

THE IGBO INTELLECTUAL TRADITION

CREATIVE CONFLICT IN AFRICAN
AND AFRICAN DIASPORIC THOUGHT

EDITED BY
GLORIA CHUKU



The Igbo Intellectual Tradition

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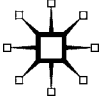
The Igbo Intellectual Tradition

Creative Conflict in African and African Diasporic
Thought

Edited by Gloria Chuku

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To my father, Mazi Tennyson Okoli Chuku (Nnawuenyi)
Don C. Ohadike
Igbo heroes and heroines, who helped shape the cause of Igbo culture,
history, and studies.

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Preface

The ideas that gave birth to this anthology formed more than 12 years ago when Don C. Ohadike and I organized two panels at the 44th Annual Meeting of African Studies Association (ASA) at Houston, Texas, in November 2001. The panels were entitled “Igbo Scholars and the Making of the Intellectual Traditions of the African Diaspora: From Olaudah Equiano to Boniface Obichere” and “I Have Two Countries—Africa and the Diasporas: Icons of Modern Intellectual Traditions of Africa and the Diaspora.” The papers presented focused on the contributions of seven iconic Igbo personages to the development of intellectual traditions in Africa and the African Diaspora. These personages are Olaudah Equiano, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Kenneth Dike, Mbonu Ojike, Boniface Obichere, Flora Nwapa, and Pius Okigbo. The initial goal was to publish the papers in an anthology with the same title as that of the first panel, but the momentum generated by the project at the ASA conference quickly dissipated due to enormous professional and familial demands on the contributors. Sadly, Ohadike’s premature death in August 2005 compounded the situation, but at the same time strengthened my resolve to tackle the challenges of bringing the book project to fruition. In an attempt to revive interest in the project, I organized another panel at the 51st Annual Conference of the African Studies Association held in Chicago, Illinois, in November 2008, entitled “Igbo Intelligentsia and the Making of African Intellectual Traditions.” The four papers at this panel were on Nnamdi Azikiwe, Mbonu Ojike, Adiele Afigbo, and Igbo scientists in Biafra during the Biafra–Nigeria War of 1967–1970. They were presented by colleagues who were not part of the initial panels. Invitations were subsequently sent out to a select number of scholars who did not take part in the above conferences. The inclusive chapters, therefore, represent the revised papers of the panelists in the three prior panels and those of a few solicited colleagues, who were amenable to project requirements and deadlines. Multidisciplinary approaches were adopted, representing the contributors’ expertise and the versatility of their subjects.

Our goal in publishing this book is that it be used to celebrate the achievements of Igbo scholars of varying professions and their contributions

to the Igbo intellectual tradition. It is also an attempt to immortalize those of them who are no longer with us. In addition, the book addresses the contradictions in the subjects' thoughts, ideas and activism, and their continuous struggles to reconcile Igbo/African cultural heritage with Western civilization. For instance, efforts are made to address how the subjects in the book negotiated the boundaries between Igbo/African tradition of collective consciousness and social responsibility and Western individualism that accentuated capitalist competitiveness; Igbo/African indigenous beliefs and Christianity; as well as the subjects' acceptance of Western technologies and ideas and their condemnation of European imperialism and colonialism that unleashed those innovations. Equally significant is how the Igbo intellectuals covered in this book navigated the sensitive and tight terrain between nationalism and ethnic consciousness in multiethnic postcolonial Nigeria, particularly during the decade of the 1960s, which was marred by ethnic conflicts and a bloody war.

Many contributed in different ways to making this book a reality. We are grateful for the constructive feedback from colleagues, who attended the three prior panels at the ASA annual conferences, and to the Palgrave Macmillan anonymous reviewers for their invaluable comments and suggestions. I would like to thank the contributors for their enthusiastic response to my invitation to honor distinguished Igbo intellectuals, and for their patience and understanding of my requests for corrections and the seemingly endless delays. My gratitude goes to Chris Chappell, Palgrave Macmillan senior editor, for patiently guiding this project through its publication; to Tom Rabenhorst, my colleague, for his professionalism and diligence in the production of the maps that appear in this book; and to the *Slovenian Law Review* and the Research Institute of Asian Women for their permission to include portions of their publications in Chapters 8 and 10, respectively. I am grateful to Vincent Carretta for his feedback on the final draft of Chapter 1 and to Christine Ohale for a careful proofreading of the book's "Introduction" and Chapter 5, and for her friendship. I thank my daughter, Chisom, for her understanding and assistance in her little ways.

Gloria Chuku
University of Maryland, Baltimore County
Fall 2012

Contributors

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Philip C. Aka is a professor of political science at Chicago State University and an adjunct professor of law at the Indiana University McKinney School of Law—Indianapolis. Dr. Aka also currently coordinates the philosophy and political science programs at Chicago State University. He holds five academic degrees, including a JD from the Temple University James E. Beasley School of Law, an LLM from the Indiana University McKinney School of Law, and a PhD in political science from Howard University, along with a license to practice law in Illinois. Dr. Aka has published widely on human rights and matters related to minority people, such as affirmative action and English-only laws. Dr. Aka's current research interest revolves around the application of human rights in domestic and foreign policies and he is now hard at work on a book manuscript titled *Small Place Close to Home: Lower Courts and Human Rights in Nigeria and South Africa*.

Gloria Chuku is an associate professor of Africana Studies with a specialty in African history, affiliate associate professor of Gender and Women's Studies, and affiliate associate professor of Language, Literacy and Culture PhD Program at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. Her research focuses primarily on Igbo history and culture, gender studies, women and the political economies of Nigeria and Africa, African nationalism and intellectual history, and slavery, slave trade and African Diaspora. She is the author of *Igbo Women and*

Economic Transformation in Southeastern Nigeria, 1900–1960 (2005). She has also published over 30 scholarly articles in peer-reviewed international journals and multi-authored volumes. She is currently working on a book manuscript on gender, ethnonationalism and the Biafra–Nigeria War.

Raphael Chijioke Njoku, PhD, is the Chair/Director of the International Studies Program/Department of Economics, and Professor of African/World History at Idaho State University. He received his doctorate in African history from Dalhousie University, Halifax, Canada. Dr. Njoku had earlier earned a doctorate in political science from Vrije University, Belgium. He is the author of *Culture and Customs of Morocco* (2005); *African Cultural Values: Igbo Political Leadership in Colonial Nigeria, 1900–1966* (2006); and co-editor of four books including: *Missions, States and European Expansions* (2007); *War and Peace in Africa* (2010); *Africa and the Wider World* (2010); and *African History* (2011). Dr. Njoku has also authored 30 scholarly articles and he is the founding editor of *Notes and Records: The International Journal of African and African Diaspora Studies*.

Christine Nwakego Ohale, née Oti, is a graduate of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, and a tenured professor of English in the department of English, Foreign Languages & Literatures at Chicago State University. Dr. Ohale has been educated in Nigeria and the United States and holds two Master's degrees in English, and a PhD in literature. Dr. Ohale is widely published and has published essays in international journals in Africa, Europe, and the United States.

John Nwachimereze Oriji is a professor of African History at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. He also teaches Modern World History, and Modern Political Economy. He is the author of many books, including the latest one titled, *Political Organization in Nigeria Since the Late Stone Age: A History of the Igbo People* (Palgrave/Macmillan, 2011), and over 40 journal articles and chapters in books.

Maps

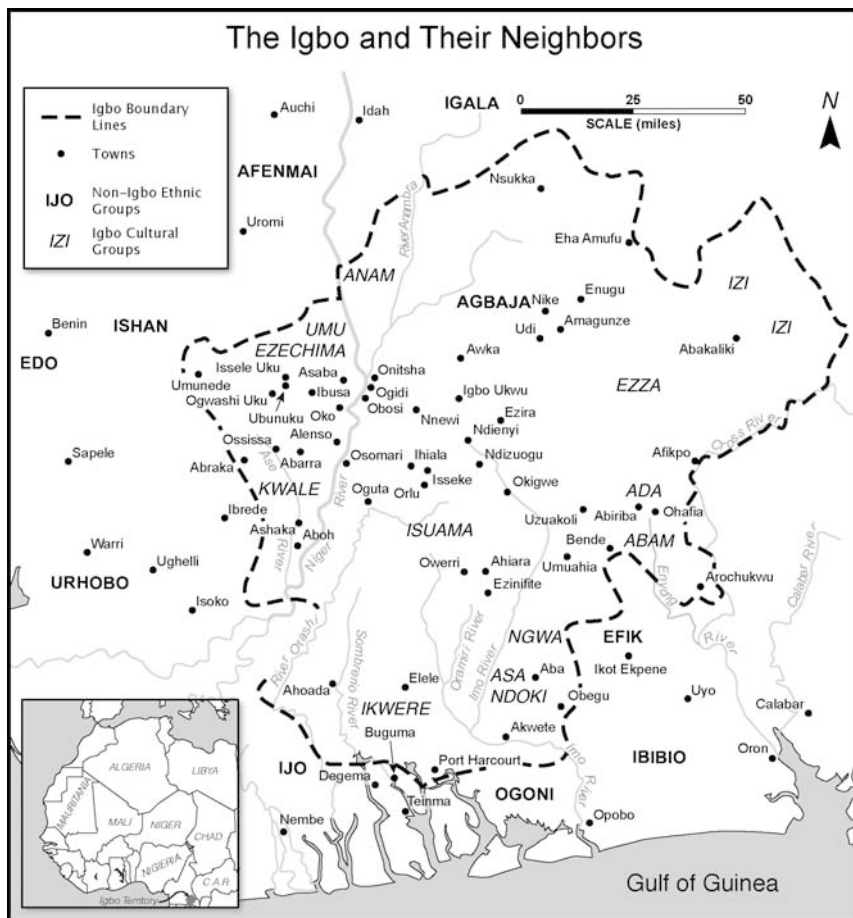


Figure 1 The Igbo and Their Neighbors

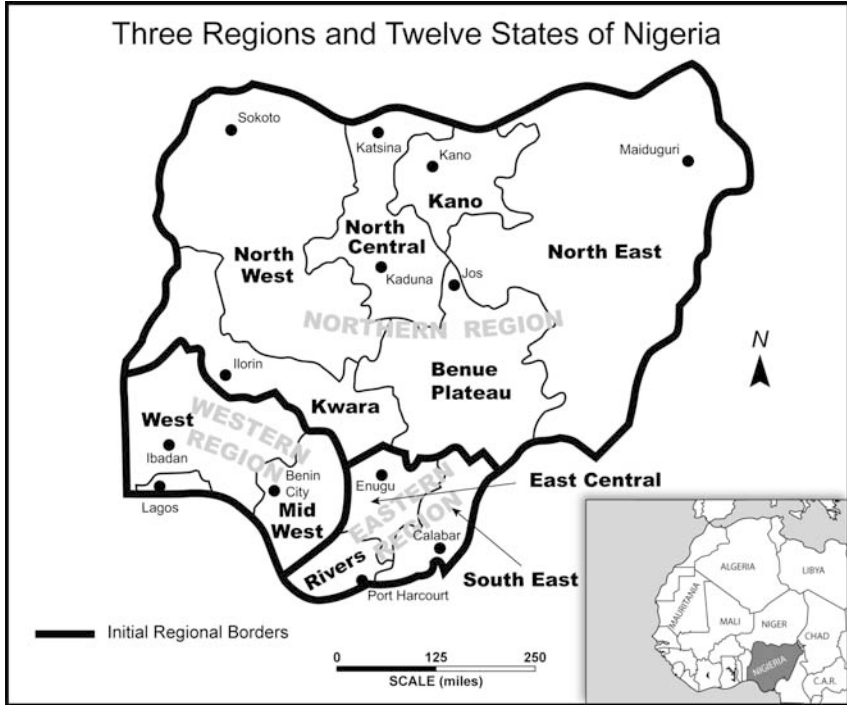


Figure 2 Three Regions and Twelve States of Nigeria



Figure 3 The Atlantic World

Introduction

Gloria Chuku

This book is an effort to capture the attempts made by a number of Igbo people educated in European traditions to come to terms with an increasingly dominant European presence. It is inspired by the ongoing efforts of scholars of African and African Diaspora studies to account for the unity of the experiences of people of African descent as they came in contact with European forces. The groups of individuals covered in this book mediated a multiplicity of relationships, debates and changing ideas that spanned over three centuries and across national and continental boundaries. Their lives and thought reflect what Wilson Moses refers to as “creative conflict,” in which they continuously struggled to reconcile and rationalize contradictions that existed within their minds as thinkers, and between them and proponents of opposing ideas.¹ As Igbo, they had to reconcile the pervasive influence of Eurocentric civilization on the various societies in which they lived with their commitment to Igbo and African cultural heritage.

The book acknowledges the complicated historical memories of these Igbo thinkers and their struggles with incurable internal contradictions inherent in the lives of great thinkers of all nations and times. The dilemma of assimilating modern universalistic ideas without themselves becoming totally assimilated to alien models remains evident in the experiences of the Igbo scholars covered in this book, irrespective of their generational differences. Maintaining a delicate balance between defending Africa against Western imperial discourses and misrepresentations and presenting unbiased accounts of the heritage of Africa, even when their lives were shaped by and constructed around experiences and identities that embodied the trajectory of these categories, remain an unending struggle for these Igbo and other African intellectuals. Equally important is how these Igbo intellectuals mediated and navigated the tightrope between national loyalty and ethnic interests in multi-ethnic postcolonial Nigeria, especially during its darkest decade of the 1960s, characterized by ethnic conflicts and a civil war.

As the following chapters demonstrate, these individuals represent not just a group of interesting eccentrics, but also a real intellectual group who have

contributed immensely to the making of intellectual traditions in both Africa and the African Diaspora. While some of these thinkers have received considerable scholarly attention, others have not. Aptly, their activities are discussed within a historical context in order to capture the social, political and economic dynamics that helped to shape their thoughts and writings. The historical narrative is imperative in capturing the complex and often competing ideas, rooted in many different cultures that informed the various intellectual trends or movements that these Igbo scholars and their other African counterparts navigated in order to produce what we may refer to as the African intellectual traditions. It is equally significant that we situate the intellectual activities of the subjects of this anthology within the appropriate paradigms of intellectualism and African intellectual traditions. Doing this requires an examination of different definitions, meanings and perspectives on intellectuals and African intellectual traditions.

Who Are the Intellectuals?

Italian Antonio Gramsci defines intellectuals as individuals who are pivotal to the workings of modern society because of their uniqueness in fulfilling a particular set of functions. He wrote, “all men are intellectuals . . . but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals.”² All people are intellectuals because they engage in activities that require at least the minimum creative intellect, but not all of them have the social function of intellectuals to organize, direct or educate others. He maintained that every social group should generate its own distinct intellectuals, and that intellectuals are functionaries of every society. This book benefits from Gramsci’s work. Nevertheless, it argues that intellectuals do not require centralized institutions or authorities to function in society and views Gramsci’s insensitivity to female gender as a great omission. One would think that the Italian, European or any other society that existed in his time was not devoid of women of intellect who were capable of fulfilling unique societal functions.

Other scholars who have contributed to the discourse on intellectualism include Malaysian Syed Alatas and Palestinian Edward Said. Alatas employs the concept of “functioning” and “non-functioning” intellectuals to differentiate intellectuals (those endowed with thinking faculty who engage in critical inquiry about ideas, values, customs and attitudes from a broad perspective) from the intelligentsia (technicians and professionals with formal education who help to run society).³ He argues that intellectuals are indispensable in nation-building because they are the only social group that possesses revolutionary ideas for change. Following in the footsteps of Gramsci, Said defines the intellectual as an individual with a specific role in society, endowed with a faculty to represent and articulate a message to and for a public, who publicly raises questions and confronts orthodoxy and dogma and who cannot easily be co-opted by governments or corporations.⁴ He maintains that intellectuals are those who make articulate representations to their public, despite all sorts of barriers, and who

“speak the truth to power.”⁵ Virginia Held succinctly posits that “intellectuals must be activists” and not apologists in pursuing intellectual independence and in achieving independent points of view that ultimately will result in truthfulness.⁶ Although Ali Mazrui, the Kenyan political scientist, defines an intellectual as “a person who has the capacity to be fascinated by ideas and has acquired the skill to handle many of them effectively,” he views intellectualism as “an engagement in the realm of ideas, rational discourse and independent enquiry.”⁷

Intellectuals are individuals who strive to maintain moral aptitude as they approach social issues and problems, and advance human knowledge and the cause of freedom and justice. They are creative thinkers who take critical approaches to transcendental values in searching for humane and rational solutions to problems. As a functioning social group, they spawn and propagate ideas that bring about change in society. Their ideas are transmitted to a broad audience as they serve a culture and chart the course of human history. By providing moral standards, they seek to evaluate the society that supports them. With the intellect they cultivate, they are better placed to articulate and augment social norms and cultural values that guide and sustain society and culture. They are expected to maintain autonomous intellect and judgment in the face of established power and authority, as this is the only position upon which their search for truth will thrive. Intellectuals should be courageous enough to question authority no matter how powerful it might be in order to get to the truth of social justice and individual freedom, or establish the lack thereof. They should unapologetically speak out on behalf of the less privileged and the oppressed in society. Individuals with these skills and knowledge abound in Africa. Over the centuries, Africans in the continent and people of African descent in the Diasporas have continued to enrich intellectual discourses and traditions. Due to their unique experiences, they have been able to produce intellectual traditions that could be referred to as African.

African Intellectual Traditions

Current scholarship on African intellectual traditions has demonstrated that Africa has a rich intellectual heritage accumulated over the centuries through unwritten and written genres. In spite of the continuous devaluation of the continent’s intellectual heritage due to European ethnocentrism and racist sentiments, and lack of literacy in some of the societies of the remotest past, Africa has contributed enormous intellectual products to the collective output of humankind and to the progress of human civilizations. It is now acknowledged that neither is literacy the only measure of intellectual worth nor is the lack of it inhibitive to the development of wisdom and knowledge production. The massive number of documents in *African Intellectual Heritage* refute the contention that Africa possesses no intellectual heritage.⁸ The volume is a product of African imagination and an impressive contribution to the study of African intellectual heritage. However, the documents in the collection are filtered through Afrocentric principles that

questionably credit all African and African Diaspora intellectual achievements to the civilization of Kemet (ancient Egypt). According to the editors:

Every African society owes something to Kemet . . . the ideas of medicine, the monarchy, geometry, the calendar, literature, and art, [as well as] . . . primordial myths that would govern the way they educated their children, preserved the values of their society, remembered their ancestors, painted their bodies and their houses, and farmed their land.⁹

This type of assertion erroneously creates a monolithic African heritage in spite of the diverse and complex cultural worlds of the continent and its people. It also ignores external forces that played a role in shaping African thought and culture over the centuries.

Constance Hilliard has shown that the absence of literacy at a certain point in African societies did not preclude the people from engaging in knowledge production for purposes of addressing human problems and bringing about positive changes in society.¹⁰ But contrary to her assertion that European colonial domination led to the ultimate demise of Africa and its history, as illustrated with the case of the British invasion of Benin,¹¹ it is our position that the histories of African societies have been kept very much alive through the activities of the intellectuals and others. Toyin Falola's study of the *Yoruba Gurus* takes intellectual activities and knowledge production outside the purviews of the academy and academics and to other sites and voices.¹² He presents the texts of Yoruba chroniclers (the grassroots indigenous intelligentsia)—the traditions, myths and history of the people—as genres of knowledge useful to academic scholars who use them as oral traditions and other primary sources. In his study of the Shambaai district of Tanzania, Steven Feierman uses the concept of “peasant intellectuals,” whom he defines as those who “engage in socially recognized organizational, directive, educative, or expressive activities [such as] [t]eachers, artists, political leaders, healers, and bureaucrats [and] men and women who earned their daily livelihood by farming.”¹³ These intellectuals were not necessarily the products of formal or Western education, but they earned their status by creating forms of discourse and counter-discourse through important leadership and organizational roles they performed in society at moments of historical importance. The above studies have shown that intellectual asset extends beyond the cognitive product of those influenced by Western tradition and those who were products of tertiary education.

Unquestionably, Africans and people of African descent have contributed immensely to our understanding of the continent, its peoples and their culture. However, while global production of knowledge about Africa has remained heavily dominated by Western scholars, whose works have been widely acknowledged, the contributions of continental African scholarship struggle with absurdity and underrepresentation. This anthology is therefore an effort to acknowledge and celebrate the contributions of African, particularly Igbo, intellectuals to the development of African intellectual traditions in Africa and its Diaspora. It adds to

the existing scholarship aimed at raising the visibility of African intellectuals and their products.¹⁴ Here, “African intellectuals” refers to individuals of diverse backgrounds whose lived experiences were not only steeped in knowledge production, but also have become subjects for knowledge production in different genres. They have straddled the two worlds of thought and action, articulating their ideas and visions in different genres and themes and providing leadership to the various causes they championed. They demonstrate the agency of illumination and social activism that challenged dominant power and paradigms of knowledge while also espousing the experiences and memories of the oppressed and the marginalized. As producers of what Paul Zeleza refers to as “countertruth,” African intellectuals have striven to make sense of the times and the different worlds in which they lived and contributed toward their progressive change.¹⁵ They question the supremacy of Western philosophy as they debunk the derogation of African intellectual capacities and the mythical constructions of Africa and Africans in Western estimation. They have had immense impact on the development of African epistemological studies as they challenge European imperial epistemologies.

One of the characteristics of the African intellectuals discussed in this book is that they have meticulously embedded their intellectual activities within African cultural subjectivities, in spite of the fact that they were bred in alien languages and shaped by Western influences. They have been able to demonstrate certain African norms and values in their writings. The weight of alien languages in which these intellectuals were trained and in which they wrote should not be underestimated, especially since language is the principal medium of intellectual activity and is essential in harnessing human resources and in grounding scientific and technological know-how in African realities. Kenyan Ngugi wa Thiong’o has stressed the significance of African languages as the people’s collective memory banks, communication agencies as they struggle for survival and the carriers of their culture and history.¹⁶ Thus, African intellectuals have thrived to construct and maintain a tradition of African cultural embeddedness, originality and vitality.¹⁷ Since Africans have been constantly challenged to justify their humanity and existence, part of the African intellectual traditions includes attempts to measure up and prove that there is something worthy of note.

In this anthology, we prefer the use of African intellectual traditions to a single tradition. This is because the activities of African intellectuals involve a plurality of voices covering diverse themes and paradigms about Africa and people of African descent in the continent and outside. In most cases, such traditions embody continuous resistance and struggle against negativism, irrelevance, denial, domination, discrimination, alienation, marginalization, crisis of development and human destitution. They are also embodiments of a humanistic paradigm that makes the human subject and experience in society the focal point of intellectual engagement. They attempt to address such questions as the nature of the human subject and the community; the African conception of individual freedom and responsibility within the cultural, socioeconomic and political prisms of a society; and the impact of globalization on the African conception of

personhood, gender and family dynamics within the realities of African political economy. The Igbo, perceived as among the most dynamic and sophisticated of African peoples, are the focus of this book.

The Development of Igbo Scholars and Intellectuals

The Igbo of southeastern Nigeria have remained one of the largest ethnic groups in Africa. They constitute the most dominant population in the region, occupying both sides of the Niger River. As a result of voluntary and involuntary migrations, the Igbo reside in different parts of Nigeria and the globe, but in significant numbers in neighboring countries such as Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea. The development of Igbo intellectuals started at their familial and communities' social settings where they first went through well-thought-out processes of socialization and different rites of passage. Through the processes of socialization and apprenticeship, the Igbo acquired knowledge about their culture, sociopolitical systems and institutions, and the prerequisite skills for the exploitation of their environment.

As demonstrated in their diverse political structures, social organizations and economic activities, the Igbo remained a heterogeneous people. Within the two broad political structures of institutionalized constitutional village monarchies and democratic village republics of the Igbo, there were variations that differentiated one polity from the other. The political organization was highly diversified and decentralized. It was guided by the principles of mass political participation and representation. Such a decentralized structure and the fluidity of the executive, judicial and legislative functions contributed to a wide dispersal of political authority among the sexes, age grades, secret and title societies, and such religious practitioners as diviners, priests and priestesses. There were different sociopolitical arenas where men and women exercised their power and authority. In most cases, men and women, and boys and girls, performed different but complementary roles leading to the maintenance of a relative equilibrium at all levels of social organization and interactions.¹⁸

However, in spite of these differences engendered by ecology, myths of origin, interactions with non-Igbo neighbors, and the dialectical variations in the autonomous kingdoms and mini-states or the subculture zones, certain cultural traits remained central to the creation of a sense of pan-Igbo identity. These include Igbo language, certain common religious practices and cosmological worldviews, institutionalized republicanism (that checked individual authoritarianism), common calendar through institutionalized market days and ritualized crops (such as yams and kola nuts). The Igbo religion and cosmological worldview encompassed the people's beliefs, ideas, values, practices and their unified vision of the cosmos and the reality. To the Igbo, the universe was a tiered structure made up of the sky above/heaven (Elu Igwe), the solid earth (Ala) and the underworld (ala-mmuo), each being an inhabited region.¹⁹ The heavens were inhabited by the Supreme Being called by different names according to the subculture zones (Chukwu, Chineke, Obasi di n'elu or Olisebuluwa), and such powerful deities as

Anyanwu, Igwe, Amadioha and Kamalu. The earth was the abode of the Earth Goddess, minor deities and spirits, cosmic forces and human beings. The ancestors and numerous other localized female and male deities and forces resided in the underworld. The activities of these deities and forces were not only intertwined with those of human beings, but they also determined human existence (fortunes and misfortunes). The Igbo religious beliefs in the Supreme Being, the Earth and water goddesses, the pantheon of other deities and ancestors, and the sanctions associated with these beliefs reinforced the people's behavioral codes, ethics and moral standards.

The Igbo inherited a body of custom—principles, values, and practices—which was articulated in the concept of *omenani/omenala*. *Omenani/omenala* encapsulated the people's code of conduct—the ideas of right or wrong, appropriate and inappropriate behaviors, morality and immorality, good and evil, aesthetic and ugly—and also served as a means of enforcing conformity to acceptable social behaviors and norms, as well as reproducing such social ethos and values from generation to generation. Thus, the ideologies and sensibilities guiding sociopolitical organization, economic activities, and gender relations were rooted in Igbo *omenani/omenala*. *Omenani/omenala* also encompassed the *iwu* (laws), *nso ala* (taboos), and *aru* (abominations) that guided the people's conduct. The acts and taboos that were abominable include homicide, suicide, poisoning, kidnapping, incest, adultery, stealing of farm crops, desecration of the land, twin or multiple births and others. A breach of law in the form of any of these acts carried severe punishments. As a deterrent to future offenders, punishments included protracted and expensive ritual cleansing, fines, banishment, enslavement, ostracism and even death penalty.

The Igbo as an agrarian people, engaged in the cultivation and processing of different kinds of crops, vegetables, grains, fruits and oils. They have a long history of artistic production of sophisticated art work of many designs and sizes with diverse utilitarian, spiritualistic and aesthetic values. The quality of their art work demonstrates the people's technological advancement in weaving, carving, metallurgy and pottery production. They also have a long tradition of engaging in local and regional commercial exchanges. These economic activities were crucial in the sustenance of the dense Igbo population.²⁰ In spite of the evident factional and intergroup conflicts that marred interpersonal and intergroup relationships at one point or the other, there were continuous efforts by the people to maintain peace, law and order, which facilitated alliances and marriages, commercial networks and relations, and labor and cultural exchanges. The above indigenous institutions and agencies helped to shape the lives and personalities of the Igbo intellectuals studied in this book. We reiterate Raphael Njoku's suggestion that since the Igbo "new elite manifests the continuity of traditions and culture," it is important to look at "the diachronic impact of indigenous and Western agencies in [their] upbringing, socialization and careers."²¹

Those key Western agencies, which brought about fundamental changes in Igbo society, the people's life and worldviews, included Euro-American traders and the transatlantic slave trade that led to the exportation of enslaved Igbo to

the Americas; the Christian missionaries, especially their role in the Christianization of the Igbo region and the introduction of formal education; and British colonization, which unleashed forces that had ambivalent effects on the people. The internal and external forces that contributed to the production of Igbo intellectuals and in shaping their worldviews are discussed below.

It is impossible to include every Igbo intellectual in a volume such as this. Those covered in this anthology are representative selections informed by historical periods, fields of studies, gender, and also by the availability of contributors willing to comply with the project requirements and deadlines. It is important that the different generations of early Igbo scholars and intellectuals be covered. The inter-generational encounters and experiences of these individuals facilitate the building of a rich tradition of intellectual discourse which helps us understand the complex heritage of the Igbo as people of African descent. There are recurring and cross-cutting themes reflecting the versatility of the subjects covered in this volume. However, certain themes stand out and are therefore more developed than others in the proceeding chapters. These include slavery and slave trade; the richness of Igbo and African culture and history; emancipation and nationalist struggles; challenges of nation-building and sustainable development in independent African states; regionalism and building a strong and competitive Africa; and issues of gender relations.

Igbo intellectuals covered in this anthology are products of their own times and environments. As social engineers, they focused their intellectual energies on addressing problems and issues relevant to their times. Thus, the first generation of Igbo intellectuals sought to highlight the existence of a rich historical and cultural heritage of Africa in the face of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Eurocentric denial of African humanity and agency. These Igbo expended their intellects in attempting to transform and transcend the negative images espoused by the institutions of slavery, racism, and imperialism. However, members of this generation believed in the redemptive power of European civilization on Africa. As products of European formal education, who converted to Christianity, and having lived outside Africa, they embraced Western culture and civilization as panacea to Africa's problems. Most members of this generation also saw Christianity as a civilizing force. As a result, they have been criticized for their doctrine of self-negation which extols the alleged African ideological backwardness that could only be redeemed and transformed by the supposedly benevolent superior European ideological traditions and civilization.²² Here lies an example of the creative conflict and contradictions inherent in their lives and thought.

Their counterparts in the twentieth century were preoccupied with liberation and emancipation from colonialism, poverty and underdevelopment. Members of this generation saw their challenge against colonialism and their engagement in nationalist projects as a moral endeavor. Ironically, while condemning European colonialism which introduced such innovations as capital, banks, roads, railway lines, motorized vehicles, formal schools and modern health facilities, they also embraced these imperialist tools of exploitation and cultural domination. There were also emphasis on nation-building, sustainable development, regional integration and cultural renaissance. The implications of class and ethnic

divisions, religious pluralism, gender discriminations and other indexes of difference and inequality on society attracted considerable attention. As Zeleza aptly observes, while the nineteenth century was a period of infatuation with civilization, the mid-twentieth century focused a great deal on modernization, and since after, the dominant discourse has been globalization.²³ In this anthology, we see globalization as a process that began with the transatlantic slave trade, obviously accelerated by European colonization and has since the late twentieth century, witnessed a heightened epoch.

Slavery, Emancipation, Early Diaspora Igbo and the Foundation of Igbo Studies

The transatlantic slave trade was responsible for the forced emigration of Igbo people to foreign lands. The mid-sixteenth century marked the beginning of the exportation of African captives, including those of Igbo origins, to the Americas through the ports of the Bight of Biafra. The largest number of enslaved Igbo was forcefully shipped across the Atlantic Ocean in the eighteenth century.²⁴ While a few enslaved Igbo and their descendants returned to the Igbo region and other parts of Africa, many did not. Nevertheless, they individually and collectively influenced their host societies culturally and intellectually and through their labor. They strove to make positive impacts on the respective societies in which they lived through their campaign for freedom and social justice. They were also champions in correcting the negative image of Africa that had been tainted by enslavement and colonialism. Their activities and those of their African counterparts resulted in the creation of meaningful linkages between Africans in the continent and people of African descent in the African diasporic communities in different parts of the globe. They contributed to the development of the concepts of African nationalism and pan-Africanism. They were a force in knowledge production, especially about Africans, their cultures and histories. The list includes Olaudah Equiano, Archibald Monteath, Edward Blyden, James Africanus Horton and Rev. John Christopher Taylor. Some of these early Diaspora Igbo were prolific authors notable for their call for independent initiatives on the part of Africans and their rebuttal of contemporary notions of African inferiority.

One area in which these Diaspora Igbo excelled was the writing of slave narratives through which they understandably wrote their autobiographies. Slave narratives and biographies have continued to play important roles in illuminating the transatlantic slave trade and the conditions of enslavement of people of African descent. Of particular significance are the accounts of Olaudah Equiano, an outstanding eighteenth-century Igbo African in England, discussed in Chapter 1 of this anthology. In this chapter, Gloria Chuku critically reviews recent debates and controversies surrounding the birthplace of Equiano and persuasively situates it in Igbo country. Relying on the evaluation of his autobiography, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*, published in 1789, and other activities, Chuku credits Equiano with the foundation of Igbo studies and Igbo intellectual tradition. She also examines his scholarly contributions to other disciplines and literary genres, as well as to the abolitionist cause in England.

Archibald Monteath's (ca. 1792–1864) little-known narrative was written by two Moravian missionaries shortly before his death in 1864 and read at his funeral as a commemoration of his contribution to the Moravian Church. First published in German in 1864 and later in English, the narrative, which was more of a spiritual testament and conversion account than an anti-slavery treatise, informs us that Archibald, whose Igbo name was Aniaso, was kidnapped from the Igbo region and sold into slavery between the ages of 9 and 12 years old.²⁵ Aniaso was bought in 1802 by a Scott plantation owner in Jamaica, John Monteath, who treated him kindly and gave him a new name, Tobi. Following his baptism in the Anglican Church, Tobi changed his name to Archibald John Monteath. The narrative offers some important information about certain aspects of Igbo culture and values such as the facial “tattooing”—*igbu ichi* practice (which Equiano also discussed in his narrative), marriage tradition, economic activities, family socialization, and gender roles. It also provides some glimpses into the slave trade in Igbo society and in Jamaica, the experiences of the enslaved during the Atlantic crossing, the 1831–1832 Jamaican slave rebellion, and useful nuances of varied life experiences under servitude and the evolution of the peasantry in Caribbean society. Monteath lived a life of both servitude and freedom in nineteenth-century Jamaica. He experienced the crucible of the Caribbean plantation system in his formative teenage years, serving as a house slave, estate driver and headman. Monteath's commitment to his Christian faith and service to the Moravian mission motivated the two missionaries to seek him out and to record his life story.

Edward Wilmot Blyden (1832–1912) was born of literate and skilled Igbo parentage in St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, on August 3, 1832. His quest for higher education took him to the United States in 1850 where he was unsuccessful in securing admission into theological schools because of his race. Frustrated and afraid that he might be enslaved following the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law, he went to Liberia in January 1851 where he spent many years and made his mark as a teacher, an innovative educator, school administrator, pioneer ambassador, secretary of state and writer. Blyden rejected the educational models of Europe and White America that were unsuitable for the African realities and advocated for the study of African history, culture, languages, literature, songs, epics and oral traditions; Islamic, Greek and Roman classics; and agriculture, mathematics, liberal education, industrial and technical education.

Blyden gained international recognition as a distinguished author of many books, pamphlets, and articles and is often referred to as a fore-runner of Pan-Africanism.²⁶ He emphasized the idea of a unique “African Personality” with intrinsic qualities embedded in rich African traditions and culture. He believed that the study of race offers the key to understanding human history and society because “the science of Sociology is the science of Race.”²⁷ He argued that African and European races “are distinct but equal,” each with its own positive and negative attributes.²⁸ He accepted the theories of racial purity and “mutual antiparty among races,” and the suggestion that racial homogeneity was crucial for creating successful nations. This belief explains why in his colonization project for

a massive emigration of African Americans to Liberia, Blyden excluded mulattoes, whom he called “weak, immoral, decadent, and hybrid” people.²⁹ For this reason, his writings have been referred to as antiracist racism, which foreshadows the theories of African Personality and Negritude.

Once a Presbyterian pastor, Blyden became very critical of Christianity in the United States and in Africa, calling it slaveholders’ tool for fostering racism against African Americans.³⁰ In Africa, he accused European missionaries of racial arrogance and creating unnecessary sectarian divisions among Africans that jeopardized any effort to develop the “African Personality.”³¹ But he saw Islam as more suitable than Christianity to African realities, especially its uplifting and unifying qualities, and lack of racial prejudice. Even though he never converted to Islam, Blyden, like Muslims, embraced many African deep-rooted institutions such as polygamous practice.

An advocate of cultural nationalism, Blyden emphasized the pride in African history, culture, and institutions and their unique contribution to world civilization. He defended African culture against European racial arrogance and placed the African social system of cooperation and equity above European excessive individualism and destructive competitiveness.³² He influenced the formation of a Dress Reform Society in Freetown which encouraged educated Africans to wear traditional attires and adopt African names. Incidentally, Blyden did not change his name or wear African attires. Practically, he was perceived as one of the most Westernized West Africans, a characterization that portrays “pragmatic contradictions” inherent in his lifestyle and thought.

Based on his perception of the British humanitarian and commercial activities as key to nation-building, Blyden sought the British to establish a vast protectorate over West Africa, believing that such an endeavor would ward off the French incursions in northern Liberia, and that the British overlordship would be temporary. He opposed what he considered “a premature challenge to European political overlordship” by young nationalists.³³ Although he has been criticized for these unpopular positions, Blyden was a great influence to such African nationalists as Kwame Nkrumah and Joseph Casely-Hayford of Ghana, and Herbert Macaulay, Eyo Ita and Nnamdi Azikiwe of Nigeria. In a foreword to a biography on Blyden, Azikiwe referred to him as “one of the greatest Africanists of all times” and “a father of African nationalism,” who was motivated by a vision of African unity, humanity and dignity.³⁴

James Africanus Horton (1835–1883) is regarded as one of the most outstanding members of the Igbo community in nineteenth-century Sierra Leone.³⁵ Born in Gloucester, Sierra Leone, of Igbo parentage in 1835, James was educated at the Sierra Leone Grammar School and Fourah Bay College. With a scholarship to study medicine in England, Horton graduated from King’s College, London, and proceeded to Edinburgh University for his medical degree. He won many distinctions and prizes, and was employed as an officer in the British army. He served in different parts of West Africa and rose to become a lieutenant-colonel and head of the Army Medical Department in the then Gold Coast, often acting as a magistrate and administrative officer. Horton wrote many books on tropical

medicine and related sciences, and on politics.³⁶ He drafted independent schemes for the government of West African colonies, which he envisioned would regain their independence in the immediate future. Horton pursued entrepreneurial schemes in mining and construction companies, and in the banking industry to assist local entrepreneurs and engage in patriotic schemes. He advocated for compulsory mass education and for the establishment of African universities, with broad curricular, including scientific education and research, dedicated to the task of intellectual decolonization, the advancement of African civilization, and the creation of a new enlightened African race.

In his *West African Countries and Peoples: A Vindication of the Negro Race*, Horton sought to vindicate African people and their cultures from the negative image portrayed in European racist literature and other forums. He rejected the idea of a fixed, permanent racial category and behavior, but argued in support of racial characteristics, determined by environment and nature, that were changeable, dynamic, and transformable. While calling on Africans to embrace their philosophical heritage, he believed strongly in the transformative power of formal education and techniques of European civilization. Unlike Blyden, Horton gave civilizing agency to Christianity instead of Islam, as an instrument of African enlightenment and development. He provided vital information about Igbo people: their characteristic features and dispensations, their sociopolitical organization, economic base, gender relations, language and dialectical differences, warfare, medicine, religious beliefs and rites, new yam festival, crime and punishment, and their adaptability to new ideas, customs and mannerism.³⁷ In spite of the complex lifestyle of the Igbo that Horton presented, he still believed that they were “barbarous, unlettered, unchristian, and imbued with a vast idolatrous superstition.”³⁸ He had plans for integrating Igbo communities into a strong united Christian nation headed by a powerful king and supported by a small, but strong professional army, with a favorable immigration policy that would attract “civilized individuals” for its development, because “it is impossible for a nation to civilize itself; civilization must come from abroad.”³⁹ Horton adopted the name “Africanus” as a demonstration of his African identity.

Rev. John C. Taylor, a schoolmaster and repatriate missionary with the Third Niger Mission, was appointed by Rev. Samuel Ajayi Crowther (later bishop in 1864), as the superintendent of the 1857 Niger Mission to found a mission in Onitsha. He was “a native clergyman, born in Sierra Leone, whose parents had been deported from the Ibo country as slaves.”⁴⁰ Like many Igbo of Sierra Leone who had a strong passion for their homeland and its Christianization, Taylor returned to Igbo region to spread Christianity.⁴¹ He laid the foundation of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in Igbo society by establishing the Onitsha mission on July 27, 1857. While heading the Onitsha church mission, Taylor visited neighboring towns, such as Obosi, Nsugbe, Oko and Asaba, spreading the gospel and collecting information about the people and their customs. He provided the first account of the size of Igbo region in southeastern Nigeria, an area which, according to him, stretched from the River Bonny to the confines of Calabar and as far back as Idda, and from Aboh and Asaba to the confines of the

Benin kingdom. He was accompanied on many of his visits by Simon Jonas.⁴² Taylor saw nothing sinful in Igbo Christians taking or retaining their ozo titles, an Igbo status marker, which had been consistently condemned by European missionaries.

He believed in the important link between effective local language communication skills and Christian evangelism, and therefore devoted considerable attention to the study of the Igbo language. Taylor's Igbo family background was very helpful in the translational work he did. Within weeks of his arrival at Onitsha, he translated the Lord's Prayer into Igbo. Although German philologist and missionary John F. Schon and Samuel Crowther should be given credit for their pioneering work in Igbo language study, Taylor's contribution was immense. By 1860, he had translated the four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles to the Corinthians and to the Philemon into Igbo. In 1866, he completed a translation of the New Testament into "Isuama" Igbo, with a copious vocabulary. He was discouraged though, when the copy he sent to England for publication was returned to him for revision. According to missionary George Basden, "the journal compiled by Taylor is of the greatest interests [and to] this son of rescued Ibo slaves belongs the honour of introducing Christianity into the Ibo country."⁴³ Although Rev. Taylor left the Igbo region and the Niger mission in 1868, disappointed by the rejection of his manuscript and problems with Schon and other missionaries, his commitment to Igbo language studies never waned. He continued to teach Igbo language at Fourah Bay College, and prepare missionaries going to the Niger and Igbo homeland. Undoubtedly, these Diaspora Igbo laid the foundation for the study of Igbo history and culture through their writings. The torchlight they beamed has become a source of illumination for their successors and generations of Igbo scholars and students to glimpse through many centuries of Igbo life, culture, and history.

Christianity, Formal Education, Colonialism and Decolonization

While the first generation of Diaspora Igbo intellectuals was educated outside the Igbo homeland, their successors' pursuit of formal education began in the region. They were products of the Christian mission education, and some of them also participated in the Christianization of Igbo region. As noted above, the Christianization of Igbo society was pioneered by African repatriates from Sierra Leone, mostly of Igbo origins.⁴⁴ There were also Bonny and Igbo slaves trading in Igbo region, who saw Christianity and mission education as sureties to higher social status, and who through their Sunday evangelical meetings helped to spread the religion in Igbo society from the 1860s.⁴⁵ The Christianization of Igbo society by men of African descent, who were socialized in European culture—*Oyibo oji* (Black Europeans)—helped to minimize culture shock and resistance by the Igbo.

White missionaries took over the leadership of the CMS Niger Mission from the Sierra Leonean African repatriates in the 1880s–1890s, following a crisis that challenged the leadership of Samuel Ajayi Crowther due to the abysmal performance of the mission. Notable White missionaries in Igbo homeland included

Henry H. Dobinson, Thomas J. Dennis, Sidney Smith and George Basden. West Indians of African descent joined the mission too and played a major role as they did in the Presbyterian mission in Calabar. While the Holy Ghost Fathers established the first Catholic mission in Igbo region at Onitsha in 1885, another Catholic mission—the Society of African Missions under Father Carlos Zappa—built a mission at Asaba in 1888. Father Lutz, the founder of the Holy Ghost mission and his successors, Father Leon Lejeune and Bishop Joseph Shanahan, were instrumental to the spread of Catholicism in Igbo society and for their use of a formal school system of education as a primary tool of evangelization. The Presbyterians built their first station in 1888 at Unwana.⁴⁶ They focused mainly on medical evangelism, training many Igbo, including Francis Akanu Ibiam, who later became the first Igbo medical doctor and a medical missionary for the Presbyterian Church of Scotland Mission (1936–1967).⁴⁷ Primitive Methodist Mission and others also carried out missionary and educational work in Igbo region.⁴⁸

The CMS was the first to provide any form of post-primary education with the establishment in 1892 of St. Monica's Women Training College, Ogbunike, Onitsha Girls School in 1895, and a training school for catechism at Asaba in 1892 (which was later moved to Inyieniu and finally to Awka in 1904—later St. Paul's College). The Roman Catholic Mission was, however, the first to establish a secondary school, a Roman Catholic High School at Onitsha in 1901. The training of the Igbo led to the production of a corps of brilliant indigenous evangelists, catechists, teachers and writers. Pioneer Igbo missionaries, mostly men of little education, but who were known for their piety and devotion—mainly former employees of the Royal Niger Company and ex-slaves—helped in the spread of Christianity throughout the region.⁴⁹ All the missions depended heavily on these Igbo mission workers for the spread of the gospel. While in 1906 the Holy Ghost mission had 10 priests, five lay brothers and 33 African catechists, by 1907 there were about 70 such Igbo CMS mission workers.⁵⁰

The list of pioneer Igbo church workers, clergymen and missionaries, many of whom rose to the rank of bishop, included Rev. George Anyaegbunam (first Igbo CMS priest), Father Paul Obodechine (first indigenous Catholic priest in British West Africa, ordained in 1920), Rev. Alphonsus Chukwuma Onyeabo (the first Igbo CMS bishop, 1937–1952), Rev. John Anyogu (the first Igbo Catholic bishop, ordained in 1957), and Father Michael Tansi (ordained a priest in 1937 and was affectionately called Saint Cyprian).⁵¹ Others were Bishops Anthony Nwedo, Godfrey Okoye, Francis Arinze (later Cardinal), Benjamin Nwankiti, Gideon Otubelu and Mark Unegbu.⁵² Many of these Igbo clergymen contributed to the laying of the foundation of Igbo studies (teaching and studying Igbo language, literature, culture and history) through their writings, sermons and hymns, and instructions, and by serving as interpreters to foreign missionaries, who invariably wrote about the people. Anthony Nwedo, discussed in Chapter 4 by Jude Aguwa, used his position as a Roman Catholic priest and bishop to expand Christian evangelism, formal education and infrastructural projects in Igbo region. Nwedo also struggled to reconcile his Igbo heritage

with the tenets of Roman Catholicism through, for example, his Catholic belief that love can only have value when it is externally reflected in one's good deeds to others, a belief that reinforces Igbo philosophical values in shared communal well-being and hospitality to strangers in their midst.

The Igbo response to mission work and their enthusiastic attendance at school literally reached unprecedented levels, especially among the lowly and less privileged members of society. Igbo enthusiastic pursuit of formal education has been attributed to their emphasis on competition and achievement over inheritance, and their substantial socioeconomic mobility and freedom of choice. The people's receptivity and adaptability to change were also vital.⁵³ In less than a year of establishing the CMS mission at Onitsha, Bishop Crowther wrote that the Igbo were very "emulative" in everything, including "book learning."⁵⁴ Horton also considered the Igbo the "most imitative and emulative people in the whole of Western Africa," who easily adapted themselves to new ideas and customs.⁵⁵ The Igbo realized that knowledge was power and that formal education was a surety to economic well-being and social mobility. As a result, some Igbo communities literally begged to have schools and teachers. While many communities built schools and even guaranteed the cost of maintaining them, a few individuals single-handedly established some. One such individual deserving of mention in this book is Alvan Azinna Ikoku (1900–1971), who received his PhD in philosophy from the University of London in 1928, and became the first Igbo to establish a secondary school in the region—the Aggrey Memorial College, Arochukwu—in 1931.⁵⁶

Formal education flourished in Igbo society not only as a result of the people's quest for knowledge, but also due to the colonial government's need for educated African personnel. British colonialism helped in the expansion of Christian missionary work and mission-run educational system in Igbo region in many other ways: improved transportation and communication systems, establishment of pass-Britannica—law and order, and the enactment of certain laws—1901 Act that banned oracular consultation. Government and foreign trading companies needed educated Igbo to serve as interpreters, lower level administrators, court clerks, court messengers, copyists, policemen, company clerks, bookkeepers, teachers and artisans. The missions, with the colonial government's assistance, laid the educational foundation of many Igbo intellectuals, including the ones in this anthology. It is important to note that the development of the formal school system, standard Igbo as a written language, and the spread of English and Igbo languages in written forms, facilitated Igbo identity formation through a linguistic unity and a common historical origin and experiences.⁵⁷

The mid-nineteenth century saw the beginning of European penetration and subsequent extensive activities in Igbo homeland. The granting of a royal charter in 1886 to the National African Company (subsequently Royal Niger Company) engendered an atmosphere of hostility between the company and the Igbo. The company's ruthlessness escalated conflicts into open wars fought between its constabulary forces and various Igbo groups from 1892 to 1899. The royal charter, which gave the company the right to administer the Niger from Aboh northward to Nupe, was revoked in 1900. Consequently, the British government established

Protectorates of Northern and Southern Nigeria. Although the process of colonial conquest of the Igbo began in the mid-1880s, it took the British up to the 1920s to finally subjugate all the Igbo states and mini-states. Almost three decades of constant military action made the Igbo resistance to colonial conquest the most tenacious in Nigeria. Notable military campaigns included the 1898–1910 western Igbo/Ekumeku movement, the 1901–1902 Aro Expedition and the 1905–1906 Bende-Onitsha Expedition, regarded as the largest military operation undertaken by the Protectorate government under Walter Egerton, the governor of the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria. There were also the 1905–1906 Ezza and Ahiara Mbaise and the 1918 Ikwo military conquests.⁵⁸ Eventually, the Igbo lost due to a number of reasons, including the inferior and chronic shortage of ammunition vis-à-vis the British colonizers' unlimited supply of sophisticated weaponry. The Igbo defeat cleared the way for the colonizers, the traders and the missionaries.

The British colonial government apparatus in the region started with the establishment in 1891 of the Oil Rivers Protectorate (renamed in 1893, the Niger Coast Protectorate) in the Niger Delta. In 1896, the officials of this government incorporated parts of southern and western Igbo, including Aboh, Obohia and Ohuhu into the protectorate. In 1900, the British government passed the 1900 Native Courts Proclamation No. 9, which authorized colonial officials to establish Native Administrations through the creation of native courts and the appointment of indigenous administrative personnel. Subsequently, they introduced the warrant chief system of native administration in the southeastern provinces, an Igbo-dominated region. Under this system, British colonial officials, who had limited knowledge of the indigenous sociopolitical organization, selected and issued a warrant of authority to certain male figures. In some cases, warrant holders were not selected on the basis of their compliance with indigenous norms and practices, but on the extent of their collaboration with the British, as well as the extent of their fluency in English and their potential to be enterprising. Others were persons of questionable backgrounds who used their new office for personal aggrandizement.

The warrant gave the holders the authority to sit in the Native courts where they exercised both executive and judicial powers.⁵⁹ Those who could speak English—court clerks, court messengers, interpreters, policemen and others—found themselves in the corridors of the new power structure. These were almost exclusively men. In fact, the British “indirect rule” governed through male authorities, and while formalizing male institutions, it ignored and undermined their female equivalents. Many of the indigenous sociopolitical structures and institutions—kinship ties, Omu-ship, title societies, age-grades, the marketplace and others—through which women exercised their power and acted as checks and balances to male authority, were weakened and rendered inactive. There were, however, a very small number of women who were offered positions in the new system of government. These were Omu Okwei Ezeiwene of Osomari, who served in the Onitsha Native Court, 1912–1930s; and Eze Ahebi Ugbabe, who served in the Enugu-Ezike Native Court in the 1920s and was later appointed a

warrant chief, the only woman to occupy such a coveted political position in all of colonial Nigeria. Others included a couple of Ngwa, Owerrinta and Mbaise women, who as a result of the Women's War of 1929, which resulted in the reformation of the local government in the region, were appointed in the 1930s as members of local councils in their respective communities.⁶⁰ This new system of government was a radical departure from the indigenous forms of government discussed earlier.

In addition to the new political system that was dominated by men, colonialism introduced taxation, a new monetary system, land alienation and commercialization, improved transportation systems, urbanization and new technologies. It also brought about increased foreign capital and goods, formal education, and health services, as well as the erosion of Igbo culture. These innovations had serious implications on gender relations and social transformation in Igbo society. While some of them created opportunities that women and other less privileged persons exploited to enhance their status in society, others undermined their economic, political and religious powers, and entrenched men's dominance of the new order. In fact, colonialism transformed Igbo society. It engendered a racial ideology and segregation that subjected the Igbo and other Africans to racial inferiority and subordination. Ironically, colonial alienation, discrimination and exploitation, which escalated during the World War years, motivated the demand for reforms, political mobilization and anticolonial resistance movements in Nigeria.

Igbo resistance to colonial domination was fierce and came in different forms. These included violent and non-violent responses to threatening and unacceptable sociocultural, religious, political and economic conditions and interferences. In addition to protest-demonstrations and military confrontations, the Igbo employed legal actions, adulteration of trade goods and withholding of produce, insults and demeaning verbal utterances, songs and dances, provocative gestures and performances, mass flight, work stoppage and strikes, boycotts and other forms of civil disobedience.⁶¹ The 1929 Women's War and several other organized protests in the 1930s and 1940s were a testament to the Igbo frustration against the colonial authority and its exploitative apparatus and agents. The WWII win-the-war policies with accompanying hardships and exploitation escalated Igbo resistance to colonial rule.

Notable Igbo nationalists who joined their counterparts from other parts of Nigeria in condemning colonial exploitation and alienation by launching a systematic resistance movement to end the British colonial domination include Nnamdi Azikiwe, Mbonu Ojike, Nwafor Orizu and many others.⁶² In Chapter 2, John Oriji provides a succinct account of how Azikiwe's rise to preeminence as a foremost Nigerian nationalist leader, a great philosopher, a frontline politician and a first-class journalist, epitomized "the triumph of knowledge." Azikiwe is presented as a major force in Nigeria's independence movement and one of the most powerful voices for the liberation of Africa from all forms of external domination. With his chain of newspapers—*West African Pilot (WAP)*, *Daily Comet*, *Eastern Nigerian Guardian*, *Eastern Sentinel*, *Nigerian Spokesman*, *Southern*

Nigerian Defender and the *Nigerian Monitor*—writings, lectures and speeches, Azikiwe launched a multi-pronged campaign against the excesses of the British colonial government in Nigeria. Due to its wider circulation, the *WAP* became a tool used to celebrate African achievements, disseminate racial consciousness and nationalist ideas, as well as fight against colonialism throughout the continent. Azikiwe inspired a generation of revered African nationalist heroes, including Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Julius Nyerere of Tanzania and Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia.⁶³

Azikiwe also inspired many Nigerians by his philosophical ideals, particularly the youth, who launched militant nationalism in the 1940s. The Nigerian Youth Movement (1936–1941), regarded as the first genuine Nigerian nationalist organization, was strengthened when Azikiwe joined the body in 1937 along with many Igbo youth. However, the Zikist Movement, established in 1946, was the most radical anticolonial movement in Nigeria. The Zikists—Kolawole Balogun (Yoruba), Habib Abdallah (Hausa) and Igbo youth—Melie Ajuluchukwu, Osita Agwuna, Mokwugo Okoye, Nduka Eze and many others—called for a “Positive Action,” which involved labor activism, civil disobedience and armed sabotage. In their 1948 “A Call for Revolution,” the Zikists viciously attacked the colonial system from all fronts and urged Nigerians to mobilize for violent civil disobedience. They campaigned for the boycott of European goods and culture, and declared Azikiwe their leader and were ready to defend him at all costs. To them, Azikiwe laid the foundation of Zikism, which they espoused, and Nwafor Orizu codified its philosophy.⁶⁴

Among many Igbo intellectuals who were part of the above tradition was Mbonu Ojike, whose philosophical ideals are meticulously analyzed in Chapter 3 by Chuku. While presenting Ojike as an uncompromising African nationalist and pan-Africanist, who called for the boycott of European colonialist education, European Christianity, and cultural practices that he deemed detrimental to Nigerian and African independence and freedom, Chuku notes that Ojike was a product of mission and Western education, who also benefitted from Western civilization in other ways. She highlights other contradictions in Ojike’s life and thought, his struggle to navigate the two worlds of Igbo/African and European/American civilizations, and the controversy surrounding his political career.

Instructively, the emergence and experiences of prominent nationalist figures exposed the contradictions of colonialism in Nigeria. These nationalists were created as the new elite under colonialism, but were subjected to racial discrimination and alienation from the colonial authority, an experience that motivated them to champion nationalist causes in Nigeria, including an end to colonial domination. As a result of their anticolonial activism and grassroots mobilization against the colonial project in Nigeria, it became apparent by the 1950s that the maintenance of such a system of domination had become very difficult and costly. The British colonial officials thus entered into a dialogue with leading Nigerian nationalists to determine when to disengage from Nigeria and what form of government to bequeath to Nigerians. Subsequently, Nigerians formed

political parties, contested for political offices and in 1957, self-government was granted to the Eastern and Western Regions, and in 1959, it was extended to the Northern Region. General elections were held in the same year, and on October 1, 1960, Nigeria became an independent state. Independence came with its challenges and problems, including a fragile federal system with a dependent economy, class struggles and a political economy of power relations among the elite and other social groups, the entrenchment of ethnic politics and suspicions, and religious tensions.

Postcolonial Nigeria and the Challenges of Nation-building

The postcolonial Nigerian state inherited a number of fundamental failures and weaknesses from the British colonial system, especially in the areas of politicization of ethnic differences, ethnic allegiance over national consciousness, corruption, misappropriation of revenues and surpluses, and the mishandling of the economic expectations and aspirations of Nigerians by the political elite, and the alienation of many Nigerians from state power and resources. Consequently, the first decade after independence was marred by political corruption, flawed census exercises and elections, economic development problems, military coups, acts of violence against many Nigerians in the northern and western parts of the country, and a bloody war (the Biafra–Nigeria War, 1967–1970). In spite of these insurmountable obstacles, efforts have been made by Nigerians, especially the intellectual class, to formulate policies and pursue programs aimed at ameliorating these problems and restoring full independence—economic, political, cultural and intellectual—to Nigeria and its citizenry.

Many Igbo and other Nigerian intellectuals were at the vanguard of the struggles for intellectual decolonization, a struggle that started during the colonial period and has intensified since independence. The establishment of University College of Ibadan in 1947 (later, University of Ibadan), the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, and others in the 1960s led to the birth of academic mode of production. Many indigenous intellectuals, who have engaged in literary studies, cultural studies, religious studies, historical studies and in almanac and newsprint media, were products of these institutions. They have sought to vindicate their cultures and histories through these bodies of work. Those who took up the challenge of decolonizing the mind through nationalist historiography included pioneer Igbo nationalist historians—Joseph Anene, Chieka Ifemesia, Adiele Afigbo and others—led by Kenneth Onwuka Dike. They have contributed to our understanding of the various aspects of the history of the Igbo and their neighbors, and their interactions with other groups in different parts of Africa. Their efforts have helped in rescuing the achievements and experiences of past Igbo, Nigerian and African communities. They pioneered a historiographical revolution challenging Western historical methodologies and imperialist narrative that denied Africans any agency in cultural and knowledge production. But the dilemma these pioneer historians faced was how to present a critical historical analysis of the various societies and social groups they studied without being consumed by their defense of

such histories against European ethnocentric denials and distortions. Was it possible for these pioneer historians to write nationalist and community histories devoid of bias and romanticization? Undoubtedly, it was a challenge to effectively navigate the boundaries between local, ethnic, national and global histories amidst competing forces engendered by class, culture, ethnicity, nationalism and globalization.

Kenneth Dike and Adiele Afigbo, two great historians covered in this anthology, demonstrated that the Igbo and their neighbors had a rich past worthy of historical studies. In Chapter 5, Chuku presents Dike as a towering figure in African historical scholarship, who initiated in the 1950s–1960s an African-oriented History Department at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, and also founded other institutions and organizations, which helped in boosting historical studies in Nigeria and Africa. Chuku demonstrates how Dike’s pioneering commitment to the development of African historical thoughts and methods and African historical consciousness earned him the title of the father of modern African historiography. In addition, she critically reviews Dike’s scholarship as a nationalist historian, the omissions and contradictions in his works, as well as his struggles over commitment to national unity and Igbo ethnic cause, and between career demands and familial responsibilities. The solid foundation laid by Dike continued, albeit with internal critique, in the 1970s by second-generation historians, typified by Adiele Afigbo and Obaro Ikime. In Chapter 6, Chuku shows how Afigbo has remained the most prolific Igbo historian of his generation. Even though his scholarship crisscrosses different aspects of Igbo, Nigerian, and African historical studies, the chapter delineates six broad themes upon which Afigbo’s scholarly contributions can be explored. It also analyzes the tightrope Afigbo had to walk as an Igbo historian, who also wrote about non-Igbo groups and challenges facing modern Nigeria. A critique of his role as a university professor is also presented.

The focus on nation-building and economic development, political stability and leadership, constitutional and institutional models to power, as well as national and regional integration are among the preoccupations of Igbo and other Nigerian intellectuals. Successive Nigerian governments have pursued different theories of development, especially dominant Western modernization paradigms. The country has thus been turned into an experimental laboratory of competing and often unsuitable development ideologies and theories. These include import substitution industrialization of the 1970s, structural adjustment program and debt-driven austerity measures of the 1980s, and the self-reliance, capital accumulation, technological innovation and sustainable long-term development of the 1990s.⁶⁵ Among economists, who have contributed immensely to the Nigerian and African development studies and discourses, is Pius Okigbo. In Chapter 7, Chuku describes Okigbo as “a prolific writer whose scholarly accomplishments surpasses those of many full-time academics.” The chapter shows how Okigbo’s works on economic theories and practices, public planning, banking and financial institutions, and fiscal federalism in Nigeria, and regional integration and cooperation in Africa have served as springboards for subsequent

and future studies within the African continent and beyond. Creative conflict in Okigbo's thought as an eclectic and pragmatic economist, and his title as a "pan-Nigerian intellectual" vis-à-vis his ethnic loyalty and commitment to the Biafra cause are examined.

The question of how to maintain political stability and national unity through strengthening democratic and constitutional institutions in Nigeria has attracted the attention of Igbo and other Nigerian intellectuals. This question has become more imperative and urgent than ever before since after the bloody civil war and the persistent divisive ethnic politics, and religious particularism and extremism, which have continuously fueled acts of violence in the country. While attempting to strike a delicate balance between embodying their Igbo values and national principles and characteristics, many Igbo intellectuals, through their writings and activism, have contributed to the debate on national unity and stability. A sample of the list include such political scientists as Eme Awa, Okwudiba Nnoli and Ikenna Nzimiro; anthropologists Victor Uchendu and Michael Angulu Onwuejeogu; distinguished educator Eni Njoku; international mathematician and educator Chike Obi; renowned diplomat and former Commonwealth Secretary-General Eleazar Chukwuemeka Anyaoku; and medical, legal and political luminaries such as Dennis C. Osadebay, Josiah O. J. Okezie, Kingsley Ozumba Mbadiwe and Michael Okpara.⁶⁶

Other Igbo scholars who have distinguished themselves in the areas of law, legal and the Nigerian constitutional studies include Louis Mbanefo, Dan Onuora Ibekwe, Raymond Amanze Njoku and Benjamin Nwabueze.⁶⁷ In Chapter 8, Philip Aka examines Benjamin Nwabueze's challenge in walking the delicate rope between Igbo values and causes on one hand, and national political stability and unity on the other hand. Aka portrays Nwabueze as a giant figure in constitutional studies and reforms, who has contributed a lot to African intellectual heritage, but has at best maintained an ambivalent and sometimes, antipathetic position to Igbo self-determination and autonomy.

There are other comparable literary giants of Igbo origin, who have through creative writings, captured different aspects of Igbo cultural values and practices as well as societal problems and challenges by presenting the African experience and stories in their own way in Igbo and in a foreign medium, such as English. Prominent pioneer Igbo literary and artistic gurus—novelists, poets, playwrights and literary critics—include Pita Nwana, D. N. Achara, Leopold Bell-Gam, Cyprian Ekwensi, Chinua Achebe, Flora Nwapa, Christopher Okigbo, Elechi Amadi, John Munonye, Vincent Chukwuemeka Ike, Michael Echeruo, Buchi Emecheta, Emmanuel Obiechina, T. Obinkaram Echewa, Tony Ubesie, Osonye Tess Onwueme and others.⁶⁸ Chinua Achebe's contributions to the development of Igbo studies in particular, and African studies in general, are presented in Chapter 9. In this chapter, Raphael Njoku discusses how Achebe's novels have served as a rare intellectual resource material to students and scholars of diverse disciplinary backgrounds interested in different aspects of Igbo and African social institutions and practices, and the conflict that was generated as they encountered Western presence. Contrary to Achebe's critics who accuse him

of perpetuating the subordination of female gender in his novels, Njoku argues that Achebe's works present the idea of gender balance in Igbo culture, especially in his representation of the gender identity of Igbo deities and their human agents, and in the role played by the association of lineage daughters in Igbo sociopolitical system.

Women and Gender Discourses

Igbo women occupy a key place in the development of African intellectual traditions through their productive and reproductive activities. Writing in the nineteenth century, Africanus Horton recommended the education of the female population due to the critical role Igbo women played in society. He argued that such a project would help break barriers of ignorance and alienation, and also advance the Igbo and their society.⁶⁹ It is important that serious attention be paid to women's education and that adequate recognition in scholarship be accorded to women for their enormous contributions to the reproduction of Igbo population, tradition and cultural heritage, and of Igbo society itself.

The recognition of Igbo women in scholarly endeavors was pioneered by early European female anthropologists during the colonial period. The works of Sylvia Leith-Ross and M. M. Green are the most detailed and comprehensive anthropological studies on Igbo women.⁷⁰ As stated elsewhere, though foundational, these works are flawed in a number of ways.⁷¹ They were not necessarily motivated by a need to study and understand Igbo women in their own right; rather they were inspired by the historical circumstances under which they were produced. The studies served the interests of the colonial authority, which commissioned their authors, following the 1929 Women's War, to examine the place of women in Igbo society. The works are marred by cultural prejudices and factual inaccuracies. With a limited knowledge of the complexity of Igbo language and cultural practices, and immersed in European ethnocentrism, Leith-Ross and Green could not have produced balanced narratives of Igbo women's experiences. For instance, in the introductory part of her book, Leith-Ross claims that it is important to study the Igbo woman "under the most primitive 'bush' conditions [and] in a semi-urban life where she would consider herself more civilized [with European influence] than her bush sister." These were women whose contact with Western civilization, she continues, increased their "cleverness," "but not their intelligence."⁷² She refers to the Igbo in general as "one of the least disciplined and least intelligible, of African peoples."⁷³ In spite of the deficiencies, the publications by early Europeans have served as a springboard for the recent scholarship on Igbo women, especially by Igbo female scholars and students.

Igbo female scholars have expanded the foundation laid by these European female authors, researching and writing more balanced accounts about Igbo and African women and other issues of interest. Though the list is quite long, such Igbo female scholars and authors as Flora Nwapa, Felicia Ekejiuba, Adora Lily Ulasi, Buchi Emecheta, Nina Mba (by marriage), Helen Chukwuma, Osonye Tess Onwueme, Juliet Okonkwo, Kamene Okonjo and Ifi Amadiume have

achieved international recognition for their significant contributions to the development of women's studies and feminist epistemology. These women have taken the roles of social critics, educators, "entertainers" and activists by weaving together multicolored yarns of Igbo oral traditions, narratives and performances into rich cloths of texts, which have immensely enriched the African intellectual traditions. Igbo female scholars have been consistent in their efforts to fill the gaps in African intellectual traditions through greater social inclusiveness along gender, ethnic and religious lines. In a world mediated by class, age, gender, ethnicity, race and social location, it is imperative to challenge entrenched imperial myths, stereotypes and exclusionary practices that question the intellectual abilities of Africans in general and African women in particular.

It is equally important to challenge the assumption, especially within colonial and nationalist historiography, that African women could not possibly be intellectuals, an assumption that has unfortunately been reinforced by the persistence of patriarchal practices in African society and in the academia. Patriarchal sensibilities have contributed to the exclusion of Igbo female intellectuals from the Ahiajioku Lectures, an annual festival of academic harvest, in which distinguished Igbo scholars have, as guest lecturers, highlighted the contributions of their people to the development of Nigerian, African and African Diaspora civilizations. Since the inception of the lecture series in 1979, the organizers have not found any female Igbo scholar or intellectual worthy enough to join the ranks of male intellectuals who have graced the annual event as guest-speakers.

Inspired by international, continental, national and local developments and forces, such as the emergence of feminist movements and women's studies; women-centered UN initiatives; the establishment of the Association of African Women on Research and Development (AAWORD) in Dakar, 1977; Women in Nigeria (WIN), 1982; Women's Research and Documentation Center, University of Ibadan, (WORDOC), 1986; and their activities, Igbo female intellectuals have strived, through their academic engagements and activism, to correct certain epistemological and stereotypical representations of Igbo/African women and their culture. In Chapter 10, Flora Nwapa's contribution to the development of Igbo cultural, African literary, and women's studies is discussed. Chuku shows how Nwapa has inspired the development of scholarly focus on Igbo culture and women and, as a result, she has been firmly entrenched in the matrix of African women's studies. Themes that feature prominently in Nwapa's writings—women's status, marriage, motherhood and childlessness, polygyny and levirate, widowhood, colonialism and Western education, women's survival strategies and the phenomenon of Uhamiri Goddess—are also analyzed. In Chapter 11, Christine Ohale explores the contribution of Helen Chukwuma as a pioneer African female literary critic, whose greatest contribution is in the areas of African feminism/feminist criticism, and Igbo oral literature. Ohale portrays Chukwuma as a crusader for women's education, who believes that education is the gateway to their empowerment. She also examines Chukwuma's contribution to the debate over the use of African indigenous and world languages in African literature, arguing that Chukwuma's focus on Igbo oral literary tradition enriches

modern African literature and mitigates against any negative effects of using foreign mediums.

This book is aimed at a broad readership because it provides accessible scholarly contributions of individuals who had navigated many worlds and terrains in spite of serious inhibitive forces and barriers. Many of them had continuously engaged in the negotiations over unequal power and authority, a situation that became more apparent under repressive military and other authoritarian regimes. They served as kingpins of nationalism as their ability to speak truth to power was critical in the independence struggle in Nigeria and other parts of Africa. They had struggled with the delicate but complex question of how to maintain an autonomous and critical distance from the state without being vilified as elitist, aloof and self-indulgent. Some of them have been derided as divisive and inimical to the Nigerian state and therefore subjected to all kinds of restrictions and harassment by the repressive state apparatus. In spite of these challenges, the Igbo intellectuals, particularly those covered in this book, had remained true to their character—conscientious, determined and fearless educators and social activists.

The inclusive chapters and the subjects therein discussed are a testament to the point that no region or nationality or ethnicity or gender has the monopoly of knowing, or holding exclusive capability over the construction and production of knowledge, or of articulating theories and putting them into practice. Hopefully, reading the contributions of these individuals will help in rescuing parts of African memories from the throes of Western enslavement and imperial domination, and interrupt the obstruction of the vision of Africa's future. These Igbo intellectuals, irrespective of where they had lived, never got detached from their Igbo roots and homeland as heads without bodies. It is our hope that this anthology will inspire further systematic studies on the contributions of Igbo intellectuals, especially those not covered in this volume. Such studies become imperative with the recent trend of brain drain, driven by a hostile political environment at home and an economic pull abroad, where a significant number of Igbo and African intellectual contributions emanate from outside the continent. The need to harness the skills and ideals of these individuals for sustainable development in Africa cannot be understated. It is equally imperative that concerted efforts be made to cultivate and nurture healthy relationships and linkages between home-based intellectuals and their counterparts abroad.

Notes

1. Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *Creative Conflict in African American Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
2. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, edited and translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey N. Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 9. Gramsci was a Marxist, parliamentarian, labor activist, revolutionary, journalist, and political philosopher imprisoned by Mussolini in 1926–1937.
3. Syed H. Alatas, *Intellectuals in Developing Societies* (London: Frank Cass, 1977).

4. Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectuals*. 1st edition, 1994 (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 11.
5. *Ibid.*, 20 and 102.
6. Virginia Held, "The Independence of Intellectuals," *The Journal of Philosophy* 80, no. 10 (1983): 576–577.
7. Ali Mazrui, "Pan-Africanism and the Intellectuals: Rise, Decline and Revival," in *African Intellectuals: Rethinking Politics, Language, Gender and Development*, ed. Thandika Mkandawire (Dakar: CODESRIA, 2005), 56 and 58.
8. Molefi Asante and Abu Abarry, eds., *African Intellectual Heritage: A Book of Sources* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1996).
9. *Ibid.*, 6.
10. Constance B. Hilliard, ed., *Intellectual Traditions of Pre-Colonial Africa* (Boston, MA: McGraw Hill, 1998).
11. *Ibid.*, 296.
12. Toyin Falola, *Yoruba Gurus: Indigenous Production of Knowledge in Africa* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1999).
13. Steven Feierman, *Peasant Intellectuals: Anthropology and History in Tanzania* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 17–18.
14. Studies on the contributions of Africans to the development of African thought and intellectual traditions include: Bjorn Beckman and Gbemisola Adeoti, eds., *Intellectuals and African Development: Pretension and Resistance in African Politics* (Dakar: CODESRIA, 2006); Toyin Falola, *Nationalism and African Intellectuals* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2001); Philip S. Zachernuk, *Colonial Subjects: An African Intelligentsia and Atlantic Ideas* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 2000); Robert W. July, *The Origins of Modern African Thought* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1967). July's work covers mostly West African men who were prominent in theology, law, politics, business, journalism, government and education during the colonial era. Zachernuk's book examines the struggles of Nigerian intellectuals as colonial subjects over conflicting issues arising from the relationships between Africa, Europe and the Western Hemisphere in their attempts to articulate their ideas and define their identity and their society. While it focuses especially on the complex relations between early Yoruba returnee intellectuals from Sierra Leone (the Saros), emerging indigenous Yoruba and other southern Nigerian intellectual groups, foreign missionaries and colonial administrators, the book omits the voices of women, northern Nigerian intellectuals and local and public intellectuals who did not have the same level of formal education as those presented.
15. Paul Zeleza, *Rethinking Africa's Globalization*, Vol. I: *The Intellectual Challenges* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2003), v and viii.
16. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms* (Oxford: James Currey, 1993); *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: James Currey, 1986).
17. Thandika Mkandawire, "Introduction," in *African Intellectuals*, ed. Thandika Mkandawire (Dakar: CODESRIA, 2005), 7.
18. See Gloria Chuku, "Igbo Women and Political Participation in Nigeria, 1800s–2005," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 42, no. 1 (2009): 81–103; Ikenna Nzimiro, *Studies in Ibo Political Systems: Chieftaincy and Politics in Four Niger States* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1972); A. E. Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs: Indirect Rule in Southeastern Nigeria, 1891–1929* (New York: Humanities Press, 1972).

19. Ogbu Kalu, "Igbo Traditional Religious Systems," in *A Survey of the Igbo Nation*, ed. G. E. K. Ofomata (Onitsha, Nigeria: Africana First Publishers Ltd., 2002), 352.
20. See Gloria Chuku, *Igbo Women and Economic Transformation in Southeastern Nigeria, 1900–1960* (New York: Routledge, 2005).
21. Raphael C. Njoku, *African Cultural Values: Igbo Political Leadership in Colonial Nigeria, 1900–1966* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 1.
22. Wole Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), xii.
23. Zeleza, *Rethinking Africa's Globalization*, v.
24. See Douglas Chambers, *Murder at Montpelier: Igbo Africans in Virginia* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2005); and Gloria Chuku's review of the book, "Enslaved Igbo and the Foundation of Afro-Virginia Slave Culture and Society," *H-Net Reviews in the Humanities and Social Sciences Online*, October 2006; Kenneth Dike and Felicia Ekejiuba, *The Aro of South-Eastern Nigeria, 1650–1980: A Study of Socio-Economic Formation and Transformation in Nigeria* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Ibadan University Press, 1990); David Northrup, *Trade Without Rulers: Pre-Colonial Economic Development in South-Eastern Nigeria* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978); "The Growth of Trade among the Igbo before 1800," *Journal of African History* 13, no. 2 (1972): 217–236; P. Amaury Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria: A Sketch of their History, Ethnology and Languages with an Abstract of the 1921 Census*, Vol. 1 (London: Oxford University Press, 1926).
25. While in the biographies written by German Hermine L. Geissler and American Joseph Kummer in 1864, the two Moravian missionaries Archibald narrated his life story to, Aniaso was born in 1799 and was kidnapped when he was about 10–12 years old, Jamaican Maureen Warner-Lewis places his date of birth around 1792 and his seizure into slavery at 9 or 10 years old. See Archibald Monteith, "Experiences of a Former Slave in Jamaica," trans. Mary Kuck, Typescript, 2002, originally published as "Erlebnisse eines ehemaligen sclaven in Jamaica," *Missions-Blatt aus der Brudergemeine* 28, no. 5 (1864): 87–102, and no. 6 (1864): 104–115; Vernon Nelson, "Archibald John Montheith: Native Helper and Assistant in the Jamaica Mission at New Carmel," *Transactions of the Moravian Historical Society* 21, no. 1 (1966): 29–52; republished in *Callaloo* 13, no. 1 (1990): 102–114; Maureen Warner-Lewis, *Archibald Montheith: Igbo, Jamaican, Moravian* (Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2007), 41.
26. One of Blyden's biographers estimated that he published almost 100 works, including 15 books and pamphlets. But his most important works include: *African Life and Customs*, reprinted from *The Sierra Leone Weekly News*, 1908 (London: African Publication Society, 1969); *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race* with an Introduction by Hon. Samuel Lewis (London: W. B. Whittingham, 1887); *The Jewish Question* (Liverpool: Lionel Hart, 1898). See Hollis Lynch, ed., *Selected Letters of Edward Wilmot Blyden* (Millwood, NY: KTO, 1978); *Black Spokesman: Selected Published Writings of Edward Wilmot Blyden* (London: Frank Cass & Co Ltd., 1971); Edith Holden, *Blyden of Liberia: An Account of the Life and Labors of Edward Wilmot Blyden as Recorded in Letters and in Print* (New York: Vintage, 1966).
27. Edward Wilmot Blyden, *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race* [1887] with an Introduction by Christopher Fyfe (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1967), 94.
28. *Ibid.*, 277.
29. Edward Blyden, "Africa and the Africans," *Fraser's Magazine* 18 (August 1878): 188; "Mixed Races in Liberia," *Annual Report of the Board of Regents of the*

- Smithsonian Institute* (Washington, DC: 1871), 386–388. Ironically, Blyden married a mulatto—Sarah Yates, in 1856—whom he accused of having more loyalty to her mulatto community than to her husband. He had an unhappy private life, which affected his personality: he regarded his wife semiliterate who had no capacity for intellectual growth but was always complaining; had three children with her who showed little intellectual ability; and he blamed these problems and the fact that one of his daughters was retarded for marrying “outside his race.” He was disliked by African Americans for being a divisive figure in their community due to his hatred against mulattoes; his close association with the American Colonization Society; and his campaign for them to abandon the civil rights movement and embrace the repatriation to Liberia. See Hollis R. Lynch, *Edward Wilmot Blyden: Pan-Negro Patriot, 1832–1912* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 38–39.
30. Blyden, *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race*, 241.
 31. Lynch, *Black Spokesman*, xxiii. An African personality was antithesis to European; it was cheerful, sympathetic and willing to serve.
 32. Blyden, *African Life and Customs*.
 33. Lynch, *Edward Wilmot Blyden*, 193–209.
 34. Holden, *Blyden of Liberia*, 9.
 35. The Igbo were the second largest ethnic group in Sierra Leone after the Yoruba. A Scottish explorer, William B. Baikie, referred to them as “both numerous and wealthy.” See William Balfour Baikie, *Narrative of an Exploring Voyage Up the Rivers Kuora and Binue, Commonly Known as the Niger and Tsadda in 1854* (London: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd, 1966), 374.
 36. James Africanus B. Horton, *West African Countries and Peoples, British and Native: A Vindication of the African Race*, 1868 (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 1969); Davidson Nicol, ed., *Africanus Horton, the Dawn of Nationalism in Modern Africa: Extracts from the Political, Educational, Scientific and Medical Writings of J. A. B. Horton* (Harlow: Longmans, 1969); James Africanus B. Horton, *Physical and Medical Climate and Meteorology of the West Coast of Africa with Valuable Hints to Europeans for the Preservation of Health in the Tropics* (London: J. Churchill, 1867).
 37. Horton, *West African Countries*, Chapter 13 titled “Empire of the Eboes,” 171–198.
 38. *Ibid.*, 192.
 39. *Ibid.*, 196.
 40. George T. Basden, *Among the Ibos of Nigeria*, 1921 (Lagos, Nigeria: University Publishing Co, 1982), 288. See also Samuel Crowther and John Christopher Taylor, *The Gospel on the Banks of the Niger: Journals and Notices of the Native Missionaries Accompanying the Niger Expedition of 1857–1859* (London: Dawsons of Pall Mall, 1968), 39 and 249.
 41. It was reported that a group of 100 Igbo in Sierra Leone petitioned their bishop in the 1850s to establish Christian missions in Igbo homeland. Subsequently, a party of three Igbo led by Rev. E. Jones (first Black American college graduate) left for Nigeria but failed to accomplish their goal. See Elizabeth Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People* (London: Macmillan Press, 1976), 70.
 42. Simon Jonas was an ex-Igbo slave and the veteran of the 1841 and 1854 Niger Missions. He stationed at Aboh since 1841, teaching children and others who came to him about the gospel, a pioneering work, which should earn him the recognition as the first apostle of the Igbo. Other nineteenth-century repatriate Igbo who pursued mission work in Igbo homeland were Thomas Samuel of the CMS and Augustine Radillo, a Baptist deacon.

43. Basden, *Among the Ibos*, 289.
44. Igbo recaptives in Regent, Sierra Leone, one of the settlements for recaptured slaves, formed an Igbo Association under the leadership of William Pratt for Christian evangelical work in Igbo homeland.
45. An example was David Okparabietoa Pepple of Igbo origin, who was sold into slavery in Ohumbele, was ordained a deacon and later became a pastor in that town. See Isichei, *A History of the Igbo*, 161. There was also Ucheya Aju Ucheya of Okoko Item, who was sold to Albert Hart of the Niger Delta as a boy, was renamed Emmanuel Hart, later gained the leadership of his master's house, converted to Christianity and was responsible at the age of 20 years for the establishment of the Methodist Church at Item. Before his death at the age of 26 years, Hart had trained students and disciples who carried out the work of Methodist evangelization to Aba, Alayi and Mbawsi.
46. For studies on the introduction of Christianity and Christian evangelism in Igbo region, see Ogbu Kalu, *The Embattled Gods: Christianization of Igboland, 1841–1991* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2003); Shed N. Adiele, ed., *The Niger Mission: Origin, Growth and Impact, 1857–1995* (Aba, Nigeria: ISAECO Press, 1996); Felix Ekechi, *Missionary Enterprise and Rivalry in Igboland, 1857–1914* (London: Frank Cass, 1972); E. A. Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria, 1842–1914* (London: Longman, 1966); Crowther and Taylor, *The Gospel on the Banks of the Niger*.
47. David C. Nwafo, *Born to Serve: The Biography of Dr. Akanu Ibiam* (Lagos, Nigeria: Macmillan Nigeria Publishers, 1988).
48. For more information on the Christian missions and the development of Western education in Igbo region, see Nicholas I. Omenka, *The School in the Service of Evangelization: The Catholic Educational Impact in Eastern Nigeria 1886–1950* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1989); Ekechi, *Missionary Enterprise*; A. Babs Fafunwa, *History of Education in Nigeria* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1974); Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact*.
49. The Igbo acceptance of Christianity was a gradual process. While Christian teachings resonated with the lowly in Igbo society—ex-slaves, women, the poor and the needy—the traditional elite and title holders reluctantly embraced the new religion. The missionary condemnation of Igbo religious beliefs and cultural practices, such as polygyny, made their religion unattractive to the people. However, Eze Onyeka-Omeli Idigo of Aguleri, and Eze Nzedegwu of Ossomari were instrumental to the establishment of Christian missions in their respective communities. There was also Alexander Ubuechi of Issele who converted to Catholicism when he was already a diviner, title man and skilled craftsman and his commitment to the mission earned him the missionary acclamation of a saint when he died in 1903. Another example was Nwafor Ogwuma of Arochukwu, a successful slave dealer and polygamist, who later assisted Rev. Rankin and later J. A. T. Beattie to establish a Presbyterian mission at the town in 1907. He was among those Igbo who helped Archdeacon T. J. Dennis in the translation of the Igbo Union Bible.
50. Elizabeth Isichei, *The Ibo People and the Europeans: The Genesis of a Relationship To 1906* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973), 146 and 150.
51. Elizabeth Isichei, *Entirely for God: The Life of Michael Iwene Tansi* (London: Macmillan Education, 1980)
52. The most prominent Igbo priest is Cardinal Francis Arinze, who became the first youngest bishop in 1965 at the age of 33 years, and the first “Black” archbishop of Onitsha (1967–1985). He has sought to incorporate aspects of Igbo religious

- practices into the Nigerian Catholicism. An author of several books on interfaith dialogue and peace, and as the president of the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue in Rome (1984–2002), Cardinal Arinze has tirelessly worked to bridge the gap between Catholicism and other religions and faiths, while maintaining an uncompromising position against such social issues as birth control and abortion. See Francis Cardinal Arinze and Gerard O’Connell, *God’s Invisible Hand: The Life and Work of Francis Cardinal Arinze* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2006).
53. Simon Ottenberg, “Ibo Receptivity to Change,” in *Continuity and Change in African Cultures*, eds. William R. Bascom and Melville J. Herskovits (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1959), 130–143.
 54. Horton, *West African Countries*, 175 quoting Bishop Crowther.
 55. *Ibid.*, 175.
 56. Alvan Ikoku was a founding member of the Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT), and later its president in 1955. In recognition of his contribution to the development of education in Nigeria, the federal government prints his portrait on the ten naira bill (the country’s currency), and a tertiary institution—Alvan Ikoku College of Education, Owerri, was named after him. See Isaac Okey Amobi, *A Biography: Alvan Ikoku* (Onitsha, Nigeria: Africana Educational Publishers, 1981); Dike and Ekejiuba, *The Aro of South-eastern Nigeria*, 328.
 57. Igbo language with many dialects has been described as one of the most difficult languages in Africa. The process of developing “Standard” Igbo has been a very long and treacherous one. The development stages include the Igbo Esperanto or Isuama Igbo (1841–1872), The Union Igbo (1905–1939), Central Igbo (1939–1972) and the Standard Igbo (since 1973). In spite of their deficiencies, credit should be given to such early foreign missionaries and Saro Igbo as J. P. Schon, John C. Taylor, Solomon Perry, Samuel Crowther, A. Ganot and Thomas John Dennis as well as to such Igbo experts as Frederick Chidozie Ogbalu and H. I. Nnaji. Ogbalu was a pan-Igbo nationalist educator and language enthusiast, who founded in 1949 the Society for Promoting Igbo Language and Culture (SPILC) under whose leadership the Standard Igbo was produced in 1973. See Ben Fulford, “An Igbo Esperanto: A History of the Union Ibo Bible, 1900–1950,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 32, no. 4 (2002): 457–501; Dmitri van den Bersselaar, “Creating ‘Union Ibo’: Missionaries and the Igbo Language,” *Africa* 67, no. 2 (1997): 273–295; A. E. Afigbo, ed., *F. C. Ogbalu and the Igbo Language* (Onitsha, Nigeria: University Publishers, 1995); F. Chidozie Ogbalu and E. Noluo Emenanjo, eds., *Igbo Language and Culture*, Vols. 1 and 2 (Ibadan, Nigeria: Oxford University Press, 1975 and 1982).
 58. For more information on some of these military campaigns and wars, see Don C. Ohadike, *The Ekumeku Movement: Western Igbo Resistance to the British Conquest of Nigeria, 1883–1914* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1991); Philip Igbafe, “Western Igbo Society and Its Resistance to British Rule: The Ekumeku Movement, 1898–1911,” *Journal of African History* 12, no. 3 (1971): 441–459; Isichei, *The Ibo People and the Europeans*, Chapter 10; Isichei, *A History of the Igbo*, Chapter 9; Dike and Ekejiuba, *The Aro of South-eastern Nigeria*; Felix Ekechi, “Merchants, Missionaries and the Bombardment of Onitsha, 1879–89: Aspects of Anglo-Igbo Encounter,” *The Conch* 5, nos. 1–2 (1973): 61–81.
 59. Afigbo, *The Warrant Chief*.
 60. Chuku, “Igbo Women and Political Participation”; Nwando Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings: Female Power and Authority in Northern Igboland, 1900–1960* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2005); Felicia Ekejiuba, “Omu Okwei,

- the Merchant Queen of Ossomari: A Biological Sketch,” *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 3, no. 4 (1967): 633–646.
61. For detailed studies of forms and examples of Igbo resistance against increased European presence in their society see Chuku, *Igbo Women and Economic Transformation*; Felix Ekechi, “The Culture of Resistance to Western Imperialism among the Igbo,” in *Power and Nationalism in Modern Africa: Essays in Honor of Don Ohadike*, eds. Toyin Falola and Salah Hassan (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2008), 135–153; “The British Assault on Ogbunorike Oracle in Eastern Nigeria,” *Journal of African Studies* 14, no. 2 (1981): 69–77; “Igbo Response to British Imperialism: The Episode of Dr. Stewart and the Ahiara Expedition, 1905–1916,” *Journal of African Studies* 1, no. 2 (1974): 145–157; Adiele Afigbo, “Revolution and Reaction in Eastern Nigeria: 1900–1929,” *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 3, no. 3 (1966): 539–551; Ohadike, *The Ekumeku Movement*. Toyin Falola, *Colonialism and Violence in Nigeria* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009) covers most part of Nigeria and shows how the British colonialism engendered a circle of violence in the region.
 62. Nwafor Orizu (1920–1999) was a newspaper editor and very active in a number of students, cultural and political organizations in the United States during the WW II years and also in Nigeria. He was a true Nigerian nationalist and a founding member of the Zikist Movement, who called on African youth to mobilize for political action. An author and politician, Orizu remained in active politics until the 1990s. He is remembered for his “politics without bitterness,” Zikism and horizontal education. See A. A. Nwafor Orizu, *Without Bitterness: Western Nations in Post-War Africa* (New York: Creative Age Press, 1944). On Nigerian nationalism, see Kalu Ezera, *Constitutional Developments in Nigeria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964); Richard Sklar, *Nigerian Political Parties: Power in an Emergent African Nation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963); James Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1958).
 63. See Gloria Chuku, “Azikiwe, Nnamdi,” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of African Thought*, Vol. 1, eds. F. Abiola Irele and Biodun Jeyifo (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 116–119; A. Ikenga, ed., *Nnamdi Azikiwe: Tributes to an African Legend* (Lagos, Nigeria: Minaj Publishers, 1996); M. S. O. Olisa and O. M. Ikejiani-Clark, eds., *Azikiwe and the African Revolution* (Lagos, Nigeria: Africana-Fep Publishers, 1989).
 64. See Hakeem Tijani, *Britain, Leftist Nationalists and the Transfer of Power in Nigeria, 1945–1965* (New York: Routledge, 2005); Ehiedu Iweriebo, *Radical Politics in Nigeria, 1945–1950: The Significant of the Zikist Movement* (Zaria, Nigeria: Ahmadu Bello University Press, 1996); G. O. Olusanya, “The Zikist Movement—A Study in Political Radicalism, 1946–50,” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 4, no. 3 (1966): 323–333; Mokwugo Okoye, *Storms on the Niger* (Enugu, Nigeria: Eastern Nigerian Printing Corporation, 1965); *Vistas of Life: A Survey of Views and Visions* (Enugu, Nigeria: Eastern Nigerian Printing Corporation, 1962); V. C. Iketuonye, *Zik of New Africa* (London: Macmillan, 1961); Osita C. Agwuna, *What is the Zikist Movement? A Brief Sketch of the Work and Organization of the Zikist Movement* (Lagos, Nigeria: Adedimeta Press, 1949); A. A. Nwafor Orizu, *Original Zikism* (Onitsha, Nigeria: United Brothers’ Press, n.d.); Osita C. Agwuna, *Inside Africa (A Study of the Colour Bar Problem)* (Yaba, Nigeria: Zik’s Press, 1947).
 65. See Paul Collier, Chukwuma Soludo, and Catherine Pattillo, eds., *Economic Policy Options for a Prosperous Nigeria* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Jeremiah

- Dibua, *Modernization and the Crisis of Development in Africa: The Nigerian Experience* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2006); Mojubaolu Okome, *A Sapped Democracy: The Political Economy of the Structural Adjustment Program and the Political Transition in Nigeria, 1983–1993* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1998); Sarah A. Khan, *Nigeria: The Political Economy of Oil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); Tom Forrest, *Politics and Economic Development in Nigeria* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993); Thomas Biersteker, ed., *Multinationals, the State, and Control of the Nigerian Economy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987).
66. H. K. Offonry, *Portrait of a Leader: The Biography of Dr. Michael Okpara* (Owerri, Nigeria: New Africa Publishing Co. Ltd., 1983).
 67. Louis Mbanefo (1911–1977) was the first Igbo lawyer and the first Nigerian chief justice in Eastern Nigeria, who served as a judge of the Supreme Court and High Court, as well as a member of the Federal Supreme Court of Appeal (1958) and the International Court of Justice at The Hague (1961). He was one of the founders of the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs. Eni Njoku (1917–1974) distinguished himself as an educator and university administrator, who served as vice-chancellor of the University of Lagos, Nigeria (1962–1965), and of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, in 1966. Chike Obi (1921–2008), an educator and renowned international mathematician, studied in both United Kingdom and United States of America in the 1930s and early 1940s, who upon return to Nigeria, taught mathematics at the University of Ibadan (1950s–1960s) and the University of Lagos (1970–1985).
 68. Pita Nwana, *Omenuko* (London: Longmans, 1933); D. N. Achara, *Ala Bingo* (London: Longmans, 1937); Leopold Bell-Gam, *Ije Odumodu Jere* (London: Longmans, 1952) are classic Igbo novels. While these three classic authors laid the foundation for the modern Igbo novel, Nwana is regarded as the father of the Igbo novel. With five Igbo novels published between 1973 and 1975, Tony Ubesie is noted as the most gifted Igbo novelist in the twentieth century. Similarly, Cyprian Ekwensi, the most prolific and versatile Igbo-Nigerian writer and one of the most prolific of modern African writers, is held as the father of the modern Nigerian novel; his first four works *When Love Whispers*; *The Leopard's Claw*; *Ikolo the Wrestler*; and *People of the City* were published between 1947 and 1954. See Ernest N. Emenyonu, ed., *The Essential Ekwensi: A Literary Celebration of Cyprian Ekwensi's Sixty-fifth Birthday* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Heinemann Educational Books, 1987); *The Rise of the Igbo Novel* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Oxford University Press, 1978); also see the review of this book by Phaniel Egejuru, *Research in African Literatures* 13, no. 1 (1982): 78–82.
 69. Horton, *West African Countries*, 173 and 193.
 70. Sylvia Leith-Ross, *African Women: A Study of Ibo of Nigeria* (London: Faber and Faber, 1939); M. M. Green, *Ibo Village Affairs* (London: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd., 1947).
 71. Chuku, *Igbo Women and Economic Transformation*, 1; Gloria Chuku, “Recovering the Voices and Life Histories of Igbo Women: Sources and Methodological Considerations,” paper presented at a workshop organized by Dartmouth College and York University/UNESCO Nigerian Hinterland Project at Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH, USA, May 18–20, 2001.
 72. Leith-Ross, *African Women*, 52 and 219.
 73. *Ibid.*, 38.

CHAPTER 1

Olaudah Equiano and the Foundation of Igbo Intellectual Tradition

Gloria Chuku

Introduction

This chapter evaluates the controversies surrounding Olaudah Equiano's birthplace, and the creative conflict in his literary and intellectual developments. It also examines his contributions to the development of Igbo intellectual tradition, slavery historiography, African American literary genre, comparative literature and other fields of study. His roles as an eighteenth-century Afro-British abolitionist, human rights activist, successful entrepreneur and a writer and author of a bestseller and a classic are articulated. By no means will a piece of work of this size claim a complete exhaustion of the issues surrounding the life of Olaudah Equiano as a boy in Igbo region, his ordeals in the hands of his kidnapers and enslavers in Africa, through the "Middle Passage" and enslavement in the Americas, and as a freeman in England. However, Equiano's life experiences and embodied identities, which helped to shape his personality, his humanity and the intellectual tradition that he left behind are discussed.

Knowledge about Olaudah Equiano comes from his book, *The Interesting Narrative*, which was published in London in 1789, and from other sources. Born an Igbo in 1745 in what became southeastern Nigeria, Equiano was the youngest son in a family of six sons and a daughter. He was kidnapped along with his younger sister between the age of ten and eleven by two men and a woman in 1756. He passed from one slave dealer to another within the region including a blacksmith whose people spoke his own language. After many months of traveling, Equiano landed on the coast from where he embarked on the horrific "Middle Passage" to Barbados, in the West Indies. From there, he was sold to a Virginia planter in North America. It was in Virginia that Michael Henry Pascal, a British naval officer, bought him from the planter. Pascal renamed Olaudah Equiano, Gustavus

Vassa,¹ and took him to London. He served with Pascal in the Royal Navy during the Seven Years War (1756–1763, also known in North America as the French and Indian Wars).

After the war, Pascal betrayed Equiano by reselling him back to the West Indies, where he was bought by Robert King, a Quaker merchant from Philadelphia (PA) who owned many vessels operating between the Caribbean and North America. Equiano's commercial voyages on behalf of his master took him to places including St. Kitts, St. Eustatius and New Providence in the Bahamas, Grenada, Guadeloupe, Montserrat, Santa Cruz, Charleston (SC), Philadelphia and Savannah (GA). One of the ship captains of Equiano's master helped him to engage in petty trade on his own account. Equiano was thrifty enough to save £40 needed to buy his freedom in 1766 from Robert King. During the period of his enslavement, Equiano learned the arts of literacy and literature from his master and dearest friend, Richard "Dick" Baker, a White Virginia youth and slave owner. Another friend, Daniel Queen, taught him how to dress hair and read the Bible. Equiano also became an experienced sailor. It is evident that Equiano regained his freedom by sheer hard work, diligence, entrepreneurial skills and by carefully studying and manipulating both individuals and institutions including those that worked to perpetuate slavery, as well as by what he referred to as "the mercies of Providence." The same society that repressed him also offered him the very tools and skills with which he resisted the oppression. Here lies one of the contradictions in Equiano's life experience.

