

LAW, JUSTICE, AND GENDER: (RE)GENDERING THE LEGAL SYSTEM IN OGIDI,
IGBOLAND

By

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

History—Doctor of Philosophy

2020

ABSTRACT

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In this study, I use the town of Ogidi as a case study to examine how female-centric law in Igboland became eclipsed by male-centric colonial law *oge ndi ocha chilu*, during the time that the British ruled. I privilege indigenous knowledge as part of my methodological approach to write an Igbo history from Igbo perspectives. For this reason, I engage in frequent use of Igbo words, phrases, periodization, and proverbs to explain both change and continuity in Ogidi and Igboland over time.

This dissertation is structured around three broad arguments. First, all forms of law that the people of Ogidi followed *tupu ndi ocha bia* (before the arrival of the British) were gendered female, as the Igbo earth goddess oversaw all legal pronouncements, judgments, and punishments, and as she designated women's councils to be judges of morality. Second, British colonial officials and their male Igbo collaborators restructured the legal system in Ogidi by imposing a male-centric law and by endowing men with novel, privileged positions of legislative and judicial authority. Third, the women of Ogidi did not simply accept the re-gendering of law that disenfranchised them and marginalized Igbo deities; rather, they attempted to reassert their judicial authority through various long-established practices that pre-dated the British arrival. While Igbo women's efforts to stop or reverse the male-centric takeover of the law were unsuccessful, the details of their protests against the colonial government and its collaborators represent evidence of the judicial authority that they had once wielded in their communities.

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This dissertation is dedicated to *umu Ogidi*—
the people of Ogidi, Anambra State, Nigeria.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation would not have been possible without the support, guidance, and assistance I received from so many—mentors, peers, family, friends, and more. I must first thank my advisor, the award-winning scholar Nwando Achebe. Her high standards—to which she holds her own academic excellence and that of each of her advisees—motivated me to constantly improve and refine my research design and my writing, from the moment I arrived at Michigan State University (MSU) until the completion of this dissertation. I also want to acknowledge the mentorship I received from the three other members of my dissertation committee, Glenn Chambers, Pero Dagbovie, and Walter Hawthorne, all of whom have imparted important knowledge regarding historiography and methodology through the graduate courses they taught and feedback they offered me on papers I submitted for those courses. Thank you to each member of my committee for your continued encouragement. I must also extend gratitude to two scholars outside of my field who have guided me in the writing of grant proposals that secured funding for my research in Nigeria: Roger Bresnahan, MSU’s former Fulbright Program Director, and David Wiley, a fellow Africanist in MSU’s sociology department.

I must also extend thanks to several institutions that have financially supported my training, research, and writing while I attended MSU. Acknowledgment must be made to the Department of History, the College of Social Science, and the Graduate School for supporting me in numerous ways through teaching and research assistantships over the years. Thanks to the MSU African Studies Center and its staff and faculty for providing various resources for study and research. I must also thank the African Studies Center in conjunction with the U.S. Department of Education for granting me multiple Foreign Language and Area Studies fellowships to study Igbo language

both in the U.S. and Nigeria, from 2015 to 2017. I extend my gratitude as well to my Igbo language instructors who taught me in the U.S. and Nigeria: Nichole Igwe, Nzube Prisca Egboluche, Norbert Uzo Odonwodo, Chima Korieh, and the several instructors at Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education in Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria.

In 2018, I conducted the bulk of my dissertation fieldwork in southeastern Nigeria as a research fellow sponsored by two prestigious institutions. Thank you to both the Fulbright-IIE/U.S. Department of State and the Social Science Research Council (SSRC)/Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for granting me these dissertation research fellowships. The Fulbright-IIE program was also supportive in providing me with a pre-departure orientation that made my entrance into Nigeria go smoothly, and the SSRC facilitated a post-research workshop that allowed me to discuss my preliminary findings with other fellows who had recently completed their dissertation research. Thank you also to the MSU Graduate School for supporting the final stage of my work with a Dissertation Completion Fellowship in 2020.

I now turn to those directly involved in my research on the ground in Igboland, Nigeria in 2016 and 2018. I once again acknowledge the advice and support of my advisor, Nwando Achebe, who not only counseled me on the usual elements of fieldwork, but also put me in contact with important members of Ogidi—my main research site—allowing me to respectfully and effectively enter my host community without any issues. I also want to thank Igwe Ezechuamagha I of Ogidi, Alex Uzo Onyido, and the members of his high council who graciously welcomed me into Ogidi with open arms. Acknowledgment also goes to the Osakwe family in Ogidi, particularly Chukwuma C. C. Osakwe and Chino Ojeh, for hosting me in 2018. I also appreciate the hospitality of Obi and Noney Achebe and their family, who welcomed me into their homes, both in Ogidi and

Lagos. Much thanks to the Nwajiaku family in Enugu for tolerating my frequent visits to their home while I stayed in the city to conduct archival research in 2018.

I extend sincere gratitude to my research assistants in Ogidi, Mbanefo Osakwe and Ngozi Amobi, for their tireless work of helping me approach and interview numerous oral history collaborators. Thank you also to my friend, Uchechi Onyegbule, for transcribing interviews for me and for always making me feel at home in Igboland. I want to thank my other friends in Nigeria who made my stay more enjoyable, especially Segun C. J. Olaitan (Ase), Kemsy Nwajiaku, Chijioke Onuoha, and Ginika Okorie. Thank you also for the many delicious dishes you provided me, Kemsy and Ginika.

I must also thank the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN) and Nnamdi Azikiwe University for providing me with valuable library resources and allowing me to access bachelors' theses that their students had previously written on Ogidi's history. Special thanks are owed to Chima Korieh and the entire UNN Department of History and International Studies, who welcomed me to campus several times between 2015 and 2018, and who willingly acted as my host institution for the duration of 2018. I also appreciate Uche Igwe, a professor in Nnamdi Azikiwe University's history department, for inviting me to campus. Much appreciation is due to the Nigerian National Archives at Enugu who granted me access in 2016 and 2018 to hundreds of documents that have proved invaluable to my work. Thanks also to the Church Mission Society Archives for offering free digitized content that has been useful in writing this dissertation.

I also want to thank those who have offered me feedback on my research at conferences such as the African Studies Association's annual meetings in 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2019, and the Association for the Study of the Worldwide African Diaspora conference in 2019. Special thanks are due to the wonderful members of the African Studies Association's Women's Caucus who

have mentored me throughout my time in graduate school. Much thanks is also due to Dan McCannell for providing helpful feedback and editing work on my chapters in 2020.

Now I turn to those who perhaps know me the best—colleagues at MSU, undergraduate mentors, friends, and family. Thank you to my peers from MSU’s history and related departments who have supported my work and have engaged in productive conversations with me about research and writing over the years, namely Eddie Bonilla, Joey Bradshaw, Heather Brothers, Katie Carline, Akil Cornelius, Emily Elliot, Dave Glovsky, Katie Greene, Abdoulie Jabang, Sarah Jacobson, Eric Kesse, Kathryn Lankford, Shaonan Liu, Alyssa Lopez, Dawson McCall, Jodie Marshall, Maria Martin, Shingi Mavima, Bernie Moore, Ola Nwabara, John Doyle-Raso, Emily Riley, Russell Stevenson, Chioma Uchefuna, David Walton, Liao Zhang; and special thanks my good friend and colleague James Blackwell, who has been invested in nearly every iteration of my research and professional development over the past six years. Thank you to all of the above-mentioned colleagues for your abundant wisdom, advice, critiques, and friendship throughout our time in graduate school. Thank you also to my mentors and my peers who read drafts of my chapters: Pero Dagbovie, Dave Glovsky, and Sara Balakrishnan. I have much appreciation for my two undergraduate advisors at St. Olaf College, Abdulai Iddrisu and Joseph Mbele, for challenging me to continue my interest in historical research of Africa beyond my bachelor’s degree. I would be remiss if I did not offer my heartfelt thanks to my parents, Fred and Linda Reyelts, for their continued support and for encouraging me to persevere in academics and all aspects of my life. Special thanks to my mom in particular for reading nearly all iterations of my chapter drafts and for numerous informal conversations about my study’s arguments. Thank you also to my wonderful fiancé, Cory Hollies, for being understanding of my irregular researching and writing schedule over the years, and for his unwavering support of my ambitions. Thank you to all of my

other family members and friends who have motivated and encouraged me throughout my graduate career; there are too many of you to name here.

Last but not least, I extend immeasurable gratitude to the people of Ogidi, Anambra State Nigeria. Thank you especially to my oral history collaborators for sharing your knowledge and opinions that have been invaluable to my dissertation. Thank you to all the people of Ogidi for welcoming me into your town and offering me more than I could ever repay. *Dalunu.*

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INTRODUCTION:

AKWA OKUKO JU EKETE, ONYE MA NKE WU OPARA? (IF A BASKET IS FULL OF EGGS, WHO KOWS WHICH IS THE ELDEST?)

As an Igbo adage¹ asserts, *okilikili bu ije agwo*, meaning “cyclical is the serpent’s progress.”² This dissertation has been six years in the making, but its initial inspiration was a novel that I first read eleven years ago, as a high school senior: Chinua Achebe’s 1958 masterpiece, *Things Fall Apart*, the story of an Igbo community that undergoes dramatic change when British missionaries and colonial officials arrive.³ Although a work of fiction, its plot is based on historical events that the residents of the author’s birthplace, Ogidi, fictionalized as Umuofia, endured at the turn of the twentieth century.⁴ With a population of more than 70,000 today,⁵ Ogidi is located six miles northeast of the large city of Onitsha, which is situated on the eastern bank of the River Niger

¹ Note that the Igbo adage included in the chapter title above suggests that when one has many things to do, it is difficult to know where to begin. Proverb recorded in Ryszard Pachocinski, *Proverbs of Africa: Human Nature in the Nigerian Oral Tradition* (St. Paul: Professors World Peace Academy, 1996), 252.

² This Igbo proverb points to the cyclical nature of life and everything in the universe. It reflects the Igbo conception of cyclical time as noted in A. E. Afigbo, “Time and Its Measurement in Igbo Culture,” in *Igbo History and Society: The Essays of Adiele Afigbo*, ed. Toyin Falola (Trenton: African World Press, 2005) 413. As the proverb suggests, this dissertation brings full circle the story of my introduction to Igbo history through Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*. Proverb found in Chieka Ifemesia, *Traditional Humane Living Among the Igbo: An Historical Perspective* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension, 1979), 8.

³ In the introduction to the 1997 edited volume *Conversations with Chinua Achebe*, Bernth Lindfors heralded Achebe as “Africa’s most important novelist” and noted that Achebe’s first novel, *Things Fall Apart*, had sold more than eight million copies and had been translated into more than fifty languages over the previous four decades. Bernth Lindfors, Introduction to *Conversations with Chinua Achebe*, ed. Lindfors (Jackson: University of Mississippi, 1997), ix.

⁴ Achebe has stated that *Things Fall Apart* is based on the history of Ogidi’s experience when the British arrived (Chinua Achebe, interview by *Afrique* journalist in 1962, reprinted in *Conversations with Chinua Achebe*, 8). Achebe’s daughter, Nwando Achebe, confirmed that the novel is based on Ogidi’s history, and added that it is based particularly on knowledge that indigenous custodians of Ogidi’s history—Chinua Achebe’s uncle Udo Osinyi, who earned three impressive *ozo* titles, and his neighbor Nwawulu Okudo, also a titled man—provided Chinua Achebe (conversations between Nwando Achebe and the author, 28 September 2017 and 20 April 2020). As further corroborating evidence, historian and Ogidi indigene Chukwuma C. C. Osakwe named two elders from Ikenga quarter—Nwawulu Okudo and the patriarch of the Uzowulu family living in the early/mid-twentieth century—as those with whom Achebe spent considerable time prior to his writing *Things Fall Apart*. Additionally, Osakwe pointed out the locations in Ogidi of homesteads of several families who were descended from the namesakes of some of the novel’s characters, including Okonkwo and Uzowulu (conversation with the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 12 February 2018).

⁵ This is the most recent available data and refers to the population in 2009, but that number is likely much higher in 2020. In 2018, Chukwuma C. C. Osakwe estimated that the town’s population was closer to 500,000, although there is no corroborating evidence to support this estimation (conversation with the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 10 February 2018).

in southeastern Nigeria. I read *Things Fall Apart* as a critique of colonialism, particularly the British devaluation of the female principle, especially regarding indigenous Igbo religion and law. The female principle—as defined by historian Nwando Achebe—is an essence that “embodies all aspects of female involvement in society.”⁶ The real town of Ogidi is the focus of this dissertation’s exploration of the (re)gendering of law. I did not know it then, but reading *Things Fall Apart* in high school was the beginning of a long, meticulous journey into the history that informed a literary saga of religious, political, and social changes.

By (re)gendering I mean that the functioning of indigenous Igbo law was female-centric *oge four quarters* (during the time in which Ogidi’s four quarters were established, likely between 250 and 400 years ago),⁷ but by the period known as *oge interregnum* (during the time between the rule of Ogidi’s first and second *ndi igwe*, 1925-44),⁸ it had come to be dominated by male-centric colonial law. (Re)gendering is a two-part theoretical model that accounts for both the gendering and re-gendering processes that occurred *oge four quarters-oge interregnum*.⁹ The initial gendering of law *tupu ndi ocha bia* (before the arrival of the British) refers to law being female-centric, i.e., emanating from the earth goddess and being protected particularly by councils of women. By the same token, the re-gendering of law refers to the way that law gradually transformed from female-centric to male-centric, propelled by the ignorance and male bias of

⁶ Nwando Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings: Female Power and Authority in Northern Igboland, 1900-1960* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2005), 27.

⁷ Oral tradition holds that at least three generations after Ezechuamagha, the progenitor of Ogidi’s people, founded the settlement that would later become the town of Ogidi, his descendants began to migrate from the initial location, establishing four distinct quarters, named after the four surviving sons of the man named Ogidi: Akanano, Uru, Ezinkwo, and Ikenga. It is probable that this establishment occurred between the late sixteenth and the late eighteenth century. I explain this timeline in-depth in footnote 90 below.

⁸ *Igwe*, which translates to “king,” is a construct of the colonial period. Indigenous Igbo society never had kings, but by the mid-twentieth century, *ndi igwe* (plural form of *igwe*) were considered “traditional rulers” of Igbo towns who reigned as their local central authorities. Nwando Achebe, “Ogidi Palaver’: The 1914 Women’s Market Protest,” in *Shaping Our Struggles: Nigerian Women in History, Culture, and Social Change*, ed. Obioma Nnaemeka and Chima J. Koriech (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2011), 25-26, 39 n. 1.

⁹ Throughout this dissertation, there is a distinction between ‘re-gendering,’ which is a single process, and ‘(re)gendering,’ which is a concept encompassing both the gendering and re-gendering processes.

colonial officials and the manipulations of male Igbo collaborators *oge ndi ocha chilu* (during the time that the British ruled).

This dissertation presents three main arguments. First, all forms of law that the people of Ogidi followed *tupu ndi ocha bia* were gendered female, because the Igbo earth goddess, *ani*,¹⁰ ultimately oversaw all legal pronouncements, judgments, and punishments, and because she designated women's councils to be judges of morality. Second, British colonial officials and their male Igbo collaborators restructured the legal system in Ogidi by imposing a male-centric law and by endowing men with novel, privileged positions of legislative and judicial authority. British officials' major role in this was the founding of English-style courts, inappropriately named 'native courts,' in which the indigenous people were meant to resolve their internal disputes according to a mixture of English law and what the British called 'native law and custom,'¹¹ i.e., supposedly indigenous law. Some of their collaborators, meanwhile, engaged in campaigns of distortion and invention aimed at propagating new or altered laws or parodies of indigenous institutions, notably the *igwe* position invented for political and personal gain. The third and final argument is that the women of Ogidi did not simply accept the re-gendering of law that disenfranchised them and marginalized Igbo deities; rather, they attempted to reassert their judicial authority through various long-established practices that pre-dated the British arrival. While Igbo women's efforts to stop or reverse the male-centric takeover of the law were unsuccessful, the details of their protests against

¹⁰ The Igbo word *ani* (alternatively *ana*, *ala*, or *ale*) translates to land or earth, but also refers to the earth goddess. Note that the earth goddess is one of the Igbo lesser deities, and therefore her name is uncapitalized, as capitalization is reserved for the high God, Chukwu. See Chapter 2 for further discussion of Chukwu and the lesser deities.

¹¹ According to section 2 of the 1906 Native Courts Ordinance, a 'native law' or 'custom' was considered "a Native law which was in force on the 1st day of January, 1902, and any Rules made under section 47 of this Ordinance, or declared by this Ordinance to be in force at the commencement thereof." Printed in *Laws of the Colony of Southern Nigeria vol. II* (London: Stevens and Sons, 1908), 1266 [accessed via HathiTrust Digital Library] <<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.hl3hpx&view=1up&seq=7>>).

the colonial government and its collaborators represent important evidence of the judicial authority that they had once wielded in their communities.

Thus, in broad terms, this dissertation examines changes in the interrelationship of gender, justice, and law that occurred *tupu ndi ocha bia* and *oge ndi ocha chilu*. Through microstudy of Ogidi using archival and oral history methods, this work constitutes an original contribution to knowledge of Igboland, women and gender, and colonial law. Methodologically, this study privileges indigenous Igbo forms of knowledge, not only through its adoption of Igbo periodization and proverbs (*ilu*), but also by highlighting the historiographical contributions of particular custodians of Ogidi's oral history, placing them—regardless of their educational status—on par with historians in Western academia, and their oral testimonies on par with archival documents and published scholarship.

The Gender of Law

Cosmology and religion are fundamental to an understanding of indigenous Igbo law and justice, because in Igbo society, the spheres of law, religion, and government are all intertwined.¹² The Igbo believe that there are two realms of the world—the human/visible and the spiritual/invisible—which, although distinct, constantly interact with each other.¹³ The former

¹² G. T. Basden, *Niger Ibos: A Description of the Primitive Life, Customs, and Animistic Beliefs, etc., of the Ibo People of Nigeria by One who, for Thirty-Five Years, Enjoyed the Privilege of their Intimate Confidence and Friendship* (London: Seeley, Service and Co. Ltd, 1938), 33; Ifemesia, *Traditional Humane Living*, 33; Ogechi E. Anyanwu, "Crime and Punishment in Pre-Colonial Igbo Society and the Challenge of British Colonial Rule," in *Between Tradition and Change: Sociopolitical and Economic Transformation Among the Igbo of Nigeria*, ed. Apollos O. Nwauwa and Ebere Onwudiwe (Glassboro: Goldline and Jacobs, 2012), 51; Felix K. Ekechi, "Religion and Politics in Igboland: Past and Present," in *Between Tradition and Change*, 117.

¹³ Obiakoizu A. Iloanusi, *Myths and Creation of Man and the Origin of Death in Africa: A Study in Igbo Traditional Culture and Other African Cultures* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1984), 70-71; Elizabeth Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People* (London: Macmillan Press, 1976), 25-26; Victor Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), 11-12; Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 27-28; Jude C. U. Aguwa, *The Agwu Deity in Igbo Religion: A Study of the Patron Spirit of Divination and Medicine in an African Society* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishing, 1995), 13; Chukwu Ogbajie, *The Impact of Christianity on the Igbo Religion and Culture* (Umuahia: Ark Publishers, 1995), 4; Austin Echema, *Igbo Funeral Rites Today: Anthropological and*

comprises people, animals, plants, and indeed everything else in nature that humans can directly observe, while the latter includes the high God, Chukwu; lesser deities (*alusi*); spirits of deceased ancestors (*ndiichie*); personal spirits that decide one's destiny (*chi*);¹⁴ spiritual medicines (*ogwu*) that diviners (*ndi dibia*) create through consultation with the gods;¹⁵ and oracles, spiritual forces with the ability to prophesy about the future.¹⁶ Neither realm can exist without the other, as each forms half of the Igbo universe.¹⁷ In Igbo cosmology, as in many indigenous African cosmologies, religion has informed justice and law; spiritual forces have dictated codes of ethics to the people. In the Igbo context specifically, justice has been equated closely with societal balance, and law has been devoted principally to the protection of that balance.¹⁸

There are two Igbo words for law: *omenani* and *iwu*. *Omenani* is, literally, “that which the [earth] goddess [a]ni decrees to be right or wrong,”¹⁹ whereas *iwu* is “something decided, enacted or struck,”²⁰ i.e., regulations created by humans.²¹ Yet, there are actually three categories of law,

Theological Perspectives (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2010), 10; John Njoku, *Tradition and Strategy of Change in Black Africa* ([Place of publication not identified]: [Publisher not identified], 2007), 12, 15; John E. Ebergbulam Njoku, *The Igbos of Nigeria: Ancient Rites, Changes and Survival* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), 24; C. K. Meek, *Land Tenure and Land Administration in Nigeria and the Camerouns* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1957), 113.

¹⁴ Chinua Achebe, “*Chi* in Igbo Cosmology,” in *Morning Yet on Creation Day: Essays* (London: Heinemann, 1975), 93; P. Amaury Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria: A Sketch of Their History, Ethnology and Languages, with an Account of the 1921 Census Volume II Ethnology* (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), 288; Daryll Forde and G. I. Jones, *The Igbo and Ibibio-Speaking Peoples of South-Eastern Nigeria* (London: International African Institute, 1967 [1950]), 26; A. E. Afigbo, “Religion and Economic Enterprise in Traditional Igbo Society,” in *Igbo History and Society*, 301; C. K. Meek, *Law and Authority in a Nigerian Tribe: A Study in Indirect Rule* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), 20, 55; Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 199.

¹⁵ They sometimes manifest from a concoction of natural plant material that a *dibia* has collected after instruction from the gods. Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria Volume II*, 165, 168; Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 55; Aguwa, *The Agwu Deity*, 17.

¹⁶ Some oracles are also deities, such as udo in Ogidi. Achebe, “Ogidi Palaver,” 32, 48.

¹⁷ Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 27.

¹⁸ Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria*, 12-13; Anyanwu, “Crime and Punishment,” 50-51; K. Onwuka Dike and Felicia Ekejiuba, *The Aro of South-eastern Nigeria, 1650—1980* (Ibadan: University Press, 1990), 131.

¹⁹ Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 27; Sabine Jell-Bahlsen, *The Water Goddess in Igbo Cosmology: Ogbuide of Oguta Lake* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2008), 181.

²⁰ Ifemesia, *Traditional Humane Living*, 35.

²¹ A. E. Afigbo, “Prolegomena to the Study of the Culture History of the Igbo-Speaking Peoples,” in *Igbo History and Society*, 8; Ifemesia, *Traditional Humane Living*, 35. Also note that *omenani* and *iwu* can each be used as either singular and plural nouns.

the third being the laws decreed by deities other than the earth goddess. These are denoted by the word *omenani* coupled with the relevant deity's name: for example, *omenani-udo* in the case of laws decreed by *udo*, the god of peace and the market. *Tupu ndi ocha bia*, all three forms of law were originally gendered female because they were either the direct dictates of the earth goddess or subject to her approval.²² The antithesis of *omenani* is *nso ani*, transgressions of *ani*'s laws, just as *nso-udo* are the transgression of *udo*'s laws, *nso-idemili* the transgressions of the river goddess *idemili*'s laws, and so on.

The initial gendering of law in Igboland as female is one half of the two-part theory of (re)gendering that lies at the heart of this study. That theory is based, in part, on a foundation laid by Nwando Achebe's detailed account of the female principle in Igboland, based on her comprehensive research on the history of women and gender in its Nsukka Division.²³ In the case of Ogidi, as we shall see, this female principle helps to explain the complex relationships among the earth goddess, other goddesses, women, justice, and law. In line with the core Igbo values of interdependence and duality, the Igbo worldview recognizes gender complementarity: i.e., that nearly everything in life is gendered either male or female, and that both are equally necessary. After all, the Igbo say *ife di abuo, abuo*, or "things come in pairs."²⁴ Examples of gendered pairs abound in Igbo cosmology and society: the sun (*anyanwu*) is male and the moon (*onwa*) is female;

²² S. N. Nwabara, *Iboland: A Century of Contact with Britain 1860-1960* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1977), 32; Meek, *Law and Authority*, 247.

²³ Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 27. Nsukka Division was an area of northern Igboland demarcated as a division of Onitsha Province for colonial administration. Onitsha Province was one of several territories that comprised colonial southeastern Nigeria and was the one in which Ogidi was situated *oge Walter* and *oge interregnum* (1904-1944). The other three provinces that covered Igboland during those periods were Owerri, Ogoja, and Calabar, although the latter only included the far southeastern reaches of Igboland. The boundaries of Onitsha Province changed slightly from year to year, but the province encompassed approximately one-third of Igboland *oge Walter* and *oge interregnum*. For examples of such boundary variation see NAE, ONPROF 11/1/5: "Report on Onitsha Province for the year 1915," report on Onitsha Province for the year 1915, 1; NAE OP 491/1922 ONPROF 7/9/39: "Annual Report Onitsha Province year ending 31 December 1922," Statistics of Onitsha Province Form 7.

²⁴ A. E. Afigbo, "Igbo Experience: A Prolegomenon," in *Igbo History and Society*, 202.

the sky (*igwe*) is male and the earth (*ani*) is female; the first market day, Eke, is male and the husband of the second day, Oye, which is female, and the third day, Afo, is male and the husband of the fourth day, Nkwo, which is female.²⁵

To refer to the law as gendered female *tupu ndi ocha bia* is not only to acknowledge the earth goddess' creation and oversight of the laws that governed human activity, but also that it was primarily she, other goddesses, and women who ensured that people upheld those laws. Ani entrusted women to decide some of the most serious cases in their communities, those concerning morality, and to judge and sanction transgressions of *omenani*.²⁶ Importantly, however, to call Igbo law female-centric is not to suggest that male members of society played no roles in legislating and adjudicating. For example, lesser gods could dictate their own *omenani*, and only men were able to participate in masquerade secret societies, which manifested as *egwugwu* (masked spirits of the ancestors) that acted and spoke on behalf of the ancestors in certain judicial matters.²⁷ Additionally, groups of Igbo men such as those in each *umunna* (extended family unit) could listen to and resolve disputes among its members.²⁸ Ultimately, however, male spiritual forces followed

²⁵ Afigbo, "Time and Its Measurement," 419; Gregory Enedo, interview by the author, Ogidi, 3 July 2018.

²⁶ Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 161-195; Meek, *Law and Authority*, 169; Ifi Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society* (London: Zed Books, 1987), 122; Chief Louis Okoye, interview by Chukwuma C. C. Osakwe, Akanano Ogidi, 13 September 1983, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi: The Era of Igwe Amobi I and II, 1904-1973" (B. A. Thesis, History Department, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 1984), 82. The role of women in Igbo law and justice is thoroughly explained in Chapter Four.

²⁷ Nnabuenyi Ugonna, *Mmonwu: A Dramatic Tradition of the Igbo* (Lagos: Lagos University Press, 1984), 1-25; Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria Volume II*, 767; Forde and Jones, *The Igbo and Ibibio-Speaking Peoples*, 26; Achebe, "Chi in Igbo Cosmology," 95; Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 163; Nwosu Nwawulu, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufo, Ikenga Ogidi, 20 September 1978, in Nwabufo, "Traditional Law and Colonial Change in Ogidi" (B.A. Thesis, Department of History, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 1979), 73, 163; Ogbuefi Ezigbo Otue Unachukwu, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufo, Uru Ogidi, 28 September 1978, in Nwabufo, "Traditional Law and Colonial Change," 76; Chinua Achebe, "The Igbo World and Its Art," in *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays* (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 65; Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (New York: Anchor Books, 1994 [1959]), 93-94, 186-190.

²⁸ Chief Hillary Osegbo, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 24 April 2018; Chief Ozoekwe Clement Okudo, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 27 April 2018; Udoh Boniface Uyanwa, interview by the author, Akanano Ogidi, 13 April 2018; Chief Godfrey Amazikwu, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 10 April 2018; Ifechukwu Agbakoba, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 1 September 2018; Chief Louis Okoye, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 82; Ifeyinwa Ekwealor, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 18 August 2018.

the orders that the earth goddess imparted, and men were required to respect the judicial advice, decisions, and sanctions that ani, other deities, and women delivered.²⁹

Oge ndi ocha chilu, however, the British ushered in a new legal system that was gendered quite differently. Although this male-centric colonial law never completely displaced the female-centric indigenous one, by the time that the people of Ogidi ratified their first written constitution in 1944,³⁰ women and spiritual forces—all of which operated according to female-centric law—had been almost entirely detached from the legislative and judicial roles that they had held for centuries previously. As we will see, British missionaries, colonial officers, and male colonial collaborators contributed to re-gendering in various ways. The missionaries, who first arrived in Igboland in 1857 and subsequently built a mission station, churches, and schools in Onitsha, taught English to selected Igbo men and boys, many of whom profited from this privilege by becoming clerks, messengers, and warrant chiefs of the new legal system that colonial officials imposed, under the mistaken belief that it reflected indigenous Igbo law.³¹ In reality, it was a complex amalgam of Igbo law, English law, and invented or distorted laws that some Igbo men claimed to be indigenous. The root of this problem was that the British did not recognize indigenous Igbo law as law, but rather considered it to be custom or tradition, and therefore inferior to English law;³²

²⁹ Although many of the gods and goddesses worshiped in Ogidi before the British arrived are still worshiped today, at least by some, many changes have occurred in the indigenous Igbo religion since then. For this reason, and because the time period of this study begins and ends in the past, I often use the past tense when discussing Igbo religion. This is *not* to negate the importance of indigenous Igbo religion, law, and culture to Igbo society in the present.

³⁰ 1944 Ogidi Town Council Constitution (courtesy of the Ogidi Union, Nigeria; special thanks to Sir Albert Obi Ezegbo for supplying me with a copy).

³¹ Judith Van Allen, “‘Aba Riots’ or Igbo ‘Women’s War’? Ideology, Stratification, and the Invisibility of Women,” *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* 6, no. 1 (1975): 24; Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, 134-137; Benjamin N. Lawrance, Emily Lynn Osborn, and Richard L. Roberts, eds, Introduction to *Intermediaries, Interpreters and Clerks: African Employees and the Making of Colonial Africa* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 27; A. E. Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs: Indirect Rule in Southeastern Nigeria 1891-1929* (London: Longman Group Limited, 1972), 60.

³² NAE, MINJUST 127/1/1, “The Ascertainment of Customary Laws in Southern Nigeria”; M. M. Green, *Igbo Village Affairs: Chiefly with Reference to the Village of Umueke Agbaja* (London: Frank Cass, 1964 [1947]), 78; T. Olawale Elias, *British Colonial Law: A Comparative Study of the Interaction between English and Local Laws in British Dependencies* (London: Stevens & Sons, 1962), 2-4.

and deemed it valid only as long as it was “not repugnant to natural justice or to the principles of the law of England.”³³ This combination of ignorance and disregard facilitated distortion of indigenous institutions and laws, usually to favor men, by the colonizers’ Igbo intermediaries, not only in Ogidi but across much of Igboland *oge ndi ocha chilu*.

Throughout this study, I will be using several key terms that should be defined. I use the adjective ‘judicial’ to describe matters pertaining to the adjudication and maintenance of justice. I use the term ‘legal,’ on the other hand, to refer to the institution of law, in both its legislative and judicial dimensions. Moreover, punitive actions by Igbo women aimed at bringing an offender to justice are termed ‘legal sanctions’ as well as ‘enactments of justice.’ Finally, ‘colonial law,’ ‘customary law,’ and ‘native law and custom’ are used interchangeably, because in the Igbo case, the law that the colonial administration imposed was the so-called ‘native law and custom’ that comprised both English and supposedly indigenous Igbo law, and which is often referred to as ‘customary law’ in the historiography of colonial law in Africa.

³³ 1906 Native Courts Ordinance, section 38, printed in *Laws of the Colony of Southern Nigeria vol. II*, 1272 [accessed via HathiTrust Digital Library] <<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.hl3hpx&view=1up&seq=7>>).

The Significance of Ogidi as an Igbo Case Study: Situating Igboland

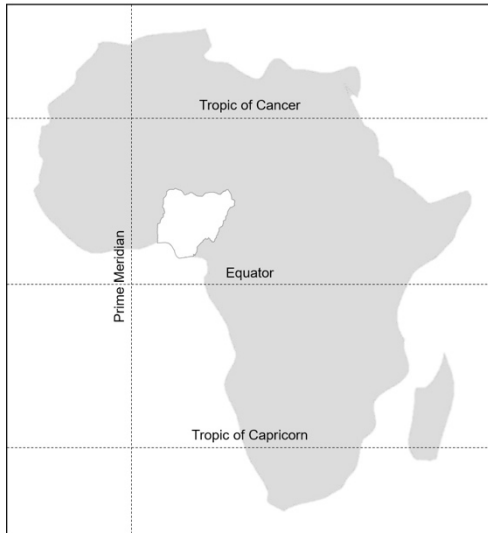


Figure 1. Map of Africa
Nigeria is highlighted³⁴

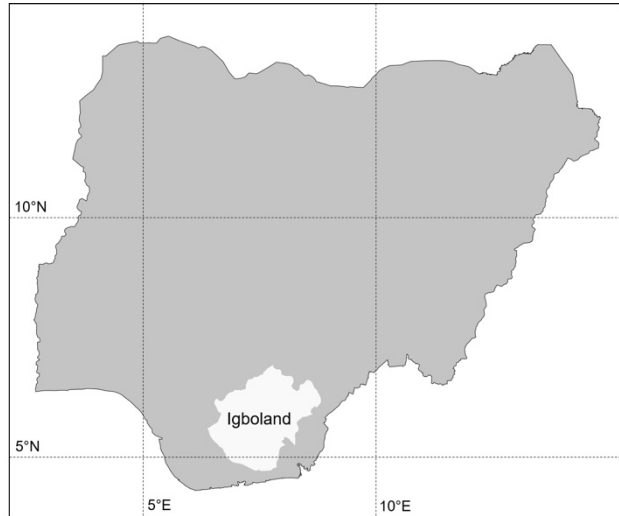


Figure 2. Map of Nigeria
Igboland is highlighted³⁵

Igboland, more than 15,800 square miles in extent, encompasses much of the region of southeastern Nigeria, stretching from the Cross River in the east to beyond the River Niger in the west,³⁶ and from the Nsukka Plateau in the north to the northern edge of the Niger Delta in the south.³⁷ Composed of democratic, autonomous communities *tupu ndi ocha bia*, Igboland has long been densely populated, and has approximately 29 million inhabitants today.³⁸ As a starting point

³⁴ Map created by the author in Microsoft PowerPoint. The outline of Africa was traced from an image sourced from Printable Maps blog: <<https://printable-maps.blogspot.com/2008/08/blank-africa-outline-map.html>>. The outline of Nigeria was traced from an image sourced from WorldAtlas: <<https://www.worldatlas.com/webimage/countrys/africa/outline/ngout.htm>>. Additionally, the author consulted Google Maps in the placing of notable lines of latitude and longitude.

³⁵ Map created by the author in Microsoft PowerPoint. The outline of Nigeria was traced from the same source as noted in footnote 34 above. The outline of Igboland was traced from an image sourced from Nairaland Forum <<https://www.nairaland.com/2786931/igboland-not-landlocked/7>>. Additionally, the author consulted Google Maps in the placing of lines of latitude and longitude.

³⁶ There are some Igbo communities that lay west of the River Niger, but a majority lay east of it.

³⁷ Ifemesia, *Traditional Humane Living*, 15; Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria*, 1.

³⁸ In the 1960s, British anthropologist and missionary G. T. Basden reported that there was likely no other area in Africa besides Egypt and major cities that had a higher population density than Igboland (Ifemesia cites Basden. See Ifemesia, *Traditional Humane Living*, 15-16). The Igbo population of Nigeria today numbers approximately 29

in tracing Igbo history, historians have looked to origin traditions, which allow a society to record a series of changes over time, but also to inculcate its members with its evolved system of beliefs, values, and laws. Chinua Achebe put it more succinctly: “Our ancestors created their different polities with myths embodying their varying perceptions of reality. Every people everywhere did the same.”³⁹ Yet, the question of how historians should interpret traditions of creation and origin in Africa remains an open one. Nwando Achebe argues that, although not necessarily a literal recounting of past events, oral traditions of a society’s origins are useful historical tools because they represent what that society collectively thinks about itself and its history.⁴⁰ One of the uses of such traditions, in the Igbo case, is to explain how the earth and the laws that forbid polluting it became sanctified. As noted by John Anenechukwu Umeh, an author of numerous scholarly works on Igbo culture and religion,⁴¹

The first purification of the earth polluted by the deaths and the other pollutants after the tragic destruction was done by Chukwu using His tears—*anya mili* which formed *Oshimili/Orimili Nnu*—the salty oceans. After that, *Ana/ala/ani*—land became sacred. And anybody or anything which commits an abomination or pollution must cleanse the land to restore Her sacredness.⁴²

Creation narratives such as the above help to substantiate the importance of *omenani* to indigenous Igbo society. The centrality of *ani* and her laws is also evident in the Igbo origin tradition.

million, but this includes Igbo people living in other regions of Nigeria as well. The United States CIA World Factbook states that based on a total Nigerian population of 203.5 million (from 2018 estimates) and Igbo people representing 14.1% of the population (based on 2013 estimates), there are 28.69 million Igbo people in Nigeria. However, since there is a lack of reliable data available and since the statistics that the CIA World Factbook provides are only estimates—estimates from different years no less—this number is only an approximation. <<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/attachments/summaries/NI-summary.pdf>>.

³⁹ Chinua Achebe, “What Has Literature Got to Do with It?” in *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays* (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 168.

⁴⁰ Nwando Achebe, *The Female King of Colonial Nigeria: Ahebi Ugbabe* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 30.

⁴¹ Umeh’s degrees and academic positions held have been in the biological sciences, but he has written several works that contribute to the social sciences and humanities, including *Compulsory Acquisition of Land and Compensation in Nigeria (Law in Africa)* (London: Sweet and Maxwell 1973); *After God is Dibia: Igbo Cosmology, Divination and Sacred Science in Nigeria* (London: Karnak House, 1997); *Nkenu: The Igbo Yes-Bird: Stories, Poems, Songs, and Superstitions of Nkenu of Igboland* (Enugu: University of Nigeria, Economic Development Institute, 2005).

⁴² Emphasis in original: Umeh, *After God is Dibia*, 8.

Although the Igbo tradition of origin has a number of variants, most of them credit a man named Eri as the progenitor of the Igbo ethnic group.⁴³ Some traditions say that Eri was a sky being who came to earth to found the first Igbo settlement at Nri,⁴⁴ which played a crucial role in the development of Igbo laws, beliefs, values, and customs over thousands of years. A man called Nri—the eldest son of Eri—and his descendants eventually spread out from the town of the same name, and by the ninth century CE founded numerous other Igbo settlements.⁴⁵ From then until the end of the sixteenth century, Igbo people from other towns held the people and religious influence of Nri in high esteem.⁴⁶ In fact, priests from Nri were often summoned to various Igbo communities to cleanse the land that had been polluted by *nso ani*.⁴⁷ During the seventeenth century, however, another Igbo group, the Aro from Arochukwu in southeastern Igboland, gained political and economic power over much of Igboland and neighboring Ibibioland through their aggressive participation in the Atlantic slave trade.⁴⁸ Many Igbo communities came to fear an

⁴³ Otigbuanyinya O. C. Onyesoh, *Nri: The Cradle of Igbo Culture and Civilization* (Onitsha: Tabansi Press, 2000), 13; Umeh, *After God is Dibia*, 9; Achebe, “*Chi* in Igbo Cosmology,” 102; Afigbo, “Time and Its Measurement,” 417; Richard Henderson, *The King in Every Man: Evolutionary Trends in Onitsha Ibo Society and Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 370; Chike Odunze, written questionnaire, questions supplied by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 5 May 2018; Ogbogu Azubuike Chuka, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 1 May 2018.

⁴⁴ Onyesoh, *Nri*, 13; Umeh, *After God is Dibia*, 9; Achebe, “*Chi* in Igbo Cosmology,” 102; Afigbo, “Time and Its Measurement,” 417.

⁴⁵ Henderson, *The King in Every Man*, 60-61; Onyesoh, *Nri*, 9-14; Augustine S. O. Okwu, *Igbo Culture and the Christian Missions, 1857-1957: Conversion in Theory and Practice* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2010), 10; Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 30; Chike Odunze, written questionnaire, questions supplied by the author.

⁴⁶ Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 30. For example, Henderson (*The King in Every Man*, 60-61) notes that since many Igbo towns have traced their lineage to Nri, the town “gained the right to produce the sacred ‘yam medicine’ (*ogwu-ji*) for which surrounding peoples traditionally came to Nri and for which they paid him an annual tribute to insure the edibility of their yams.”

⁴⁷ Sebastian Okafo, interview by Anthonia Uchenna Anyegbunam, Abatete, 6 September 1983, in Anyegbunam, “The External Relations of Ogidi Up to 1903” (B.A. Thesis, Department of History, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 1984), 93; Nwude Anumba, interview by Anthonia Uchenna Anyegbunam, Uru Ogidi, 4 September 1983, in Anyegbunam, “The External Relations of Ogidi,” 84-85; Raphael Anyagbunam, interview by Anthonia Uchenna Anyegbunam, Akanano Ogidi, 15 August 1983 in Anyegbunam, “The External Relations of Ogidi,” 68; Nwosu Enwude (Nwawulu), interview by Anthonia Uchenna Anyegbunam, Ikenga Ogidi, 7 September 1983, in Anyegbunam, “The External Relations of Ogidi,” 100; Ononenyi Amobi, interview by Anthonia Uchenna Anyegbunam, Ikenga Ogidi, 9 September 1983, in Anyegbunam, “The External Relations of Ogidi,” 105; Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria Volume III Ethnology*, 596-597.

⁴⁸ Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 32-33;

Arochukwu oracle named ibinukpabi, who was said to condemn certain criminals to enslavement.⁴⁹ Ogidi was one of the few communities that successfully defended itself from Aro slave raiders, by enslaving members of other communities and trading them to the Aro.⁵⁰

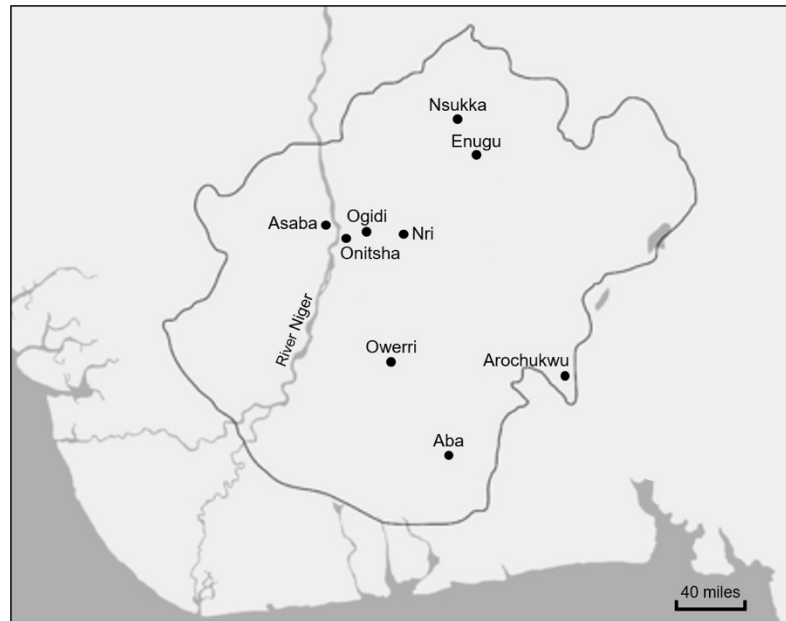


Figure 3. Map of Igboland

The outer boundary of Igboland is delineated⁵¹

⁴⁹ Dike and Ekejiuba, *The Aro of South-eastern Nigeria*, 4, 154; Meek, *Law and Authority*, 5; David Northrup, *Trade Without Rulers: Pre-Colonial Economic Development in South-Eastern Nigeria* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 115; Simon Ottenberg, "Ibo Oracles and Intergroup Relations," *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 14, no. 3 (1958): 299; A. E. Afigbo, *The Igbo and Their Neighbours: Inter-group Relations in Southeastern Nigeria to 1953* (Ibadan: University Press, 1987), 43, 171; G. Ugo Nwokeji, *The Slave Trade and Culture in the Bight of Biafra: An African Society in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 135.

⁵⁰ Chief Edward Dike Ibemesi, interview by the author, Ogidi, 7 March 2018; Ezeudo, interview by Arinze Ernest Agbogu, Ikenga Ogidi, 30 December 1975, in Agbogu, "Ogidi Before 1891: A Brief Survey of the Origins, Migrations, Settlement, and Intergroup Relations" (B.A. Thesis, Department of History and Archaeology, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 1976), 93; Lawrence Agulefo, interview by Arinze Ernest Agbogu, Ikenga Ogidi, 22 December 1975, in Agbogu, "Ogidi Before 1891," 96; Nwosu Enwude, interview by Arinze Ernest Agbogu, Ikenga Ogidi, 12 December 1974, in Agbogu, "Ogidi Before 1891," 43; Raphael Anyaegbunam, interview by Anthonia Uchenna Anyegbunam, Akanano Ogidi, 15 August 1983, in Anyegbunam, "The External Relations of Ogidi," 67; Nwosu Enwude (Nwawulu), interview by Anthonia Uchenna Anyegbunam, in Anyegbunam, "The External Relations of Ogidi," 99.

⁵¹ Map created by the author using Microsoft PowerPoint. The background image and outline of Igboland were traced from the same source as noted in footnote 35 above. Additionally, the author consulted Google Maps for the placement of notable towns and cities.

Although communities situated along the coast of the Bight of Biafra⁵² had contact with Europeans as early as the sixteenth century, those in the Igbo hinterland—including Ogidi—only had indirect interactions with Europeans *oge slave trade* (during the time of the Atlantic slave trade). When the British abolished the trade in the early nineteenth century, European commercial concerns sought to acquire palm oil, cocoa, and other valuable goods from southeastern Nigeria.⁵³ By the 1840s, they had founded outposts in the interior along the River Niger, and by 1857, the Anglican Church Missionary Society (CMS)⁵⁴ had also ventured up the Niger and established their first mission station in Igboland, at Onitsha. Although the eager missionaries were able to enter some communities located just inland from Onitsha, the CMS did not arrive in Ogidi until 1892, gaining access through the assistance of Ogidi indigene Walter Amobi, who had been sent to Onitsha in his youth and subsequently educated by the CMS.⁵⁵ As the only English speaker from Ogidi, Amobi positioned himself as an ideal colonial intermediary, and between 1900 and 1902 led colonial forces to Ogidi and other towns in the Igbo interior to confiscate their firearms, a period remembered by the people as *oge ntiji egbe* (during the time that the firearms were

⁵² Off the coast of Nigeria, the Bight of Biafra is a bay of the Atlantic Ocean that constitutes the eastern-most part of the Gulf of Guinea.

⁵³ K. Onwuka Dike, *100 Years of British Rule in Nigeria 1851-1951* (Lagos: Federal Information Service, 1958 [reprint of 1956 Dike's Lugard Lectures]), 6-7; Stephan F. Miescher and Lisa A. Lindsay, Introduction to *Men and Masculinities in Modern Africa*, ed. Stephan F. Miescher and Lisa A. Lindsay (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2003), 3; A. E. Afigbo, "Chief Igwegbe Odum: The Omenuko of History," in *Nigeria Magazine* 90 (1966): 224; Raphael Chijioko Njoku, "'Ogaranya' (Wealthy Men) in Late Nineteenth Century Igboland: Chief Igwebe Odum of Arondizuogu, c. 1860-1940," *African Economic History* 36 (2008): 27, 34, 46; G. I. Jones, *From Slaves to Palm Oil: Slave Trade and Palm Oil Trade in the Bight of Biafra* (Cambridge: African Studies Center, 1989).

⁵⁴ In 1995, the organization changed its name from Church Missionary Society to Church Mission Society.

⁵⁵ Chief Edward Dike Ibemesi, interview by the author; Raphael Anyaegbunam, interview by Anthonia Uchenna Anyegbunam, in Anyegbunam, "The External Relations of Ogidi," 71; Ezekwesilu Mba (Okwesi), interview by Anthonia Uchenna Anyegbunam, Ikenga Ogidi, 19 August 1983, in Anyegbunam, "The External Relations of Ogidi," 81; Chief Louis Okoye, interview by Chukwuma C. C. Osakwe, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 77, 78; Chief Lawrence Agulefo, interview by Chukwuma C. C. Osakwe, Ikenga Ogidi, 14 September 1983, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 83; Chief Uzowulu Udo, interview by Chukwuma C. C. Osakwe, Ikenga Ogidi, 28 September 1983, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 109; M. O. Onwugbufor, interview by Chukwuma C. C. Osakwe, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 3 October 1983, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 115; Clement Chibuzo Amobi, written questionnaire administered by Chukwuma C. C. Osakwe, 12 December 1983, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 120; Oduche Cyril Okafor, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 26 April 2018; Chief Lawrence Nwankwo Onwuteaka, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 4 April 2018; Dike Ibemesi, *Ogidi: Historical Perspective of a People* (Ogidi: Ekpechi and Sons, 1995), 66.

destroyed).⁵⁶ At that time, the British used an approach to colonization known as indirect rule, in which indigenous members of the colonized society were employed as low-ranking members of the colonial administration. In theory, this allowed the colonizers to tap into pre-existing political structures, making each community's king or chief a warrant chief: i.e., a judge in one of the newly established native courts.⁵⁷ It was in this context that Amobi returned to Ogidi permanently, becoming the town's first warrant chief in 1903.⁵⁸

The problem that the British encountered with implementing this strategy in Igboland was that Igbo society had always consisted of small-scale democracies with no individual rulers.⁵⁹ As a solution, the British created warrant chiefs, who came to act as more than court judges: often usurping leadership of their communities from titled elders, men's and women's councils, and spiritual forces. Other notable positions available to male colonial collaborators were those of court clerks and court messengers—the latter often called *kotmas*⁶⁰—who in theory fell just below the rank of warrant chief, but in reality, wielded just as much if not more power. Warrant chiefs, court clerks, and *kotmas* were among the most influential contributors, whether intentionally or not, to

⁵⁶ Chief Nwosu Nwawulu Enwude, interview by Chukwuma C. C. Osakwe, Ikenga Ogidi, 16 September 1983, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 92; Lawrence Agulefo, in Agbogu, "Ogidi Before 1891," 97; M. O. Onwugbufo, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 115; Chief Lawrence Agulefo, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 84; Chief Louis Okoye, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 77; Anonymous oral history collaborator 1, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 3 April 2018; Ibemesi, *Ogidi*, 101; Achebe, "'Ogidi Palaver,'" 24.

⁵⁷ Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs*, 51, 78; Harry A. Gailey, *The Road to Aba: A Study of British Administrative Policy in Eastern Nigeria* (New York: New York University Press, 1970), 6; Toyin Falola and Adam Paddock, *The Women's War of 1929: A History of Anti-Colonial Resistance in Eastern Nigeria* (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2011), 6-7.

⁵⁸ High Chief Robinson Okudo (Esema), interview by the author, 14 September 2018; Ezeudo, in Agbogu, "Ogidi Before 1891," 91; Chief Louis Okoye, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 78; Chief Uzowulu Udo, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 110; M. O. Onwugbufo, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 115; Berthram Aduba, interview by Ifeoma Catherine Onwugbufo, 23 February 1992, in Onwugbufo, "The Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy in Ogidi" (B.A. Thesis, Department of History, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 1992), 113; Nwosu Enwude, in Agbogu, "Ogidi Before 1891," 46; Ibemesi, *Ogidi*, 66.

⁵⁹ Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs*, 60; John E. Eberegbulam Njoku, *The Igbos of Nigeria: Ancient Rites, Changes and Survival* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), 1; Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, 21; Judith Van Allen, "'Sitting on a Man': Colonialism and the Lost Political Institutions of Igbo Women," *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 6.2 (1972): 167.

⁶⁰ *Kotmas* is the pidgin English rendering of "court messengers," and is the term with which many of my oral history collaborators referenced such individuals.

the re-gendering of law in Igboland, and in Ogidi in particular, *oge ndi ocha chilu*. Walter Amobi took this process one step further by arrogating to himself the fictitious title of *igwe* one year after becoming Ogidi's warrant chief, as we shall see in Chapter 3. Yet, despite the process of the re-gendering of law that occurred in Ogidi *oge Walter* (during the reign of Igwe Walter Amobi, 1904-25) and *oge interregnum*, the women of Ogidi collectively sought to uphold female-centric indigenous law, not least through four noteworthy protests between the turn of the twentieth century—just prior to Walter Amobi's reign—and the mid-twentieth century, *oge Benjamin* (during the reign of Igwe Benjamin Amobi, 1944-73).

The re-gendering of law in Ogidi and across Igboland was manifested gradually *oge Walter* and *oge interregnum*. In the wake of the reorganization of the native court system in the early 1930s, it was increasingly clear that the female-centric indigenous law was falling out of favor with large numbers of Igbo people. As anthropologist G. T. Basden observed in 1938,

Native law and custom has been almost completely disrupted; indeed, as a leading Ibo man said recently, 'there is no longer *any* fixed law or custom'. Much is in the melting-pot; much has perished altogether. To put the situation plainly, ancient native law and custom cannot exist side by side nor intermingle with the principles of the British Government.⁶¹

Basden was correct to note that indigenous Igbo law could not coexist for long with the male-centric agenda of colonial rule, and that what the British administration accepted and enacted as 'native law and custom' was not wholly indigenous, but rather a set of distortions of indigenous institutions created "in the melting-pot."

⁶¹ Emphasis in original: Basden, *Niger Ibos*, xii.

Ogidi: Both Unique and Representative

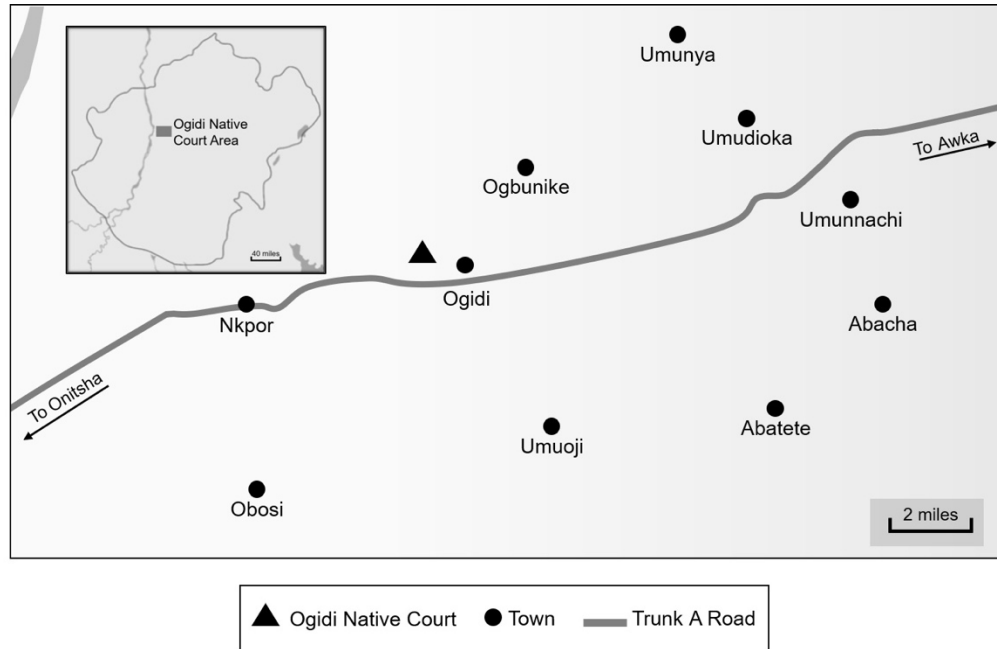


Figure 4. Map of Ogidi Native Court Area

Approximate layout from 1911 to 1932⁶²

Ogidi is a useful case-study for examining the re-gendering of law in Igboland *oge ndi ocha chilu* for several reasons. First, due in part to its proximity to Onitsha, the missionaries' and colonial officials' point of entry into Igboland, and in part due to Walter Amobi's strong ties to both of these groups of Europeans, Ogidi became the seat of a native court area that served at least ten towns.⁶³ It was also especially well-documented by the colonial administration, due to Amobi's

⁶² Map created by the author using Microsoft PowerPoint. In her drawing of Trunk A Road (which is now called Old Onitsha-Enugu Road, or alternatively, Limca Road) and the placement of cities and towns on the map, the author consulted Google Maps. For the source used in creating the in-set map in the upper left corner, see footnote 51 above.

⁶³ At least nine towns besides Ogidi—Abacha, Abatete, Nkpor, Obosi, Ogbunike, Umudioka, Umunnachi, Umunya, and Umuoji—fell within the Ogidi Native Court area. Although more towns were likely added to the jurisdiction of the Ogidi Native Court during its period of use, 1911-1932, the above are the ones that can be corroborated by multiple sources. Chief Louis Okoye, interview by Chukwuma C. C. Osakwe, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 78; Chief Akunwafor Osegbo (Omeka), interview by Chukwuma C. C. Osakwe, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 19 September 1983, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 99; Chief Lawrence Agulefo, interview by Chukwuma C. C. Osakwe, Ikenga Ogidi, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 85; Lawrence Anwurebo, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 27 March 2018; Oduche Cyril Okafor, interview by the author; Chief David N. C. Akobi, interview by the author, Akanano Ogidi, 25 April 2018;

reputation as a strong but problematic warrant chief and *igwe*; and the resulting body of surviving colonial evidence offers important insights into how British officials viewed the townspeople and their ruler *oge Walter*. And, because of its proximity, the people of Ogidi had ready access to its native court, whereas those from neighboring towns had to travel to it from farther away, which may have limited or impeded their use of that institution. Although exact statistics on the hometowns of each person who was involved in litigation in the Ogidi Native Court cannot be compiled, a high proportion of the available transcripts from Ogidi Native Court cases cite litigants from Ogidi.⁶⁴ Moreover, an arguably disproportionate number of Ogidi men became warrant chiefs, headmen,⁶⁵ *kotmas*, and court clerks, not only because of the court's presence, but because Ogidi was one of the first Igbo towns to establish English schools and inculcate its youth with the skills that would allow them to become colonial collaborators. And, no fewer than 135 individuals in Ogidi were willing to work with me as oral history collaborators,⁶⁶ providing information on their town's religion, laws, and history. In short, there is abundant evidence available from archival documents, oral sources, and secondary sources regarding the changes that swept over Ogidi *oge ndi ocha chilu*, and this allows us to draw relatively firm conclusions about how re-gendering affected this town and its people.

Additionally, focusing on one town instead of the entirety of Igboland allows for closer analysis of how the imposition of colonial law affected individuals. By the same token, Ogidi was

NAE, OP 7/1924 ONPROF 7/11/1: "Ogidi Native Court. Representation made by Mkpo [Nkpor] Town for Separation from Ogidi Native Court"; NAE, OP 80/1928 ONPROF 7/15/28: "Petition by Nwabude of Umunya re case between him and Madam Chibogwu of Onitsha in Ogidi Native Court."

⁶⁴ As I detail in Chapter 5, composite statistics on native court proceedings in the Onitsha Province, in which Ogidi was located *oge ndi ocha chilu*, are available in archival documents, but most of the transcripts of court cases (which include the hometowns of litigants involved) have been lost or misplaced and are therefore unavailable.

⁶⁵ Headmen, or (minor) chiefs as they were alternatively called, were men whom the colonial authorities selected to procure laborers for various projects. Some headmen/chiefs were later promoted to the post of warrant chief.

⁶⁶ I adopt Achebe's term 'oral history collaborators' to refer to those I interviewed for my research, agreeing that these individuals did more than just respond to questions or inform my project. Rather, they were partners or collaborators in the history-making process. See Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 5-6.

a large enough town that one can also discern wider trends in it, including how colonialism affected groups such as Igbo women. Not least, this is clear in how various factors bound up in the colonial encounter slowly unraveled the female-centric legal system of indigenous Igbo society, and replaced it with several iterations of the native court system.⁶⁷ The exclusive positioning of men in the Ogidi Native Court, for example, paralleled developments across Igboland, with the appointment of one female warrant chief in the Nsukka Division being the exception proving the rule.⁶⁸ Patterns of the increased use of the Ogidi Native Court *oge Walter* and *oge interregnum* also mirrored such patterns across much of Igboland.⁶⁹

For all the ways that Ogidi's experience reflected that of Igboland generally, the town's history has unique elements that make it particularly important for microstudy. Of key importance is Walter Amobi, whose early connections with missionaries and other Europeans, and later exploitative behavior as a community leader, drew the attention and ire of prominent local women and colonial administrators alike. Because of Amobi's tyranny, the women of Ogidi repeatedly protested his unjust rule and his offenses against women, ani, and other deities. The largest of these demonstrations, which Nwando Achebe coined the women's market protest,⁷⁰ was a series of events in March and April 1914, and is significant to both Igbo historiography and women's and gender studies, not least due to its many similarities to the 1929 Igbo Women's War,⁷¹ but also

⁶⁷ The native court system in southeastern Nigeria went through three distinct phases: first, as a burgeoning system, heavily reliant on colonial officials who oversaw warrant chiefs' adjudication from the early 1900s to 1918; second, the removal of British officials from the courts in 1918 and the subsequent increased authority of warrant chiefs and court clerks until 1933, in which the last phase—called the 'reorganization'—began by replacing warrant chiefs with large groups of all-male judicial bodies. These phases will be covered in-depth in Chapter 5.

⁶⁸ For more on this female warrant chief, see Achebe, *The Female King of Colonial Nigeria*.

⁶⁹ This is explored in detail in Chapter 5.

⁷⁰ Nwando Achebe is the first scholar to publish on this event. See Achebe, "'Ogidi Palaver,'" 23-51. This protest will be analyzed in detail in Chapter 4.

⁷¹ The Women's War consisted of thousands of Igbo and Ibibio women protesting *en masse* across the southern Nigerian provinces of Calabar and Owerri in November and December 1929. These women protested corrupt warrant chiefs, court clerks, and by extension the colonial administration, because they refused to allow women to air their many grievances with colonial rule at the native courts. Although the British collectively called these demonstrations the "Aba Riots," they are more accurately described by the Igbo term, *Ogu Umunwaanyi*, which means "Women's

due to its status as the earliest documented mass protest by Igbo women against the authority of a powerful colonial collaborator and, by extension, the colonial administration. Examining it in the context of the re-gendering of law that had recently taken root may therefore provide a useful template or baseline for analysis of other southern Nigerian women's protests against colonial and male-centric rule that followed over the ensuing decades.

The Interconnectedness of Ogidi's History and Things Fall Apart

Ogidi is also an important site for microstudy due to its status as the inspiration for *Things Fall Apart's* town of Umuofia. I agree with Chinua Achebe's assertion that his novels are legitimate sources of Igbo cosmology and history. In a 1980 interview, he explained that his works of fiction present "a total world and a total life as it is lived in that world, and you cannot do that in a vacuum . . . if someone is in search of information, or knowledge, or enlightenment about the total life of these people—the Igbo people—I think my novels would be a good source."⁷² While many of *Things Fall Apart's* themes and events are representative of the history of Igboland in general, Achebe also drew on specific knowledge that he learned from indigenous custodians of Ogidi's history; and thus, some notable elements in the novel are specific to Ogidi. The novel therefore provides an artistic rendering of the real town's legal, religious, and political histories *tupu ndi ocha bia* and *oge ndi ocha chilu*. For example, the masked spirits of the ancestors are called the *egwugwu* in Ogidi, as in Umuofia, but in most parts of Igboland they are called *mmoo*. Likewise, the river goddess idemili featured in *Things Fall Apart* is local to a relatively small area of southern Igboland that encompasses Ogidi; and Umuofia—a town said, like Ogidi, to be made

War." During a few of these protests, British officers ordered their soldiers to fire on the women, resulting in the deaths of over fifty women. For further discussion of these events, see Marc Matera, Misty L. Bastian, and Susan Kingsley Kent, *The Women's War of 1929: Gender and Violence in Colonial Nigeria* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Van Allen, "Aba Riots," 11-39; Falola and Paddock, *The Women's War of 1929*.

⁷² Chinua Achebe, interview by Kalu Ogbaa, 1980, reprinted in *Conversations with Chinua Achebe*, 64.

up of nine villages—is known for being home to the most fearsome warriors in the land, just as Ogidi was *tupu ndi ocha bia*.⁷³ And, when British officials arrive in Umuofia, they establish a native court and accompanying jail, just as they did in Ogidi, the presence of such institutions being exceptional. These are not the only similarities that point to the unique ties between Ogidi and the fictional Umuofia. The novel is a uniquely rich source of information on how Ogidi elders of the early/mid twentieth century understood their history, religion, law, and cosmology; and its general historical accuracy can be confirmed by other sources, such as the detailed ethnographies of British anthropologists including G. T. Basden, P. Amaury Talbot, and C. K. Meek, and the renowned anthropological, sociological, and historical accounts of A. E. Afigbo, Victor Uchendu, Chieka Ifemesia, and others.

Many scholars have sparingly used instances from *Things Fall Apart* to illustrate arguments about how religion, law, or governance functioned in Igboland *tupu ndi ocha bia* and the negative effects that colonialism had on Igbo society.⁷⁴ But, because of the manner of the

⁷³ Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 10-11, 162, 171, 183; Patience Nweke, interview by the author, Ikenga, Ogidi, 4 September 2018; Grace Uju Nwosu, interview by the author, Ikenga, Ogidi, 25 September 2018; Chief Dr. Okoye Obumm Ikechukwu, interview by the author, Ogidi, 26 October 2018; Chinedu Okwumelu, Ezeidemili Odida, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 31 July 2018; Christiana Okaro, interview by the author, Ogidi, 4 September 2018; Theresa Odinye, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 12 September 2018; Ifeude Okeke, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 29 August 2018; Ifeoma Chiegbu, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 27 August 2018; Chief Peter Ikem Amobi, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 29 August 2018; Edith Ugolo, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 18 August 2018; Virginia Onwunyili, interview by the author, Ikenga, Ogidi, 30 August 2018; Christopher Nwakeze, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 16 August 2018; Chief Edward Dike Ibemesi, interview by the author; Christian Chieze, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 20 March 2018; Chief Chinedu Olisa C. Onyeama, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 12 April 201; Nwokeke Okunwo, interview by Arinze Ernest Agbogu, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 19 December 1975, in Agbogu, “Ogidi Before 1891,” 77; Ezigbo Otuo, interview by Arinze Ernest Agbogu, Uru Ogidi, 12 December 1975, in Agbogu, “Ogidi Before 1891,” 82; Ezeudo, interview by Arinze Ernest Agbogu, in Agbogu, “Ogidi Before 1891,” 90; Chief Uzowulu Udo, interview by Chukwuma C. C. Osakwe, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 109.

⁷⁴ The following are selected examples: Anyanwu, “Crime and Punishment,” 58-61; Ndubueze L. Mbah, *Emergent Masculinities: Gendered Power and Social Change in the Biafran Atlantic Age* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2019), 130; Chima Korieh, *The Land Has Changed: History, Society, and Gender in Colonial Eastern Nigeria* (Calgary: The University of Calgary Press, 2010), 43-44; Ifi Amadiume, *Daughters of the Goddess, Daughters of Imperialism: African Women, Culture, Power and Democracy* (New York: Zed Books, 2000), 37; John N. Orij, “Transformations in Igbo Cosmology During the Slave Trade: A Study of the Genesis of Place-Names, Totems and Taboos,” in *Between Tradition and Change*, 101, 103; Ekechi, “Religion and Politics,” 120; Jell-Bahlsen, *The Water Goddess in Igbo Cosmology*, 362; Njoku, *The Igbos of Nigeria*, 25-26, 29, 31, 66, 68, 128; I. Chukwukere, “Chi in Igbo Religion and

novel's composition and its resulting close correlation with Ogidi's history, *Things Fall Apart* can be used as a historical source to an extent not previously attempted in Igbo historical scholarship.⁷⁵ The present work, in contrast to its predecessors, includes an in-depth, sustained dialogue with the novel, as I trace the processes of the (re)gendering of law in Ogidi *oge four quarters-oge interregnum*, and thereby arrive at a new understanding of the broader history of that Igbo community. Because it provides vivid detail on the historical processes of re-gendering, colonizing, and reorganizing society according to male-centric, British expectations, which are also major themes within the novel, this work will be a useful tool that can be studied alongside *Things Fall Apart* by those taking advanced placement high school courses as well as undergraduate courses in the fields of African studies, history, and literature. My frequent use of excerpts from the novel throughout this dissertation, and particularly in Chapter 2, offer concrete evidence not only that its plot, motifs, and themes are historically based, but also that understanding indigenous Igbo religion and law is fundamental to understanding the tragedy of Umuofia's and Igboland's falling apart under the pressure of colonial rule. My interpretation of the novel focuses on the centrality of the female principle to the narrative, and I argue that the driving force behind all of the troubles that befall the main character, and Umuofia, is the rejection or transgression of *omenani*, as will be explained further in later chapters.⁷⁶

Thought: The God in Every Man," *Anthropos* 78, no. 3 (1983): 526; Victor Chikezie Uchendu, "Ezi Na Ulo: The Extended Family in Igbo Civilization," *Dialectical Anthropology* 31, no. 1 (2007): 177; Ifi Amadiume, "Bodies, Choices, Globalizing Neocolonial Enchantments: African Matriarchs and Mammy Water," *Meridians* 2, no. 2 (2002): 57.

⁷⁵ It should be noted that several scholars have closely examined and historicized particular themes in *Things Fall Apart*, including gender, but have done so only in articles or essays, not in book-length works. See Nwando Achebe, "Balancing Male and Female Principles: Teaching About Gender in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*," *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* 29, no. 1 (2002): 121-143; Christopher Anyokwu, "Re-Imagining Gender in Chinua Achebe's 'Things Fall Apart,'" *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies* 12, no. 2 (2011): 16-31; Clement A. Okafor, "Chinua Achebe: His Novels and the Environment," *CLA Journal* 32, no. 4 (1989): 433-442; Biodun Jeyifo, "Okonkwo and His Mother: Things Fall Apart and Issues of Gender in the Constitution of African Postcolonial Discourse," *Callaloo* 16, no. 4 (1993): 847-858.

⁷⁶ Nwando Achebe first focused attention to the female principle and argued this point in her article, "Balancing Male and Female Principles," 121-143. This attention to gender is also noted briefly by Kwame Anthony Appiah, in the

Methodology

Throughout this study, as noted above, I use Igbo words, phrases, periodizations, and proverbs, all of which are essential to Igbo knowledge dissemination. I do this so that my oral history collaborators and other Ogidi people will recognize themselves in the work. After all, it is Ogidi people's history, and so should be written from their perspective, rather than from a Western one arranged according to Euro-American periodizations, or only using haphazard English translations to describe uniquely Igbo concepts. In short, I have made a conscious effort to place Igbo cosmology and Ogidi people's experiences at the heart of my study. In particular, the importance of Igbo proverbs and other adages to a rounded understanding of Igbo history, language, and cosmology can hardly be overstated. No child grows up in an Igbo community without being taught the values of Igbo society via adages and aphorisms; indeed, there is even a proverb that asserts the utility and centrality of this: *ilu bu mmanu eji eri okwu*, "proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten."⁷⁷ And, as my dissertation advisor informed one of my graduate seminars, "proverbs explain society to itself."⁷⁸ Because the intended audiences of this study are Igbo people as well as students and academics around the world, I have also strived to write it in accessible language that non-specialists and non-academics can readily understand and appreciate. I hope that it adequately reflects the importance of oral sources, and of Igbo conceptions of time and place.

Forward to *The African Trilogy: Things Fall Apart; Arrow of God; No Longer at Ease*, Chinua Achebe (New York: Penguin, 2017), x.

⁷⁷ Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 7.

⁷⁸ Statement that Nwando Achebe made to us, her students, in a Women, Gender, and Sexuality in Africa seminar, Michigan State University, 29 September 2016.

Privileging Igbo Periodization

Nearly all Africanist historians use the terms ‘pre-colonial,’ ‘colonial,’ and ‘post-colonial’ to delineate eras within their studies. This dissertation, however, employs a unique periodization aligned more closely with those used by the people of Ogidi both *tupu ndi ocha bia* and *oge ndi ocha chilu*. Igbo history can be traced back many centuries, as confirmed by archeological finds at Igbo Ukwu and other sites in southern Igboland dating back 4,500 to 5,000 years.⁷⁹ *Tupu ndi ocha bia*, the “small Igbo week” comprised four days, while the “big Igbo week” had eight. An Igbo month consisted of twenty-eight days, seven small weeks, or one lunar cycle; and an Igbo year, thirteen lunar months.⁸⁰ This system of time measurement was ubiquitous across Igboland until the arrival of the British⁸¹ and for much of Igboland, the periodizations *tupu ndi ocha bia* and *oge ndi ocha chilu* signify the broad expanses of what is generally referred to as pre-colonial and colonial history, respectively. However, there are also periodizations specific to Ogidi that I utilize throughout this dissertation. The starting point of this study is *oge four quarters*, an early phase in Ogidi’s history during which the four large sections of the town that still exist today were established. To understand the importance of this periodization, however, we must first understand Ogidi’s tradition of origin, which holds that it was founded by a man named Ezechuamagha.⁸²

⁷⁹ Okwu, *Igbo Culture and the Christian Missions*, 4, 6; Ugonna, *Mmonwu*, 12-13; Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, 3; Ifemesia, *Traditional Humane Living*, 18; John Nwachimereze Oriji, *Traditions of Igbo Origin: A Study of Pre-Colonial Population Movements in Africa* Revised Edition (New York: Peter Lang, 1994), 10. Okwu even posits that people have lived in what is considered the Igbo heartland for up to 60,000 years, although before about 4,500 years ago it is not clear that those people were distinctly Igbo (Okwu, *Igbo Culture and the Christian Missions*, 6). Historians A. E. Afigbo and Chieka Ifemesia asserted that the people who became the Igbo first settled in a triangular geographical area in between the towns of Awka, Orlu, and Okigwi, which stretches from the northern Igbo plateau into the central Igboland forests (A. E. Afigbo, “The Aro of South-Eastern Nigeria: A Socio-Historical Analysis of Legends of their Origin: Part II,” *African Notes* 7, no. 1 (no year of publication given): 105; Ifemesia, *Traditional Humane Living*, 21).

⁸⁰ Afigbo, “Time and Its Measurement,” 418; M. Angulu Onwuejeogwu, *The Principles of Ethnogeneachronology: Dating Nri (Igbo) Oral Tradition* (Benin City: Ethiope Publishing Corporation, 1997), 47.

⁸¹ In addition to following the seven-day week of the Gregorian calendar, the four-day week is still used in Igboland to this day, primarily for purposes of rotating local markets and indigenous religious festivals.

⁸² Oriji, *Traditions of Igbo Origin*, 48-49; Dominic Nnamdi Obijiofor, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 17 April 2018; Chukwuka Jerry Okongwu and Chukwudi M Okongwu, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 2 May

Although his origins are unclear,⁸³ most of my oral history collaborators agreed that he was a hunter and warrior who married a woman named Anuibosi with whom he had a son named Inwelle. Inwelle, in turn, had a son named Ogidi.⁸⁴ Some of my collaborators as well as a few interviewed in the 1970s and '80s placed the lifetime of this Ogidi *oge slave trade*, i.e., sometime during the period from the late sixteenth to the mid-nineteenth century.⁸⁵ Ogidi had two wives—Duaja and

2018; Ori C. Uzowulu, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 16 March 2018; Chief John Amanwa, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 28 March 2018; Anonymous oral history collaborator 1, interview by the author; Chief Chinedu Olisa C. Onyeama, interview by the author; Ozoekwe Clement Okudo, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 27 April 2018; Ogbogu Azubuike Chuka, interview by the author; Chief David N. C. Akobi, interview by the author; High Chief Robinson Okudo, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 1 March 2018; Emeka Daniel Onwujeaka, interview by Spencer Chuka Obi, in Obi, "The Ogidi Nkpor Relations: A Case Study of Land Disputes 1925-1966" (B.A. Thesis, Department of History and International Studies, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, 2005), 48.

⁸³ Some say that Ezechuamagha was a warrior and hunter and eventually settled in the forest of what is present-day Akanano quarter of Ogidi; others say Chukwu dropped him out of the sky and that he landed in what is now Ogidi; others say he was a hunter from Arochukwu; and still others say Ezechuamagha migrated from the town of Nri or Aguleri. Ori C. Uzowulu, interview by the author; Chief John Amanwa, interview by the author; Anonymous oral history collaborator 1, interview by the author; Nwosu Enwude, interview by Arinze Ernest Agbogu, in Agbogu, "Ogidi Before 1891," 40; Okwesili Okerulu, interview by Arinze Ernest Agbogu, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 14 November 1975, in Agbogu, "Ogidi Before 1891," 51; Izundu Mgbemena, interview by Arinze Ernest Agbogu, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 15 November 1975, in Agbogu, "Ogidi Before 1891," 60; Chief Isama Nwawuluaru Nwosu, interview by Ifeoma Catherine Onwugbufor, Ikenga Ogidi, 19 February 1992, in Onwugbufor, "The Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy in Ogidi," 97; Udoh Boniface Uyanwa, interview by the author; Ichie Ezigbo Otuo, interview by Anthonia Uchenna Anyegbunam, Uru Ogidi, 25 September 1983, in Anyegbunam, "The External Relations of Ogidi," 133; Okwesili Obiozor, interview by Arinze Ernest Agbogu, Ikenga Ogidi, 15 November 1975, in Agbogu, "Ogidi Before 1891," 65; Ezigbo Otuo, interview by Arinze Ernest Agbogu, in Agbogu, "Ogidi Before 1891," 79; Chief P.N. Ubakamma (Ichie Ezejiaku), interview by Ifeoma Catherine Onwugbufor, Uru Ogidi, 24 February 1992, in Onwugbufor, "The Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy in Ogidi," 111; Chief Chinedu Olisa C. Onyeama, interview by the author; Chief Ozoekwe Clement Okudo, interview by the author.

⁸⁴ Obi A. Okudo, interview by the author, Uru Ogidi, 2 April 2018; Anonymous oral history collaborator 1, interview by the author; Onwuameze Ikwuwelu, interview by the author, Ogidi, 5 April 2018; Chief Godfrey Amazikwu, interview by the author; Sir Albert Obi (Rex) Ezegbo, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 11 April 2018; Dominic Nnamdi Obijiofor, interview by the author; Sir Anthony Obiora Okoye, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 19 April 2018; Chief Hillary Osegbo, interview by the author; Chief Ozoekwe Clement Okudo, interview by the author; Chukwuka Jerry Okongwu and Chukwudi M Okongwu, interview by the author; High Chief Robinson Okudo, interview by the author; Oriji, *Traditions of Igbo Origin*, 48-49; O. Osakwe, "The Origin and Settlement of Ogidi People and their Ancient Government," *History* 121 (1987): 4; Ichie Ezigbo Otuo, interview by Anthonia Uchenna Anyegbunam, in Anyegbunam, "The External Relations of Ogidi," 133; Chief Isama Nwawuluaru Nwosu, interview by Ifeoma Catherine Onwugbufor, in Onwugbufor, "The Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy in Ogidi," 97.

⁸⁵ Ogbogu Azubuike Chuka, interview by the author; Chukwuka Jerry Okongwu, interview by the author; Chukwudi M. Okongwu, interview by the author; Rev. Victor Okoye, interview by Arinze Ernest Agbogu, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 13 December 1975, in Agbogu, "Ogidi Before 1891," 69; Nwokeke Okuwunwo, interview by Arinze Ernest Agbogu, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 19 December 1975, in Agbogu, "Ogidi Before 1891," 76; Lawrence Agulefo, interview by Arinze Ernest Agbogu, in Agbogu, "Ogidi Before 1891," 95; Nwosu Enwude (Nwawulu), interview by Anthonia Uchenna Anyegbunam, in Anyegbunam, "The External Relations of Ogidi," 95.

Amalanyia—and between them, they bore him nine sons.⁸⁶ With Duaja, he fathered Akanano, Uru, Ezinkwo, Umu-Udo, and Ama-Okwu; and with Amalanyia, Ikenga, Uruagu, Achalla Ogidi, and Nne-Ogidi.⁸⁷ The town’s moniker Ogidi Ebo Teghete (Ogidi of nine villages) is closely linked to these nine sons,⁸⁸ and its four quarters that exist today—Akanano, Uru, Ezinkwo, and Ikenga—are named after the strongest four of Ogidi’s sons, listed from eldest to youngest. We are told that the other five left the town, giving up their rights to land in Ogidi, either because they were too weak to compete with their stronger brothers, or because the latter had maltreated them,⁸⁹ and it was only after this that the four remaining sons settled in the respective areas that now bear their names. I tentatively date *oge four quarters* to a time between the late sixteenth and late eighteenth centuries CE, based on my analysis of the oral tradition of the lineages that descended from the man Ogidi.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Oraegbuna Joseph Iwobi, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 29 March 2018; Chukwuka Jerry Okongwu and Chukwudi M. Okongwu, interview by the author; Onwuameze Ikwuwelu, interview by the author; Grace Ufodiana, interview by Ibeguna Fredrick Chijioko Ibeguna, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 20 November 2016, in Ibeguna, “Nwafor Festival in Ogidi Community of Anambra State (1999-2016)” (B.A. Thesis, Department of History and International Studies, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, December 2016), 47; Ezigbo Otuo, interview by Arinze Ernest Agbogu, in Agbogu, “Ogidi Before 1891,” 80; Ibemesi, *Ogidi*, 5; Oriji, *Traditions of Igbo Origin*, 49.

⁸⁷ Ibemesi, *Ogidi*, 5; Sir Albert Obi (Rex) Ezegbo, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 11 April 2018; High Chief Robinson Okudo, interview by the author.

⁸⁸ Oraegbuna Joseph Iwobi, interview by the author; Onwuameze Ikwuwelu, interview by the author; Grace Ufodiana, interview by Ibeguna Fredrick Chijioko Ibeguna, in Ibeguna, “Nwafor Festival in Ogidi,” 47; Ezigbo Otuo, interview by Arinze Ernest Agbogu, in Agbogu, “Ogidi Before 1891,” 80; Ibemesi, *Ogidi*, 5. Chieka Ifemesia, an Ogidi indigene, translated Ogidi Ebo Teghete as “Ogidi (comprising) nine maximal lineages.” The distinction between village (usually called *mba*) and maximal lineage (*ebo*) is probably an issue of semantics, as the meaning is the same either way. See Ifemesia, *Traditional Humane Living*, 70-71, 129.

⁸⁹ Okwesili Okorulu, interview by Arinze Ernest Agbogu, in Agbogu, “Ogidi Before 1891,” 52; Okeke Onyejekwe, Ezeinwelle, interview by Arinze Ernest Agbogu, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 19 December 1975, in Agbogu, “Ogidi Before 1891,” 55; Nwokeke Okunwo, interview by Arinze Ernest Agbogu, in Agbogu, “Ogidi Before 1891,” 74; Nwosu Enwude (Nwawulu), interview by Anthonia Uchenna Anyegbunam, in Anyegbunam, “The External Relations of Ogidi,” 95.

⁹⁰ It was not until the sons of Ogidi had grown to adulthood and established their homesteads that the four quarters came into existence, and the subdivisions within each quarter were named after the sons or subsequent male descendants of Akanano, Ezinkwo, Uru, and Ikenga. According to testimony from several oral history collaborators, as noted above, creation of these quarters occurred no earlier than the beginning of the Atlantic slave trade, as the man Ogidi lived during that time. And, the four quarters were established no later than the late eighteenth century, at least two generations before the creation of Ogidi’s first age grades in the 1820s. I came to this conclusion based on the way that the divisions within each quarter are named: each village and subset within each village were all named after men who were descended from Akanano, Uru, Ezinkwo, and Ikenga. We can trace the minimum possible number of generations that existed between *oge four quarters* and *oge Ulo Enyi* (during the time of the age grade *Ulo Enyi*,

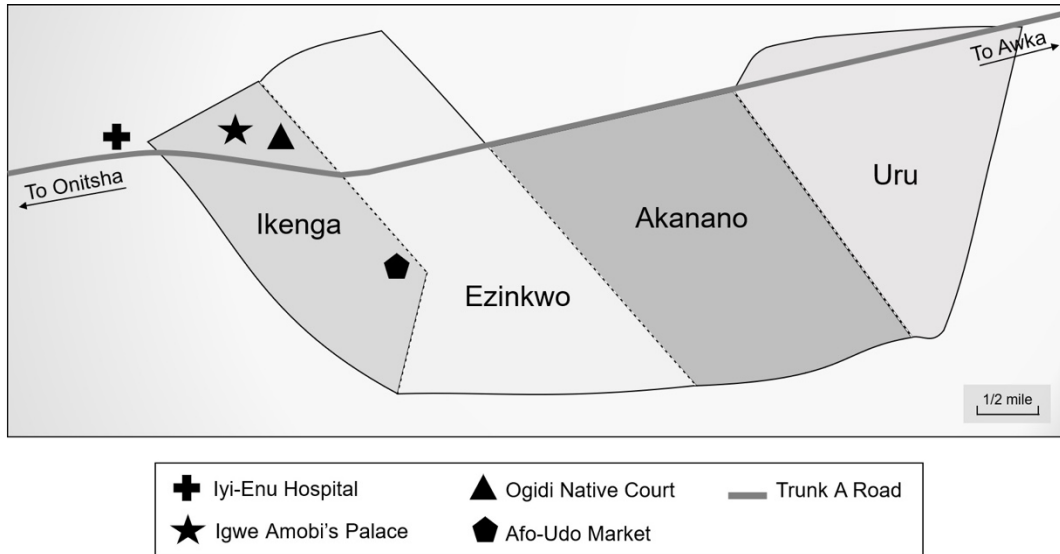


Figure 5. Map of Ogidi

The four quarters are shown as they were c. 1914⁹¹

One key reason for beginning this study with *oge four quarters* is the integral dynamics of religion and law that are organized within and across the quarters. For example, the most prominent

alternatively called *Isisekpunti*), which was the first age grade in Ogidi and which comprised males born soon before or during 1826 (Ibemesi, *Ogidi*, 82; Achebe, “Ogidi Palaver,” 31; Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, “Traditional Law and Colonial Change in Ogidi” (B.A. Thesis, Department of History, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 1979), 10). Historian Dike Ibemesi lists the names of several men belonging to the first age grade, denoting from which village each hailed. In order for these men to have hailed from certain villages within each quarter, they must have been born at least two generations later than the men whose namesakes were the quarters. These villages are the namesakes of sons of the men named Akanano, Uru, and Ezinkwo respectively, and Akanano, Uru, and Ezinkwo were the sons of Ogidi himself. Therefore, the members of the first age grade were at least three generations younger than the man named Ogidi. Based on standard Igbo generational intervals of 20 to 50 years (Onwuejeogwu, *The Principles of Ethnogeneachronology*, 119-149), Ogidi must have been born no later than the 1760s, which was roughly sixty years or three twenty-year generations before the *Ulo Enyi* age grade. Additionally, historian Arinze Agbogu noted that the settlement of Ikenga quarter, which was settled last, occurred “well before the 1800s” (Arinze Agbogu, *Ogidi: Political History*, (Owerri: Treasure Books, 2009), 26). Moreover, a few of my oral history collaborators asserted that Ezechuamagha was born around 1550, Inwelle around 1580, and Ogidi around 1610, although there is no other corroborating evidence for these specific dates: Chukwuka Jerry Okongwu, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 2 May 2018; Chukwudi M. Okongwu, interview by the author; Chief Rufus Umeanor, interview by Kosi Frances Obiefuna, Ikenga Ogidi, 3 August 2015, in Obiefuna, “Cultural Revival in Ogidi After the Nigerian Civil War: 1970-1980” (B. A. Thesis, Department of History and International Studies, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, 2016), 69.

⁹¹ The landmarks indicated on this map—Iyi-Enu Hospital, Igwe Amobi’s palace, Ogidi Native Court, Afo-Udo market, and Trunk A Road—will be discussed in detail in the following chapters.

Map created by the author using Microsoft PowerPoint. In addition to the author’s own estimations of town and quarter boundaries, she consulted the following hand-drawn maps found in the appendices of University of Nigeria, Nsukka bachelors’ theses written on Ogidi: Agbogu, “Ogidi Before 1891”; Anyegbunam, “The External Relations of Ogidi”; Nwabufu, “Traditional Law and Colonial Change”; Obiamaka M. Amaifeobu, “Socio-Religious Importance of Ofala Festival in My Town—Ogidi” (B. A. Thesis, Department of Religion, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 1986). The author also consulted Google Maps as a guide for the placement of Trunk A Road.

deities had shrines in each quarter, and those shrines also served as courts of law for their respective quarters. In some deities' cases, however, one of their four shrines was designated as the senior or most important one.⁹² The senior shrine of the god and oracle udo, for instance, was and still is located in Ikenga quarter, while the three udo shrines in the other quarters were deemed of lesser significance. Another common locale for adjudicating law was an *ilo* (public playground or courtyard) within a quarter, where the *egwugwu* council often settled disputes among members of that quarter. In Ikenga, the designated space for the *egwugwu* to hold court was at Idemili Square, an *ilo* located near both a minor shrine of the goddess idemili and the senior shrine of udo.⁹³

An additional reason for starting this study with *oge four quarters* involves the fact that some disputes initially mediated at the family level would move up through the hierarchical human court system, as opposed to the spiritual court system that involved the deities and the *egwugwu*. That is, most disputes among members of an extended family would be dealt with first by either the *umunna*, the court comprising the adult sons of that family, or the *umuokpu*, the court comprising its adult daughters. If the issue could not be resolved by one of these lower courts, it would advance to a higher one, composed of either men or women at the village level, then at the quarter level. Then, if it still remained unresolved, or if a disputant was dissatisfied with the judicial decision, the issue would be brought to the final court of appeals of the human realm: that of *umuokpu Ogidi*, which consisted of all the adult daughters of the town.⁹⁴ Because one of the major

⁹² For major deities including ani, idemili, ogwugwu, and udo, there was a senior shrine in one quarter and lesser shrines in the other quarters. Some of the less prominent deities had shrines in only one quarter. Geoffrey Parrinder, *West African Religion: A Study of the Beliefs and Practices of Akan, Ewe, Yoruba, Ibo, and Kindred Peoples* (London: Epworth Press, 1969 [1949]), 37; Ifemesia, *Traditional Humane Living*, 72.

⁹³ Ogbogu Azubuike Chuka, interview by the author; Sir Albert Obi (Rex) Ezegbo, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 2 October 2018; Chief Nwosu Nwawulu Enwude, interview by Chukwuma C. C. Osakwe, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 90; Chief Louis Okoye, interview by Chukwuma C. C. Osakwe, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 82.

⁹⁴ Zinobia Ikpeze, interview by the author, Trans-Ekulu Enugu, 24 January 2018; Chief Nwabuoku Osakwe (Dibueni Nwanyi), interview by the author, 2 October 2018; Chinwe Iloani, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 13 September 2018; Edith Ugolo, interview by the author; Amaka Molokwu, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 18 August

foci of this dissertation is how law functioned in this multi-level court system, I chose *oge four quarters* as my temporal starting point in part because, by that time, all of these levels had already been established and were functioning in all their subsequent complexity. *Oge four quarters* is a form of what anthropologist M. Angulu Onwuejeogwu describes as *ifi ima atu*, “reference time,” which communities across Igboland have employed to distinguish among various eras and epochs of their respective histories.⁹⁵ Reference time reflects drastic, usually detrimental changes that have affected society, such as the Atlantic slave trade, the arrival of the British, or the Spanish influenza of 1919.⁹⁶ It is important to note that the order of events is generally accounted more important in Igbo culture than the distinct amount of time that passed between one event and another, so it is not always possible to assign dates or time periods that correspond closely to Euro-American conceptions.⁹⁷

The other eras that I use to periodize the history of the (re)gendering of law in Ogidi are also examples of reference time, some overlapping with each other, and others being subsections of longer time periods. *Tupu ndi ocha bia*, literally meaning “before the white people arrived,” is a broad term that refers to any time prior to the arrival of the British missionaries and colonial officials in Igboland. A subtle variant of this timeframe is *tupu ndi uka bia*, literally, “before the church people arrived,” and can be used to refer either to the time before the first missionaries arrived in Igboland in 1857, or before they reached a specific Igbo town. In Ogidi, for example,

2018; Nkiru Nwachibue Ozumba, interview by the author, Ogidi, 1 August 2018; Ifechukwu Agbakoba, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 1 September 2018; Chief Louis Okoye, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 82; Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 168; Achebe, “Ogidi Palaver,” 31; Meek, *Law and Authority*, 158, 169; Sylvia Leith-Ross, *African Women: A Study of the Ibo of Nigeria* (London: Routledge & Keagan Paul, 1939), 164; A. E. Afigbo, “A History of Igbo Traditional Textile Industry,” in *Igbo History and Society: The Essays of Adiele Afigbo*, ed. Toyin Falola (Trenton: African World Press, 2005), 239.

⁹⁵ Onwuejeogwu, *The Principles of Ethnogeneachronology*, 47-48.

⁹⁶ Onwuejeogwu, *The Principles of Ethnogeneachronology*, 47; Achebe, *The Female King of Colonial Nigeria*, 19, 23; Oriji, *Traditions of Igbo Origin*, 10-11.

⁹⁷ Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 8.

tupu ndi uka bia refers to any time prior to 1892, when the CMS arrived there. Often, *tupu ndi ocha bia* and *tupu ndi uka bia* refer to the same expanse of time, since the first missionaries were among the first white men to arrive in Igboland. Another extended time period is *oge ndi ocha chilu*, literally “during the time that the white men ruled,” and I generally use this in lieu of the term ‘colonial era’ to reflect the Igbo perspective of having foreigners invade and impose a new style of government, as opposed to the hegemonic British perspective on Nigeria as a colony.

Other periods that I delineate in my study of Ogidi’s history are based on the reigns of *ndi igwe*, monarchs of the town who rose to power through the invention of kingship. Of these, the two that are most prominent in this dissertation are *oge Walter* and *oge interregnum*. The former means “during the time of Walter,” and refers to the reign of Igwe Walter Amobi, which lasted from his coronation in July 1904 to his death in December 1925. Following his demise, there was a period of hiatus in which Ogidi had no *igwe*, and my oral history collaborators referred to this by the Latin term, also current in English, ‘interregnum’; thus, *oge interregnum*, “during the period between the reigns,” refers to the period from late 1925 to mid-1944 when there was no *igwe* ruling the town. The end point of this dissertation is the end of the latter era, because in 1944 Ogidi adopted its first written constitution, which excluded women and spiritual forces from local governance entirely, and left all executive, legislative, and judicial authority in the hands of men. In Chapter 5, however, I discuss an instance of women reasserting their judicial authority by defying the new *igwe*’s orders *oge Benjamin*, “during the reign of Igwe Benjamin Amobi,” which lasted from 1944 to 1973. In the conclusion, I also touch on eras named after the third, fourth, and fifth *ndi igwe* of Ogidi. In the process of writing this dissertation, I received criticism from several colleagues for my consistent use of Igbo periodization, as being annoying, tedious, and superfluous. Despite such disparagement, I have maintained the privileging of Igbo periodization

because this is, first and foremost, a study of Igbo history. Such periodization may indeed appear confusing to a Euro-American audience, at least initially; however, I cite the corresponding dates according to the Gregorian calendar whenever possible to help such readers orient themselves.

