sense a gendering institution that distinguished males from females, un-gendered (uninitiated) boys from real boys (initiated), and boys from men. It enabled the successive transition from boyhood to adult masculinity, and it represented an effort by male society to masculinize the public space and render it exclusive to women if only seasonally.

Having successfully kept *obon* secrets from male non-members and all women including his mother,¹¹⁸⁶ a boy was at 15 years of age considered fit for initiation into the more eerie *akang*. Also owned by the patrilineage, *akang* was more secretive, its instruments were hidden

¹¹⁸⁴ Godwin Nwankwo Uko, *ezie-ogo* of Amankwu Village and his cabinet members, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Amankwu. Oct. 25, 2011; Chief Oluka Mba, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Nde-Ibe Village. Nov. 3, 2011; Ndukwe Otta and Uduma Uka, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Ebem Village. Aug. 14, 2010.

¹¹⁸⁵ For examination of structural lineage oppositions, see chapter 2; Also, Ottenberg, *Double Descent in an African Society*, 147-148, 192-202. For similar discussion of the patriarchal role of patrilineage male elders in sons' initiations, see Basden, *Among the Ibos*, 240-242.

¹¹⁸⁶ Obuba, *The History and Culture of Ohafia*, 27; Idika Aso, chief priest of *obu nkwa* Asaga, oral interview by author, tape and video recording, Asaga Village, Ohafia. August 12, 2010.

from public view in various *obu* meeting houses, the initiation fee was higher, and the process more elaborate. Initiation into *akang* has been equated with military training,¹¹⁸⁷ because it tested the candidate's courage, endurance and discipline. At night, candidates were taken through tortuous routes into the forest at the outskirts of the village. They were frightened and taunted by members, the goal being to disqualify the weak. The stronger candidates were forced to crawl on their bellies from the forest back to the patrilineage *obu* house where they were initiated into *akang*. The age-range of *akang* members and the emphasis on physical training, suggest that the society was a military training institution for the active age grades including the informal *uke* (18-25 years), and *uke ji ogo* (26-35 years) who provided the fighting forces of Ohafia military until the late 19th century. Thus, besides its roles in recreation and socialization, fostering the unity of the patrilineage (in view of the dispersal of the matrilineage), and in securing senior men's paternal authority over younger men, *akang* was an institution that prepared adult males for the performance of *igbu ishi* (to 'cut a head').

Another secret society that shaped Ohafia-Igbo gender constructs between 1850 and 1900, was the masquerade society. The *ekpe*¹¹⁸⁸ was the masquerade society of the Ohafia-Igbo. It was a pan-Igbo institution known as *mmanwu* in other parts of Igboland. However, unlike the *mmanwu*, which policed the community, and sometimes possessed the judicial power of life and death in the pre-colonial period,¹¹⁸⁹ the Ohafia *ekpe* was mostly a male dance society.¹¹⁹⁰

¹¹⁸⁷ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 30.

¹¹⁸⁸ It is important to distinguish between *ekpe* as the Ohafia general term for masked spirit, *ekpe* as the name of an Ohafia male dance society, which also owns a masquerade, and *ekpe* as the alias for *okonko* in the Cross River region. In this study, *ekpe* is used to refer to a masquerade, thus, *ekpe* (masquerade,) *ekpe akpan* (the masquerade of *akpan* institution), *ekpe okonko* (the *okonko* masquerade), and to the *ekpe* male dance society that owns a masquerade.

¹¹⁸⁹ Ifemesia, *Traditional Humane Living Among the Igbo*, 77-79; Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria*, 767; Nwabueze, "The Masquerade as Hero in Igbo Traditional Society," 95-

Unlike in other parts of Igboland where each village had a host of masquerades, in Ohafia, each village *ekpe* society had just one masked spirit.¹¹⁹¹ The existence of gendered socio-political institutions such as the all-male *akpan* and the all-female *ikpirikpe*, possibly undermined the political functionality of the *ekpe* institution in precolonial Ohafia.

Also, Ohafia-Igbo proximity to the non-Igbo Cross River peoples enabled them to substitute some of their pan-Igbo institutions with those from their non-Igbo neighbors. Thus, they adopted the *okonko* secret society between the 1820s and 1880s, in the course of trading voyages to the coastal communities of the Cross River,¹¹⁹² and upon its introduction into

107; Onyeneke, *The Dead among the Living*, p.78; Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors and Kings*, 213. Masquerades played a part in amusement, lamentation, and government of the living. Their emergence during festivals affirmed the well being of the community, and their appearance at funerals reassured all about ancestral continuity and social solidarity.

¹¹⁹⁰ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 30. An exception was the *ekpe akpan* discussed in chapter 3.

¹¹⁹¹ *Dibia* Uduma Uchendu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Akanu Village. Nov. 2, 2011; Chief Kalu Ukariwe, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Akanu. Nov. 6, 2011; Chief Oluka Mba, oral interview with author, digital voice recording, Nde-Ibe Village. Nov. 3, 2011; Chief Torti Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amuma. Nov. 26, 2011; Anaso Awalekwa, *ezie-ogo* of Ndea-Nku Village and Members of the Men's Court, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording. Nov. 17, 2011; Chief Uduma Nnochin Ogbuagu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amuke. Nov. 24, 2011.

¹¹⁹² According to Chief Oluka Mba of Nde-Ibe village, Ohafia, *ekpe okonko* was introduced to Ohafia by Ohafia traders, who constantly visited or sojourned in Calabar. While he opined that *obon* had been indigenized before his grand-father was born, Chief Oluka remembers that Mr. Kalu Esu (c. 1865-1940) the son of an itinerant *dibia* from Ukwa, in Akwa-Ibom State, introduced *ekpe okonko* to Asaga village, from where it spread to Nde-Ibe. Chief Oluka Mba, oral interview by author, *ocit*. It is plausible that the *okonko* masked spirit itself (*ekpe okonko*) was a more recent introduction. However, European observers had noted the practice of the *okonko* (the society, also known as *ekpe*) institution in Ohafia and surrounding regions by the late 19th century. See Leonard, "Notes of a Journey to Bende," 196, and Ifemesia, *Traditional Humane Living Among the Igbo*, 92-94. Also, as indicated in the introduction, the period 1820s-1880s witnessed the decline of the Atlantic slave trade, and the rise of domestic slavery and long distance trade in legitimate commodities. During this period, the Cross River was one of the major trade routes that linked European and African traders on the Biafran coast with the hinterland dwellers of southeastern Nigeria. During this period when long-distance trade was dominated by men, Ohafia-Igbo people supplied palm produce and slaves to the coastal ports of Itu, Calabar and Opobo. Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo People*, 48-49. Also, see chapter 1.

Ohafia, the *okonko* masquerade (*ekpe okonko*) eclipsed the pan-Igbo *ekpe* masquerade in social significance.¹¹⁹³ This was possibly because the former was important to the regulation of long distance trade (see below). However, both the pan-Igbo *ekpe* and *ekpe okonko* masquerades were displayed during communal festivals between 1850 and 1900, and played significant roles in the gendering of identities (initiation into masquerade societies) during this period.

Chief Oluwa Iro Kalu and Davidson Kalu Oki stated that it was only adult men that were admitted into Ohafia masquerade societies before colonial rule.¹¹⁹⁴ Indeed, an inalienable feature of masquerades wherever they existed in Igbo society was their masculinization. Thus, Onyeneke writes, “The social definition of man therefore is the ability to control a masquerade.”¹¹⁹⁵ Achebe defines the masked spirit as the institutional practice, which limitations prevented female masculinities from realizing full manhood.¹¹⁹⁶ Women were not allowed to be members, were forbidden to claim knowledge of what was behind the mask, and were required to dread the masquerade and run away from it.¹¹⁹⁷ Chieka Ifemesia shows that membership of the masquerade society served to distinguish boys from adult men, and ensured that the young obeyed the authority of the male elders. He writes,

By initiation, a youth demonstrated his right to associate with ‘spirits’ because he had visited their frightful world, gone through their gruelling mill, committed his life to their precarious keeping; and still emerged victorious. In a word, he had begun to acquire the proper arts and qualities of manhood. He was now, in the best sense of the expression, an *okolobia*, a young man . . . Indeed, it was only by

¹¹⁹³ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 30.

¹¹⁹⁴ Mr. Davidson Kalu Oki, oral interview by author, Okon Village. August 5, 2010; Chief Oluwa Iro Kalu, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording. Ebem Village. August 3, 2010.

¹¹⁹⁵ Onyeneke, *The Dead among the Living*, 78.

¹¹⁹⁶ Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors and Kings*, 213-215.

¹¹⁹⁷ Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria*, 767; Basden, *Among the Ibos*, 235; Ibewuiké, *African Women and Religious Change*, 43.

membership of the society that a male was regarded as responsible in the village.¹¹⁹⁸

The last secret society that was relevant to gender construction among the Ohafia-Igbo between 1850 and 1900, was the *okonko* institution (not its masquerade) itself. This institution played a major role in Ohafia conceptions of *ogaranya* (wealth) masculinity before colonial rule. *Okonko* was a widespread institutional practice that diffused all over the Cross River area, bestowing privileges and immunities upon members and granting them safe conduct throughout the Igbo, Ibibio, Efik, Efut, Ododop, and Ekoi territories.¹¹⁹⁹ Some accounts of its diffusion mechanisms suggest that its first point of domestication east of the Cross River (the Igbo territory) was the boundary town of Arochukwu, from where it spread through borrowing and formal insitutionalization by special Aro groups to other parts of Igboland.¹²⁰⁰

However, Ohafia informants insisted that it was introduced to their society by Ohafia traders, who came in close contact with non-Igbo Cross River peoples.¹²⁰¹ By gaining membership into *okonko*, an individual could travel more freely in the region of southeastern Nigeria, which was rendered unsafe by the internal slave trade, kidnapping and robbery between

¹¹⁹⁸ Ifemesia, *Traditional Humane Living Among the Igbo*, 77-79.

¹¹⁹⁹ Ifemesia, *Traditional Humane Living Among the Igbo*, 94.

¹²⁰⁰ Nwosu, "The Age of Cultural Hybridisation," 163.

¹²⁰¹ *Dibia* Uduma Uchendu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Akanu Village. Nov. 2, 2011; Chief Kalu Ukariwe, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Akanu Village. Nov. 6, 2011; Chief Oluka Mba, oral interview with author, digital voice recording, Nde-Ibe Village. Nov. 3, 2011; Chief Torti Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amuma. Nov. 26, 2011; Anaso Awalekwa, *ezie-ogo* of Ndea-Nku Village and Members of the Men's Court, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording. Nov. 17, 2011; Chief Uduma Nnochin Ogbuagu, oral interview by author, Amuke, Ohafia. Nov. 24, 2011.

1850 and 1900.¹²⁰² Since *okonko* had its own courts in most communities in the region, it protected its members by inflicting harsh punishments against people who threatened, harmed, or stole from them. It also brought an individual into membership of a widespread trade monopoly enjoyed by *okonko* members.¹²⁰³ Lastly, membership in *okonko* provided creditors with a powerful legal institution which forced their debtors to make payments.¹²⁰⁴ Upon the introduction of the Native Court system under British colonial rule in 1907, *okonko* was at long last (after futile efforts by British colonial officers to outlaw it)¹²⁰⁵ legalized, and members' petitions were often favorably ruled upon by Native Court members (Ohafia warrant chiefs), who were themselves, *okonko* men.¹²⁰⁶

As an institution of masculinity, *okonko* had hierarchies of titles. Through the wearing of special insignia, members distinguished ranked grades and determined the allocation of authority.¹²⁰⁷ By bringing the wealthiest group of men together, and introducing them to the

¹²⁰² Jones, *Annual Reports of Bende Division*, 4-5. The high incidence of robbery which rendered the major trade routes of the region unsafe was one of the reasons that Ohafia warriors used to justify their headhunting expeditions between 1850 and 1900; and later, the British colonial government would use the same reason as justification for the "Collective Punishment Ordinance" of 1915, and for conducting various pacification expeditions against Opobo, Bende, Afikpo, and Awka districts. See CO583/49: "Nigeria Original Correspondence, October-November, 1916." The major markets visited by Ohafia traders between 1850 and 1900, include Ikwun and Biakpan (Afikpo Division), Calabar and Itu (Cross River Division), Arochukwu and Uzuakoli (Bende Division). See Mayne, "Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934," 50.

¹²⁰³ McCall, *Dancing Histories*, 81.

¹²⁰⁴ Mayne, "Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934," 45; NAE, RIV PROF. 8/8/433: "Okonko Club: Activity of."

¹²⁰⁵ NAE, RIV PROF. 8/8/433: "Okonko Club: Activity of."

¹²⁰⁶ Mayne, "Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934," 46; Chief Torti Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amuma, Ohafia. Nov. 26, 2011; Chief Uduma Nnochin Ogbuagu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amuke, Ohafia. Nov. 24, 2011; Chief Kalu Ukariwe, oral interview by author, Akanu Village. Nov. 6, 2011.

¹²⁰⁷ Offiong, *Continuity and Change in Some Traditional Societies of Nigeria*, 92

complex secret sign-language of *nsibidi*,¹²⁰⁸ *okonko* prevented rivalry among powerful men and ensured the good order and stability of a community. However, the institution stressed the differences between the poor and rich, slave and freeman, young and old.¹²⁰⁹ Patrick Nwosu defines *okonko* as an authentic aspect of African religion that afforded protection to the elite through religious rites, mystery and secrecy, eliciting fear among free society, maintaining law and order, and creating economic inequalities between individuals and groups.¹²¹⁰

Okonko was a means through which men, who became *ogaranya* exploited slave, poor and immigrant populations. Since cases could be brought to *okonko* only through or by a member, non-members were never assured justice.¹²¹¹ However, slaves who amassed wealth were able to gain entry into *okonko*. The society admitted slaves to its lower and middle grades up to the mid-19th century; and to all its grades from the 1850s.¹²¹² Nonetheless, it vested more power in the wealthiest male members of the society; a category that excluded most slaves and

¹²⁰⁸ *Nsibidi* was a repertoire of bodily, gestural and written signs, which enabled peoples from different language groups such as Igbo, Efik, Eko and Qua to communicate intelligibly and establish their status as *okonko* members, which guaranteed them safe passage.

¹²⁰⁹ Ifemesia, *Traditional Humane Living Among the Igbo*, 93; Dike, *Trade and Politics*, 155-159; G.I. Jones, "The Political Organization of Old Calabar" in Daryll Forde (ed.), *Efik Traders of Old Calabar* (London: International African Institute, 1956), 148-157; Nair, *Politics and Society*, 48-55; Latham, *Old Calabar 1600-1891*, 34-41, 75-79, 91-96; Chieka Ifemesia, *Southern Nigeria in the Nineteenth Century: An Introductory Analysis* (New York: NOK Publishers, 1978), 43-46; Nwosu, "The Age of Cultural Hybridisation," 161-165; Nwosu, "The Theory and Practice of Secrecy," 1-17; Nwosu, "The Role of Okonko Society," 59-64.

¹²¹⁰ Nwosu, "The Theory and Practice of Secrecy," 2, 6, 14.

¹²¹¹ Chief Kalu Ukariwe, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Akanu Village. Nov. 6, 2011; Chief Oluka Mba, oral interview with author, digital voice recording, Nde-Ibe Village. Nov. 3, 2011; Chief Torti Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amuma. Nov. 26, 2011; Anaso Awalekwa, *ezie-ogo* of Ndea-Nku Village and Members of the Men's Court, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording. Nov. 17, 2011; Chief Uduma Nnochin Ogbuagu, oral interview by author; Chief Oluwa Iro Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Ebem Village. August 3, 2010.

¹²¹² Ifemesia, *Traditional Humane Living Among the Igbo*, 93.

the poor. Second, since a man could not gain membership in the society before his father, poor fathers were assured higher social status in the society than their wealthy sons who customarily purchased membership for their fathers before they themselves could gain entry.¹²¹³ Thus, while wealth was important, age and seniority also shaped the attainment of *okonko* masculinity.

However, what is most significant about the domestication of *okonko* in Ohafia is that in Calabar from whence it originated, *okonko* was used to regulate both trade and political life, was the supreme judicial authority, and was gender-inclusive.¹²¹⁴ In some other Igbo societies such as Amuzo-Ihe, *okonko* membership was also gender-inclusive in the 18th and 19th centuries.¹²¹⁵ In Ohafia however, it excluded women and lacked any substantial political prerogative, beyond protecting the interests of its own members. Thus, Njoku observed that initiation into *okonko* in Ohafia was financially and materially cost-prohibitive, and so not many men could become members. The few that did, enjoyed high social status as *ogaranya*, yet they lacked political leverage.¹²¹⁶ *Okonko* members in Ohafia could set up toll-stations on major trade routes,¹²¹⁷

¹²¹³ Ibewuiké, “*African Women and Religious Change*,” 45.

¹²¹⁴ Ifemesia, *Traditional Humane Living Among the Igbo*, 93; NAE, RIV PROF. 8/8/433: “Okonko Club: Activity of.” *Okonko* members announced community labor and penalized those who failed to turnout by seizing their livestock, especially goats and chickens, and killing and sharing these. They heard and decided upon cases brought by members including debt, larceny, committing adultery with a member’s wife, and murder. They rigidly defended the rules governing membership such as giving false evidence in a case or observing *okonko* entertainment without being initiated and exerted punishment against offenders, members and non-members. Members could be penalized with fee payment of a goat, dismissed, and then re-admitted with payment of a cow. Punishment for slaves who were non-members was death.

¹²¹⁵ NAE, RIV PROF. 8/8/433: “Okonko Club: Activity of.” Both men and women were admitted upon payment of £20. Among several Ngwa communities, women were not admitted into *okonko*, just like the Ohafia case. The reasons for the differing circumstances of gendered adaptation in these other societies have not been made clear.

¹²¹⁶ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 30. According C.J. Mayne, the cost of membership in Ohafia’s *okonko* society was two bottles of gin and a goat. Mayne, “Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934,” 45. Among the Ngwa where *okonko* fulfilled legitimate political functions

collect expensive fees from prospective members before initiation, and hold meetings and entertainments, but they lacked legislative or judicial powers over the rest of the community.¹²¹⁸

Simon Ottenberg also noted in the case of Afikpo, that the holders of the senior secret society titles were powerful only to the extent of “reinforcing the authority structure of the village,” and performing ritual and prestige functions.¹²¹⁹

The performance of *ogaranya* masculinity through *okonko* membership was a dramatization of high social status for wealthy Ohafia men between 1850 and 1900, but *okonko* members lacked formal political power over women. This may be because, while the exclusion of women from *okonko* membership provided men with yet another institution for *ufiem* performance, it equally reinforced the autonomy of female political institutions, which limited *okonko* members from realizing legitimate political power in the society, unlike in Calabar. Indeed, the political roles that *okonko* served in Calabar were fulfilled in Ohafia by two gendered institutions: the male *akpan* and the female *ikpirikpe ndi inyom*.¹²²⁰ Hence, with regard to Ohafia, Nwosu’s assertion that *okonko* represents Igbo identity and that without it a community

however, membership fees ranged from a cow and £10 to several goats and 1600 manillas. See NAE, RIV PROF. 8/8/433: “Okonko Club: Activity of.”

¹²¹⁷ Leonard, “Notes of a Journey to Bende,” 197.

¹²¹⁸ Mayne, “Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934,” 45-46; Chief Kalu Ukariwe, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Akanu Village. Nov. 6, 2011; Chief Oluka Mba, oral interview with author, digital voice recording, Nde-Ibe Village. Nov. 3, 2011; Chief Torti Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amuma. Nov. 26, 2011; Anaso Awalekwa, *ezie-ogo* of Ndea-Nku Village and Members of the Men’s Court, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Ndea-Nku Village. Nov. 17, 2011; Chief Uduma Nnochin Ogbuagu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amuke, Ohafia. Nov. 24, 2011; Chief Oluo Iro Kalu, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording. Ebem Village. August 3, 2010.

¹²¹⁹ Ottenberg, *Double Descent in an African Society*, 147.

¹²²⁰ See chapter 3 for detailed discussion of these institutions.

is without a name,¹²²¹ does not hold true. In the first two decades of the 20th century, many more Ohafia men, who amassed wealth as mission-school-trained entrepreneurs (carpenters, masons, and tailors) were able to afford membership of *okonko*.¹²²² By that time, *okonko* had gained legitimacy under British colonial rule, and the political interests of its members were protected by the colonial Native Court.¹²²³

Theorizing Gender Construction through the Lens of Ohafia Secret Societies

One important feature of Ohafia secret societies was their role in delineating and enabling successive transitions from boyhood to adult masculinity. According to Obuba Igu, “They were the societies which enable the traditional Ohafia man recognize that a male child had attained a certain level of maturity and was capable of being left with some responsibility.”¹²²⁴ This responsibility for a male child included being able to keep a secret, perform *igba nnunu* (to kill a hummingbird using bow and arrow),¹²²⁵ live with other boys independent of his mother, go on dangerous hunting expeditions, cultivate yams, establish a yam barn, marry a wife, and go to war and cut a head as the ultimate proof of *ufiem* (masculinity), between 1850 and 1900.

¹²²¹ Nwosu, “The Age of Cultural Hybridisation,” 162

¹²²² Elder Ukpai Ndukwe, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording, Asaga Village, Ohafia, April 13, 2012; Elder Agwu Kalu, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording. May 18, 2012; Mr. I. Ukoha, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording, Ebem Village. Oct. 27, 2011.

¹²²³ NAE, RIV PROF. 8/8/433: “Okonko Club: Activity of;” Mayne, “Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934,” 46; Chief Torti Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amuma Village. Nov. 26, 2011; Chief Uduma Nnochin Ogbuagu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amuke Village. Nov. 24, 2011; Chief Kalu Ukariwe, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Akanu Village. Nov. 6, 2011.

¹²²⁴ Obuba Igu, *The Advent of Catholicism in Umuahia Diocese: The Ohafia Experience* (Nigeria: Felly Prints, 2005), p.50

¹²²⁵ See chapter 3.

Second, through dance performances, secret societies functioned to socially legitimate the attainment of various forms of *ufiem*. Thus, at the death of a warrior or upon the accomplishment of *ufiem* such as *igwa nnu* (the prestigious yam title) or *igbu ishi* (“to cut a head”), *obon*, *akang*, and *ekpe* dance performances were enacted in respect and celebration of these accomplishments. Through these *ufiem*-legitimizing performances, the indigenous *logos* of masculinity was mapped on both the individual involved and the participating spectator public.

For instance, in an oral interview with Akanu elders, they recall the anthropologist John McCall as “*onye ocha ku nwunye ya bia*” [‘The white-man that came with his wife’], and that in acknowledgment of his bravery in conducting ethnographic work in the rough and tumble field, his impressive effort to understand a culture different from his own, and his symbolization of modernity and success (in Ohafia view, Western education and financial wealth), Akanu people deemed it fit to bestow *ufiem* upon him. Thus, John Idika said: “*a gbaara ya ekpe, kpuo ya akwa, kpuo ya okpu agu*” [“The *ekpe* masquerade dance was performed for him, the *jooji* cloth was wrapped around him, and the leopard cap of bravery was put on his head”].¹²²⁶

Third, as institutional practices, Ohafia-Igbo secret societies highlight the social nature of gender formation as well as the fact that the fulfillment of obligatory practices within these institutions required individual performances of distinction. On the one hand, these secret societies made social discriminations between initiates and non-initiates, which were gendered. On the other hand, through the accumulation of wealth, even slaves were able to gain membership in the most exclusive secret society in the region. Thus, Ohafia secret societies evidence the conjunctive view of *ufiem* attainment as both social configurations and a product of individuals’ quest for social mobility.

¹²²⁶ Nna John O. Idika, in Group Interview with Elders of Nde Odo Compound, Akanu Village.

Men of Spirits: An Overview of Ohafia *Dibia* Institution, 1850-1900

Spirit-mediumship in pre-colonial southeastern Nigeria was a complex phenomenon, manifest in priests and priestesses, prophets and prophetesses, reincarnates (*ogbanje*) and diviners (*dibia*).¹²²⁷ This chapter examines the most prominent spirit-mediumship in Ohafia — the *dibia*, a much-understudied aspect of Igbo religious and political life.¹²²⁸ In pre-colonial Ohafia, the *dibia* institution was exclusively male, and controlled by a fastidious guild (*aja abali*) composed of the most practiced men.¹²²⁹ Through theatrical public performances of mastery over the spiritual world, itinerant healing practices in the unsafe 19th century environment of the Bight of Biafra, and by fulfilling the role of community protectors, Ohafia men gendered the *dibia* institution, such that the few women who became *dibia* were socially defined as men.¹²³⁰

¹²²⁷ Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors and Kings*, 53-107; Chinwe Achebe, *The World of the Ogbanje* (Enugu, Nigeria: Fourth Dimension, 1986); Jude C. Aguwa, *The Agwu Deity in Igbo Religion: A Study of the Patron Spirit of Divination and Medicine in an African Society* (Enugu, Nigeria: Fourth Dimension, 1995), 39-45; Basden, *Among the Ibos*, 223-254; Francis Arinze, *Sacrifice in Igbo Religion* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Ibadan University Press, 1970).

¹²²⁸ The need to understand the *dibia* institution is heightened by misunderstandings and mis-framing generated by scholars of African identity formation within the continent and across the Atlantic, who equate African priesthood with homosexuality. Thus, the “cross-dressing” Brazilian *ades* (Candomble priests) are seen as “passive homosexuals” - *bichas* that constitute evidence of historic Yoruba homosexuality (Sango priests); and Southern Africa priests, diviners, and spirit-possessed prophets (*isangoma*, *kimbanda*, *esengei*, *mwaami*, *eshenga*, *ikihindu*, *ikimaze*, and *inkosi ygbatfazi*) are defined as homosexuals and hermaphrodites. See Lorand J. Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion: Tradition, Transnationalism, and Matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Candomble* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005), 206-212; Stephen O. Murray and Will Roscoe, eds., *Boy-Wives and Female Husbands: Studies in African Homosexualities* (New York: Palgrave, 1998). While this study is sensitive to how the masculinization of indigenous African institutions was central to the constitution of a heteronormative culture, and does not suggest that homosexuality is “un-African,” it is critical of unfounded assumptions of homosexuality within African institutional practices.

¹²²⁹ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 44.

¹²³⁰ *Dibia* Uduma Uchendu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Akanu, Ohafia. Nov. 2, 2011; *Dibia* Chikezie Emeri, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Akanu, Ohafia. Nov. 2, 2011; *Dibia* Uche Dimgba, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Nde

Between 1850 and 1900, every Ohafia village possessed a number of *dibia* but some villages such as Okon, Akanu, and Amaekpu were distinguished for the preponderance of *dibia* in their communities.¹²³¹ *Dibia* combined knowledge of herbal medicine and divination. First, they offered healing and immunization through the curative powers of roots and herbs gathered from the bush. In this sense, the *dibia* was both doctor and pharmacist. His medicine-making was known as *igwo ogwu*. This meant the preparation of medicines with natural substances and the invocation of a good or bad spirit to empower it.

Second, *dibia* were possessed by the medicine deity, *agwu*, which enabled them to function as intermediaries between humans and spirits, and interpret the will of the gods.¹²³² Hence, I define them as spirit mediums, who were gifted with four eyes: two for the human world, and two for the spiritual world.¹²³³ They were able to harness psychic forces through such extrasensory powers as clairvoyance and clairaudience,¹²³⁴ which enabled them to deal with physiological, mental, and spiritual health challenges.

The ailments treated by Ohafia *dibia* in the pre-colonial period, included stomach aches, headaches and common fevers, malaria, food poisoning and snake bites, infertility, impotence,

Idika Okoro Compound, Okon Village, Sept. 22, 2011; *Dibia* Kalu Uko, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon Village, Sept. 14, 2011; *Dibia* Azueke Kalu of Nde Idika Okoro, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon Village. September 22, 2011.

¹²³¹ Leonard, "Notes of a Journey to Bende," 197; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 44. In Okon, the male members of three out of the twenty-seven compounds were, according to Njoku, "*dibia* to a man." These compounds are Nde Ekea, Nde Ebin and Nde Idika Okoro. The Intelligence Report on Ohafia is silent about *dibia* practices.

¹²³² Aguwa, *The Agwu Deity in Igbo Religion*, 244; Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors and Kings*, 77; *Dibia* Agwu Arua, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon. August 4, 2010; *Dibia* Akirika, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon, Sept. 26, 2011; *Dibia* Kalu Ekea, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon, Sept. 24, 2011.

¹²³³ *Dibia* Uche Dimgba, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon, Sept. 22, 2011; *Dibia* Azueke Kalu, oral interview by author, Okon. Sept. 22, 2011.

¹²³⁴ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 44.

and sexually-transmitted diseases.¹²³⁵ They were experts in setting fractured bones and extracting infected blood and bullets.¹²³⁶ However, it was in the treatment of mental disorders that a *dibia*'s degree of expertise was defined. It was his ability to successfully combine herbal medicines and elaborate healing rituals to restore a psychopathic patient to good health that distinguished a successful *dibia* and assured him a place in the highest grades of his profession.¹²³⁷

As Karen Flint and Julie Livingstone observed in the Zulu and Botswana cases respectively, African medicine included practices deployed to heal the human body as well as the body politic.¹²³⁸ Ohafia *dibias* were not mobilized for the well being of a king or for the fishing out and execution of witches, neither were they used to reinforce chiefly authority, as were the cases in Zulu and Botswana. However, Ohafia *dibia* played key roles in the defense and protection of their communities, which contributed to the masculinization of the profession in the precolonial period.¹²³⁹ During the wars of the 1880s and 1890s for instance, Ohafia *dibia*

¹²³⁵ Chief Udensi Ekea, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Ndi Ekea Compound, Okon Village, Ohafia. August 4, 2010; *Dibia* Agwu Arua, oral interview by author, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon Village, Ohafia. August 4, 2010.

¹²³⁶ *Dibia* Akirika of Nde Edem Compound, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon, Sept. 26, 2011; *Dibia* Kalu Ekea of Nde Ekea Compound, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon, Sept. 24, 2011.

¹²³⁷ *Dibia* Agwu Arua, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon. August 4, 2010; *Dibia* Akirika, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon, Sept. 26, 2011; *Dibia* Kalu Ekea, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon, Sept. 24, 2011.

¹²³⁸ Karen E. Flint, *Healing Traditions: African Medicine, Cultural Exchange, and Competition in South Africa, 1820-1948* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2008), 37-89; Livingstone, *Debility and the Moral Imagination in Botswana*, 64-106.

¹²³⁹ *Dibia* Azueke Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon Village. Sept. 22, 2011; Elders of Nde Nbila compound, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon Aku Village. September 15, 2011; Elders of Nde Oka compound, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon Aku Village. September 14 and 15, 2011.

provisioned warriors with protective medicine (*ogwu*) to ensure their safe return.¹²⁴⁰ They also prepared medicines to protect their community from external attacks and social calamities (such as epidemics and famine).¹²⁴¹ *Dibia* Agwu Arua recalled that his grandfather and many other *dibias* participated in various *dibia* competitions in the Cross River region between 1860 and 1900, and their victories reinforced the notion that Ohafia was a society to be feared, which helped to keep away thieves and kidnappers.¹²⁴²

During community festivals usually held in the rainy months of August and September, *dibia* were contracted to prepare medicines to hold off rains; and during the dry seasons, they invoked rains to enable the community to plant their crops.¹²⁴³ British colonial officer, Major Arthur Glyn Leonard noted in his 1896 journal that he secured the intercession of a *dibia* in Akanu village, Ohafia “with a few heads of tobacco, [to] propitiate the elements and save [him

¹²⁴⁰ Chief Kalu Awa Kalu, oral interview by author; Mr. Davidson Kalu Oki, oral interview by author, Okon. Aug. 5, 2010; Uma, “Ohafia and Her Neighbors,” 45-48.

¹²⁴¹ Ibid. According to Chief Agwu Ojo, *dibia* practice began in Okon village during the period of settlement (1500-1650), when the original inhabitants, the Biom, who were experiencing social calamities invited *Dibia* Idika Okoro Okwara to deliver their community from uncontrollable death tolls. *Dibia* Okwara was able to save the community, and was therefore invited to live among them. His descendants maintained *dibia* practice in Okon, and served as community protectors. See Chief Agwu Ojo Agwu, oral interview by author, video-recording. Okon Aku Village, Ohafia. Sept. 22, 2011. This was also corroborated by *Dibia* Uche Dimgba, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Nde Idika Okoro Compound, Okon Village, Sept. 22, 2011. Also, various Ohafia *dibia* interviewed in the course of this project insisted that they were the reason why Ohafia was the only community in the region that did not fall to the Nigerian forces during the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970). *Dibia* from Okon village said that they covered their community with water, such that when Nigerian soldiers looked over the territory, all they saw was deep blue sea. While this magic cannot be confirmed as historical truth, this account speaks to how *dibia* saw themselves.

¹²⁴² *Dibia* Agwu Arua, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon Village, Ohafia. August 4, 2010. Also, Chief Udensi Ekea, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Ndi Ekea Compound, Okon Village, Ohafia. August 4, 2010. These men also stated that Ohafia *dibia* often visited various communities in the region (upon invitation), where they established oracles and protective medicines for individuals and entire communities.

¹²⁴³ *Dibia* Kalu Uko, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon. Sept. 14, 2011.

and his party from] a good drenching, [by causing] the threatening storm [to] roll away.”¹²⁴⁴

Ohafia *dibia* also fulfilled judicial functions. When two parties agreed to take an oath to establish the truth, they submitted themselves to a *dibia* for mediation; and when a litigant lodged a petition against another party at the shrine of a deity, the *dibia* sent a summons to the defendant.¹²⁴⁵ Beyond punishments and rewards, *dibia* justice sought to establish reconciliation through *igbandu* (covenant), and punishment only resulted from false testimony before the deity.¹²⁴⁶ Thus, when families rent by discord sought the restoration of social cohesion and mutual trust, they resorted to the *dibia*, as opposed to the punitive *ikpirikpe* or *akpan*.¹²⁴⁷

Before the advent of Christianity at the turn of the 20th century, Ohafia *dibia* proved most useful to their society, by maintaining a cosmological balance between the worlds of the living and the dead. The outbreak of malignant diseases such as smallpox and leprosy (as was the case in 1890 [*mgbe ogarelu mbu*]) signaled the displeasure of the gods and ancestors.¹²⁴⁸ As Uchendu observed, uncontrollable calamities such as continuous droughts, long periods of famine, epidemic diseases, sorcery and other antisocial forces destabilized the “moving equilibrium” between the worlds of the living and the world of the dead.¹²⁴⁹ Through *ichu aja*

¹²⁴⁴ Leonard, “Notes of a Journey to Bende,” 197.

¹²⁴⁵ *Dibia* Azueke Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon. Sept. 22, 2011; *Dibia* Uche Dimgba, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon. Sept. 22, 2011. Exploiting both faith and fears of the parties, the *dibia* established innocence and guilt.

¹²⁴⁶ Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria*, 16-20.

¹²⁴⁷ Elders of Nde Nbila compound, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon Village. Sept. 15, 2011.

¹²⁴⁸ Chief Okoro Ekeanya Ibe, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon Village, Sept. 26, 2011; *Dibia* Kalu Uko, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon Village, Sept. 14, 2011; Chief Kalu Imaga, *ezie ezi* of Nde Edem Compound, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon, Sept. 26, 2011.

¹²⁴⁹ Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria*, 12.

(sacrifice and appeasement of spirits), the *dibia* drove out evil spirits and invoked the blessings of good spirits on the living,¹²⁵⁰ restored the cosmic balance, and forged an acceptable narrative that enabled the living to make sense of such tragedies.¹²⁵¹

In the pre-colonial period,¹²⁵² Ohafia *dibias* were celebrated annually in appreciation of their roles as community protectors. During this celebration known as *ibia abia nsi* (thanksgiving to *dibia*), relatives of *dibia* from various sections of the community and other Ohafia villages visited *dibia* in their homes, presenting them with gifts and good wishes.¹²⁵³ During this celebration, new *dibia* initiates also visited senior *dibia* in their community, in order to pay homage. Dressed in white and red cloths, their bodies decorated with chalk (*nzu*), and their hair covered with beaded dread-lock braids, the young *initiates* went from one *dibia* compound to another in order of lineage seniority, to play and sing eulogies to senior *dibia* in their homes.¹²⁵⁴

The Ohafia *dibia* institution was a mechanism of socio-political change between 1850 and 1900, and it also proved itself capable of adapting to the changes brought by British colonialism and Christianity between 1900 and 1920. Unlike in South Africa where the colonial government was actively illegitimizing some African healers (*isangomas*) and licensing others

¹²⁵⁰ Basden, *Among the Ibos*, 224.

¹²⁵¹ *Dibia* Azueke Kalu of Nde Idika Okoro, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon Aku Village, Ohafia. September 22, 2011; Elders of Nde Oka compound, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon Aku Village. September 14 and 15, 2011.

¹²⁵² This ritual continues today, and was video-recorded by the author.

¹²⁵³ Chief Imaga Torti, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon, Sept. 26, 2011; *Dibia* Azueke Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon. Sept. 22, 2011; *Dibia* Uche Dimgba, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon. Sept. 22, 2011; Chief Obasi Kama, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon. Sept. 26, 2011.

¹²⁵⁴ Ibid.

(*inyangas*),¹²⁵⁵ the *dibia* were at the turn of the 20th century, entirely dismissed by both the British colonial government and European missionaries, who viewed the entire indigenous religious corpus as barbaric, satanic, and fraudulent practices.¹²⁵⁶ The dramatic success of Christian missionary medicine, especially as exemplified by Rev. Robert Collins of the Church of Scotland Mission from 1911 to 1932, posed a grave challenge to Ohafia *dibia*. Nowhere was this more dramatized than in the smallpox (*ogharelu*) and *ibi* (massive elephantiasis of the scrotum) epidemics of the 1890s and 1919, which killed thousands of Ohafia people.¹²⁵⁷ According to Rev. Collins, most of the afflicted Christian converts recovered from the smallpox because they were “sensible,” while the “heathens” who “followed the advice of witch doctors” died in their numbers.¹²⁵⁸

One of Okon, Ohafia highly respected *dibia*, Agwu Arua, who contracted the pox as a child and was quarantined in 1919, recalls that the smallpox epidemic began in the mission-run schools, and that the *dibia* community had no known cures for it.¹²⁵⁹ This consciousness of the limits of indigenous medicine practices shaped the eclectic nature of his own curative measures. *Dibia* Agwu Arua grew up fusing traditional medicine with western scientific knowledge. He also sent his son to the university to study western medicine, so that he would be able to combine

¹²⁵⁵ Flint, *Healing Traditions*, 95-115.

¹²⁵⁶ “Collins, Robert; Missionary in Calabar, Letters of: Letter from Collins Robert to Mr. Livingstone, dated 10th November 1920, *West Africa* (National Library of Scotland, MS.7793), 41-42; Basden, *Among the Ibos*, 244

¹²⁵⁷ “Collins, Robert; Missionary in Calabar, Letters of: Letter from Collins Robert to Mr. Ashcroft, dated 7th May 1920, *West Africa* (National Library of Scotland, MS.7793); *Dibia* Agwu Arua, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon, Ohafia. Aug. 4, 2010; Elizabeth Isichei, *Igbo Worlds: An Anthology of Oral Histories and Historical Descriptions* (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1978), 231-232

¹²⁵⁸ “Letter from Collins Robert to Mr. Livingstone, dated 10th November 1920, 41.

¹²⁵⁹ *Dibia* Agwu Arua, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon. Aug. 4, 2010.

both systems in his own practice. In order to expand his social legitimacy as a stellar medicare practitioner who observed the best safety principles, *Dibia* Agwu Arua obtained a government certificate, which recognized him as a reliable traditional medicare giver in 1938. This government certification expanded *Dibia* Agwu Arua's Christian clientele, and enabled him to continue the traditional ritual and spiritual elements of his craft, which gave his work authenticity. Similarly, several Ohafia *dibia* incorporate Christian iconography and concepts in the presentation and translation of their shrines. Thus, *Dibia* Kalu Azueke described his *ifummonwu* (cult objects) deities as his "Bible."¹²⁶⁰

***Dibia* Hierarchies and Conceptions of *Dibia* Masculinity, 1850-1900**

Among the Ohafia-Igbo, initiation into *dibia* was known as *iwa anya*¹²⁶¹ (to have one's eyes opened). The *iwa anya* concept denotes enlightenment — the epiphanous moment when a boy-child initiate gained revelation of his abilities as a spirit-medium; as a *dibia*. Uchendu writes that through this priestly ordination, the initiate acquired the power of vision (to forecast the future).¹²⁶² The path to *iwa-anya* was a long and tortuous one marked by assiduous training and transmission of skill and knowledge from father to son;¹²⁶³ and social mobility from *iwa-anya*

¹²⁶⁰ *Dibia* Azueke Kalu of Nde Idika Okoro, oral interview by author.