Following his freedom, Equiano returned to England and became a hair-dresser, musician and valet. It was however, a disappointing experience. Poverty forced him back to the commercial voyages in the Americas. Equiano embarked on several commercial and adventurous voyages to North America (Savannah and Philadelphia), the Mediterranean, the West Indies and the North Pole. Even as a freeman, he was constantly exposed to abuse, insult and the risk of re-enslavement. Equiano finally settled in London where he pursued spiritual and social transformation. He converted to Christianity as a Methodist. He married Susanna Cullen, an Englishwoman in April 1792 and they had two daughters: Ann Mary, born on October 16, 1793, and Joanna, born April 11, 1795. Equiano died on March 31, 1797, following the death of his wife and daughter (Ann Mary). Before his death, Equiano was an avid campaigner against slavery and the slave trade. He worked very hard to achieve fame and wealth.²

Equiano's Igbo Origin and the Controversies

Questions surrounding Equiano's birthplace, which the author believes, hinge on the complexity of race and ethnic identity, have remained a subject of discussion by individuals in both academic and non-academic spheres. Those involved in the discourse have been motivated by diverse reasons ranging from political to economic gains and from nationalist sentiments to pure academic inquiry. To the abolitionists and pro-abolitionist readers of *The Interesting Narrative*, and some scholars, especially of Igbo origins,³ Equiano was what he said he was, an

Igbo.⁴ Adiele Afigbo, an esteemed Igbo historian, states, “[t]here is no doubt that Equiano was an Igbo man to the marrow.”⁵ The doubts about Equiano’s Igbo origin started with pro-slavery writers in England who denied his African origin soon after the publication of his book in the late eighteenth century with the motive of discrediting him and his narrative. With more scholarly investigations and interpretations of diverse records, the question of Equiano’s birthplace has been revived since the twentieth century. Looking at the sociopolitical atmosphere of England when the book was published, it is not surprising that Equiano’s accounts of his early life in Igbo society, his kidnapping and experience during the Atlantic crossing attracted criticisms from anti-abolitionist quarters because it was the most impressive and fascinating aspect of his narrative, which won the patronage of its early readers and became therefore the most effective in winning public support to the abolitionist cause. As Folarin Shyllon states, “Because Equiano did much to advance the cause of Abolition, he incurred the bitter displeasure of the dealers in human flesh, who tried to discredit him and neutralize his influence. But they failed.”⁶

While the eighteenth-century critics claimed that he was born and bred in the Danish Island of Santa Cruz, in the West Indies (present St. Croix in the US Virgin Islands), others, especially since the twentieth-century point to the baptismal and naval documents that suggest a South Carolina birthplace.⁷ Unlike during the twentieth- and twenty-first-century revelations of a possible South Carolina birthplace, Equiano was alive in the eighteenth century to refute the Santa Cruz claims. From the fifth edition of *The Interesting Narrative*, Equiano made reference to two separate publications in *The Oracle* and *The Star*, alleging that he was born and bred in the Danish Island of Santa Cruz, in the West Indies, which he saw as orchestrated attempts to tarnish his character and integrity and hinder the sale of his book. In his rebuttal of these allegations, he appealed “to those numerous and respectable persons of character who knew [him] when [he] first arrived in England, and could speak no language but that of Africa . . . and to the friends of humanity” who might be touched by the cruel and dehumanizing conditions of enslaved Africans and help to end the trade in human cargo.⁸ In a letter by Alexander Tilloch to John Montieth, he reinforced Equiano’s argument that those allegations about his birthplace were fabrications meant to destabilize abolitionists’ efforts to end the slave trade. And in another correspondence, one Reverend Dr. J. Baker queried: “can any man that reads your Narrative believe that you are not a native of Africa?”⁹

The most forceful and explosive claims to a South Carolina birthplace came from Vincent Carretta, an American professor of English, who relied on Equiano’s baptismal record of 1759 and naval records from his Arctic voyage in 1773. Although Carretta has been pointing to South Carolina as Equiano’s birthplace since the mid-1990s in his various publications, it was not until his powerful biography was released in 2005 that this topic generated sustained scholarly responses: one of the most interesting being the exchanges between him and Paul Lovejoy, a prominent Canadian Africanist historian on the pages of *Slavery and Abolition*.¹⁰ In his persuasive argument that Equiano might not have

been born in Africa based on his documented baptismal information that support South Carolina birthplace, Carretta states:

Recent biographical discoveries have cast doubt on Equiano's story of his birth and early years. The available evidence suggests that the author of *The Interesting Narrative* may have invented rather than reclaimed an African identity . . . Baptismal and naval records say that he was born in South Carolina around 1747. If they are accurate, he invented his African childhood and his much-quoted account of the Middle Passage on a slave ship. Other newly found evidence proves that Equiano first came to England years earlier than he says. He was clearly willing to manipulate at least some of the details of his life.¹¹

Here, Carretta also refutes Equiano's date of birth and when he first arrived in England, which he placed in 1754. In addition to raising the curiosity as to why Equiano never used his Igbo/African names until a short while before the publication of his book, Carretta questions the motive behind Equiano's alleged embellishment or falsification of his birth records. He believes that

[T]he abolitionist debate created a demand for an African victim's account of the Middle Passage. Motive is the most likely key to recognizing what we should believe in Equiano's account, as well as to understanding why he suppressed the records in his autobiography . . . His account of Africa is a combination of printed sources, imagination, oral history and memory. But was the memory his own? . . . Equiano's possible financial and ideological motives for inventing an African nativity are clear.¹²

In his response, focusing primarily on the relationship between autobiography and memory, Lovejoy argues:

Despite the existence of documentation that refutes his claim to an African birth . . . circumstantial evidence indicates that he was born where he said he was, and that, in fact, *The Interesting Narrative* is reasonably accurate in its details, although, of course, subject to the same criticisms of selectivity and self-interested distortion that characterize the genre of autobiography.¹³

Employing his historical analytical skills, Lovejoy has raised interesting questions regarding the discrepancies surrounding the St. Margaret's Church parish register of February 9, 1759, which states: "Gustavus Vassa a black born in Carolina 12 years old," and his godmother's (Mary Guerin) willingness to support Equiano's Africanity rather than expose his "lies" when he was accused of falsifying his birth records by claiming an African birthplace instead of Santa Cluz; and the record in the muster book of the *Racehorse* during his Arctic expedition in 1773 in which Gustavus Weston was identified as a 28-year-old seaman from the Carolina instead of Gustavus Vassa. In addition to important pieces of historical information that correspond to Equiano's narrative,¹⁴ Lovejoy also raises significant linguistic questions that reinforce Equiano's Igbo birthplace.

There is significant and convincing evidence that support Equiano's account that he could not speak any language but Igbo until the late 1750s. If Equiano was employed in 1775 by Dr. Charles Irving in his abortive Mosquito Shore project because of his fluency in an African language (Igbo), as Lovejoy suggests, and if he joined his employer in 1776 to purchase slaves at Kingston to cultivate a plantation and he chose mainly his Igbo countrymen thereby using his ethnicity as a social control mechanism, where then did he acquire his fluency in Igbo if we accept the South Carolina birthplace? Bearing in mind how difficult experts say it is to learn the Igbo language in comparison to other languages in the Bight of Biafra, it would have been too much for Equiano to learn Igbo and English at the same time.¹⁵ Moreover, while there is evidence that shows how and when he learned English, there is none for the Igbo language. He might have interacted with some of the enslaved and freed Igbo in the West Indies and England, but there is no record of such interactions with the Igbo in South Carolina and Virginia. If he was born in South Carolina, he would have acquired a certain level of proficiency in English that would have saved him the trouble of learning the language from his friends and master on sea voyages. His effort would have been rather focused on Igbo language. But, assuming Equiano's childhood was spent in South Carolina, he would have spoken Gullah and not Igbo. We are yet to trace any family, childhood friends or master connections that linked him to South Carolina. Nobody has explained how Equiano at the age of seven or nine as Carretta suggests, landed in Barbados and later ended up in Virginia for purchase if he was born in the Carolina.

What the above analysis points to is that one has to choose between the two independent documents that place Equiano's birthplace in South Carolina and the cultural and linguistic information that tie him to the Igbo origin as he recollected in his book. I am much inclined as a historian to lean toward Equiano's Igbo birthplace. The baptismal record created by Equiano's master lacks any independent confirmation. It is ahistorical to rely on such a source uncritically, especially when no records of such birth or history of enslavement have been found in South Carolina, the purported birthplace. There is no evidence that Paschal was more trustworthy than Equiano, but quite the contrary instead. Equiano did not personally record his birth information on the two documents mentioned above. Even if he provided the information, we can only speculate about his motives for claiming a South Carolina birthplace before the 1770s when other evidence points to an Igbo origin, and why in the 1780s he abandoned South Carolina for "Ebeo" country. Similarly, we can only speculate the reasons for the mistakes in the muster book of the *Racehorse* as well as the motives behind the Guerins' willingness to testify in support of Equiano's claim rather than expose his "lies" even when they were aware of his baptismal record that points to South Carolina as his birthplace. One strongly believes that falsifying his birthplace would have jeopardized *The Interesting Narrative's* abolition impetus.

In order to analyze and estimate the degree of historical and ethnographic authenticity in Equiano's *Interesting Narrative*, it is important to take into

cognizance his age when he left his people as well as the impact of the brutal and inhuman conditions he was subjected to under servitude. As some have argued, the brutality of the Atlantic crossing and the dehumanizing and horrifying conditions of the plantation slavery in the Americas were enough to erase in the enslaved Africans any meaningful memories of their homeland, their culture and history.¹⁶ Applying the argument of this school of thought, if it was almost impossible for enslaved African adults to remember and retain aspects of their culture in the Americas, it must have been totally unimaginable for children as young as Equiano. The critics also argue that the intensity of Equiano's accounts, especially those of the Atlantic crossing, casts doubt on the authenticity of this childhood memory of such a traumatic experience. Therefore, to them, Equiano's recollections of his mid-eighteenth-century Igbo village life were nothing but imaginative reconstructions based on information obtained from fellow enslaved and freed Africans as well as from impressionistic accounts by early European visitors to West Africa.

Critics and even admirers have highlighted the silences and the use of certain non-English words in *The Interesting Narrative* as the source of conflicting and questionable interpretations. But a critical analysis of Equiano's narrative alongside other related sources has pointed to Equiano's reliance on multiple sources including what he could recollect of his childhood experience in Africa and his life in servitude and freedom outside Africa, accounts of early European visitors to West Africa, as well as information obtained from people of African descent both in the West Indies and in England. Moreover, he may not be classified as a "typical" slave in terms of working in the fields and being subjected to the horrors of the plantation system because he had been fortunate enough to be exposed to a variety of opportunities as a servant and attendant to a sick planter master, personal servant of a British naval officer, a cabin boy, a sailor and a trader to an entrepreneur master; opportunities he maximally exploited. Unlike many of the enslaved Africans, he had the opportunity to learn how to read and write; to interact with his "countrymen" (whether Igbo or non-Igbo); reflect on his journey so far from an African village through the Atlantic crossing and to different naval, commercial and adventurous voyages he took; and articulate in writing his interpretations and recollections of these diverse sources and experiences.

Equiano informed us that he was born in 1745 in a lush valley called Essaka in an area named Ebeo, which was a remote and fertile province or district of the powerful and wealthy kingdom of Benin. He said that his Igbo group lived far away from the sea coast and from the capital of Benin and was nominally under its control. He gave an account of the republican village and the democratic government of his people, where the council of chiefs and elders ran the affairs of the government. He also indicated that his father was a member of the governing council and also an "Embrenche" (Mgburichi) titleholder, a term he said represented "the highest distinction, and signifying in our language a mark of grandeur . . . [being marks] conferred on the person entitled to [the honor] by cutting the skin across at the top of the forehead, and drawing it down to the eye-brows . . . most of the judges and senators were thus marked."¹⁷ These were the people who adjudicated cases, settled disputes, and pronounced and enforced

punishments. Equiano's father, as a member of the governing council, had long born these marks; he had sponsored the conferment of the same title to one of his sons, which Equiano witnessed and was waiting for the appropriate time for his turn to receive a similar title and honor.

Most of Equiano's critics have described *The Interesting Narrative* as a scanty, muddled, incoherent and fabricated narrative. For instance, G. I. Jones refers to the aspect that covers his home and travels in Nigeria as "disappointingly brief and confused."¹⁸ To S. E. Ogude, Equiano's *Interesting Narrative* is largely fictional, which follows the traditions of the travelogue and the adventure tale with "a love of exaggeration, a respect for lies about distant places, and an open display of prejudice in order to conceal ignorance." It is, Ogude continues, the work of a very competent collector of tales who "had to romanticize a past that he never knew . . . [and] whose strength lies in his talent as a compelling narrator rather than in the authenticity of his narrative."¹⁹ Equiano has also been called an "inventive rhetorician."²⁰ Unlike Jones and Ogude, who support Equiano's Igbo birthplace, Carretta suggests that Equiano was dishonest by trying to invent an Igbo/African identity that he never lived or experienced.²¹ As he put it:

External contradictions are especially intriguing because Equiano's account of his life is generally remarkably verifiable when tested against documentary and historical evidence, so much so that deviations from the truth seem more likely to have been the result of artistic premeditation than absentmindedness. From the available evidence, one could argue that the author of *The Interesting Narrative* invented an African identity rather than reclaimed one.²²

Those who argue that Equiano was not born in Africa cite his acknowledged reliance on secondary sources such as the geographical descriptions of Africa, especially the Western region, by early European visitors as evidence that reinforce their argument. Yet one of them states that his "later measured and fairly objective and circumstantial descriptions of places remote from both Europe and Africa suggest that his descriptions and evaluations of Africa, America, the West Indies, and England are reliable."²³

In spite of his reliance on secondary and primary sources to situate his Essaka Eboe in the map of Africa, and despite a number of exaggerations and silences in his narrative, Equiano's Eboe homeland has a lot more in common with the Igbo of southeastern Nigeria than any other ethnicities or nationalities in Africa. Attempts to locate his hometown have attracted lots of speculations. These include Jones' Ika or West Niger Igbo; Chinua Achebe's and Catherine Acholonu's Isseke near Ihiala; and Innocent Onyema's Usaka, southeast of Umuahia.²⁴ Reference has also been made to Nsukka in northern Igbo, Ashaka near Aboh, Asaga in Ohofia, Isaka near Okrika and Isieke village of Ibeku as likely homelands of Equiano.²⁵ The research methodologies adopted by some of these writers are, to say the least, questionable and superficial. For instance, Achebe was the first person to suggest Isseke, but without any analysis or discussion on how he came to such a conclusion. Acholonu listed Isseke, Ezi Awka, Issiekenesi and Isieke as towns with names that sound like Essaka. She claimed that her

Original plan was to go to all towns in and around Igboland and the land of Benin (Equiano had mentioned that the empire of Benin had a ‘little more than nominal influence’ over his people), whose names sound like ‘Essaka.’ I had made out a list, which included the ones mentioned above. But Isseke was the first on my list, because, according to the result of my linguistic Arithmetic, part of which is explained here, *Isseke* is the most likely transcription of the word *Essaka*.²⁶

Similarly, Onyema asserts that in view of the pitfalls and doubts raised over claims and suggestions made by earlier reviews, he “has gone further to identify peculiar cultural, linguistic, and geographical similarities between Equiano’s *Essaka* and the present-day *Usaka*,” which is his choice.²⁷ Jones suggests that

It is clear from his name (Equiano, or Ekwuno, is a common Ika and riverain Ibo name) and from the few vernacular words he uses that Olaudah was an Ibo, and we can locate his home with some certainty in the northern Ika Ibo region, which is in the eastern part of the present Benin province. . . . Apart from the Niger River which bounds it on the east, there are no large rivers or waterways until one reaches its southern margin.²⁸

Among all the above contributions, Acholonu’s, so far, remains the most useful in spite of its methodological problems.²⁹ She has been able to collect some oral traditions that establish certain cultural resemblance to Equiano’s narrative. Her collected traditions on Isseke, upon which she identifies Equiano as an ancestor of the Ekwealuo family of Isseke village in Ihiala Local Government Area of Anambra State, Nigeria, would have been more reliable if she had compared them with similar traditions of Ashaka, Isieke, Isaka, Asaga and Usaka, and through the process of elimination came to the conclusion that Isseke is indeed Equiano’s hometown. It is therefore an important challenge, especially to the scholars of Igbo studies and African history, that such similar traditions be collected for corroborative and comparative analysis.

As a historian, my concern is to interpret aspects of Equiano’s narrative alongside available documentary, as well as cultural, geographical and linguistic/dialectical evidence. As Lovejoy rightly points out, “historical methodology is a process of assessing the evidence in the context of known documentation and other source materials, never trusting any document or other piece of evidence more than it can be verified.”³⁰ As per available evidence, Ashaka, more than Isseke and Usaka, matches Equiano’s *Essaka*, about which he indicated that its “subjection to the king of Benin was little more than normal.”³¹ There is no historical evidence that supports that either Isseke or Usaka was under any influence from Benin. Their distant geographic locations away from Benin made such influence impossible at the time. Thus, the West Niger region, which has a long history of Benin influence, is most likely the location of *Essaka*.

Ashaka village on the Ase River near Aboh is a more likely place than Isseke or Usaka. However, Equiano’s admission that he “had never before seen any water larger than a pond or rivulet” raises some questions. As some have suggested,

Equiano should have been familiar with such a large body of water as the Ase River if he grew up at Ashaka. But what has been ignored is the fact that the part of Ase River that is located near Ashaka and Equiano's homestead might have looked like a stream or rivulet to him. As a ten or eleven years old, and as the favorite son of his mother whom he followed around, it is not clear how often Equiano went to the river or stream to fetch water, or engage in fishing or even use it as a means of transportation (the last two activities being more likely to give him an opportunity to explore and appreciate the size of the river).

It is also important to note that while he was in the Niger Delta town of Tinmah [Teinma], Equiano said that "there were many rivulets which flowed through it; and supplied a large pond in the center of the town, where the people washed." While Jones and others claim that Tinmah cannot be identified with any modern town or village in southeastern Nigeria, Onyema suggests that the place is Utumah situated along the Arochukwu–Ibibio border.³² The fact that Equiano did not mention passing through any rivulet or river until he arrived at Tinmah should not be interpreted that such bodies of water did not exist. It could be possible that he might have passed some without noticing. If he was sleeping and occasionally being covered with slave sacks to conceal him and carried by his enslavers as was sometimes the case, the likelihood of missing certain landmarks during his journey to the coast must be higher than not.

Moreover, based on Equiano's account of his journeys from the point of his kidnapping to the time he arrived at Tinmah as well as the geographical description of the areas he passed through, it is likely that he was referring to the Niger Delta town of Teinma, which is located between Degema and Ke along the Sombreiro River and near the port of Bonny.³³ The Sombreiro and New Calabar Rivers that surround Teinma, which Equiano referred to as "rivulets," are similar in size to the Ase River near his village. It should be noted that it was in Tinmah that he saw and tasted coconuts and sugar cane for the first time, items that are still found in the Niger Delta region. It was also here that Equiano was sold for 172 *core* (cowries, sea shells, used as currency in many parts of West Africa), which he described as "little white shells, the size of the finger-nail."³⁴

Olaudah Equiano's name has also become a subject of different interpretations. As characteristic of the Igbo naming tradition in which they name their children after memorable events, circumstances surrounding their conception and birth, the day of the week they were born and after admirable relatives or friends, Equiano informed us that *Oluadah* "signifies vicissitude, or fortunate also; one favoured, and having a loud voice, and well spoken." Acholonu suggests that *Olaudah* refers to "Olaude" ("a ring with a vibrating or loud sound, a fortunate person . . . and a person with a loud voice . . . who will touch lives/go places") and *Equiano* means "Ekwealua" ("when-we-mutually-agree-we-go-to-war"). Onyema opines that *Olaudah* is "Oluudah" (loud voice) and *Equiano*, "Ikwuano," which he claims is the group clans' name to which Usaka village belonged. Thus, *Olaudah Equiano*, to him, refers to "Oluudah of Ikwuano," Ikwuano being his clan group. Jones suggests that "Equiano, or Ekwuno, is a common Ika and riverain Ibo name."³⁵ Even though Ekwu-uno is an Onitsha-Ika

Igbo name, as available evidence suggests, Jones fails to explain the meaning of the name. There is no doubt that Equiano's two names are Igbo compound words in which *Olaudah* could be interpreted as *ola* (ornament), and *ude* or *uda* (fame or echoing/high-sound). Similarly, *Equiano* could mean *Ekwuanu* (one whose speech is always heard or obeyed), or *Ekweano* (four drums or drumbeats, as in Igbo *Ekwedike*, meaning the drum of the powerful and *Ekwedasike*, the great echoing drum) or even *Ikwuano* (four-kindred).³⁶ On the precise Igbo meanings of *Olaudah Equiano*, as *Afigbo* aptly suggests, we cannot reach any certainty or agreement especially if attempts are made to correlate meanings attached to his names with the evidence from the book.³⁷ Because Equiano did not provide any names for his family members, especially those of his mother and dear sister despite his closeness to them, whatever interpretations scholars have given to his name are based on deductions and speculations.

It is therefore important to note that while there is enough evidence that supports Equiano's Igbo origins, much scholarly investigations are required to situate his birthplace in southeastern Nigeria. One should be cognizant of the fact that Equiano's accounts of "Eboe" people and his childhood experiences were those of an 11-year-old boy who was away from his homeland for over 30 years (1756–1788) when he first wrote about them. He acknowledged the limitations of human memory:

Such is the imperfect sketch my memory has furnished me with of the manners and customs of a people among whom I first drew my breath . . . They had been implanted in me with great care, and made an impression on my mind which time could not erase, and which all the adversity and variety of fortune I have since experienced served only to rivet and record.³⁸

Thus, Equiano's account is not different from similar narratives written by former slaves that are products of whatever childhood memories that they could recollect after many years or decades. In addition, these narratives are further weakened by what Philip Curtin refers to as "self-imposed censorship as [their authors] sought to explain themselves and their past to aliens of limited background."³⁹ But, as stated earlier, it is evident that Equiano relied on other sources including published texts and accounts of enslaved Igbo.⁴⁰

There were a few non-English words Equiano used as his recollections of such words in his Igbo language. One of such words was "Embrenche." He said it was a symbol of high status in his place where the elderly holders played political and judicial roles. Though there were different ethnicities and nationalities in Africa that engaged in facial scarifications, none fits more perfectly to the "Embrenche" that Equiano referred to than the Igbo *Mgburichi* or *Igbu ichi*. Adiele *Afigbo* has suggested that what Equiano meant when he used the word was *Ndichie* because "*Embreche* is *Mgburuichi* or *Mgbirichi* which in parts of Igbo land is a titular deity, and was never used in addressing a person [and that] *Igbu ichi*, was not used as title or style before a man's name."⁴¹ Evidence from different parts of the Igbo region, contrary to *Afigbo's* assertions, points to the fact that

ichi facial markings were not only a mark of transition to a new status, but also a symbol of authority and a badge of protection. The visible marks gave their wearers considerable immunity to travel from place to place especially within Igbo areas without molestation, or being subjected to kidnapping or enslavement. It was also a test of courage and endurance.

In line with the cultural norms of the Igbo where young boys accompanied their fathers who were members of the governing council to deliberation meetings (usually carrying their stools, animal skins or raffia mats, and handbags), Oludah's description of the proceedings of such assemblies enjoys a certain degree of accuracy. He described them as short, where oftentimes, retaliatory judgments were passed. But, such political and judicial deliberations lasted longer than Equiano presented. Afigbo has argued that not being the first son but his mother's boy, following her around and being educated by her, Equiano was so detached from his father that he did not have the opportunity to observe and learn about his people's political, judicial and social institutions that he wrote about.⁴² The problem with the above assertion is that it excludes Equiano from the usual gendered socialization processes that Igbo sons were subjected to, whether they were closer to their mothers than their fathers or not. Equiano's "mind" might have been formed by his mother, as he told us, but that does not suggest that he never interacted with his father and elder brothers and therefore learned certain aspects of his people's culture from them. After all, he told us that he was "destined to receive [the *ichi* title]," and he also informed us that he was trained in his earliest years in the arts of agriculture and war, shooting and throwing javelins.⁴³

Igbo society was so diverse that there was no uniform ranking ever of social titles among the people. But title-taking was an achieved status symbol that determined one's sociopolitical ranking in society. The status initiation processes increased in cost and dimension as one ascended the hierarchy. Thus, titles were expressions of wealth and means of exercising the powers they confer on their holders. There were senior titles that indicated one's graduation to the senior and highest rank of *Ndichie*, which were taken after one's father's death, and the junior ones taken in one's father's lifetime. *Ozo* title, common among some Western and Northern Igbo people, was among the senior titles. Thus, *Ozo* title holders, who wore the prestigious *ichi* facial marks, were leaders and living ancestors in their respective communities. *Ichi* facial marks title was among the junior titles in many Igbo communities. It could be taken during one's father's lifetime or after his death, depending on the individual Igbo towns and villages that practiced it. According to M. Angulu Onwuejeogwu, *igbu ichi* or *ozo ichi* was the seventh or eighth title taken by *Nri* boys usually at the age of ten, and it conferred on the initiate "the rights of a full male citizen of the state and the right to become an emissary of *Eze Nri*."⁴⁴ Equiano informed us that his elder brother had taken the title, and that he (Equiano himself) was supposed to take it before he was kidnapped. This information reinforces the *Igbu-ichi* practice among most Northern, Western, as well as parts of riverain and Southern Igbo groups. In these places, the initiates took the title at an early stage of their lives due to the painful

and tortuous nature of the initiation rites, which involved facial markings with a sharp knife, and subsequent loss of blood.

There are also accounts of the practice by early European visitors to the Igbo region that support Equiano's Igbo practice of *igbu-ichi* facial scarification. For instance, Captain John Adams, writing about his ten voyages to Africa between 1786 and 1800, stated that "Among the Heebos [Igbo] there is a class called Breeche," which he said, "in Heebo [Igbo] language signifies gentleman, or the eldest son of one, and who is not allowed to perform in his own country any menial office . . . Before attaining the age of manhood, his forehead is scarified."⁴⁵ But Charles Meek, writing in 1937, suggests that John Adams was referring to "the titled class [of the Igbo] known as Ndichie."⁴⁶ Writing in 1856, William Balfour Baikie referred to "Itshi" scarification marks as a "cut face" that was "confined to the families of the wealthy." He indicated that "Mbritshi [was] the term, but Itshi [was] more frequently employed."⁴⁷ Thurstan Shaw's archaeological findings at Igbo-Ukwu include a number of human forms engraved in bronze with facial scarifications similar to the *ichi* facial marks found among the Nri, Igbo-Ukwu, Awka, Udi, Awgu and other surrounding towns and villages.⁴⁸ When *ichi* facial markings were used on masks and carved deities, "they are conceived of as ancestral guardians who represent the ultimate in the Igbo ideal of achievement and authority."⁴⁹

Based on his 1930–1931 research, M. D. W. Jeffreys indicates that *ichi* "scarification is not a tribal mark, but a sign of status, rank, or nobility. It was taboo for persons thus marked to perform any menial task . . . their persons were privileged and sacrosanct and they were never molested."⁵⁰ He identified two administrative areas in Igbo region: Awka and Awgu, where the practice was predominant. Unlike Shaw, who erroneously suggests that Igbo women did not take this title except the eldest daughter of an Eze Nri, Jeffreys correctly notes that only men took the title in the Awka area, but in Awgu, both men and women did. But, he erroneously attributed the origins of the practice to the Umunri, and the art of cutting the marks as the preserve of the Umudioka people (near Awka). The fact is that daughters who, in the absence of a male heir, were prevented from marrying in order to maintain a patrilineal descent system through them, were conferred with *ichi* scarifications as "female sons" and "female husbands." It was this group of women that would, upon the death of their fathers, succeed them as family heads with all the accruing titles and responsibilities. It is important to note that *ichi* marks required specialized facial artistry. The most renowned Igbo master-carvers were the Umudioka, who also specialized in *ichi* facial markings, teeth-cutting and wood carvings. But, they were not the only Igbo group that engaged in *igbu ichi*. As for the attribution of the origins of the practice to the Nri, it is a matter of conjecture for no serious scholarly investigations have been carried out to reach such a conclusion.

Equiano made reference to "stout, mahogany-coloured men from the south-west [whom they] call . . . *Oye-Eboe*, which term signifies red men living at a distance."⁵¹ These men, according to him, supplied his people with firearms, gun-powder, hats, beads and dried fish, which they sought highly. The traders

also dealt in slaves, some of whom they got from Equiano's people, in addition to salt made from ashes and scented wood and earth (*nzu*). Paul Edwards and others suggest that "Oye-Eboe" means "Oyibo," which is a modern Igbo or Yoruba term for a White person. This is unlikely because Equiano indicated that he had never heard of or seen any White person or European until he got to the slave ship due to the fact that his town or village was far away from the coastal region. Similarly, Lovejoy's assertion that Equiano's "Onye-Eboe" were the Aro sounds too certain to be true even though they dominated the slave trade of the Niger Delta hinterland.⁵² The problem with this type of assertion is that it excludes other key players in the slave trade of the interior. The Aro were not everywhere in the region and did not act alone without the support of other local traders. Therefore one might suggest that Equiano's "Oye-Eboe" refers to the generic term Onitsha and Western Igbo called the Igbo, who lived east of the Niger River, as well as other non-Western Igbo, including the Ijo and Ubani traders from the Niger Delta. Thus, the people Equiano referred to as "Oye-Eboe" could be any of the famous Igbo professional traders and craftsmen east of the Niger such as the Abiriba, Aboh, Aro, Awka, Nkwerre, Nike and others who traded in different merchandise including iron implements, tools and firearms, beads and other ornaments, and slaves, as well as the Ijo traders, who supplied dried fish. Based on geographical locations and trading spheres, the traders were more likely to be the Awka, Aboh or Ijo than Aro, Abiriba or Nike.

Equiano informed us that his people sold war prisoners and convicts to these traders, and that in spite of his people's strict protective measures, they were often kidnapped by these traders, who carried large sacks with them to cover their victims. Reference to the "red men" probably points to the tradition in certain Igbo areas where the people decorated their bodies with red camwood as well as with uli body painting and designs.⁵³ While indigo blue was synonymous with the West Niger Igbo, it was also used in cloth designs in such other Igbo areas as Nsukka and Arochukwu (the famous ukara ekpe cloth). However, red color, usually derived from powdered camwood, was characteristic of the Igbo east of the Niger. For instance, Rev. J. C. Taylor described in the mid-nineteenth century a scene of initiation ceremony into a high social status in Onitsha where people marked "their faces with stripes of red ochre, or *ure*, and white clay."⁵⁴

Other non-English words Equiano used are *Ah-affoe-way-cah*, which he said "signifies calculators, or yearly men" and *Ah-affoe*, which refers to their year.⁵⁵ While there is no recognizable word in modern Igbo for *Ah-affoe-way-cah*, it contains elements with some meanings in Igbo: "ah-affoe" could be pronounced "afo," which means "year"; "cah" [kaa], which means either "pronounce" or "announce"; and "way" could be "nwe" (owner) or "nwa" (child or person just as in *Nwadibia*, meaning medicine man or person). "Way-cah" could therefore be interpreted as "nwoka". Thus, *Ah-affoe-way-cah* could be the modern Igbo "Nwokafo" or "Nwankafo" (announcer or calculator of year). Equiano indicated that the *Ah-affoe-way-cah* were also priests, magicians, doctors or physicians and wise men. Among the Igbo, people endowed with unique spiritual powers served such multiple functions as priests and priestesses, doctors, magicians, diviners,

seers and rainmakers. They served as intermediaries between the human and spirit worlds. They also performed important rituals such as those associated with *Ala* (the Earth Goddess), *Njoku/Ibejioku/Ifejioku* (God of Yam), purifications and ritual cleansing of abominable acts. Their relationships to these deities made it imperative that they accurately pronounce the calendar, for any miscalculation could lead to economic disaster and hardship. As doctors and medicine men and women, they dealt with all types of health problems including havocs caused by malevolent spirits and wicked people in the community. Thus, this group of wise men and women was highly respected in society.

In Equiano's vivid account of the economic activities of his people, he stated that agriculture was the chief occupation and that everybody engaged in farming including men, women and children. He informed us that they used all sorts of iron implements, and that their main produce included all kinds of vegetables, beans, plantains, pepper, Indian corn (maize), yams and *eadas* (spelt *ede* in Igbo, which means cocoyam or taro). These are common produce in Igbo region. The communal farmland Equiano mentioned, which was some distance away from their homesteads and was often a theatre of war, was similar to what could be obtained in the Igbo region. They also engaged in palm wine tapping, palm oil processing and kernel cracking as Equiano indicated. Oil palm tree was the most important economic tree of the Igbo. The people produced vegetable oil, palm wine, cosmetics and building materials from the tree. While these economic activities were common among the Igbo, Equiano's account contains some exaggerations. For instance, while the method of tapping palm wine was similar to the Igbo's, it was not possible that a tree would yield three to four gallons in a night as Equiano suggested. The average yield per tree was between one gallon and half a gallon.

Other economic activities his Igbo people engaged in include animal husbandry, salt production (from ashes), pottery, spinning, weaving and dyeing cotton cloth. As Equiano indicated, these were women's preserves and have almost remained the same since then. Writing in the mid-nineteenth century, William Baikie made reference to a unique woven cloth, "ornamented by perforations, which were done during weaving. . . made by the Igbo people [and sold] chiefly in the markets near the [Niger] confluence," which he later found out were made near Onitsha.⁵⁶ Cotton spinning, weaving and dyeing were widespread crafts in Igbo society. Reverend Taylor wrote at Onitsha in 1857 that he saw extensive corn and yam farms as well as cotton planted after the first two crops had been harvested. He noted that Onitsha people manufactured their own cloths, which were usually plain or designed white.⁵⁷ The craft had declined in Onitsha by the end of the nineteenth century as the people turned to trade and other occupations. By this time, the famous Igbo weavers included women from the west of the Niger River or Ika Igbo communities, Nsukka, Abakaliki, Asa and Ndoki areas.⁵⁸

Iron smelting and production of farming implements, weapons and other tools, as well as manufacturing of ornaments, were some of the occupations of

Equiano's people. His first master was a smith, a profession Equiano informed us was practiced in his village or town. Equiano described the smith's bellow, which, with minor modifications due to European contacts, was the same among the Igbo. The smith manufactured what Equiano thought was gold; it appeared to be "a lovely bright yellow colour, and was worn by the women on their wrists and ankles."⁵⁹ Famous Igbo smiths were the Awka, Nkwerre and Abiriba. Their prominent raw material was iron ore, but they also used brass. Equiano must have been referring to brass when he mentioned gold. It is also important to note that these smiths were itinerants, traveling and establishing small settlements where they sold their products in different parts of Igbo region and neighboring non-Igbo groups. Equiano was probably referring to the Awka smith as his first master because while the Awka smiths' spheres of influence were parts of northern and western Igbo including Urhobo and parts of Benin, the Nkwerre were active in the Ogoni area and the Abiriba in Ibibio communities.⁶⁰ Even though his people engaged in trade, Equiano said that they were not professional traders. This was true of most Igbo people whose chief employment was farming. Professional Igbo traders included the Aro and the Nike, as well as the Nkwerre, the Abiriba and the Awka, who were in addition itinerant smiths.

Some other customs that Equiano discussed and were similar to the Igbo include child betrothal; marriage ceremonies; different songs and dance groups appropriate for different occasions; musical instruments; modes of dressing along gender lines; and architectural designs of family houses and compounds where men engaged in reciprocal labor exchanges. Others were religious beliefs (such as in the existence of a Supreme Being—Chi Ukwu or the Great Creator, whom Equiano called "One Creator"—and reincarnation or "transmigration"), taboos, abominations and purifications (including after menstruation and touching dead bodies); circumcision and naming ceremonies; burial rites; warfare; dining etiquette; and gender relations among others. As Equiano described in his book, and which was the case among the Igbo, the head of the family (usually a man), dined alone just as his children, wives and slaves or dependents had their separate eating bowls. The customs of washing hands, throwing out a small portion of the food, and pouring a libation of wine for the spirits of departed relatives, were similar to the Igbo eating etiquette. The Igbo also ate, as Equiano described, some of the offering animals with bitter herbs (called *utazi* in Igbo). Locust visitations with their devastating impact on farms and as a major cause of famine, which Equiano remembered he had witnessed, were also infrequent events in Igbo region. Some of the animals and reptiles Equiano mentioned in *The Interesting Narrative* could be associated with the Igbo. The custom of not killing certain species of python (called *eke* in Igbo) discussed in the book was practiced by some Igbo sub-cultural groups. In fact, when such reptiles were killed by accident, they were accorded certain burial rites.⁶¹ There is not much evidence to support Equiano's suggestion that Igbo women were warriors. However, in some Igbo village groups, there were powerful medicine women who, due to their spiritual and medicinal powers, were able to announce when wars were to be fought and how to appease the gods and

goddesses in order to be victorious. Such women often performed appropriate sacrifices and led or accompanied men in such battles.

The procurement of slaves through warfare, kidnapping, judicial process and punishment of adulterous women, which Equiano discussed in his book, were the major means through which the Igbo acquired slaves. Those slaves who were not redeemed or retained were sold away. As he noted, slavery among the Igbo was different from the institution in the West Indies. The enslaved “do no more work than other members of the community, even their master. Their food, cloathing [clothing], and lodging were nearly the same as theirs, except that they were not permitted to eat with those who were free born and there were scarce any other difference between them.”⁶² Although they were kinless, the enslaved in Igbo society enjoyed certain rights and degree of independence such as leading their masters’ children to the farm, acquiring their own wealth to buy their freedom, starting their own families and marrying freeborn men. The processes of manumission were much more available to them than to the enslaved in the Americas; and they were easily absorbed into their masters’ lineages.

Equiano’s description of his people, especially the women, as hardworking, cheerful, graceful, modest, honest and affable people tends to support the characteristics of modern Igbo people. Their hard work, manner of living and almost self-sufficient society contributed to their general healthiness. Their diverse complexions, including those who had very light skin or whom the Igbo call albinos and regarded as having some deformity, are characteristics of modern Igbo. Equiano, however, indicated that physical “deformity is indeed unknown amongst us.”⁶³ It was not that the Igbo never had physically deformed children or those with Down Syndrome, but the reason why Equiano never saw one and therefore believed they never existed was that such children along with twin and multiple births were thrown away in the evil forests. The practice was informed by the Igbo belief that such children were abnormal births and resembled animals, which constituted *nso ala* (abominations). They believed that such children had powers to turn into dangerous animals and were therefore unsafe to live with their families and within the villages.⁶⁴

Equiano also informed us that Igbo and Bini slaves were preferred by West Indian planters because of their good health and physical strength as well as due to their intelligence, integrity and zeal. While some contemporaneous accounts support Equiano’s description of his people and the preference for enslaved Igbo, others contradict it. A few examples will suffice here. James Barbot described the Igbo under the name “Hackbous” in the seventeenth century as “a people much addicted to war and preying on their neighbours to the northward, and are themselves lusty tall men.”⁶⁵ Similarly, writing in 1790, John Adams stated that “The Heebos [Igbo] in their persons are tall and well-formed, many of the women symmetrically so.”⁶⁶ Basden, in his early-twentieth-century study of the physical appearance of the Igbo, has this to say:

On the whole, the Ibos are of good physique and compare very favourably with other African tribes . . . Many Ibos are truly as black as the proverbial coal: others are

almost as light-skinned as the natives of Southern Europe, while a few are distinctly reddish. The folk who stand out obtrusively are the albinos.⁶⁷

There are some contemporaneous accounts that describe enslaved Igbo as weakly, prone to suicide and escape, difficult to manage and therefore the least desired by the West Indian and North American slave dealers and planters. For instance, Bryan Edwards (1743–1800), an English merchant and historian states:

All the Negroes imported from these vast and unexplored regions [the Bight of Benin] are called in the West Indies Eboes; and in general they appear to be the lowest and most wretched of all the nations of Africa. In complexion they are much yellower than the Gold Coast and Whidah Negroes; but it is a sickly hue, their eyes appear as if suffused with bile, even when they are in perfect health . . . The great objection to the Eboes as slaves, is their constitutional timidity, and despondency of mind; which are so great to occasion them very frequently to seek, in a voluntary death, a refuge from their own melancholy reflections. They require therefore the gentlest and mildest treatment to reconcile them to their situation; but if their confidence be once obtained, they manifest as great fidelity, affection, and gratitude, as can reasonably be expected from men in a state of slavery. The females of this nation are better labourers than the men, probably from having been more hardly treated in Africa.⁶⁸

Another English historian, Edward Long (1734–1813), described enslaved Igbo men as lazy and averse to every laborious employment, but their women as hard-working and performing almost all the work in their country.⁶⁹ Based on my research on the subject of enslaved Igbo and their perception in the Americas, certain deductions can be made. To start with, there has been an erroneous labeling of various ethnicities in the Bight of Biafra with the generic name “Ebos/Eboes/Ibos.” The “weak, lazy and savage-looking Eboe men” described by the slavers in the Americas did not match the description of Igbo men by the early European visitors who actually saw and interacted with the people in their homeland. Though there might be a certain degree of credibility in the above West Indies accounts, there is no doubt that enslaved Igbo were subject of stigmatization and stereotypes.⁷⁰ The stereotypes have over time been increasingly reinforced and assumed as factual due to the power of historiographical traditions as scholars continuously recycled their information that is devoid of any in-depth knowledge of the subject and a critical application of historical analytical tools and skills.

Based on the above analysis, one is convinced that Olaudah Equiano, alias Gustavus Vassa, was an Igbo. The silences and exaggerations may have raised serious questions regarding the authenticity of his narrative, but there is no doubt that he was describing an Igbo society as he saw and lived it as a child and as he could recollect as an adult after three decades of living abroad in a racially divided world as a slave and a freeman. In spite of his horrific and near-death experiences, Equiano was able to leave a legacy through his writings and deeds.

He has, therefore, become a subject of scholarly investigations and discussion. The remaining part of this chapter examines some aspects of his legacy.

Literary and Intellectual Contributions

Equiano's acquisition of the art of writing and reading in English enabled him to write several letters to newspapers, often times anonymously. In 1789 at the age of 44, he published *The Interesting Narrative* (in two volumes). Equiano wrote as an Afro-Briton, an African and a British subject. The ninth British edition of the book (the last published in Equiano's lifetime) came out in 1794, and has over the years been reproduced with introductory notes by different scholars and publishers. It was translated into many languages including Dutch, German and Russian even before his death. The publication of the book was revived in the northern part of England in the decade following the abolition, between 1809 and 1819. In the 1820s, abridged paraphrase of 12 pages of the book in the two-penny tract series "The Negro's Friend" was published in London, a series subsidized by abolitionist philanthropists.⁷¹

Prior to 1837, there were seventeen editions in Europe and the United States.⁷² Although the first American edition appeared in 1791, it took almost half a century for another edition to appear in 1837. In addition, there were publications of tracks, pages and paraphrases of Equiano's *Narratives* in the United States between 1810 and 1829 with many reprints.⁷³ One of these publications, Abigail Mott's *Biographical Sketches and Interesting Anecdotes of Persons of Color*, an abridgement for children, was reprinted several times between 1828 and 1882 and was widely used in schools, especially those for people of African descent in New York and elsewhere. The reprinting of *The Interesting Narrative* had to wait for over hundred years before Paul Edwards, a British literary historian, published a two-volume facsimile reprint of the original 1789 edition in London by Dawson's of Pall Mall in 1969. But in 1967, Paul Edwards published an abridged edition of the book with an introduction and notes under the title *Equiano's Travels*.⁷⁴ The 1960s also saw the publication of either Equiano's contributions to the abolitionist cause and the improvement of the plight of the people of African descent in England, or the reproduction of extracts from his book.⁷⁵ Interest in the book has witnessed a new momentum since the 1980s.⁷⁶ In 1989, two bicentennial editions of *The Interesting Narrative* were published. The ninth edition, the last one Equiano published, served as the copy-text for the authoritative edition of his works in 1995.

Equiano's contribution to the study of Igbo history and culture cannot be underestimated. There is no historical and even ethnographical work of importance on the Igbo, especially works covering the period before the twentieth century that do not make reference to Equiano's *Interesting Narrative*.⁷⁷ In 1960, for example, the prominent Africanist Thomas Hodgkin published an extract from Equiano's book in his selection of documents on Nigerian history.⁷⁸ According to Afigbo, "Equiano's *Narrative* though limited in scope and depth could be said to provide a base line for the study of traditional Igbo society."⁷⁹ The book

is not only foundational in the study of the Igbo and their society, but it has also helped to enrich scholarship on the subject. It remains the earliest work most deeply rooted in Igbo society and in the people's heritage. It serves as a primary source for the study of eighteenth-century Igbo society and culture, slave trade, slavery and the abolitionist movement in the Atlantic world.

We also learned about gender roles in an eighteenth-century African society from Equiano's *Narrative*. He discussed how gender affected the economic activities of the Igbo; women's body and purity; as well as marriage, adultery and punishment in the society. His narrative gave us a glimpse into the world of enslaved women during the Atlantic crossing and under enslavement in the Americas. He informed us about how gender affected the slave trade and slavery. For instance, he noted that the West Indies slavers punished their female slaves by asking their husbands to flog them and that they "pay no regard to the situation of pregnant women."⁸⁰ In terms of sexual assaults female slaves were subjected, Equiano stated:

I used frequently to have different cargoes of new negroes in my care for sale; and it was a constant practice with our clerks, and with other whites, to commit violent depredations on the chastity of the female slaves; and these I was, though with reluctance, obliged to submit to at all times, being unable to help them . . . I have even known them gratify their brutal passion with females not ten years old.⁸¹

Equiano's narrative has been valued by scholars for its authentic and extensive account of the eighteenth-century slave life that connects the different phases of lived experiences of the enslaved in the three continents of Africa, North America and Europe, first, as a free person, and then life under enslavement and freedom. His accounts of the transitions from one social status to another as well as the horrifying experience of the Atlantic passage from Africa to the Americas on board slave ship have been widely cited and reprinted. It is therefore not surprising that Equiano's narrative has generated a great degree of interest and enriched scholarship in a wide range of disciplines across the globe, especially in historical studies, anthropology, English, comparative and American literature, African Diaspora studies, cultural studies, American studies and postcolonial studies. While two scholars have written biographies of Equiano, others have focused on his entrepreneurial achievements and Christian commitment.⁸² In spite of his doubts about Equiano's African birthplace, Carretta never disputes that Equiano is "the founder of the genre of modern Anglophone-African autobiography [and] one of the earliest self-publishing entrepreneurs."⁸³

The Interesting Narrative is no doubt one of the most important literary works of late-eighteenth-century England. It has since its first appearance in 1789 attracted media commentaries and scholarly interpretations and analyses from different parts of the world. The contemporaneous commentaries with often-times favorable reviews have appeared in such newspapers and magazines as *The Monthly Review*, *Impartial Review*, *The Analytical Review*, *The Gentleman's Magazine*, *The General Magazine*, *The Oracle*, *The Star*, *Belfast Newsletter* and

many others. The book has received both favorable and negative reviews from scholars too. Keith A. Sandiford, for example, opines that the publication of Equiano's two-volume autobiography propelled the revolution of racial and political consciousness in Black literature into its highest form and effectiveness in eighteenth-century England.⁸⁴ Akiyo Ito sees Equiano's work as a political pamphlet because of its influence on the abolitionist movement and also as a crucial text to the African American literary tradition.⁸⁵ The book, Ito continues, was very instrumental in the abolitionist movement in England and in America: "it fit into post-revolutionary rhetoric among artisans concerned with the issues of independence and republicanism."⁸⁶

Scholars of African American history and literature have therefore adopted Equiano's *Interesting Narrative* as part of their disciplinary domains and as a baseline for the emergent literary genre of slave narratives and auto/biographical studies. According to William Andrews, Equiano was "the prophet, if not the father, of Afro-American autobiography."⁸⁷ This is because his book "created the first large audience for any black writer in America."⁸⁸ Susan Marren refers to Equiano as a social reformer whose "legacy to the tradition of African American autobiographical writing is the gift of envisioning a transgressive I within whom proliferating contradictions impel not social death but ambivalence, fluidity, and freedom."⁸⁹ His *Interesting Narrative* is regarded as "one of the first points of contact between African narrative and Western print culture, and . . . a prototype of a uniquely African-American literary genre, the slave narrative."⁹⁰ While some have referred to Equiano as the "patriarch of African-American literature,"⁹¹ others have proclaimed him "the Father of the American Novel."⁹² For the above reasons, one can unequivocally state that the narrative has contributed to the development of the African American literary tradition.

Equiano's book is regarded as the first deliberate effort to celebrate African achievement in print because it created an image of an African achiever. As aptly articulated in a biographical collection on eighteenth-century Black writers:

Of all the works in this collection, *The Interesting Narrative* . . . has occupied the literary marketplace in the widest variety of forms over the longest period of time . . . upon resurfacing in the 1960s . . . its popularity has continued to grow as interest flourishes in African literature and culture, African-American studies, and Black Atlantic history and culture. As a testament to its broad appeal, Equiano's *Narrative* can now be found in classroom textbooks, adult trade books, children's books, and even in comic books.⁹³

Yet, *The Interesting Narrative* has been described by critics as fictional essay, travelogue, adventure tale, spiritual autobiography, captivity narrative, slave narrative, economic treatise, *apologia* and historical fiction. Interestingly, none of these labels has succeeded in undermining the wide attention the book has drawn. It has remained the first book by an ex-slave to give accounts in such details of an African past, the horrors of the Atlantic passage and the inhumanity and oppressiveness of slavery. Undoubtedly, Equiano and his book have remained important

subjects of scholarly discussion and interpretation from different disciplinary backgrounds. Students, especially in higher levels of education, study them.⁹⁴ Graduate and undergraduate research investigations have also been carried out on this prominent son of Igbo Africa and his narrative. In addition, a number of international conferences have also focused on him and his book.⁹⁵ There is an Equiano Society, formed in London, UK, in 1996 to encourage and popularize studies and other activities on Olaudah Equiano. Equiano was not only a celebrated author, but also a diligent activist.

Political and Anti-Slavery Activism

Equiano's political and other activities helped to bring to limelight the horror and indignity of slave trade and slavery as well as to mobilize Africans' sympathizers and humanitarians to end the trade, emancipate the enslaved and improve their conditions, especially in England and its territorial possessions. Equiano started his activist campaigns many years before the publication of his book. As an acclaimed leading abolitionist and the champion of the cause of the people of African descent in Europe, Equiano in 1774 tried, without success, to save John Annis. Annis was a black man, who upon Equiano's recommendation was employed to serve as a cook on board the Turkey-bound ship *Anglicania*, but was quickly kidnapped by his former master in London and shipped into slavery in the West Indies. On Granville Sharp's advice, Equiano hired an attorney to rescue Annis. But it was a wasteful endeavor for the attorney took Equiano's money and did nothing. Annis was eventually tortured to death in St. Kitts.⁹⁶

In 1783, Equiano brought to the attention of Granville Sharp the shocking incident of the drowning of 132 enslaved Africans on board the slave ship *Zong* by the captain in order for the ship owners to collect insurance money on them. Although Chief Justice Lord Mansfield ruled in favor of the captain and the owners of the *Zong*, the case helped in expanding the abolitionist movement.⁹⁷ Following a publication by James Tobin, a London merchant and anti-abolitionist, in 1785 in which he defended slavery, accusing Africans of laziness and dishonesty, and criticizing Reverend James Ramsay, a leading abolitionist, Equiano spoke out against Tobin in a letter he sent to the London's *Public Advertiser*. Though his offers in the press to testify in parliamentary hearings on the issues concerning slave trade and slavery were rejected, Equiano published his testimony in several venues.⁹⁸ He was also involved with the Sierra Leone project to resettle emancipated Africans.

In 1786, a group of White abolitionists formed an organization, the Committee for Relief of the Black Poor, primarily to provide the poor people of African descent with food, clothing and shelter. Shortly after, the Committee decided that the best way to address the problems of these poor Africans and their descendants in England was to resettle them in Sierra Leone, West Africa. With government approval, the Committee went to work, hiring a number of people, including Olaudah Equiano, to realize its goal. Equiano was the only person of African descent directly involved with this Committee and the Sierra

Leone resettlement project. He accepted his appointment in November 1786 as the Commissary of the project, even though he initially objected to the whole enterprise, arguing that such repatriations could lead to re-enslavement of those shipped back to Africa. As the Commissary, Equiano was to act as the British government official representative dealing directly with local African authorities in Sierra Leone. Few months after he accepted the position in which he oversaw the procurement and disposition of supplies, Equiano was fired in March 1787 because he spoke out against White agents who neglected their responsibilities to provide supplies for the emigrants even when they were paid for doing it; a failure that created an oppressive, exploitative and wretched condition for the repatriates.⁹⁹

Equiano was accused of being “turbulent and discontented” and inciting his fellow Africans to cause trouble. Ironically, the dismissal came after the Navy Board had sent a letter to the Treasury indicating that Equiano’s only crime was diligence: “In all the Transactions the Commissary has had with the Board, he has acted with great propriety and has been very regular in his information.”¹⁰⁰ The dismissal of Equiano neither stopped the Sierra Leone project nor changed the plight of Africans being shipped back to the continent, but the outcome was a disaster as less than half of the original number that embarked on the trip survived. Equiano, the fighter, never left without a fight. He subsequently organized a protest with the emigrants and mobilized fellow Africans in London to establish the Sons of Africa as the mouthpiece of the African community. He demanded that he be paid his wages and expenses for the time he worked for the Committee. Subsequently, the Treasury authorized the Navy Board to pay him £50. In his will, Equiano made allowances that part of his assets, should his two daughters not live up to their 21st year birthday, be given to the Treasurer and Directors of the Sierra Leone Company for a school the Company established in Sierra Leone.¹⁰¹

Although Equiano focused more on the evils of the slave trade and its abolition in the *Interesting Narrative* than on the institution, he was also forceful against slavery in his letters to newspapers and abolitionists. According to Shyllon, “[t]he first Appendix to his book is a collection of eighteen letters that Equiano wrote in his campaign for Abolition [including] the address [he] presented to the Quakers in 1785.”¹⁰² In his effort to appeal to the capitalist class to end the slave trade, Equiano proposed an alternative source of wealth—the colonization project that would enable Europeans make more profit than what they were making from the slave trade and slavery through the sharing of Africa’s wealth rather than the destruction of its people. Obviously, he did not realize that both the slave trade and colonialism were two evils that befell Africa. Colonial conquest unleashed violent destruction of African lives and massive exploitation of the continent’s resources.

Carretta has referred to Equiano as a “professional author committed to the abolitionist cause [who knew] that an African authorial identity would enhance the *Narrative’s* credibility, raise its market value, and serve the cause.”¹⁰³ He indicated that the *Narrative* was not Equiano’s first publication, but as “a master of

the commercial book market,” Equiano had written letters and book reviews in London newspapers as a means to promote himself and his forthcoming book. Because his book was published by subscription, some have argued that the tradition of publication by subscription was a form of self-promotion. But the important point that is often ignored is the fact that the list of subscribers served as a strategy to link the author with the larger abolitionist movement with its influential and powerful members as well as with other Afro-British authors. For instance, it has been reported that John Wesley, one of the pillars of Methodism, was reading his copy of the *Narrative* and had recommended it to William Wilberforce, a leading abolitionist in the British Parliament before his death in February 1791. The subscription lists reinforced the *Narrative*, which was formally framed by a petition submitted to the Houses of Parliament where subscribers became Equiano’s co-petitioners.

In his letter to the Parliament, Equiano wrote:

Permit me with the greatest deference and respect, to lay at your feet the following genuine Narrative; the chief design of which is to excite in your august assemblies a sense of compassion for the miseries which the Slave Trade has entailed on my unfortunate countrymen. By the horrors of that trade I was first torn away from all the tender connexions that were dear to my heart . . . I am . . . addressing to you a work so wholly devoid of literary merit; but, as the production of an unlettered African, who is actuated by the hope of becoming an instrument towards the relief of his suffering countrymen . . . May the god of Haven inspire your hearts with peculiar benevolence on that important day when the question of Abolition is to be discussed, when thousands, in consequence of your determination, are to look for Happiness or Misery!¹⁰⁴

The humility and sincerity demonstrated by Equiano in the above letter undoubtedly touched the hearts of some of the political heavyweights in England who took part in enacting the law that abolished the slave trade. There are also several letters of introduction written by influential persons in England on behalf of Equiano, many of which emphasized his contribution to the abolitionist campaign. A few examples will suffice here. In a letter of introduction, William Eddis called Equiano

an African of distinguished merit [who was well known to] the principal supporters of the Bill for the Abolition of the Slave Trade [and who had] himself, been very instrumental in promoting a plan so truly conducive to the interests of religion and humanity. Mr. VASSA has published a Narrative which clearly delineates the iniquity of that unnatural and destructive commerce [and] fully demonstrates that genius and worth are not limited to country or complexion.¹⁰⁵

Similarly, William Langworthy called Equiano “the enlightened African [whose] active part . . . in bringing about the motion for a repeal of the Slave Act, has given him much celebrity as a public man . . . a man who is engaged in so noble a cause as the freedom and salvation of his enslaved and unenlightened countrymen.”¹⁰⁶

Drawing strength from the abolitionist movement and its use of the evolving mass media to reach a wider audience, Equiano presented a narrative that was aimed at touching the conscience of the English society to end the enslavement of Africans. Unlike his contemporaries, he gave a vivid firsthand account of the horrific experience of the Atlantic crossing as he might have experienced it.¹⁰⁷ Thus, his narrative has remained the most compelling testimony of that Atlantic passage by an enslaved African and a survivor. Based on his personal experience and observations, Equiano became an expert witness and an authentic voice on the slave trade and the institution of slavery. The publication of his book coincided with the parliamentary inquiry about the slave trade and was often quoted during the proceedings. Thus, of all the three most prominent African writers and abolitionists in eighteenth-century England—Ignatius Sancho, Ottobah Cugoano and Olaudah Equiano—Equiano was the most instrumental in bringing about the end of the obnoxious trade. While American Thomas Digges described Equiano as “a principal instrument in bringing about the motion for a repeal of the Slave-act,” Folarin Shyllon regarded him as “the vanguard of the Abolitionist movement in England.”¹⁰⁸

His abolitionist campaign brought him in contact with influential and notable abolitionists in England including Granville Sharp, Reverend James Ramsay and Thomas Clarkson, with whom he not only established respectable and mutual relationships, but also became their comrade in the noble cause of abolition. Borrowing the words of Lovejoy,

Certainly his stature, as perceived through historical hindsight if not always appreciated, was comparable to that of Ramsay, Sharp, Clarkson and Wilberforce. And with the possible exception of Ottobah Cugoano, there was no other African in London who commanded such respect as a spokesperson for black people, whether African born or descendants of those forcibly removed from Africa.¹⁰⁹

While on his book tours, Equiano distributed abolitionist works written by others. As one writer put it, Equiano’s life and career were transformed between the late 1770s and 1880s “from [a] reluctant sailor to [a] professional abolitionist.”¹¹⁰

Yet some have criticized Equiano for his ambivalence over slavery. The critics believe that he did not condemn slavery in its totality because there were certain aspects of the institutions he supported and encouraged. They cite his comparison of slavery in the West Indies and Georgia, and in Africa, Philadelphia and England. According to Equiano, while enslaved Africans in the former areas experienced the worst condition in being forced to labor in gangs on large-scale agricultural farms and plantations, their experiences in the latter territories were less oppressive because they were employed as domestic servants and artisans. In Africa too, the enslaved were treated like family members of their owners and had greater access to manumission than in the dehumanizing chattel conditions of the West Indies and American south. His reference to a free Black woman in St. Kitts who owned slaves and his employment as a freeman in Dr. Irving’s Central American plantation as an overseer and slave driver are also cited as evidence

of his alleged support for the institution of slavery.¹¹¹ It is important to regard Equiano's survival strategies under the horrors of slavery as what they were—means of survival, period; we should not mistake them as evidence of his support for the system. Some have even cited his manumission process as evidence of his complicity to the institution of slavery. For instance, Vincent Carretta opines that Olaudah Equiano “implicitly acknowledged the legitimacy of slavery,” by regaining his freedom through purchase or “redemption” rather than escape.¹¹² Others have criticized him for being a “master of commerce and politics,” and a “capitalist opportunist and trickster.”¹¹³

However Equiano regained his freedom and whatever labels his critics affixed to him—a fraud, an apologist, a trickster, an accidental tourist, an ethnic separatist, an advertiser, a plagiarist and a dreamer of imaginary homeland—none of these labels denies the fact that he was a survivor. The fact that he was among the millions of enslaved Africans in the Americas and Europe who survived the ordeals of enslavement and was also able to make a positive impact to alleviate the conditions of his suffering countrymen and women should be celebrated. After all, he was not only “a native of Eboe, who was himself twice kidnapped by the English, and twice sold to slavery” as the *The Morning Chronicle* of July 1, 1788, reported, but he also “has since been appointed the King's Commissary for the African settlement, and besides having an irreproachable moral character, has frequently distinguished himself by occasional essays in the different papers, which manifest a strong and sound understanding.”¹¹⁴ He was unquestionably a proud African, a fighter and hero and a man of high moral aptitude.

Equiano was an embodiment of complex multiple identities, some he constructed for himself, others attributed to him by those who had different motives to make of him. Some of these include Igbo, African, British, African American and Black Atlantic identities. His Igbo and African identities laid the foundation to his transition to an Englishman through acculturation and also made him the spokesperson and defender of his people and their culture. Those identities were part of his contribution to the eighteenth-century debate on Africa by presenting certain positive images about Africans and their culture against the dominant savage, primitive, barbarous, brutish, lazy, stupid and uncivilized portrayals in Europe.¹¹⁵ In the introduction of one of the editions of *The Interesting Narrative*, Robert Reid-Pharr described Equiano as “an audacious, even revolutionary intellectual” for his insistence that his story as an African, a slave, a workingman and an intellectual be understood as similar to any other work by a modern writer.¹¹⁶ Equiano therefore wrote to regain and also demonstrate the shared humanity he and his fellow Africans had with the rest of the people of the world, but had been denied by the racist slave dealers and owners and their supporters.

Conclusion

Olaudah Equiano's life history is no doubt among the most interesting ones. The controversies notwithstanding, it is a story of a young enslaved Igbo boy who gained international prominence by applying a combination of skills.

His business acumen and industriousness, assertive character, literary ingenuity, political and human rights activism, and religiosity helped him navigate the treacherous terrain of the European and American societies savaged by slavery and racism. He has been regarded as the most famous and influential abolitionist of African descent in Britain, a stardom mostly propelled by his book. As a boy and an adult, Equiano perceived freedom as a process of negotiation and a continuous process of development.

Equiano was a very courageous man who in the eighteenth-century Europe was fearless enough to recommend interracial marriages. He demonstrated his call to end racism through interracial marriages by his own marriage to Englishwoman Susanna Cullen. We can, unquestionably, point to a few individuals who embodied different identities and treaded the paths Equiano did; from a happy young boy to a childhood cut short by horror of kidnapping and enslavement, and to the transformation into a curious and wise traveler between worlds (literally and figuratively)—a crusader for common humanity, a civil rights activist, a reformer, an abolitionist, a successful entrepreneur, a pan-Africanist, as well as a public speaker and editorialist, and a writer and author of a bestseller and a classic.

Notes

1. For convenience and consistency, Equiano is used in this book instead of Vassa.
2. Due to Equiano's fame, his death was reported in the *Gentleman's Magazine*. It was noted that his daughter Joanna inherited £950 from her father's estate in 1816, the equivalent of £80,000 or \$120,000 in the mid-1990s. See Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative and Other Writings*, ed. with an Introduction and Notes by Vincent Carretta (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), x.
3. See Chima Korieh, ed., *Olaudah Equiano and the Igbo World: History, Society and Atlantic Diaspora Connections* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2009), especially chapters 1–6; Paul Lovejoy, "Autobiography and Memory: Gustavus Vassa, alias Olaudah Equiano, the African," *Slavery and Abolition* 27, no. 3 (2006): 317–347; Louise Rolinger, "A Metaphor for Freedom: Olaudah Equiano and Slavery in Africa," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 38, no. 1 (2004): 88–122; Robin Sabino and Jennifer Hall, "The Path Not Taken: Cultural Identity in the Interesting Life of Olaudah Equiano," *MELUS* 24, no. 1 (1999): 5–19; Innocent Onyema, *Hail Usaka: Olaudah Equiano's Igbo Village* (Owerri, Nigeria: Ihem Davis Press, 1991); Paul Edwards and Rosalind Shaw, "The Invisible *Chi* in Equiano's *Interesting Narrative*," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 19, no. 2 (1989): 146–156; Catherine Acholonu, *The Igbo Roots of Olaudah Equiano: An Anthropological Research* (Owerri, Nigeria: AFA Publications, 1989); "The Home of Olaudah Equiano: A Linguistic and Anthropological Survey," *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 22 (1987): 5–16; "Who was Olaudah Equiano? Recent Findings on the Home of Olaudah Equiano, West Africa's Pioneer Writer," *Nigeria Magazine* 55, no. 1 (1987): 43–50; Adiele Afigbo, *Ropes of Sand: Studies in Igbo History and Culture* (London: Oxford University Press, 1981); Elizabeth Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People* (London: Macmillan, 1976), 68–69; Paul Edwards, *The Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African 1789*, Vols. 1 and 2 (London: Dawsons of Pall Mall, 1969);

- G. I. Jones, "Olaudah Equiano of the Niger Ibo," in *Africa Remembered: Narratives by West Africans from the Era of the Slave Trade*, ed., Philip Curtin (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1967), 60–98; Chinua Achebe, "Handicaps of Writing in a Second Language," *Spear Magazine* (Nigeria, August 1964); Paul Edwards, "Embenche and Ndichie," *Journal of Historical Society of Nigeria* 2, no. 3 (1962): 401–402.
4. The word "Igbo" meant different things to different people at different points in the history of the ethnic or linguistic group known today as the Igbo. It is not clear when a pan-Igbo consciousness and identity developed either within or outside the people's homeland. What is certain is that since the late seventeenth century, the term has been used to identify a distinct ethnicity or nationality in the Bight of Biafra by early European visitors. In addition to other indexes of identity, language remained the most important, especially for the Diaspora Igbo. It was therefore not surprising that Equiano identified himself as an "Eboe" [Igbo], and referred to some enslaved Africans in the West Indies who spoke similar language as "our people." See Elizabeth Isichei, *Igbo Worlds: An Anthology of Oral Histories and Historical Descriptions* (London: Macmillan, 1977), 10–13, quoting John Graziilhier's 1699 "Hackbous" [Igbo] relations with the Kalabari; and John Adams' 1786/1800 description of trade in "Heebo" [Igbo] slaves; W. B. Baikie, *Narrative of an Exploring Voyage up the Rivers Kwora and Binue, Commonly Known as the Niger and Tsadda in 1854* (London: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd., reprint, 1966), 307, explained in 1850 that within the Igbo homeland, the people identified themselves according to their village-groups/towns, but outside, they called themselves Igbo.
 5. Afigbo, *Ropes of Sand*, 183.
 6. Folarin Shyllon, *Black People in Britain, 1555–1833* (London: Oxford University Press, 1977), 237.
 7. Vincent Carretta, "Defining a Gentleman: The Status of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa," *Language Sciences* 22 (2000): 385–399; see also his reference to articles published by two London newspapers: *The Oracle* and *The Star* on pages 388–389.
 8. Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative*, 5.
 9. *Ibid.*, 6–7.
 10. Vincent Carretta, *Equiano, The African: Biography of a Self-Made Man* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2005); Lovejoy, "Autobiography and Memory"; Vincent Carretta, "Response to Paul Lovejoy's 'Autobiography and Memory: Gustavus Vassa, alias Olaudah Equiano, the African,'" *Slavery and Abolition* 28, no. 1 (2007): 115–119; Paul Lovejoy, "Issues of Motivation – Vassa/Equiano and Carretta's Critique of the Evidence," *Slavery and Abolition* 28, no. 1 (2007): 121–125. See also reviews of the book by Ugo Nwokeji in *The Journal of American History* 93, no. 3 (2006): 840–841; Jennifer Howard's in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 52, no. 3 (September 9, 2005): A11–A15; and remarks by Emmanuel Eze and Dorothy Ukaegbu in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* 25, no. 9 (October 21, 2005): A63; Alexander X. Byrd, "Eboe, Country, Nation, and Gustavus Vassa's Interesting Narrative," *William and Mary Quarterly* 63, no. 1 (2006): 123–148.
 11. Carretta, *Equiano, the African*, xiv. See also his notes in Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative*, 261, note 198; Carretta, "Defining a Gentleman"; "Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa? New Light on an Eighteenth-Century Question of Identity," *Slavery and Abolition* 20, no. 3 (1999): 96–105; "More New Light on the Identity of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa," in *The Global Eighteenth Century*,

- ed., Felicity Nussbaum (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2003), 226–235; “Response to Paul Lovejoy’s ‘Autobiography and Memory.’”
12. Carretta, “Response to Paul Lovejoy’s,” 115–116.
 13. Lovejoy, “Autobiography and Memory,” 318.
 14. Such historical information include Equiano’s arrival from Bonny to Barbados on the slave ship, *Ogden*; the year they arrived in Barbados and the number of slaves on board; the ship that brought him to Virginia; who bought him and how long he stayed in Virginia; and when Michael Pascal’s merchant ship, the *Industrious Bee* arrived in England with Equiano on board.
 15. See this book’s “Introduction,” note 57.
 16. The debate over what enslaved Africans could remember and retain of their cultural heritage in the Americas, which dates back to the 1940s, gave rise to what experts have termed “The Herskovits – Frazier Debate.” Herskovits supports the retention of certain elements of their culture by enslaved Africans in the Americas, which eventually contributed to the formation of early American history and culture, and Frazier argues to the contrary that they lost their African heritage during slavery. Yet others have argued in support of the hybridization of different cultural heritage, which drew from African, Native Indian and European cultural backgrounds. See Melville Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past*, 1941 (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958); E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Family in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939); *The Negro Church in America* (Boston: Schocken Books, 1963). For recent scholarship in support of Herskovits, see Jacob Gordon, ed., *The African Presence in Black America* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2004); Linda Heywood, ed., *Central Africans and Cultural Transformations in the American Diaspora* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Sheila Walker, *African Roots/American Cultures: Africa in the Creation of the Americas* (Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, 2001); Joseph Holloway, ed., *Africanisms in American Culture* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990).
 17. Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative*, 32–33.
 18. Jones, “Olaudah Equiano,” 61.
 19. S. E. Ogude, “Facts into Fiction: Equiano’s Narrative Reconsidered,” *Research in African Literatures* 13, no. 1 (1982): 31, 38, 40.
 20. Carretta, “Defining a Gentleman,” 398.
 21. In a 2003 international conference on Olaudah Equiano in UK, Ogude claimed that Ikwuano in Abia State of Nigeria was Equiano’s birthplace.
 22. Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative*, xi.
 23. *Ibid.*, xxvi.
 24. Jones, “Olaudah Equiano,” 61; Achebe, “Handicaps of Writing”; Acholonu, *The Igbo Roots*; Onyema, *Hail Usaka*.
 25. While D. I. Nwoga suggests Nsukka, Afigbo concludes that all evidence point to a northern Igbo community without mentioning any specific names. See Afigbo, *Ropes of Sand*, 156.
 26. Acholonu, *The Igbo Roots*, 2.
 27. Onyema, *Hail Usaka*, 13.
 28. Jones, “Olaudah Equiano,” 61.
 29. For some of the problems associated with Acholonu’s book on Equiano, see Paul Edwards’ review of the book in *Research in African Literatures* 21, no. 2 (1990): 124–128; O. S. Ogude’s review in *Africa* 61, no. 1 (1991): 138–141; Christopher Fyfe’s in *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 23, no. 4 (1990): 744–745

- [especially the last paragraph on the extraordinary longevity of Equiano's family members, 180–200 years old].
30. Lovejoy, "Autobiography and Memory," 331.
 31. Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative*, 32.
 32. Jones, "Oludah Equiano," 68; Lovejoy, "Autobiography and Memory," 328; Onyema, *Hail Usaka*, 12.
 33. For the location of Teinma in the Niger Delta see, Map 1 in this book; E. J. Alagoa, *A History of the Niger Delta* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Ibadan University Press, 1972), 186; and for Ashaka and other West Niger Igbo towns and their neighbors see Don Ohadike, *Anioma: A Social History of the Western Igbo People* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1994), 14.
 34. Contrary to Vincent Corretta's explanation that Equiano must have meant 172 pounds of cowry shells because according to him the price of slaves during the century ranged from 100 to 300 pounds of the shells, Equiano's account is probably more accurate than Carretta's. See Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative*, 249, note 97. In the Niger Delta and the hinterland local trade, cowries were used in strings, bunches, heads and bags and not by weight. See K. Onwuka Dike, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta, 1830–1885* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), 107. Quoting a mid-nineteenth-century account, Dike indicates that 40 cowries = 1 string = ¼d. to 1d.; 5 strings = 1 bunch = 3d. to 6d.; 10 bunches = 1 head = 1s. 9½d. to 2s.; and 10 heads = 1 bag = 18s. or 4 dollars. G. Chuku, *Igbo Women and Economic Transformation in Southeastern Nigeria, 1900–1960* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 46 shows that in the nineteenth century, the cost of a stout male slave in the coastal and hinterland areas was 60,000–70,000 cowries. By this time, cowries were much more available than when Equiano was sold.
 35. Jones, "Oludah Equiano," 61.
 36. See also Paul Edwards, "Introduction," in *The Interesting Narrative of Oludah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African*, facsimile edition (London: Dawson of Pall Mall, 1969), lxxiv for his interpretation of the meaning of "Oludah." "The second element of the name may be either *ude*, 'fame' . . . or *uda*, 'resonant, resounding . . . The latter seems more likely, . . . [for] a name composed of *ola*, 'ornament,' and *ude*, having the sense of 'ornament of fame,' might signify 'fortunate.'"
 37. Afigbo, *Ropes of Sand*, 153–154.
 38. Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative*, 43, 46.
 39. Philip D. Curtin, "General Introduction," in *Africa Remembered*, ed., Philip D. Curtin, 7.
 40. Anthony Benezet, *Some Historical Account of Guinea, Its Situation, Produce, and the General Disposition of Its Inhabitants*, 2nd edition (London: Frank Cass, 1788).
 41. Afigbo, *Ropes of Sand*, 152.
 42. *Ibid.*, 148–149.
 43. Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative*, 46.
 44. M. Angulu Onwuejeogwu, *An Igbo Civilization: Nri Kingdom & Hegemony* (London: Ethnographica Ltd., 1981), 78–81.
 45. John Adams, *Sketches Taken during Ten Voyages to Africa between the Years 1786 and 1800* (London: G. and W. B. Whittaker, 1822); and *Remarks on the Country Extending from Cape Palmas to the River Congo* (London: G. and W. B. Whittaker, 1823), 41.
 46. John Adams, *Sketches Taken during Ten Voyages to Africa between the Years 1786 and 1800* (London: G. and W. B. Whittaker, 1822); and *Remarks on the Country*

- Extending from Cape Palmas to the River Congo* (London: G. and W. B. Whittaker, 1823), 41.
47. Baikie, *Narrative of an Exploring Voyage*, 310.
 48. Thurstan Shaw, *Unearthing Igbo-Ukwu: Archaeological Discoveries in Eastern Nigeria* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Oxford University Press, 1977), 100.
 49. C. C. Aniako, "Art in the Culture of Igboland," in *A Survey of the Igbo Nation*, ed., G. E. K. Ofomata (Onitsha, Nigeria: Africana First Publishers, 2002), 311.
 50. M. D. W. Jeffreys, "The Winged Solar Disk or Ibo Itshi Facial Scarification," *Africa* 21, no. 2 (1951): 96.
 51. Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative*, 37.
 52. Lovejoy, "Autobiography and Memory," 327.
 53. See Herbert M. Cole and Chike C. Aniako, *Igbo Arts: Community and Cosmos* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1984); Liz Willis, "Uli Painting and the Igbo World View," *African Arts* 23, no. 1 (1989): 62–66, 104.
 54. J. A. B. Horton, *West African Countries and Peoples, British and Native: A Vindication of the African Race* [1868] (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 1969), 159.
 55. Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative*, 42.
 56. Baikie, *Narrative of an Exploring Voyage*, 287–288, 297.
 57. S. Crowther and J. C. Taylor, *Niger Expedition, 1857–1859* (London: Frank Cass reprint, 1968), 29–30.
 58. Chuku, *Igbo Women*.
 59. Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative*, 48.
 60. Nancy C. Neaher, "Awka Who Travel: Itinerant Metalsmiths of Southern Nigeria," *Africa* 49 (1979): 253–266; "Igbo Metalsmiths among the Southern Edo," *African Arts* 9, no. 3 (1976): 46–49; Onwuka Njoku, "A History of Iron Technology in Igboland, c. 1542–1900" (Ph.D. dissert., Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia, 1986).
 61. In the 1970s when I visited my grandmother, I witnessed how she used her walking staff to escort certain species of python (eke), out of her house. She was talking to the reptile, asking it to leave because children were around and they were scared of it. My grandmother explained to us that it was against our custom to harm or kill such species of pythons.
 62. Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative*, 40.
 63. *Ibid.*, 38.
 64. In the northern Igbo town of Enugu-Ezike near Nsukka, twin and multiple births were however regarded as symbol of good luck and fortune.
 65. P. Amaury Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria*, Vol. I (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), 249.
 66. C. K. Meek, *Law and Authority in a Nigerian Tribe: A Study of Indirect Rule* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), 7.
 67. G. T. Basden, *Niger Ibos* (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1938), 123–124.
 68. Bryan Edwards, *The History, Civil and Commercial of the British West Indies*, 5th edition, Vol. II (London: T. Miller, 1966), 87–88, 90.
 69. Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica or General Survey of the Ancient and Modern State of that Island with Reflections on its Situation, Settlements, Inhabitants, Climate, Products, Commerce, Law, and Government*, Vol. II, 1774 (New York: Arno Press, 1972), 403.

70. See Gloria Chuku, "The Demonization of Enslaved Igbo in the Americas: A Challenge to the Power of Historiographical Traditions," a paper presented at the fourth International Conference on Igbo Studies, Howard University, Washington, DC, March 31 – April 1, 2006; " 'Igbo Landing,' Facts and Fiction: A Preliminary Study of Igbo Slave Resistance in South Carolina," paper presented at the Tenth Anniversary Conference of the Atlantic History Seminar, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, August 8–13, 2005.
71. James Green, "The Publishing History of Olaudah Equiano's *Interesting Narrative*," *Slavery and Abolition* 16, no. 3 (1995): 367.
72. For a bibliography of editions and reprints of *The Interesting Narrative*, see Adam Potkay and Sandra Burr, eds., *Black Atlantic Writers of the Eighteenth Century: Living the New Exodus in England and the Americas* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 162–164.
73. Green, "The Publishing History," 372–373 listed some of these publications including Lydia Maria Child, *Appeal in favor of that Class of Americans called Africans* (1833 and 1836); Abigail Mott, ed., *Biographical Sketches and Interesting Anecdotes of Persons of Color* (1826 and 1829).
74. Paul Edwards, ed., *Equiano's Travels, His Autobiography: The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa, the African*, abridged edition (London: Heinemann, 1967). There is also a Swedish translation that came out in Stockholm by Tiden in 1964.
75. See, for instance, Christopher Fyfe, *A History of Sierra Leone* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962); Charles Nichols, *Many Thousand Gone: The Ex-slaves' Account of their Bondage and Freedom* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1963); Jones, "Olaudah Equiano."
76. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., ed., *The Classic Slave Narratives: The Life of Olaudah Equiano* (New York: Penguin/Mentor Books, 1987).
77. See, for instance, Afigbo, *Robes of Sand; The Igbo and their Neighbours: Inter-Group Relations in Southeastern Nigeria to 1953* (Ibadan, Nigeria: University Press Limited, 1987); Isichei, *A History of*; D. Northrup, *Trade Without Rulers: Pre-Colonial Economic Development in South-Eastern Nigeria* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978); John N. Oriji, *Traditions of Igbo Origin: A Study of Pre-Colonial Population Movements in Africa* (New York: Peter Lang, 1990); K. O. Dike and Felicia Ekejiuba, *The Aro of South-eastern Nigeria, 1650–1980: A Study of Socio-Economic Formation and Transformation in Nigeria* (Ibadan, Nigeria: University Press Limited, 1990); Ohadike, *Anioma*.
78. Thomas Hodgkin, *Nigerian Perspectives: An Historical Anthology* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), 155–166.
79. Afigbo, *Ropes of Sand*, 183.
80. Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative*, 105.
81. *Ibid.*, 104.
82. James Walvin, *An African's Life: The Life and Times of Olaudah Equiano, 1745–1797* (London: Cassell, 1998); Angelo Costanzo, *Surprising Narrative: Olaudah Equiano and the Beginnings of Black Autobiography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1987); Joseph Fichtelberg, "Word between Worlds: The Economy of Equiano's Narrative," *American Literary History* 5, no. 3 (1993): 459–480; Adam Potkay, "Olaudah Equiano and the Art of Spiritual Autobiography," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 27, no. 4 (1994): 677–692; Elizabeth Wall Hinds, "The Spirit of Trade: Olaudah Equiano's Conversion, Legalism, and the Merchant's Life," *African American Review*

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 85. Akiyo Ito, “Olaudah Equiano and the New York Artisans: The First American Edition of *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, Or Gustavus Vassa, The African*,” *Early American Literature* 32, no. 1 (1997): 82–101.
 86. *Ibid.*, 83.
 87. Quoted in Paul Edwards, “‘Master’ and ‘Father’ in Equiano’s *Interesting Narrative*,” *Slavery and Abolition* 11 (1990): 216.
 88. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., ed., *Classic Slave Narratives* (New York: Signet Classics, 2002), 8. See also Walvin, *An African’s Life*, xv.
 89. Susan M. Marren, “Between Slavery and Freedom: The Transgressive Self in Olaudah Equiano’s Autobiography,” *PMLA* 108, no. 1 (1993): 104.
 90. Green, “The Publishing History of,” 362.
 91. Matthew J. Pethers, “Talking Books, Selling Selves: Rereading the Politics of Olaudah Equiano’s *Interesting Narrative*,” *American Studies* 48, no. 1 (2007): 103.
 92. Cathy Davidson, “Olaudah Equiano, Written by Himself,” *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 40, nos. 1/2 (2006/2007): 25.
 93. Potkay and Burr, eds., *Black Atlantic Writers*, 162.
 94. See articles published under the “Forum: Teaching Equiano’s *Interesting Narrative*,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 34, no. 4 (2001): 601–624.
 95. Such conferences include: “‘Olaudah Equiano: Representation and Reality’: An International One-Day Conference,” Kingston University, UK, March 22, 2003; and “Africa and the Transatlantic Slave Trade: Revisiting the Olaudah Equiano Legacy,” an international conference held at Imo State University, Owerri, Nigeria, July 26–27, 2007.
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 97. Robert J. Allison, ed., *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano Written by Himself* (Boston, MA: Bedford Books of St. Martin’s Press, 1995), 11.
 98. Vincent Carretta, “Feedback on Final Draft of Chapter 1,” received via an email correspondence on October 6, 2012.
 99. Shyllon, *Black People*, 153.
 100. *Ibid.*, 153.
 101. Paul Edwards, “A Descriptive List of Manuscripts in the Cambridgeshire Record Office Relating to the Will of Gustavus Vassa (Olaudah Equiano),” *Research in African Literatures* 20, no. 3 (1989): 476.

102. Shyllon, *Black People*, 229.
103. Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative*, xiv.
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105. *Ibid.*, 11.
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107. Other British and Afro-British writers who used their literary works to campaign against the slave trade and slavery in the eighteenth century were Equiano's friends; some of their works are James Ramsay, *An Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves in the British Sugar Colonies* (London: James Phillips, 1784); Ottobah Cugoano (also known as John Stewart/Stuart), *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species, Humbly Submitted to the Inhabitants of Great-Britain, by Ottobah Cugoano, a Native of Africa* (London: s.n., 1787).
108. Shyllon, *Black People*, 154, 237.
109. Lovejoy, "Autobiography and Memory," 317–318.
110. Nini Rodgers, "Equiano in Belfast: A Study of the Anti-Slavery Ethos in a Northern Town," *Slavery and Abolition* 18, no. 2 (1997): 74.
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113. Robert Reid-Pharr, "Introduction," in *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or, Gustavus Vassa, the African Written by Himself*, ed., Shelly Eversley (New York: The Modern Library, 2004), xviii; Terry S. Bozeman, "Interstices, Hybridity, and Identity: Olaudah Equiano and the Discourse of the African Slave Trade," *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 36, no. 2 (2003): 61–70.
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115. See George E. Boulukos, "Olaudah Equiano and the Eighteenth-Century Debate on Africa," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 40, no. 2 (2007): 241–255.
116. Reid-Pharr, "Introduction," viii–ix.

CHAPTER 2

Nnamdi Azikiwe: The Triumph of Knowledge

John Oriji

There is no better means to arouse African peoples than that of the power of the pen and tongue.¹

Benjamin Nnamdi Azikiwe, popularly called Zik,² has in the above crisp and succinct statement affirmed that the power of knowledge contributed to the towering heights he attained in Nigerian politics. He was well-versed in history and culture, and the rhetoric of political science and journalism. In addition, his uncanny understanding of the complex and dynamic political landscape of Nigeria helped him become an agent of history whose heroic achievements took on epical features embodied in the “Zikist myth.”

It is noteworthy that Femi Ojo-Ade, a Yoruba literary scholar, has attested to the glowing worldwide tributes paid to Zik when he passed away on May 11, 1996:

“Zik of Africa” is being praised to high heavens with all sorts of superlatives. A great pan-Africanist. Owner of the foremost seat at the fountainhead of Nigeria’s modernization. One of the founding fathers of the nation. A Nigerian detribalized to the core. Universal reconciliatory. Eclectic, pragmatic and accommodating. Statesman, philosopher, sportsman and poet.³

Although the title of Femi’s work suggests that the Zikist myth is dead, yet as this study will show, the myth is well and alive, and it has continued to serve as a major unifying force in the collective memories of Nigerians. This work, which is divided into three sections, each featuring the Zikist myth, hopes to explore his political biography in a historical perspective. The first section discusses Zik’s

family and diverse educational background to better understand how and why they prepared him for leadership in Nigeria. The second section examines how he applied his knowledge in the Gold Coast (Ghana), and later in Nigeria after returning from the United States, to shed some light on his experiences, his political ideas or “postulates,” and his innovative strategies. The third section explains how Zik’s postulates and strategies helped him to emerge as the pre-eminent nationalist of his country, while the concluding part uses his political postulates to assess his accomplishments and shortcomings.

Educational Background and Work Experiences in Nigeria and the United States

According to Zik, his birth was associated with a myth.⁴ A star, the Comet, was said to have appeared on the sky on the day he was born in the northern Nigerian Hausa town of Zungeru on November 16, 1904, foretelling that he would be a great man! Zik’s father, Chukuemeka Azikiwe, who worked as a clerk in the Nigerian regiment, and his wife, Chinwe, celebrated the birth of their first child with their Igbo and Hausa friends. The young boy learned to speak Hausa fluently, and was so much acculturated that when he walked in the streets, people would call him “a Hausa boy.”⁵ Concerned about his acculturation and the fact that there were hardly any facilities for his son to receive Western education in Zungeru, Chukuemeka decided to send him to their homeland, Onitsha, to learn Igbo culture and attend a missionary school in the town.

Zik was entrusted to the care of his aunt when he arrived in Onitsha. He is said to have enjoyed the folk history of the town recounted to him by his aunt who was versed in oral traditions.⁶ Zik enrolled at the Holy Trinity Catholic School to begin his primary school education, but his father, an Anglican, insisted that he should be transferred to the Christ Church School founded by the Church Missionary Society (CMS).⁷ In addition to his classes, Zik also attended Sunday school services regularly, and developed special admiration for Nicholas Anyaegbunam, the first indigenous Anglican pastor of Onitsha. It is also noteworthy that he was shortly appointed the prefect or student officer of the school, based on his academic performance and potential leadership qualities. Zik’s educational and cultural exposures were further enriched when he had to move from Onitsha to Lagos after being bitten by a dog. Chukuemeka, who had been transferred from Zungeru to Lagos, was concerned about his health. He also wanted his son to attend elementary and high schools in the cosmopolitan town of Lagos. Zik himself welcomed the idea, having heard a lot of fascinating stories about Nigeria’s capital city and leading commercial center. His trip to Lagos was his first experience of traveling by boat, and it was an arduous and adventurous journey for him.⁸

While in Lagos, Zik continued his elementary school education (1915–1918), and learned to speak Yoruba. But when his father was posted out of Lagos, Zik returned to Onitsha in 1918 to complete his primary education. After graduation, he served as a pupil teacher at Onitsha (1918 to March 1920). He then

had to move yet again to a town called Calabar, where his father was posted. He enrolled in a famous missionary high school, the Hope Waddell Training Institute (April-August 1920), until his father was transferred to Lagos again. Zik therefore had to return to Lagos to study at Wesleyan Boys High School where he made many friends among the children of the Lagos political elite who would become an asset to him in the future, including George Shyngle, Francis Cole and princes of the Yoruba ruling aristocracy, such as Ade Williams, son of the Akarigbo of Ijebu Remo. At school, Zik had a reputation for his academic brilliance, and won a special prize from Lord Lugard, the Governor-General of Nigeria in 1917, for his brilliant performance.⁹ By the time Zik graduated from high school, he had studied in diverse educational and cultural environments in Nigeria. He had also mastered three of the country's major languages, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba, making him the most detribalized of all Nigerians of his era. As will be shown, Zik's multicultural exposure, work experience and encounter with Dr. James Aggrey intensified his desire for higher education in the United States.

Following his graduation from high school, Zik worked in the colonial civil service, where he was employed as a clerk in the Nigerian Treasury, Lagos. He began to experience for the first time the discriminatory nature and "caste structure" of the colonial civil service, which paid poor salaries to Africans, and restricted them to the lowest rung of the bureaucratic ladder. Zik, out of frustration, resigned from the civil service and began to seek ways and means of traveling to the United States to acquire higher education. Some wonder why Zik was so much enchanted with studying in the United States instead of Britain, which attracted many of his contemporaries. He probably became alienated from the British colonial system, especially after his bad experience in the civil service. In addition, to many young people of Zik's generation, America, which had gained independence from Britain, symbolized freedom and a beacon of hope for Nigerians. He became much more passionate about studying in the United States after listening to the powerful speech of Dr. James Aggrey (1875–1927), a scholar, teacher and a preacher from the Gold Coast who studied in the United States, and also a member of the Foreign Mission Conference of North America. In the speech delivered in Lagos in 1920 under the auspices of the Phelps-Stokes Fund, Dr. Aggrey, who was reputable for his rhetorical skills, moved his audience when he called upon African youth to wake up and seek education in order to liberate their fatherland from the clutches of imperialism. He concluded by urging Africans to have pride and confidence in themselves because

[We were] created in the image of God, but men have made us think that we are chickens, and we still think we are. But we are eagles. Stretch forth your wings and fly! Don't be content with the food of chickens.¹⁰

Zik was mesmerized by the speech, and from then, Dr. Aggrey became one of his heroes and role models. He expressed immense gratitude to Dr. Aggrey for giving him a directory of colleges and universities in the United States for African Americans and other foreigners. Zik applied for admission to Storer College, a

historically Black institution located in Harper's Ferry, West Virginia. He was overjoyed when he received a letter of admission from the president of the college, Dr. Macdonald, who also directed him to contact Ani Okokon, a Nigerian student at the college, to assist him in learning more about the institution's academic programs and financial aid opportunities available to foreign students. Zik quickly wrote to Ani and received an encouraging response from him.¹¹ Full of adventure and enthusiasm, Zik hardly realized the bottlenecks he would have to get through before achieving his academic goals.

After receiving his letter of admission to Storer College, Zik began to plot about how to travel overseas with two of his friends, Sidney Brown and John Anyaso, who had similar dreams of studying in the United States. The trio decided to contact a seaman in Lagos, and after making a deal with him, they embarked on their trip as stowaways in a ship heading to the United States. But they never reached their destination. Shortly after their departure, Sidney got sea sick. Zik and John, fearing that he might pass away in the ship, contacted the seaman who advised them to disembark with their sick friend at Sekondi to avoid being arrested as stowaways.¹² The adventurous young men had harrowing experiences in Sekondi, not knowing anybody in the town. But as they were brooding over their fate in Igbo language, the young men suddenly bumped into an Igbo man, David Okeke, a cook to the General Manager of the Gold Coast Railways who showed them unusual hospitality. He took the adventurers to his house and gave them food, and temporary accommodation while Sidney gradually recovered from his sickness. They then began to apply for jobs to maintain themselves. Sidney worked in a hotel, while John was employed by the Methodist Mission. As for Zik, he got a more promising job as a policeman due to his qualification and athletic features. He was sent to Accra for his training and deployment.¹³

Zik, who liked his job and the prospect of rising to the rank of an Assistant Inspector of Police, was, however, astonished to see his mother in Accra. She came with an instruction from his father, who had been reposted to Calabar, to inform him that he had to return home to receive some financial assistance to travel to the United States for further studies. She then asked Zik to resign from his job and travel with her to Calabar, arguing that he was "too educated to be in the police force."¹⁴ Zik was reluctant to quit his job because he had signed a five-year contract to serve in the police force. When, after a protracted discussion, he realized that his mother was unbending in her demand, Zik went with her to see the Inspector General of Police who had the authority to cancel the contract. His mother is said to have spoken so convincingly that the officer acceded to their request.¹⁵

Zik's father was exceedingly happy to see his wife and son when they arrived in Calabar in December of 1924. He admired his son's unquenchable zeal to study overseas, and gave him 300 pounds to support his trip to the United States. Zik quickly dispatched a letter to the president of Storer College, Dr. MacDonald, to await his arrival. He first traveled from Lagos to Liverpool by sea with his passport, and then from there, he went to the United States Vice-Consul to obtain a student's visa to the United States after staying briefly at the home of Mr. Sawyer,

a retired sailor. Their ship first landed in New York where he was advised to take a train to Washington, DC, and then board another one to Harper's Ferry. Zik was welcomed by Ani Okokon and an Afro-Canadian student who introduced him to the Dean of the College, Dr. Saunders, before taking him to his room.¹⁶

Zik's first encounter with Dr. Macdonald is worth recounting since it sheds some light on his Nigerian background and British educational values. Zik, a day after his arrival, wanted to introduce himself to the president of the college. On his way to his house, he met a man whom he thought was a laborer working in a garden with a rake. He asked the man to show him the house of the president of the college. When he asked why Zik wanted to see the president, Zik arrogantly replied:

I am a student from Africa [and], I was born and bred as an English gentleman; and it was [therefore] not the business of a gardener to find out the nature of the discussions between two gentlemen.¹⁷

Smiling, the gardener sarcastically retorted, "If you are an English gentleman, why don't you look like an Englishman?"¹⁸ Zik responded saying that "not all English men were white and that English was a universal language."¹⁹ Feeling insulted by his impudence, Zik angrily retorted "gardeners are not supposed to be intelligent; so direct me to the house of the learned president."²⁰

The gardener humorously greeted Zik, "Good afternoon Mr. Azikiwe. I am very glad to know you. I am Dr. McDonald. Please go inside the house and meet Mrs. McDonald, and I will be with you [shortly]."²¹ When Dr. McDonald entered the house, Zik apologized, but the college president was not surprised since, according to him, he had had similar experiences with students from Liberia. Zik's encounter with the president is said to have impacted him throughout his student days in the United States, as he realized that education in that country "emphasizes the use of the head, heart and the hands coordinately."²²

Besides the cultural shock Zik experienced in the United States, as evidenced by his encounter with the college president, he also had to adapt and re-educate himself about how to survive as a student in his new country by doing "menial jobs" to meet his financial obligations. For example, during the second day of his arrival when he was probably suffering from fatigue, Zik had to accept the Dean's job offer as an assistant fireman to shovel coal into the furnace to help him pay one-third of his college bills. He was paid 0.25 cents per hour, and was expected to work two hours daily after his classes. Shortly after, Zik was moved to another job with the same hourly pay to serve as a janitor responsible for sweeping the sidewalks and cleaning the wash-hand basins and toilets. He also worked for 15 weeks in the college farm during the summer, and was paid \$10.00 a week to cover 75 percent of his college expenses. His tasks included plowing, weeding, harrowing and planting of seeds and harvesting of crops.²³

Zik's ability to survive the realities of college life was strengthened by his active participation in American football, athletics, cross-country race and boxing. These sporting activities helped him to adapt to challenges of his harsh

environment, and he became increasingly convinced that life was a continuous struggle for survival. But Zik's survival capacity seemed to have reached a zero level after graduating from college. Although he was gladdened by his graduation (1926–1927) after two years of study at Storer College, he faced new challenges at Pittsburgh where he moved to search for a job. He was employed by Duquesne Electric Company as a laborer to dig ditches two feet wide and three feet deep. He found this job so difficult and tiring that the foreman fired him after two weeks for his slow output. He then moved into the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) hostel but was evicted for his inability to pay his rent. Homeless, penniless, jobless and hungry, Zik was so frustrated that he decided to take his life by lying on a train track in Central Avenue after writing suicide notes to his parents and Dr. McDonald. He was miraculously saved by a Good Samaritan a few minutes before the train arrived. The Good Samaritan took him to the YMCA hostel and deposited \$5.00 to defray his rent. Zik soon found a job in the mines, and, after working for six weeks, he was paid a total sum of \$497.45. His fortunes continued to improve until he was arrested by an immigration agent for working at Gammons' Restaurant without attending school. Zik explained his plight to the agent, and he was freed and asked to return to college with the money he had saved.²⁴

Zik kept the agreement he reached with the immigration agent. He was offered admission to Howard University (HU), where he met many people who contributed in enriching his ideas of African nationalism, especially, fellow West African students who were concerned about the liberation of Africa from colonial rule. They fraternized with him and some of them became his close friends, including two Nigerians, Babjimi Adewakun and Simeon Bankole Wright, as well as Joseph Danquah from the Gold Coast. His political ideas were also enriched by teachers, such as Doctors Harris Locke and Ralph Bunche who were versed in matters regarding the decolonization of African and African American history and culture. But Zik had to leave HU after three semesters due to financial reasons, and later returned after Dr. Locke offered him a part-time job as an office assistant on a monthly pay of \$25.00. Dr. Locke also helped him to obtain some financial aid from the Phelps-Stokes Fund to pay his fees for an academic year. When he re-enrolled at HU, Zik acquired more ideas from the works of some leading writers of African nationalism who sharpened his thought and political strategies, including, George Padmore, Joseph Casely Hayford and, especially, Marcus Garvey, well known for his "Back to Africa Movement," and whose oratory "made him the most widely acclaimed black spokesman of any generation."²⁵

Unfortunately, Zik had to once more discontinue his studies at HU due to his inability to meet his financial obligations. But his relentless quest for knowledge inspired him to enroll at the summer programs of Columbia University Teachers College (1930–1932) with a Phelps-Stokes Fund grant to earn a certificate in journalism.²⁶ Zik's financial situation improved shortly after completing his program at Columbia University when he was admitted at Lincoln University with financial aid. He graduated from the university with BA degree cum laude

in political science in June 1930. At Lincoln, his friends and classmates included W. T. Fontaine and Thurgood Marshall who, respectively, became a professor of philosophy at the University of Pennsylvania and a judge of the US Supreme Court.²⁷

Due to his academic performance, Zik was appointed a graduate assistant at Lincoln University. His new position enabled him to enroll in the university's graduate program, earning an MA degree in religion and philosophy in June 1932. He also used the opportunity provided to him at Lincoln University to enroll in a graduate program at the University of Pennsylvania, where he graduated with an MS degree in Anthropology in 1933. His academic achievements were rewarded by the university, and he was elevated to the rank of a full-time instructor on a salary of \$1,000.00 annually with free lodging, board and laundry.²⁸

Recent research has attested not only to the academic heights Zik attained at Lincoln University, but also to the rare knowledge and enthusiasm he displayed in teaching African history and politics. He is reputed to have pioneered the teaching of African history in the university, using his knowledge not only to decolonize African history but also to instill confidence and pride among Black students at a time when racism prevailed in academic circles.²⁹ Lincoln University provided Zik a fertile ground to embark on research on diverse topics of interest in African and African American history and culture. He was indeed a prolific writer as evidenced by his works comprising *The Practice of Forced Labor* (1931), *Anthropology and the Problems of Race* (1933), *Syllabus for African History* (1933), and *Readings in African Historiography* (1933). But his major contribution to scholarship at Lincoln before returning to Nigeria was entitled, *Liberia in World Politics*, published in 1934. The work reveals Zik's frame of mind by then in that he proudly saw Liberia as a model of an independent African nation, and criticized those in colonial circles who derided that nation for its failure to achieve rapid economic development.³⁰

In addition to his writings, Zik found some time to read West African newspapers, such as *The Daily Times*, *The Comet*, *The Gold Coast Spectator* and *The West African*, to familiarize himself with the political and social developments in Nigeria and other parts of the continent then under colonialism.³¹ His vast knowledge of the colonial situation created a puzzle for him: should he continue his teaching job and use the opportunity to enroll in a doctoral degree program or should he return home and help in liberating his country and the entire West African region from colonial rule? Zik's resolution of this puzzle, and his decision to return to Nigeria in 1934, eventually changed the political landscape of his country forever.