Working with Sources

There is an Igbo adage that *otuonge nwe oke-okpa rua oha nwe oluya*, “the rooster belongs to one person, but its voice belongs to the public.”⁹⁸ While the writing of this dissertation was done by one person, it nevertheless has emerged out of the collaborative efforts of many. Like the rooster, I aim to accurately reflect the many voices of Ogidi’s people. There is another Igbo proverb saying, “until lions have their own histories, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter.”⁹⁹ In my desire to understand Igbo history, I am interested in more than the history of the hunt. This drives my insistence on privileging Igbo periodization, as noted above. Likewise, I must turn to oral sources, since Igbo knowledge dissemination has been done primarily via auditory methods rather than written ones.¹⁰⁰ Oral sources including life histories and family histories, traditions of creation and origin, traditions of epic events or eras, folktales, *gwam gwam gwam* riddles,¹⁰¹ and proverbs are all legitimate oral history documents. As I will discuss in the literature review, below, some of the most useful sources on Ogidi’s history are oral ones, collections of testimony given by elderly custodians of the town’s history. Thus, my main data were provided by the oral history collaborators I interviewed in 2018, and those interviewed by other researchers in Ogidi from the 1970s to the 2010s. Of course, I also utilized written materials: predominately,

⁹⁸ Igbo proverb recorded in Pachocinski, *Proverbs of Africa*, 174.

⁹⁹ Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 34.

¹⁰⁰ *Tupu ndi ocha bia*, the Igbo developed and used a written language called *nsibidi*, but oral knowledge transmission remained significantly more common. See A. E. Afigbo, *Ropes of Sand: Studies in Igbo History and Culture* (Ibadan: University Press, 1981), 365, 374-376; Uchendu, “Ezi Na Ulo,” 191; Mbah, *Emergent Masculinities*, 79; Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, 35-39.

¹⁰¹ This type of Igbo riddle is known by the introductory words *gwam gwam gwam* (literally “tell me, tell me, tell me”) that the orator says to signal that he or she is about to tell a riddle.

colonial officials' intelligence reports and correspondence, native court records, and other documents housed at the Nigerian National Archive at Enugu (NAE), as well as missionary periodicals and reports housed at the CMS Archive. When dealing with the archival documents, I kept in mind the implicit and explicit biases that their authors may have held while living and working in Igboland in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and which often resulted in one-sided narratives of Europeans bringing "civilization" and "salvation" to the Igbo people.

Despite the many advantages of using oral sources, they have some shortcomings, and must be scrutinized as carefully as written ones. As anthropologist and historian Jan Vansina warned us, every type of historical source has its biases.¹⁰² I evaluated each of my oral history collaborators' possible agendas, and considered whether such agendas influenced their framing of Ogidi's history, whether through the addition or omission of certain details. Omissions that are consistent across many or all collaborators point to community silences.¹⁰³ The most salient of these silences that I noted was the lack of accurate description, or even mention, of female-centric law and female authority in an overwhelming majority of my collaborators' narrations of Ogidi *tupu ndi ocha bia*. Ogidi people's silence on such female-centric law and female political participation is evidence of the successful colonization of the mind,¹⁰⁴ particularly the colonial indoctrination of Igbo people with the belief that Igbo society, including its law, has always been controlled by men. It will be argued that the androcentric distortion of Ogidi's and Igboland's pre-

¹⁰² Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965 [1961]), 141.

¹⁰³ For more on community silences in oral history research of Igboland, see Achebe, *The Female King of Colonial Nigeria*, 14.

¹⁰⁴ I borrow this notion from Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, who argues that the most powerful tool of colonialism was convincing indigenous peoples that they (and their cultures, histories, religions, values, and worldviews) were either nonexistent or unimportant. See Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: J. Currey; Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1986).

colonial history that I observed in 2018 is one of the many long-lasting effects of the re-gendering of law.

The Igbo say *ejiro ililo ochie agwo oya obialu ofuu*, meaning “a disease never seen before cannot be cured with everyday herbs.”¹⁰⁵ Like healers, historians must find new solutions to solve new or difficult problems, such as those I encountered with certain source materials consulted during this research. In my interpretation of the oral and archival sources, I practiced one of Nwando Achebe’s innovative methods: reading against the grain, or finding meaning in the silences and filling gaps by creatively using various alternative source materials.¹⁰⁶ For example, the only colonial documentation of the 1914 Ogidi women’s market protest consists of a mere two paragraphs in a nine-page report from 1915, detailing the many grievances that Ogidi’s people had against their *igwe*.¹⁰⁷ The fact that the colonial administration only deemed the women’s actions barely worthy of mention in an otherwise meticulously detailed report intimates the low opinion that colonial officials had of Igbo women, and the former’s failure to recognize the women’s measures for what they truly were. To fill the gaps in the narrative of this event, I relied on oral sources—testimony that other researchers collected from collaborators between the 1970s and 2010s and the information I collected from my collaborators—and Achebe’s published account of the protest to produce a comprehensive account of the event and the women who led it.

¹⁰⁵ Igbo proverb recorded in Pachocinski, *Proverbs of Africa*, 299.

¹⁰⁶ Achebe uses this technique throughout *The Female King of Colonial Nigeria*. In it, Achebe explains that “oral historians more likely than not will be faced with the community’s uncertainty and lack of clarity at one point or the other. It was during these times that I found that marrying oral knowledge collected from the custodians of memory with available written sources completed the story” (16).

¹⁰⁷ NAE, OP 174/1914, ONPROF 7/1/13: “Complaint by certain villages of Ogidi against Chief Amobi: Letter of reparation from the Minor Chiefs of Ogidi.”

A Review of the Literature

Literature on Ogidi

Igbo historiography, in the strict sense that excludes oral sources, commenced in the early twentieth century: with anthropological writings such as Northcote Thomas' multi-volume *Anthropological Report on the Ibo-Speaking Peoples of Nigeria* (1913), G. T. Basden's *Among the Ibos of Nigeria* (1921), and P. Amaury Talbot's multi-volume *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria* (1926).¹⁰⁸ These works provided sketches of Igbo law, religion, and society, but from a male-centric perspective, which resulted in male-biased distortions of the Igbo worldview.¹⁰⁹ Then, in response to the 1929 Women's War, the colonial administration encouraged a new wave of ethnographers to study Igbo society, chiefly to understand what led women to 'make war' on¹¹⁰—or, as the British termed it, to "riot" against—warrant chiefs and the native court system. This prompted work by anthropologists Sylvia Leith-Ross, M. M. Green, Margery Perham, C. K. Meek, Daryll Forde, and G. I. Jones, as well as additional studies by Basden and Talbot.¹¹¹ Although Leith-Ross and Green focused on the roles of women in Igbo society, most of the above-mentioned literature still focused on men and presented male-biased descriptions of indigenous Igbo religion,

¹⁰⁸ Northcote Thomas, *Anthropological Report on the Ibo-Speaking Peoples of Nigeria Part I. Law and Custom of the Ibo of the Awka Neighbourhood, S. Nigeria* (London: Harrison and Sons, 1913); G. T. Basden, *Among the Ibos of Nigeria: An Account of the Curious and Interesting Habits, Customs and Beliefs of a little known African People by one who has for many years lived amongst them on close and intimate terms.* (London: Frank Cass, 1966 [1921]); Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria*.

¹⁰⁹ An example of such renderings is ethnographers' inaccurate assertions that the high God—Chukwu—is male, when Chukwu is in fact neither male nor female. Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 28.

¹¹⁰ 'Making war' is an indigenous Igbo legal sanction used on someone who transgresses *omenani*, the laws of other deities, or *iwu* and refuses to perform the required cleansing rites or accept the punishment that allows for amelioration. This activity is the exclusive preserve of women, though its targets are frequently men who abuse their wives or otherwise cause harm to female members of the community. 'Making war' can take many forms, but has most often been associated with 'sitting on a man,' which is the type of 'making war' that historian Judith Van Allen first popularized in American academia in the 1970s. See "'Sitting on a Man': Colonialism and the Lost Political Institutions of Igbo Women," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 6, no. 2 (1972): 165-181.

¹¹¹ Forde and Jones, *The Igbo and Ibibio-Speaking Peoples*, 26; Meek, *Law and Authority*; Basden, *Niger Ibos*; P. Amaury Talbot, *Tribes of the Niger Delta: Their Religions and Customs*. London: Frank Cass, 1967 [1932]; Leith-Ross, *African Women*; Green, *Igbo Village Affairs*; Margery Perham, *Native Administration in Nigeria* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937).

law, and governance. Nevertheless, these early ethnographies offer useful primary source material on the religious and political practices of communities in the Onitsha-Awka area of southern Igboland, which included Ogidi, *oge ndi ocha chilu*.¹¹² Because of similarities in laws, traditions, values, and beliefs among the communities of the Onitsha-Awka area, these somewhat generalized studies provide qualitative data on Ogidi's observance of law and religion in the early to mid-twentieth century.

The subsequent phase of scholarship on Igbo history, published from the late 1950s through the 2010s, but primarily since the '70s, notably includes the pioneering work of Kenneth Onwuka Dike, A. E. Afigbo, Victor Uchendu, C. C. Ifemesia, and Elizabeth Isichei.¹¹³ In contrast to the previous phase, the latter one has offered Igbo-centric views of Igboland's experiences *tupu ndi ocha bia* and *oge ndi ocha chilu*, in part because it has been more heavily informed by oral history. Of particular importance to the use of oral history in the present study are historian A. E. Afigbo's essays and articles collected in Toyin Falola's 2005 edited volume, *Igbo History and Society: The*

¹¹² This area of southern Igboland, located in the Anambra Valley along the eastern bank of the River Niger features prominently in the works of Thomas, Basden, and Meek: Thomas, *Anthropological Report*; Meek, *Law and Authority*; Basden, *Among the Ibos*; Basden, *Niger Ibos*.

¹¹³ Dike, *100 Years of British Rule in Nigeria*; Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs*; Afigbo, *Ropes of Sand*; Afigbo, *The Igbo and Their Neighbours*; Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria*; C. C. Ifemesia, *Southeastern Nigeria in the Nineteenth Century: An Introductory Analysis* (New York: NOK Publishers, 1978); Ifemesia, *Traditional Humane Living*; Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*; Elizabeth Isichei, *The Ibo People and the Europeans: The Genesis of a Relationship to 1906* (London: Faber and Faber, 1973).

Other notable scholars produced important work during this period: G. I. Jones, "Ecology and Social Structure among the North East Ibo" *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 31, no. 2 (1961): 117-134; Austin J. Shelton, "Onojo Ogboni: Problems of Identification and Historicity in the Oral Traditions of the Igala and Northern Nsukka Igbo of Nigeria," *The Journal of American Folklore* 81, no. 321 (1968): 243-257; Austin J. Shelton, *The Igbo-Igala Borderland: Religion and Social Control in Indigenous African Colonialism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1971); Van Allen, "'Sitting on a Man,'" 165-181; Van Allen, "'Aba Riots,'" 11-39; Kamene Okonjo, "The Dual-Sex Political System in Operation: Igbo Women and Community Politics in Midwestern Nigeria" in *Women in Africa: Studies in Social and Economic Change*, ed. Nancy J. Hafkin and Edna G. Bay (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976), 45-58; Nwabara, *Iboland*; Northrup, *Trade Without Rulers*; Achebe, *Morning Yet on Creation Day*; Achebe, *Hopes and Impediments*; Gailey, *The Road to Aba*; Henderson, *The King in Every Man*; C. N. Ubah, "Religious Change among the Igbo during the Colonial Period," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 18, no. 1 (1988): 71-91; Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*; Nina Emma Mba, *Nigerian Women Mobilized: Women's Political Activity in Southern Nigeria, 1900-1965* (Berkeley: University of California Institute of International Studies, 1982).

Essays of Adiele Afigbo; historian Don C. Ohadike's *Anioma: A Social History of the Western Igbo People* (1994); historian Axel Harneit-Sievers' *Igbo Community Histories: Locality and History in South-eastern Nigeria* (1997); Nwando Achebe's *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings: Female Power and Authority in Northern Igboland, 1900-1960* (2005), *The Female King of Colonial Nigeria: Ahebi Ugbabe* (2011) and "'Ogidi Palaver': The 1914 Women's Market Protest" (2011).¹¹⁴ The above-mentioned studies all demonstrate that writing a thorough and accurate history of an Igbo community or communities is possible, provided that it is informed by oral sources: chiefly, multi-generational oral traditions and histories from that community. I build on this foundation by heavily incorporating oral sources into my work, and by recognizing particular custodians of oral history as both living archives of valuable historical information and as historians in their own right; and as such, as vital contributors to the historiography of Ogidi.

Although the early ethnographies of Basden, Meek, and Thomas focused on the Onitsha-Awka area, and can therefore be said to be part of Ogidi historiography, a few histories of Ogidi alone have also been written. These include Dike Ibemesi's *Ogidi: Historical Perspective of a*

¹¹⁴ Afigbo, essays in *Igbo History and Society*; Don C. Ohadike, *Anioma: A Social History of the Western Igbo People* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1994); Axel Harneit-Sievers, *Igbo Community Histories: Locality and History in South-eastern Nigeria* (Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 1997); Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*; Achebe, *The Female King of Colonial Nigeria*, Achebe, "'Ogidi Palaver.'"

There are, indeed, numerous other works that engage significantly with oral history in Igboland and elsewhere in Africa that have influenced the present study: Afigbo, *Ropes of Sand*; Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*; Elizabeth Isichei, ed., *Igbo Worlds: An Anthology of Oral Histories and Historical Descriptions* (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1978); A. E. Afigbo, "Oral Tradition and the History of Segmentary Societies," *History in Africa* 12 (1985): 1-10; Oyeronke Oyewumi, "Making History, Creating Gender: Some Methodological and Interpretive Questions in the Writing of Oyo Oral Traditions," *History in Africa* 25 (1998): 263-305; Susan Geiger, "What's So Feminist about Women's Oral History?" *Journal of Women's History* 2, no.1 (1990): 169-180; David William Cohen, "Doing Social History from Pim's Doorway," in *Reliving the Past: The Worlds of Social History*, ed. Oliver Zunz (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 191-235; Vansina, *Oral Tradition*; Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (London: James Currey, 1985); Chima Korieh, *The Land Has Changed: History, Society and Gender in Colonial Eastern Nigeria* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2010); Susan Arndt, *African Women's Literature, Orature, and Intertextuality: Igbo Oral Narrative as Nigerian Women Writers' Models and Objects of Writing Back* (Bayreuth: Bayreuth University, 1998); John C. McCall, *Dancing Histories: Heuristic Ethnography with the Ohafia Igbo* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000); Mbah, *Emergent Masculinities*; Carolyn Keyes, *Adire: Cloth, Gender and Social Change in Southwestern Nigeria, 1841-1991* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993); Onaiwu Ogbomo, *When Men and Women Mattered: A History of Gender Relations among the Owan of Nigeria* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1997).

People (1995), Achebe's previously mentioned "Ogidi Palaver," and three other publications that are out of print and were only ever available in Nigeria: Ibemesi's *Iyi-Enu Hospital: Origins and Development (1907-1982)* (1982), the *Ogidi Anglican Centenary 1892-1992: An Outline History* (1992), which was jointly written by numerous scholars and members of Ogidi's elite, and historian Arinze Agbogu's *Ogidi: Political History* (2009).¹¹⁵ That is, these are the only contributions in the sense of Western scholarship; but the historiography of Ogidi is rather rich if examined through an Igbo lens. Thus, I add to this list two forms of contribution to Ogidi historiography that many Western academics might find controversial: Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (the historical value of which was discussed above), and the body of oral histories provided by two custodians of Ogidi's history, men from Ikenga quarter known best by their respective monikers of Nwawulu and Rex.

Nwawulu can reasonably be regarded as the foremost oral historian of Ogidi in living memory.¹¹⁶ He was born *oge Anam Ekwu-Nma* (during the time of the *Anam Ekwu-Nma* age grade, between 1877 and 1882)¹¹⁷ and died at some point after February 19, 1992.¹¹⁸ Although Nwawulu passed before I arrived in Ogidi for my fieldwork, his testimonies were recorded in the 'oral history transcripts' sections of the appendices of at least eight bachelors' theses written between 1974 and

¹¹⁵ Ibemesi, *Ogidi*; Dike Ibemesi, *Iyi-Enu Hospital: Origins and Development (1907-1982)* (Enugu: MAX Publicity, 1982); Chieka Ifemesia et. al, *Ogidi Anglican Centenary 1892-1992: An Outline History* ([no place of publication information]: [no publisher information], 1992); Agbogu, *Ogidi*; Achebe, "Ogidi Palaver," 23-51.

¹¹⁶ He has been cited with variations of his name—e.g., Nwosu Enwude, Nwosu Okudo, Isema Nwosu—but is more commonly known as Nwawulu.

¹¹⁷ Ibemesi, *Ogidi*, 83. This is also corroborated by some of the listed ages for Nwawulu in the metadata of the oral history transcripts in bachelors theses from 1974 to 1992. Although some of the estimated ages in this metadata are likely inaccurate, they fit into the general age range shortly before, during, or after the *Anam Ekwu-Nma* age grade. Ibemesi's estimation seems to be the most probable because Nwawulu could surely state which age grade he belonged to (which Ibemesi indicates he did) even if he could not recall the year in which he was born.

¹¹⁸ According to available transcripts, the last record of a researcher interviewing Nwawulu occurred 19 February 1992. He may have lived long beyond 1992, although he would have been approximately 110 to 115 years old that year.

1992 on various themes relating to Ogidi's history.¹¹⁹ Nwando Achebe asserts that her father, Chinua Achebe, and Nwawulu enjoyed a professional relationship in which the latter provided the former with many historical accounts of Ogidi's society *tupu ndi ocha bia* and *oge Walter*.¹²⁰

Nwawulu's oral testimony has significantly informed my work on the (re)gendering of law in Ogidi. Yet—as far as I am aware—this is the first scholarly work on West Africa to acknowledge a custodian of oral history and indigenous knowledge as a source worthy of discussion in a literature review.¹²¹ The compiled transcripts of Nwawulu's narrations of Ogidi's history, collected between the early 1970s and the early '90s, serve as a type of archive but also as a type of scholarship. As historian K. Onwuka Dike and sociologist Felicia Ekejiuba have noted, “unlike the historians of Europe and America, African custodians of the past are not only antiquarians, preserving and interpreting the past for its own sake; they remember history in order to preserve special rights or explain the ever changing social reality.”¹²² Nwawulu fit this description closely: not merely narrating events, but offering his interpretations of them and discussing their significance to Ogidi people's understanding of their laws, religion, and history. Much of what I know about the events of the 1914 women's market protest and three other protests that Ogidi women engaged in *oge ndi uka bia-oge Benjamin*,¹²³ for example, comes from the testimony of Nwawulu, which remained consistent and detailed in each documented account that he gave over a period of almost twenty years. In addition, the composition of the indigenous Igbo court

¹¹⁹ There may be additional bachelors theses that include more testimonies by Nwawulu, but the eight I collected were the only ones that could be found in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka and Nnamdi Azikiwe University history departments' archives as of 2018.

¹²⁰ Nwando Achebe, conversation with the author, 20 April 2020.

¹²¹ Credit is also due to my advisor, Nwando Achebe, who prompted me to consider this innovative way of incorporating an indigenous oral historian as a contributor to my literature review. Conversation with the author, 20 April 2020.

¹²² Dike and Ekejiuba, *The Aro of South-eastern Nigeria*, 13.

¹²³ These three events—the trading-company demonstration, the ankle-bell protest, and the head-scarves remonstrations—will be examined in Chapter 4.

system—incorporating both the human and spiritual realms—and the functioning of local government *oge four quarters-oge ndi ocha bia* is gleaned from the words of Nwawulu. Much of his description of indigenous governance has been corroborated by other oral sources and colonial documents. However, some events and details he recounted had gone unrecorded by colonial officials, and been all but forgotten by the general population. For instance, the Ogidi women’s demonstration against a European trading company’s acquisition of a tract of Ogidi’s land, on which the company sought to build a large market—which occurred in the first few years of the twentieth century—might have been lost to time had not Nwawulu narrated it in the 1980s to a younger Ogidi historian, Chief Edward Dike Ibemesi, who later recounted it to me.

Another custodian of Ogidi’s history who should be considered on par with Nwawulu is my collaborator High Chief Sir Albert Obi (Rex) Ezegbo, a titled elder, a member of the *igwe*’s cabinet, and an Anglican knight, born in 1930. Although a pharmacist by profession, Rex has long been interested in the history of his people, and his friends affectionately call him Encyclopedia due to his breadth of historical knowledge.¹²⁴ Much of the information he imparted to me, he learned through oral testimony from other indigenous custodians of local history, but he also sought to corroborate such information through archival sources. He frequently noted during the course of our two interviews as well as during informal conversations that I could find evidence supporting his statements in colonial documents in the Nigerian National Archives, which I indeed found. Like Nwawulu in his lifetime, Rex is a living archive of local history, but also provides his own interpretations of historical events.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ Sir Albert Obi (Rex) Ezegbo, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 11 April 2018. Ezegbo also conducted significant research on the laws and traditions of Ogidi *tupu ndi ocha bia* because he was one of the main litigants representing Ogidi in their nearly eighteen-year dispute in the customary court with the Amobi family from Ajilija village, Uru quarter, Ogidi, concerning who should be allowed to become the town’s *igwe*. This dispute stems from the 1926 case regarding hereditary right to rule between Ogidi and the Amobi family, which is covered in Chapter 3.

¹²⁵ There are a few other individuals (all of whom I interviewed in 2018) that can be described as living archives and indigenous custodians of Ogidi’s history, and I want to acknowledge them: High Chief Robinson Okudo (Isema), a

Literature on Igbo Women and Gender

This dissertation also draws on prior scholarship on the political participation and presence of Igbo women *tupu ndi ocha bia* and *oge ndi ocha chilu*.¹²⁶ Anthropologist Sylvia Leith-Ross, in her seminal 1939 work on the perspectives and political participation of Igbo women, *African Women: A Study of the Ibo of Nigeria*, argued that a strong sense of solidarity underpinned these women's economic and political equality with men.¹²⁷ Subsequently, detailed discussion of Igbo women's political participation was essentially muted until Van Allen's 1972 and 1975 articles—

titled elder, a member of the *igwe*'s cabinet, and one of Nwawulu's sons; Chief Lawrence Nwankwo Onwuteaka, a titled elder and one of the oldest men in Ogidi (103 years old in 2018); Chief Nwabuoku Osakwe (Dibuenyi Nwanyi), an elderly woman who has attained all three titles available to Ogidi women and who is well-versed in the intricacies of the indigenous Igbo religion; and Chief Edward Dike Ibemesi, a titled elder, a historian who has published two monographs on Ogidi's history and contributed to a third, and a man who has gained considerable knowledge from interviewing custodians of local history and by seeking corroborating evidence from archival sources.

¹²⁶ Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*; Achebe, *The Female King of Colonial Nigeria*; Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*; Amadiume, *Daughters of the Goddess*; Ifi Amadiume, *African Matriarchal Foundations: The Igbo Case* (London: Karnak House, 1987); Van Allen, "Aba Riots," 11-39; Van Allen, "Sitting on a Man," 165-181; Matera, Bastian, and Kingsley Kent, *The Women's War of 1929*; Falola and Paddock, *The Women's War of 1929*; Mba, *Nigerian Women Mobilized*; Mbah, *Emergent Masculinities*; Misty L. Bastian, "Dancing Women and Colonial Men: The *Nwaobiala* of 1925," in *"Wicked" Women and the Reconfiguration of Gender in Africa*, ed. Dorothy Hodgson and Sheryl McCurdy (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2001), 260-281; Misty L. Bastian, "Vultures of the Marketplace': Igbo and Other Southeastern Nigerian Women's Discourse about the Ogu Umunwaanyi (Women's War) of 1929," in *Women and African Colonial Histories*, ed. Jean Allman, Susan Geiger, and Nakanyike Musisi (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 260-281.

There is also a substantive body of work on the themes of women's political participation and presence in Africa more broadly: Agnes Akosua Aidoo, "Asante Queen Mothers in Government and Politics in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 9, no. 1 (1977): 1-13; Margaret Jean Hay and Marcia Wright, ed., *African Women and the Law: Historical Perspectives* (Boston: Boston University Press, 1982); Kristin Mann, *Marrying Well: Marriage, Status, and Social Change Among the Educated Elite in Colonial Lagos* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Luise White, *The Comforts of Home, Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Clara Osinulu and Nina Mba, ed., *Nigerian Women in Politics, 1986-1993* (Lagos: Malthouse Press, 1996); Oyeronke Oyewumi, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourse* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); Beverly Mack and Jean Boyd, *One Woman's Jihad: Nana Asma'u, Scholar and Scribe* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000); Hodgson and McCurdy, ed., *"Wicked" Women*; Allman, Geiger, and Musisi, ed., *Women in African Colonial Histories*; Judith A. Byfield, *The Bluest Hands: A Social and Economic History of Women Dyers in Abeokuta (Nigeria), 1890-1940* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2002); Emily Osborn, *Our New Husbands Are Here: Households, Gender, and Politics in a West African State from the Slave Trade to Colonial Rule* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2011); Alicia Decker, *In Idi Amin's Shadow: Women, Gender, and Militarism in Uganda* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2014); Linda M. Heywood, *Njinga of Angola: Africa's Warrior Queen* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017); Kalpana Hiralal and Zaheera Jinnah, ed., *Gender and Mobility in Africa: Borders, Bodies and Boundaries* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); Jacqueline-Bethel Tchouta Mougoué, *Gender, Separatist Politics, and Embodied Nationalism in Cameroon* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2019); Annette K. Joseph-Gabriel, *Reimagining Liberation: How Black Women Transformed Citizenship in the French Empire* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2020).

¹²⁷ Leith-Ross, *African Women*.

the former concerning the concept of ‘sitting on a man,’ and the second, how scholars should view the Women’s War—linked Igbo women’s judicial strategies *tupu ndi ocha bia* to the protests they staged *en masse* in 1929.¹²⁸ Anthropologist Caroline Ifeka-Moller, however, contended in 1975 that Igbo women’s political power as expressed in the Women’s War was not an extension of their pre-colonial authority, but instead arose out of changes that colonialism produced.¹²⁹ My examination of women in Ogidi and their protests *oge ndi ocha chilu* are in line with Van Allen’s thesis rather than Ifeka-Moller’s, for the reasons I present in Chapter 4. Since Van Allen’s and Ifeka-Moller’s publications, other scholars have examined the Igbo women’s indigenous legal sanction of ‘making war’ in the context of the Women’s War.¹³⁰ In her ambitious book *Nigerian Women Mobilized: Women’s Political Activity in Southern Nigeria, 1900-1965* (1982), historian Nina Emma Mba analyzes myriad southern Nigerian women’s political organizations and demonstrations *oge ndi ocha chilu*, and makes the interesting argument, representing a middle-way between those of Van Allen and Ifeka-Moller, that “the position of women in Southern Nigerian society was both diminished and enhanced under colonialism,” meaning that “colonialism, by making women feel victimized and deprived, provided them with reasons to protest, and they were able to mobilize through those traditional associations which were not destroyed by colonialism,” including the strategy of ‘making war.’¹³¹ I grapple with this intriguing proposition in Chapter 4 as it pertains to Ogidi women’s mobilization that took indigenous forms, but against a new enemy or target, i.e., corrupt colonial collaborators and the wider colonial administration. More recently, historians Toyin Falola and Adam Paddock published *The Women’s*

¹²⁸ Van Allen, “‘Sitting on a Man,’” 165-181; Van Allen, “‘Aba Riots,’” 11-39.

¹²⁹ Caroline Ifeka-Moller, “Female Militancy and Colonial Revolt: The Women’s War of 1929, Eastern Nigeria,” in *Perceiving Women*, ed. Shirley Ardener (London: Malaby Press, 1975), 127–157.

¹³⁰ Mba, *Nigerian Women Mobilized*; Falola and Paddock, *The Women’s War of 1929*; Matera, Bastian, and Kingsley Kent, *The Women’s War of 1929*; Bastian, “‘Vultures of the Marketplace,’” 260-281.

¹³¹ Mba, *Nigerian Women Mobilized*, 67.

War of 1929: A History of Anti-Colonial Resistance in Eastern Nigeria (2011), in which they problematize the previous arguments of Van Allen, Ifeka-Moller, and Mba, by situating the Women's War within a much longer trend of anti-colonial resistance that occurred across Africa, long before the independence movements of the 1950s and '60s.¹³² The 1914 women's market protest in Ogidi supports their argument, as I explain in Chapter 4.¹³³

In a similar vein, anthropologist Ifi Amadiume and historian Nwando Achebe have discussed 'making war' as a women's militant strategy of resistance, referencing occurrences in the Igbo areas of Nnobi and Nsukka, respectively, *tupu ndi ocha bia* and *oge ndi ocha chilu*.¹³⁴ In addition, Achebe examines the process of 'making war' that Ogidi women carried out on Walter Amobi in the women's market protest in her essay on the event, which is thus far the only published scholarship on that protest. Most recently, in his *Emergent Masculinities: Gendered Power and Social Change in the Biafran Atlantic Age* (2019), historian Ndubueze L. Mbah describes Ohafia-Igbo women's 'making war' as an important performance of female power *tupu ndi ocha bia*, specifically "the power to 'teach men lessons when necessary.'"¹³⁵ I contribute to this body of work through further examination of the role of 'making war' in the women's market protest, adding to the foundation laid by Achebe with new details I uncovered through oral history methods.

¹³² Falola and Paddock, *The Women's War of 1929*, 75. Elizabeth Isichei (*The Ibo People and the Europeans*, 142) also argues this.

¹³³ Additionally, Matera, Bastian, and Kingsley-Kent's *The Women's War of 1929* (2012) provides vivid detail of Igbo and Ibibio women 'making war,' although it does not offer a new description or understanding of the concept. Matera, Bastian, and Kingsley-Kent's major contributions lie in their examination of the war's events from both the women's and British male officials' perspectives, which does not directly inform my use of 'making war' in this study.

¹³⁴ Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, 122; Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 173, 176.

¹³⁵ Mbah, *Emergent Masculinities*, 164. Mbah also discusses other religious and political roles of Ohafia women, such as the sole right and responsibility of women to declare war and perform special ceremonies before men were allowed to enter any battle, and the subsequent ritual cleansing by women of male warriors who returned from war before they could appropriately re-enter society. Mbah, *Emergent Masculinities*, 53, 55-56.

This study is also informed by work concerning gender balance and gender fluidity in Igbo society.¹³⁶ As sociologist Kamene Okonjo noted in her 1976 essay, “The Dual-Sex Political System in Operation: Igbo Women and Community Politics in Midwestern Nigeria,” indigenous Igbo society was organized with a sense of gender complementarity, with certain realms being under the purview of men, and others, under that of women.¹³⁷ Amadiume and Achebe have since challenged Okonjo’s notion of a rigidly gendered social order by discussing gender fluidity that allowed for the existence of male daughters, female husbands, female kings, and *nne mmoo*—elderly titled women who were initiated into the all-male masquerade society.¹³⁸ In *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings* and *The Female King of Colonial Nigeria*, Achebe examines how Ahebi Ugbabe, a woman in northern Igboland, became colonial Nigeria’s only female warrant chief and king, and how she established her own palace court, administering so-called ‘native law and custom’ in the native court, and following her own rules in her court. Achebe explains that Ahebi was able to negotiate the colonial legal system that otherwise disenfranchised women in part because, although biologically female, she became a man in the sense that she took on male-gendered social and political roles. Mbah’s recent *Emergent Masculinities* also adds to the

¹³⁶ Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*; Achebe, *The Female King of Colonial Nigeria*; Achebe, “Gender Balance,” 121-143; Okonjo, “The Dual-Sex Political System,” 45-58; Nkiru Uwechia Nzegwu, *Family Matters: Feminist Concepts in African Philosophy of Culture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006); Afigbo, “Time and Its Measurement,” 413-424; Korieh, *The Land Has Changed*.

This dissertation is also informed by studies of gender and gendering in other African societies: Lindsay and Miescher, *Men and Masculinities in Modern Africa*; Mbah, *Emergent Masculinities*; Mougoué, *Gender, Separatist Politics, and Embodied Nationalism*; Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*; Hiralal and Jinnah, ed., *Gender and Mobility in Africa*; Oyewumi, *The Invention of Women*; Edna G. Bay, *Wives of the Leopard: Gender, Politics, and Culture in the Kingdom of Dahomey* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998); Stephan Miesher, *Making Men in Ghana* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005); Catherine M. Cole, Takyiwaa Manuh, and Stephan F. Miescher, ed., *Africa After Gender?* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007); Sandra E. Greene, *Gender, Ethnicity, and Social Change on the Upper Slave Coast: A History of the Anlo-Ewe* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1996); Osborn, *Our New Husbands Are Here*; Emmanuel Akyeampong and Pashington Obeng, “Spirituality, Gender, and Power in Asante History,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 28, no. 3 (1995): 481-508; Emily S. Burrill, *States of Marriage: Gender, Justice, and Rights in Colonial Mali* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2015).

¹³⁷ Okonjo, “The Dual-Sex Political System,” 45-58.

¹³⁸ Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, esp. 32-33, 39-40, 56; Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, esp. 208; Achebe, *The Female King of Colonial Nigeria*; Achebe, “Ogidi Palaver,” 30.

scholarship on Igbo gender fluidity, examining women who performed *ogaranya* masculinity¹³⁹—a type of female masculinity—in the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹⁴⁰ Such instances are possible because sex (a biological category) and gender (a social category) are distinct concepts in Igbo cosmology.¹⁴¹

I am also mindful of scholarship positing that gender is not an indigenous Igbo or African concept. In her bold 1997 book, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourse*, sociologist Oyeronke Oyewumi asserts that gender is not a relevant category for analyzing pre-colonial Yoruba society; rather, she asserts that seniority was the main method of classification.¹⁴² This was also true of indigenous Igbo society, according to philosopher and historian Nkiru Uwechia Nzegwu's *Family Matters: Feminist Concepts in African Philosophy of Culture* (2006). Nzegwu refers to at least part of Igboland *tupu ndi ocha bia* as “a nonpatriarchal, nongendered society.”¹⁴³ As convincing as some aspects of this argument are, there is nevertheless overwhelming evidence that indigenous Igbo society has always been gendered. Thus, unlike Oyewumi and Nzegwu, who argue that gender is a colonial construct, I align myself with Amadiume's and Achebe's proposals that Igbo society was separated into gendered realms *tupu ndi ocha bia*, and that while fluidity between realms occurred in certain situations this does not disprove the indigenous existence of the realms themselves.

¹³⁹ *Ogaranya* means “wealthy person.” Mbah describes female masculinity as a woman's performance of male-gendered actions such as participation in wars or slave raids. He urges us to separate masculinity from biological sex, thus separating male and female gender from the biological entities of man and woman. Mbah defines *ogaranya* masculinity as hegemony that arose in the era of the Atlantic slave trade and the subsequent trade in so-called legitimate goods in the nineteenth century, and argues that such hegemonic masculinity “stemmed from the capacity of wealthy individuals to usurp the political authority of male and female traditional institutions.” Mbah, *Emergent Masculinities*, 2-5.

¹⁴⁰ Mbah, *Emergent Masculinities*, 162.

¹⁴¹ See Achebe, *The Female King of Colonial Nigeria*; Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 208; Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, esp. 32-33, 39-40, 56; Mbah, *Emergent Masculinities*, 4-5, 10, 162; John C. McCall, “Portrait of a Brave Woman,” *American Anthropologist* 98, no. 1 (1996) 127-136.

¹⁴² Oyewumi, *The Invention of Women*.

¹⁴³ Nzegwu, *Family Matters*, 4.

Additionally, the balance of male and female forces in Igbo cosmology, which Afigbo, Achebe, and philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah have noted, is integral to this study, as discussed in Chapter 2.¹⁴⁴ Understanding that indigenous Igbo law is gendered female, but that within the realm of law there is gender balance, is central to understanding the initial gendering of law in Ogidi and across Igboland. As Nwando Achebe lamented in 2005, “in the historiography of Igbo religion, gender is sorely lacking.”¹⁴⁵ Fifteen years later, this is largely still the case, although recent scholarship—chiefly, Achebe’s own—has sought to fill the gap.¹⁴⁶ Her work explains how the female principle applies to the spiritual realm, using the examples of goddesses, female oracles and medicines, female diviners, and priestesses.¹⁴⁷

My conception of the initial gendering of indigenous Igbo law has also been informed by two books by Amadiume: *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society* (1987) and *Daughters of the Goddess, Daughters of Imperialism: African Women, Culture, Power and Democracy* (2000). In particular, I am referring to the Igbo “goddess religion” delineated by Amadiume, in which female spiritual forces play a central role and women who play important spiritual and religious roles in Igbo society are conceived of as “daughters of the goddess.” Building on Amadiume’s work on the “goddess religion,” anthropologist Misty L. Bastian describes the relationship between Igbo women and the earth goddess in “Dancing Women and Colonial Men, the *Nwaobiala* of 1925” (2001). Although she does not use Amadiume’s “goddess religion” terminology, she notes the centrality of *ani* to Igbo religion and social life, particularly among the communities of southern Igboland, and the responsibility of Igbo women

¹⁴⁴ A. E. Afigbo, “An Outline of Igbo History,” in *Igbo History and Society*, 109-124; Afigbo “Time and Its Measurement,” in *Igbo History and Society*, 413-424; Achebe, “Balancing Male and Female Principles,” 121-143; Appiah, Forward to *The African Trilogy*, x.

¹⁴⁵ Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 40.

¹⁴⁶ Another work that has recently helped to fill this gap is Mbah’s *Emergent Masculinities*.

¹⁴⁷ Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*; Achebe, *The Female King of Colonial Nigeria*; Achebe, “Balancing Male and Female Principles,” 121-143; Achebe, “Ogidi Palaver,” 23-51.

to share messages “sent from the earth to warn people of their transgressions.”¹⁴⁸ Through such portents, Bastian argues, Chukwu intended for women to warn the people of ani’s anger and to purify the land as a means of protecting Igbo society during the *Nwaobiala*.¹⁴⁹ Thus, I read Bastian’s essay as an acknowledgment of the supreme moral authority of the earth goddess, and therefore as an extension of Amadiume’s “goddess religion” model. Similarly, Nwando Achebe’s examination of Amadiume’s “daughters of the goddess” concept, in the specific context of the female principle among the Nsukka Igbo, demonstrates the link between the spiritual and human realms of religion, law, and politics.¹⁵⁰

As historians Marion G. Mendy and Assan Sarr note in a 2017 *Journal of West African History* retrospective on the contributions of Amadiume to African gender theories, scholarship about African women, feminism, and gender “was grossly inadequate and misleading” due to the dominance of Western perspectives and paradigms, until Amadiume’s intervention in the late 1980s.¹⁵¹ In the past three decades, scholars including Amadiume, Achebe, Bastian, Mbah, Susan Arndt, and Chima Korieh have utilized African and Igbo perspectives on theories of gender in their examinations of Igbo history.¹⁵² I follow those scholars’ pattern of employing indigenous Igbo

¹⁴⁸ Bastian, “Dancing Women and Colonial Men,” 111.

¹⁴⁹ Sometimes referred to as the Dancing Women’s Movement, the *Nwaobiala* involved groups of 50 to 300 women from individual Igbo towns passing along in chain-fashion the message about a miraculous birth—a message from Chukwu—that was witnessed by women in Okigwe Division of Owerri Province. Part of the delivery of the providential message included the messengers sweeping and dancing through the host town. Between October and December 1925, the message was relayed from town to town to the women and chiefs in each location until it spread to much of southern Igboland. Although not a protest itself, the movement is credited as a precursor to the 1929 Women’s War because the women participants took issue with the young, Christian women who refused to participate and the number of warrant chiefs who tried to interfere, on the orders of British officials. The women involved in the movement called it the *Nwaobiala*, which translates to “child from the heart of the land” or “child from the compound of the earth goddess” (Matera, Bastian, and Kingsley Kent, *The Women’s War of 1929*, 111-112). Also see Mba, *Nigerian Women Mobilized*, esp. 68-72; Bastian, “Dancing Women and Colonial Men,” 109-130.

¹⁵⁰ Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*.

¹⁵¹ Marion G. Mendy and Assan Sarr, “The Ambiguity of Gender: Ifi Amadiume and the Writing of Gender History in Igboland,” *Journal of West African History* 3, no. 2 (2017): 109. Mendy and Sarr cite Andrea Cornwall, “Introduction,” in *Readings in Gender in Africa*, ed. Andrea Cornwall (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 3.

¹⁵² Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*; Amadiume, *Afrikan Matriarchal Foundations*; Amadiume, *Daughters of the Goddess*; Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*; Achebe, *The Female King of Colonial*

theory for the exact reasons that Mendy and Sarr articulate: that reading gender from any other perspective would produce an inaccurate analysis. Thus, the concept of the (re)gendering of law that is the foundation of this study arose organically from knowledge of the duality, fluidity, and balance of male and female principles inherent in Igbo cosmology.

Literature on Colonial Law in Igboland and Africa

As previously noted, several early twentieth-century ethnographers documented the complexity of indigenous Igbo law and its fundamental basis in indigenous religion. In the 1970s and '80s, a wave of historians produced scholarship examining not only Igbo law and governance, but also its clash with the colonial legal system, particularly its native courts and warrant chiefs.¹⁵³ In his pioneering 1972 book, *The Warrant Chiefs: Indirect Rule in Southeastern Nigeria 1891-1929*, Afigbo detailed how Lord Lugard's Nigeria-wide native court system encountered major challenges in Igboland, due to the democratic nature of Igbo societies, which had always eschewed the notion of individual rulership that warrant chiefs and *ndi igwe* represented.¹⁵⁴ Published the following year, Isichei's *The Ibo People and The Europeans: The Genesis of a Relationship to 1906* reiterated Afigbo's contention that warrant chiefs were corrupt, but added that native court clerks, too, rose to positions of considerable authority, and that their practices were just as questionable.¹⁵⁵ I draw on Afigbo's and Isichei's accounts of the problem that the native court/warrant chief system presented and, through the lens of the (re)gendering of law, I advance their assertions that such a system was incongruent with indigenous Igbo society. Although some

Nigeria; Bastian, "Dancing Women and Colonial Men"; Mbah, *Emergent Masculinities*, Arndt, *African Women's Literature*; Korieh, *The Land Has Changed*.

¹⁵³ Several works that focused on these themes: Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs*, Van Allen, "'Aba Riots,'" Gailey, *The Road to Aba*; Isichei, *The Ibo People and the Europeans*; Nwabara, *Iboland*. Other works included at least some discussion of these themes: Dike, *100 Years of British Rule in Nigeria*; Omoniyi Adewoye, *The Judicial System in Southern Nigeria, 1854-1954: Law and Justice in a Dependency* (London: Longman, 1977); Mba, *Nigerian Women Mobilized*.

¹⁵⁴ Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs*.

¹⁵⁵ Isichei, *The Ibo People and the Europeans*, 157-166.

scholars writing since the 1970s have discussed the incompatibility of the native courts and indigenous Igbo law,¹⁵⁶ none have examined this issue through the paradigm of (re)gendering.

The present work also draws on historical scholarship that investigates how colonial law across Africa disrupted indigenous societies, and how Africans either resisted, collaborated with, or negotiated colonial rule.¹⁵⁷ Of particular importance to my study is the body of scholarship concerning ‘customary’ law and the invention of tradition.¹⁵⁸ In historian Terence Ranger’s seminal 1983 essay on these subjects, he proposed that tradition, and by extension ‘customary’

¹⁵⁶ The following sources have examined this in Igboland specifically: Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs*; Van Allen, “‘Aba Riots’”; Gailey, *The Road to Aba*; Isichei, *The Ibo People and the Europeans*; Nwabara, *Iboland*; Falola and Paddock, *The Women’s War of 1929*; Matera, Bastian, and Kingsley Kent, *The Women’s War of 1929*; Nwando Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*; Achebe, *The Female King of Colonial Nigeria*.

Additionally, several scholars have examined the idiosyncrasies of ‘native law and custom’ and the native courts as they were utilized in other parts of colonial Nigeria: Adewoye, *The Judicial System in Southern Nigeria*; Kristin Mann, “The Rise of Tiawo Olowo: Law, Accumulation, and Mobility in Early Colonial Lagos,” in *Law in Colonial Africa*, ed. Kristin Mann and Richard Roberts (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1991), 85-107; Allan Christelow, “Theft, Homicide, and Oath in Early Twentieth-Century Kano,” in *Law in Colonial Africa*, 205-223; Saheed Aderinto, *When Sex Threatened the State: Illicit Sexuality, Nationalism, and Politics in Colonial Nigeria, 1900-1958* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015).

¹⁵⁷ Terence Ranger, “The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa,” in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 211-262; Martin Chanock, *Law, Custom and Social Order: The Colonial Experience in Malawi and Zambia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Thomas V. McClendon, “Tradition and Domestic Struggle in the Courtroom: Customary Law and the Control of Women in Segregation-Era Natal,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 28, no. 3 (1995): 527-561; Lauren A. Benton, *Law and Colonial Cultures: Legal Regimes in World History, 1400-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004 [2002]); Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Richard Roberts, *Litigants and Households: African Disputes and Colonial Courts in the French Soudan, 1895-1912* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2005); Francis G. Snyder, “Colonialism and Legal Form: The Creation of ‘Customary Law’ in Senegal,” *Journal of Legal Pluralism* 19 (1981): 49-90; Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs*; Burrill, *States of Marriage*; Max Gluckman, “The Reasonable Man in Barotse Law,” in *Order and Rebellion in Tribal Africa: Collected Essays with an Autobiographical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2004 [1963]), 178-206; Sally Engle Merry, “Law and Colonialism,” *Law and Society Review* 25, no. 4 (1991): 889-922; Hay and Wright, ed., *African Women and the Law*; Kristin Mann and Richard Roberts, Introduction to *Law in Colonial Africa*, 3-58; Emily Burrill, Richard Roberts, and Elizabeth Thornberry, ed., *Domestic Violence and the Law in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010); Benjamin N. Lawrance, Emily Lynn Osborn, and Richard L. Roberts, ed., *Intermediaries, Interpreters and Clerks: African Employees and the Making of Colonial Africa* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2006).

¹⁵⁸ The following include the most important works that influenced my conceptions of distortion and invention: Ranger, “The Invention of Tradition,” 211-262; Chanock, *Law, Custom and Social Order*; Mann and Roberts, Introduction to *Law in Colonial Africa*, 3-58; McClendon, “Tradition and Domestic Struggle,” 527-561; Snyder, “Colonialism and Legal Form,” 49-90; Thomas Spear, “Neo-Traditionalism and the Limits of Invention in British Colonial Africa,” *Journal of African History* 44, no. 1 (2003): 3-27; Sally Falk Moore, *Social Facts and Fabrications: “Customary Law” on Kilimanjaro, 1880-1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

law, was an invention of the colonial era.¹⁵⁹ Since then, numerous scholars have used the term ‘invention’ in nuanced ways. Legal scholar Martin Chanock’s *Law, Custom and Social Order: The Colonial Experience in Malawi and Zambia* (1985) argues that ‘customary’ law in those places was “far from being a survival” of indigenous law.¹⁶⁰ In that context, ‘customary’ laws, which were clearly dissimilar from indigenous laws, were aptly called inventions. Nonetheless, other scholars have examined instances that, arguably, could be described as distortions. A year after Chanock’s *Law, Custom and Social Order*, historian Thomas V. McClendon’s “Tradition and Domestic Struggle in the Courtroom: Customary Law and the Control of Women in Segregation-Era Natal” complicated Ranger’s and Chanock’s arguments by contending that ‘customary’ law “had clear elements of continuity with the precolonial past, though continuing forms became distorted by new situations. The effort to establish native law was successful in part because the ‘invented traditions’ of customary law were grounded to some degree in the social realities of precolonial Africa.”¹⁶¹ I concur with this statement, insofar as colonial-era traditions were expressive of both continuity and change; but, I want to problematize McClendon’s reference to these distorted traditions as still fitting into the category of inventions. The Oxford English Dictionary defines distortion as “the twisting or perversion *of* words so as to give to them a different sense; [or] perversion *of* opinions, facts, history, so as to misapply them,”¹⁶² and

¹⁵⁹ Ranger, “The Invention of Tradition,” 211-262. Anthropologist Sally Engle Merry (“Law and Colonialism,” 897) notes that colonial administrations considered customary law to be indigenous as they “typically endeavored to retain some aspects of ‘native’ law” when codifying customary law or ‘native law and custom.’ While colonial officials in Igboland might have sought to retain indigenous laws through the use of the native court system, they contributed to the male-centric distortion of indigenous Igbo law in various ways, as I describe in Chapters 3 and 5. Political scientist and anthropologist Mahmood Mamdani (*Citizen and Subject*, 110) argues that ‘customary’ law across Africa “consolidated the noncustomary power of chiefs in the colonial administration,” echoing the arguments that Afigbo and Isichei made regarding warrant chiefs in Igboland.

¹⁶⁰ Chanock, *Law, Custom and Social Order*, 4.

¹⁶¹ McClendon, “Tradition and Domestic Struggle,” 533. Here McClendon references Falk Moore, *Social Facts and Fabrications*.

¹⁶² Emphasis in original: *Oxford English Dictionary*, “distortion” entry 3a (Oxford University Press, 2020): <<https://www-oed-com.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/view/Entry/55713?redirectedFrom=distortion#eid>>.

invention as “contrivance; [or] fabrication.”¹⁶³ Therefore, there is a subtle but significant difference between distortion and invention: distortions are partial truths whereas inventions are pure fabrications, and in the chapters that follow, I will develop this insight further via the case of male colonial collaborators’ manipulations of indigenous laws and of religious, political, and social institutions in Ogidi.

Indeed, even before Ranger began the historiographical debate over the invention of tradition, legal scholar Francis G. Snyder provided what I consider the most useful articulation of the distortion of indigenous law, in his 1981 article, “Colonialism and Legal Form: The Creation of ‘Customary Law’ in Senegal.” In it, Snyder frames ‘customary’ law (as recognized in the post-colonial era) as “modified or distorted versions that survived colonial rule.”¹⁶⁴ Similarly, I frame distortions of indigenous institutions as modifications rather than outright inventions, even if claims regarding the ancientness of the distorted versions were manifestly untrue. That is, although inauthentic, distortions were often considered plausible because they were rooted in some genuine institution or phenomenon. My arguments about this phenomenon in Chapter 3 also expand upon Nwando Achebe’s explanations of how Igbo colonial collaborators successfully invented kingship.¹⁶⁵

In the same vein, political scientist and anthropologist Mahmood Mamdani’s *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (1996) notes that much ‘customary’ law across the continent was neither an unchanging, ancient custom nor pure fabrication on the part of colonial authorities, but rather “reproduced through an ongoing series of

¹⁶³ *Oxford English Dictionary*, “invention” entry 2 (Oxford University Press, 2020): <<https://www-oed-com.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/view/Entry/98969?redirectedFrom=invention#eid>>.

¹⁶⁴ Snyder, “Colonialism and Legal Form,” 49.

¹⁶⁵ Achebe examines Ahebi Ugbabe’s invention of kingship in *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings* and *The Female King of Colonial Nigeria*, and Walter Amobi’s invention of it in “‘Ogidi Palaver.’”

confrontations [i.e., native court trials] between claimants with a shared history but not always the same notions of it.”¹⁶⁶ I agree with Mamdani’s assertion that ‘customary’ law was neither truly indigenous nor purely invention, but argue in the following chapters that, in the Igbo case, distortion and invention of indigenous laws and institutions took place outside of the native court system as well as within it. I also draw on the work of historian Thomas Spear, whose 2003 article “Neo-Traditionalism and the Limits of Invention in British Colonial Africa” challenges Ranger’s initial argument that Europeans invented African traditions, noting that Ranger and other scholars have overestimated the authority of British colonial administrators to do so.¹⁶⁷ I take Spear’s critique into account particularly when examining the roles that colonial officials as well as missionaries and male colonial collaborators played in the distortions and inventions of Igbo laws, institutions, and history, especially in Chapters 3 and 5.

Overview of the Chapters

Not counting its introduction and conclusion, this dissertation consists of five chapters, which are organized both thematically and more or less chronologically. In Chapter 1, “Positionality: *Onye Ocha n’Ani Ndi Igbo* (White Person in Igboland),” I discuss how my identity affected my relationship to the research site and my sources. In Chapter 2, “Law and Punishment in Ogidi, *Oge Four Quarters-Oge Ndi Ocha Bia*,” I examine the female principle as it pertains to the spiritual realm of indigenous Igbo law, meaning the roles that deities, *egwugwu*, and other spiritual forces have played in legislative and judicial processes from the establishment of Ogidi’s four quarters until the arrival of the British. In Chapter 3, “Entirely a Government created

¹⁶⁶ Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject*, 118.

¹⁶⁷ Although it is levied primarily at Ranger, Spear extends his critique more broadly to nearly all scholars who discuss colonial inventions in British colonial Africa (Spear, “Neo-Traditionalism,” 3-27, see esp. 3, 4).

Chief”:¹⁶⁸ Male-centric Distortion and Invention in the Making of an *Igwe, Oge Ndi Uka Bia-Oge Walter*,” I examine how Walter Amobi and other warrant chiefs and *ndi igwe* in Igboland distorted the indigenous institution of title-taking, and invented kingship in a society that never before had kings. The women of Ogidi protested the injustice of unprecedented male-centric legal authority by invoking indigenous legal sanctions according to female-centric law, as I detail in Chapter 4, “Women Enacting Female-centric Justice, *Oge Four Quarters-Oge Walter*.” And Chapter 5, “The Native Court and the Further Re-gendering of Law, *Oge Walter* and *Oge Interregnum*,” focuses on the ways in which the Ogidi Native Court privileged men by placing them in positions of judicial authority and disadvantaged women, deities, and *egwugwu* by disregarding the authority of their respective courts, all of which functioned according to female-centric *omenani*. In the conclusion, “The Implications and Perpetuation of Re-gendering,” I discuss some of the lasting effects of the re-gendering of law in Ogidi by offering a cursory examination of the re-gendering of the earth goddess *oge interregnum nke abuo* (during Ogidi’s second igweship interregnum from 1998 to 2016).

Throughout the following chapters, I assess how indigenous Igbo religion informed a female-centric legal system *tupu ndi ocha bia*, how such a system became dominated by a male-centric one imposed by the British *oge ndi ocha chilu*, and how the people of Ogidi negotiated the changing gender dynamics of their law and society more broadly. Before delving into this complex history, it is necessary to situate myself in this work. Thus, in the next chapter, I reflect on my positionality, examining how who I am has influenced the study I have written. As a young, white, American woman I had access to certain oral history collaborators and other sources to which most

¹⁶⁸ I leave the phrase “government created” unhyphenated and “created” uncapitalized because it is a quotation from a colonial document: NAE, OP 408/1926 ONPROF 7/13/126: “Onitsha Province: Annual Report for the year 1926,” Report on the Onitsha Province for the Year Ended 31 December 1926, 7.

Ogidi indigenes who previously studied Ogidi have not had access; but on the other hand, I faced some opposition that Ogidi indigenes would not have faced. This reality affected my research methodology and the kinds of narratives that my oral history collaborators recounted to me. For better or worse, a historian's identity affects the work she produces and therefore must be acknowledged. The following chapter is a sincere and intensive introspection of this dissertation's author and her place in this study.

CHAPTER 1:

POSITIONALITY: *ONYE OCHA N'ANI NDI IGBO* (WHITE PERSON IN IGBOLAND)

In feminist scholarship, the term ‘positionality’ is used to refer to the ways in which a researcher’s identity and her interaction with the research site affect how she conducts her study.¹

Although relatively few historians have included discussions of positionality in their work, historian Nwando Achebe urges us to do so. For Achebe, acknowledging and evaluating positionality starts with asking oneself the following key questions:

How does a researcher carry out ethical research? What is the process of information gathering? How does the researcher represent herself? What kind of power does the researcher exert during the research experience (in the actual interview and in defining the research relationship)? What is the relationship between the actual fieldwork experience and the interpretation/evaluation of research findings? How does the researcher use the information gathered? How does the researcher write and represent her collaborators’ words? Who is the researcher’s audience?²

Throughout my fieldwork in Igboland from January to December 2018, I bore these questions in mind, and recorded my reflections on them in a journal. This chapter, the product of these ruminations, explains how my identity and actions shaped the research I conducted and the dissertation I wrote.

¹ Nwando Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings: Female Power and Authority in Northern Igboland, 1900-1960* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2005), 1-2; Dána-Ain Davis and Christa Craven, *Feminist Ethnography: Thinking Through Methodologies, Challenges and Possibilities* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 65, 83; Wanda B. Knight and Yang Deng, “Neither Here nor There: Culture Location, Positionality, and Art Education,” *Visual Arts Research* 42, no. 2 (2016): 106, 108; Elizabeth Hodge-Freeman, “Out of Bounds: Negotiating Researcher Positionality in Brazil,” in *Bridging Scholarship and Activism: Reflections from the Frontlines of Collaborative Research*, ed. Bernd Reiter and Ulrich Oslender (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2015), 123-124; Richard Hunter, “Positionality, Perception, and Possibility in Mexico’s Valle del Mezquital,” *Journal of Latin American Geography* 8, no. 2 (2009): 50-52; Sarah Moser, “Personality: A New Positionality?” *Area* 40, no. 3 (2008): 383.

² Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 1.

White Woman in Igboland: Grappling with a Colonial Legacy—More than Another *Onye Ocha* in Igboland

My most prominent identity traits while living in Igboland were that I was white, American, female, young, and a researcher. With regard to the first, wherever I went, I heard numerous exclamations of *onye ocha*, an Igbo phrase that literally means “white person” (i.e., a person who is white in color). I quickly discerned that my combination of visible traits afforded me the privilege of speaking with and gaining the trust of many oral history collaborators. Among an abundance of potential collaborators, a few elderly men declined to speak to a female researcher, and some *ndi eze mmoo*—priests of deities in the indigenous Igbo religion—proved unwilling to divulge sacred knowledge to me as a foreigner. However, numerous people in Ogidi were eager to converse with the young white woman who had traveled a great distance from the United States to investigate the history of their town.

Although I was treated as something of a novelty in Ogidi, my immersion in the culture, language, and history of an Igbo community was hardly pioneering. A number of early twentieth-century European ethnographers including Northcote Thomas, C. K. Meek, M. M. Green, Margery Perham, Sylvia Leith-Ross, G. T. Basden, and P. Amaury Talbot spent years in Igboland examining the laws, traditions, and cosmology.³ European historical and scientific societies, often linked to colonial governments or Christian missionary societies, funded and directed much of this

³ G. T. Basden, *Niger Ibos: A Description of the Primitive Life, Customs, and Animistic Beliefs, etc., of the Ibo People of Nigeria by One who, for Thirty-Five Years, Enjoyed the Privilege of their Intimate Confidence and Friendship* (London: Seeley, Service and Co. Ltd, 1938); G. T. Basden, *Among the Ibos of Nigeria: An Account of the Curious and Interesting Habits, Customs and Beliefs of a little known African People by one who has for many years lived amongst them on close and intimate terms* (London: Frank Cass, 1966 [1921]); P. Amaury Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria: A Sketch of Their History, Ethnology and Languages, with an Account of the 1921 Census Volumes I-IV* (London: Oxford University Press, 1926); C. K. Meek, *Law and Authority in a Nigerian Tribe: A Study in Indirect Rule* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937); Margery Perham, *Native Administration in Nigeria* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937); M. M. Green, *Igbo Village Affairs: Chiefly with Reference to the Village of Umueke Agbaja* (London: Frank Cass, 1964 [1947]); Sylvia Leith-Ross, *African Women: A Study of the Ibo of Nigeria* (London: Routledge & Keagan Paul, 1939); Northcote Thomas, *Anthropological Report on the Ibo-Speaking Peoples of Nigeria Part I. Law and Custom of the Ibo of the Awka Neighbourhood, S. Nigeria* (London: Harrison and Sons, 1913).

early ethnographic research.⁴ For example, Meek acted as the chief anthropological agent of the colonial administration in Igboland in the 1930s, and Basden served as a missionary for the Church Missionary Society in Igboland from 1900 to the 1930s.⁵ Additionally, the powerful European grant organization Leverhulme Trust awarded research fellowships to Green and Leith-Ross to study Igbo women, specifically as a means of understanding what had led to the 1929 Igbo Women's War.⁶ Intentionally or not, these scholars contributed to Britain's colonial project by gathering intelligence that aided colonizing efforts to quell future protests.

Although my research was funded by the United States government and a North American social-science research society, I am distinguished from most ethnographers of early twentieth-century Igboland not only by the passage of time, but also by the relative lack of connection between my funders and my oral history collaborators. In other words, unlike so many of my predecessors, I was not sent by a colonial power to conduct research in one of its own colonies. The Fulbright organization, the U.S. State Department, and the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) do not appear to take interest in my knowledge of the Nigerian political climate; and since the reports I have submitted to these institutions do not contain any sensitive or overtly political material, they should not directly affect U.S. foreign relations, either with Nigeria or in general.

⁴ Anthropologist and sociologist Archie Mafeje noted that the first generations of European anthropologists who studied African societies had the same "professional interests" as colonial administrators: "Who are the Makers and Objects of Anthropology? A Critical Comment on Sally Falk Moore's 'Anthropology and Africa,'" *African Sociological Review* 1, no. 1 (1997): 5. British ethnographic whose research that was either directed by government institutions or directly affected colonial policy included Green's *Igbo Village Affairs* (see esp. xiii); Basden's *Niger Ibos* (see esp. the forward by Sir Walter Buchanan-Smith); and Meek's *Law and Authority* (see esp. the forward by Lord Lugard).

⁵ Meek, *Law and Authority* (see esp. the forward by Lord Lugard); NAE, OP 543/1929, ONPROF 7/14/220: "Anthropological Research," Letter from C.K. Meek, the Anthropological Officer, Southern Provinces to M.D.W. Jeffreys, Esq., District Officer on 9 December 1930; Basden, *Niger Ibos* (see esp. the forward by Rev. V. N. Umunna); Basden, *Among the Ibos* (see esp. 26, 27, 37-38, 45); Chief Edward Dike Ibemesi, interview by the author, Ogidi, 7 March 2018.

⁶ Green, *Igbo Village Affairs*, xiii.

To further distance myself from the specter of the ethnographers of the early twentieth century, I took great care to explain to my oral history collaborators that I intended to learn about the experiences, histories, traditions, and knowledge of Ogidi people, with the aim of producing a history of the (re)gendering of law from Igbo perspectives and for an Igbo audience.⁷ I hope that my diligence in conducting research, my attentive listening to these collaborators, and my dedication to understanding Igbo language, cosmology, and history made it obvious that I had not come to Ogidi to educate or proselytize, but rather to understand the town's history from its people's viewpoints.

There have, of course, been other white female researchers in Igboland since the ethnographers of the 1930s through the 1960s, notably including historians Elizabeth Isichei and Nina Emma Mba and anthropologist Misty L. Bastian. Each has made valuable contributions to Igbo historiography, through analyses of societal elements ranging from religion to politics broadly as well as the social, political, and economic roles of women specifically. Isichei's writings from the 1970s through the early 2000s, Mba's from the 1980s and '90s, and Bastian's from the 1990s through the 2010s differ considerably in tone from the condescending outlook of Leith-Ross, Green, and Perham.⁸ Additionally, Isichei's, Mba's, and Bastian's works have not aided colonial projects on the part of their home countries of New Zealand, Australia, and the United States, respectively. In fact, all three—but especially Mba and Bastian—have sought to describe Igbo women's political organization *oge ndi ocha chilu* in Igbo rather than Euro-American frameworks, and offered new insights into the motivations of Igbo women who protested colonial rule.⁹ This is

⁷ As stated in the Introduction, the intended audiences of this dissertation are the Igbo public as well as American/European academia.

⁸ Although the patronizing tone and derogatory diction that Leith-Ross, Green, and Perham employed in their writings on Igboland were problematic, it must be noted that they were quintessential of their time period. Perham, *Native Administration*; Green, *Igbo Village Affairs*; Leith-Ross, *African Women*.

⁹ See Nina Emma Mba, *Nigerian Women Mobilized: Women's Political Activity in Southern Nigeria, 1900-1965* (Berkeley: University of California Institute of International Studies, 1982), esp. 68-134; Misty L. Bastian, "Dancing

a testament to the diligence of their research. However, while these three scholars are distinct from the colonial ethnographers who went before them, I am distinct from both the former and the latter, insofar as I offer a detailed description of my positionality, not only by acknowledging my relationship to my research site, but also by analyzing how such a relationship has influenced this study and its findings.

“Nwanyi Ocha, Nwanyi Oma,” and Very Smart

In Igboland, friends and acquaintances of various socio-economic statuses often greeted me by saying, “*nwanyi ocha, nwanyi oma*” (white woman, good/beautiful woman) or sometimes just “*nwanyi oma.*” Occasionally, when I referred to myself as *nwanyi ocha*, oral history collaborators would respond by stating, “*nwanyi oma,*” implying that they believed I was good or beautiful. Because whiteness appeared to be associated with goodness and beauty,¹⁰ I derived special advantages from being white. For example, although Ogidi’s Chinua Achebe Library does not allow patrons to borrow books, its staff afforded me this privilege as often as I pleased. One staff member explained that this was because I understood the value of books, perhaps because I

Women and Colonial Men: The Nwaobiola of 1925,” in *“Wicked” Women and the Reconfiguration of Gender in Africa*, ed. Dorothy Hodgson and Sheryl McCurdy (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2001), 260-281; Misty L. Bastian, “‘Vultures of the Marketplace’: Igbo and Other Southeastern Nigerian Women’s Discourse about the Ogu Umunwaanyi (Women’s War) of 1929,” in *Women and African Colonial Histories*, ed. Jean Allman, Susan Geiger, and Nakanyike Musisi (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 260-281.

¹⁰ Perhaps due to the legacy of the colonial narrative of white superiority, there is a trend in present-day Nigeria of appreciating light or fair skin more than other skin tones. See Pita N. O. Ejiofor, *Cultural Revival in Igboland* (Onitsha: University Publishing Company, 1984), 13; Oluwakemi M. Balogun, “Cultural and Cosmopolitan: Idealized Femininity and Embodied Nationalism in Nigerian Beauty Pageants,” *Gender and Society* 26, no. 3 (2012): 371, 375; Adediran Daniel Ikuomola, “The Stars Must Shine: Nollywood Talent Scouts’ Influence on Theatre Arts Students’ Body Image in Nigerian Universities,” *Africa Development* 43, no. 1 (2018): 142, 148, 149; S. B. Adebajo, “An Epidemiological Survey of the Use of Cosmetic Skin Lightening Cosmetics Among Traders in Lagos, Nigeria,” *West African Journal of Medicine* 21, no. 1 (2002): 51-55; Evelyn Nakano Glenn, “Yearning for Lightness: Transnational Circuits in the Marketing and Consumption of Skin Lighteners,” *Gender and Society* 22, no. 3 (2008): 286; Yetunde M. Olumide, “Use of Skin Lightening Creams: Lack of Recognition and Regulation is Having Serious Medical Consequences,” *British Medical Journal* 342, no. 7793 (2011): 345-346.

had previously donated several to the library on behalf of my advisor and myself.¹¹ In this particular case, I am not certain whether I was favored because of my whiteness, my generosity, or my perceived relationship to Chinua Achebe, through my dissertation advisor, but I suspect it was the first option.

Impressed by my academic accomplishments and ability to conduct independent research, many of my elderly male collaborators, especially those who had received Western education,¹² described me as “very smart for a girl.” This type of comment, in my view, reflected Victorian beliefs about womanhood, particularly that women do not have the same intellectual acuity as men,¹³ and I was frustrated hearing it, as it was both a compliment and an insult.¹⁴ In those moments, I felt like Ezinma, Okonkwo’s daughter in Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* whom Okonkwo favored but always wished had been a son.¹⁵ While I would agree that I am intelligent and ambitious, I do not believe that I am exceptional, as through my affiliations with Fulbright and the SSRC, I have conversed with numerous young, female scholars who have carried out important international research in their fields.

¹¹ My advisor, Nwando Achebe, donated more than 100 books and I donated about twenty.

¹² By “Western education,” I refer to the British-styled education system that missionaries and the colonial government established in the early twentieth century and that still exist in Nigeria today. This definition of Western education also extends to that which individuals might have received abroad, in Europe or the United States.

¹³ Unsurprisingly, British missionaries and colonial officers of the late nineteenth century tended to espouse mainstream Victorian values and sought to inculcate Igbo people with them through Western education and Christianity. Colonial administrator Sir George Goldie, for instance, commented that his contemporary Mary Kingsley, a British ethnographer and explorer, “had the brain of a man” by way of praising her high intelligence and ability to carry out intensive research. Stephan Gwynn, *The Life of Mary Kingsley* (London: Macmillan, 1932), 252.

¹⁴ Elderly men, and some elderly women, often referred to me as a girl rather than a woman due to my relative youth (I was 25 and 26 at the time of my fieldwork) and because I was not married.

¹⁵ Okonkwo cherished Ezinma for behaving as a dutiful son would. On more than one occasion, he revealed that he wished Ezinma was a boy. Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (New York: Anchor Books, 1994 [1959]), 64, 66.

Situating Myself in Ogidi—An Outsider Supported by Insiders

When discussing her research in the Nsukka area of northern Igboland, Nwando Achebe defines herself as both a relative insider and a relative outsider: the former because she is Igbo and even grew up in Nsukka, which led some Nsukka elders to call her *nwada Nsukka* (a daughter of Nsukka); and the latter because she originally is from a different part of Igboland, making her *nwada Ogidi*.¹⁶ Because I am foreign, I cannot claim to be a relative insider—or, indeed, even a relative outsider—in Ogidi. Instead, I am an outsider, who could not reasonably expect to live and conduct research in Ogidi except at the invitation of respected members of the community. Nwando Achebe, my dissertation advisor, introduced me to the Osakwe family, friends of her family from Ogidi.¹⁷ One of them, Chukwuma C. C. Osakwe—a history professor at the Nigerian National Defense Academy—escorted me into Ogidi and invited me to stay with his sister, Chino Ojeh, in the Osakwe family compound situated near Ugwunwasike Junction in Ogidi’s Ikenga quarter.¹⁸ It seems unlikely that I could have settled into Ogidi or undertaken this research without the connections that the Achebe and Osakwe families provided me. For instance, on my second day in Ogidi, the town’s *igwe*, Ezechuamagha I,¹⁹ granted an audience in his magnificent palace to Osakwe and myself.²⁰ After I presented gifts and an official letter of introduction from my advisor outlining my intentions in Ogidi, the *igwe* permitted me to conduct my research. As my advisor had previously counseled me, few—if any—oral history collaborators would have agreed to speak with me unless I received the *igwe*’s formal blessing. The privileges conferred on me via

¹⁶ *Nwada* means daughter, so *nwada Ogidi* is a female who hails from Ogidi through patrilineage. For Nsukka elders to call Achebe *nwada Nsukka* means that they welcomed her as if she were born there. Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 4.

¹⁷ The Achebe family also hails from Ogidi.

¹⁸ Ugwunwasike Junction is a traffic roundabout where three heavily traveled roads converge. The Osakwe compound is located along one of these roads near the roundabout.

¹⁹ Born Alex Uzo Onyido, he is the fifth *igwe* of Ogidi, but the first who is not a member of the Amobi family.

²⁰ We visited the *igwe*’s palace on 11 February 2018.

the support of Ogidi insiders, especially Igwe Ezechuamagha I, his royal cabinet, and members of the Achebe and Osakwe families, accorded me the status of a welcomed outsider, a long-term guest.²¹

Even so, some potential collaborators viewed me with suspicion.²² One such incident occurred when my research guide/research assistant,²³ Mbanefo Osakwe, took me at a prearranged time to meet with Emeka Onyechi,²⁴ a priest of the goddess idemili.²⁵ After the priest offered us *oji* (kola nut),²⁶ Osakwe reminded him of the purpose of our visit, at which point the priest abruptly withdrew his consent to an interview until I could produce written authorization from the *igwe*. Although I had received the *igwe*'s explicit verbal approval in the presence of several elite and influential Ogidi men just six months earlier, I had not considered asking him for signed documentation, and until that moment, no other oral history collaborators had asked me for such confirmation. In fact, when first contacted, most potential collaborators informed us that they had

²¹ In a similar manner, Nwando Achebe notes that she was treated as a welcomed guest in Igalaland. My presentation of a letter of introduction to the *igwe* of Ogidi and the town's subsequent acceptance of me paralleled Achebe's route to becoming an "Igala-sanctioned guest" in Igalaland. See Nwando Achebe, *The Female King of Colonial Nigeria: Ahebi Ugbabe* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 12-13.

²² The instances of hostility and suspicion that I encountered are reminiscent of incidents during Nwando Achebe's fieldwork. For example, Achebe and her research guide were prevented from seeing a priest of the indigenous religion due to unfounded suspicions that her research guide was secretly recording what was happening at the shrine. Other collaborators demanded that Achebe explain herself and her interest in her research topic at great length. Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 17.

²³ The role of a research guide is to escort the researcher through the fieldwork location, introducing her to the community and assisting her in identifying and contacting potential oral history collaborators. Conversely, a research assistant's role is to accompany the researcher to interviews, in my case, for the purpose of reintroducing the researcher to collaborators and serving as an English-Igbo interpreter. My research guide doubled as one of my research assistants.

²⁴ As a revered priest, he is given the name Akaette Ogidi, *akaette* meaning "the deities that transform into pythons." The goddess idemili is known for protecting the sacred python.

²⁵ The goddess idemili is one of the lesser deities of the indigenous Igbo religion, and thus I intentionally spell her name without capitalization, which is reserved for the high God, Chukwu. Further discussion of this is provided in Chapter 2. There are also multiple idemili shrines in Ogidi, which is why I refer to Onyechi as *a* priest rather than *the* priest of idemili.

²⁶ Presenting kola nut to an individual or group is a sign of welcome and good wishes. Nearly every group activity in Igbo society begins with what is called the breaking of kola nut. Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria*, 74; Basden, *Niger Ibos*, 161; John Njoku, *Tradition and Strategy of Change in Black Africa* ([Place of publication not identified]: [Publisher not identified], [Year not identified]), 12; Cyril Okafor, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 26 April 2018; Onwuameze Ikwuwelu, interview by the author, Ogidi, 5 April 2018.

already heard the *igwe* had granted me permission to conduct research in Ogidi. Because I deemed it necessary to interview Onyechi, I spoke with the *igwe* about this issue, and he directed his secretary to supply me with the necessary letter of approval, which for various reasons took nearly six weeks to materialize. Despite this time lag, the document had its desired effect, and when interviewed, the priest offered a detailed account of idemili's legislative and judicial functions.²⁷ That experience was challenging, but unusual; most people in Ogidi were eager to talk to me, likely because I was a young white woman and/or someone who had the backing of important townspeople, i.e., an outsider with insider connections.

I was frequently reminded of my welcomed-guest status by collaborators, friends, and acquaintances in Ogidi who often asked about my research progress and offered to assist me. For example, during an interview with historian Chief Edward Dike Ibemesi, he generously loaned me several out-of-print books that he had published on Ogidi's history.²⁸ At the time, I was struck by his benevolence, but I soon discovered that most of my collaborators behaved similarly.²⁹ I conducted more than 140 interviews,³⁰ almost all of which began with the collaborator presenting me with a kola nut and praying for my success and well-being. Although offering such blessings is common in Igboland, I was still humbled, as these experiences solidified my view that Ogidi embraced me as a welcomed guest rather than a stranger.

²⁷ This interview with Onyechi took place in Uru Ogidi, 6 November 2018.

²⁸ I had previously read one of these books, Dike Ibemesi's *Ogidi: Historical Perspective of a People* (Ogidi: Ekpechi and Sons, 1995), which my advisor had lent me years prior. Because these books were out of print, they would have been nearly impossible for me to access on my own.

²⁹ This interview with Chief Ibemesi in Ogidi on 7 March 2018 was one of the first I conducted. It was after interviewing more oral history collaborators throughout 2018 that I noticed this pattern of generosity and support.

³⁰ I interviewed 135 individuals, five of them being interviewed twice and one being interviewed three times, totaling 142 interviews.

Living in Ogidi also helped concretize the community's view of me as a welcomed guest, and while I did collect valuable materials from archives,³¹ my time spent in Ogidi was the most important phase of my fieldwork. I lived in Ogidi for more than eight months, interviewing oral history collaborators about their life stories, oral traditions, indigenous religion, law, and the arrival of the British. Immersing myself in the community—attending a local church, shopping in Ogidi's open-air markets, volunteering at a primary school, and attending festivals and burials³²—allowed Ogidi people to become acquainted with me as more than just a researcher. If I had lived elsewhere and commuted to Ogidi for interviews, or lived there, but alone in a hotel, I suspect I would not have experienced the numerous communal activities that allowed me to build relationships of mutual trust and respect with members of my host family and their neighbors.³³ In fact, some oral history collaborations arose specifically because I made myself approachable within my host family's compound. On more than one occasion, an Ogidi resident visiting the Osakwe family home inquired about my research and offered to introduce me to an elderly custodian of local history.

Even though I was a welcomed guest and generally accepted by the townspeople—as evidenced by people I did not know greeting and engaging with me wherever I went in Ogidi—my standing in the community sometimes felt tenuous. I found myself carefully negotiating two distinct but partially overlapping spheres: the community's predominant Christianity and the indigenous Igbo religion. To blend in with the former, I regularly attended Sunday worship at St.

³¹ I conducted research at the Nigerian National Archive at Enugu for one month in the summer of 2016 and for three months in 2018. In the latter year, I also collected documents remotely from the Church Mission Society Archives in the U.K.

³² During Ogidi's largest festival, Nwafor, I attended the *igwe's* palace for a special celebration that showcased many of the town's masquerades. At other points during my stay, I was invited to burial ceremonies for community members who were related to my hosts or oral history collaborators.

³³ These activities included cooking in my host family's kitchen, greeting and playing with the children who lived in the compound after they returned from school, and sitting on the front steps of the house discussing the latest "light" problem (i.e., power outages, which are frequent in Nigeria).

Paul's Anglican Church in Ikenga quarter from six to nine or ten o'clock in the morning. To satisfy my research requirements, I attended the shrines of the indigenous Igbo religion in the town and interviewed as many of its priests as were available and willing to speak with me. I was not always successful at maintaining this delicate balance, as I discovered one Sunday morning in August 2018. By that time, I had interviewed eighteen priests of the indigenous Igbo religion and had been faithfully attending St. Paul's weekly services for several months. On this particular Sunday, the canon ascended to the pulpit, welcomed the congregation, and then spoke a word of caution. He said it had recently come to his attention that some church congregants had been visiting indigenous shrines, which he referred to as "satanic," and admonished all of us to stay away from such places for the sake of our souls. I noticed that, as he did so, his gaze lingered in the part of the church where I always sat. He could very well have been referring to any number of other congregants, as Christians did occasionally seek the assistance of an Igbo deity in procuring a favor or settling a dispute. Nonetheless, I sensed that the rebuke was meant, at least in part, for the young, white, highly-recognizable researcher who had been witnessed by many in Ogidi entering the shrines of deities of the indigenous religion over the preceding few months. Fortunately, this divergence in opinion between the canon and myself did not negatively impact my overall relationship with the people of Ogidi. Despite my continued visits to shrines and interviews with their custodians, I was still welcomed in church each Sunday, and still interacted with devout Christians in the community both professionally and socially.

Oral History in Practice

Planning and Adapting My Interview Strategy

Because the concept of gender and the theory of (re)gendering are at the center of this dissertation, I sought the perspectives of both male and female oral history collaborators. My identity as a young female scholar gave me the ability to interview both men and women in Ogidi, as male collaborators respected my intellect and ambition, while females trusted me as a fellow woman with whom they could share their intimate lived experiences. While my interviews with female oral history collaborators had topical components, I spent the bulk of them listening to women narrate their life histories. I believe that a male researcher, regardless of race, nationality, or age, would have had difficulty asking about, let alone obtaining, the sorts of personal details that were revealed to me.

Accompanied by Mbanefo Osakwe, I interviewed sixty-seven men in Ogidi. Because my research assistant was involved in several civic organizations devoted to the safeguarding of Ogidi's culture and traditions, he had access to elderly as well as titled men who were known to be custodians of the town's history.³⁴ My goal was to speak with such individuals from each of the four quarters of Ogidi and from a broad range of socio-economic strata. Despite these differences, one commonality among them was that most were at least sixty years old. In addition, I interviewed twenty-two of Ogidi's priests of the indigenous religion.³⁵ With the help of Ngozi Amobi,³⁶ my female research assistant, I interviewed sixty-eight women, including *umuokpu Ogidi* (daughters

³⁴ By "titled" I am referring to the Igbo *ozo* system, in which wealthy and accomplished men take titles that signify their achievements. Chapter 3 includes a thorough explanation of Igbo men's and women's title societies.

³⁵ As of 2018, all of Ogidi's priests except one were male. Also, a few priests were unavailable or unwilling to be interviewed.

³⁶ She is of no relation to Walter Amobi, Ogidi's first warrant chief and *igwe*. The Amobi family into which she married is distinct from the royal Amobi family.

of Ogidi) and *ndinyom Ogidi* (wives of Ogidi)³⁷ who hailed from each of the town's four quarters. They ranged in age from young adults to centenarians, and in socio-economic status from wealthy, elite business women to teachers, market women, and farmers.

When interviewing men, Osakwe and I would often travel to an oral history collaborator's home or, in the case of a priest, the shrine that he serviced. A majority of the elderly men were unwilling or unable to travel far from their compounds, so we went to them. Likewise, the priests spent a high proportion of their time at their shrines, and we did not want to pull them away from their work for any longer than necessary. The remainder of my male collaborators were mostly well-respected retired professionals, and my guide explained to me that approaching them in their homes was expected as a show of deference. My female collaborators, on the other hand, were often interviewed at Amobi's house in Ikenga quarter, located on the main road near Ogidi's popular Nkwo market, primarily for the sake of convenience to all parties.³⁸ Many of these women worked long hours, buying or selling in the markets, teaching in schools, attending church committee meetings, or selling wares along the main roads in Ogidi and nearby towns. It was thus difficult to find times when they would be at home for us to visit them, and when they were home—usually in the evenings—their husbands and children tended to be present. Allowing female collaborators to share their stories freely, without the presence of their husbands, seemed to be the most ethical way to conduct interviews with them. However, like their male counterparts, the oldest women among them preferred to be visited in their own homes.

Establishing a good rapport with all of my oral history collaborators was a crucial step in conducting sincere and diligent oral history research. Most of my interview appointments lasted

³⁷ *Umuokpu Ogidi* are women whose natal home is in Ogidi, while *ndinyom Ogidi* are women from other communities who have married Ogidi men.

³⁸ Frequently, women met with us on their way to or from Nkwo market.

two to three hours, but the first fifteen minutes of each one usually involved ceremonious welcomes that included prayers over kola nut. After such a prelude, I would offer my collaborator a brief synopsis of my project and a list of topics I wished to discuss. Some collaborators, particularly the non-elders and non-titled individuals, told me that they would be unable to contribute much because they were not historians, or because as Christians they did not know about indigenous Igbo religion or law. Nonetheless, many in this group were able to speak at length about various aspects of Ogidi's history. Chino Ojeh, a customary court president,³⁹ was a prime example. During our interview, I asked her to explain the differences between indigenous Igbo law as practiced *tupu ndi ocha bia* and the current customary law. Although she initially insisted that she did not know about things that occurred *mgbe gbo gbo* (long ago),⁴⁰ she later explained that the questions I asked had reminded her of histories and traditions that her parents recounted to her as a child, and which described life in Ogidi *tupu ndi ocha bia*.⁴¹ This incident and others like it led me to believe that most of my collaborators could remember more information than they originally assumed, once prompted by the right questions. Of course, such questions were as unique as each person I interviewed. For that reason, I made a point of carefully listening before framing person-specific follow-up questions.

Dynamics of Power and Privilege

My whiteness was the single most authoritative part of my identity, and nearly all of my collaborators and other contacts in Ogidi were aware of my presence in town prior to making my acquaintance formally. Many characterized me as a wealthy American simply because I had the

³⁹ Chino Ojeh is the president (i.e., head judge) of the Okpanam District Customary Court in Okpanam, Delta State, located in Igboland west of the River Niger.

⁴⁰ My oral history collaborators often used the phrase *mgbe gbo gbo*, literally meaning "early early time," to reference the pre-colonial and colonial eras. Similarly, Nwando Achebe uses this periodization in her study of Nsukka history, referring to it as *oge gbo gbo* (*The Female King of Colonial Nigeria: Ahebi Ugbabe* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 30.

⁴¹ Chino Ojeh, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 23 February 2018.

means to travel to Nigeria by plane, with some commenting that my whiteness made me stand out like “a walking dollar sign.”⁴² To mitigate any biases my whiteness might convey, and to put my research collaborators at ease, I sought to neutralize my privilege with a style of social decorum exemplified by Nwando Achebe. Specifically, when interviewing non-elite women in Nsukka, Achebe emulated their style by wearing “low-grade traditional garbs”; and when meeting with elite individuals, she dressed in expensive clothing and jewelry.⁴³ I modified this tactic slightly because unlike Achebe, I am not Igbo or even of African descent. Instead, for interviews with all collaborators, I wore modest American clothes, usually simple knee- or ankle-length cotton dresses with sandals—or “slippers,” as they are called in Igboland. In short, I avoided wearing anything that would project wealth or excess. These measures, coupled with my involvement in Ogidi’s community activities, seemed to help defuse or deflect prejudices, by making me seem more relatable and authentic to my collaborators, many of whom would freely share a wealth of information during interviews.

Another way I made myself relatable to my oral history collaborators was through intentional, open discourse: encouraging them to ask questions of me.⁴⁴ Most wanted to learn about my lineage or ancestry, since they stated matter-of-factly (and correctly) that white Americans are not indigenous to the United States. Never before in all my travels had my interlocutors probed my family heritage; the response that I was American had always been sufficient. Thus, when Igbo collaborators, friends, and acquaintances inquired about my genealogy, I was genuinely perplexed.

⁴² My friends Kemsy Nwajiaku, Uchechi Onyegbule, and Chijioke Onuoha told me this on several occasions, when bystanders gawked at us while we patronized restaurants, open-air markets, and shopping malls in the city of Enugu, where I spent about three months conducting archival research in 2018. Another friend, Ginika Okorie, expressed the same suspicions when observers stared at us in the Onitsha and Ogidi markets that we frequented weekly.

⁴³ Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 14.

⁴⁴ Before leaving to conduct fieldwork, my advisor reminded me of advice that she offered in her first book (Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 5), that a researcher should allow herself to be interviewed as much as she expects to interview her collaborators.

In fact, I recorded my musings on that topic in my journal during the first few months of my fieldwork. After conducting about twenty interviews, it became apparent how important lineage and connection to one's motherland and fatherland were to Igbo people, and more specifically, to the people of Ogidi. While I was cognizant of this fact from reading scholarship and fiction written about Igboland long before traveling there, I gained a deeper appreciation of it through these first-hand experiences. For instance, I became able to properly understand why *umuokpu Ogidi* hold great authority in their natal communities even if they marry and move far away. Their patrilineal descent to Ogidi binds them to the past, present, and future generations who call Ogidi home, and this bond is not easily broken. After all, the Igbo say *umunna siri ike* and *obara siri ike*, which respectively translate as "the extended family is strength" and "blood is strength." Realizing this also helped me understand the severity of certain punishments for transgressing *omenani*. According to indigenous Igbo law, one of the most serious offenses that one can commit is killing a clansperson, which—even if accidental—warrants the offender's mandatory exile for a period of several years.⁴⁵ While temporary exile might not seem like a devastating punishment to an American readership, it implies social ostracization from the people with whom one has formed one's closest bonds, and literal exclusion from the land where all of one's paternal ancestors have lived.

Interpreting a History of Women and Gender from Collaborations with Men and Women

I found that my male collaborators, especially the elderly ones, tended to recall Ogidi histories and to describe indigenous Igbo religion, law, and culture in greater detail than my female collaborators did. Thus, I agree with Nwando Achebe who states that "the best and sometimes *only*

⁴⁵ Meek, *Law and Authority*, 127; Chief Edward Dike Ibemesi, interview by the author; Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 124. This is discussed at length in Chapter 2.

way to uncover the history of women is to interview both men and women.”⁴⁶ My female collaborators were able to offer insight into the personalities of particular Ogidi women who lived in the early and mid-twentieth century, but generally they did not provide vivid historical accounts of larger structures such as the colonial rule of law and its effects on women. As in Achebe’s case, many of my male collaborators were able to describe “institutions of female power and instances of women’s collective action”⁴⁷ that existed or occurred *tupu ndi ocha bia* and *oge ndi ocha chilu*, largely because most of these men had lived all or nearly all of their lives in Ogidi, and were instilled with the rich heritage of their natal villages’ histories and oral traditions. On the contrary, a majority of my female collaborators, both *umuokpu Ogidi* and *ndinyom Ogidi*, had left their natal villages to live in their husbands’ homes, and were therefore less acquainted with such histories and traditions.⁴⁸

A noteworthy example of how I utilized both men’s and women’s contributions is my investigation of the 1914 Ogidi women’s market protest, which figures prominently in the narrative of the (re)gendering of law. While I gathered some evidence of this event from archival sources and a good deal more from Achebe’s essay on the subject,⁴⁹ I was able to glean significant corroborating and supplementary evidence regarding the protest from numerous male collaborators. They explained the order and dynamics of the events in which Ogidi women participated and named several key figures who led the protest, but they could not provide much detail about individual women. In contrast, a number of my female collaborators, while uncertain about the specifics of the event, were quick to recall personal attributes of the spokeswomen who

⁴⁶ Emphasis in original: Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 15.

⁴⁷ Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 15.

⁴⁸ See also Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 15. The few exceptions were the unmarried women I interviewed who still resided in their natal villages.

⁴⁹ Achebe, “Ogidi Palaver,” 23-51.

were at the forefront of the demonstration—women named Anyafulu, Ajamana, and Ikwubia, who were imprisoned for allegedly causing discord in the district officer’s court during that protest.⁵⁰ For instance, an elderly female collaborator of mine, Ifeude Okeke, described the intrepid Anyafulu this way: “Oh she lived a troublesome life. A man could not intimidate her in anything. She was very strong. She was the leader of the women. She could not be intimidated, so she went to jail a lot of times for her stubbornness.”⁵¹ Insight into the personalities of *umuokpu Ogidi* spokeswomen added a rich dimension to my understanding of their actions. When pairing these perceptions with the factual circumstances of the 1914 protest, I gained a more complete picture of this extraordinary event.

Encountering Unanticipated Challenges During Interviews

All the interviews I conducted were of course unique, and I learned to adapt to them as such. In more than half of them, one or more ancillary persons were present. Friends or relatives who were passing through the collaborator’s house, or people cleaning the shrine compound, often drew near to listen to what was being said. The presence of these onlookers was not problematic unless they interrupted my collaborator. Nevertheless, I respected various collaborators’ decisions to allow these third parties to participate. This adaptive interview method felt organic and productive, and the communal atmosphere sometimes inspired me to frame new questions. One vivid example occurred during my interview with Chief Godwin Nweke Agbogu, a titled man and retired trailer (i.e., semi-truck) driver from Ikenga quarter, who was born in 1954 and had lived most of his life in Ogidi. Although not a priest of an Igbo deity, Agbogu lived near the town’s senior shrine of the god udo and was familiar with its priest. Through his relationships to that priest

⁵⁰ A district officer was a British colonial official who supervised a large area within a province. In this case, the district officer, who was stationed at Onitsha, oversaw the maintenance of law and order in dozens of towns including Ogidi.

⁵¹ Ifeude Okeke, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 29 August 2018.

and to elders of his village and quarter, he had become well-versed in the indigenous Igbo religion and local history *tupu ndi ocha bia* and *oge Walter*. When I asked Agbogu to comment on Walter Amobi, the ensuing lengthy conversation involved not only the two of us, but also my research assistant and two of the collaborator's relatives who were sitting with us, each of whom shared a distinct version of Amobi's upbringing and rise to power.⁵² Their divergent commentaries prompted me to ask more questions about these conflicting traditions in subsequent interviews.

A consistent issue that I encountered was that many collaborators defined *mgbe gbo gbo*, "the olden days," in different ways: ranging from perhaps a hundred to thousands of years ago. Moreover, many of my collaborators used this term in multiple ways within a single interview, which initially caused some confusion. For example, Dominic Nnamdi Obijiofor described the composition of the Ogidi Native Court by stating that "in the olden days, the D.O. [British district officer] would be present, and the *igwe* would be present, and the messengers of the *igwe* would be there too."⁵³ Clearly, he was referring to a time between 1911, when the native court was established, and 1960, the year of Nigeria's independence from Britain. Yet, in the same interview, Obijiofor also explained that "in the olden days, before the white men came, the courts we had were [those of] deities."⁵⁴ Again, this collaborator had made the meaning of his periodization clear, this time referring to a time *tupu ndi ocha bia*. Although most of the time I could determine what was meant by "the olden days" from contextual clues, sometimes it remained unclear, which required me to follow up with the collaborator later in the interview to be sure I understood the connotation of this nebulous phrase. I chose not to interrupt, however, and made a mental note to revisit that part of the conversation after the collaborator had finished his or her narration. This

⁵² Chief Godwin Nweke Agbogu, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 6 March 2018.

⁵³ Dominic Nnamdi Obijiofor, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 17 April 2018.

⁵⁴ Dominic Nnamdi Obijiofor, interview by the author.

was not always easy for me; indeed, my greatest challenge when conducting interviews was to abstain from making any interjections while my collaborators were answering my questions, since—being enthusiastic about my research—I sometimes struggled to withhold my own prior knowledge of the topic being described. Yet, it is important for historians to allow their collaborators to speak freely, because interviews not only present the latter with an opportunity to talk, but also confer upon the former the responsibility of listening carefully, i.e., to comprehend rather than simply to respond. Occasional interruptions by my research assistants, alerting me that I had already learned a given fact or heard a particular oral tradition from someone else, emerged as a secondary challenge. My response to such comments was always the same: that the collaborator should continue his or her explanation, which represented a unique and thus valuable perspective.

Examining My Positionality: A Reflexive Methodology

Throughout my stay in Igboland, I kept a daily journal that swelled to more than 100 single-spaced typed pages. Its purpose was constant self-reflective assessment of my research progress.⁵⁵ Such reflection, in turn, prompted me to adapt my approach in pursuit of the most organic and comprehensive interviews possible. I also felt it was important to reflect on the wealth of information I had gathered through the interviews by sharing my findings with others. To fact-check my data and obtain community feedback, I presented my preliminary research conclusions on two occasions near the end of my stay in Ogidi.⁵⁶ The first was a formal presentation to about

⁵⁵ This also included reflection on the progress of my archival searches, as I drew connections between colonial documents and oral sources.

⁵⁶ Nwando Achebe used this methodology during her own dissertation research in Enugu-Ezike, allowing the community to respond—to “talk back” as Achebe puts it—to her interpretations and tentative conclusions. See Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 10-11.

thirty of the town's most respected titled men, many of whom I had previously interviewed. The feedback I received after that presentation was useful, and the men said that they appreciated my show of respect for Ogidi's elite. The other presentation was to an informal meeting of about ten elderly *ekwe* titled women⁵⁷ at the home of one of my most valued oral history collaborators, Chief Nwabuoku Osakwe,⁵⁸ a charismatic octogenarian woman. There, I discussed the major trends and themes that I had gathered from my interviews with women, and I asked for clarification of some points, which they provided. The women also expressed their gratitude to me for taking the time to interview numerous women, record their life histories, and share my tentative research findings.