¹²⁶¹ *Dibia* Agwu Arua, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon Village. August 4, 2010; Chief Udensi Ekea, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon Village. Aug. 4, 2010; Davidson Kalu Oki, oral interview by author; *Dibia* Kalu Uko, oral interview by author; *Dibia* Uche Dimgba, oral interview by author; Chief Obasi Kama, oral interview by author.

¹²⁶² Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria*, 81.

¹²⁶³ The *dibia* profession was mostly circumscribed to certain families and compounds in each village, often reflecting the historical order of settlement. Within such families or compounds, a father or an adult male *dibia*, fulfilled the role of mentor towards an apprentice/son. There were however cases where individuals whose forebears were not *dibia* sought apprenticeship under a

to the highest grade of *dibia* (*aja abali* status) was even more challenging. The initiate first performed *ije ogwu/isiara ogwu* (divination and healing trip) to a distant community, where he must distinguish himself by healing difficult ailments, and returning with new knowledge, wealth, and honor.¹²⁶⁴

Second, the new *dibia* must perform a spectacular display of bravado in various dangerous *dibia* competitions at home and abroad.¹²⁶⁵ Third, the initiate must successfully mentor a new *dibia*. Upon these accomplishments, the newly-minted *dibia* (*onye tunle ogwu*) was promoted to the status of *atule abali* (second-grade *dibia*). After years of distinguished practice, the *atule abali* was then promoted to the stature of *aja abali* (first-grade *dibia*), which earned him the right to sit in the ruling council of the *dibia* guild. Thus, among the Ohafia-Igbo, the following successive grades of *dibia* existed: *ndi lela lela* (apprentices and recruits), *nde tunle ogwu* (newly-minted *dibia*), *nde atule abali* (second-grade *dibia*), and *ndi aja abali* (first-grade *dibia*). Each grade enjoyed a commensurate social status, which was also a reflection of a *dibia*'s wealth in knowledge and material things.

The hierarchies within the *dibia* institution were based on the longevity of a *dibia*'s practice, level of spiritual power, and wealth. *Ndi aja abali*, who were the top echelon of the

well-known and respected *dibia*. In such a situation, the relationship between the *dibia* and his apprentice was expressed as that of *nna na nwa* — “father/master” and “son/servant.”

¹²⁶⁴ Agwu Kalu, L.N. Chika, and N.O. Nkata, “The Advent of Christianity in Ohafia: An Unpublished Work by Isiana Parish of the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria,” (2005), 1; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 112; Elder Ukpai Onum Ndukwe, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording, Asaga Village, Ohafia, April 13, 2012.

¹²⁶⁵ *Dibia* Uduma Uchendu of Nde Odo Patrilineage, Akanu Village, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Akanu Village, Ohafia. Nov. 2, 2011; *Dibia* Uche Dimgba, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Nde Idika Okoro Compound, Okon Village, Sept. 22, 2011; *Dibia* Kalu Uko, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon Village, Sept. 14, 2011; *Dibia* Azueke Kalu of Nde Idika Okoro, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon Aku Village, Ohafia. September 22, 2011.

institution, and who regulated admission and social mobility within the institution were the most respected cadre of *dibia* masculinities.¹²⁶⁶ The entrance to their homes was distinguished with *omu* (yellow palm leaf) decorations, which symbolized their sacred persona and the sanctity of their ritual spaces.¹²⁶⁷ Among the Ohafia-Igbo, every *dibia* worked from home, and a room within his abode was designated as the shrine. Visitors were obliged to take off their shoes before entering the shrine.

However, for those *dibia* who attained *aja abali* status, their entire compound was considered a sanctuary, and visitors observed a number of taboos within it.¹²⁶⁸ The variations in the scale of social configurations of ritual sanctity distinguished senior *dibia* from their juniors, and influenced the financial cost of their consultation, as well as the socio-political make-up of their clientele. The *aja abali dibia* was socially perceived as a living deity, and the leader of the *aja abali* was a *primus inter pares*.¹²⁶⁹ He kept the guild's *okpogho elu* (medicine pot), said to hold "the secrets" of *dibia* medicine, and was the most powerful medicine that insured the security of the community.¹²⁷⁰

¹²⁶⁶ Chief Obasi Kama, oral interview by author, Okon Village, Sept. 26, 2011; *Dibia* Akirika, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon, Sept. 26, 2011; *Dibia* Kalu Ekea of Nde Ekea Compound, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon, Sept. 24, 2011.

¹²⁶⁷ Mr. Davidson Kalu Oki, oral interview by author; *Dibia* Kalu Uko, oral interview by author; Ndukwe Otta and Elder Uduma Uka, oral conversation with author, Asaga Village. September 16, 2011; Chief Okoro Ekeanya Ibe, oral interview by author, Okon, Sept. 26, 2011.

¹²⁶⁸ The following categories of people were forbidden from the compounds of *aja abali dibia*: women who were experiencing menstruation; twin mothers, twins, an adulterer and a thief. Chief Imagha Oka of Nde Edem Compound, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon Village, Sept. 26, 2011; *Dibia* Uduma Uchendu of Nde Odo Patrilineage, Akanu Village, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Akanu Village, Ohafia. Nov. 2, 2011.

¹²⁶⁹ Chief Agwu Ojo Agwu, oral interview by author, Okon Village, Ohafia. Sept. 22, 2011.

¹²⁷⁰ The *okpogho-elu* was described as "*ihe anyi ji biri*" ("that which sustained the life of our community"), and every year, it received a grand sacrifice comprising a goat, a ram, a cock, and

The Initiation Process and the Performance of *Dibia* Masculinity

A male child born into a *dibia* family was groomed for initiation into the *dibia* cult from birth. Every year until the age of ten, he underwent a ritual and medical immunization called *itu umurima akwukwo* or *ipi ogwu* (herbal infusion). *Dibia* Agwu Arua stated:

When my mother gave birth to me [1921], we still had a tradition where every year in the month of September, my mother would provide a cock and my father would bring *ogirisi* leaves. These were mashed and squeezed; and the juices were mixed with the blood of the cock, fresh palm wine, and other medicines, and were dropped into my mouth and eyes . . . This was done every year until I reached the age of ten, when I did what we call *itu aba* or *itu anya*, at which point I was introduced to education on medicine (*ogwu*), and knowledge of different herbs and leaves in the forest.

I documented the *ipi ogwu* ritual in Okon village, Ohafia in 2011. Within the *obu* (meeting house) of Nde Idika Okoro patrilineage, which was girded by *omu* (yellow palm frond) leaves to delineate a sacred space, the male elders of the patrilineage prepared a herbal infusion in a big earthen-ware bowl called *ite nja* (this too was decorated with *omu*). The medicine thus prepared was an elixir: it was given to male and female children to immunize them against physical, mental and spiritual ailments; adult men drank it to reinforce their strengths, and increase or restore their virility; pregnant women drank it for the protection of the babies in their wombs and for safe delivery of their children; and maidens drank it to ensure that they would get pregnant.¹²⁷¹ But the ceremony focused on the children of the patrilineage, who were officially presented before the various patrilineage shrines (*kamalu*, *fijoku*, and *okpogho*), where they were blessed and immunized. In turns, the children were laid on a mat before the shrines. The infused

a dog. Chief Obasi Kama of Nde Edem Compound, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon Village, Sept. 26, 2011; *Dibia* Akirika of Nde Edem Compound, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon, Sept. 26, 2011.

¹²⁷¹ *Dibia* Kalu Eke of Nde Idika Okoro, oral interview by author, video-recording. Okon Aku Village, Ohafia. September 22, 2011; *Dibia* Kakarere (Oyibo) oral interview by author, video-recording. Okon Aku Village, Ohafia. Sept. 22, 2011.

leaves were squeezed into their mouths and eyes. Then a cock was killed and the blood spilled on the *okpogho* and into the child's mouth.

The timing of *ipi ogwu* is significant. It came on the eve of *umerowgu* (powerful medicine display competition among *dibia*), which was the high-point of the biannual *dibia* festival. Thus immunized, children were safe from harmful medicine discharged by any *dibia* in the community.¹²⁷² The ritual incorporation of every member of the lineage in *ipi ogwu* served to reinforce the unity of the patrilineage: mothers provided the requisite cocks for the ritual on behalf of each of their children, fathers prepared the medicine and conducted the herbal infusion, and all the livestock were later cooked and served to all members of the lineage.¹²⁷³ According to *Dibia* Ndukwe Uche Dimgba, the ritual made every child in the lineage the collective responsibility of all adult members, such that when a child was sick or in some difficulty in the absence of his or her parents, the entire compound assumed responsibility for his or her welfare.¹²⁷⁴ *Ipi ogwu* also served to fortify (*itahi ike*) the prospective *dibia* child and enable him to withstand the sight of spirits upon initiation.¹²⁷⁵

¹²⁷² *Dibia* Uche Dimgba, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Nde Idika Okoro Compound, Okon Village, Sept. 22, 2011; *Dibia* Kalu Uko, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon Village, Sept. 14, 2011; *Dibia* Azueke Kalu of Nde Idika Okoro, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon Aku Village, Ohafia. September 22, 2011.

¹²⁷³ *Dibia* Kalu Eke of Nde Idika Okoro, oral interview by author, video-recording. Okon Aku Village, Ohafia. September 22, 2011; *Dibia* Kakarere (Oyibo) oral interview by author, video-recording. Okon Aku Village, Ohafia. Sept. 22, 2011.

¹²⁷⁴ *Dibia* Uche Dimgba, oral interview by author, Okon. Sept. 22, 2011.

¹²⁷⁵ Chief Obasi Kama of Nde Edem Compound, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon Village, Sept. 26, 2011; *Dibia* Akirika of Nde Edem Compound, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon, Sept. 26, 2011; *Dibia* Kalu Ekea of Nde Ekea Compound, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon, Sept. 24, 2011; *Dibia* Kalu Eke of Nde Idika Okoro, oral interview by author, video-recording. Okon Aku Village, Ohafia. September 22, 2011; *Dibia* Kakarere (Oyibo) oral interview by author, video-recording. Okon Aku Village, Ohafia. Sept. 22, 2011.

At the age of ten, the boy underwent *itu aba/itu anya* ceremony, which qualified him for intensive education in the *dibia* craft. As an apprentice, he carried the *dibia*'s medicine bag, and began to identify and master the names, shapes, texture, smell and location of various medicinal plants in the forest, and their curative or poisonous functions.¹²⁷⁶ Through observation and experiment, he learned the various combinations of medicinal plants and the mechanisms of their processing, as well as the symptoms and treatment of various ailments. He escorted the *dibia* on house-calls and on his annual performances of *ije ogwu* (divination and healing trip).¹²⁷⁷

Between 1850 and 1900, Ohafia *dibia* frequently went to the riverine Cross River territories in performance of *ije ogwu*, often returning with new knowledge and pharmacological recipes.¹²⁷⁸ Until the first decade of the 20th century, such journeys were perilous because of slaving activities. Therefore, the ability of a *dibia* to embark on the journey and return successfully established his reputation as a powerful diviner. In his autobiography, Nna Kalu Ezelu Uwoma, who was kidnapped as a boy and enslaved in Opobo in the 1870s accounts for the presence of several Ohafia *dibia* in the region of Opobo and the Niger Delta, whose identities as *dibia* rendered them immune to harassment or threat of enslavement, and who facilitated his safe return from Opobo to Ohafia. It was also in view of the social aura and immunity associated with

¹²⁷⁶ *Dibia* Kalu Uko, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon Village, Sept. 14, 2011; *Dibia* Azueke Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon Aku Village, Ohafia. September 22, 2011. Also, see Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors and Kings*, 79.

¹²⁷⁷ *Dibia* Agwu Arua, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon. Aug. 4, 2010.

¹²⁷⁸ Mr. Davidson Kalu Oki, oral interview by author; *Dibia* Kalu Uko, oral interview by author; Ndukwe Otta and Elder Uduma Uka, oral conversation with author, Asaga Village, Ohafia. September 16, 2011; *Dibia* Azueke Kalu of Nde Idika Okoro, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon Aku Village, Ohafia. September 22, 2011; Elders of Nde Nbila compound, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon Aku Village. September 15, 2011; Elders of Nde Oka compound, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon Aku Village. September 14 and 15, 2011.

dibia that Nna Kalu Ezelu himself became a *dibia* upon his return to Ohafia in 1901, as an insurance against re-enslavement.¹²⁷⁹

Uchendu noted that because of the Igbo respect for *dibia*, a fact reflected in the many immunities they enjoyed in the pre-colonial period, members of the *dibia* fraternity were among the most traveled Igbo in pre-British days. They exploited their immunities to the full, and were able to establish a Pan-Igbo solidarity, even in the days when travel in southeastern Nigeria was considered dangerous.¹²⁸⁰ The social security of *dibia*-hood also played a significant role in the remarkable success of Aro diviners-*cum*-slavers who toured various communities in southeastern Nigeria in the 18th and 19th centuries, performing purification rituals and facilitating the production of slaves.¹²⁸¹

However, *ije ogwu* was still considered dangerous, because *dibia* had to trek to their destinations through forests and footpaths, sometimes over a period of five weeks,¹²⁸² and there was no guarantee that they would be successful in curing ailments, and returning with new wealth in knowledge and material things. Thus, *ije ogwu* was seen as a performance of *dibia* bravado.¹²⁸³ We may recall that *ufiem* accomplishment was premised on the idea that young Ohafia men ventured out beyond their borders into hostile territories, confronted unspeakable

¹²⁷⁹ Kalu, "An Ibo Autobiography," 158-159.

¹²⁸⁰ Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria*, 81.

¹²⁸¹ Nwokeji, *The Slave Trade and Culture*, xiii, 7.

¹²⁸² *Dibia* Agwu Arua, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon Village. Aug. 4, 2010; *Dibia* Akirika, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon, Sept. 26, 2011; *Dibia* Kalu Ekea, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon, Sept. 24, 2011.

¹²⁸³ *Dibia* Azueke Kalu, oral interview by author, Okon Village. September 22, 2011; *Dibia* Kalu Uko, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon Village, Sept. 14, 2011.

dangers and returned home with the object of their mission.¹²⁸⁴ To establish oneself as a *dibia* socially, a new *dibia* initiate embarked on *ije ogwu*, in the same fashion that Ohafia warriors went to war and cut a head in order to be recognized as real men. Indeed, the process of man making for *dibia* began at initiation (*iwa anya*), which entailed an elaborate ritual of death and resurrection. As *Dibia Kalu Uko* put it, “the initiate descended into the land of the spirits, fought incredible battles for his survival, and re-emerged in the world of the living, bursting with confidence and pride.”¹²⁸⁵

I was privileged to document this initiation ritual during the Okon *dibia* festival in 2011. It was performed as part of *umerogwu* — the *dibia* magic competition held during the special new yam festival for *dibia* persons and their families known as *aja abali* (named after the highest category of *dibia*).¹²⁸⁶ The atmosphere for the *aja abali* celebration was charged with excitement. The voices of energetic young *dibia* initiates singing various hymns and war songs rose above the din of hundreds of fans and spectators, chanting and gyrating to the music issuing from various metal gong ensembles. The spectator crowd formed a big circle around the *dibia* performers, where a grave had been dug uAfter several thrilling performances, the prospective boy initiate made his entrance with elaborate music and dancing accompanied by his parents, members of his patrilineage and matrilineage, friends and age mates. His *dibia* mentor blessed him, as did his biological father. Then, he was ceremoniously wrapped in a mat, which was borne shoulder high by four young men, who carried him into the patrilineage *obu* meeting

¹²⁸⁴ See chapter 4.

¹²⁸⁵ *Dibia Kalu Uko*, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon Village, Sept. 14, 2011. This was also confirmed by *Dibia Kalu Ekea* of Nde Ekea Compound, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon, Sept. 24, 2011; *Dibia Chikezie Emeri*, Akanu Village, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Akanu Village, Ohafia. Nov. 2, 2011.

¹²⁸⁶ Video recording by author, clips DSCN 1672, DSCN 1673, and DSCN 1674, Okon Village. September 26, 2011.

house. The mat bearers soon re-emerged, and lowered the wrapped mat into the grave, which was quickly covered up.

After about thirty minutes, the boy who had been thus buried, was seen making his way through the crowd, to the center of the theatre, amidst cheers and adulations. He was adorned in colorful *dibia* regalia. His hair had been transformed into thick, long dreadlocks; his upper body was decorated with the sacred *nzu* (white powder); a white cloth tie adorned his neck; he wore around his waist, a flowing red *jooji* wrapper cloth bedecked with cowries; and his eyes were circled with white *nzu*, signifying his new ability to see both the world of the living and the world of the dead. His father, seated beside the initiate's mother, showered praises and honorifics upon his *dibia* son, declaring his manhood, bravery, and invincibility. Walking over to his father, the new *dibia* placed his hands on his father's in homage and blessing. Then, walking over to my camera he boasted:

I was the one who was just buried here in front of Nde Idika Okoro compound. I descended into the land of the spirits, fought many valiant battles, and came back from the dead! I am the one they call Native Doctor Agu Uche. There is no manner of illness whatever its provenance, which I cannot cure! There is no disease that I do not heal! I am the last bus stop! Long live Okon village! Long live Ndi Idika Okoro patrilineage! What you just witnessed is what we call *umerogwu* (magic)!

Dibia Agu Uche came over to the camera of his own volition, without invitation, because he saw it as an opportunity to publicly announce his new social status. His new distinctive clothing, the stream of people congratulating him on his successful return back from the dead, and the elaborate feasting and dancing among his relatives and friends that would soon follow, all served to publicize his realization of *dibia* masculinity. Recalling his *iwa anya* several decades ago, *Dibia* Agwu Arua, now in his early 90s experienced a burst of energy: he stood up

and performed the graceful dance of his faded youth, declaring that *iwa anya* “is the biggest ceremony in life for us who are *dibia*.”¹²⁸⁷

Figure 8: Site of *iwa anyalitu ogwu* ritual and *umerogwu* burial and resurrection performance, Okon Village, Ohafia, Photographed by Author.



Iwa anya was also an expensive venture. Apart from the provision of rare and expensive ritual articles such as tortoise shells and tiger claws,¹²⁸⁸ it required the presentation of enough food (yams, rice, goats, chickens) and wine to entertain the entire community for a day, and the

¹²⁸⁷ *Dibia* Agwu Arua, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon. Aug. 4, 2010.

¹²⁸⁸ *Dibia* Uduma Uchendu of Nde Odo Patrilineage, Akanu Village, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Akanu Village, Ohafia. Nov. 2, 2011; *Dibia* Kalu Uko, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon, Sept. 14, 2011; *Dibia* Eke Uma of Nde Edem Compound, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon, Sept. 26, 2011.

dibia guild for eight days.¹²⁸⁹ Uchendu writes, “*dibia* recruited [their] members through ordination. This was usually a very costly ritual ceremony lasting for eight days, during which time the initiate was secluded and ‘doctored’ with medicine. He paid a high initiation fee, which was shared . . . among members.”¹²⁹⁰ The performance of *ije ogwu* divination trip, following initiation might also have served to enable new *dibia* recoup their initiation expenses.

Indeed, wealth was at the center of *dibia* masculinity. Njoku writes, “because of the wide demand for their services, traditional medical practitioners, especially the renowned ones, were among the wealthiest members of Ohafia society [in the pre-colonial period].”¹²⁹¹ Wealthy men and women such as Madam Chief Otuwe Agwu,¹²⁹² who were not from *dibia* families were able to purchase membership within the *dibia* institution.¹²⁹³ Whereas in northern Igboland, the *dibia* institution was open to both men and women, in Ohafia, women who became *dibia* were socially perceived as men, and such women were also distinguished for their wealth.¹²⁹⁴

Nna Kalu, mentioned above, was the wealthiest individual in Ohafia-Igbo society at the turn of the 20th century. He began his career as a *dibia* in 1901, and ended as a warrant-chief and leading elder of the Presbyterian Church.¹²⁹⁵ According to Chief Udensi Ekea, his grand-father, *Dibia* Udensi Ekea, was a very successful *dibia*, who served as a leader of *nde aja abali* — the

¹²⁸⁹ *Dibia* Azueke Kalu of Nde Idika Okoro, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon Aku Village, Ohafia. September 22, 2011; Mr. Davidson Kalu Oki, oral interview by author, Okon Village, Ohafia. August 5, 2010.

¹²⁹⁰ Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria*, 81.

¹²⁹¹ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 45.

¹²⁹² See chapter 5 for case study.

¹²⁹³ Kalu, “An Ibo Autobiography,” 158.

¹²⁹⁴ John McCall, “Portrait of a Brave Woman,” *American Anthropologist* 98, 127-136.

¹²⁹⁵ See chapter 5.

highest *dibia* grade, and built the first modern story house with zinc roofing in Ohafia, in performance of *ogaranya* (wealth) masculinity in the late 1890s.¹²⁹⁶ The Ekea patrilineage is a *dibia* family, and Udensi Ekea (born around 1850) was initiated into *dibia* as a boy. He gained popularity as an efficient *dibia* not only in Ohafia but also in neighboring communities such as Arochukwu and Abam in the 1870s.¹²⁹⁷

Dibia Ekea's uncles, jealous of his prosperity at such an early age, sold him into slavery to Opobo around 1875, where he became a domestic servant to a wealthy local chief, Agbomina Agbo.¹²⁹⁸ However, *Dibia* Ekea soon enabled one of Chief Agbo's wives, who was battling with infertility to become pregnant and have a son. In appreciation, his master made him head of his household and his chief physician, and he distinguished himself in curing Chief Agbo's wives, children, and numerous slaves.¹²⁹⁹ Chief Agbo further granted *Dibia* Ekea freedom and adopted him as a son. When at a point *Dibia* Ekea decided to return home to Ohafia in order to acquire more *dibia* power, Chief Agbo furnished him with a lot of money, five slaves, and two

¹²⁹⁶ Chief Udensi Ekea, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon Village. August 4, 2010. Corroborated by *Dibia* Kalu Ekea of Nde Ekea Compound, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon, Sept. 24, 2011; *Dibia* Agwu Arua, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon. Aug. 4, 2010.

¹²⁹⁷ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 44; Chief Udensi Ekea, oral interview by author, Okon. August 4, 2010; *Dibia* Agwu Arua, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon. Aug. 4, 2010; *Dibia* Kalu Ekea, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon, Sept. 24, 2011; *Dibia* Akirika, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon. Sept. 26, 2011.

¹²⁹⁸ Chief Udensi Ekea, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon. Aug. 4, 2010; *Dibia* Kalu Ekea, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon, Sept. 24, 2011.

¹²⁹⁹ Chief Udensi Ekea, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon. August 4, 2010; *Dibia* Agwu Arua, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon, Ohafia. Aug. 4, 2010; *Dibia* Kalu Ekea, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon, Sept. 24, 2011; *Dibia* Akirika, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon, Sept. 26, 2011.

wives.¹³⁰⁰ Returning to Ohafia dressed in his khaki shorts and shoes, and armed with new wealth, *Dibia* Ekea became a legendary *ufiem* around 1890.¹³⁰¹ Indeed, in performance of *ogaranya* masculinity, Nna Ekea married about twenty wives, and owned numerous slaves, who worked his palm plantations, consisting of over fifty hectares of land in the 1890s.¹³⁰² He established a thriving palm produce and salt trade between the Ohafia hinterland and the riverine commercial centers of Calabar and Opobo, and is remembered as one of the most prominent *dibia* the Okon community ever produced.¹³⁰³

In addition to wealth performance, the successful dramatization of immunity to physical and spiritual harm reinforced the social perception of a *dibia* as *ufiem*. The act of this immunity (*oda-eshi*) performance was known as *umerogwu* — medicine show, and this performance was dominated by younger *dibia* who sought to establish their nascent reputation. During *umerogwu*, spectators were invited to land powerful machete blows on the *dibia* or his medicine-protected apprentice, and to fire gun-shots at the *dibia*, who shook off the blades and bullets to the cheer of the crowd.¹³⁰⁴ Others walked around with knife blades buried into their arms and stakes pierced through their abdomens and necks. The spectacle was meant to shock observers and elicit admiration and acknowledgment of *dibia* immunity to physical harm. This public performance of

¹³⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹³⁰¹ He proudly paraded the village in his kakhi shorts and buttoned shirts, showcasing his newly acquired kerosene lantern as evidence of his new wealth. *Dibia* Kalu Ekea, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Sept. 24, 2011.

¹³⁰² Chief Udensi Ekea, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon, August 4, 2010; *Dibia* Kalu Ekea, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon, Sept. 24, 2011.

¹³⁰³ Chief Udensi Ekea, oral interview by author; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 46.

¹³⁰⁴ *Dibia* Chikezie Emeri, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Akanu, Ohafia, Nov. 2, 2011; *Dibia* Eke Uma, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon, Sept. 26, 2011; *Dibia* Kalu Uko, oral interview by author, digital voice recording; *Dibia* Azueke Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon, Sept. 22, 2011.

dibia bravado was a re-enactment of the ritual services that *dibia* afforded Ohafia warriors between 1850 and 1900: furnishing them with protective medicines before they went to war.¹³⁰⁵

Theorizing *Dibia* Masculinity and *Dibia* Power Through *Umerogwu* Performance

The historic role of Ohafia *dibia* in providing warriors with *oda-eshi* medicines was re-invented in the Bakassi Boys Movement in southeastern Nigeria between 1998 and 2006.¹³⁰⁶ A young men's vigilante organization which was created by traders to combat crime in the region, and was later adopted by various state governments as a pseudo-official state security institution, the Bakassi Boys embodied two atavistic Igbo masculinities — the *dibia* and the *dimkpa* (warrior). To establish their reputation as fierce crime warriors immune to physical and spiritual harm, the Bakassi Boys held public spectacles of *umerogwu*, just like Ohafia *dibia* performers, and the organization enjoyed a strong support in *oda-eshi* medicine provision and in membership from Ohafia-Igbo people.¹³⁰⁷

¹³⁰⁵ Thus, the *dibia* institution provided an avenue for the construction and performance of spiritual masculinity, while enabling the successful production of warrior masculinities.

¹³⁰⁶ The Bakassi Boys were disbanded in 2002 but their activities continued in several parts of southeastern Nigeria until 2006. David Pratten ed., *Perspectives on Vigilantism in Nigeria*, *AFRICA*, 78, 1 (Edinburgh, 2008), 1-10; Baker B, "When the Bakassi Boys Came: Eastern Nigeria Confronts Vigilantism," *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 20, 2 (2002), 223-244; Harnischefer J., "The Bakassi Boys: Fighting Crime in Nigeria," *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 40, 1 (2003), 23-49; Meagher K., "Hijacking Civil Society: The Inside Story of the Bakassi Boys Vigilante Group of South-Eastern Nigeria," *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 45, 1 (2007), 89-115; U. Ukiwo, "Deus ex Machina or Frankenstein Monster: The Changing Roles of Bakassi Boys in Eastern Nigeria," *Democracy and Development: A Journal of West African Affairs*, 3, 1 (2002), 39-51.

¹³⁰⁷ Dibia Kalu Uko, oral interview by author; Ndukwe Otta and Elder Uduma Uka, oral conversation with author.

Figure 9: *Umerogwu*, Okon Village, Ohafia, Photographed by Author



Figure 10: *Umerogwu*, Okon Village, Ohafia, Photographed by Author



Umerogwu immunity performances were held every two years in Ohafia, in a ceremony called *aja abali* festival, since the precolonial period.¹³⁰⁸ The *aja abali* was an elaborate ritual, usually held on *Afo* (the third day in the Igbo four-day week), which was a day of rest for Ohafia people. *Aja abali* was preceded with twelve days of rituals and sacrifices to patrilineage deities.¹³⁰⁹ When in September 2011, my research assistant and I arrived at Okon village, Ohafia around 6:00 am on *aja abali* day, the first-grade *dibia* (*nde aja abali*) were observing a ritual seclusion and deliberation in a patrilineage *obu* (meeting house), and the entire community was dead-quiet, shut indoors. The communal ritual silence which lasted three hours was observed because since the previous night, a select few of the second-grade *dibia* (*atule abali*) known as *ughara mmonwu* had been in the surrounding forests combating, killing, and appeasing evil and powerful spirits that threatened the safety of their community.¹³¹⁰ It was necessary for the human community to maintain ritual silence so that the cries of the dying spirits could be heard from the surrounding forests.¹³¹¹

¹³⁰⁸ *Dibia* Uduma Uchendu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Akanu. Nov. 2, 2011; *Dibia* Uche Dimgba, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon, Sept. 22, 2011; *Dibia* Kalu Uko, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon, Sept. 14, 2011; *Dibia* Azueke Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon. September 22, 2011.

¹³⁰⁹ These include: Day 1 (Orie): *igba aju ike kamalu*; Day 2 (Afo): *ike ikpem*; Day 3 (Nkwo): *ije afia igwa mmonwu*; Day 4 (Eke): *ekpe iri ji*; Day 5 (Orie): *ichere dibia* (also the day for *ibia abiansi* and *ibia ozo* thanksgiving to *dibia*); Days 6-8: sacrifices to personal deities; Day 9 (Afo): *aja abali* (*dibia* festival during which *umerogwu* was performed).

¹³¹⁰ *Dibia* Kalu Uko, oral conversation with author, hand-written notes, Okon Village. Sept. 26, 2011; Chief Okoro Ekeanya Ibe, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon Village, Sept. 26, 2011; Chief Kalu Imaga, *ezie ezi* of Nde Edem Compound, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon, Sept. 26, 2011.

¹³¹¹ *Dibia* Eke Uma of Nde Edem Compound, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon Village, Sept. 26, 2011; *Dibia* Kalu Uko, oral conversation with author, hand-written notes, Okon Aku Village, Ohafia. Sept. 26, 2011.

The requisite ritual silence observed for the *dibia* community was a phenomenon emblematic of the seasonality of hegemonic *dibia* power in the society. Most of the *dibia* interviewed for this study argued that while their communities possessed gendered socio-political institutions of administration, the *dibia* association enjoyed a dominant position of power, because *dibia* were the protectors of the community and peacekeepers, and their rituals defined the society's rhythm of life. Asserting the political power of *dibia* in pre-colonial Ohafia society, *Dibia Agwu Arua* stated:

Mgbe ichin [in the pre-colonial period], the *akpan* was the organ of male government in Ohafia generally but here in our Okon community, it was the *dibia* that ruled, because when the *dibia* were on the march, the *akpan* stepped aside for them. Even if you were *ezie* (king), you would clear from the road for the *dibia*.¹³¹²

While Ohafia *dibia* were not central to the day-to-day administration of their society between 1850 and 1900, their authority was often unchallenged, and some ambitious *dibia* were able to influence political outcomes in their society.¹³¹³ The power and respect accorded *dibia* partly derived from Ohafia-Igbo cosmology, where the spiritual/ancestral world was part of the social world, and was considered more powerful than the human/living world.¹³¹⁴ The ability of *dibia* to mediate between both worlds vested them with significant socio-political power. However, since *dibia* were preoccupied with healing the people and the body politic, they had

¹³¹² *Dibia Agwu Arua*, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon. Aug. 4, 2010.

¹³¹³ For instance, the intervention of two *dibia* from Nde Idika Okoro compound, enabled Kalu Ufere to become the *ezie-ogo* of Okon village between 1915 and 1935. *Dibia Uche Dimgba*, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Nde Idika Okoro Compound, Okon, Sept. 22, 2011; *Dibia Azueke Kalu*, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon Aku Village, Ohafia. Sept. 22, 2011; Mayne, "Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934," 54.

¹³¹⁴ *Dibia Azueke Kalu*, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon, Ohafia. Sept. 22, 2011; *Dibia Eke Uma*, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon Village, Sept. 26, 2011; *Dibia Kalu Uko*, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon Village, Sept. 14, 2011. Also see Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria*, 11-12.

limited direct involvement in the political administration of their societies, and hardly exercised political authority.

In practice, the *dibia* association lacked any cohesive political authority in the society. Rather, they wielded extraordinary individual influences, and at certain periods of the year such as the month of September, during the *aja abali* festival, their vision of society was law, and they defined the moral imagination of their community. During the two months period preceding the *aja abali* festival, the *dibia* association declared an *imechi ogo* (two months-long community closure). No weddings, burials or funeral ceremonies were held. Loud public gatherings, music and dancing were outlawed, and people were barred from going to farms or engaging in any substantial food production or processing.¹³¹⁵ Since pre-colonial times, women had developed an elaborate system of food processing known as *ije iwa* (stock-piling food in advance of the September month) in accommodation of *imechi ogo* (community closure) by *dibia*.¹³¹⁶

The *imechi ogo* and ritual silence declared by the *dibia* community expired on the morning of *aja abali* festival (around 9:00am). It was initiated by the emergence of the first-grade *dibia* (*aja-abali*) from their ritual seclusion and deliberation at the patrilineage *obu*. Grouped according to their patrilineage units, they marched in a single file to their separate patrilineage compounds, led by a *dibia* who carried the society's *okpogho elu* (medicine pot and deity). As soon as each of these groups reached their patrilineage compound, an army of young

¹³¹⁵ *Dibia* Azueke Kalu, oral interview by author, Okon. Sept. 22, 2011; Elders of Nde Nbila compound, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon. Sept. 15, 2011; Elders of Nde Oka compound, Group Interview by author, Okon Village. Sept. 14 and 15, 2011.

¹³¹⁶ *Dibia* Kalu Uko, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon, Sept. 14, 2011; *Dibia* Chikezie Emeri, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Akanu. Nov. 2, 2011; Field observations and video-recorded interviews about *ije iwa* intensive cassava processing in Okon. Video clips "Iri Ji Preparation, Okon [Ije Iwa] AVI-5.AVI," September 22, 2011.

dibia initiates, known as *nde apupa*, who had been anxiously awaiting their elders' return, swarmed out, running about the community in search of plantains to feed their ancestors.¹³¹⁷

Figure 11: *Nde Apupa*, Okon Village, Ohafia, Photographed by Author.



¹³¹⁷ *Dibia* Agwu Arua, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon. Aug. 4, 2010; *Dibia* Akirika, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon, Sept. 26, 2011; *Dibia* Kalu Ekea, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon, Sept. 24, 2011.

Figure 12: *Nde ughara mmonwu*, Okon Village, Ohafia, Photographed by Author.



Figure 13: *Onye ughara mmonwu*, Okon Village, Ohafia, Photographed by Author.



The plantain hunt was competitive among the young *dibia* initiates, and the search for plantains took the young warriors to the furthest reaches of their community, forests, and individual homes. For the purpose of cutting down the plantain bunches, the young warriors (*nde apupa*) were armed with wooden swords (*apupa*) decorated with sacred *omu* (palm frond) leaves. These swords were believed to be sharper than steel blades because they were blessed by the ancestors.¹³¹⁸ After each group had piled up their plantain bunches in a big heap at the village square, they performed victory dances around them, and carried these back to their various patrilineage *obu* houses, to feed the *ududu* (ancestral pots) of their ancestors housed therein.

As soon as *nde apupa* had deposited their plantains at the patrilineage *obu*, the second-grade *dibia* (*nde ughara mmonwu*), who had successfully dealt with the malignant spirits in the forest, began to retrace their steps into the community, beating their musical instruments, to announce that the community was safe. These instruments included a special wooden slit drum (*ikoro agwu*) and a ram's horn, and both were cultural symbols of masculinity in Ohafia society.¹³¹⁹ The return of *nde ughara mmonwu* spirit combatants marked the end of the *imechi ogo* (community closure) declared by the *dibia* community. The successful return of *ughara mmonwu dibia* from the land of the spirits reinforced their status as *ufiem*; and in order to distinguish their status as brave spirit combatants, they covered their bodies with ghoulish colors and leopard skins.¹³²⁰ Their heads were decorated with elaborate porcupine pikes. Their lips

¹³¹⁸ Chief Obasi Kama, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon. Sept. 26, 2011; *Dibia* Kalu Ekea, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon, Sept. 24, 2011; *Dibia* Kalu Eke, oral interview by author, video-recording. Okon. September 22, 2011; *Dibia* Kakarere (Oyibo) oral interview by author, video-recording. Okon. Sept. 22, 2011.

¹³¹⁹ The significance of *ikoro* and the ram is discussed in chapter 4.

¹³²⁰ Chief Obasi Kama, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon Village, Sept. 26, 2011; *Dibia* Uche Dimgba, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon Village,

were sealed with sacred *omu* palm leaves, and they were armed with brooms, machetes and bows and arrows. Whereas the brooms had been used to whip stubborn spirits into submission, the machetes and arrows were used to kill spirits who possessed wild beasts to attack members of the community.¹³²¹ Indeed, it was a great honor for a second-grade *dibia* (*atule abali*) to be selected into *ughara mmonwu* spirit combatants. This selection served as a social legitimation of the *dibia*'s candidacy for promotion to the highest *dibia* grade, the *aja abali*.¹³²²

The twelve hour spiritual vigilante duty of the *ughara mmonwu* in the forest was no easy endeavor. The selected individuals observed a ritual fast and silence for the duration of the vigilance period, hence the *omu*-sealed lips. Upon emerging from the forest, for the next five hours, they marched in a single file retracing invisible circuitous paths throughout the village; paths believed to have been taken by the ancestral founders of the village in the course of migration and settlement.¹³²³ Their mastery of these paths, which were invisible to ordinary members of the village, established their identity as mature *dibia* and custodians of the community's culture and history.¹³²⁴ In the course of their march, they visited the various patrilineage compounds in order of seniority — the significance was to reaffirm *utugha* (patterns of settlement and lineage descent) which defined the assignment of socio-political functions to

Sept. 22, 2011; *Dibia* Kakarere (Oyibo) oral interview by author, video-recording. Okon Village. Sept. 22, 2011; *Dibia* Akirika, oral interview by author, Okon, Sept. 26, 2011.

¹³²¹ Ibid.

¹³²² *Dibia* Agwu Arua, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon, Ohafia. Aug. 4, 2010; *Dibia* Akirika, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon, Sept. 26, 2011; *Dibia* Kalu Ekea, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon, Sept. 24, 2011.

¹³²³ *Dibia* Kalu Eke, oral interview by author, video-recording. Okon Village. Sept. 22, 2011; *Dibia* Kalu Uko, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon Village, Sept. 14, 2011; *Dibia* Azueke Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon. Sept. 22, 2011.

¹³²⁴ Ibid.

the various patrilineages, and reflected their commensurate privileges, in pre-colonial times.¹³²⁵

In each patrilineage compound, the *ughara mmonwu* performed a ritual homage of libation to any *dibia* of *aja abali* status resident at such a compound. Through this act, the *ughara mmonwu* deified the *aja abali dibia* and reaffirmed the *ufiem* hierarchies of the *dibia* institution, while soliciting supreme recognition of their new social status as prospective *aja abali*.¹³²⁶

As the *ughara mmonwu* marched around the village, spectators who had gathered to observe the event hid themselves and peered from behind houses, because it was taboo to cross the path of the *ughara mmonwu*, who were seen as living ancestral spirits, armed with powerful and harmful medicines.¹³²⁷ At the end of their laborious exercise, after they had discarded their *omu* in an evil forest, the *ughara mmonwu* retired briefly to the home of a female *dibia*,¹³²⁸ who provided them with food and drink. When they reemerged, they were greeted with panegyrics and ovations by the public, and each of them was escorted with adulatory music and dancing back to his home. At this point, the *umerogwu* (magic) competitions began, lasting for about four hours. The festival was concluded with a grand parade of the *aja abali* members. Unlike the

¹³²⁵ Ibid.

¹³²⁶ *Dibia* Agwu Arua, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon. Aug. 4, 2010; *Dibia* Akirika, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon. Sept. 26, 2011; *Dibia* Kalu Ekea, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon. Sept. 24, 2011; Chief Obasi Kama, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon Village, Sept. 26, 2011; *Dibia* Uche Dimgba, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon Village, Sept. 22, 2011.

¹³²⁷ *Dibia* Kalu Eke, oral interview by author, video-recording. Okon Village. Sept. 22, 2011; *Dibia* Kalu Uko, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon Village, Sept. 14, 2011; *Dibia* Azueke Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon. Sept. 22, 2011.