Zik in Nigeria and the Gold Coast

Zik was full of optimism when he returned to Nigeria in 1934. As a young man, he had many ideas, some of them very utopian. For example, he saw himself as "a universalist" and reasoned that West Africans would do the same thing,

disregarding their diverse national and ethnic backgrounds. He also proudly saw himself as one of the most highly educated Nigerians of his era, having acquired a chain of degrees and certificates from five universities during his eight years sojourn in the United States. Perhaps, he thought his educational qualifications would guarantee him key positions in the country. Zik's optimism was probably reinforced by the rousing reception accorded to him by the Igbo State Union and Onitsha indigenes at Glover Memorial Hall, Lagos, on November 10, 1934, during which his impressive qualifications and teaching experiences were proudly recounted to the audience. Zik naturally felt on top of the world when he was described as the first Igbo graduate in modern times and his people looked up to him as a "Hero" and "Savior."³²

Zik's optimism and his efforts to carve a political niche for himself in Nigeria ended in smoke. In fact, his immediate goal was quite modest. He simply wanted to begin with a teaching job at the country's most prestigious high school, King's College, Lagos, to earn a living before addressing other issues. But the colonial ministry of education, which administered the school, rejected his application, probably fearing that he might spread "pernicious ideas" among the students. Zik also applied to work in the diplomatic service of Liberia, but was denied the opportunity because he was not a citizen of that country. He then wrote a business proposal to start a modern newspaper in the country costing 5,000 pounds and forwarded it to banks, financiers, the Governor of Nigeria and Herbert Macaulay (his childhood hero). But none of them gave him a positive reply. Frustrated, he sent his application for a job to Alfred Ocansey, a businessman and proprietor of a Gold Coast newspaper based in Accra.³³

Zik was happy to accept Ocansey's letter of appointment, which acknowledged his solid credentials and described him as "Professor Azikiwe." He was charged with establishing and administering a new daily newspaper called *The African Morning Post*. Zik arrived in Accra on October 31, 1934, and after recruiting an administrative staff comprising peoples of diverse ethnic nationalities of West Africa, he was appointed the editor of the newspaper in 1935 on a salary of 10 pounds monthly.³⁴ It is most likely that Zik was given a free hand to run the newspaper whose motto was "Independent in all things and neutral in nothing affecting Africa."³⁵ He lived up to the motto of the newspaper, using it to launch his first major campaign against the colonial system. His combative journalism, and the dualism of his ideas in dividing the African world into two conflicting polarities of the oppressor and the oppressed, helped in revolutionizing West African journalism. He, for example, saw a conflicting relationship between the colonizers and their collaborators or "the Old Africa of yesterday," on one hand, and the emerging younger generation of nationalists associated with the "New Africa," or "Renascent Africa of tomorrow," on the other hand. Zik then went on to explain what he called his "five postulates" comprising of spiritual balance, social regeneration, economic determinism, mental emancipation and national Risorgimento, which would lead to the emancipation of the continent from colonialism.³⁶

As Zik's new nationalist ideas began to spread, a section of the press called him a Messiah. Although he admitted he was an Apostle, his ambiguous response to the claim that he was a Messiah helped in perpetuating that notion:

I will publicly admit that I have never claimed to be a New Messiah, although for reasons best known to a section of the press, I have been elevated to that creditable immortal position. It is possible that I may be one of the Apostles of New Africa.³⁷

Maybe Zik privately saw himself as a Messiah, but his postulates, which were widely publicized in the *Post*, alienated the colonial administration and its collaborators, especially some eminent chiefs who served as members of the Legislative Council. They accused him of instigating a class war in the country by pitting the educated youth against their elders. Their most vocal spokesman, Chief (Sir) Ofori Atta, Knight of the British Empire, used the floor of the Legislative Council to launch an open attack on Zik in February 1936, claiming that "the youth of the country are [being] taught and educated to disrespect and show open contempt to their Chiefs and Elders and leading public men with those views."³⁸ *The Gold Coast Independent*, a pro-government newspaper, gave Chief Atta's views wide publicity and criticized the editor of the *Post*, calling his vision of the New Africa "the bastard New Africa."³⁹ After denying the allegations of Chief Atta, Zik argued that among the Chiefs and Elders, there were those who had youthful spirit, and hence supported the "New Africa," without being stooges of the colonial administration. He then went on to explain the meanings of his five postulates, which are examined in greater detail in the concluding part of this chapter.⁴⁰

Zik also used the *Post* to promote discourse and free exchange of ideas. Thus workers, traders and others could write on any issue, especially on colonial policies that adversely affected them. In keeping with its policy of non-neutrality on African affairs, the newspaper supported Gold Coast workers and trade unions in their agitations for better pay and working conditions, and criticized the colonial administration for the appalling conditions of the working class. The newspaper, due to its mass appeal, became so popular that its circulation rapidly increased from 2,000 in 1934 to 10,000 in 1936.⁴¹

The colonial administration was, however, concerned about the rapid growth of the newspaper, and the destabilizing ideas it was spreading. Their concern was heightened when the *Post* began to intensify its criticism of colonial rule, as evidenced by a parody on colonialism authored by Theophilus Wallace-Johnson of Sierra Leone, published on May 15, 1936, entitled, "Does the African Have a God?" The parody portrayed the amorality and ruthlessness of the colonial system, asserting that "the European has a God, Deceit, whose law is Ye strong, you must weaken the weak. Ye 'civilized' Europeans, you must 'civilize' the 'barbarous' Africans with your machine-guns."⁴² Zik and Wallace-Johnson were arrested and charged with sedition. Their arrest and trial became a topical issue in West African newspapers, helping to spread their fame across the region and beyond. Zik was found guilty and fined £50.00. But his lawyer, Francis Dove, appealed his

case, and the sedition charges were quashed. Jubilant, Zik's numerous supporters from diverse ethnic nationalities of West Africa carried him shoulder-high, satisfied that at last they have a Messiah who would lead them to the promised land.⁴³

While at the crest of his fame, Zik decided to return once more to Nigeria to apply his knowledge and the wealth of experience he had acquired in the Gold Coast politics and journalism in his own country. But before his departure in 1937, he assembled his leading articles in the *Post* and other works in history and politics, and published them the same year, in a monumental book entitled, *Renascent Africa*.⁴⁴ As will be discussed later, the book became a major source of reference for him when he began to use his journalistic skills to assail colonialism, and awaken Nigerians from their slumber. While in the Gold Coast, Zik recognized the crucial role the *Post* played in arousing national consciousness among colonized people. He then decided to establish an archetype of the *Post* with a wider circulation in the West African sub-region. His dreams materialized when the most outstanding nationalist newspaper in the region, *The West African Pilot*, was launched in Lagos on November 22, 1937. Attesting to the central space the *Pilot* began to occupy in Nigerian journalism, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, a leading political opponent of Zik, acknowledged that

[The newspaper] was very popular, the very thing the youth of the country has been waiting for. Newspapermen in the employ of the *West African Pilot* were better paid, and they assumed a new status in society. Civil servants, teachers and mercantile employees resigned good and pensionable posts to lend a hand in the new journalistic awakening. . . the fact of journalistic revival and revolution was widely recognized and acknowledged.⁴⁵

Zik followed up the launching of the *Pilot* with the founding of five provincial newspapers located in different strategic towns in the country: Ibadan, Onitsha, Port Harcourt and Kano. These dailies (with the *Pilot* at the apex), which constituted what was called "Zik's Group of Newspapers," helped him to emerge between 1937 and 1949 as "the most important and celebrated nationalist leader on the West Coast of Africa, if not in all tropical Africa."⁴⁶ They publicized his anticolonial propaganda, and also contributed to the spread of the Zikist myth. As in the Gold Coast, Zik used the newspapers as major organs of interest-articulation in that they promoted public discourse, and their powerful editorials discussed issues of common concern to people in all walks of life. They had correspondents who covered events in the towns and rural areas, and thereby increased their national spread, unlike the localized orientation of existing newspapers located in Lagos. In spite of Zik's surging popularity, he had to surmount complex obstacles before emerging as the foremost nationalist leader of his country. The strategy he adopted in solving the first problem stemming from the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) is enlightening.

The NYM formed in Lagos in 1936 was the leading political movement and pressure group in Nigeria before Zik returned from the Gold Coast. Its leadership was, however, dominated by the Yoruba politico-mercantile class. This made Zik

and other youthful and ambitious backbenchers uneasy about the ethnic composition of the movement, its localized geographical spread, and the conservative goals and sluggish methods it adopted in solving national problems. In addition, Zik was also dismayed with Ernest Ikoli (an Ijo), the editor of the Movement's newspaper, *The Daily Service*, who called him "a megalomaniac" during a discussion over his group of newspapers. Zik patiently waited for an opportunity to strike back and gain the support of some powerful members of the movement. The opportunity came in February 1941 during the election of the president of NYM, hotly contested by Earnest Ikoli, and Samuel Akinsanya, an Ijebu Yoruba, supported by his townsmen, Zik, and other Igbo people. Akinsanya was upset when he learned that his fellow Yoruba people who had some prejudice against the Ijebu, had ganged up against him to vote for his opponent.⁴⁷ In protest, he resigned from the movement, and his supporters including Zik, followed suit. This crisis within the NYM had far-reaching consequences in that it caused the movement to weaken, giving Zik a rare opportunity to ally with those who had been alienated by the movement, including the doyen of Lagos politics, Herbert Macaulay. Zik and his supporters established a movement that ultimately became the leading political party in the country, the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC).⁴⁸

The NCNC and Genesis of Militant Nationalism

The withdrawal of Zik and others from the NYM, and the fragmentation of the national political platform, were a major source of concern for political activists, and ex-students of King's College, Lagos. They visited Zik, and informed him that "the youth of the country were ready [for the national liberation struggle], but there was no leadership."⁴⁹ He advised them to call a conference of the representatives of all leading political parties in Lagos, including the NYM, in order to form a national council that would unite the diverse peoples of the country. Although the NYM did not honor the invitation, the conference, which took place at Glover Memorial Hall, Lagos, on August 26, 1944, was well-attended by a cross-section of Nigerian organizations including two trade unions, two political parties, four literary societies, eight professional organizations, 11 social clubs and over 101 ethnic organizations.⁵⁰ The attendees resolved to form a national movement, the Nigerian National Council (NNC), later called NCNC to accommodate Cameroonian associations. They also charged the movement to exert "mass pressure in order to accelerate the political development of the country."⁵¹ The following persons were elected officers of the NCNC: Herbert Macaulay, President; Zik, General Secretary; Oyeshile Omage, Financial Secretary; and Abu Bakr Olurun-Nimbe, Treasurer. After Macaulay died in 1946 while leading his party on a national mobilization tour, the mantle of leadership fell upon Zik, who accepted the role as the new president.⁵² He, more than any other person, helped in defining the objectives of the party and its dynamic strategies.

The objectives of the NCNC, embodied in its constitution of 1945, and Zik's visionary leadership, helped in making the party "the leading all-Nigerian

nationalist organization” from 1944 to 1957.⁵³ It is remarkable that the objectives of the party were similar to the five postulates Zik had espoused in the Gold Coast in *The African Morning Post*, and published in *Renasant Africa* during his era of militant nationalism. The NCNC promised to promote: “Political freedom, economic security, social equality and religious toleration [and] to adopt suitable means for the purpose of imparting political education to the people of Nigeria with a view to achieving self-government.”⁵⁴ The constitution of the party and its objectives, which were widely publicized by the *Pilot* and other newspapers from Zik’s Group of Newspapers, appealed to many progressive forces throughout Nigeria. In addition, the popularity of the NCNC heightened as its leadership began to address key critical political problems that confronted the country, the first one being the Richards’ Constitution.

Zik’s political militancy and fame grew in geometric progression due to his unequivocal stand on the Richards’ Constitution of 1945, named after the then Governor-General of Nigeria, Sir Arthur Richards. Although the constitution was meant to increase the participation of Nigerians in governance, it aroused much controversy all over the country for failing to achieve its primary objectives. Zik, under the auspices of the NCNC, became the most vocal critic of the constitution, using his newspapers to publish its shortcomings. As in the Gold Coast, he adopted the strategy of “we versus them polarity” in criticizing the colonial system and the chiefs who collaborated with it, and served as its puppets in the Legislative Council. Zik further accused the Governor of acting like a dictator by appointing a majority of members of the Legislative Council by himself instead of allowing Nigerians to elect them. To reinforce his populist message, he became an advocate of chiefs who opposed colonial rule, calling for the abrogation of the Deposition of Chiefs Ordinance, which the government had used to dethrone those labeled as disloyal rulers.⁵⁵ Zik also touched on other matters that were dear to the hearts of Nigerians when he called for the abolition of the hated Lands and Minerals Ordinances, which would enable the Crown and its exploitative imperialists to take over native lands and minerals. Finally, he addressed the most controversial political issue of his era regarding regionalism, and postulated that the country should be divided into eight provinces under a strong federal administration instead of three powerful autonomous regions since such a measure would be a recipe for disaster, leading to the balkanization of the country.⁵⁶

The Governor, however, ignored the opposition of the NCNC to the constitution, and rushed it to the Legislative Council for approval. The leadership of NCNC, feeling slighted and frustrated, decided in April 1945 to embark on an eight-month nationwide tour to educate Nigerians about the import of the new constitution, and obtain the mandate of indigenous rulers and others to represent them in the struggle ahead. Their message was well-received, and 153 communities authorized the NCNC to represent them, raising 14,000 British pounds to help the party achieve its goals.⁵⁷ The tour contributed to the towering heights that the NCNC and its leadership attained in Nigerian politics. When the entourage returned to Lagos, they were welcomed by “an enthusiastic crowd

of 30,000 people,⁵⁸ and the air was filled with the sound of Zeeeeeeeeeeek, as they shouted loudly on top of their voices in praise of their Redeemer.⁵⁹

After obtaining the mandate of the people, the NCNC delegation then decided to travel to London to protest against the Richards' Constitution. But their departure was delayed by another event, the workers' strike of June 1945, which was partly precipitated by the economic crisis of the World War II era. As in the Gold Coast, the strategy Zik adopted during the strike enhanced his popularity in Nigeria. Nigerian workers embarked on a general strike after the government failed to address their grievances, including racism and discriminatory employment and promotion policies favoring expatriates. They also demanded increases in their wages to offset the high cost of living, which had risen to 200 percent by June 1945.⁶⁰ The strike, which nearly paralyzed the country, was solidly supported by Zik, who accused the colonial administration of exploiting the working class. But as his newspapers publicized his views and wrote editorials to reinforce them, the colonial administration, which tacitly believed that Zik masterminded the strike, banned *The West African Pilot* and *The Comet* for their libelous publications. The banning of the newspapers, as well as the vicious attack launched against Zik by *The Daily Times*, a pro-government newspaper, won him the support of labor, which described him as a hero, and an advocate of the working class and oppressed people of Nigeria.⁶¹

At the time the various dimensions of the Zikist myth were spreading across the country, there was another major event that helped enhance his national popularity. It was associated with the allegation that there was a plot to assassinate him. The strategy he adopted in reaction to the plot, which produced another Zikist myth, is enlightening. Shortly after the workers' strike occurred, Zik received a wireless message claiming that there was a plot to assassinate him by unknown persons. He then fled and went into hiding at Onitsha, claiming that Zik of Africa was "above human destruction."⁶² His newspapers used the opportunity to arouse national sympathy for him in their editorials, while Zik himself publicized the news internationally by sending cablegrams to eminent individuals and organizations in Britain, calling for protection from the Nigerian government. A Nigerian who received the cablegram in London helped in forming an organization called, the National Committee of Africans to "[mobilize] world opinion" in support of Zik.⁶³ The Committee dispatched the cablegrams worldwide to prominent individuals like President Harry Truman, Charles De Gaulle and Joseph Stalin, as well as to major newspapers in Britain, the USSR, the United States and the West Indies.

Although the colonial administration denied the assassination plot, many Nigerians believed it, claiming that the plot was meant to eliminate their redeemer, and champion of self-government and native rights. Hence, Zik's "name, became a household word [and] parents named their children after him."⁶⁴ It is noteworthy that a youth organization called the Zikist Movement was formed in 1946, and its members mobilized themselves to protect Zik's life, and take militant measures to achieve his dreams of self-government.⁶⁵ As Zik's fame spread across the country after the assassination plot, he and other leaders

of the NCNC decided again to travel to London in 1947 to protest against the Richards' Constitution. Zik's popularity reached a new crescendo, eclipsing those of other nationalists of his era as a result of the London trip. They met with A. C. Jones, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, who after receiving their memorandum, advised them to return to Nigeria and give the new constitution a trial, promising them that it would be changed in future. Although a section of the British press, and *The Daily Times* and *Daily Service*, criticized the trip, when the NCNC delegation returned to Lagos, it was accorded a heroic reception by "[a] mammoth crowd of 100,000, shouting NCNC: Freedom or Death? We want self-government and Nigeria first, Nigeria and Nigeria all the time."⁶⁶

The NCNC provided Zik an opportunity and pedestal to fulfill his dream of one Nigeria, as well as to actualize his idea of universalism that transcended ethnic and religious boundaries. The party drew its support largely from southern Nigeria, especially the eastern part, the mid-west and parts of western and middle-belt regions. It had minimal appeal in the conservative Islamic north, which was largely unawakened by the nationalist struggle. The party leadership then faced an enormous task due to the Macpherson's Constitution, which reaffirmed the division of the country into regions. The increasing popularity of Zik alienated the NYM and the Yoruba political class, which intensified their demand for the permanent division of Nigeria into several regions, during the drafting of the Macpherson's Constitution that was to review and improve upon the Richards' Constitution. Their views were shared by the northern leadership who hoped that the new constitution would help them to stem the tide of southern domination. As for the NCNC, it continued to oppose what it regarded as the balkanization of the country into regions, and due to its national spread, it repeated its demand for the division of the country into eight provinces with a strong federal government to guarantee the liberty and rights of all Nigerians no matter where they live. The views of the NCNC were, however, unacceptable to delegates from other regions, and the Macpherson's Constitution ended up dividing the country into three regions leading to the formation of regional political parties in western and northern Nigeria.⁶⁷

Unlike the NCNC, which had a national appeal and whose headquarter was based in Lagos, the Action Group (AG) was formed in 1951 and was headquartered at Ibadan. The party was led by Chief Obafemi Awolowo (Awo), who feared Igbo domination and the towering heights of Zik and the NCNC in Nigerian politics. The AG, which grew out of a pan-Yoruba cultural organization, Egbe Omo Oduduwa (descendants of Oduduwa, the mythical ancestor of the Yoruba of western Nigeria), was supported by the Yoruba faction of the NYM. Although the AG later began to acquire a broader national base, its original motto portrayed the party's ethno-regional orientation: "Western region for the Westerners, Eastern Region for the Easterners, Northern Region for the Northerners and Nigeria for all."⁶⁸ The second regional political party, founded also in 1951 with its headquarters in Kaduna, was the Northern People's Congress (NPC). It was led by the religious head of northern Muslims, Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto, who dreaded southern domination. The NPC's regional base

was manifested by its motto: “One North, One People, irrespective of religion, rank or tribe.”⁶⁹

Zik had to return in 1952 to the east where he was elected the premier of the Eastern Region in 1954 while Awo and the Sardauna were elected the premiers of their respective regions. The division of Nigeria into regions was a major crack in Zik’s idea of universalism. He was, however, right when he predicted that regionalism and ethno-politics were not a workable alternative as evidenced by the political crises of the 1960s that culminated in the disastrous Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970). The roots of the civil war fall outside the scope of this study since they have already been examined by many researchers.⁷⁰ But a broad review of the chain of events that occurred before and after Nigerian independence, and the roles Zik and his party and others played, are educative.

As Nigeria marched toward independence in 1960, the country was already bedeviled by regional politics. This situation was beneficial to the colonial administration since it promoted its interests of divide and rule, by provoking one region against the others. In addition, regionalism, it was argued in official circles, would dwindle the power of Zik, their arch-enemy, and frustrate his efforts of leading Nigeria. It is not surprising that even though no single party won a majority of the seats in the Federal elections of 1959 (NPC 134 seats, NCNC 89, and AG 73), the colonial administration quickly appointed their stooge and nominee Sir Tafawa Balewa as the prime minister (PM) without consulting the leaders of the other political parties. Balewa, well known for his ultraconservative and pro-British orientation, often opposed the nationalist agenda, including the demand for independence. Balewa’s northern agenda, which sought to dominate Nigeria and Islamize the whole country, helped in intensifying regional conflicts during the First Republic.⁷¹ The appointment of the PM elicited varying responses from the major political parties. The AG leadership for example, contacted Zik, offering him the post of the PM if their party would ally with the NCNC. But due to the mutual distrust between them, the NCNC rejected the offer, and allied with the NPC. Zik was elected the president of the senate (January 1 to October 1, 1960) and, later was appointed to serve in the ceremonial posts of Governor-General of Nigeria (November 16, 1960 to October 1, 1963) and the first President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (October 1, 1963 to January 16).⁷²

Unable to forge an alliance with the NCNC, the AG leadership decided to constitute the official opposition party in the national parliament. That decision was, however, opposed by a faction of the party led by Samuel Akintola, Awo’s successor as premier of the Western Region, who formed a political party in 1962 called the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP). The NNDP allied with the NPC, and got some federal cabinet posts. The crisis in the AG worsened when the federal government declared a state of emergency in the Western Region following the bloody fracas that broke out in the state house of assembly. Awo was arrested, tried for treasonable felony and jailed for 10 years in June 1963. The increasing civil disorder and violent protests in the Western Region as well as Awo’s imprisonment contributed to the collapse of the First Republic.⁷³

As for the NCNC, events reached a boiling point for the party when it realized that its power base at the federal level was threatened by the NNDP–NPC alliance, which formed a new political party called Nigerian National Alliance (NNA), to contest elections to the Federal House of Representatives and the Western House of Assembly in 1964 and 1965, respectively. The NCNC then formed a similar alliance with the AG called the United Progressive Alliance (UPGA) to contest the elections. They lost both elections, which were characterized by some of the worst electoral malpractices in Nigerian history. As the violence in the west intensified, and the drift continued, the military led by Major Kaduna Nzeogwu, an Igbo, unsuccessfully executed a coup on January 15, 1966, to save the country from total collapse. Although the military coup was welcomed by a cross-section of Nigerians, yet in the murky waters of Nigerian politics, the intentions of the coup plotters were quickly misconceived, especially in the north, which saw it as a plot by the Igbo to dominate Nigerian politics. Their suspicions were heightened by the fact that the coup failed in the Eastern Region where all the marked politicians escaped, whereas in the north and west, the Sardauna, the prime minister, the Premier of the Western Region and others were killed by the coup plotters. In addition, the new military head of state, Major General Aguiyi Ironsi, the most senior officer in the army, happened to be an Igbo. Northern officers then staged a counter coup on July 29, 1966, against the Ironsi regime, installing Lt. Col. Yakubu Gowon as the new military head of state. Full of jubilation, northern mobs went into hysteria and began a periodic and systematic massacre of thousands of Igbo and other Easterners resident in their region. Feeling unsafe in Nigeria during this period of intense fear and suspicion, Easterners under the leadership of Col. Odumegwu Ojukwu, seceded from the rest of the country on May 30, 1967, leading to the birth of a new nation called Biafra.⁷⁴

Although Zik lost his position as Nigerian president following the demise of the First Republic, the roles he played in Biafra constitute one of the most contentious issues of his lifetime. The birth of Biafra was welcomed by the Igbo and other Easterners who, like the Jews, were looking for a safe homeland. Zik acted as the political adviser to Ojukwu, who became the head of state, and also composed the national anthem of the new nation. But shortly after the declaration of the formation of Biafra, the federal government declared war against what it called the secessionists, resulting in the outbreak of the Biafra–Nigeria War, which claimed the lives of over three million Igbo. Most of them died as a result of starvation caused by the merciless blockade of Biafra by the Nigerian Federal Government.⁷⁵

As the war raged, Zik switched over to the Nigerian side in a lecture he gave in London in 1969. He remained in self-exile in Britain till the end of the war, claiming that he decided to support Nigeria to save Biafran lives, and to help in reintegrating Easterners into the national polity. But the reasons he gave for abandoning the Biafran side aroused much controversy among his numerous admirers in the short-lived nation. A majority of them argued that during the war, he betrayed their cause while a few quietly believed him, although they did

not express their opinions openly to avoid reprisals. After the war, Zik's stand attracted many more people, but some still argued that their leader should have stayed with them through thick and thin. In spite of these diverse views, it is likely that Zik's motives in supporting the concept of "one Nigeria" stemmed partly from his nationalist impulse and his unquenchable belief in universalism. Although these ideas had proved unworkable in the past, they were at the core of his political philosophy. He tried to revive them during the presidential elections, which his numerous admirers hoped would once more launch their hero into the national leadership.

Whatever might have been their views about Zik, the Igbo and his admirers in different parts of the country found out after the civil war that he was the only national hero who could rally them around. Their leadership, therefore, nominated him to contest the presidential election of 1979 under the platform of the Nigerian People's Party (NPP) during the Second Republic. Zik, with his usual charisma, campaigned in various parts of the country where he was received with much ovation. But he lost the election to Alhaji Shehu Shagari of the National Party of Nigeria (NPN). Interestingly, as in the First Republic, Zik's party formed an uneasy alliance with the ruling party, the NPN. Zik tried again to run for the presidency during the 1983 federal elections, which were marred by gross irregularities. He once more lost, and decided to retire from active politics when the military overthrew the Second Republic on December 31, 1983.⁷⁶

Assessment and Conclusion

Zik's contributions are better assessed in the context of the five political paradigms, or what he called "postulates," that formed the theoretical framework of his action. Bearing the postulates in mind, one can correctly argue that he was one of the few political philosophers of his era who worked vigorously to accomplish his major political goals. His first postulate, which stemmed largely from his academic and scholarly background, was associated with what he called "Spiritual Balance." It involved, in his own words, "respect for the views of others"⁷⁷ even if you disagreed with them. In fact, he maintained that "difference in opinion should not destroy friendship."⁷⁸ He was renowned for upholding this democratic principle, which promoted diversity of thought as a journalist and statesman, and even when his party lost elections, he showed goodwill to his opponents and congratulated them for their victory.

The second postulate he called "Social Regeneration" in which he continued to elaborate on his democratic principles, spelt out in detail his philosophy of universalism. According to Zik, the Renascent African should see "a fellow African as a man, nothing more, and nothing less."⁷⁹ He went on to argue that "A regenerated social order must come: Fanti or Ga, or Mende, Yoruba or Ibo . . . Bubi or Hausa . . . all are Africans—all are human beings."⁸⁰ As has already been noted, Zik's idea of universalism transcended ethnic nationality, gender and class, and made him one of the famous nationalists of his era. It was indeed, one of his greatest contributions to African political thought in that he advocated the

common brotherhood of all Africans. This leaves little to wonder as to why he was popularly called “Zik of Africa.”⁸¹ He practiced this postulate in the Gold Coast as evidenced by the multi-ethnic nature of his staff while he was the editor of the *African Morning Post*, and also in Nigeria where those who worked in his group of newspapers were from diverse ethnic groups. The NCNC, however, offered him the greatest opportunity to lead a multi-ethnic political organization that became the most famous nationalist movement in Nigeria.

In his third postulate labeled “Economic Determinism,” Zik argued that “the Renascent African cannot create a new social order without an economic foundation.”⁸² This postulate probably stemmed from his analysis of the works of leading philosophers, such as Adam Smith and Karl Marx, and the frustrating experiences he endured when he returned to Nigeria in 1934. He worked hard to implement this postulate. Bearing in mind the colonial structure and economy that denied Nigerians access to economic resources, Zik established in 1936, the African Continental Bank, one of the first indigenous banks to extend credit facilities to Nigerians, and break the monopoly of foreign enterprises. As regards the fourth postulate dealing with “Mental Emancipation,” Zik emphasized the importance of education and the decolonization of the mind to “teach African youth to have faith in his ability: to believe that he is the equal of the people of other races of mankind—mentally and physically.”⁸³ He excelled in implementing this postulate, which was similar to the ideas of Dr. James Aggrey. Both in the Gold Coast and in Nigeria, he espoused these views in the *Post* and his group of newspapers, and his work in *Renascent Africa*. Zik also pioneered the educational revolution in the Eastern Region as evidenced by the rapid growth of both primary and secondary schools from 1954 to 1956. Within that period, the number of children attending schools increased from 566,000 to 1.3 million, the fastest growth in all of Africa, while the total number of new school buildings increased from 205 to 1,780. In addition, Zik introduced the Universal Primary Education Scheme involving 6,500 schools that offered free primary education to their enrollees.⁸⁴

Zik’s contribution to the fourth postulate reached its apogee when he founded in 1960 the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN), under the auspices of Michigan State University and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). UNN became the first autonomous university in Nigeria and the first to introduce the American educational system in a country where the British system had prevailed for many decades. The seal of the university symbolizing a lion, and its motto, “To Restore the Dignity of Man,” actualized Zik’s dreams of the new African, proud and fearless, confident and highly educated. UNN has today produced eminent men and women who have continued to play key roles in all areas of human endeavor in Nigeria and other parts of the world. All the other postulates, according to Zik, would culminate into the fifth one called, “National Risorgimento,” and the quest for self-determination. Zik fulfilled this postulate when Nigeria gained independence in 1960.

In spite of his colossal accomplishments, Zik’s postulates created some problems in the Gold Coast and Nigeria where some of his critics accused him of

promoting a “class war” that undermined the political status quo. In addition, the NYM and Yoruba political class, who had a different perception of his goals, described him as an upstart who split their movement, calling him a champion of Igbo domination. Similarly, the British dreaded Zik’s political militancy, and they ensured through the manipulation of the electoral process, that he would not be Nigeria’s first prime minister. As for the Igbo and other Easterners, some were concerned about his penchant for political compromises during the First and Second Republics, and many are still critical of his role during the Biafra–Nigeria War.

Overall, Zik’s contributions to Nigerian history are remarkable. He acquired education in diverse ethnic and cultural environments, and became not only an outstanding politician, journalist and orator, but also a rare strategist and visionary. His mastery of the historical conditions of the 1930s–1950s in his country enabled him to emerge as its foremost nationalist. Zik’s rise to preeminence and the myths it attracted, epitomize “The Triumph of Knowledge” over the colonial world of Nigeria that denied its citizens their liberty, and rights to self-determination.

Notes

1. Nnamdi Azikiwe, *Reascent Africa* (London: Frank Cass, 1937), 17.
2. See K. A. B. Jones-Quartey, *A Life of Azikiwe* (Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books Ltd., 1965), 46. Azikiwe shortened his name to Ben Azikiwe at Storer College, but, as his fellow students found it difficult to pronounce the surname, they simply called him “Zik,” which became his most popular name. As for his baptismal name, Benjamin, he dropped it in 1934 as a protest against the British government’s refusal to allow him to participate as a runner in the British Empire games because Nigeria did not have a team in the competition.
3. Femi Ojo-Ade, *Death of Myth: Critical Essays on Nigeria* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2001), 39. Ojo-Ade made an interesting comparative but contentious study of Zik and Awo. See pages 11–51.
4. Nnamdi Azikiwe, *My Odyssey: An Autobiography* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970), 7; Olajire Olanlokun, *The Legend: Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Lantern Books, 2005), 1.
5. Azikiwe, *Ibid.*, 9; Olanlokun, *Ibid.*, 5; V. C. Iketuonye, *Zik of New Africa* (London: P.R. Macmillan, 1961), 9–11.
6. Azikiwe, *Ibid.*, 10–12; Olanlokun, *Ibid.*, 7; Iketuonye, *Ibid.*, 11–13.
7. Azikiwe, *Ibid.*, 9; Olanlokun, *Ibid.*, 8; Iketuonye, *Ibid.*, 14; Jones-Quartey, *A Life of Azikiwe*, 56.
8. Azikiwe, *Ibid.*, 17; Olanlokun, *Ibid.*, 9.
9. Azikiwe, *Ibid.*, 11–12; Iketuonye, *Zik of Africa*, 18–24; Jones-Quartey, *A Life of Azikiwe*, 49.
10. Jones-Quartey, *Ibid.*, 2.
11. Azikiwe, *My Odyssey*, 73; Iketuonye, *Zik of Africa*, 33–35.
12. Azikiwe, *Ibid.*, 57; Iketuonye, *Ibid.*, 37–38; Olanlokun, *The Legend*, 27.
13. Azikiwe, *Ibid.*, 57–59; Iketuonye, *Ibid.*, 39–42; Olanlokun, *Ibid.*, 28–31.
14. Azikiwe, *Ibid.*, 60; Olanlokun, *Ibid.*, 31.

15. Azikiwe, *Ibid.*, 58–62; Iketuonye, *Zik of Africa*, 42–45.
16. Azikiwe, *Ibid.*, 83–84; Iketuonye, *Ibid.*, 49–54; Olanlokun, *The Legend*, 38.
17. Azikiwe, *Ibid.*, 85; see also Iketuonye, *Ibid.*, 55–57.
18. Azikiwe, *Ibid.*, 85; see also Olanlokun, *The Legend*, 39–40.
19. Azikiwe, *Ibid.*, 85; Iketuonye, *Zik of Africa*, 56.
20. Azikiwe, *Ibid.*, 85.
21. *Ibid.*
22. *Ibid.*
23. Iketuonye, *Zik of Africa*, 64–65; Olanlokun, *The Legend*, 41.
24. Azikiwe, *My Odyssey*, 95–97; Olanlokun, *Ibid.*, 48–57.
25. Molefi Asante, *The Afrocentric Idea* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1987), 94. Zik himself admitted that he was greatly influenced by the ideas of Marcus Garvey. See Azikiwe, *My Odyssey*, 66.
26. Azikiwe, *Ibid.*, 66.
27. For Zik's accounts of the courses he took, his fellow students, and the teachers who influenced him in the various universities he attended, see Azikiwe, *Ibid.*, 116–151; Nnamdi Azikiwe, "A Nigerian in America," in *Crosscurrents in the Black Atlantic 1770–1965*, ed., David Northrup (Boston, MA: Bedford/Martin's, 2008), 136–144.
28. Jones-Quartey, *A Life of Azikiwe*, 86.
29. See Levi Nwachuku, "Nnamdi Azikiwe and Lincoln University: An Analysis of a Symbiotic Relationship," *Lincoln Journal of Social and Political Thought* 1, no. 1 (Fall 2002): 27–36.
30. Jones-Quartey, *A Life of Azikiwe*, 92; Azikiwe, "A Nigerian in America," 114; Iketuonye, *Zik of Africa*, 91–94.
31. Olanlokun, *The Legend*, 66–67.
32. Azikiwe, *My Odyssey*, 232–249. Many receptions were held by communities and organizations in honor of Zik when he arrived in eastern Nigeria in November 1934. The organizations include the Onitsha Improvement Union, the Igbo Community in Onitsha, the Ibo Union, Port Harcourt, and the Ibo Tribe Union, Calabar. The receptions featured welcome addresses and gifts that included cash.
33. Azikiwe, *Ibid.*, 175–190.
34. Azikiwe, *Ibid.*, 255–256; Iketuonye, *Zik of Africa*, 118–121; Olanlokun, *The Legend*, 114.
35. Olanlokun, *Ibid.*, 81.
36. Azikiwe, *Renasant Africa*, 9–11; *My Odyssey*, 252–254; Jones-Quartey, *A Life of Azikiwe*, 120–121.
37. Azikiwe, *Renasant Africa*, 17.
38. Azikiwe, *Ibid.*, 21; Iketuonye, *Zik of Africa*, 119–123.
39. Azikiwe, *Renasant Africa*, 33; *My Odyssey*, 258–259.
40. Azikiwe, *Renasant Africa*, 24–34.
41. Azikiwe, *My Odyssey*, 59; Olanlokun, *The Legend*, 83.
42. Jones-Quartey, *A Life of Azikiwe*, 131; Iketuonye, *Zik of Africa*, 125–129.
43. Azikiwe, *My Odyssey*, 260–274; Jones-Quartey, *Ibid.*, 132–136.
44. In addition to his postulates, in this work Zik delved into African and world history and politics, questioning the justificatory myths of imperialism and highlighting the significant contributions Africans had made to human civilization.
45. Jones-Quartey, *A Life of Azikiwe*, 147–148. For Zik's account of the history of his group of newspapers, see Azikiwe, *My Odyssey*, 286–308.

46. J. Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1958), 220.
47. The Ijebu were the major slave traders, especially, during the Yoruba Civil Wars of the nineteenth century, hence other Yoruba people tended to dislike them.
48. Jones-Quartey, *A Life of Azikiwe*, 160–161. See also R. Sklar, *Nigerian Political Parties: Power in an Emergent African Nation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963), 41–64 (providing an account of Nigerian political history leading to the founding of the NCNC).
49. Coleman, *Nigeria*, 264; Sklar, *Ibid.*, 56–58.
50. *Ibid.*
51. Nnamdi Azikiwe, *Zik: A Selection of Speeches from Nnamdi Azikiwe* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1961), 58–59.
52. *Ibid.*
53. Coleman, *Nigeria*, 265.
54. Azikiwe, *Zik*, 181.
55. Coleman, *Nigeria*, 271–282; Azikiwe, *Ibid.*, 381; Sklar, *Nigerian Political Parties*, 58–59.
56. *Ibid.*
57. Azikiwe, *Zik*, 320; Jones-Quartey, *A Life of Azikiwe*, 186.
58. Coleman, *Nigeria*, 292.
59. See Wole Soyinka, *Ake: The Years of Childhood* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Spectrum Books, 1981) (recounting, in his childhood days, the ovation Zik received while addressing the masses).
60. Coleman, *Nigeria*, 258.
61. Coleman, *Ibid.*, 284–285.
62. When I was in high school, I heard a variety of stories about Zik's mythical powers. For example, it was believed that before he passed away, Herbert Macaulay gave Zik the key to the Lagos lagoon, permitting him to punish the British or his political opponents by flooding Lagos and its surrounding environs if they sought to undermine him. For similar accounts of Zik's supernatural powers, see Jaiyeola Ajasa, "The Spirit-Man: Nnamdi Azikiwe," *The Week* (May 27, 1996), available at <http://emeagwali.com/nigeria/nigerians/nnamdi-azikiwe.html>. There are also other accounts, such as the one by the computer wizard Philip Emeagwali, who dwelt on how Zik got his wisdom and power from an old woman who happened to be a spirit, and also how he tricked a mermaid, and acquired the power to flood Victoria Island if Lagosians upset him.
63. Coleman, *Nigeria*, 285–286; Jones-Quartey, *A Life of Azikiwe*, 167.
64. Coleman, *Ibid.*, 287.
65. Coleman, *Ibid.*, 296–302; see also Sklar, *Nigerian Political Parties*, 72–76. The movement was founded in 1946. Due to its militancy, the colonial government banned the movement in 1950.
66. Coleman, *Ibid.*, 294.
67. Azikiwe, *Zik*, 321–330.
68. Azikiwe, *Ibid.*, 325. See also Sklar, *Nigerian Political Parties*, 65–69, 101–112. For a detailed study of the ethnic dimensions of Nigerian politics and events leading to the collapse of the First Republic, see Richard Joseph, *Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 41–68.
69. Azikiwe, *Ibid.*, 327; Sklar, *Ibid.*, 87–101.

70. See K. Post and M. Vickers, *Structure and Conflict in Nigeria, 1960–1966* (New York: Heinemann, 1973); A. Kirk-Greene, *Crisis and Conflict in Nigeria: A Documentary Source Book, 1966–1969*, Vol. I (London: Oxford University Press, 1971); O. Aborisade and R. Mundi, *Politics in Nigeria* (New York: Longman, 2001), 10–21.
71. For a study of the religious dimension of the Nigerian crisis see Toyin Falola, *Violence in Nigeria: The Crisis of Religious Politics and Secular Ideologies* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 1998), 137–265.
72. Azikiwe, “A Nigerian in America,” 136–137.
73. See Ojo-Ade, *Death of Myth*, 40–43; Sklar, *Nigerian Political Parties*, 261–283.
74. For a few of the numerous works on Biafra, see Ralph Uwechue, *Reflections on the Nigerian Civil War* (New York: Africana Publishing Corporation, 1971); Betty Nickerson, *Letters from Biafra* (Toronto, ON: New Press, 1970); Herbert Ekwe-Ekwe, *Biafra Revisited* (Dakar, Senegal: African Renaissance, 2007).
75. Most of those who died (mainly children and the elderly), perished from hunger stemming from the federal blockade of Biafra. See Dan Jacobs, *The Brutality of Nations* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1987), documenting high death tolls due to the federal blockade of the new country.
76. Joseph, *Democracy*, 94–108; Toyin Falola and Julius Ihonvbere, *The Rise and Fall of the Second Republic* (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1985), 206–265.
77. Azikiwe, *Renascent Africa*, 8.
78. *Ibid.*
79. Azikiwe, *Ibid.*, 8–9.
80. Ojo-Ade, *Death of Myth*, 39; Iketuonye, *Zik of Africa*, 23–29.
81. Azikiwe, *Renascent Africa*, 9.
82. *Ibid.*
83. Azikiwe, *Zik*, 36.
84. Azikiwe, *Ibid.*, 280–300.

CHAPTER 3

Mbonu Ojike: An African Nationalist and Pan-Africanist

Gloria Chuku

Introduction

This chapter examines Mbonu Ojike's roles as an author, an African cultural crusader, an outspoken and fearless Nigerian nationalist, a pan-Africanist, a student organizer and leader, a newspaper columnist, a politician, as well as an activist for social justice and racial equality.¹ Ojike's uncompromising rejection of alien culture, particularly European civilization and colonial domination, and his anti-European imperialist movement earned him the title of "The King of Boycottables." Yet Ojike was a beneficiary of European civilization and even campaigned for the retention of some aspects of that civilization in Africa. This type of contradictions, as well as controversies and "scandals" surrounding Ojike's scholarship, political career and activism are also examined. For instance, how can we reconcile Ojike's pride in the instruments of colonial economic exploitation—banks, postal system, telegraphs, roads, cars, railroads, schools, factories—with his uncompromising rejection of European civilization and colonialism? How did one who was once a devoted Christian and product of mission education become an avid critic of and crusader against Christianity?

Mbonu Ojike was born into the polygynous family of Ojike and Mgbekwe Emeanulu around 1912 in Ndiakeme village of Arondizuogu in eastern Nigeria at a period when Igbo culture and society came under intense European imperial assault.² Ojike's childhood saw conditions of great devastation, insecurity, uncertainty and anxiety occasioned by the confluence of events, that included British subjugation of the Igbo, the outbreak of WWI and the influenza epidemic of 1918–1919.³ These occurrences helped to shape his life. As one of the 19 sons of his parent, Mbonu demonstrated early in his life an independent mind and force of character. Although his father objected to his children attending any mission

school, due to his suspicion of the Christian missionaries, Mbonu thought differently and started his educational career in 1918 at a Church Missionary Society (CMS) school in his home town.⁴ As a prosperous trader, Ojike Emeanulu preferred his sons to toe his line through apprenticeship, but Mbonu defied him and went to school. He worked hard to put himself through primary school with minimum assistance from his family.

After graduating in 1925, Mbonu Ojike served as an elementary school teacher at the Anglican Central Schools in Arondizuogu and Abagana towns.⁵ He also trained at the CMS Teachers' Training College, Awka, between 1929 and 1931. He obtained the Cambridge School Certificate and a University of London diploma through private studies. Ojike taught at the Dennis Memorial Grammar School, Onitsha, as a high school teacher from 1933 to 1938. As a teacher, Ojike was very critical of the missionaries and the brand of education they practiced in Nigeria, which to him was uncritical, irrational and suppressive of African culture. He saw it as socially alienating and irrelevant to Nigeria's needs and conditions. He also spoke out against the poor working conditions of Nigerian teachers. In 1936, he led his colleagues to a strike action for better conditions of service. He accused European missionaries of hypocrisy, complicity and ethnocentrism, imposing European culture on Africans. As a result, after being baptized in 1922 with the name "Robinson" and serving as an organist, choir master and Sunday school superintendent, Ojike decided to drop the name for "Mbonu" (given to him by his father, which means "Actions speak louder than words") in the 1930s when according to him, "national consciousness revealed to [him] how utterly ridiculous it all was."⁶ After resigning from his teaching job, Ojike served as a local agent of the newly established national daily, the *West African Pilot* (WAP), which later played a key role in anticolonial struggle in Nigeria.

He left Nigeria on December 31, 1938, for higher education in the United States. Ojike's quest for knowledge and his intellectual curiosity were partly inspired by the legendary James Kwegyr Aggrey of the Gold Coast colony (later Ghana) after he read a book titled *Aggrey of Africa*, which he won in 1931 for his academic distinction.⁷ With contacts from Nnamdi Azikiwe, discussed in Chapter 2 as a foremost Nigerian nationalist leader who had studied there, Ojike had stints at Lincoln University of Pennsylvania, as well as at the College of Commerce and Business Administration at the University of Illinois, Urbana, and the Ohio State University, Columbus, where he graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in Economics in June 1942. He also obtained a Master's degree in Education and Administration from the University of Chicago. He took some private correspondence courses in law as well as in writing techniques from the Newspaper Institute of America. Ojike accomplished these educational achievements under a most difficult condition. His sojourn in the United States coincided with the period of WWII. He had to brave the ordeals of the war-time labor market, engaging in all kinds of odd jobs—janitor, dishwasher, handyman, salesman, children's Sunday school instructor, public speaker—in order to survive.

Ojike commended the American educational system because of its broad-based curriculum, which emphasized freedom of thought and speech. As he stated, this was an education that “taught me to know myself and my culture and to have a desire to apply my training to the contemporary problems of my country and the world.”⁸ After completing his Master’s thesis on “Higher Education in American Social Order, with Special Application to Nigeria,” in 1943, Ojike planned without success to establish an American model university in Nigeria. He illustrated how a university in Nigeria could have a cost–benefit effect to Nigerians who spent a lot to send their children overseas for higher studies.⁹ He had envisaged an American university model that would train all calibers of Nigerians in different fields of human endeavor. In an exchange he had with Dr. Thomas Jesse Jones, director of the Phelps-Stokes Fund, who wanted him to study agriculture, which he thought was what Nigeria needed at the time in place of economics and government, Ojike insisted that Nigeria needed “all kinds of trained citizens: educators, economists, traders, businessmen, politicians, lawyers, doctors, social scientists, authors, spokesmen, artists, and preachers.”¹⁰ At this juncture, it is important to examine Ojike’s scholarship and activism in the United States.

An African Cultural Nationalist

In his seven years sojourn in the United States, Ojike used his scholarship and activism to demonstrate that he was a fearless African cultural nationalist, a pan-Africanist and a student organizer and leader. These roles embodied his philosophical ideals and intellectual prowess. In spite of the difficulties, uncertainties and anxieties of the time, Ojike was able to complete his studies and write two books, a pamphlet and a number of articles aimed at educating the American readership about African people, their culture and history.¹¹ These works were written within the framework of African intellectual traditions, and specifically, in the context of African cultural and radical nationalism, which attacked the myth of African inferiority, and with the same vigor, also denounced the myth of White superiority. Ojike was among those Africans who advocated the total eradication of colonialism and replacement of racism with racial collaboration, compromise and acculturation. His writings were among the pioneering contributions to the Nigerian nationalist literature.¹² As a fellow American-educated colleague of his put it in 1946, “The first skirmishes in the struggle for political freedom of the 21 million people of Nigeria are being fought today in the colleges of the US.”¹³ Ojike was among those Nigerian nationalists.

An African cultural crusader and Black irredentist, Ojike used his pen to correct Western misconceptions and stereotypes about Africa. He condemned certain Western scholars who depicted African peoples as “primitive,” “Bushmen,” and museum materials. He called for a careful rejuvenation of African culture in a manner that does not destroy its foundation. Thus, he asked Africans to be themselves while borrowing from others what they needed. He preferred

cultural plasticity “that enables the African to remain African socially and politically [and] not be a mere imitator who makes a fool of himself and his culture.”¹⁴ Ojike emphasized the need to uphold African identity through modes that would enable Africans to rediscover themselves.

He argued eloquently: “It is idle to think of any aspect of African society as a ‘passing culture.’ This community is too stable to be unproductive, too dynamic to be static, too dignified to be unimpressive, too African to be Western.”¹⁵ Occasionally, he wrote magazine rejoinders to this effect. For instance, he swiftly countered an imperialistic propaganda article published by Julian Huxley in which he asserted that Nigeria and other colonies were not mature for political freedom. In his rejoinder, which was published as a letter, Ojike pointed out how colonialism contradicted the fundamental principles of democracy and freedom, indicating that “a country ruled by aliens is by no means a democracy [just as a] nation that imposes its rule upon another is a dictator nation.”¹⁶ He reminded colonial apologists that the British were not in Nigeria to develop it or assist the people because “No nation has ever built up another.” Instead, they were in Nigeria, he argued, to extract raw materials and cheap labor, as well as to open up markets for their home-manufactured commodities and establish administrative apparatuses to maximize their goals. For these reasons, he called for a realistic decolonization process that would guarantee independence for Nigeria within four to five years after the end of WWII.

He also responded to another sensational article on Nigeria by an American reporter, Helen Gilles, in which she made a caricature of Nigerian cultural practices. The author suggested that the only beautiful girls in Nigeria were those of Portuguese parentage.¹⁷ Ojike’s other corrective articles appeared in *Harper’s Magazine* where he criticized stereotypical representations of different parts of Africa in Western and American publications, a pattern of misrepresentations he argued did unintentional disservice to Africa and America. In one of his articles, he criticized an American anthropologist who, upon his visit to Nigeria presented an image of a static and backward society and “ignored everything in Nigeria which was modern . . . banks, postal system, telegraphs, roads, cars, railroads, schools, cities and factories.”¹⁸ He lamented that such publications confirm the erroneous impression of Americans about “Africa as a museum piece, or a sort of zoo where one may observe the lower forms of animal life, from wild beasts to wild men.”¹⁹ He pointed out that Africans were European and American contemporaries, who feared bombs and machine guns, had internal conflicts and race problems, but who thrived to live and work in a peaceful and civilized world. Ojike’s pride in the above-mentioned European tools of colonial exploitation demonstrates the contradictions in his philosophical ideals.

In *My Africa*, Ojike showed to those who denied Africans any agency in the development of world civilization that the people had meaningful names, marriage customs that worked and religious practices that recognized the existence of one Supreme Being whom the Igbo called Chineke. Thus, the people were not heathens. He explained how the ancient and indigenous political systems of Africa were effective until they were subverted by European colonialists. Ojike

informed his American audience that African economic system was rooted in land, which was held in custody by families and where the nature of land tenure did not alienate anybody from its use. But, Europeans alienated Africans from their land and forced them into waged labor, especially in such settler colonies as Kenya, South Africa, Rhodesia, Algeria and others.²⁰ He, however, did not suggest how to deal with problems associated with colonial land alienation and increased commercialization, problems that unfortunately have continued since independence in different parts of Africa.

Mbonu Ojike also gave several public lectures at American schools, churches, clubs and other organizations, including radio appearances and press interviews, about the culture and history of Nigerian and other African people. In one of such interviews, Ojike lamented that the American people did “not have sufficient information about Africa or enough interest in it, but that it [was] destined to play an important part in the post-war world.” He informed his interviewer that his lectures and books were “attempts to interpret African culture to the American people and to cement understanding between these two countries [Nigeria and the United States].”²¹ His goal was to share his knowledge of Africa with the American audiences to improve their impression about the continent and its people, as well as learn about Americans and their culture. He was eager to tell stories about himself and his people to his American audience even when such stories were sometimes embarrassing. Rather than romanticize about Africa’s history and culture, he insisted on telling the truth about the beauty and ugliness of his people’s heritage even when he hated to share such ugly stories. Ojike was undoubtedly so proud of African and Nigerian culture that he not only spoke about them, but also demonstrated his pride for his heritage in his mode of dressing and food cuisine.

He always adorned himself with African fabrics and Nigerian attires when the weather permitted. He was also brave in celebrating his cultural heritage even before sections of American public that saw such displays as offensive. For instance, in order to debunk the European and American notion that Africans were barbaric, savage and cannibalistic simply because they hardly clothe themselves, Ojike in the summer of 1946 took some snapshots of some American ladies in their bikinis at the Chautauqua Beach, New York (with their permission). He wondered:

if Americans were to undergo summer heat for only ten continuous years, they would come to appreciate why some of us tropical Africans sometimes go stark naked . . . I wonder if Americans would continue to call us barbaric, savage, and cannibal because we do not see wisdom in wearing abundant clothes when our bodies should be exposed freely to the natural vitamin from the actinic rays of the sun.²²

Some Chautauqua conservatives criticized him in New York for being the first person to wear shorts to give a lecture at the town’s hall in the 80 years of its existence.

In spite of criticisms from certain quarters, Ojike's message was well received by many who heard it. Some were impressed and grateful to him for educating them about Africa and Africans. For instance, while some called him "an unofficial ambassador from Nigeria," others admitted that "Africa means more to us after your lectures;" "You have whetted my appetite for a greater understanding of your people."²³ There are also glowing commentaries from the American intellectual community. While to Robert Buzzard, president of Eastern Illinois State Teachers College, Charleston, IL "Mr. Ojike was a missionary to our group . . . To rate him as 'excellent' is not being fair. There should be some sort of a superior class made particularly for him;" Mrs. W. N. Mitchell of Hyde Park Travel Club, Chicago, wrote that "Mbonu Ojike gave us an entertaining and enlightening lecture that left us with a warm feeling of brotherhood."²⁴ Yet to many others, he was not only a "very unusual personality . . . quite outstanding," but he also "held his hearers spellbound with his discussion of his native land, its politics, customs, religious and economic behaviorisms."²⁵ Ojike was a committed and bold African cultural crusader, who also engaged in political activism in the United States.

Political and Social Activism

As a fearless political and social activist, Mbonu Ojike and his African colleagues studying in the United States: Nigerian Kingsley Ozuomba Mbadiwe and Nwafor Orizu, and Sierra Leonean John Karefa Smart, founded the African Students Association of the United States and Canada (ASA) in September 1941. He was elected its first president.²⁶ Among the objectives of the ASA were to address some of the needs and problems of African students in the United States; serve as a forum for African students to gather together and exchange ideas about various issues concerning them and their studies, mobilize funds for scholarships for those in Africa, create global awareness of African predicaments under colonial domination, and serve as a facilitator in promoting better understanding between Africa and the United States. ASA pursued its goals of "interpret[ing] Africa to America [and facilitating] complete economic and political freedom" for the continent.²⁷ In pursuit of these objectives and to disseminate information about Africa and her people, the problems they faced as colonized people and major African initiatives toward economic and political freedom, ASA started an academic journal, the *African Interpreter*.²⁸ In its seven principles of charter adopted at its second annual conference in September 1942, ASA "unanimously opposed . . . any policy that would treat colonial territories as international pawns after [WWII]." It condemned all nations that treated

Africa as a source of labor and raw materials, or merely as a market, [but demanded] that those who claim to be fighting for democracy implement their expressed ideals by considering Africa as a sovereign land in all of its glorious heritage and history, and in its potentiality as a full and equal member of the Family of Nations-to-be.²⁹

ASA declared that true democracy could not be achieved unless all the nations of the world were liberated from servitude and colonial domination.

In April 1945, under Ojike's presidency, ASA sent copies of "Memorandum of Recommendation on Independence of British West African Colonies" to the United States Secretary of State, the British Secretary of State for Colonies and the United Nations Conference, recommending a 10-year timeline for the independence of Nigeria and the Gold Coast and other colonized people of Africa. Included in the "Memorandum" was the creation of constitutional committees that would include leaders of existing political parties in Africa. Since its inception, ASA had played a crucial role in accelerating the growth of nationalism in Africa, especially Nigeria and the Gold Coast.³⁰ Mbonu Ojike, unquestionably, was a moving force behind ASA's political activism, especially in presenting Africa's cause before the United Nations Conference in San Francisco, California.

In December 1944, Ojike spoke to the National Peace Conference in New York about what Africa wanted from the peace treaties, which as he stated, were "freedom for her colonies; [and] consolidation of her countries."³¹ Speaking specifically about Nigeria, Ojike pointed out the irony of Britain's involvement in WWII against Germany, which was seen as the aggressor nation invading and occupying territories in Europe. Yet Britain had occupied territories throughout the globe and even mobilized her colonies to assist her in the war. He indicated that Nigeria, as the third in importance and population in the British Commonwealth, had donated more than \$50,000 to the Soviet Union and \$1,500,000 to Britain for the war and had about 1,000,000 volunteer troops fighting for her. He declared: "We want independence . . . We rely on the Soviet Union, China and the United States to help us . . . As long as the Nigerian government is under any other domination than Nigerian, I'll have no part of it. We are capable of ruling ourselves and want to do so."³² Ojike presented the case for Nigeria's independence to as many listening ears as possible, each time, reminding his audience how harmonious and contented his people were until they were destabilized and disoriented by the British imperialists. He also made a similar case for the entire continent of Africa.

As stated above, some of Ojike's published articles argued forcefully for Africa's independence. In one of such articles, Ojike demanded that "realistic steps should be taken to enable Negroes to take over their own government four or five years after the war."³³ In another article, he criticized European imperialists and their demagogues for the retardation of Africa's progress. He declared: "Only Africans can adequately plan how best Africans can industrialize and develop modern Africa [and not European colonizers who] speak of democracy but act imperialistically, [who] say 'we fight for freedom,' but they give Africa political servitude and ignoble tutelage."³⁴ After reading this article, Elder Beck of Pittsburgh, the president of the American Sons and Daughters of African Descent, offered to facilitate Ojike's trip to San Francisco, to participate in the April–May 1945 United Nations Conference on International Organization (UNCIO). Ojike went to this conference (both as president of ASA and as vice-president of African

Academy of Arts and Research) with five mapped out strategies: seek after African American delegates and others for a news conference on Black problems and their unity; conduct interviews with as many dignitaries as possible at the conference about their views on the proposed independence of Nigeria and other colonies in Africa; attend committee discussions such as the Committee on Colonies; use the world press to publicize colonial discontent throughout the world; and share with the Nigerian people what he saw at the conference that they helped to support.

At San Francisco, Ojike managed to attend the Committee on Colonies' session where he challenged one of the clauses of the proposed charter of the UN that stipulated that nothing in the charter could be construed to authorize the UN to interfere in a matter that was primarily domestic. He argued that such a clause weakened the charter and the ability of the colonized to bring their case to the UN. As he rightly pointed out, the problems of colonial subjects could hardly be solved if they were to make their colonizers the judge.³⁵ In the memorandum he submitted to the Committee on Trusteeships, Ojike argued that neither colonialism nor imperialism, neither partnership nor trusteeship, neither self-determination nor dominion was acceptable to Africans because all of this amounted to dependency, alien rule and exploitation. He declared that Africans were "no political idiots," but rather were politically savvy and wanted immediate self-government, democracy and people's government that were comparable to those of the Americans, the British, the Russians and other independent nations of the world.³⁶ He warned that the quest for freedom by colonized people of the world was intricately linked with world peace, and therefore to ignore it and base the proposed charter for the international body on inequality and injustice would threaten world security for which the UNCIO was convened.

Ojike gave out copies of the ASA "Memorandum" to as many delegates as he could, and was able to secure the endorsement of the Filipino, Bolivian, Brazilian, Syrian and Saudi delegates. In exchange for the "Memorandum," the Soviet official gave Ojike a copy of Molotov's speech where he proposed independence for all peoples.³⁷ He also held joint news conference of the African American, African (Ethiopian and Liberian) and Haitian delegates at the headquarters of the Liberian contingent.³⁸ In a separate news conference he held, Ojike addressed Nigeria's struggle for independence. He criticized the Richards' Constitution, which was imposed on Nigerians on March 6, 1945, by the British government. Even though Nigeria was not permitted by Britain to send any delegation, Mbonu Ojike spoke for the colony and her people. He argued that the problems of colonial freedom were international and should be addressed by an international body rather than treated as a domestic affair of a colonial power. He also pointed out that the International Labor Organization had no right to speak on behalf of the colonized. Similarly, he denounced South Africa's racial policies against blacks and called on the UN to stop the attempt of its prime minister, General Jan C. Smuts, to annex South West Africa.³⁹

Ojike was so visible and vocal during the conference that an African American newspaper described him as "one of the most interesting men [who] has written extensively on African affairs and is at the conference pressing for the freedom

of Nigeria and other colonies.”⁴⁰ The *Chicago Defender* also acknowledged the important role Ojike played at the conference in raising within the international community, the awareness about the predicaments of the colonized people of Africa and the imperative of their independence. It was reported that “Nigeria would not have been represented or heard . . . had not the convincing Mbonu Ojike (held) a special press conference and (spoken) in public address for the masses of the second largest colony in the British Empire.”⁴¹ Another newspaper reported that as a representative of the African Academy of Arts and Research, and the African Students Association at the San Francisco conference, Mbonu Ojike

called for [the] establishment of timetables by Africans and their ‘European overlords’ for the granting of freedom ‘comparable to the arrangement between the United States of America and the Philippines.’ He warned that ‘there can be no peace until there is freedom for colonial people’ . . . He also stated that ‘the policies of the government of the Union [of] South Africa in regard to her African population, are denounced by all Africans and should prevent the UNCIO from granting the Union of South Africa her request to annex South West Africa’ [calling it] a sore spot in Africa because of its policies against the African people, and [warning that the] annexation of mandated territories to the Union ‘would spread the germ of race discrimination.’⁴²

Ojike was against any international trusteeship that would impose White racist rules on Africans. In spite of his achievements at the conference, Ojike felt that he was not as successful as he had planned, especially when, according to him, only a few local newspapers reported what he said. But he was glad that he gave a voice to Nigeria’s situation at the conference and promptly reported to the Nigerian people what he saw at the conference through front-page headlines of the *WAP*. On an optimistic note, the newspaper declared “A Nigerian was there.”⁴³

In his encounter with Archibald Clark Kerr, the British Ambassador to the USSR and later to the United States regarding his opposition to a proposal for a timetable for Nigerian independence, Ojike demonstrated his fearlessness and commitment to the cause of his people’s freedom. He accused Mr. Kerr of “insulting our political acumen” when the latter, in a condescending manner typical of British officialdom, asserted that if Britain granted Nigeria independence prematurely, “the few educated Nigerians would exploit these common people.” Ojike promptly asked him, “How can you insinuate that people who ruled themselves for centuries before Europe learned the art of government are now adjudged political babies?” “We know our problems and are better able than you to solve them.”⁴⁴ Kerr’s concerns had been echoed earlier by a prominent African American, Dr. Ralph Bunche of the US State Department, who in a heated argument with Ojike, insisted that “granting colonies political independence was worse than foreign rule [and that] a political freedom for a country like Nigeria would mean turning Nigerian common men over to a few Nigerian aristocrats.”⁴⁵ But, Ojike was not deterred by these negative remarks about Nigerians’ supposed

unpreparedness for self-government. He strongly believed that Nigerians and other Africans needed freedom and independence immediately. In addition to Africans' effort to free themselves from the stranglehold of colonialism, Ojike was of the view that America and Russia had the power to help humanity exterminate colonialism all over the world. At the end of the San Francisco conference, Ojike and his colleagues were critical of American and British officials for their unyielding stand over Africans' demand for independence. But they praised China and Russia for their support and for championing the cause of weak and colonized nations.

In the early 1940s, Mbonu Ojike, Nwafor Orizu and K. O. Mbadiwe founded two pan-African cultural organizations in the United States: the American Council on African Education (ACAE) and the African Academy of Arts and Research (AAAR).⁴⁶ Although the ACAE was the brainchild of Nwafor Orizu, who also dominated its activities, especially in Nigeria and other parts of Africa, Ojike, Mbadiwe, and prominent African Americans and Americans such as Mary McLeod Bethune (then president of the National Council of Negro Women), Melville J. Herskovits (a renowned American anthropologist), Alain Locke, Frank T. Wilson, George Schulyer and Michael Kaplan also played prominent roles in the Council. The Council was primarily concerned with providing scholarships to promising and qualified African students, securing admissions and facilitating the entrance of these students into American universities and colleges, and promoting African cultural heritage and facilitating mutual understanding and relationship between Africans and Americans. The Council and the AAAR purchased a building property in New York, the African Education Center (Africa House), which served as a transit center for ACAE grantees from Africa, and as a library. The ACAE was able to secure scholarships from reputable colleges and universities in the United States, including Columbia, Harvard, Pennsylvania, Yale, Ohio State, Detroit and Boston universities.⁴⁷ It was an important instrument of African cultural nationalism and pan-Africanism in the United States.

The AAAR, which was founded in New York in November 1943, had Mbadiwe as its president and Ojike as the General-Secretary.⁴⁸ The goals of the AAAR included publicizing African culture—music, dancing, drama, painting and sculpture; stimulating Africans in the United States to appreciate their heritage; African youth development; building institutional bases for the preservation of African cultural heritage; disseminating information relating to Africa's political, economic and commercial conditions; encouraging educational and cultural exchanges between people from Africa and the United States; establishing African cultural centers in the continent and the United States; and collaborating with organizations and institutions that shared similar interests in support of the African cause.⁴⁹ In general, the Academy focused primarily on showcasing Africa's contribution to the diverse American culture and educating the American public about African realities; as well as increasing the number of African students in the United States through scholarship awards. The Academy issued regular press releases, published in notable African American and liberal newspapers and journals, on issues concerning African culture, its people, colonial conditions in the

continent, and the pressing need for its total liberation from all forms of imperial domination. For instance, at the end of the San Francisco UN Conference, the *New York Amsterdam News* advertised a mass meeting being organized by the African Academy of Arts and Research on June 10, 1945, in New York city where Mbonu Ojike was going to present an account of his observation, experience and contacts he made at the meeting “with leaders of other nations and their response to freedom of the people of West Africa.”⁵⁰ The officers of the academy also sent important American stories to be published in the *West African Pilot* in Nigeria. Ojike, Mbadiwe and their colleagues also started the well-acclaimed African Dance and Music Festivals to celebrate and arouse the consciousness of the rich African cultural heritage. They performed at Carnegie Hall in 1943, 1945 and 1946.⁵¹

The AAAR also published two monthly journals in 1945: *Africa: Today and Tomorrow* with 18 essays on African culture, history and politics, and *The African Eagle*. The two journals were edited by H. A. B. Jones-Quartey (of the then Gold Coast Colony). In addition to publishing a newsletter called *The African News*, the Academy also organized series of lectures at the American Museum of Natural History, Washington, DC, on African culture and history as well as issues affecting Africans and their continent. These lectures were published as a collection titled “So This Is Africa” between November 1945 and April 1946.⁵² Participants to the lectures were treated to the African art works. The Academy also held a conference on the theme, “Africa Looks Ahead,” with panels on African resources, education and culture, and colonialism and world peace. These publications, lectures and the other activities of the AAAR were geared toward correcting misconceptions about Africa and Africans, and raising the consciousness of the American public, especially African Americans, to appreciate African cultural heritage and support nationalist movements in the continent. In an address at the AAAR Cultural Festival at the Carnegie Hall on December 13, 1943, the renowned Mary McLeod Bethune acknowledged that AAAR’s programs not only awakened interests on Africa, but also caused “the thirteen million black people of America to have a greater appreciation of their background and their possibilities.”⁵³

A Pan-Africanist and Champion of Racial Equality

Ojike did not only bring home to Black Americans the honor and dignity of their roots through his publications, public lectures and appearances, but also channeled these activities toward loosening racial tensions in American communities. He found especially the southern segregation laws senseless and ridiculous. In October 1945, he embarked on a tour of southern states of the United States to study the region and awaken pride in Black people, and unite them with progressive southern Whites to fight against racism. He declared that the southern race problem was a world problem and thus should be treated as such. He spoke about the need for all people of racial, ethnic, national and religious backgrounds to get together, work together, and talk to one another to understand and appreciate the

sameness or convergences of human races. He denounced what he called a “racial suicide” committed by White southerners against their biological children. This is a situation where White parents of biracial children denied the parenthood of such children and allowed them to suffer due to racism. He therefore called for an end to racial hypocrisy by White southerners.

Even though Ojike forcefully criticized the stark racial prejudices against Black people in the United States, he did not spare Black Americans for what he saw as their tolerance of such unnecessary and inhuman behaviors and customs. In his bus ride from Memphis to Jackson in Tennessee, for example, he met a young Black mother with her six-month-old baby who had to stand for a long time to make space for White passengers. He was frustrated that she had to submit to the evil custom of Jim Crow that dishonored her womanhood and debased American motherhood. In another encounter, Ojike was impressed by the great enterprising skill of southern Black women such as the owner of a beauty salon he visited in Donaldsonville, Louisiana; however, he regretted that she adorned her salon with pictures of White women without any Black images. For this reason, Ojike concluded that the woman was suffering from an erroneous psychological imitation of Whites. Here, he seemed not to be fully appreciative of the effects of several centuries of oppression, exploitation and discrimination, a long history of cultural conditioning, which consequently resulted in what appeared to be Black Americans’ docility to racial segregation against them. But the truth is that Black Americans were as diverse as whatever behavior patterns they deemed essential for their survival in the deeply racist American society that Ojike witnessed.

Yet, Ojike acknowledged the universality of the oppression and exploitation that Black people all over the world confronted. He stated:

I was convinced that in only a few countries today is there real freedom for the black man. In my country it is imperialism which has just about driven from us self-confidence and pride in ways and things African. South Africa is another Mississippi. In Egypt and Ethiopia it is the same white man’s burden—what Britain wants, what Italy wants, what everyone else wants; never what the African *needs*. In Liberia, Haiti, the West Indies, Panama, Cuba—yes, wherever the black calls his native land, he is faced with inhuman treatment.⁵⁴

He saw the realities of Black Americans when he visited some cities, such as Detroit, Cleveland and Cincinnati, a distressing picture of another side of America. He was shocked by the extremely poor, miserable, deplorable conditions African Americans lived in, an inexcusable condition in one of the supposedly richest and largest industrial centers of the world. For America to allow this group of people to languish in this poverty-ridden condition raises serious questions about the country’s emphasis on democracy, freedom and human dignity for, according to Ojike, “peoples of the world are measured by the status of their masses. Where on earth could I rejoice that our masses are not living as the most deplorable, [and] the most shocking humans?”⁵⁵ No wonder, as he reasoned, that these “hopeless, poverty-stricken, and socially Jim-Crowded people responded

most readily to Garvey's leadership. They believed in him because he seemed to offer the real solution to their frustrated conditions of life."⁵⁶ He therefore called for the removal of economic and political barriers that rendered blacks incapable of empowering themselves and shouldering their own burden.

Ojike also criticized the lack of cooperation among African Americans and the resentments between them and Africans from the continent. He gave some examples of the disunity between these two groups. He made reference to the situation where African Americans who attended the UN conference in San Francisco decided not to work together with other Black delegates and participants from the continent and its diaspora. One incident was when a Haitian delegate made a motion to abolish racism before the Committee on Racial Equality. None of the African American delegates could openly support the motion and it could have died were it not for a Filipino who gave his support. Ojike also cited some Afro-American newspapers that accused Africans of snubbing African Americans. He cautioned:

It is highly desirable that blacks in whatever country and culture seek more opportunities to understand and cooperate with one another . . . The black man cannot get anywhere by blasting his fellow blacks. He can get somewhere by throwing his support behind his fellow black man and behind the whites who fight to destroy racial and colonial exploitation.⁵⁷

He encouraged people of African descent to work together, especially in areas of common interests. He used his public lectures and conversations to promote and talk about the need for their unity. He cited the appointment of African Americans in Ethiopian government by Emperor Haile Selassie as a good example of building up the unity between people of African descent. Even though he resisted the temptation of marrying either a White or a Black American woman, Ojike advocated for intermarriages between Africans and African Americans as a means of fostering unity and trust among them.⁵⁸ To him, the African Americans' slogan should be "Back up Africa" rather than "Back to Africa."⁵⁹

Ojike used his lecture tours in the United States to preach and promote world peace and brotherhood. As he persuasively argued, mutual understanding and mutual respect was the only road to world peace. The premise for fostering world peace is through education because he believed that "if peoples of every country and class, each in its color or creed, can replace hate and greed with love and brotherhood, they must first be given the opportunity to know one another."⁶⁰ Based on this philosophy, Ojike stated that he had two countries: Nigeria and the rest of the world. He was ready to sacrifice for the freedom of movement, of expression, of opinion, of access to resources, of contacts, of human equality in Africa and throughout the world. He called on others to do so as well. Ojike believed that there is only one religion—the service of one God and of one brotherhood where "there is a human chain linking the giver and the receiver, the have and the have-not [through] understanding [and] mutual knowledge of our neighbors' conditions, whether they be good or bad."⁶¹ As a

guest of White Americans, Ojike insisted on receiving similar courtesy they were accorded in Africa.

Ojike's claim that he had two countries also represented Nigeria and the United States. In his seven years experience in the United States, he met many people from different backgrounds and made lots of friends who helped in shaping his adult life. Despite some daunting problems and deplorable racial injustices, the United States provided him with opportunities to elevate his status as a citizen of the world. As such, he remained grateful to Americans and their country. He also had two countries because as a tool formed in Africa and retouched and completed in the United States, he could not renounce one in favor of the other. In his review of *My Africa*, C. E. Carrington writes: "It is a rare pleasure to read a book by an African who is neither embittered nor deracinated by his contacts with the Western World."⁶² That was Mbonu Ojike.

The Return of a Nigerian Nationalist and the King of Boycottables

This section examines the roles of Mbonu Ojike as a great Nigerian patriot, an indomitable nationalist, a journalist and newspaper columnist, a cultural crusader, a career politician and an uncanny entrepreneur. Some contradictions and controversies surrounding his political career are also examined. Ojike returned to Nigeria in 1948 and joined the *WAP*. He later became its General Manager. He took the opportunity to launch his campaign against European imperialism and British colonial domination of Nigeria. He maintained two popular weekly columns, "Weekend Catechism," and "Something to Think About," where he engaged in a self-searching dialogue with the various segments of the Nigerian populace about their identity, and issues of concern—cultural, social, religious, economic and political matters.⁶³ He did not hesitate in launching himself into the mainstream of the Nigerian nationalist movement and developed his own brand of radical nationalism. Ojike was a fearless political force, who, with other nationalists, championed the cause of Nigeria's independence. He called on Nigerian nationalist leaders and members of their political parties to pursue independence and national unity by striving to eschew ethnic, religious and class divides in order "to make Nigeria to escape the dangers of Pakistanization."⁶⁴

In his boldness and fearlessness, which characterized his nationalist and journalistic pursuits, Ojike wrote a damaging article on the Enugu colliery shootings of 1949 in which some 21 striking miners were shot to death and 51 wounded by the colonial police. He called for a concerted action against the colonial administration. Consequently, he was charged with sedition and fined 40 pounds.⁶⁵ The national response to the shootings was the formation of a coalition called the National Emergency Committee (NEC) by Ojike and other Nigerian nationalists with Dr. Akinola Maja of the Nigerian Youth Movement as the president, and Ojike as the vice-president. NEC was very outspoken in condemning these senseless killings of Nigerians. From November 1949 to September 1950, the period that marks the lifespan of NEC, it served as an umbrella body of all nationalist forces in Nigeria. Through its activities, racial discrimination on the

teaching staff at the University College, Ibadan, was abolished. As one scholar puts it, “NEC became an exception to the chronic disunity that characterized the nationalist movement” in Nigeria.⁶⁶ Unfortunately, it did not last long. Ironically, disunity and the iron hand of the colonial authority in Nigeria eventually destroyed NEC and derailed Nigeria’s independence. Ojike succinctly captured the situation when he wrote:

If imperialism does not first divide the people it rules, it cannot rule a united people. For example, had the Eastern House of Assembly united with the NEC in the struggle, the Western and the Northern Houses would have followed suit and the end of the regime in question would have come constitutionally [and sooner than it did].⁶⁷

Ojike joined the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), one of the leading political parties in Nigeria founded by Herbert Macaulay and Nnamdi Azikiwe in 1944. He referred to the NCNC as a national political party that was built on national ideology that transcended personal, religious, ethnic, class and regional boundaries; the only party that was truly committed to Nigeria’s freedom and unity, and to the welfare, peace and prosperity of its people. As an active member of the NCNC and an agent of political mobilization, Ojike attracted many people to the party. He helped in transforming the NCNC into a mass movement. He added colors and generated enthusiasm in many NCNC political rallies through his famous “Freedom Songs.”⁶⁸ In his *Guide to Federal Elections*, Ojike articulated the objectives of the party and why Nigerians should join it and vote for its candidates in the 1956 House of Representatives elections.⁶⁹

Within a short period, Ojike rose to become a prominent member of that party including the adviser to the NCNC Delegation at the 1949 Constitutional Conference as well as the party’s national vice president. He contested and won under the NCNC platform a Lagos seat in the Legislative Council and became the first deputy mayor of Lagos in 1951. He was a member of the NCNC delegation to the London Constitutional Conference in 1953. He also participated in the 1953–1954 Constitutional Review Conference. He had earlier criticized the Richards’ Constitution, arguing that it was not a constitution because it was not drafted by Nigerians. In spite of his party loyalty and commitment, Ojike demonstrated the sharpness of his political vision by openly disagreeing with his party. For instance, he supported the creation of the principle of a federal character in place of the proposed federal system of government based on three regions, a system that collapsed in 1967, 18 years after it was adopted. He objected to the creation of a House of Chiefs and an Electoral College system. He was against indirect election via the Electoral College, having suffered a defeat because of that system.

Mbonu Ojike held important political positions in the Eastern Regional Government. These included a Member of the Eastern House of Assembly, the first Eastern Regional Minister of Finance (1954–1955), and the Eastern Regional

Minister of Works (1954). As a Finance Minister, he boldly introduced the “Pay as You Earn” (PAYE) system of taxation into the public service, arguing that it was better to pay one’s tax in accordance with one’s earning rather than wait until a reasonable income was earned before tax was paid. Ojike also saw to the smooth and effective takeoff of the African Continental Bank, the first indigenous bank in Nigeria. He founded the Eastern Region Finance Corporation in 1954 to finance agriculture, trade, commerce and industry by granting loans and subsidies or by taking up loan or share capital in any government agency, statutory corporation, local government body, cooperative society or limited liability company. On April 6, 1955, at its inaugural meeting, Mbonu Ojike as the Finance Minister, announced a grant of £2 m to the Corporation to provide it with a working capital. A sum of £0.75 m was invested in shares of the African Continental Bank. For this action, Ojike was accused of corruption and abuse of his office. His action was so politicized and scandalous that the Foster–Sutton Tribunal was appointed in 1956 to investigate the matter. The Tribunal questioned the integrity of Mbonu Ojike and Nnamdi Azikiwe, the Premier of Eastern Region, who founded the bank.⁷⁰ It should be noted that Ojike’s action was driven by his strong conviction in the vital role indigenous banks could play in transforming the Nigerian economy. He had in 1948 called on Nigerians to support the three indigenous banks—the National Bank of Nigeria, Farmers and Commercial Bank and the African Continental Bank—arguing that “no modern bank in Nigeria except Nigerian owned banks can be sympathetic to Nigerians” in helping them improve their conditions and advance their entrepreneurial pursuits.⁷¹

An apostle of economic independence for Nigeria and Africa, Ojike emphasized that Nigeria needed modernization of her farming methods and industrialization of her economy because an industrialized Nigeria would contribute more to world trade and prosperity. He took up the challenge of economic emancipation in Nigeria through public lectures and series of articles he published under his two columns in the *WAP*.⁷² He realized that the key to Nigeria’s economic independence lay in massive industrialization and the development of African capitalist enterprise and class. He recommended the use of public funds to boost indigenous private enterprises. He proposed economic diversification and a free choice of market as well as equal opportunity and greater participation of Nigerians in large-scale trading, banking and industry.

He criticized the British colonial government for what he referred to as “crude economics of imperialism” and for “impassable trade restrictions” it imposed on Nigerians, which were calculated to “stifle business initiative” from them. Writing in 1948, he cited how samples of ladies dresses, handbags and hats he shipped to Nigeria in September 1945 for the Christmas of 1945 were withheld at the port because Nigerians were not allowed to buy goods from other countries; and how only British businesses were allowed to buy cars from the United States and sell at huge profits in Nigeria—for example, buying a car at £200 and retailing the same car to Nigerians at £450.⁷³ The same government permitted foreigners—Americans, Italians, Indians, Syrians and Greeks—to establish businesses in Nigeria with stifling competitive effects on Nigerian establishments. In addition

to restricting Nigerians' access to foreign markets, the colonial government also denied them access to loans.

Ojike advised Nigerians to rigorously pursue economic freedom because it was the key to achieving political independence. He emphasized the importance of productivity, business cooperation and partnership, strict saving habit, attraction of relevant foreign wealth and investment, importation of carefully selected goods that could not be produced locally, investment in creative economic ventures, and patronizing homemade goods. In one of his lectures on economic freedom, Ojike declared: "No matter whether goods made here are not as good as those of overseas we must try to patronize them where-ever they exist because they are pioneers of our commerce and industries."⁷⁴ He called on Africans to pursue economic thought that was fundamentally independent of the West by protecting their economic heritage, while exploring different economic models—capitalism, socialism and communism—and choosing one that was most effective in achieving economic growth and freedom. Ironically, it is not clear what motivated Ojike to ship to Nigeria Western ladies' clothing materials when he opposed European imperial domination and had campaigned for patronizing homemade goods and indigenous attires. Certainly, this action negated his position as an African cultural crusader. Here lies another contradiction in Ojike's philosophy.

Ojike coined a powerful slogan centered on the African identity that became his philosophy: "Boycott the Boycottables," by urging Nigerians to be self-reliant and self-sufficient.⁷⁵ He called on them to dispense with all alien goods, material and ideas that were dispensable. Part of this doctrine included thrift, frugality and parsimony. He maintained that Nigeria and Nigerians should replace unnecessary expenditures with investment in education and other productive ventures. He called for the replacement of the culture of dependence with the optimal utilization of the Nigerian resources and human capabilities in order to achieve both economic and political independence. He advised them: "Take pride in what is yours, develop and use it, and take from others only what is necessary to your development, adapt it to serve purposes determined by you rather than by others."⁷⁶

He lived by example. Ojike resigned from the management of the *WAP* in October 1948 and founded the African Development Corporation (ADC), a commercial venture. Shortly thereafter, he bought over the celebrated Shackleford bread industry at Ebute Metta, Lagos. As the managing director of the ADC, he became the first Nigerian to run the first effective corporation owned and managed by Africans. Due to his ministerial appointments that took him away from Lagos, and serious competition from the United African Company and its subsidiaries, as well as from rising Nigerian competitors, the industry at last, failed. S. G. Ikoku, one of Nigeria's development economists and a frontline politician, said that Mbonu Ojike was "the only politician of the time who gave serious attention to economic nationalism. He gave economic dimension to Nigerian nationalism." Ikoku called Ojike the "Father of economic nationalism in Nigeria [because] he made a bold call for economic self-determination."⁷⁷

Ojike took his cultural nationalism to a high gear through the advocacy and popularization of indigenous African and Nigerian names, food cuisines, culinary habits, cloths, fashions, festivals, religions, literature, songs and dances. He called for the revival of African lifestyle in place of European colonialist education, European Christianity, modes of dressing, mannerisms of speech, names and other social conventions. Many Nigerian intelligentsia and professionals as well as city dwellers, especially in the south, paid a price for European cultural imperialism by aping their European colonizers and adopting their modes of dressing, names, mannerism and language. They found themselves in an identity crisis having been systematically subjugated to mental and cultural alienation from their indigenous values and heritage. This slavish attitude was very pervasive at the place of work, in the church and in southern cities. It was this attitude that aroused Ojike's indignation and made him strive to champion the cause of raising the consciousness of the dangers of such imitations. In his concerns against the miseducation of Africans, Ojike reminded Nigerians, especially those he described as marginally cultured men and women, that Western education should not estrange them from their cultural roots, but rather it should serve as an instrument of enlightenment to enable them accommodate alien values that help them compete effectively in the global arena while helping them enrich and cherish their cultural values and heritage. He urged them to strive for the maintenance of African cultural heritage and identity. Leading by example, Ojike preferred to be addressed as "Mazi" instead of "Mister," and he adopted African fabrics and styles.

He fostered interest in national music and records and popularized indigenous songs. He founded in May 1947, the African Musical Society to encourage interests in songs and dances of the various Nigerian groups. This group's activities popularized Nigerian songs, music and local dances and also advanced them. He was also instrumental in the formation of the Academy of African Authors, which was intended to encourage aspiring Nigerian writers to learn the art of writing and produce books in diverse fields including history, literature and politics. The goal was to ensure that the predominant literature available to Nigerians, especially the young, was written by indigenous authors with an African-centered perspective.⁷⁸ Through his numerous articles in his *WAP* column—"Something to Think About," Ojike aroused Nigerians' interests on things Nigerian. To foster this national awakening, Ojike helped in starting annual national festivals of the Arts. He also revived the indigenous wrestling contests. As Fred Anyiam states, "It was a crime to sing African songs in public much less to record them. Mazi Ojike aroused national interest and went further to revive the forgotten wrestling contests and other African pastimes that we were told to reject."⁷⁹ As noted elsewhere:

In an age when the British colonial masters made it almost a crime and certainly termed it primitive to go to school, church, or to work in Nigerian dress, when it was regarded as uncivilized and heathen for Christians and the educated to

participate in Nigerian dancing, be seen with Nigerian art or patronize Nigerian health care systems or be initiated into any of the secret or title societies, it required courage and a good sense of self to preach 'boycott all boycottables' as Mbonu Ojike did.⁸⁰

The response from Nigerians was overwhelming. Many of them heeded to the call for cultural revival and appreciation of Nigerian heritage by adopting different Nigerian modes of dressing, African fabrics and fashion; as well as indigenous names in place of European ones. Some founded indigenous African churches and others revived indigenous religious practices. He was a very strong supporter of the National Church of Nigeria founded at Aba in November 1948, which became the religious wing of the Zikist movement.⁸¹ In response to a question regarding the threat of expulsion of a boy from a United Mission school because he was a Moslem, Ojike declared: "Nigeria should not permit religious imperialists to continue to divide us up under the guise of Christianity. I am quite sure Christ never taught discrimination. A Moslem should be admitted into any school within his reach."⁸² He argued that what Nigerians needed was a religious body that was deeply rooted in Nigerian soil with an African as its highest leader, and one whose allegiance was given unequivocally to Nigerian nationalism and freedom. He called on Nigerians and Africans to return to their original religious tenets and make them part and parcel of their national life, social ethics, education and politics just as Americans, Europeans and Asians had done. To demonstrate his belief in indigenous religious institutions, Ojike got initiated into prominent exclusivist secret societies such as the Ekpe Society of the Aro, and the Reformed Ogboni Fraternity of the Yoruba. He robustly defended membership to these societies, arguing in the case of the Ogboni Fraternity for instance, that though of a Yoruba origin, the Fraternity was remarkable in making members live a life of frankness and steadfastness.

Concerned by the miseducation of Africans, Ojike proposed free and compulsory education, an education that would highlight the African cultural heritage and prepare the people to be competitive in the global economy. He was very critical of both missionary and colonial education in Nigeria and Africa. His frustration with the Christian missionary iconoclasm and ethnocentrism was so deep rooted that he campaigned for the boycott of Christian churches. His campaign to boycott Christian churches generated considerable controversy. But Ojike was not deterred because, as he argued, philosophically, churches are primarily national spiritual institutions established to serve particular communities, and therefore European churches were not in a position to adequately serve the needs of colonized Africans.⁸³ Their presence denied Africans the authenticity and validity of their indigenous religions, spiritual beliefs and cultural practices. He was disgusted with the practice of celibacy by Roman Catholic priests, whom he alleged often fathered children and refused to acknowledge them. He believed that their action was "an outrageous violation of" one of the main attributes of Nigerian customs—fatherhood and parental responsibilities. He therefore

referred to such practice as sheer pretense and hypocrisy.⁸⁴ His antipathy toward European Christian missions was also based on their often collaborative and supportive relationship with the colonial administration, which Ojike saw as a hindrance to African nationalism. Thus, to him, “all churches exist to serve a given people and not purposelessly. Our National Church must therefore serve us.”⁸⁵

Ojike’s view on the role of women in Africa is reflective of his cultural heritage. He grew up in a patriarchal society in which women, to a certain degree, depended on their men for guidance in making decisions, and where they had wielded a certain degree of influence and autonomy by controlling separate but complementary sociopolitical spheres. As he aptly observed,

African women are, in the final analysis, as important as men. They constitute the social hub around whom the home is built . . . in political, religious, economic, and social life, African women, like other women, play, and should continue to play in an increasing magnitude, their unique part in building the social order.⁸⁶

The important role of African women in maintaining healthy, stable families cannot be underestimated because, as Ojike put it, “every African home is a medical school and every mother a doctor.”⁸⁷ Ojike cited examples of Nigerian women who had distinguished themselves in politics and business—Mrs. Olajumoke Obasa, the first woman to operate a taxicab business; Mrs. Abayomi, president of the Nigerian Women’s Party; Mrs. Mark, a magistrate; as well as other women who served as telephone operators, teachers, clerks, stenographers, doctors, nurses and merchants—responsibilities they combined impressively well with their roles as wives, mothers and homemakers.

Ojike was a proud advocate of polygynous marriage, which he argued does not undermine the status of African women.⁸⁸ He explained how his father married ten women for various important reasons, including for love, more children, economic advancement, social prestige, and to cement friendly relations with important families.⁸⁹ Ojike married two wives: Pauline, his first wife, was a teacher, and Alice, who had only primary education, and they were blessed with five children. Somehow, ambivalent on his call for gender equality, Ojike in 1948 suggested that it was not justifiable for government to employ married women who had deserted their husbands because he believed that employing female divorcees in civil service would promote family breakups and foster immorality in society. As he stated, “such women should be tabooed, as we should all wives, from the civil service jobs.”⁹⁰ I think this was an extreme position to hold either against divorcees in particular, or against all married women in general. This view contradicts the principles of freedom and equality that Ojike spent most of his adult life fighting for.

Unfortunately, this pioneer exponent and exemplar of self-reliance and sustainable development in Nigeria died on November 28, 1956, at a relatively tender age of 44 years under suspicious circumstances.⁹¹ It was reported that over 16,000 people from different parts of Nigeria and the Cameroons attended Mbonu Ojike’s funeral rites at his family house in Arondizuogu on November 29,

1956. His family, relatives, friends, colleagues, admirers and well-wishers were devastated by Ojike's premature death. Several tributes to Ojike following his death attested to this sense of enormous loss. A few will suffice here. Adegoke Adelabu, leader of the Opposition in the Western House of Assembly and first national vice-president of the NCNC, had this to say:

By the death of Mazi Mbonu Ojike, Nigerian nationalism has lost its Iron General. The NCNC as a party and the nation as a whole have lost their most devoted disciple. In the bitter war between British overlordship and the new Nigeria, sacrifices have had to be made. Mazi Mbonu Ojike has paid one of the highest. Friends and foes alike will remember him for his simplicity, frugality, and unalloyed loyalty to ideals.⁹²

Dennis C. Osadebay, NCNC member in the Western House of Assembly, and the leader of the Mid-West State Movement, described Mbonu Ojike as "one of the bravest and strongest fighters on the nationalist front [who] led Nigerians back to the land in dress, food and way of life. The country has lost a hero."⁹³

At the funeral and in a tear-laden tribute, Nnamdi Azikiwe, the head of the NCNC and premier of Eastern Region, reminded those who gathered that they came "to mourn the loss of someone who has dedicated his life for the freedom of his country and one who in the midst of the struggle had fallen on the way-side." He called Ojike "a man who worked hard for Nigeria . . . a great standard bearer [of the NCNC], a man of conviction . . . was outspoken and straightforward [and] believed in discipline."⁹⁴ A mourner from Port Harcourt described Ojike's death as "a great blow to the Nation, a dagger to the heart, and an irreparable loss not only to the East but to Nigeria as a whole and to the deceased's family of which he was a pillar."⁹⁵ Another mourner suggested that Nigeria should build "an effigy for [Ojike] even if that is the last we can [do] for this most sincere nationalist of our age."⁹⁶ In lamentation, a mourner declared:

My heart breaks as I weep in sorrow when I think of a man who knew no rest or pleasure only to make this part of the world free and safe. Toil and sweat has been his lot. He is the most fearless and outspoken nationalist of our age and Alas! Death has snatched him away from us . . . His brain, his wit, and his talent all have been used to serve Nigeria's needs. [He] has filled his years with noble deeds and creative work.⁹⁷

Even Ojike's political opponents mourned his death. For instance, Obafemi Awolowo, founder of the Action Group political party and premier of the Western Region, who admitted that Ojike was "their bitter political adversary," stated that "Nigeria, no less than Dr. Azikiwe and the NCNC would lose Mazi Ojike, who . . . had left his impression on contemporary events."⁹⁸

Despite his remarkable achievements, Mbonu Ojike has remained one of the least studied and recognized among pioneer Nigerian nationalists. Other than a hall of residence in the University of Nigeria, a specialist hospital in his hometown of Arondizuogu, a street in the Fegge part of Onitsha city, at the University of

Nigeria, Nsukka, and another in Surulere part of Lagos that are named after him, this industrious son of Nigeria is only remembered through a music record and published proceedings of a lecture series that was organized in his honor in July 1981 at the University of Nigeria, Enugu campus.⁹⁹ The fact that no serious scholarly work has focused on Mbonu Ojike underscores the significance of this chapter and the need for more systematic studies on his life and accomplishments.

Conclusion

Mbonu Ojike used his scholarship to expose the evils of colonialism and racism, and denounce those who exploited Africans and their African descended counterparts in the Diaspora and denied them freedom and access to material well-being. He was a man of many ideas and action; a dedicated nationalist and cultural crusader, a fearless journalist and newspaper columnist, a versatile author, an uncanny entrepreneur, a staunch and devoted partyman, and a career politician who occupied important political positions and played a key role in the decolonization process in Nigeria. Ojike was fondly called the “Boycott King” due to his cultural crusade and personal commitment to the enduring values of his people. His admirers also remember him as “The Freedom choirmaster,” “the Iron General of Nigerian nationalism,” “the Economic Evangelist” and “a first-class journalist.” In recognition of Ojike’s contribution to the development of Nigerian arts—music, dance, drama and wrestling—one of his contemporaries and townsmen, K. O. Mbadiwe, described him as “a patron of the arts, the pioneer of our cultural heritage and one of the political, social and economic revolutionaries of our time.”¹⁰⁰ Another contemporary and top Nigerian politician assessed Ojike’s contribution in the following words: “By his austere dress [and] boycott philosophy, he rediscovered old and forgotten African values and pride in things Africa.”¹⁰¹

Ojike’s greatest impact was psychological and intellectual. As one of the icons of African intellectual traditions, Ojike enlightened many Nigerians and Africans about their world and heritage. A teacher *par excellence* who taught by example, Ojike enjoyed educating foreigners and even Africans about Africa and her rich cultural heritage. He used his pen and intellect to correct distortions and misrepresentations about Africa. As the Boycott King, Ojike believed in total eradication of all vestiges of imperialism and colonialism in Nigeria and Africa. His boycott philosophy was holistic. It involved self-reliance and independence in all aspects of life in Nigeria—esthetic, cultural, economic, political, social and religious—because to him, freedom was indivisible.

Yet Ojike’s life and thought were not devoid of contradictions and controversies. While he totally condemned European colonial and imperial domination of Africa, he welcomed and expressed pride in the innovations they introduced, which served as their instruments of hegemonic control and exploitation. He campaigned for the patronage of African indigenous fabrics and homemade goods, yet he shipped Western clothing items to Nigeria. He was once a devout Christian and product of mission and colonial education, but later in life, he

became an avid critic of Christianity and Western education. Due to his attack on the European missionaries and criticism of the celibacy of the Roman Catholic priests, Ojike's critics have referred to him as a propagandist and an advocate of "ungodly nationalism."¹⁰² His political career was also marred by controversy and scandal. Ojike was indicted and investigated for corruption and abuse of public office, but was eventually exonerated. His loyalty to Nnamdi Azikiwe and the NCNC was to a fault and it cost him dearly. While some of his critics argue that he lacked the craft of diplomacy, others believe that he was a self-seeking "tribal" chauvinist and manipulator, who collaborated with European imperialists.¹⁰³

Nevertheless, Mbonu Ojike was unquestionably an embodiment of versatility. He was a committed pan-Africanist who campaigned for the liberation of people of African descent wherever they were, as well as for their unity and well-being. He pursued his activism for social justice and racial equality with boldness and fearlessness. Ojike was a man who campaigned for education and science against superstition and religious dogmas; for equal salary for equal job in place of the colonial salary discrimination, a keen and careful speculator, who urged Nigerians to adopt a slogan of National Freedom before party politics. Mazi Mbonu Ojike died as a martyr in the struggle for national liberation in Nigeria, as well as for the restoration and preservation of African cultural heritage, and for the empowerment of Africans.

Notes

1. An earlier version of this chapter was presented as a paper at the 51st Annual Conference of the African Studies Association in Chicago, Illinois, 2008.
2. The exact date of Mbonu Ojike's birth is unknown because, not only were his parents illiterate, but also there were no modern clinics, hospitals or maternities in his town at the time he was born and therefore there is no official record of his birth. Thus, while some believe he was born in 1912, others give his birth date as either 1910 or 1914. For instance, in a correspondent report about Ojike's funeral in November 1956, it was stated that he was born on May 5, 1914. See Correspondent Report (CR), "Zik Weeps at Ojike's Funeral," *West African Pilot (WAP)*, Friday, November 30, 1956. However, according to Hollis Lynch, Mbonu was 28 years old when he enrolled at Lincoln University, Pennsylvania, in early 1939 and the oldest of a group of Nigerians (Argonauts) who had sailed to the United States for higher education and, by virtue of his age, became the recognized leader of the group. Hollis R. Lynch, "K. O. Mbadiwe, 1939–1947: The American Years of a Nigerian Political Leader," *Journal of African Studies* 7, no. 4 (1980–1981): 184–203. These other Nigerian students were Kingsley Ozuomba Mbadiwe; his brother, George Igbodebe Mbadiwe; Akwaeke A. Nwafor Orizu; J. B. C. Etuka Okala; Okechukwu Ikejiani; Nnodu Okongwu; and Nwankwo Chukwuemeka.
3. For the impact of the influenza epidemic on the Igbo, see Don Ohadike, "The Influenza Pandemic of 1918–1919 and the Spread of Cassava Cultivation on the Lower Niger: A Study in Historical Linkages," *Journal of African History* 23, no. 3 (1981): 279–291.