Although I presented small gifts to my collaborators as tokens of my appreciation, there is no way to repay Ogidi for the abundance of knowledge its people provided to me. Nonetheless, as an additional demonstration of my gratitude, I plan to donate copies of my dissertation and future scholarship to libraries and other institutions of learning in Ogidi. I hope that its people will be proud to read these works and see how they contributed to my interpretation of their history.

A Note on Expectations

My dissertation advisor, Nwando Achebe, explains that she decided to write Igbo women's history in part because of her desire to see herself in that history.⁵⁹ For me, this was not the case; as noted above, I am not Igbo, Nigerian, or African. Rather, I became interested in the study of Igbo women during my freshman year at St. Olaf College, when I first read about the political

⁵⁷ The *ekwe* title is reserved for post-menopausal married women of great wealth and achievement. Ifi Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society* (London: Zed, 1987), 42; Achebe, "'Ogidi Palaver,'" 32; Stella Igweze, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 11 August 2018; Joy Ufodiama, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 25 September 2018; Nwude Anumba, interview by Anthonia Uchenna Anyegbunam, Uru Ogidi, 4 September 1983, in Anyegbunam, "The External Relations of Ogidi Up to 1903" (B.A. Thesis, Department of History, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 1984), 87.

⁵⁸ The Osakwe family that she belonged to was not related to the Osakwe family that hosted me. Chief Nwabuoku Osakwe's title name is Dibueni Nwanyi, meaning "husband is a friend of the woman."

⁵⁹ Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 2.

power of those who participated in the 1929 Women's War. There was something about the Women's War that made the story of women's struggle in a place so far away prompt me to question the male-biased, often Euro- or American-centric history I had been taught up to that point. I also sought to closely examine the history that informed *Things Fall Apart*, my first foray into Igbo history, religion, and law. After reading about the Women's War, I sought to see the place of women and female forces comprehensively in the same foreign place (Igboland) that had become somewhat more familiar to me after reading *Things Fall Apart*, as well as other novels like Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Purple Hibiscus*. It seems that my penchant for seeking to understand perspectives other than my own, and my love of history and literature, are what first piqued my interest in an ethnic and linguistic group, a culture and a history, and a worldview that were different from my own. Thus, I entered my fieldwork with an agenda based on what I understood from historical scholarship on resistance and protests by Igbo women, and Ogidi women in particular. I expected to find evidence not only of the re-gendering of law from female to male, but the subsequent re-re-gendering of law, or the reassertion of female-centric legal authority, by way of women's successful demonstrations like that of the 1914 women's market protest. However, I did not discover much evidence of women effectively resisting the re-gendering of law in Ogidi after 1914. Quite to the contrary, I found not only that the human realm of law was re-gendered *oge Walter* and *oge interregnum*, but that more than half a century after the latter period ended, the preeminent prescriber of law—the earth goddess—had been re-gendered; so that, by the time of my arrival in Ogidi in 2018, a substantial number of priests of the indigenous religion and other knowledgeable

oral history collaborators considered ani to be male.⁶⁰ It was this realization that solidified for me the timeliness, indeed the urgency, of analyzing how and why law became re-gendered in Ogidi.

Conclusion

The Igbo say *ukwa ruo oge ya, o da*, literally meaning “when breadfruit reaches its time, it falls,”⁶¹ and intimating that everything happens in its own, rightful time. At this point in my life, I believe I am uniquely equipped and positioned to write this study of the (re)gendering of law in Ogidi, not only because of the data I collected during my fieldwork, but also because of my more personal connections to Ogidi. My advisor, Nwando Achebe, is an award-winning scholar of Igbo women’s and gender history, *nwaokpu Ogidi*, and the daughter of famed writer Chinua Achebe; and the latter’s novel *Things Fall Apart*—which offers unique, descriptive insight into Ogidi’s indigenous legal system and the balance of male and female forces within Igbo cosmology—was the original impetus for my interest in African history, more than a decade ago. My personal and professional experiences have shaped the way that I interpret the history of (re)gendering in Ogidi, and have enabled me, despite my being young, white, and American, to write that history from an Igbo-centric, and particularly an Ogidi-centric, perspective.

⁶⁰ I revisit this issue in the Conclusion.

⁶¹ From my notes for an Igbo language course at Michigan State University, 28 February 2017.

CHAPTER 2:

LAW AND PUNISHMENT IN OGIDI, *OGE FOUR QUARTERS-OGE NDI OCHA BIA*

A reasonable starting point for those seeking a better understanding of Igbo society would be an examination of its relationship to the earth and its goddess. An important depiction of this relationship occurs in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. In the novel, the fictive town of Umuofia—a stand-in for his hometown, Ogidi—holds an annual New Yam festival, which

was an occasion for giving thanks to [a]ni, the earth goddess and the source of all fertility. Ani played a greater part in the life of the people than any other deity. She was the ultimate judge of morality and conduct. And what was more, she was in close communion with the departed fathers of the clan whose bodies had been committed to earth.¹

The earth, the goddess who embodies it, and the spirits of deceased ancestors who reside in it are, indeed, central components of Igbo cosmology. As defined by historian and theologian Obiakoizu A. Iloanusi, a cosmology is a society's assessment of its own beliefs and practices as well as the relationships among its people and all other elements of the universe.² Igbo cosmology, while explaining the origins and ordering of the world, also provides a code of ethics that ensures the balance of society.³ Anthropologist and sociologist Victor Uchendu describes this code as a prescriptive system that “defines what the Igbo ought to do and what they ought to avoid,” as well as “an *action* system, which reveals what the Igbo actually do as manifested in their overt and covert behavior.”⁴ In Igbo cosmology, justice is defined as the balance of society, and law as the institution that ensures the maintenance of such balance.⁵

¹ Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (New York: Anchor Books, 1994 [1959]), 36.

² Obiakoizu A. Iloanusi, *Myths and Creation of Man and the Origin of Death in Africa: A Study in Igbo Traditional Culture and Other African Cultures* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1984), 69-70.

³ Iloanusi, *Myths and Creation of Man*, 70; Victor Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), 11.

⁴ Emphasis in original: Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria*, 11.

⁵ Ogechi E. Anyanwu, “Crime and Punishment in Pre-Colonial Igbo Society and the Challenge of British Colonial Rule,” in *Between Tradition and Change: Sociopolitical and Economic Transformation Among the Igbo of Nigeria*,

As we have seen, there are two Igbo words for law: *omenani* and *iwu*, the former referring to what the earth goddess decrees to be right or wrong⁶ and the latter, to regulations created by humans.⁷ Although there are two words for law, there are actually three categories, the third being the laws decreed by deities (or oracles) other than the earth goddess, and these laws are denoted as the *omenani* of each god. For example, the laws that the god and oracle udo decrees are called *omenani-udo*. When used by itself, *omenani* refers specifically to the laws of ani, and it is widely accepted as occupying a position of superiority to the *omenani* of other deities as well as *iwu*; therefore, whenever Igbo people introduce new laws, they must verify with the priest of ani that they are in accordance with *omenani*.⁸ These were the three forms of law that Ogidi people followed *oge four quarters-oge ndi ocha bia*, and all were female-centric in the sense that *omenani* emerged from and was protected by the earth goddess, while the *omenani* of other deities as well as *iwu* were subject to her approval. Even today in Ogidi and across Igboland, ani is regarded as the source of indigenous law and the protector of morality;⁹ and societal balance is held to be

ed. Apollos O. Nwauwa and Ebere Onwudiwe (Glassboro: Goldline and Jacobs, 2012), 50-51; Marc Matera, Misty L. Bastian, and Susan Kingsley Kent, *The Women's War of 1929: Gender and Violence in Colonial Nigeria* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 19; K. Onwuka Dike and Felicia Ekejiuba, *The Aro of South-eastern Nigeria, 1650–1980* (Ibadan: University Press, 1990), 131.

⁶ Nwando Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings: Female Power and Authority in Northern Igboland, 1900–1960* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2005), 27; Sabine Jell-Bahlsen, *The Water Goddess in Igbo Cosmology: Ogbuide of Oguta Lake* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2008), 181.

⁷ A. E. Afigbo, “Prolegomena to the Study of the Culture History of the Igbo-Speaking Peoples,” in *Igbo History and Society: The Essays of Adiele Afigbo*, ed. Toyin Falola (Trenton: African World Press, 2005), 8; Chieka Ifemesia, *Traditional Humane Living Among the Igbo: An Historical Perspective* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension, 1979), 35. Also note that *omenani* and *iwu* can each be used as singular and plural nouns.

⁸ C. K. Meek, *Law and Authority in a Nigerian Tribe: A Study in Indirect Rule* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), 247; S. N. Nwabara, *Iboland: A Century of Contact with Britain 1860–1960* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1977), 32; John Oriji, “Sacred Authority in Igbo Society,” *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 68, no. 1 (1989): 119; Emefie Ikenga-Metuh, “Ritual Dirt and Purification Rites among the Igbo,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 15, no. 1 (1985): 5.

⁹ Meek, *Law and Authority*, 340; C. K. Meek, *Land Tenure and Land Administration in Nigeria and the Cameroons* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1957), 113; Daryll Forde and G. I. Jones, *The Igbo and Ibibio-Speaking Peoples of South-Eastern Nigeria* (London: International African Institute, 1967 [1950]), 25; Chukwu Ogbajie, *The Impact of Christianity on the Igbo Religion and Culture* (Umuahia: Ark, 1995) 17; Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 36; Edmund O. Egbah, “A Reassessment of the Concept of Ibo Traditional Religion,” *Numen* 19, no. 1 (1972): 70; C. N. Ubah, “Religious Change among the Igbo during the Colonial Period,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 18, no. 1 (1988): 73.

achieved when justice and morality—which are effectively synonymous in Igbo cosmology—are upheld. The inherent duality and interdependence of that cosmology, allowing for a balance of forces,¹⁰ is reflected in the saying *ife kwulu, ife akwudebe ya*: “where one thing stands, something else stands beside it.” An excellent example of this is the belief that every individual has a guardian spirit double, called a personal *chi*, that decides his or her destiny.¹¹

In line with its valorization of interdependence and duality, the Igbo worldview incorporates gender complementarity, meaning that nearly everything in Igbo life is gendered as either male or female. *Tupu ndi ocha bia*, law in Ogidi, as elsewhere in Igboland, was gendered female, because although men and male spiritual forces participated in law-making and adjudication, they did so to a lesser extent than women and the earth goddess: other gods (and goddesses) could dictate additional laws for their worshipers to follow, and some men were able to participate in secret masquerade societies that acted and spoke on behalf of their deceased ancestors during certain types of legal disputes.¹² Ultimately, however, both male and female spiritual forces, like male and female human beings, were expected to act in accordance with *omenani*.

¹⁰ Nnabuenyi Ugonna, *Mmonwu: A Dramatic Tradition of the Igbo* (Lagos: Lagos University Press, 1984), 15; Elizabeth Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People* (London: Macmillan Press, 1976), 25; Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria*, 16; P. Amaury Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria: A Sketch of Their History, Ethnology and Languages, with an Account of the 1921 Census Volume II Ethnology* (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), 288; Forde and Jones, *The Igbo and Ibibio-Speaking Peoples*, 26; A. E. Afigbo, “Religion and Economic Enterprise in Traditional Igbo Society,” in *Igbo History and Society*, 301; Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 27, 199; Meek, *Law and Authority*, 55.

¹¹ Chinua Achebe, “*Chi* in Igbo Cosmology,” in *Morning Yet on Creation Day: Essays* (London: Heinemann, 1975), 93; Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria Volume II*, 288; Forde and Jones, *The Igbo and Ibibio-Speaking Peoples*, 26; Afigbo, “Religion and Economic Enterprise,” 301; Meek, *Law and Authority*, 20, 55; Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 199.

¹² Nnabuenyi Ugonna, *Mmonwu*, 1-25; Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria Volume II*, 767; Forde and Jones, *The Igbo and Ibibio-Speaking Peoples*, 26; Achebe, “*Chi* in Igbo Cosmology,” 95; Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 163; Nwosu Nwawulu, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufo, Ikenga Ogidi, 20 September 1978, in Nwabufo, “Traditional Law and Colonial Change in Ogidi” (B.A. Thesis, Department of History, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 1979), 73, 163; Ogbuefi Ezigbo Otue Unachukwu, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufo, Uru Ogidi, 28 September 1978, in Nwabufo, “Traditional Law and Colonial Change,” 76; Chinua Achebe, “The Igbo World and Its Art,” in *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays* (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 65; Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 93-94, 186-190.

This chapter's argument regarding the female gendering of indigenous Igbo law is grounded, in part, on historian Nwando Achebe's account of the female principle: an essence that "embodies all aspects of female involvement in society."¹³ My own investigation focuses on how the female principle permeated indigenous Igbo law specifically; and it proceeds from the insight that while both males and females participated in legislation and adjudication *tupu ndi ocha bia*, the superior authority on law and the ultimate preserver of justice was the earth goddess. Thus, I apply Achebe's female principle to an examination of law in Ogidi, starting *oge four quarters*, with the aim of explicating the interrelationships among the earth goddess, other spiritual forces, justice, and law.

The Igbo believe that there is a fragile equilibrium in the world that can be disrupted by incidents such as natural disasters, disease, and the transgression of *omenani*,¹⁴ also called, *nso ani*, "that which violates the decrees of the earth goddess."¹⁵ Moreover, *tupu ndi ocha bia*, severe disruptions of this equilibrium within or among individual members of society were held to disrupt the society as a whole.¹⁶ The Igbo proverb *ometu imi, anya akwaba*, literally "when the nose is affected, the eyes weep,"¹⁷ reflects the Igbo conviction that, "whatever happened to the individual was believed to have happened to [the] community, and whatever happened to the community happened to the individual."¹⁸ If justice was maintained in the community, then it prevailed for every person in it; and likewise, any injustice committed against an individual caused community-wide disharmony or imbalance.

¹³ Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 27.

¹⁴ Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria*, 12-13.

¹⁵ Ifemesia, *Traditional Humane Living*, 34-35; Meek, *Law and Authority*, 340; Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, 27.

¹⁶ Matera, Bastian, and Kingsley Kent, *The Women's War of 1929*, 19; Anyanwu, "Crime and Punishment," 50; Egbeke Aja, "Crime and Punishment: An Indigenous African Experience" *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 31, no. 3 (1997): 353.

¹⁷ Ifemesia, *Traditional Humane Living*, 68.

¹⁸ Anyanwu, "Crime and Punishment," 50.

The people living in Ogidi *tupu ndi ocha bia* had various means of achieving justice. They could bring their complaints to the shrine of any number of deities or to the *egwugwu* (masquerade) court, where spiritual forces would pronounce judgments based on *omenani*.¹⁹ If a serious offense was witnessed by many members of the community, however, there was no need to take one's grievance to such a court. Instead, word of the incident would reach the priest of ani, who would advise the community on the appropriate actions to take to restore justice.²⁰ Subsequently, if those guilty of committing *nso ani* did not offer sacrifices and cleanse the land, the earth goddess would deal with them directly—and severely.²¹

This chapter examines continuity and change in how Igbo cosmology and religion directly informed indigenous Igbo law in Ogidi, primarily *tupu ndi ocha bia*. It defines legislative roles as those concerning the creation of new laws; judicial roles as concerning judgment based on either *omenani* or *iwu*; and legal authority as the power to legislate and/or adjudicate. As it involves members of both the spiritual and human realms, however, indigenous Igbo law is complex and must be considered in segments. For this reason, I focus on the spiritual side in this chapter, and its human side in Chapters 3 and 4.

¹⁹ Chief Hillary Osegbo, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 24 April 2018; Chief Ozoekwe Clement Okudo, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 27 April 2018; Udoh Boniface Uyanwa, interview by the author, Akanano Ogidi, 13 April 2018; Chief Godfrey Amazikwu, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 10 April 2018; Anonymous oral history collaborator 2, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 20 March 2018; Chief Nwosu Nwawulu Enwude, interview by Chukwuma C. C. Osakwe, Ikenga Ogidi, 16 September 1983, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 93; Nweke Anene, interview by Chukwuma C. C. Osakwe, Akanano Ogidi, 20 September 1983, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 103; Haford C. Amerobi, interview by Chukwuma C. C. Osakwe, Uru Ogidi, 21 September 1983, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 108

²⁰ Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 30-31; Parrinder, *West African Religion*, 37; Thomas, *Anthropological Report Part I*, 59, 60, 67, 112, 117; Meek, *Law and Authority*, 25, 215; Basden, *Niger Ibos*, 60, 181; Nwanna Amobi, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 27 March 2018; Gabriel Nweke Agha, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 9 August 2018; Oduche Cyril Okafor, interview by the author; Okeru Okwesi, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufo, in Nwabufo, "Traditional Law and Colonial Change," 86; Udozoba Okoye, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufo, in Nwabufo, "Traditional Law and Colonial Change," 78.

²¹ Afigbo, "Prolegomena," 81; Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria*, 96; Thomas, *Anthropological Report Part I*, 116, 117; Udozoba Okoye, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufo, in Nwabufo, "Traditional Law and Colonial Change," 78; Okeru Okwesi, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufo, in Nwabufo, "Traditional Law and Colonial Change," 87; Ibemesi, *Ogidi*, 65; Nwabara, *Iboland*, 29; Chief Chinedu Olisa C. Onyeama, interview by the author.

It is important to note that there are still adherents of indigenous Igbo cosmology and practitioners of indigenous Igbo religion living in the twenty-first century. When discussing unchanging aspects of Igbo cosmology or religion in the most general terms, I therefore use the present tense to reflect such living beliefs. However, as a historian, it is also critically important to me to consider how the practice of indigenous Igbo religion evolved in Ogidi *oge four quarters-oge taa*—indeed, to the point that some tenets of belief that were commonplace *tupu ndi ocha bia* and even *oge ndi ocha chilu* have since disappeared. This chapter focuses on the observance of indigenous Igbo religion, and the laws that were born out of it, by the people of Ogidi prior to the arrival of the British. Nonetheless, references to the observations made by ethnographers in the early twentieth century and by myself in 2018 are interspersed throughout this chapter to add further description of the elements of religion and law that have remained the same, *oge four quarters-oge taa*. These observations, therefore, shed light onto Ogidi people’s adherence to indigenous Igbo religion and law *tupu ndi ocha bia*. Because of the above-mentioned dual necessity of explaining lasting tenets of Igbo cosmology and religion and examining specific instances of how the people followed Igbo religion and law *tupu ndi ocha bia*, the oscillation between present and past tense in certain sections of this chapter is inevitable.

The Interconnectedness of Igbo Cosmology

In Igbo cosmology—as we have seen—there is a human/visible realm and a spiritual/invisible one, which constantly interact with each other.²² The former includes people and

²² Iloanusi, *Myths and Creation of Man*, 70-71; Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, 25-26; Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria*, 11-12; Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 27-28; Jude C. U. Aguwa, *The Agwu Deity in Igbo Religion: A Study of the Patron Spirit of Divination and Medicine in an African Society* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishing, 1995), 13; Ogbajie, *The Impact of Christianity*, 4; Austin Echema, *Igbo Funeral Rites Today: Anthropological and Theological Perspectives* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2010), 10; John Njoku, *Tradition and Strategy of Change in Black Africa* ([Place of publication not identified]: [Publisher not identified],

everything in nature, while the latter includes the high God; lesser gods and goddesses (*alusi*); spirits of deceased ancestors (*ndiichie*); the above-mentioned personal spirits known as *chi*; spiritual medicines (*ogwu*) that diviners (*ndi dibia*) create through consultation with the gods;²³ and oracles, spiritual forces that have the ability to prophesy about the future, and explain the past.²⁴ Neither realm can exist without the other, as each forms half of the Igbo world.²⁵

At the top of the spiritual realm's hierarchy is the supreme or high God, who is given numerous names to describe its versatile functions. Among the most popular of these are Chukwu (*Chi-ukwu*), meaning "the Great God;"²⁶ Chineke (*Chi-na-eke*), "God the Creator;"²⁷ Olisa (*Olisa bulu uwa*), "God who fashions the world;"²⁸ Chinwuba, "God (*Chi*) has increase;"²⁹ and Ezechitoke (*eze chi toke*), "the king of spiritual forces who is the sharer of all goodness."³⁰

2007), 12, 15; John E. Eberegbulam Njoku, *The Igbos of Nigeria: Ancient Rites, Changes and Survival* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), 24; Meek, *Land Tenure and Land Administration*, 113.

²³ They sometimes manifest from a concoction of natural plant material that a *dibia* has collected after instruction from the gods. Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria Volume II*, 165, 168; Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 55; Aguwa, *The Agwu Deity*, 17.

²⁴ Some oracles are also deities, such as udo in Ogidi. Nwando Achebe, "'Ogidi Palaver': The 1914 Women's Market Protest," in *Shaping Our Struggles: Nigerian Women in History, Culture, and Social Change*, ed. Obioma Nnaemeka and Chima J. Korieh, (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2011), 32, 48.

²⁵ Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 27.

²⁶ Onwuameze Ikwuwelu, interview by the author, Ogidi, 5 April 2018; Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria Volume II*, 40-41, 364; Ifemesia, *Traditional Humane Living*, 35; P. Amaury Talbot, *Tribes of the Niger Delta: Their Religions and Customs* (London: Frank Cass, 1967 [1932]), 154; Forde and Jones, *The Igbo and Ibibio-Speaking Peoples*, 25; John Anenechukwu Umeh, *After God is Dibia: Igbo Cosmology, Divination and Sacred Science in Nigeria* (London: Karnak House, 1997), 129; Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria*, 95; 76; Jude C. Aguwa, "Christianity and Nigerian Indigenous Culture," in *Religion, History, and Politics in Nigeria: Essays in Honor of Ogbu U. Kalu*, ed. Chima J. Korieh and G. Ugo Nwokeji (Lanham: University Press of America, 2005) 16-17; Afigbo, "Religion and Economic Enterprise," 298; Meek, *Law and Authority*, 20.

²⁷ G. T. Basden, *Among the Ibos of Nigeria: An Account of the Curious and Interesting Habits, Customs and Beliefs of a little known African People by one who has for many years lived amongst them on close and intimate terms* (London: Frank Cass, 1966 [1921]), 215-216; Forde and Jones, *The Igbo and Ibibio-Speaking Peoples*, 25; Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria*, 95; Talbot, *Tribes of the Niger Delta*, 19; Achebe, "Chi in Igbo Cosmology," 100; Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria Volume II*, 40; Meek, *Law and Authority*, 20; Anyanwu, "Crime and Punishment," 51.

²⁸ Basden, *Among the Ibos*, 215-216; John A. Noon, "A Preliminary Examination of the Death Concepts of the Ibo," *American Anthropologist* 44, no. 4 (1942): 641.

²⁹ Achebe, "Chi in Igbo Cosmology," 101.

³⁰ Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 28.

Although many scholars have characterized Chukwu as male,³¹ the entity actually exists beyond the bounds of gender, and will therefore be referred to as Chukwu or the high God.³²

According to Igbo cosmology, Chukwu created the world and then removed itself to a distant location above the sky.³³ Since Chukwu is not easily accessible to humans, a pantheon of lesser gods and goddesses intervene in human affairs on its behalf.³⁴ In *Things Fall Apart*, an Umuofia man named Akunna compares the role of these lesser deities to that of Christian missionaries, explaining to a British missionary that Chukwu made lesser gods and goddesses “for [Chukwu’s] messengers so that we could approach [Chukwu] through them.”³⁵ These deities are often personifications of natural phenomena like earth (ani), sky (igwe), sun (anyanwu), thunder (amadiora), and yam (ifejioku).³⁶ As anthropologist M. Angulu Onwuejeogwu explains in the case of the first Igbo community, Nri, the gods and goddesses did not all come into being at the same

³¹ Afigbo, “Igbo Experience,” 198; Matera, Bastian, and Kingsley Kent, *The Women’s War of 1929*, 19; Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria*, 94; Meek, *Law and Authority*, 20; Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself* (Leeds: Printed for James Nichols, 1814), 12; Basden, *Among the Ibos*, 215; Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria Volume II*, 40; Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 179.

³² When English-speaking anthropologists published studies on Igbo religion and society in the early twentieth century, they interpreted the genderless Chukwu as male, resembling the Christian God. For this reason, many historical and fictional references to Chukwu describe the Igbo high God as male. For more on the genderless nature of Chukwu, see Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 28.

³³ Ugonna, *Mmonwu*, 14; Elizabeth Isichei, *The Ibo People and the Europeans: The Genesis of a Relationship to 1906* (London: Faber and Faber, 1973), 80-81; Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria*, 94; Afigbo, “Religion and Economic Enterprise,” 298.

³⁴ Forde and Jones, *The Igbo and Ibibio-Speaking Peoples*, 25; Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria*, 94-95; Iloanusi, *Myths and Creation of Man*, 87-88; Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 179; Aguwa, “Christianity and Nigerian Indigenous Culture,” 16; Chief Obi A. Okudo, interview by the author, Uru Ogidi, 2 April 2018; Chief Chinedu Olisa C. Onyeama, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 12 April 2018.

³⁵ Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 179.

³⁶ Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 27; Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria*, 96-98; Forde and Jones, *The Igbo and Ibibio-Speaking Peoples*, 25; Talbot, *Tribes of the Niger Delta*, 19; Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria Volume II*, 46, 109, 144; Meek, *Law and Authority*, 20; Anonymous oral history collaborator 1, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 3 April 2018; Emmanuel Nwike Sunday Onyechi, Ezeifejioku Ogidi, interview by the author, Akanano Ogidi, 2 July 2018; Chukwuka Jerry Okongwu and Chukwudi M Okongwu, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 2 May 2018; A. E. Afigbo, “An Outline of Igbo History,” in *Igbo History and Society*, 111; A. E. Afigbo, “The Age of Innocence: Neighbours in Pre-Colonial Times,” in *Igbo History and Society*, 276; Edmund Ilogu, “Worship in Ibo Traditional Religion,” *Numen* 20, no. 3 (1973): 238; Aguwa, *The Agwu Deity*, 15.

time, but rather at different stages of history *tupu ndi ocha bia*.³⁷ That is, the oldest deities are those Chukwu created directly, including ani and igwe; slightly newer ones include those established by Eri,³⁸ such as ifejioku and the patron deities for the four Igbo market days (eke, oye, afo, and nkwo); and the most recent, who came into being after the time of Eri, include the river goddess idemili, the fertility goddess ogwugwu, and the peace and market god udo.³⁹ All these deities and others are still worshiped in present-day Ogidi, at least by some.

Ani is regarded as the greatest among these lesser deities,⁴⁰ as the source of all life, the one who grants fertility to the land and peace and prosperity to the people.⁴¹ And as a mother-goddess, it is her responsibility to protect and provide for her people.⁴² Historian Chieka Ifemesia has noted how Igbo names reference the earth goddess' various roles:

The Earth Mother entered most intimately into the hearts and minds of the Igbo people. She was the defender of the weak and castigator of the wicked. Hence the personal names: *Achebe* (*Anichebe*: May Mother Earth protect); *Abogu* (*Anigboo ogu*: May Mother Earth settle the fight, resolve the conflict); *Akwuba* (*Ani kwe uba*: May Mother Earth permit increase . . .).⁴³

³⁷ M. Angulu Onwuejeogwu, *The Principles of Ethnogeneachronology: Dating Nri (Igbo) Oral Tradition* (Benin City: Ethiope, 1997), 30.

³⁸ Eri is the man considered to be the progenitor of the Igbo people, who lived between 5000 BC and 2000 BC. See the Introduction for further description.

³⁹ Onwuejeogwu, *The Principles of Ethnogeneachronology*, 30; Nweke Iwobi Godwin, Ezeudo, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 13 July 2018; Paul Okenu, Ezeudo Ire, interview by the author, Akanano Ogidi, 19 July 2018.

⁴⁰ Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 27; Meek, *Law and Authority*, 24; Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria Volume II*, 41, 43, 59; Forde and Jones, *The Igbo and Ibibio-Speaking Peoples*, 25; Achebe, "Ogidi Palaver," 30; Basden, *Niger Ibos*, 99; G. I. Jones, "Ecology and Social Structure among the North East Ibo," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 31, no. 2 (1961): 131; Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 29-31, 36; Rev. R. C. Aezu C.S.Sp., Interview with Ezenwadeyi of Ihembosi, September 1966 (transcript in possession of Fr Arazu), in Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, 28; Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria*, 95-96; Ifemesia, *Traditional Humane Living*, 34; Onwuka N. Njoku, "Magic, Religion and Iron Technology in Precolonial North-Western Igboland," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 21, no. 3 (1991): 208; Jude C. U. Aguwa, "Taboos and Purification of Ritual Pollutions in Igbo Traditional Society. Analysis and Symbolisms," *Anthropos* 88 (1993): 539; Geoffrey Parrinder, *West African Religion: A Study of the Beliefs and Practices of Akan, Ewe, Yoruba, Ibo, and Kindred Peoples* (London: Epworth Press, 1969 [1949]), 37.

⁴¹ Forde and Jones, *The Igbo and Ibibio-Speaking Peoples*, 25; Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 186; Meek, *Land Tenure and Land Administration*, 113; C. N. Ubah, "The Supreme Being, Divinities and Ancestors in Igbo Traditional Religion: Evidence from Otanchara and Otanzu," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 2, no. 2 (1982): 95; Egboh, "A Reassessment," 70; Charles Ebere, "Beating the Masculinity Game: Evidence from African Traditional Religion," *Cross Currents* 61, no. 4 (2011): 487; Iloanusi, *Myths and Creation of Man*, 89.

⁴² Nwando Achebe notes that spiritual forces who protect the people are often seen as mother-goddesses "because mothers are the traditional nurturers and protectors." Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 56.

⁴³ Emphasis in original: Ifemesia, *Traditional Humane Living*, 36.

In Igbo cosmology, all living things either emerge from the earth or sustain themselves on things that do. The Igbo proverb *ani nwe ji nwe ede onye otunyere orie* declares that “ani is the owner of yam and cocoyam and whomever she gives them to will eat.”⁴⁴ Because all life depends on the generosity of the earth goddess, obeying her laws has been deemed paramount to keeping Igbo society intact.

Another Igbo proverb, *ogba oso adiro agbaghara ani hara ifu ani*, means “wherever you run, there is nowhere that you don’t touch the ground.”⁴⁵ In other words, because the human and spiritual realms constantly interact, everything that humans do impacts or is impacted by the world of the spirits (*ani mmoo*) underground. Moreover, to help safeguard morality in the human realm, the earth goddess enlists other spiritual forces, chiefly the spirits of ancestors.⁴⁶ Such a strategy reflects that the living, the deceased, and the unborn are all held to be part of one family.⁴⁷ Unlike the gods, ancestors are not worshiped by the living; however, they are honored for their guardianship with ceremonial sacrifices.⁴⁸ Those who fail to follow *omenani* expect to anger the ancestors, as the latter are agents of ani who act as “the guardians of morality and the owners of the soil.”⁴⁹ When this happens, to restore balance to the relationship between themselves and the ancestors, the living must perform special sacrifices to cleanse the land of their wrongdoing.

⁴⁴ George E. Ekwuru, *Igbo Cosmology and the Ontogeny and Hermeneutics of Igbo Sculpture: Studies in African Ethnoaesthetics* (Owerri: Living Flames Resources, 2009), 130

⁴⁵ Mary Steimel Duru, “Continuity in the Midst of Change: Underlying Themes in Igbo Culture,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 56, no. 1 (1983): 1. Duru’s iteration is in the Central Igbo dialect, but I have written it in the dialect of Ogidi people.

⁴⁶ Ugonna, *Mmonwu*, 15; Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 27-28; Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria*, 101; Basden, *Niger Ibos*, 76; Aguwa, “Christianity and Nigerian Indigenous Culture,” 16; Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria Volume II*, 40-41, 153.

⁴⁷ Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, 25-26; Echema, *Igbo Funeral Rites Today*, 22.

⁴⁸ Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria*, 102; Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, 25-26.

⁴⁹ The quotation comes from Meek’s *Law and Authority*, 61. For a similar statement, see Forde and Jones’ *The Igbo and Ibibio-Speaking Peoples*, 25 and Iloansi’s *Myths and Creation of Man*, 90.

If humans are to know what has angered spiritual forces, however, intermediaries—priests and priestesses of the lesser deities and diviners—must consult these spiritual forces.⁵⁰ Priests and priestesses communicate with the deities they serve, and then announce their laws to humans, and explain what ceremonies must be performed to appease them when such laws have been transgressed.⁵¹ As the mouthpieces of the gods, priests and priestesses straddle the line between the human and spiritual realms and, as Nwando Achebe puts it, “embody the idiosyncrasies from both worlds.”⁵² In *Things Fall Apart*, Chielo, priestess of the oracle agbala, is described as “a widow with two children,” who is a market woman and a friend of Okonkwo’s second wife, Ekwefi.⁵³ Yet, when Chielo later takes Ekwefi’s daughter, Ezinma, on a long journey to agbala’s shrine, the narrator notes, “How a woman could carry a child of that size so easily and for so long was a miracle. But . . . Chielo was not a woman that night.”⁵⁴ In other words, Chielo is able to accomplish a preternatural feat because she is acting in her role as an intermediary, conducting a mission on the oracle’s behalf. For this reason, as the novel’s narrator explains, “anyone seeing Chielo in ordinary life would hardly believe she was the same person who prophesied when the spirit of [a]gbala was upon her.”⁵⁵

In cases in which it is unclear which deity or oracle should be consulted, a diviner may be called upon to perform rituals to reveal why trouble has befallen the human realm.⁵⁶ One diviner

⁵⁰ Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 28; Umeh, *After God is Dibia*, 76.

⁵¹ All the priests I interviewed expressed these beliefs. For a full list of these priests, see the bibliography.

⁵² Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 28.

⁵³ Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 49.

⁵⁴ Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 107.

⁵⁵ Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 49.

⁵⁶ Theresa Udenkwo Achonwa, interview by the author, Uru Ogidi, 5 July 2018; High Chief Robison Okudo, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 1 March 2018; Chief Amaeze Ekpeani, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 13 March 2018; Chief Harold B. O. Udoh, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 15 March 2018; Chief Oraegbuna Joseph Iwobi, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 29 March 2018; Chief Chinedu Olisa C. Onyeama, interview by the author; Chief Ozoekwe Clement Okudo, interview by the author; Gregory Enedo, interview by the author, Ogidi, 3 July 2018; Nweke Iwobi Godwin, Ezeudo, interview by the author; Oduche Cyril Okafor, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 26 April 2018.

in Ogidi, Theresa Udenkwo Achonwa, explained that as part of the divination process, she ascertains messages from spiritual forces by reading the arrangement of stones or other objects tossed on the ground.⁵⁷ In other instances, as missionary and religious scholar Geoffrey Parrinder observed in the 1940s, a diviner would use “four cords to which fish bones [were] attached, or two strings with four pieces of calabash attached to each. The cords [were] held in each hand and thrown on the ground in front of the diviner, and interpretation depend[ed] on how the pieces [fell], whether face up or down.”⁵⁸ Diviners are similar to priests and priestesses except that they need not be attached to a specific shrine or deity,⁵⁹ and they can perform the above-mentioned divination and concoct powerful medicines that can heal or injure.⁶⁰

The Legal Authority of Ogidi’s Deities

Oge four quarters-oge ndi ocha bia, omenani—as well as *omenani-idemili*, *omenani-ogwugwu*, and *omenani-udo*—all worked together to foster law and order in Ogidi’s society. Ani decreed moral laws, the ultimate goal of which was to protect the people of Ogidi from excesses, harm, and injustice. The laws of lesser deities beneath ani—particularly the river goddess idemili, the fertility goddess ogwugwu, and the peace and market god/oracle udo—assisted her by enforcing *omenani*, but also by creating their own additional laws.⁶¹ And this wider body of law

⁵⁷ Theresa Udenkwo Achonwa, interview by the author. A priest in Ogidi, Samson Osakwe, Ezeerulu, (interview by the author, Ogidi, 30 July 2018) confirmed that priests will ask diviners to assist them when messages from the gods confuse priests.

⁵⁸ Parrinder, *West African Religion*, 148.

⁵⁹ Theresa Udenkwo Achonwa, interview by the author; Chief Amaeze Ekpeani, interview by the author; Chief Harold B. O. Udoh, interview by the author; Chief Oraegbuna Joseph Iwobi, interview by the author; Chief Obi A. Okudo, interview by the author; Gregory Enedo, interview by the author.

⁶⁰ Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 55; Simon Ottenberg, “Statement and Reality: The Renewal of an Igbo Protective Shrine,” in *Igbo Religion, Social Life and Other Essays by Simon Ottenberg*, ed. Toyin Falola (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2006), 84; Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria Volume II*, 168; Chief Chinedu Olisa C. Onyeama, interview by the author; Gregory Enedo, interview by the author.

⁶¹ Chinedu Okwumelu, Ezeidemili Odida, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 31 July 2018; Emeka Onyechi, Akaette Ogidi, Ezeidemili, interview by the author, Uru Ogidi, 6 November 2018; Nwabufo Okafo, Ezeogwugwu Mkputi, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 17 July 2018; Ilogu, “Worship in Ibo Traditional Religion,” 233;

that comprised the *omenani* pronounced by these four deities generally worked to maintain Ogidi in a state of equilibrium. After all, as Chinua Achebe noted, “When the Igbo encounter human conflict, their first impulse is not to determine who is right but quickly to restore harmony. In my hometown, Ogidi, we have a saying, *Ikpe Ogidi adi-ama ofu onye*: The judgment of Ogidi does not go against one side.”⁶² The laws of the deities were meant to work in conjunction with one another, and the people were expected to obey them, for the purpose of preserving harmony in society.

Ani possessed paramount legal authority in Ogidi *tupu ndi ocha bia*, but other gods and goddesses were also revered, and humans were expected to obey all their orders, heed their warnings, and placate them when they became offended.⁶³ As Chinua Achebe noted, “In Igbo religion . . . [a]ll the people must placate all the gods all the time! For there is a cautionary proverb which states that even when a person has satisfied the deity [u]do completely he may yet be killed by [o]gwugwu.”⁶⁴ The laws of various deities do not always align with each other, such as in the above example in which a person steadfastly adheres to *omenani-udo* but still commits *nso-ogwugwu*. A number of Ogidi’s priests of the indigenous religion explained this discordance by describing the deities as members of the same family—husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, sons, daughters, brothers, and sisters—who each have their own duties, and who are supposed to work

Obi Nnoka, Ezeogwugwu Ire, interview by the author; Paul Okenu, Ezeudo Ire, interview by the author; Nweke Iwobi Godwin, Ezeudo, interview by the author; Edwin Nwoye Ikeabunze, Ezeudo Ogidi-Ani, interview by the author; Sunday Udegbe, Ezearo Ire, interview by the author; Chief Francis Nwoye Nwoka, Ezeogwugwu Umunebo, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 29 August 2018; Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria Volume II*, 110; Talbot, *Tribes of the Niger Delta*, 92; Hambly, “Serpent Worship in Africa,” 25-26.

⁶² Emphasis in original: Chinua Achebe, “The Education of a British-Protected Child,” in *The Education of a British-Protected Child* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009), 6.

⁶³ Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, 25.

⁶⁴ Achebe, “The Igbo World and Its Art,” 63.

hand in hand, but who—like members of a human family—do not always exercise unanimity.⁶⁵ In other words, even deities are not completely infallible.

Even though all deities must be placated, as Chinua Achebe warned, some are held in higher esteem than others by the people of Ogidi. After *ani*, the most important gods and goddesses of the town—both historically, and in the present-day—are *idemili*, *ogwugwu*, and *udo*. Based on interviews I conducted with Ogidi’s priests of the indigenous religion during my fieldwork, as well as a survey of the transcribed interviews that other researchers conducted with Ogidi elders from the 1970s to the 2010s, I determined that these three are among the most significant deities in Ogidi. I was able to amass more data on these deities than any others (besides *ani*) due to their popularity among my and others’ oral history collaborators.⁶⁶ The prominence of *idemili*, *ogwugwu*, and *udo* is additionally based on evidence in Chinua Achebe’s fiction and non-fiction

⁶⁵ Chief Francis Nwoye Nwoka, Ezeogwugwu Umunebo, interview by the author; Obi Nnoka, Ezeogwugwu Ire, interview by the author, Akanano Ogidi, 9 August 2018; Chief Anthony Nwoye, Ezeogwugwu Abor, interview by the author, Akanano Ogidi, 9 August 2018; Edwin Nwoye Ikeabunze, Ezeudo Ogidi-Ani, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 21 August 2018; Anthony Okoye, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 19 April 2018; Emeka Onyekwelu, Ezeidemili, interview by the author, Akanano Ogidi, 13 July 2018; Nweke Iwobi Godwin, Ezeudo, interview by the author; Vincent Okudo, Ezeinwelle Ogidi, interview by the author, Akanano Ogidi, 6 July 2018.

⁶⁶ The following oral history collaborators attested that in addition to *ani*, the three most important deities in Ogidi were *idemili*, *ogwugwu*, and *udo*: Udozoba Okoye, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, Ikenga Ogidi, 17 December 1978, in Nwabufu, “Traditional Law and Colonial Change,” 78; Okeru Okwesi, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 5 August 1978, in Nwabufu, “Traditional Law and Colonial Change,” 86; Nnanyelugo Ezegbo, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, Ikenga Ogidi, 30 August 1978, in Nwabufu, “Traditional Law and Colonial Change,” 88; Raphael Anyaegbunam, interview by Anthonia Uchenna Anyegbunam, Akanano Ogidi, 15 August 1983, in Anyegbunam, “The External Relations of Ogidi Up to 1903,” (B.A. Thesis, Department of History, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 1984), 68; Ezekwesilu Mba (Okwesi), interview by Anthonia Uchenna Anyegbunam, Ikenga Ogidi, 19 August 1983, in Anyegbunam, “The External Relations of Ogidi,” 75; Nwude Anumba, interview by Anthonia Uchenna Anyegbunam, Uru Ogidi, 4 September 1983, in Anyegbunam, “The External Relations of Ogidi,” 84; Nwosu Enwude (Nwawulu), interview by Anthonia Uchenna Anyegbunam, Ikenga Ogidi, 7 September 1983, in Anyegbunam, “The External Relations of Ogidi,” 99; Emeka Onyechi, Akaette Ogidi, Ezeidemili, interview by the author; Theresa Udenkwo Achonwa, interview by the author; Dominic Nnamdi Obijiofor, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 17 April 2018; Chief Harold B. O. Udoh, interview by the author; Ozoekwe Clement Okudo, interview by the author; Cyril Okafor, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 26 April 2018; Nweke Okoye, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 12 March 2018; Chief Obi A. Okudo, interview by the author; Anonymous oral history collaborator 1, interview by the author; Sir Albert Obi (Rex) Ezegbo, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 2 October 2018; Chief Hillary Osegbo, interview by the author; Fabien Chukwude Okakpu, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 1 May 2018.

writings.⁶⁷ In *Things Fall Apart*, for example, after the Christian missionaries assert that Igbo gods have no power, the narrator states, “These men must be mad . . . How else could they say that [a]ni and [a]madiora were harmless? And [i]demili and [o]gwugwu too?”⁶⁸ In addition, towards the end of the novel, an Umuofia man makes a speech to the town concerning a recent colonial incursion and the mistreatment that local elders have suffered at the hands of the colonial government: “All our gods are weeping. Idemili is weeping, [o]gwugwu is weeping, [a]gbala is weeping, and all the others.”⁶⁹ By singling out and naming idemili and ogwugwu, one can conclude that they were two of the most important deities to Umuofia, as they would have been in Ogidi. Udo, meanwhile, was a central figure in the 1914 Ogidi women’s market protest (which will be discussed in Chapter 4), and many of my oral history collaborators attested that he, and the Afo Udo market that he owned, were important to the town long before the arrival of the British.⁷⁰ Moreover, the renowned historian Chieka Ifemesia also noted that udo in particular was among the most important deities *tupu ndi ocha bia* in the Onitsha area, which included his hometown of Ogidi.⁷¹

The manner of interaction among Ogidi’s four most important deities—ani, idemili, ogwugwu, and udo—is layered. First, I should reiterate that a hierarchy exists within the pantheon

⁶⁷ Although he has mentioned other lesser gods like Amadiora and Ikenga on occasion, Chinua Achebe has repeatedly mentioned idemili, ogwugwu, and udo in a number of his novels, essays, and interviews. This constitutes evidence of their importance to the indigenous religion and lifestyle of Ogidi people, at least during Achebe’s lifetime and the lifetimes of Ogidi’s indigenous historians who acquainted Achebe with such knowledge. See Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 146, 203; Chinua Achebe, interview by Jane Wilkinson, 1987, in *Conversations with Chinua Achebe*, ed. Bernth Lindfors (Jackson: University of Mississippi, 1997), 150; Chinua Achebe, *There Was a Country: A Memoir* (New York: Penguin, 2012), 12; Chinua Achebe, “The Igbo World and Its Art,” 63; Chinua Achebe, *Anthills of the Savannah* (London: Heinemann, 1987), 102-105.

⁶⁸ Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 146.

⁶⁹ Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 203.

⁷⁰ Nwosu Enwude (Nwawulu), interview by Anthonia Uchenna Anyegbunam, in Anyegbunam, “The External Relations of Ogidi,” 98; Nwude Anumba, interview by Anthonia Uchenna Anyegbunam, in Anyegbunam, “The External Relations of Ogidi,” 83; Ezekwesilu Mba (Okwesi), in Anyegbunam, “The External Relations of Ogidi,” 75; Raphael Anyaegbunam, interview by Anthonia Uchenna Anyegbunam, in Anyegbunam, “The External Relations of Ogidi,” 66; Clement Ifedi, interview by Anyegbunam, Ogbunike, 13 September 1983, in Anyegbunam, “The External Relations of Ogidi,” 111; Micheal Chinyelugo Mba, interview by Anthonia Uchenna Anyegbunam, Ikenga Ogidi, 16 September 1983, in Anyegbunam, “The External Relations of Ogidi,” 115; Ichie Ezigbo Otue, interview by Anthonia Uchenna Anyegbunam, Uru Ogidi, 25 September 1983, in Anyegbunam, “The External Relations of Ogidi,” 134.

⁷¹ Ifemesia, *Traditional Humane Living*, 43.

of lesser gods and goddesses. Next below ani, in descending order, are idemili, ogwugwu, and udo. It is true of Ogidi, as it is of much of the rest of Igboland, that the most powerful and most important deities have always been female.⁷² In fact, Chinua Achebe went so far as to assert that ani is “the most powerful deity of the Igbo pantheon” and is “even more powerful than the supreme god [Chukwu] because of her closeness to us: the earth is where our crops lie, where we live, and where we die.”⁷³ Nevertheless, the hierarchy of deities is somewhat fluid. Though ani has remained at its pinnacle, other gods, goddesses, and oracles have risen and fallen in prominence over time; new gods have been created and old ones destroyed. As Chinua Achebe explained, “the Igbo formulate their view of the world as: ‘No condition is permanent.’ In Igbo cosmology even gods could fall out of use; and new forces are liable to appear without warning in the temporal and metaphysical firmament.”⁷⁴ Such an example is Ogidi’s deified war medicine called agadi nwanyi, which a powerful diviner created sometime after the foundation of Ogidi’s four quarters in order to protect the town’s warriors in battle.⁷⁵ And conversely, the smallpox deity (referred to as *obakitikiti*,

⁷² The following collaborators listed female deities as Ogidi’s highest ranking ones: Emeka Onyechi, Akaette Ogidi, Ezeidemili, interview by the author; Theresa Udenkwo Achonwa, interview by the author; Dominic Nnamdi Obijiofor, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 17 April 2018; Chief Harold B. O. Udoh, interview by the author; Ozoekwe Clement Okudo, interview by the author; Cyril Okafor, interview by the author; Nweke Okoye, interview by the author; Chief Obi A. Okudo, interview by the author; Anonymous oral history collaborator 1, interview by the author; Sir Albert Obi (Rex) Ezegbo, interview by the author; Chief Hillary Osegbo, interview by the author; Fabien Chukwude Okakpu, interview by the author; Chief Edward Dike Ibemesi, interview by the author, Ogidi, 7 March 2018.

Other scholars have noted the prominence of goddesses across Igboland: Austin J. Shelton (*The Igbo-Igala Borderland: Religion and Social Control in Indigenous African Colonialism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1971), 126) and Nwando Achebe (“Balancing Male and Female Principles: Teaching About Gender in Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*,” *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* 29, no. 1 (2002): 135; *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 55) assert that in northern Igboland specifically, and across Igboland more broadly, the most renowned and powerful deities were female. Likewise, Philip O. Nsugbe (*Ohaffia: A Matrilineal Igbo People* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), 111) and Ndubueze L. Mbah (*Emergent Masculinities: Gendered Power and Social Change in the Biafran Atlantic Age* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2019), 42-43) note that female ududu (“pot monuments” of deified ancestors) were stronger and more important than male ududu in the Igbo town of Ohaffia.

⁷³ Chinua Achebe, interview by Jonathan Cott, 1980, reprinted in *Conversations with Chinua Achebe*, 82.

⁷⁴ Chinua Achebe, “The Igbo World and Its Art,” 64.

⁷⁵ Chief Harold Udoh, interview by the author; Ori C. Uzowulu, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 16 March 2018; Edmund Okonkwo, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 27 August 2018; Dike Ibemesi, *Ogidi: Historical Perspective of a People* (Ogidi: Ekpechi and Sons, 1995), 54; Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 11-12; Achebe, “Balancing Male and Female Principles,” 131, 136.

okelekpa, *lolo*, or *sapata*, depending on dialect) was significant to the Igbo people during the time of the smallpox outbreak in Onitsha in the 1870s, but is no longer worshipped today.⁷⁶ Furthermore, the Igbo people's regard for ibinukpabi—an oracle situated at Arochukwu and one of the most potent oracles *oge slave trade*—and agbala at Awka, another powerful oracle, was significantly diminished after the British claimed to have destroyed them during wars of “pacification” that they waged on Igbo communities during the first decade of the twentieth century.⁷⁷

In addition to the hierarchy and fluidity that characterize the interactions among various deities, there is a balance of the male and female principles within the spiritual realm. This is embodied by the pairing of female deities or oracles with priests, and male ones with priestesses. As Nwando Achebe notes, gender balance “is most vividly stated in the gender complementarity of Igbo deities and their human workers . . . The combination of these male and female qualities promotes a whole and complete force.”⁷⁸ This is apparent in *Things Fall Apart*, as the male oracle agbala has two female custodians, Chika and Chielo, who serve as his priestesses during the course of the novel.⁷⁹ Similarly, since the foundation of Ogidi's four quarters, the goddesses ani, idemili, and ogwugwu have each been attended by male custodians.⁸⁰ Udo, on the other hand, presents a

⁷⁶ C. N. Ubah, “The Supreme Being, Divinities and Ancestors in Igbo Traditional Religion: Evidence from Otanchara and Otanzu,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 52, no. 2 (1982): 96-97; 99, Misty L. Bastian, “The Daughter She Will Eat Agousie in the World of the Spirits’ Witchcraft Confessions in Missionised Onitsha, Nigeria,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 72, no. 1 (20202): n 24; Thomas, *Anthropological Report Part II*, 84, 302, 327.

Henry John Drewal, “Performing the Other: Mami Wata Worship in Africa,” *TDR* 32, no. 2 (1988): 177; Edmund Ilogu, “Worship in Ibo Traditional Religion,” *Numen* 20, no. 3 (1973): 231;

⁷⁷ Basden, *Among the Ibos*, 253; Nwabara, *Iboland*, 54, 105; Parrinder, *West African Religion*, 155.

⁷⁸ Achebe, “Balancing Male and Female Principles,” 122.

⁷⁹ Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 17, 48-49; Achebe, “Balancing Male and Female Principles,” 122.

⁸⁰ Ike Achebe, “Religion and Politics in Igboland from the 18th Century to 1930: Earth, God and Power” (PhD Dissertation, History Department, Trinity College, University of Cambridge, 2001), 2; Achebe, “Balancing Male and Female Principles,” 122; Onyebuchi Ezigbo, Akajiofo, Ezeani Ogidi, interview by the author, Ogidi, 19 July 2018; Onyebuchi Idigo, Ezeani Ikenga, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 17 July 2018; Chief Anthony Nwoye, Ezeogwugwu Abor, interview by the author; Chief Francis Nwoye Nwoka, Ezeogwugwu Umunebo, interview by the author; Obi Nnoka, Ezeogwugwu Ire, interview by the author; Nwabufo Okafo, Ezeogwugwu Mkputi, interview by

more complex case. Although udo and his priests have always been male,⁸¹ the market women who protected the Afo Udo market *tupu ndi ocha bia* and *oge ndi ocha chilu* also acted as the deity's female counterparts, and shared duties with the priest at Ogidi's senior udo shrine, located near the market in Ikenga.⁸² This market and the specific nature of the relationship among udo, his priests, and Ogidi's women will be addressed in Chapter 4, as all play major roles in the unfolding of the 1914 women's market protest.

Despite the balancing of male and female principles in indigenous Igbo religion and the fluidity within the hierarchy of its deities, the earth goddess remained the preeminent prescriber of law *tupu ndi ocha bia*, and thus the laws or pronouncements made by other deities or oracles were not supposed to contradict hers. However, it was possible for a spiritual force to act against this pre-established order. I am not aware of any incidents in which a particular deity in Ogidi defied *omenani*, but *Things Fall Apart* offers an interesting and probable, albeit fictive, case of such defiance. The oracle agbala who is revered in Umuofia, but of course ranks beneath the earth goddess, declares that Ikemefuna must be executed.⁸³ In this instance, agbala calls for the people of Umuofia to commit murder, which is *nso ani*, thus creating a conflict between *omenani* and *omenani-agbala*.⁸⁴ To understand how such an incongruity could arise, we should examine the key attributes and laws of Ogidi's four most important lesser deities—ani, idemili, ogwugwu, and udo.

the author; Chief Godwin Mbelu, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 29 August 2018; Chinedu Okwumelu, Ezeidemili Odida, interview by the author; Emeka Onyekwelu, Ezeidemili, interview by the author.

⁸¹ Ezeudo, interview by Arinze Ernest Agbogu, Ikenga Ogidi, 30 December 1975, in Agbogu, "Ogidi Before 1891: A Brief Survey of the Origins, Migrations, Settlement, and Intergroup Relations" (B. A. Thesis, Department of History and Archaeology, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 1976), 92; Nwabufo Okafo, Ezeogwugwu Mkputi, interview by the author; Nweke Iwobi Godwin, Ezeudo, interview by the author; Paul Okenu, Ezeudo Ire, interview by the author; Chief Isama Nwawularu Nwosu, interview by Ifeoma Catherine Onwugbufor, Ikenga Ogidi, 19 February 1992, in Onwugbufor, "The Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy in Ogidi" (B.A. Thesis, Department of History, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 1992), 103.

⁸² Afo Udo market closed sometime soon after the end of the Nigerian Civil War, i.e., after 1970, and has since fallen into disrepair. Nweke Iwobi Godwin, Ezeudo, interview by the author.

⁸³ Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 57.

⁸⁴ For further discussion of this situation, see Achebe, "Balancing Male and Female Principles," 124-126.

Ani, the Earth Goddess

When I conducted fieldwork in Ogidi in 2018, there were four shrines to *ani*: two located in Akanano quarter, and one each in Ezinkwo and Ikenga.⁸⁵ *Tupu ndi ocha bia*, there would have been one shrine to *ani* in each of the four quarters, the senior one being located in the town's senior quarter of Akanano, where it remains today.⁸⁶ These shrines have served as places for worshipping, settling disputes, and performing purification ceremonies. Arguably, *ani*'s most significant roles in Igbo cosmology have been as a prescriber, judge, and guardian of morality.⁸⁷ In light of the deep-seated Igbo belief in duality, it stands to reason that *omenani* could not exist without its opposite. As historian Ogechi E. Anyanwu notes, "to enforce justice, a society has to define what is criminal."⁸⁸ In Igbo cosmology, crime is known as *nso ani*, which various scholars have also translated as taboo, pollution, or abomination.⁸⁹ These acts taint the earth, thereby polluting the source of all life. And, because *omenani* is inextricably bound up with maintaining balance in Igbo society, anything that upsets that balance—*nso ani* being a prime example—inevitably causes disharmony, instability, and injustice.⁹⁰

⁸⁵ The following were the priests of these shrines: Chief Onyebuchi Ezigbo, Akanano, priest of the senior *ani* shrine in Ogidi; Chinwike Onyechi, Akanano; Chief Emeka Nwosu, Ezinkwo; Onyebuchi Idigo, Ikenga.

⁸⁶ Early twentieth-century anthropologists noted that all Igbo towns had a shrine to *ani* in each of its quarters, with one being the senior shrine of the town. Northcote Thomas, *Anthropological Report on the Ibo-Speaking Peoples of Nigeria Part I. Law and Custom of the Ibo of the Awka Neighbourhood, S. Nigeria* (London: Harrison and Sons, 1913), 56; Meek, *Law and Authority*, 25. In Ogidi, the senior shrine to a particular deity was usually located in Akanano, the senior quarter, as seniority was highly revered in Ogidi *tupu ndi ocha bia*, which will be discussed in Chapter 3.

⁸⁷ Meek, *Law and Authority*, 340; Meek, *Land Tenure and Land Administration*, 113; Forde and Jones, *The Igbo and Ibibio-Speaking Peoples*, 25; Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 36; Egboh, "A Reassessment," 70; Ubah, "Religious Change," 73.

⁸⁸ Anyanwu, "Crime and Punishment," 47.

⁸⁹ For translation of *nso ani* as crime see Meek, *Law and Authority*, 127; Anyanwu, "Crime and Punishment," 47. For translation of *nso ani* as taboo see Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria Volume II*, 708; Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria*, 96; Meek, *Law and Authority*, 340; Afigbo, "An Outline," 110; Anyanwu, "Crime and Punishment," 47. For translation of *nso ani* as abomination, see Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, 27; Meek, *Law and Authority*, 340; Iloanusi, *Myths and Creation of Man*, 90. For translation of *nso ani* as pollution see Afigbo, "Prolegomena," 82.

⁹⁰ Anyanwu, "Crime and Punishment," 54.

Tupu ndi ocha bia, ani established laws or prohibitions against crimes, including homicide; suicide; stealing (especially yams); adultery; incest; kidnapping; being afflicted by the ailment known as “body swelling”; failing or refusing to pay a debt; disturbing the peace; falsely testifying in the court of a deity; cursing or desecrating any deities, their shrines, or their priests; insulting or defaming a masked spirit; a junior person cursing or insulting an elder; and giving birth to twins.⁹¹ Committing any of these offenses was serious, and would sometimes warrant extreme punishment. In addition to enduring punishment, those who committed *nso ani* had to perform purification rituals, often including sacrifices to ani.⁹² The dual necessity of punishment and purification distinguished *omenani* from *iwu*; that is, transgression of *iwu* only required that punishment be exacted, as it only constituted transgression against the laws of humans.⁹³ According to historian A. E. Afigbo, two of the worst possible disasters to befall individuals *tupu ndi ocha bia*—a failed harvest due to drought, and premature death—were among the punishments that ani meted out to those who committed *nso ani*.⁹⁴ Yet, she would first give many warnings of her displeasure, and would allow perpetrators to make amends before she administered her punishment.⁹⁵ For those who refused to comply, however, death was not punishment enough; so, such offenders were

⁹¹ Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 125; Basden, *Niger Ibos*, 259-261; Meek, *Law and Authority*, 25; Nwosu Nwawulu, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, in Nwabufu, “Traditional Law and Colonial Change,” 72; Okeru Okwesi, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, in Nwabufu, “Traditional Law and Colonial Change,” 86; Nnanyelugo Ezeigbo, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, in Nwabufu, “Traditional Law and Colonial Change,” 88; Basden, *Niger Ibos*, 60, 61, 181, 262, 406; Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, 26; Anyanwu, “Crime and Punishment,” 54; Talbot, *Tribes of the Niger Delta*, 69; Noon, “A Preliminary Examination,” 644; Nwabara, *Iboland*, 29; Gerald Chukwudi Njoku, *Ala di Mma in Umuohiagu: An Igbo Concept of Reconciliation and Peace Towards an Inculturation* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2014), 21; Chief Edward Dike Ibemesi, interview by the author.

⁹² Parrinder, *West African Religion*, 37; Thomas, *Anthropological Report Part I*, 59, 60, 67, 112, 117; Meek, *Law and Authority*, 25, 215; Basden, *Niger Ibos*, 60, 181; Nwanna Amobi, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 27 March 2018; Gabriel Nweke Agha, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 9 August 2018; Oduche Cyril Okafor, interview by the author; Okeru Okwesi, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, in Nwabufu, “Traditional Law and Colonial Change,” 86; Udozoba Okoye, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, in Nwabufu, “Traditional Law and Colonial Change,” 78.

⁹³ For more detailed explanation, see Thomas, *Anthropological Report Part IV. Law and Custom of the Ibo of the Asaba District, S. Nigeria*, 16.

⁹⁴ Afigbo, “Prolegomena,” 81.

⁹⁵ Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria*, 96.

denied burial in the ground. This was “the worst social humiliation for any Igbo” because it amounted to both symbolic and literal exclusion from the land of the ancestors.⁹⁶ Historian K. Onwuka Dike and sociologist Felicia Ekejiuba attest that retribution for serious crimes against ani was restorative and just, and helped reinstate order and balance in the wake of societal disruption.⁹⁷

In Ogidi *tupu ndi ocha bia*, homicide or *ochu* was one of the most severe offenses. It could be divided into *okeochu*, literally “male/masculine *ochu*,” which consisted of deliberate killing or murder, and *nwunyeochu*, “the wife of *ochu*” (female *ochu*),⁹⁸ which constituted indeliberate killing or manslaughter. Of the two, *okeochu* was treated as the more serious offense.⁹⁹ However, the law made further distinctions based on the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim, with the killing of an outsider being treated less severely than the killing of a clansperson. This difference was related to the fact that the killing of an outsider usually resulted in warfare between the community of the victim and that of the perpetrator, if negotiations for reparations failed.¹⁰⁰ The most egregious form of *ochu*, then, was intentional killing of a member of one’s own community, and a common punishment for it was being forced to hang oneself.¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria*, 96.

⁹⁷ Dike and Ekejiuba, *The Aro of South-eastern Nigeria*, 131.

⁹⁸ This is sometimes alternatively referred to as *nneochu*, “mother of *ochu*.”

⁹⁹ Okeru Okwesi, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, in Nwabufu, “Traditional Law and Colonial Change,” 86; Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 124; Basden, *Niger Ibos*, 259-261; Okeru Nnabenyi, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 7 August 1978, in Nwabufu, “Traditional Law and Colonial Change,” 84; Nwanna Amobi, interview by the author.

¹⁰⁰ Thomas, *Anthropological Report Part I*, 108. The threat of such a war emerges in *Things Fall Apart*, as another town, Mbaino, kills a daughter of Umuofia who had been married in the former town. The tension deescalates only when Okonkwo approaches Mbaino as a “proud and imperious emissary of war” who negotiates a peace treaty in which an adolescent boy and a virgin girl from Mbaino are taken by the people of Umuofia (Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 11-12).

¹⁰¹ Basden, *Niger Ibos*, 260; Thomas, *Anthropological Report Part I*, 86, 108; Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 124; Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria*, 42; Chinedu Okwumelu, Ezeidemili Odida, interview by the author; Emeka Onyechi, Akaette Ogidi, Ezeidemili, interview by the author; Nwabufu Okafo, Ezeogwugwu Mkputi, interview by the author; Okeru Okwesi, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, in Nwabufu, “Traditional Law and Colonial Change,” 86; Okeru Nnabenyi, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, in Nwabufu, “Traditional Law and Colonial Change,” 84; Meek, *Law and Authority*, 208-209; Okodo Mgbechi, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, Akanano Ogidi, 1 December 1978, in Nwabufu, “Traditional Law and Colonial Change,” 80; Nwosu Nwawulu, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, in Nwabufu, “Traditional Law and Colonial Change,” 72; Chief David N. C. Akobi,

In *Things Fall Apart*, all of Okonkwo's troubles begin when he kills Ikemefuna: a boy who had come to live in his compound and, eventually, to regard him as his father.¹⁰² For some reason, the oracle agbala decrees that Ikemefuna must be killed. Although it would normally constitute murder, this action is not punishable for the people of Umuofia who carry out agbala's order—that is, except, for Okonkwo, who has essentially become kin with Ikemefuna over the previous several years. After Okonkwo kills Ikemefuna, Okonkwo's friend informs him, "What you have done will not please the Earth. It is the kind of action for which the goddess wipes out whole families."¹⁰³ Because Ikemefuna had now come to call Okonkwo his father, Okonkwo's decision to slay the boy is a grave offense against the earth. Historians Nwando Achebe and Ogechi E. Anyanwu and philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah each argue that in the novel, it is the disintegration of *omenani* that causes Okonkwo's demise, as well as the collapse and subsequent colonization of Umuofia's society.¹⁰⁴ Okonkwo's fall from grace mirrors this wider collapse, because his disregard for *omenani*—and particularly his disregard for the female principle present in *omenani*—prompts the earth goddess to unleash her wrath on him and, eventually, the rest of the town.¹⁰⁵ After Okonkwo commits the callous and illegal act of striking down Ikemefuna, serious troubles befall him. He accidentally kills another clansperson at a funeral, and is forced into exile for seven years;

interview by the author, Akanano Ogidi, 25 April 2018; Nwando Achebe, "Balancing Male and Female Principles," 137; Nwabara, *Iboland*, 29.

¹⁰² As Nwando Achebe ("Balancing Male and Female Principles," 138) notes, it is the act of killing Ikemefuna "which sets into motion, a chain of events that ultimately lead to Okonkwo's downfall."

¹⁰³ Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 67.

¹⁰⁴ Achebe, "Balancing Male and Female Principles," 137, 139; Anyanwu, "Crime and Punishment," 60; Kwame Anthony Appiah, Forward to *The African Trilogy: Things Fall Apart; Arrow of God; No Longer at Ease*, Chinua Achebe (New York: Penguin, 2017), x.

¹⁰⁵ Achebe (Balancing Male and Female Principles," 137, 139) argues that Okonkwo's demise is catalyzed by his consistent rejection of feminine qualities within himself and the larger society—this, of course, includes his transgression of the laws of the earth goddess. Appiah (Forward to *The African Trilogy*, x) echoes this assertion, stating, "Okonkwo's crises in *Things Fall Apart* reflect his rigid adherence to a view of Igbo tradition that fails to recognize its supple flexibility . . . the dramas of his life depend largely on his refusal to recognize the proper place of the feminine virtues, as Igbo tradition conceives them: peace, patience, and gentleness. All these, along with fertility, are attributes of the Earth goddess. And it is an offense against her that begins his tragic descent."

loses his son Nwoye to the new Christian mission; and returns home to find a weakened, colonized community. This series of misfortunes ultimately leads Okonkwo to commit suicide, and thereby experience eternal social ostracization and humiliation. That is, because suicide is *nso ani*, Okonkwo's people cannot touch his body, which is polluted, and cannot bury him in the earth because the entry of his tainted body into ani's realm would enrage the goddess further.¹⁰⁶ For this reason, the men of Umuofia enlist the assistance of a British colonial official and his attendants to cut down Okonkwo's body from the tree, after which the people of Umuofia offer "sacrifices to cleanse the desecrated land."¹⁰⁷ Thus, for committing his final crime against ani, Okonkwo is barred from entering the world of the ancestors.¹⁰⁸

The above-mentioned accidental killing of a clansperson in *Things Fall Apart* occurs because Okonkwo's gun accidentally discharges during a burial ceremony. After this, "the only course open to Okonkwo was to flee from the clan. It was a crime against the earth goddess to kill a clansman, and a man who committed it must flee from the land . . . He could return to the clan after seven years."¹⁰⁹ The penalty for committing this female *ochu*, i.e., non-deliberate homicide, of a clansperson dictated the temporary exile of the offender and his or her family, and the destruction of his or her compound.¹¹⁰ In the novel, early in the morning on the day after the accidental killing, "a large crowd of men from Ezeudu's quarter¹¹¹ stormed Okonkwo's compound, dressed in garbs of war. They set fire to his houses, demolished his red walls, killed his animals and destroyed his barn. It was the justice of the earth goddess, and they were merely her

¹⁰⁶ Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 207; Jell-Bahlsen, *The Water Goddess*, 183; Achebe, "Balancing Male and Female Principles," 139; Elizabeth Isichei, *The Religious Traditions of Africa: A History* (Westport: Praeger, 2004), 232; Meek, *Law and Authority*, 213.

¹⁰⁷ Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 208.

¹⁰⁸ Achebe, "Balancing Male and Female Principles," 139.

¹⁰⁹ Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 124.

¹¹⁰ Meek, *Law and Authority*, 127; Achebe, "Balancing Male and Female Principles," 137; Thomas, *Anthropological Report Part I*, 115;

¹¹¹ It was one of Ezeudo's sons who Okonkwo had accidentally killed.

messengers.”¹¹² It is not out of malice that the men destroy Okonkwo’s property and livestock, but rather to comply with ani’s judgment that Okonkwo should be punished, and that the land he has “polluted with the blood of a clansman” be purified.¹¹³ Even Okonkwo’s closest friend participates in this somber mission, because to defy ani would have dire consequences for the whole town.¹¹⁴ The compound’s destruction and ensuing vacancy can be seen as a crucial aspect of the fulfillment of ani’s demand that the land be ceremoniously cleansed—part of the restoration of societal balance.

Another potentially serious offense in *Ogidi tupu ndi ocha bia* was theft, and the type of punishment was commensurate with the degree of theft committed. For theft of non-essential commodities, if the theft was a first offense, or if theft was committed by a family member, a fine paid to the owner of the stolen item was often the only penalty.¹¹⁵ However, the stealing of yams or other significant property such as livestock usually warranted the punishment of being dragged around the town, which sometimes resulted in the offender’s death, or being sold into slavery.¹¹⁶ Such punishment for stealing yams was considered appropriate for three reasons: yam was a staple of the Igbo diet, it held an important connection to the earth goddess whom the annual New Yam festival honored, and it was a central symbol of masculinity.¹¹⁷ Prior to the introduction of

¹¹² Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 125.

¹¹³ Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 125.

¹¹⁴ Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 125; Achebe, “Balancing Male and Female Principles,” 138.

¹¹⁵ Nnanyelugo Ezegbo, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, in Nwabufu, “Traditional Law and Colonial Change,” 89; Udozoba Okoye, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, in Nwabufu, “Traditional Law and Colonial Change,” 78.

¹¹⁶ Thomas, *Anthropological Report Part I*, 116, 117; Udozoba Okoye, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, in Nwabufu, “Traditional Law and Colonial Change,” 78; Okeru Okwesi, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, in Nwabufu, “Traditional Law and Colonial Change,” 87; Ibemesi, *Ogidi*, 65; Nwabara, *Iboland*, 29; Chief Chinedu Olisa C. Onyeama, interview by the author.

¹¹⁷ Chima Korieh, *The Land Has Changed: History, Society, and Gender in Colonial Eastern Nigeria* (Calgary: The University of Calgary Press, 2010), 11; G. Ugo Nwokeji, *The Slave Trade and Culture in the Bight of Biafra: An African Society in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 153, 160; Simon Ottenberg, *Farmers and Townspeople in a Changing Nigeria: Abakaliki during Colonial Times (1905-1960)* (Ibadan, Spectrum, 2005), 9, 19, 291; Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 23; Meek, *Law and Authority*, 216; Onyebuchi Idigo, Eze Ani Ikenga, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 17 July 2018.

European currencies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the critical measure of a man's wealth was the number of yams he harvested.¹¹⁸ In *Things Fall Apart*, for instance, Okonkwo is described as "a wealthy farmer . . . [who] had two barns full of yams."¹¹⁹ If a family could not harvest enough yams to feed themselves for an entire year, they would be forced to beseech their neighbors to share any surplus. Then, in the following season, the indebted family would have to harvest enough yams not only to feed themselves, but also to compensate their neighbors, as failing to repay a debt was *nso ani*. Moreover, if a thief stole yams out of the soil rather than out of someone's barn or basket, then the theft was more serious, because it was not only stealing—itsself a form of *nso ani*—but stealing directly from the earth, and therefore from *ani* herself.¹²⁰

Like those for murder and theft, punishments for adultery varied sharply in severity depending on who was involved in the crime. Adultery across kinship-group lines was generally seen as a private issue between the families affected, not as *nso ani*, and thus only required the adulterer's paramour to pay the affected spouse recompense in palm wine and kola nuts, and to beg for forgiveness.¹²¹ If, however, the act was committed by two members of the same kinship group, it was *nso ani* due to the fact that it constituted incest, a grave crime indeed.¹²² In the 1930s, colonial anthropologist C. K. Meek observed that incest was so reviled and therefore so rare as to

¹¹⁸ Even though other forms of currency including cowries and manilas were used earlier in the nineteenth century, yam was still a distinct sign of wealth around the turn of the twentieth century in which the novel is set.

¹¹⁹ Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 8.

¹²⁰ Okeru Okwesi, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabuo, in Nwabuo, "Traditional Law and Colonial Change," 86; Meek, *Law and Authority*, 215; Anyanwu, "Crime and Punishment," 69, n. 33.

¹²¹ Meek, *Law and Authority*, 219; Thomas, *Anthropological Report Part I*, 60, 67; Nnanyelugo Ezegbo, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabuo, in Nwabuo, "Traditional Law and Colonial Change," 88; Udozoba Okoye, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabuo, in Nwabuo, "Traditional Law and Colonial Change," 78.

¹²² High Chief Robinson Okudo, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 1 March 2018; Virginia Onwunyili, interview by the author, Ikenga, Ogidi, 30 August 2018; Meek, *Law and Authority*, 218-219; Udozoba Okoye, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabuo, in Nwabuo, "Traditional Law and Colonial Change," 78; Anyanwu, "Crime and Punishment," 69, n. 34; Nweke Iwobi Godwin, Ezeudo, interview by the author; Chief David N. C. Akobi, interview by the author; Nwanna Amobi, interview by the author; Gabriel Nweke Agha, interview by the author; Nwude Anumba, interview by Anthonia Uchenna Anyegbunam, "The External Relations of Ogidi," 84.

be “almost unknown” in Igboland.¹²³ The usual punishment for incest, including adultery between kin, was to be killed or sold into slavery.¹²⁴

Prescriptions that offenders of certain *nso ani* could be sold to the Aro—who were Ogidi’s main slave-trading partners¹²⁵—were decreed *oge slave trade*. One such *nso ani* that warranted the punishment of either death or being sold to the Aro was kidnapping.¹²⁶ Interestingly, ani’s decree that kidnapping was a crime was likely born out of a rising fear of the rampant kidnappings and raids that the Aro and other powerful slave-trading groups in southern Nigeria were then perpetrating. In addition to the emotional and psychological effects on the victim’s family of losing a child via abduction, kidnapping could affect the family’s livelihood, since the father’s wealth (as measured by his level of success in yam farming, as previously noted) would be negatively impacted by the loss of a laborer who helped him work the family’s farm.

Another pollution of the earth, the ailment referred to as “body swelling” or “the swelling,” was described to me by Emeka Onyekwelu, a priest of the idemili goddess in Ogidi, as a sudden onset of significant swelling in a person’s abdomen, resembling that of a pregnant woman in her third trimester.¹²⁷ In *Things Fall Apart*, it is because Okonkwo’s father Unoka dies of “the swelling which was an abomination to the earth goddess”¹²⁸ that he does not receive the usual first or second

¹²³ Meek, *Law and Authority*, 223-224.

¹²⁴ Meek, *Law and Authority*, 225; Nwanna Amobi, interview by the author; Gabriel Nweke Agha, interview by the author.

¹²⁵ Chief Edward Dike Ibemesi, interview by the author; Ezeudo, interview by Arinze Ernest Agbogu, in Agbogu, “Ogidi Before 1891,” 93; Lawrence Agulefo, interview by Arinze Ernest Agbogu, Ikenga Ogidi, 22 December 1975, in Agbogu, “Ogidi Before 1891,” 96. The Aro hailed from Arochukwu in southeastern Igboland and were known to be prolific slave traders. See the Introduction for more details.

¹²⁶ Okeru Okwesi, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufo, in Nwabufo, “Traditional Law and Colonial Change,” 86; Nnanyelugo Ezegbo, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufo, in Nwabufo, “Traditional Law and Colonial Change,” 88; Nwosu Nwawulu, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufo, in Nwabufo, “Traditional Law and Colonial Change,” 72; Okodo Mgbechi, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufo, in Nwabufo, “Traditional Law and Colonial Change,” 80.

¹²⁷ Emeka Onyekwelu, Ezeidemili Ogidi, interview by the author.

¹²⁸ Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 18. Meek (*Law and Authority*, 28) also noted that the swelling disease known as “dropsy” was an abomination.

burial.¹²⁹ Rather, he is carried away to *ajo ofia*, literally an “evil forest,”¹³⁰ where he is left to die and rot above ground. I view Unoka’s affliction with the swelling as punishment for the *nso ani* of failing to pay his debts. At the beginning of the novel, we see that Unoka is a notorious debtor who “owed every neighbor some money from a few cowries¹³¹ to quite substantial amounts,” and seemingly in no rush to repay them, as he is “lazy and improvident.”¹³² Indeed, Unoka draws lines of chalk on the wall of his hut to document his many debts: “there were five groups, and the smallest group had ten lines,” each line representing one hundred cowries.¹³³ Simply owing a debt was not necessarily *nso ani*, but instead seen as a personal slight against the creditor. However, if debts became habitual, went unpaid for extended periods, or were denied by the debtor, then the debtor had committed *nso ani*, which sometimes resulted in selling him or her into slavery to help cover the creditor’s economic loss.¹³⁴ Perhaps it is Unoka’s great accumulation of debts and habitual failure to repay them that leads the earth goddess to afflict him with the swelling. As well as being *nso ani* itself, the swelling was sometimes the punishment that the goddess inflicted upon a person who committed another *nso ani*;¹³⁵ and *dying from* the swelling was yet another offense

¹²⁹ The first burial takes place almost immediately, usually within a few hours of death. The more important burial, *ikwa ozo* (literally meaning “to cry for the dead”), comes months or years later and British anthropologists called it “second burial.” This is a symbolic burial (as the body was already interred during the first burial) that involves feasts and ceremonies. Basden, *Among the Ibos*, 118, 10-122; Echemba, *Igbo Funeral Rites Today*, 40-43; Basden, *Niger Ibos*, 269-270; N. W. Thomas, “Some Ibo Burial Customs,” *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 47 (1917): 167-171; Jell-Bahlsen, *The Water Goddess*, 183; Njoku, *Ala di Mma*, 23.

¹³⁰ An “evil forest” is an expanse of woodland that the community members avoid. It is designated for bad or evil things to be discarded. See Basden, *Among the Ibos*, 114; Basden, *Niger Ibos*, 276; Thomas, “Some Ibo Burial Customs,” 171; Thomas, *Anthropological Report Part I*, 96.

¹³¹ In the mid to late nineteenth century—which was when the character Unoka would have lived (he died ten years prior to the beginning of Okonkwo’s story as narrated in the novel (Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 4)—cowries were the main form of currency in Igboland.

¹³² Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 4.

¹³³ Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 7.

¹³⁴ Thomas, *Anthropological Report Part I*, 121; Meek, *Law and Authority*, 231-232; Nwosu Nwawulu, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, in Nwabufu, “Traditional Law and Colonial Change,” 72.

¹³⁵ Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria Volume II*, 166; Meek, *Law and Authority*, 306. For example, Thomas (*Anthropological Report Part I*, 116) noted that if a person was accused of theft and denied it, a trial took place in which the family members of the accused placed their hands on the accused’s back and swore the accused’s innocence, after which the gods would “kill him or cause him to swell up if he were guilty.”

against ani, precluding the individual's ground burial and thus his or her entry into the world of the ancestors.

Disturbing the peace was yet another crime. In Igboland *tupu ndi ocha bia*, there was a period of time ranging from one week to one month, before the planting season, during which ani commanded that there be absolute peace in the community.¹³⁶ It was a sacred time of resting and honoring the earth goddess, and no disputes or violence of any kind were permitted.¹³⁷ If the community kept the peace, then ani rewarded them with an abundant harvest, but if the peace was broken, ani would only allow for a meager one.¹³⁸ *Things Fall Apart* demonstrates the lengths to which Igbo people would go to mollify the goddess after breaking this mandated peace. When Okonkwo beats his youngest wife during "the Week of Peace," the priest of ani warns him that his grievous action will bring the goddess' disfavor upon all of Umuofia. For the sake of the community, Okonkwo capitulates and proffers a goat, a hen, lengths of cloth, and cowries at ani's shrine.¹³⁹ On this occasion, unlike after his slaying of Ikemefuna, Okonkwo appeases the earth goddess, and the appeasement itself is enough to restore balance to Umuofia, at least for the time being.

Falsely testifying in the courts of deities was also a serious offense, and it often resulted in its perpetrators' severe ailments or deaths.¹⁴⁰ Such action was *nso ani*, but also the *nso* of the relevant deity; for example, falsely swearing an oath at the court of idemili would constitute both *nso ani* and *nso-idemili*,¹⁴¹ and such crimes are discussed later in the present chapter. A related *nso*

¹³⁶ Iloanusì, *Myths and Creation of Man*, 91; Talbot, *Tribes of the Niger Delta*, 69; Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 28-29.

¹³⁷ Ifemesia, *Traditional Humane Living*, 36; Talbot, *Tribes of the Niger Delta*, 69; Njoku, *Ala di Mma*, 21.

¹³⁸ Talbot, *Tribes of the Niger Delta*, 69; Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 30; Afigbo, "Prolegomena," 81.

¹³⁹ Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 30-31.

¹⁴⁰ Nwosu Nwawulu, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufo, in Nwabufo, "Traditional Law and Colonial Change," 72; High Chief Robinson Okudo, interview by the author; Samson Osakwe, Ezeerulu, interview by the author.

¹⁴¹ Jeffreys, "The Origin of the Names of the Ibo Week," 167; Emeka Onyechi, Akaette Ogidi, Ezeidemili, interview by the author; Emeka Onyekwelu, Ezeidemili Ogidi, interview by the author.

ani was desecrating the shrines of the deities, especially *ani*. When interviewed in 1978, two Ogidi elders, Okeru Okwesi and Nnanyelugo Ezegbo, asserted that it was a serious crime to desecrate any of the community's gods (or their sacred physical manifestations), especially *ani*, *idemili*, *ogwugwu*, and *udo*, because these four were "responsible for the safety of the community."¹⁴² That is, if the people scorned their protectors or their dwellings, i.e., shrines, it was seen as a form of treason against the spiritual forces that controlled Ogidi. Shrines were and still are sacred places that cannot be entered by just anyone. In fact, the most important characteristic that a patron must possess before approaching the shrine of any deity in Ogidi is *obi oma*, "a good/clean heart," i.e., honest and pure intentions.¹⁴³ And because the priests of these deities were their faithful attendants and mouthpieces for the people *tupu ndi ocha bia*, insulting such esteemed intermediaries was also deemed *nso ani*.¹⁴⁴ A comparable crime against *ani* was insulting or defaming a masked spirit.¹⁴⁵ As anthropologist G. T. Basden noted in his 1938 *Niger Ibos*, "no one may molest or fight with a 'maw' [*mmoo* or *egwugwu*]."¹⁴⁶ In former days, the penalty of such an insult was death, not only for himself, but for all his relatives also."¹⁴⁷ This *nso ani* is discussed in more depth in a later section of this chapter.

¹⁴² Direct quotation comes from Okeru Okwesi, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, in Nwabufu, "Traditional Law and Colonial Change," 86. Similar statement made by Nnanyelugo Ezegbo, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, in Nwabufu, "Traditional Law and Colonial Change," 88.

¹⁴³ Chief Francis Nwoye Nwoka, Ezeogwugwu Umunebo, interview by the author; Chinedu Okwumelu, Ezeidemili Odida, interview by the author; Obi Nnoka, Ezeogwugwu Ire, interview by the author; Onyebuchi Idigo, Ezeani Ikenga, interview by the author; Paul Okenu, Ezeudo Ire, interview by the author; Paul Unachukwu, Ezeoro Okperi, interview by the author, Ogidi, 18 August 2018; Samson Osakwe, Ezeerulu, interview by the author.

¹⁴⁴ Nwosu Nwawulu, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, in Nwabufu, "Traditional Law and Colonial Change," 72; Okeru Okwesi, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, in Nwabufu, "Traditional Law and Colonial Change," 86; Nnanyelugo Ezegbo, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, in Nwabufu, "Traditional Law and Colonial Change," 88; Thomas, *Anthropological Report Part I*, 57.

¹⁴⁵ Nwosu Nwawulu, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, in Nwabufu, "Traditional Law and Colonial Change," 72; Nnanyelugo Ezegbo, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, in Nwabufu, "Traditional Law and Colonial Change," 88.

¹⁴⁶ "Maw" is Basden's rendering of the Igbo term *mmoo*, meaning masked spirit or masquerade in much of Igboland. In Ogidi, the term *egwugwu* is the equivalent of *mmoo*.

¹⁴⁷ Basden, *Niger Ibos*, 375.

Another similar, but slightly less severe *nso ani* was a junior person cursing or insulting an elder. Elders have been revered in Ogidi since the founding of its four quarters—as will be discussed at length in Chapter 3—and thus require respect from their juniors. Ranging from an individual family to the entire town, seniority was valued in Ogidi *tupu ndi ocha bia*.¹⁴⁸ To name two examples, the eldest male member of a lineage was regarded as its caretaker and representative, and the senior quarter of the town was the location of many of its most important shrines.¹⁴⁹ For a junior member of society to disrespect his or her elder, and therefore to oppose the deep-seated Igbo appreciation for seniority, meant defiance of a fundamental tenet of Igbo cosmology. Such defiance threatened the balance of society, and thus constituted *nso ani*.¹⁵⁰

Perhaps the first *omenani* that a substantial number of the people of Ogidi and of the rest of Igboland decided to disregard was the law that the birth of twins or any unnatural birth (e.g., of triplets or infants showing various visible abnormalities, or feet-first parturition) constituted an abomination. Twins were considered unnatural and therefore *nso ani* largely due to an Igbo belief that single birth was a major distinction between humans and animals.¹⁵¹ Because the earth goddess deemed twins to be abominations, such infants were promptly discarded in an “evil forest,” left to

¹⁴⁸ Meek, *Law and Authority*, 104-106; Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, 22; Chief Lawrence Agulefo, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 83; Onwuameze Ikwuwelu, interview by the author; Anonymous oral history collaborator 2, interview by the author; Chief John Amanwa, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 28 March 2018.

¹⁴⁹ Meek, *Law and Authority*, 104-106; P. Amaury Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria: A Sketch of Their History, Ethnology and Languages, with an Account of the 1921 Census Volume III Ethnology* (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), 594; Gailey, *The Road to Aba*, 23; Elizabeth Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People* (London: Macmillan Press, 1976), 22; Chief Amaeze Ekpeani, interview by the author; Chieka Ifemesia, *Traditional Humane Living Among the Igbo: An Historical Perspective* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1979), 40.

¹⁵⁰ Meek, *Law and Authority*, 230; NAE, OP 139/1929 ONPROF 7/16/78: “Petition by Balonwu and Jonathan Balonwu re conviction of Okwudili and Nnoka by Ogidi Native Court,” 12 June 1929 memorandum from the district officer of Onitsha Division to the senior resident of Onitsha Province, 1; NAE, OP 842 ONPROF 8/1/4712: “Annual Report Onitsha Province 1933,” Annual Report 1933 Onitsha Division, 38; Nwosu Nwawulu, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabuo, in Nwabuo, “Traditional Law and Colonial Change,” 72.

¹⁵¹ Thomas, *Anthropological Report Part I*, 60; Basden, *Niger Ibos*, 181; Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, 26; High Chief Robinson Okudo, interview by the author; Basden, *Niger Ibos*, 262; Meek, *Law and Authority*, 224; Anyanwu, “Crime and Punishment,” 54; Chukwuka Jerry Okongwu and Chukwudi M. Okongwu, interview by the author; Chief Ozoekwe Clement Okudo, interview by the author; Chief Chinedu Olisa C. Onyeama, interview by the author.

die and rot above ground.¹⁵² But that was not the end of the ordeal, for the body of their mother was also polluted, and she would therefore undergo a purification ceremony to cleanse herself and the land of her crime.¹⁵³ Over the eight decades that followed the arrival of missionaries in Igboland in 1857, they fervently sought to eliminate the practice of disposing of twins, and were largely successful in changing Igbo people's mindsets on that particular *nso ani*.¹⁵⁴

Idemili, Goddess of Rivers and the Sacred Python

After *ani*, *idemili*—the daughter of *Chukwu*—holds the next most important position in the pantheon of *Ogidi*'s deities.¹⁵⁵ As of 2018, *Ogidi* had six shrines to *idemili* with six corresponding priests, and the two most important shrines were located in *Akanano* and *Uru* quarters—making their priests the town's most senior of all the goddess' custodians. Of the four

¹⁵² Parrinder, *West African Religion*, 99; Meek, *Law and Authority*, 224; Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, 26; Anyanwu, "Crime and Punishment," 54; Ogbuefi Ezigbo Otue Unachukwu, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, in Nwabufu, "Traditional Law and Colonial Change," 77; Chief Edward Dike Ibemesi, interview by the author; Udeze Joyce Azuka, interview by the author, *Ogidi*, 11 August 2018; High Chief Robinson Okudo, interview by the author; Nwoye Leonard Okafor, Ezeajani, interview by the author, *Ogidi*, 22 March 2018; Chukwuka Jerry Okongwu and Chukwudi M. Okongwu, interview by the author; Chief Ozoekwe Clement Okudo, interview by the author; Anthony Okoye, interview by the author; Chief Chinedu Olisa C. Onyeama, interview by the author; Alex Uzowulu, interview by the author, *Ikenga Ogidi*, 9 March 2018; Oduche Cyril Okafor, interview by the author; Chief David N. C. Akobi, interview by the author; Nwanna Amobi, interview by the author; Gabriel Nweke Agha, interview by the author; Chief Christian Nweke Ibeazor, interview by the author, *Ezinkwo Ogidi* 21 August 2018; Josephine Ezeukanma, interview by the author, *Ikenga Ogidi*, 5 September 2018; Ifeyinwa Ekwealor, interview by the author, *Ezinkwo Ogidi*, 18 August 2018; Onwuameze Ikwuwelu, interview by the author; Thomas, *Anthropological Report Part IV*, 18; Basden, *Niger Ibos*, 262, 182; High Chief Robinson Okudo, interview by the author.

¹⁵³ Basden, *Niger Ibos*, 181; Oduche Cyril Okafor, interview by the author; Thomas, *Anthropological Report Part I*, 60.

¹⁵⁴ Eliminating the practice of killing twins was one of the first self-proclaimed victories of European missionaries in Igboland; by the end of the 1930s, the practice of disposing of twins had almost completely ceased. Udeze Joyce Azuka, interview by the author; Josephine Ezeukanma, interview by the author; Ifeyinwa Ekwealor, interview by the author; Olisa Emeka Princess, interview by the author, *Ikenga Ogidi*, 10 November 2018; Gloria Nwoka, interview by the author, *Ikenga Ogidi*, 4 September 2018; Ogbuefi Nnagboo, interview by Anthonia Uchenna Anyegbunam, in Anyegbunam, "The External Relations of *Ogidi*," 121; Nwosu Nwawulu, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, in Nwabufu, "Traditional Law and Colonial Change," 73; Ogbuefi Ezigbo Otue Unachukwu, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, in Nwabufu, *Traditional Law and Colonial Change*, 76-77; Okodo Mgbochi, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, 81; Arinze Agbogu, *Ogidi: Political History*, (Owerri: Treasure Books, 2009), 68; Nwoye Leonard Okafor, Ezeajani, interview by the author.

¹⁵⁵ Chinua Achebe noted that *idemili* is known as the daughter of *Chukwu*, interview by Jane Wilkinson, 1987, in *Conversations with Chinua Achebe*, 150.

additional shrines, Uru had one, Ezinkwo one, and Ikenga two.¹⁵⁶ According to anthropologist Sabine Jell-Bahlsen, idemili is a local manifestation of nne mmiri, the generic mother water goddess of Igboland.¹⁵⁷ Idemili translates to “pillar of water” and is the namesake of the Idemili River, which runs through a stretch of land from Nnobi to Obosi, located just south of Ogidi.¹⁵⁸ The communities along or near the river have worshiped the goddess for centuries,¹⁵⁹ and given that she is a river goddess, it is unsurprising that many of her laws concern water sources and their inhabitants.¹⁶⁰ For example, she has decreed that crocodiles residing in lakes and rivers in the region are sacred and cannot be killed.¹⁶¹ However, the most important laws that idemili has decreed concern the sacred python (*eke*), evidenced by the numerous pythons, or *eke idemilis*, that take refuge at her shrines.¹⁶² In Ogidi *oge four quarters-oge taa*, pythons have been regarded as sacred ambassadors of idemili, tasked with warning offenders that the goddess is aware of their transgressions. Two priests of idemili whom I interviewed—Chinedu Okwumelu in Ikenga quarter

¹⁵⁶ The following were the priests attending each idemili shrine: Emeka Onyekwelu, Akanano, priest of one of the senior shrines; Emeka Onyechi, Uru, priest of one of the senior shrines; Oduche Mbakwe, Uru; Sunday Ibekwe, Ezinkwo; Chief Godwin Mbelu, Ikenga; Chinedu Okwumelu, Ikenga.

¹⁵⁷ Jell-Bahlsen, *The Water Goddess*, 72, 345.

¹⁵⁸ Chinua Achebe, interview by Jane Wilkinson, 1987, in *Conversations with Chinua Achebe*, 150; Thomas, *Anthropological Report Part I*, 27.

¹⁵⁹ M. D. W. Jeffreys, “The Origin of the Names of the Ibo Week,” *Folklore* 67, no. 3 (1956): 166; Ifi Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society* (London: Zed Books, 1987), 19; Chinua Achebe, interview by Jane Wilkinson, 1987, in *Conversations with Chinua Achebe*, 150; Chinedu Okwumelu, Ezeidemili Odida, interview by the author.

¹⁶⁰ Achebe, “‘Ogidi Palaver,’” 30; Jell-Bahlsen, *The Water Goddess*, 72, 181; Basden, *Among the Ibos*, 217; Udozoba Okoye, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, in Nwabufu, “Traditional Law and Colonial Change,” 78.

¹⁶¹ Chude Akus, *Idemili Cultural History* (Owerri: Center for Igbo Civilization and History, 1991), 7; Jell-Bahlsen, *The Water Goddess*, 193; Obianuju P. Umeji, “Igbo Women as Makers of Civilization,” in *Nsukka/Nigeria: Proceedings of the First International Conference on Women in Africa and the African Diaspora*, 4 ([no publication date]): 348, cited in Jell-Bahlsen, *The Water Goddess*, 193 and 212 n. 8; Basden, *Among the Ibos*, 217.