¹³²⁸ According to the following, this female *dibia* was seen as a man, and in the absence of a female *dibia*, the wife of a male *dibia* was selected to fulfill this task. *Dibia* Agwu Arua, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon, Ohafia. Aug. 4, 2010; *Dibia* Uduma Uchendu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Akanu, Ohafia. Nov. 2, 2011; *Dibia* Chikezie Emeri, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Akanu, Ohafia. Nov. 2, 2011; *Dibia* Uche Dimgba, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon. Sept. 22, 2011.

solemn march of the *ughara mmonwu*, the *aja abali* outing was a loud and pompous affair: musical fan-fares, praise-singing, burning incenses, and a thousand feet dancing to the music issuing from tortoise shells and ram horns. In this fashion, the *aja abali* party like the *ughara mmonwu* before them, visited one patrilineage after another, in order of seniority; and thus they brought the ritual to a close at about 9:00pm.¹³²⁹

The *dibia* society, was a gendering institution. It distinguished various grades of masculinity, and enabled social mobility from apprenticeship to *ogaranya* masculinity. As a gendered practice, *dibia* excluded women and the few women that purchased membership were perceived as men. Second, through annual rituals, Ohafia *dibia* strengthened the unity of the patrilineage units, as opposed to the matrilineages. This shaped the historical diversity in the strength of matrilineage principles from one Ohafia village to another. Third, the *dibia* institution reflects the agency of Ohafia-Igbo people in social change during the pre-colonial period. By incorporating practices from their Igbo and non-Igbo neighbors through *ije ogwu* (divination and healing trips), the Ohafia-Igbo defined the *dibia* institution as eclectic in its knowledge sources and dynamic in its performance of *dibia* masculinity (from spiritual immunity to wealth [*ogaranya*] performance). Moreover, Ohafia *dibia* grappled with social change as was evident in their adaptation with western medicine and Christianity, at the turn of the 20th century.

Di Nta: The Gendering of an Economic Activity, 1850-1900

The transformation of indigenous institutions into gendering institutions for the performance of masculinity was also evident in hunting. Before the 20th century introduction of Western education and colonialism into Ohafia, remarkable success in hunting vested a man with

¹³²⁹ Field observations by author, Okon Village, Ohafia. September 26, 2011.

ufiem (masculinity) privileges. It distinguished him from his peers, and even facilitated his successful pursuit of public office. Nsugbe writes of such a hunter, Chief Emetu of Amaekpu, who in the early 20th century, accounted for “more buffalo-heads dead than alive in the bush, as well as elephants which he had a license to hunt.”¹³³⁰ Chief Emetu was regarded as the “husband” and “terror” (*di nta*) of such lesser game as bush-hogs and antelopes. However, his identity as a brave hunter did not deter him from alternative pursuits. In the 1920s, Chief Emetu became a government school headmaster and was a pioneer in education, not only in Ohafia, but as far as Afikpo and parts of Ogoja Province. As a brave *ufiem*, he often led delegations sometimes on behalf of the whole Ohafia to government ministers and high-ranking officials of his region. In so doing, he established a reputation as a fearless emissary. Finally, in the 1940s, Chief Emetu became the *ezie-ogo* (male king) of Akanu village, and exuded a personality that easily won rather than imposed respect.¹³³¹ Chief Emetu was not an exceptional case. Similar masculinities existed in several other Ohafia-Igbo villages such as Asaga and Ebem.¹³³² Such individuals often expressed their social status by performing *ogaranya* (wealth) masculinity, through the display of body parts of dangerous animals, and guns, as well as polygamy.

The point is that hunting was a very important avenue of personal distinction and performance of bravado, and the reputation a man acquired from his successful hunting career, earned him a social recognition as *ufiem*, which facilitated his social mobility. Thus, even today, a number of *ezie-ogo* (male kings) interviewed for this project have their living-room walls decorated with the hides and skulls of leopards and buffalos. While they are not themselves able to hunt these animals, which are now extinct, they advertise their fathers’ and grandfathers’

¹³³⁰ Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 69.

¹³³¹ Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 69.

¹³³² Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 69.

hunting trophies to gain social legitimation of their identities as brave, fearless, and wealthy leaders. Today, the honor which men gained through hunting has been substituted with educational honors and prosperity in business pursuits, such that various *ogaranya* masculinities, which lack the traditional iconography of hunter bravado, purchase expensive furniture, which incorporates within its intricate designs, the hides and skulls of leopards and bush-hogs.¹³³³

Secondly, the story of Chief Emetu is testament to the fact that individuals constructed and performed more than one form of *ufiem* in their lifetime.

Before the 1900s, Ohafia environs comprised of vegetation cover of orchard-bush forest, i.e. a mixture of savanna grassland and tropical rain forest with large groves of big tress.¹³³⁴

This environment where bush hogs ravaged farm-crops and leopards swooped upon homesteads seizing and devouring livestock and men,¹³³⁵ generated a need to subdue the wild, which transformed hunting from a mere economic pursuit to a performance of *ufiem* in the society. Hunters came to be seen as brave warriors who protected their communities from dangerous animals, such that when a boy killed his first wild animal with a twisted rope trap, he was said to

¹³³³ Observations during fieldwork; Godwill Nwankwo Uko, *ezie-ogo* of Amankwu Village, Ohafia, oral interview by author. Oct. 25, 2011; Ogbuka Ogbuka Abaa, oral interview by author. Njoku affirms that the sitting rooms of brave hunters were usually adorned with the skins and skulls of the animals they had killed. Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 40.

¹³³⁴ Azuonye, "The Heroic Age," 9.

¹³³⁵ Azuonye, "The Heroic Age," 13-14; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 72.

have “cut the third head,”¹³³⁶ and his father usually blessed and celebrated him, by rubbing *nzu* white chalk on his right hand, and killing a goat in his honor.¹³³⁷

The task of communal defense in the pre-colonial period was not an easy undertaking for hunters. Chief Kalu Ibem, a member of Amuma village hunters’ guild stated:

In the pre-colonial period, hunting and espionage expeditions took hunters to the furthest reaches of our community borders and forests. In fact, in the pre-colonial past, hunting expeditions were defensive reconnoitering exercises as well. We were always on the lookout for any danger to the community. During community festivals when everyone’s guard was down, hunters were the one group of people who remained vigilant, monitoring the comings and goings of people to and from the community. When people went missing in the village . . . hunters were the first group summoned to go and find such individuals. This was because hunters knew all the pathways in the forests and farmland. Before dawn, they would usually find and retrieve the missing person; otherwise, the following day, the entire village was summoned to conduct a search. Hunters saw themselves as *atule abali* (night guards) because they operated at night. It was at night that they hunted and killed their big game. It was at night that they conquered the forest, kept their community safe and recovered missing individuals. A hunter set out at dusk and within three hours, he was in Arochukwu or Ozu Abam or Abiriba. He wandered through forests across several distant communities, and by dawn, he was back in his home, with all his kills. By morning, he would display his game, often to the awe of the community, who had not observed his going and coming.¹³³⁸

The role of hunters in maintaining communal safety and solidarity shaped the manner in which their achievements were acknowledged. Until the 1920s,¹³³⁹ when any hunter from any part of Ohafia killed a lion, leopard, or tiger, he was required to present the fresh hide of the hunt before the *achichi* shrine at Elu Ohafia village and to relinquish the fangs, which were believed

¹³³⁶ This meant that he had fulfilled the last bravado rite that established his identity as a prospective *ufiem*; the “first head” and “second head” referring to the growth of his first tooth and his first bird-kill, respectively. See chapter 4.

¹³³⁷ Obuba, *The History and Culture of Ohafia*, 25. The *nzu* chalk on the right hand was a mark of prosperity (*ikenga*); it served to bless the hand that would enable the boy-child transition into full manhood by successfully cutting a human head in battle.

¹³³⁸ Chief Kalu Ibem, oral interview by author. Amuma Village. Nov. 26, 2011.

¹³³⁹ Obuba, *The History and Culture of Ohafia*, 22; Ogbuka Ogbuka Abaa, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Isiugwu Village, Ohafia. December 10, 2011.

to contain poisons that cause tuberculosis. The presentation of the hide served to acknowledge the hunter's successful conquest, just as Ohafia warriors were required to present the heads they had cut in battle for social recognition before the *ikoro* wooden slit war drum.¹³⁴⁰ Secondly, after a hunter had killed a wild animal, he presented parts of the kill to the various patrilineage compounds in his village in order of lineage seniority, thereby validating his social belongingness as well as the historical order of lineage seniority. However, the hunter was honored with the head of the animal and its hide, which he displayed around the village in a pompous and laudatory parade. The social distinction of brave hunters sought to balance individualism and social belongingness (group identity) — a situation which Achebe describes as culminating in a strange combination of power and lack of it.¹³⁴¹

However, the special position which hunters occupied in their societies enabled them to operate outside dominant social rules. As Nwabueze Kalu observed,

Before the time of the *cotuma* [court clerk] (1907) . . . anytime Isiugwu village observed a holiday requiring everyone to stay at home, hunters were not held to such restrictions because they were considered lifelong warriors of the society who defended their communities from human and animal dangers.¹³⁴²

Moreover, the processes of identity formation evident in *ufiem* performance through hunting show that while he ascribed to social welfare and solidarity, the individual was in no way handicapped by his social belongingness to a group; rather, he exploited his social belongingness to assuage legitimacy to his new status. *Ufiem* performance through hunting was a personal

¹³⁴⁰ See chapter 3 for detailed discussion; Obuba, *The History and Culture of Ohafia*, 22.

¹³⁴¹ Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors and Kings*, 199.

¹³⁴² Nwabueze Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Isiugwu. Dec. 10, 2011.

journey that began in youthful apprenticeship,¹³⁴³ and the hunter passed through stages of accomplishment within the hunters' guild hierarchy, based upon the type of animal he had killed.

Figure 14: Chief Torti Kalu of Amuma Village, Ohafia: Wild Animal Skulls Trophy on the wall of his living room. Photographed by Author.



¹³⁴³ Chief Torti Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amuma. Nov. 26, 2011; Ogbuka Ogbuka Abaa, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Isiugwu. Dec. 10, 2011.

**Figure 15: *Ite Nde Ofia* (Hunters' Pot) at Amuma, Ohafia.
Photographed by Author.**



**Figure 16: Trophies of Ogbuka Ogbuka Abaa of Isigwu: Buffalo Horn, Rotax Bullet, Traditional Hunter's Night Head-Light and Modern Head-Lamp.
Photographed by Author.**



Thus, Ogbuka Abaa stated that he first killed a bird around 1932, then an antelope in 1934, a bush hog (*potamochoerus porcus*) in 1937, and ultimately in 1940, a buffalo.¹³⁴⁴ Upon this last accomplishment, he came to be known as *omerenke-akwuakwu* (he that killed a game that had to be towed by a community).¹³⁴⁵ In acknowledgment of his achievement of a warrior's feat (killing a buffalo), his father, who was a renowned Nteje warrior (fought in the Nteje war of 1891), killed a goat in his honor, and presented him with a gift of *jooji* cloth and *okpu agu* (warrior cap of bravery), in effect defining him as *ufiem*.¹³⁴⁶ Ogbuka stated:

Killing a buffalo required a perfect shot aimed at the chest or head, using a single bullet, not the cartridges with multiple bullets. So, if you were not a good shot, you would miss it. Here is the bullet I used to kill my buffalo [produces a bullet]. The bullet is called Rotax. We preferred this bullet because even though Europeans introduced it, we could mould our own lead bullets and load them into the recycled cartridges. So, I could take any cartridge and load the Rotax lead bullet into it and seal it up with wax, to make it water resistant and I have myself a Rotax bullet . . .

As *onye-ikike* (warrior) of the hunters' guild, who killed a buffalo, I became entitled to a share of any animal killed in the village. If there was any issue of grave importance to be discussed in the community, I was always invited. During the public parade of *nde ofia* (hunters' guild), I was always showered with praises and honorifics because of my accomplishment. People hailed me *ogbu nke akwu-akwu* (he that killed the animal that had to be towed by the community), *ogbu nke oha rii* (he that killed for an entire village). No other answers the same name in our village.¹³⁴⁷

¹³⁴⁴ Ogbuka Abaa, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Isiugwu. Dec. 10, 2011.

¹³⁴⁵ Ogbuka Abaa, oral interview by author, Isiugwu. Dec. 10, 2011. Corroborated by Nwabueze Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Isiugwu. Dec. 10, 2011; Ijeoma Onyeani, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Isiugwu. Dec. 12, 2011. Ogbuka was given an arm of the buffalo and its head. He kept a buffalo horn as trophy, and gave the second horn to the hunters' guild, which it still uses to summon a meeting of its members.

¹³⁴⁶ Ogbuka Abaa, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Isiugwu. Dec. 10, 2011.

¹³⁴⁷ Ogbuka Abaa, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Isiugwu. Dec. 10, 2011.

Most Ohafia villages possessed a hunters' guild in the pre-colonial period.¹³⁴⁸ The hunters' guild was both a social welfare organization and an institution that regulated the social identification of a hunter as one who accomplished *ufiem*. According to Ijeoma Onyeani, before British pacification, the guild ensured the safety and welfare of its members, by meeting regularly and accounting for the whereabouts of individual hunters. The guild reconciled disputes among members, and made monthly contributions, in order to assist members in times of difficulty and organize entertainments at the end of the year. It also sponsored the funeral ceremonies of its members, and organized a special hunt for the benefit of the deceased's family.¹³⁴⁹ Yet, within the institution, there were hierarchies of *ufiem*. The longevity of experience and success in killing big and dangerous animals set senior hunters apart from their juniors, irrespective of age differences.¹³⁵⁰ According to Nwabueze Kalu, the distinctions on account of accomplishment was informed by the fact that when there were grave challenges facing the community such as the presence of wild animals or the need to scout enemy forces in the precolonial period, hunters relied on their experienced leaders for guidance.¹³⁵¹ He said,

One's longevity and seniority in the profession defined one's respectability. The longevity must also reflect the number and types of animals one had killed. When experienced hunters recounted their tales of encounters with wild animals,

¹³⁴⁸ Ijeoma Onyeani, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Isigwu, Ohafia. Dec. 12, 2011; Chief Kalu Ibem, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amuma, Ohafia. November 26, 2011; Godwill Nwankwo Uko, *ezie-ogo* of Amankwu Village, Ohafia, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amankwu Village. October 25, 2011.

¹³⁴⁹ Ijeoma Onyeani, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Isigwu. Dec. 12, 2011.

¹³⁵⁰ Chief Torti Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amuma Village. Nov. 26, 2011; Chief Kalu Ibem, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amuma, Ohafia. November 26, 2011; Godwill Nwankwo Uko, *ezie-ogo* of Amankwu Village, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amankwu Village. October 25, 2011; Ogbuka Ogbuka Abaa, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Isigwu Village, Ohafia. Dec. 10, 2011.

¹³⁵¹ Nwabueze Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Isigwu. Dec. 10, 2011.

younger hunters listened because it was an avenue for them to learn the behaviour and disposition of different animals and the best ways to trap or kill them.¹³⁵²

Thus, senior hunters were respected for their historical experiences and superior intelligence. Hunters who performed *ufiem* by defeating dangerous animals were portrayed as possessing distinctive qualities. According to Njoku, some had “special bush instincts or expertise, if not clairvoyance, and were able to mimic animal sounds and postures as a decoy, [and] move so stealthily in the bush as not to be noticed.”¹³⁵³ Ogbuka described hunters, who accomplished *ufiem* as those who knew that “the hide around the buffalo’s neck was triple the size of a cow’s and that trying to kill a buffalo with AA cartridge was like trying to kill a goat with a stone sling-shot, and would result in the hunter’s death.”¹³⁵⁴ To kill a buffalo, the hunter avoided “the Mark 4 which fired short range single bullets, and the AA which contained 37 bullets in one cartridge; he used the BB which contained 72 bullets or the the LG cartridge.”¹³⁵⁵ In addition, the performance of bravado implicated in hunting dangerous animals was juxtaposed with the killing of harmless animals, irrespective of their size, such as the zebra (*unyo*). For instance, it was taboo for a hunter to kill a zebra because it posed no danger to man. Hunters who violated this were seen as cowardly (*ujo*), and were required to sponsor an expensive funeral and mourn the zebra as one would a human death.¹³⁵⁶

¹³⁵² Nwabueze Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Isigwu. Dec. 10, 2011.

¹³⁵³ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 40.

¹³⁵⁴ Ogbuka Abaa, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Isigwu. Dec. 10, 2011.

¹³⁵⁵ Ogbuka Abaa, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Isigwu. Dec. 10, 2011.

¹³⁵⁶ Chief Kalu Ibem, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amuma. Nov. 26, 2011; Ogbuka Abaa, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Isigwu. Dec. 10, 2011; Ijeoma Onyeani, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Isigwu. Dec. 12, 2011; Godwill Nwankwo Uko, *ezie-ogo* of Amankwu Village, oral interview by author.

In the pre-colonial period, every hunters' guild also possessed a hunters' pot of bravery (*ite nde ofia*).¹³⁵⁷ The hunters' pot of bravery, decorated with skulls of dangerous wild animals was produced during community festivals and the funeral ceremonies of deceased distinguished hunters. The public presentation of *ite nde ofia* reminded the community of the social significance of hunters as community protectors;¹³⁵⁸ but it was also an avenue for newly distinguished hunters to boast of their recent accomplishments and acquire social legitimation of their new status.¹³⁵⁹ In this regard, *ite nde ofia* simulates the Ohafia warrior's *ite odo* (warriors' pot of bravery decorated with human skulls) and *oyaya* (Ohafia war dancers' head-dress with human skulls).¹³⁶⁰

Indeed, Ohafia hunters perceived themselves as brave warriors, who performed *ufiem* by defeating dangerous animals, and they juxtaposed this with the military distinctions of warriors; in effect challenging the social hegemony that *ndi ikike* enjoyed in the pre-colonial period. The equation of subduing dangerous animals with *igbu ishi* (to cut a head) is evident in the personifying language, which hunters employ to describe dangerous wild animals they had killed. Thus, in addition to intimating that he wrestled the buffalo to death after he shot it, Ogbuka Abaa described the buffalo as a very intelligent animal which “defecated on the ground, urinated on its feces, and used its tail to fire the mixed dung missile at hunters, sending them

¹³⁵⁷ Ogbuka Abaa, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Isigwu. Dec. 10, 2011; Chief Torti Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amuma. Nov. 26, 2011; Chief Kalu Ibem, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amuma. November 26, 2011.

¹³⁵⁸ Chief Kalu Ibem, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amuma Village. Nov. 26, 2011; Godwill Nwankwo Uko, *ezie-ogo* of Amankwu Village, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amankwu. Oct. 25, 2011; Nwabueze Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Isigwu. Dec. 10, 2011.

¹³⁵⁹ Ijeoma Onyeani, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Isiugwu Village. Dec. 12, 2011; Nna Kalu Awa, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amuma. Nov. 26, 2011.

¹³⁶⁰ See chapter 4 for detailed discussion of *ite odo* and *oyaya*.

down from tree tops where they had sought refuge, before impaling them with its horns and hooves.”¹³⁶¹ Nwabueze Kalu said:

There were warriors who went to battle and killed their enemies and returned home with a human head. But they were not considered braver than the *ogbu agu* (leopard killer) or the *ogbu enyi* (elephant killer). Indeed, the *ogbu agu* was considered a braver warrior than the headhunter. *Mgbe ichin* [in pre-colonial times], at funeral ceremonies or new yam festivals, when the warriors brought out their *ite-odo* in public, they sat apart from the crowd; and the hunters also set themselves apart from the crowd with their own *ite nde ofia*. There, warriors and hunters boasted against each other . . . You had people like Ijeoma’s father who had killed a leopard . . . when Nna Kalu lived at Isiugwu [1911-1915]¹³⁶² . . . and he would stand there and recount his brave encounter with the leopard; and you had warriors who had fought fierce battles recount their encounters with powerful enemies.¹³⁶³

Historicizing *Nde Ofia* (Hunters’) Narratives as a Lens into Socio-Political Change and *Ogaranya* Masculinity Performance among the Ohafia-Igbo

Indigenous accounts of the historical development of hunting and changes in hunting techniques elucidate significant socio-political changes in southeastern Nigeria, and highlight the agency of Ohafia-Igbo people in social change. These accounts are situated within the histories of the Atlantic slave trade, legitimate commerce, and British colonialism. Ogbuka Abaa avers:

My fathers told me this is how hunting evolved. We started by digging up the ground. There were no guns for hunting, so the technique was to dig a big hole in the ground and camouflage it. When an animal such as a bush-hog fell into it, you clubbed it to death. This was the major hunting technique in the olden days . . . [c. 1600-1800]

Then, after a long time, a new technique was invented. This time, strings (*akwara*) from palm fronds were extracted with a hook (*upi igwe*) and woven into twigs, which were then used to set animal traps. Two poles were set up at opposites and the trap string was connected to both. In the middle and at both ends of the poles, boards of sharp stakes were hidden on the ground so that when

¹³⁶¹ Ogbuka Abaa, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Isiugwu. Dec. 10, 2011.

¹³⁶² Kalu, “An Ibo Autobiography,” 166-167; Ndukwe, “From Slavery,” 62.

¹³⁶³ Nwabueze Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Isiugwu. Dec. 10, 2011.

an animal tripped the line, the boards collided upon it, staking it to death. [c. 1800-1850]

Over time, as trade with Europeans expanded, Ohafia hunters were able to purchase sturdier wire-strings for these traps. [c. 1850-1900].

Then, my mother's father, Nna Ekpele of Nde Okorie Compound, Isiugwu village introduced the *okwuru* (Dane) gun from Okposi . . . He was the first person to bring a gun here . . . It was not a cartridge gun. [c. 1850-1900].¹³⁶⁴

There were two types of hunting guns: *okwuru* and *erefren* [the Short Magazine Lee Enfield (SMLE)]. *Erefren* came later . . . [c. 1900-1950s]

Today, we use the double and single barrel cartridge rifles . . . they came just before the Mark 4 [the No. 4 MK 1, a re-modification of the SMLE developed by the British in the inter-war period] used by the Nigerian police today . . .

The hunter had a number of instruments with which he hunted. There was a night lamp we call *ochanja*. It was locally constructed. At night, you would squat in the forest, stalking your hunt. When you found it, you lighted the *ochanja* torch, and while the animal was staring at the light wondering what lurked behind it, you shot it with your gun. However, the *ochanja* night lamp was susceptible to dying out during rains, so it was not very good for hunting during the rainy season. [c. 1850-1900]

So, over time, when we were trading with Europeans, we adapted to the use of *cabad* (calcium fluoride). The person that introduced calcium fluoride night headlamp was John from Ndea Mma, and he became known as John Oku-Ifu (John Head-Lamp). He got the *cabad* headlamp from the Nigerian Coal Corporation in Enugu, where he worked in the 1930s. We started making our own head lamps, and bought the *cabad* from merchants trading with Europeans on the coast. You added water to the *cabad* in the headlamp and as it burned, it lit up blinding the wild animal and leaving you in the shadows . . . [c. 1900-1940s]

Today, a few people still use *cabad* lamps but most of us use battery headlamps.¹³⁶⁵

¹³⁶⁴ By the first decade of the 20th century, the British colonial government was battling with the proliferation of guns in the interior communities of southeastern Nigeria. In the Ohafia and Arochukwu region the British administration mounted *ntiji egbe* (gun-breaking) campaigns in the course of the Aro expedition and Bende-Onitsha Hinterland expedition. This suggests a history of gun accumulation by these Igbo communities before 1900. See CO520/68: "Colonial Office: Southern Nigeria Protectorate Original Correspondence, December, 1908," 211-214.

¹³⁶⁵ Ogbuka Abaa, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Isigwu. Dec. 10, 2011.

Guns came into use in Ohafia in the 18th century, and by the 1850s, they had become the hunter's chief weapon, when the percussion cap gun (*egbe cham*) became popular in the

region.¹³⁶⁶ Precision arms such as double-barreled guns came into use in the colonial

period.¹³⁶⁷ Leonard observed in his 1896 "Notes on a Journey to Bende" that at Akanu Ohafia,

All the way along, the people were armed with flint locks and cap guns, the majority also carrying swords and the lads bows and arrows . . . The men [also] carried shields made from the fiber of palm leaves, firmly secured and plaited together.¹³⁶⁸

Trading up the Cross River and exploiting their special *ukwuzi* diplomatic relations with the Aro merchants, Ohafia people were able to acquire imported European guns, but they also relied on locally made guns modeled after European designs. Thus, Nwabueze Kalu recalled:

Growing up as a child, I observed the dane guns owned by the older hunters, so I built my own dane guns using metal pipes. I made bullets with gunpowder, bullet cases, lead shrapnel, and scrapings of *phosphorous sesquisulfide* from matchsticks. Then I used a slingshot to ignite and launch the bullet . . . I have killed too many hares using this gun.¹³⁶⁹

From the autobiography of Kalu Ezelu, we know that there were many such Ohafia gun-making blacksmiths between 1850 and 1900.¹³⁷⁰ However, most Ohafia hunters depended on Abiriba blacksmiths for their locally made dane guns. Leonard described the Abiriba-Igbo located on the

¹³⁶⁶ The British were alarmed at the proliferation of guns in southeastern Nigeria in the 1870s. See FO84/1701: "Africa: Slave Trade, West Coast, 1885," 298-300. To prevent the British from seizing his guns, King Jaja of Opobo moved his stockpiled guns to the interior of Igboland in the 1870s. See FO84/1882: "Africa (Slave Trade), West Coast, 1888," 35-37. The British Consul Hewett reported that the chiefs of Opobo were smuggling and selling guns in the interior communities of Bende (Ohafia, Arochukwu, etc.) in the 1880s. See FO84/1941: "Africa (Slave Trade), West Coast, 1889," 353-359, 360-361.

¹³⁶⁷ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 40.

¹³⁶⁸ Leonard, "Notes of a Journey to Bende," 196.

¹³⁶⁹ Nwabueze Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Isigwu. Dec. 10, 2011.

¹³⁷⁰ Kalu, "An Ibo Autobiography," 159-162.

western boundary of Ohafia as consisting “of nothing but blacksmiths, who do all the work in brass and iron for a very great distance around,”¹³⁷¹ and Nsugbe writes that “the Abiriba Ibo have always been skilled blacksmiths and supplied the Ohaffia with most of their weapons and ammunitions of war” in the 18th and 19th centuries.¹³⁷²

Before the 20th century, guns were too expensive for many hunters to afford, and the few who acquired them employed them as a symbol of social prestige and *ogaranya* (wealth) masculinity.¹³⁷³ As Elizabeth Isichei observed, during this period, guns were primarily used ceremonially, at celebrations and funerals.¹³⁷⁴ Even today, hunters who own guns guard them jealously.¹³⁷⁵ Meredith McKittrick noted in the case of the Ovambo society of Northern Namibia that the introduction of “a gun culture linked to male power” emerged in the late 19th century, “militarized masculinity” and resulted in the emergence of an elite male culture, which incorporated European goods such as guns and clothing into indigenous textures of gender construction.¹³⁷⁶ It is in this sense that Ijeoma Onyeani compared a hunter’s gun to modern taxicabs; a popular symbol of technologies of modernity and masculinity in southeastern Nigeria, and one that is often equated with human heads and *ufiem* accomplishment in Ohafia society:

¹³⁷¹ Leonard, “Notes of a Journey to Bende,” 196-197.

¹³⁷² Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 14.

¹³⁷³ Chief Torti Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amuma. Nov. 26, 2011; Chief Kalu Ibe, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amuma. Nov. 26, 2011; Godwill Nwankwo Uko, *ezie-ogo* of Amankwu, oral interview by author. Oct. 25, 2011; Ogbuka Abaa, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Isiugwu. Dec. 10, 2011; Ijeoma Onyeani, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Isiugwu. Dec. 12, 2011; Nna Kalu Awa, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amuma. Nov. 26, 2011; Nwabueze Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Isiugwu. Dec. 10, 2011.

¹³⁷⁴ Isichei, *The Ibo and the Europeans*, 52.

¹³⁷⁵ Ogbuka Abaa, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Isiugwu. Dec. 10, 2011.

¹³⁷⁶ McKittrick, “Forsaking their Fathers?” 37-38.

In the olden days, when you came of age and your father bought you a gun, or you used your wealth to purchase a gun, it was considered a mark of respect . . . The gun was like a taxi. The car represents your wealth and status symbol in the society, but it was also a means of livelihood. If you take your taxicab into town, you make a lot of money. In the same way, if you took your gun into the forest, you made a lot of wealth, because when you sold your hunt, you earned money. Moreover, a man armed with a gun was greatly respected in the community because guns were expensive.¹³⁷⁷

Gun ownership reinforced *ufiem* hierarchies within the hunters' guild. Nwabueze stated:

There were different categories of *nde ofia* (hunters). They were not all the same. The hunter who set traps and caught small game was subordinate [not of the same calibre and social standing] with the hunter who killed a buffalo or leopard using a gun. The former could not talk while the latter was talking. Otherwise, the hunters' guild imposed a fine on the subordinate.¹³⁷⁸

The incorporation of guns as a marker of social distinction among men was thus in correlation to the type of animal a hunter could kill using a gun, and the varying degrees of bravado associated with such performance. It is in this sense that Nwabueze stated:

The trap setter or fisherman was not considered a real *onye ofia* (hunter). When a war broke out between our community and another, the fisherman or trap setter did not come out and fight, but the buffalo hunter or lion killer always led the front.¹³⁷⁹

As Njoku noted, a hunter who killed a leopard, bush hog or elephant was highly respected “for the achievement was regarded as an act of unusual bravery likened to the outmarshalling of a human foe.”¹³⁸⁰ Basden similarly observed that “the killing of a leopard was a red-letter day in a

¹³⁷⁷ Ijeoma Onyeani, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Isiugwu. Dec. 12, 2011.

¹³⁷⁸ Nwabueze Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Isiugwu. Dec. 10, 2011.

¹³⁷⁹ Nwabueze Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Isiugwu. Dec. 10, 2011.

¹³⁸⁰ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 40.

hunter's life," because it was a dangerous endeavor, and the accomplishment established a hunter's reputation as "leopard-slayer."¹³⁸¹

Besides bravery, these animals symbolized wealth because of their high cultural and commercial value. Elephants yielded tusks used for making bangles worn by men and women of estate and tusks were in great demand by European traders on the Biafran coast. As Basden noted, while elephants had become rare by the mid-20th century in the Igbo hinterland, the older men "remember the days when they were fairly numerous."¹³⁸² Leopard skin was highly treasured for social and ontological purposes, just as its whiskers, teeth and claws were used by *dibia* in making talismans.¹³⁸³ The colorful skins of the deer, the cobra and the python were used for beautifying machete sheaths and for other decorative purposes.¹³⁸⁴ The possession of body parts of dangerous animals by hunters was a marker of social distinction. Hunters who accomplished *ufiem* always carried, especially in public, leopard tails, elephant ears, or buffalo horns,¹³⁸⁵ for they symbolized a hunter's *ogaranya* status in Ohafia between 1850 and 1900.

¹³⁸¹ Basden, *Among the Ibos*, 144.

¹³⁸² Basden, *Among the Ibos*, 145.

¹³⁸³ *Dibia* Uduma Uchendu, oral interview by author, Akanu Village. Nov. 2, 2011; *Dibia* Kalu Uko, oral interview by author; *Dibia* Eke Uma, oral interview by author. Okon, Sept. 26, 2011.

¹³⁸⁴ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 40-41.

¹³⁸⁵ Chief Kalu Ibem, oral interview by author, Amuma. Nov. 26, 2011; Godwill Nwankwo Uko, *ezie-ogo* of Amankwu, oral interview by author. Oct. 25, 2011; Ogbuka Abaa, oral interview by author. Dec. 10, 2011; Nna Kalu Awa, oral interview by author. Nov. 26, 2011; Nwabueze Kalu, oral interview by author. Dec. 10, 2011; Basden, *Among the Ibos*, 144-145.

Igwa Nnu: The Masculinity of Yam Production

*The special place yams occupied in Ohafia culture as the prestige crop, associated particularly with men, cannot be explained . . . as an effect of the material importance of yam and its cultivation in the Ohafia economy . . . Indeed, the agricultural economy itself had been more dependent on female labor . . . women grew the staple food crops as maize, cassava, trifoliage yam, cocoyam and vegetables, while also maintaining the men's yam fields.*¹³⁸⁶

Ogaranya masculinity performance was evident in agricultural pursuits such as yam cultivation. Before the 1850s, when long distance trade especially in palm produce became dominant in the region, enabling many Ohafia individuals to acquire wealth in European commodities and universal currencies, yam ownership was a measure of wealth among the Ohafia-Igbo and the few men, who produced between 7,500 and 10,000 tubers of yam per year, were celebrated as *ogaranya*.¹³⁸⁷ This chapter argues that the emergence of yam cultivation as a masculine pursuit among the Ohafia-Igbo was in direct relationship with the dominance of women in agricultural production and subsistence trading. First, pre-20th century Ohafia-Igbo economy was agro-based, and female-dependent.¹³⁸⁸ Second, women's dominance in food production until 1900 was a response to men's absence on military campaigns.¹³⁸⁹ Third,

¹³⁸⁶ Arua, "Yam Ceremonies and the Values of Ohafia Culture," 694.

¹³⁸⁷ Arua, "Yam Ceremonies and the Values of Ohafia Culture," 701; Oriji, *Traditions of Igbo Origin*, 6; Nwokeji, "African Conceptions of Gender and the Slave Traffic," 59-60; Mecha Ukpai Akanu, *ezie-ogo* of Amangwu Village and Members of the Men's Court, Group Interview by author; Ogbuka Abaa, oral interview by author; Chief Torti Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording; Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author; Chief Emeh Okonkwo, oral interview by author; Chief Kalu Awa Kalu, oral interview by author; Chief K.K. Owen, oral interview by author.

¹³⁸⁸ See chapter 1.

¹³⁸⁹ Arua, "Yam Ceremonies and the Values of Ohafia Culture," 695; McCall, *Dancing Histories*, 83; Northrup, *Trade Without Rulers*, 116; Nsugbe, *Ohafia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 21; Mama Docas Kalu and Mama Mary Ezera of Ebem village, Group Interview by author; Nmia Nnaya Agbai of Elu village, oral interview by author; *Ikpirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu Village,

women's responsibility as breadwinners led them not to rely upon yams, which had a limited yield in Ohafia, as the food staples for their families. As a result, what little farming men did when they were not fighting during the war season (May-October)¹³⁹⁰ was restricted to yam production during the farming season (November-April). Because yam was the only crop cultivated by men, successful warriors were also expected to be consummate yam farmers, and *ujo* (cowards) were not expected to grow and keep yams.¹³⁹¹

While they were breadwinners, Ohafia women, did not cultivate yams; in exceptional cases, they grew a tiny and bitter variety called *una*.¹³⁹² While Ohafia-Igbo men and women worked together to set the annual farming calendar, and even though women always wielded political authority to ensure a favorable farming cycle, yam was always the first crop to be planted, followed by women's staple crops.¹³⁹³ Since men relied on women for subsistence, how did the yam crop (*Dioscorea*) attain such high cultural value, came to symbolize wealth, and became so masculinized? Opposed to the popular notion that the yam preceded other food crops

Group Interview; Chief Olua Iro Kalu of Ebem village, oral interview by author; Mama Orié Emeh and Chief Mrs. Grace Ojieke, oral interview by author.

¹³⁹⁰ Arua, "Yam Ceremonies and the Values of Ohafia Culture," 695; Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 27-28; Mba Odo Okereke, *ezie-ogo* of Akanu Village, oral conversation with the author, Akanu Village. October 15, 2011; Chief Ugbu Uduma, *eoie-Ogo* of Nde-Amogu, oral interview by author, Ihenta (Ibina) Village. November 11, 2011.

¹³⁹¹ Uka, "A Note on the 'Abam' Warriors of Igbo Land," 78; Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author; Chief Eke Emetu, oral interview by author; Chief Emeh Okonkwo, oral interview by author; Chief Kalu Awa, oral interview by author; Chief K.K. Owen, oral interview by author; Chief Olua Kalu, oral interview by author.

¹³⁹² *Ikipirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu Village, Group Interview. This was in sharp contrast to what obtained in most Igbo societies, where women also cultivated yams. See J.S. Harris, "Some Aspects of the Economics of Sixteen Ibo Individuals," *Africa* 14 (1943-44), 319; Ikennna Nzimiro, "Social Structure," in G.E.K. Ofomata, ed., *The Nsukka Environment* (Enugu, Nigeria: Fourth Dimension, 1978), 245; Amadiume, *Male Daughters and Female Husbands*, 29-31; Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors and Kings*, 109-122.

¹³⁹³ Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 23; *Ikipirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu Village, Group Interview by author.

because it was a man's crop,¹³⁹⁴ this chapter argues it was because the yam was a fragile crop that required high nutrient rich soil and a longer time to survive in contrast to cocoyam and cassava. Adiele Afigbo noted that the rituals and taboos, as well as the institutionalization of yam titles, especially among the Igbo, indicate not only its antiquity as a domesticated crop in the "yam belt of West Africa," but also of the importance attached to it, especially as it is selective as regards soil and season for its cultivation.¹³⁹⁵

As has been shown (chapter 2), the Ohafia-Igbo possessed limited arable land suitable for the production of high-nutrient¹³⁹⁶ crops like yams, and their location in a densely-populated (population density of 500 per square mile) strip of territory, characterized by hills and narrow steep-sided valleys leached by erosion, did not support extensive agricultural production. Thus, most Ohafia-Igbo farmland were in distant locations away from their residential areas, and most farmland comprised of sandy soils (*nsai*) more suitable for the cultivation of cassava, cocoyam, beans, and vegetables, as opposed to yams.¹³⁹⁷ Women monopolized the cultivation of these crops. However, the relatively limited quantities of yam available for consumption, enjoyed great value for as Ifeanyi Nwachukwu *et al.*, argue, the taste, color, and texture of the yam set it apart from other roots and tubers grown in southeastern Nigeria, and shaped consumer preference for

¹³⁹⁴ For Afigbo's view on this, see Falola, ed., *Nigerian History, Politics and Affairs*, 92.

¹³⁹⁵ Toyin Falola, ed., *Nigerian History, Politics and Affairs: The Collected Essays of Adiele Afigbo* (Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, 2005), 91-92.

¹³⁹⁶ I.N. Nwachukwu, O.U. Oteh, C.C. Ugoh, and C. Ochomma, "Buying Attitude of Yam Consumers in Southeastern Nigeria," *Tropicultura* 29, 4, (2011), 238-242.

¹³⁹⁷ Mayne, "Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934," 6, 15; Chubb, "Assessment Reports: Bende Division, 1927-1929," 2-3, 6, 20-23; Njoku, "Inter-Village Trade in Ohafia," 12-13. For a similar case see Amadiume, *Male Daughters and Female Husbands*, 30.

yams at ceremonies and festivals, thereby imbuing the crop with socio-cultural significance.¹³⁹⁸

Therefore, the yam gained socio-cultural value as a rare, unreliable, but highly demanded food staple, not simply because it was “a man’s crop.”

It is plausible that the Ohafia-Igbo arrived in their present location with a gender complementary agricultural system characteristic of the peoples of Southeastern Nigeria, where men grew yam and women cocoyam and other vegetables.¹³⁹⁹ Women’s preoccupation with the production of food staples assured them greater economic sufficiency than men, and thus, men’s exclusive cultivation of yams on limited arable land did not constitute a threat to women’s economic autonomy. Since women held a central position in the subsistence economy of their society, it made sense that they did not rely for a staple, upon a crop with limited yield.¹⁴⁰⁰

Indeed, women’s embrace of cassava cultivation and their transformation of this crop into a food staple in the 1890s, exemplify their historical consciousness of their position as bread-winners, who had to be reliable in agricultural production, and responsive to social change. Cassava was introduced to West Africa through contact with Portuguese merchants between the 16th and 17th centuries,¹⁴⁰¹ but its cultivation did not gain popularity until the late 19th century, because at

¹³⁹⁸ Nwachukwu, *et al.*, “Buying Attitude of Yam Consumers,” 238-242.

¹³⁹⁹ This gender complementary agricultural production is enshrined in the creation myth of Igbo peoples. For the case of Nri, see Henderson, *The King in Every Man*, 59-60. For the case of Nnobi, see Amadiume, *Male Daughters and Female Husbands*, 28-29.

¹⁴⁰⁰ Thus, Amadiume, *Male Daughters and Female Husbands*, 30, argues in the case of Nnobi, that ecological factors (poor soil and low yield) and industriousness made female-controlled cocoyam and cassava cultivation, the food staple of the people, while men cultivated yams on a small scale for ritual payments and other ceremonial exchanges.