4. For Igbo response to Christianity, which was diverse, see this book's "Introduction," Notes 46 and 48; Elizabeth Isichei, "Seven Varieties of Ambiguity: Some Patterns of Igbo Response to Christian Missions," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 3, no. 2 (1970): 209–227.
5. As one of the very few literate individuals in his town, Ojike started early to perform community and other services. For instance, he served his community as the secretary of his village Patriotic Union when he was just 13 years old.
6. Mbonu Ojike, *My Africa* (New York: John Day Co, 1946), 68.
7. Edwin William Smith, *Aggrey of Africa: A Study in Black and White* (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1930).
8. Mbonu Ojike, *I Have Two Countries* (New York: John Day Co, 1947), 92.
9. For the history of higher education in Nigeria, see S. S. Obidi, "Nationalist's Demands for University Education in Nigeria and Government's Response, 1920–1948," *History of Education* 19, no. 1 (1990): 55–64; Vincent Ike, *University Development in Africa: The Nigerian Experience* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Oxford University Press, 1976); Okoro Ojiaku and Gene Ulansky, "Early Nigerian Response to American Education," *Phylon* (1960–) 33, no. 4 (1972): 380–388; Babs A. Fafunwa, *A History of Nigerian Higher Education* (Lagos, Nigeria: Macmillan, 1971); Nduka Okafor, *The Development of Universities in Nigeria: A Study of the Influence of Political and other Factors on University Development in Nigeria, 1868–1967* (London: Longman, 1971).
10. Ojike, *I Have Two Countries*, 98.
11. The pamphlet and the books are Mbonu Ojike, *Portrait of a Boy in Africa* (New York: East and West Association, 1945); *My Africa*; and *I Have Two Countries*. The newspaper articles, include, "Africa and Imperialism," *Africa, Today and Tomorrow*, New York, April 1946; "African Culture and Civilization," *Negro History Bulletin* 10, no. 5 (1946): 11–15; "This Is the Hour," *Africa, Today and Tomorrow*, April 1945, 45; "Modern Africa," *Harper's Magazine* 190 (January 1945): 159; "Nigeria and the Colonial Problem," *New Republic*, March 20, 1944, 182; "African Village Syndrome: The Fallacy of Western Misconceptions and Distortions," *Africa Today and Tomorrow*, September 10, 1944. He later published *The Road to Freedom* (Aba, Nigeria: D. D. Onyemelukwe Printing Works, n.d.); *Guide to Federal Elections* (Kano, Nigeria: NCNC Kano Branch, 1954); and also maintained two weekly columns in the *West African Pilot*.
12. Others include N. Azikiwe, *Renascent Africa* (London: Frank Cass, 1937); A. A. N. Orizu, *Without Bitterness: Western Nations in Post-War Africa* (New York: Creative Age Press, 1944); Kingsley Ozuomba Mbadiwe, *British and Axis Aims in Africa* (New York: Wendell Malliet and Co, 1942).
13. Prince Okechukwu Ikejiani, "Nigeria's Made-in-America Revolution," *Magazine Digest*, January 10, 1946, 57.
14. Ojike, *My Africa*, 101.
15. *Ibid.*, 102.
16. Ojike, "Nigeria and the Colonial Problem." See also Julian Huxley, "Colonies and Freedom," *The New Republic*, January 24, 1943.
17. Helen T. Gilles, "Nigeria: From the Bight of Benin to Africa's Desert Sands," *The National Geographic Magazine* (May 1944): 537–568.
18. Ojike, "Modern Africa," 159.
19. *Ibid.*

20. See Priscilla M. Shilaro, *A Failed Eldorado: Colonial Capitalism, Rural Industrialization, Africa Land Rights in Kenya, and the Kakamega Gold Rush, 1930–1952* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2008); Steven Pierce, *Farmers and the State in Colonial Kano: Land Tenure and the Legal Imagination* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005); Tabitha Kanogo, *Squatters and the Roots of Mau Mau, 1905–1963* (London: James Currey, 1987).
21. Barbara Herrinton, “No Peace in World without Justice: Dr. Ojike Discusses Future of British Dependency, Nigeria,” *The Michigan Daily*, May 16, 1944.
22. Ojike, *I Have Two Countries*, 199.
23. *Ibid.*, 107, 197, 201 and 205.
24. <http://adrcdata.lib.uiowa.edu/libsrc/details.jsp?id/ojike> “Mbonu Ojike Lectures,” accessed April 20, 2006.
25. *Ibid.*
26. The ASA Executive Committee comprised Nigerian Mbonu Ojike, President; K. O. Mbadiwe, Executive Secretary; Nwafor Orizu, Director of Information; and Ibangu U. Akpabio, Treasurer. There were also Ugandan Ernest B. Kalibala and Akiki K. Nyabongo as Vice-President and Director of Education, respectively. See African Students Association, “History of A.S.A. and Table of Events,” *The African Interpreter* 1, no. 1 (February 1943): 5.
27. African Students Association, “History of A.S.A.,” 3.
28. The first three issues of the *African Interpreter* were published in February, March, and April 1943, with a special issue and the most ambitious released in the summer of 1943, and the final one in the spring of 1944. The journal gave ASA an image of a militant African nationalist organization. See Hollis R. Lynch, “Pan-African Responses in the United States to British Colonial Rule in Africa in the 1940s,” in *The Transfer of Power in Africa: Decolonization, 1940–1960*, eds., Prosser Gifford and Wm. Roger Louis (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982), 76.
29. African Students Association, “History of A.S.A.,” 4.
30. For the activities of African students in the United States, see Richard David Ralston, “A Second Middle Passage: African Student Sojourns in the United States during the Colonial Period and the Influence upon the Character of African Leadership” (PhD dissertation, Department of History, University of California, Los Angeles, 1972); J. Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1958), 243–248.
31. Ojike, *I Have Two Countries*, 145.
32. Herrinton, “No Peace in World.”
33. Ojike, “Nigeria and the Colonial Problem.”
34. Ojike, “This Is the Hour,” 45.
35. Ojike, *I Have Two Countries*, 155.
36. Correspondent Report (CR), “Hit U.S. Opposition to Colonial Independence,” *The Chicago Defender*, May 26, 1945.
37. Marika Sherwood, “‘There Is No New Deal for the Blackman in San Francisco’: African Attempts to Influence the Founding Conference of the United Nations, April–July 1945,” *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 29, no. 1 (1996): 71–94.
38. There were 282 official delegates from 51 countries that attended this conference.
39. See, Correspondent Report (CR), “Timetable for African Freedom Urged UNCIO,” *Atlanta Daily World* 17, no. 255 (Friday, May 25, 1945): 1.

40. Ralph Matthews, "Sidelights on UNCIO," *Richmond Afro-American* June 2, 1945, 20.
41. Sherwood, "There Is No New Deal," 85–86; CR, "Hit U.S. Opposition."
42. CR, "Timetable for African Freedom," 1 and 6.
43. Ojike, *I Have Two Countries*, 149–155. See also *WAP*, Tuesday, May 29, 1945.
44. Ojike, *I Have Two Countries*, 151.
45. *Ibid.*, 109.
46. LaRay Denzer, "American Influences in Nigerian Culture: A Case Study of the American Council on African Education," *Journal of American Studies in Nigeria* 1 (1991): 1–18; Lynch, "K. O. Mbadiwe."
47. See Michael M. Ogbeyidi, "Non-Governmental Organization and the Promotion of American Education in Nigeria, 1941–1953," *Nebula* 6, no. 4 (December 2009): 1–18; Phelps-Stokes Fund, *A Survey of African Students Studying in the United States* (New York: Phelps-Stokes Foundation, 1946), 46; Nwafor Orizu's column, "Africa Speak," *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 16, 1945.
48. Other officers of the AAAR included Lawrence Reddick, curator of the Schomburg Collection in Harlem as chairman of the Board of Directors; D. Buyabuye Mmodana, a South African clergyman as secretary; A. A. Austin, a wealthy West Indian-born businessman as treasurer; and Alain Locke, chairman of educational research. By 1946, the academy had 28 members on its Board of Directors: eight Africans, 17 African Americans, and three Whites, including Eleanor Roosevelt, who was its long-time patron. See Lynch, "Pan-African Responses in the United States," 78–79.
49. K. Ozuomba Mbadiwe, "The African Academy of Arts and Research," *Africa, Today and Tomorrow*, April 1945, 17.
50. Correspondent Report (CR), "African Academy Plans Mass Meet," *New York Amsterdam News*, Saturday, June 2, 1945, 14A.
51. Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt and other American dignitaries were regular attendants at these festivals. She and Mrs. Mary McLeod Bethune were guest speakers in the Second Annual Festival of the African Academy of Arts and Research held on April 4, 1945. See Mbadiwe, "The African Academy of Arts and Research," 17.
52. See Nina Mjagkij, ed., *Organizing Black America: An Encyclopedia of African American Associations* (New York: Garland, 2003), 3.
53. Mary McLeod Bethune, "Hands across the Waters," *Africa, Today and Tomorrow* (April 1945): 19.
54. Ojike, *I Have Two Countries*, 73–74.
55. *Ibid.*, 74.
56. *Ibid.*, 73.
57. *Ibid.*, 157.
58. For his romantic experience in the United States with both White and Black women and why he decided to marry a Nigerian, see Ojike, *I Have Two Countries*, 115–119.
59. Ojike, *I Have Two Countries*, 203.
60. *Ibid.*, 130.
61. *Ibid.*, 144.
62. C. E. Carrington, Review of *My Africa* by Mbonu Ojike (London, Blandford Press, 1955), 237, in *International Affairs* 31, no. 4 (1955): 536.
63. For the role of the press in nationalist struggles and uplifting the identity of African people, see Wale Adebani, "Hegemony and Spatial Politics: The Press and the Struggle for Lagos in Colonial Nigeria," *Africa Development* 29, no. 4 (2004):

- 75–91; Sam O. Idemili, “What the *West African Pilot* Did in the Movement for Nigerian Nationalism between 1937 and 1957,” *Black American Literature Forum* 12, no. 3 (1978): 84–91.
64. Mbonu Ojike, “Week-End Catechism,” *WAP*, Saturday, July 21, 1949. “Pakistanization” refers to the bloody decolonization experiment in 1947 that led to the partition of India into first, India and Pakistan, and largely along religious lines, and subsequently in 1971, the creation of Bangladesh from Pakistan.
 65. Mbonu Ojike, “Week-End Catechism,” Saturday, August 5, 1950.
 66. Coleman, *Nigeria*, 300.
 67. Ojike, “Week-End Catechism,” Saturday, August 5, 1950.
 68. The most prominent of the songs was, “Freedom Freedom, Everywhere there must be Freedom, Everywhere there must be Freedom.”
 69. Ojike, *Guide to Federal Elections*, see especially pages 3–4 and 7–9.
 70. Some Nigerians and other analysts believe that the colonial authorities had succeeded in their effort to use the corruption inquiry to humiliate, discredit and break the cohesion of nationalist leaders in Eastern Nigeria. See Martin Lynn, “The ‘Eastern Crisis’ of 1955–57, the Colonial Office, and Nigerian Decolonisation,” *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 30, no. 3 (2002): 91–109; Chibuike U. Uche, “Banking ‘Scandal’ in a British West African Colony: The Politics of the African Continental Bank Crisis,” *Financial History Review* 4 (1997): 51–68; Robert L. Tignor, “Political Corruption in Nigeria before Independence,” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 31, no. 2 (1993): 175–202. For the government report on the corruption inquiry, see Stafford Foster-Sutton, *Proceeding of the Tribunal Appointed to Inquire into Allegations of Improper Conducts by the Premier of Eastern Region of Nigeria in Connection with the Affairs of the African Continental Bank Limited and Other Relevant Matters*, Vols. I and II (Lagos, Nigeria: Government Printer, 1956); and Government of Eastern Nigeria, *The Eastern House of Assembly Debates, 3rd Session*, August 1956 (Enugu, Nigeria: Government Printer, 1956).
 71. Correspondent Report (CR), “Mazi Mbonu Ojike on Way to Economic Freedom,” *WAP*, October 22, 1948, 3.
 72. See, for instance, *Ibid.*, 2–3.
 73. Ojike, *The Road To Freedom*, 18–19.
 74. CR, “Mazi Mbonu Ojike on Way to Economic Freedom,” 2.
 75. Mbonu Ojike launched his boycott movement early in May 1947. In the editorial of *WAP*, June 3, 1947 titled “Boycott: Aims and Strategy,” he outlined the four-fold aim of the movement: (1) Most fundamental to prepare financially by our individual savings, for agriculture, commercial, industrial enterprises, which we must establish as we march toward economic freedom; (2) To revive in us due pride in things African—food, drink, dress, marriage, language, sports, drink, dress, marriage, language, sports, philosophy, literature, religion, morals; (3) To give us an invisible armor of psychological independence; and (4) To arm our politicians with the dynamics of visible and invisible propaganda. In his “Week-End Catechism” of *WAP*, September 6, 1947, Ojike listed the following as the laws of boycott: (i) Love Nigeria first and other nations, second; (ii) seek Nigerian independence and honor and work diligently to attain it in your lifetime; (iii) boycott foreign ideals and practices that lengthen the road to freedom; (iv) abstain from imported and all liquors, and if you should drink a little, take to palm wine, pito, and “burukutu” for your health and pocket; (v) support Nigerian nationalism with your wealth, your energy,

- your voice, your head, your tongue, your pen, your feet and every precious gift that is yours; (vi) seek first the freedom of Nigeria and love of all men and the heaven, which is here and will be yours; (vii) live frugally in order that you may not be found wanting when Nigeria calls for your personal contribution to the cause of freedom; (viii) count nothing too dear to be sacrificed at the altar of freedom; (ix) hate no man who tries to preserve his national ways of life, rather, emulate him by striving to preserve yours; (x) patronize goods made by Nigerians, our textile fabrics, our foot wear, our furniture, and whatsoever Nigerians produce, no matter how crude; (xi) keep money in Nigeria by buying less from and selling more to foreign countries; (xii) spend less than you earn so that you may be able to join the current and the forthcoming economic enterprises; and (xiii) always and everywhere, boycott the boycottables.
76. Ukwu I. Ukwu, "Introduction: Ojike and Self-Reliance," in *The Spirit of Self-Reliance*, ed., Ukwu I. Ukwu (Enugu, Nigeria: Institute for Development Studies, University of Nigeria, 1984), 1.
 77. S. G. Ikoku, "An Approach to Economic Independence," in *The Spirit of Self-Reliance*, Ukwu, ed., 21–22.
 78. Mbonu Ojike, "Wanted: African Authors to Write Books for the Freedom of Africa," *WAP*, January 16, 1947.
 79. Fred U. Anyiam, *Men and Matters in Nigerian Politics, 1934–1958* (Yaba, Nigeria: John Okwesa, 1959), 62.
 80. K. O. Dike and Felicia Ekejiuba, *The Aro of South-eastern Nigeria, 1650–1980: A Study of Socio-Economic Formation and Transformation in Nigeria* (Ibadan, Nigeria: University Press Limited, 1990), 327.
 81. For the Zikist Movement, see this book's "Introduction," 32–33, and note 64. Even though Ojike was not a member of this Organization, he supported its activities.
 82. Ojike, "Week-End Catechism," Saturday, July 21, 1949.
 83. Ojike, "Week-End Catechism," August 5, 1953.
 84. Ojike, "Week-End Catechism," October 2, 1948.
 85. Ojike, "Week-End Catechism," August 5, 1950.
 86. Ojike, *My Africa*, 147–148.
 87. *Ibid.*, 133.
 88. The debate over polygamy or polygyny vis-à-vis the status of African women has attracted the attention of feminists and African feminist scholars and need not be rehashed here. See Andrea Powell, "Problematizing Polygyny in the Historical Novels of Chinua Achebe: The Role of the Western Feminist Scholar," *Research in African Literatures* 39, no. 1 (2008): 166–184; Peter Delius and Clive Glaser, "The Myths of Polygamy: A History of Extra-Marital and Multi-Partnership Sex in South Africa," *South African Historical Journal* 50 (2004): 84–114; Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike, "Polygamy: A Feminist Critique," in *The Will to Arise: Women, Tradition and the Church in Africa*, ed., Mercy A. Oduoye and Musimbi R. Kanyoro (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1992), 101–118.
 89. Ojike, *My Africa*, 16–17.
 90. Ojike, "Week-End Catechism," June 5, 1948, 2.
 91. Instructively, the official record stated that Ojike died of high blood pressure or hypertension and broken heart, traceable to a political conspiracy against him. The Chuba Ikpeazu Commission of Inquiry instituted in 1955 to investigate any cases of corruption in the Eastern Region's public service received an allegation of corruption against Mbonu Ojike involving land allocations and building contracts.

- Although Ojike was exonerated two years after the Commission indicted him in a radio broadcast, the damage had already been done. Not only did Ojike resign from the ministry and the Eastern Nigerian cabinet before the Commission completed its report, but also he never survived the humiliation and the dent the indictment made on his hard-earned integrity and reputation. His admirers were astonished by these developments and had no way to explain them other than that Ojike was an unfortunate victim of a well-orchestrated political conspiracy in the region. Yet others believed that he died as a result of an oath he took and his unconditional support for Nnamdi Azikiwe, especially in reference to the replacement of Eyo Ita as leader of Government Business in Eastern Region. Some regarded Ojike as a victim of Azikiwe's mystic power. See Correspondent Report (CR), "Eastern Government Is Daubed Illegal: Story Report," *WAP*, February 4, 1953, 1; Mbonu Ojike, "Week-End Catechism: Expelled Ministers," *WAP*, January 17, 1953, 2.
92. CR, "Zik Weeps at Ojike's Funeral."
 93. Correspondent Report (CR), "Nigerians Pay More Tributes to Ojike," *WAP*, December 5, 1956, 3.
 94. CR, "Zik Weeps at Ojike's Funeral."
 95. CR, "Nigerians Pay More Tributes to Ojike."
 96. *Ibid.*
 97. *Ibid.*
 98. CR, "Zik Weeps at Ojike's Funeral."
 99. The music relics say: "Big men have died, small men have died, Nigeria will never forget Mbonu Ojike." Correspondent Report (CR), "Makers of Nigerian Independence," *Sunday Times*, October 1, 1972. Papers presented at the lecture were published in a volume edited by Ukwu I. Ukwu, *The Spirit of Self-Reliance*. See also R. C. Njoku, *African Cultural Values: Igbo Political Leadership in Colonial Nigeria, 1900-1966* (New York: Routledge, 2006), Chapter 5; C. O. O. Ogowo, *Eminent Nigerians of the Twentieth Century* (Lagos, Nigeria: Hugo Books, 2000); Bridget Uddoh, "Mazi Mbonu Ojike and the Anti-Colonialist Struggle in Nigeria," *The African Historian* 6, no. 1 (1973): 7–17.
 100. K. O. Mbadiwe, "Understanding the Idea of Freedom," in *The Spirit of Self-Reliance*, Ukwu, ed., 14.
 101. M. I. Okpara, "Long Live 'The Boycott King,'" in *The Spirit of Self-Reliance*, Ukwu, ed., 19.
 102. Ojike's crusade for the revival of indigenous religions and the establishment of African independent churches also made him a target of the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches in Nigeria. See Tunde Oloko, "Religion and Politics in Nigeria," *WAP*, February 2, 1957, 103; *WAP* June 22, 1949.
 103. E. A. Ayandele, *The Educated Elite in the Nigerian Society* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Ibadan University Press, 1974) has portrayed Mbonu Ojike, Nnamdi Azikiwe, K. O. Mbadiwe and Nwafor Orizu as collaborators of European imperialists.

CHAPTER 4

Bishop Anthony Nwedo of Umuahia: Faith, Vision and Mission

Jude Aguwa

Introduction

Anthony Gogo Nwedo, Bishop of Umuahia, was a *numero uno* in his various stations of life. In his hometown of Oguta, he was the first indigenous priest; and the first Nigerian to join the Holy Ghost congregation. He was the first Nigerian Catholic priest to head a college and the first indigenous residential bishop. He was also the first indigenous founder of religious congregations. Among the Catholic clergy, he was the first to receive prestigious awards including Officer of the Order of the British Empire in 1959; Commander of the Order of the Niger in 1971; and Doctor of Letters in 1986 from Imo State University, Nigeria.

When Nwedo was appointed the Bishop of Umuahia diocese, there were only 11 parishes in the sprawling area his jurisdiction covered. At his retirement, the number of parishes had grown to 70, and his diocese had grown big enough to be split into three. He began with only nine indigenous priests, but at his retirement, the number had risen to 100. During his tenure as bishop, he established several schools, hospitals and healthcare centers. By the time he retired, his churches were filled with thousands who had converted from the indigenous religion.

Such a litany of accomplishments did not come easily. Nwedo had to overcome difficult challenges and trials. One of the challenges was his position as a Catholic bishop who also desired to save his native cultural values. Equally challenging was his commitment to continue the educational efforts of the missionaries in his diocese when only meager resources were available. His greatest trial was seeming disloyalty of the congregation of religious women that he founded. How Bishop Nwedo dealt with these challenges will be one of the areas of focus in this chapter.

I do not pretend that this study will provide the full history of Nwedo, or the complete details of his legacies. Those who were close to him could do so

more effectively. However, I was able to consult some written materials about him. I also interviewed some of his priests, religious sisters and his successor, Bishop Lucius Ugorji. The result is a lot of information that portrayed Nwedo as a Church leader with vision, and energy. The investigation reveals that Nwedo was a spiritual leader, who strongly believed in his mission and so was able to overcome the challenges he met along the way. It can be said that the energy and wisdom he put to task came to him from the world into which he was born, a world whose culture endows its members with deep spirituality and a thirst for adventure.

Cultural Heritage

In Igbo society, in which Nwedo was born in 1912 and raised, the spiritualistic worldview prevailed, although the Catholic Church was already 27 years in Igboland. In their tradition, the Igbo people were deeply religious and spiritual. They cherished their deities, spirits and ancestors. The people believed that a pantheon, with Chukwu at its head, existed. Chukwu, a male deity, was revered as the creator of the universe and as a benevolent deity.¹ His attributes are reflected in some personal names, such as, Chukwukere (creator), Chukwunyere (giver), Ngozichukwu (blessing) or Iheanyichukwu (power). People are guided to live peacefully by following the ethical laws ordained by Ala (Ani), the Earth goddess. These laws were handed down through the ancestors. The Earth Goddess is believed to be a guarantor of fertility for humans, animals and plants. Besides Chukwu and Ala, other divinities support human efforts and activities regarding healing, farming, adventure and war. Humans responded to all manners of divine help or threat by erecting their shrines, carving their images and offering them worship. Nwedo was raised in this environment, which upheld absolute reliance on divine power for one's survival and progress. Missionary preaching spoke the same way about divine power and even affirmed the name and qualities of Chukwu—the God of Igbo religion.

Growing up, Nwedo learned in his cultural upbringing about respect for elders. The respect was based on the assumption that old age was a blessing, filled with wisdom. Elders lived their lives in close contact with ancestors, the givers of blessings to their descendants.² Since they reside in the realm of the supernatural, they also protect their descendants on earth against the intrusions and machinations of evil spirits and their agents.³ Converts to Christianity discovered that their values of respect for elders as well as their festivals for their ancestors in some ways correspond to the Christian teaching and practices regarding saints.

Nwedo observed and learned how people of his village used rituals to deal with mysterious situations. His world was one of a complex relationship between the seen and the unseen; between weak human beings and powerful spirits; between the human world and the world of the spirits that exist next door. He saw that rituals offered the key to favorable relations. Jordan, one of the early missionary priests, had this to say on Igbo metaphysics and ritualism: “every Ibo believes that an invisible universe was in action all around him and that his term of life was

short if he happened to fall foul of its denizens. He felt that it was up to him therefore to propitiate them and to treat them with courtesy and deference.”⁴ The propitiatory rituals included sacrifices and prayers. Through these sacred actions people made up for broken taboos and appeased the deities and patron spirits. Through them, people sought protection against evil forces, evil death, evil spirits, evil men, evil events and evil situations.⁵ With rituals, they prayed for long life, many children, good health and prosperity in their farm work.⁶

In his ministry as a priest and bishop, Nwedo certainly saw the strong resemblances between Igbo culture and Christianity. He also saw much of dissimilarities, for there were contentious areas such as *ozo* initiation, *osu* caste system or some burial ceremonies. Missionary preaching had condemned these practices based on shallow knowledge about them. It was now up to the indigenous clergy to respond from a vantage point of better understanding of the indigenous culture.

Family and Education

Anthony Nwedo was the first son of Joseph Nwedo Nzeribe and Monica Ubelife Nwedo of Oguta. Oguta is a lake town in present Imo State, Nigeria. In 1912 when Anthony was born, his uncle was the *Obi*—traditional ruler of their town. This meant that Anthony came from the ruling family. The *Obi* was a powerful person in his community. He was the custodian of traditions and culture, and certain taboos protected his person and space. It was necessary that missionaries who came to a town first contacted the traditional ruler. In this way, they were guaranteed protection and given land to build their Church or school. The *Obi* gave the missionaries a piece of land close to his compound, where they built a small Catholic Church—Sacred Heart Church. Anthony therefore had the opportunity to be baptized as a child.⁷

Anthony started to attend Sacred Heart Primary School attached to this Station Church, when he was eight, in 1920. Between 1925 and 1927, he was a pupil of Government Primary School, Owerri. He completed his primary school education at Christ the King School, Aba, in 1929. In 1931, Anthony entered St. Paul’s Minor Seminary, Onitsha, and at the same time studied at St. Charles College Onitsha for the Teachers’ Higher Elementary Certificate. These two schools coexisted in the same campus at Onitsha. After his higher elementary education course in 1934, he transferred over to Christ the King College (CKC), which was opened in Onitsha, and studied also at St. Paul’s Minor Seminary, which was transferred to the same campus. While there, Anthony completed and passed the Standard Six Certificate, which at the time, according to Michael Otonye, could “fetch a lucrative job in one of the mercantile houses.”⁸ Anthony continued at St. Paul’s Minor Seminary until 1936 and while there he also taught.

The various schools Anthony attended show the fast proliferation of missionary schools, which began with the arrival of the Holy Ghost Fathers at Onitsha in 1885. The first group of four French missionaries to this lower Niger mission was made up of Father Joseph Lutz, Father John Horne, and two Brothers, John

Gotto Jacob and Hermas Huck. The arrival and activities of this pioneer group have been well documented in several publications.⁹ Father Leon Lejeune, also a French Holy Ghost Father, who was serving in the Lambarene Mission of Gabon, later joined them. He was appointed the Superior of the Mission and Apostolic Prefect of Southern Nigeria in May 1900 and his tenure lasted till September 5, 1905, when he died of cancer. Remarkably, during his time, Father Lejeune formulated basic policies and strategies for the mission. He inspired the building of churches, schools and the training of catechists. The arrival of Father Shanahan and other Irish missionaries the same year is significant in the history of the lower Niger mission because it marked the passing of the leadership of the Catholic Mission in the lower Niger from the French to the Irish.

Shanahan succeeded Lejeune in September 1905. Later he became the first bishop of Southeastern Nigeria (Eastern lower Niger area).¹⁰ He was particularly successful through adopting the school policy already enunciated by his predecessor. From the beginning, the missionaries envisioned the school as an astounding tool for mission work. Missionary schools served a dual purpose, namely; educating young people in the secular subjects, and converting them to Christianity. Shanahan's conviction of the power of the school as a tool for the mission was extremely firm. As Desmond Forristal pointed out in his book on Bishop Shanahan, "He did not even go as an educationist, though the founding of schools and the teaching of knowledge was to be at the center of his achievement."¹¹ According to Jordan, Bishop Shanahan chose the school as "the spearhead of his attack on Ibo paganism . . . aimed at the very destruction of the body of paganism itself."¹²

The school system proved to be a remarkable tool for mission. In Jordan's estimation, "the impact of the school on paganism cannot be overstated."¹³ In these schools, the young minds like Anthony Nwedo opened up to new ideas and knowledge, which often stood in opposition to practices of the indigenous religion and culture. Spurred on by the amazing response to education in the schools, Shanahan continued to build more and more schools and used them as means to impart Christian education to many young people in the shortest possible time.¹⁴ Contemporaries of Anthony in the missionary schools later become politicians, ministers, educationists. These include Jerome Udorji, permanent secretary and renowned administrator; Justice A. E. Allagoa, jurist; Pius Nwoga, educationist; G. E. Okeke, a cabinet minister in the first republic; Ms C. N. Obinwanne, medical practitioner; Albert Osuji, an educationist; and Edmund O. Osuagwu, a parliamentarian.¹⁵ The fast growth and spread of mission schools in Eastern Nigeria enabled the recruitment of young people for training to the priesthood. Before long some of the first indigenous seminarians were being ordained as priests.

Priestly Ordination and Further Studies

In 1938, Anthony entered St. Paul's Major Seminary, Enugu, to study philosophy. This institution was later relocated to Okpala, a town in the old Owerri

Province. From 1942 to 1945, he was at Okpala where he completed his Theological studies. On July 29, 1945, he was ordained a priest by Bishop Charles Heerey. The ordination took place in the Holy Trinity Cathedral, Onitsha. His contemporaries included Fathers Edward Ahaji, Cyprian Tansi, John Anyogu, David Panaki, Joseph Nwanegbo, William Obelagu, Edward Nwafo and John Ogbonna.

The first parish of Father Anthony's pastoral assignment was St. Joseph's Idah, to serve as a curate under Rev. John Cross Anyogu, who later became Bishop of Enugu. This ministry in this town was not easy at all. For example, there was no means of transportation, not even bicycles; and so priests had to travel by foot to celebrate masses in the various stations, or to go on sick calls. The ministry at Idah, however, lasted for a short period of time because in 1947, Father Anthony proceeded to the National University of Ireland, Dublin, for further studies. His companion for the voyage was his friend, Father Mark Onwuha Unegbu, who became the first indigenous Bishop of Owerri diocese.

In his memoir, Mark recounted their experiences while in Ireland.¹⁶ Both of them looked forward to an exciting experience of the faith in the Church of Ireland that had sent out so many missionaries to Igboland. They were impressed by the religious atmosphere and organization in the institution where they carried on with their studies. Father Mark also wrote about experiences of racial discrimination, which caused them a lot of pain. As the first and only Africans in the Irish seminary institution at the time, they had no one to look up to for guidance. This negative experience, rather than diminishing them, actually emboldened them toward a more assertive appreciation of their own culture and persons. Father Anthony would use the one-line response: "I am black, but beautiful."¹⁷ Father Anthony completed his studies with a BA degree in history.

One would have imagined that Father Anthony would hasten to leave Ireland as soon as his studies in history were completed. But, as Bishop Mark Unegbu explained, that was not the case because at this juncture Father Anthony felt the calling to serve as a Holy Ghost Father. As the first African to express such a desire, he met instant opposition. Some members of the Holy Ghost Congregation were not ready socially and psychologically to admit Black Africans. Some even explained that the admission of Black Africans into the Novitiate would lower the high spiritual opinion about their Congregation. However, Father Anthony prevailed after intense screening and scrutiny, and was selected for the novitiate.¹⁸ He traveled from Dublin to a more remote part of Ireland, Tipperary, where he received formation in the Novitiate of the Holy Ghost Congregation. His formation lasted four years and in 1951, he professed the vows of community life, poverty and obedience. He then returned to Nigeria as a Holy Ghost Father. One is left to wonder about Father Anthony's real intention to join the Holy Ghost Congregation. Was it a real desire for religious life or was it a shrewd move to enable him gain easy access to ecclesiastical power in the Igbo mission, which was controlled by the Holy Ghost Congregation at the time? With his appointment as the first Indigenous Ordinary in Nigeria, the second explanation might be hard to discount.

Episcopal Appointment

In 1956, on his return to Nigeria, Father Anthony was given the assignment of opening a new secondary school at Ihitte Uboma in Umuahia Province, to be named Madonna High School. Two years later, he was transferred to Holy Ghost College, Owerri, to serve as its principal. Shortly after, in 1959, he was appointed the Bishop of the Diocese of Umuahia that was newly carved out from Owerri diocese. On Pentecost Sunday, May 17, of that same year, Father Anthony was consecrated a Bishop at Christ the King Church, Aba. As the first Nigerian residential bishop of a Catholic diocese, he was placed ahead of his peers, who later joined the group of indigenous bishops. These include; John Cross Anyogu, Godfrey Okoye, Mark Unegbu, Michael Eneja, Albert Obiefuna, Michael Okoro, Gregory Ochiagha and Anthony Ilonu. There was also Francis Arinze, who was the first indigenous bishop of the Archdiocese of Onitsha, and who was made a cardinal by Pope John Paul II.

When Nwedo was appointed bishop of Umuahia, Bishop Whelan of Owerri Diocese reposted priests to ensure that the White priest was in Owerri, and the indigenous priest was sent to Umuahia with Nwedo. This had a hint of racism and as Bishop Mark Unegbu aptly remarked: “Black bishop and black secular priests.”¹⁹ This was not in Ireland, he must have wondered. One would have imagined that the White and Black priest, the religious and the secular, working together would serve the young church much better.

The new diocese of Umuahia included Okigwe, Aba and Umuahia zones, covering a total area of 2,376 square miles. The Catholic population there at the creation of the Diocese was 139,744 and there were just 21 priests to serve them. The areas had protestant churches such as the Methodists and Presbyterians and these had strong roots and presence in the area. These Protestant Churches were perceived to be hostile to the Catholic Church. It was up to Bishop Nwedo to find ways not only for his Church to survive and grow but also to foster dialogue and ecumenical relationships among non-Catholics. The needs of the young diocese were enormous. Everything was nonexistent or in short supply; clergy, religious workers, catechists and educated laity. Basic infrastructures such as churches, schools, hospitals and maternities were yet to be built. Nwedo had to come up with strategies to deal with these problems, especially the critical ones such as getting more priests. His first option was to recruit priests and women religious individuals who would be willing to work in his diocese. This effort met little or no success, and he therefore decided to commence building a seminary as early as 1960.

With regard to religious women, Nwedo went around begging religious congregations to loan his diocese some of their sisters. But on account of the hard and impoverished conditions of the area his diocese is located and the obvious hardships involved in the apostolate of a newly created diocese, his appeals did not yield any results. He extended his search as far as to Rome, and as he on many occasions said, he was advised to start one.

Right from the beginning and despite limited resources, Nwedo was determined enough to pursue his mission. Bishop Mark Unegbu testified to this resolve:

With a small band of mostly young and zealous clergy—secular and religious, Bishop A. Gogo Nwedo . . . set to penetrate almost impenetrable barriers, set up by anti-Catholic forces in the area. Like Bishop Shanahan . . . of happy memory, his plan was to educate and to satisfy the spiritual and intellectual yearnings of the people entrusted to his pastoral care.²⁰

A priest who was a secretary to Bishop Nwedo described him as a meticulous administrator and a perfectionist. He lived by the philosophy that if anything was worth doing, it was worth doing very well. Letters had to be written very well and well typed and if need be, retyped over and over until the slightest mistakes were corrected. He planned the assignments for his priests with even greater care, always taking into account the needs of a parish and the ability of the priest. Every diocesan project, whether the establishment of a school or a hospital, required great deliberation and planning. Not leaving much to chance, he pushed forward with an ambitious vision for development of his diocese.

Planting Gospel Seed on Cultural Soil

Nwedo was a personality well known in Eastern Nigeria. He had written some pastoral letters, translated the catechism to Igbo language and was known for his eloquent sermons. I had a chance to listen to his sermon at the funeral mass of Bishop John Cross Okoye, at Holy Ghost Cathedral Enugu. The Cathedral was packed with dignitaries and so the rest of the people, including seminarians from Bigard Memorial Seminar, stayed outside. But from where we stood, Nwedo's voice was stridently ringing toward the crescendo, over and over again. This performance left on my mind the image of Nwedo as an energetic preacher of the gospel. Those who heard him preach more often knew this about his robust voice, and that he was an effective preacher and evangelizer. Preaching turned out to be his major tool of evangelization and as Sister Leonie Iweh, one of the members of the religious congregation that Nwedo founded, described him as "He planted the seed of the gospel in every soul he encountered."²¹

About the time Nwedo was appointed a bishop, there were strong movements in the universal church that advocate the adaptation of Christianity in the various world cultures. These initiatives were the basis for the theological efforts to justify opening the church to wider cultural encounters. Before long, theologians emerged and perhaps their greater accomplishment was that they debunked the theories asserting that African religious and cultural ideas were ineffectual vehicles for expressing divine concepts or transmitting the sublime truths of faith.²²

Nwedo knew that any meaningful evangelical approach must take into account the developments that were occurring. He embraced the emerging theology of adaptation by taking on the translation of catechism books into the vernacular, a practice that already had begun at Onitsha Archdiocese, where Catholicism first began in Igboland. However, after the Biafra–Nigeria War in 1970, the sudden expulsion of the missionary priests working in Biafra, by the order of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, was supposed to create even a more favorable climate for thoughts on cultural adaptation. Indigenous clergy for the first time came to dominate the ecclesiastical landscape. This situation led to the easy acceptance and implementation of the reforms of the Second Vatican Council in the area of Liturgical reform and culture.²³ Two important documents of the Council, namely, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, SC (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy) and *Gaudium et Spes*, GS (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the modern world) inspired among other things, a new and positive interpretation of the concept of culture that recognized the values of non-European cultures. Thus, vernacular, indigenous music and musical instruments as well as other practices that are not offensive to the teachings of the church became new features of the Church in Igboland from the sixties.

Nwedo was one of the bishops at the Second Vatican Council and he no doubt became a serious advocate of adaptation of Christianity to the local culture, or should I rather say: the adaptation of the local culture to Christianity. For a period of time, such semantics dominated the intellectual appraisal of the Vatican reform, especially in matters concerning Christian dogma and doctrines. Nwedo went forward with efforts to implement some of the items of the liturgical reform involving translations of catechism books and prayers into Igbo language and the use of the vernacular for administering sacraments. These efforts did not however take him far enough since the critical cases of burial ceremonies, initiation ceremonies, traditional marriage, which were major instances of conflict with the Catholic faith, mostly stayed out of discussion. Therefore, despite the fact that the indigenous hierarchy had taken control of the Church in Igboland, it appeared that the desire to avoid any change that could be considered revolutionary was simply the rule. Nwedo's predecessor, Bishop Lucius Ugorji, speaking 45 years after the Second Vatican Council, admitted how slowly some progress had come. In a Sermon, which Bishop Ugorji delivered at Assumpta Cathedral Owerri, at the 10th Anniversary of the inauguration of the new Owerri Province on January 11, 2005, he spoke about a new realization:

We now see the need to implant the Church in our culture, if it is to survive in our land. We now know that there is an Igbo way of being a Christian and a Christian way of being an Igbo. In this regard, the *Holy See* [the papacy or papal court] reminds us that in the process of inculturation, we must keep in mind that the Church is to transcend, purify and animate culture.

One may assume that the moment, which Bishop Ugorji spoke of, would include Nwedo's time as Bishop.

One of Nwedo's contemporaries, the popular Reverend Monsignor Maduka, even before Vatican reforms were announced was a promoter of culture and champion for the adaptation of Christianity to Igbo culture. He preferred native over clerical clothes. He made Igbo language, idioms and proverbs the main vehicles for preaching. He carried himself like an Igbo elder and spoke as one. He thus espoused a theology that was not a simple demand of purifying Igbo culture through the instrumentality of Christianity. In the eyes of some, Monsignor Maduka was a maverick, and while he would represent those considered to be fringe people, Bishop Nwedo would be a conformist—one committed to finding ways to satisfy the demands of the Catholic doctrines he was called to propagate and defend, and at the same time remain committed to having his heart in the right place for his native culture. I see Monsignor Maduka as a “state of mind.” If his thinking had prevailed, perhaps, the bishops of Igboland, who serve poor populations, would choose to carry sticks instead of silver crosiers; and celebrate masses with cups made of local materials instead of gold.

Founding Schools

The training of the personnel to serve in the various offices of the new diocese was a matter of urgent administrative exigency. It certainly was uppermost in Nwedo's mind. Hence in 1960, barely a year after his consecration as Bishop, Nwedo established a seminary high school—Immaculate Conception Seminary, at Ahiaeke, Umuahia. He embarked on serious campaigns to attract young boys to the seminary and these efforts proved very rewarding. This minor seminary later supplied the majority of candidates, who studied philosophy and theology at the Bigard Memorial Seminary, Enugu. Nwedo also sent some candidates to the seminaries and universities in Europe to complete their studies. His guiding philosophy was that his local church would be well enriched when those priests returned home, having become more educated and acquainted with the churches in those countries. Some of those priests were among the first group of indigenous faculty at the Bigard Seminary, Enugu.

Simultaneously, Bishop Nwedo embarked on establishing elementary and high schools. He ensured that none of the zones that made up the diocese was left out in his education plan. In Umuahia zone, there were Immaculate Conception Seminary, Ahieke; Mercy High School, Ozuabam; Santa Cruz, Olokoru; and St. Anthony's Boys High School, Ohafia. In the Aba zone, there were Mercy High School, Nbwasi; St. Ephraim Secondary School, Owerrinta; Sacred Heart College, Eziukwu; Mercy Girls Secondary School, Ogbor Hill; and Annunciation Junior Seminary, Amaudara. In Okigwe zone, there were Mercy Girls Secondary School, Okigwe; Annunciation Secondary School, Isiukwuato; Aquinas Secondary School, Osu; and Mercy High school, Ehime. Thus, following in the footsteps of such missionaries as Father Leon Lejeune and Bishop Shanahan, Nwedo chose the school as the cornerstone for evangelical ministry in Umuahia diocese. The school population was in tens of thousands. The curriculum included religion classes. In most cases, the principal was a priest or a mature

catholic educator. These mission or church schools made education accessible to the youth, especially in the rural areas, so long as government schools were fewer and were mostly located in urban areas.

Catholic schools were usually built in the communities that donated land and in some cases, contributed money as well. The church was entrusted with the management and employment of teachers and in many cases, government provided the salaries. A town was proud and felt a great sense of gratitude to the church for their school. In 1970, Nwedo joined the rest of the bishops in the former Eastern States to protest takeover of the mission schools by the Government of Ukpabia Asika. The bishops saw the government's decree as calculated measure to marginalize the role of the church in the education of the youth. Bishop Mark Unegbu explained government intentions as follows: "to deprive thereby the church of economic means of sustenance and more importantly to reverse the Christian education of the young generation."²⁴ Some people, however, supported the takeover, arguing that only government could provide the money for the repair of damages in most of the schools caused by war. Since government maintained the physical structures of the school and paid teachers' salaries, it seemed justified that it should also take over the management of the schools.²⁵ The bishops and the majority of parents were convinced that church-managed schools did a whole lot better in the areas of discipline and curriculum. The bishops refused any form of compensation, allowing the issue to remain open for discussions with subsequent state governments.

Founder of Religious Congregations

The role that missionary sisters, such as the Holy Rosary, played in Southern Nigeria, especially in the education of young women, was outstanding. It was the model Nwedo aspired to adopt for his young diocese. But on failing to attract any such foreign group, he realized he had to start one. This was in 1961, and he named this religious institute Daughters of Mary Mother of Mercy (DMMM). The institute formally opened on January 17, 1962—the feast of St. Anthony of Egypt—Nwedo's patron saint. Nwedo was perhaps proposing the spirituality of Saint Anthony for this young group.

The Institute started with 29 young aspirants at an unfinished building of Our Lady of Mercy Secondary School, Mbawsi. Most of the aspirants did not yet complete primary school education. This humble but critical step, of course, demanded intense and extensive work, involving the bishop's close supervision. Some sisters of the Immaculate Heart Congregation were invited to help with the formation of the young aspirants. The first six of the foundation members made their first religious profession at St. Theresa's Church, Afara, Umuahia, on December 8, 1966. The mission of the congregation included living a life of prayer and penance; making the life of the members a sign of the love of God for a sinful world; teaching in schools; caring for the poor in hospitals, orphanages and homes; and working in parishes as pastoral assistants. Through these activities and through observance of the evangelical counsels, the members

would bring glory to God, and honor, to the ever Blessed Virgin Mary. By the same means, they sanctify their members and bring about the salvation of souls.²⁶ The religious institute was recognized by the Vatican and raised to the status of a religious congregation on July 17, 1993. This gave the group the autonomy to decide on matters of leadership and other procedures; and the founder no longer had responsibilities in such matters.

By 1995, the Congregation had over 700 professed members. It became one of the fastest growing female religious congregations in the country. By the year 2000, the numbers had skyrocketed with 1,300 professed sisters, 120 novices, 100 postulants and about 400 aspirants.²⁷ This astronomical growth was seen as indicative of the hunger in the souls of many young women for work in the Lord's vineyard. Nwedo seemed to have anticipated this response when he made its founding a priority at the beginning of his administration.

The sisters seriously carried out the activities indicated in their organization's mission. Some of their members were sent to universities and institutions in Germany or Rome to acquire necessary skills required for work in the health and educational areas. Nwedo and the sisters worked very hard to build and manage several hospitals and health institutions in different parts of the diocese. These places include St. Joseph's Hospital, Ohabiam, Aba; Mercy Hospital, Umulogho Obowo; Mercy Hospital, Ikwelle; and Mercy Hospital, Ihechiowa in Arochukwu. An Orphanage was built at Okwelle, and today it has become a full-fledged hospital.²⁸ There are maternities at Owe, Umuna-Okigwe and Umukabia in Mbutu Ngwa. In this way, critical healthcare was made available to the sick in more remote parts of the diocese.

As their numbers increased, the congregation responded to invitations from other churches. Some were sent to work in other dioceses in Nigeria as well as overseas. Thus, the convents of the Congregation spread to Ghana, Sierra Leone, the Cameroons, Lesotho, Italy, Germany, Austria, England, the Philippines and the United States of America. According to the historian, Casmir Eke, Bishop Nwedo intended to found a congregation to serve as "A Spiritual Power House"—a contemplative order—and he was satisfied that they fulfilled that goal, engaging in active service to the people of God.²⁹

In 1970, Bishop Nwedo founded a congregation of priests—Sons of Mary Mother of Mercy (SMMM). This Congregation has also attracted many young men to priesthood. In addition to exercising normal priestly pastoral duties, the members are required to imitate the spirituality of the founder too. They have engaged in education of the youth, hospital chaplaincy and advocacy for the poor and orphans. In the vision of the founder, through these activities as well as the observance of the evangelical counsels, the members would bring glory to God, and honor to the ever Blessed Virgin Mary. SMMM sanctifies its members and assists in bringing salvation to many souls. During Nwedo's time, the congregation had grown large enough to send out missionaries to other countries. It has, however, remained an unsettled question: whether this male Congregation was redundant or not, or a duplication of institutions, especially in the face of enormous financial burden on the diocese? This is because Nwedo had financial

obligations for both his diocesan and the regional seminaries, where the training of priests had been successful in that it met the needs of the diocese.

Spiritual Legacy

While Nwedo spent a lot of time creating new parishes, building schools and hospitals, his life was equally immersed intensely in spiritual activities. He believed that to be fruitful, an apostolate required a spiritual source of energy. In his addresses to priests and religious people, he emphasized this conviction, citing the writings of such fifteenth-century spiritual masters as Thomas A. Kempis, John of the Cross and St. Theses of Avila; or the more recent ones such as Therese of Lisieux. Of course, Philippians 4: 131 (I can do everything through Christ who gives me strength) was his favorite biblical passage that he quoted ever so often. He sought to demonstrate this through his ministerial priesthood and his other spiritual activities of constant prayer, penance and the practice of Christian virtues.

According to those who lived with Nwedo, he had strong devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, which he visited each day to pray. He was also devoted to the Blessed Mother Mary through praying the rosary daily and preaching on Mary's virtues and graces at every opportunity. He had attributed the successful founding of his religious congregations to Mary's intercessions. He had named both of the congregations after Mary. Likewise, he chose Mary, the Mother of God, as the patroness of his cathedral and the diocese. In addition, Nwedo was also devoted to his patron saint, Anthony of Egypt, who was famous for his life of prayer, fasting and penance. Nwedo prayed to saints and sought to imitate the way of a strong union with Christ.

Union with Christ was Nwedo's ultimate spiritual goal and he intensely upheld and spoke about it. To avoid shallow results in their apostolate or ministries, the Disciples of Christ, the priests and religious people, must relentlessly seek to cultivate an authentic union with him. He exhorted his spiritual daughters and sons to pray constantly and to practice contemplative prayer. Contemplative prayer would guarantee that they achieve union with Christ. He explained that such relationship with Christ would strengthen them and equip them for the battles against evil forces.³⁰ It also would enable their efforts in the vineyard of the God to bear abundant fruits. Prayer and penance, according to Nwedo, call down God's blessing on the evangelical endeavors.³¹ That union sanctifies the priest, who in turn is able to sanctify others. With such teachings and exhortations, Nwedo revealed his deep convictions about the power that resides in the spiritual or interior life.

Nwedo's spirituality was rooted in biblical ethical teaching of love. There could be no separation between an authentic life of prayer and the commandment of love. The latter explains that charity is the greatest commandment that enables one to embrace both God and neighbor. One must show the love of God in practice by loving one's neighbor.³² Bishop Nwedo in his sermons and talks often stated these convictions with an aphorism: "Without love nothing

has value.”³³ He believed that one should have a love that overflows from within oneself and unto others and to show itself externally in works of prayer, sacrifice and good deeds. Such socio-ethical preaching is fundamental in Christian ethics, going back to practices in the early church. Earliest mission churches in Nigeria were devoted to humanitarian works and to the care of the sick in hospitals; and in these ways exemplified this same biblical injunction of neighborly or universal love. This is an area that Christian teaching resonates with Igbo practice of extended family relationships. This practice calls upon the members to care for very distant relations as well as members of one’s community who might be in need. This is a cultural ethic in consonance with the vision and mission of Nwedo regarding the congregations he founded.

The Test of Virtue

A major crisis occurred that threatened to taint the reputation that Bishop Nwedo had earned over the years through hard work and by the grace of God and the intercessions of Mary. The crisis erupted in the early eighties in the DMMM—the congregation of religious women he had founded. The congregation was split into two; some members behind the bishop and others supported their Mother General. The bishop was castigated by this latter group and they wrote several damning letters to the Nuncio in Lagos and to the Vatican. As a result of these complaints, Vatican’s powerful Congregation for the Religious removed Nwedo’s rights of overseeing the DMMM congregation and vested the same on Michael Eneja, the Bishop of another diocese. Rumors with innuendos of high-handedness and favoritism on the part of the Bishop and of intransigency on the part of the rebellious nuns were widespread.

Since I did not have the privilege to personally interview the bishop nor the Mother General, I cannot comment on this matter beyond what was public knowledge, and much of which was reiterated during my interview with some priests who worked with Nwedo and some sisters of the congregation. What I learned from the interviews was that the crisis started when, contrary to the bishop’s recommendation, the Mother General refused to allow a particular candidate to proceed for her religious profession. Both the Bishop and Mother General stuck to their positions and the matter lingered until Rome’s intervention. Nwedo, the founder and spiritual father, felt terribly humiliated by the actions of the Mother General. As the Congregation had autonomy by Rome’s decree, a basic question has been whether the bishop had problem of “letting go” or the Mother General was overzealous.

To Nwedo, the crisis brought pain and humiliation. Some of his spiritual daughters wrote about him, as one who, willingly accepted sufferings of the daily life and offered them to God as part of His redeeming act of love.³⁴ But this crisis was more than daily suffering of ingratitude and the burden of being a pioneer and founder of two Congregations. However, his faith and imitation of Christ remained his refuge. Hence his 1980 Lenten Pastoral letter wherein his exploration of the themes of suffering and resurrection of Christ is quite revealing.³⁵

His spiritual daughters, who were close to him, described him as one who was completely resigned to God's will in all areas and circumstances of his life. This is because he was absolutely convinced that God would not fail him, and that Jesus and Mary would always give him strength and success. He had such unflinching trust in God, and so undaunted, he took on challenging responsibilities with equanimity.³⁶ Still on the theme of Nwedo's handling of the suffering arising from the crisis, and seeing it as spiritual legacy, his successor Bishop Lucius Ugorji wrote the following:

He taught that when we are afflicted by distress and hardship; when we feel grossly misunderstood and misrepresented; when in a desolate world we feel abandoned by all; or when we are tempted to seek solution to one's problems by running from pillar to post in search of "miracles hawkers" or "prosperity preachers," we should draw strength from the cross of Christ and recall that "no cross, no crown," "no sweat, no sweet" and that "pain and gain go together."³⁷

Nwedo's teaching on forgiveness convinced everyone that he forgave the injury, which he felt was unjustly brought upon him by the Congregation he had founded. As a priest, he was an expert in forgiving others in God's name. Learning to forgive was one of his spiritual pursuits. He coined the acronym—BFA—which means "bearing one another, forgiving one another and helping one another" to teach the lesson of forgiveness. His spiritual daughters heard this over and over again as he encouraged them to live well in community and observe one of the vows they professed.³⁸ It can be said that theological anthropology espouses that the individual, who wishes to come to Christ, must do so by engaging other people in their day-to-day manifestations of shortcomings, sinfulness and weaknesses.

The Final Acts: The Cathedral and Diocesan Expansion

For a long time, Nwedo was making plans to build a Cathedral. As he well knew, building a befitting Cathedral would be the capstone of his episcopate. When finally, he laid the foundation stone in December 1988, it was on a 2,600 square feet, strategic piece of land. Although, this was two years prior to his retirement, he made sure that the design and structure of Mater Dei Cathedral would reflect several years of successful planting and deepening of the faith in Umuahia diocese. Given the limited financial resources, he knew that it would take several years to complete the building, for as the saying goes, Rome was not built in a day. By commencing the building of an imposing Cathedral, Nwedo defied every obstacle to fulfilling the dream closest to his heart.³⁹

In 1981, 25 years after Umuahia diocese came into existence with Nwedo as the first bishop, the Okigwe zone was made a diocese. In 1990, the Aba zone also became a diocese. This means that after Nwedo, three new bishops have been appointed for the huge area he shepherded single-handedly. These developments, along with the Cathedral, bear strong witness to the growing trends

of Catholicism in Eastern Nigeria. However, Igbo Catholicism still has a very strong Roman-Irish character, which Igbo bishops and priests are very proud to display. Such pride and insistence in portraying the foreign cultural trappings of the gospel, has translated to insignificant efforts in areas of inculturation during and after Nwedo. Zaire was able to get the Eucharistic rite approved for its local use; Ghana has made significant advances toward the same. These are serious cultural and faith developments in neighboring countries, from which Catholicism in Igboland could find inspiration. Such development will provide the necessary evidence that Christianity in Igboland is not against or opposed to Igbo culture.

Conclusion

In his final days, Bishop Nwedo continued to express his deepest appreciation for his beloved people and for the whole world. He continued to bless all the people in Umuahia diocese. Though he retired from active pastoral work in 1990, his presence always served as an added impetus to works of evangelization in the Catholic Church. The legacies he left behind remain the signposts for which he lived and died and will be remembered. Many of the tributes written for his funeral point to the exemplary, fulfilled and Christ-like life he led. Born in 1912 and ordained a priest in 1945, a Bishop in 1959 and died on February 12, 2000, he had achieved more than he foresaw. To the end, he was loved and respected by his people, including those who disagreed with him.

In the Nigerian Catholic circle, all agree that Bishop Nwedo was a visionary leader, a humble priest, a deliberate administrator and an educator, who founded many institutions. He is remembered as a well-gifted man, who was willing to dedicate his whole life to serving God in the Catholic Church. One of the sisters of the DDDM had these laudable comments: "Through his exemplary life style and selfless service to humanity, he carved a niche for himself. He enshrined his name deeply in the hearts of many, and so has immortalized himself in the Church, in Umuahia Diocese, Igbo land and Nigeria."⁴⁰ Following the steps of Bishop Shanahan of Eastern Nigeria, in evangelization and education of the youth, Bishop Nwedo added a chapter of gold to Igbo Catholicism.

Bishop Nwedo was a cofounder of the Knights of Saint Mulumba. He was among the first four members of this revered group which has grown in strength and numbers. The Grand Knights visited Nwedo in his sick bed and prayed together with his family for seven hours before he died. Some years after his death, his successor, Bishop Lucius Ugorji, who also had served as his secretary, believes that Nwedo lived an exemplary life worthy of consideration for sainthood. To that end, he has taken the preliminary step to compose prayers to be recited by the faithful of the diocese, and all those whose lives were touched by him. Certainly, there could be "the devil in the details" such as, some of the criticisms arising from the Episcopal appointments to the dioceses he created; or the disparaging letters written by disloyal nuns, which may still be lying in Rome. Nwedo might have appeared to many as a simple bishop, but he also might have been seen by others as an enigma, and that explains why the story of Bishop

Nwedo of Umuahia will continue to arouse discussions and study by Church people as well as historians.

Notes

1. Christopher U. Ezekwugo, *Chi: The True God in Igbo Religion* (Alwaye: Pontifical Institute of Philosophy and Theology, 1987), 114–116. See also P. Anozie, “The Religious Import of Igbo Names,” (PhD dissertation, Urban University, Rome, 1968).
2. D. Zahan, *The Religion, Spirituality and Thoughts of Traditional Africa* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 50.
3. M. A. Onwuejeogwu, “The Igbo Culture Area,” in *Igbo Language and Culture*, eds., F. C. Okafor and E. N. Emenanjo (Ibadan, Nigeria: Oxford University Press, 1975), 2–8.
4. J. P. Jordan, *Bishop Shanahan of Southern Nigeria* (Dublin: Conmore and Reynolds, 1984), 126.
5. Leonard A. Ugbor, *Prayer in Igbo Traditional Religion: Its Meaning and Message for the Church in Igboland Today* (Rome: Pontifical University Gregoriana, 1985), 56.
6. Emmanuel Ifemegbunam Ifesieh, “Prayer in Igbo Traditional Religion: Some Traditional Models (A Case Study),” in *Religion and African Culture*, ed., Elochukwu E. Uzukwu (Enugu, Nigeria: Spiritan Publications, 1988), 73.
7. *Dual Silver Jubilee Episcopal Ordination of Most Rev. Dr. Anthony G. Nwedo, C.S.Sp. and of Mater Dei Diocese, Umuahia 1959–1984*. (Brochure of celebration): 1. It was a common trend for missionaries to forge close relationships with local leaders, where possible. This helped them to acquire land for their buildings. Where a church is erected close to a palace, it might also guarantee the royal protection. In some other cases, the king or chief would have easy access to missionaries and the favors they could grant.
8. Michael Otonye, Jude U. Nwachukwu, Mary P. Ofiah, *Life and Times of His Lordship Most Rev. Dr. A.G. Nwedo: Bishop Emeritus of Umuahia Diocese* (Occasional publication, no place of publication, not dated), 2.
9. These include: F. Ekechi, *Missionary Enterprise and Rivalry in Igboland, 1857-1914* (London: Frank Cass, 1972); O. U. Kalu, *The Embattled Gods: Christianization of Igboland, 1841-1991* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2003); Elizabeth Isichei, *A History of Christianity in Africa* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1995); “Seven Varieties of Ambiguity”; Misty L. Bastian, “Young Converts: Christian Mission, Gender and Youth in Onitsha, Nigeria 1880–1929,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 73, no. 3 (2000): 145–158; E. A. Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria, 1842-1914: A Political and Social Analysis* (London: Longman, 1966); J. F. A. Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria, 1841-1891: The Making of New Elite* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1969).
10. The Prefecture of Southern Nigeria describes that ecclesiastical territory and the office. The cleric appointed to the office is referred to as the Prefect. In 1920, the Prefecture of Eastern Nigeria was raised to a Vicariate and the same year, Shanahan was ordained the bishop of the area.
11. Desmond Forristal, *The Second Burial of Bishop Shanahan* (Dublin: Veritas Publication, 1990), 72.
12. Jordan, *Bishop Shanahan*, 33–34.

13. *Ibid.*, 73.
14. *Ibid.*, 86.
15. See N. I. Omenka, *The School in the Service of Evangelization: The Catholic Educational Impact in Eastern Nigeria, 1885-1950* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1989).
16. Mark Onwuha Unegbu, *My Life: Autobiography of Most Rev. Mark Onwuha Unegbu, D.D. Bishop of Owerri* (Owerri, Nigeria: Assumpta Press, 2002).
17. Unegbu, *My Life*, 40.
18. *Ibid.*, 40.
19. *Ibid.*, 84. Diocesan priests are called secular priests to distinguish them from the religious priests, who take the vow for community life.
20. Unegbu, *My Life*, 78.
21. Leonie T. Iweh, "Bishop Anthony Gogo Nwedo and the DMMM" (Unpublished Notes).
22. Emil Ludwig reflected this prejudicial mind-set thus, "How can the untutored Africans conceive God? . . . How can this be? . . . Deity is a philosophical concept which savages are incapable of framing." See E. Smith, ed., *African Ideas of God* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh House Press, 1950), 1.
23. The Second Vatican Council lasted from October 11, 1962 to December 8, 1965.
24. Unegbu, *My Life*, 99.
25. Lawrence O. Obibuaku, "Qualitative Education: The Role of Government Take-over of School," <http://nigeriaworld.com/articles/2005/sep/061.html>, April 15, 2007.
26. Bibiana Ogbonnaya, *The Charism of the Daughters and The Sons of Mercy Congregation* (Umuahia, Nigeria: GIC Graphic Prints, 2000).
27. Otonye et al., *Life and Times of His Lordship*; Ogbonnaya, *The Charism of the Daughters*.
28. The Catholic Diocese of Umuahia, *Mater Dei Cathedral Umuahia: Blessing and Laying of the Foundation Stone, 3rd December, 1988* (Aba, Nigeria: Cynako International Press, 1988), 8. (Brochure of celebration).
29. Casimir Eke, *In the Footsteps of our Founders: A History of the Spiritan Province of Nigeria* (Enugu, Nigeria: Snaap Press Ltd, 2006), 556.
30. *Ibid.*
31. *Ibid.*
32. Eke, *In the Footsteps of our Founders*, 559.
33. Antoinette Maria Amauba and Eucharia Mary Ugonna, *Bishop Anthony G. Nwedo, C.S.SP.: His Spiritual Life and Work* (Enugu, Nigeria: Snaap Press, 2001), 7–8.
34. *Ibid.*, 12–13.
35. Anthony G. Nwedo, *Preparation for Resurrection: 1980 Lenten Pastoral* (Aba, Nigeria: Cynako International Press, 1980).
36. Amauba and Ugonna, *Bishop Anthony G. Nwedo*, 23.
37. L. I. Ugorji, *Bishop Anthony Gogo Nwedo Following Christ Crucified* (Enugu, Nigeria: Snaap Press Ltd. 2001), 20.
38. Amauba and Ugonna, *Bishop Anthony G. Nwedo*, 26.
39. *Mater Dei Cathedral Umuahia*, 3–5.
40. Iweh, "DMMM."

CHAPTER 5

Kenneth Dike: The Father of Modern African Historiography

Gloria Chuku

Introduction

Kenneth Onwuka Dike was a trailblazer in defense of African culture and historical studies. His African-centered orientation contributed to the development of historical consciousness of Africa, and the popularization of the use of oral sources and material culture in African historical method. He played a critical role in the rise of modern African historiography. Drawing primarily from his publications and augmented with studies about him and his works, and other relevant sources, this chapter analyzes Dike's record as a pioneer scholar in African historical studies. It focuses on his contributions to the protection and study of African culture and history; the advancement of African historical methods; scholarship in slave trade and the abolition in West Africa; and the British colonial rule in Nigeria. A critical review of Dike's role as a pioneer nationalist historian is presented, and his involvement in the Biafra–Nigeria War and how he juggled between career demands and familial responsibilities are also discussed.

The chapter also presents Dike as a man of foresight and many “firsts,” including a pioneer and outstanding scholar, a passionate teacher, a pragmatic intellectual leader, a dedicated administrator and an institution-builder. His sense of history impelled Dike to establish a number of institutions that still remain relevant to the Nigerian nation-state. He was a nationalist historian, who consciously deployed history in the service of Nigeria and Africa more generally in the waning days of European rule. Dike was also a husband and a father.

Childhood and Education

Dike was born in Awka in present-day Anambra state, Nigeria, on December 17, 1917. He was the third son of Nzekwe Dike, a Western-educated polygamist, an

itinerant medicine-man and a trader. His mother was Nwudu Dike.¹ His grandfather, Dike Nwancho, was a successful Onitsha-based trader with an extensive transactional network that included European traders. For Dike Nwancho, commercial success translated into political power as he was also a member of the Awka political establishment. In this capacity, he was one of the chiefs who welcomed Christian missionaries at Awka in the late nineteenth century; he later served as a warrant chief in the colonial administration.² Kenneth Dike was orphaned at a very young age, losing his father in 1922, and his mother a year later. Young Kenneth was thus raised by his grandfather, assisted by his elder brother, George Dike, who was born in 1909. Shortly after his sixth birthday, Dike was apprenticed to an itinerant medicine-man, who operated between Awka and the commercial town of Onitsha. He acquired a wealth of traditional historical knowledge and experience from itineration, and from many ancestral shrines and markets he visited with his master medicine-man, as well as from accompanying his grandfather to numerous meetings and festivals, listening to elderly men as they talked or deliberated on issues of importance to the community.

Dike began his primary school education at Government School, Awka. When his older brother, George, left for teacher training education in Warri in 1924, Dike moved between relatives and family friends, who lived in Opobo and Calabar. This meant that his formal education during this period was split between St. George's Elementary School, Igwenga, Opobo (in Ijo territory) and Hope Waddell School, Calabar (the home of the Efik and Ibibio). Dike subsequently moved with George to the latter's postings. George's first posting, after his graduation, was Government School, Udi (an Igbo town). When George was transferred to Awka, Dike returned with him and enrolled at Awka Government College. From there, he transferred to the prestigious Dennis Memorial Grammar School (DMGS), Onitsha, in 1933. Dike's leadership ability earned him the position of senior prefect (student leader) with the responsibility of supervising all students' activities. He was also involved in the school's religious activities; and was, in addition, a member of the Christ Church choir. He graduated from DMGS in December 1936. Dike then became a catechist at St. Michael's Anglican Church, Aba.³

Dike's commitment to mission work earned him a scholarship from the Niger Delta Pastorate Mission (a district of the Anglican Church of West Africa at the time) to study at Fourah Bay College, Freetown, Sierra Leone. The Sierra Leonean, S. D. Rhodes, then Chancellor of the Niger Delta Pastorate Mission, was instrumental in securing this scholarship. But first, Dike had to spend a year at Achimota College in the Gold Coast (now Ghana) to get a credit in secondary school mathematics in order to qualify for admission into Fourah Bay College. This he did in 1938. From Achimota, he moved on to Fourah Bay College in January 1939. At the time, Fourah Bay was affiliated to and awarded the degrees of Durham University. This meant that through Fourah Bay, Dike took the BA (in English, Geography and Latin) of Durham University (1939–1944), and a Diploma in Education.⁴ The diploma could be taken to indicate a professional shift from clergy to teacher.

In 1944, Dike visited home briefly, but in November of the same year he had to leave again on a British Council scholarship, for his MA degree in History at Aberdeen University, Scotland. He was the best graduating student in 1947 with a first class honors. Four months later, Dike registered for his PhD at King's College, University of London. Under the supervision of Vincent Harlow and Gerald S. Graham, he wrote a dissertation titled "Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta, 1830–1885." He successfully completed his PhD degree on July 28, 1950,⁵ and became the first African south of the Sahara to "pass through professional training" in Western historical scholarship.⁶

Career, Service and Activism

Dike left London in September 1950 after his studies and returned home to Nigeria. He joined the History Department of the University College, Ibadan, in November of the same year, making him the first African with a doctoral degree to teach African history at a university in Africa. During this period, the department did not offer any courses on African history. According to Ade Ajayi, when Dike joined the History Department, "the only available courses were in British History, European History, and the History of the Colonization of Africa by Alien Races."⁷ The latter course and the "History of the British Empire" were the only two courses where Africa was discussed. Dike tried, but failed to get the department, to introduce courses in African History. Unable to stand the internal politics within the History Department, especially those surrounding the insufficient emphasis being placed on the study of African history in history syllabus, as well as the denial of his request to start an honors school essential to training Nigerian historians, Dike resigned from University College in 1951.

He then accepted an appointment with the then West African Institute for Social and Economic Research (WAISER), later known as the Nigerian Institute for Social and Economic Research (NISER), Ibadan, as a senior research fellow (1951–1952). During this period, he pursued more research and revised his dissertation for publication. He taught in the History Department throughout the 1953–1954 academic year, but returned to it fully in the following academic year as a senior lecturer. In 1956, Dike achieved two other monumental firsts: the first African to be appointed a (full) Professor of History; and also chair of the department, thus becoming the first African to head a History Department.⁸ As the History Department chair, Dike finally had the opportunity to move the department in the direction he desired. He recruited faculty members who, with his leadership and inspiration, reformed the curriculum, with the increasing focus on the Africanist perspective. It was a challenge to develop a new curriculum that was tailored toward African history and that was relevant to Africa due to the paucity of relevant texts. Dike embraced the challenge head on in several ways. For short-term purposes, he convened conferences, which brought together scholars of diverse disciplinary backgrounds—historians, anthropologists, archaeologists and linguistics—to develop a multidisciplinary approach to the study of African past.⁹ Of critical importance to recovering Africa's past under the new curriculum

and methodology are oral traditions, archaeology and linguistics. Other important tools and techniques of reconstructing Africa's past come from anthropology, ethnography, arts, geography, musicology, botany and ethno-zoology.

With a new curriculum, Dike initiated an honors program in history as well as a number of research projects including the Benin Historical Research Schemes (1957) for the study of Benin history and culture. He was also connected with the establishment of the Eastern Nigeria History Research Scheme, and the Northern Nigeria History Research Scheme. In spite of his many commitments, Dike taught his courses because he knew it was the only way he could “remain in contact with the students and discover their talents.”¹⁰ He did identify those talents and nurtured them into outstanding scholars, and administrators. Some of them were sent overseas for advanced studies and were encouraged to work on Africa-related doctoral dissertations. Many of these dissertations “were eventually published in the Ibadan University [History] Series that Dike had arranged with the British publishing house of Longmans.”¹¹ For instance, Dike recalled how he “had a hand in sending Jacob Ajayi,” who had taken Dike's courses in his freshman year “to Jack Simmons, Professor of History in the Leicester University, where Ajayi took the honors degree in History in the University of London.” With a first class honors degree in history and the Derby prize, Ajayi was encouraged to proceed with his doctoral degree program at the same university.¹²

In general, Dike recognized that his “first job was to train Africans who will eventually join the staff.”¹³ Some of those he so trained were: Isaac M. Okonjo, who later wrote the *Constitutional Development of Nigeria*, and became head of the civil service in the Mid-West State; Mr. Odebiyi, who was later the head of the civil service in Western Nigeria; C. C. Ifemesia, who later became a professor of history; E. J. Alagoa (later, a full professor of history); T. N. Tamuno (later, head, Department of History at Ibadan, a full professor and vice-chancellor of the University); Obaro Ikime (later, a full professor of History and Director of the Institute of African Studies at Ibadan); and S. J. S. Cookey, who later became a full professor and vice-chancellor of the University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria.¹⁴

The History department at Ibadan attracted both indigenous and foreign students, and has been credited with producing the first group of home-grown doctoral degree holders. These included Adiele Afigbo (discussed in Chapter 6), Obaro Ikime, and Philip Igbafe. They were also employed as faculty members in the department. Some of them later helped in establishing and managing new universities and departments in different parts of Nigeria. As Dike put it,

if there was anything I did for my students, it was to inspire them to read more [because] I do not believe that students should go to the university to be ‘lectured’ into a degree; they should go to the university to ‘read’ for a degree. That is what libraries are for.¹⁵

Many of Dike's students took up the challenge, which eventually paid off. Dike also pursued the publication of research activities of the faculty and students of

the department, an initiative that made the Ibadan History department widely recognized as a leader in pioneering the new historiography in Africa.¹⁶ Dike transformed the department to become “the most productive and imaginative of all the centers in Africa engaged in historical research and teaching.”¹⁷ When a group of scholars sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation visited Ibadan and attended a history seminar, they reported that the “seminar in the History Department . . . was like listening to any seminar in Harvard, Oxford or Cambridge. These were times when the History Department in Ibadan was the best known in Africa.”¹⁸

Dike was the first African Principal of the University College, Ibadan (1960–1962); and when the college was upgraded to a full-fledged university, the University of Ibadan, he became its first vice-chancellor, a position he held from 1962 to 1967. He presided over the transition of the institution from a colonial college to an independent Nigerian university. Dike was pragmatic, meticulous, conscientious and firm in pursuing the Nigerianization (Africanization) of the university, especially in the employment of qualified administrative staff and faculty members as well as in course development and offerings. He was mindful of the adverse effects of in-breeding and the stimulating impact of talented and dedicated expatriate academics. He established new schools and departments including a Faculty of Social Sciences; as well as Departments of Arabic and Islamic Studies, Languages and Linguistics, Drama, Biochemistry, Forestry and Veterinary Medicine. His tenure also saw the beginnings of a Postgraduate School, which quickly matured into a highly regarded intellectual center. The School was the platform for Dike’s mission of developing Nigeria’s human capital in the humanities, the social sciences, education, the sciences, agriculture and related fields. From this point, he encouraged students to pursue their graduate programs at the university rather than at overseas institutions. He raised the standards so high that Ibadan degrees were as good as the best globally. The reputation of the Postgraduate School was such that it continued to attract students from all over the world even in the early 1980s. Based on the above accomplishments, Ade Ajayi described Dike as “a distinguished scholar, a man of integrity, a highly principled educationist, a successful administrator, [and] a far sighted pioneer who helped to build several enduring institutions,” which have served Nigeria well.¹⁹

To facilitate rigorous historical research in Nigeria, decolonize its history and address the problems of dearth of written sources, Dike played a leading role in the establishment of the Nigerian National Archives in 1954 and served as its first director.²⁰ The archives took up the task of collecting, documenting and preserving primary materials and making them accessible to students and researchers. Three branches of the National Archives were established at Ibadan in the west, Enugu in the east and Kaduna in the north. It has been observed that the “stimulus which the creation of the National Archives has given to historical research in Nigeria may well prove to be one of Dike’s major contributions to scholarship in Nigeria.”²¹ In addition to preserving historical records of Nigeria, Dike was also involved in the securing of the country’s antiquities. For 13 years, he served as

the first chairman of the Nigerian Antiquities Commission (1954–1967). Under his dynamic leadership, and in collaboration with such dedicated Englishmen as Kenneth Murray (education officer) and Bernad Fagg (an archaeologist), historical and archaeological sites and monuments were preserved, museums were built, and cultural artifacts collected and secured.²²

Dike founded the first academic and professional association in Nigeria, the Historical Society of Nigeria in 1955, and became its first president. He convened regular meetings of the association where scholarly ideas were exchanged. He also initiated the publication of historical studies in the association's *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* and the *Tarikh*. Dike was also instrumental in the establishment of book series at Ibadan, the most popular being the Ibadan History Series of which he was the first General Editor. Those who contributed to the book series were either directly or indirectly affiliated to the History Department of the University of Ibadan. The published manuscripts were mostly revised dissertations, and they represent the hallmark of nationalist historiography.²³ Dike, for a number of years, edited many of the monographs.

He founded the Institute of African Studies at University College, Ibadan, and the Center for Arabic Documentation. The institute became a meeting point of talents, who were applying interdisciplinary approach to African historical inquiries and African studies in general. Dike also played leading roles in founding other national and international organizations, such as the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs, the International (Secondary) School, Ibadan, and the International Congress of Africanists (later known as the International Congress of African Studies). In 1963, he became chairman of the organizing committee of the Congress, and until 1967 he was the president of its Permanent Bureau. He was also chairman of the Association of Commonwealth Universities (1965–1966), and vice-chairman of the International African Institute, London (1964–1975). In 1972, Dike was elected Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.²⁴

In 1959, Dike served as chairman of Eastern Region Education Commission, set up to review the educational system of the region. He was also appointed by the Nigerian government to serve as an African member of the Ashby Commission on Higher Education in Nigeria (1959–1960), set up to investigate Nigeria's needs in the areas of post-school certificate and higher education over a 20-year period. With modifications, the Ashby Commission Report was accepted by the Federal Government of Nigeria in 1961 as a blueprint for developing higher education and meeting the manpower needs of the country. One of the important achievements of the Commission was blending the best in the American higher educational experience with that of the British, and adapting the result to Nigerian conditions and realities. Subsequently, more universities were established, starting with the University of Nigeria, Nsukka; a National Universities Commission, and National Manpower Board were set up.²⁵

Following the 1966 Hausa/Fulani organized pogrom against the Igbo, Dike's faith in Nigeria, like that of most other Igbo, "faltered and he quit the University

of Ibadan in support of the Igbo [and Biafra] cause.”²⁶ In 1967, he accepted an appointment to chair the planning committee for a new university that was to be opened at Port Harcourt in the Eastern Region. During the war, Dike served as a roving ambassador and was appointed a cabinet member of the Biafra Government, even when he spent most of the time overseas, representing the Biafra cause. Some may criticize Dike for allowing ethnic sentiment to obfuscate his nationalist instinct and commitment to building a united Nigeria. As a nationalist and humanist, it was unquestionably a tough decision for Dike, but we have to remind ourselves that this was a matter of safety and survival. His appointment as the Principal and later vice-chancellor of a federal institution located in Yoruba heartland, aroused ethnic bitterness when due to the fear of Igbo domination, some individuals began campaigning for “ethnic balancing” and appointment of more Yoruba to important positions in the university. Following “the rising tide of ethnic tensions and conflicts of the mid 1960s . . . when higher education became too embroiled within the politics of ethnicity,” the University of Ibadan became “virtually ungovernable” and an unsafe environment for Dike and his family.²⁷ It was therefore natural that Dike had to leave Ibadan for safety in his Igbo homeland.

With the collapse of Biafra, Dike was appointed the Andrew W. Mellon Professor of African History (Harvard’s first Professor of African History) and also the chairman of African Studies at Harvard University (1970–1980).²⁸ At Harvard, he taught African history and pioneered the African Studies program. He also supervised research students working on different aspects of African studies. One of them was Felicia Ekejiuba with whom he collaborated on a study of the Aro of southeastern Nigeria. Upon his return to Nigeria, he became the first president of Anambra State University of Technology (ASUTEC, 1980–1983), a coordinate campus model institution with two campuses located at Enugu and Awka, respectively.

K. O. Dike was also an activist for social justice and political freedom. He was involved in the nationalist movement of the post-WWII era under the banner of the West African Students Union (WASU) when he was a student in England. According to Alex Animalu, Dike’s biographer, African students in London, who would later lead nationalist movements in their respective countries, sought Dike’s counsel. They fraternized and availed themselves of “Kenneth’s vast knowledge of African History. [He] helped them draft papers, supplying quotations from historical events, which would bolster the nationalist movement.”²⁹ It was his nationalist commitment that made him to turn down overtures from the University of Aberdeen for a position as a lecturer grade one at University College, Ibadan.³⁰ When he returned to Nigeria, Dike maintained covert involvement in political activism. For instance, in spite of increased pressure from the Awka Patriotic Union (a branch of the Igbo State Union) to play more active part in politics and Nigerian nationalist movement, Dike chose to work on his book, *Trade and Politics*, rather than engaging in overt nationalist movement and national politics of the 1950s. However, politicians and nationalist leaders sought his counsel.

Dike recalled that the Igbo, in particular, from Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe “to the lowest among the politicians made my home [at Ibadan] their base, whenever occasions demanded it.”³¹ But it was his deep sense of commitment to freedom, security and social justice that drove Dike to the Biafra cause when it became apparent that his Igbo people and neighboring ethnic minorities in Biafra were facing extermination in the hands of the Nigerian military government and its military forces.

As a humanist, dedicated to the training of young minds for the manpower development of Nigeria, Dike fought on behalf of the less privileged in society. For instance, to ensure that financial constraints did not hinder bright but indigent Nigerian children from attaining higher education, Dike persuaded the federal government to institute bursary awards (financial assistance) for Nigerian students.³² Concerned with the welfare of others, Dike and his wife were known for keeping an open house for students. At Ibadan, female students, especially those from the Eastern Region, visited regularly for advice and to have a feel of home away from home. Dike and his wife hosted parties, including wedding parties, for them in their house. This group of students desperately needed such assistance to cope with the new environment and rigorous academic demands they faced. This tradition continued at Harvard. In his remarks at the Memorial Service for Kenneth Dike on February 15, 1984, at Harvard, Preston N. Williams, Houghton Professor of Theology and Contemporary Change, who was also Dike’s neighbor and friend, stated:

I shall remember him [Dike] most fondly as a person dedicated to his wife, Ona, his five children and members of his extended family . . . The family hearth and T.V. room were always filled with children of their family members, fellow Nigerians, and citizens of every African state. Kenneth and Ona helped to provide education and housing for their relatives, and material and spiritual guidance for their African compatriots.³³

Kenneth Dike was also a loving and caring husband and father. After a seven-month courtship, he married Ona Patricia Olisa in 1953, a registered nurse and certified midwife, whom he met in London. They were blessed with three daughters and two sons: Chinwe, Emeka, Ona, Nneka and Obi. Undoubtedly, Dike’s professional commitments and the many demands on his time meant that he was mostly away from home; in turn, this took its toll on his family. For instance, when their first child, Chinwe, was born in 1954, he had so much on his hands that he told his wife, who was in labor, to “just go and take care of yourself as a nurse.”³⁴ In the 1970s, when he was at Harvard, Dike worked hard to make up for the long absences and distance of the 1950s and 1960s to the point that he refused to accept any commitment that would keep him away from his family. It was from then that he had the opportunity “of understanding [his] children, by giving time to them, and by helping towards their development.”³⁵ Dike was a sensitive family man, whose war experience made him more than ever closer to his wife and children.

Scholarship and Intellectual Legacy

In spite of the above distinguished record of accomplishments, Dike also excelled as the giant pioneer historian based on his scholarship in the field of African historical studies. In addition to his seminal book, *Trade and Politics*, Dike has to his credit a book he co-authored with Felicia Ekejiuba, three pamphlets, and over 30 pieces of scholarship, consisting of book chapters, journal articles, congress papers and occasional speeches, delivered at different forums from 1953 to 1983.³⁶ This section demonstrates the depth, quality and enormous contribution of Dike's scholarship to African historical studies, and to the development of African intellectual traditions. I examine his scholarship and intellectual legacy under four broad categories below: (1) his defense of African culture and history; (2) his role in advancing a new African historical method and historiography; (3) contribution to scholarship on slavery in West Africa, the transatlantic slave trade and abolition; and (4) on the British colonial rule in Nigeria.

Defense of African Culture and History

Kenneth Dike's greatest contribution to African intellectual traditions is in his defense and the reclaiming of African cultural and historical heritage. His earliest work, which generated international attention, was an article that was serialized in *West Africa*, a London-based journal, in 1953.³⁷ The article was a critical rejoinder to Margery Perham's piece, in which she argued against the granting of self-government to West African people (in particular, the Gold Coast) on the basis of their "primitiveness," technological "backwardness," "incapability," and "unpreparedness."³⁸ Dike was troubled by Perham's remarks because she was an influential intellectual figure and a leading adviser to the Colonial Office in London on issues affecting Africa. Conscious of the implications of Perham's derogatory remarks on the independence struggles of African people, as well as European ethnocentrism and emphasis on their technological superiority, Dike vigorously argued in favor of the primacy of culture and cultural relativism. Defining culture as "everything which goes to the making of the full life of a given community [such as] laws, customs, traditions, music, art, morals, belief, dress," Dike stated:

[T]here is no people without a culture and civilization of its own; without some means of controlling its environment in a manner more or less corresponding to its needs . . . It is my contention that seemingly abstract considerations such as those of culture and history are as important as more material ones in building a nation. They are at the root of the question of self-government. If the African has no past heritage, and no future except by imitation of European ways at a pace which the European thinks safe, then the Gold Coast is destined to fail. But if the instinctive belief of the African in his traditions is justified, the ultimate emergence of West African states as independent modern nations cannot be doubted. Every nation builds its future on its past; so the African must not only instinctively have faith in his own inheritance, but must also satisfy himself by scientific inquiry that it

exists. West African history remains largely unexplored. So the first and urgent need is research, not unwarranted claims for the African past often based on slender evidence.³⁹

Dike's response to Perham placed his name on the list of African intellectual heroes, nationalists and pan-Africanists. He was quick to grasp the linkage between historical studies and self-government for African territories. As he succinctly stated, "Our past is very much a part of our present, and as we comprehend that past so will the problems of the present be illuminated."⁴⁰ History is important to young and emergent African states, he continued, because many "great and far-reaching movements [or revolutions] have begun with a romantic appeal to the past [looking] back to their ancestors, their culture, for guidance and inspiration."⁴¹ It was Dike's belief in the relevance of African history in addressing African contemporary realities that informed his commitment to the discipline and his using it as a medium to correct long-standing Eurocentric misrepresentations of African peoples, their culture and civilization.

In the face of concerted efforts to deny Africans any agency in cultural production, a situation that was complicated by colonial assimilation and acculturation policies, Dike informed Africans of the compelling urgency to seek solace in their cultural heritage—language, music, dance, art, religion and institutions. This is because, in order for them to develop their self-esteem and confidence in themselves, they need to understand their own cultural development and respect their heritage. In another paper, Dike pointed out how Europeans had used "history to bolster imperialism" by their deliberate slanting and distorting of African history to justify their colonization of the continent.⁴²

He called for investments in research and studies about African historical and cultural heritage because "[m]an cannot live by bread alone, and cultural as well as material security is needed to make the whole man. The rediscovery of Africa's past is vital because . . . it has validity for the present-day African."⁴³ Self-knowledge and worth, central to the political and economic development of Africans, could only be achieved through the study of Africa's past and an appreciation of its cultural heritage. Undeniably, Dike's passionate and untiring efforts toward reclaiming African history and cultural heritage were unrivalled, and therefore worthy of emulation.

Advancing a New African Historical Method and Historiography

Dike was a pioneer in advancing a new historical method in the study of African history. He popularized the use of multidisciplinary approach, which in addition to documentary sources, relies on oral traditions, material culture, linguistic, archaeological and botanical evidence in African historical studies. Dike was bold to confront the hypocrisy of Eurocentric school of thought that presents Africa as a continent "without writing and so without history" by arguing that "we depend for much of our evidence of ancient history [not necessarily on written sources, but] on art, archaeology, language and oral tradition," and that all

records, whether “written or embodied in folklore and tradition, [contain] human history recorded in cultural patterns, industry, religion and art.”⁴⁴ He pointed out that “there is no reason to discard oral tradition” as an important source of historical knowledge “provided it is used in conjunction with evidence from other sources and the possibility of inaccuracy is always borne in mind.”⁴⁵

Dike demonstrated his call for multidisciplinary approach in his *Trade and Politics* by applying two broad “types of sources, British and African.”⁴⁶ In his research in Nigeria, he used oral traditions, historical remains such as works of art and their pictorial representations; and manuscripts such as government records—consular papers, court documents and a series of *Confidential Intelligence Reports*. He read papers in private hands such as family documents and accounts of local historians. He observed and consulted historical relics (war canoes, trading canoes, guns, other European articles, marble statue of Jaja of Opobo and his three-story prefabricated house imported from Liverpool, and trade routes). He conducted oral interviews and immediately was confronted with the contradictory nature of such a historical source. For instance, while at Bonny, Jaja was presented as “a rebel and a traitor”, but in Opobo, he was held as a “national hero.” Based on this contradictory evidence, Dike suggested that “it is important to discover the origin of one’s information and the community to which the informers belong.”⁴⁷ He also cross-checked the oral accounts, where possible, with those of early Europeans. The British sources included manuscripts in Colonial and Foreign Offices such as administrative correspondence; and Parliamentary papers including reports and correspondence. The above primary sources were meticulously analyzed and interpreted alongside various types of secondary materials.

Dike used the example of Aro traditions to illustrate how the history of non-literate African societies could be reconstructed through an in-depth analysis of different versions of oral tradition using multidisciplinary tools. He explained how Aro oral traditions he collected with Felicia Ekejiuba revealed the dynamics of group relations and also served as an instrument of resistance to the established order as different interest groups competed for the control of Aro political economy. They collected different versions of oral traditions on particular historical events from different segments of the population representing different interest groups and classes. Dike argued that the different versions and even the manipulations of Aro oral traditions should discredit neither such traditions nor the events being narrated. Instead, he suggested that they should be seen as a demonstration of a constantly changing polity in which dialectical relationships between its competing interest groups and classes sought solutions to the dynamic processes of development and change.

He remarked in the 1960s that when the Europeans colonized Africa, their scholars did not bother to understand African history or build on its existing tradition, rather they “continued to write as if Africans were not active participants in the great events that shaped their continent” As a result, the “history of European traders, missionaries, explorers, conquerors and rulers constituted, in their view, the sum total of African history.”⁴⁸ Even in the history of West Africa,

historians and students had continued to focus on external factors that “tended to submerge the history of the indigenous peoples and . . . bestow undue prominence on the activities of the invaders.”⁴⁹ He called on Africanist historians to apply African-centered paradigm in their analyses and interpretations of historical evidence. Applying this approach in his *Trade and Politics*, Dike explained that the “British end is dealt with only in so far as it helps to explain events in West Africa.”⁵⁰ He also noted that prior to WWII, “the study of African history was retarded, and to some extent vitiated” due to the assumption that some parts of the continent lacked written records and therefore lacked history worthy of studying.⁵¹ For these reasons, he welcomed the new African historiography that came with independence movements in Africa.

In a 1980 address, Dike urged Africanist historians not to relent in their efforts to decolonize and extend the frontiers of African history because even though the colonial era when the colonizers controlled history for their own ends had ended, “ignorance of African history persists and old prejudices die [hard].”⁵² In addition to studying about the great kingdoms and empires of Africa, he encouraged them to also focus on detailed investigation of non-literate small-scale societies and states and their institutions by deploying multidisciplinary tools and methods of the social sciences including documents, language, art, oral traditions, music, field systems and evidence from the countryside.⁵³ Since historians are both humanists and social scientists, he urged them to intensify their search for new methodologies in African history and to exercise caution when applying theories derived from the study of other cultures and societies to African historiography. Rather than propagate theories that do not always fit the facts, historians should create tools and techniques that would enable them deal with the practical problems of African historiography.

Dike also called on Africanist historians to firmly reject the practice of explaining historical events in Africa largely from impulses or stimuli originating outside the continent, the so-called “perpetual external dynamic of African history.”⁵⁴ He urged them to view modern African history as a direct continuum of the pre-historic period and as an entity in itself rather than as an appendage of Arab or European civilizations erroneously propagated by the Hamitic apologists. He was critical of cross-cultural analysis as applied to African history by Eurocentric scholars due to its inherent distortion and racial bias. But, he was of the view that in-depth historical studies of African societies could provide useful data required for comparative approach, generalizations and theory formulations that could benefit non-African cultures and societies. His commitment to developing a new historical orientation and methodology saw the birth of a novel African historiography

In his review article on *Trade and Politics*, John Flint acknowledged that there have been serious works on African history such as Samuel Johnson’s *History of the Yorubas*, but none could rival Dike’s book, which he described as “an event of more than academic interest [because it] heralds a new era of African historiography [by its] destruction of historical myths” surrounding Euro-African relations, especially how Africans reacted to “European commercial and social stimuli” in

the nineteenth century.⁵⁵ Adiele Afigbo has pointed out that the “interest and importance of” Dike’s book “lay in the historiographical revolution which it inaugurated rather than in the accuracy of its detailed narrative.”⁵⁶ According to historian Robert July, Dike was “responsible for many of the advances in historical scholarship that marked the two decades following the conclusion of the Second World War . . . His work had established a secure base for the study of an African past.”⁵⁷ To John Fage, the book was “hailed as a first fruit of the indigenuous African history that was so much needed by colonial peoples who were seeking independence and nationhood.”⁵⁸ For these accomplishments, Dike was appropriately called “The Pioneer Historian.”⁵⁹

Slavery in West Africa, the Transatlantic Slave Trade and the Abolition

One of the significant areas of historical inquiry in which Dike left his legacy is in the study of slavery in West Africa, the transatlantic slave trade, and the abolition. In his seminal book, Dike meticulously applied multiple sources to analyze the complex pattern of trade and rivalries in the Niger Delta city-states. He revealed an intricate commercial relationship between Africans of the Niger Delta and Europeans during the era of the transatlantic slave trade, and the tremendous economic, political and social changes that occurred as a result of its abolition and the transition to the so-called legitimate commerce. Justifying his focus on the Niger Delta, Dike argued that the region was not only the main center of the African trade with Europeans in the sixteenth-century Gulf of Guinea, but was also “the leading slave mart in West Africa” in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, “equaling the trade of all West Africa put together.”⁶⁰ It also exported more palm oil “than the rest of West Africa put together” in the first three decades of the nineteenth century.⁶¹

Dike was bold in linking the capital derived from the transatlantic slave trade and African slave labor to the emergence of England as an industrialized power. African slave labor, he argued, produced “the wealth of the Indies . . . from whence emerged the capital that financed the industrial revolution” in England.⁶² By the end of the eighteenth century, Liverpool was able to divert capital generated from the transatlantic slave trade to cotton trade with America and “[i]nventions connected with the cotton industry followed each other in rapid succession” and transformed England into an industrialized power.⁶³ In his award-winning book, Nigerian Joseph Inikori meticulously advances the connection between the role of Diaspora Africans in large-scale commodity production in the Americas during the era of slavery and the expanding markets and technological development that gave England a lead in industrialization. His study “focuses on the contribution of Africans [both continental and Diaspora Africans in the Americas] to the successful completion of the industrialization process in England from the mid-seventeenth to the mid-nineteenth century.”⁶⁴ By implication, the Niger Delta as the most important slave mart in West Africa contributed to the development of the economies of the West Indies and to the industrial advancement of England.

Dike attributed the rise of the Niger Delta as the largest slave market in West Africa to a number of factors including the location of the coastal communities on the Atlantic seaboard and their transformation into city-states; the Niger highway and other river-ways, which served as arteries of commerce; social and political organization around Egbo Society and the House system; proximity to the densely populated Igbo hinterland; among others. He delineated two broad political groupings in the Niger Delta city-states: the monarchies—Bonny, New Calabar (Kalabari) and Warri; and the republics such as in Old Calabar, Brass and others. The Efik trading towns of Creek Town, Henshaw Town, Duke Town, and Obutong were small republics, each with its own leader and council, but were “united by the Egbo confraternity . . . a sort of freemasonry, a secret cult, uniting the ruling classes . . . open to freemen only.”⁶⁵ It served as a supreme authority with executive and legislative functions, enforcing peace and order and safeguarding the interests and privileges of the nobility while it kept the less privileged—women, slaves and the masses—under control. The House System, which grew out of the needs of the Delta society served as a cooperative trading unit and a local government institution. It was made up of the House head, members of his family, and slaves he retained in his personal service; they manned the trading canoes and engaged in other productive activities. The House head was responsible for maintaining law and order in his separate quarter of the community.⁶⁶ The Egbo Society and the House System contributed to the rise of the Niger Delta as a famous center of commerce by maintaining law and order necessary for trade, and settling disputes among traders.

Dike also showed how land scarcity in the Igbo hinterland necessitated economic specialization and encouraged outward-migration. He noted that “owing to their numerical superiority and consequent land hunger the [Igbo] migrants (forced or voluntary) formed the bulk of the Delta population during [and prior to] the nineteenth century.”⁶⁷ Between the seventeenth century and the first three decades of the nineteenth century, the Igbo constituted the largest number of the enslaved exported across the Atlantic Ocean through the Niger Delta ports. Quoting Captain John Adams’ 1822 record in the Bonny wholesale slave mart, no

fewer than 20,000 [slaves] are annually sold here; 16,000 of whom are members of one nation, called Heebo [Igbo] . . . during the last 20 years [Bonny] exported no less than 320,000 [Igbo and] at New Calabar . . . 50,000, making an aggregate [number] of 370,000 Heeboes [Igbo]. The remaining part of the above 20,000 is composed of the natives of the Brass country . . . and also Ibbibbys [Ibibios] or Quaws [Qua Ibo].⁶⁸

Dike credited the Aro traders for increasing the number of enslaved Igbo in the Niger Delta and also the transatlantic slave trade. The Aro took advantage of their trading organization, and exploited the widespread influence of their oracle—the Ibiniukpabi—acting as “mediators between God and the clans and assuming themselves to be the spokesmen of the Almighty, they held a privileged position throughout the land.”⁶⁹ The Aro erected “what amounted to a theocratic state

over eastern Nigeria” with numerous “colonies” serving as “divinely ordained” centers of commerce and “Aro middlemen” as “the economic dictators of the hinterland.”⁷⁰ In a collaborative study with Felicia Ekejuiba, Dike elaborated more on the rise of the Aro business class, their activities in the trade of the Niger Delta and its hinterland, and the collapse of Aro economic hegemony in eastern Nigeria.⁷¹ It is important to note that the Aro were not the only slave dealers in Igbo area. The Nike, Abo, Awka, Nkwerre, Abiriba and Ngwa traders, for instance, were involved in the trade. Moreover, according to Dike, the “system of obtaining slaves by use of oracular devices was fairly widespread in the Ibo country . . . there were . . . the Agballa at Awka, the Igwe at Umunora [Igwekala of Umunneoha], the Onyili-ora near Nri, and Ogba, a cave in the Nkisi stream at Ogbunike in the Onitsha district.”⁷²

While acknowledging the spirited efforts of the abolitionists—Christian evangelicals and humanitarians led by William Wilberforce, Thomas Clarkson and others—to end the slave trade, Dike, following in the footsteps of West Indian Eric Williams, argued that the most important driving factor was a shift from mercantilist economics, which suited slavery and slave trade to the rapid technological advancement in industrial production and the aggressive pursuit of free trade.⁷³ The humanitarian factor “so widely advertised at the time,” Dike continued, reflected the “ideological place of changes taking place in the economic plane.”⁷⁴ Dike’s argument for the primacy of economic factors in the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade was bold because that was a time when it was almost heretical to pursue such line of historical interpretation. Humanitarianism and economic forces complemented each other in bringing the slave trade to an end. With the economic change induced by the industrial revolution, Britain began to view West Africa as a valuable source of raw materials and as a potential market for British manufactures. It was then that it became convincingly more profitable to use West African labor for agricultural production in Africa than to continually ship Africans to the Americas where it had become increasingly costlier to maintain and manage slave labor due to a number of factors, such as frequent bloody slave revolts and slave escapes.

In examining the enormous political, economic and social changes that occurred as a result of the abolition of the slave trade, Dike focused on the correlation between economics and imperialism and how the synthesis affected Africans. While Eberé Nwaubani has examined the dynamics and complexities of this relationship, using Dike’s *Trade and Politics*,⁷⁵ effort is being made in this chapter to expand the discussion by including other works of Dike in the analysis. In one of his articles, Dike pointed out that the “abolition of the slave trade by Britain in 1807 precipitated a drastic change in Anglo-Nigerian relations.”⁷⁶ It led to direct British control of Nigerian territories and Nigerians’ subsequent loss of independence. The industrial revolution intensified the British quest for raw materials and new markets for their manufactured goods. Coastal Nigeria witnessed bitter economic conflict between British traders who traded in European manufactured goods for Nigerian raw materials on one hand, and the Portuguese and Spanish traders and African middlemen on the other, who wanted to continue

with the much-valued slave trading in the Americas for sugar cultivation and cotton production.

Abolition also led to internal rebellions and upheavals in the Niger Delta. For Dike, the primary reason for the upheavals in Bonny was the failure of the free classes to initiate a change in the political institutions that would correspond to the new economic order and emergent social class of the city-state. With the abolition came liberated men, some of whom constituted “the richest traders, the bravest soldiers, and the ablest commanders, and on [whose labor] the economic welfare of the city-states” entirely depended.⁷⁷ As slaves, their influx “reduced the number of freemen to an absolute minimum” and they even remained dominant numerically in post-abolition era.⁷⁸ As liberated men, some of them were commercially “wealthy and influential [and] rose to positions of responsibility . . . by the sufferance of the aristocracy;” yet many were “still subjected to the intolerable social and political stigmas [and] slighted by the free classes at every turn.”⁷⁹ The political alienation and social stigmatization created class tension between freeborns and liberated slaves and resulted in open conflicts in the city-states between 1850 and 1875. Because in Bonny, “ex-slaves had no rights” politically, Dike reiterated that they “were not fighting to be free but to gain more political power.”⁸⁰ Citing the absence of any major upheavals in Nembe and Okirika states, for instance, G. I. Jones expanded Dike’s analysis by suggesting that in addition to freeborn-liberated ex-slave class antagonism, “population drift, lineage accretion and segmentation, and political accretion and fission,” were fundamental to understanding the political crisis of post-abolition Niger Delta states.⁸¹

The British Colonial Rule in Nigeria

Dike’s scholarship has enriched our understanding of the dynamics and intricacies of the British colonial project in “Niger Territories,” which later became Nigeria. He argued that the Niger and its delta provided “the best illustration of the process by which the trading activities of 500 years led in the nineteenth century to the political subjection of West Africa to Europe.”⁸² He traced the origin of colonial domination of the Niger territories to the era of consular rule (1849–1885), when the British government appointed consuls to oversee British commercial interests along the Bights of Benin and Biafra (coastal areas of modern Nigeria and the Cameroons).⁸³ John Beecroft was appointed the first consul in 1849 following the British naval defeat of Old Calabar, Bonny and Fernando Po in 1837 and 1848. In 1851, the British captured Lagos, the last stronghold of the Portuguese and Spanish slave traders in the region; deposed its ruling king, Kosoko, and enthroned Akitoye as their protégé, whose policies favored their interests. Ironically, Dike repeated the Eurocentric myth, which regarded Kosoko as “the anti-British and slave-trading king of Lagos [who] could not be persuaded to change his ways.”⁸⁴ He failed to see the British campaigns against King Kosoko in the same light as their pattern of crushing any local opposition to their trading interests. Kosoko had to be replaced with a much malleable Akitoye

for attempting to exclude European traders from the trade between Lagos and the Yoruba hinterland.⁸⁵

Coastal states were subjugated by the British naval power and their rulers either intimidated to cooperate, or exiled and replaced with malleable ones through gunboat politics. For example, King Dappa Pepple of Bonny was deposed by Consul Beecroft and exiled to Fernando Po, Ascension Island and London, where he spent seven years, and in his place, Prince Dappo, a puppet of the British, was appointed in January 1854. King Pepple's crime was his determination to protect his authority and the sovereignty of Bonny when the British reneged in their successive treaties involving financial compensations between 1836 and 1841. In 1844, King Pepple seized several British gunboats, disarmed and threw their crews into jail.⁸⁶ Consular rule was crude and informal; it was also cheap and self-supporting through reliance on indigenous authorities to advance British commercial interests. Dike informed us that it lasted as long as the British commercial activities along the coast were uninterrupted and the hinterland trade was nonexistent or in its infancy.⁸⁷ Consular rule ended in the western coast in 1861 when Lagos was proclaimed a Crown Colony of Britain and in the eastern coast in the 1880s, due to threats posed by other European imperial powers to the British interests in the Bights of Biafra and Benin.