¹⁶² Achebe, “‘Ogidi Palaver,’” 30; Basden, *Niger Ibos*, 41; Basden, *Among the Ibos*, 218; Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, 121-122; Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 160-161; Chief Anthony Nwoye, Ezeogwugwu Abor, interview by the author; Parrinder, *West African Religion*, 52; Jeffreys, “The Origin of the Names of the Ibo Week,” 166; Udozoba Okoye, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, in Nwabufu, “Traditional Law and Colonial Change,” 78.

and Emeka Onyekwelu in Akanano—explained that the goddess also sends pythons to individuals to summon them to her shrine for various reasons.¹⁶³

In Ogidi, as in other towns along or near Idemili River, injuring or killing a python is *nso-idemili*.¹⁶⁴ In *Things Fall Apart*, days after a Christian convert in the town of Mbanta kills a sacred python, he suddenly falls ill and dies, indicating “that the gods were still able to fight their own battles.”¹⁶⁵ Moreover, in the early twenty-first century, anthropologist G. T. Basden observed, “If a man have [*sic*] the misfortune to kill one [i.e., a python] accidentally, he will mourn for a year and abstain from shaving his head,” thus treating the python as if it were human.¹⁶⁶ In Ogidi, the consequence of killing a python without compensating for this action is the previously mentioned abominable body swelling.¹⁶⁷

As noted in *Things Fall Apart*, even the accidental killing of a python demanded “sacrifices of atonement and . . . an expensive burial ceremony such as was done for a great man.”¹⁶⁸ I observed the after-effects of a perfunctory ceremony while conducting fieldwork. Traveling with

¹⁶³ Chinedu Okwumelu, Ezeidemili Odida, interview by the author; Emeka Onyechi, Akaette Ogidi, Ezeidemili, interview by the author.

¹⁶⁴ Akus, *Idemili Cultural History*, 18; Jell-Bahlsen, *The Water Goddess*, 193; Umeji, “Igbo Women as Makers of Civilization,” 348, cited in Jell-Bahlsen, *The Water Goddess*, 193 and 212 n. 8; Chief Anthony Nwoye, Ezeogwugwu Abor, interview by the author; High Chief Robinson Okudo, interview by the author; Chief Nwabuoku Osakwe, interview by the author, Ogidi, 2 October 2018; Chukwuka Jerry Okongwu and Chukwudi M. Okongwu, interview by the author; Alex Uzowulu, interview by the author; Nwanna Amobi, interview by the author; Gabriel Nweke Agha, interview by the author; Ifeyinwa Ekwealor, interview by the author.

¹⁶⁵ Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 161. In this python-killing instance, it is not clear if Mbanta worships idemili, since she is never mentioned. Regardless, even in Igbo communities that do not worship idemili, ani decrees the ban on killing pythons. Basden, *Among the Ibos*, 218.

¹⁶⁶ Basden, *Niger Ibos*, 41. Referring specifically to Ogidi, the following sources affirm Basden’s observation: Akus, *Idemili Cultural History*, 18; Chief Anthony Nwoye, Ezeogwugwu Abor, interview by the author; Emeka Onyekwelu, Ezeidemili Ogidi, interview by the author; Chief Nwabuoku Osakwe, interview by the author, Ogidi, 23 April 2018; Chief Lawrence Agulefo, interview by Chukwuma C. C. Osakwe, Ikenga Ogidi, 14 September 1983, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi: The Era of Igwe Amobi I and II, 1904-1973” (B. A. Thesis, History Department, University of Nigeria Nsukka, 1984), 84.

¹⁶⁷ Chief Anthony Nwoye, Ezeogwugwu Abor, interview by the author; Emeka Onyekwelu, Ezeidemili Ogidi, interview by the author; Chukwuka Jerry Okongwu and Chukwudi M. Okongwu, interview by the author; Ifeyinwa Ekwealor, interview by the author; Gabriel Nweke Agha, interview by the author.

¹⁶⁸ Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 158. This fact was also noted by Alex Uzowulu, interview by the author; Nwanna Amobi, interview by the author; Ifeyinwa Ekwealor, interview by the author; Gabriel Nweke Agha, interview by the author.

my research assistant, Mbanefo Osakwe, we came across a dead python on the side of the road that appeared to have been run over by a vehicle. The lifeless reptile was curled up at the edge of the road and covered with leaves and long blades of grass. Osakwe told me that this was an expedited form of burial performed by a hasty motorist.¹⁶⁹ Other *nso-idemili* in Ogidi include killing members of one's clan, performing abortions, using medicine to harm innocent people, and admitting women into her shrines during their menses.¹⁷⁰ As we shall see, accusations of such crimes, other than homicide—which must be decided in ani's court—lead to court trials at the shrine of idemili.

Ogwugwu, Goddess of Fertility and Ambitions

Ogwugwu's exercise of authoritative roles varies from one locality to another, but to all Igbo people she is primarily a fertility goddess to whom women make petitions if they wish to conceive children.¹⁷¹ In Ogidi particularly, she is also a goddess of achieving one's ambitions.¹⁷² Since the establishment of Ogidi's four quarters, this has generally taken the form of patrons promising to bring gifts to ogwugwu's shrine in a show of thanks and praise, should she grant their requests.¹⁷³ However, if patrons fail to fulfill such promises, the deity sends large snakes into their

¹⁶⁹ Conversation with my research assistant, Mbanefo Osakwe, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 20 April 2018. Akus (*Idemili Cultural History*, 18) also states that covering the dead python with green leaves is a common practice in Ogidi when someone accidentally kills a python.

¹⁷⁰ Chinedu Okwumelu, Ezeidemili Odida, interview by the author; Emeka Onyechi, Akaette Ogidi, Ezeidemili, interview by the author; Nwabufo Okafo, Ezeogwugwu Mkputi, interview by the author.

¹⁷¹ Ogbu U. Kalu, "Gender Ideology in Igbo Religion: The Changing Religious Role of Women in Igboland." *Africa: Rivista trimestrale di studi e documentazione dell'Istituto italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente* 46, no. 2 (1991): 187; J. N. Ndukaku Amankulor, "Odo: The Mass Return of the Masked Dead among the Nsukka-Igo," *The Drama Review* 26, no. 4 (1982): 50-51; Chief Francis Nwoye Nwoka, Ezeogwugwu Umunebo, interview by the author; Nwabufo Okafo, Ezeogwugwu Mkputi, interview by the author; Obi Nnoka, Ezeogwugwu Ire, interview by the author; Sunday Udegbe, Ezeoro Ire, interview by the author, Akanano Ogidi, 12 July 2018; Chief Anthony Nwoye, Ezeogwugwu Abor, interview by the author; Achebe, "Balancing Male and Female Principles," 135.

¹⁷² Achebe, "Balancing Male and Female Principles," 135; Nwabufo Okafo, Ezeogwugwu Mkputi, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 17 July 2018; Obi Nnoka, Ezeogwugwu Ire, interview by the author; Chief Anthony Nwoye, Ezeogwugwu Abor, interview by the author.

¹⁷³ Talbot, *Tribes of the Niger Delta*, 92; Chief Francis Nwoye Nwoka, Ezeogwugwu Umunebo, interview by the author; Obi Nnoka, Ezeogwugwu Ire, interview by the author.

homes that remain there until the appropriate gratitude is proffered:¹⁷⁴ an action that underscores the importance of justice and the restoration of balance, for it is not right for humans to receive blessings from the gods without showing their appreciation. In Ogidi in 2018, there were six ogwugwu shrines and corresponding priests who attended to the goddess: three in Akanano quarter, two in Ezinkwo, and one in Ikenga, but there was no consensus as to which was the town's senior shrine.¹⁷⁵

Theologian Edmund Ilogu contends that ogwugwu does not tolerate offenses that “foul human relations,”¹⁷⁶ meaning that she upholds *omenani*, as all deities are expected to do. For example, Obi Nnoka, one of ogwugwu's priests in Akanano quarter, asserts that like ani and idemili, ogwugwu prohibits the killing of a clansperson.¹⁷⁷ In addition, however, the latter goddess stipulates specific prohibitions of her own: such as the harming of monkeys in the southern Igbo town of Ikwerrri, where they are sacred to her.¹⁷⁸ Likewise in Ogidi, ogwugwu dictates that neither a menstruating woman nor a man who has recently had sexual intercourse can enter her shrines, because either activity makes a person unclean and therefore unfit to approach her.¹⁷⁹

Udo, God/Oracle of Peace and the Afo Udo Market

In Ogidi, udo is both a god and an oracle: that is, based on his own prophecies, he informs townspeople of what they should or should not do to maintain balance in the community.¹⁸⁰ As of

¹⁷⁴ Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria Volume II*, 110; Talbot, *Tribes of the Niger Delta*, 92; Wilfred D. Hambly, “Serpent Worship in Africa,” *Publications of the Field Museum of Natural History Anthropological Series* 21, no. 1 (1931): 25-26.

¹⁷⁵ The priests of ogwugwu included Obi Nnoka, Akanano; Nwanne Okongwu, Akanano; Chief Nwoye Iremeka, Akanano; Nwabufo Okafo, Ezinkwo; Nweke Ezeonyelulu, Ezinkwo; Chief Francis Nwoye Nwoka, Ikenga.

¹⁷⁶ Ilogu, “Worship in Ibo Traditional Religion,” 233.

¹⁷⁷ Obi Nnoka, Ezeogwugwu Ire, interview by the author.

¹⁷⁸ Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria Volume II*, 110; Talbot, *Tribes of the Niger Delta*, 92; Hambly, “Serpent Worship in Africa,” 25-26.

¹⁷⁹ Chief Francis Nwoye Nwoka, Ezeogwugwu Umunebo, interview by the author.

¹⁸⁰ Chief Isama Nwawuluaru Nwosu, in Onwugbufor, “Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy,” 103; Achebe, “Ogidi Palaver,” 48, n 74.

2018, there were four shrines of udo in Ogidi: one in each quarter with the senior one located in Ikenga, adjacent to the grounds that used to hold the famed Afo Udo market, which belonged to the god.¹⁸¹ Although never explicitly explained in any documented primary or secondary sources nor by my collaborators, the udo shrine in Ikenga is the most senior, I suspect, due to its association with the once important and thriving market. As will be examined in detail in Chapter 4, udo declared in 1914, soon after his market had been moved to another location without his consent, that the coming year would not be prosperous for the people of Ogidi as a result of this egregious act.¹⁸² Although he represents peace, udo is conceived of as a soldier who will fight for his people, and against anyone who seeks to thwart his authority, so as to preserve justice.¹⁸³ He forbids poisoning, lying, stealing, and incest.¹⁸⁴ It is especially offensive to udo for anyone to steal from his market, for which the punishment is sudden illness or, in some cases, death.¹⁸⁵

Shrines of Deities and Oracles as Courts of Law

Since the establishment of Ogidi's four quarters, the shrines of ani, idemili, ogwugwu, and udo have served as places of worship, where patrons might ask for assistance or favor, as well as offer sacrifices of appreciation when such requests are granted. They have also served as courts of law, where priests divine the deities' sacred decrees that they subsequently proclaim to the people, and where those accused of committing *nso ani*, *nso-idemili*, *nso-ogwugwu*, and *nso-udo* are tried.

¹⁸¹ The priests of udo include Paul Okenu, Akanano; Fidelis Ekesiani, Uru; Edwin Ikeabunze, Ezinkwo; Nweke Iwobi Godwin, Ikenga, priest of the senior udo shrine.

¹⁸² Chief Isama Nwawularu Nwosu, in Onwugbufor, "Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy," 103; Achebe, "'Ogidi Palaver,'" 33.

¹⁸³ Sunday Udegbe, Ezeuro Ire, interview by the author; Edwin Nwoye Ikeabunze, Ezeuro Ogidi-Ani, interview by the author; Nweke Iwobi Godwin, Ezeuro, interview by the author; Chief Edward Dike Ibemesi, interview by the author; Samson Osakwe, Ezeerulu, interview by the author.

¹⁸⁴ Paul Okenu, Ezeuro Ire, interview by the author; Nweke Iwobi Godwin, Ezeuro, interview by the author; Edwin Nwoye Ikeabunze, Ezeuro Ogidi-Ani, interview by the author; Sunday Udegbe, Ezeuro Ire, interview by the author.

¹⁸⁵ Chief Godwin Nweke Agbogu, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 13 July 2018; Nweke Iwobi Godwin, Ezeuro, interview by the author.

The shrines, moreover, have been places in which criminal offenders must offer sacrifices to appease the deities whom they have offended so as to restore moral balance to the community.¹⁸⁶

Arrangement of Shrines

Although some aspects of the indigenous Igbo religion have changed over time, the layout of individual shrines has remained relatively the same for hundreds of years,¹⁸⁷ and the shrines of various deities and oracles across Ogidi share some similarities. Based on my observations, the physical manifestation or representation of each deity is a tree wrapped in white cloth secured to the trunk with twine (see Figures 7 and 8 below).¹⁸⁸ These shrines are usually located in isolated groves or forest clearings that are only accessible by narrow foot-paths.¹⁸⁹ However, others—such as that for ogwugwu in Ezinkwo quarter—are situated in the courtyard of the compound where its

¹⁸⁶ This note refers to the entire paragraph. Paul Okenu, Ezeudo Ire, interview by the author; Nweke Iwobi Godwin, Ezeudo, interview by the author; Edwin Nwoye Ikeabunze, Ezeudo Ogidi-Ani, interview by the author; Sunday Udegbe, Ezeudo Ire, interview by the author; Emeka Onyechi, Akaette Ogidi, Ezeidemili, interview by the author; Gregory Enedo, interview by the author; Ifeanyi Emmanuel Okubuike, Ezeukpaka Odida, interview by the author; Onyebuchi Idigo, Ezeani Ikenga, interview by the author; Paul Unachukwu, Ezeudo Okperi, interview by the author; Vincent Okudo, Ezeiwelle Ogidi, interview by the author; Emeka Onyechi, Akaette Ogidi, Ezeidemili, interview by the author; Gregory Enedo, interview by the author; Ifeanyi Emmanuel Okubuike, Ezeukpaka Odida, interview by the author; Onyebuchi Idigo, Ezeani Ikenga, interview by the author; Paul Unachukwu, Ezeudo Okperi, interview by the author; Vincent Okudo, Ezeiwelle Ogidi, interview by the author; Chief Francis Nwoye Nwoka, Ezeogwugwu Umunebo, interview by the author; Ifeanyi Emmanuel Okubuike, Ezeukpaka Odida, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 31 July 2018; Mbanefo Osakwe, interview by the author, Ogidi, 3 July 2018; Edwin Nwoye Ikeabunze, Ezeudo Ogidi-Ani, interview by the author; Sunday Udegbe, Eze Aro Ire, interview by the author, Akanano Ogidi, 12 July 2018; Paul Unachukwu, Eze Aro Okperi, interview by the author, Ogidi, 18 August 2018; Samson Osakwe, Eze Erulu, interview by the author, Ogidi, 30 July 2018.

¹⁸⁷ Paul Okenu, Ezeudo Ire, interview by the author; Nweke Iwobi Godwin, Ezeudo, interview by the author; Edwin Nwoye Ikeabunze, Ezeudo Ogidi-Ani, interview by the author; Sunday Udegbe, Ezeudo Ire, interview by the author; Emeka Onyechi, Akaette Ogidi, Ezeidemili, interview by the author; Gregory Enedo, interview by the author; Ifeanyi Emmanuel Okubuike, Ezeukpaka Odida, interview by the author; Onyebuchi Idigo, Ezeani Ikenga, interview by the author; Paul Unachukwu, Ezeudo Okperi, interview by the author; Vincent Okudo, Ezeiwelle Ogidi, interview by the author; Emeka Onyechi, Akaette Ogidi, Ezeidemili, interview by the author; Gregory Enedo, interview by the author; Ifeanyi Emmanuel Okubuike, Ezeukpaka Odida, interview by the author; Onyebuchi Idigo, Ezeani Ikenga, interview by the author; Paul Unachukwu, Ezeudo Okperi, interview by the author; Vincent Okudo, Ezeiwelle Ogidi, interview by the author; Chief Francis Nwoye Nwoka, Ezeogwugwu Umunebo, interview by the author; Ifeanyi Emmanuel Okubuike, Ezeukpaka Odida, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 31 July 2018; Mbanefo Osakwe, interview by the author, Ogidi, 3 July 2018; Edwin Nwoye Ikeabunze, Ezeudo Ogidi-Ani, interview by the author; Sunday Udegbe, Eze Aro Ire, interview by the author, Akanano Ogidi, 12 July 2018; Paul Unachukwu, Eze Aro Okperi, interview by the author, Ogidi, 18 August 2018; Samson Osakwe, Eze Erulu, interview by the author, Ogidi, 30 July 2018.

¹⁸⁸ This was also noted in Meek's *Law and Authority*, 25 and Talbot's *Peoples of Southern Nigeria*, 104-113, esp. the photographs of shrines contained therein.

¹⁸⁹ This was also noted in Basden's *Niger Ibos*, 78 and Talbot's *Peoples of Southern Nigeria*, 104-113.

priest resides (see Figure 8 below). Common features apart from the main, sacred tree, include strips of white cloth adorning the shrine compound—hanging from tree branches, clotheslines, or the rafters of an adjacent shrine-house. These adornments represent peace, purity, and virtuousness¹⁹⁰ and are often a gift of thanks from patrons to the deity.¹⁹¹ White chalk (*nzu*) and kola nut (*oji*) are also found at each shrine. Representing hospitality and good intentions, the chalk is passed around so that patrons may mark themselves with it, and the kola nut is offered to the deity by the priest before addressing him or her.¹⁹² Hand-held bells can also be found at some shrines (seen in Figures 6 and 7), and the priest will use such an instrument to summon the deities and other spiritual forces.¹⁹³ At the foot of the shrine, it is also common to see remnants of material sacrifices that patrons have offered to the relevant deity—whether in asking for their favor, in thanksgiving, or in repentance and amelioration. Today, such sacrifices include bottles of liquor, cartons of beer, kola nuts, paper money, as well as fowls or goats.¹⁹⁴ *Tupu ndi ocha bia*, kola nuts, fowls, goats, and money of various sorts such as cowries or manilas would have been offered to the deities in like manner.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁰ Chief Francis Nwoye Nwoka, Ezeogwugwu Umunebo, interview by the author; Ifeanyi Emmanuel Okubuike, Ezeukpaka Odida, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 31 July 2018; Mbanefo Osakwe, interview by the author, Ogidi, 3 July 2018; Edwin Nwoye Ikeabunze, Ezeudo Ogidi-Ani, interview by the author.

¹⁹¹ Emeka Onyechi, Akaette Ogidi, Ezeidemili, interview by the author; Gregory Enedo, interview by the author; Ifeanyi Emmanuel Okubuike, Ezeukpaka Odida, interview by the author; Onyebuchi Idigo, Ezeani Ikenga, interview by the author; Paul Unachukwu, Ezearo Okperi, interview by the author; Vincent Okudo, Ezeinwelle Ogidi, interview by the author.

¹⁹² Njoku, *Ala di Mma*, 126; Anthony N. O. Ekwunife, *Consecration in Igbo Traditional Religion* (Enugu: Jet Publishers, 2003 [1990]), 120; Anthony Okoye, interview by the author; Dominic Nnamdi Obijiofor, interview by the author; Cyril Okafor, interview by the author; Chief Godwin Nweke Agbogu, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 6 March 2018; Ozoekwe Clement Okudo, interview by the author; Chike Odunze, written questionnaire, questions supplied by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 5 May 2018; Nweke Iwobi Godwin, Ezeudo, interview by the author; Vincent Okudo, Ezeinwelle Ogidi, interview by the author.

¹⁹³ Gregory Enedo, interview by the author; Onyebuchi Ezigbo, Akajiofo, Ezeani Ogidi, interview by the author.

¹⁹⁴ This is based, in part, on my own observations throughout my fieldwork in 2018. Also see Emeka Onyekwelu, Eze Idemili, interview by the author, Akanano Ogidi, 13 July 2018; Onyebuchi Ezigbo, Akajiofo, Ezeani Ogidi, interview by the author; Chief Anthony Nwoye, Ezeogwugwu Abor, interview by the author; Emeka Onyechi, Akaette Ogidi, Eze Idemili, interview by the author, Uru Ogidi, 6 November 2018.

¹⁹⁵ Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 30-31; Aguwa, “Taboos and Purification,” 539; Adibe, *Igbo Issues*, 161; Meek, *Law and Authority*, 127.



Figure 6. Photograph of Onyebuchi Idigo, Ezeani Ikenga, at a Shrine for Ani

Onyebuchi Idigo is standing in front of the shrine to ani for which he is the custodian. Idigo holds his sacred ofo in his right hand. The tree that signifies ani is situated behind the archway draped with long strips of white cloth. At the base of the shrine can be seen various items, including a bell, a bowl containing nzu and kola nut, and a bottle of liquor. Photograph taken by the author, Obodokwe village, Ikenga, Ogidi, July 17, 2018.



Figure 7. Photograph of Chief Anthony Nwoye, Ezeogwuwgu Abor, at a Shrine for Ogwugwu

Chief Anthony Nwoye holds his sacred ofo in his right hand and stands adjacent to the tree representing ogwugwu. Spread upon the ground at the base of the shrine are various ceremonial items, including a bell, a bowl containing nzu and kola nut, and gifts from patrons to the goddess—a bottle of liquor, a carton of beer, plastic bags containing four kola nuts each, and money for “washing” the kola. Photograph taken by the author, Abor village, Akanano, Ogidi, August 9, 2018.



Figure 8. Photograph of a Shrine for Ogwugwu in Ezinkwo Quarter

This shire was attended by priest Nwabufo Okafo, not pictured. At left foreground is the tree representing the goddess. Photograph taken by the author, Nkwelle-Ogidi village, Ezinkwo, Ogidi, July 17, 2018.

Priests and Priestesses as Court Intermediaries

Oge four quarters-oge taa, shrines of various deities have functioned as courts of law—the deities serving as judges, and priests and priestesses as court intermediaries. Crucial to a priest’s or priestess’ intermediating role is the *ofo*, a special tool used to communicate with spiritual forces. In the early twentieth century, anthropologist M. M. Green observed that an *ofo* was “a sacred symbol, looking usually like a small wooden club, sometimes bound with iron.”¹⁹⁶ The typical *ofo* of a priest in Ogidi today is a 12- to 18-inch-long stick wrapped in white cloth and tied with twine. With an *ofo* in hand, the priest or priestess can speak directly to the deity;¹⁹⁷ thus, the

¹⁹⁶ Green, *Igbo Village Affairs*, 59.

¹⁹⁷ Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria Volume II*, 138; Basden, *Among the Ibos*, 224; Forde and Jones, *The Igbo and Ibibio-Speaking Peoples*, 26; Otigbuanyinya O. C. Onyesoh, *Nri: The Cradle of Igbo Culture and Civilization* (Onitsha: Tabansi Press, 2000), 24; Christopher Ifeanyi Ejizu, *Ofo: Igbo Ritual Symbol* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension,

ofò symbolizes peace, truth, and justice.¹⁹⁸ Priests in Ogidi have usually used this shorter *ofò* made of wood and cloth when communicating with the deities (as seen in Figure 6 above), but on occasion, they have also wielded a long, metal rod type of *ofò* (as seen in Figure 7 above) with which they strike the ground as they pray to the deities and announce their decrees to the people.¹⁹⁹ Either type of *ofò* can be used as an instrument for swearing one's innocence or truthfulness. Accused individuals attending a deity's shrine swear their innocence upon the divine implement, and if they are in fact innocent, the *ofò* "confers immunity" on them, protecting them from harm.²⁰⁰

Due to their proximity to the deities and their important judicial functions, priests and priestesses are held to a higher standard of behavior than the average person, and subject to additional laws.²⁰¹ For example, ethnographers in the early twentieth century observed that priests could not sit on the ground or share a seat with anyone during ceremonies.²⁰² In particular, priests of *ani* could not eat food in another person's house or food prepared by a menstruating woman.²⁰³ Because the earth goddess embodies the land and is charged with safeguarding society's morals, her stewards take special care to demonstrate their reverence for the land and to keep their bodies free of any impurities.

1986), 35; Nwoye Leonard Okafor, Ezeajani, interview by the author; Nweke Iwobi Godwin, Ezeudo, interview by the author; Samson Osakwe, Ezeerulu, interview by the author.

¹⁹⁸ Basden, *Among the Ibos*, 224; Forde and Jones, *The Igbo and Ibibio-Speaking Peoples*, 26; Afigbo, "An Outline," 111; Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 92; Iloanusi, *Myths and Creation of Man*, 203; Aguwa, *The Agwu Deity*, 54; Njoku, *Ala di Mma*, 126.

¹⁹⁹ Nweke Iwobi Godwin, Ezeudo, interview by the author; Chief Anthony Nwoye, Ezeogwugwu Abor, interview by the author.

²⁰⁰ Direct quotation from Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 92. See also Nwabara, *Iboland*, 27; Meek, *Law and Authority*, 235-236; Basden, *Niger Ibos*, 57, 61, 379, 383; Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 30; Iloanusi, *Myths and Creation of Man*, 208; Ejizu, *Ofo*, 64; Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria Volume II*, 81; Nathaniel Iloabachie, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, Uru Ogidi, 15 September 1978, in Nwabufu, "Traditional Law and Colonial Change," 82.

²⁰¹ Meek, *Law and Authority*, 30; Talbot, *Tribes of the Niger Delta*, 321; Sunday Udegbe, Ezeoro Ire, interview by the author; Nwabufu Okafo, Ezeogwugwu Mkpiti, interview by the author; Samson Osakwe, Ezeerulu, interview by the author.

²⁰² Talbot, *Tribes of the Niger Delta*, 321; Meek, *Law and Authority*, 30.

²⁰³ Talbot, *Tribes of the Niger Delta*, 321; Meek, *Law and Authority*, 30.

As well as serving deities, priests and priestesses have served oracles,²⁰⁴ whose ability to see the future has allowed them to announce orders that, if followed, would protect society from destruction. *Tupu ndi ocha bia*, oracles' guidance often took the form of proclamations, which for all intents and purposes were laws that humans were required to obey. For example, in *Things Fall Apart*, Umuofia “never went to war unless its case was clear and just and was accepted as such by its Oracle—the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves [also known as agbala]. And there were indeed occasions when the Oracle had forbidden Umuofia to wage a war. If the clan had disobeyed the Oracle they would surely have been beaten.”²⁰⁵ When agbala foresees that Umuofia's powerful war medicine, which usually supports its warriors against its enemies, will not function during an unjust war, heeding the oracle's order protects the town from dire consequences. Elsewhere in the novel, a different oracle instructs the people of Abame not to interact with a stranger who enters their town “riding an iron horse” (i.e., a bicycle); but they do not heed this warning, which would have maintained the peace and balance of their society, and are instead annihilated by European interlopers.²⁰⁶

Tupu ndi ocha bia and *oge ndi ocha chilu*, oracles also had judicial functions: namely, settling disputes via similar methods to those of many deities. According to Basden, oracles in the first four decades of the twentieth century were “instruments for settling disputes and for refuting charges of witchcraft. When reconciliation cannot be effected and feelings run strongly, an appeal is made to the oracle whose verdict is final.”²⁰⁷ Several famous Igbo oracles that acted as “the highest courts of appeal” prior to the arrival of the British were agbala at Awka, igwe-ke-ala at

²⁰⁴ Some oracles are also deities.

²⁰⁵ Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 12.

²⁰⁶ Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 138.

²⁰⁷ Basden, *Niger Ibos*, 76.

Umunoha, and ibinukpabi at Arochukwu.²⁰⁸ To help inform their adjudication, oracles required the disputants to swear oaths, and punished all who swore falsely, sometimes with death.²⁰⁹

Types of Disputes and Crimes Tried in the Courts of Deities and Oracles

Ani's role as custodian of morality is directly linked to her role as the supreme judge of disputes, and therefore the most serious disputes or cases of alleged crimes have often been directed to her shrines.²¹⁰ Anthropologist C. K. Meek explained that in the case of ani's courts *oge ndi ocha chilu*, once all the concerned parties assembled at the shrine, the priest would address the goddess, asking her to discern the truth of the matter by causing the deceiver to become ill and die.²¹¹ Then, equipped with full knowledge of the penalty for false testimony, each party was allowed to make his or her case. At the conclusion of the court hearing, the priest would either proclaim ani's judgment, or proclaim nothing at all, so as not to interfere with her impending actions.²¹²

In Ogidi, cases of disputes and alleged crimes other than the most serious *nso ani* have often been directed to the shrines of lesser, yet still prominent deities. The types of cases that idemili has judged *oge four quarters-oge taa* are varied, such as unpaid debt, land disputes, theft, and maltreatment, but not homicide.²¹³ As with the swearing of innocence before other deities, the

²⁰⁸ The quotation comes from Meek's *Law and Authority*, 44. Others who discuss the judicial roles of these oracles include Simon Ottenberg's "Ibo Oracles and Intergroup Relations," in *Igbo Religion, Social Life and Other Essays*, 61; Dike and Ekejiuba's *The Aro of South-eastern Nigeria*, 116, 135-139; Chieka Ifemesia's *Traditional Humane Living*, 25; Anyanwu's "Crime and Punishment," 56.

²⁰⁹ E. N. Okechukwu, "Umuaga: The Economic Life of an Agbaja Town," in *Igbo Worlds: An Anthology of Oral Histories and Historical Descriptions*, ed. Elizabeth Isichei (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1978), 75; Nwabara, *Iboland*, 27; Meek, *Law and Authority*, 235-236; Basden, *Niger Ibos*, 57, 61, 379, 383; Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 30; Iloanusi, *Myths and Creation of Man*, 208; Ejizu, *Ofo*, 64; Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria Volume II*, 81; Nathaniel Iloabachie, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, Uru Ogidi, 15 September 1978, in Nwabufu, "Traditional Law and Colonial Change," 82.

²¹⁰ Ifemesia, *Traditional Humane Living*, 35; Meek, *Law and Authority*, 134.

²¹¹ Meek, *Law and Authority*, 125.

²¹² Meek, *Law and Authority*, 131.

²¹³ Chinedu Okwumelu, Ezeidemili Odida, interview by the author; Emeka Onyechi, Akaette Ogidi, Ezeidemili, interview by the author. There is one exception: one of Ogidi's senior idemili shrines, in Ire village of Akanano quarter,

accused party must swear before idemili that he or she is innocent, and the goddess kills anyone who swears falsely.²¹⁴

Ogwugwu is also known to settle disputes by discerning the real guilty party, after someone accused of a crime has sworn an oath of innocence.²¹⁵ Through oath-swearing, individuals can call upon a deity to take matters into his or her own hands, and to kill the accused if he or she lied.²¹⁶ Importantly, while ogwugwu has acted as a judge in disputes among humans, not all of her shrines in Ogidi as of 2018 were deemed suitable places for such judgments to be delivered.²¹⁷ At those shrines where she was willing to settle cases, the matters at issue included marriage, apprenticeship, land, theft, and poisoning.²¹⁸

Udo, too, has settled cases, particularly those of alleged *nso-udo*, which have included poisoning, lying, stealing, and incest.²¹⁹ The senior priest of udo, Nweke Iwobi Godwin, explained that when someone brought an accusation of theft or poisoning, the priest would invite the accused to the shrine and inform udo that the parties wished to bring a case to his attention. The accuser and accused were then allowed to explain themselves, and were required to swear that they were telling the truth, upon which the priest announced that udo knew when people were dishonest and

where, as the chief priest Emeka Onyekwelu asserts, idemili settles murder cases. Emeka Onyekwelu, Ezeidemili Ogidi, interview by the author.

²¹⁴ Jeffreys, "The Origin of the Names of the Ibo Week," 167; Emeka Onyechi, Akaette Ogidi, Ezeidemili, interview by the author; Emeka Onyekwelu, Ezeidemili Ogidi, interview by the author.

²¹⁵ Remigius N. Nwabueze, "Dead Bodies in Nigerian Jurisprudence," *Journal of African Law* 51, no. 1 (2007): 118; Chief Anthony Nwoye, Ezeogwugwu Abor, interview by the author.

²¹⁶ Chief Godwin Nweke Agbogu, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 13 July 2018; Nweke Iwobi Godwin, Ezeudo, interview by the author; Nwabara, *Iboland*, 27; Meek, *Law and Authority*, 235-236; Basden, *Niger Ibos*, 57, 61, 379, 383; Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 30; Iloanusi, *Myths and Creation of Man*, 208; Ejizu, *Ofo*, 64; Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria Volume II*, 81; Nathaniel Iloabachie, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, Uru Ogidi, 15 September 1978, in Nwabufu, "Traditional Law and Colonial Change," 82.

²¹⁷ Chief Francis Nwoye Nwoka, Ezeogwugwu Umunebo, interview by the author; Obi Nnoka, Ezeogwugwu Ire, interview by the author.

²¹⁸ Chief Anthony Nwoye, Ezeogwugwu Abor, interview by the author; Nwabufu Okafo, Ezeogwugwu Mkputi, interview by the author.

²¹⁹ Paul Okenu, Ezeudo Ire, interview by the author; Nweke Iwobi Godwin, Ezeudo, interview by the author; Edwin Nwoye Ikeabunze, Ezeudo Ogidi-Ani, interview by the author; Sunday Udegbe, Ezeudo Ire, interview by the author.

would punish liars severely.²²⁰ The priest of udo in Ezinkwo quarter, Edwin Nwoye Ikeabunze, described an alternative method that udo used to punish a guilty person without them being present at his shrine. If someone complained to udo about their property being stolen, for example, the god would “chase” the guilty party by causing him or her serious problems; and this usually prompted an approach to the priest, either by the guilty party or one of his or her associates, to ask what action must be taken to appease the god.²²¹ Thus, udo—in common with other Igbo deities—has not always been able to prevent crime, but has always avenged it, for that is how balance is restored to Igbo society after a person commits a serious offense but refuses to reconcile.²²²

Oath Swearing and Trials by Ordeal—Modes of Achieving Justice

The two main modes of settling disputes and resolving allegations of crime prevalent in Igboland *tupu ndi ocha bia*, at the shrines of deities and oracles alike, were swearing an oath of innocence before a deity (as noted above) and enduring a trial by ordeal, which also involved swearing an oath.²²³ The latter practice differed in detail from community to community, but followed the same general pattern. Those who denied an accusation of committing *nso ani* would first swear their innocence using the *ofo*, and then undertake some sort of physical challenge that would determine their guilt or innocence.²²⁴ One common ordeal consisted of the imbibing of an herbal concoction (*iyi*) that was toxic, but once consumed could be manipulated by the deity or oracle so as not to harm the accused person, if the deity or oracle found him or her innocent.²²⁵

²²⁰ Nweke Iwobi Godwin, Ezeudo, interview by the author.

²²¹ Edwin Nwoye Ikeabunze, Ezeudo Ogidi-Ani, interview by the author.

²²² Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria Volume II*, 81, 109; Okechukwu, “Umuaga,” 75.

²²³ Ifemesia, *Traditional Humane Living*, 35; Okeru Okwesi, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufo, in Nwabufo, “Traditional Law and Colonial Change,” 87; Meek, *Law and Authority*, 43, 235; Ejizu, *Ofo*, 64, 111. Note that trials by ordeal still occur in the twenty-first century, but have become much less prevalent since the early twentieth century.

²²⁴ Nwabara, *Iboland*, 27; Meek, *Law and Authority*, 235; Basden, *Niger Ibos*, 57, 61, 379, 383; Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 30; Iloanusu, *Myths and Creation of Man*, 208; Ejizu, *Ofo*, 64.

²²⁵ Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria Volume II*, 81; Nathaniel Iloabachie, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufo, in Nwabufo, “Traditional Law and Colonial Change,” 82; Okeru Okwesi, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufo, in Nwabufo, “Traditional Law and Colonial Change,” 87.

Okeru Okwesi, an Ogidi elder interviewed in 1978, explained that in the matter of an alleged homicide via poisoning both the accused and the accuser went to ani's shrine where the priest administered the trial by ordeal. Before consuming *iyi*, the accused swore an oath along the following lines: "[ani,] if I am guilty of the offence of which I am being accused let your wrath be on me, but if not, spare me and my family."²²⁶ If the accused did not suffer serious illness or death within the next year, then he or she was presumed innocent.²²⁷ Similarly, Ogidi elder Nathaniel Iloabachie, also interviewed in 1978, asserted that swearing one's innocence and enduring an ordeal was the primary means of discovering guilt in cases of many other transgressions *tupu ndi ocha bia*; and, as with poisoning accusations, the manifestation of a guilty verdict was the untimely death of the accused.²²⁸

Consuming *iyi*, though common, was not the only ordeal used to settle disputes or accusations. In various parts of Igboland during the early twentieth century, ethnographers recorded the following techniques: pouring boiling palm oil over the hand of the accused, and if the hand was unharmed, the accused was considered innocent;²²⁹ forcing suspected witches to consume poisonous sasswood bark, and if they died, it was because ani had found them guilty;²³⁰ and instructing suspected murderers to drink water that had run off of the victim's corpse when it was washed, and if they did not die within the following year, they were presumed innocent, having been spared by the earth goddess.²³¹

²²⁶ Okeru Okwesi, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, in Nwabufu, "Traditional Law and Colonial Change," 87.

²²⁷ Okeru Okwesi, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, in Nwabufu, "Traditional Law and Colonial Change," 87; Chief Louis Okoye, interview by Chukwuma C. C. Osakwe, Akanano Ogidi, 13 September 1983, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 77.

²²⁸ Nathaniel Iloabachie, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, in Nwabufu, "Traditional Law and Colonial Change," 82.

²²⁹ Anyanwu, "Crime and Punishment," 56.

²³⁰ Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria Volume II*, 213; Nwabara, *Iboland*, 51.

²³¹ Basden, *Niger Ibos*, 259-260.

The authority and acceptance of trial by ordeal is summed up in the proverb *ochu nwa okuko nwe ada, nwa okuko nwe nowanwu oso*: literally, “chase the chick and you will fall, and the chick has its victory dance.”²³² In other words, like innocent young birds, wrongly accused persons will always prevail, thus justifying the use of trials by ordeal to discern innocence. As anthropologist John A. Noon noted, “[t]he efficacy of an oath lies in the certainty that the supernatural [being] who sanctions the oath will punish those who flout it.”²³³ Such a view is supported by another proverb, *okwu alusi kwuru bu ike puru ya n’ahu*: “the speech of a deity is the emission of its force.”²³⁴ Thus, in the aftermath of trials by ordeal, the survival of those whom the community members believe to be innocent, and the death of those whom they believe to be guilty, reinforces confidence in the power of deities and oracles to deliver justice.

Oge four quarters-oge taa, the punishment for lying in the court of a deity or oracle—whether an ordeal is part of the trial or not—has been the same for each: it means that severe harm or death will befall the liar, thus restoring justice. But, for those who admit their guilt before the deity, they are expected to conduct the necessary ceremonies and offer the required sacrificial items to the deity as instructed by its priest. Accepting such sacrifices from repentant offenders, rather than punishing them, has presented deities with an alternative with which they have been able to ensure the restoration of balance in Ogidi, as elsewhere in Igboland.

²³² From my notes for an Igbo language course at Michigan State University, 28 February 2017.

²³³ Noon, “A Preliminary Examination,” 643.

²³⁴ Ekwuru, *Igbo Cosmology*, 132.

Masked Spirits as Emissaries of the Earth Goddess

Masked spirits or masquerades (*egwugwu*) are ancestors who briefly manifest themselves in visible form in the human realm.²³⁵ *Oge taa*, just as *tupu ndi ocha bia*, male members of Ogidi are initiated into the masquerade society in early adolescence, roughly between the ages of ten and fifteen, but do not usually achieve full initiation until adulthood.²³⁶ The masks in question are elaborate, artistic, full-body coverings that initiated men don to personify these spirits.²³⁷ “To those who know,” Chinua Achebe explained, “the masked ‘spirits’ are only *symbolic* ancestors. But this knowledge does not in any way diminish their validity or the awesomeness of their presence.”²³⁸ Therefore, a type of suspended disbelief and reverential conduct accompanies the observance of masked spirits, with most people realizing that the masquerades are merely men dressed in masks, but also accepting them as embodying the spirits of deceased ancestors.²³⁹ The following passage from *Things Fall Apart* demonstrates this deference to masquerades:

Okonkwo’s wives, and perhaps other women as well, might have noticed that the second *egwugwu* had the springy walk of Okonkwo. And they might also have noticed that Okonkwo was not among the titled men and elders who sat behind the row of *egwugwu*. But if they thought these things they kept them within themselves. The *egwugwu* with the springy walk was one of the dead fathers of the clan.²⁴⁰

Part of an Igbo person’s fulfillment of the societal expectation to honor his or her ancestors involves accepting their authority, and not disrespecting the masquerade institution by calling attention to the human representatives.

²³⁵ Ugonna, *Mmonwu*, 1-25; Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria Volume II*, 767; Forde and Jones, *The Igbo and Ibibio-Speaking Peoples*, 26; Achebe, “*Chi* in Igbo Cosmology,” 95; Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 163; Nwosu Nwawulu, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufo, in Nwabufo, “Traditional Law and Colonial Change,” 73, 163; Ogbuefi Ezigbo Otue Unachukwu, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufo, in Nwabufo, “Traditional Law and Colonial Change,” 76; Achebe, “The Igbo World and Its Art,” 65; Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 93-94, 186-190.

²³⁶ Gabriel Nweke Agha, interview by the author; Parrinder, *West African Religion*, 103, 133.

²³⁷ The masks completely cover the bodies of the men who wear them and are made of materials such as cloth and wood. Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria Volume II*, 768.

²³⁸ Emphasis in original: Achebe, “*Chi* in Igbo Cosmology,” 95.

²³⁹ Achebe, “The Igbo World and Its Art,” 67.

²⁴⁰ Emphasis in original: Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 89-90.

Masked spirits have many functions; here, however, I will focus on their roles as judges who hold humans accountable to *omenani*, particularly *oge four quarters-oge ndi ocha chilu*. Early twentieth-century ethnographers Daryll Forde and G. I. Jones observed that the masquerade society had “certain judicial functions, such as expelling an adulteress from her husband’s house, and could formerly order persons suspected of witchcraft to undergo trial by ordeal.”²⁴¹ My oral history collaborator High Chief Robinson Okudo similarly explained that *egwugwu* in Ogidi *tupu ndi ocha bia* could visit an adulterer’s compound and admonish the person not to continue committing such offenses.²⁴² They could also arrive at a compound to forcefully send an adulteress away from her husband’s home.²⁴³ Adultery is just one example, as masked spirits could intimidate those who committed any *nso ani* into accepting the stipulated punishment or undergoing a judicial procedure to determine their punishment. In 1973, for example, an elder named Noo Udala in the Igbo town of Umuaga (some forty miles northeast of Ogidi) told a student researcher that “masquerades could invade a culprit’s home, and seize all his belongings until the owner paid the stipulated fine for his crime, and again reclaimed his property by a further fine.”²⁴⁴ Such visits did not occur if offenses were minor, however, as masked spirits only “came out”²⁴⁵ for serious or important occasions such as to intimidate or pronounce judgments against those who committed *nso ani*.²⁴⁶

There are two categories of masked spirits: *mmoo anyasi* (night masquerades, invisible masks) and *mmoo otutu* (day masquerades, visible masks).²⁴⁷ The former, solemn and frightening,

²⁴¹ Forde and Jones, *The Igbo and Ibibio-Speaking Peoples*, 26.

²⁴² High Chief Robinson Okudo, interview by the author.

²⁴³ High Chief Robinson Okudo, interview by the author; Ifemesia, *Traditional Humane Living*, 78.

²⁴⁴ Noo Udala, testimony collected by E. N. Okechukwu, in “Village Democracy: An Agbaja Example,” in *Igbo Worlds*, ed. Isichei, 74.

²⁴⁵ Achebe (“Ogidi Palaver,” 35) explains that when masked spirits appear they are said to have “come out.”

²⁴⁶ Achebe, “Ogidi Palaver,” 30.

²⁴⁷ Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 163.

were only heard, never seen;²⁴⁸ and for these reasons acted as a deterrent to misbehavior and crime.²⁴⁹ In *Things Fall Apart*, after a Christian convert in Umuofia exposes a masquerade, the narrator notes that “one of the greatest crimes a man could commit was to unmask an *egwugwu* in public, or to say or do anything which might reduce its immortal prestige in the eyes of the uninitiated.”²⁵⁰ By unmasking the *egwugwu*, the Christian “had killed an ancestral spirit.”²⁵¹ In retribution, a night masquerade called the Mother of the Spirits travels all around Umuofia that night, mourning her murdered son—the unmasked *egwugwu*—with cries described as “a strange and fearful sound” no living person in Umuofia had ever heard before.²⁵² Indeed, Nwando Achebe affirms that night masquerades made “gruesome sounds,”²⁵³ and performance arts scholar/ethnographer J. N. Ndukaku Amankulor describes them as “guttural, esoteric tongues that only the initiated and experienced male can interpret.”²⁵⁴ A few particularly frightening night masks in Ogidi *tupu ndi ocha bia* were *ayaka*, whose name means “the dreaded invisible chorus,” *ogbazulobodo*, “the night-runner,” and *onyekulum*, “who summoned me?”²⁵⁵ Such masquerades could be heard throughout the community after dark, “pointing out, and holding up to ridicule, the defects and lapses in the character and conduct of members of the community.”²⁵⁶

The more common, and usually more pleasant, day masquerades were often seen at ceremonies such as festivals and burials, and still can be *oge taa*.²⁵⁷ *Tupu ndi ocha bia*, they would

²⁴⁸ Basden, *Among the Ibos*, 238-240; Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 163.

²⁴⁹ Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, 23; Okechukwu, “Village Democracy,” 74.

²⁵⁰ Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 186.

²⁵¹ Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 186.

²⁵² Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 187.

²⁵³ Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 163.

²⁵⁴ Amankulor, “Odo,” 46.

²⁵⁵ Chinua Achebe, “The Igbo World and Its Art,” 66; Ifemesia, *Traditional Humane Living*, 78.

²⁵⁶ Ifemesia, *Traditional Humane Living*, 78.

²⁵⁷ Chinua Achebe (“The Igbo World and Its Art,” 66) notes that the majority of masquerades in Ogidi are day masks. Although they are not terrifying in the ways that night masks are, day masks often carry canes to flog women and children spectators who encroach on their space. Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 186; Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria Volume II*, 768.

sit as a body of judges deciding legal disputes within the community, of types that would likely be termed civil suits today, often pertaining to marriage or land.²⁵⁸ The judicial roles of the *egwugwu* have apparently ceased in Ogidi as none of my oral history collaborators could recall instances of masquerades settling disputes during their own lifetimes. Nonetheless, in pre-colonial Ogidi, the *egwugwu* council, composed of four masked spirits representing the town's four quarters, acted as the spiritual supreme court, upholding *omenani*.²⁵⁹ The trials over which the masked spirits presided were public and often drew large crowds.²⁶⁰ For example, if a serious matter arose in Ikenga quarter, the complainant would report it at Idemili Square, which was situated within the Afo Udo marketplace, and the town crier would alert all of the members of the quarter to converge at the square to witness the *egwugwu* council adjudicate it.²⁶¹ One of my oral history collaborators, Ogbogu Azubuike Chuka, explained that there were four masquerades—Odogwucho, Igodo, Nwanyimaraja, and Ajofia—representing the legal prowess of the ancestors of each of the four villages of Ikenga, with Ajofia (Evil Forest) being the most powerful masquerade in Ogidi.²⁶² As well as converging at the square, listening to the matters, and giving their judgments, these four

²⁵⁸ Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 89-93; Nwosu Nwawulu, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, in Nwabufu, "Traditional Law and Colonial Change," 72-73; Uzowulu Ezekwesili, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, Ikenga Ogidi, 10 September 1978, in Nwabufu, "Traditional Law and Colonial Change," 74; Ogbuefi Ezigbo Otue Unachukwu, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, in Nwabufu, "Traditional Law and Colonial Change," 76; Udozoba Okoye, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, in Nwabufu, "Traditional Law and Colonial Change," 78; Nnanyelugo Ezegbo, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, in Nwabufu, "Traditional Law and Colonial Change," 88.

²⁵⁸ Achebe, "'Ogidi Palaver,'" 29

²⁵⁹ Achebe, "'Ogidi Palaver,'" 29; Nwosu Nwawulu, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, in Nwabufu, "Traditional Law and Colonial Change," 72-73; Uzowulu Ezekwesili, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, Ikenga Ogidi, 10 September 1978, in Nwabufu, "Traditional Law and Colonial Change," 74; Ogbuefi Ezigbo Otue Unachukwu, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, in Nwabufu, "Traditional Law and Colonial Change," 76; Udozoba Okoye, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, in Nwabufu, "Traditional Law and Colonial Change," 78; Nnanyelugo Ezegbo, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, in Nwabufu, "Traditional Law and Colonial Change," 88.

²⁶⁰ Achebe, "'Ogidi Palaver,'" 29; Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 89-93; Ogbogu Azubuike Chuka, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 1 May 2018; Sir Albert Obi (Rex) Ezegbo, interview by the author.

²⁶¹ Ogbogu Azubuike Chuka, interview by the author; Sir Albert Obi (Rex) Ezegbo, interview by the author.

²⁶² Ogbogu Azubuike Chuka, interview by the author. This is also reflected in the depiction of Ajofia being the leader of the *egwugwu* in Umuofia (Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 89, 189). Nwando Achebe offers a slightly different description of Ogidi's *egwugwu*: a council of four *egwugwu*, one from each quarter, with Ajofia representing Ikenga quarter (Achebe, "'Ogidi Palaver,'" 29).

masquerades acted as one of the militant arms of government, carrying out sentences including death sentences.²⁶³

Things Fall Apart illustrates how the nine *egwugwu* who embody the ancestors of each of Umuofia's nine villages try cases.²⁶⁴ At one of these trials, the head *egwugwu*, named Evil Forest, explains, "Our duty is not to blame this man or to praise that, but to settle the dispute."²⁶⁵ That is, as emissaries of *ani*, the council members' ultimate goal is the return of balance to society. During a trial relating to a dispute between a man named Uzowulu and his in-law, the *egwugwu* council reprimands Uzowulu for having beaten his wife on numerous occasions. It is unlawful for a man to mistreat his wife or wives, so the woman is considered estranged from her husband while she remains in her natal home; but the council advises Uzowulu to beg for his wife's return by bringing palm wine to his in-laws' home to signify the reparation of the marriage.²⁶⁶ Arguably, this act of repentance was designed to bring peace and stability to the extended families of Uzowulu and his estranged wife.

In fact, the novel provides two specific examples of the types of disputes that masked spirits were called upon to adjudicate in Umuofia prior to the arrival of the British, for, after the *egwugwu* settle the Uzowulu case, two new parties approach them and begin "a great land case."²⁶⁷ The choice of this latter example may have been to remind the book's readership of the significance of land and its goddess to indigenous Igbo law and justice, since, after all, the masked spirits represent the ancestors who assist *ani* in preserving morality in both the human and spiritual realms.

²⁶³ Chief Nwosu Nwawulu Enwude, interview by Chukwuma C. C. Osakwe, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 90; Chief Louis Okoye, interview by Chukwuma C. C. Osakwe, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 82; Ogbogu Azubuike Chuka, interview by the author.

²⁶⁴ Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 89.

²⁶⁵ Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 93.

²⁶⁶ Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 93.

²⁶⁷ Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 94.

Conclusion

Within Igbo cosmology, historically and in the present day, priests, priestesses, diviners, deities, oracles, and the ancestors have worked on behalf of *ani* to uphold her sacred laws, which in turn has kept society balanced and thus safe from destruction. Igbo cosmology also embraces the complementarity of male and female aspects of the human and spiritual realms. In Ogidi *tupu ndi ocha bia*, the law was female-centric, insofar as *ani*—an unquestionably feminine entity—protected morality by decreeing laws and punishing those who defied them. In theory, if the law were somehow to become re-gendered as male, it would likely disturb the balance of society and cause it to fall apart. And in practice, this is precisely what happened in Ogidi beginning in the late nineteenth century, *oge ndi ocha bia*. In subsequent chapters, I explore the ways in which law in Ogidi became re-gendered as male, and how this led to great injustice, and therefore imbalance, in its society.

CHAPTER 3:

“ENTIRELY A GOVERNMENT CREATED CHIEF”: MALE-CENTRIC DISTORTION AND INVENTION IN THE MAKING OF AN *IGWE*, *OGE NDI UKA BIA-OGE WALTER*

In the 1926 annual report on Onitsha Province,¹ British resident,² R. A. Roberts, included a note of particular interest concerning the Ogidi district:

Chief Walter Amobi, who exercised great influence in this district[,] died in 1925. One of his sons[,] Benjamin Amobi[,] has been given a warrant on the court, but the family's claim to the hereditary ezeship [i.e., kingship] of Ogidi has been rejected. Amobi was entirely a Government created Chief and did not even come from the senior quarter of Ogidi. His personality has not been inherited by his sons, and the glamour that once attached to the name is like[ly] to grow dim.³

Walter Amobi was born Okafo Amobi in Ogidi in the early 1860s.⁴ He was sent as a young boy to live in Onitsha, where he was introduced to missionaries who taught him English and ultimately set him up to become a powerful colonial intermediary.⁵ When Roberts described Amobi as “entirely a Government created Chief,” he was referring to the fact that colonial authorities had selected him as a warrant chief⁶ who would judge disputes in the newly established native court system.⁷ As such, Amobi could be seen as having usurped the authority and respect that rightly

¹ The quoted description of Ogidi's first warrant chief, Okafo Walter Amobi, included in the chapter title above is found in a 1926 colonial report: NAE, OP 408/1926 ONPROF 7/13/126: “Onitsha Province: Annual Report for the year 1926,” Report on the Onitsha Province for the Year Ended 31 December 1926, 7.

² The resident (previously called the district commissioner) of a province was the highest-ranking member of the colonial administration within that province.

³ NAE, OP 408/1926 ONPROF 7/13/126: “Onitsha Province: Annual Report for the year 1926,” Report on the Onitsha Province for the Year Ended 31 December 1926, 7.

⁴ Nwando Achebe, “‘Ogidi Palaver’: The 1914 Women's Market Protest,” in *Shaping Our Struggles: Nigerian Women in History, Culture, and Social Change*, ed. Obioma Nnaemeka and Chima J. Korieh (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2011), 23; Dike Ibemesi, *Ogidi: Historical Perspective of a People* (Ogidi: Ekpechi and Sons Ltd., 1995), 83.

⁵ Achebe, “‘Ogidi Palaver,” 23-24.

⁶ Warrant chiefs were indigenous men (in this case, Igbo men) whom the colonial administration gave authority to judge cases in the native courts. The only female warrant chief in Nigeria was an Igbo woman who presided in the Enugu-Ezike Native Court in northern Igboland from 1918 to 1948. See Nwando Achebe, *The Female King of Colonial Nigeria: Ahebi Ugbabe* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011).

⁷ Native courts were established by the colonial administration for the purposes of dispute settlement related to supposedly indigenous laws that the British referred to as “native law and custom.” A. E. Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs: Indirect Rule in Southeastern Nigeria 1891-1929* (London: Longman Group Limited, 1972), 51, 78; Harry A. Gailey, *The Road to Aba: A Study of British Administrative Policy in Eastern Nigeria* (New York: New York University Press, 1970), 6.

belonged to others in Ogidi, by distorting the indigenous custom of title-taking and subsequently inventing kingship in a society that did not have kings before.⁸ He reigned as *igwe* of Ogidi from 1904 until his death in December 1925, during which time he exploited its people and those of the nine other towns located in the Ogidi Native Court area,⁹ by taking the credit for big-game kills made by others; compelling myriad women to be his wives; and forcing men, women, and youths to work in his compound and on colonial public-works projects for little or no pay.¹⁰ Of course, Amobi was responsible for his own actions. However, I will argue—as Roberts’ comments appear to admit—that the colonial government was partly responsible for the damage Amobi caused to indigenous society, especially when it came to the consequences of his claim of hereditary “ezeship.” That claim was rooted in a manipulation of the indigenous Igbo titles of *eze* and *ezeobodo*, which literally meant “king” and “king of the community” respectively, but were not meant to be taken literally. Rather, these terms were meant to honor elderly, respected men who served as spokespersons for their communities; and in the case of Ogidi, there had traditionally been four such individuals, one for each of the town’s four quarters.¹¹ Having distorted the

⁸ C. K. Meek, *Law and Authority in a Nigerian Tribe: A Study in Indirect Rule* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), 185; Apollos O. Nwauwa, “State Formation and Evolution of Kingship in Igboland Revisited: A Case Study of the Origin of the Aro Kingdom,” in *Between Tradition and Change: Sociopolitical and Economic Transformation Among the Igbo of Nigeria*, ed. Apollos O. Nwauwa and Ebere Onwudiwe (Glassboro: Goldline and Jacobs, 2012), 21; Ifi Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society* (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1987), 55; K. Onwuka Dike, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta, 1830-1885: An Introduction to the Economic and Political History of Nigeria* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), 26; Achebe, “Ogidi Palaver,” 42 n. 19.

⁹ For a list of these towns, see footnote 63 in the Introduction.

¹⁰ Chief Edward Dike Ibemesi, interview by the author, Ogidi, 7 March 2018; High Chief Robinson Okudo (Esema), interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 14 September 2018; Oduche Cyril Okafor, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 26 April 2018; Chief Akunwafor Osegbo (Omeka), in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 100; Nweke Anene, interview by Chukwuma C. C. Osakwe, Akanano Ogidi, 20 September 1983, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 103; Haford C. Amerobi, interview by Chukwuma C. C. Osakwe, Uru Ogidi, 21 September 1983, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 108; Chief Uzowulu Udo, interview by Chukwuma C. C. Osakwe, Ikenga Ogidi, 28 September 1983, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 111; Chief Nwosu Nwawulu Enwude, interview by Chukwuma C. C. Osakwe, Ikenga Ogidi, 16 September 1983, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 94; Achebe, “Ogidi Palaver,” 27.

¹¹ I deduce that the title positions of *ezeobodo* and *eze* of each quarter were synonymous. Thus, I use the two terms interchangeably when referencing this title in Ogidi. The following sources refer to such men as the *ezeobodo* of each of the four quarters of Ogidi: Chief Edward Dike Ibemesi, interview by the author; Chief Lawrence Agulefo, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 83; Chief Nwosu Nwawulu Enwude, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 90; Chief Akunwafor Osegbo (Omeka), in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 98; Haford C. Amerobi, in Osakwe, “Kingship in

meaning of this moniker to emphasize its supposed “kingship” element, Amobi invented a new, more prestigious title, *igwe*, which he conferred upon himself on July 9, 1904.¹² In 1926, the British resident of Onitsha Province reflected that Amobi had no right to call himself *igwe*, on the grounds that it was a pretended office arising from mere manipulation of the Igbo title system. Yet, there is abundant evidence, which will be discussed throughout this chapter, that colonial officials were aware much earlier than 1926 not only of Amobi’s contrivances, but of the oppression to which he subjected the people of Ogidi and the surrounding towns.

Aside from the tacit support of some colonial officials, the key means whereby Walter Amobi obtained unprecedented political authority in Ogidi were the twin tactics of distortion and invention. My definitions of these two terms draw on a large body of scholarship on ‘customary’ law and the invention of tradition.¹³ In historian Terrence Ranger’s seminal piece on these subjects, he proposed that tradition, and by extension ‘customary’ law, was an invention of the colonial

Ogidi,” 107; M. O. Onwugbufo, interview by Chukwuma C. C. Osakwe, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 3 October 1983, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 114; Okafor Osegbo, interview by Princess Ebere Nweze, Umuru Ogidi, 23 June 2017, in Nweze, “The Biography of Igwe Walter Okafor Kwochaaka Amobi I, The First Warrant Chief of Ogidi 1904-1924” (B.A. Thesis, Department of History and International Studies, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, 2017), 74; Nwokeke Okunwo, interview by Arinze Ernest Agbogu, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 19 December 1975, in Agbogu, “Ogidi Before 1891: A Brief Survey of the Origins, Migrations, Settlement, and Intergroup Relations” (B. A. Thesis, Department of History and Archaeology, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 1976), 77; Ezigbo Otu, interview by Arinze Ernest Agbogu, Uru Ogidi, 12 December 1975, in Agbogu, “Ogidi Before 1891,” 81; Ezeudo, interview by Arinze Ernest Agbogu, Ikenga Ogidi, 30 December 1975, in Agbogu, “Ogidi Before 1891,” 90. Achebe (“Ogidi Palaver,” 25, 43 *n.* 7) refers to these same men as the “leaders or Ezes of the Ogidi quarters.” Similarly, Assistant District Officer B. G. Stone (NAE, EP 9561 CSE 1/85/4879: “Intelligence Report on Ogidi and Abacha Villages, Onitsha Division, Onitsha Province, by Mr. B. G. Stone, A.D.O.,” 7) observed that each quarter of Ogidi had an *eze* titled man.

¹² Achebe, “Ogidi Palaver,” 23, 25; Chief Uzowulu Udo, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 110; Professor Clement Chibuzo Amobi, interview by Princess Ebere Nweze, Iyi-Enu Ogidi, 24 June 2017, in Nweze, “The Biography of Igwe Walter,” 78.

¹³ The following include the most important works that influenced my conceptions of distortion and invention: Terrence Ranger, “The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa,” in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 211-262; Martin Chanock, *Law, Custom and Social Order: The Colonial Experience in Malawi and Zambia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Roberts and Mann, Introduction to *Law in Colonial Africa*, ed. Roberts and Mann (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1991), 3-58; Thomas V. McClendon, “Tradition and Domestic Struggle in the Courtroom: Customary Law and the Control of Women in Segregation-Era Natal,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 28, no. 3 (1995): 527-561; Francis G. Snyder, “Colonialism and Legal Form: The Creation of ‘Customary Law’ in Senegal,” *Journal of Legal Pluralism* 19 (1981): 49-90; Thomas Spear, “Neo-Traditionalism and the Limits of Invention in British Colonial Africa,” *Journal of African History* 44, no. 1 (2003): 3-27.

era.¹⁴ Since Ranger's 1982 publication, numerous scholars have used the term 'invention' in nuanced ways. Historian Thomas V. McClendon asserts that 'customary' law "had clear elements of continuity with the precolonial past, though continuing forms became distorted by new situations. The effort to establish native law was successful in part because the 'invented traditions' of customary law were grounded to some degree in the social realities of precolonial Africa."¹⁵ I concur with this, to the extent that colonial-era traditions were expressive of both continuity and change, but would like to problematize McClendon's reference to these distorted traditions as inventions. The Oxford English Dictionary defines distortion as "the twisting or perversion *of* words so as to give to them a different sense; perversion *of* opinions, facts, history, so as to misapply them,"¹⁶ and invention as "the action of devising, contriving, or making up; contrivance; fabrication."¹⁷ Therefore, there is a subtle but significant difference between distortion and invention: distortions are partial truths whereas inventions are pure fabrications.

Much as legal scholar Francis G. Snyder frames 'customary' law (as recognized in the post-colonial era) as "modified or distorted versions that survived colonial rule,"¹⁸ I frame distortions of indigenous institutions as modifications rather than outright inventions. For present purposes, therefore, I define distortion as the act of altering an indigenous institution in subtle yet meaningful ways, and then convincing colonial officials that the altered institution had existed for ages. Although inauthentic, distortions were often considered plausible because they were rooted in some genuine institution or phenomenon. This chapter suggests that Amobi bolstered his

¹⁴ Ranger, "The Invention of Tradition," 211-262.

¹⁵ McClendon, "Tradition and Domestic Struggle," 533. Here McClendon references Sally Falk Moore, *Social Facts and Fabrications* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

¹⁶ Emphasis in original: *Oxford English Dictionary*, "distortion" entry 3a (Oxford University Press, 2020): <<https://www-oed-com.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/view/Entry/55713?redirectedFrom=distortion#eid>>.

¹⁷ *Oxford English Dictionary*, "invention" entry 2 (Oxford University Press, 2020): <<https://www-oed-com.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/view/Entry/98969?redirectedFrom=invention#eid>>.

¹⁸ Snyder, "Colonialism and Legal Form," 49.

invention of the office of *igwe* in two stages, first by distorting the meaning of *ezeobodo*, and later by distorting the history of Ogidi's indigenous political paradigm. With the autocratic authority that he gained through his distortions and inventions, Amobi maltreated Ogidi people and arguably committed *nso ani*, which threatened the tenuous balance of Ogidi's society.

As briefly noted above, Amobi's exploits and political chicanery were facilitated by the immense authority accorded to him by the colonial government. Indeed, he was one of a number of Igbo men who were able to ascend to new, powerful political positions due to colonial officials' ignorance, willful negligence, and favoritism.¹⁹ In addition, missionaries and other auxiliary actors were, in different ways and to different degrees, complicit in the androcentric distortions of colonial intermediaries like Amobi in the early twentieth century. Amobi's rise to power is therefore just one example—albeit a particularly vivid one—of how various groups' agendas combined to privilege a small group of Igbo men over councils of women, men, and spiritual forces that had previously governed Igbo society. This process contributed fundamentally to the re-gendering of law in Ogidi by conferring significant executive, legislative, and judicial authority on a man who threatened to unravel the system of female-centric indigenous law that had prevailed since the establishment of Ogidi's four quarters many generations earlier. The ramifications of this would also be felt across Igboland as a whole.²⁰

¹⁹ Judith Van Allen, "'Aba Riots' or Igbo 'Women's War'? Ideology, Stratification, and the Invisibility of Women," *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* 6, no. 1 (1975): 24; Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, 134-137; Benjamin N. Lawrance, Emily Lynn Osborn, and Richard L. Roberts, eds, Introduction to *Intermediaries, Interpreters and Clerks: African Employees and the Making of Colonial Africa* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 27; Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs*, 60.

²⁰ Such ramifications across the region are discussed in Chapter 5 and the Conclusion.

Earning Distinction in Ogidi, *Oge Four Quarters-Oge Ndi Ocha Bia*

Although Ogidi, like other Igbo communities, was democratic and virtually egalitarian *tupu ndi ocha bia*,²¹ individuals and groups could still distinguish themselves. For although the Igbo say *emee nwata emere ibe ya, obi adi ya mma*, meaning “if you treat a child the way you treat his/her peer, then he/she will be happy,” they also say *na isi na isi ra bu n’onu, maka na mmadu na-akari ibe ya*, meaning “that a head and a head are the same is merely talk, because a person is greater than his/her peer.”²² Seniority, for example, was greatly respected. Each nuclear family (*umunne*) had an *okpala*:²³ the eldest son, who was admired and respected by his younger siblings.²⁴ Likewise, each extended family or kindred (*umunna*) and every village and quarter had an *okpala* of a different sort, their most senior living male,²⁵ who oversaw the distribution of the harvest and game animals to all members of the group.²⁶ An *okpala*’s responsibilities also included paying bride prices and burial expenses.²⁷ As the holder of the family or lineage *ofò*,²⁸ every *okpala* was “the intermediary between the family and the ancestors.”²⁹ Like the *ofò* of priests and priestesses described in Chapter 2, a lineage *ofò* was a ritual object that signified authority.³⁰ The lineage *ofò* was distinct from other types of *ofò*, however, in that it represented the ancestors and was safeguarded by the *okpala* of a lineage (at the nuclear or extended family, village, or quarter

²¹ See footnote 59 in the Introduction.

²² From my notes for an Igbo language course at Michigan State University, 28 February 2017 and 18 April 2017.

²³ An *okpala* is alternatively referred to as a *diokpala*.

²⁴ Meek, *Law and Authority*, 105.

²⁵ P. Amaury Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria: A Sketch of Their History, Ethnology and Languages, with an Account of the 1921 Census Volume III Ethnology* (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), 594; Gailey, *The Road to Aba*, 23; Elizabeth Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People* (London: Macmillan Press, 1976), 22; Chief Amaeze Ekpeani, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 13 March 2018.

²⁶ Chieka Ifemesia, *Traditional Humane Living Among the Igbo: An Historical Perspective* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1979), 40; Meek, *Law and Authority*, 104-106.

²⁷ Meek, *Law and Authority*, 104.

²⁸ Meek, *Law and Authority*, 104; Gailey, *The Road to Aba*, 23.

²⁹ Meek, *Law and Authority*, 105.

³⁰ S. N. Nwabara, *Iboland: A Century of Contact with Britain 1860-1960* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1977), 26.

level) who performed sacrifices to honor the ancestors on behalf of that lineage.³¹ Due to this important role, the *okpala* “would settle family disputes, and commanded respect and reverence.”³²

This reverence for seniority could also be seen in the age grade (*ogbo*) system. In Igboland, age grades are groupings of all males and all females born within the same three- to five-year time span, each gender having its own organization.³³ In Ogidi, the male grades³⁴ assembled when their members reached age 15 or 16, and would go on to play socio-political roles such as law enforcement and road-clearing, with the wider aim of ensuring that community activities ran smoothly.³⁵ The junior grades deferentially heeded and implemented the older grades’ orders, so most of the burden of a given town’s communal-labor requirements fell on the former.³⁶

While seniority was important in Igboland, a more prominent form of social distinction was individual success. As the narrator in *Things Fall Apart* explains, “age was respected” among Okonkwo’s people, i.e., the people of Umuofia, “but achievement was revered.”³⁷ As mentioned

³¹ Christopher Ifeanyi Ejizu, *Ofo: Igbo Ritual Symbol* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1986), 34-3; Nwabara, *Iboland*, 26.

³² Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, 22.

³³ Achebe, “Ogidi Palaver,” 31; see table in Ibemesi, *Ogidi*, 82-90; see Chart II in Arinze Ernest Agbogu, “Ogidi Before 1891,” no pp. listed.

³⁴ Ogidi does not have female age grades, which is an anomaly in Igboland, as most Igbo communities have age grades for males and females.

³⁵ High Chief Robinson Okudo (Esema), interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 1 March 2018; Chief Hillary Osegbo, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 24 April 2018; Anonymous oral history collaborator 1, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 3 April 2018; Oduche Cyril Okafor, interview by the author; Nwosu Enwude, interview by Arinze Ernest Agbogu, Ikenga Ogidi, 12 December 1974, in Agbogu, “Ogidi Before 1891,” 43; Okeke Onyejekwe (Eze Inwelle), interview by Arinze Ernest Agbogu, Uru Ogidi, 14 November 1975, in Agbogu, “Ogidi Before 1891,” 57; Ezeudo, in Agbogu, “Ogidi Before 1891,” 91; Pious Ukaeje, interview by Onyinye Maryrose Udeh, Ogidi, 25 March 2018, in Udeh, “A Study of the Ogidi Development Union, Women Wing, 1970-2007” (B.A. Thesis, Department of History and International Studies, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, 2018), 65; Uzowulu Ezekwesili, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufo, Ikenga Ogidi, 10 September 1978, in Nwabufo, “Traditional Law and Colonial Change in Ogidi,” (B.A. Thesis, Department of History, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 1979), 74; Chief Godfrey Amazikwu, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 10 April 2018; NAE, EP 9561 CSE 1/85/4879: “Intelligence Report on Ogidi and Abacha Villages,” 5; Achebe, “Ogidi Palaver,” 31.

³⁶ Chief Lawrence Agulefo, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 83; Onwuameze Ikwuwelu, interview by the author, Ogidi, 5 April 2018; Anonymous oral history collaborator 2, Ikenga Ogidi, 20 March 2018; Chief John Amanwa, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 28 March 2018; NAE, EP 9561 CSE 1/85/4879: “Intelligence Report on Ogidi and Abacha Villages,” 5-6.

³⁷ Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (New York: Anchor Books edition, 1994 [1959]), 8.

in the previous chapter, success in yam harvesting was crucial to a man's wealth and social status. But another form of achievement—title-taking—was what colonial anthropologist C. K. Meek aptly described as “one of the most characteristic features of Ibo society,”³⁸ because systems of titles that men and women could acquire as signs of their wealth and prestige were, and still are, ubiquitous in Igboland. Title systems align with the Igbo values of duality and complementarity, as there are separate titles for women and men.³⁹ Notwithstanding their current prevalence, however, this chapter will focus on the significance of titles *tupu ndi ocha bia*, so that I can later highlight the distortion of such titles by colonial collaborators, particularly Amobi, *oge ndi ocha chilu*.

Because they were an expression of wealth and good character, titles in Igboland commanded respect from non-titled people. As historian Nwando Achebe explains, “distinction was achieved, not ascribed, and a woman's place was determined by her own achievements, not those of her husband. One of the major ways in which women could improve their political and social standing was to take titles.”⁴⁰ Some were socially significant for the individuals who acquired them, while others were private, in the sense of being only relevant to those within the holders' kindreds.⁴¹ Achebe characterizes titled women as revered, and notes that those among

³⁸ Meek, *Law and Authority*, 165.

³⁹ Moreover, titles align with the core Igbo belief in avoiding extremes and seeking balance in the community. Chinua Achebe explained how this was so in Ogidi *tupu ndi ocha bia*: “In Ibo traditional society there were built-in means of discouraging people from becoming too powerful or too rich, or rather of encouraging them to trade that power and wealth against honors and titles. If a man said he wanted to be the equivalent of a millionaire, although there is no such equivalent, the elders would say to him: ‘You want to prove to the village that you are wealthy, that you are a good and important man, then you must take titles.’ There were several titles, up to five of them. And taking titles would see to it that, in the process, the person would spend all of his money and this money would revert to the community. They would say: ‘To take this title, you will feed the village for a number of days and you will give each man who already has the same title a number of goats, or cows, or whatever.’ By the time the man had earned the title, his wealth was exhausted and he was no richer than his neighbors except in prestige.” Chinua Achebe, interview by Michel Fabre, 1973, reprinted in *Conversations with Chinua Achebe*, ed. Bernth Lindfors (Jackson: University of Mississippi, 1997), 47.

⁴⁰ Nwando Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings: Female Power and Authority in Northern Igboland, 1900-1960* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2005), 171.

⁴¹ Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 171.

them who showed leadership potential often held political positions.⁴² However, because titles were expensive to acquire, and most were reserved for elderly women, the elite group of titled women was relatively small.⁴³

The three titles available to Ogidi women starting *oge four quarters* were *ekwe*, *odu*, and *nne mmoo*.⁴⁴ The *ekwe* title showcased a woman's economic resources and social clout.⁴⁵ Its holders were powerful individuals whom men as well as other women revered,⁴⁶ and they acted as spokespeople for their women's organizations.⁴⁷ In Ogidi, as Achebe notes, only exceptional, post-menopausal, married women with many accomplishments could take this title.⁴⁸ My oral history collaborator Chief Nwabuoku Osakwe, an Ogidi woman who has attained all three titles, explained that both before and after the arrival of the British, *ekwe* women could be either *umuokpu Ogidi* (daughters of Ogidi) or *ndinyom Ogidi* (wives of Ogidi), but more importantly, they had to be mothers and they had to have amassed great wealth.⁴⁹ A higher-tiered title that a woman could take after becoming an *ekwe* was *odu*, and the people of Ogidi referred to such titleholders as those who *igba odu*: "wear large, heavy bracelets and anklets made of ivory."⁵⁰ Achebe notes that *odu*

⁴² Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 171.

⁴³ Achebe, "Ogidi Palaver," 32; Chief Nwabuoku Osakwe (Dibueni Nwanyi), interview by the author, Ogidi, 2 October 2018.

⁴⁴ Stella Igwueze, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 11 August 2018; Joy Ufodiana, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 25 September 2018; Chief Nwabuoku Osakwe (Dibueni Nwanyi), interview by the author, Ogidi, 2 October 2018; Benice Chinwoka Onyeagolum, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 13 September 2018; Ifeoma Chiegbu, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 27 August 2018; High Chief Robinson Okudo (Esema), interview by the author, 14 September 2018; Chief Lawrence Nwankwo Onwuteaka, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 31 October 2018.

⁴⁵ Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, 42; Achebe, "Ogidi Palaver," 32; Stella Igwueze, interview by the author; Joy Ufodiana, interview by the author.

⁴⁶ Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, 56; Chief Lawrence Nwankwo Onwuteaka, interview by the author, 31 October 2018.

⁴⁷ Achebe, "Ogidi Palaver," 32.

⁴⁸ Achebe, "Ogidi Palaver," 32. Also see Nwude Anumba, interview by Anthonia Uchenna Anyegbunam, Uru Ogidi, 4 September 1983, in Anyegbunam, "The External Relations of Ogidi Up to 1903" (B.A. Thesis, Department of History, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 1984), 87.

⁴⁹ Chief Nwabuoku Osakwe (Dibueni Nwanyi), interview by the author.

⁵⁰ Achebe, "Ogidi Palaver," 32; Chief Nwabuoku Osakwe (Dibueni Nwanyi), interview by the author; Joy Ufodiana, interview by the author; Benice Chinwoka Onyeagolum, interview by the author.

women “were charged with making laws for womenfolk,”⁵¹ though other councils of women also had this function.⁵²

The title of *nne mmoo*, meaning “mother of the masquerade,” was fundamentally different from the other two. This select honor was conferred on outstanding women, usually over the age of 80 years, who based on their high status in the community were initiated into the men’s secret masquerade society.⁵³ Because of her advanced age, such a person—although biologically female—was no longer considered a woman in gender terms, and therefore could be privy to that society’s secrets.⁵⁴ The ceremony for initiating a woman as a *nne mmoo* involved slaughtering a goat and offering other forms of payment. The insignia of a *nne mmoo* was *nza akwaugo*, either a cow’s tail or an ivory staff, which apart from *nne mmoo* only titled men could carry.⁵⁵

Just as titled women were honored and respected, and had their opinions valued when making decisions that affected their communities, so were their male counterparts.⁵⁶ There were many types of men’s titles: they could be public, in the sense that the whole community recognized them; or private, i.e., only important within a kindred; be hereditary or reserved for members of particular families; or have no hereditary aspects, e.g., those available to all free-born men.⁵⁷ Title

⁵¹ Achebe, “Ogidi Palaver,” 32.

⁵² The legislative roles of women’s councils are covered in Chapter 4.

⁵³ Stella Igwueze, interview by the author; Benice Chinwoka Onyeagolum, interview by the author; Chief Nwabuoku Osakwe (Dibueni Nwanyi), interview by the author; Achebe, “Ogidi Palaver,” 30.

⁵⁴ This was possible due to the gender fluidity that indigenous Igbo society embraced. While biological sex (male or female) remained, the social construct of gender (man or woman) was flexible. See Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 208; Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, esp. 32-33, 39-40, 56.

⁵⁵ Chief Nwabuoku Osakwe (Dibueni Nwanyi), interview by the author.

⁵⁶ Okeke Onyejekwe (Eze Inwelle), in Agbogu, “Ogidi Before 1891,” 57-58; Izundu Mgbemena, interview by Arinze Ernest Agbogu, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 15 November 1975, in Agbogu, “Ogidi Before 1891,” 63; Ezigbo Otuo, in Agbogu, “Ogidi Before 1891,” 81; Chikelu Okeke, interview by Onyinye Maryrose Udeh, 25 March 2018, in Udeh, “A Study of the Ogidi Development Union,” 67; Chief Louis Okoye, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 82; Chief Lawrence Agulefo, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 84.

⁵⁷ Meek, *Law and Authority*, 165.

systems varied from town to town, each having its own set of regulations;⁵⁸ and there were different items of insignia that marked the titled men of each town, ranging from ivory anklets to eagle feathers in one's cap to a fan or horse plume carried in the hand.⁵⁹

The main requirements for attaining most titles were having wealth, good character, and free-born status.⁶⁰ To take a title, a person had to pay a fee and provide a feast for the entire title society that he or she was about to enter, which was no small task.⁶¹ Much of a new member's expenditure on title-taking went to the members of the title society being joined, which operated as a form of investment:⁶² because joining fees were shared out among its members, titleholders would reap financial benefits as more individuals joined. Particularly in men's title societies, the members had to respect certain rules, such as sitting on stools rather than the ground,⁶³ avoiding contact with menstruating women because their bodies were considered impure,⁶⁴ and not taking a title more prestigious than that of one's father during the latter's lifetime.⁶⁵

⁵⁸ G. T. Basden, *Niger Ibos: A Description of the Primitive Life, Customs, and Animistic Beliefs, etc., of the Ibo People of Nigeria by One who, for Thirty-Five Years, Enjoyed the Privilege of their Intimate Confidence and Friendship* (London: Seeley, Service and Co. Ltd, 1938), 134.

⁵⁹ Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, 21; Ezeudo, in Agbogu, "Ogidi Before 1891," 94; Nwokeke Okunwo, in Agbogu, "Ogidi Before 1891," 75.

⁶⁰ Elizabeth Isichei, *The Ibo People and the Europeans: The Genesis of a Relationship to 1906* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1973), 56; Basden, *Niger Ibos*, 134.

⁶¹ Daryll Forde and G. I. Jones, *The Igbo and Ibibio-Speaking Peoples of South-Eastern Nigeria* (London: International African Institute, 1967 [1950]), 19, 20; Basden, *Niger Ibos*, 130, 133.

⁶² A. E. Afigbo, "Some Aspects of the History of Ozo Among the Igbo of Nigeria," in *Igbo History and Society: The Essays of Adiele Afigbo*, ed. Toyin Falola (Trenton: African World Press, 2005), 262; Forde and Jones, *The Igbo and Ibibio-Speaking Peoples*, 20; Simon Ottenberg, "The Development of Credit Associations in the Changing Economy of an African Society," in *Igbo Religion, Social Life and Other Essays by Simon Ottenberg*, ed. Toyin Falola (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2006), 276; M. M. Green, *Igbo Village Affairs: Chiefly with reference to the Village of Umueke Agbaja* (London: Frank Cass, 1964 [1947]), 58.

⁶³ Otigbuanyinya O. C. Onyesoh, *Nri: The Cradle of Igbo Culture and Civilization* (Onitsha: Tabansi Press, 2000), 22; Richard Henderson, *The King in Every Man: Evolutionary Trends in Onitsha Ibo Society and Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 263.

⁶⁴ Henderson, *The King in Every Man*, 263.

⁶⁵ Forde and Jones, *The Igbo and Ibibio-Speaking Peoples*, 19; Basden, *Niger Ibos*, 134.

Probably the best known and most widespread of Igbo men's titles was the *ozo* system, which involved multiple levels of titles.⁶⁶ In Ogidi these levels included *ozo*, *ichie*, *idemili*, *ozonwa*, *erulu*, and *omalo*.⁶⁷ The *ozo* title dates back to the ninth century C. E. or earlier,⁶⁸ when it was only taken by the *okpala* of each family;⁶⁹ thus, it can be traced to the concept of respect for elders, who held great social clout and responsibility. Before taking an *ozo* title in Ogidi, a man was required to have earned a certain degree of prestige and influence, as well as wealth accumulated through honest means.⁷⁰ And, as with other titles, because *ozo* was expensive, not just any man could hope to attain it.⁷¹

Much as with other titles, the criteria for obtaining an *ozo* title included integrity, good judgment, tact, and being in good favor with the people.⁷² These characteristics were closely linked to certain additional obligations placed on *ozo* titleholders, as historian Richard Henderson explains:

When they speak at patrilineage or public meetings, their words should bear evidence of their diplomacy and honorable character. They should refrain from careless speech, casual committing of forbidden acts, and abominations [*nso ani*], for the ancestors and the patrilineage spirits are believed to heed carefully what the *ozo* man says, and to act accordingly.⁷³

⁶⁶ Green, *Igbo Village Affairs*, 58; Nwude Anumba, in Anyegbunam, "The External Relations of Ogidi," 87; Ononenyi Amobi, interview by Anthonia Uchenna Anyegbunam, Ikenga Ogidi, 9 September 1983, in Anyegbunam, "The External Relations of Ogidi," 107; John Anenechukwu Umeh, *After God is Dibia: Igbo Cosmology, Divination and Sacred Science in Nigeria* (London: Karnak House, 1997), ii.

⁶⁷ High Chief Obum Osakwe, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 18 July 2018; Chief Louis Okoye, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 76; Chief Uzowulu Udo, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 109; M. O. Onwugbutor, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 114; Basden, *Niger Ibos*, 142; NAE, EP 9561 CSE 1/85/4879: "Intelligence Report on Ogidi and Abacha Villages," 7.

⁶⁸ Afigbo, "Some Aspects of the History of Ozo," 261; Thurston Shaw, *Igbo Ukwu: An Account of Archaeological Discoveries in Eastern Nigeria* (London: [no publisher information], 1970), 196, 270, 281.

⁶⁹ Basden, *Niger Ibos*, 142.

⁷⁰ Chief Edward Dike Ibemesi, interview by the author; Chikelu Okeke, in Udeh, "A Study of the Ogidi Development Union," 68; Chief Nwankwo Uduezue, interview by Ifeoma Catherine Onwugbutor, Ikenga, 1 March 1992, in Onwugbutor, "The Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy in Ogidi" (B.A. Thesis, Department of History, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 1992), 119.

⁷¹ Chikelu Okeke, in Udeh, "A Study of the Ogidi Development Union," 67; Chief Nwankwo Uduezue, in Onwugbutor, "The Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy in Ogidi," 118.

⁷² Basden, *Niger Ibos*, 142.

⁷³ Henderson, *The King in Every Man*, 263.

Ozo as well as other titleholders were expected to be exemplary citizens who upheld *omenani*, and in that way, helped maintain justice in their communities by modeling scrupulous adherence to the laws created by *ani* and other deities. Men’s title associations also actively participated in legislation;⁷⁴ but their judicial roles were minor compared to those of women and spiritual forces.⁷⁵ The human realm of government in Ogidi involved multiple branches: comprising the legislative branch were *otu umuokpu* (the council of adult daughters), *otu ndinyom* (the council of wives), and *ndiichie* (titled elders), who each created *iwu* as they saw fit;⁷⁶ the role of law enforcers was played by age-grades;⁷⁷ the judicial arm was composed of the *umuokpu*, *ndinyom*, *umunna*—and to a lesser extent, the *ndiichie*—each offering courts to settle disputes among members of their own group, with the *umuokpu Ogidi* (the *umuokpu* council at the town level) additionally acting as the final court of appeals from the lesser *ndinyom* and *umunna* courts.⁷⁸ The people of Ogidi respected

⁷⁴ Zinobia Ikpeze, interview by the author, Trans-Ekulu Enugu, 24 January 2018; Chief Nwabuoku Osakwe (Dibueni Nwanyi), interview by the author, Ogidi, 23 April 2018; Dominic Nnamdi Obijiofor, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 17 April 2018; Udoh Boniface Uyanwa, interview by the author, Akanano Ogidi, 13 April 2018; Chief Godfrey Amazikwu, interview by the author; Chief Obi A. Okudo, interview by the author, Uru Ogidi, 2 April 2018; Nwoye Leonard Okafor, Eze Ajani, interview by the author, Ogidi, 22 March 2018; Chief Godwin Nweke Agbogu, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 6 March 2018; Anonymous oral history collaborator 1, interview by the author; Chukwuka Jerry Okongwu and Chukwudi M. Okongwu, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 2 May 2018; Nweke Okoye, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 12 March 2018; Chief Hillary Osegbo, interview by the author.

⁷⁵ Achebe, “Ogidi Palaver,” 30-31; Meek, *Law and Authority*, 159; Nnabuenyi Ugonna, *Mmonwu: A Dramatic Tradition of the Igbo* (Lagos: Lagos University Press, 1984), 11; Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 12; Raphael Anyaegbunam, interview by Anthonia Uchenna Anyegbunam, Akanano Ogidi, 15 August 1983, in Anyegbunam, “The External Relations of Ogidi,” 71; Nwosu Enwude, in Agbogu, “Ogidi Before 1891,” 43; Iyom Udenkwo-Ekeobi Onwugbufor, interview by Ifeoma Catherine Onwugbufor, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 25 February 1992, in Onwugbufor, “The Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy,” 12.

⁷⁶ Chief Obi A. Okudo, interview by the author; Chukwuka Jerry Okongwu and Chukwudi M. Okongwu, interview by the author; Nweke Okoye, interview by the author; Chief Hillary Osegbo, interview by the author; Anonymous oral history collaborator 1, interview by the author; High Chief Robinson Okudo (Esema), interview by the author, 14 September 2018; Theresa Ifedigbo, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 1 November 2018; Zinobia Ikpeze, interview by the author; Chief Lawrence Agulefo, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 84; Uzowulu Ezekwesili, in Nwabufo, “Traditional Law and Colonial Change,” 74; Udozoba Okoye, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufo, Ikenga Ogidi, 17 December 1978, in Nwabufo, “Traditional Law and Colonial Change,” 78; Okeru Nnabenyi, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufo, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 7 August 1978, in Nwabufo, “Traditional Law and Colonial Change,” 84; Achebe, “Ogidi Palaver,” 31-32.

⁷⁷ Chief Hillary Osegbo, interview by the author; Anonymous oral history collaborator 1, interview by the author; High Chief Robinson Okudo (Esema), interview by the author, 1 March 2018; Oduche Cyril Okafor, interview by the author; Chief Godfrey Amazikwu, interview by the author; Achebe, “Ogidi Palaver,” 31.

⁷⁸ Further discussion of women’s legislative and judicial roles can be found in Chapter 4. Zinobia Ikpeze, interview by the author; Chief Nwabuoku Osakwe (Dibueni Nwanyi), interview by the author, Ogidi, 23 April 2018; Dominic

and valued the authority of women's groups to protect morality by upholding *omenani*, and to adjudicate disputes among or offenses committed by community members.

Although many titled individuals in Ogidi *tupu ndi ocha bia* played important political roles, it would be wrong to suppose that titles were political positions in and of themselves. Moreover, no titled individual could wield immense power over the community. Among the long-standing democratic features of Igbo society at that time, councils—not individuals—legislated and adjudicated together, and could even strip a person of his or her title if its strict requirements of good character were not adhered to.⁷⁹ However, with the arrival of the British, who generally conflated the social status of titles with political authority in a new and unfamiliar way, opportunities emerged for colonial collaborators to exploit the newcomers' misinterpretation of titles for political gain. Amobi's deceptions would come to overshadow the respect and responsibilities not only of men with *ezeobodo* titles, but also those of other titled men and women, women's councils, and spiritual forces who legislated and adjudicated in accordance with *omenani*.⁸⁰ In their place, Amobi dictated his own rules,⁸¹ and mistreated many people in Ogidi, in the ways noted above. Understanding how and why this occurred, however, calls for a close examination of the new religious, social, and political atmosphere fostered by missionaries and colonial officials.

Nnamdi Obijiofor, interview by the author; Udoh Boniface Uyanwa, interview by the author; Chief Godfrey Amazikwu, interview by the author; Chief Obi A. Okudo, interview by the author; Nwoye Leonard Okafor, Eze Ajani, interview by the author; Chief Godwin Nweke Agbogu, interview by the author; Anonymous oral history collaborator 1, interview by the author; Ifeyinwa Ekwealor, interview by the author; Ifechukwu Agbakoba, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 1 September 2018. Also see Chief Louis Okoye, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 82; Violet Agu, interview by Kosi Frances Obiefuna, Akanano Ogidi, 22 September 2015, in Obiefuna, "Cultural Revival in Ogidi After the Nigerian Civil War: 1970-1980" (B.A. Thesis, Department of History and International Studies, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, 2016), 80; Achebe, "Ogidi Palaver," 31.

⁷⁹ NAE, EP 9561 CSE 1/85/4879: "Intelligence Report on Ogidi and Abacha Villages," 13; Chief Lawrence Agulofo, in Osakwe, 84.

⁸⁰ This is explained later in the present chapter.

⁸¹ Sir Anthony Obiora Okoye, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 19 April 2018; Ifeude Okeke, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 29 August 2018; Chief Nwosu Nwawulu Enwude, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 93; Nweke Anene, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 103.

The Arrival of Europeans

Missionaries in Igboland

In London in 1799, a group of Anglican clergy and laymen established the Church Missionary Society (CMS), with the intention of spreading Protestantism in Africa and Asia.⁸² Meanwhile, European commercial concerns such as Britain's Royal Niger Company were on the brink of accessing the Nigerian hinterland and its natural resources.⁸³ After the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade in the early nineteenth century, these trading companies sought to acquire so-called legitimate trade goods such as palm oil, other palm products, and cocoa, especially in southeastern Nigeria.⁸⁴ By the 1840s, they had founded outposts in the interior along the River Niger. In 1857, John Christopher Taylor and Samuel Crowther, clergymen of Igbo and Yoruba descent respectively who had joined the CMS as freed slaves in Sierra Leone,⁸⁵ established its Niger Mission by setting up a mission station in Igboland at Onitsha, six miles southwest of Ogidi.⁸⁶ Taylor was the first head of the Onitsha station, while Crowther would come to supervise

⁸² Isichei, *The Ibo People and the Europeans*, 91; Ward, Introduction to *The Church Mission Society*, 1.

⁸³ Marc Matera, Misty L. Bastian, and Susan Kingsley Kent, *The Women's War of 1929: Gender and Violence in Colonial Nigeria* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 28; Augustine S. O. Okwu, *Igbo Culture and the Christian Missions, 1857-1957: Conversion in Theory and Practice* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2010), 81, 91; Chima Korieh, *The Land Has Changed: History, Society, and Gender in Colonial Eastern Nigeria* (Calgary: The University of Calgary Press, 2010), 52-54; G. Ugo Nwokeji, *The Slave Trade and Culture in the Bight of Biafra: An African Society in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 187.

⁸⁴ K. Onwuka Dike, *100 Years of British Rule in Nigeria 1851-1951* (Lagos: Federal Information Service, 1958 [reprint of 1956 Dike's Lugard Lectures]), 6-7; Stephan F. Miescher and Lisa A. Lindsay, Introduction to *Men and Masculinities in Modern Africa*, ed. Stephan F. Miescher and Lisa A. Lindsay (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2003), 3; A. E. Afigbo, "Chief Igwegbe Odum: The Omenuko of History," in *Nigeria Magazine* 90 (1966): 224; Raphael Chijioko Njoku, "'Ogaranya' (Wealthy Men) in Late Nineteenth Century Igboland: Chief Igwebe Odum of Arondizuogu, c. 1860-1940," *African Economic History* 36 (2008): 27, 34, 46.

⁸⁵ Both men became involved with the CMS during their time in Freetown, Sierra Leone. Isichei, *The Ibo People and the Europeans*, 92; Lamin Sanneh, "The CMS and the African Transformation: Samuel Ajayi Crowther and the Opening of Nigeria" in *The Church Mission Society*, 176.

⁸⁶ *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, July 1877, 78, from Church Missionary Society Periodicals, Crowther Mission Studies Library, London, United Kingdom; NAE, OP 2470 ONPROF 8/1/4964: "Nigerian History and Geography," short history on C.M.S. Schools in Onitsha written by C.A. Forster, General Manager, C.M.S. Schools, Onitsha; Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria Volume I*, 234; C. K. Meek, *Land Tenure and Land Administration in Nigeria and the Cameroons* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1957), 6; Isichei, *The Ibo People and the Europeans*, 90-92; Okwu, *Igbo Culture*, 33, 76, 78, 99; Dike, *100 Years of British Rule in Nigeria*, 33-34.

the whole Niger Mission as it slowly expanded over the next several decades.⁸⁷ Through the remainder of the nineteenth century, most converted by the Onitsha mission were outcasts or members of the lowest levels of society from Onitsha and its immediate surroundings.⁸⁸

Along with Christian doctrine, the CMS brought a British style of education, setting up its first primary school in Onitsha in 1857.⁸⁹ Although British colonial rule would not be consolidated until 1914, the CMS played a central role in the colonial project over the six decades between their landing at Onitsha and the completion of the colonization of Igboland.⁹⁰ Despite their efforts during this period, the CMS fell woefully short of changing the mindset or values of the Igbo people, and recognized that within the small minority of the population they had ostensibly converted, some individuals reverted “to the traditional ways from which, indeed, they were never weaned.”⁹¹ By the mid-1880s, after nearly forty years of missionization, there were only 400 Christian converts in Onitsha, representing less than three percent of its population.⁹²

⁸⁷ Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, 119; Christopher U. M. Ezekwugo, *Chi: The True God in Igbo Religion* (Doctoral Thesis, University of Innsbruck, Austria, 1973; Alwaye: Pontifical Institute of Philosophy and Theology, 1987), 73-74; *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, July 1877, 78, from Church Missionary Society Periodicals, Crowther Mission Studies Library, London, United Kingdom; NAE, OP 2470 ONPROF 8/1/4964: “Nigerian History and Geography,” short history on C.M.S. Schools in Onitsha written by C.A. Forster, General Manager, C.M.S. Schools, Onitsha; Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria Volume I*, 234; C. K. Meek, *Land Tenure and Land Administration in Nigeria and the Cameroons* (London: Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1957), 6; Isichei, *The Ibo People and the Europeans*, 90-92; Okwu, *Igbo Culture*, 33, 76, 78, 99; Dike, *100 Years of British Rule in Nigeria*, 33-34; *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, July 1877, 78; Ezekwugo, *Chi*, 74; Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, 119; Isichei, *The Ibo People and the Europeans*, 91; Okwu, *Igbo Culture*, 99.