¹⁴⁰¹ Jean Barbot, *A Description of the Coast of North and South Guinea* (London: A & J Churchill, 1732), 377; Ohadike, “The Influenza Pandemic of 1918-19,” 379; S.A. Agboola, “Introduction and Spread of Cassava in Western Nigeria,” *Nigerian Journal of Economic and Social Studies* 10, 3 (1968), 369; W.O. Jones, “Manioc: An Example of Innovation in African Economics,” *Journal of Economic Development and Cultural Change* 5, 2 (1957), 98.

first, it was considered animal feed and food for the poor.¹⁴⁰² As Nwoke Kalu demonstrates, women pioneered cassava cultivation in Ohafia between 1890 and 1920, and significantly reshaped indigenous economies.¹⁴⁰³

This ecological, cultural, and gendered theory of the masculinization of yam seeks to complicate the simplistic assumption that “as the king of crops, [yam] was a man’s crop.”¹⁴⁰⁴ In fact, yam was peripheral to the society’s subsistence, and Ohafia-Igbo women’s agricultural practices attest that the choice not to cultivate yams might have been a conscious one. Women’s lack of ownership of yams did not evidence patriarchal domination. Rather, it reflected an understanding that yam cultivation made exorbitant claims on land, labor and time, with limited yield to show for it. As Njoku noted, “Women’s farm work schedule kept them busy all year, unlike their menfolk.”¹⁴⁰⁵ Basden observed, “In comparison with the yield, the production of yam entailed a large acreage, strenuous labour and constant attention during some seven or eight months of the year.”¹⁴⁰⁶ Nsugbe noted that between the months of April and August, known as *unwu* (hunger period), which stretched from the period of crop planting (April) to harvest (November), the entire community relied for subsistence on women’s crops and vegetables.¹⁴⁰⁷ Emea Arua also writes that not only did Ohafia women assume full responsibility for weeding the yam farms from June to October, they were also solely responsible for feeding their families

¹⁴⁰² Falola, ed., *Nigerian History, Politics and Affairs*, 93.

¹⁴⁰³ Nwoke C. Kalu, “Cassava Revolution in Ohafia Up to 1990: A Historical Analysis of Economic Change,” (B.A. Thesis, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, July 1991), 14-22; Amadiume, *Male Daughters and Female Husbands*, 30.

¹⁴⁰⁴ Falola, ed., *Nigerian History, Politics and Affairs*, 92.

¹⁴⁰⁵ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 37.

¹⁴⁰⁶ Basden, *Among the Ibos*, 150.

¹⁴⁰⁷ Nsugbe, *Ohafia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 24. Also, Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 37.

and the menfolk during this period.¹⁴⁰⁸ Thus, Meek's assertion that all other crops were merely subsidiary to yam¹⁴⁰⁹ was not true for the Ohafia-Igbo.

When in 1920, following the smallpox (*ogharelu*) and *ibi* (elephantiasis of the scrotum) epidemic that swept through the region between 1918 and 1919, Ohafia-Igbo men suffered a yam famine, and were unable to supply women with the requisite annual yam contributions for the *omume iri uduma* (inauguration of the annual farming cycle) festival, Ohafia-Igbo women initiated what an Ohafia male collaborator described as the "yam revolution."¹⁴¹⁰

Refusing to make their yam contribution, the men of Ebem village accused the women of collecting yams from them and selling them in neighboring markets, instead of using them to prepare food for the community.¹⁴¹¹ In protest, the entire women of Ebem community performed *ibo ezi* — they deserted their village *en masse* and sought refuge in Akanu village, without performing the inaugural farming ritual, thereby prohibiting men from planting their yams in good time. This incident threatened the economic and social prestige of the entire menfolk of Ebem community, whose seed yams remained in their yam barns, rotting away. In retaliation, the men of Ebem village attacked the people of Akanu village for welcoming their wives, sisters, and mothers, and supporting them against Ebem men's self-interests. According to Mama Docas Kalu of Ebem village,

Uke Emeago [the male age-grade in government at the time] thought us [women] a lesson, which made us not to rely upon men for yams any longer. When we

¹⁴⁰⁸ Arua, "Yam Ceremonies and the Values of Ohafia Culture," 695, 698.

¹⁴⁰⁹ Meek, *Law and Authority in a Nigerian Tribe*, 16.

¹⁴¹⁰ Ndukwe Otta and Elder Uduma Uka, oral conversation with author, Asaga. Sept. 16, 2011.

¹⁴¹¹ Mama Docas Kalu and Mama Mary Ezera of Ebem Village, Group Interview by author; Nmia Nnaya Agbai of Elu village, oral interview by author; *Ikpirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu Village, Group Interview; Chief Olua Iro Kalu of Ebem village, oral interview by author; Mama Orié Emeh and Chief Mrs. Grace Ojieke, oral interview by author.

came back, all the women started cultivating yams, and we have been growing our own yams ever since. At the end of that farming year, I harvested a lot of big yams, and I gave twenty [50] tubers of *akuru* [big yams of a white and very sweet variety] to my son, and asked him to use them and pay homage to his father, in demonstration of my accomplishments as a yam farmer.¹⁴¹²

Several Ohafia-Igbo men confirm that since the yam revolution, women have cultivated yams in large quantities, sometimes, rivaling men. According to Chief Olua Iro Kalu,

Women have since been cultivating yams and in several cases, more than men. Some had up to two or three stretches of yam barns [about 6000-8000 yams per year] in the 1920s. They were publicly hailed *oko ji* (great yam farmer) or *o ji ji atugbu nnunu* (she that uses yams to stone birds), which meant that one played with yams!¹⁴¹³

Chief Olua further stated that in the past, before the yam revolution, while men dominated yam cultivation, some Ohafia-Igbo women such as widows and older women beyond childbearing age, cultivated yams. Thus, it was not so much a cultural taboo that prevented women from yam cultivation, as much as an indigenous ideology of complementarity in agricultural production. Where there was no husband, when women had limited dependents, or where men failed in their duty, women took up yam cultivation. Ndukwe Otta recalled that in the 1940s, as his father, Chief Aru Otta became old and was no longer able to cultivate yams, as much as he did in his youth, his mother, Mrs. Otta vigorously took up yam cultivation. Purchasing the services of several women who assisted her in the farm, Mrs. Otta harvested so much yams that she had to leave the yam barn she shared with her husband, and established three separate barns. A renowned yam farmer who accomplished the highest yam title of *igwa nnu*,

¹⁴¹² Mama Docas Kalu and Mama Mary Ezera, Group Interview by author.

¹⁴¹³ Chief Olua Iro Kalu of Ebem village, oral interview by author.

Chief Otta had a falling out with his wife, when her yams consistently “surpassed and overshadowed” his.¹⁴¹⁴ Through yam cultivation, Mrs. Otta performed *ogaranya* masculinity.

The “yam revolution” is aptly named because it represents a popular revolution in indigenous gender ideologies. Indeed, yam cultivation was a gendered practice and the pan-Igbo political economy of yam usage transformed it into a gendering institution. Basden defined the yam as “the Ibo staff of life.”¹⁴¹⁵ In spite of its reductionist tone, this was in recognition of the cultural value placed on yam. Before the 20th century, among Ohafia-Igbo men, every significant form of gift-giving including bride-wealth payment, the leasing of farmland from land-owning matrilineage units, fee payment for initiation into secret societies, and recompense for damaged property involved the use of yams. Fathers established their sons as independent men ready for marriage by providing them with their first yam barn. In this sense, yams were the first form of movable property, which fathers could transfer to their sons without challenge from their uterine siblings, through a process known as *igwa oba*.¹⁴¹⁶ Thus, yam transfer enabled a son to attain adult masculinity in the society.

Warriors who cut heads in battle and accomplished *ufiem* defined themselves against the *ujo* (coward and effeminate) by dispossessing the latter of their yams. Wealthy individuals performed *ogaranya* masculinity by holding elaborate feasts of yams. Like hunting, distinction in yam cultivation enabled a man to gain access to public office. Thus, one of the requirements for

¹⁴¹⁴ Ndukwe Otta and Uduma Uka, Group Interview by author.

¹⁴¹⁵ Basden, *Among the Ibos*, 147-154.

¹⁴¹⁶ Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 122; Chief Oluwa Iro Kalu of Ebem village, oral interview by author; Chief Kevin Ukiro, oral interview by author; Ndukwe Otta and Elder Uduma Uka, Group Interview by author; Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author; Chief Eke Emetu Kalu, oral interview by author; Chief Emeh Okonkwo, oral interview by author; Chief Kalu Awa Kalu, oral interview by author; Chief K.K. Owen, oral interview by author.

admission into the male administrative organ called *umuaka*, was the ability of a man to maintain a full yam barn.¹⁴¹⁷ Deceased *ogaranya* were in the past buried with big yams, in the hope that in their next life, they would harvest yams as fine as the ones they were buried with.¹⁴¹⁸ In the course of Atlantic and domestic slave trades (1800-1900), yams were substituted with slaves for the burial of deceased *ogaranya*.¹⁴¹⁹ The symbolic representation of yam as wealth made it a source of constant anxiety. Individuals guarded their yam wealth by sleeping on their farms during the early part of the farming season, and at harvest time; and until British colonial rule, the punishment for yam theft was sometimes, death or slavery.¹⁴²⁰

A man's social prestige depended to a great extent on the number of yams he was able to display in his yam barn,¹⁴²¹ between 1850 and 1900.¹⁴²² Successful yam farmers performed the ritual of *ike oba* (tying up 3000-4000 yam tubers in a barn),¹⁴²³ and in so doing they became

¹⁴¹⁷ Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 62. Also, see chapter 2.

¹⁴¹⁸ Meek, *Law and Authority in a Nigerian Tribe*, 303; Mecha Ukpai Akanu, *ezie-ogo* of Amangwu and Members of the Men's Court, Group Interview by author; Ogbuka Abaa, oral interview by author; Chief Torti Kalu, oral interview by author; Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview; Chief Emeh Okonkwo, oral interview by author; Chief Kalu Awa, oral interview by author; Chief K.K. Owen, oral interview by author.

¹⁴¹⁹ See chapter 5.

¹⁴²⁰ Basden, *Among the Ibos*, 148; Meek, *Law and Authority in a Nigerian Tribe*, 156, 217; Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author; Chief Emeh Okonkwo, oral interview by author.

¹⁴²¹ Barns are fenced and unroofed enclosures, located a few kilometers on the way to the farmland, and grouped together according to patrilineage units, in a single place where they could be guarded if necessary. This differed from the barn practices in most patrilineal Igbo societies, where each individual kept his own yam barn, within his compound.

¹⁴²² Meek, *Law and Authority in a Nigerian Tribe*, 17; Anaso Awalekwa, *ezie-ogo* of Ndea-Nku Village and Members of the Men's Court, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Ndea-Nku Village. November 17, 2011.

¹⁴²³ Arua, "Yam Ceremonies and the Values of Ohafia Culture," 701; Chief Torti Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amuma, Ohafia. Nov. 26, 2011; Anaso Awalekwa, *Ezie-Ogo* of Ndea-Nku Village and Members of the Men's Court, Group Interview by author,

known as *oko ji* (yam farmer). This was the first step in the performance of yam masculinity. When the individual farmer have saved up enough yams to perform *ike oba*, he informed the male members of his age-grade, who came and inspected his *eziji* (*Dioscorea rotundata*). If they were satisfied, they fired gun salutes to proclaim the successful emergence of the farmer.¹⁴²⁴ The *oko ji* (individual that attained *ike oba* status) then invited his patri-kin (*umudi-ezi*) and members of his age-grade for a feast of yams, meat, fish, and drinks. This ceremony was known as *igwa oba* (the feast of yam-barning).¹⁴²⁵

Ike oba established an individual, as a potential member of the prestigious *nnu* society, and the obligations for admission into the society was so onerous and costly that only a few men attained it.¹⁴²⁶ *Nnu* refers to a million, but in practice, a farmer that presented 7,500-10,000 *eziji* yams in his barn (*aka oba iri* — ten yam stacks), qualified for admission into the society.¹⁴²⁷ Such an individual feasted his entire village, and gave each visitor a yam tuber upon his departure.¹⁴²⁸ Arua writes that in performing *igwa nnu*, members of the society erected a booth

digital voice recording, Ndea-Nku Village. November 17, 2011; Chief Uduma Nnochin Ogbuagu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amuke Village. Nov. 24, 2011.

¹⁴²⁴ Arua, "Yam Ceremonies and the Values of Ohafia Culture," 701.

¹⁴²⁵ Arua, "Yam Ceremonies and the Values of Ohafia Culture," 701; Chief Torti Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amuma, Ohafia. Nov. 26, 2011; Anaso Awalekwa, *Ezie-Ogo* of Ndea-Nku Village and Members of the Men's Court, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Ndea-Nku Village. November 17, 2011; Chief Uduma Nnochin Ogbuagu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amuke, Ohafia. Nov. 24, 2011.

¹⁴²⁶ Arua, "Yam Ceremonies and the Values of Ohafia Culture," 701.

¹⁴²⁷ Arua, "Yam Ceremonies and the Values of Ohafia Culture," 701; Chief Torti Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amuma, Ohafia. Nov. 26, 2011; Anaso Awalekwa, *Ezie-Ogo* of Ndea-Nku Village and Members of the Men's Court, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Ndea-Nku Village. November 17, 2011; Chief Uduma Nnochin Ogbuagu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amuke, Ohafia. Nov. 24, 2011.

¹⁴²⁸ Chief Torti Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amuma. Nov. 26, 2011; Chief Emeh Okonkwo, oral interview by author; Chief K.K. Owen, oral interview by author.

covered with *jooji* cloth, taking upwards of one hundred pieces of about eight meters apiece, at the initiate's expense. In all respects, the ceremony was marked by the unabashed and arrogant display of wealth.¹⁴²⁹ Individuals who performed *igwa nnu* (admission into *nnu* society) were known as *osuu*.¹⁴³⁰ Reflecting on these yam titles, an Ohafia collaborator, Chief K.K. Owen, stated: "These were what we may call rituals of masculinity or certain traditions, which ritualize or celebrate masculinity. The *osuu* was an *ogaranya*. In pre-colonial Ohafia, there were many ceremonies surrounding yam cultivation."¹⁴³¹

It was perhaps in reference to these practices that Meek asserted, "Much of the social and religious life of [Igbo] people, therefore, centered round the cultivation of the yam. There were yam festivals, yam deities, and yam titles."¹⁴³² In a similar tone, writing about the Ohafia-Igbo, Njoku stated, "Unlike the other crops, yam was deified in *fijoku*, one of the most powerful and revered of Ohafia deities. Every significant stage in yam cultivation was preceded with rituals. And the farming calendar revolved around the rhythm of yam cultivation."¹⁴³³ While these statements are true, it should also be noted that before the planting of any crop in pre-colonial Ohafia, the *ezie-nwami* (female ruler) inaugurated the farming season with a ritual hoe.¹⁴³⁴

Before any individual could plant, the women-folk of the village performed an inaugural ritual known as *ichu aja izu orie*, or in some parts of Ohafia, *omume iri uduma*. This was

¹⁴²⁹ Arua, "Yam Ceremonies and the Values of Ohafia Culture," 702.

¹⁴³⁰ *Dibia Kalu Uko*, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okon. Sept. 14, 2011; Chief Torti Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amuma. Nov. 26, 2011; Godwin Nwankwo Uko, *ezie-ogo* of Amankwu Village and his cabinet members, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Amankwu. Oct. 25, 2011.

¹⁴³¹ Chief K.K. Owen, oral interview by author.

¹⁴³² Meek, *Law and Authority in a Nigerian Tribe*, 16.

¹⁴³³ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 36.

¹⁴³⁴ Nsugbe, *Ohafia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 24.

complementary to the men's ritual performed by *nde ezie ji* (yam priests).¹⁴³⁵ This gender complementarity is also seen in the fact that while the yam priest ministered to a male deity (*ikwan*), he must as a rule, come from a lineage that customarily housed the complementary female deity (*orie*) of the society, since the agro-based system was matrifocal.¹⁴³⁶

Figure 17: Chief Torti Kalu's Performance of *Igwa Nnu* at Amuma, Ohafia, 1952.



¹⁴³⁵ *Ikpirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu Village, Group Interview; Mama Docas Kalu and Mama Mary Ezera of Ebem village, Group Interview by author; Nmia Nnaya Agbai of Elu village, oral interview by author.

¹⁴³⁶ Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview; Obuba, *The History and Culture of Ohafia*, 15.

Yam cultivation is best seen as a conjunctive gendered practice involving men and women. Men's performance of masculinity through yam cultivation was made possible by women's provisioning of food crops throughout the year, women's constant tending of yam farms, and women's rituals enabling yam cultivation. Thus, R.W. Connell noted that masculinity was a configuration of practice within a system of gender relations.¹⁴³⁷ Against this background, Nwokeji's argument that the Bight of Biafra produced more female slaves than male slaves because of the preeminent role of men in yam cultivation, fails to see yam cultivation as a gender constituted practice.¹⁴³⁸ Expressing the preeminent role of Ohafia-Igbo women in yam cultivation, Chief K.K. Owen stated, "men in precolonial Ohafia . . . they were over-pampered by women. I don't know whether to say that they over-exploited women, or that they were over-pampered . . . women were not forced to do these things . . . they were not forced to be breadwinners."¹⁴³⁹ As Amadiume has shown, it was women's industriousness, and sense of responsibility as the pillars of the subsistence economy that engendered their dominance in agricultural production. Basden was trying to make sense of this phenomenon when he described Igbo women as "the burden-bearers of the country."¹⁴⁴⁰

Conclusion

The idea of institutions of masculinity emerged in the fieldwork context, where both researcher and Ohafia-Igbo informants jointly debated the meaning of past cultural practices. It

¹⁴³⁷ Robert Connell, *Masculinities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 84

¹⁴³⁸ Ugo G. Nwokeji, "African Conceptions of Gender and the Slave Traffic," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 58, 1 (New Perspectives on the Transatlantic Slave Trade, Third Series), 62-64.

¹⁴³⁹ Chief K.K. Owen, oral interview by author.

¹⁴⁴⁰ Basden, *Among the Ibos*, 88.

represents an effort to comprehend socio-cultural practices and organizations, which significantly shaped the production and understanding of *ufiem* and the gendered contestation of power in Ohafia-Igbo society between 1850 and 1900. In providing illustrative examples within living memory to shed light on these pre-colonial institutional practices, it has been necessary at times to draw upon specific incidences between 1900 and 1930, as well as contemporary rituals, as a lens into the past. This is a major challenge in reconstructing African historical experiences in the precolonial period.

Nonetheless, this chapter examines the role of secret societies, the *dibia* cult, hunting, and yam production in the gendering of identities and the definitions of social mobility among the Ohafia-Igbo between 1850 and 1900. My primary motive for writing this chapter is to demonstrate that male power, or what others have characterized as patriarchy in precolonial southeastern Nigeria,¹⁴⁴¹ varied from one community to another, and that by historicizing so-called patriarchy in specific cultural contexts, the limits of male power, and the relative power of women become manifest. Thus, in the Ohafia case, these institutions of masculinity (which others have presented as evidence of male domination) provided individuals with alternative avenues for social mobility and *ufiem* distinction beyond warfare, but did not enable men to exercise political domination over women between 1850 and 1900. Moreover, through these *ufiem* institutions, I examine the concept of *ogaranya* masculinity performance between 1850 and 1900. In the next chapter, I historicize changing constructions of *ogaranya* masculinity between 1900 and 1920.

¹⁴⁴¹ Van Allen, "Sitting on a Man," 165-171; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 24; Mba, *Nigerian Women Mobilized*, 27, 29, 37, 62; Lebeuf, "The Role of Women in the Political Organization of African Societies," 109, 113; Ifeka-Moller, "Female Militancy and Colonial Revolt: The Women's War of 1929, Eastern Nigeria," in Ardener, ed., *Perceiving Women*, 134

CHAPTER FIVE

TRADERS, CONVERTS, WAGE LABORERS, COLONIZED: EMERGENT MASCULINITIES AND THE PERFORMANCE OF *OGARANYA* MASCULINITY, 1900-1920

Ogaranya, the masculinity of wealth performance changed over time. It has been examined in the context of *okonko* secret society, gun ownership and hunting, *dibia* profession, and yam cultivation. This chapter analyzes changing constructions of *ogaranya* masculinity in the first two decades of the 20th century, as a lens into the gendered struggle for power among the Ohafia-Igbo. It argues that whereas *ndi ikike* were the hegemonic *ufiem* between 1850 and 1920, individuals who acquired wealth, performed the social power of *ogaranya* status, and eclipsed both male and female traditional political authorities, defined the dominant ideals of *ufiem* accomplishment in the first two decades of the 20th century, among the Ohafia-Igbo.

First, in spite of the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade, domestic slave trade continued to flourish in the Biafra hinterland until 1916.¹⁴⁴² As Afigbo argued, the trade in palm produce with which the British hoped to replace the slave economy largely depended upon slave labor.¹⁴⁴³ Slavery shaped social practices such as *ogaranya* masculinity performance in Ohafia between 1900 and 1920. The chapter theorizes *ogaranya* by examining its performance through human sacrifice, the ideology of wealth-in-people, and the resultant creation of spiritual slaves between 1900 and 1920. In the same vein, the chapter utilizes the changing material culture practices of the Ohafia-Igbo in the first two decades of the 20th century to provide a window into changes in Ohafia conceptions of *ogaranya*.

¹⁴⁴² Slavery was outlawed in 1916, but slave sales continued in the regional markets until the 1920s. See the following dispatches: BNA, CO 520/38, Dec. 1906, 88-91; CO520/107, Nov. 23, 1911; CO520/123, Mar. 1913; CO520/124, May 1913, *op cit*.

¹⁴⁴³ Afigbo, *Ropes of Sand*, 241-242.

Second, through the life history of Chief Kalu Ezelu Uwaoma, Ohafia's first warrant chief, the chapter examines the greater opportunities which British colonial rule, Christianity and Western education provided Ohafia men, over women, and enabled men to emerge in dominant positions of socio-political power. In order to capture the broader ramifications of social change in the redefinition of gendered power among the Ohafia-Igbo between 1900 and 1920, the chapter further examines the gendered impact of Christianity, Western education and colonial rule on the Ohafia-Igbo during this historical period. It argues that *ogaranya* masculinity performance manifested itself in the form of educated male Christian converts' elitism, characterized by their marriage of women transformed into "good Christian wives" by female Scottish missionaries between 1911 and 1920. This form of *ogaranya* was a manifestation of what Stephan Miescher coined Presbyterian masculinity,¹⁴⁴⁴ in the case of Kwawu and Akan societies in Ghana between 1930 and 1951.

Third, as shown in chapter 1, while women controlled domestic commerce between 1850 and 1900, long distance trade was dominated by men. Through the life histories of two women, Madam Chief Otuwe Agwu and Unyang Uka, this chapter examines how the new wealth, accrued from both slave and legitimate trade, enabled women to become female husbands, and *dibia* and to perform *ogaranya* masculinity between 1900 and 1920. It argues that Ohafia women, faced with declining spheres of economic prosperity, invaded hitherto exclusively male

¹⁴⁴⁴ Miescher, *Making Men in Ghana*, 2, 48, 49, 58, 80, 89, 138, 150, 151, 199; Stephan Miescher, "The Making of Presbyterian Teachers: Masculinities and Programs of Education in Colonial Ghana," in Lindsay and Miescher, eds., *Men and Masculinities*, 89-108. Notably, the Ghanaian Presbytery was an outgrowth of the Swiss and German Basel Mission, in contrast to Ohafia, where the Presbytery emerged from the Church of Scotland Mission. Miescher uses the Akan term *krakye* (clerk/those who passed Standard VII) (pl. *akrakyefoo*) to describe clerks, accountants, storekeepers, pupil teachers and pastors, as Presbyterian masculinities, who stood educationally, economically, and culturally between European and traditional cultural values, and subjected to conflicting expectations of manhood.

spaces, and performed *ogaranya* masculinity. These life histories demonstrate that Ohafia women moved beyond the confines of Christianity and Western education to gain social mobility during this period. While the declining socio-political power of women between 1900 and 1920 corresponded with the emergence of men in dominant positions of religious and political power, the increasing performances of *ogaranya* masculinity by women, evidence gendered resistance to emergent African and European patriarchies.

***Ogaranya* Masculinity and the Making of Spiritual Slaves, 1900-1920: An Introductory Background to Changing Constructions of *Ufiem* in the Early 20th Century**

As indicated in chapter 4, between 1850 and 1900, *ndi ikike* were buried with human heads, and sometimes live captives. However, between 1900 and 1920, individuals who performed *ogaranya* masculinity were buried with live captives and slaves, and male individuals who did not receive this honor were seen as cowards and paupers.¹⁴⁴⁵ Richard Morrissey, the Divisional Commissioner of Cross River Division reported in his August 5, 1901 letter to the British High Commissioner that in the Igbo and Ibibio communities on both sides of the Cross River, at the death of a wealthy man, sometimes one hundred captives were sacrificed, and that no attempts were made to conceal such acts.¹⁴⁴⁶ His report is definitely exaggerated and I found no evidence that such large-scale human sacrifice occurred in Ohafia. However, putting a stop to profuse practices of human sacrifice at the funeral of *ogaranya* was a major justification for military campaigns between 1905 and 1907 in Afikpo, Ohafia, Arochukwu, and Owerri during

¹⁴⁴⁵ Azuonye, "The Heroic Age," 14; Obuba, *The History and Culture of Ohafia*, 26-27; CO520/8: "Southern Nigeria Original Correspondence, May-Aug., 1901," 570-574; CO520/36: "Southern Nigeria Original Correspondence, 1906," 170-184; Patridge, *Cross River Natives*, 72.
¹⁴⁴⁶ CO520/8: "Southern Nigeria Original Correspondence, May-Aug., 1901," 573-574.

the Bende-Onitsha hinterland expedition.¹⁴⁴⁷ The high rate of human sacrifice in the early 20th century in Ohafia and neighboring communities such as Arochukwu was a result of the increasing glut of slaves on the domestic markets sequel to abolition, in addition to depressing sale prices of slaves,¹⁴⁴⁸ and the performance of *ogaranya* masculinity.¹⁴⁴⁹

Ogaranya masculinity was fundamentally linked to the ideology of wealth-in-people. Among the Ohafia-Igbo in the first two decades of the 20th century, this ideology found expression through the ownership of slaves, possession of numerous wives and concubines, and the burial of deceased *ogaranya* with live male captives.¹⁴⁵⁰ The increased rate of elite polygyny¹⁴⁵¹ (which I interpret as the marriage of numerous wives in demonstration of wealth) in Ohafia, between 1900 and 1920, may have been facilitated by the glut of slaves in the Bight of

¹⁴⁴⁷ CO520/36: "Southern Nigeria Protectorate Original Correspondence, June-Aug., 1906," 170-184; A. E. Afigbo, *The Abolition of the Slave Trade in Southeastern Nigeria, 1885-1950* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2006), 42.

¹⁴⁴⁸ John McCall, "The Atlantic Slave Trade and the Ohafia Warrior Tradition," 75-76.

¹⁴⁴⁹ Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, 104 argues that this was a result of the increasing circulation of wealth. Njoku, *African Cultural Values*, 19, attributes this in the case of Arochukwu and neighboring communities, to what he calls the *ogaranya* syndrome, which produced arrogant, lawless political patrons. Also, see O.K. Oji, "A Study of Migration and Warfare in Ohafia," B.A Thesis, Department of History, University of Nigeria Nsukka (1974), 42-44; FO84/2020: "Africa (Slave Trade), West Coast, 1890," 348-351; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 64; Nna Kalu Awa, oral interview by author, Amuma Village. November 26, 2011; Chief Udensi Ekea, oral interview by author. August 4, 2010; Chief Ikenga Ibe, in Group Interview with *Nde Ichin* (ten elders of) Amuma Village. Nov. 26, 2011; Chief Oluka Mba, oral interview by author, Nde-Ibe village. November 3, 2011.

¹⁴⁵⁰ The illustrative life histories of Chief Kalu Ezelu, Madam Chief Otuwe Agwu, and Unyang Uka are provided below.

¹⁴⁵¹ Nakanyinke Musisi, "Women, 'Elite Polygyny,' and Buganda State Formation," *Signs* 16 (1991), 757-786, used this term to describe the practice of marrying more than four wives in Buganda, beginning in the mid-19th century.

Biafra markets.¹⁴⁵² The imposition of *Pax Britannica* and the consequent decrease in the incidence of warfare and headhunting expeditions in the Cross-River region during this period¹⁴⁵³ meant that most Ohafia men could no longer capture slaves through warfare. However, slave production through judiciary decisions and kidnapping as well as the sale of slaves in domestic markets continued throughout the region of southeastern Nigeria at least until the 1920s.¹⁴⁵⁴ Hence, individuals who amassed wealth through trade dramatized their social status by purchasing slaves.¹⁴⁵⁵ Whereas these *ogaranya* employed male slaves as domestic servants, farm workers, plantation laborers, carriers (of trade goods), and trading staff, most female slaves often became wives, and a few were sold in the domestic markets at Itu, Asan, Bende, and Uzuakoli, where they fetched more money than male slaves.¹⁴⁵⁶ The greater number of women than men (a ratio of 5:3) in Ohafia between 1900 and 1930¹⁴⁵⁷ may have been a result

¹⁴⁵² In contrast to this 1900-1920 development evident in the life histories provided in this chapter below, Nwokeji indicates that before the 1900, elite polygyny in the Bight of Biafra was very low, compared to Slave Coast and West Central Africa. See Nwokeji, "African Conceptions of Gender and the Slave Traffic," 65

¹⁴⁵³ Chubb, "Assessment Reports: Bende Division, 1927-1929," 6; Jones, *Annual Reports of Bende Division*, 36; Njoku, "Inter-Village Trade in Ohafia," 29; Chief Uduma Nnochin Ogbuagu, oral interview by author, Amuke. Nov. 24, 2011; *Ezie Uka Uduma Uka (Okpere Oha 1 of Akanu-Ukwu Autonomous Community)*, oral interview by author. Nov. 2, 2011.

¹⁴⁵⁴ Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, 85; Nwokeji, "The Atlantic Slave Trade and Population Density," 633. Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors and Kings*, 75 suggests that these mechanisms of slave production continued even through the 1940s and 50s in Northern Igboland, when the Eastern House of Assembly passed a law abolishing the *osu/ohu* system.

¹⁴⁵⁵ Mayne, "Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934," 44.

¹⁴⁵⁶ Jones, *Annual Reports of Bende Division*, 70; Mayne, "Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934," 50; CO520/8: "Southern Nigeria Protectorate Original Correspondence, May-Aug., 1901," 574; Chief Idika Aso, the Chief Priest of *Obu Nkwa* shrine, Asaga Village, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording, *Obu Nkwa* Asaga shrine. August 12, 2010; Chief Udensi Ekea, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording. August 4, 2010; Vasco U. Iro, *ezie-ogo* of Nkwebi Village, Members of the Men's Court and *Nde-Ichin*, Group Interview by author.

¹⁴⁵⁷ Mayne, "Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934," 58-59.

of the gendered uses of slaves and the practice of elite polygyny. Concubinage also became a popular social practice during the same time period, and might have been a result of these factors as well.¹⁴⁵⁸

It is thus clear that the glut of slaves in the Bight of Biafra markets and the performance of *ogaranya* transformed the mode of exploitation of slaves and their labor. Suzanne Miers and Igor Kpoytoff argued that the best way to look at the impact of the trans-Atlantic slave trade on African societies is to look at their “permutations.”¹⁴⁵⁹ Thornton examined these permutations in terms of the “quality of the population left behind,” and argues that it reveals how gendered practices mediated the impact of the slave trade.¹⁴⁶⁰ The edited volumes by Jay Spaulding and Stephanie Beswick,¹⁴⁶¹ and Carolyn Brown and Paul Lovejoy¹⁴⁶² continue this conversation by examining how the Atlantic slave trade transformed indigenous slave systems. Particularly illuminating for the Ohafia context is Achebe’s examination of the power that religious

¹⁴⁵⁸ Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording, Amangwu Village. August 15, 2011; Chief Oluka Mba, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording, Nde-Ibe. November 3, 2011; Ndukwe Otta and Uduma Uka, Group Interview by author, dig. voice recording, Ebem Village., Aug. 14, 2010; Chief Kalu Awa Kalu, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording, Nde-Ukpai, Ufiele Village. October 27, 2011. The reasons for the increased popularity of concubinage include the decline of the practice of *jonkijo* marriages as a result of Christianity and Western education, and the emergence of male breadwinners and wealthy individuals, who could afford to provide financial support to concubines. The rescuing and adoption of ostracized twin mothers by Christian male converts also increased the number of concubines in the society.

¹⁴⁵⁹ Miers and Kopytoff, “Introduction,” 76. This means looking at social, political, and economic shifts within existing patterns, changes in the use of slaves and dependent persons, variations in methods of obtaining them, and redefinitions of old relationships.

¹⁴⁶⁰ John Thornton, “Sexual Demography: The Impact of the Slave Trade on Family Structure,” In *Women and Slavery in Africa*, ed., Claire C. Robertson and Martin A. Klein (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1997), 39-40.

¹⁴⁶¹ Spaulding and Beswick, eds. *African Systems of Slavery*.

¹⁴⁶² Brown and Lovejoy, eds. *Repercussions of the Atlantic Slave Trade*.

institutions and offices afforded spiritual slaves in Nsukka division.¹⁴⁶³ Achebe argues that as a result of alarming depopulation arising from slave raids from her more powerful neighbors, the Idoha community in Nsukka created a goddess, *Efuru* to protect and repopulate Idoha through marriage (dedication of people to *Efuru*, hence spiritual slaves).¹⁴⁶⁴ *Efuru* dedicatees enjoyed relative legal immunity and social power.¹⁴⁶⁵ The high rate of inhumane uses of slaves in Ohafia society in the early 20th century similarly produced a class of spiritual slaves, who had sought *ukwuzi* protection from *Omokwu* (a.k.a *obu nkwa*), the shrine of Ohafia's ancestral deity, Uma Ukpai (the founder of Asaga village).¹⁴⁶⁶

In the early colonial period, many slaves escaped human sacrifice at the burial of *ogaranya* by running into the *obu nkwa* in order to secure protection and immunity from harm.¹⁴⁶⁷ According to Ohafia oral historian Chief Kevin Ukiro, in addition to slaves, individuals found guilty of murder and theft by the *okonko* secret society, *ikpirikpe ndi inyom* and the Ebem Native Court also increasingly sought *ukwuzi* protection from *obu nkwa*, after which they were considered “children of *arunsi* [deity],” and became “automatically saved.”¹⁴⁶⁸ However, *i bi arunsi ukwuzi* (to secure the protection of a deity) stigmatized such individuals as

¹⁴⁶³ Achebe, “When Deities Marry: Indigenous ‘Slave’ Systems,” 105-133.

¹⁴⁶⁴ Achebe, “When Deities Marry: Indigenous ‘Slave’ Systems,” 110.

¹⁴⁶⁵ Achebe, “When Deities Marry: Indigenous ‘Slave’ Systems,” 127.

¹⁴⁶⁶ Jones, “Ohaffia Obu Houses,” 170; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo People*, 42; Chief Idika Aso, the Chief Priest of *Obu Nkwa* shrine, Asaga village Ohafia, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording, *Obu Nkwa* Asaga shrine. August 12, 2010, and Chief Kevin Ukiro, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording, Asaga Village, Ohafia. August 10, 2010.

¹⁴⁶⁷ Chief Idika Aso, the Chief Priest of *Obu Nkwa* shrine, Asaga village Ohafia, oral interview by author. Aug. 12, 2010; Chief Kevin Ukiro, oral interview by author, Asaga Village, August 10, 2010; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author, Amangwu Village, Ohafia. Aug. 15, 2011.

¹⁴⁶⁸ Chief Kevin Ukiro, oral interview by author, Asaga Village. August 10, 2010.

osu (spiritual slaves and outcasts).¹⁴⁶⁹ Uchendu describes the *osu* as a cult slave, who has been dedicated to a deity, and whose descendants automatically become *osu*, and he argues that the practice was most prevalent in the Owerri-Okigwi region, and was linked to powerful protector deities.¹⁴⁷⁰ However, the Ohafia use the term *osu* to describe individuals who voluntarily sought *ukwuzi* under a deity, rather than dedicatees.¹⁴⁷¹ They also employ another term, *ibemike* to distinguish a class of outcasts, who were not slaves, but who became socially ostracized because they had committed murder.¹⁴⁷² A remarkable difference in the Ohafia *osu* and *ibemike* system was the fact that while male *osu/ibemike* descendants were not allowed to intermarry with the rest of the community, the female descendants were exempt from this social inhibition because of their importance to the sustenance of matrilineages, with the result that over time, it became difficult to identify and discriminate against *osu/ibemike* descendants.¹⁴⁷³

¹⁴⁶⁹ Chief Idika Aso, the Chief Priest of *Obu Nkwa* shrine, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording, *Obu Nkwa* Asaga shrine. August 12, 2010; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording, Aug. 15, 2011.

¹⁴⁷⁰ Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria*, 89.

¹⁴⁷¹ Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording, Amangwu, Ohafia. August 15, 2011; Chief Idika Aso, the Chief Priest of *Obu Nkwa* shrine, Asaga village Ohafia, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording, *Obu Nkwa* Asaga shrine. August 12, 2010. Nwando Achebe makes a clear distinction between *osu* and dedicatees (*igberemma*).

¹⁴⁷² Chief Kevin Ukiro, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording, Asaga, Ohafia. August 10, 2010; Chief Idika Aso, the Chief Priest of *Obu Nkwa* shrine, Asaga, Ohafia, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording. August 12, 2010.

¹⁴⁷³ Chief Kevin Ukiro, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording, Asaga Village, Ohafia. August 10, 2010; Chief Idika Aso, the Chief Priest of *Obu Nkwa* shrine, Asaga village Ohafia, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording. August 12, 2010. In the few instances where these distinctions could still be made, such descendants continued to suffer social discriminations. For instance, upon their death, their family members had to purchase a private land upon which they were buried, because they would contaminate the communal land. Upon the death of an *osu* or *ibemike*, his body was not allowed to touch the ground. Usually, the door of his house was pulled out and his body laid upon it to prevent it from touching the ground. No elaborate funerals were

Ohafia Material Culture and the Memorialization of Historical Change: A Conceptual Background to Changing Constructions of *Ufiem* in the Early 20th Century

The *obu nkwa* is significant because it reflects the impact of *ogaranya* masculinity performance on the transformations in indigenous slave systems. However, it also embodies the changes in the performance of masculinity among the Ohafia-Igbo in the early colonial period. It has been shown that Ohafia *obu* houses represent a geography of masculinity. The *obu nkwa* differed from other *obu* houses because it was the only Ohafia *obu* structure with representations of female figures. Jones described the *obu nkwa* in the 1930s after it had been rebuilt in 1906 following a fire outbreak that decimated Asaga community. He noted the memorialization of various forms of male and female *ufiem* in the carved wooden effigies housed within the shrine:

It [the *obu nkwa*] houses no less than 22 male and female figures, the majority the life size or over. Rather like an African “Madame Tussaud’s,” the figures stand on pedestals along the walls and front verandah — a warrior in an Amaseri war cap with a fighting machet in one hand and a head in the other, a warrior in a trillby hat with a dane gun standing on the head of another enemy, an old man in a straw hat sucking palm wine through a straw out of a drinking horn, a masked *Ekpe* player, a court messenger, a rich woman with ivory anklets, a young girl with brass rods on her legs, a woman with a [basket] . . . Standing beside the figure of a seated woman with a child on her knee is the figure of a man bound hand and foot, said to be the [*ujo*]¹⁴⁷⁴ husband of the woman and so punished because he co-habited with her before her child was weaned . . . the tarry smear on their mouths . . . comes from the blood of the victims sacrificed at the shrine.¹⁴⁷⁵

The *obu nkwa* material culture complex captures the society’s changing vision of *ufiem*, gender roles, and power between 1900 and 1920. The current chief priest of *obu nkwa* shrine, Chief Idika Aso, now aged 88 years, described the war cap, machete, dane gun, ivory, and brass rods as symbols, which individuals who attained *ufiem*, used to socially distinguish themselves.

held for them, and no commemoration of *ufiem* accomplishment such as the beating of the *ikoro*, and the performance of *obon* and *akan* secret society dances were extended in their honor.

¹⁴⁷⁴ Insight was provided by Chief Idika Aso, the Chief Priest of *Obu Nkwa* shrine, Asaga village Ohafia, oral interview by author, *Obu Nkwa* Asaga shrine. August 12, 2010.

¹⁴⁷⁵ Jones, “Ohaffia Obu Houses,” 170-171.