With the successful exploration of the River Niger from Bussa to the Igbo territory by Richard and John Landers in 1830, the river became a major highway of European imperialism in Africa with subsequent number of steamboat commercial and humanitarian expeditions and opening up of trading posts on its banks. In the combined government, commercial and missionary expedition of 1854, educated Africans from Sierra Leone and West Indies replaced Europeans to reduce the high mortality rate of the latter in previous voyages. The expedition was led by Surgeon William B. Baikie, who used quinine to deal with the malaria menace. In 1857, the British government contracted Macgregor Laird for the commercial development of the Niger valley. Dike indicated that between 1857 and 1885, "commercial expansion in the Niger valley took precedence over scientific and missionary enterprise."⁸⁸ Consequently, trading posts were established at over 20 locations including Aboh, Onitsha and Lokoja with river navigation extended several hundreds of miles into the hinterland. Between 1879 and 1885, George Goldie and his National African Company (later, the Royal Niger Company [RNC]) contributed in securing Nigeria for Britain by defeating the French, unifying British trading interests and providing some degree of protection for the hinterland trade. The British declared an Oil Rivers Protectorate over the Niger basin on June 5, 1885, with a consulate at Old Calabar. The protectorate was renamed the Niger Coast Protectorate in 1893 with vice-consuls stationed at Degema, Bonny, Brass, Warri and Benin. Indigenous authorities were subjugated—Jaja of Opobo, 1887; Nana of Itshikiri, 1894; the Brass, 1895; and Oba of Benin, 1897 in order to fully secure the protectorate. In 1899, the administration of the protectorate was transferred to the Colonial Office. In 1900, the territory was renamed the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria.

In the north, the RNC secured a treaty with Borgu in 1894, and launched a successful military campaign against the emirates of Nupe and Ilorin in 1897. Following the revocation of the RCN's charter in 1899, the British government declared a protectorate of Northern Nigeria and took over its administration. Frederick Lugard, a distinguished British military officer, who is credited with the so-called indirect rule, succeeded Goldie in 1900 as the High Commissioner of the protectorate. He carried out military expeditions against Nupe, Kontagora and Yola in 1901; Bauchi and Bornu, 1902; Kano and Sokoto, 1903; and other states and communities, and consolidated the British colonial rule in the north. In the west, a governor was appointed in 1886 over the Colony of Lagos. With a number of successful military campaigns against Yoruba states in the hinterland, the whole region was brought together and governed as the Colony and Protectorate of Lagos in 1906. When the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria was added, the whole area became known as the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria with a governor and three provincial high commissioners for Western, Eastern and Central Provinces. In 1914, two administrations of Northern and Southern Nigeria were amalgamated and the whole territory that later became Nigeria was called the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria with Lugard as the governor.

Prior to 1933, there were, however, three different administrative units: the Colony of Lagos under an administrator; and the Northern and Southern Provinces, each under a lieutenant-governor. While the legislative power was vested in the governor alone in the Northern Provinces, in the Southern Provinces and the Colony of Lagos, the governor was assisted by legislative councils. A single Legislative Council was established for the whole country in the 1946 Richards' Constitution, which also introduced regionalism that had become a major problem in Nigerian unity. In all the administrative units, the governor enjoyed absolute power. At the local level—Native administration—it was convenient and cost effective to use local rulers, elders and their councils, who were controlled by the British district officers. The colonial regime was extremely undemocratic and excluded a few highly educated Nigerians from government. It is therefore understandable why the educated elite were instrumental in mobilizing the indigenous populations for independence movement that ousted the British colonial government in 1960.

Dike offered explanations for the British amalgamation of Nigeria. One of the reasons was financial expedience. Amalgamation enabled the British to use the resources of the Southern Protectorate to administer the relatively poor Northern Protectorate and save the Imperial Treasury "unnecessary" financial burden. It was also more expedient to engage in infrastructural development—construction and maintenance of railways, river and road facilities and communication system—from a centralized authority than from multiple administrations. Amalgamation, as Dike noted, was also "necessitated by considerations of economic progress and the administration of matters of common interest" that might arise in the component territories, which constituted Nigeria.⁸⁹ An important question here is whose "economic progress"? Britain's or Nigeria's? Even though Lugardian dual

mandate suggested that the British colonial project was for the mutual benefit of Britain and Nigeria, available evidence has shown that it was an extremely exploitative relationship.⁹⁰ Nigerians were not only subjected to exploitation, but they also suffered from racial discrimination and acts of violence in the hands of their British colonizers.⁹¹

Dike had suggested that the ultimate and primary reason for the British colonial project in the Niger territories was building a united nation. He credited the British with the work of state-building in Nigeria. He stated: "It is clear . . . that since the occupation of Lagos in 1851, the tendency in Nigeria has been towards unification [and] the development of a common nationality."⁹² This could not have been the case when the British had notoriety for the policy of "divide and rule," and preferred political fragmentation over strong centralized polities that threatened their imperial interests. According to Dike, it was due to "the divisions, rivalries and wars between the inhabitants of the Niger territories," that "Britain had to impose a government of her own making, over these discordant elements" in order for commerce to prosper.⁹³ The irony in Dike's suggestion is that he tended to condemn the indigenous state-builders—the Egbas, Ijebus, Ekitis and Ibadan people of the Yoruba; the Fulani in the northern region; and the Ibibio, Efik and Igbo in the east—for "warring against each [*sic*] other and lacking unity or cohesion" while he seemed pleased with the British invaders for bringing together this "medley of little tribes, or sections of tribes" into a "united" state called Nigeria.⁹⁴

Dike's scholarship also covers an evaluation of the contributory role of the Christian missionaries in the making of modern Nigeria. He credited them with being responsible for the social development of the country through their commitment in providing formal education and modern medical services to many Nigerians. He referred to formal education, which was provided through mission schools, as "the greatest instrument of change in Nigerian society."⁹⁵ Western education transformed many Nigerians so as to conform to the new order of society—the hybridized Nigerian milieu. It offered more avenues for economic and social mobility as well as access to new corridors of power. Most Western educated Nigerians were the products of mission education, and had largely constituted the greatest instruments of change in the Nigerian landscape—in politics, the economy, social and religious organizations. Yet Dike did not acknowledge the negative impact of missionary activities in Nigeria. The divisiveness engendered by rivalries among various Christian denominations, the condemnation of indigenous religious practices, and the erosion of the cultures of the ethno-linguistic groups in Nigeria were ignored in Dike's works.⁹⁶

Dike was a pioneer African nationalist historian. Generally, African nationalist historians have been criticized for their tendency to present one-sided and idealized narratives that obscure the destructive and destabilizing characteristics of the individuals and institutions they studied. Such accusations center on their historical methodology, which relied extensively on oral traditions and other non-written sources as viable resources in historical reconstruction, and their alleged presentation of an unproblematic past uninterrupted by conflicts and regression,

and without any social contradictions. For instance, it has been alleged that Dike celebrated the commercial and entrepreneurial ingenuity and sophistication of the Niger Delta and Aro traders, especially during the transatlantic slave trade, but minimized the fear, insecurity, destruction and instability these groups' commercial activities engendered in the Niger Delta and its hinterland.

Nationalist historiography has also been criticized for its failure to critically analyze the activities of individual African slave dealers with the same moral lens as those of their Euro-American counterparts. It has failed to explore how precolonial states, which were involved in the transatlantic slave trade, compromised sociopolitical institutions and became alienated from the internal sources of power; and has also failed to link the economic institutions and capital that sustained the trade and slavery to the colonial enterprise in Africa. Other criticisms include its failure to move beyond a historical perspective that accords privileges to the elite over the less privileged as well as failing to make historical enterprise more relevant to the challenges, problems and realities of modern Africa.⁹⁷

Reminiscences, Recognition and Awards

The above criticisms notwithstanding, Dike's enormous contribution to the reclaiming of African history and the development of African historical studies cannot be overemphasized. The acceptance and popularization of oral traditions and multidisciplinary sources in the reconstruction of Africa's past following the publication of his book, has sparked a new light and infused tremendous energy in African historical studies. Dike's scholarship, services and activism, have inspired many groundbreaking studies in African history. For instance, the multiple themes, relevant to the history of southern Nigeria in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries covered in *Trade and Politics*, motivated other scholars to explore some of them in detail.⁹⁸ Similarly, a number of historical scholarships on church history produced since the publication of Dike's pamphlet on the *Origins of the Niger Mission, 1841–1891*, might have been inspired by that piece of work. Pointing to the probability of such inspiration, Adiele Afigbo stated that “the unwary scholar would point to the fact that Professor Ajayi's study of the Christian missions came later and also covered exactly the same years, 1841–1891.”⁹⁹

Dike's pioneering efforts made history as an academic discipline an attractive scholarly endeavor, especially in Nigeria. The large number of Nigerians who pursued history as a discipline and a career between the 1950s and 1970s attests to this observation. His new intellectual orientation and historical scholarship attracted students and scholars, who engaged in serious and rigorous historical studies that made the Ibadan School of History, which he established and managed, the most popular school of historical inquiry in Africa. The scholarly debates and academic vibrancy of the Ibadan School produced a series of monographs that demonstrated originality, rigorous historical research and meticulous methodological analysis.

For the above reasons, Kenneth Onwuka Dike received several recognition and awards, nationally and internationally. Between 1961 and 1983, he was bestowed with 15 honorary degrees from notable universities in Nigeria and overseas, the highest, to the knowledge of the author, any Nigerian had received within such a space of time.¹⁰⁰ The citation of the University of Michigan (USA), conferring Honorary Doctorate of Law on Dike in 1979, appropriately likened his achievement to that of Nicolaus Copernicus (1473–1543), the Polish astronomer, who overthrew the ancient cosmology, which put the earth at the center of the universe, has remained the most quoted. According to the citation:

Voyaging strange seas of thought alone, a great scientist, artist, philosopher, or historian can change the point of view from which most of us look upon the world around us . . . Professor Kenneth Onwuka Dike's contribution [as important in its own way like that of Copernicus] has been to change our perceptions about the history of Africa. While that "heart of darkness" was being pushed into our consciousness by the explorer, the slave-trader, the missionary, and the businessman, the histories of Africa were being written by outsiders looking in. In 1956, however, in his Oxford published history of *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta*, Professor Dike looked at his country from the inside out, and suddenly no history written of any part of Africa can ever be the same, for the whole prospect has been changed. Apologetic, enthusiastic, or condescending histories of Africa are banished, like colonialism itself.¹⁰¹

In an introduction before his 1982 First Annual Museum Lecture, K. O. Dike was described as a professor of history who "was held in very high esteem the World over 'as a distinguished scholar of modern African historiography, an untiring apostle and crusader of African studies and an intellectual symbol of African personality.'" ¹⁰² Alex Animalu, who was an undergraduate at the University of Ibadan in 1960 when Dike became its first African vice-chancellor, stated:

During those years, we (the students) had variously thought of him [Dike] as a genius, a model of scholarly achievement, a leader, nationalist, *odogwu nwoke* (valiant man of Igbo ancestral legend), and a saint. Fourteen years later, those impressions remained undiminished in my heart.¹⁰³

Adiele Afigbo described Dike as "an exemplary man, a great historian, and an immaculate academic statesman."¹⁰⁴ Nigerian Matthew Mbu called Dike "a gentleman *par excellence*."¹⁰⁵ Dike has been given credit for altering "the true meanings of concepts such as adaptation, Nigerianization (or Africanization), Afrocentricity, nationalism and Pan-Africanism . . . [and for using] his various positions to stimulate a new intellectual consciousness, which rescued African history from the colonial, racist intellectual tradition of his time."¹⁰⁶

Sadly, Kenneth Dike died on October 26, 1983, at the age of 66 years. In his eulogy at the burial site of Dike on November 19, 1983, historian Chieka Ifemesia, on behalf of the Historical Society of Nigeria, applauded Dike as the "Father of modern African Historiography," "Foremost historian of the

land,” “History-king,” “Historian-statesman,” “Super man of Learning,” “Great Teacher,” and “Doyen of the brave reputed abroad,” who “studied, taught, wrote and lived history all [his] life.”¹⁰⁷ He left an enduring legacy as a liberator of African history and culture, which earned him the title of father of modern African historiography.

In recognition of his contribution to the development of higher education and human capital in Nigeria, the president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Alhaji Shehu Shagari, conferred on Dike the Commander of the Order of the Niger (CON) in 1981. In 1985, the Historical Society of Nigeria commissioned the Annual Dike Memorial Lecture series in honor of its founding father. Several eminent Nigerian scholars have, under this series, delivered stimulating lectures, covering the breadth of Dike’s scholarship, the state of historical studies in Nigeria and of the Nigeria state.¹⁰⁸ Several symposia have been organized in his honor by former students, and the Historical Society of Nigeria. A Kenneth Onwuka Dike Center was opened in his hometown of Awka on October 26, 1988.

Conclusion

It is unquestionable that Kenneth Onwuka Dike was a man of enormous energy, skills and versatility whose thoughts, ideas and concerns were about the advancement of Nigeria, Africa, people of African descent, and humanity. He was a passionate teacher and pragmatic educationist, who challenged his students, mentees and associates to strive for high standards. He fought and catered to his students, especially the less privileged ones. Mindful of the central role that teachers play in human capital development, and the significance of adequate motivation for maximum output, Dike campaigned for better conditions of service for teachers at all levels. A dynamic leader and dedicated public servant and administrator, Dike pioneered many important institutions and organizations vital to the development of Nigeria and Africa. He was a man of many “firsts”: the first senior prefect of DMGS, the first secondary school in Igbo society to score 100 percent passes at the school certificate examination in 1936; the recipient of the first first-class honors in history at Aberdeen University, Scotland, in 1947; and the first African vice-principal, first Principal and first vice-chancellor of the first university institution in Nigeria, the University of Ibadan; as well as the first president of the first university of technology in Anambra state, ASUTEC. He was the first indigenous chair of a history department (the University of Ibadan History Department); the founder and first president of the first academic organization—the Historical Society of Nigeria; the first editor of its journal, the *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*; and the first general editor of the Ibadan History Series. Dike was the founder of the National Archives of Nigeria and its first director; the cofounder of the Nigerian Antiquities Commission and its first chairman; as well as the first president of the International Congress of Africanists.

A meticulous scholar and rigorous researcher, who provided intellectual leadership for many Africans and those involved in African studies, Dike played an active role in the mobilization of scholars and the organization of resources for

the development of African history and African studies. He may not have volumes of work to his credit, but what is undeniable is the high quality, clarity, balance of judgment and sound argument in the scholarship that he produced.

For the above reasons and for the fact that Kenneth Onwuka Dike painstakingly pursued the grounding of African historiography in African culture and consciousness, he has justifiably earned the title of the Father of Modern African Historiography. He was indeed an Igbo and African cultural crusader, who turned down a request to write his biography because he felt that the person was not knowledgeable and nuanced enough in his culture. He was also a man committed to knowledge and excellence in the service of humanity, and whose dedicated service helped in enriching his country and the world. As a pioneer master-builder and diligent administrator, who made the University of Ibadan an international center of African studies and academic excellence, and a true nationalist, who was committed to making higher education relevant to human capital and other needs of Nigeria, Dike deserves more recognition than he has so far received. Here lies the significance of this chapter; and it is one's hope that many more studies would be carried out on the life and works of this giant pioneer in African historical studies.

Notes

1. See Alexander Animalu, *Life and Thoughts of Professor Kenneth Onwuka Dike* (Nsukka, Nigeria: Ucheakonam Foundation, 1997), Chapter 2.
2. *Ibid.*, 12.
3. *Ibid.*, 15–26.
4. *Ibid.*, 30–44.
5. Uzor M. Uzoatu, "Late Professor Dike's Home for History," *The Democrat* (Lagos, Nigeria), July 21, 1988, 7; Anon, "Nigerian for Ibadan," *West Africa*, February 20, 1960, 201; Michael Omolewa, "The Education Factor in the Emergence of the Modern Profession of Historians in Nigeria, 1926–1956," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 10, no. 3 (1980): 93–120.
6. See P. D. Curtin, "Recent Trends in African Historiography and Their Contribution to History in General," in *UNESCO General History of Africa*, Vol. I, ed., J. Ki-Zerbo (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1981), 54–71.
7. J. F. Ade Ajayi, "Towards a More Enduring Sense of History: A Tribute to K. O. Dike' Former President, Historical Society of Nigeria on Behalf of the Historical Society of Nigeria," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria (JHSN)* 12, nos. 3 and 4 (1984–1985): 2.
8. Animalu, *Life and Thoughts*, 83–84.
9. The Silver Jubilee Edition of the *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, 1980 covers many of these conferences convened between the late 1950s and early 1960s.
10. Animalu, *Life and Thoughts*, 86.
11. Robert W. July, *A History of the African People*, 5th edition (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1998), 591.
12. Animalu, *Life and Thoughts*, 86. Ajayi later succeeded Dike at Ibadan as the dean of the College of Arts. He also became the vice-chancellor of the University of Lagos, Nigeria.

13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*, 87.
16. Ajayi, "Towards a More Enduring Sense of History," 2.
17. July, *A History of*, 591.
18. Animalu, *Life and Thoughts*, 87.
19. Ajayi, "Towards a More Enduring Sense of History," 2.
20. Before the establishment of the Nigerian National Archives, K. O. Dike surveyed the Nigerian colonial government's documents in 1951 and produced Nigerian Records Survey, 1951–1953. The effort led to the establishment of the Nigerian Records Office in 1954, which became the Nigerian National Archives in 1958 with branches at Ibadan, Enugu and Kaduna, reflecting the three regions of the period. See K. O. Dike, *Report on the Preservation and Administration of Historical Records and the Establishment of a Public Record Office in Nigeria* (Nigeria: Government Printer, 1954); H. E. R. Hair, "The Nigerian Records Survey Remembered," *History in Africa* 20 (1993): 391–394.
21. J. D. Fage, "Kenneth Onwuka Dike, 1917–83," *Africa* 54, no. 2 (1984): 96.
22. See Kenneth Onwuka Dike, "The Nigerian Museum Movement," which is the First Annual Museum Lecture Commemorating the Silver Jubilee of the National Museum he gave at Onikan, Lagos in 1982.
23. Several important books were produced under the Ibadan History Series, including A. I. Asiwaju, *Western Yorubaland under European Rule, 1889–1945: A Comparative Analysis of French and British Colonialism* (London: Longman, 1976); P. M. Mutibwa, *The Malagasy and the Europeans: Madagascar's Foreign Relations, 1861–1895* (London: Longman, 1974); J. A. Atanda, *The New Oyo Empire: Indirect Rule and Change in Western Nigeria, 1894–1934* (New York: Humanities Press, 1973); A. E. Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs: Indirect Rule in Southeastern Nigeria, 1891–1929* (New York: Humanities Press and London: Longmans, 1972); T. N. Tamuno, *The Evolution of the Nigerian State: The Southern Phase, 1898–1914* (New York: Humanities Press, 1972); B. O. Oloruntimehin, *The Segun Tukolor Empire, 1848–1893* (London: Longman, 1972); S. A. Akintoye, *Revolution and Power Politics in Yorubaland, 1840–1893: Ibadan Expansion and the Rise of Ekitiparapo* (London: Longman, 1971); R. A. Adeleye, *Power and Diplomacy in Northern Nigeria, 1804–1906: The Sokoto Caliphate and its Enemies* (New York: Humanities Press, 1971); J. C. Anene, *The International Boundaries of Nigeria, 1885–1960: The Framework of an Emergent African Nation* (Harlow, UK: Longmans, 1970); A. F. C. Ryder, *Benin and the Europeans, 1485–1897* (New York: Humanities Press, 1969); Obaro Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry: Itsekiri-Urhobo Relations and the Europeans, 1884–1936* (New York: Humanities Press, 1969); S. J. S. Cookey, *Britain and the Congo Question, 1885–1913* (New York: Humanities Press, 1968); Murray Last, *The Sokoto Caliphate* (New York: Humanities Press, 1967); J. D. Omer-Cooper, *The Zulu Aftermath: A Nineteenth-Century Revolution in Bantu Africa* (London: Longmans, 1966); E. A. Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria, 1842–1914: A Political and Social Analysis* (London: Longman, 1966).
24. Ajayi, "Towards a More Enduring Sense of History," 3; Fage, "Kenneth Onwuka Dike," 98.
25. See K. O. Dike, "The Ashby Commission and Its Report," in *Issues in African Studies and National Education: Selected Works of Kenneth Onwuka Dike*, ed., Chieka Ifemesia (Awka, Nigeria: Kenneth Onwuka Dike Centre, 1988), 199–208.

26. Ajayi, "Towards a More Enduring Sense of History," 3.
27. *Ibid.*; Fage, "Kenneth Onwuka Dike," 98. See also Animalu, *Life and Thoughts*, 123–139.
28. This was the second time Dike was teaching in an American university. In 1958, he taught African history at Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, on the invitation of Melville J. Herskovits.
29. Animalu, *Life and Thoughts*, 64–65.
30. *Ibid.*, 70–71.
31. *Ibid.*, 90.
32. K. O. Dike, *An Address by the Principal, Dr. K. O. Dike, to Congregation in Trenchard Hall on Foundation Day, 17 November 1961* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Ibadan University Press, 1962), 8–9.
33. Animalu, *Life and Thoughts*, 197.
34. *Ibid.*, 89.
35. *Ibid.*, 6 and 156.
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37. Kenneth Onwuka Dike, "African History and Self-Government," *West Africa*, February 28, 1953, 177–178; March 14, 225–226; and March 21, 251; reprinted in Ifemesia, ed., *Issues in African Studies and National Education*, 71–79.
38. See Margery Perham, "The British Problem in Africa," *Foreign Affairs* 29, no. 4 (July 1951): 637–650.
39. Dike, "African History and Self-Government," 177.
40. *Ibid.*, 251.
41. *Ibid.*, 251.
42. Dike, "African History Twenty-five Years Ago," 14–15.
43. Dike, "African History and Self-Government," 251.
44. *Ibid.*, 225. See also K. O. Dike, "Foreword," in J. F. A. Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria, 1841–1891: The Making of New Elite* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1969), x.
45. Dike, "African History and Self-Government," 225.
46. Dike, *Trade and Politics*, v.
47. *Ibid.*, 225.
48. Dike, "Foreword," x.
49. Dike, *Trade and Politics*, 4.

50. *Ibid.*, v.
51. Dike, "Foreword," x.
52. Dike, "African History Twenty-five Years Ago," 16.
53. *Ibid.*, 17.
54. *Ibid.*, 19.
55. John Flint, "African Historians and African History," *Past and Present* 10 (November 1956): 96.
56. Adiele Afigbo, "The Spell of the Master Being a Review of Onwuka Dike and Felicia Ekejiuba: The Aro of South-eastern Nigeria 1650–1980," *Ikoru: Bulletin of Institute of African Studies* 7, nos. 1 and 2 (1992): 110.
57. July, *A History of*, 591 and 592.
58. Fage, "Kenneth Onwuka Dike," 96.
59. A Correspondent, "Pioneer Historian," *West Africa*, February 28, 1957, 917.
60. Dike, *Trade and Politics*, v and 28–29.
61. *Ibid.*, v.
62. *Ibid.*, 3.
63. *Ibid.*, 12 and 51.
64. Joseph Inikori, *Africans and the Industrial Revolution in England: A Study in International Trade and Economic Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), xvi.
65. Dike, *Trade and Politics*, 33.
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67. *Ibid.*, 30.
68. *Ibid.*, 29.
69. *Ibid.*, 38.
70. *Ibid.*
71. Dike and Ekejiuba, *The Aro of South-eastern Nigeria*.
72. Dike, *Trade and Politics*, 40.
73. *Ibid.*, 11. See Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1944).
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75. Ebere Nwaubani, "Kenneth Onwuka Dike, *Trade and Politics*, and the Restoration of the African History," *History in Africa* 27 (2000): 229–248.
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77. Dike, *Trade and Politics*, 153.
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79. *Ibid.*, 153.
80. *Ibid.*, 153 and 154.
81. G. I. Jones, *The Trading States of the Oil Rivers: A Study of Political Development in Eastern Nigeria* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 188.
82. Dike, *Trade and Politics*, 18.
83. See Dike, *Trade and Politics*, Chapter VII: "The Rise of Consular Power."
84. Dike, *Trade and Politics*, 130.
85. See R. S. Smith, *The Lagos Consulate, 1851–1861* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1979), 14–33.
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88. *Ibid.*, 22.
89. *Ibid.*, 32.

90. Frederick Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* (Edinburgh: W. Blackwood and Sons, 1922).
91. See for instance, Toyin Falola, *Colonialism and Violence in Nigeria* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009); Moses Ochonu, *Colonial Meltdown: Northern Nigeria in the Great Depression* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2009).
92. Dike, *100 Years of British Rule*, 31.
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96. Dike, *The Origins of the Niger Mission; 100 Years of British Rule*.
97. For criticisms of the African nationalist historiography, see Joseph E. Inikori, "The Development of Entrepreneurship in Africa: Southeastern Nigeria during the Era of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade," in *Black Business and Economic Power*, eds., Alusine Jalloh and Toyin Falola (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2002), 41–79; Peter Ekeh, "Sociological Anthropology and the Two Contrasting Uses of Tribalism in Africa," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 32, no. 4 (1990): 660–700; Paul Lovejoy, "Nigeria: The Ibadan School and Its Critics," in *African Historiographies: What History for Which Africa?*, eds., Bogumil Jewsiewicki and David Newbury (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1986), 197–205; E. A. Ayande, "How Truly Nigerian Is Our Nigerian History?" *African Notes* 5, no. 2 (1969): 19–35.
98. Examples of such works are Walter I. Ofonagoro, *Trade and Imperialism in Southern Nigeria, 1881–1929* (New York: NOK Publishers International, 1979); Ebiegberi J. Alagoa and Adadonye Fombo, *A Chronicle of Grand Bonny* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Ibadan University Press, 1972); Kannan K. Nair, *Politics and Society in South-Eastern Nigeria, 1841–1906: A Study of Power, Diplomacy, and Commerce in Old Calabar* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1972); Jones, *The Trading States of the Oil Rivers*.
99. A. E. Afigbo, *K. O. Dike and the African Historical Renaissance* (Owerri, Nigeria: RADA Publishing Co., 1986), 7. Even though Afigbo sounds a note of caution that Ajayi's book came out only three years (1965) after the release of Dike's pamphlet (1962), there is no doubt that Dike's work inspired others. While the pamphlet in question was a paper Dike read at the Centenary of the Mission at Christ Church, Onitsha, on November 13, 1957, Ajayi's book is a revised version of his PhD thesis presented to London University in 1958. But the book was published under the Ibadan History Series, when Dike was the general editor and therefore must have benefited from Dike's expertise. See F. Ekechi, *Missionary Enterprise and Rivalry in Igboland, 1857–1914* (London: Frank Cass, 1972); Ayande, *The Missionary Impact*; Ajayi, *Christian Missions*.
100. These honorary degrees include LLD, University of Aberdeen, Scotland (1961); DLitt, Boston University, USA (1962); LLD, Northwestern University, USA (1962); LLD, University of London, England (1963); LLD, University of Leeds, England (1963); DSc, Moscow University, USSR (1963); DLitt, University of Birmingham, England (1964); LLD, Columbia University, USA (1965); LLD, Princeton University, USA (1965); DLitt, Ahmadu Bello University, Nigeria (1965); DLitt, University of Ibadan, Nigeria (1974); DLitt, University of Ghana, Legon, Ghana (1979); LLD, University of Michigan, USA (1979); DLitt, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria (1980); and LLD, University of Bristol, England (1983). See Animalu, *Life and Thoughts*, 199 and 201.

101. "Citation by the University of Michigan on the Occasion of the Conferment of Honorary Doctor of Laws on Professor Kenneth Onwuka Dike in 1979," Reprinted in Animalu, *Life and Thoughts*, 201.
102. Dike, "The Nigerian Museum Movement."
103. Animalu, *Life and Thoughts*, 3.
104. A. E. Afigbo, "Foreword," in Animalu, *Life and Thoughts*, viii.
105. Animalu, *Life and Thoughts*, x.
106. Apollos Nwauwa, "Kenneth Onwuka Dike," in *The Dark Webs: Perspectives on Colonialism in Africa*, ed., Toyin Falola (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2005), 310 and 313.
107. Chieka Ifemesia, "Professor Kenneth Onwuka Dike, 1917–1983: A Funeral Oration," delivered at the graveside on behalf of the Historical Society of Nigeria on Saturday, November 19, 1983, *Bulletin of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, Special No. (1983): 1–3, 8 and 10. The Funeral Oration was reproduced in Animalu, *Life and Thoughts*, 190–196.
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CHAPTER 6

Adiele Afigbo and the Development of Igbo and Nigerian Historical Studies

Gloria Chuku

Introduction

This chapter examines Afigbo's enduring legacy to the development of Igbo historical studies, an area where his stellar accomplishments have been unrivaled. In addition, his impressive contribution to the development of Nigerian and African historiographical traditions as well as his ability to maintain a balance of analysis in his local, national and continental historical inquiries are analyzed. Fundamentally, Afigbo achieved a distinction in his scholarship in terms of its quality, relevance and contribution toward expanding the frontiers of knowledge and suggesting ways of ameliorating existential human and societal problems. African intellectual tradition is therefore enriched by the depth and spatial range of his scholarship. Also discussed are his contributions and services to his university employers, state and federal governments in Nigeria, and to a number of academic organizations he was associated with, as well as some of his criticisms.

Adiele Eberechukwu was born on November 22, 1937, at Ihube, Okigwe, in present-day Imo State of Nigeria. Adiele's father, Afigbo Egbuliwe, who was a farmer, died when he was just three years old. His mother, Keziah Afigbo Egbuliwe, taught him the first Igbo alphabets. But his uncle and step-father, Godwin Afigbo Egbuliwe, ensured that he received formal education. Early in life, Adiele established a history of academic excellence. He started his elementary school education in January 1944 at Methodist Central School, Ihube. With the Okigwe Native Administration scholarship, he attended St. Augustine's Grammar School, Nkwerre in Imo State from 1952 to 1956. He won the first prize in an Igbo essay competition, organized by Society for Promoting Igbo Language and Culture in 1955. In 1958, Afigbo enrolled as a history undergraduate at the University College, Ibadan, Nigeria (now University of Ibadan), which awarded

the University of London degrees. With an Eastern Nigerian Government Scholarship, Afigbo completed his undergraduate studies in 1961. He topped his class in graduation and therefore won the university's postgraduate scholarships, which enabled him to proceed immediately with his graduate studies in history. Afigbo completed his doctoral education in a record time of two years in 1964 and was awarded a University of London doctorate with the Irving and Bonnar Graduate Prize for the best original thesis in African history at Ibadan.¹ It was the first history doctorate from a university in Nigeria.

After graduation, Afigbo joined the Department of History at Ibadan. However, the mid-1960s' political crisis in Nigeria, which led to the outbreak of the Biafra–Nigeria War in 1967, forced Afigbo to leave Ibadan for the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN) in 1966.² With three solid books, 21 peer-reviewed papers, and five book reviews, he was promoted to full professor of history in 1973. He retired from UNN in 1992 at the age of 55 years. Afigbo's academic excellence and meteoric rise could be attributed to hard work, self-discipline and luck. For instance, in addition to his brilliance, intelligence and enterprise at Ibadan, he was taught and mentored by such eminent historians as Kenneth O. Dike, Joseph C. Anene, J. F. Ade Ajayi and J. D. Omer-Cooper. The discussion below explores the many caps Adiele Afigbo wore, which included being a teacher and educator, a scholar, an education administrator and a public servant.

Service and Political Activism

As an academic at the UNN, Afigbo helped build a strong Department of History and Archaeology. He served as the Department's head in the 1970s during which period he provided the leadership and blueprint for the establishment of a viable history curriculum. He introduced Igbo history as an independent subject, and also initiated departmental seminars where faculty members shared new ideas and lines of inquiry. Other important positions he held at the university included dean of the Faculty of Arts (1977–1980, and 1983–1984) and director of the Leo Hansbury Institute of African Studies (1989–1992). After retiring from the UNN in 1992, Afigbo served Abia State University, Uturu, as the dean of Michael Echeruo College of Humanities and Social Sciences (1997–1999), and the director of Center for Igbo Studies (1999–2003).

Afigbo advocated for a Pan-Igbo Center for Igbo Studies, which would provide an institutional base for the pursuit and propagation of Igbo studies.³ Thus, upon arrival at Abia State University, he embarked on the re-organization of the Center for Igbo Studies to strengthen its research component. He was one of the founding members of the Ahiajoku Lecture Series, launched in November 1979 and has since then remained the highest intellectual festival of the Igbo.⁴ He served as editor, co-editor or a member of the editorial or advisory board of many important scholarly journals that included the *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, *Ikenga: Journal of African Studies*, *Journal of African History* (USA), *History in Africa* (USA), *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* (UK), and *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* (UK).

As an educational administrator, Adele Afigbo served as the Sole Administrator of Alvan Ikoku College of Education, Owerri, Imo State, in 1996 during a most difficult period in the history of the college, when it was saddled with many problems. He was also chairman of the Governing Council, Michael Okpara College of Agriculture, Umuagwo in Imo State (1994–1995). He also served as the Director for Research, National Institute for Strategic Studies, Kuru near Jos (1979–1982); member of the Nigerian National Archives Committee (1974–1983); and member of the National Antiquities Commission (1974–1978). The last two institutions have been committed to the collection, preservation and nurturing of Nigeria's cultural artifacts and heritage as well as important documents and publications. In all these positions, Afigbo demonstrated his leadership skills and dedication to service.

He brought the wealth of his experience in various bodies and capacities he served outside the academe. During the Biafra–Nigeria War, Afigbo served in the Directorate of Propaganda of the Ministry of Information, Republic of Biafra, a directorate that played vital role in the sustenance of the morale of both the military and civilian populations of Biafra.⁵ After the war, he was appointed into such positions as chairman, Historical Events Sub-Committee of the East Central State Census Committee (1972), which produced a booklet, *Historical Events for Telling Age*, used as a handbook to estimate the ages of non-literate respondents; chairman, East Central State Committee on Chieftaincy Matters (1975); chairman, Imo State Sub-committee on FESTAC 1977 (1976); member, Imo State University Planning Council (1979–1980); member, Presidential Planning Committee on Open University of Nigeria (1980–1981); and chairman, Board of Directors, Imo State Television (1981–1983). Between 1984 and 1987, he served the Imo State Government, first as Commissioner for Education, and later as Commissioner for Local Government.

Afigbo was a dedicated teacher, who set high standards for his students. He was admired by many of his students for his exemplary teaching, punctuality to classes and commitment to his job. According to a former student of his, who later became his colleague, “Afigbo’s depth and yet simplicity of analysis, and the range of his reading seemed unrivalled. It is impossible to miss his tutorials: he challenges his students to think, explore and debate. He has inspired many of his students into academics, and who subsequently try to emulate him.”⁶ Another former student of Afigbo, who later became a faculty at the UNN Department of History, stated that Professor Afigbo was “an inspiring lecturer and no-nonsense one at that [who was] very strict when it [came] to academic competence.”⁷ The high expectations he set for his students, though commendable on one part, had also earned Afigbo some criticisms. He was accused of inflexibility and less accommodating to the needs of less gifted (average or weak) students, who actually needed his guidance and mentorship the most. Throughout his career as a university professor, Afigbo never produced a doctorate graduate. Many of the graduate students, who were assigned to be supervised by Afigbo, accused him of unnecessary strictness, high-handedness and being uncaring. They believed that he frustrated them out of their graduate programs by his

rigid and uncompromising approach.⁸ Similarly, some of his colleagues, especially the junior ones, who needed his positive assessment and recommendation before they could be promoted, had criticized Afigbo for being arrogant, insatiable and a stumbling block to their academic development. Yet he had encouraged and supported many of his junior colleagues, including the prolific Elizabeth Isichei, who acknowledged such assistance in some of her books.⁹ In spite of these apparent weaknesses and criticisms, it is unquestionable that Afigbo was a man of outstanding competence in teaching and especially in scholarship.

Scholarship and Intellectual Philosophy

Adiele Afigbo was one of the most prolific scholars of twentieth-century Nigeria and Africa. In addition to nine authored and co-authored books, Afigbo edited six more, with over 200 pieces of scholarship comprising scholarly articles in learned journals and chapters in well-known books, as well as pamphlets, book reviews, public speeches and lectures delivered to audiences of varying backgrounds and interests.¹⁰ Strikingly, the sheer volume of Afigbo's scholarship does not dilute or compromise its quality. The originality of his arguments is reinforced by novel research areas he dealt with, his ability to contextualize his claims within appropriate contexts and the rigor of his analysis. Although his scholarship represents an impressive versatility, Afigbo distinguished himself in such areas as Igbo history and culture, slave trade and slavery in southeastern Nigeria, British colonial rule in Nigeria, intergroup relations in Nigeria, Nigerian history and development, as well as African historiography and historical methods. This chapter is an attempt to present Afigbo's scholarly contributions and intellectual ideals under these six broad categories.

Igbo History and Culture

Adiele Afigbo remained the leading historian of the Igbo people, who had tirelessly engaged in the recovering, reconstruction and popularization of Igbo history and culture. The sheer breadth and depth of his knowledge of the various aspects of Igbo history and culture is unrivaled. He had given considerable attention to the study of the pre-European contact period, the most neglected phase in Igbo historical studies, which covers several millennia when the proto-Igbo and Igbo people evolved into a distinct ethno-linguistic and sociocultural group. In his *Ropes of Sand*, Afigbo demonstrated that weaving the tapestry of the people's past, especially the earliest times in the absence of written evidence, was as difficult as making a rope with sand. In the absence of a single centralized polity with a class of griots and official historians, compounded by lack of European form of literacy, the reconstruction of Igbo history in pre-European contact era has continued to pose difficult challenges. However, Afigbo's scholarship has demonstrated a meticulous piecing together of diverse sources—oral traditions, archaeological and linguistic evidence, and other material culture—in reconstructing Igbo history. He showed that a lot of historical information could

be extracted by the study of language, artifacts and other material culture of a people. Along with Kenneth Dike and others, Afigbo had given authenticity to the use of oral traditions and to Igbo history and culture without conflating them with myths.¹¹ Afigbo's ability to employ "fragments of elusive evidence to craft persuasive historical construct [which helps] to deflate the balloon of myths and prejudices, ancient and modern, [that] have shrouded precolonial Igbo history," underscores his mental fecundity and uncanny skills.¹²

His research and publications cover important episodes as well as aspects of Igbo history, including myths and patterns of origins; population structures, migrations and settlements; basic cultures and subcultural zones; political and social organizations; economic foundations; textile industry, trade and trade routes; prominent men (Olaudah Equiano and Chief Igwegbe Odum) and women (Ahebi Ugbabe); oral traditions and material culture; intragroup and intergroup relations among the Igbo and between them and their neighbors; and the people's encounter with the Europeans (covering the eras of the slave trade, colonial conquest and resistance, colonial rule and decolonization). Afigbo's studies have also aimed at correcting stereotypes and misrepresentations of the Igbo, especially by European colonial officials, Christian missionaries, ethnographers, anthropologists and others.¹³ The people have been misrepresented as opportunistic, materialistic and belligerent.¹⁴

Igbo Origins and Migrations

In his study of Igbo origins and migrations, Afigbo noted the difficulty of relying only on oral traditions and ethnography, amiss what he referred to as the "prejudices" against the so-called segmentary or "stateless" peoples in favor of centralized political organizations. He pointed out that the study of the origins of such groups as the Edo, Yoruba and Igala with large-scale centralized political systems was not less difficult as that of the Igbo or Ibibio, who were regarded as "stateless" peoples. This is because oral traditions, linguistic and archaeological evidence and other sources have remained vital tools in studying the origins of both the centralized and decentralized peoples of Nigeria. The oral traditions of centralized states are as varied with diverse claims of origins as those of decentralized groups.¹⁵ For instance, among such traditions of origins, Afigbo pointed out, are myths and providential historiography in which these groups claimed they originated directly from God—that is, their ancestors were sent down from the sky, as well as the autochthony version that indicates that their ancestors and communities had been in their present sites since the origins of human beings.

The commonality of certain aspects of Igbo culture with the so-called civilized cultures of Europe and the Middle East gave rise to the myth that the people originated either from ancient Egypt or were one of the lost "tribes" of Biblical Israel. Afigbo was one of the pioneer Igbo historians to debunk this Oriental or Hamitic myth of Igbo origin, first claimed by Olaudah Equiano, then espoused by Europeans, and later popularized by Igbo writers, who, motivated by strategic rather than scholastic interests, associated Igbo origins with the Jews of

ancient Israel. Equiano based his claims to certain similarities between Igbo and Hebrew cultural practices, such as circumcision, naming of children after specific events and experience, and seclusion and purification of women after child-birth. Similarly, European colonizers and their agents singled out aspects of Igbo life and culture, such as the people's republican and democratic political culture, the Nri priestly tradition and hegemonic dominance, the Aro trading and oracular "empire," the Onitsha centralized political system, and the sophisticated art works of the Awka, Abiriba and Nkwerre, and attributed them to foreign provenance. To them, these Igbo groups were too intelligent to be Igbo. They must have migrated from North Africa, Middle East or elsewhere.¹⁶

Another European used similarities in Igbo and Hebrew rites of passage, symbolism of blood, as well as specific forms of economic and political organization, to attribute Igbo origins to ancient Israel.¹⁷ Ironically, these claims to alien origins had resonated with the above-mentioned Igbo groups and others who saw such claims as a mark of distinction and elevation. They had drawn parallels between Igbo business acumen and their sufferings at the hands of other Nigerian ethnic nationalities, and Jewish experience throughout history; as well as between the short-lived Republic of Biafra, established during the Biafra–Nigeria War amidst the hostility of other Nigerians and the state of Israel surrounded by Arab enemies.

However, there has been no linguistic or archaeological evidence supporting such Hamitic myth of Igbo origins. Afigbo used his work on Igbo origins to question the historicity of such claims and to deconstruct the political underpinnings of the Hamitic theory. He questioned the validity of the theories of a monogenetical origin of human races and peoples from the Middle East, as well as cultural diffusionism that are popular within anthropological circles, which attribute Igbo origins to the Orient. He suggested that these claims lack historical evidence and are merely an ideology for group survival. He thus replaced the theory with more persuasive and sustained evidence, which suggests autochthonous development around the Niger–Benue confluence area and subsequent dispersal. Afigbo argued that the British colonizers' support of Middle Eastern societies' influence on the Igbo without any direct descent suited the colonial project in the region. Such theory implied that the Igbo had been under the influence of the powerful Egyptian civilization from where some of its elite migrated to Igbo areas and through the process of interbreeding, produced special groups of people such as the Nri and Aro, who variously dominated other Igbo people. Under this thinking, British rule, with its pervasive cultural influence, was not a radical departure from Igbo experience of foreign cultural dominance, but rather a continuation of what the immigrant Hebrews or Egyptians had started, both experiences being beneficial to the Igbo. In this way, the Hamitic theory of Igbo origins, propagated by the British colonizers, portrays the benevolence of the British Imperial Empire in Igbo society.

The Hamitic theory places the origins of the Igbo at a nineteenth-century date, whereas oral traditions of the people, archaeological and linguistic evidence show that the Igbo had emerged as a distinct group more than 6,000 years ago.¹⁸ Drawing on linguistic evidence, Afigbo suggested that the Igbo were among the

members of the Kwa sub-group of the Niger–Congo family of African languages who established ancient sociocultural and political communities in the forest belt of Nigeria, precisely around the Niger–Benue confluence dating back to over 6,000 years ago. It was from here that they dispersed to surrounding areas due to a variety of factors, including increased population, pressure on the land and resource scarcity, and other factors. He also pointed to archaeological evidence that suggests that the Nsukka, Awka, Udi, Okigwe and Afikpo axes had developed coherent communities about 3,000 years ago. In addition to the geographical features and oral traditions of the Igbo, Afigbo concluded that the Igbo ancestors were firmly settled in and around their present homeland in southeastern Nigeria by the third millennium BC.¹⁹ He argued that the Nsukka, Awka, Okigwe, Orlu and Owerri areas constituted the heartland of the Igbo and their cultural baseline, a center whose location helped it retain most of what could be regarded as pristine Igbo culture unadulterated by external influences until it came into contact with European forces. From this center, waves of secondary and tertiary migrations occurred, leading to the establishment of West Niger Igbo, the Isuama and Ohuhu-Ngwa communities. Further expansion of these groups brought them into contact with such non-Igbo states and ethnicities as the Edo to the west, and the Annang-Ibibio to the east. Afigbo opined that “recoil” migratory movements dating back to between 500 BC and AD 1450, caused by counter-pressure and resistance from these non-Igbo peoples, led to the establishment of the communities of Kwale-Aboh, Agbor and Onitsha on the west, and Cross River and northeastern Igbo communities of the Aro, Abam, Ohafia, Abiriba, Ezza, Izzi and Ikwo.²⁰

As a result of the origins of the various Igbo groups and their contacts with non-Igbo peoples, they have come to share common cultural traits while at the same time demonstrating certain degree of heterogeneity in their cultural practices. On this basis, Afigbo referred to Igbo society as a “cultural federation” made up of culture centers and culture margins depending on the varying intensity of the practice and usage of the dominant Igbo traits.²¹ He delineated the Igbo region into subcultural zones: Amigbo-Okigwe in central Igbo, Nsukka-Nkanu in the northeast, Asaba in the western part, Ndoki in the south, and Cross River communities in the east. Afigbo also rejected any attempt to create an Igbo civilization dominated by a single source, in contradistinction, for example, to commentaries that depict the Nri tradition as the cradle of Igbo civilization.²² He demonstrated that the Nri were itinerant ritual agents who traversed northern Igbo, just as the Abiriba, Awka and Nkwerre blacksmiths, and the Aro traders and spiritualists dominated other parts of Igbo region and contributed to the development of Igbo civilization.

Political Organization

The branding of the Igbo as disorderly people, incapable of “consolidating [their] resources for the benefit of society at large” due to the people’s emphasis on individuality and competitiveness, has been challenged by the pioneering work of a host of Igbo scholars including Afigbo.²³ Afigbo’s studies of Igbo political

institutions show that the people had developed complex political systems; and that political decentralization did not amount to political disintegration. For centuries, prior to European contact, the Igbo developed and nurtured complex political institutions, which enabled them to deal with challenges emanating from their environment and its surroundings. Such institutions were diverse and included village republican, presidential monarchy/kingship, kinship and gerontocratic systems. Most Igbo polities practiced village republican political system through councils of elders and village assemblies. The Onitsha, West Niger and other riverine Igbo communities had presidential monarchies. According to Afigbo, the latter group started with a village republican system before they were influenced by “the nomenclature, the regalia and ceremonials of kingship and royalty from either Benin or Igala, or at times from both, and sought to integrate these with their indigenous systems.”²⁴ Among the central Igbo of Okigwe, Orlu and Owerri axis, government and politics largely depended on the kinship system. Here, titles and membership of secret societies and age-grades might confer on a person respect and recognition, but did not carry with them any political power and authority. However, in the Ngwa and Ohuhu area, kinship and membership of secret societies, such as the Okonko and Akang, conferred political leadership. This system was greatly influenced by the Ibibio and their secret societies, who were their neighbors. Influenced by their Cross River neighbors and their age grade system, the Igbo of Abakaliki and Afikpo, for instance, evolved a political system in which the business of government was met by a combination of the kinship and age grade systems.

Afigbo also noted that Igbo political institutions were generally democratic. While at the sublineage, lineage and village levels, direct democracy prevailed, at the village-group sphere, which was the largest political unit, it was representative democracy. Here, government was made up of a chain of hierarchically linked popular assemblies or councils, each regulating the affairs of a specific segment. All the levels embodied popular participation and diffused centers of authority and political control. It was a political tradition based on the principles of general consensus, and on equality and equivalence, where all members of a polity, either directly or through representation, and all segments, were allowed to participate in the decision-making process. Since it was believed that rules were already made by the ancestors and sanctioned by the deities, oracles and diviners played vital roles in Igbo political processes. Igbo social organization revolved around such powerful symbols as the *ofo*, *ikenga*, *ozo* and other title-taking paraphernalia.²⁵ It was a social culture that privileged individual achievement over ascribed status. All these institutions helped the Igbo maintain an ethic of power and an art of humane living that functioned as a form of informal spiritual commonwealth.

Economic Foundations

Adiele Afigbo also studied the economic foundations of precolonial Igbo society extensively, focusing primarily on the economic substructure upon which the society rested as well as the extent to which economic factors determined the

nature and character of Igbo culture and society.²⁶ His studies show that the Igbo people were successful in their adaptation to the tropical rain forest environment of West Africa through the exploitation of their natural endowments and the development of sustainable socioeconomic life. Three major economic activities of the Igbo, namely agriculture, manufacturing and trade, played vital roles in the survival of the people, and in determining the quality and nature of their culture, religion and cosmology. The Igbo were an agrarian people. Afigbo indicated that though Igbo agricultural tradition was as old as the settlement of the people, it “had by the first millennium A.D. become so advanced that it could support the civilization with which the Igbo Ukwu finds have been associated.”²⁷ He identified three evolutionary stages of Igbo agriculture. The first phase involved Igbo experimentation with local crops, including yams, vegetables and palm trees. The second was the adoption of south-east Asian species of yams, cocoyam, banana and others; and the third phase was marked by the coming of the Europeans who introduced such Caribbean species as corn, cassava, mango and breadfruit to the Igbo and the entire West African region. These new crops and species increased the variety of cultivable food crops that helped the Igbo sustain their high population density. I will add that they also helped to revolutionize Igbo dietary patterns.

Precolonial Igbo agriculture was efficient, intensive and highly ritualized with appropriate ritual ceremonies and taboos. The Igbo attached a great deal of importance to farming, their chief sustenance. As a result, every Igbo man and woman was a farmer. Since each household performed its own farm work for its sustenance, the Igbo valued large households, a tradition that encouraged polygyny and acquisition of dependents. Because of the centrality of land to Igbo agriculture, every member of the society was guaranteed usufructuary rights. As a result of the fertility of their soils, some Igbo areas distinguished themselves as the food baskets of the region. These include the northeastern Igbo zone of Abakaliki area (known as the *Ogu-ukwu*—big hoe farmers), the eastern Igbo of Anambra River valley, the Ikwerre and the riverine Igbo, whose surplus agricultural produce stimulated commercial exchanges in foodstuffs within and outside Igbo region.²⁸

The development of trade and the institutionalization of Igbo four market days of Eke, Oye, Afo and Nkwo are among the issues Afigbo covered in his extensive study of Igbo economy. As he rightly pointed out, trade exchanges developed in Igbo region as a result of increasing ecological differentiation, with different natural resources, between various Igbo groups. The state of mutual dependency that developed as a result gave rise to local trade, regional trade within Igbo area, and between the Igbo and their neighbors. Commercial relationships between the Igbo and their neighbors are discussed below under “Intergroup Relations.” Although it is hard to date when these regional and long-distance trades developed, archaeological finds at Igbo-Ukwu have shown that by the ninth century AD, the Igbo trading system was already engaging in the exchange of ivory, beads, bronze objects and slaves from far regions in the north. This evidence demonstrates that Igbo trading system and other institutions had so firmly developed by the ninth century that they were able to sustain the

civilization associated with the Igbo-Ukwu finds. While the precolonial mode of transportation was based on human head portage and by the use of canoes along major waterways, means of exchanges included such commodity currencies as salt, metal objects, cloths, cowries, brass rods, copper wires and manilas.

Iron smithery, cloth weaving, salt manufacturing, pottery, wood and ivory carving were among the best developed Igbo industries. The differential resource endowments of the various Igbo groups necessitated occupational specialization in the region. While the Awka, Abiriba and Nkwerre were famed Igbo smiths due to the abundance of iron ore and fuel in their areas, Uburu, Okposi and Abakaliki produced salt from their abundant brine lakes. The Akwete of Ndoki, Nsukka area and west Niger Igbo were cloth weavers. While famous carvers in Igbo region were the Umudioka, well-known potters were the Ishiagu, Nsukka and Ibeku people. Many of these industries were organized along gender lines, and also in guilds, which regulated production and marketing of the products as well as protected the producers. The producers were highly respected in society, and their products served many functions, including utilitarian, ritualistic and aesthetic.²⁹ The industries provided the technological base of Igbo society as well as facilitated commercial exchanges within Igbo region and between the Igbo and their neighbors.

Igbo society was regarded as an egalitarian and achievement-oriented system where individual achievements were highly valued and applauded. Yet, these achievers were adjudged as favored by gods and goddesses, and this belief explains the preeminence of Ikenga, the iconographic right-hand guardian spirit responsible for an individual success and upright living in Igbo life and culture. Individuals who acquired enormous wealth, the *Ogaranya*, lived a life of affluence different from those who barely eked a living, the *Ogbenye*. Yet, the Igbo placed the interests of the larger community above individual acquisitive zeal, a tendency that Afigbo opined helped to undermine significant economic development in Igbo homeland. Also, Igbo egalitarianism had its limits, given that social mobility was denied to certain individuals such as *ohu* (slaves) and *osu* (social outcast). Afigbo's scholarship also addressed questions concerning slave trade and slavery in Igbo society and beyond.

Slave Trade, Slavery and Emancipation

Igbo homeland witnessed internal, regional, continental and intercontinental trade in human beings. Specialists in the transatlantic slave trade have agreed that the majority of the enslaved exported through the Atlantic Ocean from the Niger Delta ports and the entire region of the Bight of Biafra was of Igbo origin.³⁰ If this is true, one expects that the transatlantic slave trade would have an immeasurable impact on Igbo society and therefore mark an epoch on the people's history. On the contrary, Afigbo posited that

the place of the slave trade in Igbo history has been unduly exaggerated and we should not perpetuate this error by erecting that theme into a referent for the periodization of Igbo history. Also the slave trade was largely external to Igbo

society and . . . it is unnecessary to use an external scheme of reference where a more relevant indigenous one could be found.³¹

While one has a different take on the slave trade, which was both internal and external to Igbo homeland and had a profound impact on the people, one agrees with Afigbo that there was a correlation between centralized states and authorities and the procurement of slaves. Here, slave raids necessitated building large-scale political entities, where it was relatively much easier to procure slaves in large numbers through warfare and tributes. However, in mini-states, such as those of the Igbo, which lacked wide-ranging centralized authority and institutions, procurement of slaves was largely based on means other than warfare and large-scale slave raids. Slaves were rather largely procured through kidnapping, pawnship, economic hardships and judicial process. Thus, as Afigbo pungently observed, “a society lacking an organized system of incarceration for prisoners rid itself of criminals and misfits,” by responding to market forces and societal needs through enslavement.³²

Afigbo joined other experts on the history of the slave trade in the Bight of Biafra in according the Aro business class a dominant role in the trade of the interior. In one of his studies on the subject, Afigbo stated, “the internal slave trade was more or less synonymous with the Aro and the Aro synonymous with it.”³³ The wealth and ascendancy of the Aro traders, he argued, came as a result of their involvement in the slave trade. With well-established institutions, such as the Ibiniukpabi oracle and its agents, judicious marriages, strategically established settlements throughout southeastern Nigeria, and the alliance with the Abam, Ohafia and Edda warrior groups, the Aro were able to extend their influence throughout the region, including some parts of Idoma, Igala and Tivland, the coastal states of the Ijo, Ibibio and Efik, as well as the upper Cross River and the Bamenda grasslands (in present-day Cameroon). In addition to supplying the most sought-after imported goods to many of these groups, in exchange for slaves, Aro influence expanded as the peoples of these territories consulted the Ibiniukpabi as a supernatural agency capable of resolving their numerous problems. In spite of the initial British imperial assault on the Aro and their Ibiniukpabi oracle, they fought hard to retain their long-standing dominance in the economic life of the Igbo, the Ibibio and their other neighbors. But the failure to refashion the basis of their ascendancy to suit the “new” realities and conditions occasioned by the British colonial rule and interest, Afigbo suggested, was what brought Aro influence in the region to an end.³⁴

Afigbo classified the history of the British abolition of the internal slave trade in the Bight of Biafra and its hinterland into three phases. The first phase, 1807–1830, was a period characterized by humanitarianism, philanthropy and evangelicalism, marked by naval campaigns against slave ships, coastal states and businessmen. The second, 1830–1885, was what he referred to as the era of indecision and transition to economic imperialism, with the attendant measures taken to deal with the economic and political crises of the coastal states as a result of the abolition. The third phase, 1885–1960, was the period of “unabashed economic, political, and cultural imperialism,” in which the abolition campaign

assumed a subordinate status to the so-called legitimate trade and the prerequisite political institution and authority. Instead of the primary focus, the abolition campaign became the by-product of British imperial aggrandizement with the consequential political, economic and cultural emasculation of African peoples and societies.³⁵ The twists and turns of the British abolition campaign explain why in spite of the measures taken, slave dealing and child stealing persisted in the region up to the 1950s. Notwithstanding the closing of the external outlets and the surplus slaves created as a result, the internal trade continued due to a number of factors. There were persistent human sacrifices; labor needs for agricultural and palm oil production, and for canoe peddling; as well as need for foster children, wives and prostitutes stimulated by a symbiotic relationship between the densely populated but economically devastated Igbo heartland and the low-populated but economically endowed regions of the upper Cross River and Niger Delta that were in dire need of manpower. Afigbo problematized and localized the history of the campaign against slave traffic and slavery in the region, and explained why Ibibio and Igbo parents sold and pawned their children. He also captured the mobility and elusiveness of both the professional and temporary slave dealers in the face of the British colonial government in southeastern Nigeria.

Afigbo criticized the neglect and marginalization of the teaching and studying of slavery in Africa and the transatlantic slave trade in colleges and universities in Africa. As he stated, “[n]o theme, not even the evolution of states big and small in early African history, can rival the significance of the slave trade and its abolition in the history of any region of Africa or of the continent as a whole.”³⁶ While the emphasis has been on the histories of precolonial state formation and the colonial experience in the continent, the history of the slave trade has been relegated to the background. Yet, the slave trade (domestic trade, trans-Saharan trade, Indian Ocean trade, and the transatlantic and its abolition) had far-reaching consequences on Africans and their societies. He questioned the appropriateness of the use of an Atlantic-centered approach and the phrase “Atlantic slave trade” in the study of the history of slave trade in Africa or in West Africa. Such an approach and phrasing are not only misleading, but they also deny agency to the continent and the region, which supplied the enslaved, lost manpower, and suffered the economic, political, social and psychological consequences of the transatlantic slave trade. The Atlantic, he pointed out, was “only a passive, inanimate channel” of the trade. He also called attention to the problematic usage of the words “slave trade” and “slavery” as if they meant the same thing. Recognizing and maintaining a distinction between the two terms, Afigbo advised, would enable students and scholars to trace the development of scholarship in each of the two areas.

Colonialism, Resistance and the Colonial Political System

Adiele Afigbo was an authority on Igbo and Nigerian colonial history. He extensively studied Igbo encounter with the British colonial project and reduced the

so-called civilizing mission of colonialism to what it truly was—an avenue for economic exploitation. He argued that even though the British “civilizing mission” might have a moral dimension because it was predicated on their belief that free market and raw material production could only thrive in an environment devoid of slave trade and slavery, infanticide, cannibalism, human sacrifice, ignorance and illiteracy, the primary motive remained economics. Economic motives explained why they had to engage in military invasions and subsequently established political and administrative apparatuses in Nigeria, including the Igbo area. The autonomous status of Igbo polities and the people’s determination to protect their sovereignty resulted in one of the stiffest and protracted resistance movements against British colonial conquest. The colonial conquest that started with the Aguleri military campaign in 1892 continued till the Ikwo subjugation in 1918.³⁷ Such prolonged opposition deflated British propaganda that they came to liberate the Igbo from the tyranny of Aro slavers, and expose them to the benefits of European civilization, commerce and Christianity.

European superior military technologies and the inability of the Igbo states and mini-states to treat the invaders as common enemies, among other factors, opened up the Igbo area to foreign traders, missionaries and colonizers. A Native Courts Proclamation No. 9, passed in 1900, authorized colonial officials to establish Native Administrations through the creation of the Native Court Authority system and the appointment of indigenous administrative personnel. Subsequently, a warrant chief system of native administration was introduced in South-Eastern provinces, an Igbo predominated region. Under this system, certain male figures were selected and issued a warrant of authority by the British colonial officials, who had limited knowledge of the indigenous sociopolitical organization. In some cases, warrant holders were not selected based on the indigenous norms and practices, but instead, on those who collaborated with the British, could speak English, and were also enterprising.³⁸ With the introduction of Native Revenue Ordinance, which imposed taxation on the people, widespread protests erupted, the most formidable being the Women’s War of 1929, with its multiethnic and multiprovincial spread. Following the war and, based on the realization that in the indigenous political system, that authority was widely dispersed and not concentrated on a few autocrats, the Native Court Authority administration was reorganized, 1930–1939. The reorganization was based on the principle of broad-based democracy and representative government through the creation of clan and village assemblies. In addition to maintaining ethnic integrity, separate native authority and a native court were established for each of the Native Administration units. This system was replaced by County Council system in 1951, dominated by the emergent educated elite.

Afigbo argued that the colonial conquest marked the failure of the traditional military machinery and the time-honored gods and goddesses along with their medicine practitioners. The subjugation of the Igbo shook the foundations of their society. It shook the people’s beliefs in the superiority of their institutions and culture, and in their capability to solve individual and societal problems. Many were eager to acquire the secret of the Whiteman’s power. This eagerness

coupled with the Igbo tendency to adapt new ways and ideas as long as they were effective, led to the transformation of Igbo society. This explained Igbo vigorous pursuit of Western education and their readiness to take advantage of the new economic and social opportunities presented by colonialism, including urbanization, which Afigbo assessed as the second most important innovation to the Igbo and the entire Eastern Region. As he stated, “[a]fter the educational revolution, the next in importance for the Eastern Provinces was the urban revolution . . . urbanization proved a powerful catalyst . . . as a means of educating and enlightening people.”³⁹ Urban dwellers were the ones who started the formation of town and village unions, political parties, and the establishment of newspapers, which served as important instruments for the development and transformation of the region, and for the articulation of anticolonial sentiments and movement, which helped to bring British colonial rule to an end in 1960.

Intergroup Relations in Nigeria

The Igbo as a people engaged in dynamic interaction with their environment and their neighbors. They enjoyed a relatively high degree of mutual interdependence, peace and equality with their neighbors, including the Annang, the Edo, the Igala, the Idoma, the Ogoja, the Efik, the Ibibio and the Ijo. The Igbo had for centuries interacted with these neighbors on different aspects of human endeavor including wars, peace, trade, intermarriages and cultural exchanges. Differential natural endowments necessitated the creation and maintenance of intergroup relations and exchanges between the Igbo and their neighbors. According to Afigbo, intergroup relationships between the Igbo and their neighbors prior to European contact were largely derived “from the dominance of the economy of agriculture,” which involved exchange of goods and services.⁴⁰

Afigbo delineated four main regional pulls of commercial exchanges between the Igbo and their neighbors. One of them was the northward pull, which comprised of the northwest direction toward Igala and the northeast axis to Idoma. The Awka, the Aro, the Nri and Nsukka people dominated this pull and obtained horses, glass beads, bronze and other insignia in exchange for ivory and metal objects from the Awka smiths, slaves and other goods from the Aro, and medicine and ritual advice from the Nri. There was the westward pull along the River Niger to Edo, northwestward to Igala and Idah Kingdoms, and southbound to the Isoko and Urhobo territories. The Niger highway facilitated the exchange of agricultural produce and slaves from the Igala and Igbo communities with salt, fish and imported European products from the Ijo and other Niger Delta ethnic nationalities. The Aboh, Igala and Ijo dominated this highway. The eastward pull toward the Cross River commercial highway carried agricultural produce, dried meat, and slaves to the coast in exchange for dried fish, salt and European products. This highway was dominated by the Aro and Abiriba smiths. The last was the southward pull to the coastal territories of the Efik and Ijo, which supplied salt and fish in exchange for the agricultural products and manpower of the Igbo.

In addition to the Niger and Cross River commercial highways, which carried peoples, material goods, cultural ideas and linguistic skills around, there was a maze of important inland commercial routes that linked Igbo communities and those of their non-Igbo neighbors together. One of such routes was the Benue valley through Ejure, Idah to Nsukka, and through Awka, Orlu and Okigwe to Bende, Akwete and to Bonny. There was also another route from Ibi (on the Benue) through Wukari, Iyalla (in Ogoja), Ezza, Uburu, Bende and Arochukwu to Calabar through Itu.⁴¹ Igbo professional traders and servicemen—Awka, Aro, Abiriba, Aku, Nike, Nkwerre and Nri—who conducted their businesses outside Igbo territory, became bilingual or even multilingual. While attempting to maintain and spread their cultural heritage outside Igbo homeland, they also became bearers of new ideas and cultural practices from outside Igbo society. Each of these groups had different spheres of influence where they carried out their business pursuits and in which they enjoyed special privileges. Thus, in addition to economic interdependence, cultural, religious, linguistic and conjugal affinities necessitated mutual and complementary relations among the Igbo and between them and their neighbors.

Afigbo cautioned against the assumption that intergroup relations between the Igbo and their neighbors were dominated by wars, which caused serious discontinuities. Even when wars were fought between frontier Igbo village-groups and their non-Igbo counterparts across the borders, which might temporarily disrupt trade and intermarriages, he argued, such periods of warfare often intensified other kinds of contact and exchanges. They might result in espionage and camouflage, or to mutual borrowing of the enemies' modes of dressing, or learning their language in order to put them off-guard and take advantage of them. Such wars also encouraged increased travels as each party sought after weapons, powerful allies, medicines and ritual specialists. Igbo ritual specialists were sought after by Igbo and non-Igbo people during war and peace times. For instance, there is evidence that suggests that the Nri ritual influence extended beyond Igbo region to the Igala in the north and to Benin in the west, such that Nri priests played important roles in ceremonies connected with the coronation of the Oba of Benin, and the Atah of Igala. Similarly, the Ibiniukpabi of Arochukwu has been described as the most powerful and influential oracle in precolonial West Africa, extending its influence to Eastern Edo, Igala, Idoma, Ibibio, Ijo, Ogoja and beyond through its agents and clients.⁴²

Moreover, as Afigbo opined,

none of the ethnic nationalities was internally self-conscious as a group during this period. Nor was any one ever mobilized in totality against its neighbors. Such cleavages or dichotomies as Igbo/Ibibio, Ijo/Ibibio, Ibibio/Ogoja, Igbo/Igala, or Igbo/Edo which mean so much to certain persons today would have meant nothing to the peoples of south-eastern Nigeria in the period before 1900.⁴³

This is because, during this period, it was local rather than global issues that dictated how the people of southeastern Nigeria perceived their world and reacted

to those they met in the farmlands, markets and along trade routes. It is not clear that they distinguished between Igbo and non-Igbo states. Furthermore, the presence of organized militia groups, age grades and secret societies in these communities was to ensure the safety and protection of such communities as well as those of traders, travelers and others carrying out legitimate businesses within and across such boundaries.⁴⁴ In addition to such professional associations as diviners' guilds, and the practice of a blood covenant (*igbandu* institution), there were rules that guided and protected long-distance travelers, businessmen and women.⁴⁵

Afigbo also criticized the attention focused on the intergroup relations between the Igbo and such large centralized kingdoms as the Edo, Igala and the Ijo city-states, which tends to emphasize military conquests and expansion, and the imposition of the latter's institutions and cultural practices on "stateless" Igbo polities.⁴⁶ This so-called hegemonic relationship is what Afigbo, for instance, referred to as "the Beni Mirage" in which the histories of south-central Nigerian communities are attributed to the Benin Kingdom when the fact of history shows that each of the polities (whether large or small) contributed significantly to the emergence and maturity of the precolonial sociocultural, political and economic institutions of the region.⁴⁷ This is because, as Afigbo pointed out, the Igbo, for instance, had been in contact with these neighbors for millennia before their rise to expansionist centralized polities. Intergroup relationship, as a multifaceted and dynamic process, involved political, military, economic, technological, religious, linguistic, marital and cultural exchanges. Since the Igbo and their institutions were not inert, they must have influenced these "powerful" neighbors one way or the other. Therefore, contrary to perceived assumption, Igbo communities were neither the dependencies of these large-scale states, nor were Igbo institutions derivations from these polities. It was a relationship based on autonomous actions of intergroup give and take—of mutually enriching processes of diffusion and borrowing of ideas, of trade relationships, intermarriages, reciprocal visits and gifts, and of migrations and flights to neighboring territories during hard times.

Afigbo summarized the thrust of intergroup relations between the Igbo and their neighbors prior to 1900 as a relationship primarily based on free exchange and usage of ideas, institutions, goods and services through migrations and marriages. Because the dominant tone of intergroup relations between Igbo and their neighbors was peace, Afigbo referred to the period as an era of innocence when the ethnic nationalities in southeastern Nigeria were unaware and therefore held no ethnic stereotypes and prejudices against one another. He stressed that the virulent ethnic-centered politics and suspicion of the decolonization and postcolonial eras were "not necessarily a carry-over from what would appear to have been the normal tone of inter-group relations in pre-colonial Southeastern Nigeria."⁴⁸ He blamed partly the British colonial policy of "indirect" rule, which lay emphasis on local, ethnic and cultural particularism with conveniently carved out administrative boundaries, for the intergroup tension and hostility as different ethnic and linguistic groups in Nigeria became intensely self-conscious. It is important to add that the ethnic exclusiveness and interethnic jealousy and suspicion created by the colonial situation in Nigeria were exacerbated by the

poisonous political climate of the decolonization and post-independence periods engineered by the political elite and their cohorts, as well as by the stiff competitiveness of the business class for economic resources.

Studies in Nigerian History and Development

Adiele Afigbo was a pioneer in Nigerian nationalist historiographical tradition. He was a product and a leading advocate of the University of Ibadan's School of History that promoted national history research. Led by such early pioneers in Nigerian and African history as Kenneth Dike, Saburi Biobaku, Ade Ajayi and Joseph Anene, this school pursued with vigor and patriotic dedication the study of nationalist histories of various ethno-linguistic groups in Nigeria. The Ibadan School of History, which was established in the 1950s, emphasized a new method of historical inquiry and interpretation. It was popularized and boosted by Dike's book and Afigbo's doctoral thesis at Ibadan, in which oral traditions and other sources were rigorously and meticulously applied in historical inquiries and interpretations.⁴⁹ For about three decades, the Ibadan School was the leading center of history in Africa. Importantly, this school inspired the establishment of the Makerere School in Uganda led by Bethwell Alan Ogot, and subsequently, the Dar es Salem School in Tanzania.

Afigbo was bold and unapologetic in his analyses and interpretations of historical evidence. He was among the first set of Nigerian historians who helped map out the outlines and direction of historical research in Nigeria. He advocated for the uncovering and protection of historical sources; the promotion of a greater consciousness and appreciation of history in Nigerian educational system; and a history curriculum that emphasizes and promotes pan-Nigerian history and national unity. Afigbo had contributed immensely to our understanding of the history of Nigeria, especially, the precolonial and colonial experiences of many ethnic nationalities in southeastern and south-central Nigeria. As shown above, he was a leading authority in intergroup relations in Nigeria. His extensive studies have revealed patterns of migration and population dispersal; exchange and spread of ideas, technologies, beliefs and systems of social and political organization; regional commerce and intricate web of trade routes, trade goods and networks of the peoples of southeastern Nigeria. He eloquently presented accounts of the dynamics and complexity of intergroup relations, as well as the cultural unity and socioeconomic complementarity of Nigerian peoples, especially prior to British colonial rule.

As indicated before, he argued convincingly against the kingdom-oriented historiography that ascribes to the Ife–Benin cultural lifeline as the key to understanding the history of other centralized and decentralized polities of south-central Nigeria. Afigbo noted that while the colonial anthropology and late colonial historiography neglected economic, technological, religious, philosophical and cultural institutions of the peoples of southern Nigeria, they emphasized the dominance and preeminence of Ife, Benin, Igala and Delta states over other groups in the region. He maintained that the segmentary societies of southern

Nigeria were not the outgrowths of the mega-states, which was once the received dogma, but rather, that the mega-states grew out of ideas first actualized in segmentary societies and mini-states. In addition, the so-called stateless societies or mini-states, he argued, “were not synonymous with lack of order and governance,” and incapable of influencing the history of their mega-state neighbors.⁵⁰ Rather, the relationship between mega-states and mini-states of southern Nigeria was a two-way traffic of exchange of ideas and cultural practices. Consequently, he propagated the paradigm of continuous cultural exchanges, amalgamation and migration in intergroup relationships among Nigerian ethnic nationalities, especially prior to European colonialism.

Using the analysis of what he characterized as the interplay between “rational and irrational” historical writing, Afigbo delineated Nigerian historiographical tradition into three broad categories: the precolonial, colonial and the nationalist historiographies. He defined “irrational” as an application of “sloppy techniques to assumption unsupported by objective facts,” and “rational” as involving “scientific techniques” of historical inquiry.⁵¹ He subdivided the precolonial historiographical tradition into two tracks, comprising the tradition of non-Islamized peoples of the Niger–Benue forest including the Yoruba, Igbo, Edo, Ibibio, Ijo, Ogoja, Igala and Idoma; and the Islamized societies of Central Sudan grassland. He indicated that the historical tradition of these non-Islamized societies is made up of myths and legends of origin dealing with events or supposed events of the far past, as well as the chronicles of the more recent and easily remembered past. Using Western criteria, this tradition could be regarded as historically irrational, which defy scientific historiography because often times, historic institutions and developments were explained on the basis of nonhistorical factors and forces, such as the supernatural, super-humans, lower animals and inanimate objects, and as a result obfuscated the role of human beings and the physical environment in the evolution of human culture and society. Cautioning against the imposition of Western culture and standards, Afigbo suggested that the precolonial tradition of non-Islamic societies was rational and valid insofar as it was socially relevant to the people.

The historiographical tradition of Islamic societies was spiritually and ideologically dominated by Islam, was Mecca-centric, and diverted attention from autochthonous development and local forces to the Eastern origins and a supernatural force centered on Allah. All this, to Afigbo, constituted historical irrationality. But the art of writing and literacy, the concept of change and movement, and the linking of the recent with the remote past, which this tradition embodies, makes it rational and authentic. Afigbo argued that although the colonial historiographical tradition introduced the rationalistic and human-centered historical inquiry, its racist orientation bred irrationalities through the distortion of historical facts, denial of indigenous agency, appropriation of Hamitic, Semitic and European providence to any element of civilized habits in Nigeria, and the ethnocentric definition of history and historical evidence based solely on written sources. Nationalist historiography emerged as a challenge to the irrationalities of the colonial historiographical tradition. While rejecting racial and ethnocentric

definition of history and historical evidence, it acknowledged the importance of internal and external factors to historical causation, and also revolutionized historical methodology by expanding the range of sources for historical reconstruction. Yet, this tradition has a tendency to focus on political history, and has often been criticized for romanticism and ethnic chauvinism.⁵²

Afigbo persuasively argued that rather than being a colonial invention, the amalgamation of Nigeria and its history was a process that predated British colonialism, initiated by the statesmanship of leaders of the various ethno-linguistic groups that constituted modern Nigeria. In this bold but controversial claim, he strongly criticized the historiography that credits Frederick Lugard with the amalgamation of Nigeria, arguing that amalgamation as a process is multilayered and requires continuous efforts to realize its goal. Therefore, Lugard's stint (1912–1919), when he pursued administrative amalgamation in the country, could not have been credited with the multifaceted process of amalgamating the various ethnic nationalities of Niger–Benue territory. In fact, Afigbo indicated that Lugard's attempt to pursue a political amalgamation through the local government authorities failed. But under Sir Hugh Clifford, political amalgamation was consciously recognized, and pursued by Arthur Richards in 1948 with the creation of the Nigerian Legislative Council. It is important to distinguish between the creation of a political entity called “Nigeria” through legal and administrative fiats (which was indeed a British colonial creation), and the long process of amalgamating and uniting the various ethno-linguistic groups into a functional Nigerian nation-state. For the latter goal, one could support Afigbo's position that credit should be given to all the parties involved in achieving true amalgamation: precolonial statesmen and women of various ethnic nationalities, British colonial officers, Nigerian educated and nationalist elite, and ordinary Nigerians, whom he regarded as the practical amalgamators. As he argued, what precolonial “Nigerians,” whose efforts brought the peoples of the Niger–Benue area into a socioeconomic commonwealth, started was expanded by the British colonizers through the establishment of a modern bureaucracy and the development of infrastructural projects. Nigerian nationalist elite continued the process through the establishment of pan-Nigerian political parties such as the National Council of Nigeria and the Citizens (NCNC), and the achievement of the country's independence. He maintained that amalgamation as a grandiose process has continued since independence aimed at achieving a harmonious management of the common interests of the ethnic components of Nigeria and reducing tension and acrimony among them.⁵³

In the era of declining interest in history and historical studies, Afigbo wrote passionately on how to make the discipline more attractive to Nigerian students and relevant to the country's realities.⁵⁴ He believed that historical knowledge is problem-solving and socially relevant. It is vital to building a healthy nation. This is because teaching of Nigerian history and its component ethnic groups is central to inducting the citizenry, especially the young, into the national culture and fully integrate the various ethno-linguistic groups to the national society. Studies on the various ethnic components that make up Nigeria, and the knowledge

and understanding of their cultural institutions, are vital to nurturing national unity and development. Since we cannot underestimate the significance of comparative human experience, it is important that equal attention is given to both the mega and minor ethnic groups that make up Nigeria, especially by emphasizing their long history of contact and cooperation as well as their similarities through comparative studies. Afigbo maintained that it is important to study the experiences of both the powerful leaders and elites of Nigeria, as well as those of the masses and peasants. This is where social and cultural history is crucial. He suggested that history and historical studies would be more relevant to Nigerians when emphasis is shifted from the political and economic history of the powerful to the indigenous institutions, crafts and industrial production, work and production ethos, trades, religious and ritual practices of the people. These are the foundations upon which new economic policies, social patterns and national work ethos could be built. In addition, historical studies or history education should equip its recipients with specialized techniques to address practical social problems. Here lies the centrality of interdisciplinarity in historical methods and interpretations, which Afigbo espoused.

As a pragmatic historian, Afigbo practiced what he taught and preached about. For instance, his studies of decentralized societies of southeastern Nigeria through a meticulous weaving together of diverse sources give credence to the historical epistemology of these groups and to the dynamics and complexities of their institutions. They emphasize cooperation among these groups and their shared interests and similarities, vital to building a strong united Nigeria. He also embarked on the study of the less privileged in society and the invisible in Nigerian historiography, such as women. For instance, he indicated to me that his 1973 paper on “Women in Nigerian History,” which was later published in 1992, was the first time any serious historian of Nigerian history had demonstrated pointedly that women had an important role in the country’s history and society.⁵⁵ Afigbo also informed me that he wrote four more papers on methodological and conceptual issues in the study of Nigerian women in the 1980s, a period he referred to as “the dark age of women’s studies” in Nigeria.⁵⁶ Undoubtedly, he was among the first group of Nigerian historians to popularize complementary gender roles in African society, stressing that there was nothing in the people’s cultures barring women from participating in politics or other fields of life. This explained why some gifted women rose to “positions of political, economic and social eminence from which they led and dominated not only their fellow women, but the common run of men.”⁵⁷ He indicated to me that his pioneering effort on Nigerian women’s history influenced a number of scholars including Kemena Okonjo.⁵⁸

African Historiography and Historical Methods

Another area in which Afigbo had made an enormous contribution is the development of a historical tradition dedicated to asserting the validity of African

history as a distinct academic endeavor. As earlier indicated, he was a pioneer product of Ibadan School, taught by such famous African historians as Kenneth Dike, Saburi Biobaku and J. C. Anene. He also belonged to the early generation of academic historians in the 1950s and 1960s committed to the decolonization of African history. Like Nigeria's Kenneth Dike, Saburi Biobaku, Ade Ajayi and Obaro Ikime; Adu Boahen of Ghana; and Bethwell Ogot of Kenya among others, Afigbo consistently pursued nationalist historiography, which helped in rescuing African history from imperial neglect and distortion. He was relentlessly committed to the struggle in the defense and recognition of African history as a vibrant field of intellectual inquiry. In his characteristically bold manner, Afigbo criticized the African historiography of this period for its preoccupation with the political history of Africa and the neglect of social and economic history. But, he also acknowledged that the motivation for the political history of Africa studied by pioneer African historians was its use as a defensive weapon against European denial of any African agency to historical development, political engineering and statesmanship. The deployment of the political history of Africa as an ideological wing of the decolonization movement makes it appropriate at the time.

Along with others, Afigbo, through his painstaking scholarship, broadened the theoretical and methodological canvas that formed the scope and source-base of African history. This new methodology in historical research utilizes diverse sources, including oral traditions, material culture, as well as archaeological, linguistic and other evidence in historical studies and writing. Afigbo praised this new methodology as the triumph of the interdisciplinary approach to the study of African history and culture. This was at a time when this historical methodology was unpopular and under attack. As one of those pioneer African historians, Afigbo also helped in providing institutional building and patriotic zeal for African historical studies.

Through his thought-provoking scholarship and lectures, Afigbo challenged both scholars and students of African history to engage in critical thinking and analysis of popular assumptions and interpretations of the continent's past. For instance, while trying not to minimize the disruptive, destabilizing and disorienting impact of European colonialism on Africa, he criticized the glorification of indigenous African imperialism, which emphasizes ancient and medieval empires and kingdoms, their rulers and conquests. He also condemned the idealization or romanticization of precolonial Africa as the "golden age" or "age of innocence." Ironically, this position contradicts Afigbo's earlier assertion that referred pre-1900 intergroup relations of the Igbo and their neighbors as the "age of innocence." He also criticized contemporary African historiography for lack of in-depth analysis of the continent's history; and for the obfuscation of the importance of using historical studies and knowledge to address Africa's problems due to its combative preoccupation with defending the African image. He strongly advocated for historical studies that would be relevant to addressing Africa's realities and challenges including nation-building and economic development.⁵⁹

Conclusion

Adiele Afigbo died in Enugu, Nigeria on March 9, 2009, after a brief illness. There is no doubt that he lived a robust and astounding academic and public life. His outstanding scholarship and services earned him a number of recognition and awards. These coveted awards include the Nigerian National Merit Award, a mark of scholarly distinction and excellence awarded by the Nigerian Federal Government, Officer of the Order of the Niger, Fellow of the Historical Society of Nigeria, and Fellow of the Nigerian Academy of Letters, as well as honorary member of the Historical Association of Great Britain. In 2008, under the leadership of Toyin Falola, colleagues, associates, friends, former students, admirers and those who have in one way or the other benefited from Afigbo's scholarship, put together a 679-page book volume in honor of this eminent scholar and doyen of Igbo, Nigerian and African histories.⁶⁰ The book was launched at an international conference held in honor of Adiele Afigbo at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, on December 8–10, 2008, which brought together the cream of academic giants and others, and which turned out to be not only the celebration of the honoree's tall accomplishments but also an intellectual harvest on Nigerian studies.

In spite of criticisms from some of his students and junior colleagues for high-handedness and insatiability, Adiele Afigbo undoubtedly distinguished himself as an admired teacher, an accomplished scholar, and a dedicated administrator and public servant. He had, through his extensive research, prolific writing, outstanding teaching and curriculum development and dedicated service, influenced many students, colleagues and other scholars who have contributed meaningfully in the development of Igbo and Nigerian histories and African historical methodology and historiography. He successfully mapped out new areas of historical studies and programs for undergraduate and graduate students. He was a historian's historian and a critical revisionist, who contributed immensely to historical methods and paradigms through his use of oral traditions to interrogate archival and secondary sources. He engaged in insightful interpretations of historical evidence, and in rigorous debates and counter arguments on the reliability of certain sources, especially anthropological and ethnographic in historical analysis.

Afigbo is regarded as a moving spirit in Igbo studies, an individual who not only wrote widely on the people's history and culture, but also inspired many scholars in the field. As one of his former students and colleague states, Afigbo "has written on the Igbo people and their history and culture more than any other scholar, dead or living."⁶¹ Particularly, he helped to push the frontiers of Igbo history into periods in the past that before now were deemed impenetrable. He unquestionably played a major role in the recovery of Igbo indigenous knowledge. He also advanced scholarship on Igbo history and culture through the establishment of institutional bases. Some of these bases he founded are the *Ikenga* journal and the *Ikoru* bulletin of the Institute of African Studies (UNN), dedicated to the dissemination of scholarly research and information on the Igbo. Afigbo pioneered the establishment of Obi Ikenga as a Pan-Igbo Center for the

promotion of Igbo Studies situated at Abia State University, Uturu, Nigeria. He supported the establishment of historical societies in universities and colleges and even produced a blueprint on how to embark on historical excursions and the collection of oral traditions of the Igbo and other ethnic nationalities in Nigeria.

He demonstrated consistent leadership to the study of Igbo, Nigerian and African histories by engaging, interpreting and representing the past in its comprehensive and complex nature. The coherence and logical cogency of his thoughts and presentations won him many admirers even when they disagreed with his perspective. He was undoubtedly one of Africa's most prolific scholars, bold in the expression of his ideas.

Notes

1. Adiele Afigbo, "The Warrant Chief System in Eastern Nigeria, 1900-1929" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria, 1964).
2. The University of Nigeria, Nsukka was closed between 1967 and January 1970 due to the war.
3. For the compelling case Adiele Afigbo made for the establishment of a Pan-Igbo Center for Igbo Studies, and for the propagation of Igbo studies, see A. E. Afigbo, *Obi Ikenga: The Case for a Pan-Igbo Centre for Igbo Studies* (Uturu, Nigeria: Abia State University, 2000).
4. The Ahiajoku Lecture Series, which was inaugurated on November 30, 1979, was designed to offer the Igbo a rare opportunity to annually gather and harness the intellectual richness of the people through public lectures by the most erudite of Igbo scholars. It is an annual intellectual harvest in which a distinguished Igbo scholar is selected to educate and share an important aspect of Igbo life and culture related to the lecturer's expertise. Thus, Ahiajoku lecturers have focused on Igbo political, economic, cultural, social, technological, philosophical and historical experiences, as well as the people's interactions and encounters with non-Igbo ethnic groups in Nigeria, and with the Europeans. It is an occasion to celebrate the collective Igbo achievements.
5. For more information on this Directorate, see Arthur A. Nwankwo, *Nigeria: The Challenge of Biafra*, 3rd edition (Enugu, Nigeria: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1980), 26–28.
6. Onwuka Njoku, "Exploring a Darkly Tunnel: Twenty-Six Years of Afigbo at Nsukka, 1966–1992," in Toyin Falola and Adam Paddock, eds., *Emergent Themes and Methods in African Studies: Essays in Honor of Adiele E. Afigbo* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2009), 37.
7. Paul Obi-Ani, "Adiele Afigbo: Reminiscences on a Great Teacher," in Falola and Paddock, eds., *Emergent Themes and Methods*, 96.
8. Undoubtedly, there is merit in the criticisms against Afigbo because he should have been mindful that individuals are endowed differently with unique experiences and backgrounds. It is expected of an effective teacher or professor to strive to accommodate his or her students' individual differences and needs. But Afigbo was not for the mediocre or even average students. You must be above average and hardworking in order to survive Afigbo's scrutiny. The author started her doctoral thesis with Professor Afigbo, but did not complete the work with him due to no fault of theirs. Afigbo

- and the author worked very hard to complete the thesis, but it was not possible due to his retirement from the university in 1992.
9. See, for instance, E. Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People* (London: Macmillan, 1976), xiv. Here, she thanked Afigbo for the material he lent her and for giving her “the most unstinted and generous encouragement in a field of study which he has done so much to transform.”
 10. Books published by Adiele Afigbo, *The Abolition of the Slave Trade in Southeastern Nigeria, 1885–1950* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2006); *The Igbo and their Neighbours: Inter-Group Relations in Southeastern Nigeria to 1953* (Ibadan, Nigeria: University Press Limited, 1987); with S. I. O. Okita, *The Museum and Nation Building* (Owerri, Nigeria: New Africa Publishing Co, 1985); *Nigeria and the Open University* (Owerri, Nigeria: New Africa Publishing Co, 1983); with C. S. Okeke, *Weaving Tradition in Igboland: History and Mechanism of Igbo Textile Industry* (Lagos, Nigeria: Nigeria Magazine, 1982); A. E. Afigbo, *Ropes of Sand (Studies in Igbo History and Culture)* (Ibadan, Nigeria: University Press Limited, 1981); *The Warrant Chief: Indirect Rule in Southeastern Nigeria, 1891–1929* (New York: Humanities Press and London: Longmans, 1972); Adiele Afigbo, R. J. Gavin, J. D. Omer-Cooper and R. Palmer, *The Making of Modern Africa, Vol. 2: The Twentieth Century*. 1971; New edition (Essex, UK: Longman, 1986); *The Making of Modern Africa, Vol. 1: Nineteenth Century (Growth of African Civilization)* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1968); and multi-edited volumes, E. J. Otagburuagu, A. E. Afigbo, and J. T. Omenma, *Readings in African Studies* (Enugu, Nigeria: Benak Ventures, 2010); E. J. Otagburugu and A. E. Afigbo, *New Brides, More Hopes: Igbo Women in Socio-Economic Change before the Dawn of the 21st Century* (Nsukka, Nigeria: Institute of African Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 2008); A. E. Afigbo, ed., *The Tears of a Nation and People: The Igbo and the Human Rights Situation in Nigeria* (Okigwe, Nigeria: Whytem Publishers, 2000); *F. C. Ogbalu and the Igbo Language* (Onitsha, Nigeria: University Publishers, 1995); *Groundwork of Igbo History* (Lagos, Nigeria: Vista Books Limited, 1992); *The Image of the Igbo* (Lagos, Nigeria: Vista Books, 1992).
 11. For examples of path-breaking studies primarily based on the use of oral traditions, see Jan Vansina, *Paths in the Rainforests: Toward a History of Political Tradition in Equatorial Africa* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990); E. J. Alagoa, *A History of the Niger Delta: An Historical Interpretation of Ijo Oral Tradition* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Ibadan University Press, 1972); K. O. Dike, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta, 1830–1885: An Introduction to the Economic and Political History of Nigeria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956).
 12. Onwuka Njoku, “A Synoptic Overview,” in Toyin Falola, ed., *Igbo History and Society: The Essays of Adiele Afigbo* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2005), 35.
 13. Compared to such major ethno-linguistic groups as the Bini, Hausa and Yoruba, whose histories have been recorded before 1900, the only available accounts on the Igbo were those of Olaudah Equiano discussed in Chapter 1 of this volume, and Europeans. A few examples will suffice here: Arthur G. Leonard, *The Lower Niger and its Tribes* (London: Macmillan, 1906); George T. Basden, “Notes on the Ibo Country and the Ibo People, Southern Nigeria,” *The Geographical Journal* 39, no. 3 (1912): 241–247; *Among the Ibos of Nigeria*. 1921; reprint (London: Frank Cass, 1966); P. A. Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria*. Vol. IV (London: Oxford University Press and Humphrey Milford, 1926); C. K. Meek, *Law and Authority in a Nigerian Tribe: A Study of Indirect Rule* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937);

- S. Leith-Ross, *African Women: A Study of the Ibo of Nigeria* (London: Faber and Faber, 1939).
14. Toyin Falola and Matthew Heaton, "Introduction: Afigbo on the Igbo," in Falola, ed., *Igbo History and Society*, 13.
 15. See, for instance, Adiele Afigbo, *An Outline of Igbo History* (Owerri, Nigeria: RADA Publishing Co., 1986); "Traditions of Igbo Origins: A Comment," *Nigeria Magazine* 144 (1983): 3–12; *Ropes of Sand*, chapters 1–3 and 6; "On the Threshold of Igbo History: Review of Thurstan Shaw's *Igbo-Ukwu*," *The Conch* 3, no. 2 (1971): 205–218. Still on Igbo origins also see J. N. Oriji, *Traditions of Igbo Origin: A Study of Pre-Colonial Population Movements in Africa* (New York: Peter Lang, 1990).
 16. A. E. Afigbo, *The Age of Innocence: The Igbo and their Neighbours in Pre-colonial Times*. Ahiajoku Lecture Series (Owerri, Nigeria: Ministry of Information, Culture, Youth and Sports, 1981), 9.
 17. G. T. Basden, *Niger Ibos: A Description of the Primitive Life, Customs, and Animistic Beliefs and Customs of the Igbo People of Nigeria*. 1938; reprint (London: Frank Cass, 1966).
 18. Philip A. Oguagha and Alex I. Okpoko, *History and Ethnoarchaeology in Eastern Nigeria: A Study of Igbo-Igala Relations with Special Reference to the Anambra Valley*. Cambridge Monographs in African Archaeology 7 BAR International Series 195 (Oxford: BAR, 1984); Vincent E. Chikwendu, "Afikpo Excavations, May-June 1975: The Ugwuagu Rock Shelter (Site One) and The Abandoned Habitation Site (Site Two)" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Birmingham, England, December 1976). See also Thurstan Shaw, *Igbo-Ukwu: An Account of Archaeological Discoveries in Eastern Nigeria* 2 vols. (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970).
 19. Adiele Afigbo, "General Introduction," in Afigbo, ed., *Groundwork of Igbo History*, 1; "Igbo Origins and Migrations," in *Ibid.*, 45–46.
 20. Afigbo, "Igbo Origins and Migrations," 48–55.
 21. Adiele Afigbo, "Igbo Cultural Sub-Areas: Their Rise and Development," in Afigbo, ed., *Groundwork of Igbo History*, 145.
 22. M. A. Onwuejeogwu, *An Igbo Civilization: Nri Kingdom and Hegemony* (London: Ethnographica, 1981); Shaw, *Igbo-Ukwu*.
 23. Falola and Heaton, "Introduction: Afigbo on the Igbo," 4. See Onwuejeogwu, *An Igbo Civilization*; Chieka Ifemesia, *Traditional Humane Living among the Igbo: An Historical Perspective* (Enugu, Nigeria: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1979); Elechukwu N. Njaka, *Igbo Political Culture* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1974); A. E. Afigbo, "The Indigenous Political Systems of the Igbo," *Tarikh* 4, no. 2 (1973): 13–23; Nzimiro, *Studies in Ibo Political Systems*.
 24. Afigbo, "The Indigenous Political Systems," 15.
 25. See Christopher I. Ejizu, "Ritual Enactment of Achievement: Ikenga Symbol in Igboland," *Paideuma* 37 (1991): 233–251; *Ofo: Igbo Ritual Symbol* (Enugu, Nigeria: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1986); John S. Boston, *Ikenga Figures among the North-West Igbo and Igala* (London: Ethnographica, 1977).
 26. Afigbo, *Ropes of Sand*, Chapter 4.
 27. Afigbo, *Ropes of Sand*, 125.
 28. See generally G. Chuku, *Igbo Women and Economic Transformation in Southeastern Nigeria, 1900-1960* (New York: Routledge, 2005).
 29. *Ibid.*; Afigbo and Okeke, *Weaving Tradition*
 30. D. Chambers, *Murder at Montpelier: Igbo Africans in Virginia* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2005), Chapter 2; "Tracing Igbo into the African Diaspora,"

- in Paul Lovejoy, ed., *Identity in the Shadow of Slavery* (London: Continuum, 2000), 57; “The Significance of Igbo in the Bight of Biafra Slave Trade: A Rejoinder to Northrup’s ‘Myth Igbo,’” *Slavery and Abolition* 23, 1 (2002): 101–120; Paul Lovejoy, “The Impact of the Atlantic Slave Trade on Africa: A Review of the Literature,” *Journal of African History* 30, no. 3 (1989): 375; *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 148; D. Northrup, “The Growth of Trade among the Igbo before 1800,” *Journal of African History* 13, no. 2 (1972): 232.
31. Afigbo, *Ropes of Sand*, 17.
 32. Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs*, 12.
 33. Afigbo, *The Abolition of the Slave Trade*, xiii.
 34. See A. E. Afigbo, “The Nineteenth Century Crisis of the Aro Slaving Oligarchy of South-Eastern Nigeria,” *Nigeria Magazine* 110–112 (1974): 66–73; “The Eclipse of the Aro Slaving Oligarchy of South-Eastern Nigeria, 1901–1927,” *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 6, no. 1 (1971): 3–24.
 35. Afigbo, *The Abolition of the Slave Trade*, 7–13.
 36. Adiele E. Afigbo, “Africa and the Abolition of the Slave Trade,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 66, no. 4 (2009): 706–707.
 37. See A. E. Afigbo, “Colonial Conquest and Rule, 1900–1950: Igboland to the East of the Niger,” in Afigbo, ed., *Groundwork of Igbo History*, 410–436; “The Eastern Provinces under Colonial Rule,” in Obaro Ikime, ed., *Groundwork of Nigerian History* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Heinemann Educational Books, 1980), 410–428; “Patterns of Igbo Resistance to British Conquest,” *Tarikh* 4, no. 3 (1973): 14–23; “The Aro Expedition of 1901–1902 (An Episode in the British Occupation of Iboland),” *Odu* 7 (1972): 3–27. For more information on some of the military campaigns see D. C. Ohadike, *The Ekumeku Movement: Western Igbo Resistance to the British Conquest of Nigeria, 1883–1914* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1991); E. Isichei, *The Ibo People and the Europeans: The Genesis of a Relationship – To 1906* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1973), Chapter 10; Felix Ekechi, “Merchants, Missionaries and the Bombardment of Onitsha, 1879–89: Aspects of Anglo-Igbo Encounter,” *The Conch* 5, nos. 1 and 2 (1973): 61–81; Philip Igbafe, “Western Igbo Society and Its Resistance to British Rule: The Ekumeku Movement, 1898–1911,” *Journal of African History* 12, no. 3 (1971): 441–459.
 38. For a detailed study of the chaos and failure of “indirect rule” in Eastern Nigeria, see Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs*.
 39. Afigbo, “The Eastern Provinces under Colonial Rule,” 427–428.
 40. Afigbo, *The Age of Innocence*, 14.
 41. A. E. Afigbo, “Trade and Trade Routes in Nineteenth-Century Nsukka,” *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 7, no. 1 (1973): 77–90; *The Igbo and their Neighbours*, 41–42, Chapter 4; *The Age of Innocence*, 17–18; “Precolonial Trade Links between Southeastern Nigeria and the Benue Valley,” *Journal of African Studies* 4, no. 2 (1977): 119–139. See also Northrup, “The Growth of Trade among the Igbo”; E. J. Alagoa, “Long-Distance Trade and States in the Niger Delta,” *Journal of African History* 2, no. 3 (1970): 319–329.
 42. Afigbo, *The Igbo and Their Neighbours*, 42–43.
 43. Afigbo, *The Age of Innocence*, 16.
 44. Afigbo criticized many European and foreign observers and writers, especially David Northrup for his book titled *Trade Without Rulers: Pre-Colonial Economic Development in South-Eastern Nigeria* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), for assuming that

- the region of southeastern Nigeria prior to European colonial domination lacked rulers and therefore authority figures that were capable of enforcing laws that would guarantee the protection and safety of traders. This prejudicial characterization of the region and the period suggests a lawless and unstable atmosphere incapable of fostering any meaningful commercial and intergroup exchanges. Yet, historical accounts have shown that the Aro, Awka, Abiriba, Nkwerre, Aboh, Nike, Nri, Igala, Ijo, Bonny, Nembe, Brass and the Efik triumphed in their business careers before the 1900.
45. For the practice of *Igbandu*, see Felicia Ekejiuba, "Igba Ndu: An Igbo Mechanism of Social Control and Adjustment," *African Notes* 8, no. 1 (1972): 9–24.
 46. See Richard Henderson, *The King in Every Man: Evolutionary Trends in Onitsha Ibo Society and Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972); Austin Shelton, *The Igbo-Igala Borderland: Religion and Social Control in Indigenous African Colonialism* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1971); and John Boston, "Notes on Contact between the Igala and the Ibo," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 2, no. 1 (1960): 52–58 on the impact of Igala culture on Nsukka Igbo; Basden, *Niger Ibos* on the Ijo and the conquest of southern Igbo; Mervin D. W. Jeffreys, "The Umundri Tradition of Origin," *African Studies* 15, no. 3 (1956): 119–131 on Igala impact on the rise of the Nri; Charles K. Meek, *Ethnographical Report on the Peoples of Nsukka Division of Onitsha Province* (Lagos, Nigeria: Government Printer, 1930) on Igala conquests and the evolution of Nsukka society; Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria* on the Edo and the evolution of West Niger Igbo.
 47. A. E. Afigbo, "The Beni 'Mirage' and the History of South Central Nigeria," *Nigeria Magazine* 137 (1981): 17–24.
 48. Afigbo, *The Igbo and their Neighbours*, ix.
 49. For Ibadan School of History, see A. O. Adeoye, "Understanding the Crisis in Modern Nigerian Historiography," *History in Africa* 19 (1992): 1–11; P. Lovejoy, "Nigeria: The Ibadan School and Its Critics," in B. Jewsiewicki and D. Newbury, eds., *African Historiographies: What History for Which Africa?* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1986), 197–205.
 50. A. E. Afigbo, "The Anthropology and Historiography of Central-South Nigeria before and since Igbo-Ukwu," *History in Africa* 23 (1996): 9. On the issue of Nigerian historiography, see also A. E. Afigbo, "Southeastern Nigeria, the Niger-Benue Confluence, and the Benue in the Precolonial Period: Some Issues of Historiography," *History in Africa* 24 (1997): 1–8.
 51. A. E. Afigbo, "Fact and Myth in Nigerian Historiography," *Nigeria Magazine* 122–123 (1977): 82.
 52. For discussion of the criticisms of African nationalist historiography, see Adeoye, "Understanding the Crisis in Modern Nigerian Historiography"; Hannington Ochwada, "Historians, Nationalism and Pan-Africanism: Myths and Realities," in Thandika Mkandawire, ed., *African Intellectuals* (Dakar, Senegal: CODESRIA Books, 2005), 193–208.
 53. A. E. Afigbo, "The Amalgamation: Myths, Howlers and Heresies," in T. Falola, ed., *Nigerian History, Politics and Affairs: The Collected Essays of Adiele Afigbo* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2005), 244.
 54. A. E. Afigbo, "History, Archaeology and Schools in Nigeria," *West African Journal of Education* 20, no. 3 (1976): 407–415; "Reflections on the History Syllabus in Nigerian Universities," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 8, no. 1 (1975):

- 9–17; “Some Thoughts on the Teaching of History in Nigeria,” *Ikenga* 2, no. 2 (1973): 1–13.
55. It is difficult to authenticate Afigbo’s claim since this paper was not published until 1992, and especially, since there are historical works on Nigerian women published in the 1970s and 1980s. See, for instance, Bolanle Awe, “The Iyalode in the Traditional Yoruba Political System,” in Alice Schlegel, ed., *Sexual Stratification: A Cross-Cultural View* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), 144–160; Nina Mba, *Nigerian Women Mobilized: Women’s Political Activity in Southern Nigeria, 1900–1965* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982).
 56. Author’s telephone interviews with Professor Afigbo, June 7, 2006. See for instance, Adiele Afigbo, “Women in Nigerian History,” The Proceedings of the Awareness Forum Seminar, Occasional Publication of the Division of Extra-mural Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 1974, 62–79; “Women in Nigerian History,” in Martin O. Ijere, ed., *Women in Nigerian Economy* (Enugu, Nigeria: ACENA Publishers, 1991), 22–39; “Women as a Factor in Development,” in Ijere, ed., *Women in Nigerian Economy*, 41–53; “Igbo Women, Colonialism and Socio-Economic Change,” in Otagburuagu and Afigbo, eds., *New Brides, More Hopes*, 1–14.
 57. Afigbo, “Women in Nigerian History,” 23.
 58. Isabel Kamene Okonjo, “The Role of Women in Social Change among the Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria Living West of the River Niger” (Ph.D. dissertation in Sociology, Individual and Family Studies, Boston University, 1976); “The Dual-Sex Political System in Operation: Igbo Women and Community Politics in Midwestern Nigeria,” in Nancy Hafkin and Ednah G. Bay, eds., *Women in Africa: Studies in Social and Economic Change* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1976), 47–51.
 59. A. E. Afigbo, *The Poverty of African Historiography* (Lagos, Nigeria: Afrografika Publishers, 1977), 3 and 11.
 60. Falola and Paddock, eds., *Emergent Themes and Methods*.
 61. Njoku, “A Synoptic Overview,” 40.