⁸⁸ This immediate area stretched to a radius of only about three miles, to the town of Obosi. Isichei, *The Ibo People and the Europeans*, 104; Okwu, *Igbo Culture*, 93.

⁸⁹ Okwu, *Igbo Culture*, 84.

⁹⁰ Although it was not until 1920 that the British conquered the last, northernmost parts of the Igboland, almost all of the Igbo area had been colonized by 1914, and in this year all colonized regions of Nigeria were amalgamated as one colony. Achebe, *The Female King of Colonial Nigeria*, 97; Matera, Bastian, and Kingsley Kent, *The Women’s War of 1929*, 32; Dike, *100 Years of British*, 34.

⁹¹ Okwu, *Igbo Culture*, 113-114.

⁹² Isichei, *The Ibo People and the Europeans*, 103; Okwu, *Igbo Culture*, 93. Okwu cites CMS G3/A3/1885/23 Niger Mission Statistics 1883.

However, the missionaries did play a key role in colonization, perhaps unwittingly, by teaching a small group of Igbo individuals to speak, read, and write English.⁹³ skills that would prove invaluable in working with European merchants and eventually colonial officials. Indeed, teaching would-be colonial collaborators English appears to have been the single most important means by which missionaries prepared them to bring Christianity and colonial rule to their own people. Certainly, this was the case for Amobi, who ushered the missionaries and colonial officials into Ogidi in the 1890s and 1900s, respectively.⁹⁴ Although missionaries' intentions in training Igbo people in English and Anglican doctrine may have been unrelated to the political project of colonization, they nevertheless equipped Amobi and others with the skills necessary to become interpreters for the colonial government, and set them on a path that would eventually see them become warrant chiefs.

Amobi's Ascent to a Position of Authority

In historical narratives recounted by Ogidi elders interviewed in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the story of Amobi's rise from relatively humble beginnings to become the first warrant chief and *igwe* of Ogidi is contested. What follows is an attempt at a synthesized interpretation of these conflicting accounts. Amobi's grandfather, a man named Jideofo—popularly called *udene*, meaning “vulture”—was a *dibia* (diviner) who created powerful *ogwu* (medicines) for important Ogidi people, including a titled man known as the *ezeobodo* of Uru

⁹³ Okwu, *Igbo Culture and the Christian Missions*, 84, 102; Van Allen, ““Aba Riots,”” 24; Ifi Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society* (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1987), 134-137; Lawrance, Osborn, and Roberts, Introduction to *Intermediaries, Interpreters and Clerks*, 27.

⁹⁴ Chief Edward Dike Ibemesi, interview by the author; Raphael Anyaegbunam, in Anyegbunam, “The External Relations of Ogidi,” 71; Ezekwesilu Mba (Okwesi), interview by Anthonia Uchenna Anyegbunam, Ikenga Ogidi, 19 August 1983, in Anyegbunam, “The External Relations of Ogidi,” 81; Chief Louis Okoye, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 77, 78; Chief Lawrence Agulefo, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 83; Chief Uzowulu Udo, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 109; M. O. Onwugbufor, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 115; Clement Chibuzo Amobi, written questionnaire administered by Chukwuma C. C. Osakwe, 12 December 1983, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 120; Oduche Cyril Okafor, interview by the author; Chief Lawrence Nwankwo Onwuteaka, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 4 April 2018; Ibemesi, *Ogidi*, 66.

quarter.⁹⁵ As noted above, *ezeobodo* was a title that conferred respect, but not political authority, on elderly men who acted as spokespeople for each quarter of Ogidi.⁹⁶ Jidefo was from a neighboring town, either Abatete or Nkpor; but due to his work for the *ezeobodo* of Uru and his popularity among Ogidi's people, he eventually married a woman from the Ogada family, one of the kindreds of Uru quarter's Ajilija village. Jidefo and his wife settled in Ajilija,⁹⁷ and she bore a child named Amobi.⁹⁸ When this Amobi Jidefo grew up, he married a woman named Akatosi from the neighboring town of Abatete and they had five children, of whom the eldest was a son named Okafo.⁹⁹ Okafo Amobi was born *oge Anma-agu-agu*, i.e., during the time of the age grade called *Anma-agu-agu*, which fell between 1860 and 1864.¹⁰⁰

When Okafo was a young boy, his father experienced financial problems and sent him away to Onitsha.¹⁰¹ One Ogidi elder, Chief Isama Nwawuluaru Nwosu, told a researcher in 1992 the specific cause of these problems: that one of Amobi Jidefo's in-laws from Abatete was

⁹⁵ Sir Albert Obi Ezegbo, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 11 April 2018; Ifeoma Catherine Onwugbutor, "The Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy," 54; Nwosu Enwude, in Agbogu, "Ogidi Before 1891," 43-44; Chief Nwosu Nwawulu Enwude, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 91; Clement Chibuzo Amobi, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 119.

⁹⁶ Chief Uzowulu Udo, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 109; Chief Lawrence Agulefo, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 83; Chief Nwosu Nwawulu Enwude, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 90; Chief Akunwafor Osegbo (Omeka), in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 98; Haford C. Amerobi, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 107; M. O. Onwugbutor, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 114; Okafor Osegbo, in Nweze, "The Biography of Igwe Walter," 74; Ezigbo Otuo, in Agbogu, "Ogidi Before 1891," 81; Chief Edward Dike Ibemesi, interview by the author.

⁹⁷ Sir Albert Obi Ezegbo, interview by the author; High Chief Robinson Okudo, interview by the author, 1 March 2018; Nwosu Enwude, in Agbogu, "Ogidi Before 1891," 44; Chief Nwosu Nwawulu Enwude, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 91; High Chief Robinson Okudo (Esema), interview by the author, 14 September 2018; Chief Godwin Nweke Agbogu, interview by the author.

⁹⁸ It is important to note that the man named Amobi, son of Jidefo, is referred to as Jidefo by some oral history collaborators in the fashion of referring to someone by his surname. However, most collaborators referred to him as Amobi, the father of Okafo. Onwugbutor, "Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy," 54; Nwosu Enwude, in Agbogu, "Ogidi Before 1891," 44; Chief Nwosu Nwawulu Enwude, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 91; Clement Chibuzo Amobi, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 119; High Chief Robinson Okudo (Esema), interview by the author, 14 September 2018; Sir Albert Obi Ezegbo, interview by the author.

⁹⁹ Nwosu Enwude, in Agbogu, "Ogidi Before 1891," 44; Okwesili Okerulu, interview by Arinze Ernest Agbogu, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 14 November 1975, in Agbogu, "Ogidi Before 1891," 53; Ezeudo, in Agbogu, "Ogidi Before 1891," 89; Chief Nwosu Nwawulu Enwude, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 91; Chief Uzowulu Udo, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 109; Clement Chibuzo Amobi, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 119; Chief Akunwafor Osegbo (Omeka), in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 98; Sir Albert Obi Ezegbo, interview by the author.

¹⁰⁰ Achebe, "Ogidi Palaver," 23; Ibemesi, *Ogidi*, 83.

¹⁰¹ My oral history collaborator, High Chief Robinson Okudo (Esema), suggested that Okafo was between the ages of 10 and 12 years old at the time (interview by the author, 14 September 2018).

kidnapped while traveling to Ogidi for a festival, and he needed money to locate and rescue the captive. This left Amobi Jidefo no recourse but to ask a wealthy, powerful man called the *ezeoba* of Onitsha¹⁰² to lend him the necessary funds; and as security of the loan, he sent Okafo to work in the *ezeoba*'s palace until the loan was repaid.¹⁰³ Other sources, however, state that Okafo came to be a servant or slave of the *ezeoba* for other reasons;¹⁰⁴ and still others, that Okafo went to Onitsha as a free person, to serve as an apprentice to the *ezeoba*.¹⁰⁵ In any case, it is agreed that Okafo went to live with the *ezeoba* of Onitsha,¹⁰⁶ whose role of quasi-kingship was the most likely inspiration for Amobi's invention of the *igwe* position in Ogidi. Although the *ezeoba* was not a king, he was a wealthy, influential man who saw himself as a rival to the king of Onitsha, Eze

¹⁰² Prior to taking the *ezeoba* title, he was known as the Obi Ogene of Onitsha. *Ezeoba* means "king," but this man was not the king of Onitsha; rather, he was a wealthy man who contested the authority of the town's actual king. Chief Nwosu Okudo alias Nwawulu, interview by Edward Dike Ogugua Ibemesi, Ikenga Ogidi, 6 August 1981, in Ibemesi, "Iyi-Enu Hospital: Origins and Development, 1907-1982" (B.A. Thesis, History Department, University of Nigeria Nsukka, 1982), 51; Chief Isama Nwawuluaru Nwosu, interview by Ifeoma Catherine Onwugbufo, Ikenga Ogidi, 19 February 1992, in Onwugbufo, "The Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy," 100.

¹⁰³ Achebe, "'Ogidi Palaver,'" 24; Chief Isama Nwawuluaru Nwosu, in Onwugbufo, "The Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy," 100.

¹⁰⁴ Udoh Boniface Uyanwa, interview by the author; Chief Obi A. Okudo, interview by the author; Chief Oraegbuna Joseph Iwobi, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 29 March 2018; Chief Christian Nweke Ibeazor, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi 21 August 2018; Edwin Obiekwe, interview by the author, Akanano Ogidi, 21 March 2018; Chief Godfrey Amazikwu, interview by the author; Chief Godwin Nweke Agbogu, interview by the author; Dominic Nnamdi Obijiofor, interview by the author; Chief John Amanwa, interview by the author; Nwoye Leonard Okafor, Eze Ajani, interview by the author; Sir Albert Obi Ezeugo, interview by the author.

¹⁰⁵ Achebe, "'Ogidi Palaver,'" 24; Chief Uzowulu Udo, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 109; Chief Louis Okoye, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 77.

¹⁰⁶ Raphael Anyaegbunam, in Anyegbunam, "The External Relations of Ogidi," 71; Nwosu Enwude, in Agbogu, "Ogidi Before 1891," 44-45; Okeke Onyejekwe (Eze Inwelle), in Agbogu, "Ogidi Before 1891," 58; Okwesili Obiozor, interview by Arinze Ernest Agbogu, Ikenga Ogidi, 15 November 1975, in Agbogu "Ogidi Before 1891," 67; Ezigbo Otuo, in Agbogu, "Ogidi Before 1891," 81; Ezeudo, in Agbogu, "Ogidi Before 1891," 89; Lawrence Agulefo, interview by Arinze Ernest Agbogu, Ikenga Ogidi, 22 December 1975, in Agbogu, "Ogidi Before 1891," 97; Chief Louis Okoye, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 77; Chief Nwosu Nwawulu Enwude, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 92; Chief Akunwafor Osegbo (Omeka), in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 98; Chief Uzowulu Udo, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 109; Clement Chibuzo Amobi, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 119; Chief Isama Nwawuluaru Nwosu, in Onwugbufo, "The Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy," 100; Berthram Aduba, interview by Ifeoma Catherine Onwugbufo, 23 February 1992, in Onwugbufo, "The Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy," 113; Chief Oraegbuna Joseph Iwobi, interview by the author; Dominic Nnamdi Obijiofor, interview by the author; Chief Godwin Nweke Agbogu, interview by the author; Chief Harold B.O. Udoh, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 15 March 2018; Anonymous oral history collaborator 1, interview by the author; Chief Godwin Nweke Agbogu, interview by the author; Edwin Obiekwe, interview by the author; Chief Obi A. Okudo, interview by the author; Achebe, "'Ogidi Palaver,'" 24; Ibemesi, *Ogidi*, 66.

Aroli, in terms of wealth, status, and political power.¹⁰⁷ In many respects, the *ezeoba* acted as if he were king, even hosting his own version of the Ofala festival, a grand, annual celebration whereby Eze Aroli celebrated a bountiful harvest. It would have been while staying with the *ezeoba* of Onitsha that Okafo Amobi learned about the Ofala festival, which he later introduced to Ogidi as part of a display of his kingship.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, it was the *ezeoba* who first put Okafo into contact with Europeans, which helped propel him toward a career as a colonial collaborator.

Specifically, while Okafo was living in Onitsha, CMS missionaries approached the *ezeoba*, citing his prestige in the community, and asked him to give them one of his sons to be trained “in the ways of the white man.”¹⁰⁹ However, fearing the missionaries’ true intentions, the *ezeoba* offered them Okafo instead.¹¹⁰ While many oral history collaborators whom other researchers and I have interviewed were unable to specify where Okafo received his missionary education, some say that he traveled abroad to England or Sierra Leone,¹¹¹ and others that he received training at

¹⁰⁷ Chief Isama Nwawularu Nwosu, in Onwugbufor, “The Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy,” 100; Chief Nwosu Okudo alias Nwawulu, in Ibemesi, “Iyi-Enu Hospital,” 51.

¹⁰⁸ Chief Isama Nwawularu Nwosu, in Onwugbufor, “The Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy,” 100; Chief Louis Okoye, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 79; Chief Lawrence Agulefo, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 85; Chief Akunwafor Osegbo (Omeka), in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 99; Haford C. Amerobi, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 108; Chief Uzowulu Udo, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 111; M. O. Onwugbufor, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 116; Okafor Osegbo, in Nweze, “The Biography of Igwe Walter,” 74; Obiamaka M. Amaifeobu, “Socio-Religious Importance of Ofala Festival in My Town - Ogidi” (B. A. Thesis, Department of Religion, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 1986), 14.

¹⁰⁹ Achebe, “Ogidi Palaver,” 24; Chief Uzowulu Udo, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 109.

¹¹⁰ Nwosu Enwude, in Agbogu, “Ogidi Before 1891,” 44-45; Lawrence Agulefo, in Agbogu, “Ogidi Before 1891,” 97; Chief Nwosu Nwawulu Enwude, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 92; Chief Akunwafor Osegbo (Omeka), in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 98; Chief Uzowulu Udo, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 109; Clement Chibuzo Amobi, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 120; Chief Isama Nwawularu Nwosu, in Onwugbufor, “The Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy,” 100-101; High Chief Robinson Okudo (Esema), interview by the author, 14 September 2018; Chief Oraegbuna Joseph Iwobi interview by the author; Chief Godwin Nweke Agbogu, interview by the author; Anonymous oral history collaborator 1, interview by the author; Chief Obi A. Okudo, interview by the author.

¹¹¹ Chief Edward Dike Ibemesi, interview by the author; Sir Albert Obi Ezegbo, interview by the author; Chief Godwin Nweke Agbogu, interview by the author; Alfred Amobi, interview by Arinze Ernest Agbogu, Iyi-Enu Ogidi, 15 November 1974, in Agbogu, “Ogidi Before 1891,” 49-50; Nwosu Enwude, in Agbogu, “Ogidi Before 1891,” 44-45; Olisa Emeka Princess, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 10 November 2018; Chukwuka Jerry Okongwu and Chukwudi M. Okongwu, interview by the author; Edwin Obiekwe, interview by the author.

Crowther and Taylor's school in Onitsha.¹¹² In any case, Okafo learned English, converted to Christianity, and was baptized, taking the name Walter.¹¹³ Okafo, now Walter, had an auspicious career as a cook and/or interpreter on a steamship of the Royal Niger Company;¹¹⁴ as a soldier for either the Royal Niger Company's Constabulary Force or the West African Frontier Force (the colonial military contingent established in 1898, primarily comprising Hausa and Yoruba soldiers led by British officers);¹¹⁵ and as an itinerant preacher for the CMS.¹¹⁶ He dressed in European clothing, emulating the missionaries, traders, and colonial officers with whom he interacted.¹¹⁷ In short, he had been transformed into an ideal candidate for work as a colonial intermediary with the necessary linguistic, proselytizing, and soldierly skills to help the British colonize Igboland.

In 1892, Walter Amobi escorted his fellow missionaries to his hometown of Ogidi, where they established the town's first church near his parents' new home in the village of Ogidi-Ani in

¹¹² Berthram Aduba, in Onwugbufor, "The Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy," 113; Clement Chibuzo Amobi, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 120 (the latter also being cited in Achebe, "'Ogidi Palaver,'" 24).

¹¹³ Achebe, "'Ogidi Palaver,'" 23-24; Clement Chibuzo Amobi, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 120; Chief Isama Nwawulu Nwosu, in Onwugbufor, "The Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy," 101; Nwosu Enwude, in Agbogu, "Ogidi Before 1891," 44-45; Alfred Amobi, in Agbogu, "Ogidi Before 1891," 49-50; Okeke Onyejekwe (Eze Inwelle), in Agbogu, "Ogidi Before 1891," 58; Izundu Mgbemena, in Agbogu, "Ogidi Before 1891," 63-64; Okwesili Obiozor, in Agbogu, "Ogidi Before 1891," 67; Nwokeke Okunwo, in Agbogu, "Ogidi Before 1891," 77; Chief Nwosu Nwawulu Enwude, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 92; Haford C. Amerobi, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 107; Okafor Osegbo, in Nweze, "The Biography of Igwe Walter," 74-75; Chief Edward Dike Ibemesi, interview by the author.

¹¹⁴ Sir Albert Obi Ezegbo, interview by the author; Chief Edward Dike Ibemesi, interview by the author, Ogidi, 7 March 2018; Clement Chibuzo Amobi, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 120; Haford C. Amerobi, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 107; Iyom Udenkwo-Ekeobi Onwugbufor, in Onwugbufor, "The Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy," 120.

¹¹⁵ Information concerning the composition of the West African Frontier Force can be found in Toyin Falola's *Colonialism and Violence in Nigeria* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 13, 21. The following sources asserted that Amobi participated of one or both of these armed forces: Chief Lawrence Agulefo, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 84; Clement Chibuzo Amobi, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 120; High Chief Robinson Okudo (Esema), interview by the author, 14 September 2018; Chief Edward Dike Ibemesi, interview by the author.

¹¹⁶ M. O. Onwugbufor, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 115; Clement Chibuzo Amobi, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 120; Chief Edward Dike Ibemesi, interview by the author; Nwosu Enwude, in Agbogu, "Ogidi Before 1891," 45-46; Alfred Amobi, in Agbogu, "Ogidi Before 1891," 49-50; Okwesili Okerulu, in Agbogu, "Ogidi Before 1891," 53; Okeke Onyejekwe (Eze Inwelle), in Agbogu, "Ogidi Before 1891," 57; Izundu Mgbemena, in Agbogu, "Ogidi Before 1891," 68; Ezeudo, in Agbogu, "Ogidi Before 1891," 89; Arinze Agbogu, *Ogidi: Political History*, (Owerri: Treasure Books, 2009), 81; Ibemesi, *Ogidi*, 67.

¹¹⁷ Chief Lawrence Agulefo, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 85; Chief Nwosu Nwawulu Enwude, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 92; Nweke Anene, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 102; Chief Uzowulu Udo, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 110.

Ezinkwo quarter.¹¹⁸ The Amobi family was temporarily living in exile there due to an unfortunate incident in their previous village.¹¹⁹ Two Ogidi elders interviewed in 1983, Chief Nwosu Nwawulu Enwude and M. O. Onwugbufor, stated that the first white man to enter Ogidi with Amobi was Reverend S. R. Smith.¹²⁰ Many people in Ogidi understandably mistook Smith and his colleagues as spirits because their skin was white and their whole bodies were covered by clothing, and the only full-body coverings the people had previously seen were those of masquerades.¹²¹ The eager missionaries built several churches and schools in Ogidi from 1892 to 1912, as a slow but consistent stream of converts adopted the new ideology.¹²²

Around 1896, although skeptical of these strangers' long-term motives, the people of Ogidi agreed to give the Anglican missionaries a plot of land situated just beyond the western edge of

¹¹⁸ Nwosu Enwude, in Agbogu, "Ogidi Before 1891," 45; Alfred Amobi, in Agbogu, "Ogidi Before 1891," 50; Chief Isama Nwawuluaru Nwosu, in Onwugbufor, "The Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy," 101; Chief Edward Dike Ibemesi, interview by the author; Achebe, "Ogidi Palaver," 24; Ibemesi, *Ogidi*, 66-67; Anonymous oral history collaborator 2, interview by the author; Sir Albert Obi Ezegbo, interview by the author; Chief Hillary Osegbo, interview by the author.

¹¹⁹ His parents now lived in Ogidi-Ani because, as the story goes, while Okafo was away at Onitsha, someone in his family had accidentally killed a clansman, causing the family to flee Uru quarter and take refuge in Ezinkwo. As explained in Chapter 2, unintentionally killing a clansman was *nso ani* and resulted in the temporary exile of the perpetrator and his/her family. Alfred Amobi, in Agbogu, "Ogidi Before 1891," 49; Okwesili Okerulu, in Agbogu, "Ogidi Before 1891," 53; Izundu Mgbemena, in Agbogu, "Ogidi Before 1891," 62; Okwesili Obiozor, in Agbogu "Ogidi Before 1891," 67; Ezeudo, in Agbogu, "Ogidi Before 1891," 89; Okafor Osegbo, in Nweze, "The Biography of Igwe Walter," 74-75; Chief Edward Dike Ibemesi, interview by the author.

¹²⁰ Chief Nwosu Nwawulu Enwude, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 91; M. O. Onwugbufor, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 115; Chief Nwosu Okudo alias Nwawulu, in Ibemesi, "Iyi-Enu Hospital," 51; Agbogu, *Ogidi*, 108. It is said that Rev. Smith was integral in the ceasefire that Ogidi and Nkpor eventually agreed to during the year of breaking guns. Chieka Ifemesia et. al, *Ogidi Anglican Centenary 1892-1992: An Outline History* ([no place of publication information]: [no publisher information], 1992), 27; M. O. Onwugbufor, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 115.

¹²¹ M. O. Onwugbufor, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 115; Dominic Nnamdi Obijiofor, interview by the author. Moreover, Afigbo (*The Warrant Chiefs*, 67) noted that this was a common first impression that Igbo people had of Europeans.

¹²² These included a small church established at Amafo in Ogidi-Ani, Ezinkwo quarter in 1892; a school built at the same location in 1895; a boys' training college at Iyi-Enu just outside Ogidi in 1896, which became a girls' boarding school in 1903; two new churches built in 1907, one at Okperi, Nkwele Ogidi, Ezinkwo quarter and the other at Anugwo, Ikenga quarter; the opening of a school at Akpakaogwe, in Nkwele Ogidi in 1907; a church built at Omalacha, Nkwele Ogidi in 1909; a church in Abo, Akanano quarter (that would later become Ebenezer Church) built in 1910; and the construction of St. Philip's Church at Akpakaogwe in 1912. Most of the other Ogidi churches and schools that followed would not be established until the late 1940s. Chieka Ifemesia et. al, *Ogidi Anglican Centenary*, 3, 7, 8, 14, 21; Ibemesi, *Iyi-Enu Hospital: Origins and Development (1907-1982)* (Enugu: MAX Publicity Limited, 1982), 3-4.

the town, in *ajo ofia*, “an evil forest.”¹²³ That location came to be called Iyi-Enu (“high spring”) due to water that spouted from the top of a tall rock there.¹²⁴ The CMS set up a training college for boys, but in 1903 moved it to nearby Awka, and in its place established a girls’ boarding school.¹²⁵ In 1906, the boarding school relocated to the neighboring town of Ogbunike,¹²⁶ paving the way for a new occupant of the Iyi-Enu compound. Thus, in 1907, with the financial assistance of Walter Amobi (by that time a warrant chief and *igwe*), the CMS medical dispensary in Onitsha moved to Iyi-Enu. There, it became the first full-fledged hospital in Igboland, which treated patients from near and far and still operates today.¹²⁷ Four years later, the colonial administration, again with Amobi’s influence, built the Ogidi Native Court in Ikenga quarter not far from Iyi-Enu Hospital to service Ogidi and a number of other towns in the vicinity.¹²⁸ Capitalizing on the new-found prominence of this location, Amobi ordered the construction of a grand palace for himself in close proximity to the hospital and native court. In 1912, the townspeople were duly forced to build the *igwe* an opulent abode—probably the first multi-story structure in Ogidi’s history—without payment or compensation of any kind.¹²⁹

¹²³ Chief Nwosu Okudo alias Nwawulu, in Ibemesi, “Iyi-Enu Hospital,” 52; Oduche Cyril Okafor, interview by the author; Chief Obi A. Okudo, interview by the author; Chief Edward Dike Ibemesi, interview by the author.

¹²⁴ Ibemesi, *Iyi-Enu Hospital*, 3.

¹²⁵ Ibemesi, *Ogidi*, 91.

¹²⁶ Ibemesi, *Ogidi*, 91;

¹²⁷ Ibemesi, *Iyi-Enu Hospital*, 3; Ibemesi, *Ogidi*, 91; Achebe, “Ogidi Palaver,” 26; Chief Lawrence Nwankwo Onwuteaka, interview by the author, 4 April 2018; Chief John Amanwa, interview by the author.

¹²⁸ Chief Nwosu Nwawulu Enwude, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 93; Okodo Mgbochi, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, Akanano Ogidi, 1 December 1978, in Nwabufu, “Traditional Law and Colonial Change,” 80; Ogbuefi Ezigbo Otue Unachukwu, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, Uru Ogidi, 28 September 1978, in Nwabufu, “Traditional Law and Colonial Change,” 76; Ibemesi, *Ogidi*, 67; Achebe, “Ogidi Palaver,” 26.

See footnote 63 in the Introduction for the list of towns that fell within the Ogidi Native Court’s jurisdiction.

¹²⁹ M. O. Onwugbufo, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 115; Chief Isama Nwawulu Nwosu, in Onwugbufo, “The Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy,” 102; Okafor Osegbo, in Nweze, “The Biography of Igwe Walter,” 75; Professor Clement Chibuzo Amobi, in Nweze, “The Biography of Igwe Walter,” 78; High Chief Robinson Okudo (Esema), interview by the author, 14 September 2018; Chief Amaeze Ekpeani, interview by the author; Dominic Nnamdi Obijiofor, interview by the author; Achebe, “Ogidi Palaver,” 27; Ibemesi, *Ogidi*, 66.



Figure 9. Photograph of the Entrance to Iyi-Enu Hospital

Photograph taken by the author, February 28, 2018



Figure 10. Photograph of the Site of Igwe Amobi's Palace, Iyi-Enu Zone, Ogidi

Photograph by the author, November 28, 2018. Oge Igwe Amobi III, which began five years after the end of the Nigerian Civil War, the palace underwent significant rebuilding and renovation. Although this is not how the palace would have looked oge Walter, this photograph offers some semblance of the palace's impressive size when compared to the small, one-story houses in which the rest of Ogidi's residents resided during that time.

Indirect Rule and Warrant Chiefs

Beginning in 1900, British forces pushed further into Igboland, and although they met with considerable resistance, had conquered all but its farthest reaches by 1914.¹³⁰ One of their first stops was Ogidi, where Walter Amobi ushered in a colonial military contingent that confiscated and destroyed the townspeople's guns in an effort to diminish the threat of insurrection.¹³¹ This arms expropriation, which became known as *aro nti ji egbe*, "the year of breaking guns," occurred sometime between 1900 and 1902.¹³² Some sources note that on the day Amobi led the soldiers to Ogidi, the town was in the midst of a war with its neighbor, Nkpor; and that Amobi helped settle that dispute before compelling the people to surrender their firearms.¹³³ Amobi, who was starting to show signs of his prominence and leadership skills that the British surely would have noticed,

¹³⁰ Toyin Falola and Adam Paddock, *The Women's War of 1929: A History of Anti-Colonial Resistance in Eastern Nigeria* (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2011), 35-36. One famous example of such resistance was the Ekumeku movement in western Igboland, see Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, 131-137; Don C. Ohadike, *The Ekumeku Movement: Western Igbo Resistance to the British Conquest of Nigeria, 1883-1914* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1991); Achebe, *The Female King of Colonial Nigeria*, 97.

¹³¹ Raphael Anyaegbunam, in Anyegbunam, "The External Relations of Ogidi," 71; Chief Bernard Anyaegbunam, interview by Anthonia Uchenna Anyegbunam, Akanano Ogidi, 21 September 1983, in Anyegbunam, "The External Relations of Ogidi," 129; Chief Lawrence Agulefo, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 84; Rev. Victor Okoye, interview by Arinze Ernest Agbogu, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 13 December 1975, in Agbogu, "Ogidi Before 1891," 70; Chief Louis Okoye, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 77; Chief Uzowulu Udo, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 110; High Chief Robinson Okudo (Esema), interview by the author, 14 September 2018; Nwosu Enwude (Nwawulu), interview by Anthonia Uchenna Anyegbunam, Ikenga Ogidi, 7 September 1983, in Anyegbunam, "The External Relations of Ogidi," 102; Raphael Anyaegbunam, in Anyegbunam, "The External Relations of Ogidi," 71; Chief Lawrence Agulefo, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 84; Chief Nwosu Nwawulu Enwude, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 92, Achebe, "'Ogidi Palaver,'" 24.

¹³² Chief Nwosu Nwawulu Enwude, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 92; Lawrence Agulefo, in Agbogu, "Ogidi Before 1891," 97; M. O. Onwugbufo, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 115; Chief Lawrence Agulefo, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 84; Chief Louis Okoye, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 77; Anonymous oral history collaborator 1, interview by the author; Ibemesi, *Ogidi*, 101; Achebe, "'Ogidi Palaver,'" 24.

¹³³ Raphael Anyaegbunam, in Anyegbunam, "The External Relations of Ogidi," 71; Chief Bernard Anyaegbunam, in Anyegbunam, "The External Relations of Ogidi," 129; Chief Lawrence Agulefo, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 84; Lawrence Agulefo, in Agbogu, "Ogidi Before 1891," 97; Chief Uzowulu Udo, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 109; M. O. Onwugbufo, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 115; Achebe, "'Ogidi Palaver,'" 24.

also led soldiers to other Igbo towns to confiscate and destroy their guns.¹³⁴ In 1903, he returned to Ogidi, but this time as a certified warrant chief, an agent of the British colonial administration.¹³⁵

In 1900, the Niger Company's charter having been terminated, Frederick Lugard—colonel-commandant of the West African Frontier Force and concurrently Her Majesty's Commissioner for the Nigerian Hinterland—pushed to implement indirect rule in Britain's newly declared protectorate of Northern Nigeria.¹³⁶ Although indirect rule was also employed in Southern Nigeria at the same time,¹³⁷ it was not until 1914, when Britain amalgamated Northern and Southern Nigeria into a single colony, that Lugard (governor of the consolidated colony) gave orders to more strictly enforce this system across the whole of Nigeria, with particular attention to Igboland.¹³⁸ At this date, the highest tier of colonial administration was represented by Governor Lugard and the colonial secretary of the government in Lagos; and the second highest, the

¹³⁴ Nwosu Enwude (Nwawulu), in Anyegbunam, "The External Relations of Ogidi," 102; Ogbuefi Nnagboo, interview by Anthonia Uchenna Anyegbunam, Umuoji, 18 September 1983, in Anyegbunam, "The External Relations of Ogidi," 121; High Chief Robinson Okudo (Esema), interview by the author, 14 September 2018; Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria Volume I*, 236.

¹³⁵ High Chief Robinson Okudo (Esema), interview by the author, 14 September 2018; Ezeudo, in Agbogu, "Ogidi Before 1891," 91; Chief Louis Okoye, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 78; Chief Uzowulu Udo, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 110; M. O. Onwugbufor, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 115; Berthram Aduba, in Onwugbufor, "The Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy," 113; Nwosu Enwude, in Agbogu, "Ogidi Before 1891," 46; Ibemesi, *Ogidi*, 66.

¹³⁶ L. G. Wickham Legg and E. T. Williams, *Dictionary of National Bibliography, 1941-1950: with an index covering the years 1901-1950 in one alphabetical series* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), 534-535; Z. O. Apata, "Lugard and the Creation of Provincial Administration Northern Nigeria 1900-1918," *Transafrican Journal of History* 21 (1992): 111-123; primary source as cited in Apata (123): Public record Office (PRO), Colonial Office Record (CO) 1899, 380/172: "Northern Nigeria"; Dike, *100 Years of British Rule*, 31; 112.

¹³⁷ In 1891, the colonial administration began to implement the system of employing indigenous men as judges in the native courts in the coastal region of southeastern Nigeria. The Native Courts Proclamation of 1900 stipulated that all members of these courts must have secured warrants from the colonial government. By 1903, the warrant chief system had reached Igboland and Walter Amobi was one of the first in the region to receive a warrant chiefship. Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs*, 81.

¹³⁸ Months after the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 concluded, Britain declared its control over the protectorates of Northern and Southern Nigeria to claim these territories before other European powers. In 1906, Britain joined the colony and protectorate of Lagos with that of Southern Nigerian. Then in 1914, they joined the two protectorates as one colony. Prior to the amalgamation, colonial administrator Frederick Lugard had successfully implemented the warrant chief-native court system that defined indirect rule. Dike, *100 Years of British Rule*, 25, 29, 31-34; Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs*, 73. Furthermore, Falola and Paddock (*The Women's War of 1929*, 31) argue that the Great War was the main impetus for consolidating the warrant chief system because "increased British demand for foodstuffs and palm oil from Nigeria created the need for a more systematic method of control."

provincial commissioners (later called residents).¹³⁹ The eastern region was split into six provinces, and Ogidi was situated in Onitsha Province. Below the district commissioner/resident were district officers and assistant district officers, who oversaw judicial matters in the native courts and the daily functioning of smaller divisions of the province. Each British officer had African clerks and other support staff.¹⁴⁰ Even before 1914, however, it was apparent that British staff in Igboland were over-burdened by the number of tasks and disputes they needed to attend to, and this was what gave rise to warrant chiefs.¹⁴¹

The key to the British policy of indirect rule, in Nigeria as elsewhere in the world, was the employment of indigenous members of the colonized society as low- to middle-ranking members of the administration. In theory, the British would tap into the pre-existing political structure of the colony, making the king or chief of each community a warrant chief: i.e., a judge of one of the newly established native courts, which were meant to resolve disputes according to indigenous laws (as long as they did not contradict English law), and administer fines and prison sentences (in accordance with the norms of the British penal system).¹⁴² This worked well for the British in Northern Nigeria, because kings and other indigenous leaders had existed prior to their arrival. Igboland, however, with its strong, locally based democratic institutions, had never favored rule by individuals. Historian A. E. Afigbo noted that

the story of the appointment of the first Warrant Chiefs does not reveal that there was any plan or system designed to ensure that those chosen for the job were in fact the right men; that is, the traditional leaders of the people. In this matter it would appear that many political officers were at times concerned to recruit energetic and promising leaders who could secure compliance with the government's demands.¹⁴³

¹³⁹ By 1921, this position was called resident. Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs*, 130-131, 264.

¹⁴⁰ These clerks were often from northern or western Nigeria until missionary education, and therefore English literacy, became more common in Igboland.

¹⁴¹ Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs*, esp. 78-161.

¹⁴² Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs*, 51, 78; Gailey, *The Road to Aba*, 6; Falola and Paddock, *The Women's War of 1929*, 6-7.

¹⁴³ Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs*, 60.

Moreover, as Afigbo and historian Harry A. Gailey have stated, district officers after 1919 began to confess that their manner of selecting warrant chiefs and headmen (or minor chiefs)¹⁴⁴ had been arbitrary, with each officer using his own criteria.¹⁴⁵ For example, Ogidi historian Chief Edward Dike Ibemesi states that the British selected his grandfather, Chief Benjamin Bosa Ibemesi, to be an Ogidi headman in 1903 or 1904 to mobilize able-bodied men for projects including road construction and carrying heavy loads from town to town.¹⁴⁶ The main criteria for choosing Benjamin Ibemesi, who did not speak English, were his imposing height and physical strength.¹⁴⁷ By contrast, the same colonial administration (but, probably a different district officer)¹⁴⁸ had recently selected Walter Amobi to be a warrant chief based on his intellect and his ability to speak both English and Igbo. Thus, British officials seem rather indiscriminately to have distributed warrants to young and eager Igbo men, thus authorizing them to judge cases in the native courts and to act as messengers of colonial rule, relaying district officers' orders to their communities.¹⁴⁹

However, warrant chiefs soon came to act as more than native court judges or messengers, often usurping the executive, legislative, and judicial roles that elders, titled women and men,

¹⁴⁴ Headmen, or chiefs as they were alternatively called, were men whom the colonial authorities selected to procure laborers for various projects. Some headmen/chiefs were later promoted to warrant chief.

¹⁴⁵ Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs*, 74; Gailey, *The Road to Aba*, 62-63.

¹⁴⁶ Colonial authorities had also charged Amobi with organizing labor for road construction at this time, but perhaps Ibemesi worked under Amobi and solely on this task whereas Amobi had myriad other duties.

¹⁴⁷ Chief Edward Dike Ibemesi, interview by the author.

¹⁴⁸ Turnover for district officers and other British staff could occur as often as every three months, with officers being transferred to different districts for various reasons, such as filling vacancies when officers left the colony on temporary leave. For examples, see NAE, ONPROF 11/1/10: "Annual Report Onitsha Division 1921," Annual Report, Onitsha Division, from 1 January to 31 December, 1921, 1; NAE, OP 491/1922 ONPROF 7/9/39: "Annual Report Onitsha Province year ending 31 December 1922," 20 January 1923 report from the station magistrate at Onitsha to the resident of Onitsha, 1; NAE, OP 267/1929 ONPROF 7/16/172: "Annual Report - Onitsha Province 1929," 2-4; NAE, OP 316/1929 ONPROF 7/16/202: "Onitsha Division - Annual Report 1929," Onitsha Division Report for the Year Ending 31 December, 1929, 1; NAE, EP 3864 Vol. I CSE 1/85/2311: "Bound Volumes of Ordinances, Rules, Regulations, General Orders, Etc.," 4 July 1922 list of Administrative Officers on leave and date due to leave England, 1-2, and 6 July 1922 list of Administrative Officers serving in each province, 1-4.

¹⁴⁹ Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs*, 37; Chief Edward Dike Ibemesi, interview by the author; Van Allen, "Aba Riots," 20.

women's councils, and spiritual forces had previously played.¹⁵⁰ Afigbo described warrant chiefs as “a motley array of hooligans, self-seeking upstarts, [and] refugee criminals” to whom the British gave some authority;¹⁵¹ and historian Judith Van Allen similarly characterized them as “ambitious, opportunistic young men who put themselves forward as friends of the conquerors.”¹⁵² Warrant chiefs were often corrupt, levying taxes and resolving disputes without their communities' input or approval; and the indigenous legal system was incompatible with the new court system that they ran, insofar as the latter disregarded *omenani*.

The selection of warrant chiefs emerged on the heels of another trend, known as ‘big manism,’¹⁵³ which broke with the indigenous Igbo values of egalitarianism and democracy. So-called ‘big men’ emerged across West Africa, but in southeastern Nigeria in particular, during a period of pronounced economic and political change in the early nineteenth century, when the rising palm-oil trade was replacing the recently abolished traffic in slaves.¹⁵⁴ As historian Elizabeth Isichei explains, “in the early period of the *enu oyibo* [i.e., rise of the white men/foreigners], the New Men [i.e., ‘big men’] were those who used their insight into the new patterns of events to win for themselves positions which, although new, were basically traditional in kind.”¹⁵⁵ The positions that Isichei describes as new yet “traditional in kind” are what I have identified above as distortions of indigenous positions of honor and authority. Prior to this sudden rise of the palm-oil trade, Igbo men could become ‘big’ in the sense of wealth, respect, and social status by being excellent yam

¹⁵⁰ Chukwuka Jerry Okongwu and Chukwudi M. Okongwu, interview by the author; Udoh Boniface Uyanwa, interview by the author; Chief John Amanwa, interview by the author; Ogbogu Azubuike Chuka, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 1 May 2018.

¹⁵¹ Emphasis in original: Afigbo, “Chief Igwegbe Odum,” 224.

¹⁵² Van Allen, “‘Aba Riots,’” 20.

¹⁵³ Miescher and Lindsay, Introduction to *Men and Masculinities*, 3; Afigbo, “Chief Igwegbe Odum,” 224; Raphael Chijioke Njoku, “‘Ogaranya’ (Wealthy Men),” 27, 34, 46; Isichei, *The Ibo People and the Europeans*, 107.

¹⁵⁴ Miescher and Lindsay, Introduction to *Men and Masculinities*, 3; Afigbo, “Chief Igwegbe Odum,” 224; Raphael Chijioke Njoku, “‘Ogaranya’ (Wealthy Men),” 27, 34, 46.

¹⁵⁵ Emphasis in original: Isichei, *The Ibo People and the Europeans*, 107.

farmers and taking titles. The new ‘big man’ model of success, on the other hand, placed interaction with the white men at the pinnacle of respect and prosperity. The new ‘big men’ or *ndi ogaranya* (an Igbo term meaning “wealthy men”) had recently amassed substantial wealth due to their participation in burgeoning new forms of trade,¹⁵⁶ and their affluence provided them with social and, sometimes, political influence.¹⁵⁷ Subsequently, many ‘big men’ gained the attention of colonial officials who were charged with selecting warrant chiefs, and Isichei notes, such positions were a key vector of “strong informal political power” that ‘big men’ attained from their newfound wealth.¹⁵⁸

One well-attested example of a ‘big man’ was Obi Igweli who in the 1870s managed to amass power and wealth through his connections with the British, and eventually became the *obi* (king) of Asaba, a town on the western bank of the Niger, even though he was not from there.¹⁵⁹ Due to influence from the Benin and Igala kingdoms, Asaba was one of the few Igbo communities that had kings prior to the arrival of the British;¹⁶⁰ but until Igweli’s coronation, only Asaba-born persons had been eligible to become *obi*. Igweli’s kingship, then, represented a distortion of the *obi* position, via a fundamental change in the prerequisites for occupying it, apparently achieved by Igweli leveraging his connections with powerful foreigners.

Another noteworthy *ogaranya* of the late nineteenth century was Igwegbe Odum. From Arondizuogu in southern Igboland,¹⁶¹ he allegedly sold his apprentices and employees to slave traders in the late 1890s, then fled his hometown for the nearby Ajalli Native Court district,¹⁶²

¹⁵⁶ Njoku, “‘Ogaranya’ (Wealthy Men),” 28; Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, 104, 163.

¹⁵⁷ Njoku, “‘Ogaranya’ (Wealthy Men),” 27.

¹⁵⁸ Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, 103.

¹⁵⁹ Isichei, *The Ibo People and the Europeans*, 107.

¹⁶⁰ Isichei, *The Ibo People and the Europeans*, 58.

¹⁶¹ Arondizuogu is located about 25 miles southeast of Ogidi, in what became known as the Owerri Province, and was the largest of many Aro satellite settlements. Njoku, “‘Ogaranya’ (Wealthy Men),” 34, 39.

¹⁶² Ajalli was located in what became known as Onitsha Province. NAE, OP 404/1925 ONPROF 7/12/99: “Annual Report - Onitsha Province for the year 1925,” Report on the Onitsha Province for the year ended 31st December 1925,

where he befriended warrant chiefs and native court clerks.¹⁶³ Although not literate in English, Igwegbe's connections to these colonial intermediaries, and therefore to the British authorities, led him to become a warrant chief of the Ajalli Native Court in 1906, and a paramount chief in 1916.¹⁶⁴ Because a paramount chief had greater judicial authority than other warrant chiefs, it was the highest position an Igbo person could attain in the colonial system.¹⁶⁵ The opportunistic behavior of both Igweli and Igwegbe to gain positions of power would later be seen in Walter Amobi. Like Igweli, in particular, Amobi successfully distorted an indigenous institution in order to become a monarch. The difference is that unlike Asaba, Ogidi did not have kings before Amobi perpetrated this distortion.

Distortion of Titles, Invention of Kingship

The adage *ndi Igbo enwero eze* affirms that indigenous Igbo society never had kings.¹⁶⁶ Anthropologist C. K. Meek perceived this clearly in the 1930s, stating that “kingship is not and never was a feature of the Ibo constitution. Where it occurs it is clearly of exotic origin.”¹⁶⁷ For centuries prior to the arrival of Europeans in the Igbo hinterland, communities were governed by members of the spiritual realm as well as multiple men's and women's councils—with the oldest and wisest as their spokespeople—rather than allowing any one individual to rule.¹⁶⁸ The Igbo

9; NAE, OP 491/1922 ONPROF 7/9/39: “Annual Report, Onitsha Province year ending 31 December 1922,” Onitsha Province Native Court Cases—summary of criminal and civil cases chart.

¹⁶³ Afigbo, “Chief Igwegbe Odum,” 222-225; Njoku, “‘Ogaranya’ (Wealthy Men),” 38-40.

¹⁶⁴ Afigbo, “Chief Igwegbe Odum,” 225; Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs*, 159; Njoku, “‘Ogaranya’ (Wealthy Men),” 38-40.

¹⁶⁵ Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 113.

¹⁶⁶ Meek, *Law and Authority*, 185; Nwauwa, “State Formation and Evolution of Kingship in Igboland Revisited,” 21; Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, 55; Dike, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta*, 26; Achebe, “‘Ogidi Palaver,’” 42 n. 19.

¹⁶⁷ Meek, *Law and Authority*, 185.

¹⁶⁸ Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs*, 7, 25; Judith Van Allen, “‘Sitting on a Man’: Colonialism and the Lost Political Institutions of Igbo Women,” *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 6, no. 2 (1972): 167; Achebe, *The Female King of Colonial Nigeria*, 91; Chinua Achebe, “What Has Literature Got to Do with It?,” in *Hopes and Impediments: Selected*

were surrounded by centralized societies such as the Benin kingdom to the southwest, the Igala to the northwest, Arochukwu to the east, and Onitsha and Asaba to the west. While Igbo-speaking, the Aro were socially and politically distinct from most of the Igbo population *tupu ndi ocha bia*, as the Aro state had been formed from a combination of Igbo, Ibibio, and Akpa ethnic groups.¹⁶⁹ Indeed, throughout the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, there has been controversy regarding whether the Aro should be considered Igbo.¹⁷⁰ Onitsha and Asaba, located on the western edge of Igboland, are among the few Igbo settlements that adopted a system of centralized monarchy. This occurred at some point between the late fifteenth and late seventeenth century, due to influence from Benin, and to a lesser extent, the Igala kingdom.¹⁷¹ Not only these outliers, but all Igbo societies knew what kings were, and had words that translated as “king”: *eze* and *obi*. Most Igbo communities simply did not want kings themselves. In Ogidi, as we have seen, *eze* or *ezeobodo* did not refer to a king in the sense of a monarch or any supreme political officer; rather, it conferred honor upon a few titled elders who, wise through age and experience, were entrusted to speak for their quarters at all-Ogidi meetings.¹⁷² This was a democratic and practical measure that reflected the value of respecting elders such as the *okpala* of a family or village.

Essays (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 163-164; Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, 55; John E. Eberegbulam Njoku, *The Igbos of Nigeria: Ancient Rites, Changes and Survival* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), 27.

¹⁶⁹ Nwauwa, “State Formation and Evolution of Kingship in Igboland Revisited,” 22-23; Gailey, *The Road to Aba*, 28.

¹⁷⁰ Nwauwa, “State Formation and Evolution of Kingship in Igboland Revisited,” 22-23; Ezekwugo, *Chi*, 76; Nwabara, *Iboland*, 19; Gailey, *The Road to Aba*, 28.

¹⁷¹ John Nwachimereze Oriji, *Traditions of Igbo Origin: A Study of Pre-Colonial Population Movements in Africa* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994), 82-83; Nwabara, *Iboland*, 18; Njoku, *The Igbos of Nigeria*, 13; Austin J. Shelton, *The Igbo-Igala Borderland: Religion and Social Control in Indigenous African Colonialism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1971), 240-242; C. C. Ifemesia, *Southeastern Nigeria in the Nineteenth Century: An Introductory Analysis* (New York: NOK Publishers, 1978), 12, 24; Basden, *Niger Ibos*, 131; Ifemesia, *Traditional Humane Living*, 24, 40-42; Forde and Jones, *The Igbo and Ibibio-Speaking Peoples*, 20; Henderson, *The King in Every Man*, 267, 315; Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria Volume III*, 594-595; Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, 23, 76.

¹⁷² Haford C. Amerobi, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 107; Ezigbo Otuo, in Agbogu, “Ogidi Before 1891,” 81.

Well-respected men in communities across Igboland *tupu ndi ocha bia* earned the *eze* title. The best-known example is, perhaps, the *eze Nri*. Nri, a town located about ten miles east of Ogidi, is considered one of the most likely origins of Igbo civilization¹⁷³ and therefore has considerable religious and cultural significance for all of Igboland. Oral tradition holds that a man named Nri, after whom the town was named, was the first to take the *eze* title.¹⁷⁴ Since then, the *eze Nri* has been an important religious figure, a priest of the indigenous religion who could be appealed to by other Igbo communities if they were plagued by disturbances. As an intermediary and diviner, the *eze Nri* was equipped to discern the cause of such disturbances and prescribe the actions necessary to appease the gods and restore balance.¹⁷⁵ In fact, Afigbo suggested that the prominence of the first *eze Nri* arose when and because Igbo society transformed from a hunting-and-gathering to an agricultural mode of life, and reflected the increased value the Igbo placed upon land and its goddess.¹⁷⁶ Through his divine link to ani, the protector of morality and the prescriber of law, the *eze Nri* had immense social and religious importance.¹⁷⁷ Nonetheless, the *eze Nri* was not an autocratic ruler, as he was surrounded by numerous taboos that were designed to keep his power in check.¹⁷⁸

Across Igboland, the *eze* title could signify priests and priestesses of the indigenous religion who were custodians of shrines; in Igbo they are called *ndi eze mmoo*, literally “the kings of the

¹⁷³ Onyesoh, *Nri*, 12; Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, 4; Oriji, *Traditions of Igbo Origin*, 27-28; Ifemesia, *Traditional Humane Living*, 17-19.

¹⁷⁴ Nri is said to be the son of Eri, the progenitor of the Igbo people. Onyesoh, *Nri*, 13-14; Henderson, *The King in Every Man*, 370.

¹⁷⁵ Sebastian Okafo, interview by Anthonia Uchenna Anyegbunam, Abatete, 6 September 1983, in Anyegbunam, “The External Relations of Ogidi,” 93; Nwude Anumba, in Anyegbunam, “The External Relations of Ogidi,” 84-85; Raphael Anyagbunam, in Anyegbunam, “The External Relations of Ogidi,” 68; Nwosu Enwude (Nwawulu), in Anyegbunam, “The External Relations of Ogidi,” 100; Ononenyi Amobi, in Anyegbunam, “The External Relations of Ogidi,” 105; Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria Volume III*, 596-597.

¹⁷⁶ A. E. Afigbo, *Ropes of Sand: Studies in Igbo History and Culture* (Ibadan: University Press Limited, 1981), 10.

¹⁷⁷ Isichei, *The Ibo People and the Europeans*, 57-58; Henderson, *The King in Every Man*, 370; N. W. Thomas, *Anthropological Report on the Ibo-speaking Peoples of Nigeria*, Part I (London: [no publisher information] 1913), 48; Achebe, *The Female King of Colonial Nigeria*, 124.

¹⁷⁸ Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria*, 597, 600.

spirits/gods.”¹⁷⁹ Again, the term “king” did not designate a head of government, but rather a venerated religious figure. *Eze* could also be used as a short form of the term for the *ndi ezeobodo*, elderly men who had served and cared for the community with integrity and distinction. This was a nuance that European ethnographers, missionaries, and colonial officials generally failed to comprehend, which was the main reason they allowed the distortion of the *eze* title to occur.

For example, Meek seems to have conflated the honorary distinction of the *eze* title with executive or legislative office. He thus misinterpreted *eze* titleholders as rulers of the *ozo* title society and therefore, by extension, rulers of the whole community.¹⁸⁰ Likewise, anthropologist G. T. Basden noted that “a king is saluted with the title of ‘Eze’, ‘Igwe’ or ‘Obi’.”¹⁸¹ Though he understood that *eze* was a title, Basden associated it with the conventional translation of “king,” rather than the honorary one for which the Igbo intended it. Various colonial collaborators would take advantage of this widespread misunderstanding and present themselves as kings. Amobi, however, asserted that Ogidi had *always* had kings, called *ndi eze* or *ndi igwe*.¹⁸² Initially, the colonial officials took him at his word, without interrogating the real meanings of these titles; but, through inquiries spawned by complaints from Ogidi titleholders *oge Walter*, they soon learned that Ogidi had never had a monarch before Amobi ascended to such a position.

Amobi’s Distortion of the Ezeobodo Title and Invention of the Igwe Office

Like most warrant chiefs in the first decade of the twentieth century, Amobi was the only person in his town who could speak English and therefore engage in complex communication with

¹⁷⁹ Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria*, 596-600; Basden, *Niger Ibos*, 132; Talbot, *Tribes of the Niger Delta*, 289.

¹⁸⁰ Meek, *Law and Authority*, 154.

¹⁸¹ Basden, *Niger Ibos*, 131.

¹⁸² NAE, OP 56/1923 ONPROF 7/10/7: “Petition for recognition of Walter Amobi,” 17 April 1926 memorandum from the District Officer, Onitsha to the Senior Resident, Onitsha Province regarding “Inquiry into the Claim of Amobi Family to the Head Chieftainship of Ogidi,” 1-2.

the non-Igbo-speaking majority of British officials.¹⁸³ Not satisfied with the authority of a mere warrant chief, however, Amobi sought to be crowned the first king of Ogidi only a year after receiving his warrant. When he returned to Ogidi in 1903 after disarming various other towns, he took the *ozo* title and the title name Kwochaka.¹⁸⁴ This is a shortened form of the proverb *nwata kwocha aka, o soro ogaranya rie nri*, which means “a child who washes his hands can eat with big men.”¹⁸⁵ Progressing from a mere apprentice, servant, or slave of the *ezeoba* of Onitsha in his youth to a formidable authority of the new colonial government in his adulthood, Amobi embodied the proverb’s message of acquiring parity with other important and respected men. Nevertheless, this title was merely a stepping stone to the even higher ones that he ultimately sought.¹⁸⁶

Soon after becoming *ozo*, Amobi acquired the even more prestigious title of *ezeobodo*, but distorted its meaning. Unlike British anthropologists who misconstrued the meaning of *eze* as a literal king, it seems likely that Amobi did not seek to distort the meaning of the *eze* part of *ezeobodo* from “honored, respected representative or spokesman” to “king.” Rather, it appears that the target of his distortion was the *obodo* part of the title.¹⁸⁷ While *obodo* can be used to refer to a

¹⁸³ Achebe, “Ogidi Palaver,” 25; Okafor Osegbo, in Nweze, “The Biography of Igwe Walter,” 75; Onwuameze Ikwuwelu, interview by the author; Chief Godwin Nweke Agbogu, interview by the author.

¹⁸⁴ Nwosu Enwude, in Agbogu, “Ogidi Before 1891,” 45; Alfred Amobi, in Agbogu, “Ogidi Before 1891,” 50; Izundu Mgbemena, in Agbogu, “Ogidi Before 1891,” 62; Ezeudo, in Agbogu, “Ogidi Before 1891,” 90; Chief Louis Okoye, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 77-78; Chief Nwosu Nwawulu Enwude, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 91; Ezennia Okolonkwo Mbelu, interview by Ifeoma Catherine Onwugbufo, Ikenga Ogidi, 20 February 1992, in Onwugbufo, “The Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy,” 109; Berthram Aduba, in Onwugbufo, “The Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy,” 113; Augustine Okaro, interview by Princess Eberé Nweze, Uru Ogidi, 7 July 2017, in Nweze, “The Biography of Igwe Walter,” 83; High Chief Robinson Okudo (Esema), interview by the author, 14 September 2018; Onwuameze Ikwuwelu, interview by the author; Chief Godwin Nweke Agbogu, interview by the author; Chief Nwoye Leonard Okafor, Eze Ajani, interview by the author.

¹⁸⁵ From my notes for an Igbo language course at Michigan State University, 18 April 2017. Also see Achebe, “Ogidi Palaver,” 42, *n.* 26; Nwosu Enwude, in Agbogu, “Ogidi Before 1891,” 45.

¹⁸⁶ Achebe, “Ogidi Palaver,” 25; High Chief Robinson Okudo (Esema), interview by the author, 14 September 2018.

¹⁸⁷ This interpretation differs slightly from that of Achebe (“Ogidi Palaver,” 25), who asserts that Amobi took “the honorific and in essence, title of Eze of Ogidi, i.e. King of all of Ogidi” and “following his coronation, Eze Walter Amobi would take on the added title of Igwe.” I draw on Achebe’s interpretation that Amobi took a middle title (*eze/ezeobodo*) between that of *ozo* and *igwe*. Also, Assistant District Officer B. G. Stone noted that “there is strictly speaking no Eze title for the whole town [Ogidi], though Walter Amobi [...] is said to have made such a title.” (NAE, EP 9561 CSE 1/85/4879: “Intelligence Report on Ogidi and Abacha Villages,” 7-8). Stone referenced an *eze* of all Ogidi title and Achebe interprets it as the king or ruler of all of Ogidi; however, I interpret it as the

town, state, or nation, it more generally means “community.”¹⁸⁸ In the case of the *ezeobodo* title, *obodo* referred to a quarter of Ogidi, but Amobi asserted that it referred to the whole town, despite this never having been the case. There had never before been an *ezeobodo* representing all of Ogidi.¹⁸⁹ Indeed, Ogidi elder Okwesili Obiozor told a researcher in 1975 that when Amobi became the *eze* of Ogidi, just before he became the *igwe*, he had announced to the townspeople that he was the representative for all of Ogidi.¹⁹⁰ Then, to distinguish himself from the other *ezeobodo*-titled men, and to solidify his authority as the singular ruler of Ogidi, he invented a new title that doubled as a political position: *igwe* (king) of Ogidi.¹⁹¹

Amobi was not the only colonial collaborator to introduce this new political office to an Igbo community by leveraging his connection to British officials. For example, after becoming a warrant chief in Enugu-Ezike, northern Igboland in 1918, Ahebi Ugbabe traveled to Igalaland in the latter half of the 1920s and convinced the *attah*¹⁹² there to crown her as a king; and returned to

representative/spokesman of all of Ogidi. Where Achebe says the *eze* of Ogidi title was an invention, I assert that it was a distortion because it was so similar to the actual meaning of *ezeobodo* that Ogidi previously understood. See footnote 13 in the present chapter in which I explain why *eze* and *ezeobodo* were synonymous in this context. The basis of my interpretation is that I have not found any sources other than Achebe that state that Amobi was crowned king by virtue of taking the *eze* of Ogidi title. Because of this, I cannot say that taking the *eze/ezeobodo* title was what made Amobi the king or ruler of Ogidi. According to the following oral history collaborators whom other researchers and I interviewed, it was not until Amobi took the invented *igwe* title that he declared himself the ruler or king of Ogidi: High Chief Robinson Okudo (Esema), interview by the author, 14 September 2018; Chief Amaeze Ekpeani, interview by the author; Dominic Nnamdi Obijiofor, interview by the author; M. O. Onwugbufo, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 115; Chief Isama Nwawuluaru Nwosu, in Onwugbufo, “The Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy,” 102; Chief Louis Okoye, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 77-78; Okafor Osegbo, in Nweze, “The Biography of Igwe Walter,” 75; Professor Clement Chibuzo Amobi, in Nweze, “The Biography of Igwe Walter,” 78; Raphael Anyaegbunam, in Anyegbunam, “The External Relations of Ogidi,” 71; Nwosu Enwude, in Agbogu, “Ogidi Before 1891,” 43, 46; Izundu Mgbemena, in Agbogu, “Ogidi Before 1891,” 63-64; Nwokeke Okunwo, in Agbogu, “Ogidi Before 1891,” 77; Ezigbo Otuo, in Agbogu, “Ogidi Before 1891,” 81; Ezeudo, in Agbogu, “Ogidi Before 1891,” 91; Augustine Okaro, in Nweze, “The Biography of Igwe Walter,” 84.

¹⁸⁸ When Assistant District Officer B. G. Stone investigated in Ogidi in 1932, he discerned that *obodo* referred to either “village” or “town.” NAE, EP 9561 CSE 1/85/4879: “Intelligence Report on Ogidi and Abacha Villages,” 5.

¹⁸⁹ Achebe, “Ogidi Palaver,” 25; Chief Nwoye Leonard Okafor, Eze Ajani, interview by the author.

¹⁹⁰ Okwesili Obiozor, in Agbogu “Ogidi Before 1891,” 68.

¹⁹¹ Achebe, “Ogidi Palaver,” 25; NAE, OP 174/1914 ONPROF 7/1/13: “Complaint by certain villages of Ogidi against Chief Amobi: Letter of reparation from the Minor Chiefs of Ogidi” 21 January 1915 letter from the district officer of Onitsha to the commissioner of Onitsha Province concerning the ‘Ogidi Palaver,’ 4, where Chief Nwanunu stated, “We never had king.”

¹⁹² *Attah* is an Igala term for king.

Enugu-Ezike as its first king to secure her elevated position over its titled elders and respected kindred-heads.¹⁹³ Like Amobi, Ahebi understood that, while having the support of the British gave her significant power as a warrant chief, having the intrinsic authority of an indigenous king (even if it were derived from a distortion of the *eze* title) would grant her more control—control, moreover, that was not dependent on the British. As Achebe explains, “the kingship that Ahebi Ugbabe was performing and introducing was not the *title* of king but the *autocratic office* of king.”¹⁹⁴ Where Ahebi distorted the *eze* title by making it a political position, Amobi distorted the *ezebodo* title by broadening its meaning, and then invented the *igwe* position. Thus, though their methods differed slightly, the end results were equivalent.

Walter Amobi was crowned Igwe Amobi of Ogidi in July 1904.¹⁹⁵ A number of my oral history collaborators asserted that Ogidi did not make Amobi the *igwe*, but rather that he crowned himself and that the people were tricked into accepting him as their ruler.¹⁹⁶ As Ogidi’s first *igwe*, Amobi’s status and authority overshadowed that of all titled men and women. It is quite possible that numerous elderly or respected men and women in Ogidi, maybe even most of them, objected to Amobi’s assertion of an invented monarchy; but the best known example was the *ezebodo* of Ikenga quarter, a man named Ofoka. After Amobi introduced the Ofala festival to Ogidi, Ofoka

¹⁹³ Ahebi had lived in exile in Igalaland before returning to Enugu-Ezike in 1918 and was therefore familiar with Igala kingship and was astute enough to approach the Igala *attah* (king) to legitimize her ambition of kingship that she would then impose on Enugu-Ezike. Achebe, *The Female King of Colonial Nigeria*, 123-125.

¹⁹⁴ Emphasis in original: Achebe, *The Female King of Colonial Nigeria*, 125.

¹⁹⁵ M. O. Onwugbufo, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 115; Chief Isama Nwawulu Nwosu, in Onwugbufo, “The Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy,” 102; Okafor Osegbo, in Nweze, “The Biography of Igwe Walter,” 75; Professor Clement Chibuzo Amobi, in Nweze, “The Biography of Igwe Walter,” 78; High Chief Robinson Okudo (Esema), interview by the author, 14 September 2018; Chief Amaeze Ekpeani, interview by the author; Dominic Nnamdi Obijiofor, interview by the author; Achebe, “Ogidi Palaver,” 23.

¹⁹⁶ Some of my collaborators stated that the British crowned Amobi the *igwe*, but most stated that Amobi tricked the people of Ogidi into accepting him as *igwe* by claiming that the British had mandated his kingship. Chief Obi A. Okudo, interview by the author; Chukwuka Jerry Okongwu and Chukwudi M. Okongwu, interview by the author; Chief Godwin Nweke Agbogwu, interview by the author. Also see Chief Uzowulu Udo, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 110; Chief Nwosu Nwawulu Enwude, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 92; Achebe, “Ogidi Palaver,” 25-26.

decided to throw his own Ofala to rival Amobi's, in an echo of the above-mentioned rivalry between Eze Aroli and the *ezeoba* of Onitsha.¹⁹⁷ Achebe notes that, to irk Amobi, Ofoka had musicians play the *ufe*—a musical instrument that was meant to be played only for kings—wherever he went. Amobi did not tolerate challenges of this kind, and forced Ofoka to stop having *ufe* played for him.¹⁹⁸

Predictably, Amobi's unprecedented ascent to the status of *igwe* severely disrupted the balance of Ogidi's society. The members of the human constituency of government—associations of titled men and women, age grades, and councils of *umuokpu* and *ndinyom*—had been accustomed to ensuring that the people of Ogidi followed *omenani*. Now, however, they had not only to follow the decrees of a king, but one who was not concerned with supporting indigenous institutions or maintaining traditional values. Although Amobi's misrepresentation of an indigenous title and subsequent creation of a powerful new political office was a severe break with indigenous social and political organization, the matter did not appear to alarm colonial officials. In 1926, a few months after Amobi's death, the colonial government finally investigated his invention of the *igwe* office,¹⁹⁹ having apparently accepted his distortions and inventions as a factual reflection of indigenous custom for more than two decades. The investigation was only spawned by the claim to Amobi's throne made by his eldest son, Benjamin.

In April 1926, Benjamin Amobi, with the support of his extended family in the village of Ajilija in Uru quarter, contended that he should succeed his father as *igwe* of Ogidi.²⁰⁰ On April 17, the district officer of Onitsha, W. F. Jeffries, sent a memorandum to the senior resident of

¹⁹⁷ Achebe, "Ogidi Palaver," 28.

¹⁹⁸ Achebe, "Ogidi Palaver," 28.

¹⁹⁹ NAE, OP 56/1923 ONPROF 7/10/7: "Petition for recognition of Walter Amobi," 17 April 1926 memorandum from the District Officer, Onitsha to the Senior Resident, Onitsha Province regarding "Inquiry into the Claim of Amobi Family to the Head Chieftainship of Ogidi," 1-2.

²⁰⁰ NAE, OP 56/1923 ONPROF 7/10/7: "Petition for recognition of Walter Amobi," 17 April 1926 memorandum, 1-2.

Onitsha Province in which he stated that Ben Amobi believed the *igwe* office was the “hereditary head chieftainship of the whole of Ogidi” and “that this title and various emoluments etc. belonging to it, are the sole right of the Ajilli Ja [*sic*] family and that there has been an Igwe of all Ogidi for very many generations back” including men named Otala, Ezeike, Ogada, Ezeobodo, and of course Walter Amobi.²⁰¹

As part of his investigation into this matter, District Officer Jeffries interviewed men from Uru quarter, from which the Amobi family originated. The *okpala* of Uru spoke on behalf of the quarter, stating, “We claim that Uru has a right brought down from our fathers for generations back by which we can solely and entirely elect an Igwe for the whole of our quarter to rule the whole of Ogidi. The Igwe must always be elected from the family of Ajilli Ja [*sic*].”²⁰² The same spokesman also asserted, “On the death of Ezeobodo the Oru [*sic*] quarter elected as Igwe Walter Amobi. All the quarters of Ogidi then acclaimed him as Igwe and a deputation from the whole of Ogidi was sent to Onitsha to fetch him.”²⁰³ In other words, the people of Uru contended that the reason Amobi had returned in 1903 was to take over this hereditary role at the request of Ogidi’s people. If this were true, however, it would have meant that there had been an *igwe* of Ogidi in the mid- to late nineteenth century, at the time when the CMS arrived. However, neither the CMS records nor any early anthropological account mentioned a ruler that governed the town. This absence has since been corroborated by numerous oral history collaborators that other researchers and I have interviewed as well as by Achebe.²⁰⁴

²⁰¹ NAE, OP 56/1923 ONPROF 7/10/7: “Petition for recognition of Walter Amobi,” 17 April 1926 memorandum, 1-2.

²⁰² NAE, OP 56/1923 ONPROF 7/10/7: “Petition for recognition of Walter Amobi,” 17 April 1926 memorandum, 2.

²⁰³ NAE, OP 56/1923 ONPROF 7/10/7: “Petition for recognition of Walter Amobi,” 17 April 1926 memorandum, 2.

²⁰⁴ Udoh Boniface Uyanwa, interview by the author; Dominic Nnamdi Obijiofor, interview by the author; High Chief Samuel Mendu, interview by the author, Akanano Ogidi 2 March 2018; Raphael Anyaegbunam, in Anyegbunam, “The External Relations of Ogidi,” 71; Nwosu Enwude, in Agbogu, “Ogidi Before 1891,” 43; Okwesili Okerulu, in Agbogu, “Ogidi Before 1891,” 53; Izundu Mgbemena, in Agbogu, “Ogidi Before 1891,” 63; Okwesili Obiozor, in Agbogu “Ogidi Before 1891,” 68; Rev. Victor Okoye, in Agbogu, “Ogidi Before 1891,” 71; Nwokeke Okunwo, in

The Uru quarter's spokesman in 1926 also argued that Walter Amobi's position as a warrant chief was not the reason for Uru's alleged selection of him to be the *igwe*. Rather, he said, Walter was chosen "solely because he was a member of the Ajilli Ja [*sic*] family."²⁰⁵ One problem with this claim stems from Walter's absence from Ogidi during much of his youth and early adulthood. How could someone who had been away from Ogidi for so long be versed in the customs, laws, and traditions of the town to the point that he would be deemed fit to lead it, according to indigenous practice? By the same token, why would Uru not select a member of the Ajilija family who had lived his whole life in Ogidi?

Jeffries continued his inquiry into the Amobi family's claims to hereditary rule by interviewing the spokesmen (presumably *ndi ezeobodo*) of the other three quarters of Ogidi: Akanano, Ezinkwo, and Ikenga. They all asserted that Benjamin Amobi's claim to inherit the *igwe* position was not warranted. Chief Okeke Ozude, speaking on behalf of Ikenga asserted that

there is no hereditary chief common to the whole of Ogidi and therefore no family from which an *Igwe* could come. The senior quarter is Akananu [*sic*]. We called him [Walter Amobi] *Igwe* because we are all under him. We held meetings in his house because he was civilized and we were not. The Ajalli Ja [*sic*] family is not the senior family in Ogidi. Each quarter had its headman but there was no *Igwe* or King of Ogidi.²⁰⁶

Other sources concur that even if a hereditary rulership of all Ogidi could be said to exist, its incumbents would likely come not from Uru, but from Akanano: the quarter whose inhabitants descended from the first son of Ogidi, the semi-legendary name-father of the town.²⁰⁷ In a society

Agbogu, "Ogidi Before 1891," 77; Ezigbo Otuo, in Agbogu, "Ogidi Before 1891," 81; Ezeudo, in Agbogu, "Ogidi Before 1891," 90; Chief Louis Okoye, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 77; Haford C. Amerobi, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 107; M. O. Onwugbufor, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 114; Okafor Osegbo, in Nweze, "The Biography of *Igwe* Walter," 74; Professor Clement Chibuzo Amobi, in Nweze, "The Biography of *Igwe* Walter," 77; Augustine Okaro, in Nweze, "The Biography of *Igwe* Walter," 83; Achebe, "Ogidi Palaver," 25-26.

²⁰⁵ NAE, OP 56/1923 ONPROF 7/10/7: "Petition for recognition of Walter Amobi," 17 April 1926 memorandum, 2.

²⁰⁶ NAE, OP 56/1923 ONPROF 7/10/7: "Petition for recognition of Walter Amobi," 17 April 1926 memorandum, 5.

²⁰⁷ Because Akanano is the most senior quarter, in festivals and functions, the men from Akanano always go first, from partaking in the broken *oji* (kola nut) to writing their marks with *nzu* (white chalk) and so on. Moreover, almost all of Ogidi's most important religious shrines are located in Akanano quarter. Testimony by Warrant Chief Nwanunu in 21 January 1915 letter: NAE, OP 174/1914 ONPROF 7/1/13: "Complaint by certain villages," 21 January 1915

that venerates seniority, why would the townspeople select a family descended from the second son of Ogidi, rather than the first son, as its hereditary rulers? As Chief Ozude noted, the claims of the Uru quarter's spokesman did not align with Ogidi's indigenous institutions and values. Additionally, the spokesmen from Akanano, Ezinkwo, and Ikenga all offered the same explanation for what happened in 1904: that the townspeople had agreed to recognize Walter Amobi as their first *igwe*, primarily because they felt powerless to refute the self-proclaimed authority of their only English-speaking colonial intermediary.²⁰⁸

In the same memorandum to the resident of Onitsha Province cited above, Jeffries mused that "Walter Amobi was not slow to make use of this opportunity [being a colonial intermediary] and did all he could during his life to found this 'dynasty' in his family and make it appear to be hereditary for the benefit of his successors."²⁰⁹ The language Jeffries used clearly implies deliberate distortion. Yet, while the *igwe* position was invented, the re-framing of Ogidi's political history was not outright invention. It was based on some truth: that is, that Amobi's ancestors were either compeers of *ndi ezeobodo* of Uru quarter, or were *ndi ezeobodo* themselves.²¹⁰ However, this truth was distorted by Amobi's assertion that the members of his lineage were more than *ndi ezeobodo*, i.e., *ndi igwe* of Ogidi. I would argue that, as a partial truth, this was harder to discredit than an outright invention. Thus, Amobi and his supporters used it to bolster their claim that the invented *igwe* position was legitimate. I agree with the comments by one of my oral history

letter, 4; High Chief Samuel Mendu, interview by the author; Chief Nwabuoku (Dibuenyi Osakwe), interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 23 April 2018; Chief Ozoekwe Clement Okudo, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 27 April 2018; Chief Amaeze Ekpeani, interview by the author; Edwin Obiekwe, interview by the author; Nwabufu, "Traditional Law and Colonial Change," 5-6.

²⁰⁸ NAE, OP 56/1923 ONPROF 7/10/7: "Petition for recognition of Walter Amobi," 17 April, 5-6; Chief Uzowulu Udo, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 110; Nwosu Enwude, in Agbogu, "Ogidi Before 1891," 46; Ezeudo, in Agbogu, "Ogidi Before 1891," 91; Chief Nwosu Nwawulu Enwude, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 92.

²⁰⁹ NAE, OP 56/1923 ONPROF 7/10/7: "Petition for recognition of Walter Amobi," 17 April 1926, 6.

²¹⁰ Walter Amobi's grandfather was in high favor of the *ezeobodo* of Uru and Benjamin Amobi included in the list of his alleged ruling ancestors a man named Ogada, and Walter Amobi's grandfather married a woman from the Ogada family.

collaborators, Ogidi elder Sir Anthony Obiora Okoye, that the Amobi family was “very powerful in that they were using the colonial masters”²¹¹ by portraying distortions and inventions as long-standing indigenous customs. Nonetheless, after two decades of interaction with Ogidi, colonial administrators should have recognized that the town had a previously democratic government, and therefore that Amobi had invented the *igwe* institution. By Jeffries’ own admission in the 1926 memorandum, he bore some complicity in Amobi’s manipulation.

Amobi’s Exploitation of Ogidi People and Offenses Against Ani

Walter Amobi was a harsh and tyrannical ruler who inflicted many injustices on his people *oge Walter*. To showcase his kingly status, Amobi ordered his attendants to either carry him in a hammock or to push him in a wagon wherever he went,²¹² which was how British officials often traveled while on tours²¹³ of their districts.²¹⁴ Eventually, in or around 1915, the people of Ogidi were expected to contribute funds so that Amobi could purchase a motor vehicle.²¹⁵ Amobi’s decrees ranged from onerous to absurd. For example, he required all hunters in the town to bring their large game to his palace where he would perform a ritual that involved impaling the carcass with a spear or knife and declaring that he, not the hunter, was the one who had killed the fearsome beast.²¹⁶ Other decrees demanded that the people of Ogidi offer Amobi the best yams from each

²¹¹ Sir Anthony Obiora Okoye, interview by the author.

²¹² Chief Lawrence Nwankwo Onwuteaka, interview by the author, 4 April 2018; Dominic Nnamdi Obijiofor, interview by the author; Oduche Cyril Okafor, interview by the author; Onwuameze Ikwuwelu, interview by the author; Nweke Anene, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 105; Chief Uzowulu Udo, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 110; Clement Chibuzo Amobi, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 122; Achebe, “Ogidi Palaver,” 33.

²¹³ It was the responsibility of district officers and assistant district officers to intermittently travel to each of the towns within their districts to observe the status of governance and progress on any colonial public works projects, and this activity was usually referred to as going “on tour.”

²¹⁴ Afigbo (*The Warrant Chiefs*, 277) noted that colonial officers traveled by foot or by hammock prior to 1914, as there were few automobiles in Igboland until that date.

²¹⁵ Clement Chibuzo Amobi, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 122; Chief Lawrence Nwankwo Onwuteaka, interview by the author, 4 April 2018.

²¹⁶ Sir Albert Obi Ezegbo, interview by the author; Anonymous oral history collaborator 1, interview by the author; Chief Christian Nweke Ibeazor, interview by the author; Chief Hillary Osegbo, interview by the author; Dominic

harvest,²¹⁷ and that every male child born on a particular market day would be regarded as his son.²¹⁸

Moreover, as supreme ruler of Ogidi, Amobi forced men, women, and youths to perform unpaid manual labor, to the point that a saying that mocked the practice came into use in other towns: *Ogidi na-alu Igwe*, meaning “Ogidi is always working for Igwe.”²¹⁹ In 1903 and 1904, the colonial administration directed Amobi to organize his people to build a section of the Onitsha-Enugu colonial highway known as Trunk A Road. Some sources say that the government gave Amobi money to pay the laborers but that he kept it for himself.²²⁰ Additionally, Amobi ordered the people to labor on his farm, clean his palace compound, harvest food on their own farms and carry it to his palace to feed him and his many wives, and to carry heavy drums of cement from Onitsha to Awka to build housing for colonial administrators.²²¹ Even very young people were

Nnamdi Obijiofor, interview by the author; Chief John Amanwa, interview by the author; Chukwuka Jerry Okongwu and Chukwudi M. Okongwu, interview by the author; Ori C. Uzowulu, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 16 March 2018; Chief Ozoekwe Clement Okudo, interview by the author; Lawrence Anwurebo, interview by the author; Ibemesi, *Ogidi*, 68; Achebe, “Ogidi Palaver,” 27-28.

²¹⁷ Achebe, “Ogidi Palaver,” 27; Chief Amaeze Ekpeani, interview by the author; Oduche Cyril Okafor, interview by the author; Chief Christian Nweke Ibeazor, interview by the author; Chief Obi A. Okudo, interview by the author.

²¹⁸ Collaborators disagree as to which market day it was. Edwin Obiekwe, interview by the author; Ori C. Uzowulu, interview by the author; Lawrence Anwurebo, interview by the author; Udo Boniface Uyanwa, interview by the author; Chief Uzowulu Udo, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 111.

²¹⁹ Ibemesi, *Ogidi*, 67; Chief Lawrence Agulefo, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 86; M. O. Onwugbufor, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 116; Chief Ozoekwe Clement Okudo, interview by the author; Oduche Cyril Okafor, interview by the author; Lawrence Anwurebo, interview by the author; Chief Lawrence Nwankwo Onwuteaka, interview by the author, 4 April 2018. This is also cited in Achebe, “Ogidi Palaver,” 26-27.

²²⁰ Chief Louis Okoye, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 79; Chief Lawrence Agulefo, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 86; Chief Nwosu Nwawulu Enwude, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 94.

²²¹ Chief Dike Ibemesi, interview by the author, Ogidi, 7 March 2018; Anonymous oral history collaborator 1, interview by the author; Chief Akunwafor Osegbo (Omeka), in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 100; Nweke Anene, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 103; Haford C. Amerobi, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 108; Chief Uzowulu Udo, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 111; High Chief Robinson Okudo (Esema), interview by the author, 14 September 2018; Oduche Cyril Okafor, interview by the author; Chief Louis Okoye, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 79; Chief Lawrence Agulefo, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 86; Chief Nwosu Nwawulu Enwude, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 94; M. O. Onwugbufor, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 116; Iyom Udenkwo-Ekeobi Onwugbufor, in Onwugbufor, “The Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy,” 120; Chief Ozoekwe Clement Okudo, interview by the author; Ori C. Uzowulu, interview by the author; Lawrence Anwurebo, interview by the author; Chief Lawrence Nwankwo Onwuteaka, interview by the author, 4 April 2018; Achebe, “Ogidi Palaver,” 27; NAE, OP 174/1914 ONPROF 7/1/13: “Complaint by certain villages,” 30 April 1914 note from H. Rayner Eaton, the Assistant District Officer, Onitsha, to the District Officer, Onitsha, 1, 2; Chief Akunwafor Osegbo (Omeka), in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,”

required to carry heavy loads for miles along the government roads,²²² and Amobi used promises of food to entice young women to scrub his palace and decorate its walls with *nzu* and *uli*.²²³

Another of Amobi's abuses of power was his method of acquiring wives;²²⁴ he is said to have married anywhere from 25 to 200 women from Ogidi and other towns.²²⁵ He was known to select some of his wives by standing on his palace balcony and choosing the most beautiful maidens from among those cleaning and decorating the compound walls,²²⁶ and any married woman he desired might simply be appropriated.²²⁷ That is, if he saw a beautiful woman about the

100; Chief Uzowulu Udo, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 111; Chief Louis Okoye, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 79.

²²² Chief Akunwafor Osegbo (Omeka), in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 100; Nweke Anene, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 103; Haford C. Amerobi, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 108; Chief Uzowulu Udo, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 111; Chief Louis Okoye, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 79; High Chief Robinson Okudo (Esema), interview by the author, 14 September 2018; Oduche Cyril Okafor, interview by the author.

²²³ *Nzu* is white chalk and *uli* is a dark-colored chalk-like substance, both usually used to create decorative designs on one's body. Iyom Udenkwo-Ekeobi Onwugbufor, in Onwugbufor, "The Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy," 120; Chief Ozoekwe Clement Okudo, interview by the author; Ori C. Uzowulu, interview by the author; Oduche Cyril Okafor, interview by the author; Achebe, "Ogidi Palaver," 27.

²²⁴ The use of "acquiring" is intentional as it is said that Amobi treated many women as commodities over which he had ownership. This, however, was not the way in which most Igbo communities or individuals viewed wives. The language of my oral history collaborators is that Amobi "stole men's wives." To a Western audience, this might suggest that the people of Ogidi *ogé Walter* viewed wives as commodities; however, there is ample evidence that women were crucial participants in indigenous Igbo family dynamics as well as political life (Chapter 4 concerns discussion of the latter). Regarding the roles of wives in family decisions, some of my oral history collaborators repeated the aphorism, "husbands were the head, but wives were the neck," meaning that men were highly respected but their wives often consulted with them and influenced their decisions that concerned the entire family: Esther Mbaekwe, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 25 September 2018; Georgina Anyakora, interview by the author; Benedeth Angela Mbelu, interview by the author, Ogidi, 11 August 2018; Agbogu Godfrey Chiuba, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 5 March 2018.

²²⁵ I calculated that Amobi had at least 25 wives based on the number of *mkpukpe* that are attributed to his lineage. *Mkpukpe* refers to the house that each wife lived in with her children, but such a unit only qualified as a *mkpukpe* if it included a son. Olisa Emeka Princess (née Amobi), granddaughter of Walter Amobi, explained that the *igwe* had 25 *mkpukpe*; in other words, he had at least 25 wives who bore him sons. There could have been other wives who bore no children or only daughters that are not included in this number. Olisa Emeka Princess, interview by the author.

Several sources assert that the number of wives was much higher, up to 200: Dominic Nnamdi Obijiofor, interview by the author; Oduche Cyril Okafor, interview by the author; Chief Lawrence Nwankwo Onwuteaka, interview by the author, 4 April 2018; Clement Chibuzo Amobi, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 122; Ibemesi, *Ogidi*, 92.

²²⁶ Chief Ozoekwe Clement Okudo, interview by the author; Ori C. Uzowulu, interview by the author; Oduche Cyril Okafor, interview by the author; Onubuogbu Chika Felicia, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 10 November 2018; Anonymous oral history collaborator 1, interview by the author.

²²⁷ Achebe, "Ogidi Palaver," 27; Chief Nwosu Nwawulu Enwude, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 93; Nweke Anene, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 104; Ori C. Uzowulu, interview by the author; Dominic Nnamdi Obijiofor, interview by the author; Chike Odunze, written questionnaire, questions supplied by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 5 May 2018; Chief Ozoekwe Clement Okudo, interview by the author; Oduche Cyril Okafor, interview by the author.

town, he would demand that she and her husband be brought to the palace so that the *igwe* could pay him the bride price, thereby taking the man's wife as his own.²²⁸ Amobi also demanded to be paid bride prices for women who were not his daughters.²²⁹

The last-named offense sparked an incident that occurred sometime between 1911 and 1925²³⁰ that is remembered by several of my oral history collaborators. A man in Ikenga quarter named Obiefuna had a daughter named Ogbanke, who was set to marry a man from another Ikenga family. After Ogbanke's suitor paid the bride price to Obiefuna, Amobi sent a representative to him, demanding to be paid Ogbanke's bride price. When Obiefuna refused Amobi's demand, he brought allegations against Obiefuna in the Ogidi Native Court.²³¹ In the words of my oral history collaborator, Ogbogu Azubuike Chuka, the court clerk read aloud the charge against Obiefuna: "You disobeyed the *igwe* of Ogidi kingdom by refusing to hand over the dowry paid for your daughter to him. Are you guilty or not guilty?"²³² Although Obiefuna replied that he was guilty, he offered an explanation in his defense: that the *igwe* had not married Obiefuna's wife, and thus could not claim the child of Obiefuna's wife as his own; and that the *igwe* never offered financial contributions to the girl's upbringing, therefore making him undeserving of any part of her bride

²²⁸ Edwin Obiekwe, interview by the author; Anonymous oral history collaborator 1, interview by the author; Chief Chinedu Olisa C. Onyeama, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 12 April 2018; Dominic Nnamdi Obijiofor, interview by the author; Oduche Cyril Okafor, interview by the author; Chief Ozoekwe Clement Okudo, interview by the author; Ori C. Uzowulu, interview by the author; Ibemesi, *Ogidi*, 68.

²²⁹ Ori C. Uzowulu, interview by the author; Ogbogu Azubuike Chuka, interview by the author; Ifeude Okeke, interview by the author; Theresa Odinye, interview by the author; Ezennia Okolonkwo Mbelu, in Onwugbufor, "The Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy," 109.

²³⁰ The Ogidi Native Court opened in 1911, which was seven years into Amobi's twenty-one-year reign as Igwe of Ogidi. Since this incident involves both the Ogidi Native Court and Igwe Amobi, it must have occurred no earlier than 1911 and no later than 1925 when Amobi died.

²³¹ The following collaborators narrated this oral history: Ogbogu Azubuike Chuka, interview by the author; Ifeude Okeke, interview by the author; Sir Albert Obi Ezegbo, interview by the author; High Chief Robinson Okudo (Esema), interview by the author, 14 September 2018; Theresa Odinye, interview by the author.

²³² Ogbogu Azubuike Chuka, interview by the author. This and the following dialogue come from Chuka's narration, which offered the most detailed account of the Obiefuna incident. This collaborator's interpretation is informed by oral history that he has learned and the general information presented by Chuka's interpretation is corroborated by the testimony of oral history collaborators. See the previous footnote.

price.²³³ When the court asked for Amobi’s response, surprisingly, he admitted that Obiefuna was correct. Ogbogu Azubuike Chuka narrated his interpretation of Obiefuna’s words after Amobi admitted this:

Based on this point, it will be very foolish and stupid of me to give the dowry paid on my daughter—my legitimate daughter—to another man who doesn’t even know her; that if [I] do that, that means [I am] now a slave to the *igwe*, and if that is done or allowed by the court, that means the slavery the man wants to subject Ogidi people to is supported by the court.²³⁴

When the native court ruled in favor of Obiefuna, Ogidi people were so impressed that they hailed him with the praise name²³⁵ *Gbalakabue Gbalakabue*, meaning “using an empty hand to conquer” or “defeating without using any weapon.”²³⁶ My oral history collaborator Sir Albert Obi Ezegbo noted that because Obiefuna successfully challenged Amobi, when the *igwe* celebrated his annual Ofala, Obiefuna—like Ofoka—celebrated his own version of the festival “in a small way in his house” as a testament to his own prowess.²³⁷ This was a rare instance of an Ogidi resident challenging the *igwe* without suffering serious consequences.

Although Amobi indeed oppressed and afflicted his own people, perhaps the most serious component of the accusations of tyranny leveled against him was his lack of validation by the spiritual forces of the indigenous Igbo religion. Since members of the spiritual realm formed the highest level of government in Ogidi, it stands to reason that any member of the human realm who claimed authority required approval by spiritual forces. *Igwe* Amobi had no spiritual authority to

²³³ Ogbogu Azubuike Chuka, interview by the author; Ifeude Okeke, interview by the author; Sir Albert Obi Ezegbo, interview by the author; High Chief Robinson Okudo (Esema), interview by the author, 14 September 2018; Theresa Odinye, interview by the author.

²³⁴ Ogbogu Azubuike Chuka, interview by the author.

²³⁵ Praise names are distinct from titles as one does not need to pay a fee or perform certain rites to earn a praise name. Rather, community members bestow the honorable moniker upon someone whom they feel deserves particular recognition. Nwando Achebe, conversation with the author, 15 July 2019; Basden, *Niger Ibos*, 130.

²³⁶ The first translation was offered by Ogbogu Azubuike Chuka, interview by the author; High Chief Robinson Okudo (Esema), interview by the author, 14 September 2018; and the latter translation by Theresa Odinye, interview by the author.

²³⁷ Sir Albert Obi Ezegbo, interview by the author.

rule Ogidi and therefore had no authority within the indigenous legal sphere.²³⁸ To circumvent these and other inconvenient indigenous requirements, Amobi utilized his appointment from the British government to legitimize his position and to subvert indigenous Igbo religion and law. M. O. Onwugbufor, an Ogidi elder interviewed in 1983, stated, perhaps sarcastically, that Amobi's *ofò*, an emblem that signifies an office of authority, "was his warrant" given to him by colonial officials.²³⁹ Where the *ofò* held by an *okpala*, titleholder, or priest/priestess of the indigenous Igbo religion represented peace, truth, and the justice of *omenani*,²⁴⁰ Amobi's warrant represented the colonial legal system that threatened the indigenous one and, therefore, the stability of Ogidi's society. Even if Amobi eventually received an indigenous *ofò* from members of Akanano quarter, as some sources indicate,²⁴¹ he abused the authority that it signified by committing many acts of injustice. By its cruelty, his exploitation of the people of Ogidi would have been upsetting to the earth goddess, a protecting maternal figure for the Igbo.

In a more direct sense, too, Amobi's offenses were against *ani*. For one, his claims over boys born on certain market days who were not his biological children could be seen as kidnapping. Likewise, his demands that suitors pay him the bride price for women who were not his daughters

²³⁸ Nweke Anene, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 103; Chief Akunwafor Osegbo (Omeka), in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 98; Haford C. Amerobi, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 108; Chief Uzowulu Udo, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 111; M. O. Onwugbufor, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 116.

²³⁹ M. O. Onwugbufor, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 116.

²⁴⁰ Basden, *Among the Ibos*, 224; Forde and Jones, *The Igbo and Ibibio-Speaking Peoples*, 26; A. E. Afigbo, "An Outline of Igbo History," in *Igbo History and Society*, 111; Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 92; Obiakoizu A. Iloanusi, *Myths and Creation of Man and the Origin of Death in Africa: A Study in Igbo Traditional Culture and Other African Cultures* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1984), 203; Jude C. U. Aguwa, *The Agwu Deity in Igbo Religion: A Study of the Patron Spirit of Divination and Medicine in an African Society* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishing, 1995), 54; Gerald Chukwudi Njoku, *Ala di Mma in Umuohiagu: An Igbo Concept of Reconciliation and Peace Towards an Inculturation* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2014), 126.

²⁴¹ Eventually, several elders interviewed in 1983 said, Amobi went through the proper channels to receive an *ofò* of office from the representatives of Akanano quarter, the body that usually issued such staffs of office: M. O. Onwugbufor, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 116; Chief Louis Okoye, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 78; Chief Lawrence Agulofo, in Osakwe, 85; Nweke Anene, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 102; Haford C. Amerobi, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 107. However, Chief Nwosu Nwawulu Enwude stated that he could not recall whether Igwe Amobi ever received a proper *ofò* (in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 92), and Chief Akunwafor Osegbo (Omeka), asserted that Amobi did not receive it (in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 99).

and his forced expropriations of other men's wives would have rated as theft and kidnapping, respectively, in the indigenous Igbo legal system. In addition, when he took women away from their husbands, he deprived those families of members integral to the continuation of their lineage, thereby causing disorder in their compounds; and when he required men to pay bride prices to him, he deprived their actual families of the use of those funds. But, the most severe crime that Amobi committed was his blatant disregard for the sanctity of Igbo spiritual forces, which can be seen as a metaphorical desecration of the deities, especially *ani*.²⁴² In 1914, for instance, Amobi moved the market belonging to the deity *udo* without his approval;²⁴³ and when he assumed a leadership role over the entire town, he usurped the former sole right of spiritual forces including *ani*, the ancestors, and various deities such as *udo*, *ogwugwu*, and *idemili*.

We do not know whether Amobi sought to pacify *ani* after committing such *nso ani*. Since he had been a missionary prior to his warrant chiefship and *igweship*, and later an active member in the Anglican church in *Ogidi*; and since that church strongly urged its congregants not to associate with indigenous Igbo religion in any way,²⁴⁴ it appears unlikely that Amobi would have troubled himself to make the numerous sacrifices that would have been required to appease the goddess. On a psychological level, too, it seems implausible that a man who crowned himself the king of a town that had never had kings would openly admit his wrongdoings. But, even if he had sought to appease *ani*, it would be unlikely that the omnipotent earth goddess would be satisfied with insincere supplications from a recalcitrant, repeat offender. Throughout the twenty-one years of the *igwe*'s reign, his offenses against *ani* caused disorder in *Ogidi*'s society and suffering among its people. Amobi's actions—which benefited the colonial administration as well as himself—

²⁴² Physical desecration of a deity or its shrine is one of the most serious forms of *nso ani*. See Chapter 2.

²⁴³ This event is the main subject of the following chapter.

²⁴⁴ NAE, EP 9561 CSE 1/85/4879: "Intelligence Report on *Ogidi* and *Abacha* Villages, *Onitsha* Division, *Onitsha* Province, by Mr. B. G. Stone, A.D.O.," 11.

imposed male-centric laws, comprising both Amobi's personal decrees and the colonial rules that the administration directed him to implement on their behalf, at the expense of the female-centric law of *omenani* that had protected Ogidi *tupu ndi ocha bia*.