He explained that the *obu nkwa* statues memorialize the role of secret societies (such as *ekpe okonko*) in the definition of adult masculinity, the significance of *ndi ikike* to societal well-being before 1900, and the role of brave hunters in the foundation of new settlements. In contrast to these *ufiem* representations, the *ujo* statue represents “lazy and frail men,” who the Ohafia-Igbo often sold as slaves to the Aro.¹⁴⁷⁶ Chief Idika further stated that the figure of a woman carrying a basket returning from the market memorializes the historic role of women as *ndi n’aku ndi ife nri* (bread-winners), while the rich women statues represent women who performed *ogaranya* masculinity in the early colonial period. Lastly, the *obu nkwa* captures an emergent masculinity, the court messenger — a figure that speaks to larger political transformations among the Ohafia-Igbo under colonial rule.

In addition to the *obu nkwa*, other material culture practices such as the beating of the *ikoro* was transformed to accommodate the changing performances of *ufiem* between 1900 and 1920. According to Ohafia elder and oral historian, Chief Kalu Awa Kalu,

When an old man dies in Ufiele [village] today, if his son is wealthy . . . he would provide a goat, the required drinks and money, and the *ikoro* may be sounded for his father. However, the *ikoro* and *iri aha* [war dance] constitute the respect and honor accorded those who had cut head in the past [before 1900]. After the white men introduced Christianity and education, when an Ohafia man went abroad to study, and upon his return, brought back a school certificate and money, he was said to have cut a head. Some people who became *ogaranya* from trading or working in the colonial service, also returned with a lot of money or an expensive vehicle. The person would go to the elders bearing gifts, and the elders would say that even though he did not cut a head with a machete, he had actually cut a head, one that is visible and materialistic [*“O gbu ghi nke mma; mana o gbuu nke a fu anya”*]. So the *ikoro* and *iri aha* would be performed in his honor. If an individual finances the construction of motor roads for the community, which was something customarily assigned to an entire age-grade, the *ikoro* and *iri-aha* were performed in his honor. Men who built modern houses had the *ikoro* beat for them, because they had performed a feat worthy of designation as *dimkpa* [brave man], as ‘*onye*

¹⁴⁷⁶ Chief Idika Aso, the Chief Priest of *Obu Nkwa* shrine, Asaga village Ohafia, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording, *Obu Nkwa* Asaga shrine. August 12, 2010.

kpara ike [‘one who performed bravery’]. In a sense, *okpogho* (money) has replaced *igbu ishi* [to cut a head].¹⁴⁷⁷

The history of such individuals described by Chief Kalu Awa Kalu, are explored below.

Upstarts and Warrant-Chiefs: Kalu Ezelu Uwaoma and the Redefinitions of *Ufiem* In the Early 20th Century

The extension of Protectorate rule to [Bende Division between 1901 and 1910] and the clearing and maintenance of its “roads” was now making it increasingly safe for travel, while the steadily expanding needs of the government and commercial agencies offered for the first time paid employment both for unskilled [men] and for those who had been able to acquire the skills that were now in demand and particularly literacy, the ability to read and write English.¹⁴⁷⁸

Chief Kalu Ezelu Uwaoma,¹⁴⁷⁹ Ohafia’s first warrant chief was at the center of the major political changes that took place in the society in the first three decades of the 20th century. His social mobility from slavery to warrant-chief status under British colonial rule, illustrates the changes in social constructions of *ufiem* and the performance of *ogaranya* masculinity, as well as the emergence of men in dominant socio-political positions in Ohafia-Igbo society between 1900

¹⁴⁷⁷ Chief Kalu Awa Kalu, oral interview by author.

¹⁴⁷⁸ Jones, *Annual Reports of Bende Division*, 36.

¹⁴⁷⁹ This outline of Chief Kalu Ezelu Uwaoma’s life is based on the following: Kalu, “An Ibo Autobiography,” 158-170; Ndukwe, “From Slavery;” Njoku, “Inter-Village Trade in Ohafia;” Johnston, *Of God and Maxim Guns*, 42-44; Jones, *Annual Reports of Bende Division*, 9; Njoku, “Before the Middle Passage;” Chubb, “Assessment Reports: Bende Division, 1927-1929;” Mayne, “Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934;” Chief Udensi Ekea, oral interview by author. August 4, 2010; Chief Ikenga Ibe, in Group Interview with *Nde Ichin* (ten elders of) Amuma. Nov. 26, 2011; Chief Kalu Awa Kalu, oral interview by author, Ufieme. Oct. 27, 2011; Godwin Nwankwo Uko, *ezie-ogo* of Amankwu and his cabinet members., Group Interview by author, Oct. 25, 2011; Anaso Awalekwa, *ezie-ogo* of Ndea-Nku Village and Members of the Men’s Court, Group Interview by author, Nov. 17, 2011; Ogbuka Abaa oral interview by author. Dec. 10, 2011; Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author, Elu. Aug. 10, 2010.

and 1920. Chief Kalu was born around 1860,¹⁴⁸⁰ the son of *Dibia* Kalu Uwaoma and Mrs. Nwangbo Agwunsi Okoro. At the age of 12 (1872), Kalu was kidnapped and sold as a slave to Chief Akara Oja of Bonny, by Mr. Nsi Oji, an Ohafia blacksmith he was apprenticed to. At Bonny, Kalu converted to Christianity and learned to speak Pidgin English.¹⁴⁸¹ He served his Bonny master for some years, and was then sold to Chief Mini Epelle of Opobo. At Opobo, Kalu rose to become the overseer of Chief Epelle's house slaves, and conducted trade between Opobo and the Igbo hinterland on behalf of his master. Several Ohafia respondents stated that Kalu served King Jaja of Opobo¹⁴⁸² (before 1887), and according to Njoku, he became "one of the

¹⁴⁸⁰ Kalu writes that he was kidnapped at age 12, and returned to Ohafia after about 29 years, and that a year later, he went to Calabar as a *dibia* in 1901. These put his birth around 1860, rather than 1875 as he wrote. He died in 1968.

¹⁴⁸¹ Ndukwe, "From Slavery," 21; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 95.

¹⁴⁸² Chief Udensi Ekea, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording. August 4, 2010; Chief Ikenga Ibe, in Group Interview with *Nde Ichin* (ten elders of) Amuma Ohafia, dig. voice recording, Amuma. Nov. 26, 2011; Chief Kalu Awa Kalu, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording, Ufielie Village. Oct. 27, 2011; Godwin Nwankwo Uko, *ezie-ogo* of Amankwu Village and his cabinet members., Group Interview by author, Oct. 25, 2011; Anaso Awalekwa, *ezie-ogo* of Ndea-Nku Village and Members of the Men's Court, Group Interview by author, Nov. 17, 2011; Ogbuka Abaa, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording. Dec. 10, 2011; Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording, Elu Village. Aug. 10, 2010. For studies on King Jaja, see Ebiegberi J. Alagoa, *Jaja of Opobo: The Slave Who Became a King*. (London: Longman, 1970); S.J.S. Cooley, *King Jaja of the Niger Delta: His Life and Times, 1821-1891* (New York: Nok Publishers Ltd., 1974); E.A. Jaja, *King Jaja of Opobo (1821-1891): A Sketch History of the Development and Expansion of Opobo* (Lagos: Opobo Action Council, 1977); Edward L. Cox, *Rekindling the Ancestral Memory: King Ja Ja of Opobo in St. Vincent and Barbados, 1888-1891* (Cave Hill: Dept. of History, the University of the West Indies, 1998). The similarities between Jaja and Kalu are indeed interesting. Jaja was an Igbo boy enslaved in Bonny at the age of 12, and worked in the conduct of the provision trade for the Atlantic slave trade. The coastal environment was too harsh for him and he was re-assigned to the domestic, where he worked as a cook for his master. After a while, Jaja returned to Igboland, and when he re-appeared in Bonny a few years later, his master had died and he started dealing directly with the British. His newly acquired wealth enabled him to pay off his master's debt and to become the head of one of the two dominant trading houses – the Anna Pepple House. In the ensuing conflict between the two houses, Jaja broke away from Bonny and founded the town of Opobo. Jaja rose from slavery to become a king. Kalu rose from slavery to become a ruler.

most trusted servants of Jaja.”¹⁴⁸³ If this is true, Kalu must have left the service of King Jaja after 1887, when the British colonial government under the auspices of Vice Consul Henry H. Johnston kidnapped and exiled King Jaja to Barbados.¹⁴⁸⁴

Kalu’s autobiographical account suggests that he was no longer a slave in the 1890s, or that he was paying his manumission, because by this time, he had become an independent palm produce trader, but still corresponded with Chief Epelle.¹⁴⁸⁵ In 1899, Kalu volunteered as a foot soldier and gun carrier of the British West African Frontier Force (W.A.F.F) Niger Coast Protectorate troops in their expedition against the Eket.¹⁴⁸⁶ Upon his return from the Eket war, Kalu met three Ohafia *dibias*, Ukoha Nnake, Amogu Akwukwa, and Orie Obosso, who had embarked on *ije ogwu* (itinerant *dibia* healing) to Opobo. The latter agreed to lead Kalu back to Ohafia. However, on their homeward journey, *Dibia* Obosso deceived Kalu and sold him to Aro slavers at Okporoenyi in Bende. Kalu’s new Aro master, Chief Okoroafo Ukpabi maltreated him so much that he developed a profound hatred for Aro people. Kalu viewed his enslavement in the hands of the Aro as illegitimate because it was a violation of the *ukwuzi* pact that existed

¹⁴⁸³ Njoku, “Inter-Village Trade in Ohafia, 1900-1979,” 30. Under King Jaja, Kalu acquired some wealth and himself, owned a number of slaves.

¹⁴⁸⁴ FO84/1881: “Africa, West Coast, 1888,” 159-168; W.N.M. Geary, *Nigeria Under British Rule* (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1927), 283.

¹⁴⁸⁵ Kalu, “An Ibo Autobiography,” 159-160; Ndukwe, “From Slavery,” 19-20. In the course of oral interviews about Unyang Uka (discussed further below), respondents stated that she met Kalu at Opobo around 1895, and the latter furnished her with loads of corral beads, and informed her that he was passing as a legitimate son of the ex-king of Opobo. We know from extant studies that the only “ex-king” as at 1895 was Jaja. See Hon. Tessy Uzoma Odum (grand daughter of Unyang Uka) of Amangwu, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording, Ohafia Local Government office, Ebem Village, Ohafia, September 5, 2011; Grace Emehe (niece of Unyang Uka, daughter of Johnson Emehe), oral interview by author, dig. voice recording, Amangwu Village, Ohafia, Sept. 10, 2011.

¹⁴⁸⁶ See *The Daily Telegraph Supplement*, Saturday, June 24, 1899, 6 for a report on the Eket War, titled, “The Horrors of Fetish Worship.”

between Ohafia and Arochukwu, which required that both parties not enslave each other.¹⁴⁸⁷

Kalu became more resentful of the Aro when Chief Ukpabi tried to use him as a burial good.¹⁴⁸⁸

Escaping from his captors, Kalu pledged to pay £60 to another Aro man, Ifere Imaga, who led him back to Ohafia. Upon his return to Ohafia around 1900,¹⁴⁸⁹ Kalu convinced Ohafia elders to compel *Dibia* Obosso to repay him all his lost property and money.

In spite of his professed identity as a Christian, Kalu's first act upon his return to Ohafia was to purchase membership of the *dibia* guild. As a *dibia* (medicine man and spirit medium), he gained an immunity (see chapter 4) that enabled him to travel freely without fear of enslavement. Becoming *dibia* was also an economic necessity that enabled him to acquire wealth. Kalu writes that he embarked upon *ije ogwu* (divination and healing trips) to various Cross River communities such as Ikun, Atam Onoyom, Akpabuyo, and Calabar, where he acquired significant wealth and became "famed as a great native doctor."¹⁴⁹⁰ During one of his trips to Calabar in 1901, Kalu learned of the proposed British Aro expedition. He rushed back to Ohafia to forewarn his people, advising them to welcome the British and allow them free passage through Ohafia to Arochukwu.¹⁴⁹¹ Upon the arrival of the British W.A.F.F to Ohafia in late

¹⁴⁸⁷ Kalu, "An Ibo Autobiography," 160-162; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 71.

¹⁴⁸⁸ Between 1850 and 1900, slaves in Bonny and Opobo had formed themselves into the Bloodmen organization, in resistance to the increasing use of slaves as sacrifices to deities and for the burial of chiefs. This environment may also have influenced Kalu. See Daniel A. Offiong, "The Status of Slaves in Igbo and Ibibio of Nigeria," *Phylon* 46, 1 (1985), 55.

¹⁴⁸⁹ This year is popularly recalled as *afo unwu* (year of famine) because it was marked by an enduring famine caused by a locust raid. Kalu, "An Ibo Autobiography," 162; Chief Udensi Ekea, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording. August 4, 2010; Godwin Nwankwo Uko, *ezie-ogo* of Amankwu and his cabinet members, Group Interview by author, Oct. 25, 2011.

¹⁴⁹⁰ Kalu, "An Ibo Autobiography," 162.

¹⁴⁹¹ Chubb, "Assessment Reports: Bende Division, 1927-1929;" Njoku, "Inter-Village Trade in Ohafia," 28; Ndukwe, "From Slavery," 31.

1901, Kalu raised a white flag to signal peace, and relying upon his smattering English, assured the British of their safety in Ohafia. Kalu served as an interpreter during peace negotiations with British officers James Watt, Captain Mowatt, and Mr. Weir, and by mobilizing the community to provision the soldiers with food, he cultivated an enduring friendship with the British.¹⁴⁹² In what seems like an act of revenge against the Aro, Kalu led the W.A.F.F column to Arochukwu,¹⁴⁹³ which was razed to the ground in 10 days. This halted the economic monopolies enjoyed by the Aro in the region for the last 300 years.

Kalu's intervention established him as a local hero among his people. He writes that "my exertions . . . gained me honor amongst Ohaffia people. They therefore passed a law to the effect that I was to be the adviser to the bulk of Ohaffia people."¹⁴⁹⁴ Kalu's position as community adviser enabled him to play two major roles that transformed him from an ex-slave into a community leader, namely, the expulsion of two corrupt Native Court officers from Ohafia and the establishment of the Church of Scotland Mission. During the British occupation of Ohafia in 1901-02, the village of Ebem had put up a militant resistance, in spite of Kalu's intervention, upon which Ebem was sacked.¹⁴⁹⁵ In order to keep Ebem permanently pacified, the British

¹⁴⁹² Kalu, "An Ibo Autobiography," 163-164; J. C. Anene, *Southern Nigeria in Transition* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 231.

¹⁴⁹³ Jones, *Annual Reports of Bende Division*, 9; Kalu, "An Ibo Autobiography," 164. Two other ex-slaves of Ohafia origin, Uduma Uwara of Ebem and Nnanna Uka of Amangwu, had guided the column from Unwana to Ohafia.

¹⁴⁹⁴ Kalu, "An Ibo Autobiography," 164.

¹⁴⁹⁵ Chief Olua Iro Kalu, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording. Ebem Village Ohafia. Aug. 3, 2010; Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording, Elu Ohafia. Aug. 10, 2010; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 96-97. The people of Ebem village continue to blame Kalu for not protecting them from British forces.

government established a Native Court¹⁴⁹⁶ at Ebem in 1905-07, with jurisdiction over Abiriba, Nkporo and Abam.¹⁴⁹⁷ Mr. Vincent of Sierra Leone was appointed Clerk of the Native Court (C.N.C), and Mr. Cobham, a Calabar man, was made a Court Messenger and Interpreter.¹⁴⁹⁸ Ohafia oral testimonies and the reports of British colonial officers attest that Mr. Vincent and Mr. Cobham were harsh, unscrupulous and morally bankrupt, and that they imposed a reign of terror on Ohafia people.¹⁴⁹⁹

¹⁴⁹⁶ The Native Courts Proclamation of 1900 and 1901 made this possible. The colonial administration appointed local people to these courts and gave them authority or warrants to serve as local adjudicators. These appointed rulers came to be known as Warrant Chiefs. Hence, A.E. Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), 37, argues that the warrant chief system was synonymous with the Native Court system in the Eastern Provinces in the period 1891-1929. Also see, Adiele E. Afigbo, "The Warrant Chief System in Eastern Nigeria: Direct or Indirect Rule," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 3, 4, (June 1967); Obaro Ikime, "Reconstructing Indirect Rule: The Nigerian Example," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 4, 3, (1968); I.M. Okonjo, *British Administration in Nigeria, 1900-1950* (New York, 1974). Each Native Court was assigned a clerk and messenger, both of whom spoke English, and served as primary mediators between the local people and the president of the Native Court (the District Commissioner). Jones, *Annual Reports of Bende Division*, 59-61, shows that the court clerk was the most senior ranking African official of the Native Court, and as Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 104 and Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs*, 180 argue, these court clerks made themselves *de facto* District Commissioners, and abused their powers vagrantly.

¹⁴⁹⁷ Jones, *Annual Reports of Bende Division*, 27.

¹⁴⁹⁸ See Major W.A.C. Cockburn, "Annual Report on Bende District for the Year Ended 31st December, 1910," provided in Jones, *Annual Reports of Bende Division*, 68-84; Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording, Elu Ohafia. Aug. 10, 2010.

¹⁴⁹⁹ Cockburn, "Annual Report on Bende District, 1910;" Kalu, "An Ibo Autobiography," 164-165; Kalu, "The River Highway: Christianizing the Igbo," 70-71; Agwu Kalu, L.N. Chika, and N.O. Nkata, "The Advent of Christianity in Ohafia: An Unpublished Work by Isiama Parish of the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria," (2005), 3; Chief Udensi Ekea, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording. August 4, 2010; Chief Kalu Awa Kalu, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording, Ufielie Village. October 27, 2011; Godwin Nwankwo Uko, *ezie-ogo* of Amankwu Village and his cabinet members., Group Interview by author, Oct. 25, 2011; Anaso Awalekwa, *ezie-ogo* of Ndea-Nku Village and Members of the Men's Court, Group Interview by author, Nov. 17, 2011; Ogbuka Abaa, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording. Dec. 10, 2011; Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording, Elu Village. Aug. 10, 2010. Ohafia elders recall that Mr. Vincent often used the court messenger, Mr. Cobham to extort foods and livestock from the people, that he routinely sexually harrassed girls and married

The Ohafia community turned to their adviser, Kalu, who pioneered a litigation against Mr. Vincent.¹⁵⁰⁰ The Native Court officers were tried at Bende Native Court, convicted and imprisoned for three months with hard labor for unnecessary brutality, ill-treating the natives, obtaining money under false pretenses, and unscrupulously using the authority of the court for personal aggrandizement.¹⁵⁰¹ Kalu writes that he then “lectured [Ohafia elders] on the necessity of educating their children by establishing and supporting schools,”¹⁵⁰² and sent an application to the headquarters of the United Church of Scotland for a Missionary. Jones noted that the peoples of Bende district welcomed missionaries, because they believed that “if the young men of [their] village were educated, that is, could speak or write English, they could obtain the same superior employment as [court clerks and messengers, who were seen as] more favoured Africans.”¹⁵⁰³ Historians Geoffrey Johnston and Ogbu Kalu indicate that Kalu further led a delegation to Rev. Rankin at Arochukwu, stating that if Rankin helped to keep Mr. Vincent

women, and often subjected Ohafia men to public flogging and imprisonment at the flimsiest excuse. In once incident, he imposed a fine of £30 on Isigwu village for failing to supply mandatory labor, and when the fine was not paid, he routed all adult men in Isigwu and locked them up in the Native Court. In another incident, Mr. Vincent locked up two age-grades from Elu village in a cramped cell at the Native Court for failing to complete before dusk, a mud house he had mandated them to build. Ohafia people resisted Mr. Vincent by breaking down the walls of the prison cells and forcibly releasing the detainees, boycotting his requests for water and firewood supply, and publicly disparaging him with a derogatory nickname, *ajagirigwe* (crooked iron) because of his rickety bicycle. However, Mr. Vincent often found protection and support from Major Cockburn, the District Commissioner. After the removal of Mr. Vincent, Iruobam Jumbo took his place, while Mr. Jonah became the Interpreter. Jones, *Annual Reports of Bende Division*, 88.

¹⁵⁰⁰ Johnston, “Ohafia 1911-40: A Study in Church Developments,” 140; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 113.

¹⁵⁰¹ Cockburn, “Annual Report on Bende District, 1910;” Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 106.

¹⁵⁰² Kalu, “An Ibo Autobiography,” 165. The coming of the C.S.M to Ohafia was more complex and is examined below.

¹⁵⁰³ Jones, *Annual Reports of Bende Division*, 50.

away, Ohafia people would accept a missionary and support the opening of new schools.¹⁵⁰⁴ In response, Rev. Robert Collins was sent to Ohafia and in 1910, under Kalu's auspices, a residence was erected for the Scottish missionary, while a new church that compelled admiration from European visitors was completed in 1924.¹⁵⁰⁵

The residence of Rev. Robert Collins continues to serve as the official home of Presbyterian ministers in Ohafia. This house was prefabricated in Edinburgh, Scotland, shipped from Liverpool to Calabar, manually transported to Ohafia by Ohafia age-grades, and erected by European carpenters and masons.¹⁵⁰⁶ Even though the missionary residence and church were a result of four years of monthly contributions of 6 pence and 1 shilling by all adult Ohafia men and women,¹⁵⁰⁷ Ohafia people point to these structures as a legacy of Kalu's performance of *ogaranya* masculinity, because in addition to mobilizing local support for these projects, he

¹⁵⁰⁴ Johnston, *Of God and Maxim Guns*, 42-43; Kalu, "The River Highway: Christianizing the Igbo," 70-71; Chief Udensi Ekea, oral interview by author. August 4, 2010; Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author. Aug. 10, 2010; Chief Kalu Awa Kalu, oral interview by author, Ufiele. October 27, 2011.

¹⁵⁰⁵ UPC, West Africa, MS. 7793: "Collins Robert, Missionary in Calabar, Letter from Collins, Robert to Mr. Ashcroft, dated 8th April 1921," 70-71; UPC, West Africa, MS. 7793: "Collins Robert, Missionary in Calabar, Letter from Collins, Robert to Mr. Ashcroft, dated 24th November 1924," 76; UPC, West Africa, MS. 7793: "Collins Robert, Missionary in Calabar, Letter from Collins, Robert to Mr. Ashcroft, dated 5th August 1925," 148.

¹⁵⁰⁶ UFC, Foreign No. 21, MS. 7676: "Letters from Valentine to Collins, dated 10th August and 31st December 1910," 179, 357; Johnston, "Ohafia 1911-40: A Study in Church Developments," 140; Elder Agwu Kalu, Ohafia, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording. May 18, 2012; Kalu, "The River Highway: Christianizing the Igbo," 71.

¹⁵⁰⁷ UPC, West Africa, MS. 7793: "Collins Robert, Missionary in Calabar, Letters from Collins, Robert to Mr. Ashcroft, dated 14th and 17th July 1920," 29-32; UPC, West Africa, MS. 7793: "Collins Robert, Missionary in Calabar, Letter from Collins, Robert to Mr. Ashcroft, dated 28th September 1920," 39-40; UPC, West Africa, MS. 7793: "Collins Robert, Missionary in Calabar, Letter from Collins, Robert to Mr. Ashcroft, dated 16th September 1921," 98-99; UPC, West Africa, MS. 7793: "Collins Robert, Missionary in Calabar, Letter from Collins, Robert to Mr. Ashcroft, dated 21st February 1925," 106; Chief K.K. Owen, oral interview by author; Elder Agwu Kalu, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording, Amaekpu Village. May 18, 2012.

made the most substantial financial contribution, and went as far as paying the salaries of school teachers appointed by the Mission, when the community proved incapable of affording the money.¹⁵⁰⁸ Kalu also built the first modern storey-house with corrugated iron roof in Ohafia in 1916, in effect single-handedly establishing a house that rivaled the mission residence funded by the community. Jones noted that such houses were considered “permanent building” by the British, and were so cost-prohibitive, that the British government discontinued the provision of such houses to colonial officers between 1904 and 1906.¹⁵⁰⁹

As he rose to leadership stature among his people, Kalu also gained upliftment from the British colonial administration, when he was appointed the first warrant chief of Ohafia in 1910, in recognition of his support in the Aro expedition, the collection of taxes, and the expansion of missionary work and legitimate commerce in the region.¹⁵¹⁰ As a warrant chief, Kalu sat in the Native Court council at Ebem to hear cases, but his reputation as a competent negotiator and *ogaranya* led communities and individuals to bring cases to his compound.¹⁵¹¹ The District Officer, James Watt invited Kalu to settle a land dispute between the Ohafia village of Ebem and the neighboring Cross River-Igbo town of Ozu-Abam in 1920, and Rev. Collins often enlisted his services in the settlement of marital and inter-village disputes, in one incident, charging Kalu with mediating a dispute involving twin mothers, the village of Abia, and the Native Court in

¹⁵⁰⁸ Johnston, “Ohafia 1911-40: A Study in Church Developments,” 144; Ndukwe, “From Slavery,” 34-35, 59-60; Kalu, “An Ibo Autobiography,” 166; Chief Udensi Ekea, oral interview by author. August 4, 2010; Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author, Elu. Aug. 10, 2010; Chief Kalu Awa Kalu, oral interview by author, October 27, 2011.

¹⁵⁰⁹ Jones, *Annual Reports of Bende Division*, 54.

¹⁵¹⁰ Chubb, “Assessment Reports: Bende Division, 1927-1929.”

¹⁵¹¹ Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author, Elu Ohafia. Aug. 10, 2010; Ogbuka Abaa, oral interview by author; Johnston, “Ohafia 1911-40: A Study in Church Developments,” 144.

1918.¹⁵¹² Kalu earned money serving as a warrant chief. According to Jones, in addition to sitting fees and monthly salaries, warrant chiefs received remuneration from litigants, to serve as their attorneys and spokesmen, when the bench retired to consult on their verdict.¹⁵¹³ Kalu also received payments for the various cases he resolved, outside of the Native Court.¹⁵¹⁴

Chief Kalu performed *ogaranya* masculinity and his wealth in money, people, land, and material things symbolized the head he had cut to accomplish *ufiem* among his people. By 1916, he owned more than 50 slaves, married 12 wives, had numerous concubines, and many children, who worked on his various farms and plantations, processed and purchased palm produce for him, and traded these at the Itu market on the Cross River.¹⁵¹⁵ He sent his sons to the best school in southeastern Nigeria at the time: the Hope Waddell Training Institute, Calabar.¹⁵¹⁶

Chief Kalu invested heavily in land. In 1915, he established a cocoa and oil palm plantation at Ajakparata, in Isiugwu village, Ohafia, which became the center of his trading and farming operations.¹⁵¹⁷ He built various farm houses (*ulue ubi*) on distant farms and charged Ohafia people (mostly women) rent on a daily basis for the storage of food and farm tools in these houses.¹⁵¹⁸ By the mid-1920s, Chief Kalu owned one quarter of the land in Elu village, which

¹⁵¹² Johnston, "Ohafia 1911-40: A Study in Church Developments," 143; Ndukwe, "From Slavery," 35; Kalu, "An Ibo Autobiography," 166-167.

¹⁵¹³ Jones, *Annual Reports of Bende Division*, 26.

¹⁵¹⁴ Kalu, "An Ibo Autobiography," 168.

¹⁵¹⁵ Kalu, "An Ibo Autobiography," 166; Njoku, "Inter-Village Trade in Ohafia, 1900-1979," 30; Ndukwe, "From Slavery," 40, 49, 53; Chief Kalu Awa Kalu, oral interview by author, Ufiele Village. Oct. 27, 2011; Ogbuka Abaa oral interview by author, Dec. 10, 2011.

¹⁵¹⁶ Ndukwe, "From Slavery," 49. One of his sons Agwu Eke became a marine engineer (died in 1964), while another, Uma Eke was a senior staff of University of Nigeria Nsukka (died 1997).

¹⁵¹⁷ Kalu, "An Ibo Autobiography," 166; Ndukwe, "From Slavery," 54.

¹⁵¹⁸ Ndukwe, "From Slavery," 56.

he acquired through purchase, inheritance, pledges for loans, and supervision of colonial projects such as road construction and the dredging of rivers.¹⁵¹⁹

Chief Kalu viewed his extensive wealth-in-people as a symbol of his *ogaranya* status, and thus worked towards the expansion of his household. For instance, he was baptized as a Presbyterian in 1918, and in 1919, he became an evangelist of the Church of Scotland Mission (C.S.M.) When the C.S.M insisted that Chief Kalu should divorce all but one wife so that he may fully embrace his new status as a Presbyterian masculinity,¹⁵²⁰ he left the C.S.M, invited the Salvation Army Mission to establish a church and school in his compound, and switched over to the Church of Christ, where he was made a Church Elder in 1920.¹⁵²¹ By that singular move, Chief Kalu drew more than half the C.S.M membership away. This forced the C.S.M to reinstate him as an evangelist, allowing him to keep his harem of wives, on the condition that he officially wedded one of them, who had been made into a “good Christian wife” by Scottish woman missionary, Miss Arnault at Arochukwu.¹⁵²² However, Chief Kalu exploited his position as a Presbyterian minister, and the right-hand man to Rev. Robert Collins,¹⁵²³ to rescue and adopt

¹⁵¹⁹ Kalu, “An Ibo Autobiography,” 164; Ndukwe, “From Slavery,” 53; Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author, Elu Ohafia. Aug. 10, 2010; Chief K.K. Owen, oral interview by author.

¹⁵²⁰ This concept is fully historicized below. It refers to Presbyterian conceptions of *ufiem* between 1911 and 1920, with an emphasis on monogamy, the privileging of the conjugal family over the matrilineage, and the making of a Christian church spear-headed by male elders, who were rewarded with women transformed into “good Christian wives.” See CO520/124: “Colonial Office: Southern Nigeria Protectorate Original Correspondence, April to May, 1913;” Johnston, *Of God and Maxim Guns*, 84, 221-233; Kalu, “An Ibo Autobiography,” 166-167; Johnston, “Ohafia 1911-40: A Study in Church Developments,” 148.

¹⁵²¹ Ndukwe, “From Slavery,” 40-41; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 118; Chief K.K. Owen, oral interview by author; Elder Agwu Kalu, oral interview by author.

¹⁵²² Kalu, “An Ibo Autobiography,” 166; Ndukwe, “From Slavery,” 41; Chief K.K. Owen, oral interview by author; Elder Agwu Kalu, oral interview by author, May 18, 2012.

¹⁵²³ Johnston, “Ohafia 1911-40: A Study in Church Developments,” 144.

numerous abandoned twin children, and added many socially ostracized twin mothers to his household, as more wives and concubines.¹⁵²⁴ According to Njoku, Chief Kalu's large compound was a safe haven for twin mothers and twins between 1911 and 1920.¹⁵²⁵

Ohafia-Igbo people express Kalu's *ogaranya* masculinity through various stories. Ohafia elders recall that Kalu was so wealthy and had so many dependents that his wives cooked in drums instead of pots, and that "*ofe Nna Kalu gbaa uka, umu ogbenye erijuo afo*" [When Nna Kalu's food went sour, the poor had a feast].¹⁵²⁶ Similarly, in 1922, Chief Kalu obtained a permit from the British government to purchase a gun in order to hunt predatory animals on his plantations.¹⁵²⁷ However, he employed his gun as a symbol of his *ogaranya* status, like Ohafia brave hunters before him. On every *Eke* market day, Chief Kalu stepped out to the top porch of his mansion and fired four gun shots to announce the beginning of the native four-day week. Through this constant ritual of *ogaranya*, Kalu inscribed himself within the social imagination of Ohafia rhythm of daily life.¹⁵²⁸

Chief Kalu demonstrated that *ogaranya* performance entailed social legitimation of economic and political power. He reflects Uchendu's description of a "Big Man" among the

¹⁵²⁴ Kalu, "An Ibo Autobiography," 166; Ndukwe, "From Slavery," 49-50; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 117; Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author, Elu Ohafia. Aug. 10, 2010.

¹⁵²⁵ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 117.

¹⁵²⁶ Chief Udensi Ekea, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording. August 4, 2010; Chief Kalu Awa Kalu, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording; Godwin Nwankwo Uko, *ezie-ogo* of Amankwu Village and his cabinet members., Group Interview by author, Oct. 25, 2011; Anaso Awalekwa, *ezie-ogo* of Ndea-Nku Village and Members of the Men's Court, Group Interview by author, Nov. 17, 2011; Ogbuka Abaa, oral interview by author. Dec. 10, 2011; Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author, Elu Ohafia. Aug. 10, 2010.

¹⁵²⁷ Kalu, "An Ibo Autobiography," 168.

¹⁵²⁸ Chief Uche Anya Elekwa, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording. Aug. 14, 2010; Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording, Elu Ohafia. Aug. 10, 2010; *Ezie-nwami* Ucha Oji Iwe of Elu Village and her Cabinet, Group Interview.

Igbo, as a man who commanded prestige, respect and obedience, because he “helps others to get up.”¹⁵²⁹ From the 1930s, he began to purchase lorries to facilitate transportation of goods and people between Ohafia and various markets in the region. He called his lorries, “community vehicles” and contrasted them with the “pleasure cars” of European colonial and medical officers that visited the region in the 1930s, because his lorries were intended to facilitate the upliftment of Ohafia people.¹⁵³⁰

However, Kalu was also an opportunist, unhindered by social mores. For example, when he returned to Ohafia in 1900, he used to steal animals sacrificed to deities, and from these, he established a livestock farm, and raised money to purchase membership of the *dibia* guild.¹⁵³¹ After Kalu became a *dibia* (*iwa anya*), he was able to rise to the highest rank of the *dibia* profession through manipulation. He noted that the Ohafia people had consulted him as a *dibia* to forecast the day that the W.A.F.F column would depart Ohafia. Having obtained the relevant information from Captain Mowatt, Kalu made “incantations” and “declared the day, and when [the W.A.F.F] actually left [on] that day, [his] fame as a prophet became very much.”¹⁵³² Similarly, before the establishment of the Ehem Native Court (1905-07), Kalu was one of the most important British agents in the northeastern part of Bende district.¹⁵³³ According to oral accounts, Kalu extorted gifts and taxes from Ohafia villages by parading an albino who

¹⁵²⁹ Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria*, 14.

¹⁵³⁰ Kalu, “An Ibo Autobiography,” 168. Kalu indicates that this same logic had informed his dredging of the Uduma stream to facilitate canoe transportation, his philanthropic payment of teachers’ salaries, his opening of public water pumps in the landlocked villages of Elu and Amaekpu, and his efforts to open a trading station of the United African Company in his compound in Ohafia.

¹⁵³¹ Kalu, “An Ibo Autobiography,” 162.

¹⁵³² Kalu, “An Ibo Autobiography,” 164.

¹⁵³³ Jones, *Annual Reports of Bende Division*, 27.

impersonated an European officer.¹⁵³⁴ In his Intelligence Report following the Bende-Onitsha Hinterland Expedition, the Acting District Commissioner, Mr. F. Hives noted that it was common to find such “blackmailing” impostors (mostly runaway Bonny and Opobo slaves) who paraded men disguised in police uniforms, and held judiciary courts of their own from one community to another, extorting exorbitant court fees.¹⁵³⁵

The District Commissioner of Bende, Major W.A.C Cockburn noted in 1910 that because the Ehem Native Court was difficult to access during the rainy season, British officers were unable to visit it regularly, and as such, the warrant chiefs emerged as the principal authorities in Ohafia, and did as they pleased.¹⁵³⁶ According to Ohafia elders, after Kalu’s appointment as a warrant-chief, because he was the only Ohafia person that understood and spoke English, he often misinformed the people that the British District Commissioner (D.C.) had demanded contributions of goats and yams from them. After stockpiling these contributions for a period of time, Chief Kalu then chose a specific day to embark on a tribute trip to the D.C. at Bende or Nkporo. Usually carried on a hammock, Chief Kalu was accompanied by a company of young men who served as carriers. Upon his return, Kalu sometimes informed Ohafia people that the D.C. was displeased with the quantity of their contributions, and was making preparations for a military invasion. The various villages would then make further contributions and send them to

¹⁵³⁴ Ndukwe, “From Slavery,” 23; Godwin Nwankwo Uko, *ezie-ogo* of Amankwu Village and his cabinet members. Group Interview by author, Oct. 25, 2011; Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording, Elu Ohafia. Aug. 10, 2010.

¹⁵³⁵ F. Hives, “Intelligence Report: Bende-Onitsha Hinterland Expedition, 1905,” document provided in Jones, *Annual Reports of Bende Division*, 62-67.

¹⁵³⁶ Cockburn, “Annual Report on Bende District, 1910.”

Chief Kalu's home at Elu village.¹⁵³⁷ It was through these practices that Kalu constructed his political power over indigenous political authorities. Indeed, Isichei's indication that *ogaranya* masculinities usurped the political power of local authorities in southeastern Nigeria¹⁵³⁸ did not become true of the Ohafia-Igbo until colonial rule.

While Kalu's political career transcended and outshone those of other warrant chiefs representing other Ohafia villages, Mayne noted that these men also exercised political power beyond the capacity of *ezie-ogo/ndi ichin* (men's court) and *ikpirikpe ndi inyom* (women's court).¹⁵³⁹ He emphasized that whereas the *ezie-ogo* "had no autocratic power whatsoever in his village [before 1910]," the colonial administrative system vested executive power "in one man known as the Warrant Chief."¹⁵⁴⁰ Njoku also writes that, "the administrative system based on the native courts and warrant chiefs raped the foundations of Ohafia traditional system of government . . . [because it] concentrated legislative, judicial and executive powers on the warrant chief."¹⁵⁴¹ Mayne continued:

The arrival of the British who, forthwith proceeded unknowingly to sap the foundations of the only conceivable mode of government the people knew [was] viewed with extreme disfavour . . . The people had not intended their representative, who was of no "locus standi" to be an intermediary between the British and themselves. It was their impression that he was required to appease the anger of the "whiteman" and the irony of the situation was only comprehended when it was too

¹⁵³⁷ Godwin Nwankwo Uko, *ezie-ogo* of Amankwu Village and his cabinet members. Group Interview by author, Oct. 25, 2011; Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author, Elu Ohafia. Aug. 10, 2010; Nna Kalu Awa of Nde Torti Compound, Amuma Village Ohafia, oral interview by author. Nov. 26, 2011; Chief Udensi Ekea, oral interview by author. Aug. 4, 2010; Chief Ikenga Ibe, in Group Interview with *Nde Ichin* (ten elders of) Amuma Ohafia. Nov. 26, 2011; Chief Oluka Mba, oral interview by author, Nde-Ibe village, Ohafia. November 3, 2011.

¹⁵³⁸ Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, 105.

¹⁵³⁹ Mayne, "Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934," 68.

¹⁵⁴⁰ Mayne, "Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934," 13.

¹⁵⁴¹ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 103.

late and the representative had not only usurped the position of the indigenous figureheads but had virtually made himself their ruler. This representative better known as the “Warrant Chief” has been the link between the people and the Government.¹⁵⁴²

Mayne may well have been writing about Warrant Chief Kalu Ezelu himself, who came to limelight when he was able to appease the British, expunge the corrupt court clerk Mr. Vincent, and facilitated the coming of the Presbyterian mission, but soon transformed himself from a warrant chief of Elu village, into a *de facto* ruler of Ohafia people. In 1927, Mr. Chubb wrote that the Ohafia “people are splendidly ruled by Chief Kalu-Ezelu. The Chief’s hereditary right to occupy the post is open to question as he is of mixed Aro blood but he is one of the few outstanding chiefs in the Division and it is hoped will be of great assistance to the Local Administration.”¹⁵⁴³ The introduction of direct taxation in 1927-28¹⁵⁴⁴ was an opportunity which Chief Kalu exploited to secure British legitimation of his authority over the entire Ohafia region.¹⁵⁴⁵ He proved himself a competent tax collector, and came to be seen as “a loyal servant of the Government.”¹⁵⁴⁶ Mr. Chubb writes that Chief Kalu collected taxes from various Ohafia villages including Elu, Ebem, Isiwgu, Asaga, Okagwe, Nkwebi, and Akanu, and was responsible for about 85% of the total taxes collected in Bende Division in 1928. Chief Kalu also summoned adult men, who failed to pay taxes to

¹⁵⁴² Mayne, “Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934,” 68-69.

¹⁵⁴³ Chubb, “Assessment Reports: Bende Division, 1927-1929,” 17.

¹⁵⁴⁴ CO583/159/12: “Introduction of Direct Taxation in Southern Provinces, 1928.”

¹⁵⁴⁵ Mayne, “Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934,” 69; Chubb, “Assessment Reports: Bende Division, 1927-1929,” Minute No. 69/1927.