CHAPTER 7

Pius Nwabufo Okigbo: A Pragmatic Economist and an Intellectual Giant

Gloria Chuku

Introduction

This chapter examines the role of Pius Okigbo as a renowned and practical economist, a dedicated public servant, and an intellectual giant. Using the four broad areas—economic development, public planning, banking and finance, and regional cooperation—that embodied the thrust of Okigbo’s scholarship, the chapter presents him as an eclectic and pragmatic economist, who constantly shifted paradigms in his policy-oriented ideas and problem-solving options to reflect the changing dynamics and economic conditions of Nigeria and Africa. An economist with sensitivity to historical changes, Okigbo researched and wrote about the origins, evolution and transformation of major economic policies and was practical in his identification and application of competing theories of development that he thought suitable for the realities of the political economy of Nigeria and Africa. The chapter also covers the contradictions in his philosophical ideals, and in his navigation of the delicate boundaries between national loyalty and ethnic interests. How could he have been a “pan-Nigerian intellectual” committed to building a strong united Nigeria when he served the Biafra government and has a history of championing the Igbo cause?

Born on February 6, 1924, to the family of James Okoye of Ojo village and Ana Onu Okigbo (nee Ikejiofor) of Ire village, both in Ojoto town, Anambra State of Nigeria, Pius was the second of five children of his mother. His father was a pioneer Catholic schoolteacher who laid a solid foundation for the education of his children. A graduate of the famous Christ the King College, Onitsha, Pius passed his Cambridge School Certificate examination in Grade one in December 1940 with an exemption from the University of London matriculation. In 1941, he entered the prestigious Yaba Higher College, Lagos, for a diploma course in

arts (1941–1942). Following the conversion of Yaba College into a military base for the Royal West African Force at the heat of WW II, Pius transferred to the Achimota College in Accra, Gold Coast (now Ghana) in 1942, where he completed his studies in Latin, Greek, history, English language, and literature with a diploma certificate in 1943. Upon returning to Nigeria in the same year, Pius started teaching at a private school in Onitsha—the Africa College, instead of teaching in a Catholic school or joining the priesthood his mentors and parents had hoped for. He also worked as a reporter for the *Spokesman*, one of the newspaper chains of Nnamdi Azikiwe.¹ Okigbo's education and jobs brought him into a close circle of young Nigerian intellectuals in Onitsha. In 1944, he enrolled as an external degree candidate at the University of London in law and economics (1944–1948). At the time, he was simultaneously studying history, art, philosophy and literature. He graduated in 1946 with a Bachelor of Arts (Honors) degree in History; and in 1949 he obtained his Bachelor of Science degree in Economics from the University of London, and a law degree at Oxford University in 1952. He became the first Nigerian to earn two degrees from London University via correspondence as an external student.²

While pursuing these degree programs, Okigbo joined the Nigerian civil service as a development officer at Aba, Eastern Nigeria, in 1948 and continued till 1952. This was a senior service position then reserved for White colonial officers. In this capacity, Okigbo served with a team that oversaw the implementation of a Ten Year Plan of Development and Welfare for Nigeria (1946–1955), a plan that saw an unprecedented postwar agricultural and industrial expansion. With a scholarship award from the Foundation Fellowship of the New York Institute of International Education, Okigbo quit his job and left Nigeria for the United States where he enrolled for a graduate program with Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, in 1952. After he obtained his MA degree in Economics (1954), Okigbo spent a year at Oxford University. He came back to Northwestern as an exchange lecturer and completed his doctoral degree in the same field in 1956. He became the first African recipient of a doctoral degree from that university.³ With mentorship of Melville and Frances Herskovits, Okigbo was able to secure several grants and awards.⁴ He taught at Northwestern University as a lecturer (1955–1957); was a research associate at the University of Wyoming (1957–1958); and a lecturer at Oxford University, United Kingdom (1957–1958). He was a visiting professor at the University of Ghana, Legon, in 1975. In 1982, Okigbo was awarded a DSc (Economics) degree of London University through examination, a feat that made him at the time one of the six scholars to earn such a degree via examination from this university.

Service and Business Activities

Okigbo returned to Nigeria in 1958 and launched his career as a leading member of the pioneer generation of Nigerian professional public servants. He served as a permanent secretary for planning in the Eastern Nigerian civil service (1958);

first economic adviser to the Eastern Nigeria government (1958–1962); and worked with Wolfgang Stolper, one of America's distinguished economists and the economic adviser to Nigeria, to produce the First National Development Plan for Nigeria (1962–1968).⁵ He was the economic adviser to the Federal Government of Nigeria (1962–1967), and the first Nigerian ambassador to the European Economic Community (EEC) in Brussels (1963–1965), where he headed the team that skillfully negotiated favorable trade terms for Nigeria. Okigbo helped to bring Nigeria within the threshold of programmed development. It is believed that his successful mission helped other African countries such as Uganda, Tanganyika, Kenya, Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia to seek association with the EEC. He participated in the economic agreement between the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States (ACP) and the European group. He also served on the board of the Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research (1963–1966).

Driven by ethnic loyalty, Okigbo left his jobs in Nigeria following the outbreak of the Biafra–Nigeria War in 1967. Motivated by his conviction that social justice and human rights of his Igbo people were undermined when they were faced with acts of genocide in the hands of the Nigerian Military government and its agents and supporters, Okigbo was determined to do everything within his power to assist the Biafra cause. He became a prominent member of the Biafra cabinet, serving as the economic adviser to the government (1967–1970). He was one of the key planners in the Biafra Think Tank and in the formulation of its economic policies. He played a vital role in the establishment of the Central Bank of Biafra with a new Biafran currency in 1968 when the Federal Military Government of Nigeria introduced a new currency that rendered useless any old money that was in circulation within Biafra. The release of the Biafran money was timely, in spite of inherent problems, in abating what would have been a financial catastrophe in war-torn Biafra. Okigbo was so committed to the success of Biafra that he ignored the risk involved and visited military bases to address their problems. He was also involved in international diplomacy, visiting other countries on behalf of Biafra and participating in secret negotiations between Nigeria and Biafra. Consequently, he earned the title of “Biafran roving ambassador.”

At the end of the war, and after a 15-month prison term for his service in the Biafra Republic, Okigbo established a consultancy firm, SKOUP and Company Limited in 1971 and became its managing director and chief executive officer. The company was involved in research, planning and project development in agriculture, conservation, education, engineering, forestry, industry, management and transportation. The company so enjoyed high reputation under Okigbo's leadership that it undertook projects for such international organizations as the African Development Bank, the Organization of African Unity, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, the United Nations (UN) Panel of Experts on National Accounts, and the European Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. He also served as chairman of Bouygues, an international construction company; the Nigerian Tobacco Company; Torch Publishing Company; and the Magnum Trust Bank.

After the war, Pius Okigbo once more turned his attention and commitment to building a strong united Nigeria. He served as a member of the 1976 Constitution Drafting Committee, and chaired the Sub-committee on Economy, Finance and Division of Powers, as well as a member of the Constituent Assembly (1977), which reviewed the drafted copy of the 1979 Republican Constitution of Nigeria. In 1976, he chaired a committee appointed by the Federal Military Government to review the financial system of Nigeria. He was the chairman of the Presidential Commission on Revenue Allocation (1979–1980) where he recommended that primary school enrollment figures should be used as the basis for revenue allocation to the three tiers of government (federal, state and local). He also recommended that the Nigerian economy should be planned in such a way that it would be less dependent on oil. He chaired the Panel of Inquiry into the Gulf War Oil Windfall (also known as the Okigbo Inquiry into the Central Bank of Nigeria) in 1994 under Sani Abacha's regime. He indicted the Abacha military government for its extravagant spending and fraudulent activities.⁶ This indictment was a mark of fearlessness and deep nationalist commitment that Okigbo was known for throughout his lifetime. In 1996, he chaired a committee that outlined policy development in the area of solid minerals. Okigbo served as the special adviser on economic matters to President Olusegun Obasanjo (1999–2000). Since 1958, Okigbo had played an important role in policy formulation and in the development of tools for policy analysis in Nigeria. He was an active participant, but also a critic, of Nigerian development planning, a rare position for one to occupy. For his diligent services to Nigeria, Okigbo has been described as “probably the last pan-Nigerian intellectual of Igbo extraction.”⁷ Although with a dint of exaggeration, this description demonstrates Okigbo's dedication to Nigeria's development, and his unquestionable commitment to achieving a strong united country.

At the international arena, Okigbo served as the chairman of the UN Panel of Experts for the establishment of the African Development Bank (ADB) in 1961; a member of the UN Panel of Experts on the Institute of Economic Development for Africa in 1962; and a member of the Committee for Technical Cooperation for South of the Sahara, 1960–1965. At the request of the government of the United Kingdom, he served as a member of the Kenyan Fiscal Commission to provide for the devolution of fiscal authority from Kenya's central government to the regions that were then about to be created (1962). He was also a member of the External Advisory Board at the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development Center in Paris (1963–1966); chairman of the Committee on Commodities, UN Conference for Trade and Development (1964–1966); a member of the South Commission for the South–South development and cooperation (1987–1990); board member of the South Center (1995–2000); member of the UN Panel of Experts on the Reform of the Tax System in the Third World (1989); and the chairman of the ADB's Council of African Advisers (1993–2000). Undoubtedly, Okigbo had for a long time remained one of the most sought-after advisers to the UN on matters concerning

the economies of developing countries and a leading strategist in the campaign against poverty in Africa. His service was complemented by his scholarship.

Scholarship and Intellectual Legacy

Okigbo was a prolific writer whose scholarly accomplishments surpassed those of many full-time academics. He authored and coauthored several books and over 80 scholarly articles, reports and numerous lectures and speeches, most of which focus on four key areas of his expertise: economic development, public planning, and banking and finance in Nigeria, as well as regional cooperation in Africa.⁸ His philosophical ideals, which are clearly expressed in these numerous works, include the Igbo contributions and experience in Nigeria, the role of the state in economic development, fiscal federalism and the principle of derivation, probity of public institutions, restoration of enduring social values, human dignity, regional integration, and self-reliant and people-centered development. The discussion that follows elaborates on these philosophical ideals and his intellectual contributions.

Philosophical and other Contributions to the Igbo

Pius Okigbo's scholarship helps to enrich our understanding of Igbo intellectual tradition through his examination of the contributions of Igbo culture and civilization to the political economy of Nigeria and the globe since the era of the transatlantic slave trade.⁹ He demonstrated how Igbo political economy generated a parallel economic organization that was oriented toward community/communal interests and also segmentary and individualistic. Such a structure encouraged individual economic freedom and competitiveness. "It is this freedom" Okigbo argues, "that has made the single proprietorship the predominant business organization among the Igbo."¹⁰ He suggested that this type of business organization has limited the possibilities of growth beyond the management capacity of the single proprietor.

Okigbo blamed the increasing manifestation of Igbo individualism in modern times on European "capitalization" of labor services, which eroded the principle of reciprocity, and Western education that helped to break down intimate attachment to the community. He regretted that the Igbo enterprising skills have been stereotypically represented in popular Nigerian culture as the people's insatiable drive for wealth acquisition and suggested that what remained important to the Igbo "is not mere pursuit of wealth but the moral basis of that pursuit: that it must be earned under legitimate means. [Thus] wealth acquired under dubious circumstances does not earn respect."¹¹ It was the Igbo emphasis on hard work and competition that made ascribed status fall into disrepute unless it was anchored by achieved status.

He suggested that prior to the Biafra–Nigeria War, Igbo professionals, craftsmen, traders, businessmen and women, who were motivated by economic

opportunities in different parts of Nigeria and beyond, migrated and exported their attributes of integrity, industriousness, trustworthiness and humanism and contributed to the development of their host communities. During the war, the Igbo demonstrated their greatest ingenuity in order to survive in the face of major adversity and threat of extinction. They showed that it was possible to build “a totally indigenous technological civilization [within] black Africa . . . But with the end of the war, the Nigerian authorities dismantled and demobilized both the spirit and the effort.” He lamented that this rare “opportunity was therefore lost permanently to Nigeria.”¹² Okigbo listed anti-Igbo state creation, discriminatory and highly politicized labor market, the application of the quota system and relegation of merit and fair competitiveness, and ethnic resentment, which engendered the feeling of alienation, skepticism and disillusionment among Igbo youth and intellectuals, as some of the consequences of the war on the Igbo people as well as inhibitive factors militating against the development of postwar Nigeria. He therefore called for a serious commitment on the part of the Nigerian authorities for the systematic integration of the Igbo, especially the youth, into the political economy of Nigeria.

Okigbo reasoned that it does not augur well for Nigeria’s development when Igbo intellectuals, who had sought to bring their energy and skills to the service of the wider Nigerian community, found themselves unwanted by other communities outside the Igbo areas. He declared that Igbo dedication to fair competition and merit, their work ethic, enterprise, innovativeness even in the face of adversity, passionate dedication to democratic ideals and equal opportunity for individual participation in the affairs of the community, “should stand Nigeria in good stead in her search for a stable political system” and sustainable economic development.¹³ The politics and policy of ethnic inclusiveness requires a conscious effort on the part of all Nigerians (Igbo and non-Igbo) to restore or build a sense of common nationality.

Okigbo was also a believer in and promoter of Igbo culture, institutions and interests. For instance, during the 1970s constitutional drafting process, he advocated for the creation of more states that would help the Igbo build a strong political and economic foundation. His action was informed by his belief in the states as the bases for revenue allocation and the application of the principle of federal character. Okigbo was among those who strongly believed that the marginalization of the Igbo in Nigerian affairs started with the pre-war creation of states by the Gowon administration. And thus, for them to regain their position as strong competitors at par with such other major ethnicities as the Hausa–Fulani and the Yoruba, the Igbo must seek for more states in their territory.

In spite of his status at the national and international arena and his numerous educational accomplishments, Okigbo still identified with his Igbo and village people and their cultural heritage. He was a key player in the formation of the Ohaneze Ndigbo, a pan-Igbo organization committed to protecting Igbo human rights in Nigeria. He served as the secretary of the organization. He was in fact, an Igbo spokesman and a leader. He awarded scholarships to brilliant children

of his Ire village who could not afford the cost of university education through his Ire Higher Education Foundation. He also donated freely to charitable causes and development projects within Igbo homeland and across Nigeria.

The Nigerian State, Public Planning and the Economy

Most of Okigbo's writings focus on the evolution and structures of the Nigerian economy, public planning and the state as well as their inherent problems and strategies for amelioration and improvement. His earliest works addressed the central role of the state in planned development for economic growth and sustainable development. The centrality of national accounts in development planning and revenue allocation, in measuring capital formation and assessing balance of trade and payments, and in economic growth cannot be underestimated. It is more so for developing economies. This is where Okigbo's pioneer work—*Nigerian National Accounts* (being the first of its kind written by a Nigerian)—became invaluable. In this book, Okigbo filled an important void relating to statistical data and development planning in the formative years of Nigeria. As one of the key members of the team that produced the first Nigerian Development Plan, Okigbo was able to bring to bear his expertise and the data from his book in the preparation of the plan.¹⁴ Waziri Ibrahim, who was the Federal Minister of Economic Development in the early 1960s, acknowledged that Okigbo's book marked "a milestone in the development of a firm statistical basis for economic planning in the Federation of Nigeria" and that it filled gaps in "the Prest and Steward Report in 1953." He indicated how timing the book was "just before the publication of Nigeria's National Plan [and] towards the preparation of which it has made a substantial contribution."¹⁵

The book has also been described as "one of the latest and most interesting of the national income calculations which are now being produced for African countries. It fills the sad gap left by the inability of the Government statistical offices . . . to follow up Prest and Stewart's path-breaking exercise."¹⁶ The frankness and painstaking effort to explain the methodology and format used, including the difficulties of data collection, the analysis of concepts and key shortcomings make the book a valuable asset for development planners and others interested in national accounts calculations, especially in developing countries. Thus, Okigbo's emphasis on the importance of quality and adequate statistical data in policy prescriptions, fiscal planning and sound economic analysis as well as his pioneering effort in the development of the national income accounting structures, which included theoretical and statistical issues, is unquestionably invaluable.

In *National Development Planning in Nigeria*, Okigbo meticulously examined the 40 years of centralized development planning in Nigeria, which included the 1946–1955, 1962–1968, 1970–1974, 1975–1980, 1981–1985 and the 1988–1992 national development plans. He provided a summary of each of these five development plans in Nigeria, their objectives, priorities and strategies, targets, resource requirements, adopted methodologies, constraints and critical

evaluation of their performance. He discussed and offered a critique of the *Ten-Year Plan of Development and Welfare*, which emphasized improvement in physical and mental health of the population as well as development in agriculture and cottage crafts and industries. Even though it marked a slight departure from the pre-1945 era of lack of interest in development planning when the British colonial authorities were more concerned with the exploitation of the resources of Nigerian territory for the benefit of the metropolis than they were with the economic development of the region and the welfare of the population, Okigbo criticized it as merely a program of expenditures without policies and policy instruments.

He identified processes of concentration and centralization, the use of inappropriate models, lack of a coherent strategic framework, especially between the federal center and the component states, and lack of discipline in plan preparation and implementation as well as the injection of partisan and ethnic politics into the process as some of the reasons for the failure of national development plans in Nigeria. For comparative purposes, he surveyed similar plans in the Gold Coast and French West Africa and reached the same conclusion that they had fallen short of achieving their full objectives. Obviously, Okigbo was expecting a lot from colonial “development plans,” which would have contradicted the essence of colonial projects in Africa. However, one expects development plans since independence to differ in their orientation toward the development needs of modern African states. In spite of the problems, Okigbo saw effective national development planning as sine qua non to economic development of Nigeria and the welfare of its citizenry because it involves resource mobilization (both human and material). Thus, in addition to recommending the establishment of a planning commission to be headed by the head of the government of the federation, he called for a concerted effort to make Nigerians at all levels plan-conscious and to appreciate the intricate relationship between effective planning and the achievement of their welfare. Undeniably, Okigbo’s book remains a valuable contribution to our understanding of the history of development planning in Nigeria and the lessons that could be learned from what Okigbo refers to as the “forty years of disorderly growth and development leading to persistent queues and chronic shortages.”¹⁷

In the first volume of his *Essays in the Public Philosophy*, which is a collection of lectures he gave over the span of 15 years, Okigbo covered many themes including the evolution and growth of the Nigerian society and economy; the concepts of mixed economy, economic freedom and the role of government in the management of the Nigerian economy. He also addressed the problems of the civil service and bureaucracy, social values and social change, and the role of the intellectual community in shaping social values and public philosophy in the country. Even though these lectures were given many years ago, they have remained relevant in the 1990s- and 2000s-Nigeria, because as Okigbo pointed out, history is repeating itself as Nigerian leaders continuously repeat the mistakes made by their predecessors in the management of the Nigerian economy and the governance of the country.

Agricultural development in Nigeria is another area Okigbo focused his studies on. While recognizing areas where progress had been made in this sector, Okigbo criticized such government efforts to increase agricultural productivity as the Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) and the Green Revolution for not matching their “propagandist tone” with the necessary “investment” demands of the peasant farmers.¹⁸ Further, he argued that such government interventionist policies as the food importation and export control price had undermined farmers’ incentives, especially the individual family farm units that were responsible for the production of over 95 percent of all the local food consumed by the population.¹⁹ He lamented that agriculture has since the early 1970s become “a sick activity providing an opportunity for policy makers” to engage in wasteful and fraudulent expenditures by importing fertilizers, farm machinery and other inputs that were most often inappropriate and unsuitable for the needs of the farmers.

Okigbo criticized the adoption of inappropriate farming systems and technologies with massive state intervention, and the dependence on petroleum. He recommended shifting attention from what he called “the agricultural merchants and the gentlemen farmers” to the rural and small-scale farmers. He was critical of the Land Use Decree of 1978 that “accelerated liquidation of the family farm unit,” arguing that while the policy promoted large-scale farms owned by absentee farmers (retired public and military officers) and the allocation of land to foreign commercial farming interests, it alienated small-scale and family farmers from land.²⁰ Such a program encouraged large-scale foreign and local farms to oust peasant and family farm units through their acquisition of farm holdings. Yet, they focused on the production of such crops as maize for the brewery industries rather than on local food production. Such policy undermined Nigerian economy because it led to food shortages, stifled indigenous initiatives, and provided foreign investors, who owned large-scale farms, an opportunity to write off a good part of their investment costs and obtain substantial allocations for imports.

For the above reasons, Okigbo regrettably concluded that the large-scale foreign and local farms, as they operated in Nigeria, “cannot be expected to, and indeed cannot, contribute much to the feeding of the population.”²¹ In place of government farms, plantations, farm settlements and institutes, Okigbo recommended proper training and equipping of rural small-scale farmers with appropriate technologies: domestication of imported technologies and locally fabricated techniques that are not too sophisticated for them, fertilizers, pesticides, credits, extension service, weather and crop information, and other incentives. He believed that this group of farmers should be able to feed the population and produce raw materials for the industrial sector and even surplus food for export when equipped with appropriate technology and information. He was a strong advocate for the role of government in providing the above services and necessary infrastructure such as accessible farm roads, water and irrigation facilities, rural electricity, storage and handling facilities. He wished to see a Nigeria that feeds its population mostly from local food production by medium- and

small-scale farms; and farm households that are adequately sustained, just like in many other occupations, by the incomes from their farms. He looked forward to a policy that would create a linkage between farming and local industry where the latter supplies equipment and tools as well as a steady market for the farmers.²²

Okigbo also examined, with regrets, the development of industrialization in Nigeria. He was critical of the pace of industrialization in the country. He condemned the dependence on foreign technologies and increased importation, which threatened local industries. He called for an industrial revolution that would transform Nigerian economy and society. Citing the examples of Japan and South Korea, Okigbo believed that a bloodless industrial revolution could still occur in Nigeria. He advocated for a massive program of training of engineers, technologists and technicians, and a reliance on local resources—raw materials and principal inputs—to sustain the Nigerian industrial base.²³

Okigbo cautioned against “overspecialization” or dependence on a single export commodity of oil, which he argued, had created fiscal management problems and placed the country’s economy in a position of vulnerability as world market prices fluctuated. Overdependence on oil as a major source of revenue, he warned, would breed economic uncertainties and political instability, two evils that have jeopardized the country’s development efforts. Okigbo drew our attention to the dangers of “strong political instability [which places] economic as well as political policies [under] strong uncertainties” and engenders an atmosphere of fears that scares investors.²⁴ He saw the process of de-democratization that was going on in Nigeria as a bane for any form of investments, economic growth and development. Okigbo also contributed to the discourse on how to promote and balance the size of indigenous entrepreneurship with foreign investments, a concern that led to indigenization programs in Nigeria.

Indigenization policy in Nigeria, which was first articulated in the National Development Plan of 1970–1974, was aimed at reducing the level of foreign dominance over Nigeria’s economy through the creation of opportunities for Nigerian indigenous business class to exercise more control of the private sector of the economy. The Plan proposed the Nigerianization of management positions in the private sector by appointing Nigerians in such positions, and the indigenization of the ownership and control of private enterprises. Subsequently, the Nigerian Enterprises Promotion Decree (Indigenization Decree) of 1972 and the revised 1977 Decree were introduced to address the above problem. A summary breakdown of indigenous ownership under these Decrees was: 100 percent for small-scale low technology service enterprises, manufacturing and merchandizing; 40 percent (1972) and 60 percent (1977) control of more technology-intensive manufacturing industries and financial companies; and 40 percent for high-technology manufacturing industries.²⁵

Recent scholarship on the policy of indigenization (including Okigbo’s) has indicated that the change in the structure of ownership did not, however, alter the orientation and dependence of the manufacturing enterprises on imports. The policy was flawed and subverted. While indigenization transformed the distributive sector of the economy through increased indigenous ownership and control,

it consolidated international monopoly capital in Nigeria. The high-technology industries, which were highly protected and subsidized by the state, were still dominated by foreign enterprises. Okigbo questioned the reasoning behind privatization based on the claims that government enterprises were notoriously less efficient than private ones. He argued that “enterprises fully owned and run by private Nigerians are no more efficient than the enterprises fully owned and run by Government.”²⁶ The reason, he continued, was because Nigerian business owners (whether private or government) have not been able to come to terms with how to separate ownership from control, and control from the day-to-day management of such enterprises. They are yet to appreciate the special skills required to manage such companies.

Okigbo acknowledged the coercive power of government in Nigeria and warned that such powers should be checked in order not to undermine the efficiency and growth of the private sector. Yet he warned against a weak government that could not protect the “welfare of the citizen through the exercise of powers over the private sector” but simply rely on “substituting public for private ownership.”²⁷ The privatization of government property, Okigbo suggested, should be taken as a serious ideological matter, as government expression of its role in the production of goods and services, and itself as a business rather than a simple justification based on economic or financial efficiency. He called for a careful measure that should identify public enterprises that were better undertaken by private entrepreneurs and place them under the private sector through privatization and commercialization. For privatization to be successful, Okigbo argued that it must include expanding the managerial base with a monitoring program to protect the less powerful and vulnerable groups from the excesses of powerful multinational investors. Another area that required similar expansion and regulation was the banking and financial sector.

Nigerian Banking and Financial Institutions

Okigbo’s scholarship also focuses on the history of banking and financial institutions in Nigeria. His studies emphasize the role of the central bank in national economic policy and in development, and the need for adequate commercial banks, savings and credit institutions, and rural banking system in Nigeria. In his *Nigeria’s Financial System*, Okigbo offers an invaluable contribution to our understanding of financial economics, public finance and theories and practices of the banking system in Nigeria from 1960 to 1978. For the first time, a comprehensive study of the evolution and operations of the Nigerian monetary, banking and financial systems as well as problems and issues that led to their growth and expansion are covered in a single volume. Okigbo analyzed the problematic relationship between the Central Bank of Nigeria and the Ministry of Finance, and recommended an autonomous status for the former in order for it to function as the “Monetary Authority” of the country.²⁸ The persistent conflict over control and management of the bank, the fiscal irresponsibility and unnecessary interference of the federal government in the governance of the Central Bank have

compelled experts to recommend the amendment of the Central Bank Act in order to make it only responsible to the Senate.²⁹ It is not certain how this recommendation will solve the problems of the bank in view of the pervasiveness of corruption in the high echelons of government.

In spite of the progress that has been made in the various sectors of the Nigerian financial and banking systems, Okigbo regretted that they were by the early 1980s, still in their experimental stage regarding “ownership, internal structure of the constituent elements, and instruments of regulation and control.”³⁰ He indicated that Nigeria was grossly under-banked in terms of the number of banks vis-à-vis the size of the population; proportion of the transactions of the economic units passing through the banking system; and specialization of function by the central, commercial and rural banks. He therefore called for the creation of more need-target banks—rural and semi-urban commercial banks, and savings and credit institutions—to fund economic development in these neglected areas of the country and promote banking habits among rural and semi-urban dwellers, who constituted the largest percentage of the country’s population. He emphasized the need for the transformation of the banking system through the modernization of records and services, aggressive program of training at all levels, and clear delineation of functions and responsibilities between the different categories of banks as well as between the banking sector and the monetary authorities.³¹ Fortunately, some of these suggestions have been implemented, especially since the 2000s.

Another recommendation Okigbo offered was to strengthen the monetary authorities to fight inflation and poverty, and to change the unitary financial system of Nigeria (modeled after the British practice) to reflect the federal political structure of the country. This, he said, can be done by reducing the overwhelming position of the commercial banks and government through the adoption of a dual banking system similar to the United States’ model. Even though Okigbo saw the public sector “as the mobilizer and user of funds with the key role in the management of public debt,” he recommended that government should exercise its powers, as the major equity holder, over banks in an efficient and judicious manner in order to increase the effectiveness of the financial system, and engender economic growth and development.³²

In a 1983 lecture, Okigbo emphasized the need for banks as custodians of people’s money to maintain a healthy ratio of deposits to loans, minimize the risk of loss by requiring collateral and guarantees to their loans, and conduct their affairs and businesses with the utmost prudence and diligence. In order to remain relevant in fulfilling the country’s national objectives, he suggested that they should continuously study, assess and evaluate market conditions and investments as well as be mindful of their key role to the success of economic diversification in Nigeria.³³ He called on the banks to provide the leadership that would ensure that the code of ethics and probity in the Nigerian financial system are maintained. It is instructive to note that Nigeria experienced a banking crisis in the late 1980s and 1990s in spite of warnings from experts such as Okigbo.³⁴ Okigbo’s immense contribution to the development of the Nigerian financial and

banking systems, especially the release of his *Nigeria's Financial System* in 1981, seen as a watershed publication on Nigeria's financial system, cannot be forgotten. It is not surprising that an entire era in the history of banking in Nigeria is referred to as the post-Okigbo era.³⁵

Fiscal Federalism and Revenue Allocation

The importance of prudence in Nigerian public finance and treasury, where the constitution recognizes three-tiers of complex structures and relationships, cannot be overemphasized. Fiscal federalism and revenue allocation have remained constant sources of tension and conflict in Nigeria. They have remained centers of increased politicization, unfairness and exploitation. As a result, these subjects have attracted spirited debates and discussions from stakeholders and experts. Pius Okigbo was one of those who have made meaningful contribution to the discourse on these subjects. In his *Nigerian Public Finance*, Okigbo systematically traced the evolution of the Nigerian fiscal system since the colonial period, synthesizing the structure, dynamics and controversies surrounding the system. The book serves as a guide to understanding the history of direct taxation in Nigeria, and the relationships between the Nigerian fiscal system, economic growth and finance development. The complex but problematic fiscal relationships between different tiers of government—central, regional and local—based on the experimentations with the principles of need and derivation are also analyzed.³⁶ In addition, Okigbo discussed the role of the public sector in Nigeria's development, sources of revenue of the central government, as well as local and regional governments' finances.

He explained why government remains the prime mover in capital formation, finance development and in economic growth and development of Nigeria; and how government's fiscal operations could determine the expansion or contraction of businesses and investments. Having realized the dangers of excessive taxation and neglect of allocations to agriculture, he advocated for the use of a common sense tax differential policy to encourage the growth of small businesses and the creation of a robust competitive environment between them and large established enterprises. He also strongly recommended fiscal federalism that would guarantee financial autonomy of the regional governments and their complementary relationship with the federal sector. Here, Okigbo recognized the centrality of the constitution in guaranteeing the complementary responsibilities of each of the tiers of government and in resource allocation and income distribution.

In addition to analyzing the development of revenue allocation and obstacles to fiscal planning policies in the country, Okigbo presented a critique of the 1977 Aboyade Technical Committee on Revenue Allocation Report.³⁷ He had argued in one of his books that issues of revenue allocation were marginally economic, but principally a matter of politics—political compromise.³⁸ He defined revenue allocation as “a periodic re-distribution of fiscal capacity between the various tiers of government [and] therefore should be a tool of conscious and deliberate development and of efficient government.”³⁹ In spite of the recommendation

by the 1977 Revenue Allocation Report to reduce the federal recurrent revenues of 71/75 percent of the 1970s to 60 percent, and increase states' allocation from 25/29 to 40 percent, Okigbo still criticized the 60:40 percent revenue allocation in favor of the federal government because as he pointed out, the states had assumed new responsibilities (such as education—primarily, Universal Primary Education) previously handled by the center. As he indicated, it was the federal government and not the states that had been reckless and required some lessons in financial prudence and probity.⁴⁰ Instructively, the problem of financial imprudence and mismanagement of resources is widespread in the country, from local government authorities to the federal level.

Ironically, Okigbo shifted his position constantly on the weighting of revenue allocations between the central or federal government and the regions or the states. The shift was not necessarily ideological but a pragmatic reflection of the historical experience and the socioeconomic and political realities of Nigeria. He showed that when the regions dominated by the major ethnic groups were the sources of revenue for the central government, which they also dominated, the principle of derivation or revenue formula established by the Phillipson Commission of 1942 benefited those regions.⁴¹ But since the 1970s, when the federal government depended on oil revenue from the minority communities, the principle of derivation was hardly applied for over 20 years until the eruption of violent protests from those communities. Yet, Okigbo's Commission Report of 1980 deemphasized the principle of derivation and recommended greater control and share of revenue for the federal government. Okigbo has been criticized for this shift in his position, but his supporters have argued that Okigbo's new position was informed by his strong commitment to the unity of the country following the devastating three-year war. Okigbo's Commission recommended a 55 percent revenue allocation to the federal government, 30.5 percent for state governments, 10 percent for local governments and 4.5 percent for special funds, which should be controlled by the federal government.⁴²

In the 1990s, Okigbo shifted back to the principle of derivation by recommending that 55 percent of the revenue go to the derivation, which would benefit the revenue-generation communities.⁴³ Some have suggested that Okigbo's shifts reflect a long career in fiscal federalism, his sensitivity to the different political climates in Nigeria, especially his decentralized position during the war, and "his location as [an] Igbo, democrat, devolutionist and nationalist."⁴⁴ Ironically, the federal government's greater control of resource allocation and its insensitivity to the plight of the minority-producing communities have led to the escalation of violent activities in the Niger Delta. In spite of efforts made to achieve equitable distribution of oil revenue that would have been beneficial to the oil-bearing Niger Delta communities, peace and the provision of social infrastructures and economic well-being of the people have remained elusive in this part of the country.⁴⁵

Similarly, Okigbo in his early scholarship advocated for a strong institutional base and control of resources, and a centralized planned development for economic growth and development. However, he shifted positions later in the 1980s

and 1990s in favor of market forces. His pro-market forces paradigm was demonstrated when Nigeria implemented an economic adjustment program from the late 1980s through the early 1990s. Ironically, Okigbo became a strong critic of the program even when he advocated for some form of economic structural adjustment program. What one takes from Okigbo's shifting paradigms and ideologies is that they are not signs of weakness rather they are testaments to his dynamic and pragmatic commitment to relevant models for achieving Nigeria's sustainable economic development. The lesson that can be drawn from Okigbo's shifting positions is that those in authority and policy formulation should be dynamic enough in their choice for economic models and practices in order to meet the challenges of the changing times and the realities of their respective countries. They should not be rigid and static.

Nigeria and the Structural Adjustment Program

In the fourth volume of his *Essays in the Public Philosophy of Development*, Okigbo focused primarily on the meaning, application and the impact of the structural adjustment program (SAP) in Nigeria. This volume contains a series of papers and lectures he had written and delivered between 1985 and 1992 as his contribution to the debates over the viability of SAP in Nigeria and its gains and pains. The Nigerian Military Government of Ibrahim Babangida introduced SAP policies including the Second-Tier Foreign Exchange Market (SFEM) in 1986. While Okigbo believed that a form of serious adjustment was inevitable and urgent due to the economic near-disaster and the collapse of the country's foreign exchange earnings in the mid-1980s, what was unsettled before the introduction of SAP was, as he stated, "whether the medication and the dosage of adjustment prescribed and administered by President Babangida since 1986 was life saving or lethal."⁴⁶

Nigeria's pre-SAP economy was characterized by over dependence on imports, inflation caused by periodic scarcities and speculative hoarding, concentration of industrial capacity on luxury consumer goods with import-dependent technology, neglect of agricultural production, foreign exchange shortage, growing unemployment and the polarization of the social classes and further impoverishment of the poor. A situation where the rising expenditures were incompatible with the declining revenues and where there was growing import demand in the face of dwindling means of external payment, Nigeria was left with no other option but to implement some form of economic restructuring measures, whether they were homemade as the government claimed or externally imposed by the World Bank/International Monetary Fund.

The World Bank/IMF-sanctioned SAP/SFEM package was informed by the underlying philosophy that a free market is better and more efficient than a controlled system. It involved trade liberalization, agricultural export promotion, abolition of import licenses, devaluation of the naira (the Nigerian currency), reducing the size of government expenditures, removal of government subsidies on such essential goods as petroleum products and fertilizers and some social

services, reducing money in circulation and raising interest rates among other conditions. Massive devaluation of the naira through the agency of “free” market forces constituted the cardinal element of the deregulation of the country’s economy. It was promised to provide a realistic exchange rate for the naira, reduce demand for imports and correct the anomalies created by the import licensing system. This was what informed the introduction of the Second-Tier Foreign Exchange Market (SFEM), which was later replaced with the Foreign Exchange Market (FEM).

In his criticism of the implementation of the SAP/SFEM package, Okigbo warned that devaluation with contractionary monetary policy and high interest rates could only lead to de-industrialization. He considered the monopolization of foreign exchange supply by the Central Bank of Nigeria for bidding by a free and highly competitive demand sector as an abnormal market situation that made reliance on market forces to determine the actual value of the naira unrealistic. This is because such a system engendered abuse and exploitation by the bidding banks, which took advantage of the exchange rate disparity between the FEM/SFEM and the autonomous market by diverting most of the foreign exchange they earned from the bidding sessions into the latter.⁴⁷ The result was proliferation of merchant and commercial banks, which were more preoccupied with foreign exchange speculation than the normal banking services that would have strengthened the monetary institutions and the economy of the country. Thus, the naira might have been grossly overvalued prior to SFEM as the World Bank/IMF and their apologists would argue, but what became apparent was that it became grossly undervalued since SFEM and therefore detrimental to Nigeria’s economic development.

In spite of the slight rise in external reserves, realignment of the value of the naira to foreign currency, reduction in public expenditures and the deregulation of the economy in favor of the market forces, the effects of the SAP/SFEM package in Nigeria were basically negative. The implementation of the package led to massive retrenchment of workers and increased unemployment, galloping inflation, rapid decline of personal incomes, unaffordable and inaccessible health and other social services and de-industrialization. This chain of events left the poor and their cohorts below the poverty line. As Okigbo put it, “the faces of people are etched with greater sadness now than [before] they are even sadder in the rural areas and among the urban poor.”⁴⁸ He argued that these programs could not succeed based only on “growth-associated problems.” It was also imperative to pursue self-reliant human-centered development programs that target problems of poverty, hunger and disease in the country. This type of development should focus on liberation of the individual through the maintenance of the basic human rights.

Human Capital and People-Centered Development

Okigbo was a strong believer in the development of human capital through access to basic human needs and appropriate education. For this reason, he assigned an

important role to government, especially in developing countries, to function as an engine of capital formation and protector of its citizenry. Drawing from the works of such economic theorists as the English Adam Smith, the father of neoliberal economics, Okigbo emphasized the responsibility of government as the undertaker of social works for the welfare of its citizenry and the guarantor of individual freedom to engage in economic activity. He believed that government responsibilities to its citizens include the maintenance of public security, law and order and protection from external aggressions. Government should also guarantee the welfare of its citizenry through resource allocation, stabilization of prices of goods and services, and equitable income distribution.⁴⁹

Okigbo was of the view that for a meaningful development to occur, it must first satisfy the basic human needs of the population—food, clothing and shelter—based largely on local resources. Therefore, government policy should be channeled to enhance the living standards and happiness of its citizenry, especially the most vulnerable ones. He believed that the liberation and autonomy of the individual is the key for development, which in turn transforms the entire society or community.⁵⁰ The liberation must encompass a release of his/her creative and innovative talents and the extension of participatory democratic rights. It was because of his perennial focus on the primacy of human capital to Africa's development that Okigbo chastised the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank for promoting development programs that resulted in human indignity, hardship and despair. Nigerian Arthur Mbanefo, one of Okigbo's contemporaries, summarizes his economic philosophy as “humanistic brand of economics [centered around] ordinary people [and] the eradication of poverty and inequality, especially in the third world.”⁵¹

Okigbo opined that another key element to economic development was a more vigorous intellectual climate than what had existed that would focus its analytical framework on people's experience, and a reorientation toward the people's core values—honesty, integrity, moderation, obedience and dignity of work.⁵² On the role of the intellectual community in the development of Nigeria, Okigbo critically examined the management and funding of university education in the country. He concurred with the findings of the Visitation Panels of 1975–1985 on major universities in Nigeria that most of the problems that saddled university education included “inadequate funding, irregular rhythm of cash flows, frequent allegations of large scale frauds, inadequate administration and management of the funds [and] the [entire] University system.”⁵³

University dependence on government funding has posed serious problems, especially in the area of university autonomy and unnecessary government interference with the work and administration of the university system. Inadequate funding has adversely affected the provision of appropriate and adequate teaching and research facilities in Nigerian universities. Okigbo pointed out decades of political crisis, violent conflicts, mismanaged oil boom, proliferation of higher institutions (most of them inadequately funded and equipped), military regimes that had no regards for university education, politicization of university appointments and commercialization of students' admissions and honorary

degree awards as serious problems that have resulted in the decay of values and the diminished standard of Nigerian universities from what they used to be—citadels of learning where everybody involved was preoccupied with the pursuit of knowledge.⁵⁴ He regretted that there was no single university in the 1990s' Nigeria "sufficiently equipped in the high technology fields to place itself alongside any of the best [u]niversities in America or Europe or even in India, South-East Asia or China."⁵⁵

Okigbo condemned other inhibitive factors, especially the ones he referred to as "environmental" and the "banking system" of education, which raise the question of the relevance of university education to the development of Nigeria, and also tarnish the image of the universities and those associated with them—administrators, professors, researchers and their products. He called on the university administrators and professors to be pragmatic and innovative in their sources of funds, which should include consultancy services; in the programs and courses they offer; and research activities they engage in. In place of proliferation of tertiary institutions, Okigbo advocated for their consolidation and attention to specialization to avoid unnecessary replications, especially in the face of dwindling resources; and to place emphasis on merit, excellence, high standards and the redefinition of their core values.

He also addressed the problems of brain drain and "brain hemorrhage" in the country. While brain drain is the emigration overseas of a segment of the skilled manpower of a country, "brain hemorrhage" refers to willful destruction of brain power at home through all forms of misuse or abuse. Okigbo referred to "periodic purges, sudden shifts and transfers, premature retirements and promotions, frequent and willful misapplication of the concept of Federal character" as examples of government policies since the 1970s that had contributed to the pollution of the intellectual environment and the stifling of initiatives.⁵⁶ He predicted a major crisis that would rock whatever remained of the country's social values and the very foundations of its political economy if government made no effort to improve university education, maintain economic efficiency, and pursue social justice and individual liberty.

Okigbo identified corruption and mismanagement of state resources as major hindrances to economic development in Nigeria. He was critical of corruption in high places and the erosion of the social and moral values and work ethic of the people. He believed that work remuneration should be based on skill and work done and not on power, influence and ability to evade the law. As he put it, "accumulation of wealth and income must . . . reflect the contributions to the national product rather than the distribution of power and influence."⁵⁷ As a crusader against corruption, Okigbo was courageous enough to expose the scandalous disappearance of \$12.8 million in oil revenue of the Gulf War years when he headed a public panel of investigation in 1994. Having acquired notoriety as one of the most corrupt countries in the world, he was adamant that Nigeria required a genuine and committed leadership to restore the credibility and integrity of her citizenry at home and abroad.

The endemic nature of corruption in the country meant that immediate and urgent action was required to address the problem. Successive democratic governments in Nigeria since the late 1990s have made some efforts toward curbing corruption and improving Nigeria's and Nigerians' images both at home and abroad. These include President Olusegun Obasanjo's Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Act (ICPOROA) and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC).⁵⁸ The administration of Umaru Yar'Adua maintained the anticorruption policy of its predecessor. It added a "Re-branding" campaign through the Ministry of Information and Communications headed by Dora Akunyili. Even though progress has been made in this area, much work is still required to reduce the level of corruption in the country.

Regional Integration and African Development

For several decades, Pius Okigbo had pursued the critical issue of how to mobilize resources for economic development of Nigeria and Africa. Equipped with his educational background in pan-African tradition, Okigbo was a pioneer in the debate over the relevance of increased regional integration for Africa's economic development. While some policy makers and scholars strongly advocate for regional integration as a panacea for economic growth and development in Africa, others have proposed a shift to greater openness to global markets with less emphasis on an African common market. Drawing from the wealth of his experience as Nigeria's ambassador to the EEC and the trend toward greater integration in Europe and other regions of the world in the 1960s, Okigbo was able to articulate his ideas in his well-received book, *Africa and the Common Market*, which explored commercial relationships between African countries, the Common Market and the EEC; and provided an understanding of the problems and prospects of regional integration in Africa, ideas that are still relevant today.

In the book, he explored the relationship between African countries and the ECC. While commending the EEC for providing funds to the African associated states in the form of grants instead of loans, Okigbo was critical of the unequal and exploitative relationship between the Community and the African states, especially those who joined under the Yaounde Convention in 1963. Their membership forced them to remain producers of agricultural products while European states specialized in industrially manufactured goods just as it was during their colonial domination.⁵⁹ While the member states of the EEC enjoyed duty-free movement of goods within the Community, the associated states under Yaounde were required to pay duties on their manufactured and processed goods.⁶⁰ These associated states were also denied any opportunity to protect their infant industries. They were required to grant preferences in their market to the EEC member states to the disadvantage of neighboring African countries. In addition, the Yaounde states were required to extend to the EEC states exclusive grant to open subglobal quotas and special tariff concessions. But, as the Nigerian chief negotiator, Okigbo argued against reciprocity in trade relations between developing

African countries and the EEC; the concession was granted to Nigeria and East African countries.⁶¹

Unfortunately, most African countries, whether associated or unassociated, were mono-crop economies. Even when they embarked on diversification, it involved only agricultural export crops. The result was a vicious circle of decreased export earnings and imbalance of trade. For these reasons, Okigbo recommended local industrialization and the strengthening of African domestic market, arguing that “diversification can be meaningful to the African countries not in the context of expanding the range of agricultural commodities which each country exports, but in assisting the transformation of the economic structure to provide for some basis for industrialization.”⁶² He also called on the EEC to grant African countries greater access to the European markets for both their agricultural raw materials and processed goods including elementary industrial products. With the dissolution of the former Soviet Union and democratization processes in the region, Okigbo warned African leaders and their governments to be mindful of the new wave of protectionism pursued by European countries and the United States, which would definitely further marginalize Africa and perpetually subject her to the status of provider of crude raw materials.⁶³

Okigbo was a strong advocate for regional integration in Africa. He was involved in the stimulated debate on the African Common Market (ACM) following the establishment of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) in 1958 as an intellectual power base for Africa’s integration movements. Okigbo was one of those who believed that an ACM was possible and feasible as long as subregional integration and cooperation was strengthened to serve as building blocks. His unwavering support for an ACM was based on his strong conviction that it would promote trade by intensifying intra-African trade and reduce Africa’s dependence on trade with Europe. He believed that such cooperation and regional integration would ultimately result in “a balanced growth of the African economies [and serve as] a step towards political unity or union” in the continent.⁶⁴

Okigbo was also concerned about the structure of the African trade and lessons that could be learned from existing subregional political and economic integration efforts in the continent: the East African Common Market; the West African Customs Union; the Equatorial Customs Union; the Central African Customs and Economic Union; and the Union of African and Malagasy States among others. He referred to the 1970s as “the age of the New International Economic Order,” and welcomed more subregional bodies that were established in Africa during this period.⁶⁵ These included the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS, 1975), Mano River Union, West African Economic Community (CEAO, 1974), Preferential Trade Area for Eastern and Southern African States (PTA), Economic Community of Central African States (CEEAC) and the Southern African Development Cooperation Conference (SADDC). These subregional integration efforts were aimed at assisting member states to eradicate poverty, promote their economic development and secure competitive bargaining power at the international arena. Because of the differences in

stages of development, inhibitive geographical factors, lack of human and natural resources, the small size of the internal market and general shortage of capital that trapped some African countries to the status of “not only [being] underdeveloped but seemingly undevelopable,” Okigbo called on countries with high growth potential to make some concessions that would lead to stability and a balanced development within the African common market.⁶⁶ He also identified lack of political will and “abundance of political rivalries, suspicions and jealousies” as part of the problems.⁶⁷ He concluded that internal rather than external forces had more potential in undermining the movements toward regional integration and cooperation in Africa, and therefore should be addressed with the seriousness and urgency they required.

To address the limitations of regional integration, Okigbo called on African countries to strike a balance between intra-African trade through regional and subregional markets and external trade with their trading partners outside the continent. He gave primacy to regional economic integration and aggregation of subregional groupings for the economic growth of African countries and for their competitive participation in the global markets.⁶⁸ Okigbo’s work undoubtedly laid the foundation for subsequent scholarship on regionalism in Africa. His scholarship is vital to our understanding of the reasoning behind the formation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963 as an instrument for the promotion of unity and greater regional economic cooperation and collaboration among African states. In spite of its multidimensional cliques and alignments, the OAU unquestionably, achieved relative success in meeting its goals and objectives. For instance, the Lagos Plan of Action (LPA) and the Final Act of Lagos (FAL) in 1980 espoused a self-reliant and inward-oriented development strategy to counter the continent’s dwindling economy. They stressed the importance of appropriate national and regional policies and programs, especially those that would ensure the articulation and development of indigenous scientific and technological capabilities. They emphasized the need to promote agricultural development and food production through the utilization of appropriate industrial and energy requirements, education and training.

The FAL, incorporating the LPA, reaffirmed the OAU’s commitment to the establishment of an African Economic Community by the year 2000 with strong subregional and regional integration of African economies. This was aimed at promoting collective, accelerated, self-reliant and self-sustaining development of member states. Since then, the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights (1981); the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990); the Pan-African Customs Union (1990); the African Economic Community (1991); the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution (1993); African Common Position on Africa’s External Debt Crisis (1997) among other regional bodies and resolutions have been established and ratified by African states. In six-stage implementation plan, the African Economic Community would culminate in an African Common Market, using the regional economic communities as building blocks. In July 2002, African Union (AU) replaced the OAU with expanded and broader objectives than the latter’s.⁶⁹

Okigbo's scholarship has x-rayed the impact of the IMF/World Bank sanctioned structural adjustment programs on African economies. He noted that by 1988, 30 African countries had implemented the programs.⁷⁰ He expressed concerns that most of the 31 of the 51 African countries that had fully implemented SAP by the early 1990s were at varying stages of catastrophe.⁷¹ During this period too, 29 out of 51 member states of the OAU belonged to the world's 43 least developed countries. These countries were dependent on a monoculture export (mineral or commodity), and on imported equipment, foreign technology and capital. Due to poor foreign exchange earnings, they were faced with trade imbalance, budget deficits, mounting external debts and debt servicing problems. In recognition of the size of the foreign debts of African countries and their implication in pursuing sustainable development, Okigbo called for a total cancellation of the official debt, and the revaluation of the commercial debt in line with its current value in the secondary markets, which he argued, would reduce the debt of most countries by more than half of its nominal value. In order not to be subjected to "financial terrorism by the creditor countries and their banks," he urged debtor countries to pool their strategies together for collective bargaining and maximum results.⁷² He saw the formation of a Debtors' Forum, advocated by the South Commission⁷³ since 1987, as the only way for African countries and others in the South to negotiate reasonable terms with their creditors.

In a short but powerful essay, Okigbo identified leadership crisis as the greatest hindrance to Africa's development. He criticized African leaders for poor governance and blamed them for the slow integration movements in the continent, arguing that they were "haunted by the all-powerful nation state as the symbol of unlimited power."⁷⁴ He meticulously diagnosed the problems of political leadership in Africa in what he referred to as the "four epochs of slavery." These epochs included the exportation of Africans as commodities across the desert and seas to the Middle East and Asia; the transatlantic slave trade; the colonization of the continent and the systemic erosion of African institutions and traditions; and the post-independence enslavement of Africans by Africans through state institutions and power structures. He argued that the incalculable loss of effective manpower as a result of the slave trade contributed to Africa's technological deficit.⁷⁵ As colonial subjects, Africans were enslaved in their homeland and subjected to alien conditions and cultures. Even after political independence was achieved, the grip of former colonizers on Africans was still tight through series of undeclared protocols, which were insidiously supported by the new African political elite, whose minds were still under colonial bondage. He called members of this elite group, who have continued to enslave their fellow Africans through state powers "the indigenous monocratic rulers."⁷⁶ They were canonical representatives of ethnicities and other interests rather than representatives of the whole country as their constituency. They engaged in personal rule by converting the state into personal private property; and had no regard for public accountability and integrity.

In order to escape the resultant disintegration and systematically address democratic, technological and managerial deficits, and the overburden of external debt, Okigbo insisted that African leadership and the citizenry must seek what he

referred to as the “higher nationality,” which transcends the colonial artificially created boundaries. The sureties to “higher nationality” are regional integration, national and collective self-reliance, and popular participation in political process at all levels—national, subregional and regional. Since colonial education played a key role in the erosion of African cultures and institutions, Okigbo urged Africans and their leaders to strive to decolonize their educational systems, especially at the university level where massive support for self-reliant research in all fields of human endeavor, particularly in science and technology, should be the focus. In recognition of the problems associated with the technological gap between Africa and the industrialized North, which he blamed for the perpetual reduction of African economies to raw material production, Okigbo urged Africans to build a scientific culture that must start at early childhood. He called on them to study the technological history of such newcomers as India, South Korea, Taiwan, Cuba and Malaysia for lessons that could be derived from their individual advancement.⁷⁷ Appropriate education is also required for the massive retraining of African bureaucrats and for building a culture where a sense of accountability, prudent management, high moral integrity and a new spirit of service to the community, especially in public life would thrive. In the face of increased globalization, Okigbo urged African countries to strategically integrate themselves into the global economic system, an area where strong regional cooperation would offer them a competitive standing in the global markets.

Reminiscences of Others on Okigbo’s Legacy

Pius Okigbo’s works have remained accessible and valuable to scholars of development economics and comparative development. Scholars who have begun to study his works have come to appreciate his contributions to the intellectual discourse on African development economics. While some have described him as “a freelance intellectual, who was unencumbered by the institutional constraints of public service,” others regard him as a foremost African economic development expert who has laid a solid foundation upon which subsequent scholars have built on “his magna opus and expatiate on” the subjects of development planning and philosophy, financial analysis and political economy of development.⁷⁸ In acknowledging Okigbo’s immense influence on development theory and public policy in Nigeria, Nigerian Clement Adibe views “the paradigm of empowerment” as his “greatest bequest to future generation of policy makers, scholars and public intellectuals.”⁷⁹ Here, the emphasis is on the empowerment of the individual and private sector in order to curb the pervasiveness of the state in ownership, control and allocation of resources.

American Jane Guyer, then at Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, stated that the university community was reclaiming Pius Okigbo

as a representative of all our African students (past and present), and as a source of ever-relevant ideas about the future of Nigeria and of Africa [and] as a trailblazer and symbol for all of the African graduates of Northwestern University who have

contributed so much to scholarship and public life in their own countries and beyond.⁸⁰

Okigbo's former colleague and economic adviser to Nigeria in the early 1960s, Wolfgang Stolper, declared in a paper he submitted at a conference in the former's honor that it was "fitting that Northwestern University honors Pius Okigbo, its first African Ph.D. in economics [and] a highly intelligent and very well trained economist in the classical tradition."⁸¹

Okigbo's scholarly and philosophical contributions have earned him many awards and the recognition as "one of Africa's foremost intellectuals."⁸² Before his death on September 12, 2000, he was a recipient of the Nigerian distinguished award of the Commander of the Order of the Niger in 1977; the Nigeria National Merit Award, the country's highest award for intellectual achievement, in 1983; the International Order of Merit in 1992; and the Zik's Prize for Leadership in Africa in 1996. He also received honorary academic awards including Honorary LLD, University of Nigeria, Nsukka; Honorary DLitt, Federal University of Technology, Owerri; Honorary DLitt, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria; Honorary DSc, University of Lagos, Lagos; and Honorary DLitt, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

Conclusion

Pius Okigbo left an indelible mark in diverse areas and capacities in which he worked. In many aspects of Nigerian and African economic theories and practices, in national planning, banking and financial systems, and in regional integration and cooperation, Okigbo's works have served as springboards for subsequent and future studies in these areas within the African continent and beyond. He participated in important debates on appropriate economic paradigms for African countries. His ideas and perspectives on human rights and conditions, good governance and responsive government, the role of the state and the citizenry, and mutual and peaceful coexistence among diverse populations of the global world have also become focal points of academic discourse and research in colleges and universities, and in governmental and non-governmental arenas. His scholarship in financial analysis, political economy, development philosophy and planning, and politics and governance is an invaluable resource for intellectual discourse, and policy-making. He has over the years influenced public policies in developing countries and also informed certain decisions in the private sector.

Similarly, Okigbo's public service performance, especially in the areas of governance and administration, was impeccable and exemplary. Okigbo undoubtedly lived a fulfilled life as the citizen of the global world through his scholarship and public services in the South-South Commission, various UN agencies and in numerous regional, national and local governmental and non-governmental commissions and organizations. During his lifetime, he served many governments, including the British colonial, successive Nigerian and other independent African governments, and the authorities of the Republic of Biafra. In spite of

his commitment to building a strong united Nigeria, and the fact that most of his studies focused on Nigeria, Okigbo was a true Igbo. He abandoned important positions he occupied in Nigeria to pursue the Igbo/Biafra cause when it became apparent to him that his people were facing acts of genocide in the hands of the Federal Military government and its agents. Some might criticize him for choosing ethnic loyalty over support for Nigeria. But he did what many Igbo did: sacrifice their lives in defense of their Igbo homeland. At the end of the war, he served Nigeria diligently. He was not embittered by his prison term due to his role in Biafra.

A Nigerian and Igbo intellectual giant and pan-Africanist, Pius Okigbo is remembered for his immense contribution to diverse arenas, whereby he left a lasting legacy as a development economist, an academic, a business tycoon, a political analyst, a policy-maker, an international consultant, a philanthropist, a nationalist and a detribalized patriot. It is therefore apt to say that he has in so many ways contributed to the development and enrichment of Igbo, Nigerian and African intellectual traditions in Africa and beyond.

Notes

1. See Chapter 2 of this book.
2. Information in this paragraph is extracted from Jane Guyer and LaRay Denzer, eds., *Vision and Policy in Nigerian Economics: The Legacy of Pius Okigbo* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Ibadan University Press, 2005); and many of Okigbo's publications listed below in Note 8.
3. His PhD dissertation, "Capital Formation in a Developing Economy," was a pioneer study in modern African economics.
4. These included the Schaefer fellowship in Economics at the Northwestern University (1953); a Carnegie fellowship in economics (1953–1954); a studentship at Nuffield College in Oxford University, England (1954–1955; 1957–1958); and the American Philosophical Society postdoctoral fellowship, Oxford (1957–1958).
5. For Wolfgang Stolper's activities in Nigeria, see Clive S. Gray, ed., *Inside Independent Nigeria: Diaries of Wolfgang Stolper, 1960–1962* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Co., 2003).
6. Pius Okigbo, "Abuse of Public Trust," in *Newswatch*, October 24, 1994, 32–33; Pita Agbese, "The 'Stolen' Okigbo Panel Report: Of Malfeasance and Public Accountability in Nigeria," in Guyer and Denzer, eds., *Vision and Policy*, 55–75.
7. Ebere Onwudiwe, "Okigbo and the Igbo Question in Nigerian Politics," in Guyer and Denzer, eds., *Vision and Policy*, 84.
8. Pius Okigbo, *Essays in the Public Philosophy of Development Vol. 2: Change and Crisis in the Management of the Nigerian Economy* (Enugu, Nigeria: Fourth Dimension Publishing Co. Ltd., 1993); *Essays in the Public Philosophy of Development Vol. 3: Growth and Structure of the Nigerian Economy* (Enugu, Nigeria: Fourth Dimension Publishing Co. Ltd., 1993); *Essays in the Public Philosophy of Development Vol. 4: Lectures on the Structural Adjustment Programme* (Enugu, Nigeria: Fourth Dimension Publishing Co. Ltd., 1993); *Essays in the Public Philosophy of Development Vol. 5: Studies in the Political Economy of Africa* (Enugu, Nigeria: Fourth Dimension Publishing Co. Ltd., 1993); "The Future Haunted by the Past," in Adebayo Adedeji, ed., *Africa Within*

- the World: Beyond Dispossession and Dependence* (London: Zed Books, 1993), 28–38; *National Development Planning in Nigeria, 1900–92* (London: James Currey, 1989); “The Economics of the Civil War: The Biafran Experience,” in T. N. Tamuno and S. C. Ukpabi, eds., *Nigeria since Independence: The First Twenty-five Years Vol. VI: The Civil War Years* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Heinemann Educational Books, 1989), 201–212; *Essays in the Public Philosophy of Development Vol. 1* (Enugu, Nigeria: Fourth Dimension Publishing Co. Ltd., 1987); *Towards a Reconstruction of the Political Economy of Igbo Civilization*, Ahiajoku Lecture (Owerri, Nigeria: Government Printer, 1986); *Sorcerers, Astrologers and Nigerian Economic Recovery*, Distinguished Annual Lecture Series No. 2 National Institute for Policy & Strategic Studies, Kuru October 31, 1986 (Kuru, Nigeria: National Institute, 1986); *Planning the Nigerian Economy for Less Dependence on Oil*, Distinguished Lecture Series No. 3 (Ibadan, Nigeria: Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1983); *Economic Growth, Development & Freedom*, University Lecture delivered on the Occasion of the Third Convocation on Friday, December 18, 1981 (Maiduguri, Nigeria: University of Maiduguri, 1982); *Nigeria’s Financial System* (Harlow, UK: Longman, 1981); *Africa and the Common Market* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1967); *Nigerian Public Finance* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1965); *Nigerian National Accounts, 1950–57* (Enugu, Eastern Nigeria: Federal Ministry of Economic Development, 1962).
9. Okigbo, *Towards a Reconstruction*.
 10. *Ibid.*, 16.
 11. *Ibid.*, 19.
 12. Okigbo, *Towards a Reconstruction*, 22.
 13. *Ibid.*, 22–23.
 14. Wolfgang Stolper, whom Okigbo worked with, also identified the challenges of “planning without facts,” which underscores the timely release of Okigbo’s book. See Wolfgang Stolper, *Planning Without Facts: Lessons in Resource Allocation from Nigeria’s Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966).
 15. Waziri Ibrahim, “Foreword,” in Okigbo, *Nigerian National Accounts, 1950–57*, xiii. See also A. R. Prest and I. G. Stewart, *The National Income of Nigeria, 1950–51* (London: HMSO, 1953).
 16. D. A. Lury, “Book Review of *Nigerian National Accounts, 1950–57* by P. N. C. Okigbo,” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 1, no. 3 (1963): 411.
 17. Okigbo, *National Development Planning*, 204.
 18. Okigbo, *Essays in the Public Philosophy*, vol. 2, 193.
 19. *Ibid.*, 328–329.
 20. On the 1978 Land Use Decree and land policies in Nigeria, see Tom Forrest, *Politics and Economic Development in Nigeria* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993); National Seminar on Land Use Policies and Practices, *Evolving an Effective Agricultural Land Use Policy for Nigeria: Proceedings of the National Seminar on Land Use Policies and Practices*, held in Ibadan, July 19–23, 1998 (Ibadan, Nigeria: Wordsmit Editorial Services, 1999).
 21. Okigbo, *Essays in the Public Philosophy*, vol. 2, 336.
 22. *Ibid.*, 337.
 23. Okigbo, *Essays in the Public Philosophy*, vol. 1, 241–254.
 24. Okigbo, *Essays in the Public Philosophy*, vol. 3, 123.
 25. Ironically, while Asians and Middle Easterners, especially the Lebanese, owned most of the small-scale enterprises that were to be completely taken over by Nigerians,

- Western-based transnational corporations dominated those where indigenous ownership was between 60 and 40 percent. See Jeremiah Dibua, *Modernization and the Crisis of Development in Africa: The Nigerian Experience* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2006); Thomas Biersteker, ed., *Multinationals, the State, and Control of the Nigerian Economy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987).
26. Okigbo, *Essays in the Public Philosophy*, vol. 4, 66.
 27. Okigbo, *Essays in the Public Philosophy*, vol. 1, 75.
 28. Okigbo, *Nigeria's Financial System*, 3–4 and 274.
 29. Olu Ajakaiye, "Towards Securing Fiscal Policy Coordination in Nigeria," in Paul Collier, Chukwuma C. Soludo, and Catherine Pattillo, eds., *Economic Policy Options for a Prosperous Nigeria* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 205–219.
 30. Okigbo, *Nigeria's Financial System*, 269.
 31. Okigbo, "Reforming the Banking System for the 1990s," in Okigbo, *Essays in the Public Philosophy*, vol. 1, 271–293; *Nigeria's Financial System*, 271–273.
 32. Okigbo, *Nigeria's Financial System*, 143 and 271.
 33. Okigbo, *Essays in the Public Philosophy*, vol. 3, 201–210.
 34. See Howard Stein, Olu Ajakaiye, and Peter Lewis, eds., *Deregulation and Banking Crisis in Nigeria: A Comparative Study* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Green O. Nwankwo, *Perspectives on Central Banking and Economic Development in Nigeria* (Lagos, Nigeria: Evergreen Associates, 2001).
 35. Emmanuel Nnadozie, "Okigbo's Legacy and Contributions in African Economics, Public Policy and Finance," in Guyer and Denzer, eds., *Vision and Policy*, 94. See also Bennie Nunnally, D. Anthony Plath, and Emmanuel Nnadozie, "Contemporary Banking and Banking Regulation in Nigeria," *The Journal of International Banking Regulation* 2, no. 2 (2000): 51–60.
 36. In this painstaking research with numerous tables that support the text, Okigbo analyzed why the principle of need that required the redistribution of revenues from some regions to others was unpopular, and therefore was replaced by revenue allocation based on derivation using such indexes as population size, incomes and expenditure from each region.
 37. The Aboyade Report of 1977 recommended five principles for revenue allocation, which included national minimum standard for national integration; equality of access to development opportunities; independent revenue and minimum tax effort; absorptive capacity; and fiscal efficiency. Even though Okigbo was quoted extensively in the Report, his commitment to the development of Nigeria was a stronger factor in his criticism than personal recognition in the said Report.
 38. Okigbo, *Nigerian Public Finance*.
 39. Okigbo, *Essays in the Public Philosophy*, vol. 2, 275.
 40. *Ibid.*, 278.
 41. Sydney Phillipson, *Administrative and Financial Procedure under the New Constitution* (Lagos, Nigeria: Government Printer, 1942).
 42. Federal Republic of Nigeria, *Report of the Presidential Commission on Revenue Allocation* 4 vols (Lagos, Nigeria: Federal Government Press, 1980).
 43. For a brief history of revenue allocation in Nigeria see Akpan H. Ekpo and Abwaku Englama, "Fiscal Federalism in Nigeria: Issues, Challenges and Agenda for Reform," in Collier, Soludo, and Pattillo, eds., *Economic Policy Options*, 205–219; Okigbo, *Nigeria's Financial System*, 221–243.
 44. Adigun Agbaje, "Love's Labour Lost? Okigbo and the Travails of Fiscal Federalism," in Guyer and Denzer, eds., *Vision and Policy*, 48 and 51.

45. The escalation of conflicts in the Niger Delta over the control of its oil revenue has attracted the attention of scholars, policymakers and public commentators both within Nigeria and outside. See Kenneth Omeje, *High Stakes and Stakeholders: Oil Conflict and Security in Nigeria* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2006); A. Ikelegbe, "The Economy of Conflict in the Oil Rich Niger Delta Region of Nigeria," *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 14, no. 2 (2005): 208–234; C. Ifeka, "Violence, Market Forces and Militarization in the Niger Delta," *Review of African Political Economy* 31, no. 99 (2004): 144–150; A. Zalik, "The Niger Delta: Petro-violence and Partnership Development," *Review of African Political Economy* 31, no. 101 (2004): 401–424.
46. Okigbo, *Essays in the Public Philosophy*, vol. 4, x.
47. For more information on SAP and Nigeria, see Mojubaolu Okome, *A Sapped Democracy: The Political Economy of the Structural Adjustment Program and the Political Transition in Nigeria, 1983–1993* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1998); Sarah A. Khan, *Nigeria: The Political Economy of Oil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); Forrest, *Politics and Economic Development*.
48. Okigbo, *Essays in the Public Philosophy*, vol. 4, 123.
49. Okigbo, *National Development Planning*, 6–7.
50. Okigbo, *Essays in the Public Philosophy*, vol. 4, 202–204.
51. Arthur C. Mbanefo, "The Man, Dr. Pius Nwabufo Charles Okigbo," in Guyer and Denzer, eds., *Vision and Policy*, 8 and 10.
52. Okigbo, *Essays in the Public Philosophy*, vol. 1, 15 and 17.
53. Okigbo, *Essays in the Public Philosophy*, vol. 2, 363.
54. Okigbo indicated that between 1980 and 1990, 600 university honorary degrees were awarded by Nigerian universities, but less than 15 (2.5 percent) went to academics and intellectuals. This example indicates emphasis on wealth and lack of respect and appreciation of the contributions of Nigerian academics and intellectuals to the development of the country. See Okigbo, *Essays in the Public Philosophy*, vol. 2, 395.
55. Okigbo, *Essays in the Public Philosophy*, vol. 2, 375.
56. Okigbo, *Essays in the Public Philosophy*, vol. 4, 269–270.
57. Okigbo, *Essays in the Public Philosophy*, vol. 3, 218.
58. In the 1980s, the Buhari Military Regime (1984–1985) in its emphasis on the ideology of discipline pursued a program of broad-based social reform known as the War Against Indiscipline (WAI). These anticorruption policies might have been well intended, but their implementation proved very difficult. The high-handedness with which they were pursued and employed as tools for political intimidation and witch-hunting as well as for self-aggrandizement and economic enrichment has been criticized. For the criticism of the Obasanjo's anticorruption policy, see Toyin Falola and Matthew Heaton, *A History of Nigeria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 241, 271–274.
59. There were eight African states that signed the Yaounde Convention: Togo, Ivory Coast, the Central African Republic, Congo Brazzaville, Gabon, Chad, Upper Volta and Malagasy, states that, according to Okigbo, were under the "metallic grip of France." See Okigbo, *Africa and the Common Market*, 52.
60. Okigbo, *Africa and the Common Market*, 73.
61. Okigbo, *Essays in the Public Philosophy*, vol. 5, 73.
62. *Ibid.*, 9.
63. Okigbo, *Essays in the Public Philosophy*, vol. 4, 219.

64. Okigbo, *Africa and the Common Market*, 138.
65. Okigbo, *Essays in the Public Philosophy*, vol. 5, 99–100.
66. Okigbo, *Africa and the Common Market*, 154.
67. *Ibid.*, 157.
68. Some have pointed to the experience of east Asian countries, commonly referred to as the Asian Tigers, which with their small internal markets, pursued export trade with the global markets and consequently expanded beyond their domestic markets. A World Bank report indicates that these countries' rapid economic growth was as a result of their outward orientation toward the global markets rather than their involvement in regional integration through the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN). See World Bank, *The East Asian Miracle: Economic Growth and Public Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).
69. See Samuel M. Makinda and F. Wafula Okuma, *The African Union: Challenges of Globalization, Security and Governance* (New York: Routledge, 2008); Said Adejumobi and Adebayo Olukoshi, eds., *The African Union and New Strategies for Development in Africa* (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2008); Ibrahim Gambari, "The OAU and Africa's Changed Priorities," *Transafrica Forum* 6, no. 2 (1989): 3–14; David F. Luke and Timothy M. Shaw, eds., *Continental Crisis: The Lagos Plan of Action and Africa's Future* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984).
70. Okigbo, *Essays in the Public Philosophy*, vol. 5, 75–78.
71. Okigbo, *Essays in the Public Philosophy*, vol. 4, 272.
72. Okigbo, *Essays in the Public Philosophy*, vol. 3, 275–276; *Essays in the Public Philosophy*, vol. 5, 111–112.
73. Pius Okigbo was a strong advocate for the South–South cooperation, especially in fiscal flows and investment, science and technology, and in human resources development. With the assistance of Malaysian Mahathir Mohammed, Tanzanian Julius Nyerere and others, the South–South cooperation and its think tank South Commission came into existence in 1987. Okigbo was one of the 28 members of the South Commission drawn from Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Middle East and southeastern Europe. At the end of a three-year mandate, the Commission produced a report that articulated the needs, problems and the road to economic development of the South as well as how to strengthen the South in relation to the North. The Commission called for the cancellation of all official debt of 47 low-income debt-distressed countries, 22 of which were then in Africa; and emphasized the need for a people-centered and self-reliant development including maximum exploitation of the tremendous opportunities, resources and complementarity offered by the South. See Okigbo, *Essays in the Public Philosophy*, vol. 5, 318–321, 331–353.
74. Okigbo, "The Future Haunted by the Past," 38.
75. Similar argument has been echoed by Africanist scholars. See, for instance, J. E. Inikori, *Africans and the Industrial Revolution in England: A Study in International Trade and Economic Development* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (London: Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications, 1972).
76. Okigbo, "The Future Haunted by the Past," 28–31.
77. Okigbo, *Essays in the Public Philosophy*, vol. 2, 218–219.
78. Clement Adibe, "The State-Business Nexus in Nigeria: The Role of Indigenous Consultants," in Guyer and Denzer, eds., *Vision and Policy*, 108; Nnadozie, "Okigbo's Legacy," 97.
79. Adibe, "The State-Business Nexus in Nigeria," 108.

80. Jane I. Guyer, "Preface," in Guyer and Denzer, eds., *Vision and Policy*, viii, ix–x. This book came out of the one-day conference on "Vision and Policy in Nigerian Economics: The Legacy of Pius Okigbo," at Northwestern University, Evanston, IL, June 9, 2001.
81. Wolfgang F. Stolper, "Development Planning in Nigeria: A Memoir," in Guyer and Denzer, eds., *Vision and Policy*, 15.
82. Nnadozie, "Okigbo's Legacy," 87.

CHAPTER 8

Ben Nwabueze and African Intellectual Tradition

Philip Aka

Introduction

This chapter assesses the contributions of the distinguished Igbo constitutional scholar,¹ Benjamin Obi Nwabueze,² to African intellectual tradition. I show that whereas Nwabueze has, through a lifetime of professional activities, enormously enriched African intellectual heritage, his contributions relative to the Igbo are rather limited—and less consequential. On the surface, this position seems contradictory: how does Nwabueze contribute importantly to African intellectual tradition without benefiting his own people, the Igbo,³ a numerous and important national group in Africa? My challenge in this chapter is to reconcile this apparent contradiction. I meet this challenge by portraying intellectual tradition pluralistically, and by laying down specific yardsticks tied to Igbo values for assessment of Nwabueze's contributions to the Igbo. There are three main parts to this chapter. First, I define *African intellectual tradition* and explain the location of parallel or competing traditions, such as the Igbo experience, within that tradition. Next, I discuss Nwabueze's biography, and following that, summarize his contributions to African intellectual tradition. Finally, I analyze his contributions or lack thereof vis-à-vis the Igbo.

Defining African Intellectual Tradition

Intellectual, as an adjective, denotes the engagement of the intellect to achieve rational (rather than emotional) and abstract reasoning.⁴ In its noun form, the term designates a person with profound capacity for rational and abstract thinking.⁵ And while the concept is often associated with the activities of societal elites, such as teachers, artists, political leaders and bureaucrats, among others, it is also

sometimes, as here, more broadly defined to transcend these elite categories.⁶ *Tradition* is derived from the Latin root *traditionem*, translatable as “handing over,” or “passing on.” It is a custom, usage or pattern of thought and behavior, often oral but sometimes, as here, written, that is passed down from generation to generation.⁷

By piecing the three terms together, *African intellectual tradition*, one refers to the heritage of rational and abstract thinking put together by Africans; however, the researcher chooses to define his or her object of analysis, whether continentally as an undivided whole, or as by denoting Africans as Black Africans detached from Arab Africans.⁸ Such a heritage could be *macro* in the sense that it deals with Africans collectively,⁹ or it could be *micro*, in the sense that it designates a segment of the African people, such as Black women in the United States,¹⁰ or, as in this chapter, a continental African group, such as the Igbo.¹¹ Several more elements are necessary to complete the definition of *African intellectual tradition* here. First, intellectual tradition is necessarily epochal—divisible, say, into precolonial, colonial, modern and contemporary periods. Thus, the study by Constance Hilliard revolved wholly around the precolonial period. However, for obvious reasons, *African intellectual tradition*, in the sense I use it in this chapter, designates a modern or contemporary era that, for Nigeria, dates back only to the receipt of political independence from Britain in 1960. This does not mean such recent epoch cannot integrate inextricable materials from a preceding era, such as the colonial period. Second, an intellectual tradition embodies and resonates the identifying values of the owners of that tradition. Such is my argument later in this chapter with respect to the Igbo.

Third, although I refer to *African intellectual tradition* in the singular rather than in the plural sense, such is a usage of convenience that it defies the reality of Africa’s vastness (in land space, second only to Asia)¹² and the immense pluralism and diversity that mark the continent. Even at the micro level, as the Igbo experience illustrates, intellectual tradition is pluralistic, not monolithic. So at this level, as with the macro, the resort to the singular is a device meant to facilitate analysis that masks pluralism and diversity. Fourth and finally, my definition of *African intellectual traditions* embeds an understanding of *intellectuals* as social engineers who apply their skills and learning in a socially relevant manner by using their erudition to help solve problems that nag the communities and societies they live in.¹³ This approach departs from the mode of analysis, now *passé*, that, in the name of “objectivity” and scholarly detachment, abjures activism. Instead, today, participation by intellectuals in the affairs of their communities is no longer viewed as inconsistent and scholarship divorced from community problems runs the risk of analytic sterility and paralysis.

Turning to the Igbo experience within the context of African intellectual tradition, the definition accomplished above creates the possibility of the existence of multiple traditions within the rubric of the larger African structure. Such a scenario permits the assessment of Professor Nwabueze’s works using two traditions—and two parallel systems of evaluation—as I have done in this study.

Nwabueze's Biography

Nwabueze was born on December 22, 1932, in Atani, near Onitsha, to Igbo parents.¹⁴ He received his elementary education at the Church Missionary Society (CMS) Central School, Atani, from 1938 to 1945, and his high school training at CMS Central School, Onitsha, from 1947 to 1950. He studied law in London from 1956 to 1962, first at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), and subsequently at the University of London.¹⁵ Nwabueze received a master's degree in law from the LSE where he also started the doctoral degree before he returned to Nigeria in 1962 to begin his teaching career, without completing the program.¹⁶ Over the next several decades, Nwabueze affiliated himself with numerous universities within and outside Nigeria, including the Holbon College of Law, London; the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN); the University of Lagos; and the University of Zambia.¹⁷ He also held administrative positions as dean of law at both the UNN and the University of Zambia, as well as director of the Law Practice Institute of Zambia.¹⁸ Consonant with his interest in constitutional law, Nwabueze has participated in the drafting of numerous constitutional documents,¹⁹ and is on the governing board of a number of Nigerian governmental organizations, including the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs, and the Nigerian Institute of Advanced Legal Studies; he has also been an Honorary Fellow of the latter one since 1983.²⁰ Beyond these, Nwabueze also held political appointment in the Nigerian national government as minister of education and youth development under the short-lived transition government of Chief Ernest Shonekan, which followed the dictatorship of General Ibrahim Babangida (1985–1993).²¹

Testimony to versatility not common among academic lawyers, Nwabueze has had exposures to certain non-academic roles, some of them simultaneously with his academic functions. For example, for over 12 years from 1976 to 1988, Nwabueze held top positions with various Nigerian banks: company secretary and legal adviser of the United Bank for Africa (UBA) from 1976 to 1980; executive director of the same bank from 1980 to 1986; and Chairman of Oriental Bank from 1986 to 1988.²² Thereafter he served as Chairman of the First Finance and Trust Company.²³ Nwabueze was with the United Bank for Africa (UBA), not in academia, at the time he gave his Ahiajoku lecture (discussed below) in 1985.²⁴ Still, Nwabueze combines his academic role with private legal practice—and a successful one to boot, which is testimony to his many talents. His receipt of the honor of Senior Advocate of Nigeria (SAN), is testimony to that success. Popular and scholarly media in Nigeria recognize Nwabueze as “the first academic Senior Advocate of Nigeria.”²⁵ Other recognitions exist that testify to his success in private business. For example, in 2008, Corporate Press Services, Inc., a Nigerian non-governmental organization, conferred on Nwabueze its “men of achievement award” for enterprising business leaders.²⁶ Specifically, the honor recognizes “high net-worth business executives who have distinguished themselves by their significant achievement in business and noble contributions to society.”²⁷

In recognition of his contributions to societal development, Nwabueze has been bestowed with numerous honors. These include Senior Advocate of Nigeria (SAN), conferred on him in 1978, three years after the establishment of the award system; and the National Merit Award (NMA) in 1980, one year after the inauguration of the honor. The SAN is a mark of the highest distinction in the bar, comparable to the Queen's or King's Counsel in the colonial period, reserved for "some of the greatest legal minds."²⁸ An award of this honor makes a recipient a select member of the inner bar, in contradistinction to the larger outer bar of "junior advocates," and gives that recipient the opportunity, not afforded to junior advocates, to "take silk" (symbolized by adding silk to the gown of the recipient).²⁹ The NMA is designed to recognize and promote excellence in intellectual, academic or related creative achievements, whether specific breakthrough in a field, or accomplishment of a more cumulative nature.³⁰

Nwabueze's Contributions to African Intellectual Tradition

Nwabueze is an exceedingly productive scholar whom some of his colleagues refer to admirably as "an academic human factory" in tribute to his prolificness and "encyclopedic knowledge."³¹ In an academic career spanning nearly five decades from 1963, Nwabueze published about 30 pieces of scholarship, a few of them public lectures that were republished as books for a broader audience.³² The dates of his publications indicate that a year hardly passed without Nwabueze releasing a book.³³ The only exception was in the period from 1965 to 1971, when Nwabueze went for seven whole years without a book. I return to this period later in this discussion. Additionally, Nwabueze is a scholar of high energy, many of whose works are huge tomes that run into several hundred pages. Two bursts of this high energy and mark of his reputation as a prolific writer were the years 2005 and 2007. In 2005, 43 long years after the inauguration of his academic career, Nwabueze released a landmark five-volume work on constitutional democracy in Africa that, overall, totaled 2,092 pages.³⁴ Few scholars display this level of energy and passion for their work in their emeritus years. The five-volume work analyzed how constitutional democracy and various other forms of government have been applied in practice in Africa.

Collectively, the study examined in broad theoretical terms, the structures, institutions and organizing principles of constitutional-democratic government. In the volumes, Nwabueze metaphorically portrayed constitutional democracy as an edifice standing on many pillars: the rule of law, equality and justice, a market-oriented economy and democratic ethos. The edifice itself is constituted by a government freely elected by a popular majority and limited in its powers by a supreme constitution laced with legal powers. By contrasting the virtues of constitutional democracy with the shortcomings of authoritarian rule, Nwabueze elucidates his thesis that there is no better system of rule to ensure viable governance of human society than constitutional democracy. Unsurprisingly, the work received a Special Commendation in the 2005 Noma Award for Publishing in Africa.³⁵ Deservedly, the jury praised the work as "[a]

magisterial and authoritative treatment of all aspects of constitutional democracy in Africa,” pointing out that Nwabueze “cares very deeply about democracy thriving in Africa.”³⁶ It also assessed, again correctly, that the work established Nwabueze “as one of Africa’s great scholars.”³⁷ Another remarkable spasm and display of scholastic energy occurred in 2007 when Nwabueze released another three-volume scholarship, like his multivolume work on democracy, published by Spectrum Press in Ibadan, analyzing the Obasanjo presidency.³⁸

Nwabueze’s scholarship parallels or mirrors Nigerian legal and political developments. Beginning his academic career in 1963 with research focused around the administration of justice in the country, he next turned his attention to the constitutional law of the land. With the country in crisis and securely under military rule, Nwabueze understandably expanded his scholarly interest to include land law. For the prolific scholar that he is, the prevailing environment affected his productivity: between his second work and the release of his third in 1972, eight years elapsed, the longest period in his entire career that Nwabueze went without publishing a book.³⁹ The discouraging turn of constitutional-political events in Nigeria may have contributed to an expansion of his scholarly interests to include Africa. “With the country firmly under [the] authoritarian military rule of Gen[eral] Yakubu Gowon with no plan for a return to democratic rule, there was little constitutional law for scholars like Nwabueze to analyze or comment on.”⁴⁰

The era witnessed the release of *Constitutionalism in the Emergent States* (1973), *Presidentialism in Commonwealth Africa* (1975) and *Judicialism in Commonwealth Africa* (1977). In *Constitutionalism in the Emergent States*, Nwabueze contended that “the greatest danger to constitutional government in emergent states arises from the human factor in politics,” specifically the lack of a “democratic spirit.”⁴¹ The book offers a legal analysis of symptoms of constitutional breakdowns (such as revolutions, coups d’état and secession), and reviews the body of case law on these subjects in a range of “emergent states” like Cyprus, Ghana, Nigeria, Pakistan, then Rhodesia (later Zimbabwe) and Uganda. In *Presidentialism in Commonwealth Africa*, Nwabueze both sought to understand and to rationalize the appeal for strong executive powers in Africa. He reasoned that “The President, in effect, is the *chief* of the new nation, and as such entitled to the authority and respect due by tradition to a chief.”⁴² Nwabueze pinned the blame for resort to strong executive powers bordering on dictatorship in Africa on poverty, arguing: “Just as the economic depression of the early 1930s called forth Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal measure, which was perhaps the highest point presidential power had attained in peace-time America, so also does the poverty of African societies aggregate power to the presidency.”⁴³ These three works are well cited and rank among his most important contributions to African political and constitutional thought. Collectively the three served to solidify Nwabueze’s reputation as a doyen of African constitutionalism whose works in Africa, particularly in Nigeria, form the gristmill of jurisprudence.⁴⁴

Nwabueze’s scholarly interest returned to Nigeria, with a vengeance, with the termination of military rule and return to democratic experiment under the

country's so-called Second Republic (1979–1983). Features of the new democratic experiment that Nwabueze diligently studied included the new presidential model that replaced the parliamentary system Nigeria experimented with under its First Republic from 1960 to 1966, and the experience of federalism under that new model. Nwabueze's scholarly interest shifted again with the collapse of the Second Republic and reinstatement of another phase of authoritarian military rule for 16 years from 1983 to 1999. Titles heralding this shift include *Military Rule and Constitutionalism in Nigeria* (1992) and *Military Rule and Social Justice in Nigeria* (1993). A widely cited work within this period which, arguably anticipated his encyclopedic study on democratic developments in Africa, was *Democratization*, published in 1993. In the work, Nwabueze inveighed against rigged elections as inconsistent with free and fair elections necessary for maintenance of democratic rule.⁴⁵ To the contrary, he said, they are “a tragic aberration” that “deprives election of its character as a competition in which all the contestants can equally aspire to win.” Instead of being “a competition in any meaningful sense of the word[,]” rigged elections constitute “a mockery of the very idea of a competition[,]” for power without which “politics loses its essence.” Nwabueze elaborates that the terrible thing about election rigging is that once successfully employed by a political party to get itself into power, the tendency is for the party, rather than give it up and thereby risk defeat at future elections, to try to perfect its forms and techniques to a point where it becomes entrenched as part of the political culture, thereby altogether eliminating any chances for conduct of free and fair elections. As *Democratization* makes clear, even Nwabueze's more comparative works such as the studies on democracy in Africa, are largely informed by his experiences rooted in Nigeria.

Some of Nwabueze's works are “role studies” that speak to some of the positions in the government in the course of a highly productive academic career. Such works arguably include *Crises and Problems in Education in Nigeria* (1995). This work benefited from his brief experience as minister of education, although it also provides an account of Nwabueze's lifelong engagement in the educational sector both inside and outside Nigeria that includes tours of duty in educational administration as law dean.

Nwabueze's Contributions to Igbo Intellectual Tradition

One conceivable way to assess Professor Nwabueze's contribution to Igbo intellectual tradition⁴⁶ is to assess his contributions as a scholar to the Igbo value of republicanism. The Igbo are well-known for numerous attributes that define them as individuals and as a nation, such as egalitarianism, a zeal for education, technical ingenuity, and unstinting entrepreneurship, to name just these values.⁴⁷ A current that robustly runs through these qualities and animates them is a streak of republicanism that is driven by a passion for self-determination. Unlike much of their neighbors, ancient Igbo communities organized themselves into village democracies without kings, where, instead, societal affairs were run by elders and age grades with much scope for individual mobility and political participation

by every sector of society, including women.⁴⁸ For the Igbo nation, going back in time,⁴⁹ the most pressing issue is an unflagging drive for autonomy and self-governance. Whether alone on their own (as was the case most of their national history) or incorporated with other ethnic groups to create a political community (as has been their experience in Nigeria since 1914), the Igbo, as individuals and as a group, have cherished and worked to nurture their republican values.

A striking element in Igbo pursuit of republicanism is its dynamism. Several instances encompassing different eras bear out this tendency. During the slavery era, some Igbo slaves exported to the Western Hemisphere committed suicide rather than submit themselves to slavery in a foreign land.⁵⁰ Among those who stayed alive, some like Olaudah Equiano came to play a major role in the anti-slavery movement, and through their writings, contributed importantly to Igbo intellectual tradition.⁵¹ Subsequently, during the colonial era, the Igbo took the record for the fiercest resistance to British colonialism in Nigeria. In her work on Igbo history, Elizabeth Isichei recounted that “No Nigerian people resisted colonialism more tenaciously than the Igbo The conquest of Igboland took over twenty years of constant military action.”⁵²

In the postcolonial period, faced with a pogrom from which the Nigerian central government was unable or unwilling to protect the Igbo, the people exercised their customary republican impulse by declaring their independence as citizens of the Republic of Biafra. For three years from 1967 to 1970, and against overwhelming odds, they defended this republic until their military exhaustion in January 1970. In the aftermath of the war and their forcible reincorporation into Nigeria, Igbo desire for self-autonomy has found expression in relentless castigation of the practice of federalism in Nigeria that, given the known concentration of power at the national level, looks rather like unitarism. The criticism includes occasional demands for a confederal system that dates back to the peace conference in Aburi, Ghana and its aftermath in prelude to the civil war in 1967. A most recent expression of Igbo dissatisfaction with the power structure in Nigeria is the evolution in Nigeria and overseas, particularly in the United States, of neo-Biafra organizations committed to the actualization through peaceful means of Igbo sovereignty snuffed out in 1970 by Nigerian military power.⁵³

In sum, if a scholar of Igbo extraction like Professor Nwabueze versed in constitutional law contributes in any manner to Igbo intellectual heritage, it should be to Igbo republican value. As Nwabueze himself indicated in his Ahiajoku lecture in 1985 (analyzed below), given their acephalous (kingless) disposition, for the Igbo, much more so than for other Nigerian ethnic groups, incorporation in a larger Nigerian state, forms “the most momentous single event” in the annals of their long history.⁵⁴

The next issue for elucidation is Nwabueze’s scholarly contribution to the discourse of Igbo republicanism. I have indicated earlier that socially relevant scholarship is one tied to community problems, rather than divorced from those problems or detached from political activism. Back to the period of Aristotle, political philosophers insisted that the ultimate aim of political analysis is to discover “the highest good attainable by [political] action.”⁵⁵ In other words, true

intellectuals are entrepreneurs of ideas who put their learnedness to use by helping to resolve nagging problems in their communities and society. Consistent with this orientation, I define Nwabueze's scholarship here to include both his writings and any political activism in support of his ideas, to the extent that activism is ascertainable.

I turn finally to discern the character of Nwabueze's contribution to Igbo self-governance. The discussion revolves around three arguments: (1) because it is focused on Nigeria and Africa, rather than on the Igbo as such, Nwabueze's vast scholarship on constitutional developments provides little insight into his attitude toward or contribution to Igbo self-determination; (2) to the extent that his scholarship focuses at all on the Igbo, Nwabueze is ambivalent, if not antipathetic, toward Igbo autonomy; and (3) Nwabueze's political activism fits hand in glove with his ambivalent or antipathetic scholarship toward Igbo self-determination. I analyze these arguments in turn.

Nwabueze's Vast Scholarship on Constitutional Law Provides Little Insight into His Attitude toward or Contribution to Igbo Self-Determination

Nwabueze is Igbo, and a renowned expert in constitutional law, who built some of his teaching career at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka in Igboland. Additionally, some of his works were published by Igbo presses, such as the Nwamife Publishers, based in Enugu, the old regional headquarters of Eastern Nigeria and the center of the Igbo-led government of Biafra. These Igbo facts could have been among the considerations that led the organizers of the Ahiajoku lecture series to invite him in 1983 and, when he could not present that year due to ill health, to renew that invitation for 1985 when Nwabueze finally gave his lecture.

However, as I have recounted above, Nwabueze's erudite scholarship is on Nigeria and Africa rather than specifically on the Igbo as such. Some persons might choose to contest this conclusion. To support their argument, they might point to a work such as *Democratization*, published in 1993, wherein Nwabueze criticized rigged and unfair elections as "a tragic aberration" that hurt democratic development. Commentators who see something for the Igbo in Nwabueze's works will point to these positions. They will contend that, given their relentless drive for autonomy and self-governance, democracy and constitutional government of the type Nwabueze preaches in his work on constitutional law will, if it takes root in Nigeria and Africa, realize benefits that inure to the Igbo as much as, if not more than, other Nigerian groups.

Moreover, these Nwabueze defenders will contend, because of their unflagging republican impulses, ills of the Nigerian electoral system, such as rigging, that Nwabueze complains about in *Democratization* spell negative effects for Igbo more than for other Nigerian groups. They could even show how in his life and career Nwabueze has maintained a commendable marriage between the constitutional-democratic theorization embodied in his scholarship and his political activism. One event they will point to in support of that harmony, peering at occurrences in the aftermath of the rigged 2003 national elections,

would be Nwabueze's membership in The Patriots, a non-political group of eminent Nigerians. The organization condemned the presidential election of the year that awarded President Olusegun Obasanjo a second four-year term in office. This was based on the grounds that to allow the results of the elections "obtained by means of well-attested electoral malpractice" would subvert democracy and constitutionalism and entrench election-rigging as a permanent feature of Nigerian politics.⁵⁶ It advised Obasanjo to form a government of national unity that would include all opposition parties in the country, rather than draw legitimacy for a second term in office based on that irregular election. Obasanjo and his political party, the People's Democratic Party (PDP), handily rejected the suggestion.⁵⁷ A more recent "harmonic" occurrence that Nwabueze defenders might cite could be the Igbo intellectual's attempt, along with three other Nigerian lawyers, via a lawsuit, to prevent the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) from disqualifying and forbidding former vice-president Atiku Abubakar and other politicians from participating in the 2007 national elections.⁵⁸

These defenses make sense and turn up some useful insights relating to the subject matter. For one thing, Nwabueze's commentary about the terribleness of election rigging is an instructive counsel Obasanjo and his political party should have borne in mind but failed to heed, given the egregious rigging of not just the 2003 elections, but the 2007 elections as well. Second, the harmony that is perceived to exist in Nwabueze's theorization on the destructive influence of election rigging on democracy and his political practices, impressively illustrate the type of intertwining of scholarship and political activism that, as I argue in this chapter, should be the hallmark of true intellectualism.