The Complicity of Colonial Officials in Amobi's Abuse of Power

Anglican missionaries and, to a greater extent, colonial officials facilitated Amobi's intemperance and distortions through their respective roles in educating him and positioning him as a colonial intermediary. Certainly, colonial officials were keenly aware of his abuses of power, and some went on record calling his character into question. For instance, a 1915 report detailed many of the ways in which he oppressed the people of Ogidi.²⁴⁵ These grievances included the allegation that Amobi built his palace on land that belonged to Ikenga quarter, and then produced a questionable document claiming the land was his; that he demanded new title recipients pay exorbitant fees, much higher than those settled prior to his return to Ogidi in 1903; and that he banned lepers (who were numerous in the town) from approaching his palace, and sought to separate them from the rest of the people, despite their objections and those of their families.²⁴⁶ Also included in the list of grievances was a mention of a women's "palaver" with Igwe Amobi that occurred in 1914.²⁴⁷ The next chapter will delve into that controversy.

The ever-ambitious Amobi sought the coveted position of paramount chief, which was endowed with immense judicial authority, and would have allowed him to preclude litigants from

²⁴⁵ NAE, OP 174/1914 ONPROF 7/1/13: "Complaint by certain villages of Ogidi against Chief Amobi: Letter of reparation from the Minor Chiefs of Ogidi," 21 January 1915 letter.

²⁴⁶ NAE, OP 174/1914 ONPROF 7/1/13: "Complaint by certain villages of Ogidi against Chief Amobi: Letter of reparation from the Minor Chiefs of Ogidi," 21 January 1915 letter, 1-2. Evidence of the first claim is found in NAE, OP 210/1923 ONPROF 7/10/25: "Chief Walter Amobi of Ogidi requesting survey of his land at Iyi Enu."

²⁴⁷ NAE, OP 174/1914 ONPROF 7/1/13: "Complaint by certain villages of Ogidi against Chief Amobi: Letter of reparation from the Minor Chiefs of Ogidi," 21 January 1915 letter, 2.

appealing his court's decisions to British judicial authorities.²⁴⁸ In other words, in terms of his authority in adjudicating native court cases, a paramount chief was tantamount to a district officer. In 1915, more than a decade into his rule as *igwe* of Ogidi, Amobi petitioned the colonial government to appoint him as the permanent president (equivalent in status to a paramount chief) of the Ogidi Native Court, which would have given him "full and unlimited jurisdiction to adjudicate in all civil matters or to try all criminal proceedings in which the chief's subjects were parties."²⁴⁹ By promoting Amobi to such a level, the administration would have also promoted the Ogidi Native Court from a Grade B to a Grade A court, because only Grade A courts could handle all forms of civil and criminal cases.²⁵⁰ When the colonial administration organized native courts into grades A, B, C, and D in 1914, the Ogidi Native Court was a designated Grade C court, which handled minor civil and criminal cases. However, in or by 1922, the Ogidi Native Court was promoted to Grade B and it would remain so until the early 1930s.²⁵¹ This meant that it was authorized to hear civil cases concerning moderately high debts or damages, and criminal cases in which the potential punishment was up to one year imprisonment.²⁵² In 1915, Governor Lugard delegated the potential promotion of Amobi to paramount chief to the commissioner of Onitsha Province, telling him that "such Native Chiefs (if any) will be appointed as Native Court Presidents

²⁴⁸ Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject*, 113.

²⁴⁹ Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject*, 113.

²⁵⁰ NAE, EP 9561 CSE 1/85/4879: "Intelligence Report on Ogidi and Abacha Villages," 14-15; Nwabufo, "Traditional Law and Colonial Change," 37-38.

²⁵¹ Assistant District Officer's 1932 report on the towns of Ogidi and Abacha stated that the Ogidi Native Court was still a Grade B court at that time but that it might soon be scaled back to a Grade C court. NAE, EP 9561 CSE 1/85/4879: "Intelligence Report on Ogidi and Abacha Villages," 14-15.

²⁵² Nwabufo, "Traditional Law and Colonial Change," 37-38; NAE, OP 491/1922 ONPROF 7/9/39: "Annual Report, Onitsha Province year ending 31 December 1922," Onitsha Province Native Court Cases—summary of criminal and civil cases chart; NAE, OP 317/1929 ONPROF 7/16/203: "Onitsha Division Annual Report statistics 1929," Onitsha Division Native Court Cases—summary of criminal and civil cases chart.

as you may recommend.”²⁵³ Subsequently, the commissioner denied Amobi’s request;²⁵⁴ however, this did not deter the latter’s ambitions.

In January 1923, acting on behalf of Walter Amobi, fourteen chiefs from the Ogidi Native Court district sent a petition to Colonel H. C. Moorhouse, the lieutenant-governor of the Southern Provinces, who was then touring in Onitsha. In the petition, these men beseeched Moorhouse to promote Amobi to the office of paramount chief.²⁵⁵ Moorhouse referenced this petition in a February 6 letter to the senior resident of Onitsha Province, writing,

While I fully recognise the good work that Walter Amobi has done in connexion [*sic*] with the Ogidi Court, and the excellent influence he has exercised in that area, it is contrary to the present policy of Government to place one chief as paramount over towns and villages over which he has no hereditary right of control, and I personally believe it to be contrary to the custom of the Ibo people. I am therefore unable to accede to their request.²⁵⁶

Moorhouse’s problematization of Amobi’s right to hereditary rule over a territory prefigured District Officer Jeffries’ previously examined 1926 investigation of Benjamin Amobi’s claims of his hereditary right to succeed his father as *igwe*.

When Walter Amobi petitioned to become a paramount chief in 1923, Francis Jenkins, the secretary of the Southern Provinces, included his own commentary on the matter in a November 23 letter to the chief secretary of the government. Jenkins wrote that he had first met Amobi in 1900, “when he held no position in Ogidi. It is correct that he was a son of one of the Ogidi Chiefs,

²⁵³ NAE, OP 56/1923 ONPROF 7/10/7: “Petition for recognition of Walter Amobi,” 6 November 1923 memorandum from E. L. Palmer, Resident Onitsha Province, to the Secretary of the Southern Provinces, quoting Frederick Lugard’s 1915 statement.

²⁵⁴ Since Amobi tried again in 1923 to be promoted to paramount chief, it is reasonable to assume that his 1915 attempt failed. See NAE, OP 56/1923 ONPROF 7/10/7: “Petition for recognition of Walter Amobi,” 6 February 1923 letter from H. C. Moorhouse, Lieutenant-Governor, Southern Provinces to the Senior Resident, Onitsha Province.

²⁵⁵ NAE, OP 56/1923 ONPROF 7/10/7: “Petition for recognition of Walter Amobi” 31 January 1923 letter from Warrant Chiefs of Onitsha Division to Colonel H. C. Moorhouse, C.M.G., D.S.O., Lieutenant Governor of Southern Provinces at Onitsha on tour; Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs*, 172.

²⁵⁶ NAE, OP 56/1923 ONPROF 7/10/7: “Petition for recognition of Walter Amobi,” 6 February 1923 letter from H. C. Moorhouse, Lieutenant-Governor, Southern Provinces to the Senior Resident, Onitsha Province.

but there was no hereditary head chief in this village.”²⁵⁷ Yet, hereditary rule was the basis of one of Amobi’s major distortions. If colonial officials believed “hereditary right of control” to be “contrary to the custom of the Ibo people,”²⁵⁸ then why would they accept Amobi’s claims that his *igwe* office was a legitimate, long-standing, indigenous institution? It seems that colonial authorities were aware of Amobi’s distortions and inventions but did not find them problematic until he petitioned to be paramount chief, at which point they denied his request.

Although Amobi was never awarded a paramount chiefship, he frequently acted as though he had been.²⁵⁹ In 1924, for example, several warrant chiefs from the neighboring town of Nkpor complained to colonial officers in Onitsha that Amobi was abusing his power. They claimed he had specifically interfered in issues concerning only Nkpor;²⁶⁰ that *ozo* titleholders from Nkpor received “evil and illegal treatments” at the hand of Amobi in the Ogidi Native Court;²⁶¹ and that Amobi forced young men of Nkpor to do farm work for him.²⁶² Sixty of the town’s chiefs and elders submitted a petition to the colonial administration requesting that Nkpor be moved from the Ogidi Native Court area to the Onitsha one.²⁶³ In official correspondence with the resident of Onitsha Province regarding this issue, District Officer Lawton went so far as to argue that Amobi should not have possessed the authority that the government had already granted him:

It is a fact that Chief Amobi had rendered very long and loyal service to the Government and has done a lot for the Ogidi Court[,] but it is equally a fact that were all Warrant holders to be tested as to their right to the position of a Chief in accordance with the requirements

²⁵⁷ NAE, SP 2004/410 MINLOC 6/1/26: “Walter Amobi Petition for Subsidy,” 23 November 1923 letter from the Secretary, Southern Provinces to the Chief Secretary to the Government, Lagos.

²⁵⁸ NAE, OP 56/1923 ONPROF 7/10/7: “Petition for recognition of Walter Amobi,” 6 February 1923 letter from H. C. Moorhouse, Lieutenant-Governor, Southern Provinces to the Senior Resident, Onitsha Province.

²⁵⁹ Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs*, 170 n. 20.

²⁶⁰ NAE, OP 7/1924 ONPROF 7/11/1: “Ogidi Native Court. Representation made by Mkpo Town for Separation from Ogidi Native Court,” 3 January 1924 Telegram from Southern Lagos to resident Onitsha.

²⁶¹ NAE, OP 7/1924 ONPROF 7/11/1: “Ogidi Native Court. Representation made by Mkpo Town,” 27 October 1924 letter from the District Officer and the Resident of Onitsha to the Lieutenant Governor of the Southern Provinces.

²⁶² NAE, OP 7/1924 ONPROF 7/11/1: “Ogidi Native Court. Representation made by Mkpo Town,” Chief Udeze’s testimony reported in 10 January 1924 letter from District Officer J. J. Lawton to the Resident of Onitsha.

²⁶³ NAE, OP 7/1924 ONPROF 7/11/1: “Ogidi Native Court. Representation made by Mkpo Town,” petition titled Mkpo—Onitsha.

laid down by the Secretary of Native Affairs Chief Amobi would never attain that position.²⁶⁴

Lawton's admission that Amobi was unfit for his role as a warrant chief is further evidence of the pattern whereby colonial officers distributed warrants to undeserving, opportunistic men. Even after Nkpor sought to leave Amobi's jurisdiction, the government did not reprimand him or curtail his authority.

Conclusion

Walter Amobi's distortions and inventions of 'native law and customs' ultimately elevated him to a position of unchecked power in Ogidi. The British colonial administration connived at such distortions and inventions, as being necessary components of indirect colonial rule. The bottom line was that, for such a style of government to be successful in Igboland, chiefs and other rulers had to be created where none had existed before. Specifically, it appears that colonial officials enabled Amobi's exploitative surrogacy as a means of meeting their own obligations to resolve disputes in the Ogidi Native Court area, which the overburdened district officers proved unable to do. A 1922 report on native authorities in Onitsha Province illuminates what the government appreciated about Amobi. It described his character as "enterprising," and stated that he "has authority over his people."²⁶⁵ The same report noted that, while the government had not yet seen anyone fit to succeed Amobi as a native authority of the Ogidi Native Court district, they did not believe that he should be promoted to a higher appointment such as paramount chief.²⁶⁶ The report further stated that "there is still considerable friction among warrant Chiefs and sub-

²⁶⁴ NAE, OP 7/1924 ONPROF 7/11/1: "Ogidi Native Court. Representation made by Mkpó Town," 11 January 1924 memorandum reporting on Nkpor town from the district officer to the resident of Onitsha, 2.

²⁶⁵ NAE, OP 491/1922 ONPROF 7/9/39: "Annual Report, Onitsha Province—Year endings 31 December 1922," Annual Report on Chiefs for the Year 1922.

²⁶⁶ NAE, OP 491/1922 ONPROF 7/9/39: "Annual Report, Onitsha Province," Annual Report on Chiefs.

chiefs in two or three towns but Chief Amobi's influence is sufficient to counteract this in the Court."²⁶⁷ Clearly, Amobi had sizeable sway within and beyond the Ogidi Native Court during his reign. Thus, despite their irritation with his persistent political ambitions, the colonial officers in Onitsha and the governor of the Southern Provinces tolerated Amobi, due to what they perceived as the effectiveness of his management of both his peers and a large populace.

There is clear evidence that colonial officials were cognizant of Walter Amobi's oppression of the people of Ogidi and the surrounding towns. They knew that he was not genuine or trustworthy, and yet accorded him considerable, virtually unchecked power. The colonial government had the authority to revoke Amobi's warrant of office at any time, which would have mitigated his ability to exploit Ogidi's people, especially in the native court. In fact, the colonial administration removed and suspended warrant chiefs rather frequently.²⁶⁸ A useful comparison is provided by the case of Warrant Chief Igwegbe Odum. Only months after his elevation to paramount chief, nearly all the other chiefs in his district complained about Igwegbe's extortion and corruption. The colonial government promptly stripped him of his paramount chiefship, and soon afterwards removed his warrant chiefship as well.²⁶⁹ British officials, however, did not pursue such courses of action against Amobi and were thus at least partly responsible for the havoc he wreaked on the entire Ogidi Native Court area.

Amobi's many abuses threw Ogidi's social, religious, and political stability off balance; this was the first move toward the re-gendering of law, as it threatened the equilibrium that the laws of the earth goddess meant to maintain. Amobi's excesses and offenses against *ani* paralleled

²⁶⁷ NAE, OP 491/1922 ONPROF 7/9/39: "Annual Report, Onitsha Province," Onitsha Division Annual Report for 1922, 19.

²⁶⁸ An example from 1921 shows that five warrant chiefs were removed and two suspended from various courts in Onitsha Division in just one year. NAE, ONPROF 11/1/10: "Annual Report Onitsha Division 1921," document titled *Changes Native Court Chiefs 1921*.

²⁶⁹ Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs*, 159. Afigbo cited "Memo. No. OP 307/1917 dated 21.3.18 from Resident, Onitsha Province, to Secretary, Southern Province (SSP), in OP 307/1917 Chief Igwegbe, Creation of a Paramount Chief."

those of many warrant chiefs and newly-crowned kings across Igboland; and as the male-centric laws of chiefs, kings, and the colonial administration confronted the female-centric law of indigenous Igbo society, women would be called to combat injustice and protect the sacred laws of ani and other deities, first in Ogidi in 1914 and then across a large portion of southern Igboland in 1929. It is worth asking whether the people of Ogidi quietly suffered injustices at the hands of their first *igwe* during the first decade of his reign because they expected ani, other deities, or the ancestors to restore balance by punishing him for his corruption. Eventually, in 1914, the deity udo proclaimed his anger when Amobi unilaterally decided to move the Afo Udo market from its sacred location. The spiritual forces who truly ruled society often enlisted the help of women to punish those who severely disrupted society's balance, and to cleanse the land of pollution. This is precisely what transpired between Ogidi's women and Igwe Amobi in March and April of 1914, when the women organized a massive protest against the moving of Afo Udo market. That protest forms the main subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4:

WOMEN ENACTING FEMALE-CENTRIC JUSTICE, *OGE FOUR QUARTERS-OGE WALTER*

Oge Walter, the people of Ogidi tended either to suffer silently or complain to the British authorities about their first warrant chief and monarch's oppression and other misconduct. However, one incident that occurred about halfway through Igwe Amobi's twenty-one-year reign is striking, because it spawned a mass protest from the women of Ogidi. In 1914, Amobi decided to move the sacred Afo Udo market, which was the possession of the god and oracle udo,¹ away from its hallowed location about a mile and a half from the relatively new colonial highway, Trunk A Road, to a site much nearer that road and, conveniently enough, to Amobi's palace.² Before moving the market, Amobi did not consult udo, or his priest, or the Ogidi women who protected markets as intermediaries of the earth goddess.³ Although Amobi committed numerous crimes between 1904 and 1925, his unilateral decision to move the Afo Udo market stood out as one of the most severe. Thus, Ogidi's women responded in an equally severe manner: asserting their indigenous judicial roles by 'making war' on Amobi.

¹ As noted in Chapter 2, I refer to udo as a god and an oracle interchangeably, because he was both a member of the pantheon of lesser deities and served an oracular function, i.e., prophesying.

² The section of the Trunk A Road that ran through Ogidi was built between 1903 and 1904 by the coerced labor that Warrant Chief Walter Amobi and Chief Benjamin Bosa Ibemesi recruited on behalf of the colonial government. See Chapter 3 for further description of Amobi's and Ibemesi's involvement.

³ Nwando Achebe, "'Ogidi Palaver': The 1914 Women's Market Protest," in *Shaping Our Struggles: Nigerian Women in History, Culture, and Social Change*, ed. Obioma Nnaemeka and Chima J. Korieh (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2011), 25, 30-32; Chief Lawrence Agulefo, interview by Chukwuma C. C. Osakwe, Ikenga Ogidi, 14 September 1983, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi: The Era of Igwe Amobi I and II, 1904-1973" (B.A. Thesis, History Department, University of Nigeria Nsukka, 1984), 86; Chief Nwosu Nwawulu Enwude, interview by Chukwuma C. C. Osakwe, Ikenga Ogidi, 16 September 1983, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 94; Chief Isama Nwawulu Nwosu, interview by Ifeoma Catherine Onwugbufo, Ikenga Ogidi, 19 February 1992, in Onwugbufo, "The Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy in Ogidi" (B.A. Thesis, Department of History, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 1992), 103-107; Iyom Udenkwo-Ekeobi Onwugbufo, interview by Ifeoma Catherine Onwugbufo, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 25 February 1992, in Onwugbufo, "The Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy," 120-121; Professor Clement Chibuzo Amobi, in Nweze, "The Biography of Igwe Walter," 79; High Chief Robinson Okudo (Esema), interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 14 September 2018.

‘Making war’ is an indigenous Igbo legal sanction used on someone who transgresses *omenani*, the laws of other deities, or *iwu* and refuses to perform the required cleansing rites or accept the punishment that allows for amelioration. This activity is the exclusive preserve of women, though its targets are frequently men who abuse their wives or otherwise cause harm to female members of the community. ‘Making war’ can take many forms, but has most often been associated with ‘sitting on a man,’ which is the type of ‘making war’ that historian Judith Van Allen first popularized in American academia in the 1970s.⁴ Ogidi women ‘made war’ on Amobi to restore justice to society and to protect the town from the wrath of the gods, particularly udo and ani. In the 1914 protest, the women of Ogidi acted in their roles as protectors of morality and judges of law, in an effort to return balance to their town by righting the egregious wrong that Amobi had committed.

As previously discussed, the Igbo world is divided into two realms, the spiritual and the human, and indigenous Igbo law in Ogidi was gendered as female *tupu ndi ocha bia*, but began to change *oge Walter*. While Chapter 2 examined the female-centric nature of the spiritual realm of law and justice, this chapter focuses on women’s dominant roles in the human realm. As we have seen, the female principle⁵ of indigenous Igbo law is rooted in the fact that the earth goddess oversees all legislation, even those laws created by groups of men or women. Likewise, the female principle extends to the human constituency of Igbo law, because the earth goddess has entrusted women’s groups to protect and uphold her laws by enacting justice. In brief, then, the female-centric core of the human side of indigenous Igbo law as it was practiced in Ogidi prior to the rise

⁴ See Judith Van Allen, “‘Sitting on a Man’: Colonialism and the Lost Political Institutions of Igbo Women,” *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 6, no. 2 (1972): 165-181; Nwando Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings: Female Power and Authority in Northern Igboland, 1900-1960* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2005), 173; Ifi Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society* (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1987), 122.

⁵ As previously noted, Nwando Achebe coined this term. See Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 27.

of the native courts encompassed the participation of women's groups in legislating and adjudicating what Ogidi people could or could not do, based on the ethics that ani had decreed.

In this chapter, I use the adjective 'judicial' to describe matters pertaining closely to the core concept of indigenous Igbo justice, i.e., societal equilibrium. Beginning *oge four quarters*, Igbo women's judicial roles included advising the parties involved in disputes, judging such disputes, and admonishing or punishing offenders. I use the term 'legal,' on the other hand, to refer to the indigenous institution of law, in both its legislative and judicial dimensions. Moreover, punitive actions by Igbo women aimed at bringing an offender to justice are what I term 'legal sanctions' as well as 'enactments of justice.' That is, to combat the injustices committed by Igwe Amobi, Ogidi women drew on their long-standing legal authority to seek justice. Sanctions—punishments for transgressing *omenani*—were one of the tools that Ogidi women used to restore balance to society. And 'making war' was the most prominent form of sanction that Ogidi women enacted during the 1914 women's market protest.⁶

The previous chapter showed that Amobi distorted the *ezeobodo* title and invented the *igwe* political position, which he claimed was his hereditary right; and based on this pretended power dictated his own laws, disregarding the sacred laws of the earth goddess. By introducing male-centric distortions and inventions, Amobi ascended to an unprecedented height of authority over the entire town, and thereby threatened the legislative and judicial authority of men's and women's councils and spiritual forces. Historian Martin Chanock has argued that, from the British perspective, African warrant chiefs' proceedings in their own courts were legal, and anything else

⁶ Nwando Achebe coined the name of this event as the 1914 women's market protest. Achebe, "'Ogidi Palaver,'" 23-51.

was *ipso facto* extralegal.⁷ Accordingly, most of the indigenous legal actions that Ogidi women utilized to collectively protest or sanction Amobi were considered extralegal, as they did not take their grievances to the Ogidi Native Court. However, the women's many methods of enacting justice were not only legal under indigenous Igbo law, but also essential to protecting the town from the destruction that would surely result from Amobi's grave crime.

The Ogidi women's market protest was one of the earliest known mass female protests against established colonial rule in Africa. Of course, there were earlier instances of large-scale challenges by women to Europeans intruding on African soil, such as the Dahomey women warriors' battles against the French in the mid- to late nineteenth century.⁸ There were also prominent women who led both men and women in resisting colonial incursions, such as Queen Njinga of Ndongo and Matamba who fought the Portuguese in the early to mid-seventeenth century,⁹ and Yaa Ashantwaa who combatted the British at the turn of the twentieth century.¹⁰ However, the 1914 protest differed fundamentally from these earlier events, in that it employed female-centric law in combatting the male-centric distortions of colonialism. The significance of the 1914 women's market protest is also partly based on its size, as it is said that all the women of

⁷ Martin Chanock, "Making Customary Law: Men, Women, and Courts in Colonial Northern Rhodesia," in *African Women and the Law: Historical Perspectives*, ed. Margaret Jean Hay and Marcia Wright (Boston: Boston University Press, 1982), 60.

⁸ See David Ross, "Mid-Nineteenth Century Dahomey: Recent Views vs. Contemporary Evidence," *History in Africa* 12 (1985): 307-323; Stanley B. Alpern, "On the Origins of the Amazons of Dahomey," *History in Africa* 25 (1998): 9-25; Robin Law, "The 'Amazons' of Dahomey," *Paideuma: Mitteilungen zur Kulturkunde* 39 (1993): 245-260.

⁹ See John K. Thornton, "Legitimacy and Political Power: Queen Njinga, 1624-1663," *The Journal of African History* 32, no. 1 (1991): 25-40; Joseph C. Miller, "Nzinga of Matamba in a New Perspective," *The Journal of African History* 16, no. 2 (1975): 201-216; Linda M. Heywood, *Njinga of Angola: Africa's Warrior Queen* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017).

¹⁰ See T. C. McCaskie, "The Life and Afterlife of Yaa Asantewaa," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 77, no. 2 (2007): 151-179; Susan Otto, "Centering African Indigenous Women within the Context of Social-Economic and Political Development," in *Emerging Perspectives on 'African Development': Speaking Differently*, eds. George J. Sefa Dei and Paul Banahene Adjei (New York: Peter Lang, 2014), 117-127; Emmanuel Akyeamong and Pashington Obeng, "Spirituality, Gender, and Power in Asante History," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 28, no. 3 (1995): 481-508; Agnes Akosua Aidoo, "Asante Queen Mothers in Government and Politics in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 9, no. 1 (1977): 1-13.

Ogidi were involved,¹¹ and partly on its primacy, especially in Igboland, as it predated the *Nwaobiala*¹² of 1925 and the *Ogu Umunwaanyi* (Women's War) of 1929.¹³ Nonetheless, the 1914 protest has remained relatively obscure in scholarship on Igbo and African history. Nwando Achebe, who is *nwaokpu Ogidi*,¹⁴ is the only scholar to have provided a detailed account of it.¹⁵

Tupu ndi ocha bia, Igbo communities respected and valued the authority of women's groups to protect morality not only by upholding *omenani*, but also by creating their own *iwu* and judging disputes among or offenses committed by community members. *Oge Walter*, Ogidi's women continued to practice indigenous law in the same way, preserving justice in their community. Igwe Amobi tested Ogidi women's ability to enact justice in a colonial environment that was decidedly male-biased. This chapter argues that what made the women of Ogidi successful in returning the Afo Udo market to its original location was their use of indigenous legal sanctions, namely 'making war,' despite such sanctions being in conflict with the colonial rule of law.

Women's Legal Authority *Oge Four Quarters-Oge Ndi Ocha Bia*

Since the establishment of the town's four quarters, there have been two main groups of women in Ogidi: *umuokpu* and *ndinyom*, the former being the daughters of the community and the latter, wives of the community that hail from elsewhere. The *umuokpu* may be unmarried, married, divorced, or widowed, but must belong to the community by descent.¹⁶ In line with the indigenous

¹¹ The earliest population estimate for Ogidi was 5,000 total members in 1932, and it is likely that the population was slightly less than that in 1914. It is therefore reasonable to assume that at least several hundred women in Ogidi participated in the Women's Market Protest. NAE, EP 9561 CSE 1/85/4879: "Intelligence Report on Ogidi and Abacha Villages, Onitsha Division, Onitsha Province, by Mr. B. G. Stone, A.D.O.," 4.

¹² For a description of the *Nwaobiala*, see footnote 149 in the Introduction.

¹³ For a description of the Women's War, see footnote 71 in the Introduction.

¹⁴ *Nwaokpu Ogidi* is a daughter of Ogidi, meaning that she hails from that town through patrilineage. Nwando Achebe's father, Chinua Achebe, was an Ogidi man.

¹⁵ Achebe, "Ogidi Palaver," 23-51.

¹⁶ Violet Agu, interview by Kosi Frances Obiefuna, Akanano Ogidi, 22 September 2015, in Obiefuna, "Cultural Revival in Ogidi After the Nigerian Civil War: 1970-1980" (B.A. Thesis, Department of History and International

Igbo values of duality and complementarity, the social, political, and legal roles that Ogidi women—like those of other Igbo towns—enacted through *umuokpu* and *ndinyom* councils were designed to counter-balance those of men in the *umunna* (the extended family), *ndiichie* (titled male elders), and *ogbo* (the age grade society).¹⁷ According to historian Harry A. Gailey, despite men’s overt political power to decide matters affecting the *umunna* as well as the larger unit represented by the village, male leaders consulted *umuokpu* in private, valuing the women’s opinions; and in cases of high importance, women convened their own meetings to discuss and agree on the nature of the political advice they should offer to the men.¹⁸

Umuokpu, *Daughters of the Lineage*

Across Igboland, and in Ogidi in particular, the *umuokpu* were a crucial political and judicial body. Holding meetings on a regular basis, they monitored community behavior;¹⁹ kept the male arm of government in check;²⁰ ensured that *ndinyom* adjusted to and followed the community’s laws;²¹ preserved the peace of the markets;²² acted as the highest court of appeal in

Studies, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, 2016), 79; Achebe, “Ogidi Palaver,” 31. The definitions of daughters and wives have followed similar criteria in communities across Igboland. See Victor Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), 86; Matera, Bastian, and Kingsley Kent, *The Women’s War of 1929*, 25-26.

¹⁷ Matera, Bastian, and Kingsley Kent, *The Women’s War of 1929*, 25.

¹⁸ Harry A. Gailey, *The Road to Aba: A Study of British Administrative Policy in Eastern Nigeria* (New York: New York University Press, 1970), 22, 25.

¹⁹ Bridget Okudo, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 2 August 2018; Chief Louis Okoye, interview by Chukwuma C. C. Osakwe, Akanano Ogidi, 13 September 1983, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 82; Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 167-168; M. M. Green, *Igbo Village Affairs: Chiefly with reference to the Village of Umueke Agbaja* (London: Frank Cass, 1964 [1947]), 217; Gailey, *The Road to Aba*, 25.

²⁰ Chief Nwabuoku Osakwe (Dibuenu Nwanyi), interview by the author, Ogidi, 2 October 2018; Chinwe Iloani, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 13 September 2018; Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 168; Gailey, *The Road to Aba*, 22; Matera, Bastian, and Kingsley Kent, *The Women’s War of 1929*, 25-26.

²¹ Zinobia Ikpeze, interview by the author, Trans-Ekulu Enugu, 24 January 2018; Josephine Ojugo Okafor, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 12 September 2018; Mercy Onwukeme, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 13 September 2018; Chief Louis Okoye, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 82; Noo Udala, testimony collected by E. N. Okechukwu, in “Village Democracy: an Agbaja example,” in *Igbo Worlds: An Anthology of Oral Histories and Historical Descriptions*, ed. Elizabeth Isichei (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1978), 74.

²² Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 168; C. K. Meek, *Law and Authority in a Nigerian Tribe: A Study in Indirect Rule* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), 169; Sylvia Leith-Ross, *African Women: A Study of the Ibo of Nigeria* (London: Routledge & Keagan Paul, 1939), 163-164.

the human realm, judging difficult cases that other courts could not settle;²³ and most importantly, acted as the custodians of religious morality.²⁴

There was a hierarchy within the *otu umuokpu* (council of daughters). The leader of the council was the senior *nwaokpu*, the eldest living daughter of the community.²⁵ She had a cabinet comprised of executive women drawn from within the council and a group of messengers, usually young women chosen for their reliability.²⁶ According to one of my oral history collaborators, Bridget Okudo, these councils met routinely, and the host of the meeting provided food and drinks for the attendees, who would in return offer to help pay for them.²⁷ In Ogidi, there were *umuokpu* councils in each of the four quarters as well as a town-wide *umuokpu* council composed of representatives from each of the quarters' councils.²⁸ Most Igbo communities had age grades for males and females, but Ogidi was unique in that it had no female age grade system. Achebe explains that because of this absence, Ogidi women “instead used the *umuokpu* as a medium through which they could voice their feelings about things that affected their interests as women in the community.”²⁹

²³ Zinobia Ikpeze, interview by the author; Chief Nwabuoku Osakwe (Dibuenu Nwanyi), interview by the author, 2 October 2018; Chinwe Iloani, interview by the author; Edith Ugolo, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 18 August 2018; Amaka Molokwu, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 18 August 2018; Nkiru Nwachibue Ozumba, interview by the author, Ogidi, 1 August 2018; Ifechukwu Agbakoba, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 1 September 2018; Chief Louis Okoye, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 82; Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 168; Achebe, “Ogidi Palaver,” 31; Meek, *Law and Authority*, 158, 169; Leith-Ross, *African Women*, 164; A. E. Afigbo, “A History of Igbo Traditional Textile Industry,” in *Igbo History and Society: The Essays of Adiele Afigbo*, ed. Toyin Falola (Trenton: African World Press, 2005), 239.

²⁴ Zinobia Ikpeze, interview by the author; Theresa Ifedigbo, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 1 November 2018; Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 168; Matera, Bastian, and Kingsley Kent, *The Women's War of 1929*, 26; Bastian, “Dancing Women and Colonial Men,” 111.

²⁵ Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 167; Achebe, “Ogidi Palaver,” 31; Green, *Igbo Village Affairs*, 217.

²⁶ Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 167; Green, *Igbo Village Affairs*, 217.

²⁷ Bridget Okudo, interview by the author.

²⁸ Achebe, “Ogidi Palaver,” 31.

²⁹ Achebe, “Ogidi Palaver,” 31.

The *umuokpu*'s jurisdiction over monitoring community behavior extended to marital relationships. They legislated *iwu* that detailed social norms to which married men and women had to adhere, and adjudicated cases that resulted from alleged violations.³⁰ By overseeing matters regarding Ogidi's married women, the *umuokpu* preserved the morality and sanctity of womanhood in their community.³¹ Members of *umuokpu Ogidi* would assemble whenever necessary to settle disputes, meeting with all parties to gain a clear understanding of the problem before settling it.³² For example, if a man maltreated his wife, she would report the matter in the first instance to one of his 'sisters.'³³ That relative of the husband would then go to him and ask him to explain himself. If he did not offer an acceptable justification, the 'sister' would call on the *umuokpu* of that lineage, who would interrogate him collectively. After their investigation, the *umuokpu* would judge the case and, if they found that the man had mistreated his wife, decide the punishment against him. In serious cases, when the man refused to admit his wrongdoing, the *umuokpu* would 'make war' on him.³⁴

³⁰ High Chief Robinson Okudo (Esema), interview by the author, 14 September 2018; Chief Louis Okoye, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 82; Chief Lawrence Agulefo, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 84; Uzowulu Ezekwesili, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufo, Ikenga Ogidi, 10 September 1978, in Nwabufo, "Traditional Law and Colonial Change in Ogidi" (B.A. Thesis, Department of History, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 1979), 74; Udozoba Okoye, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufo, Ikenga Ogidi, 17 December 1978, in Nwabufo, "Traditional Law and Colonial Change," 78; Achebe, "Ogidi Palaver," 31.

³¹ Chief Louis Okoye, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 82; Zinobia Ikpeze, interview by the author; Chief Nwabuo Osakwe (Dibuenu Nwanyi), interview by the author, 2 October 2018; Josephine Ojugo Okafor, interview by the author; Nkiru Nneoma Igwelom, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 13 September 2018; Benice Chinwoka Onyeagolum, interview by the author.

³² Ezekwesili Mba (Okwesi), interview by Anthonia Uchenna Anyegbunam, Ikenga Ogidi, 19 August 1983, in Anyegbunam, "The External Relations of Ogidi Up to 1903," (B.A. Thesis, Department of History, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 1984), 77; Nwude Anumba, interview by Anthonia Uchenna Anyegbunam, Uru Ogidi, 4 September 1983, in Anyegbunam, "The External Relations of Ogidi," 86, 90; Chief Bernard Anyaegbunam, interview by Anthonia Uchenna Anyegbunam, Akanano Ogidi, 21 September 1983, in Anyegbunam, "The External Relations of Ogidi," 124.

³³ Sisters, in this sense, is not confined to literal siblings, but refers to the women belonging to the *umuokpu* of that man's lineage. This subset of *umuokpu* can be seen as the female counterpart to the *umunna*.

³⁴ Chief Nwabuo Osakwe (Dibuenu Osakwe), Nkiru Nwachibue Ozumba, Ifeoma Nwawulu Okoye, interviews by the author, 1 August 2018; Zinobia Ikpeze, interview by the author; Felicia Chukwuma, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 11 September 2018; Mercy Onwukeme, interview by the author; Udeze Joyce Azuka, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 11 August 2018; Theresa Ifedigbo, interview by the author; Chika Emedolibe, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 30 August 2018; Ifeyinwa Ekwealor, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 18 August 2018; Benice

In their adjudication, *umuokpu* appear simply to have sought the truth. Certainly, in deciding disputes between men and women, they did not automatically side with their fellow women, nor with their ‘brothers.’³⁵ Based on interviews with members of women’s councils in the southern Igbo town of Nneato in the 1930s, anthropologist Sylvia Leith-Ross concluded that men did not think these women discriminated against them—for instance, continuing to use them as arbitrators of disputes even after losing such cases.³⁶ And, if a wife from a particular lineage left her husband’s house because of a dispute, the *umuokpu* of that lineage sought to discover what the problem was and to resolve it, regardless of whether the man or the woman was at fault.³⁷

Umuokpu Ogidi still hold the authority to intervene in personal and family issues today, although to a lesser extent than they did before the native court system became popular, beginning in the 1910s.³⁸ Examples of women’s judicial authority today include reprimanding and ‘making war’ on the members of a woman’s husband’s family who mistreat her; settling disputes between women and their husbands, or women and their children; and resolving cases involving two *ndinyom* that are too difficult for the *otu ndinyom* (council of wives) to resolve.³⁹ They have the last-named function because, as daughters of the community, *umuokpu* have maintained the special right to authority over *ndinyom*.⁴⁰ For generations dating back to *oge four quarters*, the *umuokpu* have sanctioned any *inyom* (wife) who has transgressed the *omenani* or *iwu* of the community, and

Chinwoka Onyeagolum, interview by the author; Bridget Okudo, interview by the author; Agbogu Godfrey Chiuba, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 5 March 2018.

³⁵ Brothers, in this sense, refers to the male members of one’s extended family. Mercy Onwukeme, interview by the author; Ifeoma Udemezue, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 4 September 2018.

³⁶ Leith-Ross, *African Women*, 108.

³⁷ Chief Nwabuoku Osakwe (Dibueni Nwanyi), interview by the author, 1 August 2018; Chika Emedolibe, interview by the author.

³⁸ The increased use of native courts and the correlating decreased use of women’s courts are discussed in Chapter 5.

³⁹ Ifeoma Ofokansi, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 2 August 2018; Ifeyinwa Ekwealor, interview by the author; Chinwe Iloani, interview by the author.

⁴⁰ Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 29; Zinobia Ikepeze, interview by the author; Chief Nwabuoku Osakwe (Dibueni Nwanyi), interview by the author, 2 October 2018; Josephine Ojugo Okafor, interview by the author; Nkiru Nneoma Igwelom, interview by the author; Benice Chinwoka Onyeagolum, interview by the author; Chief Christian Nweke Ibeazor, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi 21 August 2018.

such sanctions have ranged from seizure of property to ostracization from women's groups.⁴¹ *Umuokpu* are also known to have issued cautions to *ndinyom* if they committed theft or refused to assist their husbands in farming.⁴²

Another judicial role that *umuokpu Ogidi* played *tupu ndi ocha bia*, as Achebe notes, was to act "as the human supreme court of society," dealing with cases of the greatest difficulty.⁴³ The membership of this court was coterminous with the town-wide *umuokpu* council, i.e., included the spokeswomen of the *umuokpu* council of each quarter. Because of this judicial authority, according to my collaborator Chief Nwabuoku Osakwe, *umuokpu Ogidi* had more power than men in Ogidi.⁴⁴ In the early twentieth century, too, anthropologist C. K. Meek observed that *umuokpu* across Igboland generally exercised "considerable authority in the community, for not only are they the arbiters in quarrels between women, but they sometimes intervene to settle quarrels which the male authorities have been unable to settle."⁴⁵ In other words, when the *umunna* or other men's groups could not resolve a dispute on their own, the *umuokpu* interceded in the case.⁴⁶ Conversely, if a woman reported a case to the *umuokpu*, but they thought that it would be more appropriate for men to deal with it, they could hand it off to the *umunna*.⁴⁷ Additionally, *umuokpu* at their own discretion could call on the men of the *umunna* to help them settle a difficult case jointly.⁴⁸

⁴¹ Noo Udala, in *Igbo Worlds*, 74; Zinobia Ikpeze, interview by the author; Josephine Ojugo Okafor, interview by the author; Mercy Onwukeme, interview by the author; Benice Chinwoka Onyeagolum, interview by the author.

⁴² Zinobia Ikpeze, interview by the author; Josephine Ojugo Okafor, interview by the author; Mercy Onwukeme, interview by the author; Benice Chinwoka Onyeagolum, interview by the author.

⁴³ Achebe, "'Ogidi Palaver,'" 31. This is, of course, a lesser court than that of spiritual forces such as *ani* and the *egwugwu*.

⁴⁴ Chief Nwabuoku Osakwe (Dibuenu Nwanyi), interview by the author, 2 October 2018.

⁴⁵ Meek, *Law and Authority*, 169.

⁴⁶ Zinobia Ikpeze, interview by the author; Ifechukwu Agbakoba, interview by the author; also see Chief Louis Okoye, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 82; Violet Agu, in Obiefuna, "Cultural Revival," 80.

⁴⁷ Ifeyinwa Ekwealor, interview by the author.

⁴⁸ Nkiru Nwachibue Ozumba, interview by the author; High Chief Robinson Okudo (Esema), interview by the author, 14 September 2018.

The *umuokpu*'s duties as protectors of morality for the entire community often overlapped with their function as a court of law. One way that they maintained justice and protected morality in Ogidi was by warning offenders not to make a habit of committing offenses.⁴⁹ As one oral history collaborator, Zinobia Ikpeze, explained: "If a man involves [himself] in stealing, he can be cautioned with an Igbo proverb that states that you should remove the hands of the monkey from the soup before it's transformed to a human hand, meaning you should stop an evil deed before the evil escalates to something worse."⁵⁰ When someone offended *omenani* or polluted the land, it was the *umuokpu* that Ogidi relied on to remedy the situation by enacting punishment and/or cleansing the land with ritual sacrifices.⁵¹ In the area around Nsukka in northern Igboland prior to the arrival of the British, as historian A. E. Afigbo explained, a weaver's loom "was regarded as a ritual object" with emanant spiritual power, and thus it was considered *nso ani* "for a man to interfere with his wife's weaving or to cut the wrap already set up by her."⁵² If a man transgressed this *omenani*, the *umuokpu* would deal with the offender, and the matter would not be settled until they cleansed the earth through "ritual propitiation to the gods."⁵³ Indeed, as part of their expected protection of religious morality, it was the *umuokpu*'s responsibility to appease the gods when someone from the community offended them,⁵⁴ and, as we shall see, this process was critically important to the course of the 1914 women's market protest.

⁴⁹ Zinobia Ikpeze, interview by the author; Theresa Ifedigbo, interview by the author; Chikelu Okeke, interview by Onyinye Maryrose Udeh, 25 March 2018, in Udeh, "A Study of the Ogidi Development Union, Women Wing, 1970-2007" (B.A. Thesis, Department of History and International Studies, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, 2018), 68.

⁵⁰ Zinobia Ikpeze, interview by the author.

⁵¹ Joy Ufodiana, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 25 September 2018; Amaka Molokwu, interview by the author; Ifeoma Udemezue, interview by the author; Grace Uju Nwosu, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 25 September 2018.

⁵² Afigbo, "A History of Igbo Traditional Textile Industry," 239.

⁵³ Afigbo, "A History of Igbo Traditional Textile Industry," 239.

⁵⁴ Lawrence Anwurebo, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 27 March 2018; Chief Nwabuoku Osakwe (Dibueni Nwanyi), interview by the author, Ogidi, 23 April 2018; Ezeudo, interview by Arinze Ernest Agbogu, Ikenga Ogidi, 30 December 1975, in Agbogu, "Ogidi Before 1891," 91; Dike Ibemesi, *Ogidi: Historical Perspective of a People* (Ogidi: Ekpechi and Sons Ltd., 1995), 58; Meek, *Law and Authority*, 169; Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and*

Tupu ndi ocha bia, *umuokpu Ogidi* were seldom if ever intimidated, and dealt with any offender regardless of his or her titles or social status.⁵⁵ This imperviousness carried over into the era of British rule, when not even Ogidi's notorious and powerful warrant chief and *igwe* could force the *umuokpu* to relent from their chosen approach to delivering justice. The decisions of the *umuokpu* were final; no one in Ogidi could challenge their decision regarding a dispute.⁵⁶ Moreover, anyone who disputed a decision of the *umuokpu* was fined or reprimanded for doing so;⁵⁷ and the *umuokpu* court had the power to isolate offenders, men or women, who did not accept the punishments that they meted out by prohibiting their participation in any meetings or other community events. As my collaborator Zinobia Ikpeze explained, if the offender sought to reverse his or her ostracization, he or she would have to accept "the punishment meted out for the offences committed [and] serve the punishment before he or she [could] be taken out from isolation."⁵⁸

Ndinyom, *Wives of the Lineage*

The other primary women's group in Ogidi is the *otu ndinyom* (council of wives). A woman, whether she is born in Ogidi or not, becomes an *inyom* of the lineage of her husband when she marries.⁵⁹ When a woman becomes an *inyom*, she still remains a *nwaokpu* (daughter) in her father's kindred, and is expected to play different roles according to where she is. *Tupu ndi ocha*

Kings, 168; Afigbo, "A History of Igbo Traditional Textile Industry," 239; Matera, Bastian, and Kingsley Kent, *The Women's War of 1929*, 26; Bastian, "Dancing Women and Colonial Men," 111.

⁵⁵ Chika Emedolibe, interview by the author; Bridget Okudo, interview by the author; Ifeude Okeke, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 29 August 2018.

⁵⁶ Grace Uju Nwosu, interview by the author; Josephine Ojugo Okafor, interview by the author; Chinwe Iloani, interview by the author; Edith Ugolo, interview by the author; Amaka Molokwu, interview by the author; Chikelu Okeke, in Udeh, "A Study of the Ogidi Development Union," 68.

⁵⁷ Theresa Ifedigbo, interview by the author; Bridget Okudo, interview by the author; Chikelu Okeke, in Udeh, "A Study of the Ogidi Development Union," 68.

⁵⁸ Zinobia Ikpeze, interview by the author.

⁵⁹ Stella Igwueze, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 11 August 2018; Christiana Okaro, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 4 September 2018; Chief Nwabuoku Osakwe (Dibueni Nwanyi), interview by the author, Ogidi, 1 August 2018; Theresa Ifedigbo, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 1 November 2018; Josephine Ezeukanma, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 5 September 2018; Ifeoma Chiegbu, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 27 August 2018.

bia, a wife maintained her responsibilities as a daughter of her natal community even while simultaneously fulfilling her duties as a wife in the community of her husband.⁶⁰ In their husbands' homes, the *ndinyom* could settle disputes and influence their husbands' decisions on a range of issues that affected the *umunna*. Although the *ndinyom* have not held as much authority or commanded as much respect as *umuokpu*, they have been important to keeping the peace in their husband's communities.⁶¹ Because the *ndinyom* all came from outside the *umunna* into which they had married, they were seen as able to offer impartial or fresh perspectives on issues that arose among members of that *umunna*, in whose property and reputation they had no direct stake.⁶² That is, while wives could own property in their husbands' homes, they could not inherit any from their husbands' lineages, as inheritance passed from fathers to sons, usually the eldest son.⁶³ Therefore, these *ndinyom* had virtually nothing to lose or gain in the disputes among members of the *umunna*, and thus were ideal arbiters.

Ndinyom councils could create their own laws to govern their members so long as these did not contradict *omenani*, the laws of other deities, or previously established *iwu* in the community. Achebe states that *ndinyom* councils in Ogidi "served as a lower court in which cases between members could be tried. Their rules and regulations governed the conduct of all married women in Ogidi."⁶⁴ For example, they created laws that precluded gossiping about or fighting with

⁶⁰ Matera, Bastian, and Kingsley Kent, *The Women's War of 1929*, 27.

⁶¹ High Chief Robinson Okudo (Esema), interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 1 March 2018; Chukwuma C. C. Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 2.

⁶² High Chief Robinson Okudo (Esema), interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 1 March 2018; Chukwuma C. C. Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 2.

⁶³ Uzowulu Ezekwesili, in Nwabufo, "Traditional Law and Colonial Change," 75; Ogbuefi Ezigbo Otue Unachukwu, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufo, Uru Ogidi, 28 September 1978, in Nwabufo, "Traditional Law and Colonial Change," 76; Udozoba Okoye, in Nwabufo, "Traditional Law and Colonial Change," 79.

⁶⁴ Direct quotation from Achebe, "'Ogidi Palaver,'" 31-32; similar statement from Okeru Nnabenyi, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufo, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 7 August 1978, in Nwabufo, "Traditional Law and Colonial Change," 84.

other members of the *ndinyom*, and could censure those who transgressed them.⁶⁵ As with the *umuokpu*, there were *ndinyom* councils in each quarter of Ogidi as well as an all-Ogidi council.⁶⁶

One legal arena in which both *umuokpu* and *ndinyom* converged was in the protection of certain community *iwu* and exacting punishment when such laws were transgressed. An example of such a situation is offered in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, when the women of Umuofia rush out of their homes to answer the call to action to stop a cow from damaging community members' crops. While women were busy cooking,

a sudden interruption came. It was a cry in the distance: *Oji odu achu ijiji-o-o!* (*The one that uses its tail to drive flies away!*) every woman immediately abandoned whatever she was doing and rushed out in the direction of the cry. [...The women] rushed away to see the cow that had been let loose. When they saw it they drove it back to its owner, who at once paid the heavy fine which the village imposed on anyone whose cow was let loose on his neighbors' crops. When the women had exacted the penalty they checked among themselves to see if any woman had failed to come out when the cry had been raised.⁶⁷

The women were responsible for exacting punishment on the man who failed to uphold the *iwu* that one must keep his livestock fenced in so as to prevent them from eating or trampling a neighbor's crops. In addition, the women held each other accountable as they were all expected—with the exceptions of those who were gravely ill or infirmed or who had recently given birth—to collectively resolve the issue and punish the offender by responding to the loud cry that the initial women gave to rally the others to the task.⁶⁸ As Nwando Achebe notes, this is an instance of how the female principle pervades the human realm of law and justice and community governance in Igbo society.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Theresa Ifedigbo, interview by the author; Zinobia Ikpeze, interview by the author.

⁶⁶ Achebe, "Ogidi Palaver," 31-32; Okeru Nnabenyi, in Nwabufo, "Traditional Law and Colonial Change," 84.

⁶⁷ Emphasis in original: Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (New York: Anchor Books edition, 1994 [1959]), 114-115.

⁶⁸ Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 115.

⁶⁹ Nwando Achebe, "Balancing Male and Female Principles: Teaching About Gender in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*," *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* 29, no. 1 (2002): 133-134.

Another realm over which both *umuokpu* and *ndinyom* presided *tupu ndi ocha bia* was the management and maintenance of markets.⁷⁰ Across Igboland, and in Ogidi in particular, *ndinyom* councils were in charge of markets and had responsibilities to the market deities, which included ensuring cleanliness.⁷¹ Married women, whether daughters of the community or not, worked together in this role. As historian S. N. Nwabara states, “a specific age group [of] married women would sweep the market-place early in the morning of a market day. After this the priest poured libations to ancestral spirits to ensure peace and the safety of marketers.”⁷² One of the major markets that thrived in Ogidi at least since the mid-nineteenth century, was the Afo Udo market in Ikenga quarter, which the oracle udo owned.⁷³ Ogidi’s women acted as supplementary protectors of this sacred space.⁷⁴

‘Making War’: An Igbo Women’s Enactment of Justice

The collective women’s action of ‘making war’ was prolific across Igboland *tupu ndi ocha bia* and also was observed on several occasions *oge ndi ocha chilu*. As Leith-Ross remarked, it

⁷⁰ Leith-Ross, *African Women*, 87; Gailey, *The Road to Aba*, 27; Matera, Bastian, and Kingsley Kent, *The Women’s War of 1929*, 22.

⁷¹ Achebe, “Ogidi Palaver,” 31-32; Matera, Bastian, and Kingsley Kent, *The Women’s War of 1929*, 27; Judith Van Allen, “‘Aba Riots’ or Igbo ‘Women’s War’? Ideology, Stratification, and the Invisibility of Women,” *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* 6, no. 1 (1975): 19. Many markets in Igboland are under the ownership of a particular deity. For example, Ogidi’s Afo Udo market belongs to udo.

⁷² S. N. Nwabara, *Iboland: A Century of Contact with Britain 1860-1960* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1977), 21.

⁷³ The market is said to have been popular for many generations prior to the 1914 incident. Based on this information, it is reasonable to believe that the market was prominent at least since the mid-nineteenth century. Nwosu Enwude (Nwawulu), interview by Anyegbunam, Ikenga Ogidi, 7 September 1983, in Anyegbunam, “The External Relations of Ogidi,” 98; Nwude Anumba, in Anyegbunam, “The External Relations of Ogidi,” 83; Ezekwesilu Mba (Okwesi), in Anyegbunam, “The External Relations of Ogidi,” 75; Raphael Anyaegbunam, interview by Anthonia Uchenna Anyegbunam, Akanano Ogidi, 15 August 1983, in Anyegbunam, “The External Relations of Ogidi,” 66; Clement Ifedi, interview by Anyegbunam, Ogbunike, 13 September 1983, in Anyegbunam, “The External Relations of Ogidi,” 111; Micheal Chinyelugo Mba, interview by Anthonia Uchenna Anyegbunam, Ikenga Ogidi, 16 September 1983, in Anyegbunam, “The External Relations of Ogidi,” 115; Ichie Ezigbo Otue, interview by Anthonia Uchenna Anyegbunam, Uru Ogidi, 25 September 1983, in Anyegbunam, “The External Relations of Ogidi,” 134.

⁷⁴ Oduche Cyril Okafor, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 26 April 2018; Chief Lawrence Nwankwo Onwuteaka, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 4 April 2018; Edwin Nwoye Ikeabunze, Eze Udo Ogidi-Ani, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 21 August 2018; Nweke Iwobi Godwin, Eze Udo, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 13 July 2018; Achebe, “‘Ogidi Palaver,’” 25, 32. More information on udo can be found in Chapter 2.

was a legitimate means of enforcing ani's justice and it could be made against men and women alike.⁷⁵ As Van Allen describes 'sitting on' or 'making war' on a man, women would gather at the offender's compound, "sometimes late at night, dancing, singing scurrilous songs which detailed the women's grievances against him and often called his manhood into question, banging on his hut with the pestles women used for pounding yams, and perhaps demolishing his hut or plastering it with mud and roughing him up a bit."⁷⁶ Similarly, albeit less concretely, Leith-Ross described 'making war' on a person as "the destruction of property or the infliction of corporal punishment, generally of a ridicule-making nature, by the women themselves."⁷⁷ Ogidi men who were censured by women in this way were no doubt humiliated, but as noted above, had no basis on which to challenge the women's authority in such matters.

'Making war' was a type of justice designed to be delivered swiftly in situations where the offender's guilt was flagrant, or otherwise apparent without need of an investigation.⁷⁸ In the 1930s, Anthropologist M. M. Green observed an instance in which the *ndinyom* of Umuameke in southern Igboland 'made war' on one of their own members who had failed to show up to help them with a mandated path-clearing, by plastering her house with mud.⁷⁹ The men who were present in the compound where the offender was hiding, Green said, did not attempt to interfere with the *ndinyom*'s actions.⁸⁰

'Making war' on a person for committing a severe offense often involved the women marching half-naked from their initial meeting place to confront the offender. When the women of Ogidi, like other Igbo women, dressed for war, they were partially naked with charcoal painted

⁷⁵ Leith-Ross, *African Women*, 109.

⁷⁶ Van Allen, "'Sitting on a Man,'" 179.

⁷⁷ Leith-Ross, *African Women*, 109.

⁷⁸ Green, *Igbo Village Affairs*, 196.

⁷⁹ Green, *Igbo Village Affairs*, 196.

⁸⁰ Green, *Igbo Village Affairs*, 196.

on their bodies.⁸¹ Their nakedness was meant to shame the offender and to demonstrate that the offense was grave, because as Achebe explains, it was the ultimate form of humiliation for a man to have women reveal their nakedness to him; it was essentially a curse.⁸² *Oge ndi ocha chilu*, some men committed such serious offenses because they were apparently emboldened by the general pro-male bias of both the Christian missions and colonial administration. For example, anthropologist Ifi Amadiume recounted how, in the town of Nnobi (located eight miles south of Ogidi), a Christian convert killed one of the goddess idemili's sacred pythons.⁸³ Nnobi women marched half-naked to the office of the resident⁸⁴ in Onitsha, almost fifteen miles away, to express their concern. After the resident turned them away, the women returned to their town and 'made war' on the offender, destroying his home in the process.⁸⁵

Achebe describes how women in the Nsukka Division of northern Igboland 'made war' within their communities as "often militant and immediate [...and] psychologically and socially devastating. Some of the tactics that women employed to 'make war' on offenders included the use of strikes, boycotts, force, sit-ins or sleep-ins at an offender's compound, nudity and 'sitting on a man.'"⁸⁶ This last method was the most severe militant action that women in indigenous Igbo society engaged in. Specifically,

young palm fronds would be passed from woman to woman—a symbol of the war to come. The women would dress in war gear—their heads bound with ferns and their faces smeared

⁸¹ High Chief Robinson Okudo (Esema), interview by the author, 14 September 2018; Chief Edward Dike Ibemesi, interviews by the author, Ogidi, 7 March 2018 and 27 September 2018; Achebe, "'Ogidi Palaver,'" 38-39; Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 176.

⁸² Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 177. Some of my oral history collaborators explained it in similar terms: Patience Nweke, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 4 September 2018; Theresa Odinye, interview by the author, Ikenga, Ogidi, 12 September 2018; Chief Edward Dike Ibemesi, interview by the author; Chief Arinze Ofokansi, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 1 September 2018.

⁸³ The importance of pythons to idemili is explained in Chapter 2.

⁸⁴ The resident was the top colonial officer of the province. Colonial positions and ranks are discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

⁸⁵ Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, 122.

⁸⁶ Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 173.

with *unyi* (charcoal or ashes). The women would then move in militant precision and gather at the offender's compound.⁸⁷

Achebe also explains that after performing the various elements of 'making war,' i.e., singing scornful songs about the offender, plastering his compound with mud, and tearing down his hut, the women would "take turns in symbolically 'sitting on' him," which meant that the women pulled up their cloths to sit their bare buttocks on the offender's body while other women held him down,⁸⁸ which—as noted above—was meant to shame and humiliate the offender. In the largest display of women's collective judicial authority in Igboland and possibly in Africa, thousands of Igbo and Ibibio women in Nigeria's Calabar and Owerri provinces presented themselves with charcoal-smearred faces and fern-leaf headdresses when they 'made war' on warrant chiefs and the colonial government in the 1929 Women's War.⁸⁹ 'Making war' was and is a legitimate form of judicial sanction that Igbo women have had the exclusive right to conduct as a means of upholding law and order.⁹⁰

Instances of Ogidi Women's Enactments of Justice: The Women's Trading-Company Demonstration and the Women's Ankle-Bell Protest

In reference to 'making war' on a man or punishing him for committing an offense, Amadiume uses the term "indigenous female militancy,"⁹¹ while Achebe describes it as one of several female strategies of resistance.⁹² In the case of Ogidi, I frame such actions—however militant they may have been—as enactments of female justice via female-centric legal sanctions. *Tupu ndi ocha bia*, Ogidi women 'made war' on offenders whenever necessary, and because

⁸⁷ Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 176.

⁸⁸ Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 176-177.

⁸⁹ Van Allen, "'Aba Riots' or Igbo 'Women's War,'" 22; Matera, Bastian, and Kingsley Kent, *The Women's War of 1929*, 156; Falola and Paddock, *The Women's War of 1929*, 56.

⁹⁰ Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 173-178.

⁹¹ Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, 122.

⁹² Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 173, 176.

justice was closely and strongly equated with societal balance, the strategic objective of Ogidi women who ‘made war’ was to restore that balance. That was precisely what occurred when a European trading company sought to build a large market on Ikenga land on the eve of Walter Amobi’s reign.⁹³ It is said that, just before Amobi became a warrant chief (sometime between 1901 and 1903), a commercial company wanted to build a daily market in the Ikenga quarter of Ogidi, near the area where the Ogidi Native Court and Amobi’s palace would later be constructed.⁹⁴ The trading company wanted a large area of land to establish a market, to construct its warehouses and shops, and Amobi invited them to Ogidi as he was hoping to increase revenue for the town by building a market larger than any that had been built in the area. Amobi even helped the Europeans acquire the large tract of land by force.⁹⁵ The people of Ogidi did not understand Amobi’s intentions to build a market and they did not appreciate the fact that strangers had claimed land that rightfully belonged to Ikenga. As my oral history collaborator Chief Dike Ibemesi explained, the people of Ogidi feared that the Europeans were hostile, since they had stolen a plot of Ikenga’s land.⁹⁶ This prompted swift action from cohorts of women from each quarter of Ogidi, who marched to the site where the European company was surveying the land. Women from all four

⁹³ Several Ogidi elders that researchers interviewed in the 1970s and 80s, and one elder whom I interviewed in 2018, noted the arrival of agents of a European trading company, whom the people of Ogidi referred to as *ndi compini*, “company men,” around the time that missionaries and colonial officials arrived. Most asserted that it was the Royal Niger Company. Ononenyi Amobi, interview by Anthonia Uchenna Anyegbunam, Ikenga Ogidi, 9 September 1983, in Anyegbunam, “The External Relations of Ogidi,” 108; Alfred Amobi, interview by Arinze Ernest Agbogu, Iyi-Enu Ogidi, 15 November 1974, in Agbogu, “Ogidi Before 1891,” 50; Clement Chibuzo Amobi, written questionnaire administered by Chukwuma C. C. Osakwe, 12 December 1983, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 120; Chief Bernard Anyaegbunam, in Anyegbunam, “The External Relations of Ogidi,” 129; M. O. Onwugbufor, interview by Chukwuma C. C. Osakwe, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 3 October 1983, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 115; Chief Edward Dike Ibemesi, interview by the author.

⁹⁴ Clement Chibuzo Amobi, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 123; Chief Edward Dike Ibemesi, interview by the author. In a phone conversation on 8 April 2020, Chief Edward Dike Ibemesi cited as his sources for this history two elders from Ikenga quarter whom he interviewed in 1981 and 1984, respectively: Chief Nwosu Okudo (Nwawulu) and Chief Lawrence Igboamalu Nwanunu Agulefo; the former is regarded as the preeminent indigenous historian of Ogidi during the twentieth century, and thus the narrative that Ibemesi attributes to him can be trusted. See the Introduction for more on the value of Chief Nwosu Okudo (Nwawulu) to Ogidi historiography.

⁹⁵ Chief Edward Dike Ibemesi, interview by the author; Clement Chibuzo Amobi, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 123; Alfred Amobi, in Agbogu, “Ogidi Before 1891,” 50.

⁹⁶ Chief Edward Dike Ibemesi, interview by the author.

quarters of Ogidi gathered to protest the building of this market “because when such a thing is done, women are rallied around from all quarters.”⁹⁷ The women were naked, which—as we have seen—was considered an abomination and therefore signaled that something was seriously wrong. As a result of the women’s demonstration, the European trading company abandoned its claim to the land and eventually built their market in Onitsha.⁹⁸

Sometime after the Ogidi women’s trading-company demonstration, *oge Walter*, they banded together again, this time to protest the *igwe*’s declaration that only he was allowed the privilege of wearing bells tied around the ankle, which he sported during his annual Ofala celebrations.⁹⁹ Previously, women had worn such bells while performing dances, so they understood the new decree to be a direct affront to their rights. In response, a corps of women decided to challenge Amobi’s irrational *iwu* by marching to his palace, each of them wearing the prohibited ankle bells. Infuriated by this act of defiance, the *igwe* ordered the leaders of the women to be seized and placed in prison, yet the women of Ogidi were undeterred.¹⁰⁰ As one of my collaborators, Theresa Odinye, recounted, many women brought food to their imprisoned leaders; and when they were finally released, a sizable assemblage of women marched to the *igwe*’s palace, again wearing the ankle bells and “singing war songs” to intimidate him.¹⁰¹ As we shall see, women used similar tactics in their 1914 market protest as they did in the above-mentioned demonstrations.

⁹⁷ Chief Edward Dike Ibemesi, interview by the author.

⁹⁸ Chief Edward Dike Ibemesi, interview by the author; Chief Nwosu Okudo (Nwawulu), interview by Dike Ibemesi; Chief Lawrence Igboamalu Nwanunu Agulefo, interview by Dike Ibemesi.

⁹⁹ Achebe, “Ogidi Palaver,” 48, *n.* 73.

¹⁰⁰ Theresa Odinye, interview by the author; Obiamaka M. Amaifeobu, “Socio-Religious Importance of Ofala Festival in My Town - Ogidi” (B. A. Thesis, Department of Religion, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 1986), 11; Achebe, “Ogidi Palaver,” 48, *n.* 73.

¹⁰¹ Theresa Odinye, interview by the author.

The 1914 Women's Market Protest

The women's market protest was one component of a prolonged period of strife between the people of Ogidi and Igwe Amobi, which Onitsha's district officer documented in early 1915 as the "Ogidi Palaver."¹⁰² The *igwe* argued that moving the market to the recently constructed main road would bring more revenue to the town,¹⁰³ and such an argument should not be dismissed out of hand. That is, despite his consistent pattern of maltreatment of the people of Ogidi over the previous decade, it is at least possible that Amobi really did believe that his relocation plan would boost the local economy. Be that as it may, however, the essence of the conflict was between the *igwe*'s authority, on the one hand, and on the other, that of the udo oracle who owned the market and of *umuokpu Ogidi* who acted as its custodians. Afo Udo market was held on every Afo day, one of the four days of the Igbo week. It was a large and popular market, regularly attended by traders from within and outside Ogidi, and by buyers from Ogbunike, Nkpor, Onitsha, and even as far away as Nnewi and Aguleri.¹⁰⁴

Being a bustling marketplace was not Afo Udo's only significance, however. Indigenous Igbo legal practice required that, if a serious matter arose in Ikenga, the complainant could report it to the men's masquerade society that met at Idemili Square,¹⁰⁵ which was situated on the Afo Udo market grounds, at which point the town crier would alert all the members of the quarter to

¹⁰² NAE, OP 174/1914 ONPROF 7/1/13: "Complaint by certain villages," 21 January 1915 letter from the District Officer, Onitsha to the Commissioner, Onitsha Province. The colonial labeling of the incident inspired the title of Nwando Achebe's 2011 chapter on this protest. Achebe, "'Ogidi Palaver,'" 23-51.

¹⁰³ NAE, OP 174/1914 ONPROF 7/1/13: "Complaint by certain villages," 21 January 1915 letter, 7; Achebe, "'Ogidi Palaver,'" 25, 30.

¹⁰⁴ Clement Ifedi, in Anyegbunam, "The External Relations of Ogidi," 111; Chike Okeke, interview by Anthonia Uchenna Anyegbunam, Nkwele Ezunaka, 23 September 1983, in Anyegbunam, "The External Relations of Ogidi," 132; Ichie Ezigbo Otuo, interview by Anthonia Uchenna Anyegbunam, Uru Ogidi, 25 September 1983, in Anyegbunam, "The External Relations of Ogidi," 134; Nwosu Enwude, interview by Arinze Ernest Agbogu, Ikenga Ogidi, 12 December 1974, in Agbogu, "Ogidi Before 1891," 47; Ezeudo, in Agbogu, "Ogidi Before 1891," 93; Sir Albert Obi Ezeigbo, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 11 April 2018; Chief Lawrence Nwankwo Onwuteaka, interview by the author, 4 April 2018; Chukwuka Jerry Okongwu and Chukwudi M. Okongwu, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 2 May 2018; Ibemesi, *Ogidi*, 54.

¹⁰⁵ A shrine for idemili was located nearby, thus giving the square its name.

converge there to witness the *egwugwu* council adjudicate the dispute.¹⁰⁶ The location of Afo Udo market was selected because of its proximity to Ogidi's main udo shrine.¹⁰⁷ There were important laws of the Afo Udo market to which all custodians, merchants, and customers were expected to adhere. For example, udo prohibited stealing from the market, and it is said that he would kill any thief by afflicting him or her with severe and sudden illness.¹⁰⁸ Udo appointed certain age grades of Ikenga men to patrol the market, and *umuokpu* to be the market's custodians, with these men's and women's groups jointly taking charge of Afo Udo in weekly rotations: the people that swept the market on a designated Afo day were in charge of what happened in the market during the rest of that day.¹⁰⁹ The women who swept the marketplace grounds divided themselves into groups, each with its own leader, to whom any problems during market hours were to be reported.¹¹⁰

The Initial Injustice

Amobi's unilateral decision to move the market from its location near the udo shrine to the site along Trunk A Road angered the oracle.¹¹¹ After the move was announced, the *umuokpu* Ogidi approached the priest of udo in their annual consultation, on or around March 23,¹¹² to find out whether the coming year would be prosperous.¹¹³ In this meeting, the oracle asked the women through his intermediary, the priest, "How will the year be good when you were all there and the

¹⁰⁶ This judicial process is explained in Chapter 2.

¹⁰⁷ Nweke Iwobi Godwin, Eze Udo, interview by the author; Ibemesi, *Ogidi*, 54.

¹⁰⁸ Chief Godwin Nweke Agbogu, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 13 July 2018; Nweke Iwobi Godwin, Eze Udo, interview by the author.

¹⁰⁹ Chief Godwin Nweke Agbogu, interview by the author; Chief Lawrence Nwankwo Onwuteaka, interview by the author, 4 April 2018; Nweke Iwobi Godwin, Eze Udo, interview by the author.

¹¹⁰ Mbanefo Osakwe, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 13 July 2018; Chief Godwin Nweke Agbogu, interview by the author; Nweke Iwobi Godwin, Eze Udo, interview by the author.

¹¹¹ Chief Godwin Nweke Agbogu, interview by the author; Chief Lawrence Nwankwo Onwuteaka, interview by the author, 4 April 2018; M. O. Onwugbufor, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 116; Achebe, "'Ogidi Palaver,'" 24-35, 32.

¹¹² Nwando Achebe determined this date based on colonial documents showing that the disturbance in the Onitsha court occurred on March 25 and oral histories noting that the court disturbance occurred a day after the women attempted to confront Igwe Amobi in his palace. For further explanation, see Achebe, "'Ogidi Palaver,'" 33, 48 *n.* 76.

¹¹³ Achebe, "'Ogidi Palaver,'" 33; Chief Isama Nwawularu Nwosu, in Onwugbufor, "Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy," 103.

Afo-Udo market was relocated. The year will not be good.”¹¹⁴ The women knew from that point that they were expected to right the wrong that Amobi had committed against udo. In short, Ogidi’s women decided to contest Amobi’s transfer of Afo Udo market because udo had declared it to be unlawful.¹¹⁵

After their meeting with the priest, *umuokpu Ogidi* sent a delegation of four women, one from each quarter, to the *igwe*’s palace to air their grievances with him. The representative of Ezinkwo quarter was one of Amobi’s in-laws named Emeghaa, and it is said that for a small bribe, she forewarned him about the impending meeting. In any case, when the women’s delegation arrived at the palace, he refused to meet with them. When the other three members of the women’s delegation realized that Amobi was avoiding them, they decided that they, along with cohorts of women from each quarter, would march the six miles to Onitsha on the following day to discuss the matter with the district officer.¹¹⁶ The Ogidi Native Court, which colonial officials would have preferred the women approach to resolve any such dispute, was not an option for *umuokpu Ogidi* because Amobi himself was its main arbitrator. If he would not allow the women’s delegation to approach him for a private discussion in his palace, it stood to reason that he would not have allowed them to bring a more public complaint against him in the native court. Thus, it was an audience with the next-highest tier of colonial government that they sought.

¹¹⁴ Chief Isama Nwawularu Nwosu, in Onwugbufor, “Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy,” 103; this is also cited in Achebe, “Ogidi Palaver,” 33.

¹¹⁵ Chief Nwosu Nwawulu Enwude, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 93-94; Chief Lawrence Agulefo, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 86; Chief Isama Nwawularu Nwosu, in Onwugbufor, “Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy,” 103-107; Iyom Udenkwo-Ekeobi Onwugbufor, in Onwugbufor, “The Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy,” 120-121; Professor Clement Chibuzo Amobi, interview by Princess Ebere Nweze, Iyi-Enu Ogidi, 24 June 2017, in Nweze, “The Biography of Igwe Walter Okafor Kwochaaka Amobi I, The First Warrant Chief of Ogidi 1904-1924” (B.A. Thesis, Department of History and International Studies, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, 2017), 79; High Chief Robinson Okudo (Esema), interview by the author, 14 September 2018; Nweke Okoye, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 12 March 2018; Chief Lawrence Nwankwo Onwuteaka, interview by the author, 4 April 2018; Dominic Nnamdi Obijiofor, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 17 April 2018.

¹¹⁶ Achebe, “Ogidi Palaver,” 33; Chief Isama Nwawularu Nwosu, in Onwugbufor, “Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy,” 104; Chief Nwosu Nwawulu Enwude, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 94.

Escalation of the Injustice

When Amobi learned of the women's plans to take their grievances to the district officer, he ordered his servants to push him in his wagon to Onitsha to preempt their meeting.¹¹⁷ Reaching the district officer first, Amobi used his influence as a colonial collaborator to convince the official of his innocence in the dispute with the women and, additionally, to accuse the *umuokpu Ogidi* of disturbing the peace in his town. When the women arrived at the court and learned of this deceitful interference, they became irritated and combative.¹¹⁸ In 1992, Ogidi elder Chief Isama Nwawularu Nwosu recalled, "When the women arrived [at] the court and heard about the Igwe's allegations they started fighting everybody in the court including the policemen and even the *kotmas*," i.e., court messengers.¹¹⁹ As a result of the fighting, police constables arrested fourteen women and confined them in Asaba Prison on the other side of the River Niger.¹²⁰ Among the detainees were the most prominent spokeswomen of the four quarters of Ogidi.¹²¹ The prison guards shaved the women's heads, an act deemed highly offensive not only because of their high status, but because head-shaving among women was normally reserved for those mourning their deceased husbands.¹²²

¹¹⁷ Achebe, "Ogidi Palaver," 33.

¹¹⁸ Chief Isama Nwawularu Nwosu, in Onwugbufor, "Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy," 104; Achebe, "Ogidi Palaver," 33.

¹¹⁹ Emphasis is my own, to reflect the Igbo rendering of the word. Chief Isama Nwawularu Nwosu, in Onwugbufor, "Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy," 104.

¹²⁰ Achebe, "Ogidi Palaver," 33-34; NAE, OP 174/1914 ONPROF 7/1/13: "Complaint by certain villages," 21 January 1915 letter, 2; High Chief Robinson Okudo (Esema), interview by the author, 14 September 2018. There was a prison at Onitsha at that time, but it could hold less than 200 inmates. It must have been filled to capacity, which seems a likely reason for sending the women of Ogidi to the more distant Asaba Prison. See NAE, ONPROF 11/1/4: "Onitsha Province Annual Report for 1913," 14; NAE, ONPROF 11/1/5: "Report on the Onitsha Province for the Year 1915," 42.

¹²¹ High Chief Robinson Okudo (Esema), interview by the author, 14 September 2018; Chief Lawrence Nwankwo Onwuteaka, interview by the author, 4 April 2018; Dominic Nnamdi Obijiofor, interview by the author.

¹²² Achebe, "Ogidi Palaver," 34; NAE, OP 174/1914 ONPROF 7/1/13: "Complaint by certain villages," 21 January 1915 letter, 5, testimony from Ekuwah.

One of the imprisoned leaders, Anyafulu, sent word through a messenger to the *umuokpu* *Ogidi*, ordering all women to participate in a protest and to not cook for their husbands during the time that the spokeswomen remained in prison.¹²³ After receiving this message, a high proportion of the rest of the women of Ogidi¹²⁴ marched to Onitsha and settled in for a long wait in the field adjacent to the district officer's court, in a show of solidarity with the imprisoned women and to protest the unjustness of their imprisonment. This immense contingent made it clear that they would not return home unless and until their town's representatives were released, though some were sent back to Ogidi intermittently to replenish the protesters' food supplies. In addition, the men of Ogidi contributed yams, cocoyams, vegetables, and money towards that effort.¹²⁵ Ogidi's market was deserted, and there were no women to clean their compounds, cook for their husbands, or tend to other daily duties. As Achebe puts it, "Ogidi was brought to a stand still."¹²⁶

On each day of the women's sit-in, they went to the district officer to reiterate their initial grievance: that Amobi did not have the authority to relocate Afo Udo market. At night, the women stayed with friends in Onitsha who fed and sheltered them.¹²⁷ Even Ogidi women who were pregnant remained there for weeks until the colonial government released their imprisoned leaders. A few of my most elderly oral history collaborators affirmed that some members of the Akpaka age grade were born in the field by the courthouse,¹²⁸ their mothers forgoing the comfort and safety

¹²³ Ifeude Okeke, interview by the author.

¹²⁴ While many sources state that all or many of the women of Ogidi participated in this protest at Onitsha, Chief Isama Nwawularu Nwosu (in Onwugbufor, "Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy," 104) said that all Ogidi women—with the exception of those who had recently given birth and who therefore needed to stay at home with their infants while performing *omugwo*—participated. *Omugwo* is a practice in which a woman stays with her daughter, who is a new mother, so as to allow her to recover from labor and to teach her about proper childcare.

¹²⁵ Chief Isama Nwawularu Nwosu, in Onwugbufor, "Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy," 105; High Chief Robinson Okudo, interview by the author, 14 September 2018

¹²⁶ Achebe, "'Ogidi Palaver,'" 34.

¹²⁷ Achebe, "'Ogidi Palaver,'" 34.

¹²⁸ Sir Albert Obi Ezegbo, interview by the author; High Chief Robinson Okudo (Esema), interview by the author, 14 September 2018; Chief Lawrence Nwankwo Onwuteaka, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 31 October 2018. One of the eldest men in Ogidi as of 2018 was Chief Lawrence Nwankwo Onwuteaka, who told me that he was born

of their own compounds in a remarkable show of solidarity for justice. As Achebe notes, “*umuokpu Ogidi* gathered at the court compound, singing in loud voices that Igwe Amobi had no right to move their market. Every morning, for several days, the women would return singing and dancing until nightfall.”¹²⁹

Most oral history collaborators, whether interviewed by other researchers or by me, did not specify how long the Ogidi women in Asaba Prison remained there.¹³⁰ However, Achebe calculates that it was more than fourteen days, because on April 9—fourteen days after the March 25 incident at the district officer’s court—some Ogidi women attempted to rescue their leaders from the prison.¹³¹ According to a letter to the district officer of Onitsha written by the assistant district officer, H. Rayner Eaton,

a disturbance took place on 9 April over an attempt to rescue certain convicted prisoners, a previous disturbance was made in Onitsha Court by the Market women of Ogidi on 25 March. I am satisfied that but for the presence of a strong police guard at Ogidi on 29 [*sic*]¹³² April a rescue would have been attempted of certain prisoners convicted of conduct likely to cause a breach of the peace by attending a meeting at Abocha for the purpose of subverting the authority of the Hd. Chief Amobi.¹³³

Ogidi women’s concerted effort to free their spokeswomen required a high level of organization: it involved crossing the great River Niger, entering a guarded prison, and exiting with their imprisoned comrades. The assistant district officer said he suspected the date of April 9 was chosen

in 1915 and that he is a member of the Akpaka age grade. The years of the Akpaka grade, 1914 to 1918, are corroborated by the age grade table in Ibemesi, *Ogidi*, 85.

¹²⁹ Achebe, “Ogidi Palaver,” 34.

¹³⁰ Besides Chief Nwosu Nwawulu Enwude (in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 94), who stated that the women were imprisoned for two Igbo market weeks, i.e., eight days, and High Chief Robinson Okudo (Esema) (interview by the author, 1 March 2018), who contended that it was for one Igbo month, i.e., 28 days, no collaborators offered a time frame for the women’s imprisonment.

¹³¹ Achebe, “Ogidi Palaver,” 34, 50 *n.* 85.

¹³² The assistant district officer mistakenly wrote 29 April, but clearly meant 9 April as had previously noted in the first line of the letter.

¹³³ NAE, OP 174/1914 ONPROF 7/1/13: “Complaint by certain villages,” page 4 of 30 April 1914 note from H. Rayner Eaton, the Assistant District Officer, Onitsha, to the District Officer, Onitsha; this is also cited in Achebe, “Ogidi Palaver,” 34-35.

so that they could bring the prisoners back to Ogidi to attend a meeting at Abocha market¹³⁴ in which Ogidi women (or perhaps important Ogidi leaders, both men and women) planned to discuss how to defeat their corrupt warrant chief and *igwe*. Eaton's above mention of a "strong police guard at Ogidi" most likely referred to a detachment of British police officers sent from Onitsha to monitor the escalating tensions among the people of Ogidi, and who apparently discovered rumblings of the imminent rescue plot and reported it to the authorities of Asaba Prison.

Even though the rescue mission failed, it marked a turning point in the protest. Ogidi women were no longer combating only Amobi's tyranny but also the colonial administration's complicity in the *igwe*'s unwarranted authority and influence. *Umuokpu Ogidi* must initially have viewed the colonial administration as a viable mechanism for the quick restoration of justice, for otherwise one of their primary strategies would not have been to beseech the district officer for his assistance in convincing Amobi to return Afo Udo to its rightful place. But with the imprisonment of the women's delegation, the administration had made itself an obstacle to the women's pursuit of justice. In protest, the women again marched to the Onitsha court, this time with charcoal painted on their partially naked bodies—occupying it for several days, "singing songs that outlined their grievances."¹³⁵ The women dressing in war garb was a sign that by jailing their leaders, the British had started a war with Ogidi's women, and that the latter did not back down in such circumstances. Marching to the court to make their complaints against Amobi, fighting the police and messengers there after Amobi slandered them, attempting to break their spokeswomen out of prison, and protesting outside the Onitsha court during the leaders' imprisonment were instances

¹³⁴ Abocha was a small market in Ogidi where this meeting was meant to be held. Abocha is referenced as an Ogidi market in NAE, OP 174/1914 ONPROF 7/1/13: "Complaint by certain villages," page 1 of 30 April 1914 note from H. Rayner Eaton; Achebe, "Ogidi Palaver," 50.

¹³⁵ Direct quotation from Achebe, "Ogidi Palaver," 38; similar description offered by High Chief Robinson Okudo (Esema), interview by the author, 14 September 2018.

of women ‘making war’ against Amobi and other colonial agents to enact justice in accordance with indigenous Igbo law and, where necessary, in defiance of colonial law.

‘Making War’ on Amobi

On the day of the delegation’s release from Asaba Prison, the main body of Ogidi women went to Onitsha’s Otu market¹³⁶ and bought an Ijele masquerade to accompany them in their return march to Ogidi.¹³⁷ Round, and built of fabric, wooden sticks, and other materials, an Ijele stands some fifteen to twenty feet tall and about eight feet wide, and is considered the most magnificent of all Igbo masquerades.¹³⁸ As noted in Chapter 2, masquerades represent the spirits of departed ancestors and only appear on significant occasions such as intimidating alleged criminals or judging their offenses.¹³⁹ Historian Richard Henderson describes an Ijele observed in Onitsha as moving with “the stately grandeur of a person who has attained an honored position in life.”¹⁴⁰ It is a rare and special treat to see one.

¹³⁶ Otu market was the name of a market on bank of the River Niger in Onitsha.

¹³⁷ Achebe, “‘Ogidi Palaver,’” 35; High Chief Robinson Okudo (Esema), interview by the author, 14 September 2018; Chief Oraegbuna Joseph Iwobi, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 29 March 2018.

¹³⁸ The physical description is based on my observations during fieldwork, and the reputation of magnificence gleaned from Nwando Achebe, conversation with the author, 15 July 2019; Richard Henderson, *The King in Every Man: Evolutionary Trends in Onitsha Ibo Society and Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 350.

¹³⁹ Achebe, “‘Ogidi Palaver,’” 30; Daryll Forde and G. I. Jones, *The Igbo and Ibibio-Speaking Peoples of South-Eastern Nigeria* (London: International African Institute, 1967 [1950]), 26; Noo Udala, in *Igbo Worlds*, 74; Nnabuenyi Ugonna, *Mmonwu: A Dramatic Tradition of the Igbo* (Lagos: Lagos University Press, 1984), 2; P. Amaury Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria: A Sketch of Their History, Ethnology and Languages, with an Account of the 1921 Census Volume II Ethnology* (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), 767; Forde and Jones, *The Igbo and Ibibio-Speaking Peoples*, 26; Chinua Achebe, “Chi in Igbo Cosmology,” in *Morning Yet on Creation Day: Essays* (London: Heinemann, 1975), 95; Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 163; Nwosu Nwawulu, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, Ikenga Ogidi, 20 September 1978, in Nwabufu, “Traditional Law and Colonial Change,” 73; Ogbuefi Ezigbo Otue Unachukwu, in Nwabufu, “Traditional Law and Colonial Change,” 76.

¹⁴⁰ Henderson, *The King in Every Man*, 350.



Figure 11. Photograph of an Ijele Masquerade

Photograph taken by the author, February 16, 2018, at a burial ceremony in Ikenga, Ogidi

With this masquerade, the women sang and danced all the way from Onitsha to Ogidi. In their songs, they insulted Amobi and his in-law, Emeghaa, who had betrayed them, chanting, “*Okwo maka ofu ego na sisi Igba ogo ka Emeghaa ji we lia uno enu Igba ogo.*”—‘It is because of 1 shilling and 6 pence; and because Emeghaa is trying to be a good in-law, that she was able to climb the palace stairs and betray us.’¹⁴¹ In other words, they held Emeghaa to be blameworthy for accepting a paltry bribe to sabotage the *umuokpu*’s initial attempt to air their grievances to Amobi. For his part, Amobi had not only moved udo’s market and acquitted himself of any unjust or illegal action in front of the district officer, but also framed Ogidi’s women as having disturbed the peace. Thus, it was not only to sanction Amobi for offending udo, but also for his crimes

¹⁴¹ Direct quotation from Achebe, “Ogidi Palaver,” 35. Similar description offered by Chief Isama Nwawuluaru Nwosu, in Onwugbufo, “Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy,” 105.

against the women, that the Ijele was brought out, symbolizing their unwavering dedication to justice. As Achebe explains,

the fact that the women “bought” an Ijele masquerade is quite telling. It represents a very extreme act because women in Igboland are not allowed to “buy” or more appropriately put, “create” masked spirits. Their action, called *itiputa mmoo*, symbolized a dissolution of social discourse—they were in essence saying that things had gotten out of hand. What was more, the Ijele masquerade was the most expensive masked spirit in Igboland and Ijele masquerades were not known to “come out” frivolously. On the contrary, they only “came out” during important functions.¹⁴²

In other words, Ogidi women transgressed indigenous social norms for the sake of enacting indigenous justice, placing *omenani* above social etiquette. To reinforce one indigenous institution (female-centric law), they paradoxically had to break with another indigenous institution (social decorum). Not only were women not allowed to create masked spirits or to know the secrets of the masquerade society,¹⁴³ but uninitiated women,¹⁴⁴ which would have been a majority of those who participated in the protest, were supposed to run away when they saw a masquerade for fear of being flogged.¹⁴⁵ Henderson also notes that an Ijele was “generally escorted by men in their forties to sixties.”¹⁴⁶ Moreover, the Ijele would have been quite expensive, so gathering the money or trade goods necessary to bring it out demonstrates the commitment of Ogidi’s women to reminding Amobi that he was merely human in a society controlled by spirits.

Moreover, as Micheal Chinyelugo Mba—a man from Onitsha who was also *nwadiani Ogidi*¹⁴⁷—explained to a researcher in 1983, “masquerades from Onitsha never went to Ogidi

¹⁴² Achebe, “Ogidi Palaver,” 35.

¹⁴³ Chief Louis Okoye, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 82; Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 186; Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria Volume II*, 768.

¹⁴⁴ As noted in Chapter 3, to be initiated as *nne mmoo* (mother of the masquerade), one had to be a respected, exceptional, post-menopausal woman. See Achebe, “Ogidi Palaver,” 30.

¹⁴⁵ Afigbo, “A History of Igbo Traditional Textile Industry,” 240; Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 186; Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria Volume II*, 768.

¹⁴⁶ Henderson, *The King in Every Man*, 350.

¹⁴⁷ A person who is *nwadiani Ogidi* is a grandchild of Ogidi, meaning that his or her mother is from Ogidi but his or her father is not. Since most Igbo societies are patrilineal, such a person is not considered to be a son or daughter of

except for burial ceremonies.”¹⁴⁸ For anyone, especially women, to accompany an Ijele all the way from Onitsha to Ogidi can only have been an unusual sight. As the Igbo say, *awo adiro agba oso n’efifi n’efu*, which means “a toad does not run in the afternoon for nothing.” In other words, the rare or perhaps unprecedented appearance of an Ijele escorted by women and outside any burial context clearly signaled that something very serious and unusual was happening. Indeed, Igwe Amobi’s removal of the sacred Afo Udo market and his tarnishing of Ogidi women’s reputations through false allegations were grave issues that called for unique countermeasures. The women therefore took the liberty of expanding the parameters of the indigenous legal sanction of ‘making war’ to include bringing out a masquerade, for, as Achebe notes, “extraordinary events call for extraordinary action.”¹⁴⁹ Amobi’s flagrant disrespect for indigenous institutions and the orders of a deity had never occurred before. Because of this new offense, Ogidi women had to alter their indigenous penalty of ‘making war’ in a way that would make an impact on Amobi, therefore deterring him from committing more crimes and from continuing to disregard indigenous Igbo religion and law. For Udo’s displeasure at the removal of his market from its sacred location was a pressing issue, as was Amobi’s ongoing refusal to engage in a reasonable discussion of it with the market’s guardians. As the Igbo say, a man may refuse to do what he is asked, but he must not refuse to be asked.¹⁵⁰ Amobi did not heed this adage; he did not grant the women’s delegation even the basic courtesy of allowing them to articulate their grievance to him.

Because, as previously noted, the purpose of meting out punishment for an injustice was to right the balance of society that the injustice had incurred, the women’s censure of Amobi should

Ogidi because his or her father is not from there. Nonetheless, one’s mother’s land is still important to social ties, as expressed in Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 129-134.

¹⁴⁸ Micheal Chinyelugo Mba, in Anyegbunam, “The External Relations of Ogidi,” 117.

¹⁴⁹ Achebe, “‘Ogidi Palaver,’” 35.

¹⁵⁰ Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 193.

not be viewed as vindictive, but as a dutiful enactment of justice according to indigenous Igbo law. After they publicly admonished the *igwe*, the women returned to their own homes, saying, “no one should go to Amobi’s house.”¹⁵¹ This was followed up with a boycott of his market along the government road, coupled with a gathering at the original Afo Udo site. Because it had become overgrown during the weeks that had passed since the last market day there, the women told a group of adolescent boys to clear it of grass, in preparation for its reopening.¹⁵² On the next Afo day, in addition to food-stuffs, women brought weapons to the marketplace because they suspected the *igwe* would send court messengers to intimidate them.¹⁵³ Unsurprisingly, the *igwe* heard about the women’s gathering and indeed sent messengers to it. Coincidentally, the district officer was visiting Amobi on that day, and he volunteered to accompany the messengers to observe the original site of the market that had recently caused much discord in his court. As always clever and manipulative, Amobi instructed the messengers to take a circuitous route from the palace to Afo Udo to trick the district officer into thinking it was more distant from the road than it actually was, to help justify Amobi’s relocation of it.¹⁵⁴

Despite its supposed remoteness, when the district officer’s party arrived at Afo Udo, they found it teeming with people. This prompted him to call on udo’s priest to explain to him the quarrel between Amobi and the women.¹⁵⁵ Through an interpreter, the priest told the district officer that udo would surely kill anyone who tampered with his belongings, including his market. He also explained that if the criminal did not confess to the crime and appease udo before his death,

¹⁵¹ NAE, OP 174/1914 ONPROF 7/1/13: “Complaint by certain villages,” 21 January 1915 letter, 6.

¹⁵² Chief Isama Nwawularu Nwosu, in Onwugbufo, “Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy,” 105; Achebe, “Ogidi Palaver,” 36.

¹⁵³ Chief Isama Nwawularu Nwosu, in Onwugbufo, “Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy,” 105; Achebe, “Ogidi Palaver,” 36.

¹⁵⁴ Chief Isama Nwawularu Nwosu, in Onwugbufo, “Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy,” 105; Achebe, “Ogidi Palaver,” 36.

¹⁵⁵ Chief Isama Nwawularu Nwosu, in Onwugbufo, “Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy,” 106; Achebe, “Ogidi Palaver,” 36.

the oracle would continue to terrorize the offender's family "until the crime is found out and he is appeased."¹⁵⁶ Finally, the priest noted that udo was mighty enough to kill the district officer himself. Whether or not this official found such threats credible, it is remembered that he called for all Ogidi's people to meet at his court in Onitsha later that day to finally decide the matter.¹⁵⁷

While it would clearly have been impossible for all Ogidi residents to fit inside the Onitsha courthouse, such was the public interest in the case that all able-bodied adults who could afford to leave their work and household obligations on that day proceeded to Onitsha to await the district officer's decision.¹⁵⁸ Amobi bribed men from the neighboring towns of Ogbunike and Nkpor to attend the court session, and to support him "if it ever came to a vote."¹⁵⁹ However, these bribes would prove futile due to a speech made by Anyafulu, one of the spokeswomen of *umuokpu Ogidi* who had been imprisoned at Asaba. A spirited orator, she was able to convince those at the courthouse of the injustice of Amobi's actions. In the presence of the district officer, Igwe Amobi, and numerous men and women of Ogidi, Anyafulu declared that the issue at hand did not concern men because women—not men—bought and sold in the market, and used their market earnings to feed their children. Anyafulu then claimed that "Igwe Amobi brought out their market so that their children would die of hunger," noting that the women would not accept such treatment.¹⁶⁰ After Anyafulu's speech, the district officer asked the people present to vote by raising a finger¹⁶¹ to express who wanted to return Afo Udo to its original location near the udo shrine. Moved by

¹⁵⁶ Chief Isama Nwawuluaru Nwosu, in Onwugbufor, "Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy," 106.

¹⁵⁷ Dominic Nnamdi Obijiofor, interview by the author; Chief Isama Nwawuluaru Nwosu, in Onwugbufor, "Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy," 106; Achebe, "'Ogidi Palaver,'" 36.

¹⁵⁸ Chief Isama Nwawuluaru Nwosu, in Onwugbufor, "Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy," 106; Achebe, "'Ogidi Palaver,'" 36.

¹⁵⁹ Chief Isama Nwawuluaru Nwosu, in Onwugbufor, "Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy," 106.

¹⁶⁰ Direct quotation from Chief Isama Nwawuluaru Nwosu, in Onwugbufor, "Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy," 106; similarly stated in Achebe, "'Ogidi Palaver,'" 37.

¹⁶¹ This is the equivalent of voting by "show of hands." The "raising of fingers" phrasing can be found in Chief Isama Nwawuluaru Nwosu, in Onwugbufor, "Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy," 106-107.

Anyafulu’s powerful oration, nearly everyone voted in support—even, it is said, the men from Ogbunike and Nkpor that Amobi had bribed.¹⁶² Indeed, the only significant bloc of voters who favored the market remaining near Amobi’s palace consisted of members of his own family.¹⁶³ The district officer then ordered that “on every Afo day, the Afo-Udo market would hold but [on] other market days, the one at the main road would function.”¹⁶⁴ Thus, Afo Udo market was returned to its original location, under the protection of udo and Ogidi women.¹⁶⁵

“The Lizard that Climbed the *Oji* Tree is Not a Little Lizard”: Examining the Spokeswomen of *Umuokpu Ogidi*

Ogidi oral histories record the names of four individuals who led the actions to sanction Amobi in 1914: Anyafulu, Ajamana, Ikwubia, and Nwaodu Ibeazor—Anyafulu being the most senior.¹⁶⁶ These prominent women were all *umuokpu Ogidi*, and all happened to be *ndinyom* in the Ogidi-Ani village of Ezinkwo quarter.¹⁶⁷ One reason these particular women were so influential in Ogidi was that they were both born and married there. As noted above, women from other towns who married into Ogidi families did not hold as much authority or command as much respect as the women born in Ogidi. Additionally, though they participated in protecting the markets, *ndinyom* held no responsibility in maintaining religious morality. Presumably for these reasons,

¹⁶² Achebe, “‘Ogidi Palaver,’” 37; Chief Isama Nwawularu Nwosu, in Onwugbufor, “Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy,” 106.

¹⁶³ Achebe, “‘Ogidi Palaver,’” 37; Chief Isama Nwawularu Nwosu, in Onwugbufor, “Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy,” 107; Iyom Udenkwo-Ekeobi Onwugbufor, in Onwugbufor, “The Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy,” 121; Chief Lawrence Agulefo, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 86; M. O. Onwugbufor, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 116.

¹⁶⁴ Chief Isama Nwawularu Nwosu, in Onwugbufor, “Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy,” 107.