¹⁵⁴⁶ Chubb, “Assessment Reports: Bende Division, 1927-1929,” 6.

the Ebem Native Court, “and as a result of this action the balance was collected immediately.”¹⁵⁴⁷

By 1930, after the abolition of the warrant chief system following the Igbo Women’s War of 1928, Chief Kalu had established himself as the wealthiest individual in Ohafia and a staunch ally of the British administration. He went on fishing trips with Captain Mowatt and Mr. Weir, British district officers of Bende Division, and he described Mr. Watt, the Resident Commissioner of Owerri Province as his friend.¹⁵⁴⁸ Mr. Weir contracted the construction of Ohafia-Abiriba and Ohafia-Aro roads to Chief Kalu in 1928,¹⁵⁴⁹ and in the 1930s, he contracted Chief Kalu to build the court messengers’ houses, the Ohafia post office, and the native administration dispensary.¹⁵⁵⁰ In 1938, Chief Kalu decided to immortalize himself by writing an autobiography titled, “The Autobiography of Mr. Eke Kalu, Ohaffia’s Well-Honored Son.” This was published in the British-run journal, *The Nigerian Field, Journal of the Nigerian Field Society* 7, 4 (October 1938). Following his publication, the British colonial government under the auspices of Governor Sir Bernard Bourdillion, issued Chief Kalu with a certificate of honor in the name of his Majesty King George VI.¹⁵⁵¹

Mayne was right in pointing out that Ohafia people viewed the usurpation of power by warrant chiefs with disfavor. He also noted that in spite of the usurpation of power by warrant chiefs, the indigenous system of administration “still functioned to a considerable

¹⁵⁴⁷ Chubb, “Assessment Reports: Bende Division, 1927-1929,” 8.

¹⁵⁴⁸ Kalu, “An Ibo Autobiography,” 164-167.

¹⁵⁴⁹ NAE, UMPROF 5/1/90: “Arochukwu-Bende-Afikpo Road, 1921;” Kalu, “An Ibo Autobiography,” 168.

¹⁵⁵⁰ Kalu, “An Ibo Autobiography,” 169.

¹⁵⁵¹ Ndukwe, “From Slavery,” 59-60.

extent.”¹⁵⁵² In his quest for social mobility, political power and *ogaranya* status, Chief Kalu had committed *nso ala* (abomination) by cohabiting with ostracized twin mothers and adopting twins.¹⁵⁵³ Fed up with Chief Kalu’s one-person revolution, Ohafia elders petitioned the District Officer of Bende district, and brought the following charges against Chief Kalu: he was violating Ohafia customs through social contacts with twin mothers; he extorted money from Ohafia people under false pretenses; he refused to give back land held on pledge even after the owners were prepared to redeem the pledge; he appropriated individual land for himself under the pretext of engineering projects for the colonial government; he engaged in the torturing of Ohafia people; he owned slaves and engaged in slave trading; he had murdered some Ohafia people; and lastly, he was not eligible to become the ruler of Ohafia because his father was from Arochukwu.¹⁵⁵⁴

Ohafia elders presented some human skulls to the District Officer as evidence that Chief Kalu had committed murder, and further exhumed a dead body from the forest and bargained with one of Chief Kalu’s wives (whom Kalu had refused to grant divorce) to testify that he had killed the individual.¹⁵⁵⁵ Fearing that he would not get a fair trial at Bende, Chief Kalu without consulting the District Officer of Bende, transferred his case to a

¹⁵⁵² Mayne, “Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934,” 69.

¹⁵⁵³ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 117.

¹⁵⁵⁴ Chubb, “Assessment Reports: Bende Division, 1927-1929,” 7-17; Kalu, “An Ibo Autobiography,” 166; Ndukwe, “From Slavery,” 61-64; Chief Uche Anya Elekwa, oral interview by author. Aug. 14, 2010; Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author, Elu. Aug. 10, 2010.

¹⁵⁵⁵ Eke Kalu, “An Autobiography,” 166-167; Ndukwe, “From Slavery,” 63; Chief Uche Anya Elekwa, oral interview by author. Aug. 14, 2010; Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author, Elu Ohafia. Aug. 10, 2010. Johnston, “Ohafia 1911-40: A Study in Church Developments,” 148, writes that it became common practice between 1911 and 1940 for Presbyterian masculinities such as Chief Kalu (who was an elder and minister of the Church) to use their vote in the Presbytery, to deny their wives divorce, in contrast to what obtained in the pre-colonial period.

higher court, administered by his friend, Mr. James Watt, then the Resident Commissioner of Owerri Province. Chief Kalu's subversion of the District Commissioner's authority left him chagrined, but as Kalu writes, he apologized to the former and informed him that "the Government was trying to reward [his] good deeds with death," and that the District Commissioner was biased against him.¹⁵⁵⁶ At Owerri, Mr. Watt ruled that Ohafia elders had made the allegations out of jealousy. However, when Chief Kalu returned to Ohafia, he found his compound demolished, his servants and slaves scattered, and his money and property looted. Only his matrilineage, Umu-Ubia showed solidarity.¹⁵⁵⁷ At the end of colonial rule, Chief Kalu was sued to court in the 1960s by some Ohafia people who sought to reclaim land he had seized from them during colonial rule.¹⁵⁵⁸

Chief Kalu's social mobility and *ogaranya* performance reflects a major shift in gendered power distribution among the Ohafia-Igbo between 1900 and 1920. His life history provides a window into the marginalization of women from spheres of socio-political power. It was possible for a male individual to rise from slavery to warrant chief status under colonial rule, but became increasingly difficult for women to exercise political power. Kalu's story indicates that Africans were major agents of socio-political change in Southeastern Nigeria, and that they accomplished this by exploiting the opportunities presented by domestic slave trade, legitimate commerce, Christian missionary evangelism and British colonial rule. However, this African agency in social change was gendered because, men enjoyed better opportunities over women.

¹⁵⁵⁶ Kalu, "An Ibo Autobiography," 167.

¹⁵⁵⁷ Eke Kalu, "An Autobiography", 167.

¹⁵⁵⁸ Ndukwe, "From Slavery," 61.

Just as the colonial political system sidelined women, Ohafia mission-run schools did not admit girls until the 1940s. Jones' observation that the new economic and political opportunities presented by British colonial rule were open primarily to those who were able to read and write, was particularly true for the Ohafia-Igbo, where men alone emerged as the new elite who filled the ranks of teachers, pastors, church elders, clerks, interpreters, and accountants between 1901 and 1920. Chief Kalu's life history provides but a window into these historical processes, for he was not alone in being the only upstart that was arbitrarily made a warrant-chief,¹⁵⁵⁹ nor was he the only *ogaranya* that helped his community to get uOgbu Kalu and Johnston indicate that the quest for Presbyterian masculinity among young men, was the most important factor that enabled Christianity to spread to all but one of the 26 Ohafia villages between 1911 and 1921.¹⁵⁶⁰ This new elite of Ohafia men, also strove to perform *ogaranya*, and the social processes of their empowerment shed more light on the disempowerment of women.

Christianity and Missionary Education: The Making of Presbyterian Masculinities, Male Breadwinners and "Good Christian Wives"

A number of factors combined to create a favorable environment for the spread of Christianity to Ohafia in the early 20th century. These include British colonial conquest,

¹⁵⁵⁹ Uduma Uwara of Ebem and Nnanna Uka (a.k.a Atiyonu) of Amangwu, the ex-slaves who had led the British to Ohafia were also compensated with warrant chief appointments. Similarly, on the recommendation of Rev. Robert Collins, his personal friend, Nna Ugbo Iro was made the warrant chief of Eziafo village. Also, Mazi Uche Ibe became the warrant chief of Okon village in 1913, not because his lineage provided the office of *ezie-ogo* but because, he had served as a court messenger in Ibibio and was one time a personal servant to the missionary, Mary Slessor. See NAE, File No. OW 7045: K.A.B. Cochrane, "Handing Over Note to H.M. Llyod;" Johnston, "Ohafia 1911-40: A Study in Church Developments," 142; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 101.

¹⁵⁶⁰ Kalu, "The River Highway: Christianizing the Igbo," 72; Johnston, "Ohafia 1911-40: A Study in Church Developments," 144-148.

competitive evangelization among various Christian missions, environmental factors, and indigenous agency. The Aro expedition made expansion of missionary influence to the Cross River Igbo possible.¹⁵⁶¹ Following the expedition, the British colonial administration encouraged missionaries to establish missions among the Cross River Igbo in order to stem barbarous practices.¹⁵⁶² Thus, in 1904, the C.S.M sent Rev. Uwa Akpan Essien from Ikot Ana to Asaga as a missionary.¹⁵⁶³ Ogbu Kalu noted that the C.S.M missionaries utilized the services of the District Officer to maintain their presence,¹⁵⁶⁴ and Njoku writes that Ohafia people saw British officers and Scottish missionaries as one and the same.¹⁵⁶⁵ Against this background, subsequent confrontations between Ohafia people and the British colonial administration following the Aro expedition, led many Ohafia people to believe that a village that accepted Christianity would find favor with the colonial administration.¹⁵⁶⁶ For instance, the British colonial government held the villages of Ebem, Asaga and Eziafo as troublesome, following

¹⁵⁶¹ CO520/8: "Southern Nigeria Original Correspondence, May to August, 1901," 717-722; United Free Church of Scotland, "The Recent Expedition Against the Aros," *The Missionary Record of the United Free Church of Scotland* (1902), 453; Johnston, *Of God and Maxim Guns*, 26, 39; Johnston, "Ohafia 1911-40: A Study in Church Developments," 139-143; Jones, *Annual Reports of Bende Division*, 48; Kalu, "The River Highway: Christianizing the Igbo," 55.

¹⁵⁶² Johnston, *Of God and Maxim Guns*, 40.

¹⁵⁶³ Elder Ukpai Onum Ndukwe, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording, Asaga Village, Ohafia, April 13, 2012; Johnston, *Of God and Maxim Guns*, 26.

¹⁵⁶⁴ Kalu, "The River Highway: Christianizing the Igbo," 52, 55.

¹⁵⁶⁵ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 118. Also, after the arrival of Rev. Collins to Ohafia in 1911, D.Os and court clerks respected his opinions and constantly visited his manse at Elu Ohafia.

¹⁵⁶⁶ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 116.

their militant resistance during the Aro expedition, and it was not until they embraced Christianity did British military patrols cease in these communities.¹⁵⁶⁷

Similarly, before the Bende-Onitsha Hinterland expedition, during which the village of Asaga was punished for their alleged involvement in the Obegu massacre, and their decapitation of a court messenger sent to issue a court summons, Owerri Provincial Commissioner, Frank Hives sent a note to Rev. Essien, informing him of the expedition and advising him to leave Ohafia.¹⁵⁶⁸ On leaving Asaga, Rev. Essien took along with him a local teenage boy named Ibe Mba, who later went on to become a houseboy to Rev. J.K. Macgregor, the principal of Hope Waddell Training Institute at Calabar. Mr. Ibe Mba brought Rev. Macgregor back to Asaga in 1908 to revive the mission, eradicate headhunting and human sacrifice, and make Asaga friendly to the British.¹⁵⁶⁹ The Ibe Mba and Rev. Macgregor mission failed, but it sheds light on the sentiment that the acceptance of Christianity alleviated the worst realities of colonial rule. Hence writes Jones,

The relatively sudden expansion [of Christianity] had little to do with any evangelizing drive on the part of the missions or with a sudden mass conversion to Christianity on the part of the people. The drive certainly came from the people but from both pagan and would-be Christian elements. To them, a church and its school . . . provide[d] the key to the power of the European, the power which already enabled Efik, Bonny, Sierra Leoneans and other educated Africans to oppress them.¹⁵⁷⁰

¹⁵⁶⁷ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 96-116; Chief Kevin Ukiro, oral interview by author, Asaga Village. August 10, 2010; Chief Olua Iro Kalu, oral interview by author. Ebem, Ohafia. August 3, 2010; Chief K.K. Oyeoku, oral interview by author, Ebem village. Aug. 2, 2010.

¹⁵⁶⁸ Johnston, "Ohafia 1911-40: A Study in Church Developments," 142; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 112; Hives, "Intelligence Report: Bende-Onitsha Hinterland Expedition, 1905."

¹⁵⁶⁹ Elder Ukpai Onum Ndukwe, oral interview by author, Asaga, April 13, 2012; Johnston, "Ohafia 1911-40: A Study in Church Developments," 142; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 112.

¹⁵⁷⁰ Jones, *Annual Reports of Bende Division*, 36.

Johnston writes that conversion to Christianity among the Ohafia-Igbo was the response of the people to British pacification.¹⁵⁷¹ The conversion of Abia village to Christianity is illustrative in this regard. In 1918, the village of Abia protested that smoke from the kitchen fires of twin mothers, who were forced to live on the outskirts of the village, was blowing into the village and contaminating their community. They went on to destroy the compounds of twin mothers, and the Native Court intervened and arrested the male elders of the community. Rev. Collins asked Chief Kalu to resolve the problem and the latter proposed that if Abia accepted a church and school, he would get Rev. Collins to release the chiefs and elders of Abia from the Native Court prison. The offer was accepted and Abia became a Christian community.¹⁵⁷²

Mutual competition among Church of Scotland Mission, the Church Missionary Society, the Niger Delta Pastorate, the Methodist Mission, the Qua Ibo Mission (these were the so-called ‘Big Five’) and the Roman Catholic Mission, also influenced the spread of Christianity to Ohafia.¹⁵⁷³ The rivalry for territories among these missions, particularly between the United Free Church of Scotland (later renamed Church of Scotland Mission) and the Catholic Church began in Calabar in the 1890s, and in a bid to avoid “Unchristian rivalry between Christian Sects,” the British colonial administration reached an agreement with the various Christian missions, and defined “separate spheres of Missionary influence.”¹⁵⁷⁴ The limited human and

¹⁵⁷¹ Johnston, “Ohafia 1911-40: A Study in Church Developments,” 142.

¹⁵⁷² Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 120; Johnston, “Ohafia 1911-40: A Study in Church Developments,” 143; Ndukwe, “From Slavery,” 35.

¹⁵⁷³ See Jones, *Annual Reports of Bende Division*, 48 for discussion of competition and compromise between C.S.M (Mary Slessor) and C.M.S/N.D.P (Bishop Tugwell) over Bende and Itu, from where the C.S.M then reached Ohafia.

¹⁵⁷⁴ CO520/49: “Colonial Office: Southern Nigeria Original Correspondence, 14th Sept.-18th Nov. 1907,” 293-304; Johnston, *Of God and Maxim Guns*, 136. For the map of the resultant

material resources of the missions encouraged this compromise, and the result was that the C.S.M gained monopoly over the territories mostly in the inland Cross River and east of the Cross River (including Ekoi, Umon, Okoyong, Ikot Ana, Akunakuna, Unwana, Itu, Ikorofiong and the Cross River Igbo towns of Arochukwu, Isu, Ututu, Ohafia, Abiriba, Abam, Igbere, Uburu, Okposi, Edda, and Afikpo [Ezza, Izzi, and Ikwo.]¹⁵⁷⁵

Every advance of Christianity to the Cross River region was made by a combination of African and missionary initiative.¹⁵⁷⁶ The Scottish missionaries viewed the Cross River region as a “pestilential district,”¹⁵⁷⁷ and thus, forged a policy to develop a native agency. Between 1846 and 1888, this had entailed the thorough conversion of the Efik of Calabar (such as Akpan Essien Uwa), who were then sent out as preachers and teachers to the Cross River, to endure hardships that most Europeans could not survive.¹⁵⁷⁸ On the eve of the British expedition against the Aro, the C.S.M staff comprised of ten men and four women, who were always on leave, in addition to a number of Efik teachers and preachers.¹⁵⁷⁹ It came as no surprise then that Africans themselves played a major role in the spread of Christianity to their communities. Mr. Ibe Mba noted above exemplifies indigenous agency in the early attempts to spread Christianity to Ohafia. He rose to become one of the early modern elites of Ohafia, and an icon of

spheres of missionary influence, see CO583/162/13: “Reports on Education Departments of Northern and Southern Provinces and Colony, 1927.”

¹⁵⁷⁵ Johnston, *Of God and Maxim Guns*, 21-26; Jones, *Annual Reports of Bende Division*, 48-57; Kalu, “The River Highway: Christianizing the Igbo,” 62.

¹⁵⁷⁶ Johnston, *Of God and Maxim Guns*, 26

¹⁵⁷⁷ Johnston, *Of God and Maxim Guns*, 10.

¹⁵⁷⁸ Johnston, *Of God and Maxim Guns*, 26-27.

¹⁵⁷⁹ Johnston, *Of God and Maxim Guns*, 28.

Presbyterian masculinity.¹⁵⁸⁰ However, neither him nor Chief Kalu were pioneers in this endeavor.

The initial efforts to establish Christianity in Ohafia owed a lot to Native agency. The story begins with two unlikely figures — *dibia* from Asaga village, Ohafia (Agwu Dibia and Onugu Igbeke), who had embarked on a divination and healing trip (*ije ogwu/isiara ogwu*) to Ikot Ana between 1902 and 1904.¹⁵⁸¹ These men attended a Christian service at Ikot Ana, and became fascinated by what they regarded as an intriguing and powerful cult. In a bid to acquire the cult's esoteric power, in order to enhance their social standing as *dibia* in their home village,¹⁵⁸² Agwu Dibia and Onugu Igbeke rushed back home and convinced the male elders of their community, under the leadership of *ezie-ogo* Ajadu Uma, to provide 30 brass rods for the invitation of this new cult. In response, the C.S.M sent Rev. Akpan Essien Uwa (accompanied by his wife Edet Essien, and assistants Enebiere Ana, Madam Ofia Ojoi, and Asukwo Nja) to Ohafia, where he began a church and school at one of the patrilineage compound *obu* meeting houses (*obu nde* Uma Oden) in 1904.¹⁵⁸³ As earlier noted, this mission was cut short by the

¹⁵⁸⁰ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 112; Elder Ukpai Onum Ndukwe, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording, Asaga Village, Ohafia, April 13, 2012. Mr. Ibe Mba, like Chief Kalu Ezelu Uwaoma, was one of the first individuals to marry a wife (Miss Ucha Onum of Asaga) trained by Presbyterian missionaries in 1922. The marriage of “good Christian wives” was a marker of Ohafia Christian elitism between 1911 and 1930. This is examined below.

¹⁵⁸¹ Agwu Kalu, L.N. Chika, and N.O. Nkata, “The Advent of Christianity in Ohafia: An Unpublished Work by Isiana Parish of the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria,” (2005), 1; Elder Ukpai Onum Ndukwe, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording, Asaga. April 13, 2012.

¹⁵⁸² Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 111.

¹⁵⁸³ Johnston, *Of God and Maxim Guns*, 85; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 111; Johnston, “Ohafia 1911-40: A Study in Church Developments,” 142. According to Elder Ukpai Onum Ndukwe (*ocit.*), accommodation for Rev. Essien was provided by Chief Mba Ndukwe Okorie, the father of Ernest Ibe Mba, whom Rev. Essien adopted in 1905.

Bende-Onitsha Hinterland expedition, and the subsequent effort by Ernest Ibe Mba to revive the mission through Rev. Macgregor in 1908 failed.

A number of African Christian converts also sought to establish a church independent of the C.S.M. Between 1909 and 1910, Rev. Nnanwugbuom, an Aro man, started holding church services in Amankwu village, Ohafia, and soon after, extended his operations to the larger village of Ndi Uduma Awoke. He resisted the oversight of Rev. Rankin, the resident missionary at Arochukwu, until Rev. Robert Collins arrived at Ohafia in 1911 and through his connections with the male elders of these villages, established schools in these communities and implanted teacher-ministers, who took over Rev. Nnanwugbuom's churches.¹⁵⁸⁴ Johnston also recorded a similar case where, in 1910, an Ohafia man from Akanu village went to Arochukwu and Itu in search of employment, and was converted to Christianity. He returned to his hometown and began a church, and when Rev. Collins visited the community in 1911, they rejected his application to establish a church and school.¹⁵⁸⁵

The village of Akanu canvassed for the establishment of a school in 1915, only after their neighbors, Ebem, Asaga, Isigwu, and Nde Uduma Ukwu had established schools in their own communities.¹⁵⁸⁶ As Jones, Nsugbe, Njoku, and Johnston have observed with regard to the Ohafia-Igbo, it was rather intense competitive rivalry for development among the villages that

¹⁵⁸⁴ Rev. Eke Uduma, "The Advent of Christianity in Ohafia Under Rev. Robert Collins" (Unpublished Manuscript); Johnston, "Ohafia 1911-40: A Study in Church Developments," 143.

¹⁵⁸⁵ Johnston, "Ohafia 1911-40: A Study in Church Developments," 143.

¹⁵⁸⁶ Johnston, "Ohafia 1911-40: A Study in Church Developments," 143; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 115.

led each community to seek out a school and accept the Christian faith.¹⁵⁸⁷ The foregoing accounts also indicate that where the C.S.M proved successful, the ground was almost always tilled by African fore-runners. In fact, in the case of Elu village, Rev. Rankin first sent an Abiriba (or Ozu Abam) missionary teacher, Onuoha Kalu, to start a mission at Elu, and supervise the building of the mission house, a year before Rev. Collins arrived.¹⁵⁸⁸ Johnston and Njoku further write that between 1911 and 1920, churches and schools throughout Ohafia were opened by indigenous itinerant preachers and schoolboys, who evinced their Christian zeal by starting churches in their communities.¹⁵⁸⁹

However, the whole of Ohafia did not eagerly embrace Christianity. Chief Kalu noted in his autobiography that between 1911 and 1920, “worshippers were feasted at the end of each Sunday service, and when they were no longer feasted, they all relaxed from worship.”¹⁵⁹⁰ The village of Ihenta did not accept the Christian faith and did not allow the establishment of a church and school in their community until 1962, when the Christian Women’s Guild mounted a

¹⁵⁸⁷ Jones, *Annual Reports of Bende Division*, 51; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 121-123; Nsugbe, *Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Ibo Society*, 32, 36; Johnston, “Ohafia 1911-40: A Study in Church Developments,” 144.

¹⁵⁸⁸ Johnston, “Ohafia 1911-40: A Study in Church Developments,” 141; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 113; E.I. Mba, *Condensed History of Church in the Wild Wood, 1904-1953* (Ohafia: SKA Press, 1973); Ebi Agwu, *A Short History of the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria in Asaga Ohafia* (Ohafia: Presbyterian Church of Nigeria, 1999); Eze Onuoha Uma, *Guidance and Destiny*, 4; Kalu, Chika, and Nkata, “The Advent of Christianity in Ohafia,” 4-5; Elder Ukpai Onum Ndukwe, oral interview by author, Asaga, Ohafia, April 13, 2012.

¹⁵⁸⁹ Johnston, “Ohafia 1911-40: A Study in Church Developments,” 141- 142, 144; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 119. Onuoha Kalu opened churches and schools in Elu and Amaekpu in 1910. A church and school was opened in Oboro village in 1913 with the assistance of an Asaga man, who was living there. Male Ohafia schoolboys and itinerant preachers also established churches and schools in the following villages: Asaga and Nde Uduma Ukwu (1915-16), Amuma and Amangwu (1916), Eziafor and Nde-Ibe (1917), Nde Anku (1917-18), Abia (1918), Nkwebi (1919), Nde Orieki (1920), Ufieli (1921). Rev. Collins organized the churches and schools after they had been opened.

¹⁵⁹⁰ Kalu, “An Ibo Autobiography,” 167.

vigorous campaign to install a school teacher and minister there.¹⁵⁹¹ Okon, the renowned home of *dibia* practitioners (see chapter 5) stands out in its resistance to Christianity. While at Asaga, Rev. Essien had converted two Okon men (Torti Oke and Omoka) to Christianity in 1905. These men could not make any head-way in Okon, and therefore went to the neighboring village of Amuma, where they opened a church.¹⁵⁹² The Ibe Mba/Macgregor mission also went to Okon in 1908 after they were rebuffed by Asaga, and similarly made no headway.¹⁵⁹³

In 1909, another group of C.S.M missionaries led by Rev. Gardiner (from Unwana) and Rev. Rankin (from Arochukwu) made presents of tobacco, clothes, sugar, and other items to the leaders of Okon to allow them to establish a mission there, but these entreaties were rejected. Another effort by the same team in 1910, this time accompanied by Rev. Cruickshank and Dr. Luke was similarly thwarted.¹⁵⁹⁴ After the C.S.M accepted to cite a major mission station in Ohafia, following the petition by Chief Kalu Ezelu, they made one more visit to Okon in 1910. This time, the party included Rev. Robert Collins and the leaders of the C.S.M in the region (Rev. Macgregor, F.A. Foster, S.A. Sinclair, Rev. Ward, and educationist Mr. E.B. Jones). This forceful representation was similarly turned down by Okon village. The *ezie-ogo*, Chief Okwara

¹⁵⁹¹ Kalu Awa, *ezie-ogo* of Ibina, oral interview by author, Ibina (Ihenta). Dec. 12, 2011; Chief Kalu Awa Kalu, oral interview by author, Ufiele Village. October 27, 2011; Johnston, "Ohafia 1911-40: A Study in Church Developments," 141.

¹⁵⁹² Elder Ukpai Onum Ndukwe, oral interview by author, Asaga. April 13, 2012; Uduma, "The Advent of Christianity in Ohafia;" Johnston, "Ohafia 1911-40: A Study in Church Developments," 142.

¹⁵⁹³ Johnston, "Ohafia 1911-40: A Study in Church Developments," 142; Elder Ukpai Onum Ndukwe, oral interview by author, Asaga Village, Ohafia, April 13, 2012; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, noted that two Abiriba men, Onuoha Kalu and Ezikpe Onuoha, also accompanied Macgregor and Ibe Mba on this mission.

¹⁵⁹⁴ Kalu, "The River Highway: Christianizing the Igbo," 70; Kalu, Chika, and Nkata, "The Advent of Christianity in Ohafia," 2; Elder Ukpai Onum Ndukwe, oral interview by author, Asaga, Ohafia, April 13, 2012.

Uma Efere, advised the missionaries to cite their station at Elu, since it was the first point of settlement for the Ohafia.¹⁵⁹⁵ Upon reaching Elu, the missionaries were welcomed by Chief Imaga Agwunsi (the *ezie-ogo* of Elu village) and the upstart, Chief Kalu Ezelu.¹⁵⁹⁶

It was not until Mazi Uche Ibe, an Okon man who had served Mary Slessor as a houseboy, returned in 1912 and was made a warrant chief (1913), that he used his new authority to establish a school in Okon in 1916.¹⁵⁹⁷ However, the major factor that led Okon to embrace Christianity was the outbreak of *ibi* (elephantiasis of the scrotum), influenza (which had spread from Sierra Leone through Ghana to Lagos and Eastern Nigeria, following the world wide pandemic at the close of W.W. 1), yaws and small pox epidemic between 1918 and 1920, which killed thousands of Ohafia people.¹⁵⁹⁸ Rev. Collins indicates that this quadruple epidemic was

¹⁵⁹⁵ Johnston, "Ohafia 1911-40: A Study in Church Developments," 142; Kalu, Chika, and Nkata, "The Advent of Christianity in Ohafia," 3; Elder Ukpai Onum Ndukwe, oral interview by author, Asaga Village, Ohafia, April 13, 2012; Chief K.K. Owen, oral interview by author; Elder Agwu Kalu of Amaekpu Village, Ohafia, oral interview by author. May 18, 2012.

¹⁵⁹⁶ Kalu, Chika, and Nkata, "The Advent of Christianity in Ohafia," 3-4; Kalu, "An Ibo Autobiography," 165.

¹⁵⁹⁷ Johnston, "Ohafia 1911-40: A Study in Church Developments," 142-143.

¹⁵⁹⁸ UFC, West Africa, MS. 7793: "Collins Robert, Missionary in Calabar, Letters of; Letter from Collins, Robert to Mr. Ashcroft, dated 7th May 1920," 17; *Dibia* Agwu Arua, oral interview by author; Elizabeth Isichei, *Igbo Worlds: An Anthology of Oral Histories and Historical Descriptions* (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1978), 231-232. In the November 1920 Record of the UFC, it is stated that "as many as 20, 000 people have been swept away in the Ohafia district by small-pox." Rev. Collins stated that this figure was exaggerated, and that while the death rate was certainly high, it was not as high as 20,000. See UFC, West Africa, MS. 7793: "Collins Robert, Missionary in Calabar, Letters of; Letter from Collins, Robert to Mr. Livingstone, dated 10th November 1920," 41-42. E.E. Ecoma writes that 80% of the inhabitants of Calabar went down with the influenza. See, E.E. Ecoma, "Binding the Wounds: Presbyterians and the Health of the Nation," in Kalu, ed., *A Century and Half of Presbyterian Witness in Nigeria*, 179.

so bad that most people were unable to plant their farms, resulting in a famine.¹⁵⁹⁹ As noted in chapter 4, the local *dibia* had no known cure for these diseases, and many of them died from them. Because the epidemic began in the mission-run school at Asaga, Ohafia *dibia* interpreted the diseases as a curse from the ancestors because the young had abandoned their traditional religion.¹⁶⁰⁰

The C.S.M saw the epidemic as an opportunity for evangelization. The young English missionary doctor, J.W. Hitchcock was sent to Ohafia from Uburu, accompanied by Mr. Dean, Mrs. Christie, and Mrs. Gardiner. They set up a healing camp at a dispensary in Rev. Collins' compound, where many of the patients were taken to be healed by Dr. Hitchcock and baptized by Rev. Collins, after several *dibia* had failed to restore them to good health.¹⁶⁰¹ The missionaries labored to the verge of death, and according to Rev. Collins, most of the afflicted Christian converts recovered from the smallpox because they were "sensible," while the "heathens" who "followed the advice of witch doctors" died in their numbers.¹⁶⁰² The failure of the traditional *dibia* to curb this pandemic which spread from Asaga village to Okon in 1918, and the ability of

¹⁵⁹⁹ UFC, West Africa, MS. 7793: "Collins Robert, Missionary in Calabar, Letters of; Letter from Collins, Robert to Mr. Valentine, dated 28th September 1920," 39-40.

¹⁶⁰⁰ *Dibia* Agwu Arua, oral interview by author; *Dibia* Azueke Kalu, oral interview by author.

¹⁶⁰¹ UFC, West Africa, MS. 7793: "Collins Robert, Missionary in Calabar, Letters of; Letter from Collins, Robert to Mr. Ashcroft, dated 28th April 1919," 563; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 117. Hitchcock was contracted to Calabar in 1911, and took over from Dr. David Robertson. He settled at Uburu in 1912, where he set up a hospital and following Robertson's departure in 1916, Hitchcock became singularly responsible for all the medical work of the C.S.M in Southeastern Nigeria. He died at Itu in 1919 after contracting the pox in Ohafia. See Johnston, *Of God and Maxim Guns*, 194-196; Letter from Collins, Robert to Mr. Ashcroft, dated 28th April 1919, 563; Ecoma, "Binding the Wounds: Presbyterians and the Health of the Nation," 179.

¹⁶⁰² UFC, West Africa, MS. 7793: "Collins Robert, Missionary in Calabar, Letters of; Letter from Collins, Robert to Mr. Livingstone, dated 10th November 1920," 41; UPC, West Africa, MS. 7793: "Collins Robert, Missionary in Calabar, Letters of; Letter from Collins, Robert to Mr. Valentine, dated 28th September 1920," 39-40.

European missionaries to heal the sick, led the villages of Asaga and Okon to embrace Christianity *en masse*.¹⁶⁰³ Johnston writes, “the campaign was a massive demonstration of the mastery of Western medicine over a disease which had baffled traditional methods. European doctors were in direct competition with traditional practitioners. They had to show the superiority of their methods.”¹⁶⁰⁴

What is most significant in the evangelization mission of the C.S.M in Ohafia is that from the onset, it was an all-male affair, and was marked by concerted efforts to convert various forms of *ufiem*, including *dibia* (the bastions of traditional religion), and old (*ezie-ogo*) and new (warrant chiefs) male political leaders.¹⁶⁰⁵ The administration of the C.S.M in Ohafia equally reflected the emergence of men as opposed to women in leadership positions within the church. Ohafia-Igbo men saw the mission as an opportunity to attain socio-political authority over women and non-Christians, and the C.S.M encouraged their ambitions. This is evident in the organization of the church leadership and the definition of its functions between 1911 and 1920, as shown below.

The Ohafia mission district consisted of a hierarchy of emergent masculinities. At the top were the resident European missionary, Robert Collins and his wife, Elizabeth Collins. Historian of Igbo religion and Christianity, Ogbu Kalu described Rev. Collins as “a judge with

¹⁶⁰³ *Dibia* Agwu Arua, oral interview by author; *Dibia* Azueke Kalu, oral interview by author; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 117.

¹⁶⁰⁴ Johnston, *Of God and Maxim Guns*, 197.

¹⁶⁰⁵ Johnston, “Ohafia 1911-40: A Study in Church Developments,” 142, noted a singular exception in the case of Ufiele village in 1921, where Adada Ufiele, a lady from Amuma facilitated the opening of a church in 1921.

consummate abilities, a creative and an endearing human being.”¹⁶⁰⁶ Every scholar that has written about Rev. Collins has emphasized the fact that he had great personal charm, worked tirelessly for 22 years in Ohafia, and expanded the mission to territories which the regulatory body of C.S.M, the Calabar Mission Council had not envisaged.¹⁶⁰⁷ Johnston argues that Rev. Collins “functioned like a typical Ohafia elder. The successful missionary had to be a successful chief, one who was skilled at settling disputes, and who had influence in the right quarters.”¹⁶⁰⁸ Rev. Collins and Chief Kalu Ezelu were the two most powerful individuals living in Ohafia between 1911 and 1920. Both of them rose above the Native Court clerks,¹⁶⁰⁹ and were subordinate only to the District Officer, whose power and influence was limited to the periods he visited the community. It was the duty of Rev. Collins to transform boys into Presbyterian masculinities,¹⁶¹⁰ and most Ohafia men who emerged as school teachers and ministers between 1916 and 1920 served as Rev. Collins’ houseboys between 1911 and 1915.¹⁶¹¹

Below Rev. Collins was a number of trained teachers of Efik origin responsible for the management of the central school at Elu and the supervision of untrained teachers of Ohafia origin in the various villages. These untrained teachers had finished Standard VI, but were not

¹⁶⁰⁶ Ogbu Kalu, “The Battle of the Gods: Christianization of Cross River Igboland, 1903-1950,” *Ohafia Review* 1, 2 (1985), p.15.

¹⁶⁰⁷ Johnston, “Ohafia 1911-40: A Study in Church Developments,” 145-146; Kalu, “The River Highway: Christianizing the Igbo,” 71; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 118.

¹⁶⁰⁸ Johnston, “Ohafia 1911-40: A Study in Church Developments,” 146.

¹⁶⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶¹⁰ Elder Ukpai Onum Ndukwe, oral interview by author, Asaga, April 13, 2012, stated that Rev. Collins “moulded the character of the schoolboys and his houseboys, so that they aspired to become like him.”

¹⁶¹¹ Prince Ikpo Kalu Ukoha, oral interview by author, Ebem. 19th May 2012; Mrs. Margaret Eke Anya (daughter of Rev. Nnochin Ebi), oral interview by author, Amaekpu. May 18, 2012; Elder Ukpai Ndukwe, oral interview by author, Asaga, Ohafia, April 13, 2012; Kalu, Chika, and Nkata, “The Advent of Christianity in Ohafia,” 8; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 119.

able to proceed to Hope Waddell Training Institute at Calabar for teacher training. Native teachers also served as itinerant preachers and personal interpreters for Rev. Collins, who preached in Efik language.¹⁶¹² For example, Mr. Nnochin Ebi served as Rev. Collins' interpreter for over 20 years, and later became an ordained Minister of the church.¹⁶¹³ According to Elder Ukpai Ndukwe, one had first to be a teacher before becoming an ordained minister, and many of the first generation native teachers emerged as Presbyterian ministers between 1916 and 1920.¹⁶¹⁴ Such teachers-*cum*-ministers, who were pioneers of educated Christian converts' elitism include Rev. Awa Ugbaga, Rev. Kalu Oyeoku, Rev. Onuoha Kalu, Akaji Eke of Amaekpu, and Ula Ogboku of Elu.¹⁶¹⁵ Johnston aptly described them as "emergent aristocrats," who served forty odd years in the ministry and died loaded with honors.¹⁶¹⁶

The mission work of the C.S.M completely depended on these local teacher-ministers.¹⁶¹⁷ School teachers and headmasters such as Mr. Kalu Owen of Elu, Mr. Okoko Okorie of Nde Anku, Mr. Nnochin Ebi of Amaekpu, and Mr. Ngwoke Awa of Okon, were Presbyterian masculinities who enjoyed a lot of prestige in their local communities in the 1920s.¹⁶¹⁸ They were the first class of Ohafia people to own bicycles, wear European-tailored

¹⁶¹² Kalu, Chika, and Nkata, "The Advent of Christianity in Ohafia," 6.

¹⁶¹³ Mrs. Margaret Eke Anya (daughter of Rev. Nnochin Ebi), oral interview by author, Amaekpu. May 18, 2012; Kalu, Chika, and Nkata, "The Advent of Christianity in Ohafia," 8.

¹⁶¹⁴ Elder Ukpai Onum Ndukwe, oral interview by author. Such teachers turned ministers include Onuoha Kalu, Otisi Agwu Otisi, N.A. Udu, U. Ikenga, O.A. Olugu, and Ikpo Anya.

¹⁶¹⁵ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 119.

¹⁶¹⁶ Johnston, "Ohafia 1911-40: A Study in Church Developments," 147.

¹⁶¹⁷ Johnston, *Of God and Maxim Guns*, 85.

¹⁶¹⁸ Chief Uche Anya Elekwa, oral interview by author. Aug. 14, 2010; Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author, Elu Ohafia. Aug. 10, 2010; Elder Agwu Kalu, oral interview by author.

suits, and build modern houses in demonstration of their *ogaranya* status.¹⁶¹⁹ They had constant supplies of imported canned foods and candies, which they distributed to little boys to entice them to school and church.¹⁶²⁰ Their opinions became paramount in the affairs of their local communities, and whereas the young had looked up to *ndi ikike* as role models between 1850 and 1900, becoming a school teacher, minister, or government clerk became the objective of young men of high ambition between 1911 and 1920.¹⁶²¹

Young male Christian converts and schoolboys, demonstrated their religious zeal, loyalty to schoolteachers, and commitment to education by destroying the female *ududu* housed by their mothers, while the male *ududu* housed in the patrilineage *obu* houses remained intact.¹⁶²² This Christian war against matriliney led Nsugbe to conclude that “the ritual headship vested in the female head of the matrilineage [was] likely to vanish [due to] the Christian faith. Then the dead [Ohafia ancestral matriarchs would] have lost their traditional hold upon the hearts of their living daughters and sons, who [would] now have to learn to remember and honor their ancestors no longer through [*ududu* pot monuments], the vehicle of old beliefs and old values but through

May 18, 2012; Elder Ukpai Onum Ndukwe, oral interview by author, Asaga. April 13, 2012; Chief K.K. Owen, oral interview by author; Chief K.K. Oyeoku, oral interview by author, Ebem.¹⁶¹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶²⁰ Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author, Elu. Aug. 10, 2010.

¹⁶²¹ Mr. I. Ukoha, oral interview by author, Ebem. Oct. 27, 2011; Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author, Elu Ohafia. Aug. 10, 2010; Elder Ukpai Onum Ndukwe, oral interview by author, Asaga Village, Ohafia, April 13, 2012.

¹⁶²² Mama Orie Emeh and Chief Mrs. Grace Ojieke, oral interview by author; Mama Docas Kalu and Mama Mary Ezera, Group Interview by author; Nmia Nnaya Agbai, oral interview by author; Chief Kevin Ukiro, oral interview by author; Ndukwe Otta and Elder Uduma Uka, Group Interview by author; Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author; Chief Eke Emetu Kalu, oral interview by author; Chief Emeh Okonkwo, oral interview by author; Chief Kalu Awa Kalu, oral interview by author; Chief K.K. Owen, oral interview by author; Chief Olua Iro Kalu, oral interview by author.

their Christian substitutes. Then the sacred pots [would] vanish with the warmth of the traditional bedroom fire, and the ancient devotion that had once sustained them and their guardians.”¹⁶²³

These schoolboys and young converts were militant soldiers of the C.S.M. As early as 1912, they had successfully mounted a vigorous campaign to bring back twin mothers and their children from the outskirts of Elu village into the community.¹⁶²⁴ When husbands killed their wives’ twin children,¹⁶²⁵ the schoolboys were the first to report such incidents to Rev. Collins and British officers.¹⁶²⁶ They championed the desecration of sacred streams in Okon village (by stubbornly fishing in the rivers), and refused to participate in secret societies and age grade ceremonies in Asaga village, which they viewed as fetish traditions.¹⁶²⁷ Njoku suggests that these young militants also consisted of the under-privileged and deprived such as twins and *ujo*, to whom the Christian message of equality and social justice was very appealing.¹⁶²⁸

Education was perhaps the most significant factor in the making of Presbyterian masculinities (church elders, teachers, preachers, ministers, and first-generation educated elite),

¹⁶²³ Nsugbe, *Ohafia: A Matrilineal Ibo*, 123.