However, these defenses fail to negate the thesis that Nwabueze has not aimed his massive works of scholarship on the Igbo as such. Another factor that makes the argument for Igbo benefit from Nwabueze's scholarship untenable is the paucity of constitutional democracy in Nigeria. On this point, my logic upon analyzing the prospects for Igbo human rights in Nigeria is equally valid here. I indicated that "[l]ong military rule in the country, until recently the norm rather than an aberration, left little time and room for any actual experiment with democracy."⁵⁹ I elaborated that some of Nigeria's "military regimes, particularly the ones that operated from 1983 to 1998, were exceedingly repressive and marked by human rights abuses[,]” adding: “as General Obasanjo's style of leadership since 1999 bears out, military rule has instilled into the political system residues of military values, including authoritarian rule and the use of military force in the resolution of non-military disputes, both of which are inconsistent with democratic culture.”⁶⁰

To the Extent that His Scholarship Focuses At All on the Igbo, Nwabueze Is Ambivalent, If Not Antipathetic, toward Igbo Autonomy or Self-Governance

Although Nwabueze does not tailor his scholarship to Igbo issues as such, to the extent that his scholarship focuses at all on the Igbo, Nwabueze is ambivalent,

if not antipathetic, when it comes to Igbo self-determination. I draw this conclusion based on my analysis of Nwabueze's 1985 Ahiajoku lecture, his only scholarship, to the best of my knowledge, with direct bearing on the Igbo. I first summarize the lecture and then comment on the senses in which this scholarship is inconsonant with the tenets of Igbo republicanism. The Ahiajoku lecture series was inaugurated during the regime of Sam Mbakwe, governor of Imo State from 1979 to 1983. In inaugurating the lecture series, Governor Mbakwe aimed to combat the erosion of Igbo culture and tradition. The lecture series took off in 1979 with Michael Echeruo's talk titled "Ahamefunla: A Matter of Identity."

Nwabueze's presentation was titled "The Igbo in the Context of Modern Government and Politics: A Call for Self-Examination and Self-Correction." Built on the first and third lectures in the series dealing, respectively, with Igbo identity and the Igbo and their neighbors,⁶¹ the talk was designed as an appeal to the Igbo "to rethink [their] tactics for co-existing with other Nigerians."⁶² Nwabueze dwelt on a variety of issues that includes the incorporation of the Igbo in Nigeria, their organization since that incorporation, analysis of various reasons why the Igbo's "neighbors" (meaning other Nigerians) fear or resent them, the Biafra–Nigeria War, and Igbo condition in the country in the aftermath of that war, among other issues.⁶³

On the incorporation of Igbo to form what is present-day Nigeria, Nwabueze said that this occurrence represents a more significant and "most momentous" event for the Igbo than any other Nigerian ethnic group, given the Igbo's acephalous or kingless system of rule.⁶⁴

Regarding organization of the Igbo in Nigeria, Nwabueze highlighted three events with damaging effects on the Igbo. The first is the so-called boundary adjustment exercises in 1918 and the 1970s, which resulted in the excise and transfer away of Igbo land to neighboring ethnic groups.⁶⁵ The second is the creation of states in Nigeria in a manner that put the Igbo at a disadvantage when it comes to distribution of national appointments and amenities. This was done in anticipation of a new revenue allocation formula wherein states will replace ethnic groups as the basis for revenue sharing. Nwabueze protested that the Nigerian military government confined the Igbo into only two states while creating five states each from the Hausa/Fulani and Yoruba, each of which had comparable population as the Igbo. He advised the government to correct this anomaly by creating at least two more states in Igbo areas, or failing to do so, retain ethnic groups, rather than states, as the yardstick or formula for distribution of scarce national resources.⁶⁶ He warned, "[a] situation in which the Igbos have two shares as against five each for the Hausa/Fulanis and Yorubas cannot make for harmony in the country, nor can it nurture in the Igbos the feeling that they belong and have equal rights with the others."⁶⁷

The third event that Nwabueze said hurt the Igbo was the proscription by various military governments of Igbo organizations under the guise that these and other ethnic associations contribute "to destroy or disrupt the unity" of Nigeria.⁶⁸ He said the proscriptions disadvantaged the Igbo more than rival ethnic groups, such as the Hausa/Fulani and the Yoruba, because, unlike these rival groups,

the Igbo “have no leader of any kind, religious or otherwise,” an occurrence which leaves them “to drift without proper direction and guidance.”⁶⁹ Given “the immense complexities of life in Nigeria,” he said, the Igbo “need a Leader of the Igbo, preferably a non-politician, to direct and guide our people in the context of the government and politics of contemporary Nigeria.”⁷⁰

Turning his learned mind to why the Igbo “are feared, resented[,] and hated in Nigeria,” Nwabueze found many of those reasons to be flimsy and without merit. Some of these, such as individualism as well as habits of enterprise and adventure, he said, are attributes that characterize modern communities everywhere, particularly capitalist ones.⁷¹ He also does not find accusations of “clannishness” or nepotism⁷² leveled against the Igbo to be justified, mainly because the Igbo “are democratic and fair-minded people, always prepared more than any other group to concede to others the right to share equitably in what belongs to all.”⁷³ Nwabueze thinks that Igbo detractors may have a case for what Achebe calls “arrogance,” but which, he Nwabueze himself, refers to as lack of “social diplomacy.”⁷⁴ But even here Nwabueze believes the Igbo are not in the wrong. He declared: “In so far as this may be considered a defect, I confess to being a typical Igbo, for I am quite incapable of fawning on anyone, however highly placed, even as a matter of social diplomacy.”⁷⁵ Still Nwabueze proceeded to comment on other supposedly pathological behaviors of the Igbo, among those, their lack of “discretion,”⁷⁶ and “book[ish]” idealism bordering on “political naivete.”⁷⁷ Suggesting that these acts of “thoughtlessness” may have been contributing factors for the pogrom visited upon the Igbo in 1966,⁷⁸ he advised:

There is so much in the present political situation in the country that makes it necessary that the Igbo should be extremely circumspect and cautious so as not to become scapegoats for whatever might go wrong, and thereby invite yet another massacre on themselves. Those Igbo [who are] in sensitive or critical public positions should carefully weigh their actions and utterances in the light of this. It is perhaps wiser for them not to express themselves too soon on explosive public issues.⁷⁹

Next, Nwabueze dwelled on what he captioned “Igbo propensity for self-hate, self-destruction[,] and intra-group discord.”⁸⁰ Part of his whole point here is to show how the Igbo “c[a]me to the politics of modern Nigeria with some inbred propensity for intra-group quarrelsomeness.”⁸¹ His next stop was a discussion on “[t]he Igbo [who are] in rebellion against Nigeria.” Here, Nwabueze commented on “an irony of history” embodied in the fact that “the Igbo, who had been the most ardent champions of Nigerian unity should also be the leader to sponsor secession.”⁸² He concedes that the Igbo have a moral right to secession: consistent with American revolutionary tradition, political scientists and constitutional lawyers agreed long ago regarding the moral justification embodied in an aggrieved people’s resisting by force a government that has persistently abandoned its responsibility to protect them or to cater for their material well-being.⁸³ But although morally right, Nwabueze contended that a secession or rebellion

can never be legally justified. “To concede that it can, would involve the absurd proposition that the constitution can legalize its own destruction by force, and that there can be resistance to government under the authority of government itself, and that the law sanctions violent opposition to itself.”⁸⁴

Turning to analyze the “consequence of rebellion for the Igbo,”⁸⁵ Nwabueze stated that “the bitter truth of the present position of the Igbos in Nigeria today” is that “they have, *like a conquered people which of course they are*, been reduced almost to the status of second-class citizens in their own country.”⁸⁶ Nwabueze lavishly, but insincerely, commended the “singular magnanimity” of the Nigerian central government toward the Igbo after the civil war,⁸⁷ but also chronicles two punitive measures of the Nigerian government in the aftermath of the war designed deliberately to worsen rather than ameliorate the effect of the supposedly just-ended conflict on Igbo survivors. The first was the so-called abandoned property policy under which “for a ridiculously low price, bearing no relation what[so]ever to the value of the properties concerned, the Igbo were divested of hundreds of so-called abandoned properties, in favor of the indigenes of the states [which] claimed to have ‘captured’ them as war booty.”⁸⁸ The federal government subsequently legalized the initial “capture” via a formal transfer to the captor-“purchasers” under the instruments of “sale” executed without the consent of the real owners.⁸⁹ Abandoned property took place in many parts of the country but was a major problem in Port Harcourt, a city in Eastern Nigeria that the Igbo helped build from scratch and invested heavily in.

The second measure was an infamous banking law, under which Igbo people who owned or operated a bank account before the war were paid a flat low sum regardless of the size of their actual savings or deposits. Any balance remaining was then paid by the affected banks into the coffers of the Nigerian government, which enriched itself in this way, at the expense of Igbo survivors seeking to recover from a brutal war. The proceeds from the Igbo depositors were to be used by the central government for a postwar reconstruction that never took place.⁹⁰ Nwabueze correctly assessed that the banking law was more draconian than “what was necessary to punish secession and to deter its future occurrence.”⁹¹ Rather than fit whatever crime it was supposed to punish or deter, it became “more crushing and ruinous in its effect than the secessionists perhaps deserved. So ruinous was its effect indeed that many Igbo [survivors] never recovered financially from it, some even dying of heartbreak.”⁹²

The penultimate section of the Nwabueze lecture analyzed three “lessons of the civil war.”⁹³ The first is that “a country composed of disparate social groups should not so conduct its affairs as to disaffect large sections of the community to the point where they are no longer willing to be part of the system or to have their affairs regulated under it.”⁹⁴ To avert “[t]he danger of disintegration and of demands for a confederal arrangement,” while promoting “Nigerian unity,” Nwabueze urged Nigerians and their governments to accept and commit themselves to the principle of rotation of the headship of the country among the “four pillars” of the country, made up of the Hausa-Fulani, the Igbo, the Yoruba and the minorities.⁹⁵ A second lesson is that the war underscored “the overriding

relevance and importance of justice in the administration of the government” of the country; injustice engenders alienation and disaffection of aggrieved individuals or groups toward the leadership, whereas justice promotes legitimacy in the sense of increased acceptance of the political system.⁹⁶ A third lesson is the need for compromise among leaders, something sorely lacking in the military leaders of the period.⁹⁷ Fair enough, except that Nwabueze, later on in his conclusion, appeared to rephrase this third lesson in the context of the Igbo to mean that “undue stubbornness, temerity[,] and impetuosity are not the mark of a wise and mature people.”⁹⁸

In my piece, focused on the prospects for Igbo human rights in Nigeria, I pointed out that “[a]lthough unsuccessful, the secession was a legitimate act of self-determination by the Biafran people,” adding that “[t]here is no stronger evidence to support Igbo overwhelming desire for independence than their willingness to endure nearly three years of civil war, disease, and famine to achieve that independence.”⁹⁹ Although Nwabueze highlighted the numerous injustices that the Igbo have endured in Nigeria since the war, he unwarrantedly disparaged Igbo republican tradition and their every struggle for autonomy, more than a few times in language insensitively demeaning. Nwabueze derided the Igbo as “conquered people,” and mercilessly labeled them as “secessionists,” “rebels,” “stubborn” and “impetuous,” all for engaging in a war he himself conceded was imposed on them following horrific acts of atrocities from which the Nigerian national government failed to protect them.¹⁰⁰

To make matters worse, Nwabueze implied that Igbo acts of “thoughtlessness” may have been contributing factors for the unjustified acts of atrocities and gratuitously advised the Igbo to be “extremely circumspect and cautious” so they do not “invite yet another massacre on themselves.” He went so far as to counsel Igbo office holders (to the extent that this species exist since the war), “not to express themselves too soon on explosive public issues.”¹⁰¹ And as if people are made for governments, constitutions and laws, rather than these institutions for people, Nwabueze took the position that exercise of the right to self-determination could never be legally justified.¹⁰² He advised the Nigerian national government to work to avert a confederal system that he knows or should know the Igbo would favor. And he is on record urging for a leader, evidently a king, for the Igbo, notable for their tradition of kinglessness, just to bring them at par with their neighbors. There was no institution of Igbo common history that Nwabueze spared in his denigration. For example, he portrayed Igbo resistance to colonial subjugation often pointed by historians as a shining event in Igbo republicanism, as a display of lack of “discretion,” derisively contending that “[w]ith only capguns, Dane guns, machetes and the occasional rifle, they flung themselves, heedless, against the British, heavily armed with rifles, machine guns and unlimited supplies of ammunition and were slaughtered in their thousands.”¹⁰³

Nwabueze may defend that all he did was take a critical look at the Igbo world as he finds it in the mid-1980s, in the best spirit of the Ahiajoku lecture series. However, the defense lacks merit. Nwabueze could robustly critique Igbo society without disparaging Igbo values and institutions, including the time-tested

tradition of Igbo republicanism. As a matter of fact, in impairing the integrity of Igbo values and institutions as he did, his lecture is at odds with the main purpose of the Ahiajoku series, which is to combat the erosion of Igbo cultural identity and tradition. Second, Nwabueze may defend that scholarship embodied in just one singular lecture does not make him a buster of Igbo republican institutions and values. The argument also lacks merit, not only because there is no requirement that the scholarship be more than one in order for the integrity of a people's cultural infrastructure to come under fire, but also because Nwabueze's political activism, as I show below, assuming the reader needs more than one piece of evidence, is consistent with his attitude of non-solicitude for Igbo autonomy.

Third, Nwabueze may defend that he is not the only Igbo intellectual to take the critical position embodied in his lecture. Did not Achebe, whose work Nwabueze drew upon for his lecture, comment in his analysis of Nigeria's "Igbo Problem," that "while Nigeria is at the delicate, touch-and-go-state of national evolution, the Igbo must learn less abrasiveness, more shrewdness and tact and a willingness to grant the validity of less boisterous values."¹⁰⁴ Like the two previous defenses, this one is also untenable. Two wrongs do not make a right. Also, more than Achebe's, the Nwabueze "counsel" went overboard, portending a constitutional violation of free speech, for a constitutional law scholar, who should know better, embodied in the charge to Igbo in "sensitive or critical public positions . . . not to express themselves too soon on explosive public issues." Further still, unlike Nwabueze, Achebe has, through his writings, notably *Things Fall Apart*,¹⁰⁵ drawn such positive attention to the Igbo than he could possibly undo in one episodic scholarship or statement.

A fourth and final unavailing defense Nwabueze could use relates to the period this address was given: the military was still in power under General Ibrahim Babangida (1985–1993), who was preceded in office by General Muhammadu Buhari (1983–1985). Nwabueze adverted to this constrictive political and constitutional environment, with their unquestionably negative ramifications for free speech, when he commented that "[t]here is so much in the present political situation in the country that makes it necessary that the Igbo should be extremely circumspect and cautious,"¹⁰⁶ and when, later in his speech, just so nobody misses the point, he referenced the Nigerian military leader's broadcast commemorating the country's independence anniversary on October 1, 1985.¹⁰⁷ The possibility of repressiveness and reprisals for the use of the speech was not without basis given that in 1983 and 1993, and again from 1996 to 1999, the Ahajioku lecture series did not hold, some of the time because the military governments then in office did not, in their insecurity, see any justifications for the talks to hold.¹⁰⁸ The lecture series resumed, only beginning in 2000, under the civilian administration of Governor Achike Udenwa of Imo State.¹⁰⁹ While this defense is particularly persuasive, it is, like the previous ones, untenable because the fear of possible reprisal for using speech unfavorable to the military did not prevent Nwabueze, who confessed himself "to being a typical Igbo" in the sense that he is "quite incapable of fawning on anyone, however highly placed, even as a matter of social diplomacy,"¹¹⁰ from highlighting injustice upon injustice perpetrated against the Igbo before and since the Biafra–Nigeria War.

Nwabueze's Political Activism Fits Hand in Glove with His Ambivalent or Antipathetic Scholarship toward Igbo Autonomy or Self-Governance

Nwabueze's political activism over the years where in he has applied his considerable intellect and legal talents as a legal practitioner of SAN distinction, to the extent that those acts are public knowledge, included (1) a lawsuit he and other lawyers brought in 2007 enjoining the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the organization charged with the conduct of elections in Nigeria, from preventing former vice-president Atiku Abubakar and other politicians from participating in the 2007 elections; (2) his role in 2003 as a member of The Patriots in condemning the electoral abuses that marred that year's elections; and (3) his campaign for Igbo justice under the aegis of the pan-Igbo organization, Ohaneze Ndi Igbo. I have commented already on the first two, which, as I also argued, are activities not aimed at the Igbo as such. The occurrence leaves us with Nwabueze's activities in Ohaneze as focus of analysis and it is on those activities that the rest of the discussion in this section revolves. Nwabueze was a one-time General Secretary of the organization and as an agent, participated in the crafting, dissemination and implementation of the Igbo lobby group's agenda. Two activities on that agenda, to my knowledge, that Nwabueze participated in are the organization's petition in 1999 to the Human Rights Violations Investigation Commission (otherwise known the Oputa Panel),¹¹¹ and its demand in 2000 for a confederation in place of "federalism" as appropriate structure for the organization of the country.¹¹²

Ohaneze, in its petition to the Oputa Panel, catalogued atrocities perpetrated against the Igbo by the peoples and government of Nigeria since 1966 that have served to marginalize the Igbo ethnic group in Nigeria and render its members second-class citizens in their own country.¹¹³ It pled for "reparation and appropriate restitution" with a sum of N8 trillion (or the equivalent of 82 billion in US dollars at the time) as damages arising from the atrocities and the policies of marginalization.¹¹⁴ The organization warned, "[m]arginalization of Ndi Igbo, if allowed to fester in Nigeria, will resolve itself autonomously in the fullness of time, but not without untold bloodshed and social disruption," instructively pointing out that countries like Yugoslavia, Somalia, Sudan and Burundi have paid "dearly with the blood of their citizens" because they ignored these lessons of history, and, even more poignantly, that "[t]he prospect of such a catastrophe is not farfetched for a country like Nigeria whose volatility has already been underscored by a civil war."¹¹⁵ Because of his legal background (or without regard to that background), Nwabueze played an especially important role in the preparation and presentation of this document before the Oputa Panel. Not surprisingly, he was also one of the signatories of the petition in a list of names that also includes Dr. Alex Ekwueme, former vice-president of Nigeria (1979–1983); and Dr. Sylvester Ugoh, a major figure in the Biafran government and a former Nigerian minister of education.

After Mr. Obasanjo took office in 1999, many northern states in Nigeria adopted Muslim Sharia law as criminal code, dispensing with the country's

secular rules, and proceeded to enforce these non-secular laws on non-Muslims, including Igbo residents in these states. This led to religious conflicts between Christians and Muslims in these states. The most bloody of these conflicts took place in Kaduna, a northern city with a substantial Igbo population, where more than 300 people were killed and valuable property running into millions of dollars was destroyed.¹¹⁶ It was in this setting that the Ohaneze Ndi Igbo sent a 40-person high-power delegation that included former Biafran leader, General C. Odumegwu-Ojukwu, former vice-president Ekwueme and Professor Nwabueze, among others, to present Igbo concerns to President Obasanjo, including a demand for restructuring of the country into a confederation.¹¹⁷ Ohaneze indicated its support for a call made by the governors of the five Igbo states to officially present their concerns regarding the adoption of the Sharia law in northern states as well as the killing of Igbo people and the destruction of their property that trailed those adoptions.¹¹⁸

In his Ahiajoku lecture in 1985, Nwabueze chronicled numerous injustices against the Igbo going back to the very foundation of Nigeria and pled for rectification to give the Igbo a sense of belonging and equal opportunity similar to the treatment reserved for more favored Nigerian ethnic groups.¹¹⁹ Ohaneze's petition to the Oputa Panel, which Nwabueze's participation facilitated, is consistent with the Igbo constitutional lawyer's signature plea for a fair deal for the Igbo, an advocacy that by itself does not, however, amount to any argument for Igbo autonomy. The Ohaneze petition is just a comprehensive codification of these grievances with a formalized demand for reparation and restitution that adopts the concept of marginalization, which is a term Nwabueze also used in his Ahiajoku lecture. Whereas the petition to the Oputa panel does not amount to an argument for Igbo autonomy and fits hand in glove with Nwabueze's ambivalent, if not antipathetic, attitude toward Igbo self-determination based on his scholarship, the same does not appear true with the demand for confederation, which, to the contrary, seems to depart from or negate the thesis of non-solicitude for Igbo autonomy. Such a position is plausible, considering that four short years earlier, in 1985, Nwabueze viewed negatively "demands for a confederal arrangement."¹²⁰ However, upon closer examination, the step is not as bold a measure as it seems. Nwabueze, and the Ohaneze delegation that he was a part of, were simply articulating a demand for confederation that Igbo governors made in response to the deadly fall-outs for the Igbo arising from the implementation of Sharia law in northern states.

Conclusion

This chapter has critically assessed the contributions of the talented Igbo constitutional scholar, Ben O. Nwabueze, to the making of an African intellectual tradition. I have shown that, although Nwabueze has, through a lifetime of professional activities, revolved around his passion in constitutional law, tremendously enriched African intellectual tradition, his contribution vis-à-vis the Igbo is minimal and less consequential. To resolve the seeming paradox of contribution

here yet no contribution there that this argument embeds, I have defined intellectual tradition pluralistically and designed an assessment tool for Igbo intellectual tradition based on the signature Igbo value of republicanism and a passion for autonomy and self-determination that have found expression in various forms in the long course of Igbo history, including Igbo incorporation into the Nigerian state since 1914. Those manifestations include a unilateral declaration of independence from Nigeria in 1967–1970, in response to a pogrom, and following the failure of that attempt and Igbo reincorporation into Nigeria in 1970, insistent complaint about the severely constraining the nature of Nigerian “federalism” that entails occasional demands for a confederal system with better guarantees of self-autonomy.

The bulk of the analysis in this chapter focuses on the character of Nwabueze’s contribution to Igbo intellectual tradition as I have defined it. Three arguments relating to that question this chapter has presented and strenuously supports are that (1) Nwabueze’s considerable scholarship on constitutional law provides little insight on his attitude toward or contribution to Igbo self-determination; (2) to the extent that his scholarship focuses at all on the Igbo, using his Ahiajoku lecture in 1985 as evidence, Nwabueze is ambivalent or antipathetic toward Igbo autonomy; and (3) Nwabueze’s political activism fits hand in glove with his ambivalent or antipathetic scholarship toward Igbo self-determination. For this last argument, I have analyzed Nwabueze’s activities in the pan-Igbo group, Ohaneze Ndi Igbo, focusing on two issues Nwabueze participated in, that are matters of public knowledge. These include the group’s petition to the Oputa human rights panel for resolution of Igbo issues going back to the Biafra–Nigeria War, and the restoration of Igbo human rights; and the group’s recommendation of a confederal system as ideal governmental structure for the country.

Despite the important light this chapter sheds on Nwabueze’s work and his contributions to African intellectual tradition, there are several limitations, centered on data constraints, that any future study on this topic should strive to overcome. The first is that this study is based on only Nwabueze’s published books and lectures, to the exclusion of other forms of scholarship, such as conference proceedings and articles. A second limitation is the focus of his scholarship, relative to the Igbo, on his 1985 Ahiajoku lecture. A third limitation is that the analysis of his political activism is based only on three case studies (his lawsuit in 2007 on behalf of political candidates; his work with the Patriots in 2003, campaigning against electoral practices; and his fight for Igbo justice under the aegis of the Ohaneze Ndi Igbo) that, given Nwabueze’s legendary energies and dynamism, may form a small sample of his overall initiatives.

Notes

1. Versions of this piece have been published elsewhere. See Philip C. Aka, “Professor Ben O. Nwabueze and the Struggle for Igbo Self-Determination,” *Slovenian Law Review* 4, nos. 1 and 2 (December 2007): 9–34; and “Igbo Intellectuals and Igbo Self-Determination: The Case of Professor Ben O. Nwabueze,” in Toyin Falola

and Adam Paddock, eds., *Emergent Themes and Methods in African Studies: Essays in Honor of Adiele E. Afigbo* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2009), 369–393. Although this chapter draws on these earlier works, it also departs importantly from them and incorporates updated materials that were unavailable with the earlier versions. Readers seeking the most comprehensive account of my statement on Nwabueze should read these three papers conjunctively.

2. Consistent with the chapter title and format, I hereinafter adopt the simpler name of Ben O. Nwabueze.
3. For an overview on the Igbo people and nation, see Philip C. Aka, “Prospects for Igbo Human Rights in Nigeria in the New Century,” *Howard Law Journal* 48, no. 1 (Fall 2004): 177–184.
4. See American Heritage, *The American Heritage College Dictionary*, 3rd edition (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1993), 706 (stitched together from the definitions of *intellect*, *intellectual*, and *intellectualism*).
5. *Ibid.*
6. See C. B. Hilliard, ed., *Intellectual Traditions of Pre-Colonial Africa* (Boston, MA: McGraw Hill, 1998), 3 (quoting S. Feierman, *Peasant Intellectuals: Anthropology and History in Tanzania* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 18).
7. *American Heritage College Dictionary*, 1433.
8. In her study of intellectual traditions in precolonial Africa, Hilliard grappled with the definition of *Africans*. Hilliard, ed., *Intellectual Traditions*, 4–11. Hilliard adopted the continental definition that does not demarcate Arabs from Black Africans. The problem with a definition that demarcates Africa into Arabs and Black Africans is that it can be artificial, given that Africa is also home to a large and growing number of Asians and Whites. Although many of these non-Black, non-Arab Africans live in East and Southern Africa, they are not limited to these regions.
9. See, for example, Hilliard, ed., *Intellectual Traditions*.
10. See generally Kristin Waters and Carol B. Conaway, eds., *Black Women’s Intellectual Traditions: Speaking Their Minds* (Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 2007).
11. The distinction between *macro* and *micro* traditions sometimes quickly breaks down. For example, Hilliard’s study set in the precolonial era, encompassed fragments of thoughts and materials from various regions and peoples, including the Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba of present-day Nigeria. See Hilliard, ed., *Intellectual Traditions*.
12. See David F. Gordon, David C. Miller Jr., and Howard Wolpe, *The United States and Africa: A Post-Cold War Perspective* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1998), 9 (showing how Africa has a land mass large enough to fit China, the United States, India, Europe, Argentina and New Zealand simultaneously with space still left).
13. See B. Beckman and G. Adeoti, eds., *Intellectuals and African Development: Pretension and Resistance in African Politics* (Dakar, Senegal: CODESRIA, 2006) (analyzing different responses to the African predicament, expressed in terms of commitment to the needs of the ordinary citizenry, from prominent African writers such as Achebe, Wole Soyinka and Ngugi waThiong’o, military-men in power, and students who defy repression).
14. “Nwabueze Hits 76,” *Daily Independent* (Lagos) (December 20, 2008), available at <http://allafrica.com/stories/printable/200812220902.html> (last visited July 7,

- 2010). The Igbo have their home in what is today the southeast of Nigeria. It is one of the six so-called geopolitical zones into which Nigeria is divided (the others are the southwest, south-south, north-central or Middle Belt, northeast and northwest). Created during the military dictatorship of General Sani Abacha (1993–1998), “the zones have not been the locus of any power other than a more manageable device for regrouping the country’s thirty-six states.” Aka, “Prospects for Igbo Human Rights,” 180. Anambra is one of the five Igbo states that form the southeast. Igbo constitute the majority or a substantial minority in two states in the south-south and they live in large numbers in each of the four other zones where they typically form the most numerous group after the native residents. See generally Aka, “Prospects for Igbo Human Rights,” 180–181 (reflecting on the changing political organization since 1954 of the territory that forms Igboland).
15. “Nwabueze Hits 76.”
 16. U. U. Uche, “Citation on Professor B. O. Nwabueze, S.A.N., 1985 Ahiajoku Lecturer,” available at <http://ahiajoku.igbonet.com/1985> (last visited June 29, 2010). Nwabueze appends “LL.D. London” to his name. It is not clear whether this is the same qualification as the one Professor Uche, in his citation on Nwabueze, as part of the Ahiajoku Lecture, indicated Nwabueze received in 1978 by examination based on a series of works on constitutionalism in Africa that he published during the 1970s. Uche recounted that Nwabueze is the second Nigerian, after Taslim O. Elias, sometime Chief Justice of Nigeria and member of the World Court at the Hague, to be bestowed with this honor.
 17. “Nwabueze Hits 76.”
 18. *Ibid.* This is an organization charged with admitting or “calling” law graduates to the bar.
 19. He was a member of the ill-fated constitutional committee for Nigeria in 1966; a member of the constitutional drafting committee for Zambia in 1973; a member of the constitutional drafting committee for Nigeria between -1975 and 1977, including the Constituent Assembly, which reviewed what became the country’s 1979 Constitution; and a member of the United Nations Study Group on Constitutional Processes for Namibia. Uche, “Citation on Professor B. O. Nwabueze.”
 20. Uche, “Citation on Professor B. O. Nwabueze.”
 21. “Nwabueze Hits 76.” One account of his stewardship revolved around an assessment of his handling of a paralyzing strike by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), see Kayode Komolafe, “Our Latter-Day Revolutionaries,” *This Day* (Lagos), April 9, 2008, available at <http://www.allafrica.com/stories/printable/200804090299.htm> (last visited April 24, 2008).
 22. *Ibid.*
 23. *Ibid.* This source provides no information on the dates Nwabueze worked at First Finance and Trust Company.
 24. This is not to suggest that formal membership in the academic world per se is a requirement for this lecture. However, as indicated below, the lecture series was designed as an “intellectual harvest” during which erudite scholars address issues regarding the Igbo and their world.
 25. *Ibid.*
 26. See Corporate Press Services, Inc., “About Us,” available at <http://corporatepressserv.com/aboutus.htm> (last visited June 29, 2010).
 27. Corporate Press Services, Inc., “Award,” available at <http://corporatepressserv.com/awards.html> (last visited June 29, 2010). Objectives of the award include “to

- promote leadership and business enterprises and encourage men and women of industry” as well as to “service as a motivating factor for positive values.” *Ibid.* Criteria for the award include success in business, and “significant contribution to society and the nation’s economy.”
28. Ademola Adewale, “Body of Senior Advocates of Nigeria, Inc., and Other Matters,” *Squib Guest* (February 25, 2009), available at <http://squibguest.blogspot.com/2009/02/re-body-of-senior-advocates-of-nigeria.html> (last visited June 29, 2010).
 29. *Ibid.* To put the matter in some perspective, only about 300 Nigerian attorneys out of about 75,000 forming the corpus of the Nigerian bar have been admitted to the rank of SAN.
 30. See Nigerian National Merit Award, “About NNMA,” available at <http://www.nnma.gov.ng/AboutUs..html> (last visited July 2, 2010).
 31. Uche, “Citation on Professor B. O. Nwabueze.” Uche goes so far as to liken Nwabueze to the English jurist William Blackstone (1723–1780) and the American jurist James Kent (1763–1847).
 32. These works from the earliest to recent are: B. O. Nwabueze, *The Machinery of Justice in Nigeria*, African Law Series No. 8 (London: Buttersworths, 1963); *Constitutional Law of the Nigerian Republic* (London: Buttersworths, 1964); *Nigerian Land Law* (Enugu, Nigeria: Nwamife Publishers, 1972); *Constitutionalism in the Emergent States* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1973); *Presidentialism in Commonwealth Africa* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1974); *Judicialism in Commonwealth Africa: The Role of the Courts in Government* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1977); “The Individual and the State under the New Constitution: Government Powers in Relation to Economic Affairs and the Economy under the Constitution” (public lecture delivered at the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs on February 19, 1979); *The Presidential Constitution of Nigeria* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1982); *Nigeria’s Second Model of Constitutional Democracy* (Enugu, Nigeria: Faculty of Law, University of Nigeria, 1982); *A Constitutional History of Nigeria* (New York: Longman, 1982); *Federalism in Nigeria under the Presidential Constitution* (London: Sweet & Maxwell, 1983); *Nigeria’s Presidential Constitution: The Second Experiment in Constitutional Democracy* (New York: Longman, 1984); *Transition from Military Rule to Constitutional Democracy* (Benin, Nigeria: University of Benin Press, 1988); *Social Security in Nigeria* (Lagos, Nigeria: Nigerian Institute of Advanced Legal Studies, 1989); *Military Rule and Constitutionalism in Nigeria* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Spectrum Law Pub., 1992); *Ideas and Facts in Constitution Making* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Spectrum Books, 1993); *Democratization* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Spectrum Law Pub., 1993); *Military Rule and Social Justice in Nigeria* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Spectrum Law Pub., 1993); *Nigeria ’93: The Political Crisis and Solutions* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Spectrum Books, 1994); and *Crises and Problems in Education in Nigeria* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Spectrum Books, 1995). Others are a five-volume on democracy in Africa (Spectrum Books) that Nwabueze published in 2005; and a three-volume on the Obasanjo presidency (1999–2007) published in 2007 by Gold Press Ltd.
 33. The reader will notice that I have based my analysis of Nwabueze’s scholarship mainly on his books and public lecture monographs, to the exclusion of other creative materials like conference proceedings, book chapters, journal articles, and so forth. This approach has its advantage in that, for the researcher in the era of Amazon.com and Google, books and monographs are more easily accessible, compared to the other forms of creative activities. This is especially so for a scholar

- like Nwabueze resident in Nigeria, rather than in Europe or North America. But analysis based solely on his published books has its downside; even if the books and public lectures as a category comprise a larger segment of his works, given his enormous talents and longevity in the academic business, Nwabueze could have achieved other important creative contributions outside the pigeonhole of books and public lectures that an assessment limited merely to the book category will miss out. See, for example, “Nwabueze Hits 76,” (commenting on Nwabueze’s scholarly achievements, that “[t]here are also several seminar papers, conference papers, contributions[,] and journal articles”).
34. The works, all of them published by Spectrum Press based in Ibadan, are B. O. Nwabueze, *Structures, Powers and Organizing Principles of Government*, vol. 1, 2005; *Constitutionalism, Authoritarianism and Statism*, vol. 2, 2005; *The Pillars Supporting Constitutional Democracy*, vol. 3, 2005; *Forms of Government*, vol. 4, 2005; and *The Return of Africa to Constitutional Democracy*, vol. 5, 2005.
 35. Established in 1979, the Noma Award for Publishing in Africa is open to African writers and scholars whose works are published in Africa. See “The Noma Award for Publishing in Africa,” available at <http://www.nomaaward.org/about.shtml> (last visited August 7, 2007).
 36. *Ibid.*
 37. *Ibid.*
 38. The three volumes published by Gold Press Limited in 2007 are B. O. Nwabueze, *How President Obasanjo Subverted the Rule of Law and Democracy*; *How President Obasanjo Subverted Nigeria’s Federal System*; and *The Judiciary as the Third Estate of the Realm*.
 39. Testimony to the negative impacts of the conflicts in Nigeria, including the bloody Biafra–Nigeria War of 1967–1970, on the productivity of Nwabueze and other Igbo scholars, Professor Uche, in his citation on Nwabueze as part of Nwabueze’s Ahiajoku Lecture (more below), recounted on how, during the war, Nwabueze “labor[ed] . . . in-between air raids and t[ook] cover in bunkers,” while working on his *Nigerian Land Law*, “clutch[ing] tenaciously on to the manuscripts as he ran from location to location . . .” Uche, “Citation on Professor B. O. Nwabueze.”
 40. Aka, “Igbo Intellectuals and Igbo Self-Determination,” 373.
 41. Nwabueze, *Constitutionalism in the Emergent States*, 139.
 42. Nwabueze, *Presidentialism in Commonwealth Africa*, 106.
 43. *Ibid.*, 110.
 44. On April 3, 2008, Lagos State Governor, Babantunde Raji Fashola, himself, like Nwabueze, a Senior Advocate of Nigeria, gave a speech at the launching of the three-volume work Nwabueze released on the Obasanjo presidency. See Babatunde Raji Fashola, “Public Presentation of Three Books by Professor Ben Nwabueze” (April 3, 2008), available at <http://www.tundefashola.com/archives/news/2008/04/03/20080403N21A.html> (last visited July 7, 2010). After observing that Nwabueze’s “passion, ability, and diligence” regarding the “evolution and development” of constitutional law in Nigeria and Africa are “[un]equaled,” he added, “[Nwabueze] is often quoted in judgments in the Supreme Court and the other lower courts in the land.”
 45. See, generally, Nwabueze, *Democratization*.
 46. For the sake of analysis, we assume conveniently that the Igbo have one intellectual tradition, which Igbo scholars contribute to. Such conclusion is not true in real life. Instead, Igbo are a numerous national group whose lives are characterized by

free-wheeling pluralism and therefore hardly speak with one pan-Igbo voice, except moments when their corporate existence is threatened, like that during the Biafra–Nigeria War. In Achebe’s apt phrase, “[b]eyond town or village[,] the Igbo have no compelling traditional loyalty.” Chinua Achebe, *The Trouble with Nigeria* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Heinemann, 1983), 47.

47. See Aka, “Prospects for Igbo Human Rights,” 168, 177–179. The Igbo drive for education is cited as illustrative of Igbo adaptability and depicted as a phenomenon that came with colonial rule, particularly the missionary education that rule brought. See Achebe, *The Trouble with Nigeria*, 47. However, this is only correct with respect to formal education. Long before the advent of that education, the Igbo, like many African cultures, developed an educational system based on oral tradition among themselves and exported some of the fruits of that system to neighbors. Igbo receptivity to Western education during the colonial period and after was facilitated immensely by an underlying strength in educational achievement that long predated the colonial period.
48. See Aka, “Prospects for Igbo Human Rights,” 177–178. The orientation toward republicanism and self-determination is captured by the Igbo axiom of *Igbo enweeze*, or “Igbo have no King.” Achebe has commented on the attitude of suspicion for power and wealth in Igbo communities. To countermand the possible abuse that could come from these influences, he said,

the Igbo created a system of titles to keep wealthy people harmless. If you want a big title, you can pay for it; but then you must take responsibility for feeding the whole village for a number of days. So in the end, the powerful, the titled, go bankrupt. Hence they are respected in the community, but broke, and, therefore, no longer a threat.

Roger Bowen, “Speaking Truth to Power: An Interview with Chinua Achebe,” *Academe Online* (January–February, 2005), available at <http://www.aaup.org/AAUP/pubsres/academe/2005/JF/Feat/ache.htm> (last visited July 1, 2007). There is another way, again from Achebe, of looking at this matter. Among the Igbo, he recounts, illustrating with the fictional village of Umuaro, in his novel, *C. Achebe, Arrow of God* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1964), there is a title of king that tops the pile in a hierarchy of titles. “But the conditions for its attainment had been so severe that no man had ever taken it, one of the conditions being that the man aspiring to be king must first pay the debts of every man and every woman in Umuaro.” *Ibid.*, 209.

49. E. Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People* (London: Macmillan, 1976), 3 (“[M]en have been living in Igboland for at least [5,000] years. One of the most notable facts of Igbo history is its length and continuity.”).
50. See Aka, “Prospects for Igbo Human Rights,” 181.
51. *Ibid.* Equiano’s autobiography, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano: Written by Himself*, appeared in 1789.
52. Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, 119.
53. See Andrew Maykuth, “Biafra’s Independence Dream Rekindles,” *Philadelphia Inquirer* (May 2, 2005).
54. See Ben O. Nwabueze, “The Igbo in the Context of Modern Government and Politics in Nigeria: A Call for Self-Examination and Self-Correction,” Ahiajoku Lecture Delivered at Owerri, 1985, available at <http://ahiajoku.igbonet.com/1985> (last visited June 28, 2007).

55. James N. Danziger, *Understanding the Political World: A Comparative Introduction to Political Science*, 9th edition (New York: Pearson Longman, 2009), 19.
56. See Aka, "Prospects for Igbo Human Rights," 234, note 403.
57. *Ibid.*
58. See Ise-Oluwa Ige, "Court Stops INEC Screening," *Vanguard* (Nigeria), January 23, 2007, available at <http://www.vanguardngr.com/articles/2002/headline/f123012007.html> (last visited July 22, 2007).
59. Aka, "Prospects for Igbo Human Rights," 232–233.
60. *Ibid.*
61. Nwabueze, "Call for Self-Examination." The third lecture on which Nwabueze drew ideas from was the 1981 lecture by Adiele E. Afigbo, *The Age of Innocence: The Igbo and Their Neighbors in Pre-Colonial Times* (Owerri, Nigeria: Ministry of Information, Culture, Youth and Sport, 1981).
62. Nwabueze, "Call for Self-Examination," 16.
63. Nwabueze, "Call for Self-Examination."
64. *Ibid.*, 1.
65. The 1918 boundary adjustment exercise extended the boundary of Northern Nigeria southeastwards to include a good portion of the territory that previously lay in the Eastern Province of Southern Nigeria. One analyst, contemplating the magnitude of the exercise, described it as "one of the greatest acts of gerrymandering in history." Nwabueze, "Call for Self-Examination." The second exercise that took place, during the Muhammed-Obasanjo administration (1975–1979), carved out mineral-rich areas of Imo State and merged them to neighboring non-Igbo states.
66. Nwabueze, "Call for Self-Examination," 2.
67. *Ibid.*
68. *Ibid.*, 3.
69. *Ibid.*, 4.
70. *Ibid.*, 4 and 17.
71. *Ibid.*, 5. For accord, see Achebe, *Trouble with Nigeria*, 49 (indicating, "... the competitive individualism and the adventurous spirit of the Igbo are necessary ingredients in the modernization and development of Nigerian society. It is neither necessary, nor indeed possible, to suppress them. Nigeria without the inventiveness and the dynamism of the Igbo would be a less hopeful place than it is."). Talking about "grasping and greedy," charges laid against Igbo, Achebe stated that the events since the civil war suggest the "prize for greed" should go to other groups—such as the Yoruba. *Ibid.*, 45.
72. The term "clannish" actually comes from Chinua Achebe; see Achebe, *Trouble with Nigeria*, 45. Nwabueze is familiar with this work and cited it in his Ahiajoku lecture.
73. Nwabueze, "Call for Self-Examination," 5.
74. See Achebe, *Trouble with Nigeria*, 45. This is how Nwabueze vocalized the problem:

In his relationship with others, especially people in authority, the Igbo is incapable of displaying anything of the fawning obsequiousness of the Yoruba or the submissive humility of the Hausa/Fulani, which is all part of the techniques of social diplomacy that has enabled them to get along so well in Nigeria.
- Nwabueze, "Call for Self-Examination," 6.
75. Nwabueze, "Call for Self-Examination," 6.

76. *Ibid.*, 7.
77. *Ibid.*
78. *Ibid.*
79. *Ibid.*, 7–8.
80. *Ibid.*, 8–17.
81. *Ibid.*, 8.
82. *Ibid.*, 11.
83. *Ibid.*, 12.
84. *Ibid.*
85. *Ibid.*, 12–14.
86. *Ibid.*, 12 (emphasis added).
87. *Ibid.*, 12–13.
88. *Ibid.*, 13.
89. *Ibid.* (discussing so-called Abandoned Properties Decree, 1979).
90. *Ibid.*, 14 (analyzing the so-called Banking Obligation (Eastern States) Decree, 1970).
91. *Ibid.*
92. *Ibid.*
93. *Ibid.*, 14–16.
94. *Ibid.*, 15.
95. *Ibid.*
96. *Ibid.*
97. *Ibid.* Nwabueze held “the view that the war was needlessly forced upon the country by” the “selfish and intransigent” military leaders of the period.
98. *Ibid.*, 16.
99. Aka, “Prospects for Igbo Human Rights,” 207.
100. Just why would Nwabueze harbor this hardline position on the Biafra–Nigeria War? One plausible explanation is the intra-ethnic conflict within Biafra that lingered even after the war. Many West Niger Igbo detested their mainland Igbo relatives for the latter’s involvement in the war. Coming from Atani, in the West Niger area, it is possible that Nwabueze’s negative view of the Igbo was informed by this general detest that many Igbo on the Western side of the River Niger share. See, for example, Raph Uwechue, *Reflections on the Nigerian Civil War: Facing the Future* (Victoria, Canada: Trafford Publishing, 2007) (contending that General Ojukwu paid more attention to the politics of the war than to the basic question of Igbo security, that Ojukwu sacrificed Igbo survival to the survival of his leadership. I am indebted to Gloria Chuku for this insight.
101. This is one of the most criticized portions of Nwabueze’s Ahiajoku lecture. One critic pointed out that there could be no justification for atrocities directed against the Igbo by northerners and other Nigerians and properly reminded Nwabueze that appeasement of Hausa-Fulani group has never worked in Nigeria. For example, those previous attempts to appease northerners did not prevent them from perpetrating unprovoked deadly attacks against the Igbo and their property. See James Ekechukwu, “New Igbo and Obasanjo: Of Signatures and Sour Grapes, Part II,” *Biafra Nigeria* (April 26, 2003), available at <http://magazine.biafranigeriaworld.com/jekechukwu/2003apr26.html> (last visited July 22, 2007). See also Aka, “Prospects for Igbo Human Rights,” 195–196 (commenting on various factors that made the pogrom unjustifiable). Especially valid here would be the unflinching logic of President Julius K. Nyerere of Tanzania, in recognizing Biafra.

Nyerere indicated that “unity by conquest” is neither possible nor practicable. He stated that the principle Tanzania applied in recognizing Israel was that “every people must have some place in the world where they are not liable to be rejected by their fellow citizens.”

But the Biafrans have now suffered the same kind of rejection within their state that the Jews of Germany experienced. Fortunately they already had a homeland. They have retreated to it for their own protection and for the same reason—after all other efforts had failed—they have declared it to be an independent state.

How could Tanzania accord recognition to Israel without extending the same recognition to the Biafrans? Nyerere reasoned. The Tanzanian leader took the view that “the purpose of society and of all political organization is the service of man.” See “Statement by the Minister of State (Foreign Affairs) on Tanzania’s Recognition of Biafra” (Dar-es-Salaam) (April 13, 1968), available at http://www.biafraland.com/biafra_recognized_by_tanzania.htm (last visited August 12, 2007). Nyerere’s statement, recognizing Biafra is deservedly praised as “one of the most striking state documents of our time.” Aka, “Prospects for Igbo Human Rights,” 241 (quoting late Stanley Diamond).

102. Another rebuttal to this position, besides institutions like governments, constitutions, and laws being made for people, is that, as I indicated elsewhere, “it is morally unjustified to use coercion to suppress a campaign for self-determination, as the Nigerian government did, especially one like the Biafrans’ that was driven by an overwhelming desire for independence.” Aka, “Prospects for Igbo Human Rights,” 208.
103. Nwabueze, “Call for Self-Examination,” 7 (emphasis added).
104. Achebe, *Trouble with Nigeria*, 48.
105. See generally Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1959) (work of fiction embodying a classic statement of the enormously devastating impact of British colonialism on Igbo traditional society).
106. Nwabueze, “Call for Self-Examination,” 7–8.
107. *Ibid.*, 15–16. During his address, General Babangida had affirmed, no different from previous Nigerian administrations, his government’s determination “to leave behind us the legacy of bitterness,” and “the negation of our sense of justice.”
108. While I do not hold brief for Nigerian soldiers, the cancellation of the Ahiajoku lecture in 1983 could have been for a reason other than military repressiveness. Keep in mind that Nwabueze was billed to present that year, but he could not do so due to ill health. It is possible that notice of his ill health came so late to afford the organizers of the program enough opportunity to make alternative plans and they decided to postpone the talk. The series resumed without break from 1984 to 1993 within which period the country remained firmly under an unbroken succession of military leadership, from Buhari to Babangida, and to Abacha.
109. Nkem Ekeopara, “Ahiajoku Lecture Series: An Enduring Heritage,” IgboNet (March 26, 2003), available at <http://essays.igbonet.com/nekeopara/2003mar26.html> (last visited August 5, 2007).
110. Nwabueze, “Call for Self-Examination,” 6.
111. See Oha-na-Eze Ndi-Igbo, *The Violations of Human and Civil Rights of Ndi Igbo in the Federation of Nigeria (1966–1999): A Call for Reparations and Appropriate Restitution* (1999), available at <http://www.asabamemorial.org/data/>

ohaneze-petition.pdf. (last visited August 5, 2007). The name Oputa refers to Chukwudifu Oputa, a retired Nigerian Supreme Court Justice, who chaired the seven-person commission. The panel did not have the power to compel witnesses. As a result, three of the country's former military rulers subpoenaed to appear before the commission refused to do so without any fear of any citation for contempt of court. The Nigerian central government under former president Olusegun Obasanjo set up the commission to investigate past human rights abuses in the country and make recommendations to it, but refused to publish, let alone, accept those recommendations.

112. See PanAfrican News Agency, "Igbos Insist on Confederation" (March 15, 2000), available at <http://www.umunna.org/igboconfab.htm> (last visited July 25, 2007).
113. See generally Ohaneze Petition.
114. *Ibid.*
115. *Ibid.*
116. PanAfrican News Agency.
117. *Ibid.*
118. *Ibid.*
119. Nwabueze, "Call for Self-Examination," 12.
120. *Ibid.*, 15.

CHAPTER 9

Chinua Achebe and the Development of Igbo/African Studies

Raphael Njoku

Introduction

This chapter examines the contributions of Chinua Achebe to the development of Igbo Studies in particular, and African Studies in general.¹ Conceived in the colonial context of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when very little was preserved in writing by the Africans on Igbo social life and customs, Achebe's trilogy—*Things Fall Apart* (1958), *No Longer at Ease* (1960) and *Arrow of God* (1964)—have particularly served scholars of all disciplines as a rare intellectual resource material.² The plot of these works was primarily intended to shed light on different aspects of Igbo/African social institutions and practices as well as highlight the nature of conflicts that threatened the indigenous society as it came under alien intrusion.

Excluding the Atlantic slave trade, colonialism, perceived as the highest level of capitalism by Marxist scholars, has remained as one of the most controversial and horrific episodes in African history.³ It is therefore not surprising to find its overbearing influence on both the African writers of the twentieth century, as well as their counterparts in Europe and elsewhere. Pan-Africanist scholar Walter Rodney depicts the colonial experience as the greatest pillage of a million years of human history.⁴ Also, troubled by the ominous threat of colonial rule in Africa, Robert Knox, a Saxon, had in his *The Races of Men: A Fragment*, published in 1850, predicted the inevitable demise of other races as a result of European selfish interests in Africa, praying that his own race “should desist from robbing and murdering dark races of the world.”⁵

These sample commentaries provide us with a fair idea about the pervading impact of alien subjugation and control on the Africans. In an age when the Europeans denied that Africans had a historical past, and even claimed to *know*

the natives better than they understood themselves, Achebe's counternarrative depicts the anxieties generally experienced by the Africans as the indigenous culture came under alien assault. By rebuffing the Western notion that art should neither rationalize itself nor be answerable to anybody, Achebe single-handedly brought about the emergence, in the 1960s, of a genius that is African literature. As Achebe stated in his *Morning Yet on Creation Day*, art is, and always was, at the service of man. This is the central idea at the heart of the African oral tradition. Therefore, "the African novel has to be about Africa."⁶ Indeed, as much as destiny is decided through politics, successful novelists always root their characters in the society of a particular time. A writer is only great to the extent he provides a society in general with a true mirror of itself; of its conflicts and of its problems. Among his competitors, Achebe has successfully provided his readers with this mirror of Igbo/Nigerian society than any other novelist. He strongly contends the idea that "art is autonomous and that it happens by itself," as "simply madness." He continues, "What we say, what we write or what we paint is as human beings who live in society and are accountable to that society."⁷ In order to analyze the most crucial elements of Achebe's works and put his intellectual ideas in a proper perspective, it is pertinent to briefly examine his family background and education.

Family Background and Education

A proud recipient of numerous local and international honors, awards (including professorial positions), and widely acknowledged as the king of African literature, Albert Chinualumogu Achebe, the fifth child of his parents, was born in colonial Nigeria at Ikenga village in Ogidi town of eastern Nigeria on November 16, 1930. Altogether, his parents, Isaiah Okafor (an early Christian convert) and Janet Anaenechi Achebe (nee Iloegbunam), bore six children—namely: Frank (first son), John, Zinobia (first daughter), Augustine, Chinua and Grace. Four decades earlier in 1892, the British Anglican Church Missionary Society (CMS) led by Rev. S. R. Smith, had been welcomed on their first arrival at Ogidi by Pa Udo Osinyi, Achebe's maternal grandfather, whom he described in his *Hopes and Impediment* (first published in 1988 by Heinemann), as a man of "wealth and honor" of his time.⁸

Ogidi society of the late 1890s and early 1900 had begun to witness the first appearance of European colonialists. As the British pacification forces marched across the thousands of independent Igbo villages appointing warrant chiefs, the Christian evangelists seized the initiative in an attempt to propagate the salvation of Jesus Christ among the Africans. In some instances, the Christian evangelists became forceful, among other things, in their attempts to Christianize the Igbo. They assaulted Igbo indigenous institutions and customs, while they tried to recruit new converts, mostly among the youth, for their newly established mission schools.⁹ At this initial stage, Igbo response to the ongoing forces prying into their society could be described as an ambiguous mix of hostility and friendship; indifference and curiosity.¹⁰ This ambivalence is best illustrated with

Pa Udo Osinyi's decision to expel the missionaries from his compound as soon as they had begun attacking Ogidi traditions such as ancestral worship, polygamy and masquerade dances.

The indigenous worldview, polygamous family systems, and masquerade institutions were central to understanding the precolonial Igbo life, their social relations, modes of production and political organization. The ancestors occupied a central position in the indigenous cosmology as intermediaries between the living and the Almighty powers. Polygamy was a means of raising a pool of agrarian labor force and therefore served as a measure of individual achievement and success. Through acts of ritual and time-honored values, the elders made the appearance of masks and masquerades to be accepted as the visitation of the gods and ancestors in physical forms.¹¹ This belief system and practices were crucial for social control and harmony. Thus, the attempt by the missionaries to superimpose their alien ideology on the indigenous order was simply a direct attack on the social fabric that held the Igbo society together.¹²

Yet, despite the initial resistance and suspicions, the Christian religion quickly gained its first converts among the orphans, outcasts and other marginalized members of the old Igbo society.¹³ This outcome of events reminds us that in any society (whether traditional or modern) where individuals or groups are marginalized, the tendency is high for enemies from outside to recruit local collaborators among the aggrieved within. Among this group of locals who embraced the new religion was an orphan named Okafor (later, Achebe's father), who was under the foster care of his uncle Pa Osinyi. Through his early contact with the Europeans, Okafor, baptized and became known as Isaiah Achebe in 1904. He later became one of the most influential educated elite and African evangelists in his hometown of Ogidi. Achebe then got married to Miss Janet Iloegbunam and the wedding was personally officiated at the St. Ebenezer Church, Ogidi in 1908 by the legendary Reverend (Dr.) George Thomas Basden of the CMS, a distinguished scholar of Igbo life and customs. Isaiah and Janet ran their family life in the typically strict Christian style.¹⁴ According to Ezenwa-Ohaeto, Achebe's biographer, while Pastor Isaiah, a teacher and CMS missionary, worked assiduously to win African souls for the new religion, Janet Achebe cultivated the habit of quoting Psalm 34, verse 11 to her acquaintances at every occasion that called for her words of exhortation: "Come my sons, I will teach you the fear of Yahweh."¹⁵ This was the home to which Achebe was born in 1930.

Despite his strict Christian family upbringing, Achebe, as the themes of his novels reveal, observed and knew enough about the Igbo traditional religion and ritual observances, all of which he also internalized as a young man. From a distance, Achebe observed the family values and practices of his uncle who refused to convert to the new religion. At school, the young Achebe interacted with his peers from other families that substantially retained the old ways. So at home, in the village society and at school, Achebe watched, with curiosity and fascination, the old beliefs and practices. As he acknowledges, "I think I am basically an ancestor worshipper, if you like, but not in the same sense as my grandfather would probably do it, pouring palm wine on the floor for the ancestors."¹⁶

In view of the social transformations that were witnessed over the early colonial period and more that came from the period of his birth and childhood, it is important to briefly underline some of the dominant ideas and influences that may have contributed to Achebe's upbringing. The first is the influence of his family and kinship on Achebe's upbringing and career. Having been born in a family that had embraced Christianity and Western education as the most influential forces that would shape the future of the new generations, Chinua, like his siblings, pursued his mission education with devotion. Achebe said, "My parents knew that education was important. To my father, it was almost a religion. He wanted us to have as much education as possible, as much as he can afford."¹⁷ This view is supported by the Achebe siblings' academic successes. Chinua began his primary education at the St. Philip's Central School, Akpakaogwe, in 1936 and completed it in 1943. As he recalls, one of the memorable incidents over the period of his primary education was WWII and the recruitment of pupils in the win-the-war effort. Achebe vividly recalls that their headmaster had "told us that every kernel we collected in the bush would buy a nail for Hitler's coffin."¹⁸ Between 1944 and 1948, Achebe completed his secondary education at the Government College, Umuahia. Between 1948 and 1953, Achebe concluded his tertiary education at The University College, Ibadan, with second-class honors in English. While at Ibadan, Achebe wrote his *Things Fall Apart*, pending publication. After receiving his BA degree awarded from London University in 1953 (when the University College, Ibadan was still affiliated to London University), Achebe proceeded to study Broadcasting at the British Broadcasting Corporation, London, in 1956.¹⁹

Another important influence on Achebe's upbringing and career is the Igbo village life of storytelling, oral literature, discussion with proverbs and so on. In his fifth novel, *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987), for instance, a wise old man insisted that storytelling is far more important to a community than drumming or fighting. This is "Because it is only the story can continue beyond the war and the warrior It is the story, not the others, that saves our progeny The story is our escort; without it we are blind."²⁰ Achebe's novels reveal that he makes good use of these oral sources in historical and literary narratives. Of course Achebe was not born until three decades after the arrival of the White man, but in his

village of Ogidi, the events of the colonial conquest had been recorded and preserved in oral tradition, and through his father Isaiah, [Chinua] Achebe had access to the first written records about the beginnings of colonial history in his home area—the two main areas, the two main sources that informed *Things Fall Apart* as a historical novel.²¹

In this context, one can emphasize the role of family and kinship, village tradition and modernity in the making of Achebe's intellectual ideas. Although the Igbo did not fully develop an indigenous writing culture, oral tradition, use of proverbs, public speaking skills, and knowledge of legends, myths, folklore

and poetry formed some of the important measures of social intelligence and leadership abilities. In Igbo public leadership, “power resides with the people and one’s ability to persuade and convince them.”²²

Third, growing up in Ikenga village society of the 1930s and 1940s, Achebe’s psychic and literary ideas were profoundly affected by the various forces of change and conflicts that characterized the high colonial period (1920–1940s). These conflicts included the increasing popularity of Christianity over the indigenous religious practices, the power of colonial authority over Igbo village government, and the increasing promises of Western education as the most viable route to individual advancement.²³ The competition engendered by mission education among the Igbo was well captured by Achebe in the response of Obierika to Okonkwo’s question on why the locals cannot fight in unity against the alien invaders. “How do you think we can fight when our brothers have turned against us . . . our clan can no longer act as one”²⁴ In *No Longer at Ease*, Achebe metaphorically likened this state of disunity among the Africans as “the curse of the snake.” “If all snakes lived together in one place,” “Who would approach them? But they lived everyone unto himself and so fall easy prey to man.”²⁵ While the emergent alien ideology and institutions affected the Igbo family, kinship and village sociopolitical institutions, it must be noted that it did not completely obliterate the old order. Rather the old and new ways engaged each other in a process of dialogue and adaptation.

Along with the new trends, for instance, Igbo masks and masquerades, which easily attracted Achebe’s interest, continued to appear as a means of social control. The age grades and secret societies, and festivals continued to exist even as village life slowly adapted to the new changes, like the taste for European goods and the zinc houses that had emerged in the urban centers and filtered into the villages through the mission school teachers and the young people who had moved into the townships.²⁶ In an interview with Nkosi and Soyinka in 1963, Achebe admitted that he belonged “to a very fortunate generation” in the respect that “the old [ways] hadn’t been completely disorganized when I was growing up The festivals, of course, were still observed; may be not in the same force, but they were still there.”²⁷

Meanwhile, the dialectics of the ongoing social reordering profoundly informed Achebe’s literary ideas. While at the University of Ibadan in the early 1950s, for instance, Achebe had published in the *University Herald* a short story entitled: “The Old Order in Conflict with the New,” in which he explored the cultural implications of contemporary marriages in the urban centers of colonial Nigeria. This theme of conflict between the old and new ways would dominate his trilogy: *Things Fall Apart* (1958), *No Longer at Ease* (1960) and *Arrow of God* (1964). In these works, Achebe paints a curious picture of the disintegrative impact of British colonial control in what later became eastern Nigeria. Achebe’s works are popular for their originality and contextual depiction of colonialism. What follows below is a brief account of Achebe’s marriage and additional historical realities that informed his first three novels and overall career.

Career, Marriage and Novels

The first job Achebe held after his Bachelor's degree in 1953 was a teaching position at Merchant of Light School Oba, a poorly equipped but well-managed private institution, located few miles from his hometown of Ogidi. Achebe was at the school for about eight months when the Nigerian Broadcasting Service (NBS) based at Lagos made him an offer as a senior Broadcasting Officer. Generally, life in colonial Lagos, which has been qualified by Michael Echeruo as "Victorian" in outlook, was rich with experiences that would inform his second novel, *No Longer at Ease*, published in 1960.²⁸ In fact, the experiences of Obi Okonkwo, the principal character of the novel, somewhat reflects Achebe's personal experiences—that is his strong connection with family, kinship, village versus his Western education and a brief sojourn in London in 1956 and his appointment as a high-ranking officer in the civil service in Lagos.

For several reasons, including career breakthroughs, 1958 may be described as a turning point in Achebe's life. First, the typescript of *Things Fall Apart*, which he took to London in 1956, was finally getting serious evaluation from publishers there. This development coincided with his promotion to the rank of Controller of the Eastern Region's Broadcasting Service in 1958. While Achebe was busy setting up the command headquarters of the new regional broadcasting services at Enugu, his manuscript finally received favor from William Heinemann publishers. Heinemann's assessment on the novel is captured in the words of one of its representatives, Alan Hill:

Heinemann's normal fiction reader read it and did a long report but the firm was still hesitating whether to accept it. Would anyone possibly buy a novel by an African? There are no precedents. So the rather doubting bunch at the top of the Heinemann's thought of the educational department, who after all sold books to Africa and were supposed to know about Africans. So they showed it to one of our educational advisers, Professor Donald MacRea, who was just back from West Africa. He read it in the office and ended the debate with an eleven-word report: "This is the best novel I have read since the war."²⁹

With MacRea's positive recommendation, Heinemann published *Things Fall Apart* on June 17, 1958, with a first print of 2,000 copies. Few days following its release, *Things Fall Apart* was reviewed in several popular tabloids in London, including the popular *New Statesman* of June 21, 1958 and *The Times Literary Supplement* of Friday June 20, 1958, which judged it a resounding success. The reviewer was particularly impressed with the literary style of the author, which he described as "apparently simple but a vivid imagination illuminates every page, and his style is a model of clarity . . . The greatest interest of this novel is that it genuinely succeeds in presenting tribal life from the inside."³⁰

Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, which won him the prestigious Margaret Wrong Memorial Prize for African Literature in 1959, was entitled after *The Second Coming*, written by an Irish poet and Nobel Laureate William Butler Yeats (1865–1939). The pertinent lines are: "Things fall apart; the center cannot hold;

mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.”³¹ The story is the tragedy of Ogbuefi Okonkwo, an important man of his days when the White man first appeared in the Igbo area. Achebe looks back at his Ogidi town of the period, swamped by the alien missionaries, traders, soldiers and administrators, throwing into relief the relevance of the immense disorganization that soon besieged the indigenous society. Obierika, one of the main characters of the novel, locates this awareness of things falling apart in his accusation of the White man: “Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart.”³²

The indigenous religion was the binding force holding together the precolonial African societies, including the Igbo. In an African society where religious values and ideas traversed all aspects of life, and every phenomenon was interpreted in the perspective of the unseen forces, Achebe captures the role of the Christian ideology in the European colonial enterprise in Africa. With Christianity serving as an instrument of destabilization, the titles of Achebe’s works conjure a vivid picture of the disintegrative impact the alien religion brought on the social fabric that held together the African social order.

Thus, *Things Fall Apart*, located between 1850 and 1900—that is between the beginnings of consular authority in coastal towns like Lagos and the colonial conquest proper—is about a group of family villages that once shared a common identity. This unity was broken with the alien interlude. In the process, new ideas, new words, and new applications gained entrance into men’s heads and hearts, and the old society gradually gave way. Sidney Hook has defined the hero as one who breaks the law.³³ Okonkwo, the hero of the novel, despised the cautious responses of his kinsmen. In this conflict, Okonkwo and his kinsmen were caught up in a dance of destiny. Ambitious, brave, impatient, daring and exiled for seven years for murder, Okonkwo moved to resist everything that the colonial order stood for. He despised all those who advised for caution. In a village meeting of the elders deliberating on the best response to the increasing authority of the aliens, Okonkwo thundered against a suggestion for a peaceful settlement:

Let us not reason like cowards. If a man comes into my hut and defecates on the floor, what do I do? Do I shut my eyes? I take a stick and break his head. That is what a man does. These people are daily pouring filth over us, and Okeke says we should pretend not to see.³⁴

Enraged by the provocative arrogance of the District Officer’s (D O) messenger, who had come to stop a village meeting, Okonkwo drew his sword and beheaded the emissary. He tried to mobilize his Umuofia people to act as one in the face of treachery and alien violation, but the people failed to respond. Okonkwo, the tragic hero, hung himself. It is pertinent to pause here and consider the second major event that happened to Achebe in 1958.

Besides literary and career breakthroughs, Achebe also had the opportunity to meet his future life partner, Christie Chinweifenu Okoli, in 1958. Christie, an Awka woman, along with two others, was offered a holiday job at the Nigerian

Broadcasting Service soon after Achebe arrived at Enugu. One may quickly add that Achebe's mother was also from Awka. After a three-year courtship, Christie was married to Achebe on September 10, 1961. The couple had four children: Chinelo, Ikechukwu, Chidi and Nwando.

A year before Achebe solemnized his marriage, *No Longer at Ease* (1960), his second novel, was published by Heinemann as a sequel to *Things Fall Apart*.³⁵ Yet, *No Longer at Ease* was different in that the narrative moved from the early years of conquest and colonization (1850–1900) to the late colonial and postcolonial period of decolonization and self-rule (1950s and 1960s). Unlike the first novel, which focuses on Achebe's grandfather's generation, the new one depicts Achebe's generation—the postcolonial African educated elite who had emerged as the inheritors of the African postcolonial state. The central character of the novel, Obi Okonkwo (who is also the grandson of Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*), secures a civil service employment in Lagos after his studies in England. Soon, his promising career and future was jeopardized by corruption and graft. Obi Okonkwo's problem stemmed mostly from the huge expectations and pressure brought upon him by family and kinship ties and the conflicts between his inherited village values and his Western education. The layered and familiar problems of kinship expectations and corruption of leadership, which have remained as the burden of nationhood in Africa, has also been discussed elsewhere by Achebe.³⁶

In 1964, Achebe returned to the earlier theme of colonial intrusion on indigenous ways of life with his publication of *Arrow of God*, which won him the Jock Campbell-*New Statesman* Award for Literature in 1966. The new novel is a stirring story of a village life of Achebe's father's generation, centered on the struggle for authority of Ezeulu, the Chief Priest of Ulu (the traditional god of Umuaro people), against both rivals of his own town, the District Officer, and Christian missionaries. The collision between the local chieftain and the imperial authority began when the DO invited Ezeulu for talks over a plan to make him the warrant chief of the community. His kinsmen had mistaken the liaison between the traditional ruler and the DO to mean complacency to alien intrusion and therefore showed open suspicion to the local priest. The stubborn and vengeful Ezeulu not only surprised his people, but also shocked the DO by arrogantly declining the offer from Her Majesty's representatives. In a bold and defiant statement of response, Ezeulu, speaking through an interpreter, replied "that Ezeulu will not be anybody's chief, except that of Ulu."³⁷ Shocked by the unexpected bluff of the local priest, the DO barked, "Is the fellow mad? A witch doctor making a fool of the British Administration in public. In that case he goes back to prison."³⁸ Before then, Ezeulu had been incarcerated for months on charges of contempt of the DO's initial invitation.

As the truth emerged, Ezeulu's reputation among his people soared high, for such a refusal had no parallel in Igboland. In fact, Adiele Afigbo's *Warrant Chiefs: Indirect Rule in Southeastern Nigeria, 1891–1929* reveals that across the entire region, the general conducts of warrant chiefs were morally deplorable.³⁹ Ezeulu's incarceration for two months at Government Hill caused an upset in his traditional functions to the village. On his return, the local chieftain pitched a battle

with his community by refusing to perform his traditional duties as the chief priest. Ezeulu was mad at his people for initially suspecting him as a collaborator with European colonialists. Additionally, he had expected the people to rise against the Europeans during the period of his incarceration at Government Hill. Consequently, the whole community was thrown into serious turmoil, from which it never recovered.

The Relevance of Achebe's Novels to Igbo/African Studies

Achebe's works have been extolled for blazing the path to a new genre of African literature that successfully departs from the English model. Undoubtedly, Achebe's was not the first African novel, but he was the foremost African writer to successfully subordinate the European character study to the portrayal of communal life. A year after the publication of his third novel, *Time Literary Supplement* had noted that Achebe "is a big factor in the formation of a young West African's picture of his past, and of his relation to it."⁴⁰ Achebe is able to achieve this because characters rooted in African communal life lie at the center of *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease* and *Arrow of God*. Although in these novels, the clash between African and European cultures and the resulting outcome of the encounter is central, Nwando, Achebe's daughter and African historian, has reiterated the crucial need for readers and students of her father's works to realize that there are other "hidden themes buried within" these novels.⁴¹

Indeed, the Achebe novels have enriched our study of African studies by highlighting several aspects of Igbo indigenous life that cannot be fully accounted for here due to limited space. Among other things, Achebe's works depict the Igbo tradition of communalism, which stresses the importance of the community over the individual. This value cautions the individual against excesses in all aspects of human activities.⁴² The fate of Ezeulu in *Arrow of God*, who pitched an uneasy battle against his community, best demonstrates the priority of the community over the individual, no matter who he is. Ezeulu refused to call for the Festival of the New Yam (an equivalent of American Thanksgiving Celebration) as a form of punishment for the people not accepting his lead in the confrontation with the White man. By implication, his Umuaro people will not be able to harvest yams, a staple crop of the Igbo people. But as the Igbo often say: *Obadike*, which means that "power resides within the general assembly." This is in line with Achebe's doubt whether "man is strong enough on his own to counter [the] forces he might come up against." Achebe further argues that man "stands a better chance if he is operating within his society."⁴³ Against this milieu, Ezeulu fought his people only to a predictable self-destruct. In *No Longer at Ease*, a similar dynamic of communal consciousness is revealed in the form of pressures exerted by family and kin on the emergent African educated middle class to take the responsibility of catering to the welfare of their less privileged kinsmen. With the increasing tide of corruption, this pressure has continued as the African struggles to reconcile his cultural instincts with the survival of the African postcolonial state.

Also found in Achebe's novels is the idea about gender balance in Igbo culture. This ideology is mostly notable in the gender identity of Igbo deities and their human agents. In *Things Fall Apart*, for instance, the female goddess *Ani* has a male priest *Ezeani*, and the male oracle *Agbala* has a female priestess *Chielo*. Against this evidence, the notion that Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*, who ruled his household with an iron hand, represents an example of gender relations in precolonial Igbo society, is incorrect. No matter how manly Okonkwo appeared, he was subservient to Chielo, the priestess of Agbala, who was one of the strongest defenders of the old religion. In fact, Okonkwo represents the exception rather than the ordinary. The life of Okonkwo reminds historians of the emergent Igbo *ogaranya*s or aristocrats, who arose in Igbo society on the eve of colonialism. The *ogaranya*s were the products of the violence that characterized the slave trade era (ca. 1700–1912) and the new form of wealth it brought.⁴⁴ A good point at hand is when Okonkwo physically assaulted one of his wives during the sacred Week of Peace. Okonkwo's action drew the outrage of the male priest of the Earth Goddess (*Ani* or *Ala*), who termed the action "evil," adding that such mistakes "can ruin the whole clan."⁴⁵ As a form of propitiation, Okonkwo was mandated to offer some sacrifices to the Earth Goddess, the supreme deity in Igbo cosmology. In Igbo society, women were, among other things, culture carriers and historians who transmitted social values from one generation to another through moonlight and nighttime stories with children.⁴⁶ In *Things Fall Apart*, women sat down at night and told their children stories about tortoise, the earth and the sky.⁴⁷ As Achebe explained in an interview with Jerome Brooks, it was his interest in Igbo narratives that drew him to writing. "I knew I loved stories, stories told in our homes, first by my mother, then by my elder sisters—such as the story of the tortoise."⁴⁸

Still on gender, Achebe introduces the reader to the role of *Otu umuada* in the various precolonial village governments in Igboland.⁴⁹ Gloria Chuku explains that the "*Otu Umuada* or *Otu Umuokpu* (society of daughters of the lineage who might be married, unmarried, divorced or widowed) was a powerful force to reckon with, especially in their natal lineage."⁵⁰ In the precolonial era, this group acted as the police force against patrilineage wives, as well as ritual and purification specialists, and family psychotherapists. They met regularly, rotating their assembly between their natal and married villages. The *umuada* also played important roles in creating unifying influences, settling intralineage disputes and quarrels between natal and marital villages. When the need arose, the *umuada* also supervised various rites of passage, rituals and sacrifices on behalf of their communities. In some communities, as Nwando Achebe explains, "It was the *umuada* leader, the *ada ebo*, who performs the final ablution rites for new brides."⁵¹ In *Things Fall Apart*, it was Uchendu's daughter Njide, who supervised this ritual for her brother's new bride: "It was a full gathering of *umuada*, in the same way as they would meet if a death occurred in the family. There were twenty-two of them. They sat in a big circle on the ground and the bride sat in the center with a hen in her hand."⁵²

Another important aspect of Achebe's works that mirrors Igbo life in particular and African culture in general is the rich use of proverbs in conversations.⁵³

According to Achebe, “A proverb is both a functional means of communication and also a very elegant and artistic performance itself.”⁵⁴ Emeka Nwabueze, an Igbo scholar and commentator on Achebe novels, observes that “The use of proverbial lore is a prominent conversational feature in Igboland of Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*.”⁵⁵ Proverbs are the spice of public speaking, and the repertoire of knowledge and wisdom in the precolonial African society. Those who possessed the skills can summarize a thousand words in a single proverb, which could easily carry the masses in a public debate. According to Achebe, “the art of conversation is regarded very highly [in Igboland], and proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten.”⁵⁶

Achebe’s novels also tell us much about Igbo precolonial warfare. Like all societies, the Igbo village groups sometimes went to war against one another. In his study of precolonial wars among the Igbos, Adiele Afigbo reveals that these battles were fought face-to-face with local weapons like sticks (*ńkuruunkuru*), machetes (*nma*), arrow (*uta na aku*) and so on. Although locally made guns were in some instances employed in combats; among the Igbo, it was generally considered an act of cowardice to use them.⁵⁷ The character of Igbo precolonial wars was more like family disagreements. This dispels the wrongly held notion among the Europeans that Africans were barbarians deeply engrossed in tribal bloodshed.

In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe narrates the schism that brought Ikemefuna to Umuofia, Okonkwo’s village, as a compensation for the murder of Udo’s wife. To avert a war and bloodshed, the people of Mbaino accepted to pay Umuofia off with a virgin and a young man.⁵⁸ This shows that warfare in precolonial Igboland was nothing close to the genocidal practices the Europeans, who had better weapons, brought to Africa in the age of imperialism. Achebe conjured this fact in Nweke Ukpala’s comment; “only a foolish man can go after a leopard with his bare hands.”⁵⁹ Even more revealing is Achebe’s description of the British armed expedition against the people of Abame (which is actually a real story of British expedition against Ahiara people of Igbo country in 1905). The Abame were waylaid at a market square and summarily wiped out for previously killing a White man who arrived on a bicycle.⁶⁰ Similar British armed expeditions against the Benin kingdom in 1897, and the Aro in 1901–1902, to mention but these two examples, were genocidal in their nature of execution. Thus, many Africans resisted the colonial powers almost too late for their own good. Achebe figured this point in *Arrow of God*, in Moses Unachukwu’s advice against the Otakaagu age grade’s decision to fight against the colonial authority’s forced (unpaid) labor:

There is no escape from the white man . . . he has come. When suffering knocks at your door, and you tell him there is no seat left for him, he tells you not to worry because he has brought his own stool. The white man is like that.⁶¹

In *Things Fall Apart*, Obierika aptly admitted that it was already too late to fight the invaders:

Our own men and our sons have joined the rank of the stranger . . . and they help to uphold his government . . . The white man is very clever. He came quietly and

peaceably . . . We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan.⁶²

African struggle and resistance spanned about 70 years, broadly divided into three phases: I, 1880–1920; II, 1920–1940; and III, 1940–1960s.⁶³ *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* were conceptualized in the first phase (1880s–1920), seen as the era of incipient nationalism in African history. For clarity, this was the period when traditional rulers, or chiefs, and other popular individuals led the resistance against European presence. Achebe's fictional characters, Okonkwo and Ezeulu, as well as the rampaging ancestral spirits and the protesting *Otakeagu* age grade, each represented manifestations of anticolonial struggles in Africa. As leaders of their respective traditional societies, their reactions were understandable. The threat to African sovereignty affected them directly. In what later became Nigeria, King Jaja of Opobo was bundled into exile for refusing to oblige to British demand for a protectorate treaty.⁶⁴

It may be important to observe that most of these martial acts of resistance were directed against mere alien presence. It was later, when that presence became more obvious, that the resistance was directed against objectionable aspects of the colonial rule. However, resistance was not only expressed in martial terms. It also took political and diplomatic forms, as well as religious and cultural forms. The most notable significance of the earliest phase of resistance is that it formed the foundation on which the later, more coordinated, anticolonial movements were built.⁶⁵

A Critical Reappraisal

Like all great writers of his generation, Achebe's works have attracted all manners of critical reviews. Achebe's novels looked at colonialism from both angles of philanthropy, as claimed by the missionaries, and the obvious ulterior political and economic motives resisted against by the Africans. In both *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, Achebe portrays the Christian religion as an instrument of colonial conquest and control. In their confrontation with the adherents to the indigenous religion, the missionaries had to rely on the political support of the soldiers on the spot in the face of African protests against missionary extremism. In *Things Fall Apart*, for instance, a Christian convert boasted openly about his intentions to burn all the gods in Umuofia. At a point, an adherent killed a sacred python, and in another instance, a fanatic unmasked an ancestral spirit. These acts of desecration left the elders lamenting:

All our gods are weeping. Idemili is weeping. Ogwugwu is weeping. Agbala is weeping, and all the others . . . because of the shameful sacrilege they are suffering and the abomination we have all seen with our eyes.⁶⁶

When the village elders of Umuofia proceeded to burn a church property, the DO cunningly invited them for talks and upon their arrival, he held the elders

hostage at Government Hill until the community paid a stipulated fine. Justifying his action, the DO said, “we have a court of law where we judge cases and administer justice just as it is done in our country under a great Queen”⁶⁷ The DO’s comments reflect an imperial language that did not escape the author’s comment.

Nevertheless, it is remarkable to note Achebe’s almost unbiased account of some of the local cultures the imperial administration and missionaries fought against in Africa. These included such practices as killing of twins, human sacrifice and such seemingly jungle justices as having “a man buried alive up to his neck, with a piece of roasted yam on his head to attract vultures.”⁶⁸ In *Things Fall Apart*, Ikemefula (an innocent 15-year-old male ransom for an intercommunal murder), was beheaded by Okonkwo, whom the boy called father, simply because *Agbala* (the local deity) demanded so. Nwando has argued that “Okonkwo kills, not because he feels compelled to carry out the order of the oracle, but for a more selfish reason—an innate need to prove to the Umuofia elders present, and especially himself, that he is not weak.”⁶⁹ For whatever reasons such horrific acts were done, Achebe highlights them in order to provide his readers with a balanced narrative. In reaction to a question directed at this part of his work in 1972, Achebe enthused that

There were certainly faults in the Ibo system that was depicted in *Things Fall Apart*. There is no reason, for instance, for twins to be thrown away. But if you take a position for or against, then you find yourself defending the throwing away of twins or else you say that everything in Africa is barbarism, which appears to be the trend among black writers, and they are immediately applauded by whites because it gives them an easy conscience again after all these periods of doubt.⁷⁰

Like the Africans, as Patrick Brantlinger, a European writer, observed, a great many Europeans went “native” in Africa, and often practiced genocide and cannibalism as a hobby.⁷¹ An observer like Sir Harry Johnston in British central Africa was “increasingly struck with the rapidity with which such members of the white race as are of the superior class can throw restraints of civilization and develop into savages of unbridled lust and abominable cruelty.”⁷²

Elizabeth Isichei has criticized the British pacifists for their high-handedness in Igboland, arguing that some local communities were practically exterminated for minor offences; local chiefs were bullied for lack of cooperation with the colonialists and forced labors were exerted.⁷³ In an African society where people see the finger of God in every event, these cruel acts left the African subjects with a sense of both helplessness and resignation in spite of their anger. Nweke Ukpala voiced this feeling in *Arrow of God* as follows:

Umuaro was here before the white man came from his own land to seek us out. We did not ask him to visit us; he is neither our kinsman nor our in-law. We did not steal his goat or his fowl; we did not take his land or his wife. In no way whatever have we done him wrong. And yet he has come to make trouble with us . . . The stranger will not kill his host with his visit.⁷⁴

Against this background, Ode Ogede, a literary critic, attacks the narrative of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* for not concentrating on the heroics of Igbo resistance against the British conquest. Rather, as Ogede argues, Achebe tended to treat these military expeditions as trivial and valorized "the triumph of colonialism and the success of European cultural imperialism." This, in the summation of Ogede, amounts to "pander[ing] to the taste of his metropolitan (European) audience."⁷⁵ A similar criticism was noted by *The Times Literary Supplement* in 1958. The reviewer argues that "For Mr. Achebe himself owes much to missionary education and his sympathies are naturally more with the new than the old. His picture of the collapse of the tribal custom is perhaps less compassionate."⁷⁶

In a rare reaction to his literary critics, Achebe admits on the one hand that given a chance he would "probably alter a few things in *Things Fall Apart* . . . There are little weaknesses that I might like to edit out of *Things Fall Apart*, some conversation that I would develop a little more, but no more."⁷⁷ On the other, Achebe defends his works, saying "I don't object to critics at all. What I do object to is people preaching from a position of ignorance, and this you'll find quite a lot in the criticisms that are made of my work."⁷⁸

Conclusion

This chapter focused on Chinua Achebe and his contributions to Igbo studies in particular, and African studies in general. The focus of the analysis was limited to Achebe's first three novels that treated the Euro-African colonial encounter and the results emerging from the meeting of the two cultures. Through Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, we glean ideas about what Igbo society was like before British conquest of the area and the conflicts that marked the processes of setting of colonial administration. Through *No Longer at Ease*, historians have also learnt about how the Euro-African encounter has continued to affect postcolonial order.⁷⁹

Overall, Achebe, whose writings are subjects of undergraduate and graduate studies around the world, was largely inspired by his desire to reevaluate his African culture, which he has successfully done. Scholars of all disciplines have deepened their knowledge about Igbo ways of life in particular, and African in general, through his novels and other works: *Things Fall Apart* (1958); *No Longer at Ease* (1960); *The Sacrificial Egg and Other Stories* (1962); *A Man of the People* (1966); *Chike and the River* (1966); *Beware, Soul Brother* (1971); *Girls at War* (1972); *How the Leopard Got His Claws* (1972); *Christmas in Biafra* (1973); *Morning Yet on Creation Day* (1975); *The Drum* (1977); *The Flute* (1977); *Literature and Society* (1980); *The Trouble With Nigeria* (1983); *The World of Ogbanije* (1986); *Anthills of the Savanna* (1987); *The University and Leadership Factor in Nigeria* (1988); *Hopes and Impediments* (1989); *Nigerian Topics* (1989); *The Heinemann Book of Contemporary African Short Stories* (1992); *Home and Exile* (2000); *Collected Poems* (2004); and *The Education of a British Protected Child* (2009).

One of Achebe's most outstanding contributions to the African intellectual tradition is the provision of a superior context of imagining social change. He

does not conceive social change as a given, or something that materializes out of nowhere. Rather, Achebe sees social change as a dynamic process, a negotiation in which the old and new values are engaged in a dialogue. This framework of imaging also allows the learner to quickly grasp similarities and differences between societies. In this regard, Francis Mogu, an Ogoja indigene, notes that “a reading of *Things Fall Apart* [drew] immediate parallels and revealed the multiple similarities between the Igbo people and Ejaghams of Ogoja.”⁸⁰ Indeed, Achebe, according to Michael Ondaatje “is one of the few writers of our time who has touched us with a code of values that will never be ironic. This great voice.”⁸¹

Notes

1. This research was made possible with funds from the University of Louisville’s Project Initiation Fund, Dean’s Incentive Fund, History Department’s Dale Fund, and Pan African Studies Faculty research fund.
2. Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (London: Heinemann, 1958) remains the most cited and widely read historical novel in African Studies. It has sold over 8 million copies and translated into more than 40 languages worldwide.
3. For a cursory review of the Marxist view, see for instance, Sidney Hook, *From Hegel to Marx, Studies in the Intellectual Development of Karl Marx* (Ann Arbor, MI: Michigan University Press, 1968); S. Hook and Louise Snyder, *World Communism: Key Documentary Material* (New Jersey: Princeton Press, 1962).
4. W. Rodney, *How Europe Under-developed Africa* (Washington, DC: Harvard University Press 1972), 20–67.
5. Robert Knox, *The Races of Men: A Fragment* (1850; reprint, Philadelphia, PA: Lea and Blanchard, 1950), 149–150.
6. Chinua Achebe, *Morning Yet on Creation Day* (New York: Anchor Press and Doubleday, 1975), 83.
7. Chinua Achebe, “Achebe Accountable to Our Society” interview with Ernest and Pat Emenyonu, *Africa Report* (May 1972), 21.
8. Chinua Achebe, *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays* (New York: Anchor Books, 1988), 31–33. See also Kwame Anthony Appiah, “Introduction,” in Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1992 edition), xvi; and Gordon Lewis, “Interview with Chinua Achebe” (1995), in Bernth Lindfors, ed., *Conversations with Chinua Achebe* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1997), 185–191.
9. Nigerian National Archives Enugu (hereafter NNAE) OP 117, ONPROF 7/12/18. “Conflict between Christian and Pagan Customs” (1925).
10. For a detailed read on this, see David Abernethy, *The Dilemma of Popular Education* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1969), 40, 62–63. As Abernethy explains, the Igbo people eventually embraced Western education for economic reasons.
11. NNAE, OP 2057 12/1/1351. “Maw Juju Society Amawbia, Awka Division” (1940). For expert studies on Igbo masks and masquerade traditions see the works of Simon Ottenberg, an eminent scholar of Igbo studies, compiled by Toyin Falola in T. Falola, ed., *Igbo Art and Culture and Other Essays by Simon Ottenberg* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2006).
12. NNAE, OP 1301 ONDIST 12/1/854. “Conflict between Christian Rites and Pagan Customs” (1935). This conflict was not peculiar to the Igbo alone. For an analysis that incorporates the whole of Africa, see John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1991).

13. NNAE, OW 76, RIVPROF 8/3/29, "Christian-Pagan Conflict in" (1915). This historical reality has been analyzed by Felix K. Ekechi, *Missionary Enterprise and Rivalry in Igboland, 1857–1914* (London: Frank Cass, 1972). See also Felix K. Ekechi, "Colonialism and Christianity in West Africa: The Igbo Case, 1900–1915" *Journal of African History* 12, no. 1 (1971): 103–115.
14. See G. T. Basden, *Among the Ibos of Nigeria* (1921; reprint, London: Frank Cass, 1966); *Niger Ibos: A Description of the Primitive Life, Customs, and Animistic Beliefs and Customs of the Igbo People of Nigeria* (1938; reprint, London: Frank Cass, 1966).
15. Ezenwa-Ohaeto, *Chinua Achebe: A Biography* (Oxford: James Currey, 1997), 6.
16. Chinua Achebe, interview with Nkosi and Soyinka, in *Conversation*, 14.
17. Chinua Achebe, interview with Gordon Lewis, in *Conversation*, 187.
18. Achebe cited by Ezenwa-Ohaeto, *Achebe*, 13.
19. See C. L. Innes, *Chinua Achebe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), xv.
20. Chinua Achebe, *Anthills of the Savannah*, (1987; reprint, New York: Anchor Books, 1988), 114.
21. Eckhard Breiting, Book Review of *Chinua Achebe: A Biography* by Ezenwa-Ohaeto. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997 in *Research in African Literature* 31, no. 2 (Summer 2000): 210–213.
22. For a recent analysis on this, see R. C. Njoku, *African Cultural Values: Igbo Political Leadership in Colonial Nigeria, 1900–1966* (New York: Routledge, 2006), especially 152.
23. NNAE, OP 1301 ONDIST 12/1/854. "Conflict between Christian Rites and Pagan Customs" (1935).
24. Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 124.
25. Chinua Achebe, *No Longer at Ease* (London: Heinemann, 1960), 81.
26. See NNAE, CALPROF 345/2-7/1/420 "Leopard Society, Court Cases" (1946–1954). For a very erudite analysis on this, see A. E. Afigbo, "The Eastern Provinces under Colonial Rule," in O. Ikime, ed., *Groundwork of Nigerian History* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Heinemann Educational Books, 1980), 410–428.
27. Lewis Nkosi and Wole Soyinka, Interview with Chinua Achebe, republished in B. Lindfors, ed., *Conversation with Chinua Achebe* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1997), 13. For a similar comment, see *Sunday Nation* (Nairobi), January 15, 1967, 15–16.
28. See Michael J. C. Echeruo, *Victorian Lagos: Aspects of Nineteenth-Century Lagos Life* (London: Macmillan, 1977).
29. Alan Hill cited in Ezenwa-Ohaeto, *Achebe*, 65.
30. See *The Times Literary Supplement*, "The Centre Cannot Hold," (London, Friday June 20, 1958), 341.
31. W. B. Yeats, "The Second Coming," in W. B. Yeats, ed., *The Collected Poems by W. B. Yeats* (1933; reprint, London: Macmillan, 1979). See also Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, cloth edition (London: Heinemann, 1958), back cover.
32. Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 125.
33. Sidney Hook, *The Hero in History: A Study in Limitation and Possibility* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1955).
34. Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 113.
35. Achebe, *No Longer at Ease*.
36. See C. Achebe, *The Trouble with Nigeria* (Enugu, Nigeria: Fourth Dimension, 1983); *Anthills of the Savannah*.
37. Chinua Achebe, *Arrow of God* (London: Heinemann, 1964), 215.

38. *Ibid.*, 215.
39. NNAE, OW 68, RIVPROF 8/3/22 and RIVPROF 8/3/23, "Courts, Native – Issue of Warrants" (1915); OW 225, RIVPROF 8/9/191. "Suspension and Cancellation of Warrants" (1921); and NNAE, OWDIST 19. "Warrant Chiefs Registers," 1906–1947. See also A. E. Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs: Indirect Rule in Southeastern Nigeria 1891-1929* (New York: Humanities Press and London: Longmans, 1972).
40. *The Times Literary Supplement* (London, September 16, 1975), 791.
41. 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 (2001–2002), 121–143.
42. For a recent analysis on this, see Clement Okafor, "Igbo Cosmology and the Parameters of Individual Accomplishments in *Things Fall Apart*," in Ernest N. Emenyonu, ed., *Emerging Perspectives on Chinua Achebe*, vol. 1 (Trenton, NJ: African World Press, 2004), 85–96.
43. Achebe, interview with Ernest and Pat Emenyonu, 42.
44. NNAE, Degdist 7/7/1. "Captain Wauton's Papers" (1919). See also D. C. Ohadike, *The Ekumeku Movement: Western Igbo Resistance to the British Conquest of Nigeria, 1883–1914* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1991), 30–31.
45. Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 26.
46. For a detailed analysis of the role of Igbo women as culture carriers and historians, see G. Chuku, "Igbo Women and the Production of Historical Knowledge: An Examination of Unwritten and Written Sources," in Toyin Falola and Adam Paddock, eds., *Emergent Themes and Methods in African Studies: Essays in Honor of Adiele E. Afigbo* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2009), 255–278.
47. Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 53–54, 75, 96–99.
48. Achebe cited in Bernth Lindfors, "Introduction," in Lindfors, ed., *Conversation with Chinua Achebe* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1997), ix–x.
49. NNAE, EP 15626, CSE 1/85/7523, "Status of and Development of Women's Organizations" (1937); C Conf. I. CALPROF 4/6/1, "Women-Husband: Steps to Stop the Practice" (1917). For more on this, see V. Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), especially 39–48; I. Nzimiro, *Studies in Ibo Political Systems: Chieftaincy and Politics in Four Niger States* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1972), 21–133.
50. See G. Chuku, *Igbo Women and Economic Transformation in Southeastern Nigeria, 1900–1960* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 21.
51. Achebe, "Balancing Male and Female Principles," 131. For details on this culture, see K. Okonjo, "The Dual-Sex Political System in Operation: Igbo Women and Community Politics in Midwestern Nigeria," in N. Hafkin and E. G. Bay, eds., *Women in Africa: Studies in Social and Economic Change* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1976), 47–51.
52. Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 132.
53. Lindfors has identified this liberal use of proverbs in other works by Achebe. See Bernth Lindfors, "Achebe's African Parable," in Emenyonu, ed., *Emerging Perspectives on Chinua Achebe*, vol. 1 (Trenton, NJ: African World Press, 2004), 277–292.
54. Chinua Achebe, interview with Kalu Ogbaa in 1980, published in *Research in African Literature* 12 (1981), 1–13.
55. Emeka Nwabueze, "Theoretical Construction and Constructive Theorizing on the Execution of Ikemefuna in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*: A Study in Critical Dualism," *Research in African Literature* 31, no. 2 (2000), 163.

56. Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 4.
57. Adiele Afigbo, "Towards a Study of Weaponry in Traditional Igbo," in Toyin Falola, ed., *Igbo History and Society: Essays of Adiele Afigbo* (Trenton, NJ: African World Press, 2005), 307–319.
58. Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 6–9.
59. Achebe, *Arrow of God*, 105.
60. See Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 124; Ode Ogede, *Achebe and the Politics of Representation* (Trenton, NJ: African World Press, 2001), 21.
61. Achebe, *Arrow of God*, 104–105.
62. Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 124–125.
63. G. I. C. Eluwa, "African Nationalist Movements: An Analytical Survey," *Alvama Journal of the Social Sciences* 1 no. 1 (1981): 29.
64. For primary sources on Jaja, see NNAE, CALPROF 53/1/1: "Regarding the Accounts of," 1819; EP 19230, CSE 1/85/9515, 1942.
65. Terrence O. Ranger, "African Initiatives and Resistance in the Face of Partition and Conquest," in Adu Boahen, ed., *Africa under Colonial Domination: 1880–1935* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985), 45–62.
66. Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 143.
67. *Ibid.*, 137.
68. Achebe, *Arrow of God*, 68.
69. Achebe, "Balancing Male and Female Principles," 125.
70. Achebe, interview with Ernest and Pat Emenyonu, 31.
71. See Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830–1914* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988).
72. Sir Henry Johnston, *British Central Africa* (London: Methuen, 1897), cited in Robert Kimbrough, ed., *The Heart of Darkness by Joseph Conrad – an Authoritative Text Background and Source Essays in Criticism* (New York: WW Norton and Company Inc, 1963), 272.
73. See E. Isichei, *The Ibo People and the Europeans: The Genesis of a Relationship - To 1906* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973), 109–112; *A History of the Igbo People* (London: Macmillan, 1976), 119.
74. Achebe, *Arrow of God*, 85–86.
75. Ogede, *Politics of Representation*, 20, 24.
76. *The Times Literary Supplement*, "The Centre Cannot Hold," (London, Friday June 20, 1958), 341.
77. Achebe, interview with Ernest and Pat Emenyonu, 43.
78. Achebe, interview with Nkosi and Sonyinka, *Conversations*, 16.
79. In his subsequent works he continued to analyze the modern Nigerian society in fictional style. For instance, see Achebe, *Anthills of the Savannah*.
80. Francis Ibe Mogu, "Beyond the Igbo Cosmos: Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* as a Cross-Cultural Novel," in Emenyonu, ed., *Emerging Perspectives on Chinua Achebe*, vol. 1 (Trenton, NJ: African World Press, 2004), 25.
81. Michael Ondaatje, cited on the back cover of Achebe, *Arrow of God*; 1989 impression.

CHAPTER 10

Nwanyibuife Flora Nwapa, Igbo Culture and Women's Studies

Gloria Chuku

Introduction

This chapter evaluates the principal themes in *Nwanyibuife*¹ Flora Nwapa's literary production and historical lessons that could be drawn from her writings.² While acknowledging the intellectual contributions of Nwapa to the development of scholarly focus on Igbo culture and women's studies, the chapter also reconciles the contradictions in her fictional representations of women vis-à-vis their actual historical experiences and their place within Oguta's and Igbo worldviews. For instance, how do we reconcile the primacy of motherhood in Oguta and Igbo society with Nwapa's elevation of economic power as the ultimate source of fulfillment for women, especially childless ones? The Igbo condemned adultery, which could attract severe punishments such as death and enslavement, yet in Nwapa's fictional world, it was condoned as long as it resulted in motherhood. She represents Uhamiri, the Goddess of Oguta Lake, as a deity that denies her worshippers the gift of procreation. Yet in reality, the goddess has been credited with the gift of fertility and human reproduction among other functions she performed.

For a number of reasons, Flora Nwanzuruahu Nwapa was destined to make a major contribution in the study of Igbo women and their culture, and in the development of African women's studies. Her family background and the historical contexts in which she grew up, prepared Flora for the tasks ahead. Growing up in a society that was witnessing enormous transformation, Flora Nwapa was able to successfully straddle the indigenous, colonial and postcolonial worlds of the Oguta (Ugwuta), the Igbo and Nigerians.³ As demonstrated below, different aspects of these worlds molded Flora's personality, and also informed her literary imagination and creativity.

Childhood and Education

Born the first daughter of six children (five girls and a son) at Oguta on January 13, 1931, Flora Nwapa's childhood coincided with the highpoint of British colonialism in Nigeria with its devastation, economic exploitation and increased militarization, especially during the WWII years.⁴ Colonial Oguta/Igbo and Nigeria, among other things, also witnessed the introduction of capital and new technologies, increased formal education and the involvement of women in the export–import economy. Many Igbo women including those from Oguta took advantage of favorable innovations introduced during this period and distinguished themselves as local distributors of imports, suppliers of export goods and as international merchants.⁵ The colonial conditions in these areas, and images and life experiences of generations of economically independent and influential Oguta women had a profound impact on Flora as a child, an adult and a writer.⁶ In fact, Nwapa confirmed the impact of these powerful and assertive female figures on her career as a writer in an interview she granted to Ezenwa-Ohaeto: “From my childhood I lived among very strong women: my two grandmothers and their co-wives [indomitable women who] gained economic power through trade [and who] influenced my writing and that is why I project women as great achievers. I did not see women as second-class citizens.”⁷ The image of subordinate, passive and vulnerable women was not what Flora saw growing up in Oguta.

Oguta sociocultural realities and worldview also influenced Nwapa's writings. The socialization and early education of children through moonlight stories, folktales, proverbs, rites of passage, songs and dances were part of Oguta's socio-cultural realities that benefited Flora Nwapa, and also influenced her literary imagination and creativity. She acknowledged in many interviews she granted to scholars and journalists that Oguta's oral traditions, customs and beliefs were the foundation of her knowledge-base and sources of inspiration. In one of those interviews, Nwapa noted that as a child, she was an avid listener to notable female verbal wordsmiths who told lots of stories, including moonlight ones.⁸ The female deity of Uhamiri that was highly respected within Oguta and the surrounding areas, and which Flora Nwapa wrote about is another example of how Oguta worldview influenced her writings.⁹ Oguta people believed that the lake goddess was their protector from evils and misfortunes, and also a source of life, fortune and wealth. From the above picture, it is not a surprise that Nwapa attempted to reflect in her writings the centrality of women to the economic and cultural life of their society.

Flora was born to Christian and Western-educated parents of Oguta in present-day Imo state of Nigeria. Her parents, Chief Christopher Ijeoma and Lady Martha Onyenma Nwapa, were both ex-teachers and traders when Flora was born. Christopher worked for the United African Company (UAC)-Nigeria and later became its agents. After resigning from her teaching job following her marriage to Christopher, Martha pursued petty trade in local foodstuffs. With her industriousness and family support, she eventually became a successful dealer

in imported textiles including George wrappers and coral beads, which earned her the title “The Coral Queen.”¹⁰ Both Christopher and Martha believed in the Igbo philosophical dictum that *Nwanyibuife*—a woman is something—and thus invested their resources in the education of their children irrespective of their sexes.