¹⁶⁵ Achebe, “‘Ogidi Palaver,’” 37; Chief Nwosu Nwawulu Enwude, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 93.

¹⁶⁶ Explanation of the proverb used in the heading above: in Igbo, this proverb reads *ngwere riri oji aburu nwa ngwe*. From my notes for an Igbo language course at Michigan State University, 18 April 2017.

¹⁶⁷ Theresa Odinye, interview by the author; Ifeoma Chiegbu, interview by the author; High Chief Robinson Okudo (Esema), interview by the author, 14 September 2018; Chief Nwabuoku Osakwe (Dibueni Nwanyi), interview by the author, 2 October 2018; Ifeude Okeke, interview by the author; Edmund Okonkwo, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 27 August 2018.

most of the written and oral sources that discuss the women's market protest refer to the actions of all Ogidi women, or to *umuokpu Ogidi*, but not to the *ndinyom* specifically.

Ogidi's people respected and feared the four above-named women as spokespeople of *umuokpu Ogidi*, even before the 1914 women's market protest. Ajamana, for example, was an Ekwe titleholder and a priestess of the erulu deity.¹⁶⁸ My oral history collaborator Virginia Onwunyili explained that, because of Ajamana's leadership within *otu umuokpu Ogidi* and her relationship to the powerful erulu, she was one of the spokeswomen for *umuokpu* who sat as judges in cases of alleged *nso ani* brought by both men and women.¹⁶⁹ According to Ifeude Okeke, another of my collaborators, Anyafulu, Ajamana, and Ikwubia "were not intimidated. You could not take what belongs to them and go free. You could not impose levy or fees on them; they would refuse and get the support of other women and they [would] stand for it until the end."¹⁷⁰ On March 25, 1914, Anyafulu, Ajamana, and Ikwubia were among the fourteen women arrested and imprisoned for fighting the Onitsha courthouse messengers and police constables.¹⁷¹

The most famous of these spokeswomen, Anyafulu, a market woman specializing in salt, was known throughout Ogidi as a strong woman who stood for justice.¹⁷² According to one of my collaborators, Chief Christian Nweke Ibeazor, she was small in stature, fair in complexion, and quite stubborn and confrontational.¹⁷³ Men, women, and children feared Anyafulu because of her

¹⁶⁸ Ifeoma Chiegbu, interview by the author; Chief Christian Nweke Ibeazor, interview by the author; Virginia Onwunyili, interview by the author, Ikenga, Ogidi, 30 August 2018.

¹⁶⁹ Virginia Onwunyili, interview by the author.

¹⁷⁰ Ifeude Okeke, interview by the author.

¹⁷¹ Ifeude Okeke, interview by the author; Ifeoma Chiegbu, interview by the author; High Chief Robinson Okudo (Esema), interview by the author, 14 September 2018. It is inconclusive whether the fourth woman, Nwaodu Ibeazor, was also imprisoned.

¹⁷² Ifeoma Chiegbu, interview by the author; Dominic Nnamdi Obijiofor, interview by the author; Chief Christian Nweke Ibeazor, interview by the author.

¹⁷³ Chief Christian Nweke Ibeazor, interview by the author.

relentless quest for justice.¹⁷⁴ The full praise name by which she is remembered in Ogidi today is *Anyafulu Kuja Okpegbulu Mmoo*, which means “your eyes see me, you are startled or terrified, because I defeated the masquerade”; and Achebe conjectures that the “you” in this praise “most likely refers to both Igwe Amobi and the British District Officer.”¹⁷⁵ If this is correct, then Anyafulu earned her praise name through her actions in the women’s market protest.

A few of my oral history collaborators labeled Anyafulu a troublemaker.¹⁷⁶ Her granddaughter, Ifeude Okeke, explained that “she lived a troublesome life. A man could not intimidate her in anything. She was very strong. She was the leader of the women. She could not be intimidated, so she went to jail a lot of times for her stubbornness.”¹⁷⁷ From this description, it is reasonable to interpret “making trouble” or being “troublesome” as a positive attribute, while the label itself might have stuck due to colonial influence. Certainly, Anyafulu caused the district officer quite a bit of trouble by fighting his court messengers and instigating a protest outside his court, so it is possible that Ogidi people’s memory of her is tied to the colonial term.

Discourse about “troublemakers” abounds in scholarship on colonial Africa.¹⁷⁸ In varied contexts, European colonial officials deemed as “troublemakers” African individuals and groups

¹⁷⁴ Chief Christian Nweke Ibezor, interview by the author; Edmund Okonkwo, interview by the author; Ifeoma Chiegbu, interview by the author; Ifeude Okeke, interview by the author.

¹⁷⁵ Interpretation given by Achebe, “Ogidi Palaver,” 51; the full praise name is also stated by Chief Isama Nwawuluaru Nwosu, in Onwugbufor, “Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy,” 106.

¹⁷⁶ Ifeoma Chiegbu, interview by the author; Ifeude Okeke, interview by the author; Edmund Okonkwo, interview by the author; Chief Christian Nweke Ibezor, interview by the author.

¹⁷⁷ Ifeude Okeke, interview by the author.

¹⁷⁸ Toyin Falola, “Manufacturing Trouble’: Currency Forgery in Colonial Southwestern Nigeria,” *African Economic History* 25 (1997): 121-147; Hal Brands, “Wartime Recruiting Practices, Martial Identity and Post-World War II Demobilization in Colonial Kenya,” *The Journal of African History* 46, no. 1 (2005): 103-125; Caroline Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning: The Untold Story of Britain’s Gulag in Kenya* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2005); Marina E. Santoru, “The Colonial Idea of Women and Direct Intervention: The Mau Mau Case,” *African Affairs* 95, no. 397 (1996): 253-267; Kathleen Keller, *Colonial Suspects: Suspicion, Imperial Rule, and Colonial Society in Interwar French West Africa* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018), esp. 149-152; Ikanyeng S. Malila, “The Role of Punishment in the Political Subordination of the Dikgosi in Colonial Botswana,” *Botswana Notes and Records* 44 (2012): 13-24; Anusa Daimon, “Ringleaders and Troublemakers’: Malawian (Nyasa) Migrants and Transnational Labor Movements in Southern Africa, c. 1910-1960,” *Labor History* 58, no. 5 (2017): 656-675; David Meredith, “The Colonial Office, British Business Interests and the Reform of Cocoa Marketing in West Africa, 1937-1945,” *The Journal of African History* 29, no. 2 (1988): 285-300; Stacey Hynd, “Pickpockets, Pilot Boys, and Prostitutes: The

who presented political threats, real or imagined, to the stability of the colonial government. “Troublemakers”—whether actual revolutionaries or mere rule breakers—were the bane of colonial administrations across Africa. In the aftermath of the 1929 Igbo Women’s War, for instance, the British launched investigations aimed at identifying the “ringleaders” of the “frenzied mobs” of women who protested the corruption of warrant chiefs, native courts, and colonialism more generally.¹⁷⁹ They interviewed colonial officials as well as Igbo and Ibibio men, many of them native court employees—but only some women—in the Calabar and Owerri provinces. The government sought not only to uncover the galvanizers of the so-called riots but also to determine which towns to reprimand under the Collective Punishment Ordinance of 1912, which allowed it to fine entire communities for alleged infractions by some of their members.¹⁸⁰ Although not explicitly labeled “troublemakers,” these Igbo and Ibibio women caused the colonial government significant trouble by ‘making war.’ In the Ogidi women’s market protest, the “troublemakers” were not military revolutionaries, migrants, or counterfeiters,¹⁸¹ but rather resolute, outspoken women who upheld indigenous Igbo law in the face of male-centric colonial rule. What Anyafulu

Construction of Juvenile Delinquency in the Gold Coast [Colonial Ghana], c. 1929-57,” *Journal of West African History* 4, no. 2 (2018): 47-74; Matera, Misty, and Kingsley Kent, *The Women’s War of 1929*, esp. 188-234; Falola and Paddock, *The Women’s War of 1929*, esp. 94-99.

¹⁷⁹ Matera, Misty, and Kingsley Kent, *The Women’s War of 1929*, 206, 208; Falola and Paddock, *The Women’s War of 1929*, 81-83.

¹⁸⁰ Matera, Misty, and Kingsley Kent, *The Women’s War of 1929*, 31, 218; Falola and Paddock, *The Women’s War of 1929*, 81-82.

¹⁸¹ These categorizes reference other instances of Africans whom colonial administrations labeled as “troublesome.” Historian Hal Brands (“Wartime Recruiting Practices,” 119) notes that after World War II, the Kenyan colonial government viewed veterans who were capable of “fomenting unrest” among the populace—those who wanted to organize other former soldiers to protect or bolster their labor rights—as potential troublemakers. Also in the 1950s, in the midst of the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (KLFA) conflict, as historian Marina E. Santoru (*The Colonial Idea of Women*, 263) contends, the “very black” or most “unrepentant Mau Mau women” were deemed troublemakers and isolated in their own cells in the concentration camps. Historian Anusa Daimon (“Ringleaders and Troublemakers,” 657) notes that in Rhodesia and South Africa from 1910 to 1960, the government labeled as ringleaders and troublemakers the Nyasa migrants who, it said, “spread discontent among the supposedly passive and happy Rhodesian and South African ‘natives.’” According to historian Toyin Falola (“Manufacturing Trouble,” 129), the Nigerian colonial government and public of the 1930s to 1950s labeled Yoruba currency-counterfeiters “criminals” and “troublemakers” while the counterfeiters themselves viewed their work not as criminal, but as surviving on their “cleverness.”

had in common with other so-called troublemakers across the continent was that she stood up for and was vocal about her authority, which in her case stemmed not from the colonial administration but from indigenous Igbo cosmology, law, and religion.

Some of my oral history collaborators noted that while Anyafulu was tenacious about serious matters, she did not cause trouble over small ones.¹⁸² Therefore, her “troublemaking” in the Onitsha court—a fairly mild term, given that she took on one of the most powerful and feared men in all of Onitsha Province and suffered imprisonment for it—signaled to those who knew her that the matter of the *igwe*’s offenses must have been serious. Then, when the district officer invited Ogidi indigenes to his court to make a final decision about the market’s location, it was Anyafulu’s defiance of Amobi’s authority, and her public condemnation of his actions, that convinced the majority to vote in favor of returning the market to its spirit-authorized location.

Interpreting the Enactments of Justice during the Women’s Market Protest

Walter Amobi may have considered himself superior both to his people and to indigenous Igbo laws, but the women of Ogidi refused to accept his transfer of Afo Udo because their duties included preserving the peace of the markets and ensuring the sanctity of the community. As Meek observed, Igbo women, particularly *umuokpu*, were expected to “perform annual rites in honour of their deity” and anyone who repudiated their authority “would be regarded as guilty of sacrilege.”¹⁸³ Amobi’s disregard for the women’s authority, and therefore of the authority of the udo oracle, was considered heinous irreverence. For this reason, it was the women’s responsibility

¹⁸² Edmund Okonkwo, interview by the author; Ifeoma Chiegbu, interview by the author; Ifeude Okeke, interview by the author; Chief Christian Nweke Ibeazor, interview by the author.

¹⁸³ Meek, *Law and Authority*, 169.

to restore justice by returning the market to its original location near udo's shrine by any means available.

The women's initial attempts to approach Amobi at his palace, their quest to air their grievances to the district officer, their confrontations with colonial police and messengers, their sit-in at Onitsha, their attempted rescue mission at Asaba Prison, their bringing out of an Ijele masquerade, and their boycott of Amobi's new market were all evidence of Ogidi women's judicial and religious authority. It was the duty of the women—and especially of the *umuokpu*—to protect the morality of Ogidi by following the decrees of the oracle udo, even when faced with an unprecedented and daunting offender. An Igbo proverb exemplifies the resolve of Ogidi women during these events: *anumanu a na-egbe egbe, o na-akpa nri*, which means “although an animal is being pursued by a hunter who is shooting at it, the animal continues to search for food.”¹⁸⁴ In other words, a determined person does not allow danger or difficulty to deter her from pursuing legitimate goals.

A particularly crucial action that the women took in this series of confrontations with Amobi was that they “swore against him.”¹⁸⁵ This type of swearing, expressed in the phrases *e gbu ikpele n'ani* (“judged and killed by ani”) and *ibu onu* (“to curse”), involved women kneeling on the ground or placing their hand on the ground as they called upon ani to punish the *igwe* for his severe offences.¹⁸⁶ Kneeling or touching the earth while uttering curses against the offender could

¹⁸⁴ From my notes for an Igbo language course at Michigan State University, 20 September 2015.

¹⁸⁵ Chief Hillary Osegbo, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 24 April 2018; Chief David N. C. Akobi, interview by the author, Akanano Ogidi, 25 April 2018; Chief Ozoekwe Clement Okudo, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 27 April 2018; Chief Oraegbuna Joseph Iwobi, interview by the author; Oduche Cyril Okafo, interview by the author; Ifeude Okeke, interview by the author; Theresa Odinye, interview by the author; Joy Ufodiana, interview by the author; Udoh Boniface Uyanwa, interview by the author, Akanano Ogidi, 13 April 2018.

¹⁸⁶ Chief Nwabuoku Osakwe (Dibueni Nwanyi), interview by the author, 2 October 2018; Patience Nweke, interview by the author; Theresa Odinye, interview by the author; Joy Ufodiana, interview by the author; Udoh Boniface Uyanwa, interview by the author; Chief Oraegbuna Joseph Iwobi, interview by the author; Chief Hillary Osegbo, interview by the author.

be interpreted as a symbolic and spiritual action, letting everyone know that the case was out of the hands of women, and in those of the earth goddess herself, and those of other spiritual forces who work on her behalf. For as we have seen, in Igbo cosmology, *ani* is the preeminent prescriber and protector of law. My oral history collaborators disagree on precisely when this cursing occurred within the sequence of events collectively known as the women's market protest; but on balance, it seems likely that it took place at the climax of the action, i.e., when the women brought the Ijele to the *igwe*'s palace, for these women would have perceived swearing against him and asking *ani* to deliver justice as a last resort. After all, as mentioned in Chapter 2, the transgressions of one member of society could bring the wrath of *ani* upon the whole town. *Umuokpu Ogidi* were charged with judging and sanctioning those who committed *nso ani*, and it was generally only when these human actors could not accomplish such goals that the even higher judicial authority of the earth goddess intervened. Thus, beseeching *ani* to deal with Amobi directly exemplified the women's confidence in the supremacy of spiritual forces within their society's system of governance, and particularly in the power of a *female* spiritual force.

Another important element of the climax of the women's actions was their march with the Ijele masquerade to Amobi's palace during which they donned red fezzes, replicas of the chieftaincy caps that Amobi had introduced to Ogidi after he became the town's first warrant chief in 1903.¹⁸⁷ Starting in the southern Igbo town of Ikot Ekpene around the turn of the twentieth century, the practice of distributing these caps to warrant chiefs quickly spread throughout the Igbo hinterland, and the caps themselves had become emblematic of warrant chiefs by 1914, with communities perceiving them as a symbol of such chiefs' superiority to all other non-Europeans.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁷ M. O. Onwugbufor, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 116; Chief Akunwafor Osegbo (Omeka), interview by Chukwuma C. C. Osakwe, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 99; Achebe, "Ogidi Palaver," 36.

¹⁸⁸ A. E. Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs: Indirect Rule in Southeastern Nigeria 1891-1929* (London: Longman Group Limited, 1972), 105; Gailey, *The Road to Aba*, 64.

Thus, the women's appropriation of this symbol can be seen—and was probably seen at the time—as a challenge to the whole system by which indirect colonial rule operated. As Achebe notes, the women's decision to wear the fez caps “could be interpreted as calling into question or mocking the Igwe office and in extension autocratic and absolute masculinities,” and “was also in keeping with the traditional patterns of employing derisive means to outline women's grievances.”¹⁸⁹ It was arguably a mockery of all warrant chiefs and therefore of the colonial administration itself. By wearing the replica red fezzes while ‘making war’ on Amobi, the women seemed to call attention to two issues: that Amobi had defied *omenani-udo* and therefore *omenani* itself by moving the market, and that colonial rule—including but not limited to Amobi's distortion of the *ezebodo* title and invention of the *igwe* office—was not good for Ogidi. For, had it not been for the colonial administration's invention of warrant chiefs, Amobi's tyranny would not have been feasible.

While I do not contend that the Ogidi women's market protest in any way precipitated the events of the 1929 Women's War, which occurred in a different part of Igboland, it is noteworthy that the Ogidi protest lends further support for what historians Toyin Falola and Adam Paddock deem “a long held African interpretation of colonialism that suggests that European interference and control was opposed throughout the duration of imperial rule” rather than only during the few years leading to independence.¹⁹⁰ Falola and Paddock propose that the Women's War is evidence in favor of such an interpretation; and I would argue that the Ogidi women's market protest is as well, being an even earlier example of Igbo women's challenge to colonial rule, and in particular, the essentially unbridled authority of colonial collaborators such as Walter Amobi. In the same year that Britain consolidated the colony of Nigeria and began to intensify the implementation of

¹⁸⁹ Achebe, “Ogidi Palaver,” 39.

¹⁹⁰ Falola and Paddock, *The Women's War of 1929*, 75.

the warrant chief system in Igboland, the women of Ogidi made a mockery of male-centric colonial rule, which can straightforwardly be construed as a form of opposition to it.

That being said, it should be made clear that resistance to colonialism does not appear to be the women's main aim. This event and the two other Ogidi women's protests mentioned above should be viewed as more than just resistance: primarily as enactments of justice brought down from the highest court of the human realm. The women of Ogidi had long-since held the responsibility to sanction offenders whose crimes threatened *omenani*, i.e., the balance of their society. I assert that the women did not set out to challenge colonial rule or even male-centric rule *because* they were colonial or male-centric, but rather because what the male-centric, colonial rule presented in the case of moving Afo Udo market (and to a lesser extent in the cases of the trading company demonstration and the ankle-bell protest) was a threat to the justice and balance that members of the indigenous Igbo society enjoyed by way of respecting *omenani*.

A Male-centric View of Female-centric Enactments of Justice

The ways in which the men of Ogidi confronted Walter Amobi very often involved litigation in the native court or petitioning of colonial officials, as evidenced by the many complaints that Ogidi chiefs lodged against Amobi as detailed in the January 1915 memorandum on the "Ogidi Palaver."¹⁹¹ In short, *oge ndi ocha chilu*, men tended to use the colonial legal and administrative system to try to sanction Amobi, and often as individuals or in small contingents. As we saw in the previous chapter, Ofoka of Ikenga quarter acted alone in his challenge to Amobi's kingship, and Obiefuna, also of Ikenga quarter, individually challenged Amobi's order that suitors must pay him the bride price for women who were not his daughters.

¹⁹¹ See NAE, OP 174/1914 ONPROF 7/1/13: "Complaint by certain villages," 21 January 1915 letter.

In contrast, women often protested *en masse* and used indigenous legal sanctions more often than seeking justice in the colonial legal system. The trading-company demonstration, the ankle-bell protest, and the Afo Udo market protest all exemplify Ogidi women's collective measures to challenge threats to the maintenance of justice. There was a strong sense of solidarity among Ogidi women, and a similar solidarity was later witnessed in portions of Igboland during the 1929 Women's War.¹⁹² In Ogidi as in the towns involved in the Women's War, Igbo women drew on the judicial authority with which *ani* had ordained them. As Achebe notes, "the behavior of the women in the 1914 Ogidi women's market protest can be viewed as an extension of the ways in which Igbo women took care of their interests in pre-colonial society" through "group tactics of negotiation, striking, boycotting, sitting in and when all else failed, 'making war' on offenders."¹⁹³ Indeed, as we have seen, Ogidi women used every one of these strategies in 1914 in defense of Afo Udo market. Achebe also argues that the women's physical struggle with Onitsha court messengers and police and the attempted rescue of the spokeswomen from Asaba Prison can be interpreted as instances of 'making war': since physical beating of an offender (the court employees that supported or protected Amobi) and releasing of all of his or her animals (or in this case, the imprisoned women) were aspects of 'making war' aimed at demonstrating the severity of the crime that had been committed.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹² When asked why women collectively protested during the Women's War, several participants expressed that women needed to act together to challenge the injustice that colonial rule had caused, and that they were willing to risk their lives in the process. See Rosanah Ogwe, "The Testimony of Rosanah Ogwe," 22 April 1930, Document 117 of Enquiries into the Aba Native Court Area Convened at Aba, Proceedings before the Commission of Inquiry into Disturbances in the Calabar and Owerri Provinces, NAE, CE/K5A, reprinted in Falola and Paddock, *The Women's War of 1929*, 641; Enyeremaka, "The Testimony of Enyeremaka," 15 March 1930, Document 14 of Enquiries Convened at Umudike, Proceedings before the Commission of Inquiry into Disturbances in the Calabar and Owerri Provinces, NAE, CE/K5A, reprinted in Falola and Paddock, *The Women's War of 1929*, 307; Ikodia, "The Testimony of Ikodia," 14 March 1930, Document 1 of Enquiries Convened at Umudike, Proceedings before the Commission of Inquiry into Disturbances in the Calabar and Owerri Provinces, NAE, CE/K5A, reprinted in Falola and Paddock, *The Women's War of 1929*, 269. Also, my oral history collaborator, Sir Albert Obi Ezegbo, spoke of such female solidarity as common in Igbo society, interview by the author.

¹⁹³ Achebe, "'Ogidi Palaver,'" 37.

¹⁹⁴ Achebe, "'Ogidi Palaver,'" 38.

The nine-page “Palaver” memorandum sent by the district officer of Onitsha to the commissioner of Onitsha Province in January 1915 mentioned the women’s protests and imprisonment in just two paragraphs. The other pages documented disputes involving Ogidi men—mostly headmen and warrant chiefs—who complained that Amobi was usurping power in the native court and demanding new fees from *ozo* titleholders.¹⁹⁵ In the report’s cover letter, the district officer included his personal assessment that one of Ogidi’s warrant chiefs, a long-time adversary of Amobi named Chief Nwanunu, had instigated all the trouble, including the women’s protest. He wrote, “I am sure that Nwanunu is at the bottom of the whole palaver,”¹⁹⁶ and recommended that the district commissioner suspend Nwanunu’s warrant of office for six months; the commissioner obliged.¹⁹⁷ Due in part to assumptions about women’s inherent irrationality and delicate sensibilities dating back to Victorian times, the British refused to believe that Igbo women held political authority, or that they were able to self-organize. Moreover, Amobi and his supporters perpetuated false information regarding women’s supposed non-participation in indigenous government, which tended to bolster British officials’ male-centric biases. In fact, as recorded in the “Palaver” report, Amobi told the district officer that the conflict between him and the women was not his fault because “woman [*sic*] does not control a Town.”¹⁹⁸ That is, although both men and women played important roles in the government of Ogidi, Amobi either ignored or denied women’s responsibility to maintain justice.

The men of Ogidi did not instigate the women’s protests, and other than supplying necessary foodstuffs to them during their sit-in at Onitsha, the men generally stayed out of the

¹⁹⁵ NAE, OP 174/1914 ONPROF 7/1/13: “Complaint by certain villages,” 21 January 1915 letter, 1-9.

¹⁹⁶ NAE, OP 174/1914 ONPROF 7/1/13: “Complaint by certain villages,” 21 January 1915 letter, 2.

¹⁹⁷ NAE, OP 174/1914 ONPROF 7/1/13: “Complaint by certain villages,” 12 February 1915 telegram from the commissioner of Onitsha to the secretary of the Southern Provinces.

¹⁹⁸ NAE, OP 174/1914 ONPROF 7/1/13: “Complaint by certain villages,” report titled “Ogidi Palaver” included in a 21 January 1915 letter from the district officer of Onitsha to the commissioner of Onitsha province, 9.

way. The district officer blaming Chief Nwanunu for the protest is not surprising, however. Just as British officials would later fail to understand how Igbo women could plan and execute mass protests without the guidance or even participation of men during the Women's War,¹⁹⁹ their counterparts in Onitsha Province failed or refused to comprehend that Ogidi women were the ones who had made trouble for Amobi and for the district officer by 'making war.'

Conclusion

Women protected the Afo Udo market as part of their service to udo, who owned it. They were able to challenge a grave injustice because historically they had the authority to do just that. In Ogidi, *tupu ndi ocha bia*, women were the protectors and enforcers of morality: roles that colonial rule and Amobi's injustices had so far failed to eliminate. It is also important to remember that, as we saw in the previous chapter, Amobi first petitioned the governor of the southern provinces to make him a paramount chief in 1915. That would have granted him even more political influence than he already had. For years afterwards, he and others acting on his behalf petitioned the colonial government to promote Amobi to this prestigious position, but to no avail. From this fact, we can gather that Amobi's problems with the Ogidi market women had not discouraged him from continuing to overreach his bounds, seeking ever more political power. This meant that, although the women had defeated him regarding the site of Afo Udo market, their roles as protectors of morality and enforcers of indigenous Igbo law were still desperately needed for the remainder of the *igwe's* reign. At the same time, the fact that the colonial administration denied Amobi's repeated requests to be made a paramount chief suggests that the return of Afo Udo to its

¹⁹⁹ The administration held fast to this inaccurate view even after the formal investigation that followed the 1929 Women's War, which resembled the 1914 protest on a much larger scale. Van Allen, "'Aba Riots' or Igbo 'Women's War,'" 13, 14, 23, 27-28; Falola and Paddock, *The Women's War of 1929*, 76; Matera, Misty, and Kingsley Kent, *The Women's War of 1929*, 188-189, 192-193; 206.

rightful place was not the only victory the women had won. It is at least possible that their conspicuous enactments of justice made the district officer and other officials in Onitsha Province apprehensive about what Ogidi women might do if the government dared to give Amobi any more power, which he would surely abuse. In this way, the incident documented in the colonial record as part of the “Ogidi Palaver” is an example of Ogidi women maintaining justice according to *omenani* even in a time when male-centric colonial rule was emerging as a fundamental threat to female-centric indigenous Igbo law. This suggests that, as of 1914, the dominant law that governed Ogidi was still the female-centric, indigenous one. However, over the next few decades, that would change as the native court system rose in popularity, as will be discussed in the following chapter.

Ogidi women assembled and executed one of the first large-scale, all-women protests against consolidated colonial rule in Africa. And yet, although this protest was extraordinary in size, and unprecedented as a means of combating male-centric colonialism, its basic elements—‘making war’ and other enactments of female-centric justice—were unexceptional. Because ‘making war’ on those who transgressed *omenani* or *iwu* was one of the responsibilities that *ani* had delegated to Igbo women, the people of Ogidi would have expected to see many aspects of the women’s enactments of justice in 1914. However, the unprecedented and extreme measures that Amobi took to disregard indigenous Igbo religion, law, and justice in the Afo Udo incident caused Ogidi women to expand their ‘war-making’ in unprecedented ways, notably including their use of an Ijele masquerade normally brought out by men only for rare occasions; of red fez caps that were the normal (if relatively novel) preserve of male warrant chiefs; and of calling upon *ani* directly to punish Amobi through the act of swearing.

This protest rather precisely marks a shift in the dominant law of Igboland, away from indigenous practices and toward a convoluted and unjust system of colonial law that incorporated

both English and ‘customary’ features. Despite the male-centric direction in which the law was drifting *oge Walter*, the fact remains that Ogidi women successfully reclaimed udo’s market for him, returning balance to their society. As the Igbo say, *afia oma na-ere onwe ya*, meaning “a good market ware sells itself,” or that a matter speaks for itself.²⁰⁰ It is the assertion of this chapter that the judicial authority of Ogidi women spoke for itself through the example of the 1914 women’s market protest. In the next chapter, we turn our attention to the native court system, the very same one that failed Ogidi women during the women’s market protest.

²⁰⁰ From my notes for an Igbo language course at Michigan State University, 13 September 2015.

CHAPTER 5:

THE NATIVE COURT AND THE FURTHER RE-GENDERING OF LAW, *OGE WALTER* AND *OGE INTERREGNUM*

In 1931, *nso ani*, a crime against the earth goddess, was committed at the Afo Igwe market, located on the boundary between Ogidi's Uru quarter and the town of Umudioka to the north. In that year's annual report on Onitsha Province, the Onitsha Division district officer briefly noted that "in April some trouble threatened between Ogidi and Umudioka in relation to their communal Afo Market, and the actions of Ogidi Muo (juju dancers) in seizing an Umudioka woman's property."¹ My oral history collaborator Chief Oraegbuna Joseph Iwobi's description of such an incident,² however, portrayed it as a severe one. Iwobi explained that, due to a problem that arose in the Afo Igwe market, *egwugwu* (masked spirits or masquerades) from Ogidi came to deliver justice to the Umudioka woman who had caused it. These *egwugwu*, emissaries of the earth goddess, seized the woman's property as part of the punishment, which prompted a member of the crowd to unmask one of the *egwugwu*, killing it.³ While the man representing the masquerade was physically unharmed, the spirit that he had personified had died, which was a serious offense that would surely anger the earth goddess, as defiling a masquerade is *nso ani*.⁴ Yet, the matter was somehow "dealt with in the Ogidi Native Court and amicable relations between the two towns were re-established," in the district officer's words.⁵ That it did not lead to severe punishment of the culprit, and that amicable relations were quickly restored through native court proceedings,

¹ NAE, OP 214/1931 ONPROF 7/18/111: "Annual Report 1931 Onitsha Province," Annual General Report 1931 Onitsha Division, 20.

² The incident described by Iwobi appears to be the same one that is cited in the 1931 Annual Report, although Iwobi could not confirm the exact year of the incident. Equating the two events is partly based on speculation.

³ Chief Oraegbuna Joseph Iwobi, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 29 March 2018.

⁴ The severity of such an offense is explained in Chapter 2.

⁵ NAE, OP 214/1931 ONPROF 7/18/111: "Annual Report 1931 Onitsha Province," Annual General Report 1931 Onitsha Division, 20.

both demonstrate the extent to which the male-centric law of the colonial officials and their collaborators had eclipsed the female-centric law of indigenous Igbo society by this date. Similar incidents of the killing of Ogidi's masked spirits were also resolved in the native court throughout the 1930s and '40s.⁶ As we shall see, this was due in large part to more people in Ogidi and nearby towns turning to Christianity and accepting the colonial legal system in preference to *omenani*, disregarding the finality and supremacy of the judicial decisions of the *egwugwu* council, and even of *ani* herself. These episodes stand in stark contrast to how the killing of an *egwugwu* would have been handled *tupu ndi ocha bia* as well as early on *oge ndi ocha chilu*: in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, for example, the response to a Christian convert killing an *egwugwu* within the first few years of British rule was that the church was razed by the Umuofia *egwugwu*.⁷

The Ogidi Native Court opened in 1911, and Igwe Amobi's palace court in 1912.⁸ By the latter date, therefore, Ogidi residents seeking justice had, within certain limits, their choice of an

⁶ More incidents of killings of Ogidi's masquerades are described in NAE, OP 870 ONPROF 8/1/60: "Okosa of Eziowelle: Ogidi Native Court Petition from," 18 September 1934 letter from the district officer of Onitsha to the resident of Onitsha; and by Chief Oraegbuna Joseph Iwobi, interview by the author; Fabien Chukwude Okakpu, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 1 May 2018.

Chinua Achebe noted that in Ogidi *tupu ndi ocha bia*, the ancestors were "enticed to the world by rare crises such as the desecration of a masked spirit" (Chinua Achebe, "The Igbo World and Its Art," in *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays* (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 66). The instances of killing—and therefore desecrating—a masquerade would have provoked the ancestors to avenge the offense. But, as we can see from a few examples in the 1930s and 40s, this no longer appeared to be the case.

⁷ Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (New York: Anchor Books edition, 1994 [1959]), 186-191.

⁸ M. O. Onwugbufor, interview by Chukwuma C. C. Osakwe, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 3 October 1983, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi: The Era of Igwe Amobi I and II, 1904-1973" (B. A. Thesis, History Department, University of Nigeria Nsukka, 1984), 115; Chief Isama Nwawularu Nwosu, interview by Ifeoma Catherine Onwugbufor, Ikenga Ogidi, 19 February 1992, in Onwugbufor, "The Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy in Ogidi" (B.A. Thesis, Department of History, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 1992), 102; Okafor Osegbo, interview by Princess Ebere Nweze, Umuru Ogidi, 23 June 2017, in Nweze, "The Biography of Igwe Walter Okafor Kwochaaka Amobi I, The First Warrant Chief of Ogidi 1904-1924" (B.A. Thesis, Department of History and International Studies, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, 2017), 75; Professor Clement Chibuzo Amobi, interview by Princess Ebere Nweze, Iyi-Enu Ogidi, 24 June 2017, in Nweze, "The Biography of Igwe Walter," 78; High Chief Robinson Okudo (Esema), interview by the author, 14 September 2018; Chief Amaeze Ekpeani, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 13 March 2018; Dominic Nnamdi Obijiofor, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 17 April 2018; Nwando Achebe, "'Ogidi Palaver': The 1914 Women's Market Protest," in *Shaping Our Struggles: Nigerian Women in History, Culture, and Social Change*, ed. Obioma Nnaemeka and Chima J. Korieh (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2011), 27; Dike Ibemesi, *Ogidi: Historical Perspective of a People* (Ogidi: Ekpechi and Sons, 1995), 66.

array of court types. As well as the two new foundations, these choices included the indigenous courts of the deities at their shrines, of the *egwugwu* council, and of the councils of *umuokpu* (daughters), *ndinyom* (wives), *ndiichie* (titled elders), and *umunna* (men of each extended family). Thus, *oge Walter* and subsequently *oge interregnum*, collectively the period from 1904 to 1944 was marked by an on-going struggle for court business between the British-imposed, male-centric legal system and the female-centric indigenous Igbo one.

As time passed, the native courts could increasingly be seen as prevailing in this struggle, to the point that by the early 1930s, there was a clear rift in Ogidi's and much of the Igbo's society between those who still adhered to the indigenous religion and legal system, and those—mostly Christians—who utilized the colonial legal system.⁹ Because the native court system rose to prominence, because it was a male-dominated sphere that offered privileged positions to men but not to most women, and because its male-centric law was often at odds with *omenani*, law itself came to be re-gendered from female to male as the native court increased in popularity. However, this did not mean that the male-centric law abolished the female-centric one altogether.

As we shall see, the native courts were male-dominated spaces from the beginning, reflecting British colonial officers' unshakable notion that judicial authority was a male preserve. A program of reforms in the early 1930s aimed to return the native courts to a more indigenous format, but even after this was carried out, all their judges were male.¹⁰ This chapter examines the various ways in which the native courts gave power to men and sought to draw litigants away from

⁹ This rift was observed by Chinua Achebe, who noted that in the 1930s and '40s in Ogidi, Christians, such as Achebe and his parents, "tended to look down on the others. We were called in our language 'the people of the church' or 'the association of God.' The others we called, with the conceit appropriate to followers of the true religion, the heathen or even 'the people of nothing'" (Chinua Achebe, "Named for Victoria, Queen of England," in *Hopes and Impediments*, 30). Achebe questioned the overt and zealous Christianity upon which he was raised, commenting, "Thinking about it today I am not so sure that it isn't they [the practitioners of the indigenous Igbo religion] who should have been looking down on us for our apostasy" (Achebe, "Named for Victoria," 30).

¹⁰ NAE, OP 842 ONPROF 8/1/4712: "Annual Report Onitsha Province 1933," Annual Report 1933 Onitsha Division, 22; NAE, OP 1659 ONPROF 1/14/523: "Annual Report Onitsha Province 1937," 9.

courts run by women and the spiritual forces of the indigenous Igbo religion. The influence accorded to warrant chiefs was examined in Chapter 3, but will be elaborated on further in the present chapter, along with the levels and types of power wielded by court clerks and messengers; the selected elders whom district officers sometimes consulted when hearing appeals; and literate, wealthy, or well-connected litigants. Almost all of these men who became privileged through their interactions with the native courts did so because they were literate in English.¹¹ Thus, the re-gendering of the law had a complex relation to the gendering of literacy *oge Walter* and *oge interregnum*, during which males had more access than females to new forms of education.¹² However, some women of those periods did acquire English literacy, and were able to use it to their benefit if and when they dealt with the native courts.¹³

There is limited data on native courts in Ogidi and elsewhere prior to 1921. This might be due to a lack of adequate record-keeping in the early twentieth century, or to storage conditions in the Nigerian National Archive at Enugu (NAE), which lost portions of its collections during the Nigerian Civil War of 1967-70 and has since fallen into disrepair. Therefore, although statistics and general information are available through the annual reports on the divisions and provinces of

¹¹ English literacy was a prerequisite for most native court and other colonial administrative positions. See Dominic Nnamdi Obijiofor, interview by the author; Udoh Boniface Uyanwa, interview by the author, Akanano Ogidi, 13 April 2018; Lawrence Anwurebo, interview by the author, Ikenga, Ogidi, 27 March 2018; Anonymous oral history collaborator 2, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 20 March 2018; Nweke Okoye, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 12 March 2018; Oduche Cyril Okafor, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 26 April 2018; Chief Hillary Osegbo, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 24 April 2018; Chief Godwin Nweke Agbogu, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 6 March 2018; Chief Godfrey Amazikwu, interview by the author; Chief Obi A. Okudo, interview by the author, Uru Ogidi, 2 April 2018; Chief Oraegbuna Joseph Iwobi, interview by the author; Chief David N. C. Akobi, interview by the author, Akanano Ogidi, 25 April 2018; Fabien Chukwude Okakpu, interview by the author.

¹² Judith Van Allen, "'Aba Riots' or Igbo 'Women's War'? Ideology, Stratification, and the Invisibility of Women," *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* 6, no. 1 (1975): 24; Ifi Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society* (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1987), 134-137; Benjamin N. Lawrance, Emily Lynn Osborn, and Richard L. Roberts, eds, Introduction to *Intermediaries, Interpreters and Clerks: African Employees and the Making of Colonial Africa* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 27.

¹³ One example can be found in NAE, OP 80/1928 ONPROF 7/15/28: "Petition by Nwabude of Umunya re case between him and Madam Chibogwu of Onitsha in Ogidi Native Court," which is examined later in this chapter.

southeastern Nigeria, relatively few transcripts of native court cases have survived. I have compiled statistics about the Ogidi Native Court and the native court system throughout Onitsha Province from the 1910s to the 1940s based on the available sources, although there are still some gaps in the record, especially for the years of the First World War.¹⁴ Oral sources have helped to fill some of the gaps anecdotally, but by their nature cannot provide detailed quantitative data on the use of either indigenous or native courts. Several Africanist scholars have examined the specific ‘customary’ laws debated in native or customary courts across the continent, as part of an investigation of how inventions of ‘customary’ laws allowed a few powerful men to oppress women and young people.¹⁵ While I endorse those scholars’ arguments in broad outline, the sparse survival of actual trial transcripts from my study area has led me to focus on how the native court system of Igboland in general provided men with opportunities for power. Of course, those transcripts that have survived will also be discussed.

Before the Ogidi Native Court Opened

As laid out in the previous chapters, *oge four quarters-oge ndi ocha bia*, the people of Ogidi could bring disputes to various indigenous courts—those of the *umuokpu*, *ndinyom*, *umunna*, *ndiichie*, and spiritual forces including deities and *egwugwu*—with the *ndinyom* and *ndiichie* handling minor matters; the *umunna* usually handling family matters; *umuokpu* addressing issues

¹⁴ For example, statistical data concerning the number and nature of civil and criminal cases tried in the Ogidi Native Court and other courts in Onitsha Province are available for the years 1912 to 1915 and from 1922 to 1944 (with some years missing from the latter section) but little to no information for the years 1916 to 1921.

¹⁵ These scholars’ works pertain to southern Africa, but nonetheless illuminate the male biases of emerging ‘customary’ law (or ‘native law and custom’ as it was termed in Nigeria) across British colonial Africa: Terence Ranger, “The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa,” in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 211-262; Martin Chanock, *Law, Custom and Social Order: The Colonial Experience in Malawi and Zambia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Thomas V. McClendon, “Tradition and Domestic Struggle in the Courtroom: Customary Law and the Control of Women in Segregation-Era Natal,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 28, no. 3 (1995): 527-561.

of morality, and resolving all cases that other human courts could not; and the courts of *egwugwu* and deities dealing with a range of issues concerning *omenani*.¹⁶ Though the colonial administration had incorporated Ogidi into the native court system in 1903, the indigenous courts remained dominant there until the Ogidi Native Court opened in 1911, due in part to the convenience of not having to travel six miles to Onitsha, where the nearest native court was located in the intervening years.¹⁷ In any case, during the first eleven years of colonial rule in Ogidi (1903 to 1914), though *omenani* was threatened by the oppressive rules that the new *igwe* imposed, and despite the colonial administration's preference that all legal matters concerning the Igbo be brought to the new native courts, numerous individuals continued to bring their disputes to the courts of *umunna*, *ndiichie*, *ndinyom*, *umuokpu*, *egwugwu*, and deities.¹⁸

Even when the Ogidi Native Court had come to dominate certain areas of the law such as domestic disputes, theft, and assault, an extended family might urge its members to bring their quarrels to either the *umuokpu* or the *umunna* courts, which respectively consisted of the adult daughters or sons of that extended family. If the disputants within the family were not satisfied with the decisions of the *umuokpu* or *umunna*, then they could appeal to larger councils of women or men from the relevant quarter of Ogidi, or to courts of *egwugwu* or indigenous deities, or the Ogidi Native Court, or Igwe Amobi's court.¹⁹ In some instances, however, individuals brought

¹⁶ See Chapters 2, 3, and 4 for specifics.

¹⁷ High Chief Robinson Okudo (Esema), interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 1 March 2018; Clement Chibuzo Amobi, written questionnaire administered by Chukwuma C. C. Osakwe, 12 December 1983, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 123; NAE, EP 9561 CSE 1/85/4879: "Intelligence Report on Ogidi and Abacha Villages, Onitsha Division, Onitsha Province, by Mr. B. G. Stone, A.D.O.," 5.

¹⁸ Chief Hillary Osegbo, interview by the author; Chief Ozoekwe Clement Okudo, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 27 April 2018; Udoh Boniface Uyanwa, interview by the author; Chief Godfrey Amazikwu, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 10 April 2018; Anonymous oral history collaborator 2, interview by the author; Chief Nwosu Nwawulu Enwude, interview by Chukwuma C. C. Osakwe, Ikenga Ogidi, 16 September 1983, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 93; Nweke Anene, interview by Chukwuma C. C. Osakwe, Akanano Ogidi, 20 September 1983, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 103; Haford C. Amerobi, interview by Chukwuma C. C. Osakwe, Uru Ogidi, 21 September 1983, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 108.

¹⁹ Chief Hillary Osegbo, interview by the author; Chief Ozoekwe Clement Okudo, interview by the author; Udoh Boniface Uyanwa, interview by the author; Chief Godfrey Amazikwu, interview by the author; Anonymous oral

their disputes to the native court first, but when the outcome proved unsatisfactory, moved on to the court of a deity of the indigenous religion.²⁰ These deities, who were known to discern truth and to punish anyone who gave false testimony, were contrasted with the native courts, with their predilections for corruption, deceit, and bribery.²¹

Additional evidence of the relevance of *omenani* and the laws of other deities up until 1914 was that the *umuokpu Ogidi* met annually with the priest of udo in Ikenga to discern how the Afo Udo market would fare in the coming year.²² We also know, due to the indigenous enactments of justice that the women of Ogidi performed *en masse* in 1914 to sanction Walter Amobi for moving Afo Udo, that women's judicial authority was still strong and generally recognized by the people of Ogidi: nearly all women participated, and the men supported their efforts by supplying them with provisions during the sit-in at Onitsha.²³ Notably, the women on that occasion bypassed the three-year-old Ogidi Native Court in their quest for justice, likely due to the fact that Walter Amobi was its head judge. However, after the 1914 women's market protest until the reign of Igwe Amobi II, which began in 1944,²⁴ there was no recorded mass demonstration of women enacting justice in Ogidi. As I will show in this chapter, corruption and injustice thrived during this period;

history collaborator 2, interview by the author; Chief Nwosu Nwawulu Enwude, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 93; Nweke Anene, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 103; Haford C. Amerobi, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 108.

²⁰ Udoh Boniface Uyanwa, interview by the author; Chief Christian Nweke Ibeazor, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi 21 August 2018; Chief Obi A. Okudo, interview by the author; Nweke Anene, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 103.

²¹ Samson Osakwe, Eze Erulu, interview by the author, Ogidi, 30 July 2018; Chief Oraegbuna Joseph Iwobi, interview by the author; Chief Christian Nweke Ibeazor, interview by the author; Chief Obi A. Okudo, interview by the author; Dominic Nnamdi Obijiofor, interview by the author; Joy Ufodiama, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 25 September 2018; Chief Amaeze Ekpeani, interview by the author; Chief Nwabuoku Osakwe (Dibueni Nwanyi), interview by the author, Ogidi, 23 April 2018.

²² We know this practice continued at least until 1914 because when the *umuokpu* met with the priest in that year, oral history collaborators described this as an annual practice that had continued for some. See Chapter 4. Also see Achebe, "Ogidi Palaver," 33.

²³ See Chapter 4.

²⁴ 1944 Ogidi Town Council Constitution (courtesy of the Ogidi Union, Nigeria; special thanks to Sir Albert Obi Ezegbo for supplying me with a copy); Ibemesi, *Ogidi*, 68-69; Arinze Agbogu, *Ogidi Political History* (Owerri: Treasure Books, 2009), 85; Mr. Berthram Aduba, interview by Ifeoma Catherine Onwugbutor, Uru Ogidi, 23 February 1992, in "The Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy," 113; Chief Obi A. Okudo, interview by the author.

therefore, it is reasonable to believe that the absence of any remembered instances of women's collective legal sanctions against those committing such injustice suggests that Ogidi women's ability to enact justice was being hindered in some way.

Gendered Access to Positions of Authority in the Native Court

The male-centric authority of the native court was reflected in its all-male personnel, comprising the district officer, warrant chiefs, court clerk, and court messengers, commonly called *kotmas*.²⁵ The only woman in Igboland known to have participated in colonial governance was a female warrant chief and king from Nsukka Division, Ahebi Ugbabe, who occupied her colonial post from 1918 to 1948.²⁶ The immense power that colonial collaborators gained in the new patriarchal order that the British established in Igboland in the early twentieth century demonstrates how the colonial legal system privileged men over women. Of course, it did not automatically benefit all men to the detriment of all women; but the inherent male bias in the British colonial ideology granted men more opportunities than women to rise to positions of authority that were recognized and reinforced by the colonial administration.²⁷

Women were not completely absent from the native court system, but they were generally disadvantaged compared to their male counterparts. As well as English literacy, which as noted above was more common among males in this period, advantage was gained in the court system by those with connections to powerful colonial collaborators—but this too was often gendered, as

²⁵ *Kotmas* is the pidgin English rendering of “court messengers” and it is how many of my oral history collaborators referenced them.

²⁶ Nwando Achebe, *The Female King of Colonial Nigeria: Ahebi Ugbabe* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011).

²⁷ This was true specifically in Igboland (see Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs*, esp. 60, 224; Van Allen, “‘Aba Riots,’” 20, 24; Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, 134-137) as it was across British colonial Africa (see Ranger, “The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa,” 211-262; Martin Chanock, *Law, Custom and Social Order*, Lawrance, Osborn, and Roberts, Introduction to *Intermediaries, Interpreters and Clerks*, esp. 27).

males had more access to such figures than females did.²⁸ One's status as a Christian also played a part, as we shall see. All of these factors were bound up with English education, which became an increasingly important basis for entering political service in Igboland *oge ndi ocha chilu*. It was offered by some government-run schools as well as mission schools, but they all favored male pupils over females because they sought to prepare males to become employees in the colonial economy and participants in colonial politics, and expected females to prepare to take care of their homes and children.²⁹ This dichotomy was based on the Victorian ideals of men as breadwinners and women as homemakers that British missionaries and colonial officers held when they arrived in Igboland in the mid to late nineteenth century, and continued to promote for decades afterwards.³⁰

However, some of the preference for the education of sons over daughters began in Igbo households. As historian Judith Van Allen argues, sons, “not their sisters, would be expected to support their parents in old age.”³¹ For the parents' part, because daughters would eventually marry

²⁸ This was largely due to the Victorian-era ideals that British officials imposed on their colonies and upheld even into the mid-twentieth century—ideals which dictated that women should stay in the home and out of the political sphere. See Karen Tranberg Hansen, “Introduction: Domesticity in Africa,” in *African Encounters with Domesticity*, ed. Karen Tranberg Hansen (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 1-2; Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, 134-135; Elizabeth Schmidt, “Race, Sex, and Domestic Labor: The Question of African Female Servants in Southern Rhodesia, 1900-1939,” in *African Encounters with Domesticity*, 221-222.

²⁹ Several scholars have made this argument, but the following are most relevant to the situation in Igboland: Van Allen, ““Aba Riots,”” 24; Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, 134-137; Lawrance, Osborn, and Roberts, Introduction to *Intermediaries, Interpreters and Clerks*, 27. Additionally, the disparity between male and female pupils in such schools across Onitsha Division, Onitsha Province, and the southeast region of Nigeria can be observed in select colonial annual reports: in schools across the Eastern Province of Southern Nigeria in 1910, there were 5,395 boys and 891 girls enrolled (Great Britain Colonial Office, Southern Nigeria Report for 1910, 23 [part of the Annual Reports of the Colonies, Nigeria, 1897-1938 Colonial Office collection found via HathiTrust Digital Library <<http://hdl.handle.net/2027/uiuc.3064634v1910i3>>]); in schools throughout Onitsha Province in 1928, there were 6,637 boys and 606 girls (NAE, OP 170/1928 ONPROF 7/15/78: “Departmental Annual Reports,” 14 January 1929 Onitsha Province government and assisted schools tables); in schools throughout the province in 1933, there were 18,391 boys and 3,583 girls (NAE, OP 842 ONPROF 8/1/4712: “Annual Report Onitsha Province 1933,” Onitsha Province Educational Statistics 1933 table); and for schools within Onitsha Division in 1934, there were 7,603 boys and 2,236 girls (NAE, OP 842 ONPROF 8/1/4713: “Annual Report Onitsha Province 1934,” Onitsha Division Educational Statistics 1934 table).

³⁰ Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, 134-135.

³¹ Van Allen, ““Aba Riots,”” 24.

and move to their husbands' communities, investing in their English education was likely seen as an economic expense that would not be repaid in later years. Sons, in contrast, often lived in their natal communities all their lives, and were thus the primary economic resources for and caretakers of their elderly parents. Investing in their education, and therefore in their future lucrative careers in the missions or colonial government, made economic sense.³² Additionally, many in Ogidi were wary of the new education system,³³ and some girls and young women feared that participating in it would negatively impact their marriage prospects. One of my oral history collaborators, a man born in 1930 who preferred to remain anonymous, stated that girls "were not considered at all for schooling because they felt that if they went to school they won't find [a] husband [...] My mother went to school, but after a few months or years she was told that she won't get a husband so she withdrew and many more others like [her]."³⁴

Moreover, those few girls who did attend mission or government schools often received a different type of training than their male counterparts, focusing on domestic tasks rather than skills that would prepare them for jobs, as we have seen. Specifically, such male professions included clerks or interpreters for British officials; clerks, messengers, or warrant chiefs in the native courts; and letter writers who made themselves available to any non-literate litigant who sought to submit letters of appeal to British officials.³⁵ As well as an increased demand for English literacy and higher levels of Western education in colonial economic and political life generally, this range of occupations reflected that, to safeguard him- or herself from being taken advantage of in a native

³² Van Allen, "Aba Riots," 24.

³³ Anonymous oral history collaborator 2, interview by the author; Nwanna Amobi, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 27 March 2018; Chief John Amanwa, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 28 March 2018; Chief Obi A. Okudo, interview by the author, Uru Ogidi, 2 April 2018.

³⁴ Anonymous oral history collaborator 2, interview by the author.

³⁵ Van Allen, "Aba Riots," 24; Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, 135; Lawrance, Osborn, and Roberts, Introduction to *Intermediaries, Interpreters and Clerks*, 27.

court, a litigant should be literate, accompanied by someone who was literate, and/or have connections to a member of the court.

Functioning of the Ogidi Native Court

With the opening of a native court in Ogidi in 1911 and Igwe Amobi's personal palace court the following year, the residents of Ogidi and the surrounding towns were presented with two new legal arenas in which they could seek redress of their grievances. Amobi's insistence that he be allowed to try cases in his palace was widely seen as an extension of his excesses and corruption,³⁶ given that private palace courts were neither indigenous to Igboland nor imposed by the British. Yet, it was not uncommon for Igbo colonial collaborators who rose to the invented position of king *oge ndi ocha chilu* to convene them. King Ahebi Ugbabe of Nsukka, for example, judged cases in her palace court away from the restrictions of colonial policy, without the court clerks who registered cases in the native court.³⁷ Walter Amobi, too, replaced the native court clerk and *kotmas* with several of his loyal followers whom he sent out to bring litigants to his court if they were implicated in a dispute or grievance.³⁸ Amobi's judgments in his court could not be appealed, as he would imprison anyone who dared to defy his judicial pronouncements.³⁹ This made many in Ogidi and the surrounding towns wary of the palace court. However, it is rumored that a *de facto* appeal was made by two brave hunters who had brought to Amobi's palace court their dispute over rights to an animal they had jointly killed. When neither of the litigants found the *igwe*'s judgment acceptable, they decided to take their case to the native court so that the district officer could offer his opinion.⁴⁰

³⁶ See Chapter 3 for further details on Amobi's excesses and corruption.

³⁷ Achebe, *The Female King of Nigeria*, 155-156.

³⁸ Udoh Boniface Uyanwa, interview by the author; Oduche Cyril Okafor, interview by the author.

³⁹ Oduche Cyril Okafor, interview by the author; Chief John Amanwa, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 28 March 2018; Theresa Odinye, interview by the author, Ikenga, Ogidi, 12 September 2018.

⁴⁰ Udoh Boniface Uyanwa, interview by the author.

The ratio of native court cases to deities' and *egwugwu* court cases cannot be determined, but several of my oral history collaborators affirmed that at least some people in Ogidi still attended the courts of deities and *egwugwu oge Walter* and *oge interregnum*.⁴¹ The fact that people did this at all, despite threats of punishment for doing so from the colonial administration, demonstrates that the legal system in Ogidi was not fully re-gendered; *omenani*, which was female-centric in essence, was still relevant. Nonetheless, from the time that the Ogidi Native Court opened through the end of the interregnum, it gradually gained in popularity, as did many other native courts in Igboland. This is evidenced, as we shall see, by colonial annual report statistics; by frequent comments made by colonial officials in their correspondence about the state of the native courts; and by the changes that the colonial administration implemented to better deal with native court cases when these became too numerous for district officers and residents to handle.

When the colonial administration established the native court system, all legal matters concerning the indigenous people other than severe offenses such as homicide and rape (which British officials judged in their own courts) were supposed to be handled at the native court that was assigned to each district.⁴² The Ogidi Native Court area included nine other nearby towns within a five-mile radius: Abacha, Abatete, Nkpor, Obosi, Ogbunike, Umudioka, Umunnachi, Umunya, and Umuoji.⁴³ On its opening, the Ogidi Native Court was categorized as a C grade court; as such, it could hear civil cases that did not involve demands of more than £50 in debts or damages, and criminal cases that would not result in more than six months' imprisonment or fines

⁴¹ Udoh Boniface Uyanwa, interview by the author; Chief John Amanwa, interview by the author; Chief Amaeze Ekpeani, interview by the author; Chief Obi A. Okudo, interview by the author.

⁴² 1906 Native Courts Ordinance, sections 14-19, printed in *Laws of the Colony of Southern Nigeria vol. II* (London: Stevens and Sons, 1908), 1268-1269 [accessed via HathiTrust Digital Library <<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.hl3hpx&view=1up&seq=7>>]. This is also evident in each Onitsha Province annual report's charts cataloguing the types of civil and criminal cases judged in the native courts.

⁴³ See footnote 63 in Introduction.

of more than £10.⁴⁴ In or by 1922, however, this court had been promoted to B grade,⁴⁵ and could therefore handle more serious civil cases not exceeding £100 in debts or damages, and criminal ones warranting up to one year of imprisonment or a £50 fine.⁴⁶ Each grade of native court could also sentence offenders to be flogged or placed in the stocks as the judges saw fit.⁴⁷

Because litigants were not allowed legal counsel in the native courts, they represented themselves.⁴⁸ A council of warrant chiefs, often termed a bench, led by a president or head chief adjudicated these matters according to an amalgamation of indigenous Igbo law and English law that was known as ‘native law and custom.’⁴⁹ In the Ogidi Native Court, the presidency rotated through a select number of the warrant chiefs, each serving for a set period of a few weeks, and the court would usually hear cases on three designated days of each seven-day week.⁵⁰ Throughout

⁴⁴ With its 1914 restructuring, the colonial administration implemented a system of four grades of native courts: A, B, C, and D, in descending order. Allan Christelow, “Theft, Homicide, and Oath in Early Twentieth-Century Kano,” in *Law in Colonial Africa*, ed. Kristin Mann and Richard Roberts (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1991), 232; Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, “Traditional Law and Colonial Change in Ogidi” (B.A. Thesis, Department of History, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 1979), 37-38; NAE, OP 491/1922 ONPROF 7/9/39: “Annual Report, Onitsha Province year ending 31 December 1922,” Onitsha Province Native Court Cases—summary of criminal and civil cases chart; NAE, OP 317/1929 ONPROF 7/16/203: “Onitsha Division Annual Report statistics 1929,” Onitsha Division Native Court Cases—summary of criminal and civil cases chart; NAE, ONPROF 11/1/5: “Report on the Onitsha Province for the Year 1915,” 18; 1906 Native Courts Ordinance, sections 16-19, printed in *Laws of the Colony vol. II*, 1268-1269.

⁴⁵ There is no available data on the grade of the Ogidi Native Court for the years of 1916 to 1921, but in a 1922 report, the Ogidi Native Court is labeled B grade. NAE, OP 491/1922 ONPROF 7/9/39: “Annual Report Onitsha Province year ending 31 December 1922,” Onitsha Province Native Court Cases—summary of criminal and civil cases chart.

⁴⁶ Nwabufu, “Traditional Law and Colonial Change,” 37-38; NAE, OP 491/1922 ONPROF 7/9/39: “Annual Report, Onitsha Province year ending 31 December 1922,” Onitsha Province Native Court Cases—summary of criminal and civil cases chart; NAE, OP 317/1929 ONPROF 7/16/203: “Onitsha Division Annual Report statistics 1929,” Onitsha Division Native Court Cases—summary of criminal and civil cases chart; 1906 Native Courts Ordinance, sections 16-19, printed in *Laws of the Colony vol. II*, 1268-1269.

⁴⁷ NAE, OP 491/1922 ONPROF 7/9/39: “Annual Report, Onitsha Province year ending 31 December 1922,” Onitsha Province Native Court Cases—summary of criminal and civil cases chart; NAE, OP 317/1929 ONPROF 7/16/203: “Onitsha Division Annual Report statistics 1929,” Onitsha Division Native Court Cases—summary of criminal and civil cases chart.

⁴⁸ According to section 33 of the 1906 Native Courts Ordinance, “no counsel, advocate, solicitor, proctor or attorney shall appear or act for any party before a Native Court, except by special leave of such Court.” Printed in *Laws of the Colony vol. II*, 1271. Also see Chief Lawrence Agulefo, interview by Chukwuma C. C. Osakwe, Ikenga Ogidi, 14 September 1983, in Osakwe, “Kingship in Ogidi,” 88.

⁴⁹ See footnote 11 in the Introduction.

⁵⁰ This refers to the seven-day week of the Gregorian calendar, as opposed to the four-day Igbo week. NAE, EP 9561 CSE 1/85/4879: “Intelligence Report on Ogidi and Abacha Villages,” 14.

Not all warrant chiefs who adjudicated in the Ogidi Native Court had an opportunity to serve as president. Throughout Walter Amobi’s career, he almost always sat as court president. After his death, the presidency rotation

1925, one of the busier years for the Ogidi Native Court with 928 total cases, it heard an average of 77 cases per month,⁵¹ which meant that on average six or seven would come before the court on a given day.

Up until 1918, either the district officer or the assistant district officer observed the court proceedings, supervising the warrant chiefs' decisions and offering advice when necessary. After 1918, the British officers only appeared at the native court once a month to check in.⁵² If a case proved too difficult for the warrant chiefs to judge, it could be forwarded to the provincial court and then to the supreme court of the province; or, starting in 1922, to the magistrate's court.⁵³ Similarly, if litigants were dissatisfied with a native court judgment, they could either appeal their case to a higher court or request that the district officer review it. If, in the latter circumstance, the reviewed case was too difficult for the district officer to decide, it would be forwarded to the resident of the province, and (albeit rarely) then on to the secretary of the southern provinces.⁵⁴ Appeals and reviews became more common after 1918 when district officers were no longer present in the court to oversee every case.⁵⁵ According to the Native Courts Ordinance of 1906, warrant chiefs were granted the authority to "arrest without a warrant any native who commit[ted] in his presence or [was] charged by any person on oath with having committed any offence against any native or other law."⁵⁶ This 1906 order allowed for, and the decreased supervision after 1918 further allowed, court members such as Amobi to imprison anyone who, based on their

came to include more warrant chiefs. Chief Nwosu Nwawulu Enwude, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 95; Chief Lawrence Agulefo, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 86-87.

⁵¹ NAE, OP 404/1925 ONPROF 7/12/99: "Annual Report - Onitsha Province for the year 1925," Annual Report Onitsha Division, 15.

⁵² Van Allen, "'Aba Riots,'" 21; C. K. Meek, *Law and Authority in a Nigerian Tribe: A Study in Indirect Rule* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), 329.

⁵³ NAE, A 414/1923, CSE 2/16/7: "Resident, Onitsha Province, Annual Report on 1922," 43.

⁵⁴ 1906 Native Courts Ordinance, sections 28, 29, 40, 42, printed in *Laws of the Colony vol. II*, 1271, 1273-1274; NAE, OP 491/1922 ONPROF 7/9/39: "Annual Report Onitsha Province year ending 31 December 1922," 14.

⁵⁵ See footnote 53 above.

⁵⁶ 1906 Native Courts Ordinance, section 55a, printed in *Laws of the Colony vol. II*, 1277.

interpretations of indigenous laws, committed an offense. Once the alleged offender's case was brought before the Ogidi Native Court, warrant chiefs again had the ability to interpret what they believed indigenous laws were or ought to be.

Also present during native court trials were the court clerk and *kotmas*, who in theory fell just below the rank of warrant chief, but in reality, arguably wielded just as much if not more power. A cadre of *kotmas*, usually six, functioned as the native court's designated police force, delivering summonses and arresting those who refused to cooperate with them.⁵⁷ The court clerk, on the other hand, acted as the court's sole interpreter and scribe, translating when necessary and documenting court proceedings. It was the district officer who selected the *kotmas* and clerk, often based on the recommendations of warrant chiefs.⁵⁸

The prerequisites for selection as a *kotma* were a basic level of English speaking and comprehension, though not necessarily writing or reading, and—more importantly—physical size and strength.⁵⁹ These intimidating men induced trepidation within as well as outside of the court: whenever Ogidi people saw a *kotma* approaching, they ran away in fear, for most were corrupt, and would arrest anyone for even the slightest perceived insult.⁶⁰ Along with their physical profile,

⁵⁷ NAE, EP 9561 CSE 1/85/4879: "Intelligence Report on Ogidi and Abacha Villages, Onitsha Division, Onitsha Province, by Mr. B. G. Stone, A.D.O.," 14.

⁵⁸ Chief Oraegbuna Joseph Iwobi, interview by the author; Chief Godwin Nweke Agbogu, interview by the author; Anonymous oral history collaborator 2, interview by the author; Nweke Okoye, interview by the author; Dominic Nnamdi Obijiofor, interview by the author; Chukwuka Jerry Okongwu and Chukwudi M. Okongwu, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 2 May 2018; Udoh Boniface Uyanwa, interview by the author; Chief Hillary Osegbo, interview by the author.

⁵⁹ Dominic Nnamdi Obijiofor, interview by the author; Udoh Boniface Uyanwa, interview by the author; Lawrence Anwurebo, interview by the author; Anonymous oral history collaborator 2, interview by the author; Nweke Okoye, interview by the author; Oduche Cyril Okafor, interview by the author; Chief Hillary Osegbo, interview by the author; Chief Godwin Nweke Agbogu, interview by the author.

⁶⁰ Chief Godfrey Amazikwu, interview by the author; Chukwuka Jerry Okongwu and Chukwudi M. Okongwu, interview by the author; Udoh Boniface Uyanwa, interview by the author; Lawrence Anwurebo, interview by the author; Anthony Okoye, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 19 April 2018; Anonymous oral history collaborator 1, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 3 April 2018; Chief Oraegbuna Joseph Iwobi, interview by the author; Fabien Chukwude Okakpu, interview by the author; Nwosu Nwawulu, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufo, Ikenga Ogidi, 20 September 1978, in Nwabufo, "Traditional Law and Colonial Change," 73; Chief Ozoekwe Clement Okudo, interview by the author; Chief David N. C. Akobi, interview by the author; Chief Obi A. Okudo, interview by the

the *kotmas* were easy to spot due to their unique uniforms that included a cap, khaki shorts fastened with a large belt, and high stockings without shoes.⁶¹ Their uniforms appeared quite comical to many onlookers, and as noted in *Things Fall Apart*, “because of their ash-colored shorts they earned the additional name of Ashy-Buttocks.”⁶² However, any overt display of amusement by the townspeople would have been dangerous indeed, given these hulking men’s ready use of their batons.⁶³

Once litigants arrived at the court, whether by coercion or of their own volition, they would enter the building, which Assistant District Officer B. G. Stone described in 1932 as “a substantial one of dried bricks faced with cement with a corrugated iron roof.”⁶⁴ They might also observe the small jail attached to the court and buildings nearby that housed those court employees who were not Ogidi indigenes.⁶⁵ Once inside the court, litigants would find the clerk translating between Igbo and English when British officers were present, and documenting the proceedings of the court in English for the colonial authorities.⁶⁶ To become a court clerk, one had to have passed the English schools’ standard six, which amounted to an intermediate level of English reading and writing.⁶⁷ Because clerks and *kotmas* were so powerful, their jobs were considered highly

author; Chief Amaeze Ekpeani, interview by the author; Onwuameze Ikwuwelu, interview by the author, Ogidi, 5 April 2018.

⁶¹ Oduche Cyril Okafor, interview by the author; Chief John Amanwa, interview by the author; Chief Hillary Osegbo, interview by the author; Lawrence Anwurebo, interview by the author.

⁶² Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 174.

⁶³ Not allowed to carry firearms, *kotmas* were issued batons to be used at their discretion to enforce the law. Chief Oraegbuna Joseph Iwobi, interview by the author; Dominic Nnamdi Obijiofor, interview by the author; Lawrence Anwurebo, interview by the author; Chief Edward Dike Ibemesi, interview by the author, Ogidi, 7 March 2018; High Chief Robinson Okudo (Esema), interview by the author.

⁶⁴ NAE, EP 9561 CSE 1/85/4879: “Intelligence Report on Ogidi and Abacha Villages,” 14.

⁶⁵ NAE, EP 9561 CSE 1/85/4879: “Intelligence Report on Ogidi and Abacha Villages,” 14; NAE, ONPROF 11/1/10: “Annual Report Onitsha Division 1921,” Notes of Meeting on Taxation held at Onitsha on 13 May 1927, 9 (this document is apparently misfiled in the 1921 annual report).

⁶⁶ Chief Godfrey Amazikwu, interview by the author; Onwuameze Ikwuwelu, interview by the author; Chief Oraegbuna Joseph Iwobi, interview by the author; Lawrence Anwurebo, interview by the author; Chief Ozoekwe Clement Okudo, interview by the author; Chief David N. C. Akobi, interview by the author.

⁶⁷ What was known in the early colonial era as standard classes one through six are known in Nigeria today as primary one through six. Chief Godfrey Amazikwu, interview by the author; Chief Obi A. Okudo, interview by the author; Lawrence Anwurebo, interview by the author; Chief Godwin Nweke Agbogu, interview by the author; Chief

prestigious, even if the individuals occupying these positions were contemptible.⁶⁸ They occasionally came from Ogidi, but more often than not they were from other towns, as it was common for them to be transferred from court to court at the whim of the colonial administration.⁶⁹ As Ogidi elder Nwosu Nwawulu explained in 1978, this posed a problem because these strangers did not always understand Ogidi's indigenous laws.⁷⁰ This sentiment is also found in *Things Fall Apart*, in which the narrator remarks: "These court messengers were greatly hated in Umuofia because they were foreigners and also arrogant and high-handed."⁷¹ The disdain felt by many who had been arrested by the *kotmas* is also captured in a refrain that prisoners of the Umuofia Native Court sing to mock their captors, and which quickly spreads throughout the town: "Kotma of the ash buttocks, [/] He is fit to be a slave. [/] The white man has no sense, [/] He is fit to be a slave."⁷² Just as in fictional Umuofia, the presence of strangers who wielded authority over and menaced Ogidi's people bred animosity between native court employees and townspeople.

The Undue Influence of Clerks and Kotmas

Court clerks and *kotmas* were paid well for their work, but they derived even more substantial benefit from corrupt practices such as extortion and bribery. When delivering summonses or warrants of arrest to non-literate litigants at their homes, *kotmas* often

Oraegbuna Joseph Iwobi, interview by the author; Chief David N. C. Akobi, interview by the author; Dominic Nnamdi Obijiofor, interview by the author; Fabien Chukwude Okakpu, interview by the author.

⁶⁸ Fabien Chukwude Okakpu, interview by the author; Dominic Nnamdi Obijiofor, interview by the author; Chief Godfrey Amazikwu, interview by the author; Onwuameze Ikwuwelu, interview by the author; Chief John Amanwa, interview by the author; Anthony Okoye, interview by the author; Chief Ozoekwe Clement Okudo, interview by the author.

⁶⁹ Chief Obi A. Okudo, interview by the author; Chief Oraegbuna Joseph Iwobi, interview by the author; Lawrence Anwurebo, interview by the author; Chief Hillary Osegbo, interview by the author; Edwin Obiekwe, interview by the author; Akanano Ogidi, 21 March 2018; Fabien Chukwude Okakpu, interview by the author; Nwosu Nwawulu, in Nwabufo, "Traditional Law and Colonial Change," 73. Additionally, Jonathan Derrick ("The 'Native Clerk' in Colonial West Africa," *African Affairs* 82, no. 326 (1983): 66) noted that it was common for Igbo clerks in particular to work in court areas away from their hometowns.

⁷⁰ Nwosu Nwawulu, in Nwabufo, "Traditional Law and Colonial Change," 73.

⁷¹ Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 174.

⁷² I use [/] to indicate the line breaks shown in original; italics in original: Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 175.

misrepresented or fabricated what was stated in the court order: telling litigants they must produce money, yams, or a goat for the *kotma* to take to the court as part of a routine payment or fine.⁷³ In *Things Fall Apart*, the native court declares that the people of Umuofia must pay 200 bags of cowries to the court to secure the release of their imprisoned titled elders, but the *kotmas* sent to deliver the message and collect the fee from the people increase the amount to 250 bags, retaining the extra fifty for their own use.⁷⁴

If *kotmas* were corrupt, clerks were perhaps even more so, as they had access to court documents and could unofficially influence court decisions. They often solicited bribes of money, yams, fowls, and goats from litigants in exchange for ensuring judgment in their favor, and they even blackmailed litigants with the threat of intentionally misinterpreting or incorrectly documenting their testimony if they did not pay a bribe.⁷⁵ In the words of one of my oral history collaborators, Fabien Chukwude Okakpu, “the interpreter [would] not interpret what he heard, what the D.O. [district officer] [was] saying. He [would] expect you to come to his house and give him something. The court clerk [would] not write exactly what you said unless you grease[d] his palm.”⁷⁶ In the event that the district officer reviewed a case and declared that a litigant must pay a fine to the court, the interpreter often would translate the stipulated directive into Igbo for the litigant, but also add that he should bring a goat or cow to the interpreter’s house later on, which he claimed he would deliver to the district officer.⁷⁷

⁷³ Anonymous oral history collaborator 2, interview by the author; Udoh Boniface Uyanwa, interview by the author.

⁷⁴ Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 197.

⁷⁵ Dominic Nnamdi Obijiofor, interview by the author; Chief Godwin Nweke Agbogu, interview by the author; Anthony Okoye, interview by the author; Chukwuka Jerry Okongwu and Chukwudi M. Okongwu, interview by the author; Chief John Amanwa, interview by the author; Chief Oraegbuna Joseph Iwobi, interview by the author; Fabien Chukwude Okakpu, interview by the author; Falola and Adam Paddock, ed., *The Women’s War of 1929*, 39.

⁷⁶ Fabien Chukwude Okakpu, interview by the author.

⁷⁷ Chief John Amanwa, interview by the author; Chief Oraegbuna Joseph Iwobi, interview by the author; Anthony Okoye, interview by the author; Anonymous oral history collaborator 2, interview by the author; Chief Godwin Nweke Agbogu, interview by the author.

Corruption was endemic in the native court system from its beginning.⁷⁸ As early as 1913, there were reports of native court clerks in Onitsha Province being found guilty of bribery and blackmail. In the Onitsha Province annual report for that year, the commissioner noted that some issues arose concerning the people's mistrust of the native courts, due to "blackmailing and oppression on the part of the Police, Native Court Messenger[s] and other such officials."⁷⁹ In the same report, the commissioner made the following statement about the province's native courts:

Generally speaking, they appear to have done good service, although from time to time unfortunate misbehaviour on the part of the staff, and sometimes of the Chiefs as well, is brought to light. There can be no doubt but that they are, if efficiently supervised, a great factor in preserving the peace of the country; but when this is not possible, and sometimes it is not, then there is no question but that they degenerate into 'legalised' blackmailing centres, and are a constant and potent source of danger.⁸⁰

When caught, corrupt court employees could be sentenced to between six and eighteen months in prison.⁸¹

The colonial administration's 1918 removal of district officers from the native court was part of an attempt to make the courts more indigenous;⁸² but in practice, allowing warrant chiefs and clerks more control over court proceedings created new problems. Prior to 1918, the district officer or occasionally the assistant district officer of each division of Onitsha Province would regularly visit each of its eight native courts and supervise most of the cases brought to it.⁸³

⁷⁸ Harry A. Gailey, *The Road to Aba: A Study of British Administrative Policy in Eastern Nigeria* (New York: New York University Press, 1970), 72-73; Anonymous oral history collaborator 2, Ikenga Ogidi, 20 March 2018; Anthony Okoye, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 19 April 2018; Udoh Boniface Uyanwa, interview by the author, Akanano Ogidi, 13 April 2018; Anthony Okoye, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 19 April 2018; Chief Godwin Nweke Abogu, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 6 March 2018; Chief John Amanwa, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 28 March 2018; Fabien Chukwude Okakpu, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 1 May 2018.

⁷⁹ NAE, ONPROF 11/1/4: "Onitsha Province Annual Report for 1913," 1.

⁸⁰ NAE, ONPROF 11/1/4: "Onitsha Province Annual Report for 1913," 6.

⁸¹ For an example, see NAE, OP 404/1925 ONPROF 7/12/99: "Annual Report - Onitsha Province for the year 1925," 28. Corruption by way of giving or receiving bribes to influence court proceedings was explicitly prohibited by sections 53 and 54 of the 1906 Native Courts Ordinance, printed in *Laws of the Colony vol. II*, 1276-1277.

⁸² Van Allen, "Aba Riots," 21; Meek, *Law and Authority*, 329; Gailey, *The Road to Aba*, 72-73.

⁸³ NAE, OP 404/1925 ONPROF 7/12/99: "Annual Report - Onitsha Province for the year 1925," 2.

Subsequently, district officers would visit each native court about once every month, which left immense control in the hands of warrant chiefs, clerks, and *kotmas* at all other times.⁸⁴ As historians Toyin Falola and Adam Paddock note, this advantaged clerks even more than warrant chiefs, because the former “played significant roles in extorting money from court litigants by offering loans to losers so they could appeal decisions.”⁸⁵ Thus, after 1918, corruption in the courts soared.

An Igbo proverb holds that “a child will not be guilty if his father is among the judges,”⁸⁶ intimating that judgment made by humans is fallible and corruptible. In the native court system, these proverbial judges could be said to include court clerks in addition to members of the bench.⁸⁷ It is reasonable to presume that many of the litigants who brought cases to the native court did so because they believed that doing so increased their chances of a favorable outcome, i.e., winning the case. For some, this was because of bribery or a personal connection to a member of the court. One notable example was a 1928 Ogidi Native Court civil suit involving a well-connected woman from Onitsha, Madam Chibogwu, and a non-literate warrant chief from Umunya named Nwabude. According to the district officer who reviewed the case, Chibogwu tried to extort more money from Nwabude, despite his having already paid her the large sum of £216 that the Ogidi Native Court had determined that he owed.⁸⁸ Nwabude alleged that four court clerks had conspired with Chibogwu to withhold the receipts of his payments, and said that he was taken advantage of because he was not literate. The district officer, unaware of Chibogwu’s and the clerks’

⁸⁴ NAE, OP 404/1925 ONPROF 7/12/99: “Annual Report - Onitsha Province for the year 1925,” 2.

⁸⁵ Toyin Falola and Adam Paddock, *The Women’s War of 1929: A History of Anti-Colonial Resistance in Eastern Nigeria* (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2011), 39.

⁸⁶ I learned this Igbo proverb from Fabien Chukwude Okakpu, interview by the author.

⁸⁷ Clerks can be lumped into this category after 1918 due to their increased authority, as noted by Falola and Paddock above.

⁸⁸ NAE, OP 80/1928 ONPROF 7/15/28: “Petition by Nwabude of Umunya re case between him and Madam Chibogwu of Onitsha in Ogidi Native Court,” 17 February 1928 memorandum from the district officer of Onitsha to the resident of Onitsha province. In 2020, £216 amounts to approximately £16,460 or \$21,470.

manipulations, ordered Nwabude be suspended from his warrant chief position, which disallowed him from sitting as a native court judge, until he paid the exorbitant fine.⁸⁹ Nwabude beseeched the resident to help him escape this unjust predicament, but the resident explained that he could not intervene in an open case, as there was at least one pending case between Nwabude and Chibogwu in the Onitsha magistrate's court.⁹⁰ From this, it can be seen that the male-centric law of the native courts did not always benefit men to the detriment of women. Other factors—especially literacy and connections with court clerks—played a role in how people were treated in the native courts and, indeed, the wider colonial system. Yet, the ability to dictate the outcomes of native court cases in the way that clerks did was a distinctly male opportunity, because women were not eligible for clerkships.⁹¹

Another example of such corruption is provided by a 1935 case involving one of Walter Amobi's sons. The court document names him only as Mr. Amobi, brother of Ben Amobi, the latter being the eldest son of the late *igwe*. Mr. Amobi was a clerk for the Ogidi Native Court and was accused of tampering with a civil case between two women, Nwinyinya v. Emengini. In the initial trial, the court ruled in favor of the plaintiff, ordering Emengini to compensate the victim for the two teeth knocked out during a fight. The defendant appealed the ruling, the evidence from the original case being submitted to an appellate court in Onitsha, and on the day of that court's

⁸⁹ NAE, OP 80/1928 ONPROF 7/15/28: "Petition by Nwabude of Umunya," 25 January 1928 letter from Chief Nwabude to the resident of Onitsha province, 8-9.

⁹⁰ NAE, OP 80/1928 ONPROF 7/15/28: "Petition by Nwabude of Umunya," 25 January 1928 letter from Chief Nwabude to the resident of Onitsha province, 8-9, and 29 February 1928 memorandum from the resident of Onitsha to the district officer of Onitsha.

⁹¹ Multiple historians have noted the power that male colonial collaborators—especially court clerks and interpreters—wielded in different colonies across Africa from the nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century. Select examples include Emily Osborn, "Interpreting Colonial Power in French Guinea: The Boubou Penda-Ernest Noirot Affair of 1905," in *Intermediaries, Interpreters and Clerks*, 56-76; Maurice Nyamanga Amutabi, "Power and Influence of African Court Clerks and Translators in Colonial Kenya: The Case of Khwisero Native (African) Court, 1946-1956," in *Intermediaries, Interpreters and Clerks*, 202-219; Martin Klein, "African Participation in Colonial Rule: The Roles of Clerks, Interpreters, and Other Intermediaries," in *Intermediaries, Interpreters and Clerks*, 273-285; Derrick, "The 'Native Clerk,'" 61-74.

review, Nwinyinya was unable to attend. She later found out that the appellate court had “confirmed the original decision”; however, the original decision was now recorded in Ogidi as in favor of the defendant, Emengini.⁹² The only person who had access to the records and the ability to re-write the judgment was the court scribe, Mr. Amobi. Upon this discovery, Nwinyinya petitioned the district officer, arguing that Mr. Amobi had submitted a falsified copy of the original court proceedings to the appellate court. In her petition, Nwinyinya asserted that Mr. Amobi tampered with the document because the defendant, Emengini, was his paramour. The following is an excerpt from Nwinyinya’s petition:

The clerk wrote down what was necessary for the safeguard of his lover [...] The pugnacious court clerk Mr. Amobi, has failed to put on record the Majority judgment to the effect that [the] accused was found guilty, and fined [...] compensating for two teeth destroyed and costs. The most striking point is that he refused to accept the Doctor’s Certificate as evidence when tendered in the court, and did not show it in the record.⁹³

At the very least, this scenario presented a conflict of interest. It is also interesting in that it reveals Mr. Amobi apparently held the authority to decide whether or not certain evidence, such as a medical certificate submitted to the court, would be recognized as such.

A year later, the same Mr. Amobi was again accused of committing malfeasance, this time in the context of a civil case between in-laws regarding childcare payments. The defendant, a man from Umudioka named Kokwelu, had been left by his wife twenty years previously, and she and their children had since been living with her family. Upon her death in 1936, members of her *umunna* claimed that Kokwelu had not adequately contributed to the maintenance of the children, and demanded payment.⁹⁴ Soon after that case had been settled in the Ogidi Native Court, Kokwelu petitioned the resident of Onitsha Province, stating that the judges had given a verbal ruling in his

⁹² NAE, OP 8/137 ONPROF 8/1/122: “Nwinyinya of Ogidi - Petition from - Ogidi Native Court, 1935.”

⁹³ NAE, OP 8/137 ONPROF 8/1/122: “Nwinyinya of Ogidi - Petition from - Ogidi Native Court, 1935,” 2.

⁹⁴ NAE, OP 8/326 ONPROF 8/1/279: “Petition from Kokwelu against the judgment of Ogidi Native Court Case No. 53/1936 Okuefunu versus Kokwelu,” 20 January 1937 petition by Kokwelu to the resident of Onitsha province.

favor, but that he later found out the written report ruled in favor of the plaintiff.⁹⁵ Since Kokwelu himself was not literate, he was unaware of the incorrect report until a *kotma* later summoned him for payment of a fine connected with his supposed loss of the case. In his petition to the resident, Kokwelu detailed Mr. Amobi's misconduct, stating that the clerk's brother, Ben Amobi, was marrying the plaintiff's aunt, a woman named Ugoye. Mr. Amobi therefore displayed partiality, choosing not to record most of Kokwelu's statement in the court transcripts.⁹⁶ However, the resident of Onitsha Province denied Kokwelu's request for an appeal.⁹⁷

While the corruption of the Ogidi Native Court was frustrating to some litigants, others saw it as a primary reason for attending that court rather than the courts of deities, where lying and bribery were intolerable, and even punishable by death.⁹⁸ Specifically, some litigants believed they could give false testimony in native courts without fear of spiritual repercussions, because spiritual forces refused to enter these and other unclean or unholy places.⁹⁹ This was linked to the assertion that the court had been built where *ajo ofia*, an "evil forest," had once stood.¹⁰⁰ Those who were both wealthy and dishonest thrived in the native courts, because bribery virtually assured them of success, and they were protected from the wrath of deities that might otherwise accrue to them if they produced deceitful testimony. Bribery, meanwhile, was unthinkable in a deity's or *egwugwu*

⁹⁵ NAE, OP 8/326 ONPROF 8/1/279: "Petition from Kokwelu against the judgment of Ogidi Native Court Case No. 53/1936 Okuefuna versus Kokwelu," 20 January 1937 petition by Kokwelu to the resident of Onitsha province.

⁹⁶ NAE, OP 8/326 ONPROF 8/1/279: "Petition from Kokwelu against the judgment of Ogidi Native Court Case No. 53/1936 Okuefuna versus Kokwelu," 20 January 1937 petition by Kokwelu to the resident of Onitsha province.

⁹⁷ NAE, OP 8/326 ONPROF 8/1/279: "Petition from Kokwelu against the judgment of Ogidi Native Court Case No. 53/1936 Okuefuna versus Kokwelu," 4 February 1937 letter from the District Officer of Onitsha to the Resident of Onitsha Province.

⁹⁸ See Chapter 2.

⁹⁹ Chukwuka Jerry Okongwu and Chukwudi M. Okongwu, interview by the author; Fabien Chukwude Okakpu, interview by the author; Chief Amaeze Ekpeani, interview by the author; Chief Godwin Nweke Agbogu, interview by the author; Chief Godfrey Amazikwu, interview by the author; Anthony Okoye, interview by the author; Chief Obi A. Okudo, interview by the author.

¹⁰⁰ Chief Nwosu Okudo alias Nwawulu, interview by Edward Dike Ogugua Ibemesi, Ikenga Ogidi, 6 August 1981, in Edward Dike Ogugua Ibemesi, "Iyi-Enu Hospital: Origins and Development, 1907-1982," (B.A. Thesis, History Department, University of Nigeria Nsukka, 1982), 52; Oduche Cyril Okafor, interview by the author; Chief Obi A. Okudo, interview by the author; Chief Edward Dike Ibemesi, interview by the author.

court, because such spiritual forces always delivered justice; and this attitude appears to have carried over to the courts of *umunna*, *ndiichie*, *umuokpu*, and *ndinyom*. That is, even if one of their members might have been willing to take a bribe, the other members probably took steps to address this problem, given that bribery complaints against the indigenous courts were rare to nonexistent.¹⁰¹

Appeals and the Authority of Male Elders and Chiefs

Perhaps due to the extent of corruption in the native courts, litigants so frequently opted to appeal cases that district officers became overburdened.¹⁰² And, as the senior resident of Onitsha Province remarked in 1926, though these appeals were “far too numerous [...] very few of them [were] frivolous.”¹⁰³ This clearly implies that the original judgments were often incorrect or biased. Appeals processes could drag on for months or years, and litigants dissatisfied with the district officer’s determination of their appeals often sent letters directly to the resident, beseeching him to overturn the judgment of the district officer. The fact that such attempts almost never succeeded did nothing to deter litigants from protesting district officers’ allegedly final decisions.

This was an important way in which the native court appeals process differed from that of the indigenous courts, with its clear sense of finality. That is, the decisions of the *umuokpu Ogidi* council, the *egwugwu* council, and deities were incontrovertible,¹⁰⁴ whereas—at least in theory—one could appeal native court decisions an indefinite number of times. This was highlighted in the

¹⁰¹ Basden, *Among the Ibos*, 224; Forde and Jones, *The Igbo and Ibibio-Speaking Peoples*, 26; Afigbo, “An Outline,” 111; Iloanusi, *Myths and Creation of Man*, 203; Aguwa, *The Agwu Deity*, 54; Njoku, *Ala di Mma*, 126; Leith-Ross, *African Women*, 108; Mercy Onwukeme, interview by the author; Ifeoma Udemezue, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 4 September 2018; Chief Nwabuoku Osakwe (Dibueni Nwanyi), interview by the author, 1 August 2018; Chika Emedolibe, interview by the author.

¹⁰² Gailey (*The Road to Aba*, 72-73) notes that district officers in the early years of colonial rule spent (or could spend) much of their time settling issues regarding accusations of corruption that claimants levied against native court employees.

¹⁰³ NAE, OP 408/1926 ONPROF 7/13/126: “Onitsha Province: Annual Report for the year 1926,” 2.

¹⁰⁴ See Chapters 2 and 4.

above-mentioned 1928 conflict between Chibogwu and Nwabude. Indeed, a large number of native court cases traveled through multiple series of appeals, sometimes returning to the same district officer after the overloaded resident declined to address yet another appeal or request for review. In some instances, litigants directly refuted the decision of the district officer: as in the 1929 Ogidi Native Court case of Udozo v. Chukuemeka of Umunya. A man named Udozo from the town of Umunya petitioned the resident of the province to reconsider his case in a land dispute because, as he asserted, the district officer's review of the case yielded an incorrect and bad judgment, in favor of the other litigant.¹⁰⁵ When neither warrant chiefs nor British officials could resolve a conflict, the indigenous Igbo definition of justice—the maintenance of balance in the community—was not met; and in fact, native court decisions often led to more discord, as evidenced by the many disgruntled litigants who petitioned against them. As compared to the clear and indisputable justice that *umuokpu*, *egwugwu*, *ani*, and other deities decreed in indigenous courts, the outcomes of many Ogidi Native Court cases appeared questionable at best.

The situation was further complicated by the fact that overburdened district officers sometimes deferred to the opinions of the chiefs and male elders of Ogidi when judging appeals and reviews.¹⁰⁶ This was in part due to British officers' relative ignorance of indigenous Igbo law, despite having supervised native court trials for years. Following the 1929 criminal slander case Okafo of Ogidi vs. Okwudili and Nnoka, the defendant Okwudili petitioned against his conviction and the lengthy prison sentence the Ogidi Native Court had handed to him.¹⁰⁷ District Officer F.

¹⁰⁵ NAE, OP 269/1929 ONPROF 7/16/192: "Petition from Udozo in Ogidi Native Court case Udozo v. Chukuemeka of Umunya," 27 November 1929 letter from Udozo to the resident of Onitsha, 1-2.

¹⁰⁶ NAE, OP 139/1929 ONPROF 7/16/78: "Petition by Balonwu and Jonathan Balonwu re conviction of Okwudili and Nnoka by Ogidi Native Court"; NAE, OP 8/309 ONPROF 8/1/273: "Petition from Ikerika of Ogidi in Case Okeke vs. Ikerika Ogidi Native Court"; NAE, OP 506, ONPROF 8/1/4637: "Grant of Increased Judicial Powers to Hear and Determine."

¹⁰⁷ NAE, OP 139/1929 ONPROF 7/16/78: "Petition by Balonwu and Jonathan Balonwu re conviction of Okwudili and Nnoka by Ogidi Native Court," 18 June 1929 letter from the resident of Onitsha Province to the secretary of the Southern Provinces, 1.

S. Purchas sought the counsel of Ogidi male elders to discern what an appropriate punishment would be according to indigenous Igbo law, after which, Purchas remarked that “any interference with the sentence would have serious political consequences, and would tend to bring the Court and the Administration into disrepute.”¹⁰⁸ Thus, against the advice of his superiors, Purchas upheld the native court sentence, as the Ogidi elders had encouraged him to do.¹⁰⁹ Similarly, in the 1936 matter of Okeke vs. Ikerika, a land dispute between two men of the village of Nkwelle-Ogidi in Ezinkwo quarter, the district officer asked the village’s male elders for their advice, essentially granting them permission to decide the case for him.¹¹⁰ Importantly, however, it seems it was only Ogidi men, never women, that district officers consulted when faced with difficult appeals and reviews decisions,¹¹¹ despite *umuokpu Ogidi* having for centuries acted as the supreme court of appeals of the human realm.

Authority of the Native Court’s Judges

In the Onitsha Province generally and the Ogidi Native Court in particular from the 1910s to the 1940s, a plurality of criminal cases involved assault and theft, while most civil suits concerned debts and matrimonial issues.¹¹² Matrimonial cases might involve divorce or any issues

¹⁰⁸ NAE, OP 139/1929 ONPROF 7/16/78: “Petition by Balonwu and Jonathan Balonwu re conviction of Okwudili and Nnoka by Ogidi Native Court,” 12 June 1929 memorandum from the district officer of Onitsha to the resident of Onitsha, 1.

¹⁰⁹ NAE, OP 139/1929 ONPROF 7/16/78: “Petition by Balonwu and Jonathan Balonwu re conviction of Okwudili and Nnoka by Ogidi Native Court,” 12 June 1929 memorandum from the district officer of Onitsha to the resident of Onitsha, 1.

¹¹⁰ NAE, OP 8/309 ONPROF 8/1/273: “Petition from Ikerika of Ogidi in Case Okeke vs. Ikerika Ogidi Native Court,” 30 November 1936 from the district officer of Onitsha to the resident of Onitsha province, 20 October 1936 letter from the district officer of Onitsha to the resident of Onitsha, 2.

¹¹¹ This inference is based on the fact that colonial officials noted their consultations of “chiefs” and “elders,” which were all male, but never referenced women. See NAE, OP 269/1929 ONPROF 7/16/192: “Petition from Udozo in Ogidi Native Court case Udozo v. Chukuemeka of Umunya”; NAE, OP 139/1929 ONPROF 7/16/78: “Petition by Balonwu and Jonathan Balonwu re conviction of Okwudili and Nnoka by Ogidi Native Court.”

¹¹² Assault and theft were two of the most prominent categories of criminal cases, but did not quite comprise half of the total criminal cases brought to the courts, whereas more than half of all civil suits fell into either the categories of matrimonial or debt. NAE, OP 491/1922 ONPROF 7/9/39: “Annual Report Onitsha Province year ending 31 December 1922,” Onitsha Province Native Court Cases—summary of criminal and civil cases chart; NAE, OP 409/1923 ONPROF 7/10/41: “Annual Report - Onitsha Province - year ending 31 December 1923,” Onitsha Province Native Court Cases—summary of criminal and civil cases chart; NAE, OP 408/1926 ONPROF 7/13/126: “Onitsha

between husbands and wives apart from adultery, which was categorized separately. According to indigenous Igbo law, transgressions related to married life were often under the purview of women: *umuokpu*, in cases of maltreatment or general husband-wife disputes, and *ndinyom*, where wives were alleged to have acted inappropriately vis-à-vis their wifely duties.¹¹³ As explained by Violet Agu, a *nwaokpu Ogidi* who was interviewed by a researcher in 2015, prior to the arrival of the British, “in complex conflicts of conjugal character, the intervention of Umuada [i.e., *umuokpu*] was always [a] given.”¹¹⁴ The fact that marital civil cases were brought to the native courts in high numbers is likely to mean that relatively fewer cases of this nature were brought to the women’s courts. There is no firm evidence regarding the total number of such cases that were brought to the courts of *umuokpu* or *ndinyom* in any given year, so it cannot be determined what percentage of these cases were taken to the Ogidi Native Court instead. Nevertheless, the fact that matrimonial cases were tried by anyone other than *umuokpu* and *ndinyom* is a noteworthy indication of Ogidi women’s judicial authority being supplanted.