¹⁶²⁴ The Missionary Record of the United Free Church of Scotland, Shelfmark U.402 (1908), 21-23; The Missionary Record of the United Free Church of Scotland, Shelfmark U.402 (1913), 19-21; Elder Ukpai Onum Ndukwe, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording, Asaga Village, Ohafia, April 13, 2012; Elder Agwu Kalu of Amaekpu Village, oral interview by author, May 18, 2012; Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author, Elu Ohafia. Aug. 10, 2010.

¹⁶²⁵ Mayne, “Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934,” 49. Mayne noted that the killing of twins occurred almost every month in the first two decades of the 20th century.

¹⁶²⁶ A popular incident in this regard was the case of Ikpa Ngele, who killed his wife’s twin children, and following the report of he incident by Amaekpu schoolboys, Mr. James Watt, the D.O. ordered all twin mothers on the outskirts of Amaekpu village to return home in 1913. Ibid; Kalu, Chika, and Nkata, “The Advent of Christianity in Ohafia,” 7.

¹⁶²⁷ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 120. In Asaga, the elders refused to allow these Christian converts access to farming land, upon their refusal to take part in age grade ceremonies.

¹⁶²⁸ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 117. This was equally true for many parts of Igboland. See Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, 119-121; Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors and Kings*, 87.

the emergence of men as bread-winners, and the marginalization of women from leadership positions and lucrative ventures, between 1911 and 1920. Johnston writes, “for 120 years the school, whether it was a simple mud-and-thatch shelter or an elaborate complex, like the Hope Waddell Training Institution, was the characteristic mark of the Presbyterian Church.”¹⁶²⁹ Upon the introduction of Christianity to Ohafia, the villages built and maintained their own schools and raised the money for the payment of teachers’ salaries.¹⁶³⁰ While women made financial contributions to the erection of new schools and churches,¹⁶³¹ Ohafia Elder of the Presbyterian mission and local historian, Ukpai Onum Ndukwe, averred that “there is no record attesting that a girl was among the intakes into any of the schools opened by the missionaries between 1911 and 1921.”¹⁶³² Until 1928, there was no female representative in the colonial Board of Education (this consisted of four representatives from the CMS, RCM, UFCSM, and Wesleyan Mission) and female education was outside the primary objectives of both missionaries and colonial officers until 1922.¹⁶³³

While the C.S.M provided the staff for the village schools and offered supervision, the colonial government initially did not play a role until 1917, when it provided an inspection

¹⁶²⁹ Johnston, *Of God and Maxim Guns*, 160.

¹⁶³⁰ Jones, *Annual Reports of Bende Division*, 51; Johnston, *Of God and Maxim Guns*, 39.

¹⁶³¹ Elder Agwu Kalu of Amaekpu Village, Ohafia, oral interview by author. May 18, 2012; Ezie-Nwami Ucha Oji Iwe of Elu Village and her Cabinet, Group Interview; Chief Uduma Nnochin Ogbuagu, oral interview by author, Amuke Village. Nov. 24, 2011; UPC, West Africa, MS. 7793: “Collins Robert, Missionary in Calabar, Letter from Collins, Robert to Mr. Ashcroft, dated 16th September 1921,” 98-99.

¹⁶³² Elder Ukpai Onum Ndukwe, oral interview by author, Asaga, Ohafia, April 13, 2012. This was affirmed by Elder Agwu Kalu of Amaekpu, oral interview by author. May 18, 2012.

¹⁶³³ CO583/166/6: “Colonial Office: Nigeria Original Correspondence; Reports on Education Departments of Northern Provinces, Southern Provinces and Colony, 1928” 7. The Christian missions were “unwilling to nominate women as their representatives.”

system and regulated education standards.¹⁶³⁴ The Education Ordinance and Regulations of 1917, which captures both the limitations of missionary education and the bigotry of the colonial government, described African teacher-ministers as “men of undesirable character” and “boys who have left school with the smallest smattering of education and are unable to read and write, [but have] set up so-called schools in the villages which are merely a means of extorting fees.”¹⁶³⁵ The Education Ordinance concluded that there was a need to control “private venture Christian schools by way of registration, license or permit [to ensure] closer supervision . . . over all persons, other than British subjects, who desire to undertake either missionary or educational work in the Colonies.”¹⁶³⁶

The ideology of Presbyterian education until the 1920s was that Africans were a simple-minded people, for whom learning was not of much use, whereas the colonial government pushed for what it called “industrial education” (carpentry, brickmaking, bricklaying, tailoring, printing, and bakery.)¹⁶³⁷ The result was that key jobs such as district minister positions, medical services personnel, and school management were reserved for Europeans, while Nigerian men constituted ill-trained teachers, preachers, catechists, interpreters, and clerks, who assisted Europeans.¹⁶³⁸ The first indigenous Ohafia headmaster emerged only in 1928.¹⁶³⁹ However, the literary and industrial education provided men, enabled them to become

¹⁶³⁴ Jones, *Annual Reports of Bende Division*, 47-51; Kalu, “An Ibo Autobiography,” 166; Elder Ukpai Onum Ndukwe, oral interview by author, Asaga. April 13, 2012; Chief K.K. Oyeoku, oral interview by author, Ebem. Aug. 2, 2010.

¹⁶³⁵ CO583/56: “Nigeria Original Correspondence, 8 February – March, 1917,” 152.

¹⁶³⁶ CO583/56: “Nigeria Original Correspondence, 8 February – March, 1917,” 151, 160.

¹⁶³⁷ Johnston, *Of God and Maxim Guns*, 109; CO520/8: “Southern Nigeria Protectorate Original Correspondence, May to August, 1901,” 297-313, 321-330.

¹⁶³⁸ Johnston, *Of God and Maxim Guns*, 113, 118, 120.

¹⁶³⁹ Johnston, “Ohafia 1911-40: A Study in Church Developments,” 148.

entrepreneurs (masons, carpenters, tailors, and printers) and constitute the educated elite (teachers, preachers, ministers, clerks, policemen, and railway workers) between 1916 and 1920.¹⁶⁴⁰

The ultimate manifestation of Presbyterian masculinity for the Ohafia educated elite was the marriage of “good Christian wives.”¹⁶⁴¹ Between 1917 and 1922, such Christian wives were trained at Slessor Memorial School, Arochukwu by Scottish female missionaries Mrs. Arnot, Susan McKennell, and Marion Gilmour.¹⁶⁴² According to Johnston, whereas McKennell was mainly responsible for missionary work in the district, the school fell to Mrs. Arnot, known as *Ezinne* (the good mother), who like Mary Chalmers of the Edgerly Memorial Girls School in Creek Town, believed that the training of girls for marriage was of paramount importance.¹⁶⁴³ In 1922, the Ohafia Girls’ School (O.G.S) was established at Asaga village, and Miss. Marion Gilmore took charge of its administration, with the assistance of Mrs. J.D. Moffat, Miss Barclay,

¹⁶⁴⁰ The first generation policemen from Ohafia included Sgt. Major J. Eme Amogu, Sgt. John Emea Awa, Captain Job Ume Iro, Inspector Ginger Uma Ntima, Sgt. Ibem Anya, and Inspector Sam Ama. Elder Ukpai Onum Ndukwe, oral interview by author, Asaga, April 13, 2012. In the 1940s, the first generation university-trained Ohafia men such as Prof. O.I. Uduma and Prof. Ezera were welcomed home with *ikoro* beats and masquerade parades. *Ezie-ogo* Vasco U. Iro of Nkwebi Village, in council with elders of Nkwebi Village, Group Interview with author, at *Obu-Nta* Kwebi. Nov. 17, 2011.

¹⁶⁴¹ Elder Ukpai Onum Ndukwe, oral interview by author, Asaga Village, April 13, 2012; Chief K.K. Oyeoku, oral interview by author, Ebem. Aug. 2, 2010; Mrs. Margaret Eke Anya, oral interview by author, Amaekpu. May 18, 2012; Elder Agwu Kalu, oral interview by author. May 18, 2012. The following women were the first set of girls trained at O.G.S and they all married Presbyterian masculinities: Miss Nkacha Emetu of Ebem (married Rev. Ume Olugu), Miss Ucha Onum of Asaga (married Mr. Ernest Ibe Mba), Mrs. Sarah Olugu, Mrs. Anya of Ebem, Mrs. Ugo Ebi Arua of Amaekpu, and Mrs. Maduekwe (married Ojo Maduekwe).

¹⁶⁴² CO583/166/6: “Reports on Education Departments of Northern Provinces, Southern Provinces and Colony, 1928” 47-48; Johnston, *Of God and Maxim Guns*, 227.

¹⁶⁴³ Johnston, *Of God and Maxim Guns*, 228.

Miss Reid, Mrs. McLachlan, and Miss Flemming.¹⁶⁴⁴ Its goal according to Elder Ukpai Ndukwe, was to train “good Christian wives for the new Ohafia educated elite.”¹⁶⁴⁵ In the tradition of Presbyterian women missionaries, the O.G.S was a boarding school that combined Christian education and domestic science, to instruct girls in the nurture and admonition of the Lord and in the arts of a Victorian household.¹⁶⁴⁶

Young Ohafia women were trained in the following skills: bible reading in Ohafia dialect, singing Christian hymns, cooking, dress washing, dress cutting, dress weaving and dressmaking, personal hygiene, gardening, soap-making, palm oil processing and the extraction of palm kernel oil.¹⁶⁴⁷ It was not until the 1940s, when girls began to be admitted into the general primary schools that O.G.S incorporated instructions in English language, elementary reading and writing. But even then, it was only up to Standard IV, at which point girls moved on to the Presbyterian School, Asaga to complete Standard V and VI.¹⁶⁴⁸ Johnston noted that unlike the men, Scottish female missionaries took little or no interest in training an African staff.¹⁶⁴⁹ By this he meant the absence of African women trained to substitute the European staff as missionaries, teachers, and ministers. Thus, the girls trained at O.G.S between 1922 and 1930

¹⁶⁴⁴ Mayne, “Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934,” 49; Mrs. Margaret Eke Anya, oral interview by author, Amaekpu. May 18, 2012; Johnston, “Ohafia 1911-40: A Study in Church Developments,” 145.

¹⁶⁴⁵ Elder Ukpai Onum Ndukwe, oral interview by author, Asaga, April 13, 2012; Kalu, Chika, and Nkata, “The Advent of Christianity in Ohafia,” 7. Johnston, *Of God and Maxim Guns*, 227, also writes that the objective of the O.G.S was “the preparation of girls for marriage.”

¹⁶⁴⁶ The Missionary Record of the United Free Church of Scotland (1906), 116-117.

¹⁶⁴⁷ Mrs. Margaret Eke Anya, oral interview by author, Amaekpu. May 18, 2012; Elder Agwu Kalu of Amaekpu Village, Ohafia, oral interview by author. May 18, 2012; Elder Ukpai Onum Ndukwe, oral interview by author; K.K. Oyeoku, oral interview by author.

¹⁶⁴⁸ Mrs. Margaret Eke Anya, oral interview by author. According to Mrs. Eke Anya, even during this latter period, O.G.S. did not abandon its emphasis on wife training.

¹⁶⁴⁹ Johnston, *Of God and Maxim Guns*, 223.

were mostly employed as matrons within the school, and their duties were restricted to supervising young female students in various domestic science exercises.¹⁶⁵⁰ It was not until the late 1940s that the first crop of Ohafia female teachers and tailors emerged.¹⁶⁵¹ By this time however, Ohafia people were organizing communal scholarship programs to send their young men to Britain and the United States of America, for post-graduate studies and medical training.¹⁶⁵²

Above the local teacher-minister class of Presbyterian masculinities were the ordained church Elders. Rev. Collins chose educated (ability to read and write) men of influence, especially those who were socially perceived as *ogaranya* to become church Elders in order that their influence would attract people to church.¹⁶⁵³ Elder-hood was the final reward for educated Christians who accomplished Presbyterian masculinity. Elder Agwu Kalu stated that “there were no female elders in the church. It was only men. The Presbyterian church was a man’s world. It was very masculinist . . . It was not until the 1970s that we started having female elders little by little. It used to be an all-male affair.”¹⁶⁵⁴ Pioneer elders were placed in charge of congregations,

¹⁶⁵⁰ Mrs. Margaret Eke Anya, oral interview by author, Amaekpu. May 18, 2012. Such women included Miss Nkacha Emetu of Ebem, Miss Ucha Onum of Asaga, Mrs. Sarah Olugu, Mrs. Anya of Ebem, Mrs. Ugo Ebi Arua of Amaekpu, and Mrs. Maduekwe.

¹⁶⁵¹ Mrs. Margaret Eke Anya, oral interview by author, Amaekpu. May 18, 2012; Elder Ukpai Onum Ndukwe, oral interview by author, Asaga, April 13, 2012; K.K. Oyeoku, oral interview by author; Elder Agwu Kalu of Amaekpu Village, Ohafia, oral interview by author. May 18, 2012.

¹⁶⁵² Kalu, “The River Highway: Christianizing the Igbo,” 69.

¹⁶⁵³ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 118; Elder Ukpai Onum Ndukwe, oral interview by author, Asaga. April 13, 2012; Elder Agwu Kalu, oral interview by author, May 18, 2012. We have seen this in the case of Chief Kalu.

¹⁶⁵⁴ Elder Agwu Kalu, oral interview by author. May 18, 2012.

and worked directly under Rev. Collins' supervision.¹⁶⁵⁵ In every village, or group of villages depending on the size of the church, was an elder, or group of elders, charged with the management of the village churches. The Elders were assisted by teachers and ministers, but they had the final say in all decision-making situations.¹⁶⁵⁶

Johnston writes that "In Ohafia . . . the elders took a more prominent part in the affairs of the church than they did in Ibibio country."¹⁶⁵⁷ While they were few, the church Elders had a lot of power vested in their hands. By 1930, about 33% of the total population were Christian converts,¹⁶⁵⁸ including more than 700 communicants,¹⁶⁵⁹ and the social laws regulating the life of these Christian converts were governed by twenty church Elders in 1924.¹⁶⁶⁰ Between 1914 and 1924, Elder Ukoha Kalu was solely responsible for the Christian congregation at Amuke and Amangwu villages.¹⁶⁶¹ Warrant Chief Eke Kalu (discussed above) served as the Elder of Isigwu and Elu villages between 1915 and 1918, when he was replaced by Elder Ula Ogboko and Elder

¹⁶⁵⁵ Johnston, *Of God and Maxim Guns*, 84; Elder Agwu Kalu, oral interview by author.

Amaekpu. May 18, 2012; Elder Ukpai Onum Ndukwe, oral interview by author. April 13, 2012.

¹⁶⁵⁶ Johnston, "Ohafia 1911-40: A Study in Church Developments," 145; Elder Agwu Kalu, oral interview by author, Amaekpu Village. May 18, 2012.

¹⁶⁵⁷ Johnston, *Of God and Maxim Guns*, 84.

¹⁶⁵⁸ Mayne, "Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934," 70.

¹⁶⁵⁹ Johnston, "Ohafia 1911-40: A Study in Church Developments," 145.

¹⁶⁶⁰ Johnston, "Ohafia 1911-40: A Study in Church Developments," 145-148.

¹⁶⁶¹ Uduma, "The Advent of Christianity in Ohafia."

Otum Onuoha.¹⁶⁶² Amaekpu village also had two Elders ordained in 1917: Igu Uduma and Awa Emele.¹⁶⁶³

The elders were responsible for the management of the congregations and the affairs of the whole parish. Their major business in session was the settling of marriage cases and disciplining of sexual offenses — duties hitherto fulfilled by *Ikperikpe Ndi Inyom* (the Female Court).¹⁶⁶⁴ It was the Elders who upheld the Church mandate on monogamy, as a prerequisite for true Presbyterian masculine identity, and they often denied Ohafia women permission to obtain divorce, contrary to what had obtained in the pre-colonial period.¹⁶⁶⁵ They also settled land disputes and regulated permissions for litigants to proceed to the Native Court — duties hitherto fulfilled by the traditional Village Assembly.¹⁶⁶⁶ Moreover, the Elders sometimes constituted a diocesan court including Rev. Collins, teachers and ministers, in which Collins assumed the position of a bishop, leader, supervisor, judge, and dispenser of sacraments, and this system remained intact until the 1930s.¹⁶⁶⁷

The social principles introduced by Christianity and Western education, including condemnation of the *dibia* guild, ancestral worship, secret societies, age-grade activities, polygamy, headhunting, and new yam festivals,¹⁶⁶⁸ undermined indigenous avenues of *ufiem*

¹⁶⁶² Kalu, “An Ibo Autobiography,” 166-167; Elder Ukpai Onum Ndukwe, oral interview by author, Asaga Village, Ohafia, April 13, 2012. As noted above, Chief Kalu also became an Elder of Church of Christ in 1920, and simultaneously, a Minister of the Church of Scotland Mission.

¹⁶⁶³ Kalu, Chika, and Nkata, “The Advent of Christianity in Ohafia,” 7.

¹⁶⁶⁴ Johnston, “Ohafia 1911-40: A Study in Church Developments,” 147.

¹⁶⁶⁵ Johnston, “Ohafia 1911-40: A Study in Church Developments,” 148.

¹⁶⁶⁶ Johnston, “Ohafia 1911-40: A Study in Church Developments,” 147.

¹⁶⁶⁷ Johnston, “Ohafia 1911-40: A Study in Church Developments,” 149.

¹⁶⁶⁸ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 112.

attainment. As a result, many Ohafia-Igbo people channeled their energies, from the military defense of their villages, slave production, headhunting, and agriculture to western education, leadership in the Christian missions, and colonial service — opportunities which women were denied.¹⁶⁶⁹ Christianity and Western education thus facilitated the subversion of both male and female indigenous political systems, and enabled male educated Christian converts and church elders to usurp the political prerogatives of preexisting institutions. Mayne observed in 1931 that,

The indigenous rulers, now, however, once again [in addition to the warrant chiefs] behold a menace that threatens danger to themselves, namely, the expansion of Christianity. They perceive that whereas in the past, their position was not challenged by reason of their extensive knowledge of the laws and customs of their forefathers that now this is insufficient, for with civilisation, education has come, which is represented in their villages by the Christian element [converts], who no longer are content to listen to the voice of age.¹⁶⁷⁰

Ohafia-Igbo women also attest that Christianity undermined their political authority, by transferring their duties, including arbitration and intervention in divorce and the regulation of social mores (*ilu*) to the male Christian church elders.¹⁶⁷¹

¹⁶⁶⁹ Njoku, “Inter-Village Trade in Ohafia, 1900-1979,” 29; Chubb, “Assessment Reports: Bende Division, 1927-1929,” 2-3, 6, 20-23. Mr. Chubb writes that following Christianity, Ohafia became a “tractable and law-abiding people,” and that in pursuit of western education and trade, they paid little attention to agriculture, with the result that they suddenly became “the poorest in [Bende] division.”

¹⁶⁷⁰ Mayne, “Intelligence Report on the Ohafia Clan, 1934,” 69.

¹⁶⁷¹ *Ezie-Nwami* Ogbonne Kalu Kalu, oral interview by author, Uduma Ukwu Village, November 17, 2011; Mama Orie Emeh and Chief Mrs. Grace Ojieke, oral interview by author; *Ezie-Nwami* Ucha Oji Iwe of Elu Village and her Cabinet, Group Interview; *Ikpirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu Village, Group Interview; Nmia Nnaya Agbai, oral interview by author, Elu Village, August 18, 2011.

Women Reconfiguring *Ufiem*: Long Distance Trade and *Ogaranya* Masculinity in the Early 20th Century

The disparity in economic and political status between men and women from 1900 to 1920, surely invites the term burgeoning patriarchy, to define the greater socio-political power Ohafia men suddenly came to enjoy over women. As Ohafia women became increasingly marginalized from the dominant socio-political positions of power in their society between 1900 and 1920, they sought through their struggles, to redefine preexisting conceptions of gendered spaces, roles and opportunities.

This chapter argues that the expression of female power and authority in this period increasingly took the form of performing *ogaranya* masculinity, as the following case studies suggest. Whereas the accomplishment of *ndi ikike* masculinity by women who went to war and cut a human head (chapter 3), was not clearly motivated by the quest for political and economic power (since women were politically and economically powerful) between 1850 and 1900, women's quest for *ogaranya* status was both an economic and political endeavor, in view of their increasing loss of economic and political power under British colonial rule and missionary influence between 1900 and 1920. Thus, lacking access to Western education and Presbyterian masculinity, Madam Chief Otuwe Agwu first became a *dibia* (thereby performing masculinity), then married a wife (thereby becoming a female husband and later, grand-father), and performed *ogaranya* masculinity. Similarly, in her quest for social mobility beyond the colonial service, schools and churches, Unyang Uka became a long distance trader in slaves and legitimate commodities, amassed great wealth, and in performance of *ogaranya* masculinity, married a lot of wives (elite polygyny), between 1900 and 1920.

Amadiume and Achebe have demonstrated that the fluidity of the Igbo gender system, in which biological sex did not always correspond to gender, meant that gender roles were not

rigidly masculinized or feminized, and thus, women could play roles usually monopolized by men, or be classified males, by fulfilling masculine social obligations.¹⁶⁷² By performing *ogaranya* masculinity between 1900 and 1920, Ohafia women did not become men; rather, they were socially perceived as *ufiem* (masculine). The distinction between manhood and masculinity is an important one, and as shown in the introduction, a number of scholars have made this differentiation. Lindsay and Miescher define manhood as indigenous notions explicitly related to men's physiology, often recognized in terms of male adulthood.¹⁶⁷³ Thus, among the Ohafia-Igbo between 1850 and 1900, boys were socialized into manhood through gendered games such as *igba nnunu* (to shoot a bird), joining secret societies, and marrying a wife (chapters 3 and 4). Lindsay and Miescher define masculinity as a cluster of norms, values, and behavioral patterns expressing explicit and implicit expectations of how men should act and represent themselves to others.¹⁶⁷⁴ Thus, Ohafia women, such as Madam Chief Otuwe Agwu and Unyang Uka, who represented themselves as *ogaranya* between 1900 and 1920, were accorded the honor and privilege reserved for individuals who accomplished *ufiem*.

Achebe draws upon Judith Halberstam's definition of female masculinity as "women who feel themselves to be more masculine than feminine,"¹⁶⁷⁵ in contrast to the notion that masculinity is the social, cultural, and political expression of maleness, and argues that the

¹⁶⁷² Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, 185-186; Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors and Kings*, 206-215; Achebe, "And She Became a Man," 52-68; Achebe, *The Female King*, 97-223. Hence, while women could perform masculinity by becoming female sons in Nigeria for inheritance purposes, female husbands in Kenya and Nigeria, honorary men and chiefs in colonial Lesotho, and what Achebe has theorized as female kings in Nigeria, these scholars argue that they never attained what Achebe coined as "full manhood."

¹⁶⁷³ Lindsay and Miescher, "Introduction," 4.

¹⁶⁷⁴ Lindsay and Miescher, "Introduction," 5.

¹⁶⁷⁵ Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1998), xi-4.

concept refers to notions and intersections of gendered power, legitimacy, and privilege within society.¹⁶⁷⁶ Whereas Halberstam describes female masculinity as masculinity without men, Achebe posits that female masculinity does not oppose maleness, but rather flourishes and expresses itself in heterosexual culture. The life histories presented here further complicate the idea of female masculinity as women who feel themselves to be more masculine than feminine. Whereas this description perfectly captures the self-representations of Unyang Uka, it does not fit with Madam Chief Otuwe Agwu, who became a *dibia*, female husband, and *ogaranya*, not because of a desire to “become a man” like Ahebi Ugbabe¹⁶⁷⁷ studied by Achebe, but rather, as a means to achieve the ultimate manifestation of Ohafia femininity (to become a matriarch and ancestress of her matrilineage) in a period of colonial and missionary backlash. Therefore, I define female masculinity as women’s social representations of masculine distinction in the process of self-advancement.

My research assistant, Uduma Uka, described Madam Chief Otuwe Agwu as his female grandfather.¹⁶⁷⁸ Chief Otuwe had married Uduma Uka’s grand-mother from Umuahia patrilineal Igbo society around 1930, and according to Ndukwe Otta, “because she paid the bride-price, thereby fulfilling the customary obligations to make the woman a wife, all the children that woman begot belonged to her and her matrilineage.”¹⁶⁷⁹ Born in Ohafia around 1885, Chief Otuwe was the first daughter (*ada*) of her parents, and as such, in line to become *ezie-nwami*

¹⁶⁷⁶ Achebe, *The Female King*, 2.

¹⁶⁷⁷ Achebe, *The Female King*, 197-217. Ahebi actively wanted to become a man. She became a female headman, female warrant chief, female husband, female king, and even tried to realize full manhood by producing a masked spirit.

¹⁶⁷⁸ Ndukwe Otta and Uduma Uka, Group Interview by author, dig. voice recording, Ebem Village, Ohafia. Aug. 14, 2010. The logic behind this description will become clear in a moment.

¹⁶⁷⁹ Ndukwe Otta and Uduma Uka, Group Interview by author, dig. voice recording, Ebem Village, Ohafia. Aug. 14, 2010.

ikwu (matriarch of her matrilineage). She had married a husband around 1905, but did not have a child. This meant that upon her death, there would be nobody to raise an *ududu* (ancestral pot and matrilineage deity) monument in her honor, which would enshrine her as an ancestral matriarch of her matrilineage.¹⁶⁸⁰ Without *ududu*, she would not be a powerful spiritual force after death, she would not be ministered to and fed by any descendants, and she would have no legacy — in effect, she would not be a powerful Ohafia matriarch. It was to remedy this that Chief Otuwe married a wife.¹⁶⁸¹

Amadiume argues that the practice of female husband among Nnobi people of southeastern Nigeria, was a mechanism through which women acquired wealth and formal political power and authority, until British colonial rule empowered men (particularly warrant chiefs who became *ogaranya*) to dispossess women of their rights to wives and children.¹⁶⁸²

Achebe argues that Ahebi Ugbabe's adoption, kidnapping and marriage of other men's wives in Enugu Ezike during the colonial period, was part of a complex process of constructing a powerful and mythical image, as well as controlling women who provided sexual services to male visitors in her court.¹⁶⁸³ Whereas Achebe distinguishes female wives from female

¹⁶⁸⁰ Ndukwe Otta and Elder Uduma Uka, Group Interview by author. See chapter 2 for discussion of *ikwu* and *ududu*.

¹⁶⁸¹ Mama Docas Kalu and Mama Mary Ezera, Group Interview by author, Elu. August 10, 2010; Ndukwe Otta and Elder Uduma Uka, oral conversation with author, Asaga Village, Ohafia. September 16, 2011.

¹⁶⁸² Amadiume, *Male Daughters and Female Husbands*, 123-132. Amadiume defined this as the "helplessness of women against modern institutions" such as colonial courts and Christian churches. She concludes, "From my observations during fieldwork, Christianity did not seem to have deterred men from accumulating as many wives as their wealth allowed them. This was not the case with wealthy women." Women who became *ogaranya* in Nnobi during colonial rule could no longer marry wives; rather they married wives for their sons. In contrast to Nnobi, the practice of female husband among the Ohafia-Igbo did not cease with colonial rule.

¹⁶⁸³ Achebe, *The Female King*, 209-211.

slaves,¹⁶⁸⁴ Amadiume problematically defines becoming a female husband as *igba ohu*, a phrase that refers to enslavement.¹⁶⁸⁵

As chapter one of this dissertation shows, while indigenous Ohafia-Igbo women critically described wives of female husbands as “slaves of the matrilineage,” such wives were not in fact slaves, but rather enjoyed privileged status in their husbands’ homes, hence they are known as *nwannediya* (husband’s sister).¹⁶⁸⁶ Moreover, indigenous Ohafia women criticized *nwannediya* as “slaves of the matrilineage,” because they symbolized the wealth of a matrilineage.¹⁶⁸⁷ *Nwannediya* symbolized wealth because it was very expensive to marry a wife from patrilineal Igbo society, and the practice of female husband was a performance of wealth (*ogaranya*) for women,¹⁶⁸⁸ as well as an effort to strengthen a dwindling matrilineage.¹⁶⁸⁹ Ohafia local

¹⁶⁸⁴ Achebe, *The Female King*, 211.

¹⁶⁸⁵ Amadiume, *Male Daughters and Female Husbands*, 123. Hence, Nwokeji has taken up this issue to argue that there were no female husbands in pre-colonial Igbo society, only female slave owners. See Nwokeji, “African Conceptions of Gender and the Slave Traffic,” 58.

¹⁶⁸⁶ Obuba, *The History and Culture of Ohafia*, 51; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 26; Nwannediya Mmonwu-Oti, oral interview by author, Okon. August 5, 2010; Nmia Nnaya Agbai, oral interview by author; Mama Orie Emeh and Chief Mrs. Grace Ojieke, oral interview; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author, Amangwu. August 15, 2011; *Ikpirikpe Ndi Inyom* of Akanu Village, Group Interview with author. Nov. 3, 2011; Ndukwe Otta and Elder Uduma Uka, Group Interview by author, Ebem Village, Ohafia. August 14, 2010; Chief Kevin Ukiro, oral interview by author, Asaga Village. August 10, 2010. This also contrasts with Achebe’s description of the uses to which Ahebi put her wives and concubines.

¹⁶⁸⁷ Nwannediya Mmonwu-Oti, oral interview by author, Ndi Owom, Okon. August 5, 2010; Nmia Nnaya Agbai, oral interview by author; Mama Orie Emeh and Chief Mrs. Grace Ojieke, oral interview; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author, Amangwu Village. August 15, 2011.

¹⁶⁸⁸ Chief Udensi Ekea of Ndi Ekea Compound, Okon Village, oral interview by author. August 4, 2010; Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author, Amangwu, Ohafia. August 15, 2011.

¹⁶⁸⁹ *Ibid.* In chapter 1, it is clearly explained that female husbands were not able to marry wives from within Ohafia, because an indigenous Ohafia wife had a matrilineage of her own, to which her children belonged. Wives from patrilineal Igbo societies on the other hand, had no established matrilineage other their Ohafia husband’s. This was the logic behind women marrying women from outside Ohafia.

historian Obuba writes that *nwannediya* “symbolized pride in the wealth and affluence of the family she was married into [and] even today, it costs more to marry a foreign wife than an indigenous Ohafia wife.”¹⁶⁹⁰

The related case of Mrs. Uzo Kamalu, a wealthy trader from Okon village sheds more light on Ohafia practices of female husband. Mrs. Kamalu had two sons but had no daughter, which posed a threat to the continuation of her Umueze matrilineage.¹⁶⁹¹ Around 1890 therefore, she married two wives and purchased a female slave, who produced female descendants that sustained the Umueze matrilineage.¹⁶⁹² Mrs. Kamalu’s story shows that there was a distinction between female wives and female slaves. It also shows that female husbands were motivated to marry wives not just because they desired to perform *ogaranya* masculinity, but because it affected their social status as matriarchs of their matrilineages, and it ensured the continuation of their matrilineage. In this case, *ogaranya* was the consequence, not the inspiration for women’s quest for social mobility. Thus, McCall noted that Ohafia possessed a latent system of potential alternatives, which enabled women to perform femininity and masculinity simultaneously.¹⁶⁹³

In her effort to fulfill Ohafia-Igbo femininity (becoming a matrilineage matriarch) therefore, Chief Otuwe had first to acquire wealth, and this resulted in various gender transformations. After *mgbe ogarelu abuo* (the second smallpox epidemic, 1918-1920), when some Ohafia *dibia* were embracing Christianity, Chief Otuwe purchased membership of the

¹⁶⁹⁰ Obuba, *The History and Culture of Ohafia*, 51.

¹⁶⁹¹ Mr. Davidson Kalu Oki, oral interview by author, Okon Village, Ohafia. August 5, 2010.

¹⁶⁹² Mr. Davidson Kalu Oki, oral interview by author, Okon Village, Ohafia. August 5, 2010.

¹⁶⁹³ McCall “Portrait of a Brave Woman,” 129-130, 134.

dibia guild.¹⁶⁹⁴ As noted in chapter four, because the *dibia* guild was an institution of *ufiem*, monopolized by men, the few women who became *dibia* were socially perceived as men. In an expression of Chief Otuwe's initiation (*iwa-anya*) into the *dibia* guild, which was an expensive endeavor, the Ohafia say that she performed male bravado — *o kere ike eleghe ikom*.¹⁶⁹⁵

As part of her performance of *dibia*, she undertook *ije ogwu*, which was the spiritual pilgrimage of the *dibia* to a distant and unknown community, where he must prove his expertise and gain popularity. Between 1850 and 1900, *ije ogwu* was a proof of *dibia* bravery, because the high incidence of slaving and headhunting rendered the roads unsafe for travel, and *dibias* who fulfilled *ije ogwu* thereby dramatized their power and immunity.¹⁶⁹⁶ The relative peace and security assured by British colonial presence, as well as improved means of transportation, made it easier for Chief Otuwe to successfully fulfill this objective in 1920, in Port Harcourt. Jones writes that between 1901 and 1940, “Bende [Ohafia administrative district] was [part of] the Owerri province and looked to Port Harcourt for its provincial headquarters.”¹⁶⁹⁷

Chief Otuwe's choice of Port Harcourt, and her ability to quickly establish a reputation as *Anyanwu N'enyé Ihe* (the sun that brings light to the world) in this urban colonial environment, characterized by colonial and missionary stifling campaigns against *dibia* practices (which they

¹⁶⁹⁴ Ndukwe Otta and Elder Uduma Uka, oral conversation with author, Asaga Village, Ohafia. September 16, 2011.

¹⁶⁹⁵ Mama Docas Kalu and Mama Mary Ezera, Group Interview by author, Elu Village. August 10, 2010; Ndukwe Otta and Elder Uduma Uka, oral conversation with author, Asaga Village, Ohafia. September 16, 2011.

¹⁶⁹⁶ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 45

¹⁶⁹⁷ Jones, *Annual Reports of Bende Division*, 12.

viewed as barbaric and ineffective),¹⁶⁹⁸ speaks to the effectiveness of her healing methods, and her triumph over popular modern forms of medicine. According to Ndukwe Otta, in this period when most *dibia* could not cure yaws and gonorrhoea, Chief Otuwe successfully healed patients of these ailments, and particularly excelled in enabling barren women to become pregnant.¹⁶⁹⁹

Through her *dibia* practice, Chief Otuwe accumulated significant wealth, and took steps to fulfill two more gender transformations, namely, *ogaranya* (wealth and elite masculinity) and female husband. First, she *returned home* to Ohafia, in the fashion of the successful *onye ikike* (warrior), and became one of the first women to independently purchase a plot of land in the society, and build a modern four-bedroom house with zinc-iron roofing.¹⁷⁰⁰ She thus equated herself with a few distinguished men in her community, who had attained *ogaranya* masculinity through gender-biased missionary education and colonial wage labor. This according to Mama Docas Kalu and Mary Ezera, was why she was referred to as “Chief.”¹⁷⁰¹ Second, in order to have children of her own: sons who would establish a patrilineage in her name, and daughters who would memorialize her as a matriarch upon her death, she married a wife, in 1930.

Chief Otuwe was called “Madam” because she was one of the first Ohafia women to live in the big city. Ndukwe Otta described her as standing six feet tall and exceedingly beautiful. She owned a house in Port Harcourt, where she lived from 1940 until she died in 1976. Each time she made her annual visit to Ohafia, she brought home gifts of clothes and imported food items.

¹⁶⁹⁸ “Letter from Collins Robert to Mr. Livingstone, dated 10th November 1920, *West Africa* (National Library of Scotland, MS.7793), 41-42.

¹⁶⁹⁹ Ndukwe Otta and Elder Uduma Uka, oral conversation with author.

¹⁷⁰⁰ Ndukwe Otta and Elder Uduma Uka, oral conversation with author, Asaga. Sept. 16, 2011; Mama Docas Kalu and Mama Mary Ezera, Group Interview by author, Elu. Aug. 10, 2010.

¹⁷⁰¹ Mama Docas Kalu and Mama Mary Ezera, Group Interview by author.

Hence, she came to be known as *Obia Nwami* (the female grand-visitor).¹⁷⁰² Madam Chief Otuwe represents individualized female resistance to emerging male hegemony under British colonial rule, for she was able to carve out a niche for herself, and perform *ogaranya*, in spite of being denied access to Western education, leadership in Christian churches, and employment in colonial service.

Whereas Chief Otuwe performed gender transformations in the process of fulfilling Ohafia ideals of femininity, Unyang Uka, actively tried to become a man. Unyang Uka was an icon of Ohafia women's performance of *ogaranya* masculinity at the turn of the 20th century. She was born around 1865 and was a contemporary of Chief Kalu Ezelu.¹⁷⁰³

Her father, Uka Afijo¹⁷⁰⁴ was a renowned brave warrior who performed *ndi ikike* masculinity between 1850 and 1890. Uka Afijo used to capture slaves from warfare, whom he sold to the Aro or disposed of in the slave markets at Itu, Assan and Calabar, and he always brought back human head trophies before the *ikoro* at Amangwu village.¹⁷⁰⁵ In commemoration of his bravado in warfare, he was hailed Okpodu. According to his great grand-daughter, Tessy Uzoma, "Okpodu was an individual that often single-handedly conquered a village and razed it

¹⁷⁰² Ndukwe Otta and Elder Uduma Uka, oral conversation with author, Asaga Village.

¹⁷⁰³ The following sketch of the life history of Unyang Uka is based on the following interviews: Hon. Kingsley, Peoples Democratic Party Chairman of Ohafia Local Government Area, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording, Ebem Village, Sept. 3, 2011; Mr. E.I. Udensi of Ezikwu Compound, Okagwe Village, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Ebem Village. Sept. 5, 2011; Hon. Tessy Uzoma Odum (grand daughter of Unyang Uka) of Amangwu, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording, Ohafia Local Government office, Ebem Village, Ohafia, September 5, 2011; Grace Emehe (niece of Unyang Uka, daughter of Johnson Emehe), oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Sept. 10, 2011.

¹⁷⁰⁴ Uka Afijo of Nde Okoronkwo in the patrilineage of Ekeluogo, Amangwu village, Ohafia.

¹⁷⁰⁵ Grace Emehe (niece of Unyang Uka, daughter of Johnston Emehe), oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amangwu Village, Ohafia, Sept. 10, 2011.

to the ground with fire.”¹⁷⁰⁶ Another of his great grand-daughter, Grace Emehe said that “Nna Afijo Okpodu’s reputation influenced Unyang Uka so much that she started behaving like a man.”¹⁷⁰⁷ Unyang Uka’s mother was Nne Agbaeze. She was a wealthy farmer and trader, said to be a generous philanthropist, who often feasted her community.¹⁷⁰⁸ Unyang Uka had an elder brother, Nna Johnson Emehe, and a younger sister, Afo Uka. Nna Emehe was pampered by his mother, and became a Presbyterian minister around 1917.¹⁷⁰⁹ Unyang Uka on the other hand stood over six feet tall, behaved like a man, and assisted her father in his slave trade venture in the 1890s.¹⁷¹⁰ She married a brave warrior named Nna Agwu around 1885, and they had a daughter, whom Unyang Uka named Unyang Agwu, after herself. Tessy Uzoma stated:

Because she behaved like a man, she named the woman after herself . . . You know a husband usually named a child, but my grand-mother insisted . . . After her father passed away, [Unyang Uka] started purchasing slaves, male and female. She would sell most of the male slaves and distribute most of the female slaves as wives to her maternal male cousins and relatives. She also married a lot of wives herself and distributed them. So, if you come to our village, Amangwu, today, you will find half of the village are descendants of Unyang Okpu Agu [Unyang Uka] and her wives. She had four girls and one boy [biologically]. My mother, Ugoaha Udonsi Ibe was her second daughter. She was born in 1922. In 2012 she would be 90 years. Her age grade is Nchina. Because Unyang Okpu Agu had only one son, who also had only one son, she believed that she could marry many wives, who would bear her many sons . . . Our *ikwu* [matrilineage] is Ibe-Obobi of Umuaka. Umuaka is the largest matrilineage in Ohafia and it has seven *ulue* [units]. Our own *ulue* is Ibe-Obobi, and we are the head of Umuaka matrilineage . . . Unyang

¹⁷⁰⁶ Hon. Tessy Uzoma Odum (grand daughter of Unyang Uka) of Amangwu, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording, Ohafia Local Government office, Ebem Village. September 5, 2011.