Flora started her educational career at Central School, Oguta, in 1936. This was a time when many Igbo parents invested only in the education of their male children. They believed that any investment on the education of a female child was a waste since she would eventually be married off. But Flora's parents thought otherwise. When her parents relocated to Port Harcourt city, Flora attended Archdeacon Crowther Memorial Girls School, Elelenwa, Port Harcourt (1944). Her educational pursuit took Flora to Lagos, where she enrolled at the Church Missionary Society Girls School, Lagos (1949–1950), and later graduated from the prestigious Queen's College, Lagos, in 1951. Upon graduation, Flora taught at Priscilla Memorial Grammar School, Oguta (1952).¹¹ With successful passing of her School Certificate Examinations and the General Certificate of Education (London), Flora secured an admission at the University College, Ibadan, in 1953 to study English, History and Geography. She earned her BA degree in 1957. Subsequently, she obtained a Diploma in Education from the University of Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1958. She studied public relations, fund raising and alumni administration at Northwestern University, Evanston (IL, USA) in 1965 on a Ford Foundation and USA State Department scholarship. She also studied university administration in the United Kingdom on a British Council grant.

Service, Business and Political Activities

Flora Nwapa's educational background and family upbringing solidly groomed her for the many important roles she played in Igbo society and Africa at large, which included a teacher, education officer, a university assistant registrar, an administrator, a novelist, an author, a poet, a playwright, a publisher and an entrepreneur as well as a wife and a mother. After her educational pursuits at Scotland, Flora served as an education officer at Calabar, Nigeria, in 1958. In 1959, she taught at Queen's College, Enugu (Nigeria). Nwapa served as an assistant registrar at the University of Lagos, in Nigeria, 1962–1967. While in Lagos, she became actively involved in the affairs of the Society of Nigerian Authors, and served as its secretary, when Chinua Achebe was the president.¹² With the outbreak of the Biafra–Nigeria War in 1967, Nwapa left Lagos for her homeland in the Eastern Region of Nigeria. Soon after, she married her hometown industrialist Gogo Nwakuche. They were blessed with two children, Uzoma (son, 1969) and Amede (second daughter, 1971). Nwapa had her first child Ejine in 1959 with Gogo Chu Nzeribe, who was a trade unionist from Oguta. Like a typical Igbo woman, she admirably combined motherhood with her role as a wife, an administrator and a writer.

In 1967, the Federal Military Government, headed by General Yakubu Gowon, created 12 states out of the previous five regional governments. East

Central State was one of those states, and the only state predominated by the Igbo. Nwapa was appointed to the Executive Council of the East Central State Government by Ukpabi Asika, the state's sole administrator, to serve as Commissioner for Health and Social Welfare in 1970; and later for Lands, Survey and Urban Development in 1971–1975.¹³ She became the first Igbo woman to serve in this capacity. Being a commissioner in the immediate postwar Eastern Region, the epicenter of the Biafra–Nigeria War, with enormous devastation, was a difficult task. But Nwapa worked hard and earned her reputation as a diligent public administrator.

Another area in which Nwapa demonstrated her pursuit for excellence and diligence was publishing industry. With her husband, Flora established a printing press, Tana Press Limited, and a publishing company, Flora Nwapa Books and Company, in 1977. She thus became the first Nigerian woman to own and manage a publishing company.¹⁴ As the editor-in-chief, and guided by the principles of fair play and ethical standards, she read all the manuscripts submitted to her company and was responsible for making the decision of selecting the ones to be published. The two companies printed and published mainly children's books, novels and short stories, written by both men and women, but more committed to female than male writers.¹⁵ The emphasis to publish children's books was based on Nwapa's informed determination that in an era of television, it was prudent to encourage Nigerian children to spend more time reading about their cultural heritage and societal values than on watching television. She stated: "This is the era of television. Children no longer have the time to sit around the fireside and listen to stories . . . We must make our children understand that they have a heritage and we can only do that through books."¹⁶

Publishing generally is not an easy task, especially in Nigeria during the time of Flora Nwapa. Explaining some of the difficulties her publishing company faced, including financial constraints and lack of encouragement and support from the ministries of education in Nigeria, Nwapa indicated that between the inception of her company and 1988, they had published 20 children's books, and out of these, only two were selling fairly well, and regrettably, none had been adopted in Nigerian schools despite their quality standards and relevance.¹⁷ In spite of these problems and the barriers posed by her gender, Nwapa triumphed as a trailblazer in the Nigerian publishing industry through producing numerous books, and in the nurturing of young talents, some of whom later became award-winning authors.¹⁸

Scholarship and Intellectual Contribution

Flora Nwapa was the first African woman to publish a novel, *Efuru* (1966), in English with a London-based company. While many regarded her as the mother of African women's literature and the first African woman to be published internationally, others variously referred to her as "the Mother of the African novel by women," "the ancestor and literary foremother," "the doyenne of African female writers," and "Nigeria's (and Africa's) first published female novelist in English."¹⁹

In the period of 20 years that spanned her career as a writer, 1966–1986, and before she died on October 16, 1993, Nwapa produced five novels.²⁰ A versatile writer, Nwapa also published short stories,²¹ children's literature,²² and plays.²³ She had also published a book of poetry.²⁴ She paved the way for other Nigerian women writers such as Buchi Emecheta, Adaora Lily Ulasi and Ifeoma Okoye; and positively influenced Nigerian writers who now write with more gender sensitivity on sociopolitical, economic and other societal issues.²⁵ Unlike male Nigerian novelists such as Cyprian Ekwensi, Chinua Achebe, Chukwuemeka Ike and Wole Soyinka, who in their earlier fictional writings presented images of one-dimensional, subordinate and voiceless African women as appendages to the men, Nwapa gave women a voice. She presented them as strong, brave, courageous, independent and hardworking members of society whose roles were complementary to and sometimes independent of men.

Based only on five of her novels and accessible articles, Flora Nwapa's intellectual legacy is examined in this chapter under eight broad categories. These include the Igbo world of women; marriage, motherhood and childlessness; polygyny, levirate and widowhood; the Uhamiri Goddess; gender, colonialism and Western education; women and the Biafra–Nigeria War; women's survival strategies; and her contribution to African women's studies.

The Igbo World of Women

Flora Nwapa successfully recorded in her works the journey and experiences of Igbo women through life, a journey that spans from the early colonial period through the brutal Biafra–Nigeria War and to postwar Nigeria. Examining the various sociocultural, political and economic changes that affected women throughout these periods, she impressively adopted a historical approach through the chronological arrangement of her five novels. More specifically, she captured the evolution of Igbo society and Nigeria through the lives and status of women, commenting on important historical developments such as the political awakening of the 1930s and the struggles of Igbo women, the WWII experience, pockets of resistance movements and the intensification of nationalist activities of the 1940s and 1950s, the destruction and devastation associated with the Biafra–Nigeria War, and the rampant corruption of the 1970s and 1980s.

Incisively, Nwapa's novels are gender-oriented, child-directed and community-centered in their specificity. They capture the experiences of women and their interactions with one another, as well as with men within a communal context. Nwapa presented individual women's experiences and interests as they were subsumed in group's ones within the community. She covered familial and community experiences of women. Important social institutions related to women such as marriage, childbirth and burial rites, age grades and women's organizations, as well as motherhood, storytelling and trading are emphasized in Nwapa's novels. It is not surprising that the dominant themes in Nwapa's gender-oriented novels include women's status and complementary gender roles in the family and society; their experiences under marriage and during divorce; how motherhood,

childlessness, polygyny, levirate and widowhood practices affected them; and their coping and survival strategies.

The ultimate goal of Nwapa's novels was to restore the dignity of African women and the appreciation of their diverse roles and contributions to society. Thus, in her novels, she discussed women's lives, their culture and role in the family, at the village level, and the larger society. Women's roles as wives, mothers raising and nurturing their children to responsible adults, and as custodians and enforcers of community norms and expectations were highlighted. Scenes in her novels are thus dramatized in such arenas as the home, stream and marketplace, the main centers of women's social and economic activities in traditional Igbo culture. Nwapa examined the expected roles of an Igbo woman from childhood through adulthood and old age. From an early age, a girl was taught how to talk, sit, dress and act. She was supposed to conduct herself according to society's expectations. Everything about her socialization as a girl was built around marriage and procreation. The girl was taught how to cook and provide domestic services to her husband. She was also trained in her mother's trade or sent away as an apprentice to learn other trades that would enable her take care of her children when that time came. As part of the socialization process, she was also subjected to circumcision and fattening processes in preparation for marriage. These socialization processes are not particular to the Igbo, but also typical of many African societies.

Flora Nwapa saw circumcision as a bath, which all adult women needed to take in order to become clean and ready for marriage and childbearing. Female circumcision was relatively widespread in Igbo society, at least, before the entrenchment of Western values through colonialism and Christianity. Elderly women helped to enforce and perpetuate this practice by telling stories about the dire consequences of not being circumcised and how this could result in mishaps such as miscarriage and death of mother and child. Unlike Nwapa, who saw circumcision as a process of purification and ritual cleansing, Western feminist scholars explain it through myths that perceive women as being inferior and unclean, and therefore subordinate to men. The issue of female circumcision in Africa has generated one of the hottest debates in Western discourse, especially among feminist scholars.²⁶ Inasmuch as one condemns the practice and would like to see its total eradication on the continent, the manner in which some Western feminists pursued the problem is rather discomfiting. Some of them have presented female circumcision as the prime point of reference in the West and North America vis-à-vis African women. To them, female circumcision takes precedence over other serious problems facing African women. As a result, it appears that the only problem they can identify African women with is the so-called genital mutilation. Other problems confronting African women, especially their living conditions and struggle for survival, are often ignored or downplayed.

Through her novels, Nwapa recreated the world of women not only in rural African communities, but also in the city and contemporary African society. She presented women through their voices. Her representation of the elderly women seen in such female characters as Efuru, Idu, Ajanupu, Ojiugo, Nwasobi and

Uzoечи evoked feelings of nostalgia about strong, assertive and independent women in Oguta's and Igbo history. These women were true representatives of womanhood in Igbo and African societies, who strove to maintain their tradition and cultural values. Unlike these women, their contemporary counterparts, captured in Nwapa's *One Is Enough* and *Women Are Different*, were less tolerant of sociocultural constraints such as polygyny, arranged marriages, infidelity in marriage, and abandonment. The boundaries and confinements of women's lives—their customs, their domestic chores and roles, their market rivalries, their anxieties about marriage, their husbands, families and children as well as societal expectations—are meticulously recorded, especially in *Efuru* and *Idu*.

Though the main concerns of African women were bearing children and being good mothers, Nwapa's female characters diverged from these role stereotypes by not allowing their lives to be defined solely through their maternal function. Using the characters of *Efuru* and *Amaka* as examples, Nwapa clearly demonstrated that fecundity might be important to women in Igbo life and African society, but it was not everything. She gave her characters a voice and identity, as well as wisdom, imagination and intellect in dealing with human affairs. As Elleke Boehmer noted:

In both *Efuru* and *Idu*, Nwapa's interest is in the routines and rituals of everyday life specifically within women's compounds. Women press into Nwapa's narrative as speakers, actors, decision-makers, brokers of opinion and market prices and unofficial jurors in their communities. But Nwapa's specific intervention as a writer goes beyond her interest in women subjects. What also distinguishes her writing from others in the "Igbo school" are the ways in which she has used choric language to enable and to empower her representation, creating the effect of a women's verbal presence within her text, while bringing home her subject matter by evoking the vocalicity of women's everyday existence.²⁷

Nwapa presented a view that is contrary to the subordinate and lowly status of African women generally portrayed in Western feminist literature. Moreover, the representation of women by male writers before Nwapa as docile, subservient, mindless individuals who existed only for the services they provided inside the home for their children and husbands, distorts the fact that women in Africa exercised reasonable degrees of independent authority in society. Nwapa showed where and in what ways women wielded verbal and actual power. Women in Igbo society had relevant powers that were exercised individually and collectively, and brokered by such collective women's associations as the *Umuada* (daughters of the lineage), *Otu Ndiataradi/Inyemedi* (lineage wives), *Otu Ndinyom/Ndome* (women solidarity), title societies and age grades.²⁸ Individually, African women commanded power through marriage and childbirth, spirituality and economic means (mostly acquired through trade).

The control of the marketplace and their participation in trade empowered women in Igbo society and Nigeria.²⁹ *Efuru*, *Idu* and *Amaka*, for instance, developed trading prowess, business acumen and economic prudence. These were

virtues highly regarded in Oguta community and Igbo society at large. As a result, these women were respected for their accumulated skills and generosity even when they had no children. The economic success of Efurū, for example, reverberated throughout the length and breadth of her community. She became an embodiment of kindness and generosity and was highly respected even though she was unsuccessful in other vital areas—unable to either stay married or have children. The centrality of trade in the economic, social and political empowerment of women explains why some of them, after acquiring Western education, abandoned their careers for trading. Amaka, after acquiring formal education to become a teacher, abandoned teaching for trading and contracting; Adaobi left her nursing career for trading; and even Flora Nwapa's mother, Madam Martha Nwapa, resigned her teaching job to become a trader.³⁰

Instructively, even when women commanded power through economic means, it was limited due to patriarchal practices that affected matters of trade and the women's role as wives.³¹ It was only when women discarded society-assigned gender roles that tend to marginalize them and assumed those ones with spiritual powers such as priestesses and others exemplified by the Uhamiri, that they were able to enter arenas where male authority had little effect. As priestesses, for instance, women had the spiritual powers to act as intermediaries between the human world and the spirit world, and by so doing, controlled the actions of men and women. They acted on behalf of the community in situations of danger, impending war, famine or pestilence of any kind. They were preoccupied with maintaining peace in the community. They had powers to cure the sick and the afflicted. Because their powers were derived from the supernatural, which they could not misuse, priestesses and female priests had authority over men and women.

In some other ways, women asserted their rights and power through defiance, self-determination and courage. Efurū, for example, became a heroine by marrying without parental consent; she was defiant and unafraid. She also left her husband when he proved unworthy. Similarly, the character of elderly women such as Ajanupu in *Efurū* and Ojugo in *Idu* did not portray subordination of women in Igbo society but rather exemplified qualities similar to Efurū's decisiveness, outspokenness, self-sufficiency and independence. We must note that not every woman in Igbo region had these qualities, and was able to negotiate favorable positions in society. Many suffered patriarchal domination and exploitation.

Marriage, Motherhood and Childlessness

Themes of marriage, motherhood and childlessness feature prominently in Flora Nwapa's works, especially in *Efurū*, *Idu* and *One Is Enough*. In Africa, the most important reason for marriage is procreation. Marriage and procreation are indispensable in creating new family units and in increasing the population of the family and the community. The emphasis and joy of childbearing on one hand, and the anguish of the tragedy of childlessness on the other, are all indications of

the overwhelming significance of biological motherhood in all aspects of African traditional life. In almost all her novels, Nwapa emphasized the overwhelming biological demands of the Igbo society from wives. In *Efuru*, for instance, Efuru's anxious female neighbors concerned with the state of her childlessness queried: "Marriage must be fruitful. Of what use is it if it is not fruitful. Of what use is it if your husband licks your body, worships you and buys everything in the market for you and you are not productive?"³² Similarly, in *Idu*, Nwasobi, emphasizing the importance of children in Oguta and Igbo society, stated: "What we are all praying for is children. What else do we want if we have children?"³³ A woman's status in her family and society was enhanced and guaranteed through her children. Children were and are still a source of joy, pride and fulfillment to their parents.

The importance attached to children underscores actions (at times extreme ones) taken by women and even men to remedy the situation of childlessness and why such condition attracted malicious gossips from anxious relatives and neighbors in Igbo society. In *Efuru*, Efuru encouraged her husband to marry more wives. Also in *Idu*, the heroine forced Adiewere, her husband, to take a second wife, who later left when Idu became pregnant and the new wife was ignored.³⁴ Adultery in Igbo society was a serious issue that could be punishable by death, but it was condoned when the purpose was to have a child in a childless marriage. For example, the character of Ojiugo left Amarajeme, her husband, and lived with another man who made her pregnant. As an extreme reaction and in great humiliation, Amarajeme hung himself, an action, coupled with his impotency, exemplified ultimate abominations in Igbo society.

Similarly, Amaka, the main character in *One Is Enough*, was childless in her marriage. After her mother-in-law threw her out of her home in Onitsha, Amaka was forced to move to Lagos, where by seducing Izu, a priest, she became pregnant and fulfilled her role as a woman. When a nun came to inform Amaka of Izu's return to the church, she said "I shall forever remain grateful to him for proving to the world that I am a mother as well as a woman."³⁵ Ironically, even when Amaka felt accomplished with her new life-style in Lagos, her mother never stopped putting pressure on her to get married. This is because, in a pro-marriage society such as Igbo or Nigeria, the issues of marriage and being marriageable were the main preoccupation of many women and still are a serious challenge if one remains unmarried or worse yet childless. Irrespective of one's class or academic accomplishments, an unmarried or childless woman or one who does not have male children is seen as a failure in Igbo society.³⁶

Motherhood was and still is a yardstick for recognition and to measure success. In other words, motherhood defines womanhood, and is very crucial to a woman's status in African society. For the African woman, motherhood is supreme. In fact, one could say that in patriarchal African societies, a woman's humanity hinges on the ability to have children and raise them to become meaningful members of society. Whereas a husband could be dispensed with, children cannot. This explains the values attached to motherhood with its status recognition in African society. The primacy of children in African marriage institution stems from the

fact that they are regarded by their parents as social security, expected to take adequate care of their parents when they are aged.³⁷

Nwapa's heroines sometimes contradicted the importance attached to motherhood in Igbo and African societies. It was un-Igbo and un-African for women to choose their husbands over their children. In most cases, women shoulder abusive marriages because of their children. Most women lived for their children and not for their husbands, especially in polygynous and abusive marriages. Nevertheless, Idu willed herself to die to follow her dead husband instead of staying alive to take care of her son Ijioma and the unborn one because of the love that existed between the two of them.³⁸ Here, husband–wife bond outweighed mother–child bond. Although Idu's action might appeal to the Western ideal of absolute romantic love (as demonstrated in *Romeo and Juliet*), it would be viewed as abominable in Igbo society because it was essentially selfish and not directed to the greater good of her family and community. Also, Nwapa's ambivalent attitude to motherhood and marriage could be explained by her effort to console childless and single women and to reassure them that children and marriage do not necessarily bring happiness. A happy and a fruitful life could also be achieved through successful careers, and improving the quality of life as exemplified by the Uhamiri deity and her priestesses. Nwapa saw marriage as a desirable institution but detested a marital situation where women are neglected, humiliated or oppressed. In one of her essays, Nwapa asks:

Does this handicap, this childlessness make a woman less woman, less human? I do not think so. Efurū finds fulfillment by becoming the priestess of the water goddess. Therefore, we should create characters that are fulfilled and not weighed down by the shackles of marriage and motherhood.³⁹

Incidentally, most of the marriages in Nwapa's novels were unsuccessful, implying that something was wrong with marriage practices in a patriarchal society. Therefore, she advocated for a different type of marriage where each individual's worth is nurtured and maintained through respect, tolerance and mutual understanding.

Polygyny, Levirate and Widowhood

Traditions and customs instituted in African societies reflected the realities and prevailing conditions of the time. While some of them remained relevant insofar as they met the needs of the people who practiced them, others, though unpopular, were still in existence due to the insistence of the elderly. Polygyny, widowhood and levirate were among such practices. To many Igbo, polygyny and levirate served as safety nets or social securities. As one African writer succinctly put it, these cultural practices were established “to cater to those who found themselves . . . isolated, traumatized, or destabilized by the vicissitudes of life.”⁴⁰ Nwapa discussed polygyny and levirate in her novels as important aspects of Igbo culture. In patriarchal Igbo and African societies where a great emphasis was

placed on marriage and procreation, polygyny gave women the opportunity to get married and childless couples the opportunity to have children. Thus, the great emphasis placed on marriage and procreation encouraged polygyny. No matter the extent of wealth and educational qualifications, the greatest achievement of an Igbo/African woman was to get married and have children. This explains why even highly educated African women were not only willing to marry a man as third or even fourth wife, but childless wives also encouraged their husbands to marry young wives. It is a failure for a woman to remain unmarried and worse still, childless. As Nwapa stated in one of her novels, "*Di bu mma Ogori*," "a husband is a woman's beauty."⁴¹ However, we must note that at the same time, as women were put under surveillance by their families and the entire community, men's privileges included the practice of polygyny, sexual promiscuity and acquisition of concubines or mistresses.

Like many other African groups, the Igbo practiced levirate (wife inheritance). A man could inherit his deceased brother's wife/wives and a son could inherit his father's wife/wives upon the latter's death. In most cases, the inheritance amounted to taking over the deceased husband's obligations to his spouses. The new husband acquired domestic and sexual rights to the widow but not rights to filiate her children.⁴² The children belonged to the dead husband. The levirate system of marriage as practiced in Igbo society was seen as a welfare scheme for widows, especially young ones who could not stand on their own economically. Contrary to feminist criticisms of levirate as demeaning to and infringing on widows' rights, it was rarely forced on women. In Nwapa's *Idu*, the wealthy Idu could have objected being inherited by Ashiodu, her lazy and foolish brother-in-law after the premature death of her husband, Adiewere. But she also died. It is erroneous to suggest that her "death shortly after her spouse's demise is therefore a protest against the traditional custom of levirate."⁴³ Widows who objected to the practice were allowed their freedom. They could decide to remain single parents in their deceased husbands' compounds, or they might move away. They could also decide to remarry outside their dead husbands' families, in which case, arrangements would be made to refund the bridewealth. Bridewealth, which could be represented in any material objects, was what legitimized a marriage. A refund of it by the bride and her family signified the end of a marriage. Contrary to Western feminists' criticisms of polygyny and levirate for undermining women's rights, there were beneficial effects that sustained the practices. It was widowhood that has received widespread criticisms in Africa.

Widowhood is one of the cultural practices that subordinated women in Igbo and other African societies. Upon the death of her husband, a widow was usually treated very harshly as if she was responsible for her husband's death. Her hair was shaved with blades, and she was made to sit on cold floor for days and mourn her husband's death for months. She was placed under surveillance by the elderly women in the community and also by the *Umuada* (daughters of the lineage, especially the *isiokpu*—first daughters). Through widowhood practices, women effected and perpetuated their own subservience and dehumanization in Igbo society. Idu was openly rebellious by refusing to cut her beautiful hair and wear

black cloths to make her unattractive as was customarily demanded of a widow when her husband died. Tortured by a sense of loss and repelled by the idea of levirate, Idu was exposed to the loneliness of widowhood.⁴⁴

Similarly, women were the ones who most often taunted other women in situations of childlessness. Amaka was forced out of her matrimonial home by her mother-in-law. In the case of Efurū, other women pressured her mother-in-law to look for another wife for her son since Efurū could not have a child. Women gossiped a lot about Efurū's childlessness, and made her life miserable. It was women who attacked Nkoyenu for questioning her husband about having a son out of wedlock. They called her names such as "madwoman" and pressured her mother-in-law into forcing her back to her father's house. The perpetuation of cultural practices that debase women and undermine their status was and is still, unfortunately, carried out by elderly and privileged women more than by men. In this context, the solution to women's problems lies in their own hands. Women should work together as a social group in order to end inhibitive cultural practices in their society.

The Uhamiri Goddess

Uhamiri, also known as Ogbuide and the Woman of the Lake, is a powerful female deity worshipped by Oguta people. It is the supernatural element and symbolic representation of heroines in Nwapa's novels. Although she was beautiful, rich and worshipped, she was childless. In spite of her childlessness, she served as a model of a successful woman, strong, ageless, rich and powerful. In *Efurū* and *Idu*, Uhamiri has been presented as a powerful deity that offered her female worshippers self-fulfillment through economic empowerment rather than through motherhood.⁴⁵ She represented the feminine principle, playing both central and controlling roles in Oguta society. She embodied female beauty, power, assertiveness, independence and accomplishment. She legitimized female freedom and independence. Uhamiri gave her worshippers, as in the case of Efurū, emotional and psychological stability as well as economic power. Efurū as a surrogate mother, controlled and nurtured both men and women, and through that role, she felt fulfilled and empowered.⁴⁶ According to Oladele Taiwo, Nwapa has used Uhamiri to symbolize the freedom of all women and to vindicate their ability to free themselves from the shackles imposed by society in favor of men.⁴⁷ But, it is important to point out that only a few and exceptional women could liberate themselves through this process because Uhamiri does not call every woman to such an elevated position of serving her.

In Nwapa's fictional representation, Uhamiri was adopted for womanhood. Nwapa presented a portrait of a deity where only women functioned as devotees and worshippers. But in reality, both men and women worshipped Uhamiri. Another portrayal of Uhamiri by Nwapa was a deity that was incapable of giving children to those who sought her help because she had none herself. Yet oral traditions of Oguta and surrounding villages attest to the fact that men and women prayed to Uhamiri for children, life, prosperity and other favors, and such prayers were usually answered. In fact, female deities in Igbo society and other parts of

Africa were usually associated with the power of offering the gift of fertility and reproduction to their worshippers even when they had no husbands and could not bear children themselves. So, even in the absence of experiencing maternity, such female deities were often addressed “Mother” by their people and worshippers. What one takes out of the phenomenon of Uhamiri (whether in reality or in Nwapa’s fiction) is that the deity was committed to justice and fair play, and to the welfare of her people.

In *Never Again*, Uhamiri became the powerful source of refuge, who offered her protective hands to Oguta people when they ran to her during the Biafra–Nigeria War. Oguta people believed that the deity saved them from the invading federal soldiers, who entered the town through the Oguta Lake. In one of her novels, Nwapa stated: “Uhamiri heard the pleadings of her people. She did not turn a deaf ear . . . No invader coming by water had ever succeeded in Ugwuta.”⁴⁸ Nwapa used the phenomenon of Uhamiri to empower and uplift women. Yet she denied the child-giving role of the goddess, which in Igbo culture was the most important gift to humanity. As an Oguta woman *par excellence*, Uhamiri was beautiful, hardworking, rich, assertive, independent and married to the river god Urashi. Her protective, reproductive and productive functions explain why the deity is still relevant in Oguta and the surrounding areas.⁴⁹

Gender, Colonialism and Western Education

The premise of this section is that both colonialism and Western education had contradictory effects on Igbo and Nigerian women. On the one hand, they created opportunities that some women were able to exploit to become assertive and independent. Colonialism unleashed economic opportunities and social reforms that helped women improve their status in society.⁵⁰ Flora Nwapa used Efurú to illustrate the benefits of colonial innovations to Igbo women. Efurú’s commercial enterprise expanded when she became part of the colonial economic and international trading system. She also used her Western-trained friend, a physician, to carry on her charity work and her maternal duties in the community. However, on the other hand, colonialism and Western education undermined women’s status and subjected them to conditions of dependence. Along with its patriarchal practices and racist ideology, colonialism undermined African women’s status in society because certain colonial policies prevented women from migrating to the cities, and also denied them access to wage employment. New skills and resources were made available primarily to boys and men. Men also gained political advantage as customary sources of female power were ignored or undermined.⁵¹

While young men were encouraged to pursue their studies, young women were pressured by their families and societal expectations to marry early. Separate institutions for boys and girls existed in Nigeria until 1970, and in Christian schools, men and women were educated differently. Consequently, inherent contradictions affecting relations between men and women, especially marital relationships, became apparent. For example, while women’s education focused on virtues of an “ideal” wife—good behavior, cleanliness, Godliness, obedience, contentment, selflessness and hard work—men’s education was geared

toward producing professionals and leaders of modern society. No effort was made to train boys and young men to be responsible fathers and caring husbands. As a result, a good number of Nigerian men acquired the arrogance of a male-dominated Western society, which was reinforced by existing patriarchal sensibilities.

In *Women Are Different*, Flora Nwapa discussed the experiences of four friends: Rose, Agnes, Dora and Comfort (alias Musketeers) from their youthful days as classmates at Archdeacon Crowther Memorial Girls' School to adult life as modern women in different businesses and professions. Their difficulties, successes, failures and disappointments while striving to adapt to the challenges of the changing values of modern Nigeria were also examined. Nwapa used their experiences to stress inherent contradictions affecting male–female relationships in Nigeria. Dora, who trained as a nurse, moved into catering business and urban housing. Instead of joining his wife in her business, her husband Chris abandoned her for overseas study. He sold their house without her knowledge to pay for his education, and also married another woman overseas. Agnes married, and while having children, also pursued her higher education despite opposition from her husband. Though she succeeded in getting a degree in mathematics, she paid for it by going through the agonies of a broken marriage, single parenthood and emotional insecurity. With a higher degree in education, Rose became a teacher, then an education officer, and later, an executive in a private public relations firm. Having been deceived by three different men and without any children of her own, Rose went through pain and emotional distress.⁵² Generally, Western education inspired women, as seen in the three examples above, to take advantage of opportunities in modern society, embark on self-improvement and participate in national development.⁵³

However, Western presence (Christianity, formal education and colonialism) had negative effects on women's lives and on African society in general. The incursion of Western traditions and Christian religion did contribute to the erosion of traditional culture, lapses in the strictness attached to the proper upbringing of children and other negative traits in contemporary African family and society. In *Women Are Different*, Nwapa blamed colonialism, which broadened the vision of Nigerian women, for the tragic break-up of families. There was not a single successful marriage recorded for her characters and their children in the novel. She saw dysfunctional families and lack of nationalism as part of the colonial legacy. The Western cultural hegemony unleashed by colonialism had debilitating effects on women. It imposed Victorian gender norms that replaced the industrious and prosperous self-definition of Igbo and Nigerian women with a dependent status. Colonial education produced an elitist class of women, who became either assertive and independent, or subservient to their men. The latter were often turned into idle and housebound wives by their wealthy husbands who surrounded them with houseboys and maids. Married to rich husbands, some of them became prisoners in their husbands' houses, shouldering abuses and unable to help themselves due to fear of undesirable consequences. This group of women usually took advantage of the class differences between them and the less educated

ones. They looked condescendingly on illiterate women as a group that has nothing to contribute to modern society, and as dirty lots and harbingers of diseases that would infect them and their children.⁵⁴

Nwapa also gave insights into the nature of Nigeria's colonial and postcolonial society. This was a society characterized by anticolonial movements and independence struggles, urbanization, the Biafra–Nigeria War, militarization of politics, and the oil boom economy with its culture of corruption. The ascendancy of individual interests over community welfare was a feature of postcolonial Igbo society and a colonial legacy. This is contrary to the basic tenets of Igbo culture, which was community-based, where the individual was accountable to his or her community and worked toward its overall well-being. In precolonial Igbo society, each person's business was that of the entire community. With colonial experience, the people became individualistic and achievement is now measured in terms of personal wealth instead of ones contribution to the well-being of the community. The Western presence brought about changes in the value system where material wealth became a major determinant of power and recognition in society. In place of family reputation, compatibility, mutual respect, good character, hard work, ability to procreate, and a husband's emotional and material support for his wife, wealth became the greatest consideration for marriage. The cultural confusion that the European presence created had undermined the moral order of traditional Igbo society.

In the clash between traditional and contemporary values, elderly women had often, as in Nwapa's novels, functioned as custodians of Igbo custom. They saw to the transmission of their culture from generation to generation, and to the perpetuation of such cultural practices as birth and marriage rites, circumcision, polygyny and others. As shown in Nwapa's novels, they used folktales for both entertainment of children and teaching them good manners, obedience, wisdom and Igbo customs. Nwapa used the example of a folktale by Eneke, which is a story about a girl who disobeyed her mother and ended up marrying a spirit, to illustrate how the Igbo educated their children.⁵⁵ Nwapa's message is that while embracing important Western values that are useful for human and societal advancement, concerted efforts should be made to preserve Igbo cultural heritage that ensures certain degree of equilibrium within the family and the community.

Women and the Biafra–Nigeria War

In *Never Again*, Nwapa captured the role of women in the Biafra–Nigeria War. She envisioned her war narrative from a woman-centered perspective, validating women's war experiences as worthy of documentation. Many male novelists and writers, unlike Nwapa, neglected the supportive roles of women in their narratives. They instead highlighted and exaggerated women's moral laxity, and sensationalized their marital infidelities.⁵⁶ Chidi Amuta, for instance, criticized Nwapa for her representation of women in her war novels as courageous and sensible beings. He refers to such a positive representation as "feminist propagandizing."⁵⁷ Instead of demonizing women or perceiving them as sex

objects or prostitutes like her male counterparts, Nwapa saw their activities during the war in the context of politics of survival, women's struggle to survive the war with their families. It is important to note that wars always create conditions in which survival takes precedence over custom. So, the case of the Igbo and other Biafrans was not an exception.

Nwapa saw her wartime women as independent, assertive, courageous and economically active individuals who did everything within their power to protect their families and communities. She captured in *Kate* (in *Never Again*) the determination of women to feed and protect their children from hunger and kwashiorkor (a protein-deficient disease common among Igbo children during the war). Women went into farming, buying and selling in local markets (which became the targets for air raids, strafing and rockets), and particularly, took to *ahia ataaki* ("attack" or smuggle trade) between Biafra and Nigeria including federally occupied territories in Biafra. Through the activities of these female traders, manufactured goods and certain essential food items entered the blockaded Biafra. They provided food and support services that helped to sustain their families and the soldiers.⁵⁸

In *One Is Enough*, Nwapa discussed the activities of ten of the women, whom she called brave and independent. These women engaged in the wartime smuggle trade and later became part of "the new generation of [postwar] women contractors."⁵⁹ During the war, one of the women went with a group of other female smugglers to the war fronts to buy cigarettes, batteries and "guff" (marijuana). Stragglers attacked the women while they were sleeping in a hut. The woman used her son's toy gun, with which she always traveled, to scare a straggler into panic. While others were robbed and one who resisted was shot, the courageous one, who had a toy gun, escaped unhurt.⁶⁰ From Nwapa's war narratives, and the actual experiences of Biafran women, we could see that they were exposed to as much danger as the soldiers. As a result, they deserve proper recognition in war literature and Igbo historiography.

Just as the women in *Never Again*, Flora Nwapa experienced the war too. They all shared in the futility and needlessness of the war. Most of them did not know why it was fought. Or even when they had some idea, they felt that the explanations were not enough to justify the sufferings of the people, especially women and children. While many lives were lost and properties destroyed, women were subjected to rape, physical abuse and exploitation. Nwapa certainly viewed the Biafra–Nigeria War as a destructive, dehumanizing historical event that could have been averted.

Women's Survival Strategies

Another important subject that Nwapa examined in her novels is how women constantly negotiated their position in patriarchal society. She explored women's options in both traditional setting and modern postcolonial society to pursue and achieve social, economic and emotional independence. One of the strategies women adopted to confront male domination was prostitution. Prostitution, as

Florence Stratton aptly observes, “is a vexed issue in African literary and critical discourse,” which male writers and other critics have defined “in terms of female moral laxity, encoding women as agents of moral corruption.”⁶¹ In Western and colonial discourse, African women were criminalized as agents of immorality, who spread diseases around through prostitution.⁶² According to Sylvia Leith-Ross, “the morality of the younger generation [of Igbo women] had become increasingly lax . . . it was [never] real necessity that drove the girls to immoral ways. It was more a glad throwing off of all restraint and a blind grab after money, new clothes and tasteless finery.”⁶³ On the contrary, Nwapa replaced moral laxity with survival necessity in which prostitution became a strategy that women adopted to confront male domination. She defined prostitution in the context of power politics in which women resorted to the practice (sometimes on a part-time basis) in order to level the playfield to compete with men in political and economic arenas. For example, some women used sex to gain contract awards or political appointments from male-dominated institutions. To this group of women, sex was used as a means to regain the freedom and power they had lost under colonialism and postcolonial patriarchal society.

Commodification of sexual acts served many purposes: a source of acquiring power, financial security, of ensuring personal protection and advancement, and emotional comfort. For example, in *One Is Enough*, the childless, taunted Amaka moved to Lagos determined to succeed. She turned to the skills she acquired from the wartime “attack trade” to gain business contracts. She had children (twin sons) through a Roman Catholic priest, Izu, in spite of his vow of chastity, and also became very rich and independent. She gained favors in her business through sexual negotiations, trading sex for contracts from powerful men. She was happier as an independent woman than when she was married. Thus, she decided that one marital experience with Obiora (her ex-husband), was enough, and turned down the marriage proposal by Izu, the father of her children. Like Efurum, Amaka ended up alone (without a husband), but she was independent, powerful, rich and happy. Nwapa seemed to have approved of behaviors socially defined as immoral as long as they empowered women. She approved such behaviors as far as they helped women circumvent patriarchal tradition, gave them a voice, and guaranteed their independence. Nwapa has been criticized for condoning acts of immorality. But, before heaping all the blames of moral laxity on women, it is important to remember that they did not act alone. There were also influential and wealthy men involved in such acts, men one would assume with their power and means were in a better position than women to check any societal excesses. Ironically, such men of power and affluence were often the most corrupt and oppressive members of society.

Another women's strategy that Nwapa captured in her novels was women's solidarity. Women could achieve social, economic and emotional independence through feminine support network from mothers, sisters and friends. In *One Is Enough*, Nwapa demonstrated the strong bond of sisterhood that existed between Amaka, Adaobi and Ayo with the Cash Madam Club. The all-female Cash Madam Club cast off male authority, and enjoyed solidarity where members

used eroticism to access power and acquire wealth. Through female bonding they became economically independent. Another example of female supportiveness and solidarity is demonstrated when Amaka brought her friend Adaobi in the contract business. She helped Adaobi get some contracts, with the proceeds from which she bought a bungalow for her husband, Mike and herself. Efurū, who was in the process of formulating her own identity, found herself in the midst of a network of women who supported, encouraged and occasionally obstructed her.

The “three musketeers”—Agnes, Dora and Rose—were very successful not only because they acquired Western education, but also due to their mutual assistance to one another. Nwapa used their experience of supportive solidarity to show that women are different and could wield power and strength when they act in unity. She stated in 1973:

The most valuable aspect of the new women’s movement is the rediscovery that women can think and work together and find common ground for action . . . only when we ourselves can treat one another as full human beings worthy of other women’s trust and respect can we be fully liberated.⁶⁴

Nwapa was an advocate for international sisterhood, who boldly proclaimed universal feminist values as a strategy to empower women all over the globe. She was a pioneer in demonstrating that female empowerment comes about through their resilience and an intricate network of support, which resists oppression and stretches across generations, ethnicities and nationalities. There was no time the female supportive solidarity was more evident in Africa than in the period of independence movements. Women need to continue or resurrect this age-old tradition as they navigate the modern terrains of statehood and patriarchy.

Flora Nwapa and African Women’s Studies

Flora Nwapa’s works are studied by feminists, scholars and students of multiple disciplines in Africa, Western Europe and North America. Many scholars have written about Nwapa’s publications and many interpretations and paradigms that emerge from them. To some scholars, Nwapa was a feminist, who provided a feminine perspective of African womanhood and gave a very complex treatment of the female character. To others, she was an African feminist or a “womanist,” who discussed African women’s issues and problems from an African experiential base.⁶⁵ Yet there are also those scholars who regard her as an Afracentrist. Buchi Emecheta is one of those scholars who regard Nwapa as a feminist. In her tribute to Flora Nwapa, Emecheta wrote:

One innocent Igboman wrote an appreciation of you recently in one of our weeklies. He said you’re not a Feminist, not even a feminist with a small “f.” How those of us who knew you well had laughed. How was he to know that most of your last visits to London were funded by the Feminist movement, and your last talk at the Feminist Bookshop in Upper Street, London, had a strong cultural Feminist message? How was he to know that what we African women writers resented in the

Feminist movement was the fact that the name was from the West, and that we still cherish our families, that we value most of our relevant cultures?⁶⁶

Inasmuch as one agrees that African women cherish their families and value their cultural heritage, it is hard to ascertain whether the word "Feminism" is being rejected by them because it came from the West, as Emecheta insinuates.

Nwapa as an African feminist presented Igbo women's lives in all their complexities, and also exposed the contradictions inherent in their culture. She articulated a system of thought that is uniquely African; though at times it expresses ideas that are fundamental to Western feminism. She fought against women's bondage to tradition, motherhood and patriarchal subjugation. Using feminism in the European and North American contexts, which centered on the fight for equality between the sexes, Nwapa could not be said to be a feminist because to her the problem of African women was not sex equality but survival. She made it clear that even though the thrust of her works was to prove that women were first and foremost human beings, she was not a feminist.⁶⁷ The point is that in her construction of African women's experiences, Nwapa provided ideas and perspectives that were at various times similar to, different from, and/or opposed to Western feminism. In Nigeria of the 1960s when Nwapa's first novel was published, women in patriarchal Nigerian society were neither heard nor respected in their community. She thus championed the cause of being the voice of thousands of voiceless and invisible women in the new Nigeria. It is in this context that we could see the so-called contradictions in Nwapa's novels as her way of giving women a voice and hope in Nigeria.

Nwapa saw the apparent contradictions in the behavior of her female heroines mostly as survival strategies adopted by women to negotiate their positions in patriarchal Nigerian society. She believed that African feminism differs from Western feminism because it is survival-centered rather than being confrontational and oriented toward sex equality. While the feminist perspective seeks for a radical transformation of the role of women, the womanist or African feminist school advocates moderate reforms, in which the survival of women as human beings constitutes the central question. African feminism is therefore an effort by women to work for the communal good, committed to the survival and wholeness of all the people within the community, including men and women, boys and girls. It recognizes the complementarity of gender roles where men and women act as members of a family or a community to pool their resources together for the survival and benefit of all.

As an "Afracentrist," according to Gay Wilentz, Nwapa was an embodiment of feminized Afrocentism. Wilentz defines "Afracentrism" as a woman-centered affective theory grounded in the socio-historical realities of women's experience and hinged on women's major role in transmitting orally the values of their traditions and culture from generation to generation.⁶⁸ Wilentz sees Nwapa's works within the context of African women's cultural production. By telling the stories of women's complex roles and experiences in traditional and contemporary Nigerian society, Nwapa successfully engaged in culture (re)production and in the transmission of her cultural heritage from generation to generation.⁶⁹

Flora Nwapa's works are studied at primary, secondary and undergraduate levels in many countries in Africa, Europe and North America. Her work is the subject of many graduate theses and doctoral dissertations.⁷⁰ For wider readership, *Efuru* was translated into French in 1986 and into Dutch in 1991. Magazines, professional journals, scholarly books and anthologies all over the globe have made Flora Nwapa's works the focus of their analysis. For instance, an American-based academic journal, *Research in African Literatures (RAL)*, and a Nigerian-based one, *Journal of Women's Studies in Africa (JOWSA)*, have dedicated entire volumes to Flora Nwapa's writings.⁷¹ In addition, a collection of scholarly essays representing a wide variety of interdisciplinary perspectives on Nwapa's works, edited by Marie Umeh, has been published in recognition of her contributions to the development of woman-centered and gender-specific discourses in Nigeria, Africa and throughout the world.⁷² Buchi Emecheta, one of the most prolific African female writers, culled the title of her third novel, *The Joys of Motherhood*, from the last page of *Efuru*. Talking about Uhamiri, Nwapa writes, "She was happy, she was wealthy. She was beautiful. She gave women beauty and wealth but she had no child. She had never experienced the joy of motherhood," yet, women worshipped her.⁷³ The interest in Nwapa's works, which has intensified since after her death in 1993 from pneumonia, could also be seen in the organization of three international conferences in which her works were given much attention.⁷⁴

The trailblazing role of Flora Nwapa in Nigerian and African literary world and in the female publishing industry has earned her a number of recognition and awards. In 1980, the Nigerian Association of University Women honored her with a Certificate of Merit Award. A Nigerian university, the University of Ife awarded Flora Nwapa its Merit Award for Authorship and Publishing in 1985. She was appointed to the Board of Trustees of the Nigerian Book Foundation, a non-governmental organization committed to providing Nigeria with a vibrant indigenous book industry. She was inducted into PEN International (Poets, Essayists, Novelists) in 1991 in recognition of her distinguished career as a writer and publisher. The Nigerian Federal Government under President Shehu Shagari conferred Flora Nwapa with the coveted Officer of the Order of the Niger (OON) award in 1983 for her stellar accomplishments in creative writing and publishing. She also received a medal of honor from Imo State of Nigeria governor, Amadi Ikweche in 1992 in appreciation of her service to the state and her community. As an illustrious daughter of Oguta, Flora Nwapa was conferred a chieftaincy title of Ogbuefi of Oguta (Killer of a cow) in 1978, the highest title for Oguta women.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented Flora Nwapa as a public servant, educator, intellectual, writer and publisher. It has demonstrated how her greatest contributions to the study of Igbo culture, pedagogical development, and African intellectual traditions are her woman-centered, gender-oriented and community-based

paradigms. Her writings focused mainly on how to empower women economically, socially and politically. Her philosophical ideals are therefore centered on women's freedom from the shackles of patriarchal and other forms of oppression. She advocated for increased supportive bonds of sisterhood as a remedy for women's oppressive experiences. Women could achieve much success in society if they work as a group through their networks that should transcend class, religious affiliations, and ethnic, national or regional boundaries. In contradiction to Igbo culture, she gave primacy to women's economic independence and self-fulfillment over motherhood. She accepted amorality insofar as it empowered women. Nwapa was a strong believer in the complementarity of gender roles, which she also lived and experienced growing up at Oguta. As an African feminist, Nwapa valued the worth of men and women in the smooth running of the family and community. She entrusted two men, for example, to publish her first and last novels: Chinua Achebe for the publication of *Efuru*, and Jamaican-born Chester Mills for *The Lake Goddess*. Nwapa's reliance on networks that transcended gender and international boundaries is worthy of emulation.

Flora Nwapa's works may be fictional, but her historical imagination, which she demonstrated in her novels, is outstanding. Through the chronological arrangement of her novels, Nwapa demonstrated a remarkable understanding of history and historical process. Her works represented the exploration of women's experiences in society from the past to contemporary times. She showed how her childhood environment, surrounded by strong and powerful women, societal forces of change, and a multiplicity of female voices within and outside Africa inspired her creative imagination. Although many of Nwapa's examples were drawn from Igbo culture and Nigeria, they also reflected experiences of women in most African societies. Such examples have also formed the bases for comparative analyses of the statuses and conditions of women in other parts of Africa and beyond.

Her contribution to Igbo and African intellectual traditions cannot be overemphasized. With commendable determination and insightfulness, Flora Nwapa pursued the art of creative writing and publishing at a time when such fields or careers were "no go areas" for Nigerian and African women. Being the first African woman to publish a novel in English in London, and based on her African female-centered and gender-oriented discourses, Flora Nwapa was just like her parents who saw the potential in investing on female education at a time when emphasis was placed on male children. She has demonstrated through her services, activism and scholarship that *Nwanyibuife*—a woman is something. As one of the first Africanists to proclaim the values of African feminism globally, she is indeed firmly entrenched in the matrix of African Women's Studies.

Notes

1. One of my elementary school classmates, who later became my friend, was named Nwanyibuife. Nwanyibuife was the fourth and last child of her parents' four daughters. There was too much pressure from members of her extended family and

community on her father to marry another woman and also on her mother to allow another wife for her husband since they did not have any son. The burning question was who would continue the family lineage after the father passed away? Nevertheless, the couple stuck together and weathered the storm. They argued that daughters are children and important too. If they could train the four girls to become responsible adults, they would be better off than having a dozen stupid and irresponsible sons. Several years later, Nwanyibuife and her sisters became responsible career women. Three of the girls got married and one stayed behind to carry on the family lineage, assuming the position of a female son. The girls took very good care of their parents. When their father passed away, the girls gave him a befitting burial ceremony that was the talk of the town. Nwanyibuife's sister, who stayed behind is now having children for the family by a special arrangement. Her children answer the family name. She now assumes multiple gender identities as a daughter, a female son and a female father. She has inherited the family property with which she takes care of her children, who would continue the family lineage. Nwanyibuife's parents have been vindicated and their determination to stick together and train their four daughters has paid off, demonstrating that after all women are "something" (*Umunwanyibuife*) or a woman is something (*Nwanyibuife*). For the analysis of complex gender identities among the Igbo and other ethnic groups in Nigeria, see Gloria Chuku, "Women and the Complexity of Gender Relations," in Toyin Falola, ed., *Nigeria in the Twentieth Century* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2002), 79–100. For consistency, Flora Nwapa is used throughout this chapter even though she remained married to Gogo Nwakuche until her death.

2. This chapter is an enlarged version of a piece I published as "Flora Nwapa: The Matrix of African Women's Studies," *Asian Women* 16 (2003): 21–44. An earlier version of the paper was presented at the African Studies Association Conference in Houston, Texas, 2001.
3. Ugwuta is the name used by the community, which the British colonizers distorted as Oguta. Since then, Oguta has remained the official name of the town. It is thus the name used in this chapter.
4. See Gloria Chuku, "'Crack Kernels, Crack Hitler': Export Production Drive and Igbo Women during the Second World War," in Judith A. Byfield, LaRay Denzer, and Anthea Morrison, eds., *Gendering the African Diaspora: Women, Culture, and Historical Change in the Caribbean and Nigerian Hinterland* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010), 219–244.
5. See G. Chuku, *Igbo Women and Economic Transformation in Southeastern Nigeria, 1900-1960* (New York: Routledge, 2005), especially Chapter 6; "From Petty Traders to International Merchants: A Historical Account of Three Igbo Women of Nigeria in Trade and Commerce, 1886 to 1970," *African Economic History* 27(1999): 1–22.
6. Flora Nwapa's hometown of Oguta, located on a beautiful lake, was a small fishing and trading community, which became an important center of palm produce trade in the nineteenth century. Oguta women dominated this trade and were therefore known for their industriousness and uncanny business acumen. Many of the women traders became economically independent, influential and powerful. Flora's mother and aunt, the famous Mary Nzimiro, distinguished themselves as successful entrepreneurs. Martha and Mary came from a family of influential female traders. Their mother (Flora's maternal grandmother), the indomitable Madam Ruth Onumonu Uzoaru, has been described as "a veritable Amazon among traders." So, growing up at Oguta, the young Flora was influenced by the images and profiles of

- these powerful women. See Chuku, *Igbo Women*, Chapter 6; "From Petty Traders to International Merchants"; S. Leith-Ross, *African Women: A Study of the Ibo of Nigeria* (London: Faber and Faber, 1939), 343.
7. Marie Umeh, "Introduction: Historicizing Flora Nwapa," in Marie Umeh, ed., *Emerging Perspectives on Flora Nwapa: Critical and Theoretical Essays* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1998), 10 (quoting Ezenwa-Ohaeto).
 8. See Marie Umeh, "Part One: Igbo Women: Culture and Literary Enterprise," in Umeh, ed., *Emerging Perspectives*, 46; "The Poetics of Economic Independence for Female Empowerment: An Interview with Flora Nwapa," *Research in African Literatures* 26, no. 2 (1995): 22–29.
 9. The goddess of the Oguta Lake is called different names by local populations including "Uhammiri" (Uhamiri), "Ogbuide." Her praise names include "Eze Mmiri" (Water Monarch) and "Eze Nwanyi" (Female Monarch). See Sabine Jell-Bahlsen, *The Water Goddess in Igbo Cosmology: Ogbuide of Oguta Lake* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2008).
 10. Chuku, "From Petty Traders to International Merchants." Lady Martha Nwapa was one of the three women studied in this article. See also Chuku, *Igbo Women*, 192–194.
 11. This school was founded by Flora's aunt, Mary Nzimiro and her husband, Richard Nzimiro, the first indigenous mayor of Port Harcourt, in honor of their only daughter who died in Glasgow, Scotland, while studying medicine.
 12. Nwapa's encounter with Achebe was a blessing because it opened the door of publishing for her. It has been reported that Achebe was the one who introduced Nwapa to the Heinemann publishers and played a significant role in the publishing of her first novel, *Efuru* in 1966.
 13. Flora Nwapa and Ukpabi Asika of Onitsha town were classmates at the University College, Ibadan, in the early to mid-1950s, but it was her personality, expertise and work ethics that earned her the appointment.
 14. Umeh, "Introduction: Historicizing Flora Nwapa," 10 (quoting Katherine Frank in *Africa Now*, May 1983, 61–62).
 15. Some of the children's books published by Nwapa's companies included *Mammywater* (1979), *My Animal Colouring Book* (1979), *The Adventures of Deke* (1980), *The Miracle Kittens* (1980) and *My Tana Alphabet Book* (1981), all written by Flora Nwapa; *Eme Goes to School* (1980) and *The Adventures of Tulu, the Little Monkey* (1980) by Ifeoma Okoye; and *How Plants Scattered* (1980) by Obiora Moneke. See Ezenwa-Ohaeto, "Breaking Through: The Publishing Enterprise of Flora Nwapa," in Umeh, ed., *Emerging Perspectives*, 189–199.
 16. Bankole Olayebi, "Conversation with Flora Nwapa," *The African Guardian*, September 18, 1986, 40.
 17. Flora Nwapa, "Writers, Printers and Publishers," *The Guardian* (Lagos, Nigeria), August 17, 1988, 16. Her publishing company had to face the severe competition from the three mega-publishing companies—Heinemann, Longman and Macmillan—which dominated the Nigerian market. This was compounded by inadequate state-sponsored support facilities such as libraries, bookshops and book clubs.
 18. Ifeoma Okoye is an example. As indicated in note 15 above, Flora Nwapa and Company published some of Okoye's works at the beginning of her career as a writer. Since then, she has published other works, some of which won awards. These are *Behind the Clouds* (Harlow, Essex: Longman, 1982); *Men Without Ears* (Harlow,

- Essex: Longman, 1984); *Chimere* (Ikeja, Nigeria: Longman Nigeria, 1992); and *The Trial and Other Stories* (New York: African Heritage Press, 2005).
19. See, for instance, Chukwuemeka Ike, "Foreword," in Umeh, ed., *Emerging Perspectives*, xiii; Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, *Africa WolMan Palava: The Nigerian Novel by Women* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 131; "Introduction: The Invalid, Dea(r)th, and the Author: The Case of Flora Nwapa, aka Professor (Mrs.) Flora Nwanzuruahu Nwakuche," *Research in African Literatures* 26, no. 2 (1995): 5; Umeh, "The Poetics of Economic Independence," 22. It is important to note that Kenyan Grace Ogot published short stories before 1966, and her first novel—*The Promised Land*, was published in Nairobi, Kenya by East African Publishing House in 1966. But the publication of Nwapa's *Efuru* in London gave it a wider publicity than Ogot's work.
 20. Flora Nwapa, *Efuru* (London: Heinemann Books, 1966); *Idu* (London: Heinemann Books, 1970); *Never Again* (Enugu, Nigeria: Nwamife Publishers, 1975); *One Is Enough* (Enugu, Nigeria: Tana Press, 1981); and *Women Are Different* (Enugu, Nigeria: Tana Press, 1986).
 21. Flora Nwapa, *This is Lagos and Other Stories* (Enugu, Nigeria: Nwankwo-Ifejika, 1971); and *Wives at War and Other Stories* (Enugu, Nigeria: Tana Press, 1980).
 22. Flora Nwapa, *Emeka—Driver's Guard* (London: University of London Press, 1972); *Mammy Water; My Tana Colouring Book; The Miracle Kittens; Adventures of Deke; Journey to Space* (Enugu, Nigeria: Flora Nwapa Books, 1980); *My Animal Number Book* (Enugu, Nigeria: Flora Nwapa Books, 1981); *My Tana Alphabet Book* (Enugu, Nigeria: Flora Nwapa Books, 1981).
 23. Flora Nwapa, *The First Lady* (Enugu, Nigeria: Tana Press, 1993).
 24. Flora Nwapa, *Cassava Song and Rice Song* (Enugu, Nigeria: Tana Press, 1986).
 25. Examples are: Chinua Achebe, *Anthills of the Savanna* (New York: Anchor, 1987); and Wole Soyinka, *Ake: The Years of Childhood* (London: Rex Collings Ltd., 1981). In Chinua Achebe's *Anthills*, for example, women's subordinate position is somewhat redressed in the name given to the heroine of the novel, Beatrice Nwanyibuife. This is an assertion that women are a force to be reckoned with. Beatrice was also a liberated powerful woman.
 26. Bettina Shell-Duncan and Ylva Hernlund, eds., *Female "Circumcision" in Africa: Culture, Controversy, and Change* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publisher, 2000); Gloria Chuku, "African Women and New Orientation: Defining the Solution from Within," paper presented at the Workshop organized by the Institute for the Study of Gender in Africa, UCLA, June 10, 1999. See also Obioma Nnaemeka, ed., *Female Circumcision and the Politics of Knowledge: African Women in Imperialist Discourses* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2005), which is a polemic to Alice Walker and Pratibha Parmar, *Warrior Marks: Female Genital Mutilation and the Sexual Blinding of Women* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1993) (title for a video documentary and a book of explanation).
 27. Elleke Boehmer, "Stories of Women and Mothers: Gender and Nationalism in the Early Fiction of Flora Nwapa," in Susheila Nasta, ed., *Motherlands: Black Women's Writing from Africa, the Caribbean and South Asia* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 12.
 28. Chuku, *Igbo Women*, 21–24.
 29. *Ibid.*; "From Petty Traders to International Merchants"; "Women in the Economy of Igboland, 1900–1970: A Survey," *African Economic History*, 23 (1995): 37–50; Niara

- Sudarkasa, *Where Women Work: A Study of Yoruba Women in the Marketplace and in the Home* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1974).
30. Chuku, *Igbo Women*; "From Petty Traders to International Merchants." See also Sudarkasa, *Where Women Work*.
 31. In *Efuru*, 140–141, Flora Nwapa narrates how Gilbert, Efuru's husband on a trading trip to Ndoni and at Ogwu over the decision to buy groundnuts or corn abandoned her for almost two days. This author has recorded how some women were restricted by their husbands from engaging in certain trades. Familial responsibilities were also a hindrance for women to engage in long-distance trade that could take them away from their homes for days. See Chuku, *Igbo Women*.
 32. Nwapa, *Efuru*, 137.
 33. Nwapa, *Idu*, 150.
 34. Growing up in Igbo society and being a region where I have carried out research activities, I have encountered women who went as far as encouraging their husbands to marry their younger sisters for purposes of procreation.
 35. Nwapa, *One Is Enough*, 154.
 36. See Philomena E. Okeke-Ihejirika, *Negotiating Power and Privilege: Igbo Career Women in Contemporary Nigeria* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Research in International Studies, 2004).
 37. Elderly African parents do not always suffer the loneliness their Western counterparts experience because their children and grandchildren take care of them and keep them company. In addition, with lack of adequate state-sponsored welfare services for the elderly in many African countries, children and relatives provide these services.
 38. Nwapa, *Idu*, 159.
 39. Flora Nwapa, "Women and Creative Writing in Africa," in Obioma Nnaemeka, ed., *Sisterhood, Feminisms and Power: From Africa to the Diaspora* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, Inc, 1998), 97.
 40. Theodora Akachi Ezeigbo, "Myth, History, Culture, and Igbo Womanhood in Flora Nwapa's Novels," in Umeh, ed., *Emerging Perspectives*, 53.
 41. Nwapa, *Efuru*, 97.
 42. See Paul Bohannon and Philip Curtin, *Africa and Africans*, 3rd edition (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1988), 120–121.
 43. Marie Umeh, "Signifyin(g) the Griottes: Flora Nwapa's Legacy of (Re)Vision and Voice," *Research in African Literatures* 26, no. 2 (1995): 118.
 44. For different types of widowhood practices in African societies, see Betty Potash, ed., *Widows in African Societies: Choices and Constraints* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1986).
 45. In Igbo cosmology, it is believed that water deities offered their worshippers three major gifts from which they must choose two. These are children, long life and wealth. It could be that Efuru chose wealth and long life if we apply this belief, because at last, as Uhamiri's priestess, she was wealthy, happy and felt self-fulfilled even when she did not have children or any husband.
 46. In Flora Nwapa, "Priestesses and Power among the Riverine Igbo," in Flora E. S. Kaplan, ed., *Queens, Queen Mothers, Priestesses, and Power: Case Studies in African Gender* (New York: The New York Academy of Science, 1997), 415–424, she revealed her desire to write a sequel to *Efuru* to be titled *Efuru in Her Glory*. This is intended to explore women's spiritual power in society. Though not published before she died in 1993, Nwapa was able to complete the novel with the title *The Lake Goddess*.

47. Oladele Taiwo, *Female Novelists of Modern Africa* (London: Macmillan, 1984), 52.
48. Nwapa, *Never Again*, 84.
49. For the most extensive study of the Uhamiri water goddess, see Jell-Bahlsen, *The Water Goddess*.
50. Chuku, *Igbo Women*; "From Petty Traders to International Merchants"; and Kristin Mann, *Marrying Well: Marriage, Status, and Social Change in Colonial Lagos* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).
51. Chuku, *Igbo Women*; "The Militancy of Nigerian Women since the Colonial Period: Evolution and Transformation," *UFAHAMU* 26, no. 1 (1998): 55–76; Van Allen, "‘Sitting on a Man’: Colonialism and the Lost Political Institutions of Igbo Women," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 6, no. 2 (1972): 165–182. On African women and the effects of colonialism, see Jean Allman, Susan Geiger, and Nakanyike Musisi, eds., *Women in Colonial Histories* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002); LaRay Denzer, "Yoruba Women: A Historiographical Study," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 27, no. 1 (1994): 1–39.
52. Nwapa, *Women Are Different*, 61, 67–69.
53. See Chuku, *Igbo Women*; N. E. Mba, *Nigerian Women Mobilized: Women's Political Activities in Southern Nigeria, 1900-1965* (Berkeley, CA: Institute of International Studies, University of California, 1982).
54. Nwapa, *Efuru*, 193–195.
55. *Ibid.*, 106–111.
56. See Eddie Iroh, *Toads of War* (London: Heinemann, 1979); Cyprian Ekwensi, *Survive the Peace* (London: Heinemann, 1976); and C. K. Aniebo, *The Anonymity of Sacrifice* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1974).
57. Chidi Amuta, "The Nigerian Civil War and the Evolution of Nigerian Literature," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 17, no. 1 (1983): 93.
58. Gloria Chuku, "Biafran Women under Fire: Strategies in Organizing Local and Transborder Trades During the Nigerian Civil War," in Eghosa Osaghae, Ebere Onwudiwe, and Rotimi Suberu, eds., *The Nigerian Civil War and Its Aftermath* (Ibadan, Nigeria: John Archers Publishers, 2002), 216–228.
59. Nwapa, *One Is Enough*, 49.
60. *Ibid.*, 50.
61. Florence Stratton, "‘The Empire, Far Flung’: Flora Nwapa's Critique of Colonialism," in Umeh, ed., *Emerging Perspectives*, 133.
62. See Luise White, *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Benedict Naanen, "‘Itinerant Gold Mines’: Prostitution in the Cross River Basin of Nigeria, 1930–1950," *African Studies Review* 34, no. 2 (1991): 57–79.
63. Leith-Ross, *African Women*, 219–220.
64. Nina E. Mba, "Foreword," in Umeh, ed., *Emerging Perspectives*, xx (quoting a 1973 speech that Flora Nwapa gave to a women's group at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka).
65. Flora Nwapa and many Africans do not subscribe to Alice Walker's "womanism" primarily due to its advocacy for lesbianism. See Alice Walker, *The Color Purple* (Boston, MA: G.K. Hall, 1986).
66. Buchi Emecheta, "Nwayioma, Biko Nodunma," in Umeh, ed., *Emerging Perspectives*, 30–31.
67. In a Book Fair in London, 1984, Flora Nwapa vehemently refused to be called a feminist. She reluctantly preferred womanist. A few years after, in a talk given at

- Sarah Lawrence College, New York on April 23, 1991, she insisted that she did not want to be branded a feminist, but at the same time she denied knowing what the implications of being a womanist were. See Alison Perry, "Meeting Flora Nwapa," *West Africa*, 18 (1984): 1262; Ogunyemi, *Africa Wolman Palava*, 133.
68. Gay Wilentz, "Not Feminist but Afracentrist: Flora Nwapa and the Politics of African Cultural Production," in Umeh, ed., *Emerging Perspectives*, 143–160.
 69. See Gloria Chuku, "Igbo Women and the Production of Historical Knowledge: An Examination of Unwritten and Written Sources," in Toyin Falola and Adam Paddock, eds., *Emergent Themes and Methods in African Studies: Essays in Honor of Adiele E. Afigbo* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2009), 255–278.
 70. See, for instance, Mary D. Mears, "Choice and Discovery: An Analysis of Women and Culture in Flora Nwapa's Fiction," PhD dissertation, English Department, University of South Florida, 2009; Pauline Nalova Lyonga, "Uhamiri, or, A Feminist Approach to African Literature: An Analysis of Selected Texts by Women in Oral and Written Literature," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1985.
 71. *Research in African Literatures* 26, no. 2 (1995), edited by Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi and Marie Umeh.
 72. Umeh, ed., *Emerging Perspectives*. Other works that focused on Flora Nwapa's writings include Florence Stratton, *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender* (London: Routledge, 1994); Helen Chukwuma, ed., *Feminism in African Literature* (Enugu, Nigeria: New Generations Books, 1994).
 73. Nwapa, *Efuru*, 221. See also Buchi Emecheta, *The Joys of Motherhood* (New York: George Braziller, 1979).
 74. They are the May 1994 Annual International Conference on African Literature and the English Language at the University of Calabar, Nigeria; the July 1994 International Conference on Women in Africa and African Literature held at the African Research Institute at La Trobe University in Australia; and the March 1995 African Literature Association Conference at Columbus, Ohio, United States.

CHAPTER 11

Helen Chukwuma: The Inimitable Advocate for African Women's Empowerment

Christine Obale

Introduction

Helen Obiageli Chukwuma, née Obba, was born on August 18, 1942, to Chief Bernard Uzowulu Obba, Ogene Onishaa of Umuoshele village, Abala-Uno, in Ndokwa East Local Government Area of Delta State and Chief Mrs. Cecilia Uyaoke Obba, Okwesileze Enyi bu Odu, of Isiolu village, Ossomala, in Ogbaru Local Government Area of Anambra State of Nigeria. The second of eight children, she started school at the age of four and attended St. Joseph's Primary School, Kaduna, and Roman Catholic Mission School, Bauchi, in Northern Nigeria. Later, Helen's parents, mindful of the primacy of education in success and desirous of giving their eight children the best education available, decided to send their two oldest children, Helen and her elder brother, down to their maternal grandmother in Eastern Nigeria to continue their education and prepare for the highly competitive entrance examination into any of those select secondary schools run by Irish missionaries that were famous for their first-rate education. Years later, Helen would have this to say about her parents' decision: "This couple had the uncanny foresight to send me to school along with my elder brother, the late Barrister Lawrence Chukwuemeka Obba, at a time when female education was considered a waste of time and precious resources."¹ While in Eastern Nigeria, Helen continued her primary education at Immaculata Primary School, Onitsha. In primary five, one full year shy of officially qualifying to take the entrance examination, and on the encouragement of a dynamic teacher, the late Mrs. Egwele, she sat for and passed the entrance examination to the much-coveted Queen of the Rosary College (QRC), Onitsha, in 1954.

At QRC, young Helen realized that she had a flair for language and could effortlessly articulate her vision, a talent that would reach full bloom in later years. An all-round student, she joined the school's debating society, participated in school plays, and represented her school in the national Festival of Arts and Culture. Although she excelled in all the subjects, her main interest revolved round the arts and the humanities. Sadly, Helen's father, her pillar of support, who continually encouraged her to reach for the sky, took ill and died in her last year of secondary school, long before his precious fruit was ripe for harvest. Helen was devastated but, nevertheless, was able to pass the Cambridge School Certificate examination in 1958.

Education and Family Life

Helen Obba descends from a long line of accomplished and highly assertive matriarchs—her great grandmother was a queen and priestess of the River Niger, her grandmother was a princess, and her grandmother's aunt was Omu Okwei, the celebrated, rich merchant queen of the Niger. These forebears were avid storytellers and brought enjoyment to their families' leisure through the art of storytelling, indulging them with a variety of stories from the oral tradition. These stories, designed to entertain and instruct, have fulfilled these functions in serving both young and old through countless generations. Helen was therefore exposed from a young age to an extensive repertoire of oral tales and historical legends.

Her great grandmother, her grandmother and her mother before her had all been groomed in the domestic arts and had admirably raised and held their families together. Their resilience and strength of character would remain a source of inspiration to Helen. Her mother and grandmother had nurtured her to be self-contented and to harness the glory and power of womanhood. In later years, from her esteemed position as a university professor, Helen would pay a special tribute to her grandmother for bequeathing to her a legacy of such profound significance. In her 2004 Inaugural Lecture, Chukwuma recognized her "Beloved grandmother, Amede Olisa Anyaka, Ezeuli Nwanyi, the Ossomala princess bedecked in her heavy but royal ivory bracelets [that] nurtured me in my adolescent years and taught me the beauty and dignity of womanhood."²

After her graduation from secondary school, Helen taught briefly at Holy Rosary Teachers' College, Uboma, near Umuahia, and Holy Rosary Secondary School, Ihioma, near Orlu in Imo State of Nigeria. During this time, she was also taking Rapid Results courses for her Advanced Levels Certificate, and in 1960 took the entrance examination to the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Although she passed the examination, her tuition was not guaranteed because her father, the family's bread-winner, had died in her final year of secondary school. Helen was in despair as the resumption date neared, knowing that her mother had her hands full with her younger sibling in school and could barely cope financially. But something providential happened, a miracle of sorts. Her former principal at QRC, Mother de Victoire, who saw great potential in Helen and knew her as a girl of character, stepped forward and paid off her first year's school fees.

The nun figured that if her father had been alive, Helen would never have had a break in her education. This singular good fortune gave Helen a huge advantage over many of her mates most of whom did not have funding beyond the first term. But for Helen, the best was yet to come. The principal's kind and noble gesture set in motion a trail of happy surprises for Helen as, thereafter, the management of the then Bank of West Africa, now First Bank, decided to celebrate Nigeria's independence in style by awarding scholarships to deserving students. Helen's former principal submitted some names to the bank and Helen was chosen and was subsequently awarded a scholarship for the rest of her undergraduate studies.

She was officially admitted into the English department of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, in 1960 as one of the foundation students. Not long afterwards, she met and fell in love with Flavian Onyejiaka Chukwuma, a medical doctor, from Ogbakuba town in Ogbaru Local Government Area of Anambra State of Nigeria. Dr. Chukwuma did not hesitate to propose to Helen, and she accepted. Helen Obba and Flavian Chukwuma were united in holy matrimony on August 12, 1962, and their marriage was blessed with nine children, six of whom are alive. Helen Chukwuma went on to graduate with a Bachelor's degree (Second Class Honors Upper Division) in English in 1964, and was the winner of that year's English Prize. Her brilliant academic performance ultimately earned her a teaching position in the English department as an assistant lecturer.

In 1966, Chukwuma won the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) award to pursue a Master's degree in English and the Post-Graduate Certificate in Teaching English as a Second Language at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), USA. At the end of her Master's program at UCLA, Chukwuma realized she had enough time to complete a post-graduate certificate course and so decided to take a second Master's in Folklore and Mythology. She undertook this endeavor as a necessary first step toward her main area of interest—African literature and African Oral literature. With industry and great determination, she successfully completed the programs.

Having bagged two Master's degrees and a Postgraduate Certificate from UCLA, Chukwuma was set to return home in 1969 but Nigeria was in turmoil as a section of the country had seceded and renamed itself Biafra. This secession resulted in a full-blown war between Nigeria and the newly minted Biafra and by 1969 the war was raging relentlessly. The great uncertainty and fear during this time was exacerbated by the staggering death toll on the Biafra side. Chukwuma belonged to the Biafra side but nothing would deter her from returning to her family. Luckily, she and her family survived the harrowing onslaught on Biafra and at the end of the war in 1970, she returned to the English department at Nsukka. At this point, she knew without a shred of doubt that her research interests were pointing in the direction of oral literature.

In 1972, she won the Commonwealth Scholarship award to pursue her Doctoral studies in Literature at the University of Birmingham in the United Kingdom. Chukwuma subsequently earned her PhD in 1974 and, once again, returned home to her family and to the English department at Nsukka. Her

selection in 1976 and 1978 for biographic entries in *The International Who is Who of Women*, Cambridge third and fourth editions, was a testament to her budding international reputation as a scholar. She taught a variety of courses at Nsukka and her overall academic and professional diligence earned her a promotion to the rank of Senior Lecturer in 1981.

Helen Chukwuma is a total woman and the pride of her family. She is a loving mother to her children and a devoted wife and partner to her beloved husband for 43 years until his death in 2005. It is worthy of mention that even as marriage continues to lose its honored place in Igbo society, Chukwuma and her husband enjoyed a happy and fulfilled married life. Through thick and thin they stuck together and remained devoted to each other, investing time and effort to build and nurture their relationship. They realized from the onset that even a good marriage could have its ups and downs, even if occasionally, and so must be continually nurtured for it to continue to serve as a union of two people who share mutual love and abiding respect. Chukwuma clearly understood this, having been nurtured by her lordly forebears who taught her to hold her family close to her heart and make it the center of her gravity.

Chukwuma's intellectualism and humility coexisting in total accord has debunked societal insinuation that the educated female is pompous and unmarriageable. She contends that the vilification and stigmatization of educated and successful women are hurtful to society and that women's position in society shall continue to be the yardstick with which its social progress is measured. She maintains that: "Womanhood is nationhood, because if the woman develops, the family develops, and with the family so does the nation because the family is the nucleus of society. Women's empowerment therefore is family empowerment."³

Some people speculate that Chukwuma's untiring crusade and advocacy for women's causes may have stemmed from some unpleasant experiences in her life, but nothing could be farther from the truth. Here is her response to that speculation: "My feministic consciousness is in-born and family centred [*sic*] and not as a consequence of any male hurt."⁴ This confirms that her advocacy for women is not a labor of vengeance but one borne out of a deep empathy for the plight of the majority of African women who endure countless restrictions and exclusions engendered by the patriarchal institution. Chukwuma has made it her life's work to be a spokesperson for women and their advocate against the institutions that oppress them. She argues that the status quo of male domination needs to change and urges women to be the front-runners in effecting that change. She insists that "Feminism operates on the political ideology of change, change in existing power structures, change in men and women geared toward better enhancement of women."⁵

Chukwuma's crusade is propelled by her own happy marriage and family life and her desire for other women to experience similar fulfillment. Of her husband, she endearingly intones: "He is always there, my Mambilla Plateau, looming large, saying little but meaning everything."⁶ Chukwuma has expressed sincere gratitude to her husband for never coming between her and her career and for withstanding all pressures to do just that, particularly when she had to leave the

family to study overseas for her Master's and Doctoral degrees. But despite the difficulties that her educational pursuit posed on her young family, her husband managed well enough in her absence and continued to support her academic and feminist endeavors all the way to her ascendancy to the pinnacle of her profession.

Besides being a creative artist, a teacher, a wife and mother, Chukwuma is also deeply religious. A practical Christian, her commitment to her Roman Catholic faith is total. That faith has remained the stronghold upon which she firmly anchors in good times and in bad. She is able to be an intellectual, a social and spiritual person. Some people might see a contradiction in Chukwuma's devotion to her Roman Catholic faith, her commitment to Igbo cultural heritage, and her advocacy for women's rights, but Chukwuma insists that there is no contradiction at all. She admits to observing patriarchy in so far as it does not "deny women the opportunity of personhood and development."⁷ The denial of human rights to women, she maintains, is no longer a community or state problem but a global one that has necessitated the intervention of the United Nations and other world bodies. Regarding her staunch adherence to Roman Catholicism, Chukwuma acknowledges that she "abides by the Church's dogmas and teachings,"⁸ and supports its pro-life stance and non-ordination of women to the priesthood, but maintains that these do not detract from the merit of her "socio-cultural and intellectual pursuits, such as researching into the issues of women and speaking up on their behalf."⁹ She makes it clear that her own brand of feminism rests solely with promoting cultural and social justice for women. Chukwuma explains her position thus:

I am a feminist because I abhor the various injustices meted out to women not only in Nigeria but the world over. Being literate and working in the academy, I see it as an emergent duty to represent the millions of voiceless women out there. This has nothing to do with one's culture or religion; it has everything to do with one's conviction and disposition and opportunity to articulate one's views. This is my position and the reason I'm involved in feminist scholarship through all these decades.¹⁰

Service and Political Activism

Helen Chukwuma was appointed the Honorable Commissioner for Social Development and Culture in the Old Anambra State of Nigeria in 1981 by Governor Jim Nwobodo, a position she held for two years. Always interested in people, particularly women and the dispossessed, this position provided a platform through which she could reach out to all those people. As demanding as the job proved to be, she took the challenge in her stride and actually derived great joy from serving. Her background in English proved invaluable for she wrote most of her own speeches to better articulate her vision. All the while, she never lost touch with her academic institution and looked forward to returning to that more familiar terrain when her appointment was over.

Chukwuma brought laudable innovations and good leadership to the office and was widely hailed as a great asset to the Governor Nwobodo administration. It is perhaps worthy of mention that at a time when most highly placed government officials fraudulently enriched themselves by shamelessly stealing from the public treasury, Helen Chukwuma came to her post with a totally different attitude and brought integrity and a high sense of purpose to the office. Although deserving of the position, she viewed all of its accompanying perks as a great privilege and so felt contented and never considered using her position as an opportunity to embezzle public funds.

In 1982, while serving as commissioner in the Old Anambra State Executive Council, her natal community in Ndokwa East Local Government Area of Delta State conferred on her the honorific title, *Gegeli of Abala*.¹¹ Before then, following her husband's investiture as *Ajie*¹² by his own community in Ogbakuba, she had equally been honored with the title *Odoziaku*.¹³ These titles are indicative of the extent to which she is esteemed not only by her natal community but also by her community by marriage. They all point to her people's pride in her educational as well as her domestic accomplishments. When her tenure as commissioner ended in 1983, Chukwuma returned to the classroom. In 1984, she had a brief stint as an associate professor at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Onitsha, before its later relocation to Awka.

Professorial Career

Chukwuma joined the teaching faculty of the Department of English Studies, University of Port Harcourt, in 1985, and this move, from all indications, bore rich fruit. Her relocation to Port Harcourt seemed to open up a whole new world of creative awareness. According to her, the University's proximity to Imo State University, Alvan Ikoku College of Education, Abia State University and the University of Calabar made it easy for her to liaise frequently with numerous colleagues and attend many more conferences hosted by these campuses. She rarely missed the yearly International Conference on African Literature and the English Language hosted by the University of Calabar. Founded by Professor Ernest Emenyonu, the Calabar conference soon acquired international reputation and has been attracting notable scholars from across the globe. Chukwuma was a frequent presenter of papers and a key participant at the conference in the 1980s and 1990s. She made a point of revising her numerous conference papers and turning them into published articles and book chapters.

One of the highlights of the conference was the "Writers and Critics Forum," which Chukwuma had the privilege of chairing for many years. As her academic reputation soared, she began to be solicited to give keynote speeches and journal editors sought her out to contribute essays for journals, book chapters, reviews and so on. In fact, the University of Port Harcourt literally opened the floodgate to so many other possibilities, transforming her into a true academic. By her own admission, the profuse literary creativity at this time may be attributed to the University's location and the sheer beauty of the environment, namely the

temperate weather, the lush, green and expansive lawns that adorned her office and official residence. These factors awakened her creative sensibilities in ways she could never have imagined, and as she basked in the joy of this serene and inspiring atmosphere, she generously indulged in her creative impulses. So immersed in her creative endeavors that she was oblivious of the fact that she was overdue for promotion to full professor. When she eventually did apply in 1993, little did she realize that she was about to make history as the first indigenous female to be promoted to the highest rank of the academic profession at the University.

Following her promotion, she gradually began researching for her inaugural lecture. Her inaugural lecture was so well received that her teeming audience was instantly roused to a standing ovation. The full text of that lecture was subsequently published in 2004 by the University of Port Harcourt Press and was titled *Women Writing: Feminism and National Development in Nigeria*.¹⁴ The book has since become a handbook for serious researchers on women's issues. Between 1985 and 2004, Chukwuma taught a variety of courses at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, supervised a host of doctoral dissertations and master's and bachelor's theses, in addition to being invited to assess professorial candidates and serve as external examiner to countless master's and doctoral students in other universities.

Chukwuma served the University of Port Harcourt in varying capacities at the departmental and faculty levels and on numerous committees. A full listing of her service would probably require an anthology but a few examples will suffice. She served as the leader of the English Communication Skills Program (COMSKIP) from 1990 to 1992, and as Acting Chair of the Department of English from 1989 to 1991. By their sensitive nature, some of Chukwuma's committee responsibilities reveal the confidence reposed in her by the authorities as a person of principle. As some of these committees take weighty decisions from time to time, it became imperative that the people at the helm be not randomly picked but must be people of proven integrity. Chukwuma chaired the Faculty of Humanities Enquiry into Examination Malpractice and the Senate Committee on Convocation Ceremony Review in 1987 and 1990, respectively. In 1997 and 1998, she chaired the 15th and 16th University of Port Harcourt Convocation and the University Endowment Fund committees. From 1998 to 2000, she was elected a member of the Governing Council of the University.

Chukwuma is a member of many professional associations, some of which are: Nigerian Comparative Literature Association; Nigerian Literary Society; West African Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (WACLALAS); and African Literature Association (ALA). She founded the *Journal of Women's Studies in Africa* and was the first president of the Nigerian Association of Lecturers of English for Academic Purposes (NALEAP). She is also a member of numerous organizations and social groups at the national, community and church levels, and has been generous in volunteering her talents in the service of humanity as a whole. In 2000, she served as the chairperson of the Board of Trustees, Working Women Support Group, Port Harcourt. From 1979 to 1981, she was president of the National Council of Women's Societies

in Anambra State and, while serving as commissioner, chaired the Old Anambra State Library Board.

Chukwuma is the recipient of numerous honors and awards but for brevity only three will be listed. In 2003, as a tribute to her on her 60th birthday, her former doctoral students and colleagues honored her with a book, a *Festschrift*, the title of which is *Woman in the Academy: Festschrift for Professor Helen Chukwuma*.¹⁵ Edited by Seiyifa Koroye and Noel C. Anyadike, Chukwuma's former doctoral students, the book was published in 2004. It is a glorious celebration of Chukwuma's life and academic achievements and covers a wide variety of topics in the three genres of literature. Her contributions to the academy and society have been recognized by the "Award of Excellence in Literature," conferred on her in 2004 by the organizers of the yearly International Conference on African Literature and the English Language at the University of Calabar, Nigeria. In the 1991–1992 academic year, she was the recipient of the Fulbright Research Fellowship Award at the University of Cincinnati, Ohio, USA.

A fine teacher, Chukwuma is perhaps best known for her scholarship on African feminism. Her timely intervention in this new genre of literature provided the much-needed challenge to the male-controlled discourse on African literary criticism and marked the high point of her academic career. Chukwuma is wonderfully gifted with the power of language and her eloquence in the classroom, and at public forums she often leave her audiences mesmerized and compelled to listen respectfully. A woman of great charm, she brings professionalism and excellence as well as maternal warmth, care and a stable humane disposition into the classroom. These qualities endear her to her students and naturally create an atmosphere conducive for learning. In preparation for retirement after a long, productive and rewarding academic career, Chukwuma accepted a Visiting Professorship for her Sabbatical leave at the Department of English and Modern Foreign Languages at Jackson State University, Jackson, Mississippi, USA. After her Sabbatical year, she was absorbed as permanent faculty.

Scholarship and Intellectual Philosophy

Helen Chukwuma is widely acclaimed for her contributions to two areas of literary studies: oral literature, particularly Igbo oral literature, and feminist criticism, with a focus on African women authors. A scholar of immense creative talent, she is an untiring advocate for women and will go down in history as one of the great foremothers of African feminist criticism. She has been in the vanguard of the crusade for the education of women as a gateway to women's empowerment. She maintains that education and empowerment go hand in hand, education being the main key that opens doors of opportunities for women the world over. Chukwuma contends that education gives women the confidence they need to look inward and make choices, and ultimately begin to reject the many years of cultural and social subjugation, and realize not only their complementary role but also their indispensability to the male.

In her tribute to Chukwuma in the *Festschrift*, Gloria Chukukere states: "Her scholarly works, especially those on feminist criticism, were some of the earliest challenges to the male control of discourse in African literature. In terms of women's empowerment, she looms larger than life, having achieved excellence in governance and in leadership of and for women."¹⁶ The term "feminism" seems problematic for many and Chukwuma readily agrees that feminism has been gravely misconstrued, but maintains that it is not exactly a new phenomenon in Africa: "Feminism may be a term of Western origin but its application is universal. If feminism is thought of simply as self affirmation, then the precolonial African woman has always projected womanhood in the most unambiguous terms."¹⁷ By way of clarification, Chukwuma adds: "Feminism or womanism in Africa does not advocate a negative stance against the male or indeed a life without men, nor does it negate the family. Rather it advocates a complementary relationship between the sexes where female individualism and character are given ample opportunity for life and expression."¹⁸

She therefore cautions that such opportunities for self-expression should not be stifled so as not to create uncontrollable situations. She, however, acknowledges that feminist criticism is a new trend in African literature with the emphasis that:

The indigenous cultures had more regard for women in terms of the roles they played. The Nigerian woman is still suffering and battling with the throes of colonialism on one side and sexism on the other. Colonialism built its systems on men which economically empowered the men and had the contrary effect on women. The men by acquiring education and white-collar jobs abandoned the women to the circumscribed domains of home and farm. Women's dependency on men increased and so were their passivity, voicelessness and marginalization.¹⁹

Chukwuma's scholarship has contributed immensely to the enrichment of African intellectual traditions. She was one of the first African female literary critics to speak loudly and clearly on the deplorable condition of women in Africa and to call attention to the patriarchal delineation of women in the early African novels written by men. She has written extensively on the dearth of female presence in those first novels in which women have been cast in marginal roles and depicted as mere objects of sexual gratification and procreation. She maintains that these male writers have presented an unbalanced picture of African rural life, ignoring the complementary roles that African women have played in society through the generations. Chukwuma has continually beamed a bright light on this issue through her writing and continues to do so at local and international conferences. So admirably comprehensive is her contribution in this genre that it has come to be treasured by serious researchers on African feminism who never fail to cite her at every turn.

Chukwuma concedes that the status of women in the early beginnings of African literature may have influenced their characterization, but hastens to add that "In every age and time there had been women who exhibited economic

sense and resource management within and outside their homes, even in the rural environment.”²⁰ She therefore urges African women writers to research into the lives of these illustrious and accomplished women and “show the power of women and what they can achieve if given the opportunity.”²¹ She zealously urges women writers to embark on a mission to:

Tell about the battered voiceless wife, [and to] also tell about the women of means who ruled their households; tell about the merchant queens, the omus, the Iyalodes, the Magiras; tell about the priestesses of deities; yes, tell about women because indeed there are some herstorical [*sic*] precedents whose stories will give hope to women. Go tell about them.²²

Chukwuma commends the best-known African feminist writers, most notably, Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, Nuruddin Farah, Mariama Bâ, Ifeoma Okoye, Akachi Adimora Ezeigbo, Femi Osofisan and Ngugi wa Thiong’o for charting a new and refreshing course in the delineation of the African female character. Not surprisingly, some of these writers are not female, and need not be. This new trend, Chukwuma intones, is a welcome departure from “the traditional docile, lack-lustre figure of subjugation.”²³ She affirms that the new female characters present a more balanced picture of the African female in her assertiveness and individualism.

Chukwuma’s book *Feminism in African Literature*²⁴ examines the strengths and weaknesses of feminist criticism and promotes awareness of the trend to ensure its longevity. In her essay “Positivism and the Female Crisis: The Novels of Buchi Emecheta,”²⁵ she further elaborates on the issue of the gender gap with respect to characterization in contemporary African writing, pointing out the complacency of the female characters in the first novels. To this end she states: “Formerly, female characters’ trained ambition revolved round marriage and procreation. Her other female obligations ranged further to cooking the family meals, honouring [*sic*] her husband’s bed, on invitation; and other times merging with the home environment peacefully.”²⁶ She applauds the emergence of the new female writers who have ushered in the much-anticipated role reversal in the characterization of the female. She reiterates that “the rural, back-house, timid, subservient, lack-lustre woman has been replaced by her modern counterpart, a full-rounded human being, rational, individualistic and assertive, fighting for, claiming and keeping her own.”²⁷

Chukwuma maintains that feminism is not negative but a bold step in the rejection of inferiority and a striving for recognition, and that it bestows on the woman a sense of self-worthiness and makes her a recognized contributor in human affairs. She recognizes, however, that feminist writing is a deviation from the norm and so may arouse both revulsion and suspicion and may suggest a smack of female radicalism. Chukwuma maintains that feminism is a worthy cause and should be allowed to succeed and to gain legitimate “acclaim, recognition and acceptance.”²⁸ She notes that although all the heroines of Buchi

Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*²⁹ and *Second Class citizen*,³⁰ Flora Nwapa's *One is Enough*³¹ and Mariama Bâ's *So Long a Letter*³² have been successful in their dissent, it is uncertain whether their new roles have actually been widely acclaimed, recognized and accepted. She, however, insists that the women's success must not be shoved aside but must be maintained in order to be accepted.

Chukwuma continues to emphasize the complementary roles of both male and female and is convinced that one group's undermining of the other is certain to dislodge the desired equilibrium. She therefore calls for an urgent redefinition of the concept of feminism in contemporary African literature so as to correct the notion that "feminism is a disorder, a deviation, an extremism associated with misguided, frustrated or disgruntled women."³³ She maintains that "African feminism posits self-worth and assertiveness in the positive sense."³⁴ Chukwuma dismisses the notion that feminism is elitist and exclusive to educated women while readily agreeing that education and economic independence are huge advantages. She points out that the success of female assertion depends solely on the individual woman, her perception of herself, her readiness to fight for herself, and the milieu in which she operates. Her view is that "Feminism is natural, individualistic and propelled from within the individual."³⁵ Chukwuma's feminist scholarship encourages African women to strive for positive self-assertion and self-realization instead of doing nothing and passively bemoaning their lot.

In *Accents in the African Novel*,³⁶ Chukwuma posits that the novel is currently the most dominant and pervasive literary genre in Africa. Here, she reaffirms the privilege and prestige enjoyed by the first crop of African graduates who found themselves in a vantage position that provided them the platform to raise their voice in the face of hopeless socioeconomic conditions. Their voice invariably found expression in the novel. Chukwuma reiterates that these new graduate novelists brought African literature to glory by the masterful ways in which they have explored the human condition, describing them as "the new home-grown intelligentsia, educated, erudite and probing, fired with the zeal of having a voice and being heard."³⁷ Chukwuma's *Accents in the African Novel* is a major contribution to African literary scholarship; it explores the major thematic issues of the times and portrays her as a deft analyst of contemporary political and social concerns in Africa.

Chukwuma's intellectual ideals have contributed in large measure to the literary canon and the enrichment of African intellectual traditions. She took a solid position in a long-standing debate concerning African literature. From the time that African literature began to flourish, there have been endless debates on whether African literature should be rendered in indigenous or world languages. Some early commentators on the subject have argued that rendering African literature in a foreign language would stifle creativity and impair the authenticity of the work and that true African literature must be written in African languages. Chukwuma's stand on the issue is in accord with Chinua Achebe's,³⁸ who remains the best read and best known African writer acclaimed for his prowess in restoring a sense of pride to Africa through his novels.

Chukwuma, like Achebe, has argued in favor of using world languages such as English or French to convey African oral traditions and the African experience. She contends that, commendable though linguistic nationalism may be, it seems to have obvious limitations. Echoing Achebe, she points out that one of the pitfalls of writing in indigenous languages is a severely limited readership. Citing Ngugi wa Thiong’O, who gave up writing in English in favor of writing in his native Gikuyu,³⁹ Chukwuma notes that as things currently stand, only Gikuyu readers and speakers may be able to read, analyze and appreciate his novels. This must be deemed a waste given that Ngugi is one of the most prominent and highly talented African writers. How then would a wider, non-Gikuyu readership appreciate his work?

Chukwuma applauds the best African writers for the successful indigenization of their work, adding that those insistent on writing in indigenous languages can only hope to reach a wider audience through translations of their works which, according to her, seem to be the remains of the original. Chukwuma contends that the use of indigenous languages is not feasible at this point due to the absence of an indigenous African language with a cross-national spread. She, however, expresses optimism that such a venture may be realizable in the future. Until then, we should stick with the world languages.

In *Igbo Oral Literature: Theory and Tradition*,⁴⁰ an offspring of her doctoral dissertation, Chukwuma sheds more light on the oral tradition of the Igbo and posits that “Igbo oral literature by its very nature cannot be fully appreciated without some background information on the people who coin and use it, their history and environment and the language which communicates it.”⁴¹ Her motivation for the work was due to the paucity of empirical research in oral literature, particularly Igbo oral literature, and the need to provide a basis for analyzing oral literary tradition in modern African literature. Having seen firsthand how Igbo oral literature has been misinterpreted, she insists that the analyses of oral literature must be done as a whole corpus, not in isolated fragments.

Chukwuma maintains that Igbo oral literature takes into account every aspect of the Igbo ethos, culture and worldview, stressing that its study is long overdue, particularly when one considers the flowering of scholarly interest in indigenous languages and cultures in Nigeria. She contends:

The most cogent need for Igbo oral literature study is the exposition it affords of this rich indigenous tradition that nurtured the refreshing vigorous creative genius of modern Nigerian writers. These creative writers are children of this oral legacy and a knowledge of it helps in a better appreciation of the socio-cultural disposition and literary style of their works.⁴²

Chukwuma, however, acknowledges that the new term “oral literature” poses a problem and that the problem stems from the fact that Africans have been bred to view literature purely as written work with specific authors. She further elaborates:

The average African student understands literature to mean works by Shakespeare, D.H. Lawrence, Chinua Achebe, Soyinka, Ngugi and others. What then do we call all the songs we sing at play, work, war, or funeral; the stories we tell beside the fire in the hearths of our mothers, or outdoors in the clearings of the compound enclosures in the moon-cloaked nights? The riddles children swap and compete in; masquerade displays that draw together whole communities in a theatrical frenzy; festivals of the new yam, dramatic enactment at funerals; the sheer artistry of words seen in the application of proverbs in speeches and oratorical sayings. Literature? Yes, but Oral Literature.⁴³

Chukwuma points out that the term literature has no equivalent translation in Igbo vocabulary and that there is no word in the culture that can be used to denote the endless literary activities, but in reality the existence of these activities dates back to antiquity and predates the colonial invasion of the region. She affirms that these activities are rooted in tradition, “which is handed down from one generation to another, communally owned and communally transmitted”⁴⁴ for the sole purpose of entertainment and instruction. She maintains that the appeal of oral art lies in the performance—“in its delivery, its manner of communication, its style of enactment and its aptness to the occasion.”⁴⁵ She emphasizes that oral literature readily lends itself to loss, and that one way to eliminate the threat of imminent extinction is to continue to make it indispensable to traditional ceremonies and performances. Technological advancement, she states, now makes it easy to capture and preserve oral genres, thereby giving them a new life, vitality and appreciation. The body of Chukwuma’s work constitutes a comprehensive survey of her literary career in relation to her social, intellectual and creative convictions.

Conclusion

Helen Chukwuma is the personification of African womanhood. She is a renowned feminist scholar, an advocate, a trailblazer, a role model and a gift to society. Her life, grace, simplicity and inner beauty leave people who have encountered her in awe. She takes pride in her womanhood and unwaveringly champions the cause of women everywhere. Chukwuma has made a monumental contribution to feministic criticism and African literary scholarship and her body of research has contributed in no small measure to Africanist discourse. She has dedicated her life to advancing the frontiers of knowledge and advocating for women’s empowerment. Currently, she has a number of ongoing projects at various stages of completion, including two books, namely *African Feminist Theory* and *Accents in African Oral Literature*. At 70, she still exudes a remarkable intellectual and professional vibrancy and shows no signs of slowing down, and if that is anything to count on, this may well be her “morning yet on creation day.”⁴⁶

During an interview for the Festschrift, Chukwuma was asked both as a national figure and one approaching the twilight of her career whether she had

any regrets and/or plans to continue to contribute to the creative process. Here is what she had to say:

I have no regrets. No, I'm not done. God willing, I would want to do more. You see, age is beautiful. Age is experience. With age you have hindsight . . . I thank God for the opportunities I had to serve at the cultural level, the academic level, the social level, the religious level, and at the home front as a wife and mother.⁴⁷

Notes

1. Helen Chukwuma, *Women Writing: Feminism and National Development in Nigeria* (Port Harcourt, Nigeria: University of Port Harcourt Press, 2004), 2.
2. *Ibid.*, 3.
3. *Ibid.*, 5.
4. *Ibid.*, 4.
5. *Ibid.*, 12.
6. *Ibid.*, 3.
7. Helen Chukwuma, Personal interview, September 16, 2012.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*
11. Gegeli is a title given solely to deserving women in Chukwuma's natal community. It has connotations of kindness and magnanimity and refers to a woman who gives bounteously, feeds her community and caters to its welfare. Chukwuma had priorly made a personal donation toward the development of the school project in her natal hometown. At the conferment of the Gegeli title, Chukwuma was presented with an insignia—a wooden ladle—which she brandished as she danced and which was symbolic of what she represents in her community.
12. Ajie is a cabinet title; it is a title of accomplishment and grandeur but also of responsibility. The Ajie is expected to be a nurturer, protector and promoter of the sociocultural and material well-being of his family and the community at large. Upon a man's investiture as Ajie, he is expected to feed the community for three whole days.
13. The title Odoziaku (literally the arranger of wealth) is actually developmental. When a woman first marries, she is said to be enjoying her husband's wealth. But later, when she matures and becomes fully entrenched in the family, she then evolves from enjoying her husband's wealth to contributing to the family's resources and becoming a participant in the wealth-making effort and so is in a position to "arrange" their collective wealth. Odoziaku, therefore, is a significant and fitting title for the wife of an Ajie.
14. Chukwuma, *Women Writing*.
15. Seiyifa Koroye and Noel Anyadike, *Woman in the Academy: Festschrift for Professor Helen Chukwuma* (Port Harcourt, Nigeria: Pearl Publishers, 2004).
16. *Ibid.*, 27.
17. Chukwuma, *Women Writing*, 36.
18. Helen Chukwuma, "Introduction," in Helen Chukwuma, ed., *Accents in the African Novel*, 2nd edition (Port Harcourt, Nigeria: Pearl Publishers, 2003).
19. Chukwuma, *Women Writing*, 16.
20. *Ibid.*, 36.

21. *Ibid.*, 40.
22. *Ibid.*, 17. Chukwuma notes that the Magiras are the heads of the palace women in precolonial Borno empire.
23. Chukwuma, introduction to *Accents*, ix.
24. Helen Chukwuma, ed., *Feminism in African Literature*, 2nd edition (Port Harcourt, Nigeria: Pearl Publishers, 2003).
25. Helen Chukwuma, "Positivism and the Female Crisis: The Novels of Buchi Emecheta," in Henrietta C. Otokunefor and Obiageli C. Nwodo, eds., *Nigerian Female Writers* (Lagos, Nigeria: Malthouse Press Ltd., 1989), 2–18.
26. *Ibid.*, 2.
27. *Ibid.*
28. Chukwuma, "Introduction," xv.
29. Buchi Emecheta, *The Joys of Motherhood* (New York: George Braziller, 1979).
30. Buchi Emecheta, *Second Class Citizen* (New York: George Braziller, 1974).
31. Flora Nwapa, *One Is Enough* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, Inc., 1992).
32. Mariama Bâ, *So Long a Letter* (London: Heinemann, 1989).
33. Chukwuma, "Introduction."
34. Chukwuma, *Women Writing*, 40.
35. *Ibid.*, 13.
36. Chukwuma, *Accents*.
37. *Ibid.*, vii.
38. Chinua Achebe, "The African Writer and the English Language," in Chinua Achebe, *Morning Yet on Creation Day* (London: Heinemann, 1975).
39. Chukwuma, "Introduction," xii.
40. Helen Chukwuma, *Igbo Oral Literature: Theory and Tradition*, 2nd edition (Port Harcourt, Nigeria: Pearl Publishers, 2002), 1.
41. *Ibid.*, 1.
42. *Ibid.*, x.
43. *Ibid.*
44. *Ibid.*, xi.
45. *Ibid.*, xii.
46. Achebe, *Morning Yet*.
47. Koroye and Anyadike, *Woman in the Academy*, 20–21.

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