Matrimonial civil suits included issues around divorce that had not been resolved amicably by the families concerned. Before the Ogidi Native Court opened, if the *umunna* of the husband and that of the wife failed to resolve such a conflict, it could be decided by the *umuokpu*, which was the highest court of appeal in the human realm, or by the *egwugwu*, which was the highest

Province: Annual Report for the year 1926,” Onitsha Province Native Court Cases—summary of criminal and civil cases chart; NAE, OP 522/1927 ONPROF 7/14/213: “Annual Report Onitsha Province 1927,” Onitsha Province Native Court Cases—summary of criminal and civil cases chart; NAE, OP 317/1929 ONPROF 7/16/203: “Onitsha Division Annual Report statistics 1929,” Onitsha Division Native Court Cases—summary of criminal and civil cases chart; NAE, OP 267/1929 ONPROF 7/16/173: “Provincial Annual Report statistics 1929,” Onitsha Province Native Court Cases—summary of criminal and civil cases chart; NAE, OP 323/1930 ONPROF 7/17/203: “Annual Report Onitsha Province 1930,” Onitsha Province Native Court Cases—summary of criminal and civil cases chart; NAE, OP 1865 ONPROF 8/1/4902: “Annual Report Onitsha Province 1944,” Onitsha Province Native Court Cases—summary of criminal and civil cases chart; Fabien Chukwude Okakpu, interview by the author; Chief John Amanwa, interview by the author; Chief Hillary Osegbo, interview by the author; Anthony Okoye, interview by the author.

¹¹³ See Chapter 4.

¹¹⁴ Violet Agu, interview by Kosi Frances Obiefuna, 22 September 2015, Akanano Ogidi, in Obiefuna, “Cultural Revival in Ogidi After the Nigerian Civil War: 1970-1980” (B.A. Thesis, Department of History and International Studies, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, 2016), 80.

court (human or spiritual) in the land.¹¹⁵ The fact that some residents of Ogidi and the surrounding area chose the native court over their community's sacred and revered *egwugwu* council is telling.¹¹⁶ Essentially, this action was defiance of the supreme executive, legislative, and judicial authority of spiritual forces—particularly the *egwugwu*, who were the physical manifestations of one's own ancestors as well as emissaries of the earth goddess and her just laws.

Outstanding debt was by far the most common bone of contention in civil cases brought to the native courts.¹¹⁷ As failing to pay a debt is *nso ani* and therefore a direct offense against *ani*,¹¹⁸ prior to the establishment of the native courts, Ogidi creditors' only recourse was to the court of *ani*. Similarly, cases of alleged assault had traditionally been brought to the *umuokpu* council or the courts of deities, but were now being litigated in the native court. Likewise, stealing—the most common form of criminal accusation brought to the native court¹¹⁹—had previously been the province of several deities, including *ani* and *udo*. In the same vein as matrimonial cases, debt,

¹¹⁵ Chinua Achebe (*Things Fall Apart*, 90-93) illustrated an example of finality of the *egwugwu* council's decision in a divorce settlement in indigenous Igbo society.

¹¹⁶ Unlike the native courts in the early twentieth-century French Soudan, as Richard Roberts (*Litigants and Households: African Disputes and Colonial Courts in the French Soudan, 1895-1912* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2005), 125-147) notes, the contemporaneous native courts in Igboland did not offer an unprecedented avenue for women to leave their husbands or obtain new freedom, power, and rights. *Tupu ndi ocha bia*, divorce was a viable option (although negotiations were first sought and divorce was only a last resort), and women who were unhappy with or mistreated by their husbands were able to nullify their marriages and return to their natal homes according to indigenous law. While French colonial courts might have freed many women from unwanted marriages, the native courts of Igboland generally cannot be viewed as empowering for women. For evidence of divorce as legal under indigenous law in Ogidi, see Ononenyi Amobi, interview by Anthonia Uchenna Anyegbunam, Ikenga Ogidi, 9 September 1983, in Anyegbunam, "The External Relations of Ogidi Up to 1903" (B.A. Thesis, Department of History, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 1984), 106; Sebastian Okafo, interview by Anthonia Uchenna Anyegbunam, Abatete, 6 September 1983, in Anyegbunam, "The External Relations of Ogidi," 93; Nwude Anumba, interview by Anthonia Uchenna Anyegbunam, Uru Ogidi, 4 September 1983, in Anyegbunam, "The External Relations of Ogidi," 84; Ezekwesilu Mba (Okwesi), interview by Anthonia Uchenna Anyegbunam, Ikenga Ogidi, 19 August 1983, in Anyegbunam, "The External Relations of Ogidi," 77; Raphael Anyaegbunam, interview by Anthonia Uchenna Anyegbunam, Akanano Ogidi, 15 August 1983, in Anyegbunam, "The External Relations of Ogidi," 69; Clement Ifedi, interview by Anyegbunam, Ogbunike, 13 September 1983, in Anyegbunam, "The External Relations of Ogidi," 111; Chief Bernard Anyaegbunam, interview by Anthonia Uchenna Anyegbunam, Akanano Ogidi, 21 September 1983, in Anyegbunam, "The External Relations of Ogidi," 124; Victor Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), 87.

¹¹⁷ See footnote 113 above.

¹¹⁸ See Chapter 2.

¹¹⁹ See footnote 113 above.

assault, and theft cases litigated in the Ogidi Native Court presumably reduced the number, and at any rate reduced the proportion, of such cases that ani and other deities settled in their courts. Again, the extent of this change cannot be calculated due to lack of surviving evidence, but it was highly problematic irrespective of its size, as it undermined the judicial authority of the gods and goddesses of the indigenous Igbo religion, and subverted ani's ability to protect the community from injustice. And any departures from *omenani*, even small ones, thus represented a danger to the balance of indigenous Igbo society.

The Increasing Popularity of Native Courts

With the passage of time, the native courts became more acceptable to the people of Onitsha Province as a means of settling disputes. The earliest available colonial records indicate that 10,644 criminal and civil cases were brought to the fourteen native courts in the province in 1912.¹²⁰ This number slowly increased, reaching a peak in 1929 of 16,908 cases, when the province's native courts numbered thirty-two; and the system continued to attract more than 12,000 annual cases over the next two decades.¹²¹ Although data from after 1931 is limited, usage of the Ogidi Native Court appears to have reflected these general trends: peaking between 1925

¹²⁰ NAE, ONPROF 11/1/4: "Onitsha Province Annual Report for 1913," 7.

¹²¹ NAE, ONPROF 11/1/4: "Onitsha Province Annual Report for 1913," 7; NAE, ONPROF 11/1/5: "Report on the Onitsha Province for the Year 1915," 23-24; NAE, OP 491/1922 ONPROF 7/9/39: "Annual Report Onitsha Province year ending 31 December 1922," Onitsha Province Native Court Cases—summary of criminal and civil cases chart; NAE, OP 409/1923 ONPROF 7/10/41: "Annual Report - Onitsha Province - year ending 31 December 1923," Onitsha Province Native Court Cases—summary of criminal and civil cases chart; NAE, OP 408/1926 ONPROF 7/13/126: "Onitsha Province: Annual Report for the year 1926," Onitsha Province Native Court Cases—summary of criminal and civil cases chart; NAE, OP 522/1927 ONPROF 7/14/213: "Annual Report Onitsha Province 1927," Onitsha Province Native Court Cases—summary of criminal and civil cases chart; NAE, OP 267/1929 ONPROF 7/16/173: "Provincial Annual Report statistics 1929," Onitsha Province Native Court Cases—summary of criminal and civil cases chart; NAE, OP 323/1930 ONPROF 7/17/203: "Annual Report Onitsha Province 1930," Onitsha Province Native Court Cases—summary of criminal and civil cases chart; NAE, OP 324 ONPROF 8/1/3070: "Onitsha Province Annual Report 1932," Onitsha Province Native Court Cases—summary of criminal and civil cases chart; NAE, OP 1865 ONPROF 8/1/4902: "Annual Report Onitsha Province 1944," Onitsha Province Native Court Cases—summary of criminal and civil cases chart.

and 1931, when it surpassed 600 cases per year.¹²² This high volume of native court cases had several causes. For one, the palace court did not operate from late 1925 to 1944 due to the lack of an *igwe*.¹²³ But more importantly, the native courts' increasing popularity was due to Ogidi and other Igbo people's acceptance of the new religion, education system, and government that Europeans had ushered in. As more people converted to Christianity, joining the numerous Anglican and Catholic churches, they were urged by church leaders not to attend the shrines of indigenous deities, which the churches described as pagan or fetish worship.¹²⁴

The term fetishism was originated by French religious scholar Charles de Brosses. In his 1760 theory of religion, he defined it as the endowment of the natural world with sacred power, and deemed it proto-religious: a primitive stage of spirituality that had not yet developed into the final, monotheistic stage of religion.¹²⁵ A fundamentally similar misconception of indigenous Igbo religion as primitive led the British to assume that the Igbo did not practice religion, but rather, worshiped idols made of stone or wood. From the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth, missionaries and colonial officers described Igbo indigenous religion as superstition, fetishism,

¹²² NAE, ONPROF 11/1/10: "Annual Report Onitsha Division 1921," 5; NAE, OP 491/1922 ONPROF 7/9/39: "Annual Report Onitsha Province year ending 31 December 1922," Onitsha Province Native Court Cases—summary of criminal and civil cases chart; NAE, OP 409/1923 ONPROF 7/10/41: "Annual Report - Onitsha Province - year ending 31 December 1923," Onitsha Province Native Court Cases—summary of criminal and civil cases chart; NAE, OP 404/1925 ONPROF 7/12/99: "Annual Report - Onitsha Province for the year 1925," Annual Report Onitsha Division, 15; NAE, ONPROF 11/1/16: "Annual Report Onitsha Division 1926," 17; NAE, OP 522/1927 ONPROF 7/14/213: "Annual Report Onitsha Province 1927," Onitsha Province Native Court Cases—summary of criminal and civil cases chart; NAE, OP 317/1929 ONPROF 7/16/203: "Onitsha Division Annual Report statistics 1929," Onitsha Division Native Court Cases—summary of criminal and civil cases chart; NAE, OP 323/1930 ONPROF 7/17/203: "Annual Report Onitsha Province 1930," Onitsha Province Native Court Cases—summary of criminal and civil cases chart; NAE, OP 324 ONPROF 8/1/3070: "Onitsha Province Annual Report 1932," Onitsha Province Native Court Cases—summary of criminal and civil cases chart.

¹²³ See the Introduction.

¹²⁴ NAE, EP 9561 CSE 1/85/4879: "Intelligence Report on Ogidi and Abacha Villages, Onitsha Division, Onitsha Province, by Mr. B. G. Stone, A.D.O.," 11.

¹²⁵ Charles de Brosses, *Du Culte des Dieux Fétiches: ou Parallèle de l'Ancienne Religion de l'Egypte avec la Religion Actuelle de Nigritie* ([No publisher information], 1760); cited in Benjamin C. Ray, *African Religions: Symbol, Ritual, and Community* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1976), 5-6.

paganism, and heathenism.¹²⁶ British colonial officials' and British and French¹²⁷ missionaries' uses of these and other derogatory terms to describe Igbo indigenous religion and its practitioners demonstrated their low opinions of Igbo religion, culture, and society. Because Christianity was at odds with indigenous Igbo religion, it was also at odds with indigenous Igbo law, with which that religion—as we have seen—was intricately bound up. Thus, when churches sought to ban their congregants from attending indigenous deities' shrines, they were also (although perhaps inadvertently in some cases) denying them access to important courts of law within the indigenous legal system.

Factors Leading to the Rise of the Ogidi Native Court's Popularity

People visited the Ogidi Native Court with increasing frequency from the 1910s to the early 1930s for a variety of reasons, not all of which have been mentioned above. One was fear of contravening the colonial government's expectation that, aside from certain criminal cases as previously noted, all legal cases involving the indigenous people of Nigeria were to be brought to the native courts, where colonial officials could supervise their adjudication according to 'native

¹²⁶ Select examples of colonial officers and missionaries referring to Igbo religion as superstition, fetishism, paganism, or heathenism: *The Church Missionary Gleaner* May 1860 (London: Church Missionary Society. Available via Adam Matthew, Marlborough, Church Missionary Society Periodicals), 52, 53; *The Church Missionary Gleaner, Volume 4, Issue 3* 1844 London: Church Missionary Society. Available via Adam Matthew, Marlborough, Church Missionary Society Periodicals, 25; Church Mission Society Annual Report 1941-1942 (*Annual Report of the Church Missionary Society*, 1929 London: Church Missionary Society. Available via Adam Matthew, Marlborough, Church Missionary Society Periodicals), 12; NAE, OP 391/1920, ONPROF 7/7/42: "Record of customs and superstitions of the tribes of the Colony and Southern Provinces of Nigeria," 3 September 1920 letter from Bertram Hodges, Acting Secretary, Southern Provinces to Residents of the Southern Provinces, 2; NAE, OP 117/1925 ONPROF 7/12/18: "Conflict between Christian and Pagan Customs," 22 April 1925 Memorandum from the Station Magistrate, Onitsha to the Senior Resident, Onitsha Province; NAE, OP 351/1924 ONPROF 7/11/56: "Christianity - Converts in disposal of wives in excess of one," 16 October 1924 letter from N. C. Duncan, Udi District Officer, to the Very Reverend Father Davey; NAE, OP 199/1928 ONPROF 7/15/90: "Divorce Cases tried in Native Courts—Ruling," 12 May 1928 letter from C. M. S., Onitsha to the W. Buchanan, Resident of Onitsha Province, 1; NAE, OP 543/1929 ONPROF 7/14/220: "Anthropological Research," 9 December 1927 letter from H. J. Matthews, the Anthropological Officer, Southern Provinces to the Resident, Onitsha Province, 1; NAE, SP 2004/410 MINLOC 6/1/26: "Walter Amobi of Onitsha Petition for Subsidy and to be made Permanent President of the Native Court," 22 October 1923 petition from Walter Amobi, Ogidi, to the Governor General Sir Hugh Clifford, G. C. M. G (with copies to the Lieutenant-Governor, SP, and the Resident Onitsha), 3.

¹²⁷ The French missionaries were the Holy Ghost Missionaries of the Roman Catholic Mission. They first arrived in Onitsha in 1885 and Ogidi in 1912. Ibemesi, *Ogidi*, 97.

law and custom.’ This meant that the indigenous courts of *umuokpu*, *ndinyom*, *umunna*, *ndiichie*, *egwugwu*, and various deities were not perceived as acceptable courts of law by the colony’s administration, and attending them could incur colonial officials’ wrath. One of my oral history collaborators, Anthony Okoye, explained that if anyone tried to resist colonial rules, then *kotmas* would arrest them, and not even a man wielding a machete would dare to resist arrest by attacking the fearsome messengers.¹²⁸ The British had already displayed their military prowess in *aro nti ji egbe*, “the year of breaking guns,” when an army was brought in to seize the people’s firearms; and their legal authority in 1914, when they incarcerated women who fought native court employees during the women’s market protest. Thus, the people of Ogidi had little choice but to accept the colonizer’s commands, including that their new legal system be used in place of the old. This general acceptance of colonial law due to fear is also captured in *Things Fall Apart*. While the people of Umuofia gather in the marketplace to discuss what action to take against the colonizers who had recently imprisoned six of their most respected elders, a troop of *kotmas* arrives to deliver the district commissioner’s orders that the meeting must cease. Okonkwo’s immediate reaction is to kill the head messenger with his machete, but he quickly realizes that the rest of Umuofia is shocked by his fatal deed. Too afraid to join in his resistance, they allow the other messengers to flee and tell the British officers what transpired.¹²⁹ As a result, the district commissioner, flanked by soldiers and *kotmas*, arrives at Okonkwo’s compound to arrest and try him in the commissioner’s court.¹³⁰ Of course, they do not find Okonkwo there, for he has already hanged himself in the forest behind his compound.¹³¹

¹²⁸ Anthony Okoye, interview by the author. Similar sentiments expressed by Chief Obi A. Okudo, interview by the author; Nwoye Leonard Okafor, Eze Ajani, interview by the author, Ogidi, 22 March 2018.

¹²⁹ Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 204-205.

¹³⁰ Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 206.

¹³¹ Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 207.

The people of Umuofia, like those of Ogidi, had reason to fear the might of the colonial state, and recognized that following *omenani* did not safeguard them from its punishments. In an earlier episode in the novel, for example, the men of Umuofia discuss the fate of a man named Aneto who had killed a clansman. As Aneto packs up his belongings, preparing to be exiled in accordance with *omenani*, the *kotmas* find him and bring him to the district commissioner's headquarters, where he is convicted of homicide and hanged.¹³² Even though Aneto had been prepared to head into exile and to allow the community to raze his compound and cleanse the land that had been tainted by the blood of a clansman—which would have satisfied *ani* and restored balance to society¹³³—it is British law that decides his fate.

Another motivating factor for patronizing the Ogidi Native Court was, at least according to colonial officials, Igbo people's increasing confidence in the colonial government, coupled with the increasing value that they placed on written judgments.¹³⁴ Whether real or imagined, this increased trust in the administration and in the value of written court records would have made sense, due to a combination of other changes that had occurred since the arrival of missionaries in the region. That is, a growing number of people accepted the native courts because they began to endorse the new lifestyle instituted by the British. A considerable body of oral history evidence cites specific changes that the people of Ogidi genuinely appreciated, prominent among which

¹³² Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 177.

¹³³ See Chapter 2.

¹³⁴ In the 1913 Onitsha Province report, the commissioner wrote that “the condition of the Province may be deemed Politically sound in regard to the general attitude of the Natives towards the Government. A substantial proof of this is shown by the more general interest shown by the people in the Administration, and by the daily increasing numbers who come in to the various District Officers to have their complaints settled” (NAE, ONPROF 11/1/4: “Onitsha Province Annual Report for 1913,” 1).

Similarly, in the province's 1925 report, the senior resident remarked that “there has been a large increase in the number of both Civil and Criminal actions taken in the Native Courts. This increase in my opinion, is due in a large measure to the fact that there has been greater confidence and this is borne out by the lessening number of appeals. [...] The natives too are realising more and more the benefit and value of recorded judgments” (NAE, OP 404/1925 ONPROF 7/12/99: “Annual Report - Onitsha Province for the year 1925,” Report on the Onitsha Province for the year ended 31st December 1925, 27).

were the keeping of written rather than oral records; the teachings of Christianity; English education; the construction of hospitals and wider, paved roads; the efforts by British forces to end the region's frequent wars; and the bans on slavery and the killing of twins.¹³⁵

The popularity of Iyi-Enu Hospital, in particular, may have helped to endear the British to the people of Ogidi and the surrounding area. District Officer Purchas wrote in 1929 that "patients attend in large numbers, and from all parts of the Province";¹³⁶ and the hospital's enduring popularity is substantiated by statistics from the 1930s and early '40s, which show that roughly 28,000 to 58,000 out-patients and 500 to 4,000 in-patients were treated every year.¹³⁷ The hospital also helped to foster a positive relationship between the missionaries who ran the compound and nearby communities, especially Ogidi. One of the hospital's measurable benefits was that the missionaries who ran it trained and employed numerous people from Ogidi in Western medicine, which allowed them to prosper in the colonial society that valued such medical professionals.¹³⁸

¹³⁵ Nwanna Amobi, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 27 March 2018; Ori C. Uzowulu, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 16 March 2018; Udoh Boniface Uyanwa, interview by the author; Zinobia Ikpeze, interview by the author, Trans-Ekulu Enugu, 24 January 2018; Fabien Chukwude Okakpu, interview by the author; Ogbuefi Nnagboo, interview by Anthonia Uchenna Anyegbunam, Umuoji, 18 September 1983, in Anyegbunam, "The External Relations of Ogidi," 121; Nwosu Nwawulu, in Nwabufu, "Traditional Law and Colonial Change," 73; Ogbuefi Ezigbo Otue Unachukwu, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, Uru Ogidi, 28 September 1978, in Nwabufu, "Traditional Law and Colonial Change," 76-77; Okodo Mgbochi, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, Akanano Ogidi, 1 December 1978, in Nwabufu, "Traditional Law and Colonial Change," 81; Nwokoye Igboekwe, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, Akanano Ogidi, 15 August 1978, in Nwabufu, "Traditional Law and Colonial Change," 91; Uzowulu Ezekwesili, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, Ikenga Ogidi, 10 September 1978, in Nwabufu, "Traditional Law and Colonial Change," 75; Chief Bernard Anyaegbunam, in Anyegbunam, "The External Relations of Ogidi," 129; Ezekwesilu Mba (Okwesi), in Anyegbunam, "The External Relations of Ogidi," 81; Raphael Anyaegbunam, in Anyegbunam, "The External Relations of Ogidi," 71; Nwosu Enwude (Nwawulu), interview by Anyegbunam, Ikenga Ogidi, 7 September 1983, in Anyegbunam, "The External Relations of Ogidi," 102; Ichie Ezigbo Otuo, interview by Anthonia Uchenna Anyegbunam, Uru Ogidi, 25 September 1983, in Anyegbunam, "The External Relations of Ogidi," 137.

¹³⁶ NAE, OP 267/1929 ONPROF 7/16/172: "Annual Report - Onitsha Province 1929," 55. Furthermore, Ogidi elder, Ezekwesilu Mba (Okwesi) (in Anyegbunam, "The External Relations of Ogidi," 81), interviewed in 1983, asserted that Iyi-Enu brought many patients to Ogidi.

¹³⁷ NAE, OP 214/1931 ONPROF 7/18/111: "Annual Report 1931 Onitsha Province," Appendix "D"; NAE, OP 842 ONPROF 8/1/4712: "Annual Report Onitsha Province 1933," Annual Report Onitsha Division, 62; NAE, OP 842 ONPROF 8/1/4713: "Annual Report Onitsha Province 1934," 25; NAE, OP 1659 ONPROF 1/14/523: "Annual Report Onitsha Province 1937," 23; NAE, OP 1865 ONPROF 8/1/4902: "Annual Report Onitsha Province 1944," Annual Report on the Onitsha Division 1944, 6.

¹³⁸ Chief Nwosu Okudo alias Nwawulu, in Ibemesi, "Iyi-Enu Hospital," 51-52; Ogbuefi Godfrey Anene Emekwue, interview by Edward Dike Ogugua Ibemesi, Obosi, 18 August 1981, in Ibemesi, "Iyi-Enu Hospital," 59-60; Eunice

When they first arrived in Ogidi, in 1892 and 1912 respectively, Anglican and Catholic missionaries enticed some individuals to join their churches by offering them commodities such as tobacco, liquor, sweets, biscuits, and mirrors.¹³⁹ These tactics were moderately successful, but the incentives were soon outweighed by the sad-sounding songs that missionaries sang, which many in Ogidi found unpleasant.¹⁴⁰ Nonetheless, some townspeople sought to join the new religion and the new form of education because they found their content genuinely appealing, and others because of the opportunities they provided to elevate their personal prosperity and social standing,¹⁴¹ since—as we have seen—one needed at least minimal English education to be qualified to work for the missionaries or the colonial government. Both of these two groups were personified by Walter Amobi. Although conversion in Ogidi was slow at first, only yielding twenty-three baptized converts over the first fifteen years of Christian proselytization, the churches and to a larger extent the schools that the missionaries established drew in many more people between the 1910s and the 1930s.¹⁴² According to a 1931 census, Onitsha Division, an area of

Ikeazor (nne Iwaka), interview by Edward Dike Ogugua Ibemesi, Obosi, 18 August 1981, in Ibemesi, “Iyi-Enu Hospital,” 57-58; Phyllis Emetam Obi (nee Araka), interview by Edward Dike Ogugua Ibemesi, Onitsha, 19 August 1981, in Ibemesi, “Iyi-Enu Hospital,” 62-63.

¹³⁹ Anonymous oral history collaborator 1, interview by the author; Chief Godwin Nweke Agbogwu, interview by the author; Chief Obi A. Okudo, interview by the author; Nwanna Amobi, interview by the author.

¹⁴⁰ Chinua Achebe (*There Was A Country: A Memoir*. New York: Penguin Books, 2012), 7) recounted that his father’s maternal uncle received the first Christian missionaries in Ogidi but later asked them to move their church services to “a public playground on account of their singing, which he considered too dismal for a living man’s compound.” Achebe’s daughter, Nwando Achebe (*Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings: Female Power and Authority in Northern Igboland, 1900-1960* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2005), 3), reiterates this explanation, stating that the missionaries’ “‘sad and dreary songs’ [...] upset my great-great-uncle and his family. As a result, my great-great-uncle sent them on their way.”

¹⁴¹ Fabien Chukwude Okakpu, interview by the author; Chukwuka Jerry Okongwu and Chukwudi M. Okongwu, interview by the author; Dominic Nnamdi Obijiofor, interview by the author; Udoh Boniface Uyanwa, interview by the author; Chief Oraegbuna Joseph Iwobi, interview by the author; Anonymous oral history collaborator 2, interview by the author; Ori C. Uzowulu, interview by the author; Nwanna Amobi, interview by the author.

¹⁴² Chieka Ifemesia et. al, *Ogidi Anglican Centenary 1892-1992: An Outline History* ([no place of publication information]: [no publisher information], 1992), 6, 11. This was also true across Igboland, see NAE, OP 324 ONPROF 8/1/3070: “Onitsha Province Annual Report 1932,” 58; Van Allen, “‘Aba Riots,’” 24.

In the mid-1930s, Ogidi was still one of the main hubs of English education in the area. As an anecdotal evidence, Chinua Achebe remembered entering primary school in or around 1936, attending St. Philip’s Central School in Ogidi along with “pupils from Ogidi and surrounding towns.” Chinua Achebe, *There Was a Country: A Memoir* (New York: Penguin, 2012), 15.

roughly 4,900 square miles, was home to 29,000 Christian Igbos, comprising more than ten percent of its population.¹⁴³ However, the percentage of Christian converts within Ogidi was probably higher than the division-wide average, because of its proximity to the missionary center of Onitsha, and because it had numerous churches and some of the only schools in the area as of the 1930s.¹⁴⁴ In 1933, moreover, the Onitsha Division district officer made a direct connection between missionization and the legal changes I have been describing: “almost certainly as the result of educative Christian ideas,” he wrote, “jujuism is definitely declining.”¹⁴⁵ As evidence, he pointed to “the fading value of the ‘oath’ in the Native Courts. Oaths which formerly were regarded as tremendous things are frequently treated lightly—and the tendency is apparent in the Courts to dispense with the oath if possible. Formerly[,] almost every decision depended upon the oath of one or other of the parties.”¹⁴⁶ This is particularly important, given that the practice of oath-swearing was central to the procedures of the courts of deities of the indigenous religion.¹⁴⁷

With the increased acceptance of British institutions, particularly Christianity and English education, opportunities emerged for individuals in Ogidi to rise to previously unattainable political, economic, and social heights. Many of those who initially joined the churches and schools were of low social status in indigenous Igbo society because of their youth or various other personal circumstances,¹⁴⁸ and thus had little to lose and everything to gain from joining the new

¹⁴³ This number included 12,000 Anglicans and 17,000 Catholics. NAE, OP 324 ONPROF 8/1/3070: “Onitsha Province Annual Report 1932,” 58.

¹⁴⁴ Ifemesia et. al, *Ogidi Anglican Centenary*, 3, 7, 8, 14, 21; Ibemesi, *Iyi-Enu Hospital: Origins and Development (1907-1982)* (Enugu: MAX Publicity Limited, 1982), 3-4.

¹⁴⁵ What the district officer referred to as “jujuism” was the indigenous Igbo religion. NAE, OP 842 ONPROF 8/1/4712: “Annual Report Onitsha Province 1933,” Annual Report 1933 Onitsha Division, 40.

¹⁴⁶ NAE, OP 842 ONPROF 8/1/4712: “Annual Report Onitsha Province 1933,” Annual Report 1933 Onitsha Division, 40.

¹⁴⁷ See Chapter 2.

¹⁴⁸ Anonymous oral history collaborator 2, interview by the author; Ori C. Uzowulu, interview by the author; Augustine S. O. Okwu, *Igbo Culture and the Christian Missions, 1857-1957: Conversion in Theory and Practice* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2010), 93; Elizabeth Isichei, *The Ibo People and the Europeans: The Genesis of a Relationship to 1906* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1973), 104.

religion. Of course, many still feared or remained suspicious of the British, their churches and schools, or just remained steadfast in their religious beliefs and way of life.¹⁴⁹ Yet, whether they wished to or not, many in Ogidi and the surrounding towns learned to adapt to and accept the changes that the British imposed, including the notoriously corrupt native courts. Despite such corruption—or for some devious litigants, because of it—the native courts in Onitsha Province steadily increased in popularity from the early 1910s to the mid 1920s; and they remained popular until the early 1930s, when district officers began to encourage councils of men in each town to settle more disputes outside of the courts. This change was intended in part to help decrease pressure on the system, and in part to provide a smooth transition to a revamped native court system that the administration was preparing to introduce.¹⁵⁰

1930s Reforms and the Authority of Titled Men

In the wake of the famous 1929 Women’s War that swept across the Owerri and Calabar Provinces, the colonial administration launched inquiries into indigenous governance and the effectiveness of the native courts in all parts of southeastern Nigeria.¹⁵¹ Colonial officials finally conceded in 1932 that “the present Native Courts generally cannot be said to be in accord with Native Custom either in their constitution or organisation.”¹⁵² Even though no towns from Onitsha Province participated in the Women’s War, by the end of 1932, “practically the whole of the

¹⁴⁹ Lawrence Anwurebo, interview by the author; Nwoye Leonard Okafor, Eze Ajani, interview by the author; Dominic Nnamdi Obijiofor, interview by the author; Udoh Boniface Uyanwa, interview by the author; Chief John Amanwa, interview by the author.

¹⁵⁰ NAE, OP 324 ONPROF 8/1/3070: “Onitsha Province Annual Report 1932”; NAE, EP 9561 CSE 1/85/4879: “Intelligence Report on Ogidi and Abacha Villages.”

¹⁵¹ See Falola and Paddock, *The Women’s War of 1929*, esp. 75-96; Marc Matera, Misty L. Bastian, and Susan Kingsley Kent, *The Women’s War of 1929: Gender and Violence in Colonial Nigeria* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), esp. 218-234.

¹⁵² NAE, OP 324 ONPROF 8/1/3070: “Onitsha Province Annual Report 1932,” Onitsha Province by W. H. Lloyd, Esqr. Acting Resident, 4.

Province [...was] covered by intelligence enquiries.”¹⁵³ Based on this intelligence gathered in Onitsha Province’s communities, the administration reorganized the native court system, replacing the old-style courts with two new types, both allegedly based on indigenous practice.¹⁵⁴

Part of the intelligence-gathering effort that had led to this change involved British officers’ investigations of the composition of the indigenous system of government in each town. Their accounts, however, consistently failed to include information on the roles of women and spiritual forces, and the report on Ogidi was no exception. Assistant District Officer B. G. Stone’s assessment of the framework of indigenous governance there was as follows: “the administrative organisation is based solely on the title system with no admixture of untitled elders as in Abacha. [...] The Village Council is composed of the Ezes and the Ozo title-holders who at present number between 200 and 300.”¹⁵⁵ Later in the same report, Stone described the “ancient judicial system” as “identical with the administrative” one.¹⁵⁶ There are two main, possible reasons for Stone’s inaccurate conclusion that Ogidi’s government only included men. First, he could have failed to ask both women and men about women’s roles; and if he only asked men, they might by that point have bought into British male biases against women having political or judicial roles. Second, the men of Ogidi could have endeavored to explain that indigenous governance was based on a balance of male and female powers, but Stone would have dismissed this as untrue and irrelevant. Likewise, Stone’s omission of the authority of spiritual forces could have been because the men he interviewed in Ogidi did not mention them, or because he failed to comprehend how these invisible forces could relate to governance and law, or because he dismissed any talk of spiritual

¹⁵³ NAE, OP 324 ONPROF 8/1/3070: “Onitsha Province Annual Report 1932,” Onitsha Province by W. H. Lloyd, Esqr. Acting Resident, 59.

¹⁵⁴ NAE, OP 842 ONPROF 8/1/4712: “Annual Report Onitsha Province 1933,” Annual Report 1933 Onitsha Division, 22; NAE, OP 1659 ONPROF 1/14/523: “Annual Report Onitsha Province 1937,” 9.

¹⁵⁵ NAE, EP 9561 CSE 1/85/4879: “Intelligence Report on Ogidi and Abacha Villages,” 7, 8.

¹⁵⁶ NAE, EP 9561 CSE 1/85/4879: “Intelligence Report on Ogidi and Abacha Villages,” 12.

forces out of hand, as paganism. In short, the colonial administration's second stage of re-gendering Ogidi's legal system was probably inadvertent, in that its officials by the 1930s seem to have assumed it had always been male-dominated. Moreover, it would not have been in the interest of the male colonial collaborators to reveal the true nature of their town's indigenous institution of law to the British, because by doing so, that evidence would work against these men's newfound positions of authority in the colonial system.

Some other factors should also be considered, however. Stone was accompanied by a government-employed interpreter and a *kotma*, and spent a total of three or four days interviewing the townspeople.¹⁵⁷ From my experience with interviewing in Ogidi, it generally takes much longer than a few days to earn the trust of oral history collaborators, and much longer to gather the opinions and knowledge of a wide array of people from the various quarters of the town. Therefore, Stone's investigation could not have been thorough, and this almost certainly had a negative impact on the accuracy of the information he accumulated. Moreover, in the ominous presence of a *kotma*, perhaps no one wished to say anything that might upset the colonial order that had given the *kotma* his privileged but undeserved position. And it is also possible that Stone's interpreter chose to omit or add details when translating the information gathered from the people of Ogidi.

In any event, based on Stone's and parallel intelligence-gathering efforts across the region, two types of reformed courts were established. The first, termed village councils, operated at the town level;¹⁵⁸ and the second, group courts, catered to clusters of between four and eight proximate towns.¹⁵⁹ These group courts were still often referred to as native courts and functioned much the

¹⁵⁷ NAE, EP 9561 CSE 1/85/4879: "Intelligence Report on Ogidi and Abacha Villages," 3.

¹⁵⁸ British officials often conflated the terms 'village' and 'town,' which was the case in the labeling of this type of council.

¹⁵⁹ NAE, OP 842 ONPROF 8/1/4712: "Annual Report Onitsha Province 1933," Annual Report 1933 Onitsha Division, 22; NAE, OP 1659 ONPROF 1/14/523: "Annual Report Onitsha Province 1937," 9.

same as their predecessors, except that 1) none were graded above D, and thus only dealt with minor offenses, and 2) their judges were large panels of men selected by the townspeople, rather than warrant chiefs.¹⁶⁰ In 1933, Ogidi was assigned to a perambulating group court that also covered the towns of Abacha, Eziowelle, Umudioka, and Umunnachi, and that was held in each location at regular intervals and in a set order.¹⁶¹ Regardless of which of these five towns it was meeting in, however, this court was most often referred to as either the Ogidi Native Court or the Ogidi Group Court.¹⁶² The main purpose of this reorganization, as colonial officials termed it, was to eliminate the problematic warrant chief position, and instead allow councils of men to jointly judge cases in a more public setting.

Across the province, the village councils usually comprised the eldest age grades of men, plus titled men of any age. However, as noted in Stone's report, only titled men formed the council in Ogidi.¹⁶³ As the Anglican and Catholic churches both prohibited title-taking because of its links to indigenous religious rituals,¹⁶⁴ no Christians were eligible to sit as judges in Ogidi when the native court system was first reorganized. However, the churches allowed their congregants to take titles beginning in the mid-1930s, when the title societies agreed that Christians only needed to provide the necessary entrance fees, and were not required to participate in any indigenous religious ceremonies.¹⁶⁵ From that point, many young and wealthy Christian men joined the village

¹⁶⁰ NAE, OP 842 ONPROF 8/1/4712: "Annual Report Onitsha Province 1933," Annual Report 1933 Onitsha Division, 22; NAE, OP 1659 ONPROF 1/14/523: "Annual Report Onitsha Province 1937," 9.

¹⁶¹ NAE, OP 842 ONPROF 8/1/4712: "Annual Report Onitsha Province 1933," Annual Report 1933 Onitsha Division, 13.

¹⁶² NAE, OP 842 ONPROF 8/1/4712: "Annual Report Onitsha Province 1933," Annual Report 1933 Onitsha Division, 13, 23.

¹⁶³ NAE, OP 842 ONPROF 8/1/4712: "Annual Report Onitsha Province 1933," Annual Report 1933 Onitsha Division, 15, 22.

¹⁶⁴ NAE, OP 842 ONPROF 8/1/4712: "Annual Report Onitsha Province 1933," Annual Report 1933 Onitsha Division, 39-40.

¹⁶⁵ NAE, OP 842 ONPROF 8/1/4712: "Annual Report Onitsha Province 1933," Annual Report 1933 Onitsha Division, 39-40.

councils, and some sat as judges on the group court bench.¹⁶⁶ Thus, not only were these new courts all-male, but they also included increasing numbers of Christians who were generally not elders; who brought with them the baggage of the male-biased teachings of the churches and schools that they attended; and who, by virtue of their new faith, did not strictly adhere to *omenani*. In his 1933 annual report, the district officer of Onitsha Division observed a rift between the largely English-educated, Christian youth and the elders, most of whom had not attended the new schools or churches:

The measure of enlightenment which the youth acquires from his schooling and the inclination to scoff at the old-time usages of the illiterates has tended to awaken a spirit of independence and disrespect for the authority of the Elders. Then too, jujuism in all its forms which make up the life of the older men of the villages is opposed to the Christian teaching of the schools—the young lad therefore is divorced from the practices which govern the illiterates’ life and which keep them in some degree in disciplined subjection.¹⁶⁷

In this context, it is important to recall that it is *nso ani* for a junior member of Igbo society to insult or disrespect a senior one, on pain of banishment.¹⁶⁸ Thus, the above-mentioned disrespect that young men showed to their elders by scoffing at them for their illiteracy constituted a serious violation of indigenous law, and yet this was apparently consequence-free, given the degree to which members of the younger generation were “divorced from the practices” of their elders.

In short, the restructuring of the native court system in a purportedly more indigenous direction merely extended authority to more men, i.e., councils with up to 300 members per village or town¹⁶⁹ rather than a handful of warrant chiefs, but it still excluded women. It was by this two-

¹⁶⁶ NAE, OP 842 ONPROF 8/1/4712: “Annual Report Onitsha Province 1933,” Annual Report 1933 Onitsha Division, 39-40.

¹⁶⁷ NAE, OP 842 ONPROF 8/1/4712: “Annual Report Onitsha Province 1933,” Annual Report 1933 Onitsha Division, 38.

¹⁶⁸ NAE, OP 139/1929 ONPROF 7/16/78: “Petition by Balonwu and Jonathan Balonwu re conviction of Okwudili and Nnoka by Ogidi Native Court,” 12 June 1929 memorandum from the district officer of Onitsha Division to the senior resident of Onitsha Province, 1. See Chapter 2 for further explanation.

¹⁶⁹ In 1933, the Onitsha Division district officer stated, “As many as 200 to 300 judges would attend a sitting—with the result that nothing could be achieved.” NAE, OP 842 ONPROF 8/1/4712: “Annual Report Onitsha Province 1933,” Annual Report 1933 Onitsha Division, 18.

stage process of the restructuring of the judiciary, then, that between 1911 and 1933 *umuokpu Ogidi* went from being the supreme court of the human realm of law to only being involved in women's affairs and not imbued with any legitimate judicial authority in the eyes of the colonial government. In addition, the women's council's most severe and effective enactment of justice, 'making war,' was effectively banned. Van Allen explains that, as part of the 1933 reforms, the colonial government

outlawed "self-help"—the use of force by anyone but the government to punish wrongdoers—and the increasingly effective enforcement of this ban eliminated the women's ultimate weapon: "sitting on a man". In attempting to create specialized political institutions on the Western model with participation on the basis of individual achievement, the British created a system in which there was no place for group solidarity, no possibility of dispersed and shared political authority or power of enforcement, and thus very little place for women.¹⁷⁰

As we have seen, when the women of *Ogidi* acted collectively, they were effective in sanctioning wrongdoers. Part of the reason that the native court system was generally not beneficial to women is that it did not allow large groups (of men or women) to present their cases. While cases could be placed on behalf of large groups, and sometimes even on behalf of whole towns, only a few individuals were selected to represent the group as litigants in the court. The relatively few women who brought grievances to the *Ogidi* Native Court were forced to do so on their own, rather than with the support of a cohort of women from their village, quarter, or town.¹⁷¹

In addition to excluding women's judicial participation, the reorganized native court system can be seen as usurping the role of the *egwugwu* council. One of the issues with the first iteration of native courts was that, although technically public, their court buildings could not accommodate their whole communities. The reorganization of 1933 was modeled to some extent

¹⁷⁰ Van Allen, "'Aba Riots,'" 23-24. Van Allen cites Leith-Ross, *African Women*, 109-110, 163, 214.

¹⁷¹ One example can be found in the story of the 1914 women's market protest in Chapter 4, in which a small delegation of women was dispatched to air their grievances with Amobi to the district officer in his courthouse in Onitsha. Courts built *oge ndi ocha chilu* were too small to fit any entire village.

on trials that were truly open to the public: with the judges meeting in an open marketplace or *ilo* (village square), allowing everyone in the community to gather and listen to whatever dispute was brought forward.¹⁷² As such, the reformed native courts bore some physical resemblance to *egwugwu* councils' courts. Nonetheless, the group courts were distortions of indigenous courts, insofar as they were considered final courts of appeal, but were composed of men rather than *umuokpu* or *egwugwu*. Such re-gendering of judicial authority ultimately undermined the female principle, a crucial component of Igbo law, religion, and nearly every aspect of society.

Ogidi's 1944 Town Council Constitution

Eighteen years after Igwe Walter Amobi's tyrannical reign ended, Ogidi decided that it would allow Walter's eldest son, the eager Benjamin Amobi, to become the town's second *igwe*.¹⁷³ Born on April 13, 1889,¹⁷⁴ Benjamin Amobi was just as ambitious in education and politics as his father. Having traveled to Sierra Leone to study at Fourah Bay College, he worked for the United Africa Company until his father's death led him to return to Ogidi in late 1925, at which point he became a warrant chief.¹⁷⁵ He sought to be crowned as *igwe* immediately following his father's death, but the people of Ogidi refused him for almost two decades, because the mistreatment and exploitation that Walter Amobi had subjected them to was still fresh in their minds.¹⁷⁶ Nonetheless,

¹⁷² According to the following sources, this was the case *tupu ndi ohca bia*: Achebe, "'Ogidi Palaver,'" 29; Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 89-93; Chief John Amanwa, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 28 March 2018; High Chief Robinson Okudo (Esema), interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 1 March 2018; Chief Hillary Osegbo, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 24 April 2018; Ogbogu Azubuike Chuka, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 1 May 2018; Sir Albert Obi (Rex) Ezegbo, interview by the author.

According to the following report, the 1933 reforms sought to make cases available to a larger audience and a larger judicial body: NAE, EP 9561 CSE 1/85/4879: "Intelligence Report on Ogidi and Abacha Villages, Onitsha Division, Onitsha Province, by Mr. B. G. Stone, A.D.O.," 5-8.

¹⁷³ Ibemesi, *Ogidi*, 68; 1944 Ogidi Town Council Constitution, 5.

¹⁷⁴ Ibemesi, *Ogidi*, 68.

¹⁷⁵ Ibemesi, *Ogidi*, 68; Ifeoma Catherine Onwugbufor, "The Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy," 65; Anonymous oral history collaborator 1, interview by the author.

¹⁷⁶ Chief John Amanwa, interview by the author; Chukwuka Jerry Okongwu and Chukwudi M. Okongwu, interview by the author; Nwoye Leonard Okafor, Eze Ajani, interview by the author; Christopher Nwakeze, interview by the

the wealthy and ambitious Benjamin continued to plead with the people of Ogidi, promising that he would not behave tyrannically like his father, and as a show of good faith celebrated the annual Ofala festival: hosting the people of Ogidi with bountiful food, drink, and entertainment, as his father had done when *igwe*.¹⁷⁷ His eventual acceptance in 1944 occurred in the context of Ogidi's first written constitution. After agreeing to its terms and signing it, Benjamin was crowned Igwe Amobi II of Ogidi on July 6, 1944 and he reigned until his death on December 25, 1973.¹⁷⁸

Although sometimes referred to as the Igweship Constitution, the six-page, ten-article document he signed on May 23, 1944 was officially termed the Ogidi Town Council Constitution, and it dealt not only with the executive powers of the *igwe* and his cabinet of councilors, but also with the legislative powers of the newly appointed town council. Article I listed numerous actions from which the *igwe* was prohibited, such as declaring himself king without being voted in by the town council, being dictatorial in any way, and forcing the people to work for him.¹⁷⁹ These stipulations appeared to be an assurance that Ogidi would never again suffer under a dictator. Nevertheless, the constitution also stated certain ways in which the people of Ogidi were expected to pay homage to the *igwe*. For example, each quarter was required to contribute 200 yams and ten shillings for the annual Ofala festival, and for any eagle or leopard that a citizen of Ogidi killed, a certain share of the animal had to be given to the *igwe*.¹⁸⁰

This constitution was significant because it was the first time *oge ndi ocha chilu* that the people of Ogidi articulated a desire for a new political system that they had designed for themselves. It remains an open question how well this reflected the general sentiment of the people,

author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 16 August 2018; Chief David N. C. Akobi, interview by the author; Achebe, "'Ogidi Palaver,'" 28.

¹⁷⁷ Chief Obi A. Okudo, interview by the author; Chief Godwin Nweke Agbogu, interview by the author.

¹⁷⁸ Ibemesi, *Ogidi*, 68-69; Agbogu, *Ogidi Political History*, 85; Mr. Berthram Aduba, in "The Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy," 113; Chief Obi A. Okudo, interview by the author.

¹⁷⁹ 1944 Ogidi Town Council Constitution, 1-2.

¹⁸⁰ 1944 Ogidi Town Council Constitution, 3-4.

or merely that of those in power, i.e., the sixteen men (half of them Christians, the other half adherents of the indigenous Igbo religion) who contributed to the writing of it. Be that as it may, the constitution served to correct some of the distortions of indigenous Igbo law that had occurred since the first *igwe* took office in 1904. It did this by establishing equal participation of Christians and adherents of the indigenous religion in the new town council, and by discouraging excesses and abuses characteristic of the first *igwe* that had thrown Ogidi's society out of balance. But, in the specific sphere of re-gendering, the new constitution actually may have accelerated the process of making Ogidi's legal system more male-centric.

In fact, there are two reasons that the 1944 constitution should be seen as a major milestone on the path to the re-gendering of law in Ogidi. The first is that it did not stipulate a place for women or spiritual forces in the town's new political system; and the second is that, by allowing someone—and the son of a tyrant, no less—to take the invented position of *igwe*, Ogidi tacitly accepted the male-centric distortion of the town's indigenous system of titles, as explained in Chapter 3. Regarding the first reason, the constitution made no mention of either women or spiritual forces, but acknowledged the legislative authority of a town council; and this body, though not explicitly gendered in the document, has only ever been composed of men.¹⁸¹ Regarding the second reason, even though the constitution made clear provisions to limit the *igwe*'s power, it still gave significant executive authority to one man and further authority to two groups of men, the *igwe*'s *ndiichie* cabinet and the town council.¹⁸² Article I, section 11 also stipulated that the secretary of the king's cabinet council, arguably the next highest-ranking official

¹⁸¹ In the 1975 revised Ogidi Town Constitution, the gendering of the Ogidi Town Council is explicitly described as “an indigenous body of sixty-four men elected by and representing the four quarters” (1975 Ogidi Town Constitution, preface). Mbanefo Osakwe confirmed that no women have served on the town council: WhatsApp conversation with the author, 7 April 2020.

¹⁸² 1944 Ogidi Town Council Constitution, 1-3.

in the town, must have passed at least standard six education,¹⁸³ which meant that the position was only open to those who had been trained in the English schools. This reinforced the idea that the colonial education system and the use of written documents rather than oral sources were privileged in Ogidi's new political system. Furthermore, judicial authority was not mentioned in the 1944 constitution, given that Ogidi was still under colonial rule, and therefore obligated to use the native court system that the British had re-founded in the 1930s, and which only recognized councils of men—not women or spiritual forces—as judges. By omitting the supreme judicial roles of *umuokpu Ogidi*, the *egwugwu* council, and *ani*, the constitution can be seen as implicitly accepting the colonial judicial system not only as the *de jure*, but also the *de facto*, system for Ogidi.

The 1944 constitution purportedly reflected the sentiments of the people of Ogidi, as it was the first written document created *by* members of Ogidi *for* members of Ogidi that stipulated how the town's government would function,¹⁸⁴ however, this does not mean that the majority of the townspeople accepted all of the document's terms. In reality, the constitution only needed to be accepted by the men who drafted it, the incoming *igwe*, and the colonial officials in charge of Onitsha.¹⁸⁵ It is difficult to imagine that many of the women who had protested the unjust behavior of their first *igwe* thirty years previously would have supported a constitution that not only reinstated the problematic *igwe* position, but also failed to recognize women's long-standing legislative and judicial roles. In fact, in a confrontation with the newly crowned *Igwe Amobi II*, a group of Ogidi women made it clear that they would not tolerate injustice, that they still played

¹⁸³ 1944 Ogidi Town Council Constitution, 1.

¹⁸⁴ Chief Edward Dike Ibemesi, interview by the author, Ogidi, 27 September 2018; Sir Albert Obi Ezeigbo, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 2 October 2018.

¹⁸⁵ 1944 Ogidi Town Council Constitution, 5-6.

important legal roles, even if the colonial government and the most prominent men of the town denied it.

Ogidi Women Respond to Injustice *Oge Benjamin*

Although the 1944 constitution demonstrated that not only the colonial authorities but also the ever-growing number of titled men who had risen to positions of political power in Ogidi did not recognize women's or female spiritual forces' roles in legislation or adjudication, that did not mean that women's enactments of justice ceased. They were no longer universally respected as the supreme court of the human realm, but they still had not lost all their political power, and still retained the ability to enact justice in certain situations. Of course, women were also members of the town's growing population of Christian converts, including its subset that was connected to the colonial government and accepted or agreed with the new political situation. Even so, a conflict that arose between a group of elderly women in Ogidi and Benjamin Amobi suggests that many elderly women still believed in their own judicial authority.

Although at first the new *igwe* seems to have behaved according to the agreed terms of the 1944 constitution, he soon began to rule much like his father had, exploiting the people of Ogidi.¹⁸⁶ At some point during his reign, a delegation of women approached Benjamin Amobi in his palace. When they arrived, wearing head ties, the *igwe* instructed his messengers to remove the women's headwear, claiming that they needed to show him more respect. Many of the women were elderly and when the men removed their head scarves their grey hair was exposed, which they took as an

¹⁸⁶ Chief Godwin Nweke Agbogu, interview by the author; Alex Uzowulu, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 9 March 2018; Edwin Obiekwe, interview by the author; Chief John Amanwa, interview by the author; Anonymous oral history collaborator 1, interview by the author; Chief Chinedu Olisa C. Onyeama, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 12 April 2018; Udoh Boniface Uyanwa, interview by the author; Sir Anthony Obiora Okoye, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 19 April 2018; Fabien Chukwude Okakpu, interview by the author; Chukwuka Jerry Okongwu and Chukwudi M. Okongwu, interview by the author; Chief Nwabuoku Osakwe (Dibuenu Nwanyi), interview by the author; Theresa Odinye, interview by the author.

affront.¹⁸⁷ Because of this, the women vowed to boycott all of his festivals and ceremonies, and it is said that they cursed him in the same way that the women had cursed his father during the 1914 women's market protest.¹⁸⁸ The idea that women must remove their head ties in his presence was seen as the creation of an unwarranted rule, echoing those invented by Walter Amobi; and once again, Ogidi women refused to tolerate the unjust *iwu* created by an *igwe*, and called upon *ani* to deal with him. It was soon after this incident that Igwe Amobi II fell ill and became crippled.¹⁸⁹ Although this may have been polio or another well-known disease, some of my oral history collaborators suggested that it was due to curses—not necessarily by this women's delegation alone—brought down by his high-handed and oppressive behavior, after the pattern set by his father.¹⁹⁰ Thus, even though the colonial administration had ignored the judicial roles of women for decades, and even though some of the most powerful men in Ogidi had recently written a constitution that ignored the traditional functions of women and spiritual forces, Ogidi women invoked *ani* to stand up to Igwe Amobi II.

¹⁸⁷ Chief Nwosu Nwawulu Enwude, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 96; Chief Nwabuoku Osakwe (Dibueni Nwanyi), interview by the author; Theresa Odinye, interview by the author.

¹⁸⁸ Chief Nwabuoku Osakwe (Dibueni Nwanyi), interview by the author; Theresa Odinye, interview by the author; Chief Nwosu Nwawulu Enwude, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 96.

¹⁸⁹ Chief Godwin Nweke Agbogu, interview by the author; Theresa Odinye, interview by the author; Chief Uzowulu Udo, interview by Chukwuma C. C. Osakwe, Ikenga Ogidi, 28 September 1983, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 112; M. O. Onwugbufor, interview by Chukwuma C. C. Osakwe, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 3 October 1983, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 118; Chief Louis Okoye, interview by Chukwuma C. C. Osakwe, Akanano Ogidi, 13 September 1983, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 81; Onwugbufor, "The Evolution of Igwe Chieftaincy," 66.

¹⁹⁰ Some of my collaborators asserted that Benjamin Amobi's illness and subsequent crippling was due in large part to his betrayal of Ogidi in a previous land case between Ogidi and Nkpor, in which Amobi testified in support of Nkpor, against his own people. Others attested that it was the women's curses that crippled Amobi. Chief Oraegbuna Joseph Iwobi, interview by the author; Chief Godwin Nweke Agbogu, interview by the author; Anonymous oral history collaborator 1, interview by the author; Udoh Boniface Uyanwa, interview by the author; Chukwuka Jerry Okongwu and Chukwudi M. Okongwu, interview by the author; Theresa Odinye, interview by the author; Chief Uzowulu Udo, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 112.

Conclusion

Although many courts existed *oge Walter* and *oge interregnum*, people's options for settling disputes or seeking criminal justice narrowed over these periods. For Christians, who were still a minority of the population but steadily increasing in number each year, the courts of deities and *egwugwu* were not an option. *Oge interregnum*, options were limited even further for both Christians and members of the indigenous Igbo religion, due to the closure of the palace court. In addition, the 1933 reforms effectively banned women's collective judicial authority: by outlawing all punishments not sanctioned by the colonial government, including 'making war,' and by recognizing only men's judicial councils as truly indigenous and therefore acceptable.

The native court system's positions of authority were specifically male-gendered. Court clerks had the power to influence or alter court judgments, and *kotmas* had the power to charge anyone with crimes based on personal vendettas. Warrant chiefs—and after 1933, all-male village councils and group court benches—had the power to decide cases, and therefore, to interpret the laws. Titled elders and chiefs were sometimes called upon by the district officer for their opinions when reviewing appealed cases; and litigants, mostly male and to a lesser extent female, who could afford to bribe court employees or who had connections to them through family or friends, could take advantage of non-literate, poor, or non-connected opponents.

The male-centric law that the British introduced and their colonial collaborators propagated came to be dominant in Ogidi and its hinterland, due in large part to increasing use of the native courts by the population, and the increased authority these courts gave to males. Ogidi's 1944 constitution cemented male-centric law as the dominant law of the town, by asserting the executive role of the invented *igwe* position and the legislative role of a council of men. This, combined with the already male-dominated judicial system, solidified men as the only legislative and judicial

authorities recognized by either the colonial government or the new Ogidi town government. This does not mean, however, that female-centric indigenous Igbo law was abolished; the male-centric distortion of law in Ogidi did not completely erase women from the legal sphere. However, it did shift law from being female-centric, centered on the decrees of *ani* and utilizing *umuokpu* as the supreme court of the human realm, to being male-centric, focused on the *iwu* created by men, and by establishing titled men's councils as the main judicial authority, superseding *umuokpu*. The councils of *ndinyom* and *umuokpu* continued to function as courts, as indeed they still do today, but almost exclusively for the resolution of disputes among women.¹⁹¹ Instances of women 'making war' have been few and far between in the years since the signing of Ogidi's first constitution. As anecdotal evidence, Chinua Achebe attested that he only knew of one instance occurring during his lifetime of women in Ogidi 'sitting on' a man, and that man resorted to suicide due to the shame of being sanctioned in such a way.¹⁹²

As far as oral histories tell us, Ogidi women's collective enactment of justice on the scale of the 1914 protest has not occurred since then. Other councils, particularly women's guilds in the Anglican, Catholic, and Pentecostal churches that continued to grow in Ogidi and across Igboland, have come to be just as important if not more important for many women than meetings of *umuokpu* and *ndinyom*.¹⁹³ In these church groups, the women focus on the tenets expressed in the Bible rather than *omenani*, the latter of which many now regard as custom rather than law. The

¹⁹¹ Ifeoma Ofokansi, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 2 August 2018; Ifeyinwa Ekwealor, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 18 August 2018; Chinwe Iloani, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 13 September 2018; Zinobia Ikpeze, interview by the author; Josephine Ojugo Okafor, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 12 September 2018; Mercy Onwukeme, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 1 September 2018; Benice Chinwoka Onyeagolum, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 13 September 2018.

¹⁹² Testimony of Achebe's daughter, Nwando Achebe, conversation with the author, 20 April 2020.

¹⁹³ Ngozi Amobi, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 30 October 2018; Obioma Agwuncha, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 26 March 2018; Nkiru Nneoma Igwelom, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 13 September 2018; Chinwe Iloani, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 13 September 2018; Amaka Nwakor, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 13 September 2018; Gloria Nwoka, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 4 September 2018; Ifeoma Udemezue, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 4 September 2018.

term *iwu*, which initially referred to laws created by people and which was differentiated from *omenani*—the moral decrees of the earth goddess—has come to supplant *omenani* and the laws of other deities as the widely recognized Igbo terminology for law in the twenty-first century. By the same token, *omenani* has often been translated, as of late, to mean “custom” or “culture” rather than “law.”¹⁹⁴ A case in point is that during three years of Igbo language training at Michigan State University and a summer language course in Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria, the only word for “law” that I was taught—by six of seven different Igbo instructors—was *iwu*; and the translation I was given for *omenani* was “culture” or “the law of the land,” with the caveat that it was “non-judicial law,” which would not be recognized by modern courts. I heard similar explanations frequently from my oral history collaborators and acquaintances in Ogidi.

In the seven decades since the signing of the Ogidi Town Constitution, women have still regularly met for *otu umuokpu* and *otu ndinyom* meetings and have sought to resolve issues that affect their members; however, their legal authority is generally not recognized beyond the confines of their groups, and any punishments they mete out could be contested and even considered illegal in the customary courts, which the Republic of Nigeria recognizes as the only legitimate lower courts of law today. Only after independence did women begin to serve as judges in customary courts as well as high courts and the Nigerian Supreme Court,¹⁹⁵ although there have been relatively few in the past half-century and they certainly have not had the unchecked power that warrant chiefs and male village councils and group court judges had *oge Walter* and *oge interregnum*. Male-centric distortions of the institutions of indigenous Igbo law and community

¹⁹⁴ Nwando Achebe, “Balancing Male and Female Principles: Teaching About Gender in Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*,” *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* 29, no. 1 (2002): 137; Elizabeth Isichei, *The Religious Traditions of Africa: A History* (Westport: Praeger, 2004), 232; Nwosu Nwawulu, in Nwabufo, “Traditional Law and Colonial Change,” 72; Nnanyelugo Ezegbo, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufo, Ikenga Ogidi, 30 August 1978, in Nwabufo, “Traditional Law and Colonial Change,” 88.

¹⁹⁵ Nweke Okoye, interview by the author, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 12 March 2018; Chinonyelum Ojeh, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 23 February 2018.

governance *oge Walter* and *oge interregnum* were the impetus for the gradual erasure of the female principle from the realm of law that has continued for decades following the ratification of Ogidi's first written constitution.

CONCLUSION:

THE IMPLICATIONS AND PERPETUATION OF RE-GENDERING

This dissertation has shown that *tupu ndi ocha bia*, law in indigenous Igbo society was female-centric, insofar as all forms of law—even those decreed by humans and a pantheon of lesser deities—were subject to the approval of the earth goddess. Based on oral histories in Ogidi, it is clear that the townspeople have followed *omenani* and the laws of other deities at least since the establishment of the town's four quarters. From that time onward, new laws were decreed as the gods and the people saw fit for their changing society. And, just as the spiritual realm of indigenous Igbo law was female-centric, so too was the human one; for although both men's and women's groups could create *iwu* and resolve disputes, it was *umuokpu Ogidi* whom *ani* had entrusted to act as the human realm's highest court of appeal, and to safeguard the morality and balance of society.

As we have seen, the changes ushered in by British missionaries and colonial officials paved the way for some men in Ogidi to distort or invent laws and institutions for their personal gain. While these distortions and inventions were often male-centric, that aspect seems to have been secondary or even unintentional: colonial collaborators such as Walter Amobi acted primarily out of self-interest rather than an ideological agenda of elevating all men over all women. In addition, the colonial legal system, and particularly the native courts, further re-gendered law from female to male, by placing only men in positions of judicial authority. Though purportedly consisting of approximations of 'native law and custom' that the colonizers sought to make more accurate as time went by, the male-centric law practiced in these courts came to dominate the true indigenous law, i.e., female-centric law as practiced in the courts of deities, the *egwugwu* council, and women's councils. Capping off the gradual four-decade process of the re-gendering of law in Ogidi *oge Walter* and *oge interregnum*, the people of Ogidi ostensibly declared for themselves, by

signing the town's first constitution into law in 1944, that they desired distinctly male executive and legislative branches of local government, as well as the retention of the decidedly male-dominated colonial judicial system.

This study has sought to privilege the Igbo cosmology and worldview, especially through the consistent use of Igbo periodization, and more specifically, periods that not only reflect the events and eras most relevant to the people of Ogidi, but also their understandings of the gendering and re-gendering processes that its law underwent. My re-gendering hypothesis can serve to explain how the female-centric law that was practiced in Ogidi, as elsewhere in Igboland, *tupu ndi ocha bia* came slowly to be dominated by the male-centric law that the British and their collaborators built. Historiographically, therefore, this dissertation has potentially important implications for our understanding of the multi-layered process of the re-gendering of law that occurred across much of Africa *oge ndi ocha chilu*, as colonial legal systems across the continent—but perhaps especially in southern Africa—accepted or even encouraged novel versions of ‘customary’ laws or ‘native laws and customs’ that were twisted to men’s advantage, notably though not exclusively by replacing women with men in positions of judicial authority.¹

The present work also offers insight into the ways in which women across Africa drew on elements of female-centric legal authority to challenge male-centric colonial rule. In multiple ways, Ogidi’s experience with the re-gendering of law is fairly typical of Igboland’s. The crucial roles that *ani* and other spiritual forces as well as *umuokpu* and *ndinyom* councils played in legislation and adjudication in Ogidi before the rise of the native courts paralleled that of spiritual

¹ For examples from southern Africa, see Terence Ranger, “The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa,” in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 211-262; Martin Chanock, *Law, Custom and Social Order: The Colonial Experience in Malawi and Zambia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Thomas V. McClendon, “Tradition and Domestic Struggle in the Courtroom: Customary Law and the Control of Women in Segregation-Era Natal,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 28, no. 3 (1995): 527-561.

forces and women in other Igbo communities. In addition, Amobi's rise to a position of autocracy via the use of distortions and inventions, facilitated by the ineptitude of the colonial administration, bore a close resemblance to those of other warrant chiefs and kings across Igboland *oge ndi ocha chilu*. Moreover, *oge Walter* and *oge interregnum*, the increased prominence of the Ogidi Native Court in the administration of justice reflected a general trend of increasing use of native courts across the region.

Despite the re-gendering of law in Ogidi, its women continued to act in their traditional roles as judges and protectors of community morality, as evidenced especially by the four protests they organized beginning just before *oge Walter* and into *oge Benjamin*: the trading-company demonstration, the ankle-bell protest, the women's market protest, and the head-scarves remonstrance. Of the latter two events, we are told that the women involved invoked the authority of *ani* to punish the offenders. Such instances can be seen as manifesting Ogidi women's assertions not only of the fact of their judicial authority, but also that such authority emanates from that of the supreme judge of morality, the earth goddess. Although the new male-centric law had nearly eclipsed the female-centric one by 1944, women in Ogidi remained able to levy legal sanctions from time to time. Law was not completely re-gendered, as evidenced by intermittent incidents of *umuokpu* and *ndinyom* groups in Ogidi resolving marital disputes or reprimanding men who offended them, beginning *oge Benjamin* and continuing into the present, *oge taa*.

Ogidi women's enactments of justice via protests should be viewed as part of a larger trend of Igbo and Nigerian women relying on indigenous law and practices as a means of asserting their authority, often in the context of protecting their societies from outside threats, namely colonial rule. In addition to the better-known 1925 *Nwaobiala* and 1929 Women's War, women's mass protests occurred throughout Nigeria. In the south alone, women in Abeokuta rebelled against their

unjust treatment by colonial officials in 1918, and again in 1946; women played a major role in protests against taxation in Owerri Province in 1938; market women demonstrated against the government's cassava price-fixing in 1944 in Ibibioland; female palm oil producers burned down palm oil mills that threatened their trade, and razed native courts, in Owerri and Calabar Provinces in 1948, and twice protested against other such mills in the following decade; and market women protested against the introduction of taxation of women across southeastern Nigeria in 1956, with epicenters at Onitsha and Aba.² In all of these varied demonstrations, collective action by women drew on indigenous legal sanctions to challenge injustice *oge ndi ocha chilu*. Women's participation in combatting the injustices of colonial rule could also be observed across the continent, particularly during 1950s and '60s nationalist movements and agitations for independence in places such as Cameroon, Eritrea, Guinea, South Africa, Tanzania, and Zambia.³ In their efforts to oppose the re-gendering of law that colonialism had initiated, the women of Ogidi exemplified this wider saga of seeking justice through collective action.

Re-gendering *Oge Taa*: The Re-gendering of Ani

When I arrived in Ogidi in February 2018, I observed a society that was broadly male-dominated, not just in terms of law and legal administration, but in many other aspects of daily

² Nina Emma Mba, *Nigerian Women Mobilized: Women's Political Activity in Southern Nigeria, 1900-1965* (Berkeley: University of California Institute of International Studies, 1982), 98-113, 135-140; Nwando Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings: Female Power and Authority in Northern Igboland, 1900-1960* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2005), 227.

³ Elizabeth Schmidt, "'Emancipate Your Husbands!' Women and Nationalism in Guinea, 1953-1958," in *Women in African Colonial Histories*, eds. Allman, Jean, Susan Geiger, and Nakanyike Musisi (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 282-304; Tanya Lyons, "Guerrilla Girls and Women in the Zimbabwean National Liberation Struggle," in *Women in African Colonial Histories*, 305-326; Jacqueline-Bethel Tchouta Mougoué, *Gender, Separatist Politics, and Embodied Nationalism in Cameroon* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2019); Susan Geiger, "Tanganyikan Nationalism as 'Women's Work': Life Histories, Collective Biography and Changing Historiography," *The Journal of African History* 37, no. 3 (1996): 465-478; Dan Connell, "Strategies for Change: Women and Politics in Eritrea and South Africa," *Review of African Political Economy* 25, no 76 (1998): 189-206.

life. Nonetheless, when I attended burial ceremonies in Ikenga, Ezinkwo, and Uru quarters throughout my subsequent stay, I frequently witnessed quarrels between the *umuokpu* of the deceased person's lineage and representatives of the same lineage's *umunna*. The *umuokpu* would refuse to allow the burial of their 'brother'⁴ until the men of the family had paid them their proper respects and delivered them a list of items—usually including various foods, drinks, money, and a select portion of the cow, which many called the 'waist,' that had been ceremoniously slaughtered for the occasion—to which the *umuokpu* had a right under indigenous law.⁵ On these occasions, I observed strong, unwavering women who had banded together to show men that they could not be disregarded, and could see from this that Ogidi's law, and indeed its wider society, had not been re-gendered fully. Its women still exerted their authority and demanded respect. My elation at beholding this, however, was blunted somewhat by a surprising piece of information that I stumbled upon while conducting interviews with various chief priests and elderly custodians of local history, all well-versed in the intricacies of indigenous Igbo religion and law. That was that, alongside Ogidi's anomalous status as one of the only Igbo communities that lacks a female age grade system, *ani* was apparently male. *Ani* is an essential component of the female principle, especially as that principle relates to law and justice. However, this has been undermined by a disagreement among Ogidi's citizens regarding whether *ani* is, or indeed ever was, female. There is ample evidence that the people of Ogidi recognized *ani* as female *tupu ndi ocha bia* and *oge ndi*

⁴ Brother here means male relative from within their extended family.

⁵ One of my oral history collaborators, Ifeoma Udemzue, explained that this was still commonplace at burials in Ogidi. Interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 4 September 2018. This reflects the position that Ogidi women took in refusing their designated portions of sacrificial animals in the 1910s. Northcote Thomas noted, "if there is a big quarrel the women assemble to arbitrate; if their decision is not accepted they refuse to receive the waist of a victim [cow or other livestock] which is their due. They have to agree on their decision and take oath among themselves to give a true decision" (Northcote Thomas, *Anthropological Report on the Ibo-Speaking Peoples of Nigeria Part I. Law and Custom of the Ibo of the Awka Neighbourhood, S. Nigeria* (London: Harrison and Sons, 1913), 73).

ocha chilu, as documented by many British missionaries, ethnographers, and colonial officers.⁶ But today in Ogidi, ani's gender is contested.

As noted in Chapter 2, the deity of the land in Igbo cosmology is irrefutably female; ani is the earth goddess. Below, I reiterate the main evidence for ani having been recognized as female *oge four quarters-oge interregnum*. P. Amaury Talbot, a British anthropologist and district officer in early twentieth-century Igboland, spent years collecting data on Igbo laws, religion, values, beliefs, and traditions and categorizing them by locale. Of the thirty-two different such locales that Talbot researched in his multiple-volume ethnography of Igbo society that was published in 1926, he recorded that the people recognized the earth deity as female in all but one: a portion of the Ika zone,⁷ west of the River Niger, where various customs, beliefs, and laws differed from those of the Igbo mainstream due to influence from the proximate Igala and Benin kingdoms.⁸ Regarding the Onitsha-Awka area, of which Ogidi was nearly the geographical center, Talbot noted that the towns all recognized ani as female.⁹

⁶ C. K. Meek, *Law and Authority in a Nigerian Tribe: A Study in Indirect Rule* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), 24; G. T. Basden, *Niger Ibos: A Description of the Primitive Life, Customs, and Animistic Beliefs, etc., of the Ibo People of Nigeria by One who, for Thirty-Five Years, Enjoyed the Privilege of their Intimate Confidence and Friendship* (London: Seeley, Service and Co. Ltd, 1938), 99; G. I. Jones, "Ecology and Social Structure among the North East Ibo," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 31, no. 2 (1961): 131; Daryll Forde and G. I. Jones, *The Igbo and Ibibio-Speaking Peoples of South-Eastern Nigeria* (London: International African Institute, 1967 [1950]), 25; M. M. Green, *Igbo Village Affairs: Chiefly with reference to the Village of Umueke Agbaja* (London: Frank Cass, 1964 [1947]), 100; P. Amaury Talbot, *Tribes of the Niger Delta: Their Religions and Customs* (London: Frank Cass, 1967 [1932]), 19; Sylvia Leith-Ross, *African Women: A Study of the Ibo of Nigeria* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1939), 117; M. D. W. Jeffreys, "A Triad of Gods in Africa," *Anthropos* 67, no. 5/6 (1972): 728, 730.

⁷ P. Amaury Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria: A Sketch of Their History, Ethnology and Languages, with an Account of the 1921 Census Volume III Ethnology* (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), 43, 55-60. In this chart there are two areas identified as recognizing ani as male or androgynous; however, it appears that the other area is mis-identified (likely due to a typo) since Talbot noted that the area in question (Ikwo) believed ani was female earlier in the same chapter, see pages 43-44.

⁸ Austin J. Shelton, *The Igbo-Igala Borderland: Religion and Social Control in Indigenous African Colonialism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1971), 240-242; C. C. Ifemesia, *Southeastern Nigeria in the Nineteenth Century: An Introductory Analysis* (New York: NOK Publishers, 1978), 12; Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria Volume III*, 592.

⁹ Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria Volume II*, 59. One more recent exception should be noted: according to an oral history collected by N. Nzewunwa in 1973, there was one village group south of the town of Owerri where ani was considered male. See Elizabeth Isichei, *The Religious Traditions of Africa: A History* (Westport: Praeger, 2004), 232; Isichei, *Igbo Worlds*, 100.

The work of other early twentieth-century British ethnographers—including anthropologist and missionary G. T. Basden, and anthropologists C. K. Meek, Daryll Forde, and G. I. Jones—supported Talbot’s conclusions that almost all Igbo people viewed ani as female.¹⁰ In addition, twentieth and twenty-first century scholars of Igbo history and society, whether hailing from Igboland or abroad, have asserted that ani is female.¹¹ This group includes historians and writers from Ogidi.¹² And in Chinua Achebe’s 1958 novel, *Things Fall Apart*, ani is definitively female, described with the pronouns “her” and “she” and with the moniker of “earth goddess” throughout.¹³

¹⁰ Basden, *Niger Ibos*, 99; Meek, *Law and Authority*, 24; Forde and Jones, *The Igbo and Ibibio-Speaking*, 25; G. I. Jones, “Ecology and Social Structure among the North East Ibo.” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 31, no. 2 (1961): 131.

¹¹ Victor Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), 95; Raphael Chijioko Njoku, “Missionary Enterprise and Sociocultural Change in Igboland, Southeastern Nigeria: Realities, Myths, and Continuities, 1900-1960,” in *Religion, History, and Politics in Nigeria: Essays in Honor of Ogbu U. Kalu*, ed. Chima J. Korieh and G. Ugo Nwokeji (Lanham: University Press of America, 2005), 78; Jude C. U. Aguwa, “Christianity and Nigerian Indigenous Culture,” in *Religion, History, and Politics in Nigeria*, 17; Chima J. Korieh, *The Land Has Changed: History, Society and Gender in Colonial Eastern Nigeria* (University of Calgary Press, 2010), 41; Charles Ebere, “Beating the Masculinity Game: Evidence from African Traditional Religion,” *Cross Currents* 61, no. 4 (2011): 487; Edmund O. Egbah, “A Reassessment of the Concept of Ibo Traditional Religion,” *Numen* 19, no. 1 (1972): 70; Emefie Ikenga-Metuh, “Ritual Dirt and Purification Rites among the Igbo,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 15, no. 1 (1985): 4; John N. Oriji, “The End of Sacred Authority and the Genesis of Amorality and Disorder in Igbo Mini States,” *Dialectical Anthropology* 31, no. 1 (2007): 265; C. N. Ubah, “The Supreme Being, Divinities and Ancestors in Igbo Traditional Religion: Evidence from Otanchara and Otanzu,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 2, no. 2 (1982): 94; Obiakoizu A. Iloanusi, *Myths of the Creation of Man and the Origin of Death in Africa: A Study in Igbo Traditional Culture and other African Cultures* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1984), 89; Shelton, *The Igbo-Igala Borderland*, 127; K. Onwuka Dike and Felicia Ekejiuba, *The Aro of South-eastern Nigeria, 1650–1980* (Ibadan: University Press, 1990), 109; Simon Ottenberg, “Culture, Art and Peasantry in Africa,” in *Igbo Religion, Social Life and Other Essays by Simon Ottenberg*, ed. Toyin Falola (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2006), 579, 581; A. E. Afigbo, “Igbo Experience: A Prolegomenon,” in *Igbo History and Society: The Essays of Adiele Afigbo*, ed. Toyin Falola (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2005), 198; Ogechi E. Anyanwu, “Crime and Punishment in Pre-Colonial Igbo Society and the Challenge of British Colonial Rule,” in *Between Tradition and Change: Sociopolitical and Economic Transformation Among the Igbo of Nigeria*, ed. Apollon O. Nwauwa and Ebere Onwudiwe (Glassboro: Goldline and Jacobs, 2012), 47; Jude C. U. Aguwa, *The Agwu Deity in Igbo Religion: A Study of the Patron Spirit of Divination and Medicine in an African Society* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishing, 1995), 15; Edmund Ilogu, “Worship in Ibo Traditional Religion,” *Numen* 20, no. 3 (1973): 238; Augustine S. O. Okwu, *Igbo Culture and the Christian Missions, 1857-1957: Conversion in Theory and Practice* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2010), 5, 11.

¹² Chieka Ifemesia, *Traditional Humane Living Among the Igbo: An Historical Perspective* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1979), 35; Chinua Achebe, *There Was a Country: A Memoir* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012), 18; Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings*, 27; Dike Ibemesi, *Ogidi: Historical Perspective of a People* (Ogidi: Ekpechi and Sons Ltd., 1995), 58.

¹³ For examples, see Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (New York: Anchor Books edition, 1994 [1959]), 29-31, 36, 124-125, 186.

Nevertheless, most of my 135 oral history collaborators in 2018 did not know or declined to state whether ani was male or female.¹⁴ Of the fifteen who did discuss the deity's identity, ten asserted that ani is male.¹⁵ Among these ten were five priests—two of ani, one of ogwugwu, one of idemili, and one of ifejioku (the god of yam)—three elderly custodians of local history, and two middle-aged men familiar with indigenous Igbo religion and history—statuses that by all accounts should make them expert sources of such a central tenet of indigenous Igbo religion. Additionally, one priest, Vincent Okudo,¹⁶ contended that ani is both male and female, a perhaps equally problematic assertion. Though only four of the fifteen collaborators asserted that ani is female,¹⁷ all were credible, and their opinions regarding ani's gender were supported by abundant secondary-source material, as previously stated. Thus, not everyone in Ogidi believes that ani is male; but enough people—including those who should know best, i.e., the priests of the earth deity—assert that ani is the *male* god of the land.

In November 2018, I discussed these findings with historians at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, and several of them adamantly disagreed with my collaborators' majority view. Amidst shouting and impassioned gesticulation, I discerned them saying that ani could not be male, that

¹⁴ As staunch Christians, many of my collaborators did not wish to discuss indigenous Igbo religion at all.

¹⁵ Onyebuchi Ezigbo, Akajiofo, Eze ani Ogidi, interview by the author, Ogidi, 19 July 2018; Onyebuchi Idigo, Eze Ani Ikenga, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi 17 July 2018; Emmanuel Nwike Sunday Onyechi, Eze Ifejioku Ogidi, interview by the author; Emeka Onyechi, Akaette Ogidi, Eze Idemili, interview by the author; Chief Francis Nwoye Nwoka, Eze Ogwugwu, Umunebo, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 29 August 2018; Chief Nwabuoku Osakwe (Dibueni Nwanyi), interview by the author, Ogidi, 2 October 2018; Madam Ifeude Okeke, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 29 August 2018; High Chief Robinson Okudo (Esema), interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 14 September 2018; Chief Godwin Nweke Abogu, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 6 March 2018; Nwanna Amobi, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 27 March 2018. Two priests of ani asserted that ani is male, and Ogidi's other two priests of ani declined my requests for interviews.

¹⁶ He is the priest of the Inwelle shrine, located in Ire village of the Akanano quarter of Ogidi. This shrine is not named after a particular deity but the father of the historical man named Ogidi whose sons spread out and created the town. This shrine is one of the most important in the town as it is situated in the original village where the town's founder, Ezechuamagha (father of Inwelle and grandfather of Ogidi) lived. The large shrine compound is home to numerous deities including ani, ogwugwu, and udo. Vincent Okudo, Eze Inwelle Ogidi, interview by the author, Akanano Ogidi, 6 July 2018.

¹⁷ Chief Edward Dike Ibemesi, interview by the author, Ogidi, 7 March 2018; Chinedu Okwumelu, Eze Idemili Odida, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 31 July 2018; Ori C. Uzowulu, Ikenga Ogidi, interview by the author, Akanano Ogidi, 16 March 2018; Anonymous Oral History Collaborator 1, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 3 April 2018.

she had never been male, and that it was not possible for her to be male, because everywhere in Igboland ani is known as the goddess of the land.¹⁸ When I divulged these same findings to my dissertation advisor, Nwando Achebe, upon my return to Michigan State University, her reaction was similarly intense. The outrage and disbelief of these Igbo scholars at the idea that anyone could claim that ani was male was completely warranted, because to mis-gender one of the most powerful and renowned Igbo deities is essentially blasphemy.

Ani Re-gendered: How, When, and Why?

Three important questions must now be asked: *How did ani become re-gendered? When did it happen? and Why?* Another worthwhile question is whether Ogidi is the only place where such re-gendering has occurred. As far as I can tell, it is the only Igbo community to espouse such a belief; however, I fear that as with Ogidi's history of the re-gendering of law, which reflected a wider trend, this recent aspect of the re-gendering process might also be reflected across Igboland. These questions cannot be definitively answered using the data at hand, however, and thus present an opportunity for further research, some promising avenues for which are suggested below.

Regarding the question of *when* ani was re-gendered in Ogidi, there is evidence that points to the late twentieth or early twenty-first century, both in my oral history data gathered in Ogidi and such data gathered by others there from the 1970s to the 2010s: notably, the transcripts of the interviews that ten undergraduate history students from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka and Nnamdi Azikiwe University conducted with Ogidi residents over the past five decades. These transcripts reveal something of what was known, remembered, and believed of Ogidi's history, religion, and law over that half-century, mostly by elderly, titled men who were known as reliable custodians of local history and a few women, also mostly titled elders respected as reliable sources.

¹⁸ Conversation with Prof. Uche Igwe and anonymous lecturers at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, 14 November 2018.

Of these ten sets of oral history transcripts, only five included mention of indigenous Igbo religion or *ani*. The interviews in question took place in 1975, 1978, 1983, 2015, and 2018. Based on those from 1975, 1978, and 1983, it seems that many of the students' interviewees did not assign *ani* a gender, but simply made reference to "the earth deity" with no gender identifier.¹⁹ Only one, a man named Ogbuefi Ezigbo Otue Unachukwu, who was about 95 years old when he was interviewed in 1978, indicated that *ani* was female.²⁰ In addition, one researcher, Chinyere Florence Ndukwe, included in the glossary of her 1986 thesis a description of *ani* as "mother earth."²¹ In 2015, researcher Kosi Frances Obiefuna's only collaborator to discuss indigenous Igbo religion, Frank N. Obiefuna, also stated that *ani* is female.²²

In summary, there is strong and extensive ethnographic evidence from the 1920s to the '50s that the people of Ogidi recognized *ani* as female. In the 1970s and early '80s, however, there

¹⁹ Nweke Anene, Nweke Anene, interview by Chukwuma C. C. Osakwe, Akanano Ogidi, 20 September 1983, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi: The Era of Igwe Amobi I and II, 1904-1973" (B.A. Thesis, History Department, University of Nigeria Nsukka, 1984), 102; Okeke Onyejekwe, Eze Inwelle, interview by Arinze Ernest Agbogu, Uru Ogidi, 14 November 1974, in Agbogu, "Ogidi Before 1891: A Brief Survey of the Origins, Migrations, Settlement, and Intergroup Relations" (B.A. Thesis, Department of History and Archaeology, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 1976), 58; Chief Louis Okoye, interview by Chukwuma C. C. Osakwe, Akanano Ogidi, 13 September 1983, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 76; Nathaniel Iloabachie, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, Uru Ogidi, 15 September 1978, in Nwabufu, "Traditional Law and Colonial Change in Ogidi" (B.A. Thesis, Department of History, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 1979), 82; Nwosu Nwawulu, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, Ikenga Ogidi, 20 September 1978, in Nwabufu, "Traditional Law and Colonial Change," 72; Okeru Nnabenyi, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 7 August 1978, in Nwabufu, "Traditional Law and Colonial Change," 84; Okeru Okwesi, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 5 August 1978, in Nwabufu, "Traditional Law and Colonial Change," 86-87; Nnanyelugo Ezegbo, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, Ikenga Ogidi, 30 August 1978, in Nwabufu, "Traditional Law and Colonial Change," 88; Nwokoye Igboekwe, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, Akanano Ogidi, 15 August 1978, in Nwabufu, "Traditional Law and Colonial Change," 90; Chief Lawrence Agulefo, interview by Chukwuma C. C. Osakwe, Ikenga Ogidi, 14 September 1983, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 85; M. O. Onwugburor, interview by Chukwuma C. C. Osakwe, Ezinkwo Ogidi, 3 October 1983, in Osakwe, "Kingship in Ogidi," 114; Udozoba Okoye, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, Ikenga Ogidi, 17 December 1978, in Nwabufu, "Traditional Law and Colonial Change," 78; Nwosu Enwude (Nwawulu), interview by Anthonia Uchenna Anyegbunam, Ikenga Ogidi, 7 September 1983, in Anyegbunam, "The External Relations of Ogidi Up to 1903" (B.A. Thesis, Department of History, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 1984), 99.

²⁰ Ogbuefi Ezigbo Otue Unachukwu, interview by Eugene Obiora Nwabufu, Uru Ogidi, 28 September 1978, in Nwabufu, "Traditional Law and Colonial Change," 76.

²¹ Florence Chinyere Ndukwe, "Burial Rites Given to Title Holders in Ogidi Idemili Local Government Area, Anambra State," B.A. Thesis, Department of Religion, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 1986), 45.

²² Frank N. Obiefuna, interview by Kosi Frances Obiefuna, 20 September 2015, Ikenga Ogidi, in Obiefuna, "Cultural Revival in Ogidi After the Nigerian Civil War: 1970-1980" (B.A. Thesis, Department of History and International Studies, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, 2016), 76.

is some evidence that Ogidi residents referred to ani as *it* rather than *he* or *she*, with one known exception. And, in 2018, I was privy to a notable number of claims from Ogidi people that ani is male. Although few if any relevant oral interviews appear to have been conducted between the late 1980s and the 2010s, leaving considerable room for debate about possible re-gendering during that time, I suspect that ani was re-gendered *oge interregnum nke abuo* (during the second Igweship interregnum), from 1998 to 2016.

My reasons for this suspicion are rooted in a hypothesis that the cause of ani being re-gendered, in Ogidi specifically, is more likely to have been a particular movement or event than a long-term, organic process. However, while major events such as the turmoil of the Nigerian Civil War from 1967 to 1970 or the Igbo cultural revolution of the 1970s and '80s²³ might have contributed to distortions of or changes to indigenous religious beliefs, these factors by their nature could not explain how or why the re-gendering of ani occurred in an isolated instance, i.e., only in Ogidi. Thus, the town's absence of an *igwe* between 1998 and 2016 would appear to be a more logical key factor. At some point, Ogidi's *ndi igwe* came to supervise many indigenous religious activities there.²⁴ This was certainly not yet the case *oge Walter*, when there was considerable animosity between Walter Amobi and many of the important men and women who had earned their authority within the indigenous politico-legal system. However, some time during the reign

²³ Achebe, *There Was A Country*, 169, 173; Roseline Ukani, interview by the author, Ikenga Ogidi, 5 September 2018; Kosi Frances Obiefuna, "Cultural Revival in Ogidi After the Nigerian Civil War," 59; Herbert M. Cole, "The Survival and Impact of Igbo Mbari," *African Arts* 21, no. 2 (1988), esp. 65; Simon Ottenberg, "Culture, Art, and Peasantry in Africa," in *Igbo Religion, Social Life and Other Essays by Simon Ottenberg*, ed. Toyin Falola (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2006), esp. 576; Simon Ottenberg, "A History of the Studies of Culture and Social Life in Southeastern Nigeria," in *Igbo Religion, Social Life and Other Essays by Simon Ottenberg*, ed. Toyin Falola (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2006), 645; Eli Bentor, "Masquerade Politic in Contemporary Southeastern Nigeria," *African Arts* 41, no. 4 (2008): 32.

²⁴ This is largely based on my observations and my informal conversations with friends and acquaintances in Ogidi. For instance, all major indigenous holidays and festivals now include ceremonies held at the *igwe*'s palace, several of which I attended in 2018. I was told that this had been a tradition for some time prior to the current *igwe*'s coronation. For an example of the *igwe*'s relationship to deities of the indigenous religion and their shrines, see the anecdote about my interaction with Emeka Onyechi in Chapter 1.

of either Igwe Amobi III (Dr. Benedict Vincent Obiora Amobi, also known as B. V. O.) from 1975 to 1985, or that of Igwe Amobi IV (Walter Nnamdi Ifediora Amobi) from 1993 to 1998, it appears that the *igwe* took on the role of Ogidi's "traditional" leader, making him the ultimate supervisor of its indigenous religious activities.²⁵ This was not yet the case when the Ogidi Town Constitution of 1944 was drawn up, and Igwe Benjamin is not known to have fulfilled any such function. The Ogidi Igweship Constitution of 1975, on the other hand, states that the *igwe* was the "traditional head of the whole of Ogidi" at that time;²⁶ and according to historian Dike Ibemesi, this was still the case *oge Walter Nnamdi Ifediora*.²⁷ Thus, *oge interregnum nke abuo*, Ogidi can be said to have lost its central figure of authority for oversight of indigenous religious rituals and festivals. Conceivably, without such a person to reaffirm that indigenous Igbo religious ceremonies and laws are based on the earth goddess' decrees, it is possible that the public forgot about ani, or at least about some of her traits. It is also possible that researchers, even *umu Ogidi*,²⁸ were not granted access to indigenous shrines *oge interregnum nke abuo*, and therefore had no basis for suspecting that changes to ani's gender identity might be occurring during that time. After all, it was particularly difficult for me to access some of the priests of the indigenous religion, even after receiving the *igwe*'s permission; so, when there was no *igwe* to give such permission, the process might have become more difficult, or even impossible. In any case, my version of when and how ani might have been re-gendered is far from conclusive, and the question of why it happened is still unknown. Therefore, the re-gendering of the preeminent lawgiver in Ogidi is an anomaly that should be investigated further, especially since it seems to foreshadow the complete erasure of the female principle from the spiritual realm of law. An investigation into ani's re-gendering in the

²⁵ See the previous footnote.

²⁶ 1975 Ogidi Town Constitution, 5.

²⁷ Ibemesi, *Ogidi*, 72.

²⁸ *Umu Ogidi* are children of Ogidi.

late twentieth and early twenty-first century has implications beyond the study of history, for studies in anthropology, sociology, and comparative religion, because it embodies the phenomenon of members of a community drastically altering fundamental religious beliefs in a modern context.

A Final Note: What This Study Can Offer

An Igbo adage warns that if you do not know where the rain began to beat you, you will not know where you began to dry yourself.²⁹ Before I arrived in Ogidi for fieldwork, I took for granted that *ani* was female, and that this was accepted in Ogidi as it is across Igboland. I also expected—or rather, eagerly hoped—that I would uncover evidence that, some three generations after Nigerian independence, the women of Ogidi had succeeded in *re-re-gendering* law; in other words, reasserted the dominance of indigenous Igbo law through their enactments of indigenous Igbo justice, reminiscent of the 1914 women’s market protest. I certainly did not expect to find that the process of re-gendering had continued, slowly but steadily, for more than a century after that momentous affirmation of female-centric legal authority in the face of male-centric distortions and inventions. I freely admit that I was reluctant to accept this reality, as I strongly desired to write a feminist narrative of women defying all odds to reassert their legislative and judicial superiority within their community. But alas, the evidence compels me to accept that re-gendering had not been matched by any significant reaffirmation of female-centric law. Even so, when I was confronted with various oral history collaborators’ statements that *ani* is male, I recognized this study of the re-gendering of law in Ogidi up to 1944 as having taken on new meaning, and arguably, a wider than expected historiographical importance. Although future investigation into

²⁹ Achebe, *There Was a Country*, 1.

the re-gendering of ani will undoubtedly be arduous, this dissertation will serve as a useful guidepost for understanding where the ‘rains’ of re-gendering began to beat Ogidi, and enable present and future scholars to appreciate the long process of re-gendering that has continued beyond its initial phase *oge Walter* and *oge interregnum*. Although likely precipitated by events *oge interregnum nke abuo*, it seems unlikely that ani’s re-gendering could have proceeded were it not for the re-gendering of her major sphere of operation—the law—in those earlier periods.

APPENDIX

GLOSSARY

Igbo Terms	English Translations
<i>alusi</i>	deity within the indigenous Igbo religion
<i>ani</i>	land, earth; the earth goddess
<i>dibia</i>	diviner
<i>egwugwu</i>	masquerade/masked spirit
<i>ekwe</i>	a women's title
<i>eze</i>	king
<i>eze mmoo</i>	priest for a deity of the indigenous Igbo religion
<i>ezeobodo</i>	representative/spokesperson of a community
<i>igwe</i>	colonial-era term meaning "king"
<i>ilo</i>	public playground or square
<i>iwu</i>	law(s) created by humans
<i>iyi</i>	toxic herbal concoction used in oath-swearing
<i>kotma</i>	court messenger (<i>kotma</i> is a Pidgin word, not Igbo)
<i>mmoo</i>	spirit or deity
<i>nnemmoo</i>	"mother of the masquerade," a women's title
<i>nwada</i>	daughter
<i>nwaokpu</i>	daughter of the lineage
<i>nyom</i>	wife of the lineage
<i>ndi</i>	plural form for people (e.g., <i>ndi Igbo</i> means Igbo people)
<i>ndiichie</i>	titled elders or ancestors
<i>ndinyom</i>	wives of the lineage

<i>nso ani</i>	abomination, crime, transgression against <i>omenani</i>
<i>nzu</i>	white chalk
<i>odu</i>	a women's title
<i>oba</i>	king (of Onitsha)
<i>obi</i>	king
<i>ogaranya</i>	wealthy man
<i>ogwu</i>	medicine
<i>okpala</i>	eldest son
<i>omenani</i>	law(s) decreed by the earth goddess
<i>onye ocha</i>	white/British/foreign person
<i>ofo</i>	sacred hand-held instrument
<i>ogbo</i>	age grade
<i>oge</i>	during the time of
<i>oji</i>	kola nut
<i>otu ndinyom</i>	council of wives
<i>otu umuokpu</i>	council of daughters
<i>tupu</i>	before
<i>uli</i>	dark-colored chalky substance
<i>umunna</i>	extended family, or council of men belonging to said family
<i>umunne</i>	nuclear family
<i>umuokpu</i>	daughters of the lineage
Igbo Periodizations	English Translations
<i>oge Anma-agu-agu</i>	during the time of the <i>Anma-agu-agu</i> age grade, 1860-64

<i>oge Anam Ekwu-Nma</i>	during the time of the <i>Anam Ekwu-Nma</i> age grade, 1877-82
<i>oge Benjamin</i>	during the rule of Igwe Benjamin Amobi, 1944-73
<i>oge B. V. O.</i>	during the rule of Igwe Benedict Vincent Obiora Amobi, 1975-85
<i>oge four quarters</i>	during the time in which Ogidi's four quarters were established
<i>oge interregnum</i>	between the reigns of Ogidi's first and second <i>ndi igwe</i> , 1925-44
<i>oge interregnum nke abuo</i>	during Ogidi's second igweship interregnum, 1998-2016
<i>oge ndi ocha bia</i>	during the time that the white men/British arrived
<i>oge ndi ocha chilu</i>	during the time that the white men/British ruled
<i>oge ndi uka bia</i>	during the time that the church people/missionaries arrived
<i>oge ntiji egbe</i>	during the time of breaking guns
<i>oge slave trade</i>	during the time of the Atlantic slave trade
<i>oge taa</i>	today
<i>oge Walter</i>	during the reign of Igwe Walter Amobi, 1904-25
<i>oge Walter Nnamdi Ifediora</i>	during the rule of Igwe Walter Nnamdi Ifediora Amobi. 1993-98
<i>tupu ndi ocha bia</i>	before the arrival of the white men/British

Names of Selected Igbo Deities

Descriptions

amadiora	thunder god
ani	earth goddess
Chukwu	supreme creator, high God
idemili	river goddess
ifejioku	yam god
ogwugwu	fertility goddess
udo	market and peace god/oracle

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