¹⁷⁰⁷ Grace Emehe (niece of Unyang Uka, daughter of Johnson Emehe), oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amangwu Village, Ohafia, Sept. 10, 2011.

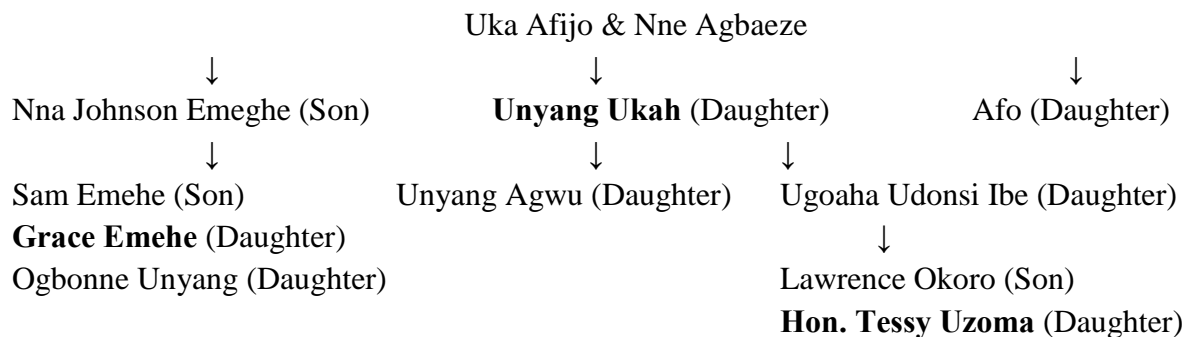
¹⁷⁰⁸ Hon. Tessy Uzoma Odum (grand daughter of Unyang Uka), oral interview by author. In describing such an individual, Ohafia people say, *okpodugbushiala ulo mmuo* [he that razed peoples’ homes to the ground with fire].”

¹⁷⁰⁹ Grace Emehe (niece of Unyang Uka, daughter of Johnson Emehe), oral interview by author, Amangwu, Sept. 10, 2011. Tessy Uzoma described him as effeminate, and “not a warrior.”

¹⁷¹⁰ Hon. Tessy Uzoma Odum (grand daughter of Unyang Uka), oral interview by author.

Uka was a major reason why Ibe-Obobi grew into the largest *ulue* in Ohafia. She married many wives and distributed them to her matrilineage brothers across Ohafia. Men that did not have money to afford wives came to her and she gave them wives. All those children belonged to her and the Ibe-Obobi matrilineage . . . That is how she started behaving like a man. She was a husband of many wives and father of many children.¹⁷¹¹

Figure 18: Family Tree Sketch of Unyang Uka



After her father passed away, Unyang Uka took over the slave trade business, and on one of her business trips to Opobo around 1895, she met the ex-slave, Kalu Ezelu,¹⁷¹² who furnished her with loads of corral beads. Unyang Uka thus began to trade in corral beads and slaves, and by 1905,¹⁷¹³ she had developed a prosperous trade between the slave port of Opobo and the hinterland market of Bende. She also established a widespread reputation as a wealthy money-lender, who always took her debtors to the Native Court at Bende. All my respondents stated that

¹⁷¹¹ Hon. Tessy Uzoma Odum (grand daughter of Unyang Uka), oral interview by author.

¹⁷¹² Hon. Tessy Uzoma Odum (grand daughter of Unyang Uka), oral interview by author. Hon. Uzoma is not certain of the date 1895, but stated that Kalu had introduced himself to her grandmother as the ex-slave of King Jaja, and pleaded with her never to return to Opobo, so that his identity as Jaja's ex-slave would not be discovered. From Kalu's autobiography, we know this must have been between 1887 exile of Jaja and 1899 when he fought in the Eket war.

¹⁷¹³ The date provided for this is "the time of *uso Asaga*," which is the exodus of Asaga village, during the Bende-Onitsha hinterland expedition of 1905-1907. Hon. Tessy Uzoma Odum (grand daughter of Unyang Uka), oral interview by author; Grace Emehe (niece of Unyang Uka, daughter of Johnson Emehe), oral interview by author, digital voice recording.

Unyang Uka was business savvy, and it was never her practice to settle disputes with people through palavers. She always took people to court, and came to be feared as a trouble-maker.¹⁷¹⁴

It is not clear when or if Unyang Uka's first husband, Nna Agwu passed away. But sometime before 1922 (when Ugoaha Udonsi Ibe, her second daughter was born), Unyang Uka met and married the then *kotuma* (Clerk of the Native Court - C.N.C) of Bende, Mr. Cobham. Jones informs us that the Bende Native Court was established around 1907, and by 1911, it was handling about 4,162 civil cases annually.¹⁷¹⁵ At the center of the Court was the clerk, who recorded the cases in full, kept a roster of warrant chiefs sitting on the bench, and documented court judgments on which appeals were based. C.N.Cs were corrupt individuals who often manipulated court information to the advantage of preferred litigants,¹⁷¹⁶ and after 1914 when the Indirect Rule system came into effect, the British District Commissioner ceased to attend Court sittings, and the C.N.C became *D.C. afu anya* (the D.C. who was seen physically).¹⁷¹⁷ The C.N.C was salaried at £4 by 1911, and for many miles around, he was regarded as a *de facto* governor.¹⁷¹⁸ Unyang Uka was older than Mr. Cobham, and their marriage strategically enhanced her respectability, as she came to be seen as a great *ogaranya*, not to be trifled with.¹⁷¹⁹ This marriage enabled Unyang Uka to expand her money-lending scheme beyond

¹⁷¹⁴ Hon. Kingsley, oral interview by author; Mr. E.I. Udensi of Ezikwu Compound, Okagwe Village, oral interview by author; Hon. Tessy Uzoma Odum (grand daughter of Unyang Uka), oral interview by author; Grace Emehe (niece of Unyang Uka, daughter of Johnson Emehe), oral interview by author.

¹⁷¹⁵ Jones, *Annual Reports of Bende Division*, 27.

¹⁷¹⁶ Jones, *Annual Reports of Bende Division*, 28, 60; Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 104.

¹⁷¹⁷ Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo*, 104.

¹⁷¹⁸ Jones, *Annual Reports of Bende Division*, 61.

¹⁷¹⁹ Mr. E.I. Udensi of Ezikwu Compound, Okagwe Village, oral interview by author; Hon. Tessy Uzoma Odum (grand daughter of Unyang Uka), oral interview by author; Grace Emehe

Ohafia to Bende, where she lived with her *kotuma* husband between 1910 and 1925. Her marriage to the *kotuma* also helped her to ensure that her debtors always paid their loans.

Otherwise, she had them arrested and locked up in the Bende Court prison¹⁷²⁰ — an ordeal that was most emasculating to Igbo men, who had no prisons until colonial rule.

Female husband, female father, giver of wives to men, peopler of Ibe-Obobi matrilineage, wife of *kotuma*, wealthy merchant of slaves and corral beads, renowned money-lender, and prisoner of men, Unyang Uka was famed for her performance of *ogaranya* masculinity in the first three decades of the 20th century. Every year, in the month of December, Unyang Uka made a historic voyage from Bende to Ohafia. Like British colonial officers of her time, and like Chief Kalu Ezelu, she was always carried by young men on a hammock. According to Tessy Uzoma,

Six men carried her in a hammock from Bende to Ohafia. Upon reaching Ohafia, the male age-grades of the first village would carry her to the boundary of the next village, and it would continue like that until she reached her own village, Amangwu. They carried her over hills and streams . . . My mother's older sister told me that the men used to carry Unyang Uka over their shoulders and did not rest until they reached another village . . . She always came home during Christmas. And whenever she came home, she had an entourage of male slaves carrying her several metal trunk boxes filled with European goods and money. She traded some of the European goods and gave out many as gifts to her people. Upon her arrival, the *ikoro* would start beating, and people would be shouting, “*Ada ukwu alaole!*” [Our great daughter has returned!] Because of her performance of *ogaranya*, she was no longer considered a woman. So, the *ikoro*

(niece of Unyang Uka, daughter of Johnson Emehe), oral interview by author, dig. voice recording. It is not been possible to establish how Unyang Uka's masculinity performance affected Mr. Cobham, but they lived happily together and grew old together.

¹⁷²⁰ Mr. E.I. Udensi of Ezikwu Compound, Okagwe Village, oral interview by author; Hon. Tessy Uzoma Odum (grand daughter of Unyang Uka), oral interview by author; Grace Emehe (niece of Unyang Uka, daughter of Johnson Emehe), oral interview by author. Tessy Uzoma stated that many of Unyang Uka's debtors came from far away places to take loans from her, and did not always pay back the loans promptly. So, after she married the *cotuma*, when her debtors failed to pay, Mr. Kobom sent Native Court policemen to arrest and imprison her debtors. Unyang Uka also arrested and imprisoned her maternal brothers and in-laws, who failed to pay their debts, for while she was kind; she was a no-nonsense person when it came to business. As a result, whenever her homecoming was announced, all her debtors ran away from the village, and stayed in hiding until she left.

was always sounded for her, and they dressed her head in *okpu agu* [warriors' leopard cap of bravery]. She was always wearing *okpu agu*; that is why she is remembered as *Unyang Okpu Agu*. Instead of wearing a head-tie like other women, she wore the *okpu agu*, with *abubo ugo* [eagle fathers] attached to it. *Okpu agu* and *abubo ugo* were great things in Ohafia, reserved only for men who had performed *igbu ishi*. I am not aware that she cut a human head but her status in the community earned her that honor. She stood tall and huge like a man.¹⁷²¹

It was through these performances that Unyang Uka, according to Tessy Uzoma, “transformed herself into a man.”¹⁷²² As shown in chapter three, the *ikoro* was never sounded for women in Ohafia, except for the few that accomplished *ndi ikike* masculinity, such as Unyang Olugu, who demanded that the *ikoro* should not chant praises to her husband but to “Unyang Olugu, killer-that-gave-the-honor-to-her-husband.”¹⁷²³ As indicated at the beginning of this chapter, Ohafia material culture practices were transformed at the turn of the 20th century, because of the changing constructions of *ufiem* through *ogaranya* masculinity performance. For such individuals as Unyang Uka, Chief Kalu Awa Kalu stated that “even though [they] did not cut a head with a machete, [they] had actually cut a head, one that is visible and materialistic [*O gbu ghi nke mma; mana o gbuu nke a fu anya.*]”¹⁷²⁴ Unyang Uka’s wealth symbolized the head she had cut to attain *ufiem*. In memorialization of her unprecedented wealth (rivaled only by Chief Kalu Ezele), Unyang Uka was nicknamed *Unyang Pon-Pon* (the Female Chief of British Pounds), the logic being that she did not deal or talk in shillings; but in pounds.¹⁷²⁵ According to

¹⁷²¹ Hon. Tessy Uzoma Odum (grand daughter of Unyang Uka), oral interview by author.

¹⁷²² Hon. Tessy Uzoma Odum (grand daughter of Unyang Uka), oral interview by author.

¹⁷²³ Azuonye, “The Narrative War Songs,” 408.

¹⁷²⁴ Chief Kalu Awa Kalu, oral interview by author.

¹⁷²⁵ Hon. Kingsley, oral interview by author; Mr. E.I. Udensi of Ezikwu Compound, Okagwe Village, oral interview by author; Hon. Tessy Uzoma Odum (grand daughter of Unyang Uka), oral interview by author; Grace Emehe (niece of Unyang Uka, daughter of Johnson Emehe), oral interview by author.

Grace Emehe, Unyang Uka further built a modern house with zinc roofing in Port Harcourt in the late 1920s, and was one of the major people that funded the building of St. Mary's Catholic Church in that colonial city in the 1950s. Her house in Port Harcourt was a rallying ground, rest house, and home-away-from-home for all Ohafia persons that visited the city.¹⁷²⁶ Tessy Uzoma added, "If you went to Port Harcourt, you must visit Unyang Okpu Agu's house at No. 96 Agri Road. Students, government workers and traders from Ohafia stayed at her house."¹⁷²⁷

Unyang Uka passed away in old age in 1959, and her husband died 11 years later. Her granddaughter, Tessy Uzoma recalls that when she visited Unyang Uka in the late 1950s,

She had become very fat; because her breakfast always consisted of quaker oats, various meat dishes and a big bottle of Guinness stout . . . We would be playing outside and waiting for her to finish eating so that we could have her left-overs. Once she was done, we would rush, everybody grabbing what he or she could . . . She died at 96 years old . . . There was something we used to do when we wanted to steal her money. She had a lot of money in those days. She would pack all her pounds and shillings under her blanket in her very big bed. If she saw you walking towards her bed, she would yell at you, "*Hei! Hei! Gbaa emetukwa blangidi aka!* [Hey! Hey! Do not touch that blanket!] She used to call the blanket, *blangidi*. Sometimes, she would have us children sit around her, and she would bring out a very big basin filled with money, and remind us why she was called *Unyang Pon Pon*. One day, we went into her room and brought out her money and put it another room, and she did not say anything. That was how we knew she was in her last hours. On the second day, she asked for a Catholic priest, who used to come every morning and give her Holy Communion. That morning, when the priest came to celebrate mass for her and administer her communion, she asked the priest to call all her children that were around. We came and stayed with her. After she took her communion, at night she went to sleep and did not wake up again. That was how she died. Throughout the period I knew her, I never saw her tie a wrapper, like other women did.¹⁷²⁸

¹⁷²⁶ Grace Emehe (niece of Unyang Uka, daughter of Johnson Emehe), oral interview by author.

¹⁷²⁷ Hon. Tessy Uzoma Odum (grand daughter of Unyang Uka), oral interview by author.

¹⁷²⁸ Hon. Tessy Uzoma Odum (grand daughter of Unyang Uka), oral interview by author.

Conclusion

This chapter has historicized the socio-political processes that shaped emergent masculinities among the Ohafia-Igbo in the first two decades of the 20th century, as well as their roles in changing constructions of *ufiem* through *ogaranya* performance. It argues that the performance of *ogaranya* masculinity was a manifestation of the complex gendering of identities and the gendered performance of power among the Ohafia-Igbo between 1900 and 1920. Miescher has forcefully argued that in African colonial contexts, it became difficult to distinguish a single hegemonic masculinity, for there were many conflicting versions of how real men should behave.¹⁷²⁹ This chapter acknowledges the diverse notions of masculinity prevalent in Ohafia between 1900 and 1920. However, it demonstrates that through the articulation of wealth as *igbu ishi*, *ogaranya* became the dominant form of masculinity, such that political leaders, church elders, educated elite (Presbyterian masculinities), wealthy traders, and *dibia* all sought to perform *ogaranya*.

Second, the chapter clearly links changes in gender constructions to changes in gendered power between 1850 and 1920. It demonstrates that whereas the hegemony of *ndi ikike* masculinity between 1850 and 1900 did not translate to superior political power and authority over women, the hegemony of the emergent *ogaranya* masculinities between 1900 and 1920 entailed the usurpation of the socio-political authority and privileges of both male and female traditional institutions. Hence, *ogaranya* translated itself into political power. Individuals who attained *ogaranya* walked in the corridors of political power, as warrant chiefs, court clerks, teachers, ministers, and wealthy traders.

¹⁷²⁹ Miescher, *Making Men in Ghana*, 2.

Third, the chapter conceptualizes African agency in self-making and social change as a gendered struggle for power because, the historical processes of social mobility and the opportunities for the attainment of socio-political power among the Ohafia-Igbo between 1900 and 1920 varied for men and women. The institutions that produced Presbyterian masculinities also produced subordinate “good Christian wives.” Whereas chapters 2 and 4 demonstrate Ohafia-Igbo women’s popular mechanisms of power negotiation such as rituals, boycotts, strike actions, deserting their homes *en-masse*, making war upon men, and revolutionary yam cultivation, this chapter shows that women’s power struggles were also individualized, and represent gendered resistance to a patchwork of European and African patriarchies that emerged between 1900 and 1920. The case-studies of Madam Chief Otuwe Agwu and Unyang Uka attest that; because women were denied access to Western education, leadership positions and decision-making voices in the Christian churches, and employment within formal colonial economy, they invaded traditional male spaces such as *dibia* and long distance trade, and were able to utilize these opportunities to perform *ogaranya* masculinity, like the warrant chiefs, court clerks, District Officers, and Presbyterian masculinities of their day.

CONCLUSION

Ohafia's unique socio-political institutions and kinship system in terms of southeastern Nigeria, force the scholar of Igbo history to abandon a search for an original Igbo identity, re-examine existing interpretations of Igbo cultural practices, and confront this West African society on its own terms. From the perspective of one, such as myself, who is from a patrilineal Igbo society, it is an ideological juxtaposition that a warrior society such as Ohafia was equally a matrilineal society with strong mother-centered systems of inheritance, economic production, and religion. Against this background, there are tensions in Ohafia men's and women's narrative interpretations of their society's past. What may seem like I privilege women's voices over men's, was in reality an endeavor to unearth the socio-political power and historical agency of Ohafia-Igbo women, which has been clouded in both archival sources and published literature.

Moreover, the gendered tensions in Ohafia peoples' historical narratives led me to rely upon a reflexive methodology, in the sense that I present up-front, male and female voices, which at first appear to be contradictory, rather than bury such gendered conflicts. I then try to reconcile these tensions. For instance, when some Ohafia male collaborators stated that women were subordinate to men in the pre-colonial period, the evidence they presented to justify their statement was always premised on the notion that women did not fight wars. This is why the same male collaborators also affirmed that women were breadwinners in the pre-colonial period, and that women's political institution of *ikpirikpe* was more powerful and effective than its male counterpart. Thus, the issue is that of a difference in men's and women's subjective interpretations of what constituted power, and what may be characterized as definitive to Ohafia social identity (a heroic or a matrifocal society). By situating Ohafia men's and women's narratives within existing studies on female power and authority, as well as patriarchy in

southeastern Nigeria, I have put forward theoretical exegeses, while being faithful to my sources. As a result, what appear to be contradictions soon become, upon interrogation, different ways of seeing and understanding the socio-political transformations that took place in this society.

This dissertation seeks to think with the Ohafia-Igbo, and in so doing, moves beyond established historical research methods to historicize a pre-colonial period in Southern Nigeria for which archival sources are thin. By relying upon oral histories as well as indigenous interpretations of current ritual practices, material culture and gendered linguistic expressions (idioms and proverbs), this study centers Ohafia-Igbo people in the complex processes of socio-political change in southeastern Nigeria. Thus, “Emergent Masculinities” interrogates the shifting meanings of the Ohafia-Igbo concept of *mgbe-ichin* (olden days), in the contexts of their migration and settlement, slave production, legitimate commerce, British colonialism and Christian missionary evangelism, and links this to the dynamic articulation of masculinity performance through the idiom of *igbu ishi* (to cut a head). Secondly, through an examination of contemporary gendered performances (war dance, *dibia* festivals, and women’s rituals), this study captures Ohafia men’s and women’s subjective interpretations of their own history and their place within it, beyond discourses. Thirdly, borrowing from the example of other scholars, this study locates indigenous historical time markers that shed light on Ohafia historical experiences, such as *mgbe ogharelu* (time of smallpox epidemic), *mgbe uke* Emeago (in the reign of Emeago age-grade: the yam revolution), *mgbe uso lama* (in the time of the cattle exodus), and *mgbe ochichi Nna Kalu* (in the reign of warrant chief Kalu, which speaks to changing conceptions of *ogaranya* masculinity in the 20th century).

In a similar vein, while engaging with established social science theories of masculinity, this dissertation centers the Ohafia-Igbo concept of *ufiem* in examining the complex relationships

between different avenues of social mobility in the society from the pre-colonial to the colonial period. Indeed, Ohafia provides a rich laboratory for testing existing social science theories and forging new ones. I wish to bring up three specific examples. The first is the geography of masculinities. This concept was inspired by the physical distribution and gendered uses of Ohafia material culture complex such as the *ikoro* wooden war drum, the patrilineage *obu* meeting houses, and shrines, which defined men's and women's access to public spaces, and symbolized the competitive struggle over socio-political visibility between men and women. As I argue in chapter 3, this gendered landscape was a product of masculinity performance, as well as an instrument in the forging of the hegemony of warrior masculinities in the pre-colonial period. On the other hand, Ohafia women's transformation of public spaces into the most effective platform for dramatizing their ability to exercise power over both men and women, locate the public sphere as a context for understanding the gendered struggle for power in this society.

The second concept I wish to revisit is *ogaranya* masculinity. *Ogaranya* is a general Igbo word for a wealthy individual. However, this is its first deployment to analyze the gendering of identities and the performance of power in southeastern Nigeria. *Ogaranya* masculinity enables me to show how what was once a marginal form of *ufiem* in the pre-colonial period (as evident in the status of yam farmers and hunters, who were defined as subaltern *ujo* by warriors), became at the turn of the 20th century, a dominant form of gendered power performance. *Ogaranya* flourished within the structures of British colonialism, Christianity, and Western education, and aptly captures the designation, emergent masculinities, because it showcases the new socio-political power and privileges, which men suddenly came to enjoy at the turn of the 20th century. The concept also sheds light on gendered power struggles and female agency, in the sense that it reflects Ohafia-Igbo women's ability to carve out new spaces for themselves beyond imperial

structures of social mobility. The concept of *ogaranya* masculinity raises the question: was wealth gendered male in Ohafia-Igbo society? The answer is yes. While women were breadwinners in the agro-based economy of the pre-colonial period, the few individual men who amassed great wealth were bestowed with *ufiem* honors and privileges. It was this principle that shaped *ogaranya* masculinity performance at the turn of the 20th century. Did the few men who attained *ogaranya* status in the pre-colonial period displace women as primary breadwinners and politically dominate women? The answer is no. *Ogaranya* were marginal to dominant definitions of socio-political power until the first two decades of the 20th century.

The third is my theory of institutions of masculinity, through which I historicize the gendering of African institutions as well as the limits of their political influence. This theory goes hand-in-hand with my concept of masculinization, and is premised on the fact that practices and institutions (such as *okonko*, yam cultivation, hunting, *dibia*, *amali* assembly, the war dance, and Ohafia geography of masculinity), which most scholars of Igbo history assume to be evidence of patriarchy, because they were male-dominated, have never been historicized. By analyzing how particular institutions were borrowed and put to use in the constructions of new forms of *ufiem* in Ohafia between 1850 and 1920, this dissertation seeks to historicize such institutional practices, as well as their gendered adaptations. Moreover, the historical tradition of gendering institutions informed Ohafia engagements with the Atlantic slave trade, British colonialism, Christianity, and Western education. We see this in the changing performances of *ogaranya* masculinity in the contexts of yam cultivation, *dibia* practice, hunting, *okonko* secret society, long distance trade, and later in the colonial period, through Presbyterian masculinities, elite polygy, Western education, and service in the colonial government.

In effect, masculinization is a concept that enables me to show continuity and change over time, as well as challenge the tendency to define colonialism as the ethnographic baseline for identity formation and social change in African societies. Also, the concept of masculinization enables me to examine the agency of Ohafia-Igbo men in historical change as well as the limits of male power and privilege. Some practices such as hunting, yam cultivation and *okonko* secret society became transformed into avenues for performing alternative forms of *ufiem* (such as *ogaranya*) besides warrior masculinity and negotiating social mobility in Ohafia-Igbo society, in contrast to how these institutions were put to use in other societies. However, the gendered adaptation of these institutions did not enable Ohafia men to exercise socio-political power over women, as evident in the limited political prerogatives that *okonko* gained locally, as well as the yam revolution. Lastly, masculinization is not based on the notion that these institutions were originally feminine. The concept emphasizes the changing processes of historical usage of institutions, rather than an original state, because individuals were changing the meanings of institutions even as they used them.

Uchendu writes, “The Igbo world is a world . . . in which others can be manipulated for the sake of the individual’s status achievement — the goal of Igbo life.”¹⁷³⁰ However, there is a troubling tendency among some scholars of African history, Western and African, to project the image of pre-colonial Africa as comprising of aggregated communities, bound by collective identities such as kinship, and devoid of individualism. In fact, individualism is portrayed as alien to African societies until the modern and capitalist influences of European colonialism. In this vein, social change is constructed as externally derived. This dissertation shows that by looking at internal historical processes and institutions within African societies in the pre-

¹⁷³⁰ Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria*, p. 20

colonial period, it becomes clear that individual competition and self-realization was one of the most important factors for social change. Thus, Azuonye concluded that “the principal preoccupation of Ohafia cultural traditions is with the ideal of personal success.”¹⁷³¹ “Emergent Masculinities” argues that constructing dynamic individual and collective identities for political purposes was a real and immediate necessity in both pre-colonial and colonial Africa. The gendered character of this identity formation based on individual negotiations of social constraints, underlines the dramatic shift from a pre-colonial period characterized by more powerful and more effective female socio-political institutions, to a colonial period of male socio-political domination in southeastern Nigeria.

This dissertation makes important contributions to African gender studies. First, it is a pioneer study of changing constructions of masculinity in pre-colonial Africa. Second, by demonstrating that women occupied dominant positions of economic and political power in matrilineal Ohafia-Igbo society until 1900, this dissertation invites a reconsideration of the existing scholarship on female power and authority in southeastern Nigeria. For instance, a number of scholars have argued that Igbo women played a major role in the agro-based economy of the pre-colonial period and that they possessed powerful political institutions, even if these were *ad hoc* in nature. However, this study reframes the scholarship by positing Ohafia women as breadwinners and portraying their political institutions as central, rather than marginal to total society. Third, by analyzing the relationship between the changing constructions of masculinities through institutionalization and performance, and female performance of political power, this dissertation brings the scholarship on African women into a deeper conversation with the burgeoning studies on African masculinities. My work clearly links changes in gender

¹⁷³¹ Azuonye, “The Heroic Age of the Ohafia Igbo,” p. 23

constructions to changes in gendered power between 1850 and 1920. It shows that whereas the hegemony of *ndi ikike* masculinity between 1850 and 1900 did not translate to superior political power and authority over women, the hegemony of the emergent *ogaranya* masculinities between 1900 and 1920 entailed the usurpation of the socio-political authority and privileges of both male and female traditional institutions. I have demonstrated that upon British colonial rule, the age-grade-based political institutions of *akpan* and *ikpirikpe* declined in political significance as formal political institutions of government in the society. Their place was taken by warrant-chiefs, court clerks, and Presbyterian church elders. However, women continued to draw upon time-tested strategies to resist male domination, and negotiate socio-political privileges, including the performance of female masculinity.

“Emergent Masculinities” redefines current understandings of Ohafia matriliney, by bringing a gendered lens to Nsugbe’s structuralist analysis of Ohafia kinship system. It also contributes to preexisting scholarship on African matrilineal societies generally, by arguing that the changes that attended Ohafia kinship system were not merely a result of the imposition of Western capitalist culture, colonialism and Christianity, but were rather based on changing practices of inheritance and lineage affiliation at the individual level. Thus, I conclude that lineages were practices. Finally, this study contributes to studies on the agency of non-centralized African societies in slave production, the transformation of African slave systems as a result of the repercussions of the Atlantic slave trade, and the reality that individuals, not just political groups, were able to successfully resist slavery and gain the highest categories of social mobility (by joining *okonko* secret society and becoming political rulers), irrespective of kinship systems. Perhaps, an area of future research which this dissertation provides grounds for is the

impact of Ohafia militant slave production on the ratio of male-female slaves produced from the Bight of Biafra, and destined to the New World.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Ufiem — Masculinity/dynamic social representations of respectable manhood status.

Ujo — Coward and weak male/ one who embodied fear/victims of *ufiem*.

Igbu Ishi — To cut a head (the dominant idiom of expressing *ufiem* accomplishment)

Ogaranya — Igbo term for a wealthy individual; elevated into a form of masculinity in Ohafia-Igbo society, such that *ogaranya* were bestowed with *ufiem* honours and privileges, and women who accomplished *ogaranya* status were socially perceived as men.

Ikom — Adult male.

Inyom — Adult Female.

Ndi Ikike — Warriors.

Iba Mba — The Warrior's Boast (a social performance of *ufiem* accomplishment)

Ikoro — Wooden war drum.

Ibiri Ikoro — To dance before the *ikoro* upon *ufiem* accomplishment.

Iri Aha — Ohafia War Dance.

Abu Aha — Ohafia War Songs.

Ite-Odo — Warriors' Society's Pot of Bravery (decorated with human skulls)

Ite Nde-Ofia — Hunters' Guild's Pot of Bravery (decorated with skulls of dangerous animals)

Igba Nnunu — To kill a hummingbird (symbolic admission of a boy into the world of men)

Ifu Nso — To experience first menstruation (symbolic definition of a girl as woman)

Idoru Nna — To deify an accomplished *ufiem* upon death through the raising an ancestral pot monument.

Okerenkwa — The Brave Warrior's Dance performed during *idoru nna*.

Ihiwe Ududu — To deify a deceased Ohafia female ruler of the matrilineage through the raising an ancestral pot monument.

Ududu — Sex-differentiated ancestral pot monuments.

Umudi — Patrilineage.

Ikwu — Matrilineage.

Ezie-Nwami Ikwu — Matriarch of the matrilineage.

Onu-Agba — Patrilineage stone shrine.

Fijoku — Personal yam deity within patrilineage compound.

Kamalu — Personal deity of god of war within patrilineage compound.

Uduma — Personal goddess of fertility.

Ikwan — Ohafia god of war.

Orie — Ohafia goddess.

Nde Ichin — Male and Female Elders.

Uke — Age Grade System.

Obu — Patrilineage meeting house.

Obi — A man's living room.

Uluenta/Ulote — Boys' living quarters.

Ezie-Nwami — Female Ruler, coronated in the fashion of a king.

Ezie-Ogo — Male Ruler, coronated in the fashion of a king.

Ikipirikpe Ndi Inyom — The Female Court.

Akpan/Umuaka — The police force of the Men's Assembly.

Okonko, Ekpe, Akan, Obon — Exclusively male secret societies.

Dibia — Medicine men/diviners/spirit mediums.

Umerogwu — Social performance of spiritual and physical immunity by *dibia*.

Igwa Nnu — The social performance of the masculinity of yam wealth.

Uzo Iyi — Women-led virginity testing ritual and land purification.

Ije Akpaka — Women's ritual sanction of warfare, which authorized men to go to war.

Ibo Ezi — Women's collective strike, boycott and mass desertion of their homes in protest.

Ikpo Mgbogho — Women's social ostracization and punitive death sentence accompanied by
“sitting on a man.”

Iyi Ose — Women's ritual purification and social reincorporation of an *ikpo mgbogho* victim.

Ichu Aja Izu Orie — Women's ritual inauguration of crop planting.

Mgbe Ichin — The olden days.

Mgbe Ogarelu Mbu — In the time of the first smallpox epidemic (1890s)

Mgbe Ogarelu Abuo — In the time of the second smallpox epidemic (1918-1919)

Uso Asaga — In the time of Asaga Exodus (during the 1905-07 Bende Hinterland Expedition).

Uso Lama — In the time of the cattle exodus (c. 1909)

Mgbe ochichi Nna Kalu — In the time of the warrant chieftaincy of Kalu Ezelu (1911-1927)

Mgbe Uke Emeago — In the time of Emeago Age Grade (1918-1920s)

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Ezie-ogo Godwin Nwankwo Uko of Amankwu Village and his cabinet members, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Amankwu Village. October 25, 2011

Ezie-ogo U. E. Imaga of Elu Village, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, August 15, 2010.

Ezie-ogo Mba Odo Okereke (Modok) of Akanu Village, oral conversation with the author, Akanu. October 15, 2011

Ezie-ogo Mecha Ukpai Akanu, the *Uduma Anaga* 2nd of Amangwu Village, oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Aug. 18, 2011

Ezie-ogo O.K. Anya of Ufiele, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Ufiele Village. August 21, 2010.

Ezie-ogo Okorie Kalu of Isiugwu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Isiugwu. December 10, 2011.

Ezie-ogo Okpan Ncheghe of Ndi-Orie-Eke Village, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Dec. 15, 2011.

Ezie-ogo Ukonu Okoro Ekere of Eziafor Village, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Dec. 17, 2011.

Ezie-ogo U. Nwojo of Okagwe, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Okagwe Village. August 17, 2010.

Ezie Uka Uduma Uka (*Okpere Oha 1 of Akanu-Ukwu Autonomous Community*), oral interview by author, digital voice recording. Nov. 6, 2011.

Ezie-ogo Ugbu Uduma of Nde-Amogu Village, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Ihenta (Ibina) Village. November 11, 2011.

Ezie-ogo Vasco U. Iro of Nkwebi Village Ohafia, in council with elders of Nkwebi Village, Group Interview with author, at Obu-Nta Kwebi, dig. voice recording. Nov. 17, 2011
Chief Ota Eke [council speaker], Eziukwu Compound (88 years/ Uke Ejindu)
Chief Ezema O. Iwe of Nde Ibe Compound (77 years/ Uke Okezie)
Chief Agwu Ojo of Nde Agu Compound (91 years/ Uke Onyiwa)
Chief Kalu Amadi of Nde Ibe Compound (88 years/ Uke Ejindu)
Chief Ike Eke of Nde Ufere Compound (88 years/ Uke Ejindu)
Chief Agwu Kalu Amogu of Nde Agu Compound (82 years/ Uke Amasiri)
Chief Azu Agqu of Nde Echem Compound (82 years/ Uke Amasiri)
Chief Ndukwe Kalu Agwu of Nde Ibe Compound (82 years/ Uke Amasiri)
Elder Josiah Onum EKpe of Eziukwu Compound (70 years/ Uke Ekwueme)
Chief Igwe Okike of Nde Okoro (68 years/ Uke Emeago)
Chief Ojike Onuma of Nde Echem Compound [Court Messenger] (60 years/ Ugwumba)
Elders of Umu Mkpara Awa [4 men]
Members of Nkwebi Autonomous Development Union [5 men]

Grace Emehe (niece of Unyang Uka, daughter of Johnson Emehe), oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amangwu Village, Ohafia, September 10, 2011.

Hon. Kingsley, Peoples Democratic Party Chairman of Ohafia Local Government Area, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Ebem Village, September 3, 2011.

Ijeoma Onyeani, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Isiugwu, Ohafia. December 12, 2011.

Ikpirikpe Ndi Inyom of Akanu Village, Group Interview. November 3, 2011
Madam Lovina Kalu, Nde Alulu of Amafor Compound (53years, Uke Ugwumba)
Mrs. Nnenna Emeri, Nde Odo Compound (52 years, Uke Anyafumba)
Nne Agwu Ukpai, Nde Okoro of Ekeluogo Compound (53 years, Uke Ugwumba)
Mrs. Eunice Kalu, Ezi Ndea Mba of Ibina-Ukwu Compound (53 years, Uke Ugwumba)
Madam Comfort Ukoha, Ezi Nde Okoro of Ekeluogo Compound (60 years, Uke Okezie)
Mmia Nnaya Basse, Nde Odo Compound (45 years, Uke Akumba [“Ohu Ali”])

Madam Ugoenyi Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Nde Unua Nnechi, Elu. August 18, 2010.

Mama Docas Kalu and Mama Mary Ezera, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Elu. August 10, 2010

Mama Mary Ezera, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Ebem Ohafia. August 3, 2010.

Mama Orié Emeh and Chief Mrs. Grace Ojjeke, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Ebem Ohafia. August 3, 2010.

Mecha Ukpai Akanu, *ezie-ogo* of Amangwu Village and Members of the Men's Court, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Amangwu Village. August 18, 2011

Mr. Arunsi Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amangwu Village. August 15, 2011.

Mr. Davidson Kalu Oki, oral interview by author, Okon Village, Ohafia. August 5, 2010.

Mr. E.I. Udensi, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Ebem Village, Ohafia. Sept. 5, 2011.

Mr. Elvis Osonwa, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Nde Umachi, Akanu. October 29, 2011.

Mr. Enwelu Agwu Uduma, oral interview by author, hand-written notes, Amaekpu, Ohafia. August 16, 2010.

Mr. I. Ukoha, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Ebem village, Ohafia. Oct. 27, 2011.

Mr. Kalu Udensi (*ezie-akpan* of Nde-Ibe village), oral interview by author, hand-written notes, Nde-Ibe, Ohafia. October 27, 2011.

Mr. M.A. Igwe, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amaekpu, Ohafia. August 16, 2010.

Mr. Onu Idika Kalu, oral interview by author, hand-written notes, Okagwe Village. August 25, 2011.

Mrs. Margaret Eke Anya, oral interview by author, dig. voice recording, Amaekpu. May 18, 2012.

Mrs. Nnenna Obuba, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Amaekpu. Aug. 15, 2011.

- Mrs. Orie Udo Eke, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Asaga Village, Ohafia. April 30, 2012.
- Mrs. Uka Kalu, oral interview by author, hand-written notes, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. July 29, 2010.
- Nmia Nnaya Agbai, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Elu Village, August 18, 2011.
- Nna Agbai Ndukwe, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Elu Ohafia, August 10, 2010.
- Nna Ibem Kalu Agwu, carpenter and sculptor (erected the statue of heroic ancestor, Olumba Ezi Akuma at Amuma Village), oral interview by author, hand-written notes, Uduma Awoke Village. October 25, 2011.
- Nde Ichin* (Elders) of Amuma Village, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording, Amuma. Nov. 26, 2011.
 Nna Kalu Awa of Nde Torti Compound, Amuma Village.
 Chief Torti Kalu of Nde Torti Compound, Amuma Village.
 Chief Kalu Ibem of Nde Ibe-Anyia Compound, Amuma Village.
 Pa Okoro Okoro of Nde Torti, Amuma Village.
 Chief Ikenga Ibe of Nde Torti Compound, Amuma Village.
 Mr. Nsi Kalu of Nde Okpo compound, Amuma Village.
 Ten Elders of Akpan, Amuma Village.
- Nde Ichin* of Nde Edem Compound, Group Interview by author, digital voice recording. Okon. Sept. 26, 2011
 Chief Obasi Kama of Nde Edem Compound
 Chief Imagha Oka of Nde Edem Compound
 Chief Okoro Ekeanya Ibe of Nde Edem Compound (75 years/Akajiaku)
Dibia Eke Uma of Nde Edem Compound (75 years/Akajiaku)
 Chief Okoro Obuba of Nde Edem Compound (50 years/Enyimba)
 Chief Kalu Imaga, *ezie ezi* of Nde Edem Compound (87 year/Oka-Omee)
Dibia Moses Enwere Oka of Nde Edem Compound (50 years)
 Chief Imaga Torti of Nde Edem Compound (95 years/Anyafumba)
- Ndukwe Otta, oral interview by author, hand-written notes, Ebem Village. August 2, 2010.
- Ndukwe Otta and Elder Uduma Uka, Group Interview by author, Ebem Village, Ohafia. August 14, 2011.
- Ndukwe Otta and Elder Uduma Uka, oral conversation with author, Asaga Village, Ohafia. September 16, 2011.

Nwabueze Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Isigwu, Ohafia. December 10, 2011.

Nwannediya Mmonwu-Oti, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Ndi Owom, Okon. August 5, 2010.

Nwadiala Oti-Mmonwu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Ndi Owom, Okon. August 5, 2010.

Ogbuka Ogbuka Abaa, oral interview by author, Nde Oji Compound, Isiugwu Village Ohafia. December 10, 2011.

Oyidiya Ukpai Nwankwo, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Nde Agwu, Elu. August 18, 2010.

Prince Igwe Oji (self-styled traditional prime minister of Akanu village), oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Akanu Village. November 2, 2011.

Prince Ikpo Kalu, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Ebem Village. May 19, 2012.

Prof. Onwuka Njoku, oral conversation with author, University of Nigeria Nsukka, July 12, 2010

Prof. Onwuka Njoku, phone conversation with author, Lansing Michigan to Enugu Nigeria, March 22, 2013.

Rev. Dr. Ndukwe, oral interview by author, hand-written notes, Presbyterian Church Manse, Elu. August 20, 2011.

Rev. Dr. Uma Onwunta, Former Principal Clerk of the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria, oral interview by author, hand-written notes, Umuahia, Nigeria. August 23, 2011.

Tessy Uzoma Odum, oral interview by author, digital voice recording, Ohafia Local Government Council Office, Ebem Village, Ohafia. Sept. 5, 2011

Video recording of *umerogwu* (magic) performances by author, clips DSCN 1672, DSCN 1673, and DSCN 1674, Okon Village. September 26, 2011.

Video recording of *ije iwa* (massive food production) by author, clips AVI-5.AVI, Okon. September 22, 2011.

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